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Advertising Contact:

Andy Preece
07948 720973

Editorial Contact:

contactredditchmatters@gmail.com

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Remembrance Sunday in Redditch: A United Community Pays Tribute

Redditch came together in solemn unity this Remembrance Sunday to honour the brave men and women who gave their lives in service to our country. From the heart of the town centre to the surrounding villages, hundreds gathered to pay their respects and ensure their sacrifice is never forgotten.

The main service at the Redditch War Memorial in Plymouth Road

Gardens drew a large crowd, with veterans, serving personnel, civic leaders, cadets and local families standing shoulder to shoulder in quiet reflection. As the town fell silent at 11am, the sound of the bugle's Last Post echoed through the cold November air, followed by the laying of wreaths by representatives from the armed forces, emergency services, schools,



and community groups. The parade through the town centre, led by local cadet units and uniformed services, was met with warm applause from onlookers a show of gratitude from a community that continues to remember. Many paused to reflect on family connections to wartime generations, while young children proudly wore poppies, learning the importance of remembrance for years to come.

Similar acts of remembrance were also held across Church Hill, Astwood Bank and Headless Cross, where local churches



and community groups gathered for intimate services and moments of silence. Each event was a poignant reminder of how deeply the spirit of remembrance runs throughout Redditch.

As poppies adorned coats and memorials alike, Redditch once again demonstrated its enduring respect and unity in honouring those who served. The scenes of reflection and gratitude captured across the town remind us that remembrance is not just about the past it's a promise to carry forward the values of peace and courage for generations to come.







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Step into the Magic at Santa's Woodland Grotto A Redditch Christmas Tradition!

This festive season, the Kingfisher Shopping Centre is being transformed into a winter wonderland as Santa's Woodland Grotto returns to Redditch – promising a magical experience for children and families alike. Running from Thursday 27th November right through to Christmas Eve, it's the perfect way to make lasting Christmas memories.

From the moment you step inside, you'll be transported into a beautifully themed woodland filled with twinkling lights, festive creatures and the scent of

Christmas pine. Children can take part in a heartwarming experience that includes receiving a special Wishing Coin to make their Christmas wish before meeting Santa himself in his cosy grotto. Every child will also receive a wrapped gift to take home – a keepsake of their special visit.

Tickets are priced at £7.50 per child, which includes the full grotto experience, visit with Santa and a gift. Pre-booking is advised to secure a time slot, and there are discounts available for school groups and SEN



visits – making this an inclusive event for all.

More than just a grotto, it's a chance to enjoy the festive atmosphere across Redditch town centre, with nearby cafés, shops and seasonal treats adding to the Christmas spirit.

2 Santa's Woodland Grotto is open from 27th November to 24th December at the Kingfisher Shopping Centre, Redditch.

For bookings or more information, visit redditchbid.co.uk or contact the Kingfisher team on 01527 405806.

Bring the family, share a little magic and make this Christmas in Redditch one to remember!





A Full House for Charity! TH Developments Casino Night Raises £2,307 for Primrose Hospice

TH Developments UK Ltd hosted a very successful Charity Casino Night in aid of Primrose Hospice.

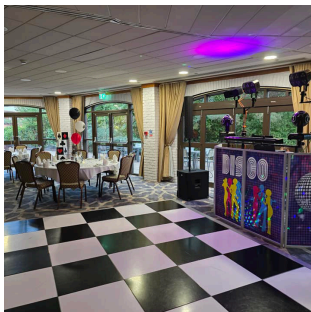
Held locally at the Abbey Hotel, the night consisted of a three-course meal, Blackjack and Roulette played with 'funny money,' a disco and a silent auction which ran throughout the evening. They have had lots of great feedback from their guests about what a great evening it was, some even asking when the next one would be.

The small locally run, family business were thrilled to report that they raised an amazing £2,307 for a fantastic charity.

'Primrose Hospice & Family Support Centre are honoured to be able to support patients with life-limiting illnesses and families, providing them with the care and support they need

during difficult times. Primrose Hospice is an independent charity and relies heavily on support from the local community. We have to raise over £1.95 million each year to continue to provide our services to care for our patients and families so events such as these really do make a difference.

The team at TH Developments would like to thank everyone who supported the event and contributed to making it such a success.



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Best of British

The Lloyds British Business Excellence Awards 2025

By Ella McCormack
Bainbridge Bespoke Opticians



Visionary entrepreneur Sarah Austin founded the Lloyds British Business Excellence Awards in 2021, shortly after launching her own events management company on International Women's Day. As the UK's largest business awards programme, the aim of the game is to celebrate resilience, innovation, and creativity in the business community.

