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Town braced for nine days of fun and laughter

by **Tristan Harris**
tristan.harris@bullivantmedia.com

DROITWICH will be filled with laughter for the next nine days when the annual Rik Mayall Comedy Festival (RMCF) returns today (Friday, May 29).

This is the second time the entirely volunteer-led, non-profit, community comedy extravaganza has been held after a successful inaugural outing last year.

Original stars of the Young Ones - Nigel Planer and Alexei Sayle, along with Comic Strip founder and Festival Patron Peter Richardson - will be among the highlights.

But there will be something for everyone with more than 300 performances across the town between today and June 9.

Honouring the legacy of legendary alternative comedy pioneer Rik Mayall in the very town where he grew up and caught the acting bug, the festival transforms the entire town into a vibrant stage with performances spanning the historic Norbury Theatre, local pubs, cafés, a canal boat, and outdoor spaces.

Rik Mayall's family, reflecting on the success of last year's inaugural event, said: "We were truly touched by the sheer amount of love for Rik



displayed all over the town. We cannot wait for the fun to arrive back home to Droitwich Spa again this year."

The official Totally Bonkers Family Fun Launch Party, organised in partnership Droitwich Spa Friends and Businesses CIC, takes place tomorrow (Saturday).

It is free to attend and will be a day packed with family entertainment, live music and street performers with absolutely no tickets required.

From 11am through to the evening, the High Street and St Andrews Square will be packed with live music, comedy, family entertainment, walkabout performers, games,

food, drink and plenty of festival silliness.

Performances from Mitch Benn, Droitwich Spa Community Choir, Droitwich Ukulele Club, CircusMash, Kane and Abel Magicians, Coppice Shanty Crew and loads more brilliant local acts and groups across the day will all help to kick off the 2026 fes-

BarberTown was one of the venues used last year and returns for this year's festival. Picture by Jimmy Hill Photography. s

tival in style.

There will also be live music to Friar Street (outside the Old Cock Inn) from 12.30pm to 8pm on Sunday, May 31 and next Saturday, June 6, from midday to 4pm.

The line-up will include local talent, BBC Introducing acts and a few very special guests.

The Pop-Up Museum at the Norbury Theatre will return. It has been curated by top photographer Andy Hollingworth, has a Young Ones theme and has been fully funded by local county councillor Dan Birch. It will offer a nostalgic dive into alternative comedy heritage.

Funding from Worcestershire County Councillor Richard Morris and the dedicated RMCF Youth Team has focused on the next generation, backing a line-up of youth development schemes running throughout the week.

There will be comedy workshops to help young people build confidence, creativity and performance skills and The Festival Joke Spot Live - an interactive spot in St Andrew's Square in partnership with The UK Kids Comedy Festival where children and young people can grab the microphone and share their favourite jokes.

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Special games bring in £1,600

CRICKETERS at the University of Worcester have raised around £1,600 in memory of Redditch cricketer Josh Baker.

Through a series of matches with his former school and clubs, the university's men's and women's cricket teams raised funds for the JB33 Foundation.

Archie Grimsey, chair of the University's Men's Cricket Club, said: "During our first year, Josh came into one of our lectures to talk about the professional sport.

"He was also well known to quite a few of the students in our society and at the university through playing cricket in the county growing up."

Students organised fixtures at Astwood Bank, Josh's childhood club, as well as two T20 matches against his former school, Malvern College.

Alongside their regular British Universities and Colleges Sport (BUCS) fixtures, they also faced the Worcestershire Academy, a pathway Josh had progressed through.

Archie, in the fourth year of his Cricket Coaching and Management integrated Master's degree, said he was particularly proud the club had raised the funds in a way which involved such a breadth of different people.

Holly Neal, chair of Women's Cricket at the University of Worcester, said: "I knew Josh personally, as we both trained at Astwood Bank Cricket Club.

"The day we spent at Astwood Bank was incredible - it was so great to see so many people enjoying the cricket in the sunshine and supporting the JB33 Foundation."

Wheels in motion to help boost memorial charity

A BROMSGROVE cyclist will take on an extraordinary endurance riding challenge this summer to raise funds for a charity set up in memory of a Redditch cricketer.

Starting on July 4, Matt Foden will ride 300km, scaling more than 5,000ft worth of incline from Holyhead to Chepstow in Wales.

After his initial cycle, he will continue on to Cardiff the following day where Glamorgan take on Worcestershire in the Vitality T20 Blast.

He will undertake the feat to support the JB33 Foundation, set up in memory of Josh Baker who died, aged 20, in May 2024.

The ride will see Matt pass iconic beauty spots, including Harlech Castle, Rhyader & Tintern Abbey. The challenge aims to raise vital funds and awareness for the foundation.

Matt's motivation is deeply personal. As a member of David Lloyd (Bromsgrove), he would often speak with Josh and followed his inspiring journey and achievements with great interest.

Matt said: "Being half Welsh, this fundraising challenge brings



Matt Foden will take on the 300km cycle to raise funds for the JB33 foundation, set up in memory of Josh Baker. Picture by Neil Duggan. s

together my passion for Wales, cricket, and mental health.

"I'd love to share this experience with supporters of both Worcestershire and Glamorgan CCC, as well as cycling enthusiasts."

Matt is now calling on the community for support.

Volunteers are welcome to join him for day one of the ride (experienced cyclists) and take part in sections of the route or the more accessible 60km ride on day two.

He is also looking for people to

assist with logistics, such as food stops and transport, spread the word and support his fundraising efforts.

This is a unique opportunity for cyclists and supporters alike to be part of a meaningful challenge for a powerful cause.

Josh's parents, Paul and Lisa, set-up the JB33 Foundation charity in his memory to support local cricket clubs.

Paul added: "We are deeply touched that Matt will be taking on this challenge and raising funds

for the JB33 Foundation.

"If you can offer any support or want to join in with the ride, please reach out to Matt."

Anyone wanting more information on the challenge or to get involved in Matt's journey through Wales, should contact email him at: matt.foden@gmail.com or call him on 07719 019833.

Visit <https://shorturl.at/GizQR> for Matt's JustGiving page to sponsor him. Matt said: "Every £10 really does matter to the foundation."

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Belbroughton School wants a more inclusive play area. s

A colourful way to raise playground cash

THE FIRST Belbroughton School sponsored colour run took place before half-term.

The event was organised by parent Stacey Scott and the parent-teacher association to raise funds for the latter's playground project.

The school wants a more inclusive and enjoyable environment for all children.

Sponsorship was received from local businesses and the children raised extra cash by asking family and friends to sponsor them.

Headteacher Clare Bishop said everyone had a fantastic time.

"It was great fun, with parents, children and even the local vicar, Rev Chloe Hewitt, getting involved," said the head.

Villagers fears over new homes

by Ryan Smith
ryan.smith@bullivantmedia.com

DISGRUNTLED residents have claimed the government has disrespected their concerns and have described a "laughable" response to their fears about a potential housing spike in Droitwich.

Concerns were raised future planning applications, if accepted, will put pressure on infrastructure in the town.

A recent bid to build up to 180 homes on land at Chawson Lane has been of particular concern to residents, as has a planning application for 475 homes on land at Hanbury Road.

Droitwich MP Nigel Huddleston, on behalf of Coun Seb James, wrote a letter expressing residents' concerns.

Last week, Coun James received a response from Baroness Sharton Taylor, the parliamentary under-secretary of state for housing and local government.

The letter, seen by *The Standard*, said: "The government has inherited one of the most acute housing crises in living memory. "We must build more homes in places where people want to live and work.

"A new method for assessing housing need, introduced in December 2024, is based on a more objective assessment of need and supports a more strategic approach to housing, distributing growth across wider city regions, not just the largest urban authorities.

"The national planning policy framework states that the planning system should contribute to the achievement of sustainable development, including the provision of sup-

porting infrastructure. Developer contributions, secured through section 106 planning obligations and the community infrastructure levy, play an important role in delivering infrastructure to support new development.

"While prioritising brownfield land, the framework requires authorities that cannot otherwise meet development needs to review their green belt.

"Priority should be given to brownfield land and to low-quality 'grey belt' land, that does not strongly contribute to green belt purposes."

The response has been slammed by residents on social media, who have described it as a copy-and-paste response that shows a complete lack of awareness of, or respect for people living in Droitwich.

Disappointed

Coun James said he was incredibly disappointed by the response from the minister, and described it as laughable.

He told *The Standard*: "Residents are rightly concerned about housing development. I'm yet to meet a resident who says a blanket no - we're all saying infrastructure first, in the most suitable locations.

"Why are small villages having hundreds of homes when we have unused brown fields vacant?"

"We need more schools, more NHS services, more contributions to roads and more infrastructure.

"I will be writing back to the minister and the secretary of state to actually invite them to rural Droitwich.

"Not one of them has bothered to try to understand rural life - our countryside is under attack and we will not stand for it."

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Charity bid nets a stunning total



REDDITCH'S FTD Brothers have finished their month-long challenge to run 32 marathons in 32 days to raise funds for Alzheimer's UK.

Jordan and Cian, who have both been diagnosed with the faulty MAPT gene that leads to Frontotemporal Dementia, lost their mother to the same disease at just 52.

Despite this devastating reality, the brothers have dedicated themselves to fundraising and awareness for Alzheimer's Research UK.

Jordan and Cian started the challenge with Jordan running the London Marathon with a 25kg fridge on his back.

He set to show people that 'no matter what they carried, they did not have to carry it alone'.

Since the initial announcement of the challenge, support has surged, helping Jordan and Cian exceed their ambitious £1million fundraising goal far earlier than expected. And they have now hit £1.5million.

Jordan said: "We want to thank everyone both locally in Redditch where it all started, those who have engaged in our online community and now supported our latest campaign in Ireland."

"But more than the money, we are proud to have inspired millions of people - and this is just the start."

Cian Adams, the other half of The FTD Brothers, who supported Jordan throughout his current challenge as his physio, added: "We are so proud, as a family, to have achieved that already, quicker than we could ever have imagined."

"Clearly the devastation of a dementia diagnosis resonates with so many."



"We are extremely grateful to every single person who has engaged with this campaign - whether that be through a donation, interacting with posts or engaging with us in London or Ireland."

This week they have covered Laois, Offaly, Kildare and finished yesterday (Thursday, May 28) in Dublin.

