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this festive season

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- 6 DAVID ATTENBOROUGH
- 8 GREAT BRITISH BAKED OFF
- 11 HOME & DIY
- 17 LOCAL NEWS
- 25 GARDENING
- 26 DAISY RIDLEY
- 28 IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE
- 29 SCHOOL SAVVY
- 31 BEAUTY
- 33 HEALTH & FITNESS
- 37 PUZZLES
- 39 FASHION
- 41 FOOD & DRINK
- 45 WHAT'S ON
- 46 SPORT
- 48 MOTORING
- 45 LOCAL TRADES & SERVICES

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Editor's notes...



Nik Allen, Editor

Hello and welcome to this month's edition of **VISION** Billericay.

As we close off 2017 and celebrate our achievements of the year, I always like to reflect on what has been achieved and where I can improve.

I've focused on doing this for the past few years and found setting goals has always put me in good stead for the year ahead.

This year has been a great and very busy one for me. Business wise, we have now expanded the **VISION** brand into three areas across Essex and to see the magazines grow every month and to hear positive feedback from advertisers and readers is very pleasing for me.

On a personal note, I got married this year and moved house, both busy tasks.

I'm looking forward to 2018 and we look forward to bringing you fresh and exciting content every month, whilst we continue to preach to our readership to keep your £ local.

In local news, a £250,000 investment to refurbish the High Street has been cancelled, 15 new homes will be built in Roman Way and three community groups have been awarded grants.

As always please make sure you are quoting **VISION** when calling our advertisers.

I would like to wish you all every success in 2018. I hope you have a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year with this festive edition, enjoy reading.

Nik

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BLUE IS THE COLOUR

As Sir David Attenborough returns to our screens with arguably his most spectacular and revealing series yet, we ask the world's most renowned naturalist if human beings will ever know everything about the deep.

From brine pools that lure in unsuspecting eels to cuttlefish that hypnotise their prey; from shrimps living in deep sea coral sponges to airborne trevallies – fish that leave the water to eat low-flying birds – we are discovering new mysteries of the deep with every mission. And no better are these more elegantly presented than in *Blue Planet II*, Attenborough's majestic, subterranean return to form, and currently the Sunday night feeding frenzy for natural world fans of all ages, all backgrounds.

"Nature is one of those unique things that unites us," begins Attenborough, now 91, and in his sixth decade of documentary-making with the BBC. "It pays no attention to social class or skin colour or wealth – nature inspires everyone in equal measure, and that's what makes it so perfect for me."

Of all nature, the ocean remains arguably the biggest mystery. Clearly, humans are not genetically equipped to venture to the depths, but even the latest technology can only take us so far.

"They say 95 per cent of the oceans are still unexplored, and when you get to the ocean floor that figure climbs to 99 per cent. If 70 per cent of the Earth's surface is water, you can see how little we actually know," Attenborough continues.

"We need to prepare ourselves for some spectacular discoveries in future. We will learn more about ecosystems and these strange environments, building a greater understanding of just how magnificent mother nature is.

"But with learning comes responsibility, and that's what I am most interested in ensuring we preserve, long after I've departed. We have a duty to protect what we find – from the coral reefs to fishing quotas to sand dunes – because if we can do that, then all the exploration is worthwhile."

Every week, viewers are mesmerised by the sights that are shown on their TV, with many calling the show a real-life Pixar. The filming is something to be admired, with the crystal-clear imagery, but it's the creatures of the sea that are the real stars. Here are some of the extraordinary moments from the show.



Bobbit Worm

Viewers were left terrified during the third episode of the show with one of the scariest creatures – the bobbit worm. At around a metre long, the predator hides underneath the sand stalking fish until they come close enough to make their move.



Giant Trevally

The giant trevally can grow to around 1.7m in length. It is no normal fish, as it tracks the flight path of a bird and then leaps out of the ocean to catch it. It will capture any bird sitting or gliding over the surface.



Transgender Fish

Female wrasses have the ability to become male, but not all of them do. This is still puzzling to scientists and they are still trying to figure out why.



Cuttlefish

One of the most fascinating creatures to be shown on the show was the cuttlefish, which has hypnotic powers. It lurks in south-east Asia and changes colour and pattern and pulsates its body to put its prey in a trance. This gives the fish enough time to capture its prey.



Ocean Swells

Impressive ocean swells aren't just for blockbuster movies, the stunning scenes were shot by the film crew showing enormous waves forming and crashing, displaying their true power.

THE GREAT BRITISH BAKED OFF



The eighth series of *The Great British Bake Off* returned to our screens in August, with this being the first to be broadcast on Channel 4. Many of the show's fans were sceptical with the channel move which meant a new judge, new presenters and adverts, however they quickly warmed to the changes.

Prue Leith was chosen to judge the bakers alongside Paul Hollywood and Noel Fielding and Sandi Toksvig fronted the show.

Throughout the weeks there were several incredible bakes, as well as some the contestants would like to forget. But one of the constant front runners was Sophie, who was crowned the overall winner of the series.

In week one, she made herself known to the other bakers as she received the famous 'Hollywood handshake' and came first in the technical challenge. There were only three weeks in the whole competition where she wasn't one of the judge's

favourite bakers, announced star baker or the winner of the show.

However, outside of the Bake Off tent, Sophie was in the media for the wrong reasons. It was reported by *The Sun* that she was being investigated over benefits fraud for claiming single person's allowance despite living with her boyfriend.

But a Bake Off spokesperson denied this, telling *The Sun*: "Sophie has recently declared a change in her circumstances to the Department for Work and Pensions. Any suggestion of benefit fraud relating to Sophie is categorically untrue."

On the day of the final, Prue tweeted the result hours before the show had been aired. She blamed the blunder on being in a different time zone and later apologised to fans for ruining the result. Despite this, 7.7 million people still tuned in to watch Sophie be crowned the champion.

The Great British Bake Off returns to Channel 4 in 2018.



Photo credit: Channel4

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Ideas to make your very own DIY Christmas wreaths, easily and inexpensively

What a corker

Hide (or exhibit) your Chrimbo booze consumption by threading wine corks interspersed with baubles onto string until they form a circle. The perfect dining room decoration.



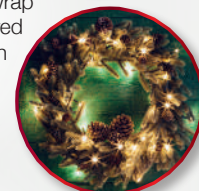
Disco doorbell

Create that Christmas party feeling at home with a sparkle-studded bauble wreath. Incredibly simple to make, just take a polystyrene ring base and glue on as many miniature baubles as possible until you can no longer see the white underneath. Finish with an extra sprinkle of glitter, or if you're feeling traditional, a spray of fake snow.



Light fantastic

Guide Santa to your house with a fabulous neon wreath. Use a wire metal wreath as a base and wrap layers of different coloured lights (battery-powered LED preferably) around the wire, alternating with tinsel to cover the light leads. Keep all-white for a classic effect or go colourful and flashy so everyone knows where the party is.



