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Happy New Year

Welcome to the January edition

Wishing you all a very happy 2025.

Here's hoping you've survived the mayhem of Christmas and are ready for a healthy and happy 2025.

If your aim for 2025 is to experience more fun events then see what's coming up on page 6, or if you've decided this is the year to get round to updating your house or fixing all those jobs you never get round to, we have a wide range of local businesses in here who can help.



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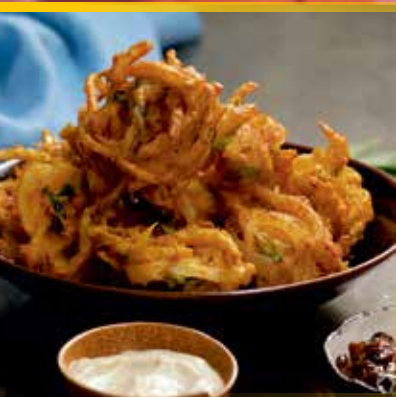
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community events

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"THE FOUR Ds" tribute to DETROIT MOTOWN

31 January
The Lake at Barston

The Four D's are heading to The Motor City with this unstoppable hit machine paying homage to the unforgettable artists whose innovative music still fills dance floors across the globe. The Temptations, The Spinners, The Jacksons, Stevie Wonder, The Supremes and Lionel Richie all feature in this stunning representation of The Sounds



Of Detroit. Tickets from £10 per person. Call 01675 444890 to book.

Snow Patrol

16 February
bp pulse LIVE, NEC

SNOW PATROL have announced their eagerly awaited return with a brand new album 'The Forest Is The Path', their first album in six years. Now comprising the trio of Gary Lightbody, Nathan Connolly and Johnny McDaid, Snow Patrol offer the first taste of their extraordinary new album. Visit www.bppulselive.co.uk to book.

Zombie Prom

20-22 February
Malley Hall, Alderbook School

This girl-loves-ghoul rock 'n'

roll off-Broadway musical, presented by SOSage Factory, is set in the atomic 1950s at Enrico Fermi High, where the law is laid down by a zany, tyrannical principal. A tuneful selection of original songs in the style of 50s hits keeps the action rocking across the stage. To book tickets please call 0121 704 6962.

Elvis Tribute Night

1 March, Shirley British Legion

Join in for a spectacular evening filled with the electrifying sounds and timeless charm of the King of Rock 'n' Roll himself! Get ready to experience the magic of Elvis Presley and pay tribute to his legendary music and iconic presence. Tickets from www.ticketsource.co.uk



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Fancy relaxing with a massage in Solihull?

There are so many benefits to having a regular massage. For some people it's a treat, to give them some time out from their busy schedule, and to help them relax. For others it's a necessity, to help remove muscle tension and ease painful joints. Having a regular massage is likely to improve your circulation, increase your flexibility, and reduce any muscle stiffness and joint inflammation you may have. It can also help to relieve stress, manage pain, and improve your exercise performance.

Types of massages

There are many different types of massages – some beauty

salons will just offer one or two standard ones like a back or full body massage, while others will offer a wide range from Swedish to Thai and aromatherapy to hot stones. If you're not sure which one would suit you best, chat to the beauty therapist when you make your booking and take their advice.

Where to get a massage in Solihull

You're spoilt for choice in Solihull as there are loads of different places that can give you a lovely relaxing massage.

- **Pure Retreat** in Dickens Heath offer a deep muscle or a relaxing massage for your back; or you can have a back, neck, shoulder, and

scalp massage; or a back, face, and scalp massage.

- **Serene Beauty** do a full body aromatherapy massage in Solihull, or you can choose a more focused leg and foot massage, arm and hand massage, or a back and shoulder massage.
- Why not indulge in a Himalayan hot rock salt massage at **Hampton Clinic in Knowle?** Following treatment, the salt rocks are yours to keep, to use in the bath, further benefiting your skin and wellbeing.
- In need of a more therapeutic sports massage? **Simon Evans Physiotherapy** in Solihull offer 30-minute appointments to help with muscle tension, aches and pains, and to improve movement and circulation.
- **Beauty by Ash** at Jiggs Hair & Beauty in Solihull offer a range of massages including an Indian head massage which involves stimulating the massaging acupressure points along the head, neck, and shoulders.