Although the £1million target has been surpassed, The FTD Brothers' campaign continues, with ongoing fundraising efforts for the FTD Foundation dedicated to supporting awareness, advocacy, and families impacted by dementia and Alzheimer's Society Ireland.

Visit gofundme.com/f/thftdbrothers to donate.

Jordan and Cian have raised over £1.5million for Alzheimer's UK. s

THIS YEAR'S Bromsgrove Blood Cancer UK Fun Run has raised more than \$17,000 for the cause.

The event took place at Bromsgrove Rugby Club on May 10 and offered participants the chance to take on either a 5k or a 10k

course. Nicole Harris from Bromsgrove Blood Cancer UK said: "We raised a lot more money than last year and we still have more to come in so I am absolutely delighted."

"It was a great day and some blood cancer patients

took part in our run showing there is life after blood cancer.

"I would like to take the opportunity to thank everyone who took part, sponsors and everyone who helped on the day. We had an incredible team."

A total of 32 members of the Ormerod Rutter Chartered Accountants team raised more than \$3,000 for Blood Cancer UK after taking part in the run.

Whether it was a first-time fun run or a more seasoned effort, every member of the OR team rose to the occasion and crossed the finish line cheered on by colleagues who came out to support them at the finish.

The team said it was a cause close to their hearts as blood cancer affected thousands of families across the UK every year.

"We're proud to play a small part in supporting the vital research and care that Blood Cancer UK provides."

"A huge thank you goes to everyone who sponsored our runners, and to the OR team members who came along on the day to cheer from the sidelines. It made all the difference."

Next year's fun run has already been booked and will take place on May 9, 2027, once again at Bromsgrove Rugby Club.

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There will be records and CDs to suit all tastes when the fair returns on Sunday. s

Vinyl delights on offer on Sunday

THE LATEST Bromsgrove vinyl record and CD fair will be held on Sunday.

The event, which takes place from 9am to 3pm at the Bromsgrove Hotel and Spa, will boast an amazing selection of more than 20 traders across more than 50 tables, selling thousands of vinyl records on the day. The selection available will cater for all budgets, with both new and used vinyl.

There will be traders covering most genres for sale on the day, including Britpop, '80s pop classics, classic rock, punk, 2000s collectables, reggae, hip-hop, dance, soul, rock 'n' roll and new vinyl.

There is free on-site car parking when registering in the hotel, plus a cafe and restaurant on site.

Call Ben on 07832 247109 or 01527 873014 or visit: midlandsrecordfairs.co.uk for more information.

Spate of break-ins hits villages

by **Tristan Harris**
tristan.harris@bullivantmedia.com

RESIDENTS in Hagley and Belbroughton are being warned to be on their guard after a spate of burglaries in the villages.

Eight burglaries were reported in six weeks during March and April.

On three occasions, raiders entered through open first-floor windows. In three other incidents, they forced entry by snapping a lock.

There were three reports of jewellery being taken and one theft – plus an attempted theft – of a boiler.

The police has said a thorough

investigation is being carried out, adding it is believed the incidents are linked.

Det Insp Dave Knight said: "We don't underestimate the impact that burglary has on those who are affected. Whilst it is the offenders who are responsible, these incidents serve as a timely reminder to residents to keep their properties secure, particularly as the warmer weather arrives."

The detective urged anyone going away, or out for the day, to ensure windows are closed and secure. "Please take extra care to ensure back and patio doors are secured and consider changing your locks to ones that cannot be snapped," he added.

Det Insp Knight also urged any-

one able to consider motion sensor CCTV to use it, as that could be linked directly to a mobile device.

"It is a good idea to take photos of your property and possessions and mark valuables with SmartWater, for your own records and for insurance purposes, which would make them more easily identifiable if they were ever stolen," added the detective.

Det Insp Knight said anyone who sees an attempted theft of break-in should call 999.

Anyone with any information on the incidents should call Det Con Emily Jay, on 01905 717707, or email her at: emily.jay@westmercia.police.uk to pass on details.

Alternatively, call Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.

Man assaulted in Droitwich

A MAN suffered facial injuries in a serious attack in Droitwich at 10pm on Friday, May 21.

The incident happened on Westlands Walk, at the junction of the A38, and saw a man assaulted.

Another man, aged 28, was arrested on suspicion of assault. He has since been released on bail and an investigation is ongoing.

Det Sgt Matthew Robinson said enquiries had been carried out to establish what happened on Westlands Walk, adding

officers were keen to speak to anyone who saw the incident, or the moments leading up to it.

He said police understood a woman was in the area at the time of the assault and officers believe she may have information which could prove vital.

He urged her to get in touch with any information she has.

Anyone with information should email DS Robinson at: matthew.robinson@westmercia.police.uk or call police on 101 or Crimestoppers, on 0800 555 111.



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Primrose Hospice will celebrate its helpers during volunteers week and has appealed for more. s

Could you help your hospice?

by **Tristan Harris**
tristan.harris@bullivantmedia.com

THE PRIMROSE Hospice will recognise the incredible individuals who give their time, dedication and compassion to support patients and families across the community.

Next week is national volunteers' week and the charity has more than 435 people in its ranks who play a huge role in helping the Primrose deliver its services.

The hospice roles dependent on volunteers range from welcoming visitors and helping family support teams to working in charity shops and providing transport.

The contribution of unpaid staff is seen across the hospice organisation.

In the past year alone, volunteer drivers have travelled more than 32,500 miles, ensuring patients and clients can access the support they need.

The Primrose is also proud to support the

next generation of volunteers, with 48 students gaining valuable work experience.

Jo Wright, the Primrose Hospice's volunteers' manager, said: "Our volunteers give so much more than time – they bring kindness and reassurance to every person they meet."

"Their impact is enormous and we simply couldn't provide the level of care we do without them."

"Volunteers' week is a chance for us to say a huge thank you for everything they do each and every day."

The Primrose Hospice is always on the lookout for more people who can volunteer their time.

Whether people can offer a listening ear, lend a helping hand or bring a smile to someone's face, they can make a real difference for their local hospice.

Anyone who wants to help, can visit primrosehospice.org/support-us/volunteering/current-vacancies/ for more information or to apply. Alternatively, call Jo on 01527 871051 or email: volunteering@primrosehospice.org for more details..

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Pub celebrations at the double

THE LANDLORDS of a popular Droitwich pub are a very happy couple after toasting being named CAMRA's Pub of the Year and getting married within a matter of weeks.

Hayley and Gareth Jones from the Hop Pole Inn tied the knot earlier this month, just a few weeks after their beloved pub was honoured by the Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA) group. The pair found out the news last month and were presented with their special certificate as well as the trophy at a CAMRA meeting at the pub.

Days later, the Friar Street pub landlords then made the rare decision to close the pub for a 'private party' - Hayley and Gareth's wedding celebrations - before reopening the following day.

Hayley told the Standard: "Gareth and I would say we're both very overwhelmed and proud to receive our award."

"To win the CAMRA Pub of the Year award fills our hearts with so much happiness."

"We couldn't do it without all of our fantastic staff who work so hard week in, week out. We love them all and class each and every one of them as our family."

"We also want to say a massive thank you to our amazing customers who constantly support us. The Hop Pole to us is not just our pub, it's our living room where we love welcoming each and every person in."

"Gareth and I also got married last Friday, so we've had double celebrations over the



last week or so."

Judging criteria for CAMRA's Pub of the Year include the quality and condition of beer or cider, the promotion and knowledge of real ale, cleanliness and staff hygiene, community focus, service, decor and atmosphere.

More than 100 people from around Droitwich have sent the happy couple messages of congratulations on social media, for both the award and their wedding.

Newlyweds Hayley and Gareth Jones celebrate the Hop Pole Inn being named pub of the year. s

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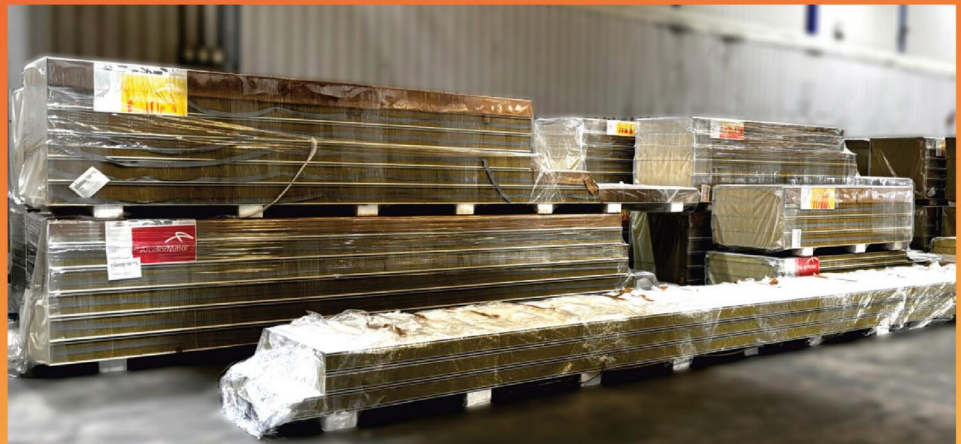
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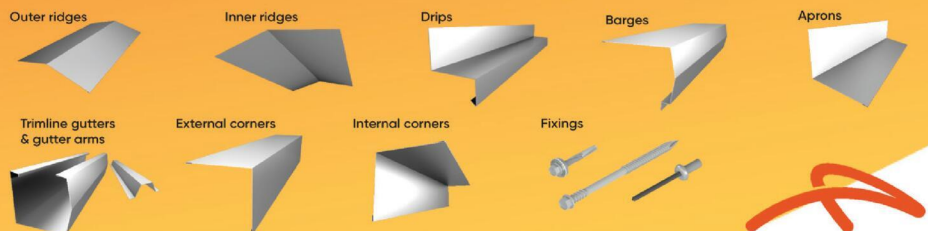
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Looking for local hero

REDDITCH Borough Council is on the hunt for a local hero with strong connections to the Greenlands and/ or Woodrow areas.

In October 2025, the council was awarded up to £20million over 10 years from the UK Government as part of its Pride in Place programme.

The decisions on how the money is spent will be managed by a Neighbourhood Board made up of people who live and work in the area. Working side-by-side with the community, they will create a shared vision for the future and use the funding to bring that vision to life.

