

# The Villager

Piddinghoe, East Sussex



April 2020

## EDITORIAL

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We can't avoid the obvious, can we. At the time of writing and putting it together, we do not even know if the magazine will get printed. If you are now reading this rather later in the year – we were timed for an April publication – then the printer would have been forced to shut because of the rules on self-isolation. One regular item is missing: the Minutes of the Parish Council, whose end-of-March meeting had to be cancelled.

It is said that one learns more about people when things go wrong than when things are just fine. We now know that the population in general is prone to panic, and that loo rolls are the most desired commodity in the country. We have heard too much about greed, and too many stories about disinformation (i.e. wicked rumours) spread on social media. Some people need to create excitement, come what may. The rumour monger feels powerful. And there are, of course, those who have happily self isolated, keeping themselves to themselves, secure in the thought that their very large freezers are full. I'm alright Jack!

What we have learned about most people in Piddinghoe is that there is fellow spirit and consideration here for those whose need is greatest – the elderly and the infirm. A commendable number of people signed up to be volunteers to help out those finding the current restrictions even more difficult than most of us. Out and about, residents are observed keeping that crucial 6 feet between themselves. Otherwise, it is awfully quiet out there.

There have been kindnesses apart from the Village's volunteer scheme. Some villagers will never forget those who gave and brought things they needed. These are favours that will be repaid. And that is the point, isn't it. We discover who the 'diamonds' are and who are the disappointments. Civility and kindness are reciprocal. You get back what you put in.

We are in a better place than living in London or any of the big cities. They are teeming with people, living and moving close together, fully accustomed to having instant access to everything.

The sudden loss of a way of life, and the greater exposure to other people and their viruses, will be shocking. Our relative deprivation is helping us in a funny sort of way. We are used to our shopping opportunities being limited. Buses do not come along every few minutes. Still, we have had to take our chances in the supermarkets just like everyone else. However, being in beautiful countryside is a kind of solace, and doing gardening an even bigger one. There are jobs we have been meaning to do, and now can.

We must believe that one day this extraordinary period will be over. We will certainly remember it. We shall look back at it and retell our stories. We will know much more about ourselves and those around us. We shall take stock. More than that would be unwise to predict!

*Editorial team: Sheila Redman (Chair), Gill Davies, Sue Massey, Bill Pierce.*



## **PIDDINGHOE PARISH COUNCIL 2020**

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Due to the ongoing situation the recent PC meeting had to be cancelled so no Minutes in this issue of *The Villager*. Your councillors and clerk are communicating on-line, however, and are keeping things ticking over whilst monitoring Government advice.

I've been carrying out some repairs to gates, etc. around the village so if you do see any Parish property which needs attention do let us know.

There has been a tremendous response to the call for volunteers to help those unable to leave their houses to go shopping, collect prescriptions, etc. If you need help, just contact one of the coordinators and they will put you in touch with a volunteer.

David Hallett:  **davidmhallett@gmail.com**  01273 514234/  
07716 409506

Mary & Isla Sitwell:  **Isla.sitwell@btinternet.com**  01273 510183

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Check the Parish Council website for more information:

**piddinghoe-pc.org.uk**

The Village Hall and playground are also closed for the foreseeable future.

There have been reports of groups of teenagers hanging around the Hoe and riverside, some of whom have been quite verbally abusive (and threatening violence in one case). Advice from the Police is to phone 101 and report them. Please don't confront them personally, leave it to the Police to deal with.

I hope you're all keeping well and safe. We can take some comfort in the great community spirit in our village and be thankful for living in such a beautiful area with easy walks on our doorstep.

Very best wishes

**David Aicken**

*Chair, Piddinghoe Parish Council*

## VILLAGE HALL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

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### Treasurer's Report

Accounts are summarised below. See Village notice board for more details.

The accounts for 2019-2020 reflect the heavy maintenance expenditures we have had to face this year. Last year our maintenance bill amounted to £105; this year £2020! Most of this was for some very pricey electrical work. Pilates continues to keep us afloat (thankyou Bex, and the participants) with healthy contributions from Film night, Piddinghoe Players and excellent social events, notably The Big Tea which netted £315.32. Also three local elections during the year helped. But we end the year with no ongoing income, and this is likely to endure for some time. Our Accountants may not be in a position to complete the examining of this account for some time. So the figures remain subject to examination.

