



## FLOOD HAVOC

On the evening of Wednesday December 23<sup>rd</sup> 2020, traffic on the busy A48 through Westbury came to a standstill as floodwater poured through the village. The surrounding fields were already waterlogged, the brook overburdened, and presumably the nearby Severn had its own capacity problems, as the rain continued to beat down with an almost biblical intensity. Local residents couldn't recall the water reaching such a depth outside Arden's Farm for over fifty years. Motorists were stranded for hours. However, this being Westbury-on-Severn, succour and con-

solation were at hand for the weary and beleaguered travellers, as local folk rallied round to offer assistance with rescue using tractors, or accommodation and food as the Lyon and the Severn & Wye Smokery opened their doors on this dark and stormy night. Ed was comfortably stranded in Rodley while all this was going on, but poor Mrs Ed took four hours to get home from work in Gloucester, and completed the last leg from the Parish Hall thanks to the gallant intervention of David Brewer and his tractor. Others who volunteered their services to distressed travellers

were Gemma Correa, Justin Sterry, Jake Bennett and Jason Thomas. There could very well be more Good Samaritans who helped out that night, and we should be delighted to hear from anyone who has a story to tell. It is good to know, particularly in these troubling times, that the flame of community spirit burns brightly in this Parish.

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## Parish Council

**T**he December Parish Council meeting, held on Zoom, lacked something of the usual Christmas spirit, but Alan Hyett soon cheered us up by appearing on our screens as an elf, which got the meeting off to a more festive start.

After the usual formalities, we went straight on to the planning applications. Severn and Wye Smokery has applied to extend a building to accommodate two bio-mass boilers and provide workshop and staff welfare facilities and we unanimously agreed to support this application. Support was also given to a variation in the plans for a single storey extension at Ridgeway in Stantway Lane. Chairman Simon Phelps had declared an interest in the application for the enlargement of the residential curtilage and the siting of a log cabin at Boseley House, and following discussion the rest of us voted to support this application as well.

Fiona then advised us that planning permission for Ninnage Lodge and the felling of trees at The Limes had been granted. Chairman Simon then updated us on the development proposed for the area between the A40 and the A48. He had attended a meeting of the six Parish Councils involved, together with the

FoDDC's chief planning officer Nigel Gibbons and Chris McFarling, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Climate and Planning. It is hoped that the recent flooding, the traffic chaos caused by the A40 road closure at Highnam when the water main burst and the visible growing tide of opposition to the plan may be beginning to cause some doubts as to the feasibility and/or wisdom of the plan, but it is important that we all make our feelings known by writing to the District Council. Leaflets are being distributed throughout the parish about the development plan with information about how best to respond to it. You have until 29th Jan 2021 to comment and you can e-mail [localplans@fdean.gov.uk](mailto:localplans@fdean.gov.uk) or comment by letter sent to: Local Plans, Forest of Dean District Council, Council Offices, High Street, Coleford, Gloucestershire, GL16 8HG.

### **Finance**

The grass cutting contract was discussed as several tenders had been submitted, but regrettably no decision could be reached as there was insufficient detail to compare "like for like", so further information has to be sought and a decision made when this is received. Discussion regarding the precept was also deferred as much of this hinges on our grass cutting costs but Fiona was able to report that the Parish Council's accounts had been signed off by the external auditor.

**Highways** Our County Councillor Brian Robinson had joined us by this time and reported that, with less traffic on the roads during the pandemic, it has been quite a good year for getting roadworks completed. However, there are still plenty of problems and many of these seem to be down to the work by

Gigaclear, as this has changed the contours of some of the roads and verges so that the water does not run off properly. If these areas can be identified, the Highways department will sort them out. Other issues are pot holes in Lower Ley Lane and Hunt Hill, the carriageway breaking up near the White House on the A48 approaching the Dinney, flooding in several places in Northwood Green and Elton Lane and a fallen 30mph sign. The manhole covers in the village are still not as they should be which is down to either Severn Trent or Highways or both. However, the good news is that Nathan Choat from Highways had met Chairman Simon at Adsett and Highways have now cleaned out the ditches in Adsett Lane, and Mark and Ben Stephens have done a great job clearing the ditches in Church Lane.