Applications to lead the Neighbourhood Board are welcome from people who are passionate, community-minded and with close connections to the area.

Members do not need to have leadership experience as full support will be provided - enthusiasm is the main requirement.

Former Redditch Borough Council leader, Coun Sharon Harvey, said: "Putting local people at the heart of every decision that is made means we can be sure to make impactful change."

"That starts with finding the right person to guide the ship, as it were."

"If you are considering applying, I would say: 'go for it'."

"With full support provided, this is a great chance to really shape the vision for your area."

Applications for the lead role close on June 1.

Visit redditchbc.gov.uk/PrideInPlace for more information.

Developer renews vow to sponsor shed group

BROMSGROVE Men in Sheds has received a boost from Barratt Homes West Midlands which has donated to its Shed Share Scheme for a fifth consecutive year.

The developer renewed its sponsorship for the scheme which - run by Age UK North Worcestershire - helps people stay connected and active.

Jo Hughes, Deputy CEO at Age UK North Worcestershire, said: "The Shed is not just about making things - it is about making connections, supporting mental and physical health, reducing isolation and creating a sense of purpose."

"It just works, but it only continues 'working' because of the amazing support the Bromsgrove Shed receives, which is why we are so grateful to Barratt Homes for renewing its sponsorship."

Men in Sheds, originally introduced to the country by Age UK Cheshire in 2008, tackles loneliness and isolation in older men, where retirement can mean loss of status and contact.

The first 'Bromsgrove Shed' was set up in The Craft Centre, Stoke Prior, in December 2015 and the group moved to larger premises on the Metal and Ores Industrial estate in April 2016.

When those premises were put up for sale in 2024, the future of the Shed was at risk but a shared unit was identified and, in November that year, the Bromsgrove Shed relocated to Finstall. Under its former name -



Bromsgrove Men in Shed members Geoff, Joe, Neil, Eugene, Rod and Graham will be among those benefiting from Barratt Homes West Midlands. s

Age UK Bromsgrove, Redditch and Wyre Forest - the charity launched its annual Shed Share Sponsorship Scheme in 2018 to support the cost of running and developing its much-valued group.

Local businesses and organisations have a 'Shed Share' for a year in return for a Shed Share certificate and their support recognised in a variety of ways by Age UK North Worcestershire and the Sheddors.

The Shed provides a space for anyone to work on DIY projects or furniture reclamation and enjoy the community spirit. Visit ageuk.org.uk/northwocs/ for more.

ARTRIX UPDATE

31ST MAY 2026 - MEMBERSHIP LAUNCH

Artrix will soon launch our new membership programme - Friends of Artrix giving supporters the opportunity to play a direct role in securing the theatre's future.

Membership will offer benefits for audiences while helping sustain the venue for generations to come. For those who want to be even more closely involved, volunteering remains one of the most powerful ways to contribute. Whether welcoming audiences, supporting events or helping shape the future of the theatre, our volunteers truly make Artrix possible.

For more info, we'd love to welcome you to our membership launch event at Artrix on the 31st May 2026, Its free, nibbles and a free drink on entry. A night of live music in the foyer, tours of the venue and meet the team. Signup at: artrixbromsgrove.co.uk/membershiplaunch

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In the running to have fun

ORGANISERS are gearing up ready for the Wythall and Hollywood fun run next Sunday, June 7.

The event promises a full day of activities, entertainment and community spirit for all ages, with the popular 5k, 10k and Families on Track races, there is something for everyone to enjoy.

Those looking to try something new can take part in free taster sessions with Wythall Tennis Club, Redhill Archers and Wythall Community Association Bowling.

Younger visitors can enjoy a bouncy castle, while a range of local organisations will be on hand to showcase their work.

Community First Responders will be demonstrating how they support people in emergency situations, bringing along one of their 4x4 response vehicles. They will also be inviting people to learn CPR.

The Severn Area Rescue Association (SARA) will be attending with one of its boats, offering insight into the group's vital search and rescue work. Local police will also be present on the day.

When hunger strikes post-race, there's a variety of food and drinks stalls to enjoy. Food and drink options include a barbecue from Tidbury Green Scouts, cakes from Pearls of Wythall, pizza from Slice and Easy and much more.

Whether people are congratulating themselves on their run, or just getting together with family and friends, the licensed bar at Wythall Park will also be open.

Bookings close at midnight on Wednesday June 3, so participants are encouraged to secure their place at the start line soon.

Visit wythallhollywoodfunrun.org.uk for more information.

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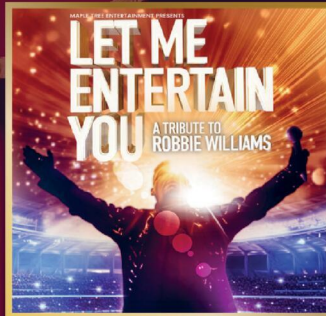


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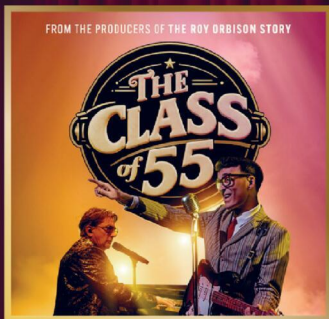
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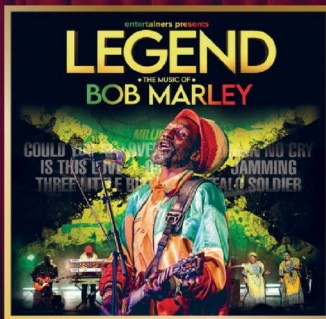
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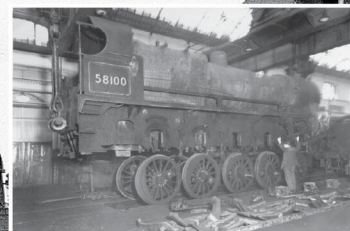
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Banking engine *Big Bertha* on duty at Bromsgrove. Picture courtesy of Adrian Troth.



Top: Locomotive 58100 at Derby Works in 1956, after its final journey from Bromsgrove. Above: *Big Bertha* being dismantled at Derby Works. Pictures courtesy of Adrian Troth.

Memories of famed *Big Bertha*

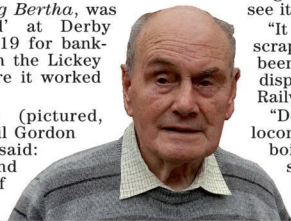
by Neil Gordon

A RETIRED railway worker who took the famous steam engine *Big Bertha* on its final journey has said the locomotive should have been saved.

Barry Troth, who was a fireman at Bromsgrove, where the engine was based, made the claim last week, on the 70th anniversary of the locomotive's withdrawal from service.

The famous *Big Bertha* - it was a part of engine, number 58100 and known as *Big Bertha*, was 'out-shopped' at Derby Works in 1919 for banking duties on the Lickey Incline, where it worked until 1956.

Mr Troth (pictured, image by Neil Gordon) said: "I have fond memories of working on



drawal from service. The famous *Big Bertha* - it was a part of engine, number 58100 and known as *Big Bertha*, was 'out-shopped' at Derby Works in 1919 for banking duties on the Lickey Incline, where it worked until 1956.

"It shouldn't have been scrapped, it should have been saved and put on display at the National Railway Museum."

"Derby Works said the locomotive needed a new boiler and claimed the spare boiler wasn't usable, so it was scrapped."

Big Bertha's final task was to assist a Bristol-to-Newcastle mail train up the incline at 3.30am on May 19, 1956.

Once it had returned to Bromsgrove it departed one final time, for Derby at 4am, with driver Les Rudge and Barry.

Barry said: "We were told in advance it was going for scrapping and I believe the early departure was so it couldn't be photographed leaving Bromsgrove. "We stopped at Kingsbury, on

the way, as the engine needed more water.

"Then, after leaving *Bertha* at Derby, we caught a passenger train back home."

At Derby, the locomotive was dismantled before being reassembled for an open day and then being dismantled one final time.

Barry, 91 and known for his British Legion work, added: "There can't be many people left now who saw *Big Bertha* in steam."



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HoW College is celebrating being named as one of the best places to work. s

College is on the list

HEART of Worcestershire College has been named in the official Sunday Times Best Places to Work list, which has been created in partnership with leading employee experience platform WorkL.

This nationwide workplace survey recognises and celebrates the UK's top employers, showcasing organisations leading the way in employee engagement, workplace culture and overall employee experience.

Michelle Dowse, CEO and Principal at HoW College, said: "We are delighted to be recognised as one of The Sunday Times Best Places to Work 2026. This accolade reflects the culture we have worked hard to build across the College, where colleagues feel valued, supported and able to thrive.

"We firmly believe delivering high-quality teaching, learning and support begins with a motivated and engaged workforce. As colleagues spend a significant proportion of their lives at work, it is important to us that HoW College is a place where people feel happy, recognised and proud of the contribu-

tion they make.

"Our staff are deeply committed to student success and passionate about nurturing each individual's brilliance and it is this shared sense of purpose that underpins the positive feedback we have received across areas such as reward and recognition, confidence in leadership, instilling pride and job satisfaction."

This year's Best Places to Work features 567 organisations across industries, split into 28 Best Very Big Places to Work, 126 Best Big Places to Work, 218 Best Medium Places to Work, and 195 Best Small Places to Work.

Zoe Thomas, editor of The Sunday Times Best Places to Work, said: "In an evolving world of work Britain's leading employers are helping staff forge careers that count today – and in the future.

"In turn, the Best Places to Work have the resilience to weather the current economic storms baked in, thanks to engaged workers who go above and beyond with a smile."



