

BLYTHBURGH

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JANET BECKER – A LIFE IN VERSE

Janet Becker – whose life we have featured before in *Focus* – was the daughter of artists Harry and Georgina Becker. From 1913, when her father brought the family to Wenhaston, she was based for the whole of her life in east Suffolk. First in Wenhaston, then Hinton Lodge, until her father died in 1928. Then she lived with her mother in Wangford. Educated at St Felix School and then, for two years, at University College London.

Janet was a pioneer conservator and cleaner of church monuments, and a great supporter of Blythburgh church, where she and her parents are buried. She published a number of books based on historical research, two novels and a volume of verse. But, when she died leukaemia in 1953, she

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left unpublished a substantial amount of work, including a great deal of poetry.

In 1944 she published *Flowers by Post*, 19 poems written between 1924 and 1944, of which some had already appeared in *The Lady*. But she left over 230 poems, some neatly typed, others written on scraps of paper, even on a fragment of an envelope addressed to her father from the tax inspector. Most of her work has therefore never been seen by the public.

Janet Becker's life is in her poetry. Nearly 90 works can be dated, with 40 written when she was at school. She describes schooldays, home, her dislike of London, love of the countryside, history, Blythburgh church, relationships, and in a poem of excruciating awareness, her illness and impending death.

A sense of loss, even perhaps of unrequited love, is evident in a number of poems. In 1915, only twelve, she wrote (and later annotated 'rewrite') 'The Last Kiss':

... ..Then he said goodnight, and we kist
(Little I knew 'twas the last)
He walked out of sight through the mist
And a happy day was passed.

In 1919:

Have I said I do not miss you?
God Knows
When the night wind blows
I cry, because I cannot kiss you ...

And perhaps in the 1950s, in 'The Lover'

Often and often had we talked and laughed
In light companionship and merry whim
Till that one night – beside a fire grown dim
I knew I loved her
Loved her so it hurt.

The sense of loss was real when, at the age of 16, she remembered cousins John and Charlie Becker, who died in the First World War. Recalling life when she was twelve, she wrote:

... They used to come and play with me
Did John and Violet and Charlie

... They went to fight for Glory
But by our guns they fell
And that fight is known to history
As the battle of Neuve Chappelle.

And in 'To the Boys':

If you find the gate shut, push it open.
Roam about the garden at your will
No matter if the others do not know you
For I remember still ...

Janet left Suffolk in 1923 to study for two years at UCL, then Secretarial College, followed by her first research job, on the medieval accounts for Rochester Bridge. She missed Suffolk and disliked London. In 'Resentment' her feelings are clear:

I who love a quiet place
An empty Church, a wood in winter
I who love rain in my face
Must live in noise and grime.

... with another four verses of complaint.

Pleasure at returning to Suffolk is expressed in a long work describing the train journey from Liverpool Street to Halesworth. At Liverpool Street 'In such a little while I shall be free!' Passing the tenements and yards of Goodmayes and Chadwell Heath with hanging washing, it was open country, water, marsh and lane beyond Colchester, then Ipswich and at last Halesworth:

'Outside the deep blue night has wrapped away
The quiet fields from sight, but they are there!'

Janet Becker spent her working life in churches and cathedrals, cleaning and conserving monuments. Such buildings, with their characteristic feel and sound, were inspiring, especially Blythburgh:

The scent of Time is here
Among the piers that, arched like trees,
Hold up a flowery sky.

A sound known to people for decades, even centuries, is in 'Alone in Church':

So still within, the creaking lock
Made echoes through the pillars ring ...

There is not enough space here to show how Janet Becker reflected in her poetry her love of home, and her interest in the countryside, buildings, and history and archaeology. She wrote until the very end of her life. She died of leukaemia in 1953. Her last poem reveals that she knew that her life was coming to its end. In five verses, very difficult to read:

There's sickness in my blood to-night
No medicine can allay
I yearn in hearing, scent and sight
For dear things far away.

... ..

There's sickness in my blood to-night
No medicine can relieve
For cherished sounds and friendly sights
Have made my spirit grieve.

Alan Mackley

The poems and portrait by Harry Becker are © Simon Loftus.

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SOLICITORS & NOTARIES

COULD YOU SAVE SOUTHWOLD GUIDES?

