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Issue No 55

<http://blythburgh.onesuffolk.net>

Feb/March 2021

STARRY, STARRY NIGHT



The Christmas Star (Saturn and Jupiter conjoined) appeared over Blythburgh last year

We have some good night skies and I thought it might be fun to share my interest in astronomy. This is the first of an occasional series suggesting what you might expect to see from the safety of your garden. I'll focus (no pun intended) on objects that are easy to find without fancy equipment, but a pair of binoculars would help a lot. If you happen to have a small telescope that would be a bonus but isn't essential. Apologies if you're already an expert astronomer – this isn't

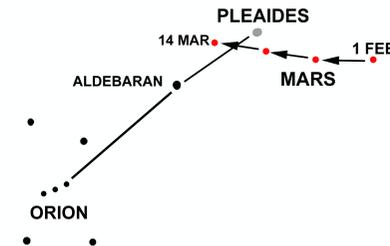
Issue 55

intended for you! I will assume that you are not already an expert – if you are, you are probably reading the wrong article!

The best times will be the first two weeks of both February and March, avoiding evenings with a bright moon. Let it get properly dark – around 6:50pm in February and 7:40pm in March. Give your eyes time to get used to the darkness so you can see more.

Find the distinctive constellation of Orion towards the south and imagine a line up from the three stars in Orion's belt, past the star of Aldebaran and about half as far again to the open star cluster of Pleiades. You should be able to see between four and six stars with the naked eye, but binoculars will show them at their best. In Greek mythology they are known as the Seven Sisters (maybe they had clearer skies!). The Japanese call them Subaru, hence that car's six-star logo.

There are actually around 1,000 stars in the cluster. They are hot, blue stars, young by stellar standards, being about 100 million years old. They are so far away that their light has taken 444 years to arrive here, so you're effectively looking back to the Elizabeth I's reign!



To the right of Pleiades in February, or back towards Aldebaran in March, you can see the planet Mars with the naked eye. About half the size of Earth, and currently about 130 million miles away, its light takes only around 12 minutes to arrive here. Through binoculars you should be able to make it out as a tiny disc, rather than a point of light. 120 years ago, H.G.Wells imagined Martians taking over our world, but don't expect to see them waving to you. As you look at Mars, remember there are two objects operating on the surface, with a third scheduled to land on 18 February.

Colin Huggins



WILD WATCH

For most of us, buying half-a-pound of mushrooms from the supermarket is as close as we get to one of the most important of the five kingdoms of life on Earth.

We generally only notice fungi when they produce their spore-bearing fruiting bodies. As well as the mushrooms and toadstools we're familiar with, some fungal fruiting bodies can look otherworldly, or even



Amanita muscaria fly agaric

downright rude. The main part of the fungus, however, is hidden underground or within the body of another organism. Called the *mycelium*, these grow and form a mat-like mass which can extend over many square metres.

Fungi are found all over the world and, while we still have much to learn about their evolution, they are thought to have been around for at least a billion years. This is apparent from their position as fundamental components of our planet's ecosystems.

Fungi are not plants or animals: they do not photosynthesise but, like animals, they can't manufacture their own food. Being the planet's principal recyclers, fungi produce enzymes which break organic matter down into a form that they can digest themselves. As a by-product of this process, fungi release the nutrients that many plants and animals need to fuel their own growth.

Life on Earth would be unlikely to survive without fungi. We humans rely on a fungus for our daily bread, beer and wine. Antibiotics are derived from fungi, notably penicillin, and we have also developed compounds based on fungi to control some pests that would otherwise damage our important food crops.

Some fungi have close relationships with a wide variety of partners. With algae, primitive plants, they form organisms known collectively as lichens. The fungal partner is the visible one we see growing on trees

and tombstones. The alga lives within the fungus and pays rent with some of the food it has manufactured for itself.



Lichen on willow

Most green plants, even trees, rely on relationships with fungi. The fungus provides nutrients to the plant's roots and, in return, the plant provides the fungus with the sugars and starches it has made through photosynthesis.

Humans once had closer connections with fungi. In parts of Europe, gathering edible mushrooms has long been a traditional pastime. It is, however, important to know what you're collecting. Some fungi contain deadly toxins while others can cause curious reactions if eaten with other foods or with alcohol.

Better, perhaps, to stick to the supermarket.

