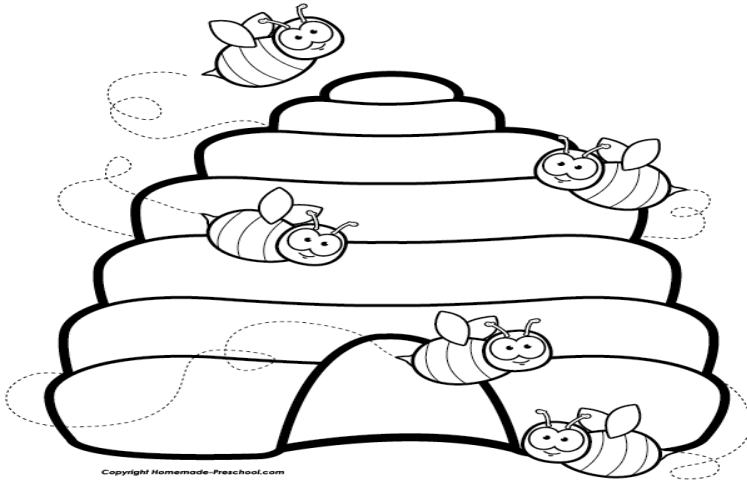


May 2021

PITCOMBE

news



May 2021

In this issue:

Tales of lambs and bunnies!

Neighbourhood Watch Special

Pitcombe Pearl

MONTHLY MAGAZINE FOR THE PARISH OF PITCOMBE

What's on...

May 2021

Sunday 2nd	9.30am Holy Communion
Sunday 9th	11am Morning Prayer
Tuesday 11th	7.30pm Parish Council Meet on Zoom
Friday 14th	Black bins
Sunday 16th	11 am Holy Communion
Sunday 23rd	6pm Evensong
Friday 28th	Black bin collection
Sunday 30th	No service

EVENT

...weekly

We hope to report resumption of-
weekly activities in a month or two!

...later

welcome

PITCOMBE NEWS

A cheery note from a scribbler about the month of May: 'It is the month of transition, it's getting warmer, the spring flowers are blooming, birds are chirping and life is starting to seem a little more joyful day by day'. To this can be added, for us, the emergence from a dreary lockdown, being reunited with family and friends and having a pint at ones local. In short, there is much to be thankful for.

Contributions to the Pitcombe News this month reflect this air of eager anticipation: The horticultural societies are starting to list their planned monthly events – great to see them back. Yarlington House is advertising a specialist Plant Fair in its lovely, spacious gardens. Elaine Beedle writes a charming piece on the experience of lambing and Tina Harley pens an amusing experience she had with 'Easter Bunnies'. Our new Rector commences his 'Ruminations' by describing the 'inexplicable thrill' of the sound of the cuckoo, as it returns each year, and The Village Hall announces its intention of re-opening to users on 17th May. What a programme!

Elsewhere, Sue Chamberlain, longstanding (about 15 years by our reckoning) Neighbourhood Watch Co-ordinator (and tireless previous editor of the Pitcombe News), announces her retirement. In her farewell note, Sue nostalgically trawls through the changing trends of local crime over time and the types of media used to alert the community. We salute her for her dedication to the cause and she goes with our very grateful thanks for looking after us so diligently. Which begs the question: Who will replace her? If there any interested, socially-minded characters willing to don her mantle, please get in touch with Sue directly.

Contributions please to the Editors by 15th of the month—contact details in the Parish Directory page 14

ST LEONARD'S MAY 2021

I am pleased to say that as the Covid-19 situation improves we have been able to resume worship at St Leonards', and the Reverend Jonathan Evans is taking services supported by our team of retired clergy. We ask you to wear a face covering and to ensure that social distancing of 2 metres between individuals, or those from separate households, is adhered to. And please also use the hand sanitiser provided on the chest immediately through the door upon entering the church. We no longer ask people to book into services beforehand, but we will need to take the contact details of those attending in accordance with government regulations.

