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A Note From the Editor

Welcome to our August/September edition.

August is the month to relax, enjoy life and, for once, be a little lazy. In fact, August 10th is National Lazy Day here in the UK when we are encouraged to take life a little easier for one day, to skip cooking and treat ourselves to a meal delivered to our door, to pamper ourselves, perhaps with a spa day or even a relaxing bath to unwind, or to just generally disconnect from modern life by turning off electronic devices and social media to truly relax.

Many of us will enjoy a holiday away this month and those who are staying at home can enjoy the holiday feel in the garden, the park or a local beach. And by staying at home, you can avoid the crowds or traffic and choose to enjoy dining alfresco by way of a picnic or barbecue or sitting outside a delightful local cafe savouring a fresh scone with some seasonal blackberry jam on top, or in the beer garden of a beloved country pub with a cool drink just enjoying the month.

September is the month when many go back to school, to college, university or work after the long hot lazy days of summer. For those returning to school, this month is a busy one as new classes are attended and new subjects tried for the first time. September 8th is International Literacy Day, and, for young and old, on September 13th Roald Dahl Story Day!

Harvest festivals are taking place in village halls all across the country with gardeners proud to show off the fruit of the hard labour, while visitors can sample delicious afternoon teas, sandwiches, cakes, pastries and a cup of tea or glass of something cold and refreshing. Food festivals are also becoming more popular allowing visitors the chance to enjoy culinary celebrations featuring top chefs, street food and live entertainment.

Here is the date for your calendar:
31st August - Summer Bank Holiday;

As always, we ask you to please remember to mention Stonestrow Directories when calling our Advertisers, so we can keep bringing even more trusted local professionals and quality local stories to your door every other month.

However you choose to spend the next couple of months - please remember to keep your heart and your business local.

Yours, Stonestrow Publications.

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SIGNS TO LOOK OUT FOR WHEN CONSIDERING CARE

As people become less able to look after their physical needs and mental well-being they could need some support.

Here in the UK, according to the Department of Health and Social Care, last year there were more than 350,000 people living in care homes in England, additionally, there were nearly one million people who received some level of domiciliary care.

Different Kinds of Care

Social care can vary greatly and includes different levels of support, from assistance with everyday chores to specialised nursing support. It can include caring for someone in their own home, which is known as domiciliary care, to day centres where someone can visit and get hot food and socialise, to care provided by residential and nursing homes.

Signs to Consider When Considering Care

Everyone is different and everyone has different care needs. Some people might need someone to visit each day and clean their home, or do cooking and shopping, others might have a medical condition that requires 24/7 specialised nursing care, and care needs change over time. Spotting the signs of changes or that a loved one needs help can be difficult and it can include watching for physical deterioration, personal changes, changes to someone's mental wellbeing or just struggling with things that they have always done.

Physical Signs

These can perhaps be easier to spot especially if someone is struggling with their mobility or has had falls. Losing weight, increased frailty or if some is having difficulty with their daily routines might be harder to spot but this might suggest a loved one is not managing well on their own.

Personal Care Challenges

Something that might be more obvious is if someone is struggling with their personal care, like bathing, dressing, grooming or neglecting their personal hygiene when this has never been an issue before. This might suggest some underlying health issues like dementia, and the need for professional care.

Cognitive Changes

Memory issues can affect many people as they get older and can include forgetfulness or confusion. Forgetfulness can indicate cognitive decline, or worsening of a condition like dementia, which may require specialised care. If someone is struggling to manage their home or their finances when before this was not a problem this could indicate a loved one needs have changed and that there is an increased care.

Social Isolation

Because of health or mobility issues many people find it difficult to get out of the house and this can lead to depression and loneliness and the effects they can have on a loved one's emotional wellbeing could indicate that they need extra care. Spending long periods on their own and losing interest in social activities that were once important to them can severely impact mental health and lead to further issues.

Although they can be subtle and hard to spot, recognising the signs early can help ensure that you can help your loved one receive the support they need to maintain their best quality of life.

By Rob Bullock

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Thinking of improving your home? Some projects can significantly increase a property's appeal and market value, while others may cost far more than they return.

Before reaching for the toolbox, it pays to know where your money is likely to make the biggest impact.

