

All items for the

Spring Edition by:

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Stoke News Winter 2023

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Coates English Willow Sponsors of the Stoke News

Looking back over the last few months, we have been really pleased by the number of visitors coming to do the Willow Sculpture trails. Everyone seems to enjoy the quizzes and

getting the prize at the end. Look out for the Christmas Trail, we are planning it already.

In July this year we opened a new gift shop called Stripples – the name comes from the bark that comes off the willow when it's stripped.

Stripples is everything we love about Somerset including willow furniture, watercolour pictures, handmade soaps, jewellery and cider. We are endeavouring to

Stripples

everything we love about
s o m e r s e t

New Shop

at

COATES ENGLISH WILLOW

Open Monday to Saturday
10 am - 4 pm

Unit 1
Coates English Willow
Stoke St Gregory TA3 6HY

01823 490249

info@coatesenglishwillow.co.uk

support small makers and local companies selling products either made in or linked to Somerset. The opening hours are currently 10am until 4pm, Monday to Saturday.

Also, in the planning stage is the Christmas Fayre on the 9th December, 10am to 4pm. The Christmas Fairy is polishing her wand in preparation. The entertainment includes the ever-popular puppet show, Taunton Dean Morris Men, the Langport Community Choir and the Taunton Ukulele Strummers. We are fully booked with 30 stall holders, who will be mostly undercover and keeping cosy. Please do come along and support these local makers and traders, we all need it in these difficult times.

Looking ahead, there are going to be more changes in the Courtyard, but it is too early to share everything so you will need to come and visit to find out.

Stoke Stampede

On the 7th January 2024, the Stoke Stampede will be celebrating 40 years of the event.

We have already registered a record number of runners. The race cannot be run without our amazing band of volunteers, whether that is being on the organising committee or volunteering on the day for car parking duties or Course Marshalls keeping everyone safe.

If you wish to help, could you please contact Tom Duxbury on 07714696707.

We welcome you all to come out and support and cheer our runners on in the fabulous atmosphere that is always generated on the day. Hope to see you there.

Paul Morse Race Director

Parish Council Report

We are pleased to welcome our new Parish Clerk, Sally Taylor and three new Parish Councillors: David Cuthbertson, Lawrence Bostock and John Derby.

All correspondence will now be managed by Sally Taylor
ssgparishclerk@hotmail.co.uk

At our last meeting on November 13th Councillor David Fothergill issued a Somerset Council brief which predicts an end of year overspend of £27.3 million. The financial position for 2024/5; there is an expected budget gap of £100 million which represents 20% of the total budget. It is likely the Council will be served a section 114 notice in February. This notice prevents all new spending with the exception of protecting vulnerable people and statutory services and pre-existing spending commitments.

They will still be delivering core road maintenance throughout the county including Somerset Gritters which are ready to be mobilised once the temperature drops below zero this winter.

Recycling will not be affected but there will be changes to collection days in February 2024.

Our bus service could be at risk. Please join the campaign to save it. Use the service or we lose it.

The Parish Council are about to set the precept for next year and need to prepare for the worst case scenario.

Communication

The PC are in the process of replacing the Parish Noticeboard on the corner of Church Close.

We are launching a quarterly surgery, the first to be held at the HOTV café on **Saturday 15th December from 10am until 12 noon** to give people an opportunity to raise any issues. The surgery times and venues will be printed in the Stoke Newsletter every quarter.

Defibrillators

We are currently in the process of introducing two new defibrillators in the village to allow better access for all. One will be sited in Curload and the other in Meare Green.

Damage to the Coppice at the village Hall

Hugh Griffiths the Managing Director of RSK Hi Line Ltd has issued an apology to the community of Stoke St Gregory for: "the confusion around the planning of the works and the understandable frustration and disappointment the works caused across your community."

Compensatory payments of £1000 were made to SEG and £1,000 to the Village Hall Trust.

They have promised to make good the damage.

We wish everyone a very Happy Christmas and a healthy and prosperous New Year.

The Mummers

Our multi-award-winning Community Hub/Pub, The Royal Oak, in the heart of the village of Stoke St Gregory, is delighted to host the North Curry Mummers on Boxing Day, 26th December. Mumming is best described as early pantomime. The plays are based loosely on the legend of St George and the dragon and intended to show the struggle between good and evil.