Fun floral

Naturally, one wants to avoid a wreath that feels funereal rather than festive, so you may think you ought to steer clear of flowers. Consider using pom-pom bursts of hydrangeas in alternative colours for a look that is both bright and beautifully Christmassy.



Rustic romance

Create the classic wreath using gifts from Mother Earth as you forage and find bits and bobs from an autumn walk (or just pop to your local florist). Using either a straw or metal ring as a base, attach anything from pine cones to fir branches, apples and cinnamon sticks, dried lemon slices and flowers, and even candy canes and ribbons.



Gingerbread bake

Using either a cardboard circle or gingerbread base, bake an array of biscuit shapes (leaves, trees, candy canes, etc.) which you can attach and decorate with icing. How fabulously festive of you.



Good Wreath!



HOME & DIY



Smells LIKE HOME

Whether you prefer candles, sprays or diffusers, find out what your candles and home scents say about you.

Vanilla and sugar scents

If you love to fill your home with sweet and soothing fragrances, you are likely to be a homebody – someone who strives to make their home as welcoming and comforting as possible. Vanilla is one of the most calming aromas and is often used in candles that aim to evoke childhood memories like cupcakes or ice cream.

Pine and woody scents

You have get-up-and-go and like to wake up in a home that is as invigorating as a clear winter's day. You decorate your home with rustic flourishes and lots of wood to match this wonderful earthy perfume.

Rose and floral scents

In Victorian times, flowers were used as a way of expressing love, making them a very romantic scent to spritz. Die-hard dreamers can't get enough of the heady scent of rose, which is evocative of a first kiss, while those who prefer lighter florals like daisy and honeysuckle have a more whimsical and care-free approach to life.

Cotton and fresh scents

Throw those windows open and let the sunshine in! If bracing fragrances that evoke the ocean or fresh laundry are your thing, you are likely to be a very breezy, care-free person. You love bright, airy spaces and your home is an immaculate retreat from the chaos of the world.

Frankincense and musky scents

You are mysterious and have a penchant for the exotic. Your home is equally provocative and features lots of dark wood and velvet. Candles which feature amber and frankincense are ideal for the bedroom and are virtually guaranteed to set the mood.

Citrus and fruity scents

You have a happy and optimistic outlook on life and prefer a home fragrance which uplifts, even on the gloomy days. But citrus scents can sometimes overwhelm and be reminiscent of bathrooms, so consider fig as a summery alternative.



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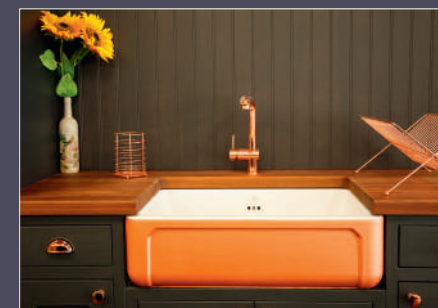
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THE INTERIOR DESIGN TRENDS THAT ARE TAKING SCANDINAVIA BY STORM

Lagom

Cited as the new 'hygge' – think cosiness and contentment – lagom is more about 'not too little, not too much'. A tad less indulgent than its plaid-clad predecessor, lagom is about finding the balance in life. In interiors it is interpreted as having less clutter with a focus on good-quality, ecologically-sourced investment pieces.

Stylish storage

A step on from the Ikea clothes rail you used to overload in your student dorm, this is more about having a storage unit which is almost a work of art in itself, which you can then use to create a capsule wardrobe of your most aesthetically-pleasing pieces. A dead-cert way to impress the lover you could never get in college...

Outdoors indoors

There's nothing better than sleeping out under the stars, but if your locale is more the North Circular than the Northern Lights, you can still delight your little ones with a wood-stick tent bed. Fast becoming popular in Sweden, these adorable

tented canopies are light, easy to assemble and fit over existing frames. Glow-in-the-dark stars not essential.

Tech-free spaces

Philistines rejoice. Bedrooms can be device-free once more. Scandi style has always had a certain minimalism to it and this is now beginning to extend into people's desires to have bedrooms that are an oasis rather than an extension of one's TV room/office. Colour palettes soften to milky whites and greys, and designers are drawn to natural fabrics once more: like sheepskin and leather.

Black and white

Live your life like a Nordic noir television show by drenching your home in monochrome. Following in the lagom style of not too little, not too much, the trick is to add touches of black and white while keeping the overall colour scheme soft and neutral: a chevron throw, for example, or your favourite black and white film poster, though perhaps not one you can buy in Ikea.




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*We decided to go with **VISION**, rather than a leaflet drop that we would usually recycle. **VISION** is colourful, interesting and light reading, including just the right amount of advertising and offers.*

We joined from the 1st edition (June 2016) and as well as us using the trades and services in there, we have already received a significant amount of work, including large commercial works. We highly recommend. Thank you Nik!

The Gleaming Glass Co

*I took out a 12 month advert in **VISION** Brentwood and so far in 3 months I've had a lot of work from it. I've used leaflets in the past but never got much out of it but this magazine has really worked well me raising my profile in the area.*

Neil (The Gleaming Glass Co)

Billericay SELF STORAGE

***VISION** has made a significant difference to our business. We have seen a 27% increase in enquiries from the magazine. **VISION** handled the advert design themselves and that made everything easier. I could trust them to bring new eyes on our marketing goal and produce a professional advert to generate more leads. We have now managed to increase our occupancy to a level we require. I would definitely recommend this magazine to anyone looking to generate sales enquiries.*

Billericay Self Storage - Ed

...advertising really does work!

LOCAL NEWS

from your neighbourhood

LOCAL NEWS

Photo credit: Basildon Council

Fifteen new homes to be built

Contracts have been awarded for new homes in Billericay.

Basildon Council awarded build contracts for two developments from its ambitious New Homes Programme.

Indecon Building Ltd were awarded the contract to design and build 15 houses in Roman Way, Billericay.

The homes will be built on behalf of Semptra Homes, which is the council's wholly owned company.

The scheme will comprise of nine two-bedroom houses, two three-bedroom houses and four four-bedroom houses for a mix of tenures including affordable rent, shared ownership and market sale.

Indecon will engage with Billericay School to arrange several safe and controlled site tours to demonstrate the full range of activities which will

enhance the construction modules that the school already provides.

Cllr Kerry Smith, Basildon Council's chairman of the housing and community contracts sub-committee, said: "The award of these contracts marks a significant milestone in the progress of our New Homes Programme, which will provide excellent housing opportunities to our residents as well as the borough's key workers.

"It's also excellent to see local companies competing for these contracts and giving back to the community.

"We are committed to reviving locations which are at risk of falling into disrepair and redeveloping underused parcels of land, which can also help reduce crime and anti-social behaviour in our communities."