Property values are influenced by many factors, but well-chosen improvements can make a home more attractive to both buyers and valuers. Whether you're planning to sell soon or simply investing for the future, some upgrades consistently deliver better returns than others.

1. A modern kitchen, for instance, remains one of the strongest investments. Often described as the heart of the home, a bright, practical kitchen can dramatically improve first impressions. This doesn't necessarily mean spending tens of thousands of pounds. New worktops, cabinet doors and lighting can sometimes achieve excellent results without a complete overhaul.

2. Bathrooms are another area buyers scrutinise closely. Fresh tiling, modern fixtures and improved ventilation can transform a tired room into a major selling point. Even relatively modest upgrades can create a more contemporary feel.

3. Energy efficiency has become increasingly important. Better insulation, double glazing, efficient boilers and renewable technologies can help reduce running costs while making a property more appealing to environmentally

conscious buyers. Energy Performance Certificate ratings are attracting more attention than ever before.

4. Kerb appeal should never be overlooked. First impressions matter, and simple improvements such as repainting exterior surfaces, replacing worn fencing, tidying gardens and upgrading pathways can instantly enhance a home's appearance.

5. Additional living space can also add considerable value. Converting a loft, garage or underused room often provides more practical square footage without the cost and disruption of moving house.

6. Gardens deserve attention too. Attractive outdoor spaces became highly desirable in recent years, with buyers increasingly looking for areas suitable for relaxing, entertaining and family life.

Naturally, before undertaking any major project, seek professional advice and obtain multiple quotations. Local builders, tradespeople and property experts can often identify the improvements most likely to deliver value in your particular area, and when it comes to making changes that truly add up, it's often worth getting the professionals in rather than trying to remodel things yourself.

Ultimately, when planned carefully, home improvements can enhance both daily life and long-term financial prospects, whether you're staying put or looking to cash in.

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Meriden: The Home of Triumph Motorcycles

For more than four decades, the village of Meriden stood at the heart of British motor cycling. From wartime production to world championship victories and iconic road bikes, the Triumph factory at Meriden became synonymous with engineering excellence, speed and style. Although production ended in 1983, the factory's legacy continues to shape one of Britain's most famous motorcycle brands.

Triumph's story began in Coventry in 1902, but the company's future changed dramatically during the Second World War. Following heavy bombing of the original Coventry factory during The Blitz on the night of 14 November 1940, just two years later a new manufacturing plant was established in Meriden. Initially producing motorcycles for the British military, the factory helped supply more than 50,000 machines during the war, proving both reliable and robust under the toughest conditions.

After the war, Meriden became the centre of Triumph's civilian motorcycle production. The factory produced legendary machines such as the Speed Twin, Tiger 100 and Thunderbird, motorcycles that combined performance with everyday usability. Edward Turner's revolutionary parallel-twin engine design transformed the industry and became the blueprint for British motorcycles for decades. The 1937 Speed Twin is widely regarded as one of the most influential motorcycles ever built.

The 1950s and 60s marked Triumph's golden age. The brand enjoyed worldwide success, particularly in the United States, where Hollywood stars including Marlon Brando and Steve McQueen helped cement Triumph's image as the motorcycle of choice for rebels and racers alike. McQueen even visited the factory in August 1964 to collect custom built Triumph Trophy motorcycles for his US team to race in East Germany.

Meriden-built Bonneville's became renowned for their speed and reliability, while Triumph machines dominated production racing, setting land-speed records and achieving multiple victories at the Isle of Man TT. Malcolm Uphill's record-breaking 100 mph lap on a production Bonneville in 1969 remains one of the company's proudest achievements.

However, by the early 1970s Britain's motorcycle industry faced fierce competition from Japanese manufacturers offering cheaper, more technologically advanced machines. Financial difficulties led to the creation of Norton Villiers Triumph (NVT), which announced plans to close the Meriden factory in 1973. Refusing to accept the decision, the workforce staged a famous sit-in that lasted more than a year before forming the Meriden Workers' Co-operative.

