

Edition 014

March 2026

Birkdale

A Community Magazine

BUZZ



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at the Station Master's House

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The Junior Chess Club is free to join and is proving to be very successful. The two volunteers, Yvonne and Charlie (who is at Birkdale High School) have welcomed chess players, from total novices to experienced players over a range of ages, starting at age six.



Come and join us at Birkdale Community Hub and Library

Contact us on: **01704 566 992** for more details

Want to advertise in the Birkdale Buzz?

The magazine comes out every quarter (March, June, September and December) and is printed in A5 format. Adverts can be printed either in B&W or full colour.

The charge for adverts in the next edition in **June** is:

B&W adverts: 1/8 page costs £15, 1/4 page costs £25, 1/2 page costs £50

Colour adverts: 1/8 page costs £20, 1/4 page costs £35, 1/2 page costs £70

We also offer a discount for placing an advert in four editions: four adverts for the price of three. The deadline date for the **June** edition is **13th April**

For further information and advice please email us at:

birkdalebuzz@thestationmastershouse.co.uk

Hello Readers

Welcome to the March edition of the Birkdale Buzz, produced quarterly by volunteers at the Birkdale Community Hub & Library charity. We produce the magazine to help keep locals in touch with people and events around Birkdale and provide an interesting read on all sorts of topics. We distribute copies to over 3000 homes in the Birkdale area.



Birkdale Library is situated in the Station Master's House next to the station where, besides the library, there is a computer suite and two meeting rooms for hire (for details of room hire costs, email roombookings@thestationmastershouse.co.uk). The charity also runs a branch library at the Birkdale Methodist Church on Liverpool Road.

Membership of the library is free, and all our facilities are free for members to use. We organise frequent social events, so why not pop into the library or visit our website at www.thestationmastershouse.co.uk for more details?

News: we are delighted to announce that, starting in January, the charity has gained two new sponsors for 2026: Connell Court and Birkdale Tower care homes. We look forward to working with the staff and residents of both homes during the year and reporting on our activities in future issues of the Buzz.

Phil Margham (Editor)

Note: An online version of the Buzz can be found at www.thestationmastershouse.co.uk If you would like to send an online copy to friends and relatives, please email us at birkdalebuzz@thestationmastershouse.co.uk and we will put you on the emailing list.

What's On in Southport

Our Day Out (18-21 March) Little Theatre Southport *SDC Youth Production*

St Patrick's Day Beer Festival (21 March) Victoria Park

The Gondoliers (25-28 March) Little Theatre Southport *Crosby Gilbert & Sullivan Society*

Cristal Palace (3-4 April) French street theatre brings its spectacular show to Lord St

The 39 Steps (10-18 April) Little Theatre Southport *SDC Production*

Sausage & Cider Festival (18 April) Victoria Park

Red Squirrel 10K (19 April)

Big Top Festival (2-3 May) Modern Circus Performers take over Southport Streets

The Railway Children (8-16 May) Little Theatre Southport *SDC Production*

Lancashire v Worcestershire County Cricket Match (15-18 May) S&B Sports Club

Southport Food & Drink Festival (29-31 May)

Open Golf Championship (16-19 July) Royal Birkdale Golf Club

Southport Flower Show (20-23 August) Victoria Park

Southport Air Show (29-30 August)



Presents for
2026

Bruce Graham's Production of

The Gondoliers

Wednesday 25th, Thursday 26th,
Friday 27th March 2026 at 7:30pm
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The next issue of the Birkdale Buzz will
be out in **June 2026**

Advert requests, contributions,
questions or feedback should be
submitted to the Editor by **13 April 2026**
birkdalebuzz@thestationmastershouse.co.uk

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Gardeners' Corner

My name is Wendy, I am a volunteer at Birkdale library. I love gardening and hope you do too.

Aren't the spring bulbs in our village just gorgeous. I hope you enjoy our spring garden display at the Station Master's House and the mass display of daffodils planted in the grounds and beds of the Liverpool Road Methodist Church, PR8 4PD, where our branch library is based.



The 4th Annual Community Sunflower Summer Challenge



Look out for details of this year's sunflower challenge to see who can grow the tallest sunflower from seed this year in Birkdale. It could be YOU! Whether you are 8 or 80, we would love you to join in. Full details will be available from the library in early May.

What's your garden project for 2026? Here are some suggestions:-

- Plant a hedge instead of putting up a fence. Examples are lime or copper beech which retains its leaves in winter, Japanese Holly or Escallonia with vibrant, glossy evergreen foliage
- Plant a tree, the birds will thank you. Examples of quick growing ornamental trees are Silver Birch, Eucalyptus, Rowan and the Tulip Tree
- Add a trellis to an existing wall and grow some climbers. Examples are honeysuckle, clematis, climbing roses, jasmine
- Add some bird feeders and a bird bath.

And of course there are lots of garden housekeeping jobs, such as:

- Finish off pruning your roses to encourage flowers, and apply rose feed
- Carry on deadheading spring flowers like daffodils so they don't set seed
- Add generous quantities of garden compost to your borders
- Check any new shoots for aphids and remove.

As our gardens and house plants come alive there is always plenty to do but, most importantly, do take time to sit back with a cup of tea and enjoy your garden, or visit our library gardens.



Happy Gardening!

NGS Open Gardens in Ainsdale and Birkdale 2026



The National Garden Scheme gives visitors access to a number of private gardens and raises impressive amounts of money for nursing and health charities through admissions, teas and cakes.

The 2026 NGS brochure will be available from March—please pick up a copy from Birkdale Community Hub & Library or visit the website: ngs.org.uk for full details (including dates and opening times) of local gardens.



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Why Southport Deserves Better Than This Train Service

By Patrick Hurley, Member of Parliament for Southport

Southport is only around thirty-five miles from Manchester. On a map, the journey looks trivial, the sort of distance that should place our town comfortably within the orbit of a major city's jobs, culture, and opportunities. In reality, travelling by train between Southport and Manchester is an experience defined by delay, discomfort and frustration.

I know this not just because residents regularly contact me to complain about the service, but because I recently took the journey myself and documented it live on social media as it happened. I wanted to experience, unfiltered, what Southport residents experience week in, week out. What I found was a service that simply is not good enough.

I left home in time to make sure I caught the 12.03 train. The journey, in theory, should be easily commutable. In practice, it took over an hour and twenty minutes just to reach Manchester. Ten minutes into the journey, we had barely left town, chugging along just past Meols Cop station. This is not an isolated bad day; it is a familiar pattern.

