Birlingham News online

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Guest Editorial

Honouring the Past, Embracing the Present, and Looking to the Future

As we step further into 2025, Birlingham continues to thrive as a village deeply rooted in its past, engaged in its present, and always looking ahead to what the future may bring. This edition of *Birlingham News* captures this journey perfectly, with stories that honour our history, celebrate community spirit, and introduce new initiatives that shape what is to come.

We begin with a tribute to Revd Martin Coombs, a much-loved figure who served our parish from 1976 to 1991. His devotion to Pershore, Birlingham, and surrounding villages left a lasting impact on so many, and his memory remains strong in the hearts of those who knew him. Meanwhile, Chris Ludlow's upcoming talk, *Tales of Birlingham*, illustrated with historic photographs, provides an opportunity for us all to reflect on how our village has evolved over the last 60 years.

But Birlingham is not just about looking back – it is about cherishing the traditions that make the village what it is today. The Snowdrop Teas continue to attract visitors, drawing them to the beauty of our churchyard and the warm hospitality of the Village Hall. The much-loved Bulb Sunday Service was so well attended this year that we even ran out of service sheets – a testament to the strong community spirit that fills St James' Church.

Continues on page 17

Birlingham IW

by Caryl Mills



Open meetings
We are opening our March meeting to the whole village, your friends and family.

20th February: CANCELLED
Regretfully we are having to cancel the meeting on 20th February – Fire Safety talk by Hereford and Worcester Fire Service. Hopefully we will be rescheduling this.

20th March: Tales of Birlingham with Chris Ludlow
Illustrated by old photographs of Birlingham, Chris will be telling tales of Birlingham over the last 60 years. This looks to be a fascinating talk and everyone can join us to find out the history of this village.

The talk starts at 7.30pm in the Village Hall. £3 for non-members.



Revd Martin Coombs

by Anna Coombs

We are so very sad that Martin Coombs, Vicar of Pershore, Birlingham with Nafford, Wick and Pinvin from 1976 to 1991, much loved dad to Dan and I and beloved husband to our mum, Margaret, died aged 91 on the morning of Wednesday 29th January after a short illness.

He was peaceful, comfortable and free of pain, and surrounded by his immediate family at the time of his passing.

We are most grateful to Rev. Jayne Parker and the Pershore Abbey Community who will circulate funeral arrangements in due course.

Dad loved Pershore, he loved the people, and our very many friends there. He was in turn loved by so many in the town and surrounding villages, as were we.

We cherish your comments but please forgive us if we cannot respond to individual messages on Facebook at this time.

Condolences by post are welcomed to mum, Margaret Coombs at 54 Divinity Road, Oxford OX4 1LJ or to me, Anna, at Flat Seven, 1 Downs Road, London E5 8QJ.

'But three things remain: faith, hope and love. The greatest of these is love'



Text and photo reproduced from Memories of Pershore Facebook page

Flower Arranging at St James'

by Jayne Mackenzie

I would like to give huge thanks to Enid Caldicott who, after many years of loyal flower arranging in the church, is stepping down. Enid has decorated her windowsill and the altar with expertise and skill to produce wonderful arrangements which have given pleasure to so many people. She has also helped newcomers to flower arranging with very useful advice. Jessica Dormer has kindly agreed to take over decorating Enid's windowsill.

If there are any folk who are keen to help with the flower arranging in the church please do not hesitate to get in touch with me – jaynemackenzie01@gmail.com.



Enid's arrangement for St James' Day in 2023



Snowdrop Teas

by Julia Luff

We're half way through Snowdrop Teas, and so far we have had a huge number of visitors admiring the prolific snowdrops in the churchyard, the flowers in the church and then into the Village Hall for tea and cakes. Come and join us!

Birlingham Village Hall
February Saturdays and Sundays
11am-4pm





The snowdrops a few days before the teas began *(Photos: Nikki Hollier)*

Guest Editorial continued

Change is also happening around us. Enid Caldicott, after many years of dedicated flower arranging at St James', is passing on the role, and we warmly welcome Jessica Dormer as she steps into this tradition. Meanwhile, modernisation comes in the form of the Village Hall lighting scheme, an upgrade that has been met with positive feedback and ensures the Hall remains an inviting space for future gatherings.

And then there are the forward-looking initiatives that remind us that Birlingham is always evolving. The new *Light Up Your Special Date* scheme allows residents to celebrate meaningful occasions by illuminating St James' Church, creating a poignant and visible reminder of personal and collective milestones. At the same time, discussions around local government reorganisation highlight how the structures around us continue to shift, shaping the way our village operates within the wider county.