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BILLERICAY TOWN FC

LOCAL NEWS

Ricky Modeste capped for Grenada



Ricky Modeste made history last month when he became the first Billericay FC player to become an international footballer.

He was named in the Grenada side which took on Trinidad and Tobago in an international friendly. It was a debut to remember for the winger as he found the back of the net after 72 minutes, helping the visitors into a 2-0 lead. His team were unable to claim victory however after two goals in the last five minutes saw the game end in a 2-2 draw.

Modeste was delighted to make his debut and tweeted after the game.

He wrote: "Buzzing to make my international debut and to get a goal.

Unfortunately we didn't hold on to the win but great experience #SpiceBoyz"

Photo credit: Nicky Hayes



Hundred businesses attend Blue Book Launch

One hundred local businesses were invited to the AGP Arena this month for a business networking event to showcase The Blue Book, an online b2b and b2c directory. You can access the directory at www.billericaytownfc.co.uk/thebluebook

If you want to sign up for The Blue Book, email info@billericaytown.co.uk marking your email for the attention of CEO Paul Webster.

Cup defeat could prove positive



Billericay's FA Cup run came to a disappointing end in November when they were knocked out by Leatherhead.

The teams drew 1-1 when they first faced each other on November 5, but The Blues failed to come up with a win when they came head-to-head again with the game finishing 1-3.

Despite being knocked out, Billericay can now focus on promotion, which is ultimately the number one target for this season.

With five games in hand and just six points behind table toppers Dulwich Hamlet, it is hoped that with one less major distraction The Blues can take a huge step towards Glenn Tamplin's dream to gain football league status.

#TogetherWeSailAsOne



Good news from the Street Pastors in Essex. A new initiative is coming to the county. As part of our role with the Ascension Trust guidelines, our national charity, we are soon to launch Rail Pastors in addition to all our Street Pastor patrols in the Night Time Economy.

Rail Pastors are experienced Street Pastors who have undertaken additional training to become available to patrol on Network Rail stations and trains. We have a great relationship with The Samaritans who provide us with one-day training called 'Managing Suicidal Contacts'. We seek to support the work they do as we go about our efforts in trying to intervene in those dark times and hopefully help someone to realise that there are other options to take in life. We also have an additional day with the Train Operating Company to ensure we are safe around the railway network.

We hope to begin our patrols on the Greater

Abellio line between Shenfield and Colchester before Christmas. All our volunteers will be over 18, DBS checked, trained and accredited before patrolling. This is a very exciting new initiative which we hope will expand to cover the whole line and also then look to launch along the C2C line in 2018.

Since I last reported, I am also excited to report that Billericay Street Pastors celebrated their fourth birthday of operating in the High Street. We continue to feel that what we are doing in our community is worthwhile and brings some peace and support to that area during our patrols.

Next month I have some exciting news about Schools Pastors projects in Southend, Billericay and Brentwood.

If you would like to know more about Street or Rail Pastors or are a Street Pastor and want to join in then please feel free to email us at Billericay@streetpastors.org.uk or follow us on Facebook or Twitter.

Cancer patients ring for recovery



Patients who have finished treatment for cancer at Basildon University Hospital can now mark the occasion with a bell ringing ceremony.

One of the first patients to ring the end of treatment bell was Patricia Corben, aged 61. She was

diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, which is now in remission after treatment at the hospital.

She rang the end of treatment bell and said farewell to staff. She has now moved from Billericay to live on a farm in South Wales with her partner and their collie dog.

She said: "The care here has been terrific; words can't say how good it has been, and this is a nice ending to it."

Staff on the hospital's haematology day unit wanted to find a way for patients to symbolise this significant milestone.

Ada Emerson, advanced health care assistant on the unit, contacted the national charity End of Treatment Bell, which aims to place bells into hospitals for children and adults with cancer to ring after their treatment.

Ada said: "It's a way of patients saying they have come through a battle and it makes the moment when they are ready to leave more special."

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Our company offer help and assistance with a variety of jobs for anyone, including older people needing an extra pair of hands, new mums struggling to juggle home life, those with mental health challenges, for carers or for those that just simply struggle to manage their time.

We can carry out basic gardening, basic cleaning, check on your home whilst you are on holiday. We can stay in for packages too if you know you will not be available for your delivery slot. Other services also include, ironing, day trips, accompaniment to appointments, picking up prescriptions as well as shopping and odd jobs around the house. We can also offer dog walking services & can check on any other furry friends you may have throughout your working day or whilst you are on holiday.

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Lucy & Lisa
Directors of Any Little Thing Ltd



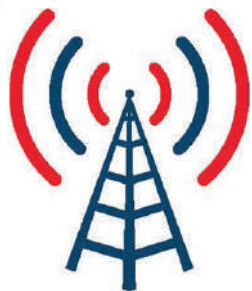
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War Memorial to be lit up by November 2018



Photo Credit: Billericay Town Council

Following the withdrawal of funding by Basildon Borough Council and cancellation of various High Street improvements, Billericay Town Council is hoping to illuminate the War Memorial through crowdfunding.

After the funding was cut, the town council looked in more detail at the list of projects which had been proposed and this one stood out.

Councillor Adam Adshead said: "We didn't have the funding to do it ourselves but Armistice Day was approaching and we thought it was something the town would like to get involved in and fund."

Lights would be sunk into the ground, which would need be resilient due to withstanding weather and people walking on them.

The response from the public has been extremely positive so far.

Cllr Adshead continued: "We're doing investigations at the moment but it will cost approximately £3,000."

It's hoped that the project will be completed by November 2018, which will mark 100 years since the end of the Second World War.

To show your support, please email townclerk@billericaytowncouncil.gov.uk

Major High Street investment cancelled

A £320,000 investment project to refurbish Billericay High Street has been removed meaning planned work will no longer go ahead.

Basildon Borough Council's Regeneration and Environment Committee moved the funding to

another part of the borough. All councillors voted in favour of the money move.

Within the minutes of the meeting, it states: "The committee approves the undertaking of public realm improvements in Wickford up to a maximum of £250,000.

"The above is funded through virement of £250,000 from allocated funding for public realm improvements in Billericay; leaving £70,000 in the budget for Billericay, this money to be frozen pending further discussions."

Planned work for Billericay included the replacement of street lamps with a traditional design in keeping with Billericay's conservation area; the removal, replacement or repair of railings; consolidating of wayfinding signage; flower baskets and a bus shelter.

Applications open for 2018 primary school places

Parents in Essex can now apply for their children's Reception places.

Children are entitled to start primary school in September after their fourth birthday, and parents/carers of children born during September 1, 2013 and August 31, 2014 must apply before January 15.

Essex County Council has warned that any late applications will only be considered once all on-time applications have been determined.