Then there is the cost. The off-peak return ticket I bought cost me £16.20. That may not sound outrageous to some, but if you are making that journey five days a week, it quickly becomes a significant drain on an average salary. Reliable, affordable transport should be a gateway to opportunity, not a barrier to it.

What makes the contrast even starker is the rolling stock itself. Southport is served by modern, comfortable trains on the Merseyrail network when travelling to Liverpool. But if you're heading to Manchester on the other line, the experience changes abruptly. The trains are older. Facilities are lacking. There were no pull-down trays, no charging points. These are basic features that matter to anyone trying to work while travelling, but they were missing from my train. On a cold, wet, winter's day the carriage was absolutely freezing. By the time I arrived, my toes were numb and my hands were purple with cold.

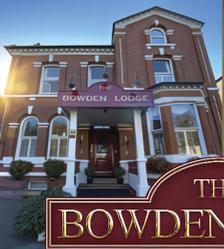
This poor service matters because transport is not just about getting from A to B. It shapes the economic geography of our country. When a rail service is unreliable, slow, expensive, and uncomfortable, it quietly limits people's choices. It discourages employers from recruiting locally. It makes commuting unviable. It removes options. Southport deserves better than that. This is not about blaming staff on the ground, who do their best in difficult circumstances. But it is about recognising that sustained underinvestment and poor strategic decisions have left this route lagging behind where it needs to be.

My constituents have been telling me since before I was even elected that this service is not remotely good enough. They are right and, as Southport's MP, I am determined to change this. I have raised these issues directly with the train operator, Northern, and with ministers. I will continue pressing for improvements in reliability, frequency, rolling stock, and passenger comfort. I am also making the case that towns like Southport should not be treated as peripheral, but as integral parts of a wider regional economy that includes both Manchester and Liverpool.

Office of Patrick Hurley MP House of Commons, SW1A 0AA

Email: patrick.hurley.mp@parliament.uk

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Serves 2 Ready in 30 minutes

INGREDIENTS

- 1 medium onion – finely chopped
- A large knob of fresh ginger finely grated
- 3 tbsp korma paste
- 300ml chicken stock
- 5 tbsp of ground almonds
- 1 300g pack of frozen king prawns (or Argentinian shrimps) – cook from frozen
- 4 tbsp Greek style yoghurt
- Small handful of fresh chopped coriander
- Basmati rice to serve



METHOD

- Gently sauté the onion in butter/olive oil (whichever you prefer). Add a pinch of salt. Stir briefly then cover with a lid and fry on a medium heat for five minutes. (Do not let the onion go brown/crispy)
- Add the ginger and korma paste and fry stirring for one minute.
- Stir in the stock, cover and simmer for 10 minutes.
- Remove from heat and blend – **this is optional**, but gives a better texture and the onions thicken the sauce.
- Return to heat, stir in the ground almonds and frozen prawns and simmer for about five minutes or until the prawns are pink (ie if they are the black uncooked type) and cooked through.
- Stir in the yoghurt and coriander.
- Serve with basmati rice.

Enjoy! – you will never have another korma takeaway!

Drop-in Community Police Advice Surgeries

Luke Holden, an officer from Merseyside Police, or another officer if he is away, holds regular drop-in community police advice sessions at the Station Master's House. The surgery offers local residents the opportunity to meet the officer to discuss and receive advice on any local or neighbourhood issues and concerns. You can also seek advice on security and crime prevention measures and get guidance if you are worried about any approaches you've had that you think may be a scam.

The surgery takes place at the library every three weeks on Tuesday evenings from 5.00pm to 7.00pm. As this is a drop-in service, no appointment is needed. Please contact the Station Master's House (tel: **01704 566 992**) for the next surgery dates.

Southport & Birkdale Sports Club



Southport & Birkdale Sports Club is the leading multi-sports club in the area. Sporting members have the opportunity to concentrate on one sport or take part in all five: cricket, hockey, snooker, squash and tennis. You can play either competitively, or, in the case of squash and tennis, just socially. As the season starts for the summer sports, cricket and tennis, would you, or your children, wish to take advantage of our coaching sessions?

If you just wish to have a social membership, this allows you to use the club facilities whether it be to have a drink, at discounted prices, on a summer afternoon, watching the cricket, take a meal supplied by the renowned D'vine Catering, or attend one of the many functions arranged throughout the year.

All these functions are detailed on the Club website or you can telephone to get more information, see below

Contact: Claire Crew, Honorary Membership Secretary, email - clcrew36@gmail.com

S&B Sports Club, Trafalgar Road, Birkdale PR8 2HF Tel. 01704 569951

website www.sandbsportsclub.co.uk Email: social@sandbsportsclub.co.uk

Upcoming Sporting Events

Regardless of the freezing weather, at least two sports clubs in Southport began the New Year by resuming their preparations for major events that will take place over the next few months. In July, the attention of the world's media will be focused on the Open Golf Championship at Royal Birkdale. But two months prior to Rory McIlroy, Scottie Scheffler and an entourage of thousands arriving in the village, cricket fans will be turning up to watch Lancashire take on Worcestershire in a Rothesay County Championship match at Trafalgar Road.

Southport and Birkdale Sports Club chair David Salt, cricket chair Jordan Bell and a battalion of volunteers have already begun to prepare for the game, which will be played from **15-18 May**, with demand for corporate hospitality packages expected to be particularly strong.

"We are delighted to welcome top-class county cricket back to the club," said an S&B spokesman. "We have a longstanding reputation for hosting first-class fixtures, with players and spectators alike praising the quality of the wicket, facilities and atmosphere. And we're pleased the fixture forms part of Lancashire's ongoing commitment to taking championship cricket out to clubs across the county. The match promises to be a highlight of the local sporting calendar and another example of the club's ability to host major sporting events."

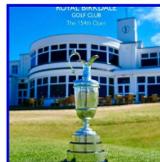
A limited number of hospitality spaces will be available across the first three days of the match. Anyone interested in reserving or registering their interest in booking a table in the marquee can do so by emailing Jordan Bell (jord.b@hotmail.co.uk)

For further updates, ticket information, and hospitality details, supporters are encouraged to follow S&B and Lancashire's social media channels.