2025 saw 20 coveted categories to choose from including Small Business of the Year, Scale Up Business of the Year, Sustainable Business of the Year, and The Purpose Before Profit Award. At Bainbridge Bespoke Opticians, we're extremely proud to have been recognised locally at the Redditch Business Awards

(2022-2025), and nationally at the Optician Awards in 2024. Spurred on by a courageous 'why not?' moment in March, we decided to throw our hat in the ring for The Customer Loyalty Award at the BBEA 2025.

The first step was a gruelling online application form. Entrants were quizzed about employee and customer engagement, leadership and innovation, organisational ethics and policies, and financial performance and growth. Case study examples and top-line data were required alongside supporting evidence and testimonials. When we were announced as finalists in July, it was another 'pinch me' moment for Team Bainbridge! But joy quickly

turned into fear as we set our sights on the next stage of the competition a Dragon's Den style interview at Ten Trinity Square Private Club in London.

Disaster struck leading up to the presentation as Director Steve Bainbridge was declared out of action after suffering broken ribs from playing rugby. Despite tube strikes threatening to derail the day, I arrived just in time to deliver our presentation to the panel of industry experts. A 20-minute Q&A session ensued, where I was grilled by five judges before lunch. I learnt much from the daunting experience and left in awe of the achievements of others.

Uniting the best in class is a year-long adventure, with exclusive

networking opportunities and special events at luxurious London locations scattered along the way to whet the appetite for the main event. First up was a summer soiree on the terrace of the House of Commons. Autumn hosted a lavish drinks reception at the iconic BAFTA in London's West End. Winter welcomed the grand awards ceremony at Grosvenor House, Park Lane. Spring will serve up a winner's luncheon. Over 1100 guests gathered in one of the largest ballrooms in London for fine dining and entertainment on the awards night. Aptly named The Great Room, it was once an ice rink where late Queen Elizabeth II and her sister Margaret learnt to skate as children.

A champagne reception relaxed the room before talented Lucy the Pianist opened the show. Chancellor Rachel Reeves congratulated the finalists via video message on the big screen, and popular tv presenter Ranvir Singh sparked in a live interview with the extraordinary broadcaster Louis Theroux. Comedian and celebrity impressionist Josh Berry brought fruitful humour to the stage, and a silent charity auction raised money for Crisis, whose vital work helps people experiencing homelessness across the UK.

UK-wide travel experience experts, Travel Counsellors, walked away as the worthy winner of

The Customer Loyalty Award. It's a win for Redditch, as the company has independent representatives in our terrific town and the surrounding areas. Local talent was further represented by finalist Ski Astons, who are Worcester-based school ski trips and training specialists.

We had an amazing evening, and we would like to extend our congratulations to all the wonderful winners and inspiring finalists of this year's awards.

Would we do it all again? You can bank on it!

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Santa Paws Comes to Forge Mill

A Festive Treat for You and Your Four-Legged Friends!

Christmas just got even more paw-some in Redditch! This year, Forge Mill Needle Museum & Bordesley Abbey Visitor Centre is hosting a truly tail-wagging event Santa Paws, where dogs (and their humans!) can meet Father Christmas himself.

For just £7.50 per family group, your furry friend will be welcomed into Santa's cosy grotto and receive a festive treat to take home. Families are invited to join in the fun, though organisers ask that no more than two dogs per session attend.

There's plenty more to enjoy beyond the grotto from photo opportunities with Santa to a festive agility course and a joyful snowball-catching activity on the grassed area. And for those who love to get into the spirit of things, Christmas dress-up is

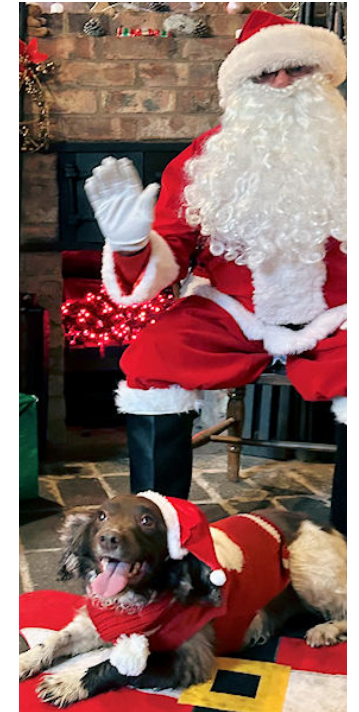
highly encouraged for both dogs
and owners!

Why not make a morning of it? Enjoy a refreshing walk around the Abbey Meadows, followed by some seasonal treats at the Mill View Coffee Bar, where even the pups can indulge in a festive Puppuccino.

As always, dogs should be well-behaved and kept on a lead while on site.

