

# Brixworth and District Newsletter



**Learn, laugh, live**

Registered Charity No 1178196

**Issue 93**

**January 2024**

## **Interview with Jo Parker by Jackie Bird**



Many of you will recognise Jo from sitting at the table at the monthly meeting organising the lunch club or maybe at London Studies or the Local History group.

Jo has 2 daughters and moved back to Brixworth from Yorkshire to be closer to them just at the outbreak of Covid.

She was born in London but moved to Northamptonshire in 1984 living in Long Buckby at the time, moving to Brixworth a few years later. She worked at that time for Speedy Bake where she met her late husband. When the bakery closed down, Jo decided to have a change of lifestyle so she moved to Yorkshire to be closer to her partner and she bought a pub! The success of the Stafford Arms in Halifax proved to be the start of an interesting and exciting business career for Jo. The pub was a great success providing food and friendship for its patrons which she ran and managed with her partner. This led to the purchase of a delicatessen in the town centre where the two businesses allowed her to pursue her love of cooking. However, after 12 years of running the pub and 8 years of managing the deli the couple took a much needed holiday in South Africa. Whilst they were there they decided to sell up and take a break but Jo was soon back working again this time in a local school for young people with complex special needs. Jo was asked by the head teacher to set up a springboard programme of work experience for the young people. The success of this project led to Jo setting up the 'Next Step Trust'. This trust started as a small day centre in a shared building providing daycare but is now a very successful and large organisation thanks to Jo's energy, enthusiasm and business acumen. It provides day care, activities, personal care and respite care in centres and staffed bungalows for young people with very special and complex needs. The original rented building was later bought and a hydro pool installed. Before Jo finally retired she managed over one hundred staff providing training and Human Resources for the organisation which now has a CEO at its head.

After 10 years of working in this busy but exciting project Jo wanted to be closer to her daughters and grandchildren, so she sold up in Yorkshire and moved back to Brixworth.

Since retiring Jo has moved in to her cottage, overseen the renovations and refurbishment and joined the Brixworth U3A. Always busy she spends her time caring for her elderly mother in Frinton on Sea, visits her best friend in Turkey, helps with her young granddaughter which includes helping with her horse although these days Jo draws the line at riding it. Jo also likes to go out and about with her daughters shopping, visiting family and walking her daughter's dog which she says is her daily exercise. Despite an invitation to spend Christmas with friends in Turkey this year she is hosting Christmas and looking forward to cooking and celebrating with her family.

## NEWS FROM OUR GROUPS

### **WALKING GROUP –14<sup>th</sup> November 2023**

Photo by Colin Rowe: The Walking Group near Teeton.



I am told that following a lovely cross-country walk from Spratton (where the cars were parked), the group emerged at Creaton and realised they then had to walk back to Spratton. I understand that last mile was a bit of a shock.

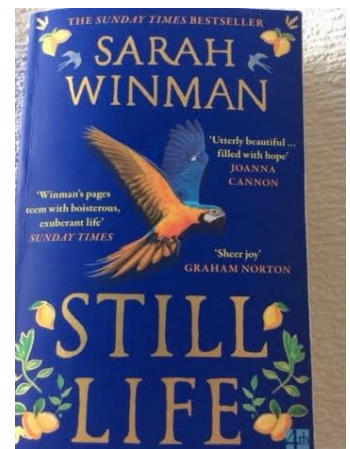
**And to make matters worse – it started raining!**

### **BOOK CLUB 1 - November 2023: Still Life by Sarah Winman**

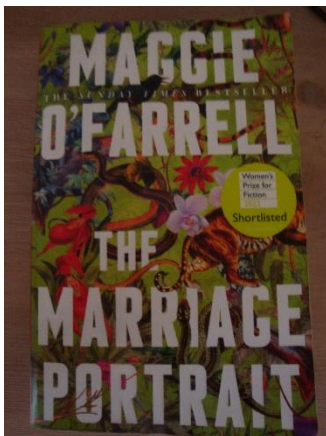
Some members struggled with the beginning of the book but as they read on found the book became more engaging. The characters were an interesting, quirky and lively bunch, very human, full of frailties but very endearing. There was a lot of humour in the book and a talking parrot who showed great wisdom.

The descriptive prose was beautiful and painted a good back drop to the settings. Be it the dreariness of post-war London or the beauty of Florence.

Not everyone was certain if they would read another book by the same author.



### **December 2023: The Marriage Portrait by Maggie O'Farrell**



This month's choice marked a return to an author that the group have enjoyed in the past. We were not disappointed. O'Farrell has created a very compelling story based on the brief life of Lucrezia di Cosimo de' Medici (February 1545 – April 1561).

The book has a dramatic but sombre opening where Lucrezia confronts her realisation that her husband intends to kill her. The book then moves forwards and backwards in time depicting her childhood and the imagined circumstances that led to her death. Some members found the switches of time a little confusing, but despite this there was definite tension and pace as the story reached its conclusion.