Things are warming up for The Open

Henry James

The Open Golf Championship will be returning to Southport and Royal Birkdale for the eleventh time this July. It is nine years since the event was last staged in the resort and the winner that year was the American Jordan Spieth. The Open was first held at Royal Birkdale, in 1954 when the Australian Peter Thomson won the first of his five Open titles.



American golfers have done well at Royal Birkdale, with past Open winners at the course including Arnold Palmer, Lee Trevino, Johnny Miller, Tom Watson, and Mark O'Meara. Palmer's win at the course in 1961 is remembered for the six-iron he hit from deep rough near a bush to salvage a par. His victory also encouraged more Americans to make the journey across the Atlantic to compete in The Open.

Among the favourites to win this year will be Southport golfer Tommy Fleetwood. His best finish at The Open was when he came second at the 2019 event at Royal Portrush. The 34-year-old has 12 professional wins but has yet to win a major. However, last year he won the Tour Championship on the PGA tour and the FedEx Cup, taking home a massive \$10 million prize.

The town's hotels are expected to be full during The Open week and the village is likely to be buzzing with activity. Last year's Open was held at Royal Portrush in Northern Ireland, and the event's organisers, the R&A, predicted it brought £89.2 million of economic impact to the country



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CHECK OUT OUR 5* REVIEWS ON TRUSTPILOT

Pet Corner

by Paul Crowther

Seymour came into our life from above and, by that, I mean he fell off a roof. I should explain that Seymour was a seagull chick whose parents had nested on the roof of a flat we owned in Conwy. The slope on the roof meant that as soon as Seymour ventured out of his nest, he slipped off and landed in our back yard. We found him when we arrived for a weekend stay, a scrawny intruder wandering around our patio. I knew that his parents would probably still be around and would continue to feed him, so we left him well alone.

However, Seymour's parents were conspicuous by their absence, and we realised that without our intervention his outlook was bleak. We made the decision to take Seymour back with us to Birkdale and rear him ourselves. Once home, the fun and games started as our seagull-husbandry skills were non-existent. We created a compound for him on our patio but were conscious that Seymour was a wild bird, and as such we had to be careful not to create a tame seagull. One thing we felt confident about was his diet because seagulls are not renowned for having a discerning palate. Seymour, however, was surprisingly fussy. After a lot of trial and error we found that raw fish fingers were his idea of a square meal - but only if the breadcrumbs were removed - obviously.

Against the odds Seymour thrived, soon developing into a handsome chap. In no time at all he was able to jump out of his pen and suddenly his new enclosure was our walled back garden which he explored enthusiastically. We were preparing ourselves for his inevitable departure with the feeling of a job well done, when an unexpected spanner was thrown in the works. One evening my wife heard Seymour making a frightful racket. The cause was a fox who was closing in on a distressed Seymour. She shouted at the fox, who wisely retreated back over our garden wall. We knew, however, that this would not be the end of the fox's interest in Seymour, so we started a vigil to keep him safe. We even moved our mattress into the kitchen, taking turns to sleep, whilst the other kept watch.

The fox returned at daybreak a few days later and, before we could react, Seymour took matters into his own hands/wings. A few flaps of his newly-feathered pinions and he was up, up and away, flying towards the rising sun, leaving behind a frustrated fox and two teary humans. Seymour never returned and we like to think that he managed to hook up with a local flock of seagulls and prospered. We still find ourselves occasionally looking at a seagull hoping that it will wink back at us, acknowledging a previous existence as Seymour, before flying off to pull fish-and-chip wrappers from a public bin!

Printing and Copying Services at Birkdale Community Hub and Library

Do you know that Birkdale Community Hub and Library offers printing and copying services at the Station Master's House? You can print from your phone or from one of the computers at the library for just 10p per page, in colour or black and white, single or double sided. Photocopying is the same price. We also offer a laminating service at 50p per page.

A Local Doctor writes: Sunlight: A Simple Daily Boost for Health

In recent years, many of us have spent more time indoors than ever before. While cosy homes and modern lighting have their benefits, there's growing evidence that regular exposure to natural daylight plays an important role in our health and wellbeing.

Sunlight does far more than help us make vitamin D. When daylight enters our eyes and skin, it helps set our internal body clock (our "circadian rhythm"), which influences sleep quality, energy levels, mood, and even metabolism. Just a few minutes of outdoor light in the morning can help the body wake up properly and improve sleep later that night.

Even on cloudy days, daylight contains beneficial wavelengths that support our cells' energy production and circulation. Studies suggest that short, regular outdoor breaks may help lower blood pressure, improve mood, and support immune health. Importantly, these benefits don't require long sunbathing sessions — consistency matters more than duration. Of course, balance is key. We should avoid sunburn, especially in summer, and use common sense when UV levels are high. But for most of the year in the UK, brief daily exposure is both safe and beneficial.

So, whether it's a morning walk, a quick trip into the garden, or simply pausing outside with a cup of tea, letting daylight into your routine is one of the simplest (and free!) ways to support your health.

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What's happening at Birkdale Community Library?

Groups that meet here on a regular basis include: Rhyme Time, Story Time, Shared Reading, Knit & Natter, Lego Club, Computer Club, and Junior Chess Club, most of which are free to join. We also host drop-in sessions for you to meet local councillors and Merseyside police officers.



The library charity organises fundraising events every few weeks with all profits helping to support our activities, including a music evening in April and regular quiz nights and special events we host around Birkdale during the year. Also join us at our Easter Open Morning on Saturday 4th April (books, cakes and children's knits for sale).

Our information board, just inside the library, displays posters of what is happening in the library and elsewhere in the area, eg U3a meetings, singing groups, talks, walking groups, etc.

For information about what is happening at the library and details about our fundraising events and group activities, please call in to the Station Master's House (next to the station) and speak to our volunteers or contact us on:

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BIRKDALE NEWS Sonya Kelly, Labour Councillor for Birkdale Ward writes:

BIKE MARKING EVENTS: Sefton Police ran a bike marking event just after Christmas in Bedford Park, hoping to help those who had new bikes for Christmas take that extra step to protect their bikes. The bike register is there to help deter thieves as well as reunite bikes with their owners. If you want to see more events like this then please get in touch with me or your local policing team. Sonya.kelly@sefton.gov.uk

NEW PEDESTRIAN WARNING LIGHT: I am pleased to say the new pedestrian warning lights at the level crossing on Crescent Road have now been installed after my request for safety measures to be improved for pedestrians. Crescent Road is a single barrier crossing which works well for vehicles but not for pedestrians. It is a small improvement for pedestrian safety and hopefully, being a flashing light at eyelevel, provides a visual indicator along with the vehicle warning lights and alarm. I will continue to contact Network Rail regarding the need for double barriers.