Even small, everyday contributions play a role in the community's development. Michael Porter's offer of unwanted office furniture, with donations supporting the Jubilee Committee, is a fine example of how individual generosity benefits the village as a whole.

Birlingham's story is one of continuity and change, of preserving what is special while embracing new opportunities. As we move through the year, let us continue to honour the past, engage in the present, and shape the future together.

Our Guest Editor will be introduced in the next edition of Birlingham News*. In the meantime, we would be pleased to hear any feedback on their comments.*

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Birlingham Village Hall Lighting Scheme

by Paul Burton

The lighting and carbon reduction changes to the Village Hall were completed to budget and timescale. Initial feedback from those using the Hall has been most positive about the level of light and the lighting's adaptability.

Thanks go to Buzz Electrical in Evesham for their efficient service, but most particularly to the *Wychavon Rural England Prosperity Fund – Community Small Grants* who made it possible.

We are happy to demonstrate the lighting to any users of the Hall.

Bulb Sunday Service

by Adrianne Woodward

The ringing of the church bells, organised by Stuart Allen, encouraged the worshippers to attend the annual Bulb Sunday service. In fact there were so many in the congregation that we ran out of service sheets!

The service was taken by Canon Claire, supported by James MacDowall Scott, the Director of Music at Pershore Abbey, who was the organist, and the Abbey Choir. The organ sounded superb and it was lovely to hear the choristers as their voices filled the church.

There were readings in prose and poetry by Val Gilmore, Deborah Frost and Nadia and Alan Underwood and some rousing traditional hymns.

After the service we went over to the Village Hall to take advantage of the Snowdrop Teas.



Unwanted Office Furniture

by Michael Porter

I have decommissioned my home office and have a number of items that I could do without. The items are free to people who are happy to collect. I suggest anyone who takes something should make a voluntary contribution to the Jubilee Committee funds.

The items are:

1. A four-drawer steel filing cabinet – lockable – slightly dented but in full working order
2. A simple worktable/desk (125cm x 75cm)
3. 2 smaller bookcases
4. A large bookcase suitable for box files
5. A small table with folding sides
6. A wheeled carriage for hanging files – takes 50+ hanging folders
7. A tall thin cupboard (MDF) (180cm x 40cm x 40cm) containing 6 moveable shelves
8. 2 office chairs in good condition
9. A set of 4 shelves

If you are interested please contact me on 07785 767711 or mb.porter@btinternet.com.



















Light Up Your Special Date

by Adrianne Woodward

St James' is introducing a 'Light up Your Special Date' scheme in 2025. Do you have a special date on the calendar that marks an anniversary, or perhaps a memory of a loved one? If so, you are invited to sponsor the floodlighting of St James' on that date for a donation of £10.00, with the option of having an inscription in a Book of Commemoration.

Full details are on the next page or contact Sue Hayward, PCC Treasurer, on dennett90@aol.com.

Local Government Reorganisation

by Cllr Paul Middleborough

I thought your readers might like to see the letter the leader of Wychavon Council has written to the Minister of State supporting one unitary authority in Worcestershire, which would mean the abolition of the six districts and the county to create the new unitary council.

The letter is shown in full on page 21 onwards.

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A frosty morning on 10th January

(Photo: Jayne Mackenzie)

St James' Church

Light Up Your Special Date



Is there a special date on the calendar that marks an anniversary or memory of a loved one?

Sponsor the floodlighting of St James' Church on your special date for just £10.00

ST JAMES' CHURCH FLOODLIGHTING AND BOOK OF COMMEMORATION

This scheme, which enables people to floodlight St James' Church to mark a special occasion or an "In Memoriam" anniversary, has been running very successfully at Pershore Abbey and other local churches for many years.

The floodlit St James' tower is an important symbol for the whole of Birlingham and beyond and we are most grateful to all those who subscribe, enabling this to happen.

Your special Anniversary/In Memoriam name(s) and date may also be recorded in the Book of Commemoration, which is kept in St James' Church.

If you would like to start/continue a subscription, please complete the form overleaf and return it to:

Sue Hayward
Tadpole Cottage
Birlingham
Pershore
WR10 3AE

Telephone 07766 318901

To ease administration, we are inviting subscriptions for more than one year.

ST JAMES' CHURCH BIRLINGHAM

There are various ways in which you can support and help us maintain St James' Church for future generations.

For more information, please contact:

St James' PCC
(for donations and regular giving)
Sue Hayward, Treasurer
dennett90@aol.com

The Friends of St James' Church
Jessica Dormer, Secretary
jessica@thedormers.net
07939 695113

Thank you for your support.

St James' Church, Birlingham



Photo: Sue Allen

Remembering is really important. Our Commemoration Book helps people to remember special loved ones.