Earlier this year, I appealed for new leaders for 1st Southwold Guides. A number of people said they might be able to help, but unfortunately, no-one has come forward to take over the unit. So, it has been temporarily suspended and is not meeting at the moment. If this situation continues, it is with very great regret that next year it will be closed, thus ending 113 years of existence.

But this doesn't have to happen if there are a couple of women out there who would be prepared to take it over. You don't have to have been a Guide yourself: full training is given, and the previous leaders will be happy to work with whoever comes forward until they complete it. This could be you! It's really great fun, the girls are lovely, you can feel you're really making a difference, and it can be a useful thing to have on your CV too.

There's still an active Rainbow Unit in Reydon (4-7 year olds) and Brownie Units in Southwold and Halesworth (7-10 year olds), but if 1st Southwold Guides closes, the nearest Guide Units for them to move on to will be in Beccles or Bungay. (Since the closure of the last Guide unit in Halesworth a few years ago, also for lack of leaders, Southwold has been welcoming girls from Halesworth and surrounding villages too.)

New to Guiding? Check out <https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/> to find more about what we do. If you think you might be interested, please get in touch with Jenny Allen for a chat: jennyanddick@aol.com, 01502 478314

Jenny Allen

District Commissioner, Girlguiding Southwold and Halesworth



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DAISY BANK CXV

The windscreen wipers on the 2CV need replacing. Peter, the chap who looks after the car for me, is in France. So, I send off for them online. When they arrive, full of good intentions I attempt the replacement. Nightmare. I ask my friend Brian from Wenhaston who is little more competent than me, but he fails too. We look dumbfounded at the problem. Then up into the church car park comes an innocent family out walking. Cheekily, Brian calls over to ask the husband if he knows anything about windscreen wipers. While his family and their dog stand patiently by, he does the job. It turns out that he and his family live in Blythburgh, and his name is Paul. At some point in the conversation Brian tells him that my other car is the orange monster parked in our driveway. He's a car enthusiast, and the Mustang is one of his favourites. The following Saturday morning he accompanies me to the cake shop on my weekly run.

For some strange reason and, it has never happened before, my trousers are on inside out due to a basic error of confused dressing in the morning. So, by way of a thank you for his efforts, he ends up with a man of a certain age, whose trousers are inside out, being a passenger in a 150-mile-an-hour car. Not that we ever exceeded the speed limit officer! And I promise no more mention of cars in future DBs!

A chap turned up the other day and said hello from the lane. He was somebody who bought a painting off me years ago. It was a water colour sketch of my then oldest friend washing up in his farmhouse in Devon. Every few years this bloke visits this part of the world from his home near Cambridge and comes to see me. I asked him if he still had the pic or had it, like I predict so much of my work, ended up in a charity shop or on the local tip. No, he still has it and it is still in his kitchen and he still likes it. By the way, the oldest friend I haven't seen for 17 years. I decided his friendship was no longer viable. Sad but that's life.

Winter looms ominously, and the thought of it all is almost too much to bear, especially as the summer has been one of the worst for years. Tragically, it looks as though this will become the norm and our weather will become more and more unpredictable. What we need is an alien from another galaxy landing on earth and giving us all an ultimatum to 'buck up'. Either that or he threatens to get rid of us all. Not the earth or its other inhabitants but just us humans. Leave the animals to sort it all out. They can't do worse than us. Sometimes I think that Milo our Siamese cat knows more than he's letting on, and realises what a hash we're making of it all. Maybe he'll turn out to be the alien that we need?

Paul Bennett



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WHY BLYTHBURGH M@TTERS

Let me introduce you to Ro Williams. She has been an active member of the Blythburgh community for more years than I can remember and if I described her as a whirlwind of a woman I wouldn't be exaggerating! I wanted to talk to her about how she set up and became the face and driving force behind Blythburgh M@tters.

So how did it all start?

It was the Parish Plan of 2007/8. The big thing that came out of this was the lack of social activities in the village. People felt that they wanted to become more of a community and mix at social events. Initially, about five of us set up Blythburgh M@tters to coordinate activities in the village and encourage new activities and social events.

What are the different facets of Blythburgh M@tters?

Over the years it's really been three things: (i) communication, (ii) planning and hosting activities & events, and (iii) facilitation. In the early days we organised a lot but gradually our numbers dwindled until there were just two of us. It became more and more difficult to organise a regular programme, so we became facilitators – we now help to get things going but then hand on to others to run them. The communication side has worked well – there's an email list that grows and grows and – provided people let me know that they want a village activity advertised – then it will be circulated.