BIRKDALE SIGNAL BOX: Following enquiries about the state of the signal box in Birkdale village I have contacted Network Rail. Their response was disappointing and a little vague; external refurbishment will take place between 2026 -2027. There is no fixed date for these works to be carried out. I will endeavour to chase this up in a couple of months to try and find out what exactly they intend to do and when.

SUPPORTING FAMILIES AT A DIFFICULT TIME: A new policy has been introduced by Sefton Council granting full exemption from Council Tax for householders where a resident has received a terminal diagnosis. Householders will receive exemptions from the date a diagnosis is confirmed. For further details please go to www.sefton.gov.uk/Terminal-Illness-Discount

PUBLIC SPACE PROTECTION ORDER (PSPO): PSPOs are designed to stop anti-social behaviour in a public space when that behaviour is detrimental to the quality of life in the local community. The last PSPO for Southport which ran for three years was not as efficient as needed so a new one has been created with tighter restrictions. Some of the issues covered are street drinking, illegal drug use, abusive behaviour and language and spitting. The new PSPO will hopefully give our local policing teams and Community Safety and Engagement teams the tools to do their jobs effectively in making our town safe for everyone.

Sefton Councillor Surgeries

The Labour Councillor also representing Birkdale Ward will hold midday surgeries at **Birkdale Community Hub & Library** on the **first Wednesday of every month between 1 and 2 pm.**

Lib Dem Councillors representing Birkdale Ward (i.e. Birkdale to landward of the railway line) and Dukes Ward (Shoreside Birkdale as well as Town Centre) will hold evening surgeries at **Birkdale Community Hub & Library** on the **3rd Tuesday of every month between 6 and 7 pm.**

No need to book, just turn up to discuss any issues you may have.

Warhammer: table-top gaming re-imagined

Many years ago, men (and they were usually men) played re-enactments of old battles, using model soldiers and artillery, horses and tanks, depending on the historical period. They threw dice to determine who played when and what the outcome of a particular move would be. They often painted their own model soldiers and created suitable battlefield layouts on home table-tops.

Then in 1983 the quiet world of table-top gaming was given a giant boost when Games Workshop, a UK-based company, first introduced Warhammer. Instead of re-enacting old battles, the company developed new weird characters and fantasy settings that would encourage players to role-play new epic battles. Players often create and paint their own model characters who operate in various realms, each with its unique lore and setting. Their imagination is given free rein, taking on roles as "warriors" or "goblins", navigating treacherous and fantastic landscapes and applying deep strategic thinking to achieve victory.



The Warhammer franchise has expanded beyond tabletop roots to include video games, novels, comics and other media. Fans can explore various settings and realms, and in recent years players have been offered a fresh take on classic characters while maintaining their beloved favourites from previous versions. With its rich history and ongoing updates to keep fans engaged, it's no wonder that Warhammer remains one of the most popular tabletop gaming experiences available today.

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We're Looking for Readers at Home

Birkdale Community Hub & Library runs a **Books at Home** visiting service for local residents who are unable to get to a library and would like to borrow from our extensive range of books. The service is free and working well. At the moment, our six volunteers visit around 70 readers, some at home but most in residential care homes. Our volunteers find out what type of books are of interest and provide a selection from which to choose. The readers like a mixture of large print and regular print. One of our first clients is an avid reader and, so far, has borrowed well over 300 books. Some readers are asking for audio books too as their eyesight starts to fail and we are planning to lend CD players for listeners in the near future.

We are keen to expand the service to those living on their own at home who like to read, would be interested in a new range of books, but find it difficult to get out. So, if you are living on your own, or know someone living on their own or in a care home who would like to receive a visit from our volunteers, please email us at:

homevisit@thestationmastershouse.co.uk or call the library on 01704 566992



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Computer Corner by Adam

What is a "Local LLM" and Why Should You Care?

You've no doubt heard a lot about ChatGPT and other AI assistants such as Google's Gemini and Microsoft's Copilot. A local LLM (Large Language Model) is essentially the same thing, but it runs entirely on your computer—no internet required, and no tech company watching over your shoulder. Think of it a bit like going to a library to ask a librarian your questions. Running a local LLM is like having your own personal librarian living in your study area.

Why Would You Want to Do This?

- Your conversations never leave your computer—not a single word goes to the internet
- Perfect for discussing personal matters, health questions, or financial information
- No one is collecting or analysing what you type
- Works even if you have no internet access

How can I try it? You'll need an app to run the local LLM. An easy place to start is with **GPT4All** which can be downloaded at <https://www.nomic.ai/gpt4all>

Once you've installed it:

- Click "Start Chatting"
- Click "+ Add Model" or look for a "Download Models" button
- You'll see a list of available AI models

Which model should I try? It's important to look for the smallest possible models to start with and then you can experiment with larger ones if your computer can handle it. Try **Llama 3.2 1B Instruct** or any other small model between 1B and 3B. The great thing is GPT4All recognises your computer's capabilities and will state clearly below the download button if it thinks the model won't run well on your computer.

Signs a model will work well on your computer:

- File size under 4GB
- "Q4" in the model name
- Numbers like "1B", "2B", or "3B" in the name
- Words like "mini", "tiny", or "small" in the name

Some things to be aware of: *Remember that, whatever model you use, the information it sends you is like a snapshot of knowledge from a moment in time, and things may have changed since you asked your question. So, if you need up-to-date information you may not want to use a Local LLM.*

Always sense check the output as they can and will make mistakes.

When not using a Local LLM, always consider what personal or sensitive information you might be sharing with tech giants.

Using Your Local AI

Once you've downloaded a model:

- Select it from your model list in GPT4All
- Type your question in the chat box
- Press Enter and wait

Now you have your own local AI!



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The Dawn Chorus

Hillside Birder

*Blackbird singing in the dead of night,
Take these broken wings and learn to fly.
All your life,
You were only waiting for the moment to arise.
(Lennon & McCartney)*

Winter birdsong is quite sparse, mainly from Robins (*Erithacus rubecula*), but in late February and early March the “overture” of the changing of seasons as many other species add their voices is a cue many of us only pick up subconsciously.