On these days St James' Church is floodlit so we can all give thanks.

We believe that Jesus is the light of the world.

" The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it."
John 1:5



Photo: Peter Luff

Front Cover Photo: Peter Luff

FLOODLIGHTING BOOKING FORM ST JAMES' CHURCH

I wish to book /renew *(delete as applicable)*

The evening of: …..……

In memory of: *(Name(s)* ……...

……

To mark the occasion of: ….……..……

……

And remembered by: …..……..

……

Please tick if you wish to include an inscription in the Book of Commemoration ☐

I enclose my donation of £…….... for …….. year(s)
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BACS payments can be made to:
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Sort Code: 30-93-11 Account No: 01283590
Please use the reference FLOODLIGHTING

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Name……..

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Postcode ……..……..Tel No ……..…..

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GIFT AID: I would like to Gift Aid my donation and any future donations I make to St James' ☐

By ticking this box I acknowledge that I am a UK tax-payer and I understand if I pay less Income Tax and/ or Capital Gains Tax than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations in that tax year it is my responsibility to pay any difference.

FINALLY I consent to St James' Church contacting me by: Email ☐ Post ☐ Telephone ☐

We take your privacy seriously and look after your data in the strictest confidence. Please refer to our privacy policy at www.pershoreabbey.org.uk

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WYCHAVON Wychavon District Council, Civic Centre, Queen Elizabeth Drive, Pershore, Worcs. WR10 1PT
T: 01386 565000 DX25934 Pershore www.wychavon.gov.uk

Jim McMahon OBE MP
Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

By email

The Leader's Office
Wychavon District Council
Civic Centre
Queen Elizabeth Drive
Pershore
WR10 1PT

Cllr Christopher Day
Leader of the Council

15 January 2025

Dear Minister,

Devolution and Local Government Reform - The Case for a One Worcestershire Unitary

I am writing in support of the recent letter sent by Cllr Simon Geraghty, Leader of Worcestershire County Council advocating the formation of a One Worcestershire Unitary Authority. There are several benefits to this approach when compared with splitting Worcestershire into two or more unitary authorities.

Protecting the Wychavon District legacy and ongoing District services

Before I describe those benefits, I should point out that I write this letter with a heavy heart at the prospect of the closure of a well-run and much-respected Council.

Wychavon has the third lowest Council Tax rate in England, out of 164 Districts, and enjoys high resident satisfaction levels with 71% of residents saying they are satisfied with how Wychavon runs services. We are rightly proud of our 50-year legacy and whilst we look forward to working with other Districts and the County to raise standards across Worcestershire, I am very concerned that merging District budgets with the statutory needs of the County will put much of our good work at risk.

You will be aware of the significant pressure that adult and children's social care has put upon County Councils throughout England. The expansion in the cost of these services is unrelenting and because they are statutory services they will inevitably take precedence over other services provided by the new unitary authority.

Up until this point District Councils have provided the protection of a separate legal entity for these services. In Worcestershire, the District Councils account for just 14% of local government spending yet they ensure good standards of parks (six Green Flag parks in Wychavon alone), health and well-being facilities, (well-being hubs and leisure centres in each of our three towns), and community building, where in Wychavon we have provided £4m to our local communities for locally driven initiatives.

Councillor Christopher Day
Leader
Email: christopher.day@wychavon.net

WYCHAVON DISTRICT COUNCIL
good services, good value

These activities help make life enjoyable and support the resilience of all our residents. They are a very public and visible sign of the delivery of both local and central government. They will however be at risk when placed in the same accounting budget as social care. The pressing statutory requirement will overcome these discretionary items.

My request is simple; that in publishing the Devolution Bill you ensure there is a measure in place to protect these activities either through a ring-fenced budget or a guaranteed percentage of total spending so that they continue to account for the same proportion of costs going forward.

Allied with this of course is the need to resolve the long-term funding of social care and whilst I was delighted to learn of the appointment of Baroness Louise Casey to drive change in this area, I was disappointed that she should be asked to perform yet another commission with a timeline stretching to 2028.

Benefits of a One Worcestershire Unitary Authority

Accepting these concerns, the ambitious timeline and the limits on the size of both unitary and Mayoral Combination Authorities set out in the White paper, there are in my view significant benefits to operating a One Worcestershire Unitary authority as opposed to anything smaller.

Scale and reduced operating costs - Worcestershire has a population of just over 600,000 and is an excellent match for the target of 500,000+ residents for newly formed unitary authorities referenced in the English Devolution White Paper.