The co-operative became one of Britain's best-known industrial experiments. Supported by government loans, the workers resumed production of the beloved Bonneville and other classic models. Although the venture demonstrated remarkable determination and preserved British motorcycle manufacturing for another decade, limited investment and increasing competition ultimately proved insurmountable. The factory finally closed in August 1983, bringing an emotional end to motorcycle production at Meriden.

Today, the original factory has disappeared, replaced by housing, though street names such as Bonneville Close and Daytona Drive commemorate the site's remarkable past. Meanwhile, Triumph itself was successfully revived with a new factory established at Hinckley in Leicestershire. Modern Triumph motorcycles continue to honour the engineering traditions established at Meriden, where generations of skilled workers built machines that became icons of British design.

Meriden was more than a factory—it was the spiritual home of Triumph. Its motorcycles captured the imagination of riders across the globe, and its story remains one of innovation, resilience and enduring British craftsmanship.

Keri Wills, Meriden Library



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Spotlight: meet your local heroes

Balsall Common Festival



Christina O'Sullivan is the Chairwoman of the Balsall Common Festival Team who put together The Picnic in The Park every Summer. She has kindly agreed to talk to us about the behind the scenes work which goes into organising the event.

How did the Balsall Common Festival begin?

In 2012 a group of 15 residents got together and formed The Balsall Common Festival Team. It was the year which celebrated Queen Elizabeth II's Diamond Jubilee marking 60 years on the throne. They organised a fete on the grounds of Berkswell Cricket Club.

How has the festival changed over the years?

Since 2019 the Fete moved to Lavender Hall park and also that year there were two events and we ran our first Picnic in the Park which we have run every year since. We have a bandstand and stall holders attend with food and drink. We maintain a policy that if residents want to bring their own that's absolutely fine too. We have performers on the stage from 3pm to 8pm. Starting these last few years with Hannah Cassidy Dance children, Heart of England band, Heart of England singers and the Bablake swing band. In the evening we have pop band to conclude the day.

What does the festival mean to the village today?

I hope our community enjoy coming together, it is certainly well supported. We receive lovely comments like this one: "Thank you it was such an amazing day my family and friends really enjoyed the day. Very well organised".

What's something people would be surprised to learn about organising the festival?

We start organising next years event straight away. We have to book the bandstand and pop group well in time. We always go for the solstice evening as its light late as of course there's no electric at the Park. The bandstand is solar.

How much work goes into organising a single day of celebrations?

Apart from getting everything ordered and

organising the traffic cones etc., funding is a big problem. We cannot charge people to enter the park as there are 8 entrances and you can just climb over the fence so one of our biggest efforts is getting funding. Both Balsall and Berkswell Parish Councils have supported us with a grant since we have run the Picnic. Heart of England Community Funds supported us too with a grant but the fund that supported us for £5k has ended. It cost £9k a year to pay for the band, bandstand, toilets, insurance and advertising so we are asking our residents to donate to keep this event going. We have a QR code on Facebook too. We have to comply with many rules and regulations laid down by Solihull Council, that documentation is a lot of work each year and they add more and more each year. We manage everything we need to do with Job List each year at our meetings.

What does the festival say about Balsall Common as a community?

Balsall Common, Berkswell and surrounding communities as far as Fen End attend and so may comments on Facebook relate to a "joining together day" for all.

What's the first thing you do when the Festival is over?

Get going on booking the band and bandstand for next year.

How can residents get involved if they'd like to volunteer?

We would welcome new members to join our team. We start monthly meetings in January each year after our AGM. We would also welcome residents who would be prepared to volunteer on the day to help with set up, asking residents for donations and help with close down at the end. Contact us on balsallcommonfestival@gmail.com

Finish this sentence: "The Balsall Common Festival wouldn't be the same without the community and the volunteers from the Scouts and U3a. We also loan equipment from the Lions too."

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West Midlands Police 0845 113 5000 or 101
Warwickshire Fire & Rescue 01675 62 007
Bickenhill Community Fire Station 0121 380 7527
Solihull Fire Station 0121 380 7521

HELPLINES & HOTLINES

Samaritans 116123
Consumer Advice 03454 04 05 06
Citizens Advice Bureau 01926 457 900
RSPCA 024 7671 3717

UTILITIES

Electricity Power Loss 0800 3281111
Severn Trent Water 0800 783 4444
Transco Gas Leak 0800 111 999
BT Fault Line 0800 800151
National Rail Enquiries: 03457 484950

TRAVEL

Chiltern Railways 08456 005165
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What's On

Balsall Common Country Market

Date: every Saturday / Time: 10am - 12pm /
Venue: The Jubilee, 225 Station Road, Balsall
Common CV7 7FE

We are more than just a place to shop – we are a place where people meet and belong.