#### **Burial Ground Extension**

Chairman Simon and Robert Worlock have had a good look at the drainage ditches and will be discussing the layout of these with the contractors. There were no specific instructions in the planning conditions about drainage methods and so a plan has to be devised to satisfy the requirements of Sport England. We also need quotes for the work from other contractors.

#### **Burial Ground**

Jerry Green has recommended crab apple trees to replace the trees that have died and so Mike Townsend has agreed to organise the purchase and planting of these.

**Play Area** After 13 years of use, some parts of the play area are beginning to look a little worse for wear and the algae currently all over the wet pour surface makes it look rather neglected. The installers, Greenfields, will be asked for

their advice about this and John Henry offered to look at possible sources of funding for repairs and improvements. John is also looking into the possibility of funding from the British Heart Foundation for a defib in the Stantway telephone kiosk.

**Footpaths** Mike Townsend reported that a new bridge has been installed on the footpath behind Frocester House and John Henry expressed thanks to Brian Robinson for all his support for the provision of gates on the riverside footpath.

**Sandbags** It was agreed that we need an easily accessible site for the provision of sandbags for parishioners to use to avoid flooding and enquiries are to be made about this.

**Other business** Pam Ensor ended up with the unenviable job of completing, on the council's behalf, the survey entitled "Safe and Social Roads," which had been sent out by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner – a rather long and detailed survey, I fear!

The next meeting will be held on Monday 18<sup>th</sup> January at 7pm on Zoom.

*Di Landon*





**T**he December meeting of the Parish Hall Management Committee is traditionally accompanied by a glass of wine and mince pies or sausage rolls, or possibly both, so in the present circumstances, Chair Jan D'Ambrogio urged members to charge their individual glasses for the upcoming Zoom meeting on December 8<sup>th</sup>. Thus I found myself seated expectantly in front of the screen, a glass of something red which Clive Tempest wouldn't consider cooking with in hand, Santa Claus beaming out from my chest region, ready to offer my counsel to the committee. I don't recall precisely what happened next. I thought I had pressed all the right keys, but the end result was less than satisfactory. I had clearly logged on to the meeting, because there was Jan speaking urgently, but noiselessly to someone. I shouted that I couldn't hear, but she ignored me and continued to talk silently to some other phantom listener. Normally in these circumstances, which are quite common, I seek help from my IT adviser (Mrs Ed), however on this occasion she was on another Zoom meeting, so I took the only course open to me. I switched off, drank the wine and went in search of a mince pie. However, Jo Barry, who took the minutes, has kindly sent them to me, so I can provide a distilled version of what was discussed. It is worth mentioning that the Hall has been closed for some time now, so not much is happening. Nevertheless, the rugby club has started

training again, although they are not using the changing rooms. Zumba classes and the Didi rugby do use the Hall, observing strict guidelines.

In the car park, Gumbies Pizzas visited in December, and made a donation to Hall funds, and Jan will be talking to 'Fish & Chips Without Gluten' about possible return visits in 2021. She also confirmed that the boiler in the changing rooms would be serviced in January, and the leak in the roof would be investigated. So, although income is much reduced, we continue to incur costs, including the running costs of the defibrillator. Nevertheless, Treasurer **Sarah Mitten** was able to report on reassuring balances, and on continuing discussions with Water Plus (Severn Trent).

#### **Severndipity Club (bar)**

It is obviously a lean time for the bar at the moment, so it is unsurprising that they reported a small loss at the end of their financial year. At the AGM all members of the Severndipity Committee were reconfirmed in office, with Gwyn Evans agreeing to assist Val Morgan-Townsend in the role of Treasurer.

#### **Odds and Ends**

Tim Smith provided an update on the ventilation in the main hall, having consulted a specialist company, and gave details of the volume of air flow needed to conform to the present Covid-19 requirements.

Mike Edginton agreed to deal with the deteriorating pot hole situation in the car park.

Jan concluded by thanking everyone for their sustained effort in a difficult year, and wished everyone a happy Christmas. Those with glasses probably raised them .

### Thoughts of Chairman Jan

Due to a night when sleep eluded me, my thoughts turned to the Parish Hall and how it had shaped my life.

