

Whatlington News

DECEMBER 2023

CONTACT: STEVE TURNER 01424 870041

Carols Round the Bar at the Oak

Rare screening of a classic movie

Historic outdoor nativity service

Learn to make a festive wreath

Your guide to Christmas in Whatlington



Dual carriageway the answer to A21 problems

But don't worry, MP says, it's unlikely there'll ever be the money to build it

A dual carriageway would solve Whatlington's road safety problems, MP Huw Merriman told villagers.

He was speaking at a unique Village Hall meeting attended by nearly 30 residents.

As a minister, with responsibility for railways, he was the first member of the Government to come to a meeting in the village.

The dangers of the A21 dominated villagers' question's but the MP's ideal solution was not one, he admitted, that would be popular

He said: "I am an enthusiast for dualling the A21 all the way to Hastings, although that's not always positively received by local people.

"It would solve the problems of dangerous

INSIDE

- Pavement plan comes a step closer
- Black cat could make roads safer
- Flexibus just isn't flexible

bends and other road safety issues for the village.

"Businesses are being held back by the A21 – a dual carriageway would attract more companies bringing more and better paid jobs and help to keep young people in the area."

A show of hands among the people attending the meeting saw two thirds voting against a Whatlington dual carriageway.

Huw responded: "I realise my views on this might not make me popular but it does not change my opinion.

"However, I don't think you need worry – it's unlikely the money is going to be available for such a project at any time in the foreseeable future."



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Christmas at the Oak
Sing-along carols

21 December
(see page 8)

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ROAD SAFETY TOPS AGENDA AT MP MEETING



MP Huw, centre, was the first Government minister to address a public meeting in the village

A black cat could bring good luck for Whatlington's road safety campaigners, MP Huw Merriman told the Village Hall meeting.

The portable device can be fixed on telegraph poles to record data about traffic, including speed.

The results can be used to support moves to increase safety measures and the police, Huw said, were committed to act on the results and make a case to the highways authorities.

The boxes are generally funded by parish councils but could be hired from neighbouring parishes such as Catsfield.

He was responding to villagers pressing for more support to tackle speeding through the village.

Yvonne Underhill said there seemed to be little regard by motorists for other road users such as pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders. Navigating Whatlington Road was "extremely dangerous" for those groups of people.

Jane Hendley called for more 'Slow' signs, sharp bend warnings and perhaps chicanes as seen in other villages.

Anne Smith, who heads up the village Community Speedwatch, said support from police to improve safety measures, including roadside devices that flash up motorists' speed, was lacking and their view was that there aren't enough accidents to warrant further action.

Black cat may guide way to safer roads



Roger Fisher said the problem was made worse because many non-injury accidents, however serious, are not reported to the police or, if they are, the force does not respond.

Huw said police resources dedicated to tackling speeding had been ramped up but he would raise villagers' issues with the Sussex Safer Roads Partnership and with the divisional commander.

He added: "The A21 is a poor road. It cuts the village in two and isn't good in terms of supporting Hastings, which is one of the most deprived towns in the Southeast.

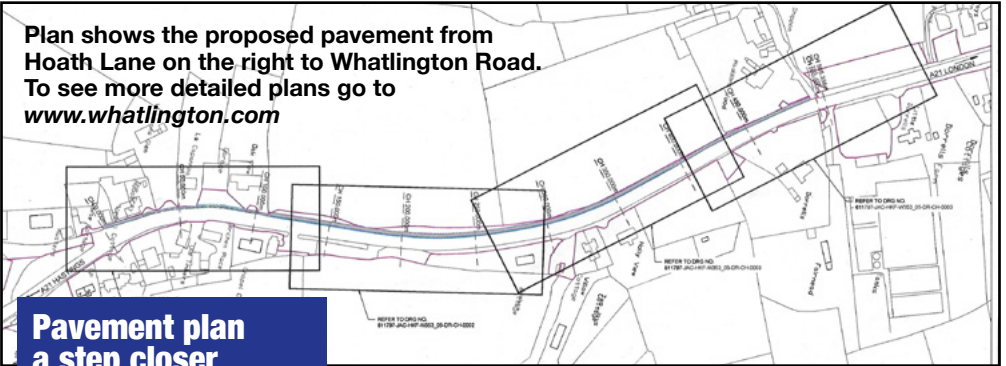
"The latest Government investment strategy on roads has a £20m budget and while it is frustrating how long it takes to decide what the money is to be spent on, live traffic data is now being captured before designing road improvements."