*David Hallett*

*Treasurer VHMC*

Balances Opening 1 May 2019		Balances Closing 31 March 2020	BANK
Bond	£3,000.00	Bond	£3,000.00
CAF CASH	£4,753.91	CAF CASH	£2,764.92
CAF GOLD	£1,068.68	CAF GOLD	£1,070.28
cash in hand	£208.04	cash in hand	£106.98
	£9,030.63		£6,942.18

## **Chairman's Report 2019-2020**

It's been an interesting year in more ways than one to be Chairman of the Village Hall Management Committee. During some rather challenging times, the Committee has strived to keep the hall in good repair, put on events that would interest villagers, and maintain a spirit of community and togetherness.

I would like to thank all members of the committee who have been generous with both their time and their commitment to the village. Moreover, I would also like to thank all the cake makers, washer uppers, chair stackers and so forth, who have come forward to help without being asked, on many occasions. Without you all, Piddinghoe would not be the special place that we all love.

As a result, we have all had the opportunity to enjoy several wonderful community events such as the summer tea party, bar and food, and more recently some great amateur dramatics. I hope that you will all agree that these events have helped to bring the village together.

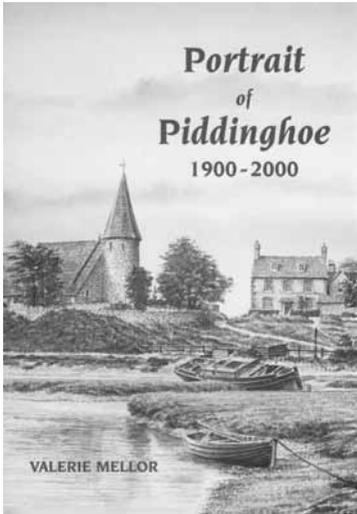
It is now time for the VHMC to have some fresh blood, so the three elected members of the committee will be standing down at the end of April. Please think if this is something that you would like to take on.

Your village needs you!

***Melanie Morgan***  
*Chair VHMC*

## PORTRAIT OF PIDDINGHOE

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**By Valerie Mellor £7.99**

We seem to be featuring a number of articles with an historic theme. Perhaps the Past is now even more appealing than the Present.

You can still buy this book without leaving the village! It is available from the leading online, second-hand book seller in the country – ABE Books – but they will charge you nearly £1.50 more! Hurry. Stocks are low.

Written by Valerie Mellor, the greatly respected, and missed, historian of the village, it covers much of the history of Piddinghoe up to the end of the 20th Century, and is illustrated throughout. Essential reading for any residents who want to know much more about the village in which they live.

All sales proceedings will go to the Church's Bell Fund.

Contact Gill Davies at [davies.gill@btinternet.com](mailto:davies.gill@btinternet.com)

## THE ROYAL OAK REVIVERS

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### Update

My article about the reborn and renamed Royal Oak Survivors in *The Villager's* last issue was received enthusiastically by Piddinghoe residents old and new. I had a lot of very positive feedback. Thank you! Our shiny new Royal Oak Revivers' team had booked our first get-together on Monday, March 23 to throw some ideas in the ring, and make some exciting plans for events throughout the year.

But fate and The Plague intervened, and so we have postponed our evening of happiness and merriment to an unknown date sometime in the future.

This is your second opportunity to nail your ribbons to the mast, volunteer your time and energy, and join our jolly team.

Just email me with your phone number and /or email address so I can contact you when this situation has improved, the sun has come out again, and we can make plans for the future. In the meantime keep cheery, look after yourselves and each other.

*Angie Ridge*

*angelaridge7@gmail.com*

## **GOODNIGHT JUDY BUT FILM NIGHT AT VILLAGE HALL WILL BE BACK**

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Sadly, Judy Garland did not survive the corona virus even though it came nowhere near spreading to BN9 before her scheduled appearance at Piddinghoe Village Hall's Film Night last month.

Well, not her exactly, the celebrated Ms Garland, but the image of her, played by the remarkably adaptable actress Rene Zellweger in 'Judy', the motion picture about the life and times of the tragic American songbird who lost her battle against alcoholism but won the hearts of a world-wide audience in the Fifties.

The movie was due to be aired here on Friday March 27th but more than a week earlier it was obvious it had to be indefinitely postponed as real life became more and more restricted by the government's campaign to keep us all safe if not sane. You just have to respect what has been called the biggest threat to health for a generation.