Forge Mill Needle Museum
Bookings & Info: 01527 62509
Advance booking is required
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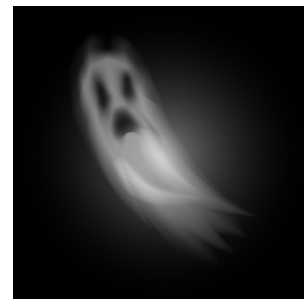


THIS MONTHS

Local Lowdown Quirky Tales & Local Lore

The Ghost on the Srone Bridge

As the mist rolls across the the road, locals still speak of the "Grey Lady" who haunts Stone bridge. Said to be the spirit of a ferryman's wife who drowned before the bridge was built in the 1790s, she is doomed, so the legend goes, to finish her final crossing. Many a late-night walker has claimed to glimpse her drifting halfway across before disappearing into the fog. Whether ghost or imagination, Stone Bridge remains one of the town's most atmospheric landmarks after dark.



The Lion of Lakeside

It sounds unbelievable, but in the early 1800s, Lakeside briefly played host to a lion! When a travelling menagerie visited town, one of its cages reportedly broke open, sending a "great tawny beast" padding through the canal district. Panic followed, and the animal was soon captured some say by being lured with meat into a stable yard. The lion spent its final days locally, and the tale became one of Lakesides strangest bits of history.



The Beer Boats of Redditch

Before railways and lorries, Redditch's breweries shipped their beer down the River Arrow to Bristol and beyond. Each spring, "beer boats" set sail loaded with local casks, returning with exotic goods, gossip and stories from distant ports. The riverside inns were packed with sailors and traders, their laughter and songs echoing across the water — a lively reminder that the Arrow was once the beating heart of our local economy.



The Whispering Woods

And finally, venture deep into the Arrow Valley Park at dusk and you may hear more than the rustle of leaves. Walkers tell of soft whispers, faint laughter, even the sound of music between the trees. Some say they are the spirits of long-gone charcoal burners who once lived and worked by firelight in these woods. True or not, it's easy to feel the ancient energy of this place — where history, myth and nature blend into one.



Have a quirky Wyre Forest story of your own? We'd love to hear it! Drop us a line at:
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Making sure you have the right amount of food this Christmas Day

Christmas Day is the culinary highlight of the year, but sometimes that festive abundance leads to a sleigh-load of unnecessary food waste. Don't let your glorious feast turn into mountains of forgotten leftovers!

This year, the best thing you can do is plan! Use a portion planner to work out how much you actually need to cook on Christmas Day; there is one available through the #FoodSavvy webpage (www.letswasteless.com/foodsavvy/portion-pro) which will give you the correct amounts de-

pending on the number of people you are cooking for. A little planning saves you money, saves you effort and ensures the beautiful food you've prepared doesn't end up in the bin.

Let's make sure everyone has a full-filling plate this Christmas, with just enough left for a delicious Boxing Day sandwich or curry, but nothing more!

For more information visit www.letswasteless.com/foodsavvy and look out for your Christmas recipes and inspiration.



Christmas Portions

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LET'S WASTE LESS





History: The Beating Heart of Redditch The Story of the Kingfisher Centre

Few places define modern Redditch quite like the Kingfisher Centre. For nearly half a century, it has stood as the town's commercial and social hub a place where generations have met friends, grabbed a coffee, shopped for Christmas, and watched the town itself evolve around it.

When it first opened in 1976, the Kingfisher Centre was more than just another shopping mall it was a bold statement about Redditch's future. As the town grew rapidly under its New Town status, planners envisioned a modern, enclosed shopping complex that would rival those of larger cities. The result was a striking piece of 1970s architecture, complete with glass-roofed arcades, escalators, and an ambitious mix of high-street names and local in-

dependents.

In its early years, the centre was a symbol of optimism a place buzzing with shoppers drawn to Woolworths, C&A, and the much-loved Co-op department store. The addition of the multi-storey car park made it one of the most accessible shopping destinations in the Midlands, while its central location tied seamlessly into Redditch's unique ring road system.

Through the 1990s and 2000s, the Kingfisher Centre adapted to the changing retail landscape. Major refurbishments brought brighter spaces, new entrances, and big-name brands, while the opening of The Range, Vue Cinema, and a host of restaurants gave it a new life as an entertainment destination.

Today, the Kingfisher Centre remains a vital part of Redditch's identity. It's more than a shopping complex it's a community space that hosts seasonal events, family fun days, and pop-up markets. Whether you're browsing the shops, catching a film, or meeting friends for lunch, the centre continues to serve the same purpose it did nearly fifty years ago: bringing Redditch together under one roof.

As the retail world keeps changing, one thing is certain the Kingfisher Centre will continue to evolve with it, just as it always has.
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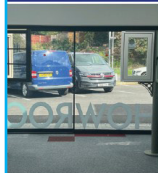
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Closed doors and no easy access send the wrong message about community policing

By Chris Bloore, Labour MP for Redditch and the Villages

I've heard from residents and local businesses who are angry and frustrated. Try reporting a crime online when you're elderly or not confident with technology. Try calling 101 and waiting half an hour in a queue. For too many people, these so-called "digital solutions" have become barriers that stop them getting help.