Which football team did the baby Jesus support? Manger-ster City

ROAD SAFETY TOPS AGENDA AT MP MEETING

Plan shows the proposed pavement from Hoath Lane on the right to Whatlington Road. To see more detailed plans go to www.whatlington.com



Pavement plan a step closer

The proposal for a pavement along the A21 has taken a step further, with designs drawn up by National Highways.

Huw unveiled the plans at the meeting saying: "The money is there and the Highways team is planning to bring its ideas back to the village to discuss them."

There were, however, some sticking points, he said.

Several trees would need to be felled, telegraph poles moved and it wasn't clear who owns the land near Whatlington Garage, making it difficult for the pavement to continue at that point.

Linda Fisher pointed out that if the pavement was not continuous on one side of the road there would need to be provision for crossing points.

It was also pointed out that the parish council had submitted its own ideas for the footpath which, as well as improving safety for pedestrians would also reinforce to drivers that they were in a residential area.

The parish plan included a possible two crossing points.

Flexibus is not flexible enough

Huw pledged to tackle East Sussex County Council over confusion surrounding the area's new Flexibus service which, he was told, does not seem to benefit Whatlington.

Although the village is poorly served by the existing bus service the fact that there is a route through the village to Battle means the Flexi bus would not compete with it.

It was pointed out that on some occasions using the main bus service into Battle meant having to get the return bus back 15 minutes after arriving!

The MP said: "Buses are important for social mobility and allow, for example, young people to get jobs and be able to travel to and fro. We have a labour shortage, particularly in sectors such as hospitality, and it doesn't help if people can't get to jobs.

"But the problem with buses is that everybody wants them but too few use them."

Roadsigns must be kept clean

It's all very well that £20m is being spent to improve safety including new road signs but who will ensure they are kept clean and free from vegetation? Jeffrey Bridges asked the MP.

Huw replied: "We have been in touch with the maintenance service and they seem to me to be more determined to do a better job. You can rest assured I will keep on top of it.

"Jeffrey's idea of a maintenance plan is a good one. The work needs to be scheduled in, it is no good saying it will be done 'as and when'."



How is Christmas just like a day in the office?
You do all the work and a fat guy in a suit gets all the credit.

New road closure dates

A new timetable for night-time closures of the A21 has been unveiled by Highways England.

An announcement from the authority stated: "The A21 has, for many years, suffered from a significant level of collisions.

"We are bringing forward a series of schemes to improve safety along this corridor, which will include, amongst others:

- junction improvements
- improvements to road alignment and visibility
- changes to speed limits
- improved signing, markings and road studs.



"This work is to improve safety and won't improve capacity along the A21. We'll be looking at that as part of our 'route strategy' work

which is due to start shortly."

Closure dates

Monday 8 to Wednesday 10 January – between Northbridge Street roundabout and John's Cross roundabout for two nights – 8pm to 5am.

Thursday 11 January to Friday 9 February – between John's Cross Roundabout and the A21/A28 Westfield Lane junction for 22 weeknights – 8pm to 5am.

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What's the most popular Christmas wine? 'Aaagh . . . I don't like sprouts!'

Threat to News deliveries

Some residents may no longer be able to receive the Whatlington News unless new volunteers come forward to help with deliveries.

The future of the delivery service has been thrown into doubt by a shortage of people to put the newsletter through doors, particularly in the Woodman's Oak Road area of the village.

The problem has been made more acute by the fact Ken Jones, who has overseen

CAN YOU HELP?

Call Steve Turner on 07941 669678 or email steveturner807@gmail.com

the distribution for many years, is moving out of the area early next year.

Editor Steve Turner says: "While there is always the possibility of receiving digital

issues via email or village websites, I know an overwhelming majority of readers favour the hard copy version put through their letterboxes. But there is a very real danger this may not be possible for many residents in the future. It's not an onerous task – about an hour every two months."



It's a soggy autumn

While the village escaped the worst effects of Storm Ciarán's gales it's rainfall led to flooding of the River Line by the Village Hall once again

Picture by Peter Lyon

October was the third wettest month, and the second wettest October, in more than 20 years.

