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Holiday Time!

Welcome to the August edition...

For those of you that aren't jetting off overseas this Summer, there's lots of great things happening locally, including tribute acts and beer festivals.

Check out the local event guide on page 6 to see what takes your fancy. Whether you're staying locally or exploring Europe or further afield, this Summer, have a great month and make the most of the weather and the Summer holidays, while they last!



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community events

Shirley Dining Club

25 August, noon – 6pm

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Male Voice Choir

6 September, 7pm

Knowle Village Hall.

The Knowle Village Hall Association invites you to enjoy a late summer Evening of Song with the Birmingham Male Voice Choir (formerly the Canoldir and the Icknield Male Voice choirs). Tickets £15 from 01564 779898 or 01564 778163 or from the Friday Coffee Morning at the Hall from 10am until noon.

A Tribute to Lionel Richie

6 September

Core Theatre Solihull

Following his appearances with Lionel Richie himself on ITV's 'Sunday Night At The Palladium' and the 'Graham Norton Show' for the BBC,



Malcolm Pitt delivers a powerhouse and breathtaking performance in this high octane show celebrating the music of Lionel Richie and the Commodores. Call 0121 704 6962 to book.

The Lions Beer and Cider Festival

12 & 13 September, noon to

11pm, Shirley Royal British

Legion, Parkgate, Shirley

A charity fund raising event organised by Acocks Green, Shirley and Solihull Lions Clubs, featuring 18 different real ales and 10 ciders. Admission £10, including £5 worth of drinks tokens, a souvenir glass and

an event programme with tasting notes. Live music provided by Ray's Open Night musicians. More info at www.shirleylions.co.uk/events/beerfestival.html

Elvis Tribute Show

19 September

Nailcote Hall

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Astrantias

The quiet star of a cottage garden

If you've ever wandered through a traditional English cottage garden in midsummer, chances are you've caught sight of astrantias - those charming, understated flowers that quietly hold their own among the showier blooms. Also known as masterworts or the rather quaint "Hattie's pincushion," these perennials are the perfect blend of beauty and practicality.

With their starry, pincushion-style blooms in shades from soft white to dusky pink and deep ruby, they're a treat for the eye - and for the bees and butterflies, too!

Astrantias bloom their hearts out from June right through to August, giving us gardeners a generous season of colour, not to mention plenty of nectar for our insect friends. They're absolutely brilliant for shady spots, especially those damp, awkward corners where other plants might sulk. Moisture-retentive soil is their sweet spot, but don't worry if your patch is on the drier side - they'll still do well with regular watering and a good mulch.

Speaking of soil, astrantias are fans of the rich stuff: well-rotted manure, home-made compost, or leaf mould



worked into the ground before planting. Pop the plant into a prepared hole, firm it in, and water generously. Keep up the watering through the first summer, especially if your soil's particularly free-draining. Once settled, they're pretty self-sufficient, and wonderfully resistant to slugs and snails, which is a real bonus in my own garden!

If you want to encourage a second flush of flowers (and who wouldn't?), cut them back after their first round of blooming. Give them a proper haircut again in autumn or early spring to keep them looking tidy.

Astrantias can be divided in spring. Lift a clump, gently prise it apart with your hands or a fork and replant the sections right away. If you've

got the patience, they can also be grown from seed - either collected from your own plants or from a packet under cover in spring.

Astrantias are mostly trouble-free, though occasionally powdery mildew can be an issue. Keep them healthy with plenty of water and mulch and bin any mildewy leaves in autumn.

For varieties, try 'Roma' for soft pink blooms, 'Venice' for a dramatic ruby red, or 'Hadsphen Blood' if you're after something truly striking. For a lighter look, 'Buckland' and 'Alba' are gentle on the eye and lovely in a pastel scheme.

In all, astrantias are reliable, romantic, and ridiculously easy to grow - a real cottage garden treasure.