Paul Lacey





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FUNDING THE PARISH COUNCIL

Did you know that– if you're a parishioner – you pay a 'precept'? This is the parish Council's share of the Council Tax. The District Council collects this on the Parish Council's behalf and then gives it back to us. This year, we'll be asking for a bit more. Not much – just 2% – that's the equivalent of about 60p more a year, per household.

"What do we do with your money?" you may well ask. Firstly, I want to say that none of it goes to your councillors. Not only do they not receive any payment, but they're forbidden to charge for any work they may personally do for the council (for example, painting or making repairs to the village hall).

But what we do pay for, for example, is maintaining the play site and the bus shelters. Also, over the years, we've bought a speed gun used by our local Speedwatch team, and also the speed display sign which you'll have seen at various positions around the village. We recently bought and installed a CCTV camera to oversee the area around the bottle banks because of an increasing fly-tipping problem. In the near future, we'll be laying a wheelchair-friendly path from the A12 to the village hall. Insurance is a major item – this includes the village hall and public liability. We also pay our Clerk (see page x).

With the cuts that have been made to local authorities over the last few years, it has become increasingly difficult to get funding from either Suffolk County Council, or East Suffolk District Council, for village improvements. We do apply for grants wherever possible, but nevertheless we have to find money for many projects from our own budget. That's why we've decided to increase the precept for this coming year. If you'd like to know more, do please get in touch at roderick@millend6.plus.com.

Roderick Orr-Ewing

Chair Blythburgh with Bulcamp and Hinton Parish Council

BLYTHBURGH COVID HELPLINE

Help is still at hand! The rota of volunteers – set up last March by the Parish Council offering help to residents who needs help with shopping, fetching prescription medications or any other errand – is still available. Please note, however, that the phone number has changed. So, if you, or someone you know, needs assistance, then please call **07484 817911**

You may be able to organise online deliveries, or call on family or friends to support you, but if for any reason this isn't possible, and you need supplies, medication or anything else please contact this service. Even if you would simply like to chat with someone please don't hesitate to call. We can also offer a lift to anyone who needs transport for their for their Covid vaccination.

We're still picking up prescription medicines from Sole Bay Health Centre Pharmacy every Thursday – if you would like to use this service please contact the Pharmacy direct. We can also pick up medicines from Cutlers Hill if required.

The service is available between 8am and 6pm, seven days a week. If you need more information, please call: **Val Carse: 07973 389 898** or **Malcolm Doney: 07812 566 520.**

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JURMIN – ONE OF OUR OWN

We have our own saint, St Jurmin. Also known as Germinus, his day is celebrated on 23 February. He was a prince of the royal East Anglian house and died in the battle of Bulcamp in 654 fighting with the Christian East Anglians against pagan Penda of Mercia. Jurmin's body was brought to Blythburgh and was the focus for pilgrimages until the 11th century. Then, in 1095 his relics were translated to the powerful abbey at Bury and enshrined alongside Saint Edmund and Saint Botolph. The fate of the relics after the destruction of the shrines at the Reformation is not known.

Jurmin is generally regarded as the son of King Anna, who also died at the Battle of Bulcamp. The early historian, William of Malmesbury, viewing the shrine at Bury, thought so, although he could find no information about Jurmin other than that he was the brother of St Etheldreda (she also happened to be a queen, and founder and abbess of Ely). That would make him Anna's son. This is also the conclusion of a history of Ely. On the other hand, the monk Florence of Worcester, who died in 1118, wrote that Jurmin was the son of Aethelhere, Anna's brother and successor. The *Oxford Dictionary of Saints* prefers that conclusion. However, Dr Sam Newton, expert on the Wuffings dynasty, assures me that the latest research confirms that Jurmin was indeed the son of Anna.

However, Jurmin may not be Blythburgh's only saint. Some believe that St Walstan (patron saint of agriculture and farm animals) was born in Blythburgh. But that's another story.

Alan Mackley



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BETHLEHEM COMES TO BLYTHBURGH



Originally an idea from Sue Ireland-Cutting, we have been wanting to host a Nativities Festival at Holy Trinity for at least two years. In 2020 we were finally ready – when Covid struck. Undeterred, we put out a request asking people in the village and around if they would lend us their treasured nativity scenes for a Christmas display. We were happily surprised when 14 people responded. We were offered 30 different scenes drawn from all over the world.



German manger scene made by Susan Haward's father, graced the

Swillington tomb. Finally, thanks to Claire Lyth and Roderick Orr-Ewing, the church's own nativity was fully restored and re-lit.