We felt the book was beautifully written, the descriptions created a very visual experience and brought the characters, settings and plot to life. Given that part of the plot involved Lucrezia sitting for a portrait this visual element really complimented the themes.

A most interesting and enjoyable read.

**2<sup>nd</sup> January: No meeting**

**6<sup>th</sup> February: Two Brothers by Ben Elton**

**5<sup>th</sup> March: West with Giraffes by Lynda Rutledge**

## DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY – update from Brian Robertson

The Digital Photographic Group met on Thursday 9th November and the topics for the day were:-

AUTUMN  
PEOPLE AT WORK  
WATER.

The four members present showed their pictures. I have included an overseas night river scene from Issy Lambley and an autumn seaside scene from Stephen Jones, and cable laying outside my house. The red and yellow on the riverside is the local Co-Op.

There will not be a meeting in December or January, and the date and venue for February will be notified to all nearer the day. The topics for February are:-

WINTER  
ANIMALS



## PAINTING & DRAWING GROUP – Report and photos by Chris Rowe



The basket of knitting wool and needles

A display of 2023 artworks from the Painting & Drawing group

The November meeting saw members faced with a basket of knitting wool and needles. I think we all had a go at it, although some gave up and did their own painting or drawing.

In December we had a display of our paintings and drawings completed throughout the year, as well as either a still life champagne bottle and glass, or a winter floral display.





## LOCAL HISTORY GROUP – Meeting on 23<sup>rd</sup> November

The final meeting of 2023 and the last one at Loder Hall, was all about “**Tales from the Tudor Table – and the Sayings of Sulgrave**”. More about them later.

We heard that the Tudors liked to eat – and if you were rich enough, you ate enormous amounts of meat and game, except on fish days, followed by desserts in your “Banqueting House”. I’m not sure anyone liked the thought of eating peacock or swan served inside its skin and feathers (which were used over and over again until they fell to bits). Maybe rich Tudor families were used to being poisoned with salmonella?

The “Saying of Sulgrave” were put together while I was a guide at Sulgrave Manor (home of George Washington’s ancestral family) and explains some of the well known phrases and sayings we use without being aware of the historical relevance.-For example:

**The Board** in Sulgrave’s Great Hall is not actually a table in that it is several planks of wood joined together and resting on its own trestle. From the Board comes such expressions as playing “**Board Games**” such as draughts or checkers (game boards would often be etched into the underside of the board).

“**Taking the Rough with the Smooth**” is an expression used when the rough side of the board is uppermost for doing everyday jobs, but if unexpected guests arrive, the polished smooth side may quickly (as in **Turning the Tables**) be swapped if the guests were not happy to “Take the rough with the smooth”.

In the kitchen at Sulgrave is a mechanical spit, which ensures your haunch of meat is “**Done to a Turn**”. And of course, to get into the house you have to cross the “**Threshold**” – the strip of wood in the doorway which holds the straw, herbs and dried flowers in place. Very important before the days of carpets. The thresh would be changed weekly so was always kept sweet-smelling.

Before the days of potatoes, bread was often served with the meat dish – and it was usual for the cook to have to bake at least one loaf per day per person in the household. But the bread oven, heated with wood very early in the morning before the loaves were put in, could leave the loaves a bit dusty on the underside. This burnt and ashy bit would be cut off and either used as a trencher in place of a dish or plate, or be passed to the servants, while the posher members of the household would be given “**The Upper Crust**”.

We ended up hearing about Tudor Christmas traditions but not many people knew that Oliver Cromwell not only banned Christmas (in particular singing and dancing) but also mince pies. A strange piece of legislation that apparently has never been repealed. You have been warned that the mince pie police may be on the look-out!



Roast peacock served in its skin and feathers (taken at Aston Hall)



The “Lady of the Manor” with the “Board” (guiding on a Christmas tour)



Sulgrave Manor (home of the Washington family)

**THE NEXT LOCAL HISTORY GROUP MEETING WILL BE ON THURSDAY 25<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY WHEN A HISTORICAL FILM OF NORTHAMPTONSHIRE WILL BE SHOWN – AT SCALDWELL VILLAGE HALL.**

**Chris Rowe**

## SINGING FOR PLEASURE – Latest news from Tim Smith

The Singing 4 Pleasure group were very pleased to help out by carol singing at the opening of the Brixworth Library Christmas Fayre on Saturday 9th December. It was a cold, wet and windy morning but twenty members turned up on the day to sing a total of eleven carols - a mixture of traditional and new songs. The event seemed well supported and many other u3a members were spotted in attendance. This was the third year that we have sung at this event, and as group leader I am always very impressed and grateful for the members commitment in supporting events such as these.



The group have now finished their weekly rehearsals for this year and will recommence in January - if you are interested in joining us and singing along with others (no experience necessary) please get in touch for more details – please contact Tim Smith via the Pigeon Post on the website.

## CRAFT GROUP – report from Rosemary Jenkins

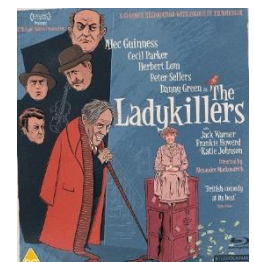
Our trip out to the Bramble Patch in Weedon was fantastic so much choice a bit overwhelming and the quilts were super. We spent about four hours browsing!