What kind of things have Blythburgh M@tters been involved in?

The café & mini-market immediately comes to mind. It came about at the Annual Parish meeting. We were talking about the church and how they wanted to raise some funds so I raised the idea of a monthly market and helped kick that off. It started small-scale but has really taken off and is a monthly highlight now with a life of its own. And as a result of the monthly market, there's now an annual Christmas Market.

Forerunner to the monthly film club was Flicks in the Sticks. In those days, someone had to drive to The Cut (Halesworth) to pick up a screen and projection equipment and set it up in the village hall for a film night. It proved popular so Blythburgh M@tters supported the village hall in an application for funding to buy the kit we have now. So, the monthly film



club (now very successfully run by Olive Forsythe & Terry Goss) was born out of Flicks in the Sticks.

Not everything was a success and some things, like the village fete in the pub grounds, just didn't take off, but of course we now have the very successful Blythburgh Day.

Some things that did run for a time, with Pat and Terry Goss at the helm, were the themed nights with a group meal and a film in the village hall. They were great fun and may be something that could be done again.

Blythburgh M@tters has always tended to pick up one-off events that fall outside the remit of other village organisations: a ceilidh in the church treasure hunts round the village, various Royal celebrations and a memorable village picnic with Beating of the Bounds.

So, how does someone sign up for the email list and how can Blythburgh M@tters help if someone wants to get something going in the village?

That's easy: email ro@blythburgh.plus.com to be added to the email distribution list, or to tell me if you have an idea and you'd like help to get it off the ground.

Finally, what is Blythburgh M@tters next big thing?

Well, we tried to organise a village trip to Abba Voyage but there wasn't enough interest. On the plus side, we discovered a trip being organised by Belle Coaches so there is a good alternative for people.

Finally, we want to support the Village Hall, so if you have any ideas for activities or events there. Most importantly, if you would like to get involved, please let us know because Blythburgh does M@tter!

Sonie Boggis



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DEREK KETT – BLYTHBURGH MAN AND BOY

Derek Kett was one of a rare and vanishing species: someone born and raised in the Blythburgh and, indeed, spent almost his entire life here. In fact, the Kett family's village connections go back several generations: one of Derek's grandfathers farmed Church Farm and the other had Street Farm. He was born in 1929 in what's now called Chantry Cottage opposite the church. Ninety-three years later, he died peacefully at home in the Bungalow, Church Lane, a house he himself had built in 1963.



Derek was a kind of village landmark – in later years you could find him on Church Lane, or by the marshes, leaning on a stick, accompanied by a free-range Jack Russell. He was always ready with a greeting and a story about the old days. A warm and witty man, at ease with himself.

He was strong willed and determined, hardworking and practical, keen to give anything a go and having a deep passion to live self-sufficiently in harmony with nature, using those old country traditions passed down before him.

The 1930s and 40s were not easy for a large family (Derek was the youngest of six), but family farming connections meant they didn't go short, even in the war years. Derek attended Blythburgh school and then Reydon Secondary Modern. His older brothers and sister had enlisted into military service, much to the envy of the under-age Derek.

However, at 14, he joined the Wenhaston Army cadets and became a Home Guard junior. One day, on look-out duty from Blythburgh church tower, he was ordered to urgently deliver a message to the village police station. Derek scrambled down, mounted his bike, and sped off to the police house. Returning to collect his bike, a Halesworth Police inspector was standing next to it, threatening to charge the terrified Derek for leaving a vehicle unattended which could be used by the enemy!

Derek left school at 14 to work for Dickon Nurseries in Walberswick, where he gained his lifelong horticultural skills. He also had an interest electro-mechanical equipment and went on to work for Nolleth Electrical in Southwold.



In 1953, Derek did National Service, becoming Gunner Kett in the Royal Regiment of Artillery. This took him to Egypt in defence of the Canal Zone. The following year, he married Lily before being re-deployed to Germany.

Married life resumed. Derek tried working at the Vauxhall factory in Luton for a year for the extra wages, but Blythburgh drew him back and he joined Hubbard Electrical in Southwold. Their first child Anthony was born in 1957, followed by Roger in 1959. The family left Chantry Cottage for Trudy Cottage in Church Lane. It was from there that Derek (a skilled builder and fixer) took on the ultimate DIY project by buying the land next door, on which he designed and built a bungalow, with the help of his cousin. The family moved in in 1963 and stayed.