At least Film Night was able to finish – although we didn't know it then – on a happy note with the feelgood factor that embraced 'Fisherman's Friends', a based-on-truth tale of a motley Cornish crew who found fame, fortune and love through their singing of sea shanties that somehow found a wide appeal among the masses. It was a simple, cheerful saga for a good-sized audience and, to be fair, Film Night does seem to be catching on again... after nearly eight years.

But is this the end? We sincerely hope not. We have a bundle of films up our sleeves for presentation if the will to carry on continues after this nasty bug has gone away.

And maybe we will show them on a different night of the week.

Thirty-five people came to see the very first Film Night back in 2012 when Ben Whitaker introduced himself to the village by inaugurating a film show with the wartime propaganda epic 'Mrs Miniver', starring Oscar-winner Greer Garson who, rumour has it, lived in Piddinghoe's Kiln Cottage, where the late former Labour MP Ben's wife Janet – also known as Baroness Whitaker – now resides for much of the week when she can get time off from her duties in the House of Lords.

Janet is one of our regulars at Film Night, living here most weekends, and understandably her preference is for Friday nights but I am hearing that more villagers might be happier with a different night and it seems that Wednesdays are available at the venue.

So we are going to have a test. Wednesday nights or Friday nights or, perhaps, switch them about? What evening suits you best? Just contact me at the address at the bottom of this page and I will take the temperature of what is most popular. All you need to do is write one word on your email message (although I am very happy to hear other news from you): Wednesday or Friday.

***Bill Pierce***

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## **SAINT JOHN'S CHURCH PIDDINGHOE**

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It is three years exactly since Isla and I 'completed' our purchase of Chambles. On the only day that we saw over the house, we sat in our car with our backs to the Church, looked across Village Green and walked to The Hoe. Later we strolled down the slope past Sheila's home, as we now know it to be, and gave Saint John's not a thought, since we knew it to be locked, closure having been agreed at Diocesan level.

Three years later and the Church here is loved, regularly used and, I hope, welcoming. It is visited by cyclists, former villagers, and walkers who sign the Book and attest to the beauty of its surroundings and its history. It is, of course, now locked again, a symbol of the extraordinary circumstances in which we as a Nation, indeed as a World, find ourselves. No services are allowed including funerals; all marriages are to be postponed and only emergency baptisms are permitted. I must not encourage any community worship and the Bell Ringers, who so faithfully ring weekly, may not enter. And priests may not visit homes, any more than anyone else may, for fear of unknowingly spreading this Virus which, like the wind, cannot be seen but has its effects felt globally.

Isla is busy in the garden, tending plants and painting sheds; what a pity that the Open Gardens event, planned for this Summer, in aid of our Bell Fund, will not happen. He is also spending time in the Churchyard, which we hope will be mowed, after the spring bulbs have died down and before Easter.

The Churchyard has been a place of mystery to us: recent interments are well documented but, apart from some old gravestones, there are poor records of burials here. But, about six weeks ago, Rona, Don Burdett's sister, arrived at our front door with five boxes of books and papers left in his house, which she needed cleared. Amongst it all are eleven charts of family histories that Don painstakingly researched, six of which I have given to Iford's Churchwarden, since they deal exclusively with families who had lived and are buried in that Village. The remaining five, relating to Piddinghoe, date from the early 1700s and make for fascinating and subduing reading. They speak of a time when married women spent their lives pregnant, giving birth to large numbers of children many of whom died within twelve months and most of whom, we now know, are buried here in our Churchyard, without memorials, but now remembered through Don's work.

Do visit the Churchyard: there are wonderful views from which to reflect on the beauty of this Village and its history. There is space to offer prayer for an end to the present crisis and for our families, now separated from us. And, when COVID-19 is long gone, we shall meet again in Saint John's to give thanks, not least for the work of the National Health Service.

In the meantime – take care.

*Mary Sitwell*

## PIDDINGHOE'S PAST LIFE

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Once upon a time before mobile phones, tablets, and the internet, villagers were far more anxious to socialise, make merry and 'do stuff' together. The Piddinghoe 'Fayre' had long been established as an annual event when we first got to experience it in the early '70s. It was always held annually on the last Saturday in June.