Cllr Ray Gooding, Essex County Council's cabinet member for education, said: "Starting school for the first time is a significant milestone in every child's life and we understand that deciding which schools to apply for can be a hard decision to make.

"To ensure parents have the best chance of being offered a preferred place, I would stress the importance of submitting applications on time and using all four of the preferences available.

"I would also encourage parents to carefully consider the admissions criteria for each school they are applying for and to make use of all of the information available on our website."

Applications can be made online at www.essex.gov.uk/admissions



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Monthly
Lifestyle
Magazine

VISION

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Festive Plant SAFETY



GARDENING

The Christmas season brings with it lots of Christmas plants. We put up and decorate our Christmas trees, hang mistletoe above our doors and display holly in our homes. But not all of these plants are considered safe in the hands of children and animals.

Christmas trees

Christmas trees are probably the most popular plant to bring indoors over the festive season. Although not a major concern, cedars, pines and firs are mildly toxic. The biggest concern is the possibility of puncturing part of the gastrointestinal tract. The tree oils could also cause irritation to the skin.

Holly

As holly is so widely used it may seem surprising that this plant is poisonous if eaten. The berries are poisonous to both people and pets and swallowing them can cause a number of illnesses, including vomiting, diarrhoea, dehydration and drowsiness. Holly leaves can also cause problems if eaten, but due to their prickly nature, they are usually left alone.

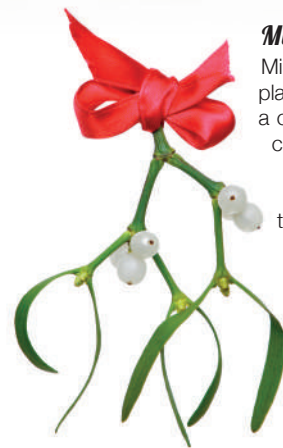
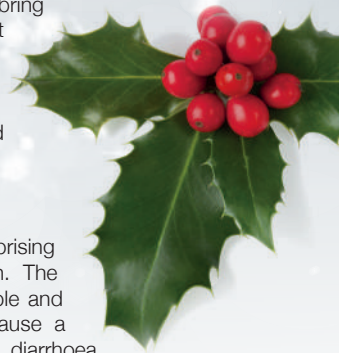
If you are decorating with holly this winter, remove the berries before displaying the leaves, as even if they are out of reach, the berries can soon dry out and fall to the floor.

Mistletoe

Mistletoe is one of the most popular Christmas plants, but also one of the most dangerous. If a child eats a couple of berries it's unlikely to cause much of a problem, but a small pet could be harmed by this. However, if any amount of mistletoe is eaten, it's advised to seek medical advice.

Poinsettia

Although the poinsettia isn't particularly dangerous, it can cause irritation if the sap gets onto your skin. It will leave you with an itchy rash, but this is one of the safest festive plants.



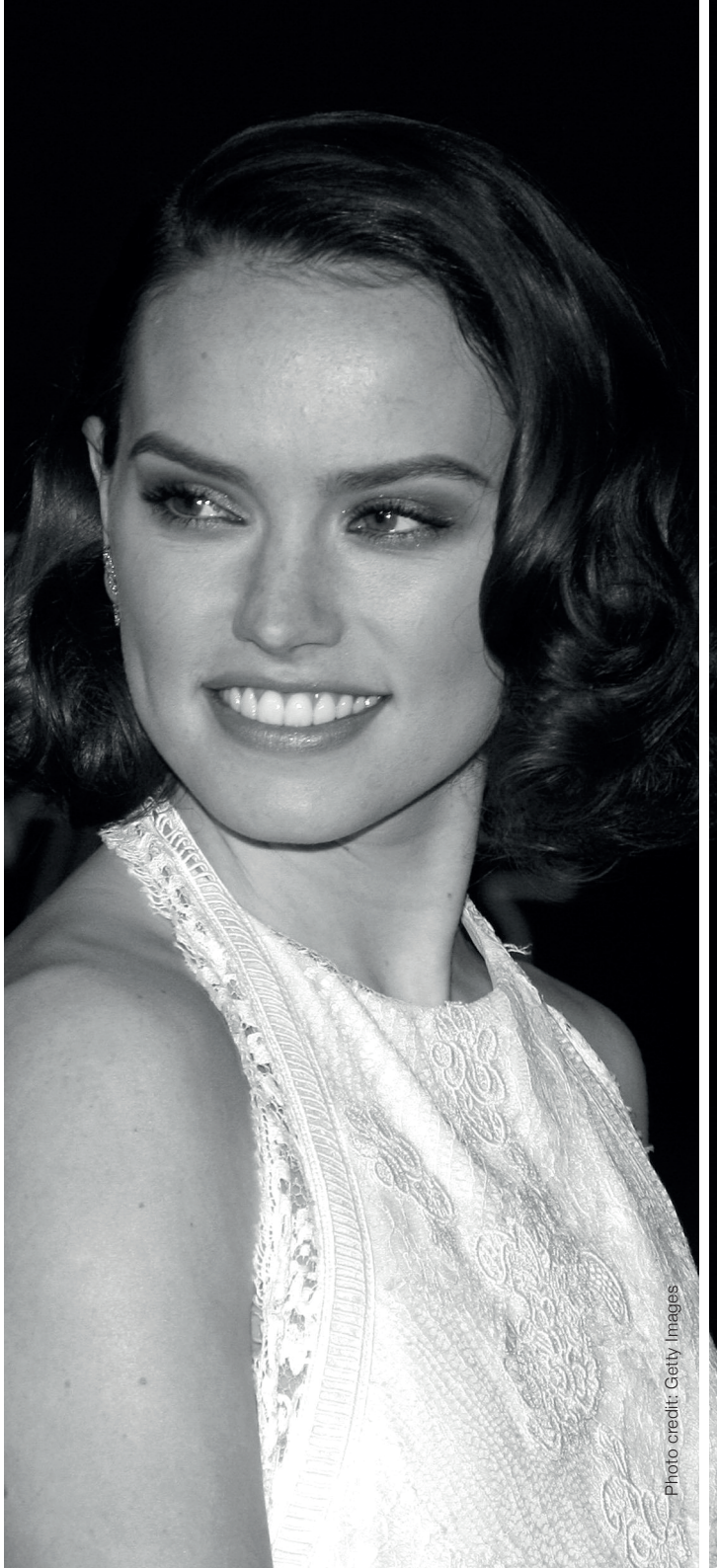


Photo credit: Getty Images

STARRING *Miss Daisy*

Her cinematic journey may have begun in a galaxy far, far away, but *Star Wars* actress Daisy Ridley is still as down-to-earth as they come.

In the last few years she has become one of Hollywood's biggest and brightest stars, but Daisy Ridley is exactly the same – bubbly, grounded and infectiously relatable, which is all the more astonishing given that her breakout movie, *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, is the third highest grossing film of all time. “Everyone keeps asking me how I have changed, like it was this guaranteed expectation. Was I supposed to? I don’t feel any different,” demurs the 25-year-old star.