Services at St Leonard's in May are as follows:

Holy Communion on 2nd May at 9:30 – Rev'd Dan Richards

Morning Prayer on 9th May at 11:00 – Preb. Mark Ellis

Holy Communion on 16th May at 11:00 – Rev'd Hilary Jalland

Evening Prayer on 23th May at 6:00pm – Rev'd Jonathan Evans
Pentecost

I write this report for the Pitcombe News on the day of the funeral of The Duke of Edinburgh, a day of great sadness for the Queen and the Royal Family. I am pleased that we held a special service to remember Prince Philip at St Mary's Bruton. His contribution to our country and the world was immense, not only for his lifetime of duty to the monarchy, but also for his patronage of many organisers, including the WWF and the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme; the latter touching the lives of so many young people, not just in the UK but across the globe.

Philip Pidsley, Church Warden

Rector's Ruminations

Have you heard the cuckoo yet? At the time of writing, I haven't, but perhaps by the time of publication I will have done. I always feel a certain inexplicable thrill at the sound of the cuckoo as it returns each year – perhaps as something bringing reassurance that the rhythms of nature are not so disrupted that we have lost this part of the fabric of our summer.

I'm not very good at poetry and am often perplexed and baffled by its use of words and images, but I am beginning to grow into some of Gerard Manley Hopkins' poems – possibly because I have relaxed a little bit when it comes to trying to work out what the poems mean and am more able simply to enjoy the words, the resonances, the images he evokes.

He has a rather beautiful poem called *The May Magnificat*, in which he muses on why the month of May, 'the Lady Month', is associated with Mary, the Mother of God. In this poem, Hopkins identifies Spring with new life and growth in nature all around – 'flesh and fleece, fur and feather, grass and greenworld altogether'. He sees nature's motherhood, with 'all things rising, all things sizing' and it is in this sense of growth of young, new life that he understands the link to Mary, in whom the very life of God grew.

The cuckoo makes an appearance in the poem; the poet sees the cuckoo as that which, above all the beauty and bliss of the Spring calls to Mary, calling her to remember her own joy and exultation in serving God. The 'magic cuckoo-call' crowns all the other signs and sights of Spring and bids us to be joyful in the source of all life. I hope you hear the cuckoo often this summer.

Jonathan Evans

The Village Hall

It is the intention that the hall will reopen on 17th May, in line with the Government road map and village hall guidance, but this will be confirmed at the hall's Management Committee meeting on 27th April. The opening will be with the same social distancing, cleaning regime and the same broad restrictions on using the kitchen, etc. as before. Some of these may be reduced in line with the Government road map but we will continue to keep a close watch on developments and follow guidance applicable to village halls.

We are delighted that many of our regular users will be starting to use the hall upon reopening. Others will leave it until they receive guidelines from their governing bodies. The Hall's Management Committee of Trustees has met occasionally during the lockdown and will be considering the re-introduction of hall sponsored events and, in particular, a special Summer celebration if the country continues current progress out of lockdown.

The hall will be open for one day only on Thursday 6th May, as the Polling Station for electing a new Police and Crime Commissioner for Avon and Somerset, having passed the relevant risk assessment carried out recently by the returning officer.

VHC

Musings from a reader

Just a thought:

Is a peck on the cheek, a sign of greeting and affection, a thing of the past? I hope not!

Peter Wyatt

Important message to dog walkers

Pick it up and take it home.

Neosporosis is a virus affecting both cattle and sheep, which causes abortion at a critical stage of pregnancy. **Dogs** are the most common carriers of the virus and transmit the disease via their faeces. The spore is capable of surviving in soil and water for prolonged periods after the faeces have decomposed.

This alarming virus is brought to our attention by local farmer, Martin Jennings, who justifiably has concerns about walkers with dogs, pooing in his fields. The distress of observing aborted foetuses, and sometimes the death of the mother, not to mention the adverse financial effect, is very real.

In Martin's words: ***'I am asking all dog owners to please pick up your dog poo and take it home. Most of you do! I find plastic bags containing the poo hanging in hedgerows and recently a bag hanging on a gate into my field. I am happy to see dog walkers in my field, but not using it as a dog's toilet. AND PLEASE KEEP TO THE FOOTPATHS. If you see sheep in my fields, please keep your dog on a lead, especially with lambs at foot.'***

Needless to say, this serves as a general appeal from all farmers to all dog walkers, but we salute Martin for taking the trouble to emphasis the point in the Pitcombe News for the benefit of all the community.