Come and have a cup of tea or coffee with us along with home-made cakes and goodies. Our range of foods includes cakes to die for, savoury meals you can pop in the freezer for later in the week and jams and marmalades in a class of their own. We have splendid flower arrangements, plants for your garden that include both the unusual and old favourites. Our fruits and vegetables are home grown and wholesome.

Coffee Together

Date: first Saturday of every month / Time: 10.30am - 12noon; Venue: The Jubilee Centre, 225 Station Rd, Balsall Common CV7 7FE
Organised by Churches Together in Balsall and Berkswell. Coffee and homemade cake for £2. Any profit goes to charity. All are welcome.

Balsall Common Memories Cafe

Date: 2nd Wednesday of every month / Time: 1.15pm – 3.00pm / Venue: Balsall Common Village Hall, Station Road CV7 7FF
We meet for social chat, laughter, entertainment, activities, raffle all accompanied by refreshments. Coffee & Chat 1st Thursday of the month 11 - 12.30pm at Balsall Common Library. For those with Dementia and their carers, all are welcome. Further information 07974 140353.

Card Club

Date: every 2 weeks on Mondays / Time: 2.15 - 4pm / Venue: Balsall Common Library
Refreshments are provided for a small charge. For more information please ask at help desk, call us on 01676 532 590 or visit www.solihull.gov.uk/library-events

Land Rover Sports and Social Club

Date: First Tuesday of every month / Time: 12pm – 3.00pm / Venue: Land Rover Sports & Social Club, 6 Billsmore Green B92 9LN
Join Age UK Solihull staff and volunteers for this monthly lunch club with a hot meal, weekly raffle and occasional singer. £10 to attend (includes meal).

Free Digital Training for older Solihull residents

Various times.
Age UK Solihull are offering free digital training for older Solihull residents who would like to improve their digital skills. Group courses and one-to-one support is available, for both beginners and those who already have basic

digital skills. The training can help with online shopping, video calling, searching for information, accessing online learning, downloading and using apps, and more. For more information, contact Ashlee on 07397 718 455 or www.ageuk.org.uk/solihull/digital-champions

Berkswell and Balsall Common Sports & Community Association

Date: varied / Time: varied / Venue: The Lant, Meeting House Lane, Balsall Common
With cricket, hockey, running, sailing and tennis clubs plus a clubhouse and bar. Facilities also available for private hire. See www.bbcsc.co.uk or Facebook - BBCSCA / Berkswell Sports Bar

Balsall Common Methodist Church Toddlers Group

Date: every Tuesday / Time: 10am - 11.30am /
Venue: Church Hall, Station Road
Term time only, £3 per adult, refreshments included. Open to all carers of pre-school children. All will be made very welcome. For further details contact Joy on 01676 532006.

Balsall Common Bat and Chat

Date: 2nd, 3rd and 4th Friday of the month /
Venue: The Jubilee Centre.
Jacqui Clark has started a non-profit making Table Tennis Club. Come along and play Table Tennis. All abilities and ages very welcome. £5 per session which includes a cuppa and biscuits.

Warm Welcome Café

Date: Mondays / Time: 9.30 - 11.30am / Venue: Balsall Common Methodist Church, Station Road;
Date: Thursdays / Time: 2 - 4pm / Venue: St Peter's Church, Balsall Street East;
Date: Fridays / Time: 2 - 4pm / Venue: Balsall Common Methodist Church, Station Road.
Would you welcome the opportunity to enjoy cheerful chat in a warm, safe and relaxed environment? Tea/coffee/biscuits/cake available at both venues. All are welcome.