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a good read

By Natasha Donovan

Small Pleasures

by Clare Chambers

Small Pleasures is a quiet gem of a book that unfolds with the grace of a classic British drama, while packing a modern literary punch. Set in the meticulously rendered suburbs of 1957 southeast London the story follows Jean Swinney, a journalist approaching her fortieth birthday, and stuck writing lightweight 'women's pieces'. Her life is defined by routine, duty, and the quiet ache of unrealised dreams. When she's assigned to investigate a local woman's claim of a virgin birth, she anticipates a hoax. Instead, she finds herself drawn into the lives of Gretchen Tilbury, her charming daughter Margaret, and Gretchen's enigmatic husband, Howard. As Jean's professional curiosity evolves into personal entanglement, Chambers masterfully explores themes of loneliness, desire, and the societal constraints of postwar Britain. The novel's strength lies in its subtlety. Chambers crafts a narrative rich in period detail and emotional nuance, where the most profound moments are found in the quietest exchanges. Jean's internal struggle between duty and desire is portrayed with a tenderness that resonates deeply, making her journey all the more poignant. While the mystery of the virgin birth is central to the plot, it's Jean's personal awakening and the intricate dynamics between characters that draw us in. Small Pleasures is a novel that lingers, reflecting on the small joys and quiet tragedies that define a life. It's a reminder that the most extraordinary stories often emerge from the most ordinary lives.



The Book of Stolen Dreams

by David Farr

This is a dazzling children's debut that sweeps readers into a richly imagined world where courage and imagination are the keys to survival. Set in the oppressive city of Brava, siblings Rachel and Robert Klein find themselves thrust into a perilous adventure after their librarian father entrusts them with a mysterious, forbidden book. Their mission: to find the missing final page and prevent the book from falling into the hands of the tyrannical ruler, Charles Malstain. Farr's screenwriting and theatre credentials are very much present as he brings a cinematic flair to his storytelling, deftly balancing moments of suspense with real humour and warmth. There are many parallels to be drawn with certain chapters in history as well as more current events. Farr paints a compellingly grim picture of life under highly restrictive rules and regulations where almost every kind of fun is outlawed, and teaching takes place under the tightest of rules. In spite of this, Rachel and Robert's spirits shine like beacons as they embark on their adventures. The Book of Stolen Dreams is more than just a fantasy adventure; it's a poignant exploration of the power of stories and the resilience of the human spirit. The suggested age range is 8-12 but quite frankly this 40-year-old adored it as much as her son.



Salmon Florentine

A lovely supper for summer



Preparation time: 5 minutes

Cooking time: 5 minutes

Serves: 2

Ingredients

2 large salmon fillets
with the skin on
1 small onion, finely diced.
1 tbsp olive oil
3 large garlic cloves crushed
or finely chopped.
120g fresh spinach
150g mushrooms (any type
but wild are great) sliced.
60ml cup white wine
170ml double cream
Salt
1/2 tsp chilli flakes (optional)

Method

Preheat the oven to 220C /
200 fan / Gas mark 7 and line
a small, rimmed baking sheet
with greaseproof paper.

Rub the salmon fillets
with oil and place them
skin side down on the
greaseproof paper.
Season the fillets well
with salt and pepper.
Place the salmon into the
oven for 18-25 minutes.
cooking time will depend
on the size and thickness
of the salmon fillets used.
While salmon is cooking,
heat the olive oil in a large
pan over medium heat. Fry
the onion gently until soft
and translucent. Add the
garlic and mushrooms and
cook for another minute,
then add the spinach. Cover
and let the spinach cook

down, stirring occasionally.
Once spinach has wilted,
drain off the excess liquid.
Return to the stove and
add white wine. Simmer
for about a minute.
Remove from the heat,
add the cream, and mix
everything well. Season
with salt and chilli flakes.
Return to a low heat and
allow to heat through for
a couple of minutes.
When the salmon is cooked,
remove it from the oven and
place it on preheated plates.
Pour the creamy spinach
and mushroom mixture
over the salmon. Serve
with a green salad.