We already face a real problem with under-reporting in Redditch. Time and again, people tell me they didn't report something because they didn't think it would be acted on. But the police can't deal with what they don't know. Without proper face-to-face contact, crimes and antisocial behaviour go unrecorded, and the problem often looks smaller on paper than it feels on our streets.

This is no criticism of our hard-working police officers. My grandfather was a police officer and I grew up understanding the quiet dedication and professionalism the job requires. I'm proud of our local officers who, day in and day out, work without fanfare and often behind the scenes to keep us safe. Their commitment isn't in question, but they need the right tools and connection with the public to build trust and tackle crime effectively.

Over the years, front counters have closed across West Mercia due to funding pressures and reduced footfall. But now is the time to rebuild the link between the police and the public. A visible, welcoming front counter

isn't a luxury - it's a vital part of making people feel safe and supported.

That's why I've joined forces with Redditch Borough Council Leader Sharon Harvey and councillors from across the political spectrum to campaign for a public front counter at our town's police station. Our goal is simple: to make sure everyone can access policing when they need it. I've also raised this issue in Parliament. When new funding for policing becomes available, Redditch must get its fair share, and that money must go towards making policing accessible, visible and community focused.

This isn't about politics. It's about people. It's about making sure everyone can reach out to the police and know they'll be listened to. Redditch deserves a police service that's open, connected and trusted, and I'll keep fighting to make that happen. If you'd like to support our campaign, please scan the QR code and help make your voice heard.



Get in touch:
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December Gardening: Preparing for Winter and planning ahead



As winter settles in and frosty mornings become the norm, the garden may seem quiet, but there's still plenty to do to prepare for the year ahead. December is a time to take stock, tidy up, and give nature a helping hand while it rests.

Start by clearing fallen leaves from lawns and pathways to prevent slippery surfaces and mould growth. Compost healthy leaves to enrich next year's soil, but discard any that are diseased. Borders benefit from a good mulch of compost or well-rotted manure now, helping to insulate roots against the cold and improve soil structure.

It's also the perfect moment to prune dormant trees and shrubs. Apple and pear trees,

in particular, can be shaped and thinned while they're leafless, encouraging healthy growth and better crops come spring. Roses can be lightly trimmed to prevent wind rock, while any dead or damaged wood should be removed entirely.

For those who like to stay busy, December offers the chance to plan next year's planting scheme. Take a moment by the fire with a notebook or seed catalogue and think about what worked – and what didn't – over the past year. Ordering seeds early ensures the best selection and avoids the spring rush.

Birds will be grateful for extra support now. Keep feeders topped up with seeds, suet, and peanuts, and make sure fresh wa-

ter is available even when temperatures drop below freezing. A simple act like this not only helps wildlife survive the winter but also brings colour and life to the garden when little else is stirring.

If you grow vegetables, hardy winter greens such as kale, Brussels sprouts, and leeks can still be harvested, offering a rewarding taste of home-grown produce at Christmas time.

Finally, take a moment to enjoy the stillness of the season. Frosted seed heads, evergreen structure, and low golden light bring a quiet beauty to the garden in December – a reminder that rest is an essential part of nature's cycle, and spring will return before you know it.



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Natural Beauty Indoors: Winter's Organic Charm

As nature sleeps under frost and snow, winter brings its own unique beauty, and more homeowners are finding ways to reflect that indoors. The trend for natural materials continues into December, blending sustainability with seasonal warmth.

Wood, stone and wool form the foundation of this look. A rustic oak coffee table, woven jute rug or slate candle plate can instantly ground a space and bring that sought after organic texture. Pair these with earthy tones such as mushroom, sand, sage and soft cream to create calm and balance.

Add in greenery to keep your home feeling alive. Sprigs of pine, mistletoe and holly make charming decorations that celebrate the season's simplicity. Bundle them into vases, hang a wreath on an interior door, or lay a garland across your dining table for a natural centrepiece.

Warmth is key, so layer in knitted throws, sheepskin rugs and thick curtains to insulate and soften. Lighting should feel gentle, choose warm lamps, fairy lights, or even clusters of tealights to mimic the glow of a winter fire. A few well chosen accessories such as ceramic vases, wooden

bowls or woven baskets will enhance the look without overpowering it, keeping the focus on texture and tone. Even a simple display of dried flowers or twigs can add understated charm and a sense of connection to the season.

This look isn't about perfection, it's about embracing the beauty of nature in its raw, honest form. By bringing the outdoors in, you can create a winter home that feels authentic, calming and wonderfully connected to the world beyond your windows.