Derek was in his element, cultivating a garden to grow his own vegetables, keeping chickens, ducks, geese and rabbits. There was always a trusty gun dog around to accompany shooting ventures for wild fowl, rabbits, pigeons – all for the pot. Boating on the Blyth was another enthusiasm, for pleasure and productivity: rod and line fishing for the elusive grey mullet evolved into net fishing, eel catching and shellfish gathering.

Derek loved the camaraderie of the local pubs, particularly the White Hart and the Bell in Walberswick. Folk music was a feature of pub life which he joined with relish: progressing from the spoons the piano-accordion.

Derek left Hubbard Electrical in 1977 and became self-employed as a gardener and maintenance-man, which he continued well into his eighties. His abilities as a grower were legendary. The Blythburgh Horticulture Society have an annual cup awarded for the overall winner of the vegetable section. Derek won this at least 13 times, and probably more, because they ran out of space to put his name on! The Hort Soc 'Derek Kett Trowel Award for Runner Beans' (a Kett speciality) is a fitting legacy.



Derek was built to last. It's only a shame that he and Lily didn't quite get to celebrate the 70th anniversary of their faithful and companionable marriage, which they were due to reach next year.

Derek lived a rounded, good-hearted, warm life,

replete with creative productivity. We mourn his passing, but he will live long in the memory.

Tony Kett and Malcolm Doney

BLYTHBURGH CHURCH NEWS

Here are the details of the church **Christmas events:**

Saturday 16 November 4pm: Carols by Candlelight with the Blythburgh Singers

Friday 22 December 6pm: Carol singing around the village (we'll be visiting the east side of the A12 this year). If you'd like to join the singing, meet at 5.50pm at Wolsey House, Church Road – or if you'd like the singers to visit your front door, let Jenny Allen know:

jennyanddick@aol.com

Christmas Eve, 24 December 5.30pm: Crib Service – a family-friendly gathering to assemble the nativity set and get Christmassy

Christmas Eve, 24 December 11.30pm: Midnight Mass

Christmas Day, 25 December: Christmas Morning service, with an informal touch

Everyone is more than welcome.

Malcolm takes a break

Blythburgh resident and volunteer priest Malcolm Doney is stepping back from his church duties for three months from January 1. He says: "I need to take a break, partly because I feel a bit jaded, but also because the Church of England's failure to recognise and welcome same-sex marriage makes it hard for me – for the time being – to represent the institution. I need some time out, which is tinged with sadness, but hope that I will return."



WILD WATCH

Last time I described how we discovered the origins of our moon and how, in its early history, it orbited the Earth much closer than it does now. With its formation, it began to influence our planet’s evolution.

As the moon’s gravitational effect gradually began to lessen, its effects on the Earth’s crust diminished and, as it cooled, water began to form on the Earth’s surface. We’ve long known that water provided the cradle in which the earliest life-forms evolved. These first organisms were primitive cyanobacteria, single-celled organisms that can still be found in ponds, rivers and seas in the form of diatoms. Diatoms still provide up to 50% of the Earth’s atmospheric oxygen through their photosynthesis.

Their descendants, blue-green algae, formed the first large living structures. Called stromatolites, they’re still around today in places like Shark Bay in Northern Australia, but their descendants are found all over the world, including our own rivers and seas. Those green smudges that often appear on the banks of the Blyth after high tide, and the seaweed that clings to rocks and jetties are all descended from these ancient blue-greens.

The moon played a crucial role in the evolution of these algae. The moon shines by reflected sunlight. Even today, a full moon can cast shadows



A cloudy sky lit by moonlight - night skies during early history would have been short but well-lit

and illuminate landscapes.

Three billion years ago, not only was the moon much closer to Earth but its gravity meant the Earth spun much faster on its axis. Days lasted less than 10 hours, and brighter moonlight meant that these early algae could photosynthesise and grow virtually continuously.

The oxygen they produced coalesced and helped form the Earth’s atmosphere.

This allowed the evolutionary process to accelerate, leading to more advanced forms of algae. These, in turn, evolved into the complex plants we see today. The oxygen-rich atmosphere also provided conditions for the development of the earliest non-plant organisms, free moving animals that no longer had to rely on photosynthesis or water currents to provide their food. They could actively hunt for it, and they were the ancestors of all today’s animals.