The Wychavon District has the second-highest growth rate in the West Midlands and includes the planned Worcester Parkway development. Over the past four years, we are proud to have built over one thousand affordable homes.

The Council already operates a successful shared service agreement with neighbouring Malvern Hills District Council and the local development plan is shared with Malvern Hills and Worcester City. There is good cooperation between the Councils but a South Worcestershire-only unitary would be well below the scale the Government is requesting and would not achieve the savings outlined in the 2020 PwC report "Evaluating the importance of scale in proposals for local government reorganisation", referenced on p102 of the White Paper.

Reduced costs of change - by keeping the County footprint, the cost of change needed to split currently combined functions such as adult's and children's social care and highways will be eliminated. Future upgrades of processes and systems will also be lower for a single entity.

Place Implications and Inward Investment – a One Worcestershire Unitary means the benefits of strategic growth can be maximised and potentially attract more inward investment. A single, coherent voice for the area is better than competing North and South Worcestershire visions.

Improved career opportunities for staff - A single Worcestershire solution will over time offer more progression and future job opportunities for staff than two separate entities.

Provides a stronger voice for the Mayoral Combined Authority than a two-Worcestershire solution - Mayoral Combined Authorities are expected to have 1.5m+ residents. Worcestershire's population of 610,000 will have more impact than two authorities of half that size.

Makes a 2027 transition date more likely, reducing uncertainty and flight risk of key staff - splitting the County services will elongate the transition period making it harder to retain key staff.

Simplicity and clarity of identity – Worcestershire's identity is based on a thousand-year history, which when kept intact supports rather than diminishes the historic role of the City of Worcester. By comparison, a South and North Worcestershire solution would only add confusion for residents, businesses, and visitors.

I trust that for the reasons outlined above, the benefits of a One Worcestershire Unitary Authority are clear and will gain the support of both you and your team.

In the meantime, I look forward to working with my colleagues from the six Districts in Worcestershire and the County Council to outline the business case for such a change when we receive your letter later this month.

Yours sincerely,



Cllr Christopher Day

Leader of Wychavon District Council

Jayne Brassington

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We welcome brief letters to the Editors on any subject relating to Birlingham. The Editors reserve the right to shorten letters and we cannot guarantee that all letters will be printed.

Please send letters to:
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Personal adverts should consist of one paragraph of text, maximum 100 words, and will be included in a single issue of Birlingham News. Please note that advertisement text will be published exactly as received. Personal ads should be sent to news@birlingham.org no later than the Monday before publication. Birlingham News is published on the 2nd and 4th Wednesdays of the month.

Bystander Archives



The Autumn 2015 edition of the *Birlingham Bystander* begins with a welcome for Revd Claire Lording and a garden party at the Clock House.

The Friends of St James' visited Revills' and there was a commemoration of the 75th anniversary of VJ Day. Bill Trow-Poole's article from the Spring edition concludes and there is an article about Revd. Rashleigh Duke's Book of Common Prayer, recently donated to the village. There are reports of the Flower & Produce Show and Harvest Festival, plus several other articles.

The wedding of Anthony Brand and Maria Wilson is reported and there are obituaries for Mike Bibby and Arthur Bennett. There are welcomes and goodbyes relating to quite few houses in the village; the goodbyes include the Commins, McVitte and Shaw families.

Issue 74 of the *Bystander* can be viewed at:
www.birlingham.org/village/bystander/issues/bystander074.pdf



Sherpool, 5th February
(Photo: Nikki Hollier)

Dates for your diary

February

Sat 15/Sun 16	Snowdrop Teas, 11.00am-4.00pm
Thu 20	Birlingham IW – **Cancelled**
Sat 22/Sun 23	Snowdrop Teas, 11.00am-4.00pm

March

Wed 5	Cuppa & Chat, 3.00–4.30pm, Birlingham Village Hall
Wed 19	Birlingham Parish Council, 7.00pm, Birlingham Village Hall
Thu 20	Birlingham IW, 7.30pm, Birlingham Village Hall: Tales of Birlingham with Chris Ludlow

Birlingham News online is available at www.birlingham.org. Details of future editions will be emailed to subscribers of *Birlingham News*. These emails are available to residents of Birlingham, their families and friends. If you know anyone who would like to receive these emails, or have any comments or items for inclusion in either the email or online edition of *Birlingham News*, or wish to be removed from the mailing list, please write to news@birlingham.org.

Birlingham News online is open to any organisation or business within the parish to promote events. Inclusion of an event does not imply that Birlingham Jubilee Committee supports either the event or the views of the organisation promoting it.

The copy date for the next edition is Monday 24th February (for publication on Wednesday 26th February). We regret that we cannot guarantee to include any items submitted after that date.

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