The Dawn Chorus grows in intensity through the next months and will reach a peak in late April and early May; International Dawn Chorus Day being marked on the first Sunday in May. It combines birds defending new territories in anticipation of breeding, attracting potential mates or calling in flocks.

A very good resource can be found at wildlifetrusts.org/dawn-chorus-day which describes the appearance and gives audio clips of the songs of the main contributors. The Blackbird (*Turdus merula*) is often one of the first to give voice – hence the Beatles’ song. This bird is one of our most familiar and widely distributed, particularly in winter when our resident population is more than doubled by an influx from as far away as Ukraine. Many other species join in as the light grows with the sun rising in the sky; even the raucous Woodpigeon (*Columba palumbus*) will make itself heard.

So, one morning set your alarm for “crack of sparrow” and enjoy the wonder of the variety of our native choirs.

I-Spy – what to watch (and listen) out for in parks and gardens

The Blackcap (*Sylvia atricapilla*) is one of our finest songsters, described by Gilbert White as having a “full, sweet, deep, loud and wild pipe”. In recent years some of its number have given up on their annual migration and remain over winter, but most arrive from their African wintering grounds in late March and early April.



A small, skulky bird, both sexes are mostly olive-drab (the lot of warblers - often known as Little Brown Jobs- LBJs) but have a distinct coloured cap, black in the male and chestnut brown in the female.

Over the next few weeks they can be found anywhere in parks and gardens, usually in the shrubs and bushes, more often heard than seen, one of the unmistakable markers of Spring.

Children's Emergency A&E: decision soon

Update from John Pugh, LibDem Councillor for Dukes Ward

It's crunch time for A&E reconfiguration and the final decision where our children go in an emergency is nigh.

I sit on a joint Scrutiny Committee that examines the proposals. It consists of three Sefton councillors and three from West Lancs. The choice could not be more stark. There are two proposals before us – all A&E is in Southport OR all A&E is in Ormskirk. No prizes for guessing the points of disagreement between Sefton and West Lancs councillors.

What is impressive though is the amount of data we have before us about clinical risk, staffing, finances, buildings, transport, patient preference, consultation findings etc. The clear balance of the data-driven argument is tilted in favour of Southport. The cost of moving all A&E to Ormskirk or doing nothing is so much greater and more clinically risky.

No issue in the last 30 years has been higher profile than this since Children's A&E left town, but when that happened the decision was based on a simple report (the Shields Report) that contained all too little data. One thing though that that report said, and that we are still told today, is that the winding road link between Southport and Ormskirk is a problem for emergency vehicles. However, as I pointed out to the Lancashire team, it's their road to improve (8 of the 8.3 miles between hospitals is in West Lancs). We in Sefton just have to put up with it!

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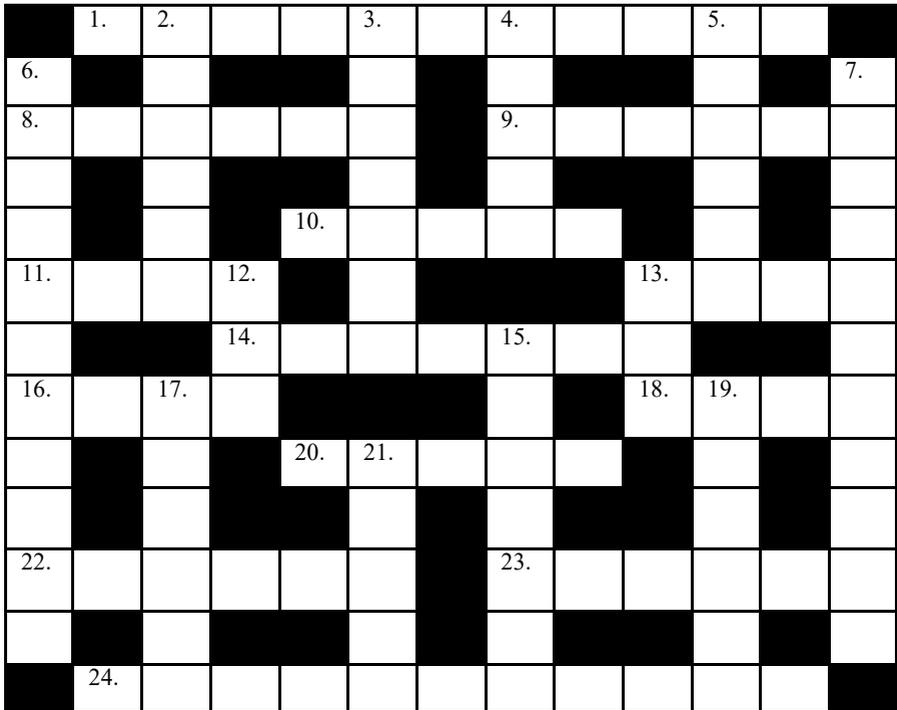
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Springtime Crossword by Dandyman *Answers on page 38*



ACROSS

1. Rabbit that brings gifts to children. (6,5)
8. Pupa or cocoon of a social insect that lives in colonies. (3, 3)
9. Mollusc often eaten with tabasco or a squeeze of lemon. (6)
10. Tropical evergreen trees whose leaves are used in some churches at Eastertime. (5)
11. Flower that is often given as a sign of love. (4)
13. They are used to support balls at our Southport Links courses. (4)
14. Rhythm and flow of music. (7)
16. Short for information (4)
18. Short for ammunition. (4)
20. Shines.... like a candle in the dark. (5)
22. Completely ridiculous. (6)
23. Tractor's motor. (6)
24. Springtime flowering plant known for its clouds of tiny vibrant flowers, usually blue. (6-2-3)

DOWN

2. Flowers that bud from late spring, and their name means star. (6)
3. Country known for its green and pleasant land. (7)
4. Blossom, flower or flourish. (5)
5. Stinging plant. (6)
6. The larva of a moth or butterfly and very hungry in children's books! (11)
7. A chirping insect, and a micropub in Hillside. (11)
12. Type of warrior who is friendly to the environment. (3)
13. Hot or iced drink. (3)
15. The beginning of a period of schooling. (3, 4)
17. Wall painting.... rhymes with a supermarket. (6)
19. North American country famous for enchiladas and tacos. (6)
21. Spoon used to serve soup. (5)

In the Footsteps of Mr Darcy or A Visit to East Derbyshire

East Derbyshire, nestled on the eastern edge of the Peak District offers a fascinating blend of rural tranquillity, historical interest and natural beauty. My recent visit to this captivating part of England proved to be an enriching experience, filled with scenic landscapes, warm community spirit, and a touch of adventure. This was my first visit to this part of our beautiful country, and I was particularly attracted by the fact that at least two of the stately homes I visited have been used in adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice*.