Having won a scholarship to Tring Park School for the Performing Arts in Hertfordshire, followed by small, earnest roles in TV shows like *Casualty* and *Mr Selfridge*, it’s hard to imagine a faster onward ascent to stardom, with Ridley plucked from obscurity and placed smack bang into one of the biggest, most lucrative franchises of all time.

So how is the London-born beauty coping with her fledgling fame? “In terms of personal life, nothing has really changed,” she says with a shrug. “Professionally, it’s been brilliant – the people I’m getting to work with and the places I’m travelling to, places I never thought I would get to see at this stage in my life... that’s all different, of course, and sometimes you have to stop and think, ‘How is this possible?’. It’s madness. And I don’t believe I will never stop being wowed. It’s all astonishing to me.”

The so-called “madness” is set to continue, with two major films released before the end of the year. Already in cinemas is Kenneth Branagh’s lavish re-imagining of Agatha Christie’s classic mystery *Murder on the Orient Express*, starring Branagh himself as the infamous and immaculately moustachioed detective Hercule Poirot. Ridley plays the indignant Miss Debenham, alongside Johnny Depp, Judi Dench, Olivia Colman and Michelle Pfeiffer.

When asked if she was excited about featuring in such a stellar line-up, Ridley is unable to contain her glee, saying with a laugh: “Oh my god, are you kidding? Seriously, if someone had asked me my dream cast, I don’t think I’d have come up with a combination so utterly amazing.”

Next year, Ridley will play the titular role in *Ophelia*, a reimagining of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* told from the perspective of Ophelia, arguably one of the Bard’s most tragic female characters. She also lends her vocal talents to the cast of animated romp *Peter Rabbit*.

But first, we have the release of *Star Wars: The Last Jedi*, which continues the journey of Ridley’s Rey as she and the Resistance seek out Luke Skywalker. Shrouded in secrecy, principal photography of the film was completed almost a year-and-a-half ago, but fortunately, Ridley has become very good at keeping secrets.

“I quite like it,” she says with a wry smile. “I’d done it before with the first film, and I thought it would be completely impossible to keep my mouth shut because, you know, I like to talk. Yet it was easier than I predicted, and seeing the reaction from moviegoers makes it all worthwhile.”

It's a Wonderful Life

Home Alone 2: Lost in New York

If you aren't a nine-year-old boy who harbours a secret desire to ditch your family for a solo frolic in New York, then you likely have a soft spot for the Big Apple and would love nothing more than a pre-Christmas shopping spree at Bloomingdales.

Bad Santa

You're the kind of person who tells very inappropriate jokes at the Christmas dinner table to varying degrees of success, like the year you almost made your grandmother choke on her stuffing.

The Holiday

If this is on the top of your viewing list, you are probably a very stressed-out mum who would happily swap your shambolic household for a bit of peace and quiet by the beach this Christmas.

It's a Wonderful Life

You're a philosopher. Of course, Christmas is expensive and stressful and more hassle than it's worth, but hey – it could always be worse. It could be New Year's Eve.

Holiday Inn

Oh, you old romantic. Do you remember when Christmas really used to mean something? When it was all about love rather than consumerism? Do you remember when everything was in black and white? *Sigh*

The Muppet Christmas Carol

You love a classic, but also feel that even Charles Dickens would prefer this hilarious and musical retelling of his most famous novella.

Love Actually

You might be a wee bit lonely, actually...

Elf

You're a child at heart and love to revel in all the Christmas merriment, from hollering out carols to tearing open presents and drinking candy cane-flavoured vodka until you pass out.

Die Hard

You always initiate the annual Christmas Nerf war in your mother's house, and when she berates you for knocking over the Christmas tree, yell: "Welcome to the party, pal."



SCHOOL SAVVY

Forget Christmas, if you're a parent with a child enrolling into a new school next year, then this is the most stressful period for you. But don't fret, for here are some dos and don'ts for picking the right school for your little one.

DO attend the open days: It's easy to gloss over an establishment's flaws when looking at a fancy brochure, which is why attending a school's open day is essential (even though this is still arguably the best the place will ever look). Upon arriving, pay attention to how the school feels – what's on the walls, how organised are the classrooms, are the teachers friendly and, if it's a daytime opening, how engaged are the kids?

DON'T be afraid to ask questions: Take the opportunity to ask teachers and pupils alike how they feel about the school, and don't fret about being upfront with representatives regarding any nagging doubts you have.

DO pay attention to the Ofsted report and league tables: Official statistics will tell you test and exam

results for the schools you're looking at, offering a pretty reliable snapshot of how each is performing, while the Ofsted report will offer a broader understanding of how the curriculum is taught and the pupils' overall wellbeing.

But **DON'T** base your decision entirely on that: If an institute has an 'outstanding' Ofsted rating, but you've heard of excessive bullying or disruption at the school, it's important to bear both in mind. Similarly, if a school has a 'satisfactory' rating but seems to have got its act together since the report, it may be worth giving it a second look.

DO go with your heart: Whatever the facts and figures, the most important barometer is how you and your little one feel about the school, and that feeling normally comes from the heart.



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HOW TO BEAUTY: *eyes and hair*



BEAUTY

When it comes to Christmas parties, hair and make-up are often the most talked about subjects. How should you have your hair? Up or down? Should you go all out and wear your new red lippy or be subtle and go for a nude shade? Whatever you plan to wear, these hair and make-up ideas will be the perfect accompaniment to any outfit.

Smoky eye

A smoky eye is the perfect choice as you can often achieve this look by adding to your original make-up. So, if you're rushing to get ready after work, this is a great time saving make-up idea. If you want to make more of an impact, use darker shades, or for a subtler look, use light brown tones.

Start by using a light tone of eye shadow and applying this all over the lid and slightly above. Then, using a darker shade, apply a small amount

to the outer eye and blend in towards the inner eye. This will create your smoky eye look. You can also add winged eyeliner for added impact and top up your mascara for bolder eyelashes.

Waves

Waves are a must this festive season. With the cold weather, they are perfect for when you are wearing a woolly hat or ear muffs. Waves are also longer lasting than straight hair as often the cold weather will make it wispy and frizzy. This is less noticeable with wavy hair and it can be styled in numerous ways which are simple yet stylish.

For a perfect party updo, create a messy bun. This is easy to do and will only take a matter of minutes. Creating a bun with wavy hair will also give it more volume. The messy bun trend has been huge recently and you can even add hair accessories such as pins and clips to add a touch of glamour.





SKIN *Rescue*

How to save your complexion from the perils of cold winds and central heating.