Ed.

Odd Jobs

For all those jobs you
never get around to doing!

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Obituary

Ann Jacqueline (Jackie) Bowring d. 2nd April 2021

I wonder how many of those in the Pitcombe Parish know the debt that we owe Jackie (and her husband, Terry) who lived in Hadspen.

Due to lack of support, it was a strong possibility that St Leonard's Church, Pitcombe, could be closed, whereupon some of us rallied round and Jackie gave unstinted help at PCC meetings, floral decorations, cleaning of the Church and the annual clearing of the Churchyard.

Sadly, Jackie and Terry moved on, but when they moved to Ditchet, Jackie once more came to St Leonard's services and was a major supporter of improving amenities at the back of the Church to the delight of, amongst others, visiting clergy.

With failing health, she still came to Haspen Village Hall social activities, including the Bridge Club.

I shall remember her as a great friend who supported local Hospitals, Antique Shows at Shepton Mallet Showground and a stint on the Committee of NADFAS (now the Arts Society).

She will be sorely missed.

Biddiy Coghill-Smith

Local Gardening Clubs

Castle Cary Garden Club

As the plants and the gardeners emerge from a long winter, the promise of all that could be possible is exciting. Our daffodils managed their full three weeks thanks to these endless frosts, other things have fared less well.

The garden club continues with Zoom only meetings. Our next one is by the garden designer Marion Dale, her talk is 'Designing with Plants'. It is at 7.30pm on Thursday June 6th. Membership details are on our website <http://ccga.btck.co.uk>

We would love to see you there! **Erica Holt**

Bruton & District Horticultural

We can't wait to get up and running again and the news is very positive. There have been false starts before, but we feel it is the right time to start planning for when we can meet up again. Of course, we can't be sure that events will be able to take place and what restrictions will be in place in future months.

The committee has decided that if all restrictions are indeed lifted on 21 June, then what better way to celebrate than with our annual garden supper on that date. It will not be possible to have a plant sale in the Community Hall in early May, so we thought that instead we would have a plant table at the annual garden supper. It would be a bit different from our normal plant sale as it is 6 weeks later. It will not include lots of tiny seedlings, ready to go out after the last frost. It will be a great opportunity to pass on potted up bits of favourite perennials or rooted cuttings or annuals nearly in flower.

We hope the show will be able to go ahead on 21 August, and an autumn programme of visits and talks is being prepared. Details will be on www.brutonthorticultural.org.uk and emailed to members.

Here is a gruesome gardening anecdote for you. (The fainthearted should look away now.) Planting peas prompted my husband to recall a story told by a friend whose garden was being wrecked by a pheasant. Seeing the pheasant on the newly planted pea patch he took a pot-shot at it. Gutting it later, he found its crop full of peas. They looked fine so he replanted them. Amazingly they all grew. If only all seeds were that resilient. **Alison Bleasdale**

Specialist Plant Fair at Yarlington House

By kind invitation of Count and Countess Charles de Salis

Saturday 22nd May 10am-4pm



To be held in the spacious park at Yarlington House with social distancing measures. An opportunity to buy plants from specialist dealers from all over the South West – plus a selection of unusual annuals on the Yarlington House stall. The beautiful flower garden and walled kitchen garden will be open. Tea, coffee and cake all day. Plant raffle.

ENTRANCE £5 (under 16s free) Please bring exact money

Covid Track and Trace Compliant Event

For further information please ring Carolyn de Salis 01963 440344 **Proceeds to St Mary's Church Yarlington and Yarlington Village Hall**

Pitcombe News

The Blackbird

The nightingale has a lyre of gold;
The lark's is a clarion call,
And the blackbird plays but a box-wood flute,
But I love him best of all.
For his song is all of the joy of life,
And we in the mad, spring weather,
We too have listened till he sang
Our hearts and lips together.