As the daffodils died down and the trees burst in leaf, the Fayre Committee leapt into action and planning for the big event began. Not that the format was ever under consideration for any drastic change. Visitors always expected there to be a large marquee groaning with produce made by the thriving village W.I. There had to be roundabouts, wellie throwing, donkey rides and dog shows, to name but a few. In later years, Jan, looking as if she had been created just for that part, sat in her wigwam telling fortunes. She always had a long queue.

Prior to the big day, during late May, and in order to fund up-front costs, a Ploughman's Lunch, with bar, of course, was held in the Village Hall (once the Hall had come into being – not quite sure what happened before that). It was always packed and provided the opportunity for networking and for arms to be twisted and volunteers be signed up.

Come the day (actually it was only half a day), opening was at 2 pm. The morning was frantic with preparations. The 2 or 3 marquees had already been erected and decorated, and the rides and slides had arrived by a massive pantechnicon the previous day. By 1.30 pm a steady stream of visitors wound their way along the road from Newhaven by four wheels, two wheels, on foot and sometimes pushing prams and buggies. Oddly enough, the day always seemed to be dry and sunny.

By 4 o'clock, the W.I. stall had been stripped bare and by 5 o'clock, the trek home was under way leaving behind a number of wilting helpers, donkeys, and a lot of worn grass. However, there was still work to be done. The largest marquee had to be set up for the Big Supper. Tables and chairs were assembled and piles of

food and drinks delivered ready for the gathering of most of the villagers to celebrate a happy, and what always seemed to be, a very successful day.

In those days, the village did not have to levy a rate and proceeds from the Fayre enabled funds to be given to the Church, towards the conversion of the 'cowsheds' into the Village Hall, for the birth of the Tennis Club and for other village amenities.

In the early 80s, the then Chairperson, by this time having too many other commitments, hoped somebody else would take over wearing the red hat. Unfortunately, no queue formed, not even of one person.

Ah well, we can now concentrate on the Flower Festival, which had already come into being as a biennial event.

*Sheila Redman*

## **ALLOTMENTS AVAILABLE NOW!**

If you'd like to grow your own fruit and veg, there's never been a better time to start. Many of us have more free time on our hands and we're still permitted to tend to our allotments as part of our daily exercise, subject to social distancing and hygiene recommendations of course.

If you'd like to know more, call me on 01273 515203 / 07950 935526, or email me: [suemassey17@gmail.com](mailto:suemassey17@gmail.com)

*Sue Massey*



## **PIDDINGHOE RESIDENTS AND THEIR OCCUPATIONS IN 1841**

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I am getting very excited. I have only 2 years left to wait for the release of the 1921 census in January 2022! Yes, I am a family historian and have been researching my own family tree for over 30 years. The 1921 census proved to be the last available until 1951 and was due to be made public from 1952. This was because the majority of the 1931 census was destroyed by fire and in 1941 no census was enumerated due to the war. However, the 1939 Register is a vital tool for these in-between years. This Register was supposedly taken on 29 September 1939 (the eve of the war), recording all information about civilians. The information was used to produce identity cards and, once rationing was introduced in January 1940, to issue ration books.

I moved to Piddinghoe 18 months ago with my partner, dog and 2 cats, and we live at the south end of the village. Having lived in many areas of the UK, from the Highlands of Scotland to the Isle of Wight, working as a Quantity Surveyor/Senior Quantity Surveyor for large Construction Companies, wherever 'I have laid my hat' I have always had an interest in local history and Piddinghoe is no exception.

I am going to begin with the demographics of the 1841 census and relate it to Piddinghoe. I shall start with some general information about the village, and in future articles, I will look at several families who lived here.

First a few facts. The 1841 census was taken on the night of June 6, 1841, and albeit very basic, it was the first census to record the names of all individuals in a household; previous censuses between 1801 and 1831 were purely statistical.

Clerical staff and enumerators were appointed and the country was divided into more than 30,000 districts based on the Old Hundreds structure, which in 1834 became the Poor Law Unions.