We stayed on a working farm in a converted railway carriage which turned out to be more snug than expected but nonetheless was quite comfortable. The view was stunning – overlooking a valley with sheep and horses. Although not far from the M1 motorway, which could be heard humming faintly in the distance, the situation was rural – dark skies at night! We were close to the small town of Clay Cross where supermarkets, pubs and restaurants were to be found in abundance.

But I digress – I will not further delay my pursuit of Mr Darcy, dear Readers! We spent a day at Chatsworth, which belongs to the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire and is every bit as grand as you might expect, filled with priceless works of art, grand State Rooms and fascinating family stories. Debo Mitford, the youngest of the Mitford sisters, became Duchess of Devonshire in the 1940s and it was during her time as Duchess that the house was opened to the public in 1949.



The house was used for Pemberley in the film adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* and I am delighted to inform readers that copies of the bust of Mr Darcy (Matthew McFadyen) are available to purchase in the Gift Shop.

The gardens are a world unto themselves: formal parterres, wild woodland, tumbling cascades, and even a maze to get lost in. We didn't actually get lost in the maze although it was tricky to find the way out!

Also on the itinerary was a visit to Lyme Park which was Pemberley in the television adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* with Colin Firth. Unfortunately, as I had neglected to check the opening times of the House, we arrived on a day when it was shut to the public, but the grounds (and especially the pond, which featured in THAT scene!), shops and café were open to the public, so all was not lost.

For those of you not quite so enthralled by stately homes, Crich Tramway Village offers a very different kind of heritage experience. Enthusiastic volunteers, often dressed in period attire, add authenticity and warmth to the visit. The highlight, of course, is riding the lovingly restored trams as they rattle their way through the Derbyshire countryside – a penny is bestowed upon you at the entrance for this express purpose.



The National Tramway Museum, housed within the village, brings the history of tram travel to life with fascinating exhibits and interactive displays. There is also an old fashioned pub, brought from Stoke-on Trent and reconstructed here, a café, an old-fashioned sweet shop where you can bemoan the fact that chocolate bars have definitely shrunk over the past fifty years and of course the ubiquitous gift shop!

Hardwick Hall, built by the redoubtable Bess of Hardwick (Elizabeth, Countess of Shrewsbury) was another of our visits. As you approach the Hall you can see her initials (E.S. Elizabeth Shrewsbury) on top of the Hall, in case anyone was in any doubt! The Hall's famed phrase, "*Hardwick Hall, more glass than wall*", rings true: its enormous windows seem to let the Derbyshire sunlight flood through at every turn. Inside, the long gallery stuns with its tapestries and period furnishings. The sense of Elizabeth's ambition is palpable, and the formal gardens, with their neatly clipped hedges and colourful borders, provide a peaceful space for reflection. Bess also began the building at Chatsworth: she married into the Cavendish family who later became the Dukes of Devonshire.



Last but not least, Kedleston Hall, designed by Robert Adam in the 18th century, is a splendid example of Palladian architecture, with a majestic portico and sweeping drive that sets the scene for grandeur. Inside, the Marble Hall and Saloon impress with their scale and opulence. The Hall's extensive grounds—complete with lakes, follies, and woodland walks—are perfect for a leisurely stroll. The house, although administered by the National Trust, is still the residence of the Curzon family, whose descendants still live in one of the wings of the house. It was used for the filming of *The Duchess*, the film about Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, who lived in...yes, you've guessed it – Chatsworth! I would recommend East Derbyshire as a destination – there are many more (non-literary) places to visit there!



Eileen Downes

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Something to Sing About?

The Wayfarers Chorus was founded in 1989 and was given permission to use the name by Arthur Pedlar, whose family owned the Wayfarers Arcade at the time. We sing 'a cappella', four-part harmony with no musical accompaniment and therefore are very different, both in sound and performance. Our audiences love us and over the years we have raised many thousands of pounds for national and local charities. Our current nominated charity is the Southport Spinal Unit Action Group.

Originally an all-male chorus, we have opened our doors to ladies this year and now have three in the chorus. However, since Covid, we are finding it challenging to recruit new members.

What are we looking for? Men and women who like to sing, of course, but also like to be part of a positive team and have fun. We offer training to newcomers so, even if you don't know much about our way of singing, why not come along and give us a try?

Contact us on 07840 918131 or via our website at wayfarerschorus.com.



On being a Sefton Councillor

Iain Brodie-Brown, LibDem Councillor for Birkdale Ward

Thanks to Birkdale Buzz readers who contacted me after my article about homelessness in our town in the December edition. How can local councillors influence decisions? Sefton puts the power in the hands of a nine-person cabinet. Their meetings are often short and key information is not available to other councillors. The challenge, and the big responsibility, for the other 57 councillors is how to hold the cabinet to account.

There are ways that councillors can probe the efficiency and cost effectiveness of Sefton. There are motions and a period of public questions. Regrettably that can't always get at the big strategic decisions. Here are two examples where it can work. A family who had bought an electric car approached me wanting to know why Sefton was languishing at the foot of the league table for those Councils who had installed charging points. A series of questions over several meetings elicited that, although money was available, Sefton had not drawn it down. They are on to it now.

The second example is the 14-year campaign to get Sefton to live-stream its meetings. The vast majority of Councils put that in place years ago. By persistent challenge Sefton finally let the cameras in, and you can now see what goes on in the Council chamber. I firmly believe that will improve the accountability and quality of Council decisions. The videos are at: https://sefton.public-i.tv/core/portal/webcast_interactive/1038618 More remains to be done to open up the Council and next time I will look at Council motions.