It's no secret that summer skin is easy to master. You've been wearing your SPF 50 tinted moisturiser every day, getting a regular dose of vitamin D and enjoying a dewy natural glow with just a dab of lip gloss and a lick of mascara. But then, overnight, everything changes and you wake up with skin that's as flaky as a Greggs sausage roll. Everything feels like it's attacking your pores, from scalding shower water to the drying central heating and the bruising cold air.

The trouble is that when your skin is healthy with its moisture barrier intact, it's glowing and plump and easy to care for, but once that barrier is damaged it can feel like nothing will repair it, ever, and even the products it once found nourishing now sting and burn – this is because chemicals are absorbed easier, leading to a greater chance of irritation. So how do we repair skin that has been stripped of its protective layer? The answer: through gentle nourishment and lipid replacement.

Firstly, get back to basics. Simplify your routine with a gentle cream cleanser and avoid alcohol-based products and scrubs at all costs. Find a moisturiser that boosts ceramide production or anything with omega oils. Rosehip oil is a great way to slowly start rebuilding your layer of protection and is best applied when your face is slightly damp to trap moisture.

When cleansing, use tepid water and try drinking green tea. Next, you'll find eating lots of berries and oily fish will boost antioxidants whilst reducing inflammation within the body. Once skin is healed, you can protect it by avoiding harsh products, investing in a humidifier and drinking lots of water. Oh, and like Baz Luhrmann sagely said: "Wear sunscreen (even when it's cloudy)."



Festive Fatties

THE ABSOLUTE CALORIE CON OF CHRISTMAS BEVERAGES

It used to be that Christmas indulgence lasted for a couple of days at the end of December. And while it is possible to put on weight from even just a day or two of excessive eating, it's fairly easy to bounce back. The trouble is, with every high street chain keen to offer an abundance of fattening festive fare, often from as early as late October, it can be easy to unwittingly consume massive amounts of extra calories.

The most insidious of these festive 'treats' is arguably the ubiquitous Christmas beverage, be it hot chocolate with festive sprinkles or a latte infused with gingerbread. The first problem is – like when consuming wine or beer – it can be easy to forget that what you're drinking is counting towards your daily calories.

But the biggest problem is just how much fat and sugar is packed into some of these mugs, particularly when you consider the barista's casual upsell to a bigger size or the addition of cream and marshmallows. In anticipation of this year's fair cocktail menu of hot drinks, we looked at the calorific content from last year's recipes, and found...

COSTA MINT HOT CHOCOLATE MEDIO 452 calories | 20.4g of fat | 45.5g of sugar

TALL STARBUCKS GINGERBREAD LATTE 305 calories | 15.6g of fat | 28.6g of sugar

CAFFÈ NERO PRALINE LATTE & WHIPPED CREAM 325 calories | 20.9g of fat | 25.4g of sugar

But there is some good news. It appears some coffee chains are aware of the problem: Starbucks has been whispering about reducing the sugar content in its most iconic Chiribo drinks, and have already removed the largest size from menu boards, with others set to follow suit.

Plus, remember, it's actually okay to treat yourself occasionally, but try to limit your intake and do your best to resist the dreaded 'whipped cream upsell'!



FESTIVE holiday maths

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How much exercise do you need to do to burn off a mince pie? **VISION** finds out...

It is widely believed that we double our calorie intake on Christmas Day, which means that by the end of the entire chocolate-scoffing, Baileys-quaffing festive marathon, you would have to do, well, a marathon to burn off the damage. But what if you could drop some of the excess along the way?

A mince pie for example, is around 295 calories, which would require you to jog for around 45 minutes, but you could also inspire a family footie match down the park or have a rambunctious game of tag around the house.

A single portion of Christmas pudding is sadly a little more fattening at 350 calories (not including cream), but the good news is that dancing can burn up to 400 calories an hour, meaning you can have seconds AND an evening of jiving to *Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree*.

So with two of the worst festive offenders taken care of, let's take a look at everyone's favourite Christmas tipples. Sweet and spicy mulled wine can sometimes go down a little too easy, but at only 106 calories a mug, it's not that hard to expend. In fact, you can burn an extra 42 calories an hour from just standing, so if you volunteer to do the post-lunch washing up you'll be both popular and slimmer by the end of it.

A large glass of Baileys (100ml) however, is around 327 calories which equates to a three-mile run. Include the customary chocolate liquor on the side of it and those calories are creeping back up. Thankfully Christmas comes but once a year, and if you're prepared to do a little work after the main event, then it's probably better to just enjoy yourself and prepare to lace up those running shoes in the New Year.



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The recently published report about stress and mental health "Thriving at Work" reveals that the UK is facing a mental health challenge at work that is much larger than we had thought.

Not only is there a big human cost, there are also knock on impacts for society and the economy. Employers are losing billions of pounds because employees are less productive, less effective, or off sick.

The review sets out a number of core standards that can be adopted across all workplaces and recommends the following changes:

- Employees in all types of employment will have "good work", which contributes positively to their mental health, our society and our economy.
- Every one of us will have the knowledge, tools and confidence, to understand and look after our own mental health and the mental health of those around us

All organisations, both commercial and not-for-profit, whatever their size, will be:

- Equipped with the awareness and tools to not only address but prevent

mental ill-health caused or worsened by work;

- Equipped to support individuals with a mental health condition to thrive, from recruitment and throughout the organisation;
- Aware of how to get access to timely help to reduce sickness absence caused by mental ill health;
- We dramatically reduce the proportion of people with a long-term mental health condition who leave employment each year and ensure that all, who can, benefit from the positive impacts of good work.

The Change Agency provides specialist workplace wellbeing support services and has recently opened an office in Billericay to help local business owners radically reduce stress and absenteeism at work, enabling increased effectiveness, productivity and profits.

If you are interested call or email David Cotterill personally and confidentially on 07841 437951 or email hatsofftchange@gmail.com for details and availability.