This unmissable free event, (although there will be a collection for our Hub project), is the ultimate feel-good entertainment after a strenuous Christmas as it is both heartwarming and hilarious. Our Shop and Café will also be open for snacks and warm drinks.

Come and see how we go above and beyond in building a better Community in our Village.

Project Play Update

We've been working extremely hard over the last few months getting everything in place to apply for the funding we need.

Here is an update :

Confirmation from Somerset Council that the NuMUGA facility does not require planning permission.

A proposed new path to link the entrance to the playing field with the new facility has been agreed by the Playing Fields Committee.

Fantastic feedback from children of all ages on the 'star sticker boards', which enabled them to tell us which pieces of play equipment they would like to see.

We now have the final design, which is 480sqm, includes 17 pieces of equipment, cycle stands, seating and planting.

Costs have been updated to reflect the use of different materials, reducing the overall cost without compromising on quality or durability.

Sparks Somerset (who provide funding support) have commended the work that has been done to date, particularly the Community Plan and the ongoing engagement we have with the children. Funding applications are now being prepared and will be supported by a Project Play funding document, which has been reviewed and approved by Sparks Somerset.

The result of all of this hard work will be a truly bespoke play facility that has been designed and inspired by the young people of our community. Please keep an eye out for images of the final design at the Royal Oak Community Hub and the Playing Fields.

New Community Hub Group

As agreed at the Annual Members' Meeting of HOTV, and further endorsed at the first meeting of the new Management Committee, the Community Hub Group met for the first time on 6th November, with 22 people attending and others sending in comments and suggestions. The group brings together all those involved in the Community Hub Project - Staff, Volunteers, and most importantly those who use the shop, café & pub, and who provide the money to guarantee the continued existence of the project. It should be noted that the new group is completely separate from, but will liaise with, HOTV Management.

The subjects discussed at the very positive first meeting included: Various ways of establishing the future aims of the overall project and the individual elements - shop, café & pub; Cleaning; Volunteering; Communication; Phase 3 of the building programme; Customer Retention; Car Parking; and other more specific topics concerning shop, café and pub.

A member of the group will attend the next HOTV committee meeting and the resulting comments and decisions will be reported (we're working on how to do that - '**Feedback**' has to be the key word for this new group).

In the meantime, why not get in touch with your thoughts? Send an email to communityhub@mail.uk and join our mailing list. If you don't have access to email, maybe you could ask a neighbour for help?

WI

Friday 15th December is Stoke St Gregory WI's Christmas meal at the Royal Oak from 12 noon for a 12.30 lunch. We will then meet back in the Village Hall from 7pm for the first member's meeting of the New Year on Tuesday 9th January.

Jackie Jay will be demonstrating needle felting with all those attending receiving an individual kit so they can participate and take home their own handcrafted item.

The February meeting is an attempt to beat any Winter blues with a "dance fit" session.

Through the first four months of the year, we will be running a competition each month that can be completed on the night by individuals with a prize at the May Annual Meeting for the member with the highest cumulative score.

We have an exciting agenda for the coming year, so why not come along as a visitor on the 2nd Tuesday of the month. It only costs £4 as a visitor and you can visit 3 times before joining – a warm welcome awaits.

On behalf of the whole committee, we would like to wish our members a very Happy Christmas and here's to an interesting and fun filled New Year at Stoke St Gregory WI.

St Gregory Baptist Church

Everyone is welcome to any of our Christmas activities. We wish you all a happy and peaceful Christmas!

Messy Church: 10am Sunday 3rd December. Fun for all the family to enjoy together. Join us for breakfast followed by crafts, story and songs.

Village Carol Service: Sunday 17th December 6.30pm at St Gregory's Church. Readings and carols. Refreshments served afterwards.

Carols in the Square: Thursday 21st December 6pm. Enjoy singing carols together outside. (A joint event with St Gregory's Church).

Family Christingle Service: Sunday 24th December 6pm. For those who like to dress up, this is your chance to come dressed as a nativity character. Not compulsory to dress up though!

Christmas Day Service: 10am. Short family service. Feel free to bring a favourite present to show everyone.

We look forward to seeing you!

For more details, email sonyacsetchell@gmail.com

Willowset Preschool, Wrap Around Care And Holiday Club

Saturday 16th December 9am to 11.30am

Have breakfast with **Santa** and receive a gift, followed by fun **Bingo** with lovely prizes.