William Ernest Henley

1849—1903

THE HAPPY COOKER



Ceviche

Delicious, this lime cured dish is easily assembled - a chopped ripe avocado makes a tasty addition to the ceviche—copious quantities of lime prevent it from browning

INGREDIENTS

500g firm white fish fillets, such as
haddock, halibut or pollack,
skinned and thinly sliced
juice 8 limes (250ml/9fl oz), plus
extra wedges to serve
1 red onion , sliced into rings
handful pitted green olives , finely
chopped
2-3 green chillies , finely chopped

2-3 tomatoes , seeded and chopped
into 2cm pieces
bunch coriander, roughly chopped
2 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
good pinch caster sugar
tortilla chips, to serve

METHOD

STEP 1

In a large glass bowl, combine the fish, lime juice and onion. The juice should completely cover the fish; if not, add a little more. Cover with cling film and place in the fridge for 1 hr 30 mins.

STEP 2

Remove the fish and onion from the lime juice (discard the juice) and place in a bowl. Add the olives, chilies, tomatoes, coriander and olive oil, stir gently, then season with a good pinch of salt and sugar. This can be made a couple of hours in advance and stored in the fridge. Serve with tortilla chips to scoop up the ceviche and enjoy with a glass of cold beer.

Pitcombe Parish Directory

Parish Council

Chairman	Richard Waller	01749 812754 ritwaller@hotmail.com
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Parish Clerk	Patrick Pender-Cudlip	07742 930521 clerk@pitcombecpc.org.uk
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St Leonard's Church

The Rector	Rev'd Jonathan Evans	01749 812775
	mobile	07305 736042 rector@stmarysbruton.org

Benefice Office		01749 813080 benefice@stmarysbruton.org
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Bell-ringing	Tina Harley	01749 813262 tina.harley@btinternet.com
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Church Flowers roster	Tina Harley	01749 813262 tina.harley@btinternet.com
-----------------------	-------------	--

Church Wardens	Philip Pidsley	01749 813842 philip.pidsley@btinternet.com
----------------	----------------	--

PPC Secretary	Carole Wyatt	01963 350222 carolewyatt@btinternet.com
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Friends of St Leonards

Secretary	Cathie Brook	01963 351492 catherinebrook@aol.com
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Hadspen Village Hall

Chairman	Robin Currie	01749 814899 arctheduke@gmail.com
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Bookings Secretaries	Penny Mounsey	01963 359488 penny.mounsey345@btinternet.com
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	Jan James	01963 350464 janet.james945@btinternet.com
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Secretary	Sheelagh Douglas	07733 102819. sdmdouglas7@gmail.com
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Neighbourhood Watch

Co-ordinating Officer	Sue Chamberlain	01963 350616 sechamberlain@btinternet.com
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Pitcombe News

Co-editors	Jane Hodges	01963 351429 janepamelahodges@hotmail.com
	Anthony Hodges	anthony.hodges@hodgesassociates.org

Short Mat Bowls Club

Secretary	Carole Wyatt	01963 350222 carolewyatt@btinternet.com
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U3A

Bridge	Kate Mair	01963 351544 kateandbillmair@hotmail.com
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Patchwork	Jan Wilcox	01747 840335 mail@janwilcox.plus.com
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History	Bruce Bower	01747 840335 bowersxb@btinternet.com
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<u>Pilates</u>	Shirley Rutter	07733 085 077
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Avon and Somerset Police

Emergencies	999
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Non Emergencies	101
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Healthcare

Bruton Surgery	01749 812 310
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Wincanton Health Centre	01963 435700
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Shepton Mallet Treatment Centre	01749 333600
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Local Government

District Councillor,	Robin Bastable	01749 812335 robin.bastable@southsomerset.gov.uk
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County Councillor	Anna Groskop.	01749 812520 amgroskop@somerset.gov.uk roadsandtransportSD@somerset.gov.uk
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Neighbourhood Watch



Quite when I volunteered to become Neighbourhood Watch Coordinator for Hadspen is lost in the mists of time. Was it really fifteen years ago or even longer? Now the time come to say goodbye. It has been a long time, certainly before everyone in the village had access to internet and email. A number of notices were slipped through letter boxes and pinned on the notice board. The first iPhones were launched in Europe in 2007, but I don't think anyone had a smart phone. Back then phones were used to talk to people, not to text, pay bills, order groceries etc. How could we have managed a pandemic nearly as well in those far off days? What could have taken the place of the village WhatsApp do you suppose? Bush Telegraph?