Balsall Common u3a All-Members Meetings

Date: first Thursday of the month; Time: 2 pm /
Venue: St Peter's Church Hall, Holly Lane
If you are looking to meet new people, try something different, or pick up a hobby you've always been curious about? The U3A is the place for you. We have over 390 members and 40 interest groups ranging from table tennis to photography to theatre trips, giving you the chance to explore new interests and share experiences with others. We welcome those who are semi-retired or retired. Find out more: www.balsallcommon.u3asite.co.uk.

Sew at the Jubilee

Date: First Friday in the month / Time: 10am - 4pm / Venue: The Jubilee, Balsall Common
Bring your own project and equipment and enjoy the company and experience of fellow stitchers. Irons and drinks provided. For further information contact Joy Fine 07773994847

Trivia Night

Date: every Thursday / Time: 8pm / Venue: Ye Olde Saracens Head, Balsall Common
Hosted by Liam Sawyer, all proceeds go to Balsall Common primary school. £3 entry.

Heart of England WI

Date: 2nd Thursday of the month / Time: 7.30pm / Venue: Balsall Common Village Hall
The Heart of England Women's Institute is a thriving group, with lively members aged from mid-20s to 90s. New members are always welcome. Talks for the summer include one from enthusiastic members of The Gloucestershire Warwickshire Steam Railway on 14 July. More information is on Heart of England WI Facebook page or by phoning Lyn 01676 533675 or Kathryn 01676 534824. Email: hoewi2019@hotmail.com

Stories and Painting

Date: every Monday / Time: 2.15 - 2.45pm / Venue: Meriden Library
A favourite story and painting fun for under 5s and their grown-ups.

Welcome Wednesdays

Date: First Wednesday of every month / Time: 2pm - 3.30pm / Venue: Eastcote Park Care Home, Knowle Road, Barston B92 0JA
Enjoy hot drinks, cake, activities and a chat with others. Suggested donation to attend - £3.

Knit & Natter

Date: every Wednesday / Time: 11.30am - 1pm / Venue: Eastcote Park Care Home, Knowle Road, Barston B91 0JA
Love knitting, crochet, or just a good chat over a cuppa? Join us for friendly faces, yarn, and conversation.

Community Coffee Mornings

Date: every Friday / Time: 11am - 12.30pm / Venue: Eastcote Park Care Home, Knowle Road, Barston B92 0JA
Freshly brewed tea and coffee and homemade sweet treats.

Charity Quiz Night at The White Horse

Date: 16th August / Time: 7.30pm / Venue: The White Horse, Kenilworth Road, Balsall Common, CV7 7DT
Brains, Banter & a Brilliant Cause – Join the Balsall Common Lions Charity Quiz Night! Gather your team and enjoy a fun-filled evening of trivia, laughter, and friendly competition. £5 per person, with all proceeds supporting local good causes, so book in your Quiz Team through Lion Mark Whitfield (07795 184745, or quiz.night@balsallcommonlions.org)

Car Boot Sale

Date: 30th August / Time: 9am / Venue: Old Coventrians RFC, Tile Hill Lane, Coventry, CV4 9DE
Car boot, pre-loved Fair and Family Fun Day: bouncy castles, sports, games, ice cream and doughnuts. Free entry.

Balsall Common Fun Run

Date: 13th September / Time: 10.30am - 5pm / Venue: Balsall Common Primary School
Walk, Jog, Run, Race. We welcome people of all ages and abilities for our Mini Runs, Junior 5KM, Family 5KM and Adult 5KM & 10KM events. All race numbers and prepaid for T-shirts are given out on Fun Run day.

Charity Quiz

Date: 17th September / Time: 7pm / Venue: Eastcote Park Care Home, Knowle Road, Barston B92 0JA
Teams of 6 (max) £15 per team, all proceeds to the Cameron Grant Memorial Trust.

Prostate Screening Event

Date: 10th October / Time: 9.30am - 1.30pm / Venue: Heart of England School
Prostate cancer is the most common cancer in men, but when detected early it is often highly treatable. Thanks to fundraising, sponsorship and community support, Balsall Common Lions is subsidising the cost of each test, meaning local men can be screened for just £15 instead of the full £26 cost. Go to our website: www.balsallcommonlions.org for booking information.