My first memories would have been going to Brownies followed by Guides, Youth Club, Youth Project, Under 18 discos, Over 18 discos, Westbury Young Farmers, Westbury Players (cooking not acting), member of the Fund raising committee, bringing back Mother and Toddlers and finally member of the Parish Hall Committee and for the last 10 years taking the role of Chair.

This does not include the social activities resulting from rugby, football and cricket, and there have been many, many social gatherings - some sad, many happy.

This does sound a bit like 'This is my Life in Westbury' and I am glad that the hall was there as it has been a great venue.

During lockdown, there was a lot of clearing out done, and I was given a number of paper clippings relating to the hall dating back to the 1980's. These include names of people still on the committee today, and many more that have helped to keep the hall running, so we must be doing something right for them to be still giving up their second Tuesday of the month to come to the main Parish Hall Management Committee meetings.

However, we really do need some fresh ideas. The Hall is run like a small business and we need to keep up to date with how halls are being managed in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, especially after the year we have just had. All those on the committee are Trustees and volunteers

whose objectives are to maintain and provide for the future of the Parish Hall. There is a bar at the hall but this is run by a separate Committee and the profits from the bar are covenanted to the hall and this is basically how the hall can continue to function. The rent from our user groups makes up a small proportion of the balance needed to run the hall, but the user groups are an essential part of the hall make up.

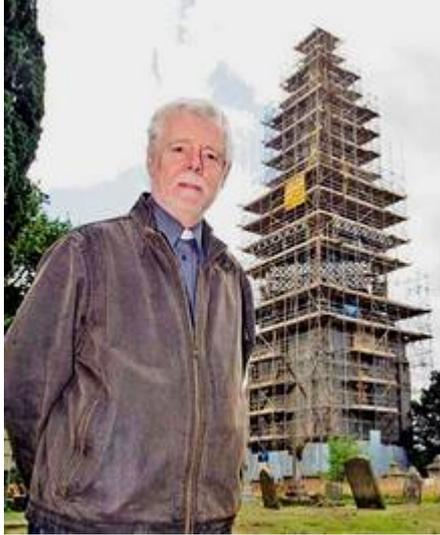
The hall is also a useful venue to meet and make new friends if you have moved in to the village. Taking the first step to be involved is the hardest, but once there you will be welcomed with a smile.

So my initial spiel about the hall is to remind those of you who have had the benefit of this great venue in the Parish that maybe you could help to ensure that the hall is there for the next 100 years.

I have been in the Chair now for a long time and when we come to the AGM there are no takers, but this situation cannot carry on. We need some new committee members to continue the legacy as laid down by past chairs and committee members.



*"Good news! I've paid all the bills"*



## Our Vicar retires

**S**teve Taylor held his farewell service in Westbury Church on December 13th. We should have celebrated his ministry on the first Sunday of Advent, exactly seven years after he took up his post in charge of the Benefice of Westbury, Blaisdon, Flaxley and Minsterworth but restrictions precluded this, of course. The good news is that as he will still live in Northwood Green, he will remain a supporter at local events.

The service was a moment for us all to reflect on the part Steve has played in the community. A modern vicar's role is a very difficult thing. Where once every church had at least one full-time cleric, now churches are grouped together into larger and larger benefices and then the priest in charge is only appointed for half the week. So, in our benefice, there isn't one set of PCC meetings but four, not one pattern of services but four and so on. The vicar also has extra duties such as being on the chair of governors for Westbury School, visiting our local care homes

and maintaining links with the diocese. When Steve announced at the service that he had conducted almost 1,000 services and written 84 magazine letters, that was just the tip of the work he has done. He has been always ready to lead, support and guide.

His quiet, dry humour showed throughout the service - he commented that his record for bringing good weather to funerals was poor so he felt that Mike Matthews was possibly relieved he was retiring. He was careful not to thank individual people for their help - a dangerous custom as someone is always left out - but instead, with characteristic generosity of spirit, at one point he turned the occasion from focusing on his own work to thanking all those who work so hard to keep our churches open.

We thank him for his ministry and his wife, Viv, for her steady support and wish them the traditional Celtic blessing 'May the road rise up to meet you. May the wind be always at your back. May the sun shine warm upon your face; the rains fall soft upon your fields and until we meet again, may God hold you in the palm of His hand.'