All we had to worry about then was keeping equipment, particularly expensive garden tools, under lock and key in sheds, garages, not having visible keys on a windowsill or such, even near a door [as I learnt to my cost]. Always, but always lock car doors and ensure, particularly at Christmas, that parcels were out of sight.

In later years, it wasn't car radios being stolen it was valuable Sat Nav equipment. There was the odd car that didn't fit. Someone would report the number to the police and occasionally one was found to have been abandoned. We did have the odd burglary in the village for the police to come to investigate, but rarely when one thinks about it.

Before scam the word was swindle, much more descriptive in my view. A rare occurrence but we were warned about workmen going door to door eager to repair a driveway, a roof, or such. We were particularly asked to look after elderly women who perhaps could be swindled out of quite large sums or even life savings. Now life seems to be all about scams. Never press 1 has become the mantra.

In addition to the very comprehensive website avonandsomersetpolice.uk, including a page about 'what is happening in your area' the police for Avon and Somerset may be found on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, town sites etc.

If you would like to become the NHW Coordinator for Hadspen, please get in touch with me. I am trying to find the name of the present administrator as emails are sent by ALERTS.

GOODBYE!

Sue Chamberlain 01963 350616

sechamberlain@btinternet.com



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Easter Bunnies!

On Easter Saturday I was on my way home from arranging flowers at St Leonard's, and, turning left out of Mill Lane, I spotted a young man in running kit crouched beside the road mobile in hand.

Intrigued, I pulled over and asked him what he was looking at, as there was nothing immediately obvious. There were two very young rabbits, about 4 weeks old, scrambling with difficulty through spikey undergrowth inches from the tarmac. He was very concerned and wasn't sure what to do, as it was clear they had little chance of survival. We could see their burrow at the top of the bank with sand spilling out of the hole, so it seemed the immediate solution was to return them to safety. With one in-hand I scrambled up the bank, and putting it down noticed there was another dead one inside.

Presumably, the mother had been killed and her brood scattered. Whilst pursuing the second, Phil was on the phone determined to find a wildlife sanctuary to take them in, and after several leads he did. He needed to collect his car, so a shopping bag made it possible for me to transport these tiny creatures home (another scramble to collect the one returned to the burrow!). By the time Phil returned, a bright yellow shoe box with air-holes in the lid containing the Easter bunnies, with some grass and dandelion leaves and secured firmly with a cord, was ready to hand over.

What WAS I thinking of as a gardener and having had problems in the past with wild rabbits! My heart ruled my head thinking of happy childhood memories of Beatrix Potter stories – The Flopsy Bunnies and Peter Rabbit in particular. Our children had looked after pet rabbits too, some years ago.

Tina Harley

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PARISH COUNCIL



We were all no doubt greatly saddened by the recent death of HRH Duke of Edinburgh and I hope it will not be taken amiss to share with you an ironic consequence of the event. We had to cancel the scheduled meeting of the PPC, along with many other local authorities I am sure, to comply with the period of National Mourning. I am sharing with you the advice we received:

“The local legal beagles have received a number of specific requests today on whether the period of mourning for His Royal Highness, The Duke of Edinburgh affects the computation of days for council meeting purposes.

There is an official period of mourning for eight days set out in the government guidance.

As a result, these days should be excluded for calculation of time and any timescales that end in this period should be postponed until the first day after the period in accordance with section 243 of the Local Government Act 1972.

We do not draw a distinction between national and public mourning.

The above means that no days this week can be counted as days for serving notice to Council Members of formal meetings. The first day you can now serve notice of a formal meeting is Monday 19th April. Further, any meetings that have already been called cannot go ahead this week, unless three clear days of notice have already been served.”

What would the Duke have made of this? I suspect he would have snorted in impatience at the very least and told us to get on with it, perhaps with a salty phrase indicating urgency. Unfortunately, we have been obliged to postpone most of the business until the May meeting and will hold a short emergency one at the end of April to cover essentials.