Eighties Night

Date: 10th October / Time: 7.45pm / Venue: Heart of England School
Join Balsall Common Lions for a fantastic night of live music and classic 80s favourites, featuring Mario. This fun evening will help raise funds towards our Prostate Screening Event, taking place earlier the same day - supporting local men's health in our community. Tickets £15. Dust off your dancing shoes, bring your friends, and enjoy a brilliant night for a great local cause! To book please contact: Lion Rob Jones – 0345 833 8565; contact@balsallcommonlions.org.

Autumn Foodbank - Door-to-door Foodbank Collection

Date: 17th October / Time: 11am
Your support could help food banks provide emergency food and vital advice to everyone who needs it, including to the thousands of people who will need to use foodbanks for the first time. Balsall Common Lions will be collecting essential supplies with a door-to-door collection over the weekend of 17 & 18th October 2026. Leave your donations on your doorstep or at one of our many Drop-off points around Balsall Common. Alternatively, if you miss us, you can donate here. www.cafdonate.cafonline.org/28383

While we do our best to ensure the accuracy of our listings, events may be postponed or cancelled without notice. Please confirm with the organiser before making any plans for attending events. For your news, events and group meetings to be featured free of charge on our What's On Page please email Ksenia: info@stonesthrowpublications.co.uk

Horoscopes: August



ARIES

(MARCH 21 - APRIL 20)

Warrior planet Mars, your ruler, is strong in Gemini in your communication area, indicating that some ingenious and inspirational ideas are coming your way. Be prepared, your life could take on a totally different path. The powerful Leo solar eclipse on the 12th highlights all aspects of your relationships, Leo is the sign of love affairs and extreme joy – be open to some wonderful experiences!

TAURUS

(APRIL 21 - MAY 21)

August is a power packed month as dynamic Mars in Gemini stirs up your financial sector; you'll have the courage to make some major changes and possibly take some risks that will put you in a much better position. The Leo eclipse on the 12th falls in your home and family sector, be prepared as the cosmos is suggesting some radical transformation concerning family members.

GEMINI

(MAY 22 - JUNE 21)

Power packed Mars remains in your sign until the 11th, make the most of this auspicious time by restructuring the way you plan and think and be sure to remain open to exciting opportunities that will present themselves. The powerful Leo new moon eclipse on the 12th offers some excellent creative ideas, take time to think things through and plan your future.

CANCER

(JUNE 22 - JULY 22)

During August the radiant Leo Sun suggests that creative money making schemes are at an all-time high, particularly around the Leo new moon eclipse on the 12th. Venus arrives in Libra on the 7th energising your home and family sector with practical and creative new concepts. Mars arrives in your sign on the 11th, this unique energy leaves you feeling successful and prosperous.

LEO

(JULY 23 - AUGUST 23)

August is always your special time and this year Jupiter and the solar eclipse both work together as a cosmic power boost making it especially action packed. Your energy and enthusiasm will be at an all-time high as new friendships and group endeavours are particularly favoured. The new moon on the 28th offers a turning point, encouraging you to take up the challenge on an important project

VIRGO

(AUGUST 24 - SEPTEMBER 22)

August offers a radical shake up in all matters concerning your goals, ambition and career prospects. Dynamic Mars and radical Uranus are suggesting that exciting new beginnings are evident. Venus arrives in your money sector on the 7th, indicating that some financial issues will come to the surface and need some careful consideration - and a practical solution!

LIBRA

(SEPTEMBER 23 - OCTOBER 23)

August draws you toward faraway travel, adventure and higher learning. Action planet Mars and radical Uranus in restless Gemini ensure that some exciting changes are about to take place. Jupiter in Leo and the powerful solar eclipse in courageous Leo on the 12th both point you in the direction of some exciting new friendships and group endeavours.

SCORPIO

(OCTOBER 24 - NOVEMBER 22)

The powerful Leo Solar eclipse and expansive Jupiter are highlighting your ambition and career sector, flagging up some important challenges that will need your undivided attention. Adjustments will need to be made so that you can move forward positively. Venus arrives in Libra on the 7th offering favourable new insight around any decisions that need to be made.

SAGITTARIUS

(NOVEMBER 23 - DECEMBER 21)

August is an optimistic time for Sagittarians as positive planetary activity is at its height. Abundant Jupiter, your ruler, is courageous and optimistic in Leo and the powerful solar eclipse on the 12th brings many things to a conclusion. Power planet Mars arrives in Cancer on the 11th, indicating that a financial issue will surface and offer the potential for positive change.