Despite the difficult we were so glad that we were able to welcome people through the doors for Christmas services, and – because we were able to keep the church open for visitors – we were able to offer something of the spirit of Christmas for village and visitors alike.

Meryl Doney



CHURCH NEWS

Christmas cheer

It was nip and tuck holding Christmas services between tier changes and a third lockdown. But we managed a successful raft of them over the season. Numbers were down a bit, for understandable reasons, but we salvaged some real Christmas cheer.

We nominated Hope and Aid Direct and the NSPCC as our Christmas charities this year and – despite Covid difficulties – raised a very respectable £846. We thank everyone for their generosity.

Food Bank collection

This is a reminder that we have now set up a collecting point for food donations to be passed to Lowestoft Food Bank. There is a large plastic crate inside the church to the left of the main door, beside the Traidcraft stall, with up-to-date details of what is needed urgently as well as what is currently in good supply. This is updated weekly.

Closed but still open

Holy Trinity is still open in daylight hours for prayer and contemplation, but we are holding no Sunday services until further notice. However, we are still hosting the popular weekly service of Compline on Zoom every Thursday at 8.30pm. If you would like to join us (and everyone is welcome), please contact Jenny Allen for access details: jennyanddick@aol.com.

THATCHING – A VERY LOCAL CRAFT

Early this year, on yet another lockdown walk, the harsh, cold winter sun seemed to bring the reed beds of Blythburgh to life. The straight polished stems stretched up from the gloopy black mud and the heads of the reeds rippled and danced in the gentle breeze as the sun dipped towards the horizon.



I've always been enthralled by a thatched roof. Even as a youngster, they held some kind of magic for me. I would be drawn back day after day to watch a thatcher at work as they created a masterpiece high above my young head.

Initially, my younger self

focused on the skills of the thatcher but, living opposite a marsh, it was soon clear that you needed good reeds in order to thatch a roof. Realising that the thatcher rarely lived close to the reed beds was a revelation, and so was discovering that a thatcher rarely gathered their own reeds. Instead, the thatcher would travel, sometimes a considerable distance, to "view" a reed bed before purchasing the bed from the owner of the land. The thatcher would



then pay a reed cutter so much per bundle to cut the bed for them.

Reed cutting was seasonal work, with cutting concentrated in the winter months of January, February and March. The cutters used simple tools: a small hooked knife, a specialised carting barrow and – extremely importantly – they had wooden planks to use as bridges across the dykes.



The usual method of cutting was to take 30-40 good reeds under the left arm, pull them slightly away from the ground and, with the right hand, draw the hooked knife across the reeds towards the body. The cutter made it look really easy but I'm sure it wasn't as simple as they made it seem.



This process was repeated, until the bundle measured about 12 inches round – at which point it was thoroughly shaken to remove loose ends and tied twice with binder twine. At the end of each day the bundles would be gathered together and moved using either the specialist barrow or sometimes just manpower.



Reeds are the raw material a thatcher uses. Just take a walk down Priory Road to witness first hand a fine example of the finished product. These

two pictures were taken 50 years apart – an ancient craft lives on in Blythburgh.

Sonia Boggis

A VICTORIAN SCANDAL

Edith Charlotte Musgrave Bonham, an earl's step-daughter marries the vicar of Blythburgh, becomes the lover of a Southwold doctor, runs away to Australia, and ends up as a pioneering correspondent during the Boer War.



In 1870 the Rev William Belcher, the 36-year-old Irish-born vicar of Blythburgh, visited Henham Hall in connection with a proposed appointment as rector of Larling (Norfolk). Augusta, Countess of Stradbroke's diary records that Edith (19), her daughter by her first marriage, became infatuated with this much older man. They married within the year. Mr Belcher advanced rapidly, via Larling and Thorington to Heveningham, where he became Rector in 1875.

There were four surviving children of the marriage: Edith

Augusta Bonham (b.1871), twins Frederick Harry Bonham and Reginald Henry George Holland (b.1878), and Musgrave Vanneck Gordon (b.1881).

In March 1884 Edith senior attended a first-aid course at Southwold vicarage, "numerously and fashionably attended" according to *The Ipswich Journal*. It was run by a local doctor, Augustus Newton Maximilian Dickenson. Edith and Augustus became lovers. As a consequence, he lost his post in Southwold. He was married, having left a wife in Dublin, with their four children and two others that his wife had by a previous marriage. By the end of the year, Edith was clearly separated from her husband. At Christmas she advertised from a Southwold address for a nursemaid to look after her three boys.