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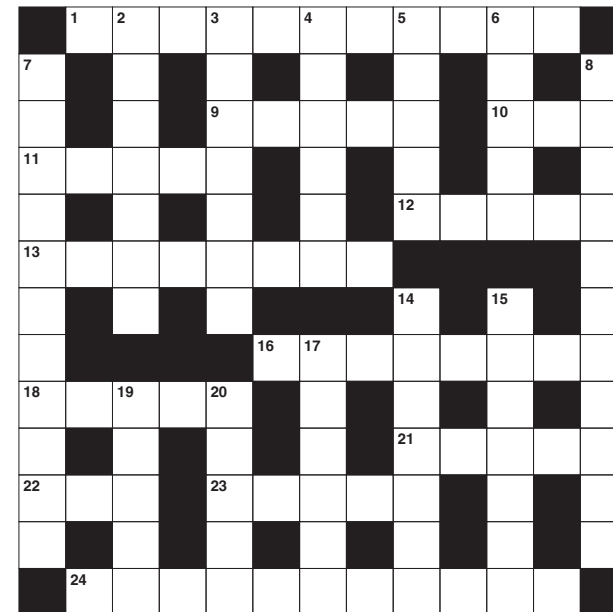
Answers can be found on the Contents Page 4

ACROSS

1. Disenchant (11)
9. Holy chalice (5)
10. Arrest; apprehend (3)
11. Academy award (5)
12. Active cause (5)
13. Sweet on a stick (8)
16. Definite and clear (8)
18. Meat and vegetables on a skewer (5)
21. Musical times (5)
22. Grandmother (3)
23. Group of eight (5)
24. Rural scenery (11)

DOWN

2. Freezing (3-4)
3. Firmly establish (7)
4. Temporary shelter (4-2)
5. Latin American dance; sauce (5)
6. Snow leopard (5)
7. Attractive (4-7)
8. State of preoccupation (11)
14. Segregated groups or areas (7)
15. Impressed a pattern on (7)
17. Experienced adviser (6)



19. Small drum (5)
20. _____ Ulvaeus: member of ABBA (5)

DID YOU KNOW

► Britain was introduced to the Christmas tree in 1841, when Queen Victoria's German husband Prince Albert brought one to Windsor Castle for the Royal Family

► The Christmas cracker was invented in 1847 by Tom Smith, a baker of wedding cakes from Clerkenwell, London.

► The Christmas candy cane, shaped as a shepherd's crook, represents the humble shepherds who were first to worship the new-born Christ.

► In some countries, the baby Jesus delivers the gifts, in others, the Three Wise Men. But in most countries, Santa Claus does the honours.

SUDOKU

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Snow Queens

It is the season for Christmas and New Year parties, so it's time to start thinking about party cover-ups. Many think that by adding a jacket you will be ruining your glamorous look, but these cover-up ideas will have you turning heads.

Sequin shrug

If you have a simple outfit with little embellishment or detail, sequin shrugs will be the perfect addition. If you have a dark-coloured dress such as black or navy blue, then add a contrasting coloured shrug such as gold. It will make the overall look more glamorous and sparkle when the light hits.

Furs

This timeless piece will add a touch of chic to any look with its faux fur finish and bow. With the cold weather setting in, it will also keep you warm and is available in a variety of colours to go with any outfit.

Ponchos

Ponchos are a great addition if you want something to keep you snug. They make the perfect layering piece and can easily be paired with any outfit.

Cape

While more expensive to buy, capes are the perfect substitute for a coat. They are great whatever the weather and with a relaxed fit, they will slip on easily. Buy your cape in a colour that will go with any outfit, such as black, and wear it time and time again.

Cover-up

For something simpler and just as stylish, why not opt for a knitted cover-up? They are great for wrapping up on a cold evening and will complement any outfit, particularly print dresses.



Photo Credit: www.debenhams.com



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FOOD & DRINK

5 WAYS TO GET CREATIVE WITH Brussels Sprouts

Far from being just a Christmas dinner side dish, these vitamin-packed powerhouses are a superb way to brighten up many a comfort food, adding a wealth of health benefits along the way.

Bacon and Brussels hash

A classic flavour combination, this hash topped with a poached egg makes a fantastic hangover breakfast and is a great way to use up leftovers. Simply fry bacon, onions, parboiled potatoes and cooked Brussels sprouts in a little oil until crispy, golden and delicious.

Caramelised sprouts with garlic

Set a sturdy roasting pan on the stove with oil and add a pound of halved, raw Brussels sprouts (cut side down) with five peeled garlic cloves and sauté until the bottoms are browned. Season the pan and transfer it to a pre-heated oven (approx. 200C) for 10-15 minutes, shaking occasionally. Add a glug of good balsamic vinegar and serve.

Lemony sprouts and breadcrumb penne

A superb use for leftovers, just fry cooked sprouts with garlic and chilli until warmed through, then add half a glass of white wine and reduce. Finally, stir in cooked penne and toasted breadcrumbs with the zest of half a lemon.

Sprout salad with apple, walnut and blue cheese

Wash your sprouts and separate the leaves before tossing with toasted walnuts, shredded apple and chunks of blue cheese. Finish with a classic vinaigrette dressing.

Gruyere and parmesan gratin

If you are going to serve sprouts as a side, consider mixing it up by including them in a gratin. Rich, creamy and flavoursome, this makes an impressive little dish and the only skill required is the ability to whip up a béchamel sauce with plenty of tangy gruyere and parmesan, which you can then bake with your parboiled veg. Consider Brussels sprouts haters fully converted.



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SHAKEN & STIRRED cocktail for Winter

From James Bond to Tom Cruise, the humble cocktail has been a staple of every party-lover's back catalogue of booze. Here is a fantastic recipe for a winter cocktail that will revolutionise your reputation as a master mixologist.

HOT TODDY

With honey, sugar and lemon combined with the full-bodied blast of dark rum, this cocktail is perfect to enjoy with friends around a roaring fire – and will even stave off any sniffles in the process.

INGREDIENTS

- ▮ 1 part dark rum
- ▮ 1 bar spoon honey
- ▮ 1 large lemon peel
- ▮ 1 ounce hot water

INSTRUCTIONS

Prepare a mug by rinsing it with boiling water and pouring the water out. Add the honey (or sugar) and the lemon peel and pour in an ounce of hot water and stir until the sweetener has dissolved. Add dark rum and top off with more boiling water.







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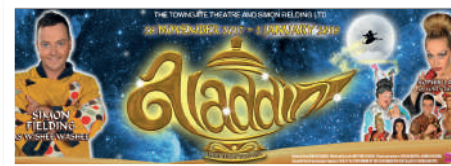
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Billericay Christmas Market

Billericay High Street, CM12 9AS
Sunday, December 3, 11am – 5pm

Starting with Santa's Parade at 11am, the market in Billericay High Street has attractions and events to appeal to the whole family. From a market, fairground, music, parades and much more, the Christmas Market has something for everyone. This is a free community and charity fundraising event.

Christmas Craft Fair

St Mary Magdalen Church, High Street,
Billericay, CM12 9BQ
December 9, 10am – 4pm



The Guild of Essex Craftsmen are holding a Christmas Craft Fair supporting Essex Air Ambulance at St Mary Magdalen Church, from 10am to 4pm.

Seventeen talented craftsmen and artists will be displaying and selling their handcrafted works.

Come along and see their original works, chat to the artist/craftsman and buy directly from the makers. Free admission. Contact 07817 049432 for more details.

Charity Lunch

Billericay Methodist Church, Western Road,
CM12 9EA

December 9, 12.30pm – 1.30pm

A snack lunch and drink is being served for £4. The proceeds this month are going to Action for Children, supporting disadvantaged children across the UK. There is no need to book.

For more information, call 01277 622297.