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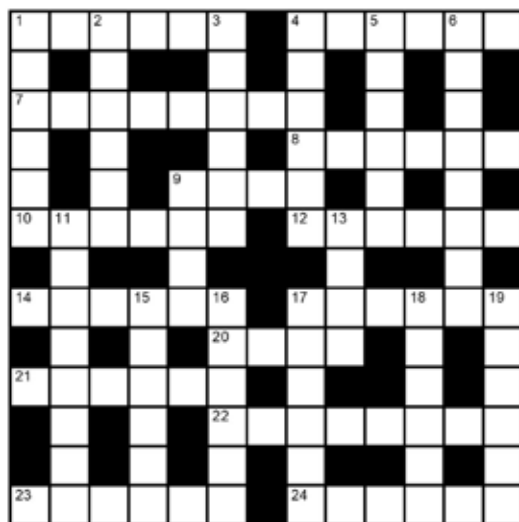


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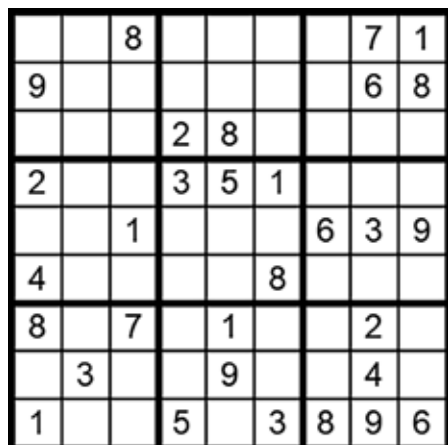
Across

- 1 Prejudiced (6)
- 4 Whiten, decolour (6)
- 7 Maritime, used on the ocean (8)
- 8 Rhododendron-like shrub (6)
- 9 Particle (4)
- 10 Shortcrust, flaky or puff _____ (6)
- 12 Every twelve months (6)
- 14 Socially awkward (6)
- 17 Daredevil (6)
- 20 Ruffian, thug (4)
- 21 Ceramic artist (6)
- 22 Items of jewellery (8)
- 23 People who look after others (6)
- 24 Abrupt (6)

Down

- 1 Church official (6)
- 2 Warning devices (6)
- 3 Delicate, fragile (6)
- 4 Married to two people at the same time (6)
- 5 Mistake in print (6)
- 6 Shrub with waxy scented flowers (8)
- 9 Bowed structure (4)
- 11 Large South American snake (8)
- 13 Welsh name (4)
- 15 Oxen and cows (6)
- 16 The act of leaving a place (6)
- 17 _____ dancing, type of folk dancing. (6)
- 18 Stretched out the body or neck to see better (6)
- 19 Toxic substance (6)

answer on page 22



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 22



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What is Bubble Tea?

You've probably seen bubble tea shops popping (no pun intended) up on a high street near you recently. Bubble tea, also known as boba, is a colourful, chewy drink, that's taken the UK by storm in recent years. Originally from Taiwan in the 1980s, it was created by blending milk tea with tapioca pearls, which are small, chewy balls made from cassava starch. The drink is typically served cold, with a wide straw to slurp up the "bubbles."

Classic bubble tea is

made with black tea, milk, sweetener, and tapioca pearls, but modern versions are highly customisable. You'll find fruity teas, green or matcha options, flavoured jellies, and popping boba (juice-filled spheres).

While the teas are popular, they're pricey, and they're not exactly health drinks. Most shop-bought bubble teas are loaded with sugar, artificial flavours, and sweetened condensed milk, with some coming in at 400 calories per cup. The Tapioca pearls themselves



are comprised mainly of carbohydrates and have little nutritional value, and the portion sizes are often huge.

If you're tempted, but want to try a healthier option, many stores offer reduced sugar, plant milk, or fruit tea bases, so you can tailor the drink to your taste and diet.



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Mindbenders

Can you find the hidden phrases?



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answers on page 22

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August is the New January!