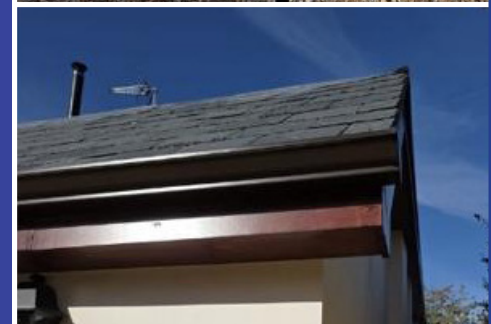
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uncluttered
by Kath



Seasonal Sparkle Elegant Touches for a Festive Home

When it comes to festive interiors, a little sparkle goes a long way. December is the time to embrace warmth, light and a touch of glamour, not just for Christmas Day, but for the whole winter season.

Start by introducing metallic accents into your decor. Brass candleholders, gold edged glassware, or a silver framed mirror can elevate your space with subtle shine. Pair metallics with deep seasonal hues such

as emerald, plum or navy for an elegant contrast that feels luxurious yet timeless.

Layer in texture for richness: velvet cushions, satin ribbons, or soft wool throws create depth and comfort. Fairy lights aren't just for the tree, drape them along mantels, shelves or stairways to bring gentle, ambient light that transforms the atmosphere on dark evenings.

If you prefer a natural look, opt for a woodland luxe theme. Mix

greenery such as eucalyptus, pine and ivy with candles, pinecones and rustic ceramics. The result feels festive yet calm, perfect for relaxing nights by the fire.

Finally, scent completes the mood. Fragrance your home with notes of orange, clove, cedarwood and vanilla to evoke that classic Christmas feeling. This winter, balance elegance with comfort, a home that glows softly, sparkles subtly, and feels joyful all season long.



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HOME FURNISHING

Warm Up Your Home

Winter Comforts and Cosy Styling

As winter settles in, our homes become the heart of our seasonal celebrations, a place to gather, unwind, and keep the cold at bay. Creating a warm and inviting atmosphere doesn't mean a full redesign; it's all about adding layers of comfort, texture and light.

Start with your living areas. Introduce plush throws and soft cushions in rich tones like mulberry, forest green and burnt orange. These colours not only

reflect the season but bring a sense of warmth that instantly transforms a room. Soft, tactile fabrics such as velvet, wool and faux fur make everything feel more luxurious.

Lighting is crucial during darker days. Replace cool white bulbs with warm amber tones and add a few candles to create a soft flickering glow. If you have a fireplace, make it the focal point; a neatly stacked pile of logs or a glowing wood burner instantly

signals winter comfort.

In the dining room, layer your table with natural textures such as linen runners, wooden serveware and sprigs of evergreen. Simple touches like cinnamon sticks tied with ribbon or pinecones as place settings make for beautiful, effortless decoration. This December, embrace a slower pace and make your home a true winter sanctuary, somewhere to retreat from the cold, recharge, and savour the season's simple pleasures





Health: The Hidden Danger of Nasal Tanning Sprays: What You Need to Know

In the age of social media and influencer beauty trends, many people—especially younger generations—are constantly seeking fast, effective ways to enhance their appearance. One such trend gaining popularity is the use of nasal tanning sprays: products that promise a deep, bronzed glow without the need for sun exposure or sunbeds. But beneath the surface of these seemingly harmless sprays lies a very real and alarming health risk—including a possible link to skin cancer.

Nasal tanning sprays typically contain a synthetic peptide known as melanotan II, a chemical that stimulates the production of melanin in the skin. Melanin is the pigment responsible for skin colour, and when increased, it can give the skin a darker, tanned appearance. These sprays are often marketed as a quick fix to achieve a sun-kissed look

without harmful UV exposure. However, melanotan II is not approved by any major health authority, including the UK's Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) or the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). It is an unregulated, unlicensed substance, and its use comes with serious health concerns.

One of the most significant risks associated with melanotan II is its potential to cause abnormal changes in skin cells, increasing the risk of melanoma, the most serious form of skin cancer. Some users have reported a darkening or change in shape of moles, an indicator that skin cells are reacting to the substance in unpredictable and potentially dangerous ways.

Doctors and dermatologists have been sounding the alarm, urging the public to steer clear of these products. Not only are they untested and unregulated, but the way they are administered—via nasal spray—means the chemicals enter the bloodstream quickly and directly. This bypasses the body's natural filtering systems and increases the chance of side effects, which can include nausea, high blood pressure, facial flushing, increased freckles or moles, and even libido changes.

Despite these risks, nasal tanning sprays have seen a surge in popularity, largely due to their promotion by influencers and online sellers. Platforms like TikTok and Instagram are flooded with before-and-after

videos and glowing reviews that fail to mention the lack of safety testing or regulation. This gives users a false sense of security and normalises the use of potentially harmful substances—all in the name of aesthetics. The problem is compounded by the fact that these sprays are often marketed directly to young, image-conscious consumers, many of whom may not fully understand the long-term health consequences. With skin cancer rates rising among younger people, experts fear that products like nasal tanning sprays could be contributing to a dangerous trend.