Ticket only event, everyone welcome. Please pop into

Willowset or email admin@willowset.org.uk

£8 per child to include food, gift and one game of Bingo.

The Government have announced that they are expanding childcare support. This is to be phased in over 18 months. The first phase is to provide 15 hours free childcare to 2-year-olds from working families from 1st April 2024. If you may be interested in this, please arrange to come for a show around asap as we are expecting this offer to be fully taken up. Limited spaces will be available. Please email

Sally: admin@willowset.org.uk or call on 01823 491567.

Playing Field Committee Celebrate Grant Success

The playing field committee are delighted to have been awarded a grant to install a youth shelter on the Playing Field. In discussions with some of the young people who use our playing field it became obvious that they really need somewhere safe they can hang out with their friends. Working with them, the PFMC applied to the Valencia Communities Fund for a grant and have been awarded £11,442.

Neil, Chair of the Playing Field Management Committee says 'we are thrilled to be able to work with some of the young people who use our playing field to install the shelter to keep them dry and safe, working with them to agree to the final location and colours as well as them deciding on the rules and being responsible for ensuring that everyone sticks to them'.

The PFMC are hoping that the shelter will be a great asset for other groups including the Willowset, Friends of School, the Scouts, residents of the village and dog walkers. Somewhere dry for everyone to take a seat and rest their legs.

The plan is to start work early next year when the weather and field aren't so wet.

Table Tennis – Social Or Competitive, Take Your Pick – Wednesday Mornings Or Evenings

We are a thriving group of friendly players from mid-teens to OAPs from Stoke St Gregory and neighbouring villages, mixed abilities, mostly returners to table tennis after many years away.

So why not you too? Some choose the social friendly group sessions, singles and doubles, others participate in our 2 teams in the Bridgwater League – whatever suits you best. No membership required – just come along when you are available and bring a friend if you wish. All equipment provided. Charges include refreshments (OK – tea, coffee and a biscuit), and are just £3 for Wednesday morning **Women Only Session**, or £2 for Wednesday evening, **All Comers** (£1 for youngsters). First week no charge so why not give it a try? Join us at the Williams Hall:

Wednesday 10.00-12.00 Women Only – more info from Jo Valentine 01823 698529, **Wednesday 19.00-21.00 All Comers** – info from Paul Fielding 01823 490565.

HOTV News

We are delighted to be able to announce that as well as securing a £16,000 grant from Valencia Waste Management to upgrade our kitchen equipment, we have been generously awarded £45,911 by Valencia Communities Fund to fund Phase 3 of the refurbishment of the Royal Oak.

Phase 3 was always part of the plan for the Royal Oak and will complete our accessibility programme, providing disabled access toilets and extending the eating area, making more sense of the layout of the building we have all inherited.

We will be holding an open day at the Oak on Saturday 16 December to show the proposed plans to HOTV Members and customers, to discuss the options and to receive comments and suggestions.

The grant is dependent on the overall design as per the plan that VCF agreed to fund. Within this constraint we are open to feedback and possible minor adaptations, which is why we are holding the open day.

The pub and shop will both be open from 10 till 4. Copies of the plans will be available to consult and members of the

Management Committee available to talk through any issues and answer questions. We look forward to meeting you there to discuss the next phase in this heartening village success story. Christmas is fast approaching and we have already got a display of seasonal treats available in the shop. Both the shop and pub have a number of special events planned for the festive period.

Our chef Jenna, as well as providing her usual excellent fare is planning a one-off spectacular culinary experience; she will be producing a fantastic multi course feast. Details have not been finalised yet but keep an eye out for further details!

Music night – 4th Thursday of the month

Christmas Fair - 4th December

Volunteer Celebration - 11th December

Open Day – December 16th

Mummers Play - 26th December (Boxing Day) at 12 Noon.

New Years Eve Banquet - Details to be confirmed

As the new year rolls on and the phase 3 improvements expand our services, we will have a real need of more volunteers to assist in keeping us successful and no matter how little time you can spare, there will be something you can help us with. It is a really sociable and friendly atmosphere and we would welcome you with open arms. Please see Ann Woods at the shop to discuss.