I was sitting in a pub garden with my two closest friends, enjoying cold drinks in the sun when talk turned to which was the worst month

of the year. "Well, I hate August!" declared Lucy,

"Ugh! Me too," agreed Alice, and they both went on to explain (in some detail) why August sucks.

"It's the end of summer but not quite Autumn. The plants in my garden are crispy and most have gone over. School is about to restart, and I've not even thought about new shoes and uniform."

"Yeah...And most of the elaborate plans I had for doing things with the kids this summer never really came to anything. August just feels like a long list of obligations."

I was surprised. I like August, and not just because it's my birthday (oh dear, maybe that was one of the obligations Alice referred to). If you feel like August is your least favourite month, please let me advocate for a moment on its behalf.

New Start – August has lots in common with January. It feels like a new start! As a child I remember new shoes, clothes, and stationery (oh the thrill of new colouring pencils). I could reinvent myself with a new teacher and unblemished exercise books. August, like



January was full of potential and possibilities. So what if I'd broken all my New Year's resolutions before the last of the festive fairy lights had been packed away;

August was another chance. This academic year I could be a cooler, kinder version of me, who worked harder and achieved better grades! Call me a cock-eyed optimist but even as an adult, August still evokes those feelings for me.

New Season – Ok, Autumn doesn't start until September, but August is the prelude. Temperatures are dropping and you can 'smell' the difference in the mornings. I adore the heat and freedom summer but by the middle of August I'm looking forward to opaque tights and craving the calmness and structure of 'back to school' days.

Summer is more stressful as an adult. As a child the whole summer was mine. I focussed only on fun and friends. Now even though I love summer

frivolity, it has to be fitted around my job. Summer feels fun-but-frantic, so by mid-August I'm anticipating the finish line.

Reset – No matter what the first 7 months of the year were like, there's still time to instigate changes. July was the start of the long summer break yes, but really July was just an extension of June, packed with end-of-term chaos: exams, concerts, presentations, school trips and sports days. August on the other hand provides the mental space for bit of a soft reset, to evaluate how the first half of the year went and think about what went well, and what needs to change.

"August resolutions should definitely be a thing," I finished happily, before realising my friends were now regarding me with something akin to a mix of incredulity and pity.

Well, my besties may not be convinced, but what about you? Are you ready to embrace a fresh start and make a resolution or two? Who's with me?



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Sardul Marwa MBE
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sardul.marwa@solihull.gov.uk

Bob Grinsell
Tel: 07515 527345
bob.grinsell@solihull.gov.uk

Samantha Gethen
Tel: 07360 648047
samantha.gethen@solihull.gov.uk

local police contact for solihull
Solihull Police Station: 0845 113 5000 or 101

| | |
|----------------------------------|---------------|
| Misc | |
| Solihull Council | 0121 704 8001 |
| Health | |
| NHS non-emergency | 111 |
| Solihull Hospital | 0121 424 2000 |
| Spire Parkway Hospital | 0121 704 1451 |
| Grove Surgery | 0121 705 1105 |
| Northbrook Group Practice | 0121 746 5000 |
| Hobs Moat Medical Centre | 0121 742 5211 |
| Daleswood Health | 01675 489489 |
| Utilities | |
| Electricity power cut | 105 |
| Gas leak | 0800 111 999 |
| Severn Trent Water | 0300 034 2222 |
| Severn Trent Water (emergencies) | 0800 783 4444 |
| Travel | |
| National Rail Enquiries | 03457 484950 |
| Network West Midlands (buses) | 0345 303 6760 |

Councillor surgeries

These are face-to-face meetings held by councillors for local people to raise issues in their area.

Held at The Core Library, Solihull on the first Saturday of every month, 10am – 12 noon, excluding bank holidays, for both Silhill and St Alphege residents.


Solution to Mind benders

1. A dime a dozen
2. Once in a blue moon
3. Call it a day

midbenders
from page 17



Crossword Solution
from page 14



Sudoku Solution
from page 14

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