<b>1841 Demographics</b>									
<b>Age</b>	<b>70+</b>	<b>60-69</b>	<b>50-59</b>	<b>40-49</b>	<b>30-39</b>	<b>20-29</b>	<b>10-19</b>		
Agricultural Labourer	3	5	8	17	13	14			
Blacksmith			1						
Bricklayer		1							
Brickmaker			1		1				
Carpenter		1							
Chief Boatman		1							
F.S. (Female Servant)	1					4	5		
Farmer		1			2				
Gardener		1				1			
M.S. (Male Servant)						2	1		
Maltster						1			
Navigator			3		1				
Navy					1				
Shepherd		1		1		1			
Shoemaker						2			
Thatcher						1			
Unknown/Illegible	1	1	1	1	22	26	20		
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>20</b>		

**A total of 98 working people**

On Monday was married at Piddinglee, in Sussex, a woman to her *brov* husband. After the death of her first, he could wait but it is weeks for her second; but the strength of her passion being somewhat abated at 60, she waited till double that time for her third *bride*.

The Stamford Mercury 17 Jan 1794

Mrs. Bretz, a Lady who resides at Piddinglee, in Sussex, and in her 90th year, has now actually lived 100 years round her table, of children, grand, great, and great-grand children, no fewer than one hundred and ten.

Morning Chronicle 7 January 1809

A few evenings ago, some profane persons, not having the fear of God before their eyes, wantonly discharged their guns at the windows of Piddinglee church, and shattered them to pieces.

Sussex Advertiser 25 January 1813

**A**BSCONDED from Piddinglee, near Lewes, leaving his family chargeable to said parish, THOMAS GRINDEN, a tall, thin, middle-aged man. Whoever will secure him in any of the Bishop's jails, or in the County Jail, shall be rewarded with £100, to be paid immediately on his recovery, and the same to be equally divided among the Discoverers of Piddinglee, shall be hand- somely rewarded for their trouble.

Sussex Advertiser 19 April 1813

*New method of detraging Males.*—The gentleman, of Henry Campion, esq. at Milling, has lately discovered great quantities of moles, the following is the manner in which he has effected the earth raised by the animal, he discharged the contents of a low blue-pipe into the mound, which in every instance proved fatal to the little en- gineer.

Sussex Advertiser 30 January 1815

**Stolen or Strayed.**—The following is the description of a dark bay horse, the colour BEAGLE, and that species, marked with white, long neck, small ears, round nose, short mane, four feet white, long dark, small dark round hoofs, blackish old; answers to the name of TOPPER. At Mr. T. BARKER, Newhaven, shall receive ONE GUINEA for the horse. Any person stopping him after this notice, will be prosecuted.

Sussex Advertiser 29 November 1819

Prior to this census, the responsibility was down to the Overseers of the Poor and local Clergy.

Although a crude schedule, these appointed persons recorded:

- the age, which was usually rounded down to the nearest 5 years for persons aged 15 plus
- the place of birth, purely recorded as to whether or not born in the county of enumeration
- the address, which could have been no more than a street name, farm or village
- finally, only one forename was recorded.

In 1841, the Enumeration Schedule for Piddinghoe, District 3, consisted of only 7 pages: 2 houses uninhabited and 55 inhabited; 134 male family members and 128 female family members; with 98 family members being employed in work. The Avery family had 30 residents in the village at this time!

The majority of Piddinghoe residents were Agricultural Labourers and/or Occupiers of Farms. National Statistics recorded 1,251,751 Agricultural Occupiers and Labourers aged 20 years plus (not including Farm Servants) throughout the United Kingdom. The demographics for Piddinghoe are shown on page 8.

So this is the broad picture of the kind of people who lived in Piddinghoe in 1841. The population is very much connected to the land but with some connections to the sea. A Maltser, by the way, is someone who worked in a malt house, soaking grain in water, which was then used in brewing.

In my next article, I am going to look more closely at the first enumerated family in this census (the Mainwoods) and also write about the pitfalls involved in trying to get accurate information.

***Carol Kent***

*High Banks*

## PIDDINGHOE BOOK CLUB

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### April meeting

The Book club was due to meet on April 16, but has had to be cancelled.

The Club planned to discuss 'My Brilliant Friend' by Elena Ferrante.

When the current rules on social distancing are over, the Book Club will meet again.

In the meantime, if Villagers would like to know more, please contact Christine Bentham at [ccbentham@gmail.com](mailto:ccbentham@gmail.com) or telephone 07944577774.



## GRASS ROOTS

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### Concerning Sussex...The Brown Hare and Coursing

I am of the opinion that the most unacceptable activities still undertaken in the countryside are the abuses inflicted on, and destruction of our wildlife called Bloodsports. In this I include fox hunting, shooting and in particular... hare coursing.