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## Weather Report

Warmest Day 9/11/20. 14.5c  
Warmest Night 9-10/11/20 9c  
Coolest Day 27/11/20 3c  
Coolest Night 26-27/11/20 -3.5c  
Total Rainfall 68mm  
Wettest Day 14/11/20 12mm  
Number of Wet Days 18  
Predominant Wind Direction 9 Days  
NE, 9 Days SE  
Nights with Frost 6  
Mornings with Fog 5  
Average Maximum Temperature 10.9c  
Average Minimum Temperature 3.5c  
*Simon Phelps*

**We've been here before.**  
**Smallpox and Edward Jenner**

**A**fter a year where we have all been affected, one way or another, by the coronavirus pandemic, the development of a vaccine that will provide some immunity provides hope of a return to normal. However, many are apprehensive about having the vaccine and some of the more vehement opposition seems to echo the campaign against smallpox vaccination in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Smallpox had been around since the 3<sup>rd</sup> century and it is estimated that in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, 400,000 people in Europe died from the disease each year and those who survived were usually scarred and often blind. So one would think that Edward Jenner's discovery, in 1796, that inoculation with material from a cowpox lesion provided immunity to this deadly disease, would have been universally welcomed. However, opposition to it was widespread and savage. Some argued that using material from cows was unhealthy or unchristian, some did not even believe that smallpox was passed from person to person and others simply objected to being told what was good for them. In Britain, it was hoped that making the vaccinations free would persuade the doubters, but this did not work and so in 1853 vaccination was made compulsory. This led to riots in some towns, while in Westbury the opposition took the form of a strongly vocal anti-vaccination league.

Much of the opposition was due to mistrust and, at this time, this was understandable. Vaccines were not as safe as they are now and a third of the doctors in this country were unqualified. Even the fact that germs could cause disease was

not yet widely accepted, even by the medical profession. So the battle between the authorities and the sceptical public went on, with thousands of people on the streets demonstrating, wielding banners and "lynching" Edward Jenner's effigy.

In Westbury, Dr. Bond, the medical officer, had urged everyone to be vaccinated and assured them of its safety, but opposition continued. In 1896, there had been 2,000 cases in Gloucester but a report showed that of 378 births in this area, only 48 children had been vaccinated. An 8 year old child from Bollow, who had not been vaccinated, contracted the disease, and the Urban District Council quarantined the house to prevent it spreading. The Board of Guardians at the workhouse were berated by the Local Government Board for not enforcing vaccination but one member, who was opposed to vaccination, insisted that the Bollow child did not have smallpox, even though he had no medical training. He just wanted the quarantine ended so that the father could go back to work, as the family were very poor and were being a charge on the rates. At the next meeting of the Board, when the child's sibling had also developed smallpox, doubts were still expressed about the diagnosis.

In 1898, conscientious objection to the vaccine was allowed, and the success of the diphtheria immunisation programme, which was optional, soon showed that education and persuasion worked better than compulsion. The uptake of routine smallpox vaccination was variable but in times of epidemic, people rushed to be vaccinated and the disease was gradually brought under control, first in Europe and North

America, and then by May 1980 the World Health Assembly was at last able to officially declare the world free from this disease.

Medical knowledge has come a long way since Jenner's discovery and I hope that our trust in the science of today can provide the reassurance that people need to have the coronavirus vaccine as soon as they can, so that it does not take 18 centuries to eradicate this disease. Incidentally, I had the vaccine on Day 1 with no side effects. *Di Landon*



Edward Jenner

### Ash Dieback

**T**his year Gloucestershire County Council has launched an Ash Dieback Project in order to protect users of the Highway and County Council land from the danger posed by numerous dying trees. The general consensus currently is that up to 95% of ash trees in the UK may eventually become affected by the disease. Ash dieback is a disease that causes leaf loss and dying branches, and can lead to the death of a tree. The disease attacks ash trees



quickly and there currently is no prevention or treatment available. It may kill a young tree in only a single year, but older trees can take a number of years to perish. Ash trees are very common in Gloucestershire and cutting down any tree is a huge loss to our county's biodiversity, but this is something that has to be done to stop more trees becoming diseased. The County Council is fully committed to stopping this disease, saving as many trees as they can and undertaking a programme of tree planting throughout the county.