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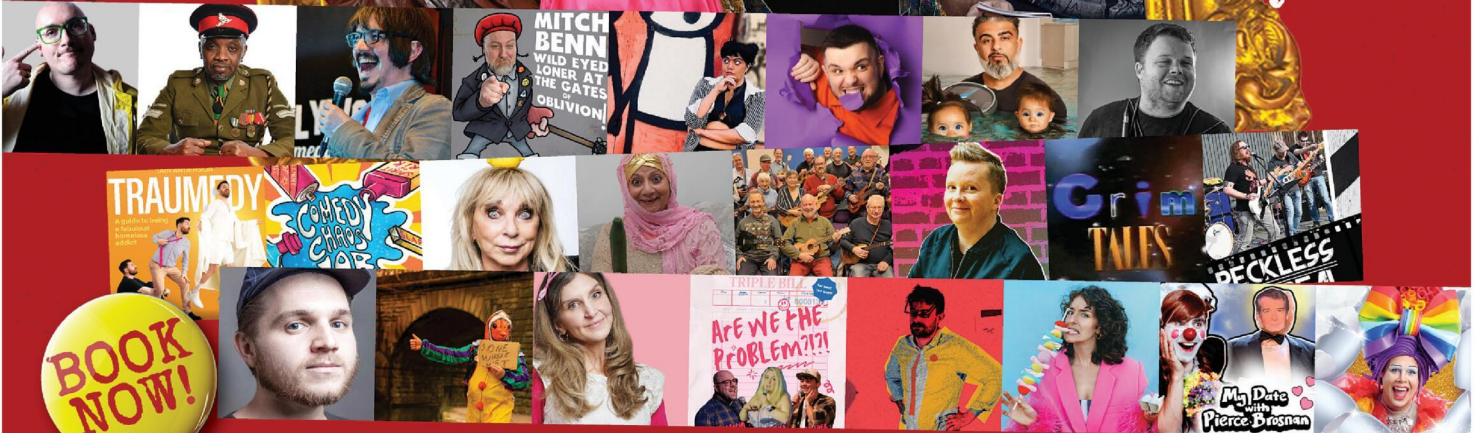
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Mark Fogarty (left) and Kevin Redmond (right) with Alvechurch's award. s

Community award for football club

ALVECHURCH Football Club have won a prestigious national prize at the Non-League Paper's National Game Awards. Church won the Community Club of the Year award for the 2025/26 season based on the impact generated by the club in their local area.

Some of the club's projects included walking football, walking football for Parkinson's, a mental health team, disability team, growth in the female game, school coaching and Nathan Redmond holiday camps.

Church also runs a number of regular programmes including youth and junior football camps and football education courses.

A club spokesperson said: "To be recognised in this way amongst our peers and alongside some huge football clubs is testa-

ment to the hard work carried out daily by good people at our club.

"Thanks go out particularly to Mark Fogarty and Kevin Redmond who head up the Alvechurch Foundation and who do this work - not for any recognition but for a genuine compassion and caring about people in our community.

"Well done to all involved and thank you. "We are extremely proud."

Clubs from the National League to Step Four of non-league compete to win prizes at the Non-League Paper's National Game Awards.

And Church took the Community Club prize ahead of hundreds of other non-league clubs. The ceremony took place at AFC Wimbledon's Plough Lane home.



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Businesses back 'flexible approach'

WORCESTERSHIRE businesses are backing a more flexible approach to work experience in schools.

This follows government-led changes from the traditional block of one week, to a modern work experience model that offers a range of meaningful experiences spread across school Years 7 to 11.

On Wednesday, Early Careers Worcestershire, part of Worcestershire County Council's Skills and Employability service, hosted a business forum at Visit Worcestershire New Road.

This brought together employers, education partners, and careers professionals to help shape the future of work experience in the county.

This session opened up a discussion on a wider range of opportunities for young people, including workplace visits, employer-led projects, mentoring, careers talks and shorter, more flexible placements.

This approach will give pupils a broader exposure to different industries, while making it easier for businesses of all sizes to get involved.

Judy Gibbs, head of skills and employability at Worcestershire County Council, said: "This is about building a stronger, more connected system between education and business."

"By working together, we can give young people better, more meaningful experiences of the workplace while supporting employers to develop the future workforce they need."

At the forum, employers shared their experiences and ideas, with many pledging to support the approach and play a role in creat-



ing more meaningful opportunities for young people across Worcestershire.

Matt Tope, programme manager for Early Careers Worcestershire, added: "It's really encouraging to see Worcestershire businesses already stepping forward and getting behind this first forum."

"There's a real appetite to do things differently and make work experience more useful for everyone."

"What we saw was really encouraging, but it's just the start. We're looking forward to seeing where this new approach will lead in the future."

Businesses across Worcestershire are now being encouraged to get involved and help shape the next phase of work experience, with opportunities ranging from workplace visits and careers talks to mentoring, employer-led projects, and flexible placement opportunities for young people.

Businesses interested in joining the conversation and finding out how they can get involved are encouraged to contact Early Careers Worcestershire for more information.

Visit www.worcestershire.gov.uk/skills for more information.

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New chairman named

BROMSGROVE District Council will have its third youngest chairman ever over the next year after Coun Joshua Robinson was elected into the role.

Coun Robinson will be joined by his wife and fellow district councillor, Siobhan Robinson, as his consort. Coun Bakul Kumar has also been elect-

ed as vice-chairman. He said: "I am absolutely honoured by this and want to thank council colleagues for their faith in me and their support.

"I intend to be a fair chair and I want to use the next 12 months to be about bringing people together and look forward to getting out and about in our communities."

Coun Robinson has yet to announce his chosen charities for the year ahead.

The outgoing chairman, Coun Sam Evans, announced that during his term of office, he raised £3,000 for the Basement Project through fundraising events and a £1,500 contribution from the District Council's Ward Fund.

Coun Evans said: "Over the last year, it has been an honour and privilege to meet the people who work tirelessly within our communities to make our district a better place in which to live.

"I am delighted to have raised money for the Basement Project and the amazing work it is doing locally in helping young people with housing issues."

Coun Josh Robinson promises to be a 'fair chair.'



MP urges cash help plan over cyberattacks

REDDITCH MP Chris Bloore has urged the Government to establish a formal national framework for financial intervention following major cyberattacks, warning the current ad-hoc approach risked leaving local businesses and workers exposed.

The call follows the 2025 cyberattack on Jaguar Land Rover (JLR) by the 'Scattered Lapsus Hunters' group, which forced a five-week production shutdown and cost the UK economy an estimated £1.9billion.

While the Government intervened with a £1.5billion loan guarantee to protect 154,000 jobs, experts have criticised the lack of a pre-existing strategy for such crises.

In a series of Parliamentary Questions to the Treasury, Cabinet Office and Department for Business and Trade, Mr Bloore pressed Ministers for 'clear criteria' to ensure value for money and protect the network of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that underpinned the automotive supply chain in the West Midlands.

He said: "The cyberattack on Jaguar Land Rover wasn't just a blow to one company - it sent shockwaves through Redditch.

"When production stops, local suppliers and workers bear the brunt.

"While the Government's intervention saved jobs, we cannot afford to react to each crisis as it arises.

"We need a Cyber Resilience Framework that gives businesses certainty before disaster strikes."

The Government's responses revealed that, while the Cyber Security and Resilience Bill aimed to strengthen national defences, there were 'no plans' to introduce a pooled cyber-risk insurance scheme or a formal framework for financial support. Instead, interventions remain assessed on a case-by-case basis.

The MP is also championing the needs of smaller firms in Redditch, which may not qualify for the same level of support as major manufacturers.

"He is pushing for mandatory resilience standards for strategically important suppliers to prevent a single breach from collapsing local supply chains.

He added: "Security experts are clear - we need a framework, not just a reaction.

"I'm calling for resilience standards that ensure a breach at the top doesn't devastate the local firms that keep our economy moving.

"Workers deserve to know their jobs aren't one hack away from vanishing without a plan."

The MP's intervention follows warnings from Ciaran Martin, former head of the National Cyber Security Centre, who argued that intervening without clear criteria left the UK economy 'no wiser' on handling future incidents.

Mr Bloore said: "We cannot wait for the next crisis to act.

"By establishing a clear framework now, we can protect jobs, support businesses and ensure taxpayers get value for money."

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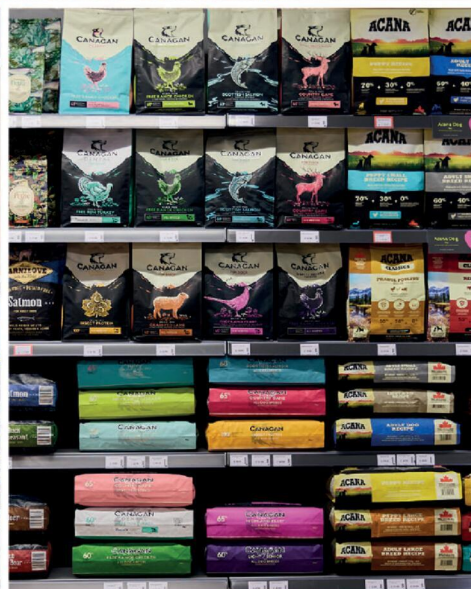
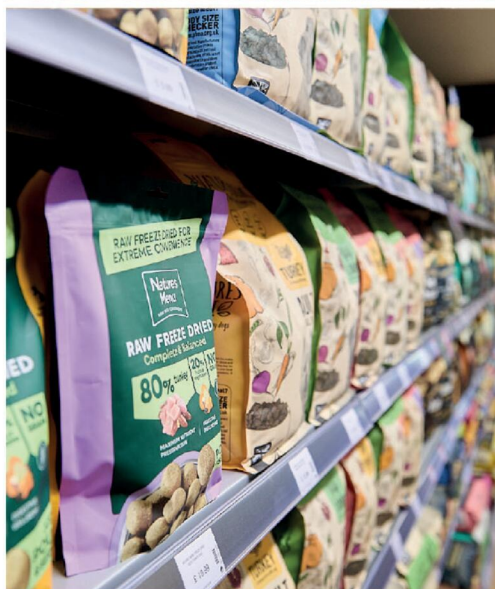


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Time to start up the music

THERE will be plenty of live entertainment at Bromsgrove's Sanders Park when the 'Music in the Bandstand' series starts next weekend and runs until September.

Free concerts will be held at the park's Jubilee Bandstand from 2.30pm to 4.30pm every Sunday.

Opening the programme on June 7 will be the City of Birmingham Brass Band, followed by Malvern Hills District Brass on June 14.

Stourport-on-Severn Brass Band will perform on June 21 and the City of Coventry Brass Band will take centre stage on June 28.

The rest of the programme features local bands in a variety of different genres, including big bands, silver bands and even a jazz collective.

Bromsgrove District Council cabinet member for health and wellbeing, and leisure and culture, Coun Shirley Webb, said she was pleased to see Music in the Bandstand back at Sanders Park.