The moon still controls all life on Earth, from the mass spawning of coral reefs and fish, to patterns of migration and feeding, and in ways we’ve yet to fully understand.

As fellow creatures on the planet the moon influences our own lives as well, and I’ll be looking at some of those effects next time.

Paul Lacey



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MISTS AND MELLOW FRUITFULNESS?

As I write this, rain lashes against the window and the wind is whipping our trees into a frenzy – it's hardly the season of mists and mellow fruitfulness!

Since our last report there have been a number of Horticultural Society events starting in September with a visit to East Ruston Old Vicarage Gardens. Described as “an exotic garden in an exposed prairie landscape by the North Norfolk coast”, I'm reliably informed that the small group who made the journey had a most enjoyable visit and the on-site café comes highly recommended.

In October, we hosted our first Apple Day in the Village Hall. Sadly, this was a poor year for apples, but on the plus side, it did give us an opportunity to try out the process without the pressure of crates and crates of apples. Those that were there had great fun chopping, scratting, pressing, bottling.

Twenty-eight members attended the annual dinner at the White Hart. The food was delicious, the staff couldn't have been more helpful, and it was lovely to relax and enjoy the company of so many members.

Our year closed in early November with the AGM and social supper in the Village Hall. Total membership for 2023 was a fantastic 75, and more than half of those gathered AGM and a warming supper. Tables were lit by autumnal decorations, created by members, teams competed in a quiz masterminded by Cilla Wilson, and Sue Ireland-Cutting organised a splendid raffle.

Thanks are due to the whole committee who worked so tirelessly throughout the year to put together an interesting and varied programme of events.

2024 membership fees are now due and, if you want to join us, membership is £5 for the year and you can get a membership form by emailing sonia.boggis@btinternet.com.

On a sad note, at the AGM we marked the passing of our Honorary President, Derek Kett, who had been an active member of the Horticultural Society for many years before becoming our Honorary President in 2020 (*see the tribute elsewhere in this edition*). The AGM paused to remember and honour Derek.

Sonia Boggis

Secretary, Blythburgh Horticultural Society

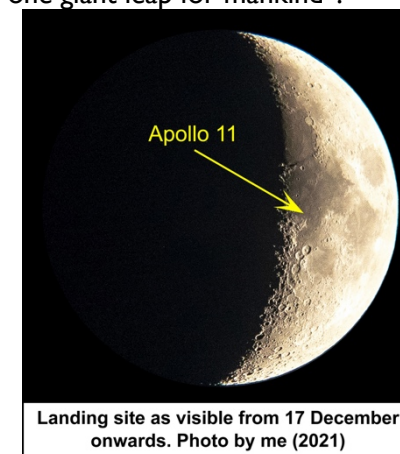
STARRY, STARRY NIGHT

On Christmas Eve it will be 55 years since Apollo 8 orbited the Moon. Frank Borman, Jim Lovell and Bill Anders were the first humans to travel there, seven months prior to the Apollo 11 landing. They were also the first to see it's far side and to see an Earthrise. They read the creation verses from the Book of Genesis as they orbited. On Christmas morning, as they emerged from behind the Moon prior to their return home, it was Lovell who radioed confirming “there is a Santa Claus”.

Borman died in November at the age of 95. Lovell and Anders are 95 and 90 respectively.

The Moon is of course the easiest object to observe in our night sky, and I thought it might be fun to try to locate the site where Neil Armstrong famously took “one small step for (a) man, one giant leap for mankind”.

That first landing took place close to the Moon's equator, in the south west corner of the Sea of Tranquility, which shows up as a dark area as we see it. Wait until 17 December when the landing site will be almost exactly on the day/night terminator. If you were standing in the boots of Armstrong and Aldrin you would be seeing the sunrise. This is a good time to view, as the shadows on the Moon will be long, accentuating features such as mountains and craters. The landing site remains on view until it is plunged into darkness at lunar sunset on 31 December.



Landing site as visible from 17 December onwards. Photo by me (2021)

You can identify the area with the naked eye, and take a closer look with binoculars or a telescope, but don't expect to see any evidence! The base of the 'Eagle' lander would fit within the centre circle of a football pitch. This is equivalent to trying to see a postage stamp in Rome from Blythburgh. There is yet to be a telescope that can achieve that.