CAPRICORN

(DECEMBER 22 - JANUARY 20)

August brings some important personal issues to your attention as Mercury in your opposite sign of Cancer requests that you face facts both personally and professionally. Life seems to get much easier after love planet Venus arrives in Libra around the 7th and your intuition should flow nicely, particularly around the time of the Leo solar eclipse on the 12th.

AQUARIUS

(JANUARY 21 - FEBRUARY 18)

August is an important month for Aquarians, expansive Jupiter and the powerful solar eclipse are both in your opposite sign of Leo. All your relationships come to the forefront during this month as a variety of issues demand your attention. Uranus, your ruler, might be stirring up some trouble and you'll need to keep a clear head to avoid any arguments.

PISCES

(FEBRUARY 19 - MARCH 20)

Expansive Jupiter and the powerful Leo Sun light up your work sector as you start to explore some creative new ways of structuring your day and improving your earning potential. The new moon eclipse in your sign on the 28th emphasises your need to use your intuitive gifts. Mercury in sentimental Cancer suggests that good communication is vital, as any decisions made now will need your full attention.

Christine Chalklin, Inspirational Astrologer and Life Coach

Take a refreshing new look at the year ahead by booking an astrological reading now. Consultations are available on Zoom, WhatsApp or telephone.

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Roasted Duck Breast with Plum Sauce

INGREDIENTS:

2 Duck Breasts
1 sprig of Thyme
1 Star Anise
25g Butter

PLUM SAUCE

1 Shallot, finely chopped
1 tbsp Olive Oil
250g Dark Red Plums, halved, stoned and cut into small wedges
50g Demerara Sugar
50ml Red Wine
300ml Beef Stock

METHOD

Step 1

For the sauce, fry the shallot in the oil for 5 mins or until softened but not coloured. Add the plums and sugar, stirring for a few mins until the sugar has dissolved. Add the red wine and stock, then simmer for about 15 mins, stirring occasionally, until softened and slightly thickened. Keep warm or leave at room temperature for up to a day before reheating to serve.

Step 2

Meanwhile, heat the oven to 180C/ 160C fan/gas 4. Score the skin of the duck breasts with a sharp knife and season well with salt and pepper. Heat a non-stick frying pan and place the duck breasts in, skin-side down. Fry for 6-7 mins, then turn and add the thyme, star anise and butter. Allow this to melt, basting the duck with the juices, then transfer everything to a small roasting tin and finish in the oven for 5-6 mins for pink or 10-12 mins for well done.

Step 3

When the duck is ready, baste again with the juices, then rest for 5 mins while you finish everything else.

Step 4

To serve, thinly slice each duck breast on a chopping board. Arrange on each plate along with a spoon of the Creamed potatoes, some of the plum sauce and the Buttered spinach.

RECIPE TIPS

Creamed Potatoes

Quarter 450g Maris Piper potatoes and boil in salted water for 20-25 mins until cooked. Drain well, return to pan and mash, gradually adding 50g butter, 50ml double cream and 50ml milk as you do. Season.

Buttered Spinach

Wash 250g spinach leaves in a colander. Throw into a big pan with a knob of butter and some seasoning, then wilt for 1 min, stirring.



Restaurants & Takeaways

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The White Horse *British, European*

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01676 533 118

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01676 533 004

Oakes Farm Shop & Café *Café*

Balsall Street, Balsall Common CV7 7AQ
01676 535 537

Ye Olde Saracens Head *Gastropub*

Balsall Street, Balsall Common CV7 7AS
01676 533 862

Domino's Pizza *Takeaway Pizza*

209 Station Road, Balsall Common, CV7 7FE
01676 530 099

The Railway *Gastropub*

547 Station Rd, Balsall Common CV7 7EF
01676 533 284

Bear Inn *Gastropub*

Spencers Lane, Berkswell CV7 7BB
01676 925 562

The Oak Room at Nailcote Hall Hotel *British, European*

Nailcote Lane, Berkswell
02476 466 174

Bewitched Coffee *Café*

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