"It's a wonderful opportunity for our community to come together, enjoy fantastic live music, and make the most of our beautiful green spaces.

"I'd encourage everyone to pack a picnic, meet up with friends and family, and spend a relaxing Sunday afternoon outdoors - there really is no better way to enjoy the summer."

This vibrant programme showcases an exciting mix of talented performances, from the bold sounds of brass bands to the smooth rhythms of jazz and big band ensembles.

The events are completely free to attend, making them an ideal way to enjoy Bromsgrove's beautiful green spaces.

Visit bromsgrove.gov.uk/things-to-do/activities-events/ for more on the forthcoming Music in the Bandstand programme.

Raising some vital funds thanks to an uphill task

A CARE team from Redditch successfully completed a challenging team ascent of Mount Snowdon, raising funds and awareness for the Stroke Association.

The group took on the climb together over the May bank holiday weekend, reaching the summit as a team after months of preparation, training walks and shared determination.

The team has so far raised £1,622 for the Stroke Association, which provides lifelong support for stroke survivors and their families across the UK, while also funding vital research and campaigning for improved care and recovery services.

The challenge was designed not only to raise funds, but also to reflect on the physical and emotional resilience required by people rebuilding their lives after stroke.

Home Instead supports people living with the long-term effects of stroke, helping them to remain independent at home wherever possible. The team witnesses daily the profound impact a stroke can have - not only on individuals, but also on their families and wider support networks.

Every day, another 240 people wake up to the catastrophic impact of a stroke.

A spokesperson for the team

The team trekked up Snowdon to raise money for the Stroke Association.



said. "Taking on Snowdon together gave us a small insight into challenge, endurance and the importance of support when things become difficult."

The group committed to the challenge at the start of the year, undertaking a rigorous training programme and pushing themselves beyond their comfort zones in preparation for the climb.

Throughout the challenge, their focus remained on teamwork and ensuring they reached the summit together rather than as individuals.

Laura Goodridge, CEO of Home Instead West Midlands and Cotswolds operations, said: "I am incredibly proud of the team for what they have achieved."

"The commitment, encourage-

ment and support they showed one another throughout this journey has been outstanding.

"Reaching the summit of Snowdon together is something we will all remember - not just as a physical achievement, but as a shared moment of pride and connection."

Visit justgiving.com/page/home-instead-hg to donate.

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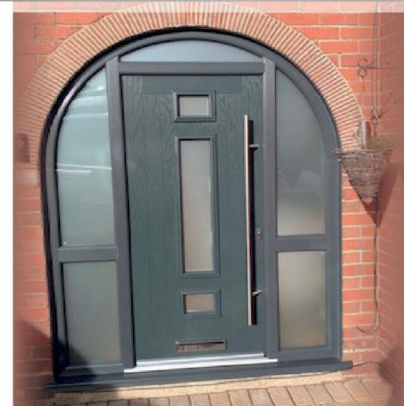
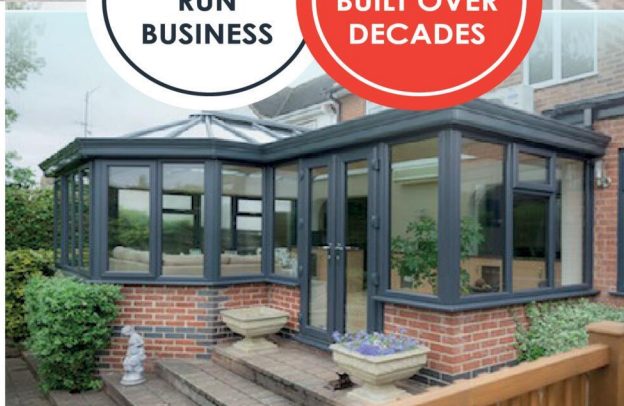


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Improvements in NHS services

HEREFORDSHIRE and Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust has received positive feedback in the latest national Community Mental Health Survey, with results showing improvements across key areas of patient experience.

The survey, carried out annually by the Care Quality Commission (CQC), gathers the views of people who have used NHS community mental health services over the past year.

Locally, these services include Talking Therapies, Neighbourhood Mental Health Teams and other support delivered in community settings such as clinics, GP practices, or within people's homes.

Service users reported that their overall experience of care is consistent with national expectations, reflecting the Trust's ongoing commitment to providing high-quality support.

The survey highlighted meaningful improvements in two important aspects of care.

Fewer people reported having to repeat their mental health history, suggesting better continuity and more joined up working across teams.

Patients also felt more supported to take an active role in decisions about their care and treatment.

The Trust performed somewhat better than expected in areas such as having clear discussions about medication and ensuring patients have sufficient privacy during therapy sessions.

Justine Hill, deputy associate director for primary care and community mental health said: "We are delighted to see the results from the recent Community Mental Health Survey.

"These reflect the dedication and professionalism of our teams, who work tirelessly to deliver high-quality care to our patients.

"While we are pleased to be performing at or above average in all areas, we know that some results highlight the need to further improve the experience of our patients.

"We are committed to building on this progress and continuing to drive improvements across our services."



The final total of 6,637.79 miles is the equivalent of walking the Herefordshire and Worcestershire border 127 times, completing 18 full laps of the two counties, or an incredible 253 marathons. S

Taking steps to boost funds

RESIDENTS across Worcestershire have stepped up for the Walk This May Challenge 2026, smashing last year's total and covering an incredible 6,637.79 miles in just two weeks.

The challenge, which ran from Friday May 1 to Thursday May 14, brought together communities from across both counties to take part in free, friendly and accessible walks ranging from 10 to 90 minutes.

Led by Active Hereford and Worcestershire, Herefordshire Council and Worcestershire County Council, Walk This May once again encouraged people of all ages and abilities to get active, enjoy the outdoors and connect with others.

The final total of 6,637.79 miles is the equivalent of walking the Herefordshire and Worcestershire border 127 times, completing 18 full laps of the two counties, or an incredible 253 marathons.

Dr Lisa McNally, director of public health for Worcestershire County Council, said: "Seeing our communities come together to achieve this incredible total is truly inspiring.

"Walking is such a simple but powerful way to improve your health and wellbeing, and these results show what's possible when people support and encourage each other.

"A huge thank you to everyone who took part and especially to our dedicated volunteer walk leaders who make it all happen."

Zoe Clifford, director of public health for Herefordshire Council, said: "This year's challenge has been fantastic.

"Not only have we surpassed last year's total, but we've seen people building healthy habits, enjoying nature and forming new connections along the way.

"It's a brilliant example of how small steps can lead to big changes for individuals and communities alike."

To recognise this achievement, a celebratory event was held at Ledbury Rugby Club on Tuesday May 19, bringing together volunteer walk leaders from across Herefordshire and Worcestershire to thank them for their vital role in supporting residents to stay active and well. Stephen Brewster, CEO

of Active Herefordshire and Worcestershire, said: "To see our communities collectively walk over 6,600 miles is an incredible achievement.

"It shows the power of getting active together. We're incredibly grateful to our volunteer walk leaders whose passion and commitment make these opportunities possible across both counties."

The Walk This May Challenge forms part of National Walking Month and continues to celebrate the dedication of local volunteers, walk leaders and community groups who support residents all year round.

Visit www.worcestershire.gov.uk/healthwalks for more information.

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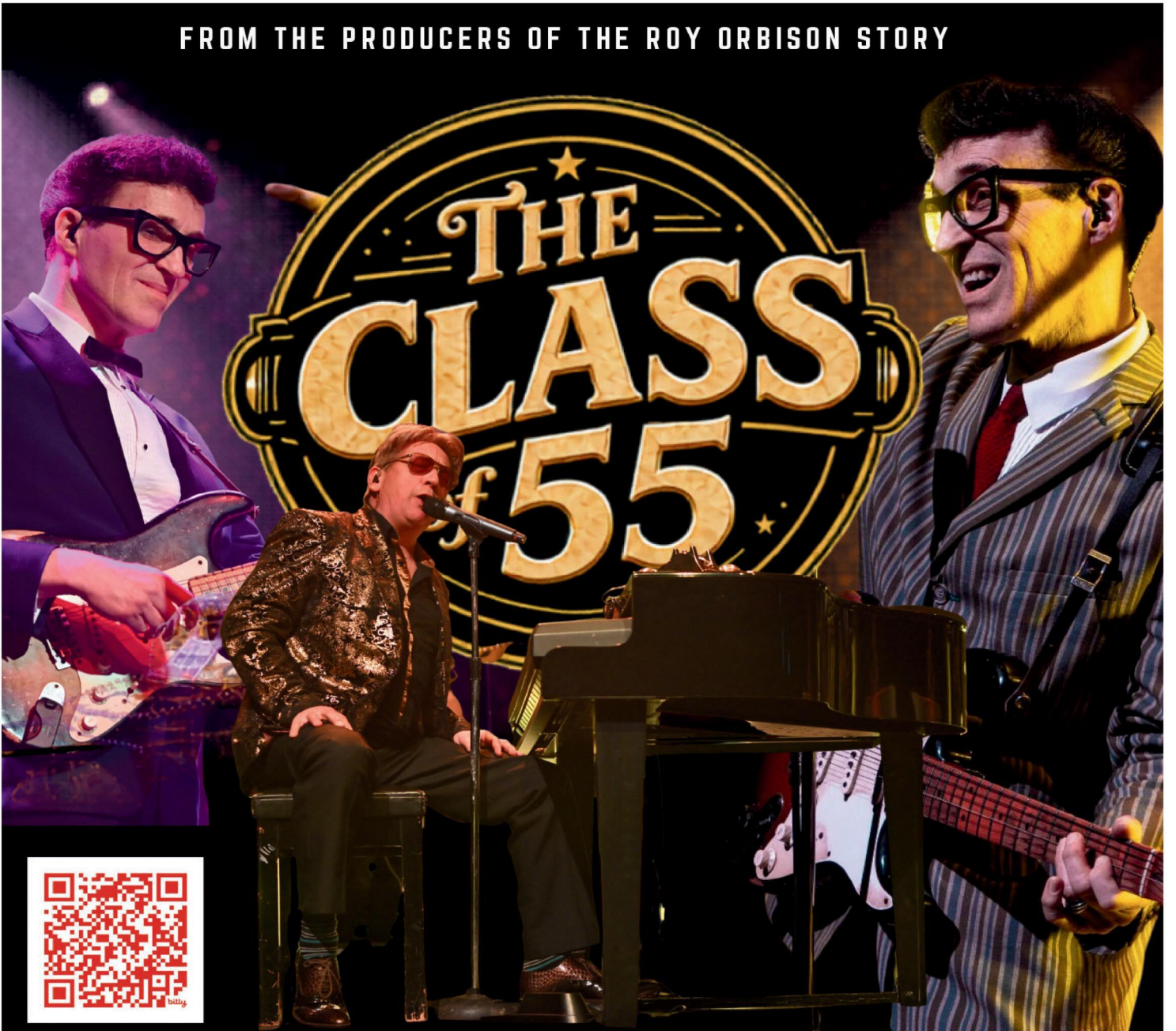
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Free access to this app

PARENTS and carers of children aged up to five in Worcestershire can now get free access to EasyPeasy, funded by the county council.