Dickenson sailed to Australia in 1885 and Edith followed the following year. She travelled first-class, suggesting that she had

independent means. They lived together as man and wife, and had two children, moving frequently, as Dickenson practised in one remote place after another, keeping one step ahead of the English divorce courts. His wife obtained a divorce in 1889, but no evidence has been found that Belcher ever divorced Edith. Edith's Belcher sons were with her for some of the time.

During the 1890s Edith travelled widely in Australia and India, and made trips to England, writing articles and taking photographs as Edith Dickenson for an Adelaide newspaper. With Dickenson, she travelled to South Africa at the time of the Boer War, and Edith – a pioneering female war correspondent – may have had privileged access, since her brother and twin sons were army officers serving in South Africa.

She helped to expose the appalling conditions in the concentration camps set up by the British to house Boer women and children. Dr Dickenson died in 1902 while practising in one of the camps. After a visit to England in 1900, accompanied by her Dickenson children, Edith Charlotte Musgrave Bonham returned to South Africa but died in Cape Town in 1903, worn out by her experiences.

The Dickenson orphans were raised by the Bonham family. The daughter, Edith Augusta, had been left behind in Heveningham at the age of 15. She was to marry the son of a gamekeeper and her Lipscombe descendants still live in Canada.

With thanks to Australian historian and writer Patricia Clarke for reminding me of this story.

Alan Mackley

PUB NEWS

At the time of going to press, the **White Hart** in Blythburgh is closed, but things change often and quickly, so please keep an eye for signage outside the pub and visit www.blythburgh-whitehart.co.uk for up-to-the-minute news.

The **Wenhaston Star** is offering a range of stone-baked pizzas on Friday and Saturday evenings, available for collection between 5 and 7pm. Please phone to pre-order on 478 240. More details www.wenhastonstar.co.uk.

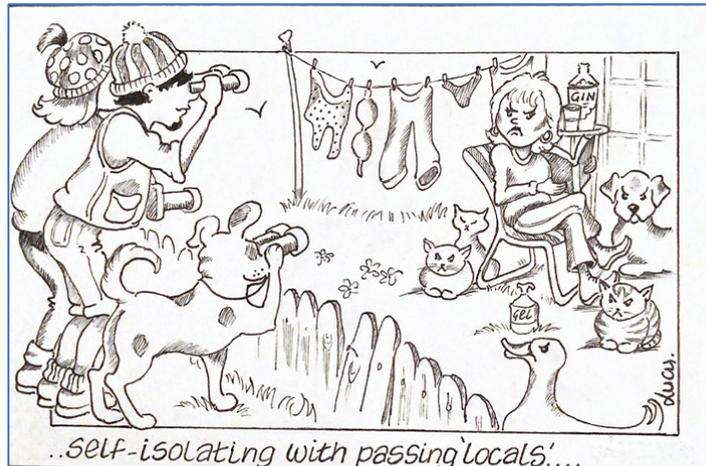
NEW CLERK IN PROFILE

We have a new Parish Clerk in place of Jim Boggis, who stepped down at the end of 2020 after 14 years' service. In case you don't know, the job of a Parish Clerk is essentially to: make sure that the Parish Council conducts its business lawfully; ensure meeting papers are properly prepared; maintain financial control: and implement the council's decisions.

We now give a warm welcome to Jim's replacement Alistair (Al) Besly. Al was born in Yorkshire but spent most of his school years in Wiltshire. After his A-levels, he worked in a bank for six years before joining BT, where he embarked on an accountancy career.

Al retired from BT to embark on a house renovation project in Little Glemham, where he and his partner (together with five cats and two dogs) have now lived for four years. Al is a qualified yacht skipper, and loves to charter boats with friends, and get out on the water when he can. He also publishes magazines for two animal charities – Greek Animal Rescue and the Greek Cat Welfare Society. He raises funds for these organisations, when lockdown rules allow, and runs the merchandise shop for Greek Animal Rescue.

He came to clerking because his neighbour in Little Glemham was a councillor and – knowing of Al's accountancy qualifications – asked him to become Clerk for the parish, as the current clerk was retiring. He discovered that he enjoyed the variety of the role and has since taken on the clerk role for two other parishes, one of them being Blythburgh.