Although the first 11 days of the month were dry the remainder more than made up for it with 225.5mm (almost 9ins) of rain falling.

In terms of soggy Octobers it was beaten only by the year 2000 with 229mm.

That was the year the Whatlington News weather watcher first started recording rainfall and figures show the latest October was the third wettest month of any since January 2000.

November is following in similar vein, with 166.5mm (6.6ins) by the 24th. An overnight temperature of 0.6C on the 11th saw the first frosts of the season in low-lying areas of the village.

■ The official 2023/24 storm season runs from September 2023 to the end of August 2024, with storms given a name when they are forecast to cause medium or high impacts in the UK, Ireland or the Netherlands. In September we had Agnes, in October Babet and Ciarán and, most recently, Debi.



Looking for a cheap gift? My friend is selling his vacuum cleaner – he says it's just collecting dust.

A village Christmas



Find local events at
www.whatlington.com

Whatlington Pageant
Sunday 17 December 3pm
Whatlington Church



Casting call for village's festive favourite

This year's Pageant – a festive fixture in village celebrations for more than 70 years – will begin and end at Whatlington Church.

After the start of the service the young nativity cast and attendant congregation will move outside, stopping to warm themselves by a bonfire, before returning to the church for mulled wine and hot soup – often much needed!

The event always sees a packed church and is the best-loved of all the village's Christmas traditions.

There's an opportunity for children from the area to get involved by taking on some

of the lead – but non-speaking – roles as the nativity story unfolds.

Grown-ups can play their part too, by doing some of the readings that take place during the outdoor procession.

■ If you would like your children to be involved then contact Pam Butcher on 07971 784218 or pamela.butcher@hotmail.com

■ If you would like to read a lesson, or have any other queries, contact Yvonne Underhill on 07721 880893 or underhilly@msn.com

Parking will be at the Village Hall. Warm clothes, boots and torches are well advised.

Whatlington Church Christmas services

Sunday 3 December – 1st Sunday of Advent
Holy Communion, 9.15am

Sunday 10 December, 2nd Sunday of Advent
Carols by Candlelight, 4pm

Tuesday 12 December
Licensing service for Rev John Hawkins, 7.30pm
Sedlescombe Church (see page 14)

Sunday 17 December, 3rd Sunday of Advent
Whatlington Pageant, 3pm (see above)

Christmas Eve, 4th Sunday of Advent
Holy Communion, 10pm

Christmas Day
United Parish Communion, Sedlescombe,
10.30am

Sunday 31 December
United Parish Communion, Sedlescombe,
10.30am

Sunday 7 January
Holy Communion, 9.15

Sunday 14 January
Family Service,
10.30am



My wife said if she didn't like my Christmas gift she'd burn it.
So I got her a candle.



Singalonga Christmas

It'll be no silent night as carol singing returns to the Oak!



Thursday 21 December, 7pm, Royal Oak

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lungs is the key attribute.

This year, however, will kick off with carols sung by people who actually know how to sing! A choir from the locally-based

Pheeb's Sing School will get proceedings under way at 7pm. Then it's over to the massed ranks of the pub goers to give full voice to an evening of well-loved festive tunes. Songsheets will be provided and you are advised to **get there early!**

■ **If you fancy something to eat on the night you can take advantage of the Oak's £10 basket meal offer: sausages, scampi or chicken, all served with chips. But you'll need to book in advance by calling 01424 870 492 or emailing info@royaloakwhatlington.co.uk**

The classic festive movie . . . that few people know about!

Thursday 14 December, 7pm, Royal Oak

Everybody knows of, or most likely has watched, *It's a Wonderful Life* but *The Shop Around the Corner* is James Stewart's 'other Christmas movie'. And most critics rate it just as highly. Set in a small shop in Budapest it tells how bickering sales assistants Alfred (Stewart) and Klara (Margaret Sullavan) are besotted with their respective pen pals . . . little knowing they are writing to each other. Swap handwritten letters for emails and you've got one of the many movies inspired by this 1940 classic – the Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan rom-com *You've Got Mail*.

■ **Fancy coming along? Contact Steve Turner on 07941 669678 or email steveturner807@gmail.com**



I think the person who invented Tipp-Ex lived in Whatlington, but correct me if I'm wrong.