The app has lots of simple, fun, appropriate educational tips and ideas that fit easily into a family's routines. Plus, it uses everyday things you find at home and no expensive materials are needed.

Topics found on the app include children's wellbeing and emotional development, bedtime and daily routines, mealtimes and healthy habits, speech, language and communication and mindfulness and calmer moments.

Jen Lexmond, Founder and CEO of EasyPeasy, said: "Our mission is to support parents during the early years with ideas that are practical, inclusive, and easy to use."

"We're delighted to be working with the County Council to offer EasyPeasy for free to families with young children, aged 0 to 5 years, across Worcestershire."

Claire Mitchell, head of service for pregnancy, early years and families in Public Health added: "All parents want to give their children the best possible start in life. EasyPeasy offers a modern, accessible way to support parents and carers with everyday ideas that really make a difference."

"Providing free access to this app across Worcestershire is a practical step to support our children and families."

"By making this app freely available across Worcestershire, we are investing in our children, our families and our future."

Visit worcestershire.gov.uk/EasyPeasy to access the app.

Businesses back flexible move on work experience

WORCESTERSHIRE businesses are backing a more flexible approach to work experience in schools.

This follows government-led changes from the traditional block of one week, to a modern work experience model that offers a range of meaningful experiences spread across school Years 7 to 11.

On Wednesday, Early Careers Worcestershire, part of Worcestershire County Council's Skills and Employability service, hosted a business forum at Visit Worcestershire New Road.

This brought together employers, education partners, and careers professionals to help shape the future of work experience in the county.

This session opened up a discussion on a wider range of opportunities for young people, including workplace visits, employer-led projects, mentoring, careers talks and shorter, more flexible placements.

This approach will give pupils a broader exposure to different industries, while making it easier for businesses of all sizes to get involved.

Judy Gibbs, head of skills and employability at Worcestershire County Council, said: "This is about building a stronger, more connected system between edu-



cation and business.

"By working together, we can give young people better, more meaningful experiences of the workplace while supporting employers to develop the future workforce they need."

At the forum, employers shared their experiences and ideas, with many pledging to support the approach and play a role in creating more meaningful opportunities for young people across Worcestershire.

Matt Tope, programme manager for Early Careers

Worcestershire, added: "It's really encouraging to see Worcestershire businesses already stepping forward and getting behind this first forum."

"There's a real appetite to do things differently and make work experience more useful for everyone."

"What we saw was really encouraging, but it's just the start. We're looking forward to seeing where this new approach will lead in the future."

Businesses across Worcestershire are now being

encouraged to get involved and help shape the next phase of work experience, with opportunities ranging from workplace visits and careers talks to mentoring, employer-led projects, and flexible placement opportunities for young people.

Businesses interested in joining the conversation and finding out how they can get involved are encouraged to contact Early Careers Worcestershire for more information.

Visit www.worcestershire.gov.uk/skills for more information.

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Aldi takes the lead in reducing period poverty in the West Midlands

Almost one in three high-school-aged girls have struggled to afford or have access to period products. s

by Sarah Mason
sarah.mason@bullivantmedia.com

ALMOST one in five West Midlands women and girls feel embarrassed buying period products in store, according to a new survey.

Research about period-product buying habits, commissioned by Aldi, surveyed 1,000 women aged over 12 who have, or who have ever had a period.

The exercise revealed half of those who felt embarrassed about buying period-related products have used self-checkouts to avoid

being seen and another 50 per cent have asked someone else to buy products for them.

The cost of period products is a negative factor, with 28 per cent of high-school-aged girls having struggled to afford or access such goods.

Across all age groups, half of the respondents said they had used unsafe alternatives, such as toilet roll or tissue, and 20 per cent had worn products for longer than recommended. Some 20 per cent of respondents had missed work or school activities as a result.

The findings, commissioned ahead of the recent period poverty

awareness week, reveal how stigma and cost are preventing people in the West Midlands accessing the products they need.

Aldi has distributed 1.4million free period products since March last year, with customers and colleagues able to take what they need, when they need it.

That initiative was introduced to help ensure essential items such as tampons and pads are accessible to everyone who needs them.

Julie Ashfield, chief commercial Officer at Aldi UK, said: "We believe that access to period products is a basic right, not a privilege, and we know that period poverty is still a

very real issue for many across the UK. That's why we took the step to make free period products available in all our store toilets – for both our customers and colleagues.

"This latest research really highlights the ongoing issues of stigma and affordability and that's why, one year on, we continue to play our part in helping remove the barriers some face when accessing period products."

The provision of free period products forms part of Aldi's commitment to supporting communities and ensuring access to essentials.

Aldi has also donated one million period products to people experi-

encing period poverty, through its partnership with charities such as Freedom4Girls.

Tina Leslie, founder of Freedom4Girls, a menstrual equity charity dedicated to tackling period poverty, said: "Period poverty remains a huge issue in the UK and we're encouraged to see Aldi's continued commitment to tackling it.

"This research demonstrates what we see every day in the communities we support: stigma and cost create real barriers that affect work, school, and health.

"We're calling on other retailers to follow Aldi's lead and help remove these obstacles."

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SO MUCH INCLUDED...

- ✓ Return coach travel from Redditch
- ✓ 4 nights at the Leonardo Hotel, Newcastle (JG3 rating) with dinner & breakfast
- ✓ Blue Badge guided tour of Vera's Northumbria (Alnmouth, Amble, Seaton Sluice, Whitley Bay, Cullercoats and Tynemouth)
- ✓ Guided tour of the Durham Dales, North Pennines & Barnard Castle with a local specialist
- ✓ Guided Borders Country tour (Ford, Etal, Coldstream, Kelso & Jedburgh) with a local specialist
- ✓ Photo stop at the Angel of the North
- ✓ Free time in Newcastle-upon-Tyne

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Isle of Wight Weekend

Departing Fri 17 Jul '26

A long weekend by the sea beckons on this lovely escape to the Isle of Wight. Beloved since Queen Victoria's reign, follow in the footsteps of royalty and relax at our base in a popular seaside resort and discover other highlights during an optional trip!

SO MUCH INCLUDED...

- ✓ Return coach travel & ferry crossings from Redditch, Bromsgrove
- ✓ 3 nights at the Medehamstede Hotel, Shanklin (JG2+ rating) with dinner & breakfast
- ✓ Entertainment some evenings
- ✓ Excursion to Newport

Optional Island Highlights tour (£15pp)

4 Days by Coach **only £309**
Single Supplement £60



Bristol International Balloon Fiesta

Departing Sat 8 Aug '26

Join us at the Bristol International Balloon Fiesta for a wonderful weekend to see colourful and creative balloons majestically rise skyward. As Europe's largest ballooning event, this will be a fun and uplifting break for everyone to enjoy!

SO MUCH INCLUDED...

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- ✓ Overnight stay at a selected hotel (JG3 or JG4 rating) with breakfast
- ✓ Visit to the Bristol International Balloon Fiesta

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Newquay, the Eden Project, Land's End & Penzance

Departing Sun 5 Jul '26

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SO MUCH INCLUDED...

- ✓ Return coach travel from Bromsgrove
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THE ARCHITECTURAL brilliance of the UK's castles is being showcased in a new collection of 12 Royal Mail Stamps.

The stamps depict eight castles from England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland and a further four stamps in a miniature sheet to celebrate Royal castles.

The newly commissioned artworks are by Rob Ball who has worked as a graphic designer and illustrator. He gained critical acclaim and a loyal following for his posters for every episode of HBO's Game of Thrones.

Midlands' gem Warwick Castle is included in the 12. That was built by William the Conqueror dur-

ing the brutal military campaigns fought against the Anglo-Saxons that followed the Battle of Hastings in 1066. In 1068, William ordered its construction to control the town and, according to the Domesday survey of 1086, several properties were demolished to accommodate its fortifications.

Dunluce Castle in Northern Ireland played an important role in attempts by the English Crown to secure and colonise Ireland in the 17th century.

Another Northern Irish castle featured is Dundrum Castle. This was one of the first generation of castles built by Anglo-Norman adventurers eager to acquire ter-

ritory in Ireland from the 1170s onwards.

Castell Rhaglan (Raglan Castle) in Wales was a royalist stronghold during the Civil Wars. William ap Thomas began building the castle around 1435, but his son, William Herbert - nicknamed the 'masterlock' or effective regent of Wales - made it a palace-fortress.

Castell Penfro (Pembroke Castle) was used by The Normans to quickly extend their power into south Wales in the late 11th century.

Iurquhart Castle, which lies on the western shore of Loch Ness, was developed in around 1230 by Alan Durward, the son-in-law of King Alexander II of Scotland.

During the Middle Ages, the castle played a role in the violent internal politics of Scotland but ceased to be occupied by the early 17th century.

Stirling Castle commands a natural crossroads between the Highlands and the Lowlands of Scotland. Two crucial Scottish victories in the wars of independence from England were fought within sight of its walls: the Battle of Stirling Bridge (1297) and the Battle of Bannockburn (1314).

And Bamburgh Castle in Northumberland was first fortified from 547 as the capital of the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Bernicia.

It was a castle until 1095 and then, in 1120, a great keep was built on the rock, establishing it as the northernmost royal fortress in England.

The further four royal castles featured are Castell Caernarfon (Caernarfon Castle), Windsor Castle, Dover Castle and Balmoral Castle.