Contacts: General enquiries – email contact@hotvssg.org
Shop - email shop@hotvssg.org - Facebook Hotvshop - phone 07842992825

Pub - royaloakssg@gmail.com - Facebook Royal Oak Stoke St Gregory - phone 01823490602

Stoke Environment Group

It's fair to say that 2023 has been an exciting year for SEG. A few highlights include:

Planting a range of wildflowers in public spaces.

Continued maintenance of The Spinney at Williams Hall.

Taking over the management of the Community Orchard. Soft fruit bushes will be planted in the New Year. This will become a great green space for the community to play, picnic and explore – anyone can pick and eat the fruit produced.

The most successful Envirofair to date.

A Bat Detective Evening – another to be organised in 2024.

Refurbishment of the Royal Oak bus stop.

The footpath group performing sterling work to improve access to our many paths and bridleways, liaising with landowners to identify repairs to stiles and other access points and producing footpath maps to help us navigate and make the most of our local countryside.

At our AGM in October, it was agreed to hold Envirofair 24 on 1st June 2024 at the Williams Hall. We hope to have a wide range of displays, organisations and talks. Something for everyone, young and not so young. Please do make a note in your new diary and support this village event if you can.

We continue to work towards identifying some land where we can work with a landowner to create a woodland green space. This is a long-term project that will require significant effort and funding, but we are determined to make it work if at all possible. Such a space will benefit people, animals and the environment as a whole, giving back where we have taken.

The volunteers of Stoke Environment Group would like to wish all our friends and neighbours in Stoke St Gregory and beyond a happy festive period and we look forward to welcoming you to one or more of our events in 2024.

Blacksmiths of Stoke by Dave Evans

By the beginning of the last century, there were only two blacksmiths left in Stoke. Daniel North, originally from Beercrocombe, was in Meare Green, near Huntham Lane. Frank Bird's forge was opposite the Baptist Chapel. The Bird family also went on to run the post office there, in the house now known as 'Normans'. Griggs Hill itself was named after a previous blacksmith. William Grigg, of Isle Abbots, married Charlotte Andrews in North Curry in 1836, and they lived next to the smithy in what was then just called 'The Lane'.

Lot Watts headed another family of Stoke's Victorian blacksmiths. Born in Mark, he married Stoke girl, Jemima Cummins, in 1823. Lot owned the land, including the old Village Stores, around the corner to Huntham Lane, to what is now the rear entrance to Jessamine. In 1832, Lot's house suffered a devastating fire, caused by a spark from the chimney of his forge next door. The Taunton Courier reported on the incident on 13th June and gave a warning to all rural blacksmiths:

"It is hoped that this will be a caution to country blacksmiths who, for the most part, have thatched houses adjoining their smiths' shops, and which, in dry weather, so very much endanger not only their own houses and property, but those of their neighbours. The expense of substituting tiles would be a mere trifle when compared with the damage to which they are daily and hourly exposed by the use of thatch."

Williams Hall

A Christmas Evening with the Kingsbury Episcopi Band

Friday 15th December doors open at 7.00pm

Tickets £8 including mulled wine and mince pies.

Under 16's Free

Available from the Shop, on the door or Paul 01823 490565

"It Takes a Village to Raise a Child"

I want to use this article as a way of thanking you for the ongoing support many members of your community have given the school and to give you an update on some changes.

Firstly, a sincere 'thank you' for all of the community engagement in support of the school.

A sincere thank you also to the Revd. Simon Bale and Revd. Sonya Setchell and the communities of St Gregory Church and Stoke St Gregory Baptist Church for their support and commitment to the school.

Very soon the primary school will become an academy and part of a wider community of schools called The Oak Partnership multi-academy trust (MAT).

The Trust is a family of schools that cater for children and young people from 2 – 19 years old which was established on 1st January 2019. This will mean that the school is no longer maintained by Somerset Council.

The Trust have been supporting our primary school for a year now on a consultancy basis so we are delighted that the support and collaboration is now on the verge of being formalised.

The staff at Stoke have been trusting, enthusiastic and committed to making a large number of changes to the school in the last year and it is now with great pride that we see the school thriving and continuing to develop and grow. We look forward to welcoming new school age children into the school in September 2024 and hope to see our school population grow. If you missed our Open Days and would like a tour of the school, please do email us to arrange an appointment: office@sstgs.co.uk

The African proverb "it takes a village to raise a child" certainly resonates for our school given the level of community involvement. I look forward to meeting many of you at the Christmas Sing-a-long at Williams Hall on Saturday 25th November.