A village Christmas



Find local events at www.whatlington.com



HURRY! ONLY A FEW PLACES AVAILABLE!

Learn to make a Christmas wreath

Tuesday 5 December, 6.30-8.30pm, Village Hall

Make your front door Christmas-ready by learning how to create your own festive wreath.

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Instruction and materials will be provided by Sandie Madge from the Floral Boutique in Robertsbridge but you can bring your own favourite decorations if you'd like.

The cost is £35 to include refreshments but bring your own wine if you prefer something stronger.

TO BOOK: Ring Sandie Sullivan on 07939 025828 or email ssullivan1904@btinternet.com

Village choir outgrows church

Whatlington Singers choir has outgrown Whatlington Church!

Now it rehearses at Battle Abbey School with new Director of Music, Lucinda Sheppard.

The choir will be performing a Celebration of Christmas Music at St Mary's Church Battle on Monday 18 December at 7pm.

Entry is free but donations are warmly encouraged, profit going to the St Mary's Church Organ Fund. Refreshments will be served

It will be a varied programme of seasonal music and will showcase some younger singers as well as Travis Baker, an accomplished organist.

All will be warmly welcomed to start Christmas week in style.



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SINGERS**

Director Lucinda Sheppard

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Join surgery's 'voice of the patient' group

Residents registered with Martin's Oak Surgery in Battle are being invited to help enhance the care it delivers to patients.

The surgery is looking to expand its Patient Participation Group (PPG) from its current membership of four to 12.

It is also looking to develop a 'virtual' PPG operating via email so all patients can have a voice.

Patient representatives discuss issues

affecting the practice and help the surgery to deliver the best service it can by contributing to practice decision making, service development and provision.

If you wish to join either the physical PPG, which meets every 2-3 months, or the email group, contact ppgmartinsoak@gmail.com giving your name, address and telephone number, or pop into the surgery to pick up an application form.

Visit **facebook** and search 'Whatlington Village'

The difficult financial climate continues to put council budgets under severe pressure.

Inflation, increases in the cost of providing services such as waste and housing, coupled with more than a decade of reductions in central Government funding, means that Rother District Council is facing a £3.8 million budget shortfall for 2024/25.

A spokesperson for the authority says: "Despite this stark situation, we remain committed to putting our residents at the heart of all we do.

"We will focus on these priorities: delivering affordable homes, creating a strong local economy, providing more effective services, empowering our people, strengthening our processes, aiming for financial stability, protecting our environment and tackling climate change."

The council is looking for feedback from villagers on how it should tackle its budget

Council asks: tell us how to beat squeeze

shortfall during a consultation period that runs until 17 December.

Some measures, such as closing many public toilets during the winter months, have already taken place. Local loos affected include those in the Mount Street car park in Battle and off Gammons Way in Sedlescombe.

You can find our more, including how to take part in the council survey, by going to www.rother.gov.uk and searching for 'budget challenge'.

Responses will be collated and reported to councillors early next year.

Battle late night shopping

Thursday 7 December, 6-9pm

Santa in his grotto at The Almonry, street entertainers, stilt walkers, festive shop window displays and free parking in council car parks.



Why did Santa go to a psychiatrist? He no longer believed in himself.

LEARNING THE ART OF . . .

MOSAICS



With designs ranging from beach huts to hot air balloons, and dogs to cup cakes, villagers are learning the craft of mosaics each week at the Village Hall.

Mosaics teacher and craft expert Lorraine Ashley, who sells her own creations on Etsy, is guiding up to a dozen villagers in two-hour sessions organised by the Whatlington Connectors.

Initially the idea was for two classes as a taster of the skill, enabling those attending to get an idea of how to make their own coasters, plant

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stands, wall plaques and whatever else sparks their imagination.

However, the classes have proved so successful they are now continuing each Wednesday from 10am-12midday at a cost of no more than £10 per session, plus materials, depending on numbers attending.

Other crafts are planned to be introduced in the future.

■ **Want to give it a try? Pop into one of the classes, book at whatlington.com/events, email info@whatlington.com or call Anne Smith on 07771 994389**



What carol is heard in the desert? 'O camel ye faithful!'