The stamps, and a range of collectible products, are available at: royalmail.com/castles or by calling 03457 641 641.

A Presentation Pack including all 12 stamps is priced at £22.50.



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SUDOKU

Complete the grid so that every row, every column and every 3 x 3 box contains every digit from 1 to 9.

EASY

9			1			3	6	
		6	2	3		7		
8	7			5		1	2	
	9		7	1				8
7			5					1
5		1		6		2		
	8		1				6	
		4	5	7		9		3
2	5		6					7

HARD

2								6
		6	7	1	5	9		
	3						5	
		7	2		6	4		
4								8
		8	4		3	5		
	7							1
		1	8	4	7	3		
9								7

PATHFINDER

Beginning with the top highlighted letter, follow a continuous path of words associated with the given subject. The trail goes through each letter once, twisting up, down and sideways, but never diagonally.

Chat show hosts

M V I N O G R Y E S A N T H M
 I A D A L U A D L E L A I S E
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 A Y I N D A R U H J O Y S F R
 L L N A M V I E C A N O S S A
 L I L E R L D T T T N R S K N
 E E S T T E R L O H A I K R I
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 K R C I O G N O I W H R C O L
 I O N M R B R T N E Y E H D T
 N S F E R N I T F R J A C K Y

Solutions opposite

CROSSWORD

1		2		3			4		5		6
7							8				
					9						
10								11			
12						13					
					14				15		16
			17						18		
19		20						21			
22						23					
24							25				

ACROSS

- Public funds (6)
- Visitor (6)
- Uniform (7)
- Concise (5)
- Small bay (4)
- Essential (5)
- Condition (5)
- Inflamed eye-lid (4)
- Salt water (5)
- Cut short (7)
- Transfer (6)
- Catchphrase (6)

DOWN

- Largest bird (7)
- Pardon (7)
- Aptitude (5)
- Biased (7)
- Vigilant (5)
- Salute (5)
- Truce (9)
- Extend (7)
- Alien (7)
- Effective (7)
- Reville (5)
- Inflexible (5)
- Amusing (5)

Scribble pad

LADDER

Using the clues provided, fill in each step of the ladder with a new word, changing one letter at a time.

- Single
- Be defeated
- Missing
- Majority
- Castle surround



NINER

Each number from 1 to 9 represents a different letter. Solve the clues and insert the letters in the appropriate squares to discover a word which uses all nine letters.

- 7983** gives a bird;
- 62185** gives another bird;
- 7654** gives an animal.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

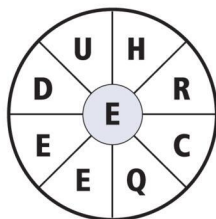
CODEWORD

This puzzle has no clues. Instead, every number printed in the grid represents a letter, with the same number always representing the same letter. For example, if 8 turns out to be a V, you can write in V wherever a square contains 8. Using your knowledge of words, complete the puzzle.

		25		4			8		18	11	23	10	21	
A	15	22	19	11	19	20	11		10			1		
B								3	17	10	10	4		
C		13			20		1							
D	26	19	17	10	21	12	10	2	17				14	
E														
F		2				11			10		24		19	
G														
H	19	10	17	8	22	21	5		21	10	4	11	7	
I														
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							T							

WORDWHEEL

You have 10 mins to find as many words as possible using the letters in the wheel. Each must use the hub letter and at least 3 others. Letters may be used only once. You cannot use plurals, foreign words or proper nouns. There is at least one 9-letter word to be found.

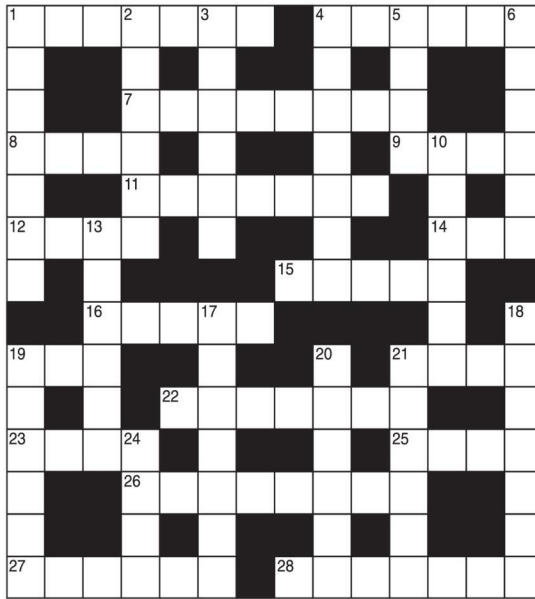


How you rate
 10 words: average 20 words: very good
 15 words: good 25 or more: excellent.

GENERAL KNOWLEDGE CROSSWORD

ACROSS

- 16 & 14. Whig politician who was the first British foreign secretary (7,5,3)
25. Satirical fable by George Orwell (6,4)
7. Mineral commonly called blacklead or plumbago (8)
8. The colour of unbleached linen (4)
- 9 & 11. Novelist whose best-known work is Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus (4,7)
12. --- Tindall, daughter of the Princess Royal (4)
14. See 1 Across
15. See 10 Down
16. See 1 Across
19. Name applied to several species of poisonous snakes (3)
21. One of the chief gods of the ancient Germanic tribes (4)
22. A fabulous Arabian bird (7)
23. Daughter-in-law of Naomi, in the Old Testament (4)
25. See 4 Across
26. The golden city imagined by the Spanish conquerors of America (2,6)
27. Domesticated animal related to the llama (6)
28. Fresh greenness (7)



DOWN

1. In music, a flourish for a solo instrument at some important stage of a movement (7)
2. Italian town on Sicily, south-west of Syracuse (6)
3. Calcified substance forming the glossy coating on teeth (6)
4. Fruits of anise used for flavouring, etc. (7)
5. Latin word meaning "the same" (4)
6. The upper part of the windpipe (6)
- 10 & 15. Austrian who founded the school of individual psychology (6,5)
13. A high-caste Hindu of India (6)
17. Another name for the spiny anteater (7)
18. Plant genus in the crowfoot family, including the Pasque flower (7)
19. The Roman goddess of the dawn (6)
20. Breathe in air into the lungs (6)
21. City on the Thames, and seat of a famous university (6)
24. The sister and wife of Zeus (4)

SOLUTIONS

General Knowledge Crossword

ACROSS: 1 Charles; 4 Animal; 7 Graphite; 8 Ecu; 9 Mary; 11 Shelley; 12 Zara; 14 Fox; 15 Adler; 16 James; 19 Asp; 21 Odin; 22 Phoenix; 23 Ruth; 25 Farm; 26 El Dorado; 27 Alpaca; 28 Verdure. DOWN: 1 Cadenza; 2 Ragus; 3 Enamel; 4 Aniseed; 5 Idem; 6 Larynx; 10 Alfred; 13 Rajput; 17 Echidna; 18 Anemone; 19 Aurora; 20 Inhale; 21 Oxford; 24 Hera.

Crossword

ACROSS: 7 Stock; 8 Caller; 10 Regular; 11 Tense; 12 Cove; 13 Vital; 17 State; 18 Syc; 22 Brine; 23 Curial; 24 Switch; 25 Slogan. DOWN: 1 Ostrich; 2 Forgive; 3 Skill; 4 Partial; 5 Alert; 6 Greet; 9 Armistice; 14 Stretch; 15 Strange; 16 Telling; 19 Abuse; 20 Rigid; 21 Drill.

Wordwheel Pathfinder

Des O'Connor, Michael Parkinson, Fern Britton, Graham Norton, Charlotte Church, Paul O'Grady, Ellen DeGeneres, Alan Titchmarsh, Michael McIntyre, Davina McCall, David Letterman, Lily Allen, Doehery, Patrick Kielty, SUNFLOWER

Niner

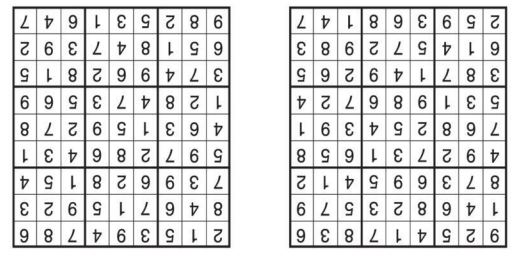
Melanie Sykes, Jonathan Ross, Frank Skinner, Oprah Winfrey, Jack

Codeword

1=Y, 2=C, 3=S, 4=L, 5=K, 6=M, 7=X, 8=W, 9=Q, 10=E, 11=A, 12=L, 13=U, 14=Y, 15=B, 16=H, 17=L, 18=F, 19=N, 20=Z, 21=R, 22=O, 23=D, 24=G, 25=P, 26=I

Ladder

Long, Lone, Lose, Lost, Most, Moat, Boat



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Following on from the fantastic response to our debut 'Winter' edition of **Seasons**, we're delighted to announce that **Seasons 'Spring'** edition has now Sprung.

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You can still browse the 'Winter' edition of **Seasons 24/7** and now, you can enjoy the 'Spring' edition of **Seasons** too!

If you'd like your business to be featured in the next edition of **Seasons**, or if you'd like more details - just call **01527 588688** and speak to Kelly, Caroline, Roisin, Debra, Paul, Gareth or Sharon.

Seasons magazine is brought to you, by your local **Observer** and your local **Standard** Newspaper Team



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live for today,
hope for tomorrow.
Anonymous



Family Notices

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DEATHS

EDWARDS Jean Anne

Passed away peacefully on 6th May 2026, aged 96 years. Will be sadly missed by all family and friends.