As a teenager I was enthralled by the Apollo missions and – after the final Moon landings in 1972 – I had visions of settlements on the Moon and human exploration beyond. In fact, no human has since ventured further than Earth orbit and, with only four of the twelve astronauts who walked on the Moon still alive, the youngest being 88, I wonder whether any of them will live to see people follow in their footsteps.

Colin Huggins

The Blythburgh Latitude Trust is making grants

The Blythburgh Latitude Trust makes grants to individual parishioners, families and organisations to meet specific needs.

For your grant, contact the honorary administrator, **Jim Boggis, Marsh End, Church Road, (478 687)**

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BLYTHBURGH FIELD NOTES

The Osprey and up to three Hobby – two of which encouragingly were juveniles – continued to be seen regularly on the Blyth in early September, while waders included up to 16 Ruff, two Little Stint and Curlew Sandpiper along with several Greenshank, Common Snipe and Ringed Plover.

A Wheatear was present on 11 September, along with a final flurry of summer warblers, including: Whitethroat, Lesser Whitethroat, Reed Warbler and Blackcap.

October started with the final two Wheatear of the year and up to eight Grey Plover, while on the 5th. 45 Golden Plover were seen, building up to 310 by the 19th, along with 188 Lapwings. On the same date, 11 Brent Geese were present, including 8 of the Dark-bellied form, which are the common passage and winter visitor here. These often occur in large numbers on south Suffolk and Essex estuaries, and during passage they often pass close inshore in their thousands. They feed mainly on eelgrass and algae, although, in more recent years, they have also developed a taste for winter wheat. Our usual dark-bellied form come mainly from West Siberia, but the three other birds present were the pale-bellied form, from Greenland and Canada. These are rare in Suffolk, but small numbers are regular in Ireland.

Although none have been seen in the parish yet, there have been good numbers of Waxwing seen in the county – mainly around Lowestoft. This winter visitor is one of Europe’s most beautiful birds, having a buffy crest on their head, and red and yellow waxy tips to the flight feathers and tail. It is an eruptive species, rather than a regularly winter visitor. The lack of food or hard weather is the main reasons for these birds moving southward. They are particularly fond of Rowan berries and also Holly, but will wait until the first heavy frosts soften them. This is the reason those nice holly berries that you’ve been lining up for Christmas mysteriously disappear!

November 18 saw a fine male Hen Harrier over the Blyth. It was calling loudly for this species because it was being harassed by a Carrion Crow, which continued to attack it for more than a mile, both eventually disappearing over the woodland.

I Nonowt

Getting help with the cost of winter

As we move into winter, it is worth knowing what support is available.

Local Welfare Assistance – to help with essential household costs. To qualify you need to

- be able to demonstrate that you are in financial hardship
- live in Suffolk
- be 16-years old or over
- have a combined household income of £27,500 a year or less
- have less than £1,500 available in savings across the household
- not have received an award since 1st October 2023

Apply online on the Suffolk County Council website (you will need your national insurance number and be able to upload proof of address and bank statements) or you can ask your local Citizens Advice for help.

Surviving Winter – a payment of up to £175 towards fuel costs, or a delivery of fuel for households using Oil or LPG in their heating systems for working households, those who are in work but who still face financial hardship. It is for people who:

- are aged 65 or under
- have a combined household income of less than £35,000
- are not in receipt of any means-tested benefits
- have a combined household savings of less than £1,500
- have a home address in Suffolk

Apply online at Citizens Advice Ipswich (you will need to be able to upload documents) or you can ask your local Citizens Advice for help.

Energy Advice – one to one energy advice for people who are in or at risk of fuel poverty and who may be vulnerable and struggling to pay their bills.

People qualify for this advice

- If their home is rated below C and the household is on a low income (ie they can be in receipt of benefits) and
- if they have an additional medical, social or age-related vulnerability. (i.e. medical, social or age-related vulnerability such as: being of pensionable age, experiencing long term sickness / disability, having dependent children)

The advice is provided by Citizens Advice East Suffolk.

To contact Citizens Advice East Suffolk please email advice@caes.org.uk or ring 0808 278 7866, Monday to Friday 10-2 (lines are busy). There is also a drop in at the Stella Peskett Millenium Hall in Southwold (10-12 every other Monday (next one 4th December) and at Halesworth library (10-12 on the 1st and 3rd Tuesday of the month.)



courtesy of Colin Huggins