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SOME LIGHT ON THE SUBJECT by local artist Graham McQuade

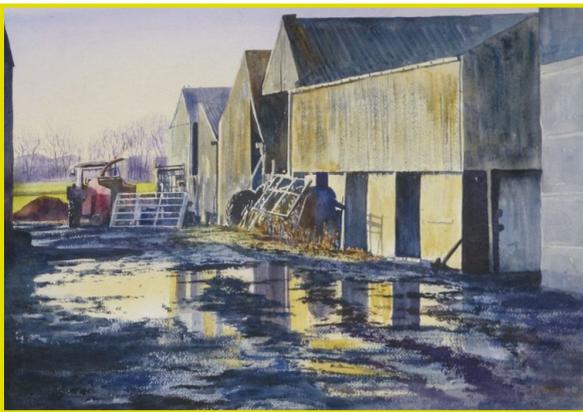
Like many people, I love days of bright sunlight. As a painter, it can twist the mundane into the marvellous. A break in the clouds unleashes dancing light and fleeting shadows, laying out new visual opportunities, forcing me to pause to look a little closer. These revelations can jolt the imagination much like a hint of scent or aroma arousing distant associations and thoughts. Anyway, that's what I hope for when I go out sketching.

Sometimes you see these revelations in the work of others. Velasquez's presentation painting to the court of Spain's Henry IV, 'The Water Seller of Seville', has at its centre an illuminated glass of clear water. This attention-grabbing glass is being handed by the old water-seller to a thirsty young boy. I was entranced by the rendering of that glass and its contents and the run of water glistening down the earthenware jug from the pour.

The painting is now held at Apsley House in London, once the residence of the Duke of Wellington. It was a gift for ridding Spain and Portugal of the French army under Joseph Bonaparte in 1813. In the same room hangs another of Velasquez's paintings, a copy of the portrait of Pope Innocent X, a man who appears neither pious nor innocent, even when viewed from this, his favoured side. Francis Bacon had his own take on the painting, using it as a basis for his Screaming Popes series, notably the 1953 painting.

An early Turner Prize winner, Howard Hodgkin, had the curious practice of painting the canvas in its frame which itself got painted over as part of the work. The paintings mainly centre on partially and fully-abstracted recollections of places and occurrences in his life. One painting of his particularly grabbed my attention. It was a painting entitled 'Glimpse', a quite abstract work that made me recall the feeling you get when you see something arresting in the corner of your eye, causing a second look. Sometimes that second look reveals nothing; had the event passed in the time it took you to turn your head, or was it never there? Sometimes, though, it remains.

I had this experience as I cycled along Segars Lane towards Halsall one bright morning in search of sketching subjects. In the corner of my eye I detected a flash of interest which made me stop, turn around and look closer. What I saw, to most would appear a muddy farmyard surrounded by uninteresting buildings. To me though, the pattern of reflected light between dark tracks of mud and manure with the distant source of light sneaking between the buildings, was a scene worth painting.



Definitely the kind of subject I hope for when I venture out a bright sunlit day.

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Housing Perspectives: a professional view from Karen Potter

Buying your first home is an exciting step and it is important to be prepared. It can be confusing if you don't know where to start but there is a great deal of valuable advice available from local professionals and, of course, online. These few simple tips at the outset can make the world of difference for you later.

It's worth considering a Lifetime ISA for your savings because there is a Government bonus to put towards your first home. Then you should speak with a Mortgage Broker to study the mortgage market for the best deal and make sure you know exactly how much you can afford, before you start viewing, to avoid disappointment. Also, it is important you set aside finances to cover the costs of your Conveyancer, Mortgage Broker (if applicable) and Surveyor. Make sure you have your bank statements and identification ready as this will later be requested by the Estate Agent, Mortgage Broker and Conveyancer. It is best to supply these as soon as they are requested.

Now it is time to start looking! Arrange as many viewings as possible to work out those all-important "*must haves*" for your new home. Remember, you can improve a property but you cannot move it; location is of paramount importance. Prepare a list to enable you to ask lots of questions at those viewings, for example: What are the neighbours like? What work has been carried out recently? What are the running costs? Good Luck!

**Mrs Jones
is delighted!**



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The cost-of-living crisis means that it's more important than ever to make sure you are receiving all the government benefits that you are entitled to, such as Attendance Allowance.

Let me show you how you might be able to get regular financial assistance to help you remain independent in your own home for as long as you wish.



Carolyn Gorman
Life Navigator
Grey Matters Consultancy
Southport



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Buying Second-Hand Electric Vehicles

by John Sharp

As a small independent used-car dealer, I've seen a clear rise in interest around electric vehicles (EVs), and it's easy to understand why. More drivers are looking for affordable ways to switch to electric, and the used market often gives them that chance. Many EVs depreciate quicker than traditional cars, which means I can offer models at prices that attract buyers who may have been priced out of new electric options. On top of that, customers like the idea of lower running costs, fewer mechanical issues, and the convenience of home charging.

Choosing the right type of EV to suit your driving needs is very important and there is a lot of choice:

Battery Electric Vehicles: An Electric Vehicle (EV) or Battery Electric vehicle (BEV) is a car powered by only a battery. These vehicles have no other energy source and must be charged by plugging in at home to a wall box or to a public charging station.

Plug-in Hybrid Electric Vehicles: The Plug-in Hybrid Electric Vehicle (PHEV) has both a battery and a 'normal' petrol or diesel engine. These vehicles can go shorter distances on their battery alone with the petrol or diesel engine taking over when the battery runs out of charge. To charge the battery you would plug this car in, similar to an all-electric vehicle.

Hybrid Electric Vehicles: Similar to the PHEV, the Hybrid Electric Vehicle (HEV) has both a petrol or diesel engine and a battery. However, the HEV cannot be plugged in to charge. The battery charges through regenerative braking or using internal combustion engines. The battery in this car will be used at low speeds with the petrol or diesel engine taking over as the car gets faster.

Mild Hybrid Electric Vehicles (MHEV) are powered by a system that harvests and stores energy normally lost during vehicle deceleration and intelligently redeploys the energy to support the engine. Similar to a HEV, but the MHEV's electric motor isn't powerful enough to power the car on its own, it can only assist the engine.

The different types of EVs can have lots of advantages and be an attractive second hand purchase. But selling used EVs isn't without its challenges, especially for dealerships like mine. The biggest hurdle is after-sales support. Unlike larger franchised dealers, I don't have specialist EV technicians, high-voltage tools, or the workshop setup to carry out complex electric repairs. When a buyer asks about long-term maintenance or battery concerns, I have to be upfront about the limits of what I can offer and explore possible main dealer maintenance packages

Despite these challenges, I still see potential in stocking the right used EVs. For me, it comes down to transparency and selecting cars that I feel confident standing behind. While I may not have the full repair facilities of a big dealership, I can offer honest advice, realistic expectations, and a personal level of service that many customers appreciate. With the market continuing to grow, I believe there's a place for independents like myself — as long as we approach EVs with care and clarity.