Funeral service will be at St Catherine's Church, Blackwell on Friday 19th June 2026 at 10.30am followed by cremation for close family only, at Redditch Crematorium. Family flowers only please, any donations may be made to RAF Benevolent Fund. <https://www.rafbf.org/> and <https://rnl.org/>

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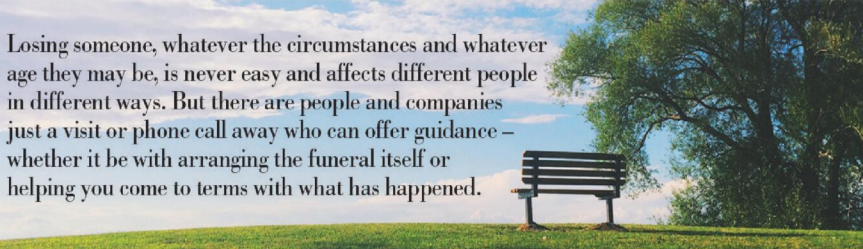
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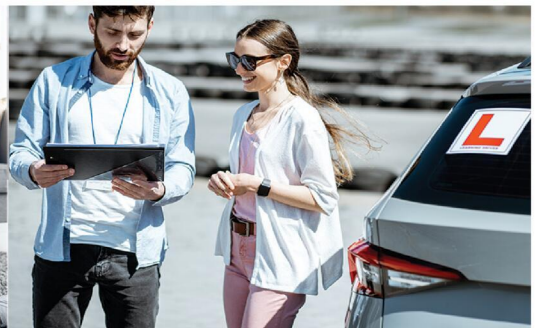


Losing someone, whatever the circumstances and whatever age they may be, is never easy and affects different people in different ways. But there are people and companies just a visit or phone call away who can offer guidance – whether it be with arranging the funeral itself or helping you come to terms with what has happened.



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PUBLIC NOTICES

PUBLIC NOTICES

Warwickshire County Council

ROAD TRAFFIC REGULATION ACT 1984
Warwickshire County Council has made the following Temporary Traffic Orders:

YORK CLOSE, STUDLEY
Order Effect: Road closed to vehicular traffic.
Reason for Order: To enable duct laying works.
Order Commences: 1 June 2026 for up to 18 months.

Anticipated Completion: 3 June 2026.
Access & Diversion: No diversion available.
Contractor: Quantum TM, Tel: 01724 786286.

SPERNAL LANE, SPERNALL
Order Effect: Road closed to vehicular traffic.

Reason for Order: Removal of two cut kerbs, replace with radius kerbs, repair a sunken carriageway patch, & apply topsoil/seed to verge.
Order Commences: 2 June 2026 for up to 18 months.

Anticipated Completion: 3 June 2026.
Access & Diversion: Spermall Lane, Spermall Lane, School Road, Captains Hill, Kinwarton Road, Kinwarton Farm Road, Tything Road West, Arden Road, Birmingham Road, Willoughby Close, Coughton Hill, Haydon Way and vice versa.
Contractor: Network Plus, Tel: 01613 515370.

PUBLIC FOOTPATH AL45 IN THE PARISH OF ARROW WITH WEETHLEY
Order Effect: Public Footpath AL45 will be closed to ALL traffic between grid references SP07570-56768 and SP05657-55480.

Reason for Order: The closures and restrictions are required for the safety of the public and of the participants in the Ragley Hall Air Show 2026.
Order Commences: 29 May 2026 for up to 3 days.

Access & Diversion: There is no alternative route available.
Contact: Slipstream Management Ltd (Midlands Air Festival) Tel: 07970 505436.

Warwickshire County Council proposes to make the following Temporary Traffic Orders:

MOAT LANE, ULLENHALL
Order Effect: Road closed to vehicular traffic.

Reason for Order: New water connection works.
Order Commences: 16 June 2026 for up to 18 months.

Anticipated Completion: 18 June 2026.
Access & Diversion: Mill Lane, Tanworth Lane, Birmingham Road, High Street, New Road, Henley Road, Hunger Hill, Green Lane, Grimshaw Hill and vice versa.

Contractor: Network Plus, Tel: 01332 820920.

For all of the above temporary orders, pedestrian access to and egress from properties and land situated adjacent to the length of road to be closed will be maintained at all times. Vehicular access will be maintained where possible.

To report any problems with these works or for further details of our current & planned roadworks visit our website warwickshire.gov.uk/roadworksmap or call us 01926 412515.

S Duxbury, Director of Strategy, Planning & Governance, Shire Hall, Warwick CV34 4RL Date 29 April 2026

PUBLIC NOTICES

PUBLIC NOTICE - LICENSING ACT 2003 APPLICATION FOR A PREMISES LICENCE OR CLUB PREMISES CERTIFICATE TO BE GRANTED UNDER THE LICENSING ACT 2003

Name of applicant/club: The AfterCourt Ltd
Postal address of premises/club premises or description: The AfterCourt Ltd, OMNI Padel, Astwood Business Park, Astwood Bank, B96 6HH, Redditch.

The applicant proposes to carry out the following licensable activities or qualifying club activities on or from the above premises/club premises: The premises comprise a bar located within an indoor padel centre. The bar will serve alcohol and light refreshments to customers using the wider sports facility, as well as general visitors.

The premises include a designated indoor bar area with seating and a small number of recreational features such as darts, operating as a social space ancillary to the padel centre. There is also an external area associated with the premises which may be used for the consumption of alcohol served from the bar. This area is not freely accessible to the general public and will be managed and controlled by staff at all times.

Representations by interested parties or responsible authorities should be made in writing to Worcestershire Regulatory Services, Wyre Forest House, Finepoint Way, Kidderminster, DY11 7VF or enquiries@worcesterservices.gov.uk by 18/06/26.

The record of the application is available for inspection by appointment.

Please call us on 01905 822799 for an appointment.
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MERCEDES is redefining performance with the new AMG GT four door Coupé.

With extreme power, enormous continuous performance, highly precise driving dynamics, and a thrilling AMG intensive driving experience, the four-door sports car catapults performance and driving pleasure to a new level.

It is based on the high-performance AMG.EA architecture and consequently underlines Affalterbach's pioneering spirit with numerous world firsts.

Central to this is a newly developed drive concept, strictly designed for high performance, which is being used for the first time in a

series-production EV. It utilises a new, highly innovative electric motor technology, so-called axial flux motors, combined with a high-performance battery.

The result is a drive unit that not only impressively delivers peak power but can also call upon it repeatedly and continuously, thereby shifting the benchmark in the high-performance segment.

Mercedes-AMG demonstrated the capability of this technology last year, the technology demonstrator sprinted over 40,000 kilometres in seven days and 13 hours – literally driving 'around the world in eight days' – and pulverised a total of 25 long-distance records in the

process. Customers will be able to choose between two powerful powertrains at the start of ordering in the coming days: the Mercedes-AMG GT 63 4-Door Coupé and the Mercedes-AMG GT 55 4-Door Coupé. The models' pricing will be based on comparable predecessor vehicles.

Ola Källenius, Chairman of the Board of Management, Mercedes-Benz Group AG said: "I've driven the new AMG GT 4-Door Coupé myself many times – and it genuinely stands out. It pushes performance to new limits and delivers the emotion our fans expect – now in the electric era."

"From my time at AMG, I know

how high the bar is set in Affalterbach. With this first model on the new AMG.EA architecture, we don't just meet it, we move it."

Ola Källenius, Chairman of the Board of Management, Mercedes-Benz Group AG said: "The new Mercedes-AMG GT 4-door Coupé ushers in an entirely new era. It is an absolute high-performance machine,

packed with pioneering innovations that enable previously unimaginable driving performance.

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History for Hamilton as Team Vertu drivers all step onto podium

by Aaron Sutcliffe
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BTCC: ALL four of Team Vertu's drivers stepped onto the podium at Snetterton in the latest round of the British Touring Car Championship (BTCC).

Tom Ingram, Ricky Collard and Tom Chilton all secured a top-three finish across the three races for the Droitwich-based team in Norfolk.

Ingram finished second in race one while Collard and Chilton finished second and third respectively in race two.

And the team's other driver, Nicolas Hamilton, won the Jack Sears Trophy award for the first silverware of his motorsport career.

Only drivers without a BTCC podium at the start of a new season can win the Jack Sears Trophy.

Team owner, Justina Williams said: "This is a weekend that really shows what being part of the BTCC is all about.

"Obviously on the one hand there is some disappointment that our results could have been even better, but on the other, we've come away from Snetterton with silverware for every driver which is a fantastic achievement.

"For Nic in particular, I'm massively proud that we have helped him to realise his childhood dream and it is richly deserved as people don't see all of the effort and hard work that he puts in behind the scenes, never mind when he is in the car.

"To see members of other teams in tears when he got out of the car and then celebrated on the podium was the most amazing thing.



Tom Ingram on the podium for Team Vertu. Picture by Darren Price.

It was most certainly a very special moment for us all.

"From a championship perspective, we know there is work to do."

Team Vertu made a strong start to the weekend as Ingram rose to third place on lap one of the qualifying race where he remained throughout to gain ground on leader Ash Sutton who had to retire.

And Ingram then achieved a podium finish in race one behind race winner Charles Rainford with Chilton seventh, Collard eighth and Hamilton 17th.

Ingram surged into the race lead in the second race only for a power steering issue and alternator failure to force the defending champion to retire.

However, Collard and Chilton rose through the field on soft tyres to take second and third and secure a double podium for Team Vertu behind race winner Sutton with Hamilton down in 16th.

Ingram starred from the back of the grid in race three and initially crossed the line in third place.

However, a 10-second post-race penalty for exceeding track limits saw him drop to eighth just behind teammate Chilton in seventh while Collard finished last after he received a 10-second penalty for a false start.

Hamilton produced another solid drive to finish 16th which earned the Vertu driver the Jack Sears Trophy for the first-ever silverware of his racing career.



Hellenic Premier again for Saltmen

FOOTBALL: DROITWICH Spa have discovered which league they will play in next season after the FA released the National League System (NLS) club allocations for steps one to six.

The Saltmen will again play in the Hellenic League Premier Division in 2026/27 after suffering a cruel play-off final defeat last season.

Andy Crowther's side almost celebrated back-to-back promotions only to fall at the final hurdle against rivals Worcester Raiders.

Droitwich can look forward to local derby games against Pershore Town and Stourport Swifts next season.

Devizes Town and Malmesbury Victoria achieved promotion into the division from the step below.

No relegated clubs have dropped into the division from the step above although Stourport have moved laterally from the Midland Football League Premier Division.

And Cribbs have received a reprieve from relegation to remain in the Hellenic League Premier Division next season.

The other teams Droitwich will come up against next season are: Cinderford Town, Cirencester Town, Corsham Town, Fairford Town, Hallen, Hereford Pegasus, Highworth Town, Longlevens, Mangotsfield United, Roman Glass St George, Royal Wootton Bassett Town, Thornbury Town, Tuffley Rovers and Westfields.

The league comprises 20 teams.

All leagues are subject to FA Council ratification.

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