Hare coursing was banned in the UK by the Hunting Act in 2004. Illegal film footage seized by police is very difficult to watch, but I cannot help marvel at, and admire the hare's incredible ability to dodge, weave and switch direction at remarkable speeds up to 45mph to escape the hunting dogs.

I am told that at one time hares were specially bred in Ireland for their size, speed, strength and stamina to supply rural hare coursing events. Gambling on the outcome of a chase challenge between hares and specially bred 'sighthounds' (usually greyhounds or lurchers) made a lot of money for organisers and owners.

\* The oldest documented description of hare coursing is the work known in English as 'On Coursing'. It was written by *Arrian* a Greek historian of the Roman period circa 180 AD. In ancient Greek it is known as *Kynegetikos*.

\*(Source Wikipedia)

It is from *Arrian* that the most famous quote on the sporting fairness of coursing originates. 'True huntsman do not take out their hounds to catch the creature, but for a trial of speed and a race, and they are satisfied if the hare manages to find something that will save her.'

In the reign of Elizabeth I the first complete set of English rules, known as the 'Laws of the Leash' was drawn up reputedly by Thomas Howard. A head start termed 'Law' was to be given to the hare for a fair run, and category points were awarded to judge the dog's performance, for 'Speed', 'Go-Bye', 'Turn', 'Trip', 'Wrench', and 'Kill'.

Hares do not use burrows like their close relative the rabbit, which was brought to Britain by the Romans – not the Normans as was previously believed. Hares are primarily nocturnal, spending a third of their time foraging. They live above ground and will make small depressions in the ground which they use for cover...sometimes known as a 'seats'.

Brown Hares can be seen standing on their hind legs 'boxing' during the breeding season. This was long assumed to be males fighting each other for females, but it is in fact females fighting away the males.

I have a treasured watercolour 'Boxing Hares' by Kate Osborne, a local artist living in Hove who is famous for her paintings of animals and flowers. I recommend a peep at her delightful website: [www.kateosborneart.com](http://www.kateosborneart.com)

### **The Magical Hare and the Moon**

The symbol of the moon-gazing hare is almost universal and dates back to ancient times. It symbolizes fertility. Pagans believed moon-gazing hares would bring growth, re-birth, abundance, new beginnings and fortune.

Since ancient times people have claimed to see the image of a rabbit or hare on the face of the moon.

The May full moon has been known as the Hare Moon since medieval times in England. Other names include the Flower Moon, (many Native American Tribes), Milk Moon (Colonial America), Bright Moon (Celtic), Dragon Moon (Chinese), Green Grass Moon (neo Pagan).

In ancient Egyptian belief, hares were intrinsically linked to the moon's cyclical movement – being at once masculine when waxing, and feminine when waning. Hares would thus be depicted as alchemists making the elixir of immortality or as messengers of the female moon deity.

*(Source: [celticanamcara.blogspot.com](http://celticanamcara.blogspot.com) Celtic Lady)*

**Angie Ridge**

## EXCLUSIVE: THE BEST FOOTBALL STORY THAT NOBODY EVER READ

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*Many of us are missing sport during these strange times when we must all go without some of our normal pursuits. So I have agreed – well, I didn't actually take too much persuading – to recall a few off-beat tales from 40-odd years of reporting mainly football, boxing and lawn tennis for a string of Fleet Street newspapers. Whether they continue after the pandemic finally leaves us (please God) will be reviewed at the appropriate time.*



George Best had gone missing. Again. And, daft as it now seems, I was supposed to try and find him. A new Sports Editor wanted to make a name for himself on the London Evening Standard where I was a young reporter in the early 1980s and I had been silly enough to open my mouth in his company, saying I remembered seeing George drinking at a pub near London's Barbican Centre during the time he played for Fulham – about five years earlier. Despite the tenuous nature of that link my boss promptly gave me the job of tracking him down.

Everybody, surely, remembers Best, the Irish football genius who thrilled a generation of fans with his magical skill, but then wrecked his life – and finally sacrificed it – on that clichéd altar of 'birds and booze'.

He was about my age, a year or two older maybe, and had made headlines many times already with his brilliance on the pitch but also a penchant for self-destruction, repeatedly walking out on those who helped fuel his lifestyle: mainly Manchester United, his first love where he started at 16, and a series of teams in the United States.