For those who might be interested in attending the Annual Meeting in May, details will be published in due course on the Parish Council website.

Richard Waller, Chairman PPC

Somerset Wildlife Trust

CELEBRITY AUCTIONEER ANNOUNCED FOR VIRTUAL CHARITY ART AUCTION

‘Homes Under the Hammer’ TV auctioneer and property consultant, Graham Barton, to live-host the closing stages of art auction to drum up maximum funds for Somerset’s natural environment.

Monday 19th April 2021 - Somerset Wildlife Trust is so excited to be able to announce that TV celebrity auctioneer and property consultant, **Graham Barton** will be hosting the final stages of its online art auction to help raise funds for wildlife. With his trademark striped blazer, Graham is perhaps the most instantly recognisable auctioneer in the country thanks to BBC1’s ‘Homes under the Hammer.’

The auction is LIVE at www.jumblebee.co.uk/art2021 and **closes on Friday 30th April**. Graham will present the final hours of the auction between 7pm – 9pm on the Friday as the auction lots close.

The virtual art auction presents a unique opportunity for people to bid on over 120 beautiful artworks donated by local artists, whilst raising funds to protect the species and special places that inspire them. There is something for all artistic tastes, from paintings and textiles to sculptures and ceramics. It is a chance to secure a wonderful piece of art at a great price, whilst raising funds for a good cause.

To view the incredible range of art donated and to #BidforWildlife visit www.jumblebee.co.uk/art2021

A Pitcombe Pearl

Viewers of *All That Glitters*, the six-part series that is showing on BBC2 at the moment, may recognise one of the judges - parish resident Solange Azagury-Partridge. The well-known jeweller, whose funky, colourful pieces adorn the neck, wrist and finger of many a film star and celebrity, and her husband Murray Partridge have had a house here for 10 years. Our very own glitterati in this jewel of a parish, one could say.

The couple came across their house by chance: 'We would visit friends here on weekends and, meandering around the little lanes one day, we saw the house with a For Sale sign on it and immediately fell in love,' says Solange. 'We are incredibly lucky to be so close to Bruton, which is now such a hub, while feeling remote and rural when we're in our home.'

All That Glitters, was filmed at The Birmingham School of Jewellery, with an initial eight contestants fighting to save their spots and battle it out to win the ultimate prize. They have to create two pieces each week to subject to the gimlet-eyed scrutiny of Solange and her co-judge Shaun Leane - it is a tough challenge within a three-hour constraint. Half of the episodes were shot before Covid 19, then the rest between lockdowns. With social distancing enforced latterly, 'it was rather a different experience,' says Solange, who would stay up in Birmingham during the shooting periods.

Usually, however, she and Murray, a writer, divide their time between the parish and London, where she has a shop and studio in Bayswater. 'Now that I have sorted out the wif, I can do the odd week working from Somerset, though actually it is nice to feel a bit disconnected when we are here.' Meanwhile, she is keeping tight-lipped about who will be the winner of *All That Glitters* - we will have to wait until the end of the month to find out.

Caroline Donald

What lambing is like ...

We started lambing in mid February this year, a bit earlier than usual as we put the rams in with the ewes a fortnight earlier than usual last autumn. So whereas I am usually impatient for it to start, this year lambing began before I had time to start tapping my fingers, which was good. Our first lambs - a male and a female - were born on Valentine's Day: Valentino and Valentina, a friend suggested. After that they came quickly, with a peak about ten days after the start, when there was a point where I had three ewes lambing at once and trying to keep an eye on them all simultaneously.

Most of our ewes manage very well without any assistance, which is as it should be. Keeping checking on them at four hour intervals means that any problems are noticed early and help can be given in good time if necessary. My husband Greg and I take the late shift and the early shift respectively, recognising our natural owl vs lark tendencies.

I write this on 11 March, when it is almost all done. Last night we had four ewes left to go enclosed on one side of the shed. One of them we think miscarried early, another was scanned as barren, and two are visibly expecting.