Organisations such as the British Association of Dermatologists and Cancer Research UK have issued public warnings, stating that melanotan II and similar products should be avoided entirely. They urge consumers to opt for safer, regulated alternatives such as topical self-tanning

lotions and sprays, which are widely available and have been tested for safety.

It's important to remember that a tan, whether from the sun or a spray, is not a sign of health—it's a response to skin damage. Chasing a certain look at the cost of your long-term health simply isn't worth it. If you're looking for a bronzed appearance, use reputable, approved self-tanners or consider embracing your natural skin tone. In a world increasingly driven by online trends and instant results, it's easy to be drawn in by the promise of a quick fix. But when it comes to your health, especially something as serious as cancer risk, it's vital to make informed, cautious choices. Don't be misled by viral videos or influencer endorsements—always do your research and consult a medical professional before using any cosmetic product, especially those not approved for use.

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PALACE THEATRE

The Palace Theatre is set to dazzle audiences this festive season with a spectacular production of Aladdin, running from 8 December 2025 to 4 January 2026. Packed with laughter, adventure, and a touch of magic, this year's pantomime promises fun for the whole family.

Join Aladdin on his journey from the bustling streets of old Peking to the mystical Cave of Wonders, as he dreams of winning the heart of the beautiful Princess and outsmarting the wicked Abanazar. With stunning scenery, sparkling costumes, and all the traditional panto silliness you could wish for, it's a show that's sure to light up your Christmas.

This year's star-studded cast includes Bill Ward (of Coronation

Street and Emmerdale fame) as the dastardly Abanazar, Dave Benson Phillips as the Emperor, and Tony Rudd as the lovable Wishee Washee. Making his Redditch debut, Simon Bashford steps into the iconic role of Widow Twankey, bringing the big laughs and plenty of mischief.

Expect dazzling dance numbers, toe-tapping tunes, and enough jokes to keep everyone smiling from start to finish. There will also be relaxed and signed performances available, ensuring everyone in the community can join in the festive fun.

Located right in the heart of town, the Palace Theatre provides the perfect setting for a Christmas outing whether you're planning a family treat, a

night out with friends, or a festive tradition with the kids. Why not make a full evening of it and enjoy a meal or drink in one of Redditch's nearby restaurants before the show?

With tickets starting from £17, and family and group options available, Aladdin is fantastic value for money and guaranteed to leave audiences feeling festive and full of cheer.

So, polish up that magic lamp, grab your tickets early, and get ready to shout "He's behind you!" as Aladdin brings a whole new world of fun to Redditch this Christmas.

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Dates: 8 December 2025 – 4 January

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Seasonal Spotlight:

Chestnuts & Cranberries

December brings a wonderful array of seasonal produce perfect for hearty winter dishes and festive feasts. As the days grow shorter and colder, our kitchens fill with the comforting aromas of slow cooked stews, roasted vegetables, and freshly baked treats.

Root vegetables truly shine this month. Carrots, parsnips, and swedes are at their sweetest, developing rich flavours after the first frosts. They're ideal for roasting with herbs or blending into warming soups. Brussels sprouts, the traditional

Christmas staple, are also at their peak, delicious when roasted with chestnuts or tossed with crispy bacon. Don't overlook red cabbage, which adds both colour and a touch of sweetness to festive plates when braised with apple and spices.

Few things capture the spirit of December like the smell of roasted chestnuts on an open fire. Whether you're enjoying them while out Christmas shopping or roasting them at home, they bring a nostalgic warmth to the season. Simply score each nut before roasting to pre-

vent them from bursting, then cook over gentle heat until the shells crack and the insides turn golden and tender. Served warm with a sprinkle of salt, roasted chestnuts are the perfect winter treat – sweet, smoky, and wonderfully comforting. December also offers vibrant fruits to brighten dark days. Clementines, satsumas, and oranges are juicy and fragrant, perfect for snacking, garnishing puddings, or infusing a mulled wine. Apples and pears are still plentiful too, wonderful baked into crumbles or paired with cinnamon for a cosy dessert.

For something truly seasonal, try adding chestnuts or cranberries to your festive cooking. Fresh chestnuts bring a nutty depth to stuffings or winter salads, while cranberries add a sharp burst of flavour in sauces and bakes.

Buying local, in season produce this month not only supports nearby growers but also ensures maximum freshness and flavour. So, whether you're preparing a comforting midweek meal or planning your Christmas dinner, December's produce offers plenty of inspiration for warming, wholesome dishes.

A Taste of Christmas at the Brook

Where rustic charm meets festive flavour in the heart of the Worcestershire countryside

Tucked away in the peaceful hamlet of Elcocks Brook, just a few miles from Redditch, The Brook is a countryside treasure that truly comes alive at Christmas. With its roaring fires, twinkling lights and beautifully decorated interior, this historic inn offers everything you could want from a festive dining experience: warmth, atmosphere and food that celebrates the very best of the season.