Ash dieback damages tree's limbs and causes them to become unsafe. These diseased trees have an increased risk of collapsing which can be dangerous, especially if they fall on a road. County Council crews are carrying out essential work around the county to remove the unsafe trees that are infected with ash dieback.

Privately owned ash trees that are within falling of the highway which are considered to be an imminent risk to highway users will be identified, and landowners given information regarding any required action to be taken within a stipulated time period.

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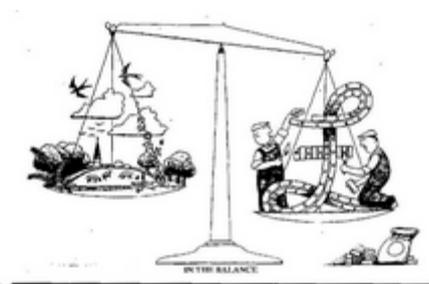
*Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power.*

## New Town in the Forest

**F**or those concerned about the plans for housing development in our area, you can keep up with the news and views on this subject on the Facebook page “New Town in the Forest; Have Your Say!” Postings on this page mention recent events which suggest that the idea is totally impractical - such as the severe flooding and rising river levels and the traffic chaos that ensued when the A48 was closed due to a burst water main.

It is central government that sets the quota for housing but it is then down to the district council to choose how they will achieve the government’s demands. The Gloucestershire Association of Parish and Town Councils is concerned about the way these housing requirements are determined, especially if algorithms are used, and feel that the current system is likely to produce more housing in areas where developers can maximise profits. While it is claimed that brownfield sites are always the preferred option, it seems that they are not always attractive to developers.

So please let both your MP and the District Council know your views on the scheme before the deadline of 29<sup>th</sup> January.



## Road closures

Part of Rock and Fountain Lane will be closed for repairs from its junction with A48 to its junction with Stanway Lane, as will part of Ley Lane from its junction with A48 to outside Ley Court. This will be from 8th January 2021 until 10th January 2021 between 08:00 and 17:00 for one day each only or until the works have been completed.

We have also been notified that there will be temporary closures in the Upper Ley area - Frewins Lane, Chapel Lane, and Grange Court Road are all mentioned – and these are scheduled from between 7<sup>th</sup> January and 31<sup>st</sup> March. Sorry about the lack of detail but notices will be displayed and the closures will be from 7am – 7pm.

There will also be a partial and temporary closure of the C44 Road from the junction with Blaisdon Road to the junction with Grange Court Road for a distance of approximately 40 metres between 08:00 and 17:00 on 26th January 2021. This is for a safety examination of the railway bridge structure.

## Rooks & Crows

"One for the Rook, one for the Crow, one to rot and one to grow". The saying has stuck in my mind since I was a very small boy watching my Father sowing peas, or beans or some other seed. I think this was said more out of a sense of resignation than out of a sense of generosity towards those birds that visited our garden. Rooks and Crows are members of the Corvid family as are Jays, Magpies, Ravens, and in other areas Choughs and Hooded Crows. These birds were in fact rare garden visitors except in snowy weather, though Jackdaws were common

enough, skilfully unzipping broad bean pods to extract the tender young beans. Until we moved to Elton 10 years ago we had lived on the edge of woodland for many years where the profile of bird life was different. On moving here we immediately noticed quite a large population of Rooks and Jackdaws, with the occasional Crow, and no shortage of Magpies. These birds are mostly farmland birds, so it's no surprise that the fields around Elton lend themselves well to them and their habits.

Some of the Crow family are unpopular creatures, often associated in folklore with death, witchcraft, and dark deeds such as nest-robbing and taking advantage of any sickly-looking bird or creature. They are, nonetheless, crafty and intelligent survivors, and there has been research that suggests that they can count as high as eight.

Rooks and Jackdaws will happily co-habit, but they seem to be choosy in their selection of trees here, preferring mostly to nest in Ash rather than Oak, though they are happy to adapt when space is tight.

John Christian was a naturalist and writer who lived at Elton, and in his book "Sketches of Dean's Birds" he wrote of the relative absence of rookeries in and around the Dean, even in agricultural areas where you might expect them to be found. If he were alive today he might be pleased to note that there's a small but very healthy rookery only a hundred yards from the house in which he lived.