I am woken by a buffeting of wind outside the house before my alarm goes off. I dress, let the dog out, and put a bowl of porridge to cook in the microwave before going outside. I glance at my overalls but think, *"No, chances are there won't be anything to do"* and shrug into Greg's old suede jacket, wrapping it round me against the cold morning air. Wellies and woolly hat, then look for 'my' head-torch, which isn't where it should be - probably purloined by a torch-rustling member of my family, as is sadly common. I find a small, almost-out-of-battery hand torch and make my way down to the yard.

I switch on the overhead light in the lambing shed and observe the four ewes. At first sight all is quiet, but then I see that one of the ewes, the one standing in the far corner, has a furtive look in her eye. I make my way around behind her and see a protruding lamb's head, together with two feet. This is how a lamb should be presented - but this lamb's head is dry, as if it has been out for a while. His face and furry cheeks are also slightly swollen, like a plump Victorian alderman with mutton-chop whiskers. The lamb is probably all right, as long as the cord hasn't broken yet - but it's time to help.

I sigh, thinking of the overalls hanging by the back door: Sod's Law in operation. I go into the small side shed and take off Greg's jacket, and, after a moment's thought, my body warmer - the jumper underneath it will be easier to wash. I pull on waterproof trousers and grab the bucket of lambing essentials.

I return to the ewe, and persuade her into a lambing pen. She is a first-time mother - one of our own lambs, born in the spring two years ago. I check her scanning mark. Ah, scanned as a single. That makes sense - one large lamb. I pull on arm length gloves, and squeeze some lubricant into my right hand.

She is very jumpy, and not at all sure that this is what she signed up for. I kneel, and pin her, still standing, against a hurdle, with my left arm braced under her neck, stopping her going forward, my upper body pushing hers into the hurdle, and my right hand seeking under her tail.

I lean into her, and without thinking close my eyes, the better to visualise what I can feel. The world shrinks to a six-foot square containing me, the ewe, and the lamb.

I talk to her, softly, too - as much to gather my thoughts as to calm her. *"What have we got here, then?"* I relax, as I feel the lamb moving. It's alive! Oh good! *"Two feet, yes. Are they front feet? Yes, I think so. And how is this head doing?"* The head is out to just above the lamb's eyes. Everything is jammed up tight. Nothing is moving. I curl a forefinger around first one ear, then another. They are pointing backwards, even the thin flap of skin unable to make its way out. I pull them through and then curve my four fingers around the hard bony dome of the lamb's skull. It fits into my hand like a cricket ball. I ease it out, gently. Suddenly there is more space for the legs, now the narrower neck has replaced the head. *"That's it, now the legs. This one? Or this one?"*

I tug, tentatively, on either leg, testing which one wants to come most easily. The long bones wriggle under my hand, energy gathering, a life wanting to begin. I extend the first leg, and then as I draw the second one free too I pull the whole body of the lamb up slightly and then out and along and there it is, on the straw, a limp and stained morsel of sheep, lanky and still as I rub it with a handful of straw. *"Come on now, matey, breathe"* and then he does, snuffling. I lean back hastily as often the next thing a new born lamb does is shake his head, spraying gunk everywhere that I don't mind on my clothes but would prefer not to have in my face. His breathing is shallow but definitely there. The ewe doesn't know what to do so I pull him round to beneath her nose.

"Here - look what you made! Well done!" She begins to lick him clean, at first tentatively, then with more confidence. I sit back on my heels, and the world expands again. I look out of the open side of the shed at the sky, still dark but now filled with birdsong. Other creatures, born and to die in their turn, but at this moment celebrating the arrival of a new day.

I give the ewe and lamb a few minutes and then check them over. Squirt his navel with iodine solution (and yes, he is a boy - the large, troublemaker ones often are). I check her milk and then leave them to it. I will come back in a little while to check that he is standing and feeding.

I tidy up, remove gloves and waterproof trousers, write up the birth in our records, and make my way back to the house. I wash and then put the microwave on to re-heat my porridge. I check my watch. It is 6.21am, an hour before I need to wake my daughter for school. In the quiet, warm kitchen I eat my porridge, sip my coffee, and plan what to do in the rest of my day.

Elaine Beedle

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