Owners Josh and Katie have built The Brook around a simple idea: serve exceptional food made from high-quality, sustainably sourced ingredients, and make every guest feel right

at home. It's a philosophy that shines brighter than ever during the festive period. From the moment you step through the door, the scent of mulled wine, slow-roasted meats and freshly baked desserts fills the air, setting the tone for a truly special visit.

The Festive Menu, available from late November, is packed with indulgent seasonal favourites. Highlights include roasted turkey with maple syrup and orange glaze, served with goose-fat roast potatoes, pancetta sprouts and rich homemade gravy the ultimate Christmas classic done to perfection. For something a little different, din-



Some of the finest meals at The Brook in Redditch

ers can enjoy slow-braised beef cheek with horseradish mash, or a vibrant wild mushroom and truffle risotto, a firm favourite among vegetarian guests. To finish, indulgent desserts like gingerbread cheesecake, chocolate and orange brownie, and Christmas pudding with brandy sauce provide the perfect sweet ending.

Sourcing remains central to everything The Brook does. Fish is brought in fresh from Cornish day boats, while meats come from award-winning British butchers ensuring every plate served is traceable, ethical and



The Brook - Dishes to delight!

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full of flavour. The drinks list, meanwhile, has a distinctly festive flair, featuring premium ales, handpicked wines and winter warmers such as hot chocolate liqueurs and spiced cider.

Beyond the food, The Brook knows how to celebrate. Throughout December, guests can enjoy a series of Festive Nights from live music and outdoor bar evenings to cosy gatherings in The Woodshed or The Shack. The pub kicks off the season with its much-loved Festive Cheer Night, complete with s'mores, hot dogs and mulled wine around the fire a relaxed way to welcome the most wonderful time of the year.

Whether you're planning a family meal, an office Christmas party, or a romantic evening by the fire, The Brook provides the perfect backdrop. Its blend of countryside character, creative cooking and genuine hospitality has made it one of Redditch's most talked-about destinations and with good reason.

The Brook, Sillins Lane, Elcocks Brook, Redditch B97 5UD
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Follow on Facebook and Instagram for festive menus and event updates.





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Christmas Special - Beef wellington



Ingredients

- Beef fillet of around 1kg
- 3 tbsp olive oil
- 250g/9oz chestnut mushroom
- 50g/2oz butter
- 1 large sprig fresh thyme
- 100ml dry white wine
- 12 slices prosciutto
- 500g 2oz pack puff pastry
- a little flour
- 2 egg yolks

Method

- Heat oven to 220C/fan
- Sit the 1kg beef fillet on a roasting tray, brush with 1 tbsp olive oil and season with pepper, then roast for 15 mins for medium-rare or 20 mins for medium. When the beef is cooked to your liking, remove from the oven to cool, then chill in the fridge for about 20 mins.
- While the beef is cooling, chop 250g chestnut (and wild, if you like) mushrooms as finely as possible so they have the texture of

coarse breadcrumbs. You can use a food processor to do this, but make sure you pulse-chop the mushrooms so they don't become a slurry.

- Heat 2 tbsp of the olive oil and 50g butter in a large pan and fry the mushrooms on a medium heat, with 1 large sprig fresh thyme, for about 10 mins stirring often, until you have a softened mixture.

• Season the mushroom mixture, pour over 100ml dry white wine and cook for about 10 mins until all the wine has been absorbed. The mixture should hold its shape when stirred.

- Remove the mushroom duxelle from the pan to cool and discard the thyme.

• Overlap two pieces of cling film over a large chopping board. Lay 12 slices prosciutto on the cling film, slightly overlapping, in a double row.

- Spread half the duxelles over

the prosciutto, then sit the fillet on it and spread the remaining duxelles over.

- Use the cling film's edges to draw the prosciutto around the fillet, then roll it into a sausage shape, twisting the ends of cling film to tighten it as you go.

- Chill the fillet while you roll out the pastry.

- Dust your work surface with a little flour. Roll out a third of the 500g pack of puff pastry to a 18 x 30cm strip and place on a non-stick baking sheet.

- Roll out the remainder of the 500g pack of puff pastry to about 28 x 36cm.

- Unravel the fillet from the cling film and sit it in the centre of the smaller strip of pastry.

- Beat the 2 egg yolks with 1 tsp water and brush the pastry's edges, and the top and sides of the wrapped fillet.

- Using a rolling pin, carefully lift and drape the larger piece of pastry over the fillet, pressing well into the sides.

- Trim the joins to about a 4cm rim. Seal the rim with the edge of a fork or spoon handle.

- Glaze all over with more egg yolk and, using the back of a knife, mark the beef Wellington with long diagonal lines taking care not to cut into the pastry.

- Chill for at least 30 mins and up to 24 hrs. Heat oven to 200C/fan 180C/gas 6.