Poppies big and small

Poppies sprung up across the village to mark Remembrance Day. The Parish Council funded a dozen giant-sized poppies 'planted' around the village. Meanwhile two members of the Whatlington Connectors got crafting. Sandie Sullivan decorated the postbox near the Royal Oak while Anne Smith dressed a road sign on the A21 in a cascade of poppies.



Unique challenge for pub quizzers

More than 30 people took part in a quiz like no other to raise funds for community events in the village.

The event challenged quizzers on their drawing skills in Pictionary-style rounds, alternating with questions based on popular TV programmes from the 1960s onwards.

Organised by Anne Smith, money raised from the event will be used to fund further community events next year under the umbrella of the Community Connectors.

Got an idea for a community event or like to get more involved in the life of the village?

Email info@whatlington.com to find our more

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Why is it getting harder to buy Advent calendars? Their days are numbered.

ST MARY MAGDALENE CHURCH

Churchwardens: Jeffrey Bridges 01424 772535/07446 903239 and John Crouch 07788 416903

Email: whatlingtonparishchurch@gmail.com Web: www.achurchnearyou.com/church/5226

Service to officially welcome new rector



By Jeffrey Bridges

After more than two and a half years without our own priest we are looking forward to the Service of Licensing for Rev John Hawkins as our new rector.

The service will take place in Sedlescombe Church at 7.30pm on Tuesday 12 December.

The licensing will be carried out by the Bishop of Lewes, Rt Rev Will Hazelwood, assisted by the Archdeacon of Hastings, the Ven Edward Dowler.

John will continue to live in his own home, as opposed to the rectory at Sedlescombe, and will work for 2.5 days a week, including Sundays, the appointment being termed Non- Stipendiary House for Duty.

Readers may recall that Kevin Mepham was priest-in-charge. Historically both Whatlington

and Sedlescombe churches had rectors – a rector had what was known as the Living of the Parish and had

indefinite tenure, whereas a vicar can be moved by the diocese.

Nowadays many parishes have a priest-in-charge, who could be given three months' notice by the diocese. In some respects, having a non-stipendiary rector is a hybrid appointment, though it does

mean that John is appointed for three years, with the option to extend for a further two. It also restores the historic title to the post.

Whatever the terminology, we are very pleased to have John with us and feel sure he will make a positive effect on our churches.

Anyone who lives in the ecclesiastical parish of Sedlescombe with Whatlington is welcome to join us for the licensing service, but it would be appreciated if you would let us know in advance by emailing whatlingtonparishchurch@gmail.com or calling 07446 903239.

Time's up for beetles

The ancient timbers in the church roof, as well as the newer replacements, have an infestation of Deathwatch beetle.

Anyone with an interest in Listed buildings will know that very little can be done to them without permission. In the case of parish churches such permission has to come from the diocese.

For what is a relatively straightforward job the permission is granted by our Archdeacon, in consultation with a church architect and, after some hiccups, we are now cleared for the work to start in the New Year.

The treatment will require the erection of a scaffold platform inside the church.

Memorial goes online

Following the Remembrance Sunday service it's worth mentioning the village war memorial, which is located inside the church. As well as being able to see it in person by visiting the church it is now recorded on the following websites:

- www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/memorial/297620
- www.roll-of-honour.com/Sussex/Whatlington.html
- www.iwm.org.uk/memorials/search?query=whatlington&pageSize=15

The roll-of-honour website has details of the names recorded on the memorial.



A fisherman setting out from Hastings saw cuts of meat floating past. He thought: 'It's getting a bit choppy.'

So, we've got this toad living in our cellar . . .



Martyn Hole has a long-term tenant living in his Whatlington home. He's not paying rent but is good with flies (the guest, not Martyn).

F We have a toad in our cellar and occasionally he slides under the door and hops about our hallway, but so fast I've been unable to capture it in a photo.

We think he's a common toad or *Bufo Bufo*, which is his scientific name.

The conditions in the cellar are ideal: it is very damp, which encourages the growth of a disgusting fungus that smells like a Durian. This is a fruit that smells so badly, it is illegal to take one into a hotel in Singapore.

The smell attracts flies which our toad then eats. For this, he is supremely well equipped, with his weapon of choice being his tongue, which is twice the length of his body and amazingly fast and accurate.