This time, however, it was modest third division outfit AFC Bournemouth who were briefly his employers, having found a sponsor mad enough to finance Best's move back to England after he looked washed up in The States.

He was 37, still had skill and his good looks but not the old pace and hunger. He played about five games for Bournemouth and then, the story goes, he was given time off to go to the funeral of a much-loved landlady who looked after him when he was a young apprentice footballer in digs in Manchester. He never went back to Bournemouth and it was my task to look for him in London.

Incredibly, I walked straight in on him in that pub I remembered – I can't even recall its name now. What's more, I was even invited to join his company thanks to a pal of mine (Eric), who was already sitting with George and his entourage of about eight, including two pretty girls, at a big round table in one corner. There was hardly another person in the bar. The great man was affable, friendly, charming, and happy to include me in conversation after Eric told him 'This is Bill, he's Press but a good lad....' Over about an hour George drank steadily from refilled glasses of red wine but was never drunk.

Suddenly everybody seemed to disappear. It transpired that Bournemouth had also sent someone to look for George and I heard later he escaped through a window in the gents' toilet. The following weekend was the start of a new football season and there was plenty of work to do to fill our paper's sports pages. I wasn't even asked how I had got on looking for George. And actually I was glad. Sometimes your best stories should not appear in print.

George Best never played in England again. An alcoholic, he died tragically young at 59 in November 2005 despite a liver transplant. Thousands attended his funeral in Belfast.

*Bill Pierce*

## PIDDINGHOE BIRDS

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### **The Moorhen – *Gallinula Chloropus***

The Moorhen, previously known as the common waterhen and also known as swamp chicken, skitty coot, and Marsh hen, etc, is a small chicken sized brownish-black wading bird. It is easily recognisable by its bright red beak and frontal shield and with an equally bright yellow tip. On each side of its body it has a white patch and also has white on the underside of its tail. This is clearly visible when agitated and the tail is upturned. Its legs and feet are green. Their feet are strong and well adapted for walking on floating vegetation and for swimming.

The Moorhen is a bird of fresh water. It frequents a wide range of ponds, marshes, rivers, streams, lakes, and can be seen in urban parks, and pretty well anywhere where there is water. It is omniverous and feeds on a variety of plants, grass and insects, as well as earthworms, slugs, tadpoles and fish. It builds its nest in reed beds or on aquatic plants close to water where 5-11 eggs are laid. The resulting chicks are enchanting (see photo). When threatened, apparently the chicks will cling to the parent who will fly off with them to safety. I must say, I have not seen this. In winter, Moorhens congregate together and feed in fields, parks, etc. They are clumsy fliers, and when disturbed will run, rather than fly. They are, however capable of flying long distances.

In the field at the back of number 20 Brookside, on most days this winter, it has been good to see about 6 to 8 Moorhens foraging for food in the grass, and puddles that remain there after the recent winter of endless rain. I have not seen the field so flooded since I came here in 2013. The Moorhens seem to like it: they are after all wading birds. They have now returned to the Pond to breed.

Most people will have seen a Moorhen. They are probably the commonest bird in the world and can be seen in almost every continent with the exception of the polar regions and areas of rainforest. They are not so common in Scotland and Ireland.

Moorhens are not of conservation concern, and do not have many predators. They make a variety of squeaks and calls familiar to anyone who frequents watery places. I'm not sure if moorhens are good to eat!

A piece by Wayne Richard Baker:

'There is nothing I enjoy more than a walk along the river... just to observe or maybe take a few photos. In summer the banks are rich with reeds and bullrushes that gently sway... But no matter how quietly you walk the river bank, however stealthily you tread there is always one bird will give away your presence. The moorhen always alert and vigilant. When she flees it's as if she is walking on water.'

The photo below was taken in Cambridge, not Piddinghoe, where they rarely come near enough to the house to get a good picture.

*Julia Clayson*



## **WOULD YOU LIKE TO CONTRIBUTE TO 'THE VILLAGER'?**

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Articles, letters, snippets are all welcome. If you want to contribute an article, please try to make it about 550 words or less. Due to space and time restrictions we can't guarantee inclusion in the magazine, but we'll do our best to accommodate everybody.

If possible please send articles as Word documents, attached to an email addressed to either **davies.gill@btinternet.com** or **piercewilliam991@gmail.com**

*The deadline for contributions to the next Villager is 8 June.*