For more ideas on health and beauty treatments in Solihull please visit www.hellosolihull.com/articles

Restaurant Review **Bon Gusto, Knowle.**

5 of us visited this Italian restaurant last month. Skipping starters, we dived right into mains, with 2 of us ordering the sea bass - pan fried, served with king prawns, garlic, shallots, and fresh tomatoes. They said the fish was well cooked and the sauce delicious - as was evident by their empty plates. Someone else ordered a pizza but only managed to eat half of it, nothing to do with the quality of the food, as it was everything you'd want from a pizza - hot, light, crispy and gooey - just too much for them to manage so they got to take

the other half away with them. Another couple of us fancied something lighter and ordered starters and shared them out, opting for the caprese salad and some zucchini fritte (fried courgettes). The caprese salad was pretty large for a starter and tasted really light and fresh - creamy mozzarella slices interspersed with tomato, drizzled with balsamic. Afterwards we ordered one mango ice cream cheesecake and all tried a bite - it was so good I'd go back just for the dessert! We ended up with 5 very happy and satisfied customers, proud



to have supported a local, independent restaurant that's trying really hard to offer great food and great service.

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Welcome to the asylum

Edward Augustus Bowles, known affectionately known as "Gussie," was a British horticulturist, plantsman, and garden writer, who transformed the gardens of Myddelton House into a horticultural masterpiece, introducing a diverse array of plants, including many rare and exotic species. He deserves to be better known for many reasons, but my favourite is that he devoted one corner of his garden to cultivating 'odd' plants... weird specimens which took his fancy. He called this his 'lunatic asylum' and the plants his 'maniacs'!

Like Bowles I enjoy collecting quirky specimens but rather than grouping them together in one corner I prefer to integrate the whimsical with the conventional, partly due to space restrictions and partly because I like it when visitors suddenly pause, do a double take, or raise an eyebrow and smile.

The first candidate for Bowles' asylum was the corkscrew hazel. This is a variant of the common hazel and has fabulous spiral stems which are smothered in cheerful yellow catkins in the late winter and early spring.



I added a corkscrew hazel to my own plot a few years ago and admit that its twisted branches and sculptural appearance give me a lot of pleasure on cold grey winter days.

Another plant which Bowles coveted was the Plymouth Strawberry, (*Fragaria vesca muricata*). It looks like a strawberry with a freaky green

spiked hairdo. You can eat the fruit because the spikes are soft and harmless, but it's more usually grown for its ornamental properties.

If you only have a very small space, like a balcony, try *Ophiopogon planiscapus "Nigrescens"*. This intensely black grass looks like a small black fountain and grows well in a pot. It's a very attractive, unusual addition especially if set against white gravel or pebbles.

A favourite with children is *Tolmiea menziesii*, more commonly known as the 'piggyback plant' due to its strange habit of carrying its young on its leaves. Each little plantlet which sprouts can be potted up and established on its own. They make great teacher and office gifts!

Among my own personal collection of 'maniacs' my favourite is my small colony of pitcher plants (*sarracenias*) which look exotic but are actually quite easy to grow. They appeal to small boys (and lots of older ones!) because of their gruesome insect-eating habit.

If your garden is a bit boring and in need of a little spice why not try one of these more unconventional additions to your plot?

Sweet Potato and Cauli Coconut Curry

Infused with spices, this is a delicious creamy curry for a cold January evening. Its also perfect for Veganuary month!



Preparation time &

Cooking time: 35-40 minutes

Serves: 4

Ingredients

500g sweet potatoes, scrubbed.
Vegetable oil
1 large cauliflower
1 onion, chopped.
Thumb-sized piece of peeled root ginger.
2 red chillies
5 garlic cloves
2 tsp ground cumin
1 tsp ground coriander
1 tsp ground turmeric
1 x 400g tin full-fat coconut milk
1 x 30g pack flat-leaf parsley, leaves picked.

Method

Preheat the oven to 220°C,

fan 200°C, gas 7. Chop the unpeeled sweet potatoes into 2cm cubes. Toss in a bowl with a tablespoon of oil then season and place into a large baking tray. Roast for 10 minutes. Meanwhile, prepare the cauliflower. Remove the outer leaves and cut the head into florets. Add these to the tray with another tablespoon of oil and a little more seasoning. Toss the veg to mix then roast the cauli with the sweet potato for another 15 minutes or until the vegetables are tender. Heat 2 teaspoons of oil in a frying pan then fry

the chopped onion for 5 minutes or until translucent. Deseed the chillies then thinly slice, and finely chop the ginger and garlic. Add these to the pan along with the spices and cook for 2 minutes. Add the coconut milk, 200ml of water and season to taste. Simmer gently for 10 minutes.

Remove the roasted sweet potato and cauliflower from the oven and stir the roasted vegetables into the curry sauce. Simmer for 3-4 minutes, then throw in the parsley. Adjust the seasoning to taste then serve the curry alongside jasmine rice.