Mayflower Morris Men's Christmas Display

The Bear, 16 The Square, Stock, CM4 9LH
December 17, 12.45pm – 1.45pm

Christmas is one of the traditional times for Morris dancing. Billericay's very own side will be putting on its Christmas display for all ages. Come along and get into the Christmas spirit - totally free - just for fun - bring your friends. Tel. 01277 654228, www.mayflowermorris.com

Mayflower Morris Men Teach Beginners

St Mary Magdalen Church, High Street,
Billericay, CM12 9BQ
January 4, 8pm – 10pm

What better New Year's resolution than to learn an Old English tradition. Two left feet? Not a problem. Just so long as you have a pulse and two hankies. New dancers/musicians of all ages welcome - tuition is free. A new pastime you will never regret taking up. Tel. 01277 654228, www.mayflowermorris.com

Gone Too Soon Bereavement Support Group

Reids, 66-68 Laindon Road, Billericay, CM12 9LD

January 15, 7pm – 9pm

Gone Too Soon is a monthly bereavement support group for parents who have lost a son or daughter. During the meetings there will be at least one counsellor to facilitate and support the sessions. For more information, please contact Linda on 07387 805406 or email lyn-currie@hotmail.co.uk

MAY THE FOURTH BE WITH YOU



Not since the legendary racing icon James Hunt has F1 found someone who mixes style and substance in the way Lewis Hamilton does. Yet when gawping at his questionable fashion statements, or in looking past the ubiquitous throng of beautiful women, it's easy to dismiss the fact that the 32-year-old Stevenage-born racer has just surpassed the great Sir Jackie Stewart's longstanding record of three World Championship victories.

"I try to find a balance in my life," he begins. "The lifestyle I live is definitely different to the other drivers, but who says it has to be the way they are doing things? My style works perfectly for me."

"If people don't know or don't recognise the amount of preparation I put into this then I'm pretty sure they'll never get it."

Hamilton's recent move into the history books is just the latest milestone in a career saturated by success. Alongside his four Championship titles, the Brit also holds the record for pole positions in qualifying, and is the only driver in the sport's history to have won a race in every season he's competed. He's even managed to bag a BBC Sports Personality of the Year along the way.

And while his 'try hard' behaviour has made for tabloid ridicule and feuds with fellow drivers, there's another side to Hamilton off the track - it's the side that stays ultimately grounded, guided by an unrelenting show of support he has for his younger brother Nicholas, who was born with cerebral palsy and constantly defied the odds to end up as a current-day British Touring Car Championship competitor.

"Nicholas was told he'd never walk, or play the drums, or drive, and he can do all those things now and more," the elder Hamilton brother beams. "I look at him and I'm incredibly inspired every day."

"He acts as a constant reminder of how very blessed I am whilst carving out his own future and his own success. It's just incredible - he is the hero, not me."

For British number one Anthony Joshua, it has been quite a ride, yet ask those in the boxing fraternity, and they'll tell you the 28-year-old Watford-born fighter's journey has only really just begun.

Whatever is in store, it appears Anthony's grounded personality is here to stay. After all, why should the orthodox heavyweight champ change tact? His sucker-punch humility has already done for everyone who's crossed his path up until now.

Here are the British bulldog's magic moments so far:

🔥 2009-2012

As an amateur, Anthony boxed through home and international tournaments, coming second in the AIBA World Boxing Championships in 2011 before clinching Olympic gold for Team GB at London 2012.

🔥 October 5, 2013

Anthony's first professional fight vs Emanuele Leo of Italy - won with a TKO (technical knock-out) after just 2mins 47secs.

🔥 September 13, 2014

Sealing his first year as a professional, Anthony boxed and defeated Konstantin Airich at the Manchester Arena, to take his professional record to 8-0. This was also his longest fight to date, making it all the way to the third round!

🔥 October 11, 2014

Anthony won the vacant WBC International Heavyweight title at the O2 Arena by defeating Denis Bakhtov, and retained that title seven months later against Kevin Johnson to take his record to 13-0.

🔥 2015-2016

Anthony picked up the vacant Commonwealth, British Heavyweight and IBF Heavyweight titles, as well as retaining his existing belts in bouts against Dillian Whyte, Charles Martin, Dominic Breazeale and Eric Molina.

🔥 April 29, 2017

In Anthony's biggest victory yet, he defeated Wladimir Klitschko, a modern-day icon, to also claim the WBA Super and IBO Heavyweight titles.

🔥 October 28, 2017

Tricky Frenchman Carlos Takam put up a good fight but succumbed to Anthony's power in the 10th round in Cardiff.

🔥 **Boxing record:** 20-0 (5 Kos, 15 TKOs).



Gold

PLATED

Whether you consider them ostentatious or a symbol of prestige, the market for personalised number plates has established itself as a multimillion-dollar industry. But what are the most expensive number plates in the history of automobiles, and who owns them?

For many multimillionaires, owning the latest model of luxury sports car just simply isn't enough, with a few adding their own touch of individualism to the vehicle with a personalised number plate. While anyone can own one of these fancy auto accessories, the very top end of personal plates can often cost their buyers a seven-figure sum – with the world's most expensive, a plate bearing the single number '1', currently belonging to Saeed Abdul Ghaffar Khouri of Abu Dhabi, who parted with £7million for his prized possession.

Looking a little closer to home, here's a run-down of the three most expensive plates that the UK currently has to offer:

VIP 1

3. 'VIP 1' – ROMAN ABRAMOVICH

Abramovich's name has become synonymous with splashing the cash since taking over Chelsea Football Club in 2003, and the Russian oil mogul grabbed the 'VIP 1' plate in 2006 for £285,000

in a deal he hopes to provide more value for money that the £50million he gave Liverpool for the services of Fernando Torres. Interestingly, this unique plate was originally commissioned to be put on Pope John Paul II's Popemobile for a papal visit to Ireland.

M 1

2. 'M 1' – MIKE McCOMB

After selling his Mobile Phone Store to BT Cellnet in 2000, Mike McComb had a fairly large pile of wonga lying about. Six years later he decided to put £330,000 of that to good use by purchasing the 'M 1' plates as a present for his son... who was just six years old at the time.

F 1

1. 'F 1' – AFZAL KHAN

Bradford-born entrepreneur Afzal Khan takes the top spot for vehicular vanity in Britain by grabbing the holy grail of petrol-head plates to affix to his Mercedes SLR McLaren for a massive £440,000. At the time, Khan described the figure as "a good price to pay" as the plates were "probably worth 10 times that".

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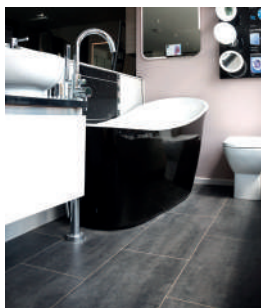
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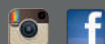
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