Barney Rycroft – Head Teacher

Community Plan Update

The Parish Council has determined that they are best placed to deliver the Plan over the remaining 18 months period, before it is due for review.

The Community Plan Facebook page and email has been shut down but there is a commitment in the Plan to update the community on the progress of all actions in the Plan every three months. Any updates will now come directly from the Parish Council. Any queries in relation to the Plan should now be directed to the Parish Council ssgparishclerk@hotmail.co.uk

Stoke St Gregory Tennis Club

The Tennis Club is open for play throughout the Winter, but please be careful in slippery or icy conditions, as you then play at your own risk. Visitors welcome to join in at our regular club sessions: Mondays 10.00am, Wednesdays 2.00pm & Sundays 2.00pm. Our Rusty Rackets also play on Fridays 10.00am & Sundays 11.00am.

Pay & Play available as usual. If you are interested in coaching, please contact the Club.

Please look out for the Stoke Stampede raffle run by the Tennis Club on Sunday January 7th. Offers of raffle prizes gratefully received.

Advance notice of the Clubs "Frostbite" event on Sunday January 14th. All players welcome to this fun tournament! For more information on any of the above, please contact Stuart Mark 01823 490541 / 07956 981679 or see our website: <https://clubspark.lta.org.uk/StokeStGregoryTennisClub>

St Gregory's Church

Do you ever give a thought to the beautiful, ancient building we have in the heart of our village? I'm sure we can all remember times of joy or sadness when the church has featured significantly. It has stood there, rock-solid, grey and steadfast for everybody, over almost a thousand years of our village's history. Sadly, we cannot assume that it will be there for the next millennium. This will not be the case without some significant help from all those who have used it in the past and hope to do so in the future.

One wall of the Lady Chapel has suffered severely following the erection by our Victorian predecessors of two heavy stone memorials. These have now been removed, exposing areas of collapsed stonework requiring expert repair. The churchyard paths have long been a subject of discussion and head-scratching and will need serious investments to make safe.

With our latest five-yearly architect's inspection other developing problems have come to light.

This glorious building is not there just for the vicar and a few worshippers to gather on a Sunday but for **ALL OF YOU, ALL THE TIME**. The regular worshippers would be sad to see it fall into disrepair, but we can worship anywhere; would you seriously like to see it abandoned and derelict? Just where in your own village would you or your family like to be married, baptised or buried?

If you have never set foot inside St Gregory's then please come in and take a look around – we're open every day during daylight hours.

If you feel moved to make a donation towards the tasks we have ahead please contact the Church Warden or Treasurer to find out how.

Jane White 07799 201145 (Warden) Steve Loveridge (Treasurer) 07808 656329

Royal Oak Hub

Please see to the left for Christmas opening.

Christmas Fair 4th December 6.30pm-8.30pm. Lots of stalls and present ideas. Father Christmas will be there with gifts for the children. Raffle with many prizes. Tickets £1 from the shop.

Christmas Meat from Riverside Butchers Last day to order Sunday 10th December. **Jamie's Sourdough** on Saturday 23rd and 30th please pre-order

Christmas Quiz Wednesday 13th December at 8.00pm.

Restaurant Christmas Party Menu 1st -22nd December

New Post Office Outreach Van Every Friday 11.30am to 12.30.

Date	Shop/Cafe	Pub	Restaurant
Sat 23 rd Dec	8am-3pm	5.30pm-11pm	6pm-9pm
Sun 24 th Dec	9am-12pm	12noon-10pm	Curry Night 4pm-7.30pm
Christmas Day	Closed	Bar Only 11am-2pm	Closed
Boxing Day	9am-1pm	Bar Only 11am-6pm	Closed
Wed 27 th Dec	7.30am-5.30pm	5.30pm-11pm	6pm-9pm
Thurs 28 th Dec	7.30am-5.30pm	5.30pm-11pm	6pm-9pm
Fri 29 th Dec	7.30am-5.30pm	5.30pm-11pm	6pm-9pm
Sat 30 th Dec	8.00am-2.30pm	5.30pm-11pm	6pm-9pm
Sun 31 st Dec	9am-12pm	5.30pm-Late Bar	New Year Banquet
Mon 1 st Jan	9am-1pm	Closed	Closed