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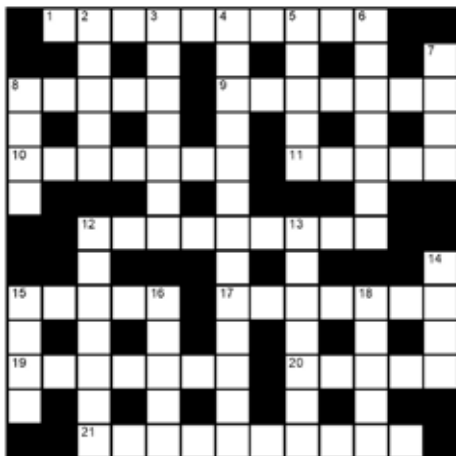


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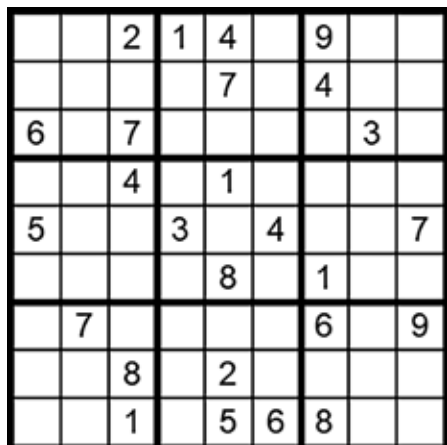
Across

- 1 Hoards, gathers supplies (10)
- 8 Salty, like the sea (5)
- 9 British language (7)
- 10 Series of boat races (7)
- 11 Verbal or written answer (5)
- 12 Someone who digs the dirt (colloq) (4-5)
- 15 Take an examination again (5)
- 17 Rust, weaken something gradually (7)
- 19 Comforter, rug (7)
- 20 Appetising (5)
- 21 Deserting, dumping (10)

Down

- 2 Item (5)
- 3 Ambiguous, enigmatic (7)
- 4 Ready to assemble (building) (13)
- 5 German light beer (5)
- 6 Comfy indoor shoe (7)
- 7 Pronoun (4)
- 8 Naked (4)
- 12 Eyelash make-up (7)
- 13 Interview with a Vampire actor _____ Dust (7)
- 14 Refute (4)
- 15 Red gemstone (4)
- 16 Chicken _____ Masala, popular Indian dish (5)
- 18 Citizen Kane actor _____ Welles (5)

answer on page 18



how to play sudoku

It's simple!

Fill in the grid so that each row, column and 3x3 box, contains the numbers 1 through to 9 with no repetition. You don't need to be a genius. These puzzles use logic alone. Watch out! Sudoku is highly addictive.

answer on page 18



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Six Nations Rugby

A Legacy of Rivalries and Passion

The 2025 Six Nations Championship kicks off on 31st January, when France host Wales under the Friday night lights in Paris.

It's one of the oldest and most prestigious rugby tournaments in the world. It brings together England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, France, and Italy in an annual competition that captivates fans with fierce rivalries and thrilling matches.

The championship began as the Home Nations Championship, contested between England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland. By 1910, France joined the fray, transforming the competition into the Five Nations Championship.

Five became six in 2000 when Italy joined, marking the birth of the Six Nations Championship as we know it today. Despite initially struggling to compete with the established rugby powers, Italy's inclusion expanded the championship's reach and added a new layer of intrigue.

Over their long history, first the Five Nations then the Six Nations have delivered countless unforgettable moments. One of the most remarkable



achievements came in 1973 when the five nations finished tied, with each team winning two matches. This extraordinary result underscored the evenly matched nature of the competition and remains the only time the tournament ended without a clear winner.

The Grand Slam - winning all matches in a single tournament - is a rare and celebrated feat. England's 2003 campaign was especially memorable, as they not only secured the Grand Slam but also carried that momentum to win the Rugby World Cup later that year. Led by captain Martin Johnson and guided by Jonny Wilkinson's legendary kicking, England demonstrated unparalleled dominance.

Upsets have also defined the championships' drama. In 1999, Scotland stunned England

in the final Five Nations match to deny them a Grand Slam, with a superb kicking display from Scott Hastings. More recently, in 2007, Italy shocked Scotland with an historic victory at Murrayfield, cementing their place as a competitive force in the championship.

This season, Ireland head into the 2025 competition looking for a third title in a row. They didn't manage a clean sweep in 2024, after England beat them at Twickenham. France have been their closest rivals in recent years and - with superstar scrum-half Antoine Dupont back from winning gold in the Olympic rugby sevens - seem likely to be the biggest threat to an Irish hat-trick.

Get ready for some thrills and possibly some surprises. The Six Nations never fails to deliver.



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Held at The Core Library, Solihull on the first and last Saturday of the month, 10am - 12 noon.



Crossword Solution
from page 14



Sudoku Solution
from page 14

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