- Brush the Wellington with a little more egg yolk and cook until golden and crisp - 20-25 mins for medium-rare beef, 30 mins for medium. Allow to stand for 10 mins before serving in thick slices.



WARMING FESTIVE DRINKS: COMFORT DRINKS

As the festive season rolls in and the chill bites a little harder, nothing lifts the spirits quite like a warming Christmas drink. Whether you're gathered with family, hosting friends, or simply enjoying a quiet evening by the fire, these festive favourites bring comfort, cheer, and a touch of indulgence to December days.

A classic choice is mulled wine, the ultimate winter warmer.

Simmer red wine gently with slices of orange, cinnamon sticks, cloves, and a hint of star anise. Add a splash of brandy or port for extra depth, and let the fragrant spices fill your kitchen with Christmas aromas. For a nonalcoholic alternative, mulled apple juice or spiced cranberry punch offers the same cosy feel without the kick.

For those who prefer some-

thing creamy, Baileys hot chocolate is hard to beat. Rich, velvety, and utterly indulgent, it's perfect topped with whipped cream and chocolate flakes. If you fancy a twist, try stirring in a shot of peppermint liqueur or hazelnut syrup. A sprinkle of crushed candy cane or grated nutmeg on top adds an extra festive flourish.

Another favourite is hot spiced cider, a wonderful balance of sweetness and spice. Heat cloudy apple cider with cinnamon, nutmeg, and a few apple slices for a drink that tastes like Christmas in a cup. And for coffee lovers, a gingerbread latte brings café style comfort to your own kitchen. Just mix espresso with steamed milk, gingerbread syrup, and a sprinkle of nutmeg on top for a comforting winter pick me up.

Finally, for something truly traditional, serve eggnog, a creamy blend of milk, eggs, sugar, and a dash of rum or bourbon. It's smooth, sweet, and feels like a festive hug in a mug.

Whether it's mulled wine at a Christmas market or hot chocolate after a frosty walk, these warming drinks make the season sparkle and fill even the coldest day with a little Christmas magic.



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December Motoring Getting Winter-Ready

As winter settles in, December can be one of the most challenging months for motorists. With shorter days, plummeting temperatures, and unpredictable weather, a bit of preparation can make the difference between a safe journey and a stressful one.

Start with a thorough winter check. Tyres are your first line of defence, so make sure they have at least 3mm of tread and are inflated correctly, as cold weather can cause the pressure to drop. Consider switching to all season or winter tyres if you regularly drive in icy or rural conditions. Check your lights too, clean lenses and replace any faulty bulbs to ensure you can both see and be seen on dark mornings and misty evenings. Your windscreen is another key area. Top up your washer fluid

with a winter grade mix that will not freeze, and make sure your wipers are free from cracks or smears. A quick spray of silicone lubricant on your door seals and locks can also prevent them from freezing shut overnight.

Cold weather can take a real toll on batteries, especially if yours is over three years old. Many garages offer a free battery test, and it is worth taking advantage before the mercury drops further. Keep your fuel tank at least half full to avoid condensation building up inside, and check that your antifreeze is at the correct strength. For longer journeys, particularly over the festive season, pack a small winter survival kit. A blanket, torch, spare

phone charger, water, and some snacks can be a real comfort if you get caught in traffic or stuck in bad weather. A shovel, de icer, and high visibility vest are handy additions too.

Above all, adapt your driving style to the conditions. Accelerate gently, avoid harsh braking, and leave plenty of space between you and the car in front. Remember, stopping distances can be ten times longer on icy roads.

Whether you are heading to see family for Christmas or just facing the daily commute, a calm, prepared approach will help you stay safe and stress free. With a little extra care, you can keep your car running smoothly and enjoy the season with confidence.



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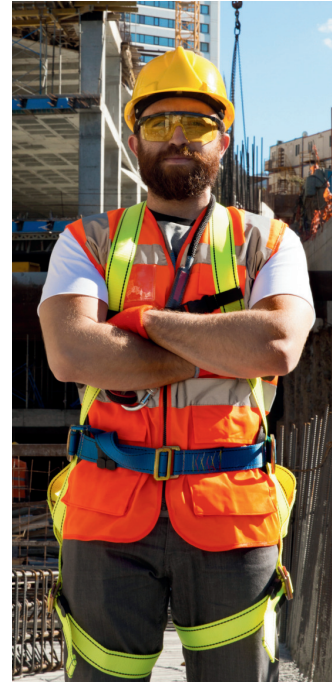


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They are fully funded by the Department for Education and co-delivered by **Worcestershire County Council** through its **Careers Worcestershire** service. They work with further education and training providers, plus local businesses, to offer a variety of Skills Bootcamps that take place at training provider locations and education settings all across Worcestershire such as Kidderminster College, GLP Training & Adult Learning Worcestershire.

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