In his book 'A Gloucestershire Notebook' Humphrey Phelps in 1980 notes that when a large Elm tree near his home died, the Rooks moved out, at least initially. Their attempts to nest in a nearby Oak failed that year, though in

subsequent years they seem to have refined their technique, and at least some returned. Maybe some of 'his' Rooks moved down the road to Elton?

Although not the finest songsters, Rooks do have a much wider vocabulary than the raucous 'Caw' that we are all familiar with. This is particularly so in spring when nest-building. Standing quietly within earshot the dialogue between male and female birds as they arrange and rearrange twigs can resemble that of an inharmonious conversation between a human couple trying to agree on wallpaper.

*Tim Humphries*

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## Sports Report

**A**s iceberg A68c, the world's largest iceberg drifts inexorably towards the coast of South Georgia, so Westbury FC emerged from lockdown to continue their similarly slow but relentless journey towards the basement of the premier division with a 3-1 loss to Blakeney FC.

The joy of being back out in bright sunshine playing the beautiful game was however only slightly dulled by defeat. The goals conceded provided a mixture of admiration, for a 25 yard free kick into the top corner, with frustration as a back pass caused a rather unnecessary panic, scuffed clearance and a simple punt back into the net from 10 yards out. Blakeney finished the game off after Jamie Ward had pulled a goal back from the spot, with a direct lob over the top and first time finish that had the Westbury management team scowling with jealousy as their own attack had created considerably more chances throughout the game, through intricate passing patterns and long dribbling



*Joseph D'Amrogio makes a clean contact*

moves but always rounded off with consistently hopeless finishing. On the touchline, Director of Football Tempest had started the game in good cheer, flourishing his sterling silver stirrup cup (a sort of telescopic beaker) which he produced with the aplomb of a magician proffering a bunch of flowers from his sleeve. His mood was a little deflated when a warm cup of coffee was poured in which promptly ran out the bottom. When he was consoled that for a man of his age, a dribbly stirrup cup was only to be expected he stomped up the touchline in a rage. Man of the match Joseph D'ambrogio had an excellent game despite having to be unceremoniously lifted up and dumped off the pitch whilst suffering from cramp in the final minutes - it's an unsympathetic game in the adult leagues. His passing, movement and running with the ball were high points of a game that was always entertaining to watch. As passions grew and tempers

flared in the final moments their linesman was forced to apologize for swearing at Jamie Ward, who hadn't noticed and then the referee blew for full time and the supporters and management raced to the Lyon for an excellent substantial meal and a welcome beer, all served strictly according to current government guidelines - which was nice. On Saturday 12th December, Westbury Utd travelled to Redbrook for an "almost" bottom of the table clash with both sides level on 3 points. The pitch, located on the banks of the Wye is nestled in a valley, an idyllic location for anything other than a football pitch. The tiny size of the playing area coupled with a fast flowing river on one side and the main road to Monmouth on the other meant any stray passes (and there were plenty) ended up in the drink or bouncing off down the road towards Wales. Indeed, Andrew Jayne, a centre forward of yesteryear and now top bird-watcher, once found a Redbrook FC match ball washed up in Minsterworth having bobbed all the way there via



*Gary Morgan clears his lines*

Chepstow, the Severn Estuary, and back up the Severn via Lydney. The team saw a welcome appearance from Alex Wyman, who has featured



*Tom Landon rises above the opposition*

more often in cricket reports lately, who added a certain amount of dynamism and aggression in midfield. Unfortunately everyone else had a rather poor day although Cuds confounded his critics by managing to score in the final few minutes. However, and I had been hoping to avoid mentioning it, the lads got stuffed 4-1, conceding a series of goals through various defensive howlers which in turn were generated by a rather ineffective midfield performance. In fact Director of Football Tempest at one point mulled over adopting the tactic of trying to kick all the match balls into the Wye and get the match abandoned, but the prospect of the forward line missing the target put paid to that idea. *Mark Landon*

**A VERY HAPPY,  
PROSPEROUS  
AND HEALTHY  
NEW YEAR TO  
ALL OUR  
READERS**

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