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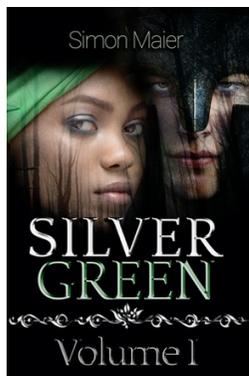
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Blyth View Author Gets Busy



Local author Simon Maier, who casts a writerly eye on the village from his eyrie in Blyth View, has a new book out. *Silver Green* is the first of a fantasy thriller series exploring the lure and dangers of immortality.

From the early 1990s Simon’s family had a house in Westleton, sold in 2012. After leaving Westleton, he was based in London, but “I missed the big skies, the beaches, the villages and the people.” He moved into Blyth View in 2017. A career as a lecturer in Shakespeare morphed into directing and producing televisual and corporate events along with some mainstream theatre. Along the way, he wrote speeches and scripts for politicians and business leaders which in turn gave birth to his first book, *The 100*, which was about the effect of 100 major speeches throughout history. There followed a series of books on communication, including *Speak Like a President*, inspired partly by speeches of a then little-known lawyer, Barack Obama and *In Any Event*, about the power of live events.

Silver Green came about because of work Simon undertook for the pharmaceutical industry: “I’d had some fascinating discussions with eminent doctors and scientists about the possibilities of longevity and what science could do about DNA and the eradication of some – or even all – diseases. I was also interested in powerful, secret societies, and their reach and influence.” In the novel, a number of characters have something in their DNA which stops disease and aging. These people, Silver Greens, are secretly protected by a shadowy society called The Watchers. Jacob and Gabriella are 14 years old and live hundreds of years apart in history, one in the Judea of CE 79 and the other in the Italy of 1492. By accident, they discover that they’re immortal, but they also find out that immortality carries terrifying risks. One is that they can be killed, and the other is that an ancient and violent organisation, The Guild, desperately seeks the secret to immortality. That would mean capture and eventual death.

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Simon’s next book – a fast-paced page turner set in East Suffolk – is almost finished. It’s a witty English village whodunnit full of mystery and intrigue, with some serious undertones. And volume II of *Silver Green* is already mapped out, and he hopes to have it finished by the middle of this year.

Silver Green is published by Michael Terence Publishing, and available at the usual bookshops and online outlets.

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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Blyth Belles

Sarah Wickham blythbelles@gmail.com

DAISY BANK XCVI I

Just before Christmas I was opening the church, and I noticed that some flowers had been put on Ray St Claire Brown's grave. On further inspection I noticed that besides the flowers there was a can of ready-mixed Gordons Gin & Tonic, and a bottle of Adams bitter. Ray, besides being a dear friend of mine, was part of an art group called the Blythburgh Group. Nick Catling, photographer, Dot Midson, potter, Ray, painter and I were the founders of the group. After Ray died, Nick and I had a wooden cross made with a brass plaque to mark where he was buried in the churchyard, with his wife Joan who had died a few years earlier. After the group was disbanded, Ray and I were regular gin & tonic drinkers every fortnight. I can't tell you how much I miss the conversations and laughs we had together. Irreplaceable! Perhaps after Christmas I'll spirit the drinks away and toast my old pal. Or is that too macabre I wonder. Nick thinks that by the time I decide, they'll be gone. But it was a nice thought.



For anyone not on our Christmas Card list, this year's card is my copy of a Leonardo painting called *Salvatore Mundi*. Perhaps a little audaciously, I have dared to change several parts of the picture in particular, the glass ball he is holding in his hand. I see it as almost glowing in his hand, so I've increased the light emanating from it. Also, some of the colours have been changed in my version; forgiveness please, Leonardo. Next year, it will be a chocolate box Christmas card again and B will definitely be pleased by that. Unlike me, she's not a melancholy person.

Since the virus, every Saturday I start the posh car in the church car park, take it down to our drive and run it for an hour. After that, I start the 2cv and run that for half an hour; its air-cooled so, like an FI car, it requires air to cool the engine. As we hardly use either car, both of them would be battery dead if we didn't charge them up. Last Saturday I did the usual thing with the 2cv. The following morning when I got up at seven, I realised I'd failed to turn the 2cv engine off. In a mad panic I rushed down the garden and there it was, still chugging away, none the worse for wear. No wonder it gets pride of place under the car port, and the posh one is left outside in the elements.

Paul Bennett