He has one other advantage: the flies are incredibly lethargic.

I sent a photo to a college friend who is now a professor of environmental biology and is one of the world's leading experts on insects.

William said they were Slow Flies and I have to say, whoever came up with the name, probably hundreds of years ago, was accurate but lacked imagination.

We clearly have had more than one: toads live a long time but the first one was 30 years ago and it can't have lived that long to be still here.

The incontrovertible evidence is, sadly, a mummified toad on the cellar steps which is as flat as a pancake and turning white.

This raises an interesting question: are they simply dropping through the air vent or are they breeding?

Toads are not hermaphrodites and have to mate with a toad of the opposite sex to produce offspring.

They also have to lay their toadspawn in a pond or a lake (*here's an interesting thing: frogspawn is a mass of eggs whereas toadspawn is a laid as a string*) so they can't be breeding in the cellar.

One final point: our cats never touch them – maybe they're afraid of warts?

They only go after fur and feathers, which I think is also a great name for a pub.



Got something to say? Share it in the News. Email steveturner807@gmail.com

NAME THAT TOAD!

I leave you with a challenge: we have given our toad a really lame name – Mr Toad. So there is a bottle of champagne (the real stuff not Cava or Prosecco) for the best suggestion. Email Steve the editor (see left) with your names. Good luck!



Every new year I spend two weeks sitting on a large hard-backed book. It's my annual holiday.

IN YOUR GARDEN

Tom Schollar



Creating autumn gold

As I write, the rain has just started again and the fabulous display of autumn colour at Sheffield Park will soon just be decaying leaves on the ground. If you can find a dry day and the will to go out into the garden, you can turn these autumn leaves from yellow into black gold – leaf mould.

All you need to do is to make a pile of them and wait. After about two years (depending on the type of leaf) you will have a black crumbly compost which is free of weed seeds and makes a versatile compost, mulch, soil conditioner or growing medium.

Well, perhaps a little more than just waiting, but not a lot.

Leaves decay by fungal action rather than bacterial action as in a normal compost heap, so the leaves need to be kept moist. If they are dry when you collect them there is a danger they will stay that way.

I used to put the leaves in old builder's bags and leave them behind a shed, but I found this tended to lead to un-decayed areas.

Nowadays I make a three foot high pile contained by a hoop of rabbit wire under some trees.

After two years the pile will have sunk to about a quarter of its original height and be ready

to use. Separate out the dry edges and top and add them to next year's pile.

If you have enough, put down a 2-3 inch layer as a thin layer won't be enough to suppress weeds or retain moisture and so it is better to do a smaller area thoroughly.

In time the worms will drag it down, which opens up the soil and adds organic matter.

You can just dig it in, of course, or you can use it in making a mix for potting up plants or growing seeds.

I don't bother using a mower to cut up the leaves and this works fine for our leaves which are predominantly oak, but for larger leaves and evergreens it might be worthwhile.

I find that small quantities of leaves don't really work and it is probably better to just add them to the compost heap in the normal way

Leaves left on grass can lead to bare patches. We normally collect them from the garden because we want to be able to locate the shoots of emerging plants in the spring.

Some people let leaves stay on the garden and rot down slowly. So even though it is wet and cold out now, collecting up leaves is a job best done as soon as you can face it.

SEDLSCOMBE AND DISTRICT GARDEN SOCIETY

www.sedlescombegarden society.org.uk

Our aim: to promote to residents of Sedlescombe, Whatlington and surrounding areas an interest in all aspects of gardening, including maintaining the rich diversity of garden plants to help combat the effects of climate change.

How we do it: shows, speakers, trips, social events, newsletter.

How to join: Contact Secretary Brenda Page on 01424 870455 or email sdgs.secretary@gmail.com

What it costs: £9 per person per year or £12 for joint membership.

COMING EVENTS
Sedlescombe Village Hall

Saturday 20 Jan 11am
AGM and Winter Lunch.
Non-members may join us for lunch at a £5 per head.

Wednesday 14 Feb 2pm
Jim Bingham speaking about 45 years in horticulture (*you may have seen Jim on the TV*).

Wednesday 6 March 7pm
Chris Lane will talk about flowering cherries (*Chris holds National Collections of these, in addition to those of Witch Hazels and Wisterias.*)