Springtime Crossword Answers

ACROSS

- 1. Easter Bunny
- 8. Ant Egg
- 9. Oyster
- 10. Palms
- 11. Rose
- 13. Tees
- 14. Cadence
- 16. Info
- 18. Ammo
- 20. Glows
- 22. Absurd
- 23. Engine
- 24. Forget-Me-Not

DOWN

- 2. Asters
- 3. England
- 4. Blooms
- 5. Nettle
- 6. Caterpillar
- 7. Grasshopper
- 12. Eco
- 13. Tea
- 15. New term
- 17. Fresco
- 19. Mexico
- 21. Ladle

Friends of Rotten Row

2025 was a tremendous year for Friends of Rotten Row (FORR). For the fourteenth year running we achieved Level 5 Outstanding in the Britain in Bloom “*It’s Your Neighbourhood*” award. Since 2015 we have held Community Green Flag status, which recognises and rewards well-managed parks and green spaces, and we have retained this for another year.



In 2024 FORR were asked to enter a show garden in the Southport Flower show. A new challenge for us! We were delighted to obtain a Silver Award and in

2025 we bettered this by achieving GOLD, for our display ‘*Gardening on a Shoestring*’.

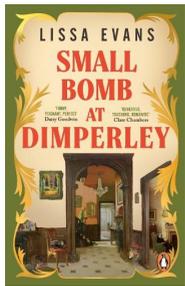
2025 was an amazing year for the town of Southport and FORR were honoured to be involved. Along with Lord Street in Bloom, Botanic Gardens and Hesketh Park, we were part of Southport’s entry for the **National Britain in Bloom Best Coastal award**. Up against tough competition from Llandudno, Jersey and Whitehaven, we were delighted when Southport won Gold in this category and then a further surprise when the best overall winner was announced – **Southport**. What a fabulous achievement for our town. **So, would you like to be part of this award-winning team?**

We will be starting back in March (weather dependent). No experience necessary, we all muck in and tools are provided. You will find us on the Row Monday and Thursday 10.00 – 3.30pm. Join us for the morning or afternoon or stay all day. We finish up with a cup of tea and a piece of homemade cake. For more information contact Seonaid McNab 07840 136124. **We look forward to seeing you.**

New books in Birkdale Community Hub & Library

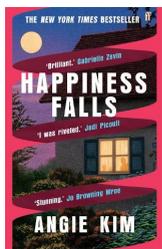
For a complete list of new titles go to <https://thestationmastershouse.slls.online/>

Small Bomb at Dimperley. Lissa Evans



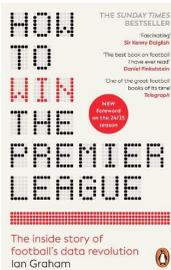
It's 1945, and Corporal Valentine Vere-Thissett, aged 23, is on his way home. But 'home' is Dimperley, built in the 1500s, vast and dilapidated, up to its eaves in debt and half-full of fly-blown taxidermy and dependent relatives. Following the death of his heroic older brother – Valentine, who is now Sir Valentine, is responsible for the whole place. To Valentine, it's a millstone; to Zena Baxter, who has never really had a home before being evacuated there with her small daughter, it's a place of wonder and sentiment. Funny, sharp and touching, *Small Bomb at Dimperley* is both a love story and a bittersweet portrait of an era of profound loss, and renewal.

Happiness Falls. Angie Kim *NY Times bestseller*



Mia Parkson's life is turned upside down when her stay-at-home dad, the family's anchor, goes missing. The only witness? Eugene - her younger, nonspeaking teenage brother. As the police struggle for leads, and her mother and twin brother struggle to keep things together at home, Mia gains access to key clues about her father's disappearance. Headstrong, hyper-analytical, and with secrets of her own, she decides to try and solve the case. But could Mia's impulsive actions be putting her whole family in danger?

How to Win the Premier league. Ian Graham *Sunday Times Bestseller*



Between 2012 and 2023, Ian Graham worked as Liverpool FC's Director of Research. His tenure coincided with the club's greatest period of success since the 1980s, including winning the Premier League in 2020 – Liverpool's first league title after an agonising three decades. Graham reveals the fascinating data that informed some of the club's most pivotal moments of the past decade, from the appointment of Jurgen Klopp as manager in 2015 to the signing of Mohamed Salah in 2017. He shares groundbreaking insight into the modern game, including how a season largely played behind closed doors transformed our understanding of home team advantage..

Don't miss out on a good book ...

We've currently got 50 books on our new titles list, and it is updated regularly as we add more. Unsurprisingly, new titles are very popular with our library members so to secure that new bestseller, why not log into your library account at <https://thestationmastershouse.slls.online/>, search a list of new books, search the library catalogue, and reserve the book you want. For the digitally terrified, our volunteers will be happy to place reservations for you. We'll also let you know when your reservation is ready to collect .

Important Numbers and Information

Birkdale Community Hub & Library: 01704 566 992

BCHL website: www.thestationmastershouse.co.uk

Station Master's House: 2 Liverpool Road, Birkdale, PR8 4AR

Liverpool Road Methodist Church: Liverpool Road, PR8 4PD

Fire, Ambulance, Police emergency	999
Police (non-emergency)	101
NHS Health Advice	111
Out of Hours GP service	01704 395 755
Southport Police Station	0151 709 6010
Southport Community Fire Station	0151 296 6650
United Utilities (emergency)	0345 672 3723
Gas emergency (if gas smell)	0800 111 999
Sefton Council Services	0345 140 0845
National Rail Enquiries	03457 484 950
Southport Citizens Advice	0808 278 7841
Benefits Enquiry Line	0151 934 3660
Job Centre Plus	0800 1690190
Passport Advice Line	0300 222 0000
Samaritans	116 123
RSPCA Southport	01704 567 624

Defibrillators in Birkdale

- in the Merseyrail Ticket Office
- on the side wall of Samuels & Co
- on the side wall of Morrisons Daily
- St Peter's Church
- Busy Bees Nursery, Lulworth Road
- Bedford Park
- Liverpool Road Methodist Church next to the entrance to the main hall
- Salvation Army, Shakespeare Street
- S&B Sports Club Trafalgar Road
- The Lifeboat Shop
- Birkdale Primary School
- Between Hillside Pharmacy and the Grasshopper, Sandon Road

Social Media Links

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At the Station Master's House



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Birkdale CH&L