## LONDON STUDIES GROUP

The London Studies group met at the beginning of November for our last session of the year. We enjoyed tea, coffee and mince pies and watched the Ealing Studios comedy, “The Ladykillers” which was made in 1955.

Our next meeting will be on January 5<sup>th</sup> 2024 when we will start to look at London in the 1960’s.



## ARMCHAIR TRAVEL – Latest News from Annie Curtis

**Please Note:** Armchair Travellers will not be meeting on Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> January, so the first meeting of the New Year will be on Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> February at 2pm in Scaldwell Village Hall. The title of my talk that afternoon will be “A Journey on the Coasthopper Bus along the North Norfolk Coast”.

Then in March, Colin Rowe will tell us about his experiences as a holiday tour coach driver. It sounds very interesting!

I look forward to welcoming all Armchair Travellers back after the Festive Season – and indeed any new members who would like to join us. Just send a message via the pigeon and hop on board. You will be made very welcome.



The North Norfolk Coast – 2022  
photo by Chris Rowe

## MONTHLY DUPLICATE BRIDGE COMPETITION RESULTS

### DUPLICATE BRIDGE RESULTS FOR THURSDAY 9<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER 2023

And it is a big congratulations to Jill and Rosemary for a massive win against some tough opposition.

	IMPS	%		Tops	Joint Top
1st	82	64.06	Jill Snedker & Rosemary Heaver	2	3
2nd	77	60.16	Ruby Cole & Chris Williams	5	1
3rd	72	56.25	Paul Jarvis & Brian Collett	3	2
4th	69	53.91	Richard Hartley & Bea Bennett	2	0
5th	68	53.13	Denise Cowling & Lynda Stevenson	4	1
6th	61	47.66	Barry Johnson & Clive West	2	1
7th	60	46.88	Del Smith & Gila Gwinn	1	1
8th	59	46.09	Diane Williamson & Jim Wardle	1	4
9th	47	36.72	Chris Hill & Chris Russell	1	1
10th	45	35.16	Mavis Sturgess & Chris Bailey	1	0

### DUPLICATE BRIDGE RESULTS FOR FRIDAY 17<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER 2023

	IMPS	%		Tops	Joint Tops
1st	58	60.42	Jim Wardle & Brian Collett	3	2
2nd	57	59.38	Tony Nixon & Katie Lindenbaum	5	1
3rd	54	56.25	Paula Jones & Del Smith	3	2
4th	51	53.13	Helen Coghill & Carol Phillips	3	2
5th	47	48.96	Judy Peck & Ann Maynard	1	4
5th	47	48.96	Ruby Cole & Jane Davis	1	2
7th	45	46.88	Anne Weddle & Chris Russell	4	0
8th	42	43.75	Gila Gwinn & Mavis Sturgess	2	1
9th	31	32.29	Sheila Jones & Tim Smith	1	0

### FRIDAY AFTERNOON BRIDGE GROUP – DUPLICATE RESULTS – 1<sup>st</sup> DECEMBER 2023

	IMPS	%		Tops	Jt Tops
1st	54	64.29	Ruby Cole & Gila Gwinn	4	2
2nd	52	61.90	Paul Jarvis & Brian Collett	4	2
3rd	51	60.71	Tony Nixon & Katie Lindenbaum	4	0
4th	44	52.38	Judy Peck & Jim Wardle	2	1
5th	36	42.86	Sheila Jones & Tim Smith	4	0
6th	33	39.29	Kathy & Roger Morgan	3	0
6th	33	39.29	Del Smith & Jane Davis	1	0
6th	33	39.29	Helen Coghill & Carol Phillips	1	0

### THURSDAY EVENING BRIDGE GROUP – DUPLICATE RESULTS – 7<sup>th</sup> DECEMBER 2023

	IMPS	%		Tops	Jt Tops
1st	33	58.93	Richard Hartley & Bea Bennett	6	1
2nd	32	57.14	Ruby Cole & Chris Williams	4	1
3rd	30	53.57	Denise Cowling & Lynda Stevenson	3	2
4th	29	51.79	Jan Blinch & Brian Collett	4	2
4th	29	51.79	Simon & Sally Bevan	2	3
6th	28	50.00	Del Smith & Gila Gwinn	3	1
7th	15	26.79	Jill Snedker & Chris Hill	0	0

## SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY – VISIT TO THE BMW MINI FACTORY IN COWLEY



On Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> December 13 members of the Brixworth u3a Science & Technology Group travelled to the Mini assembly plant at Cowley near Oxford, on the site of the former Morris Cars factory founded by William Morris (Lord Nuffield), where, as long ago as 1915 the Bull nose Morris was manufactured followed by the Morris Minor and in the late 1950s the original Mini. In 1994 the German car manufacturer BMW bought the Austin Rover Group but when it was sold back in year 2000 the Cowley plant was retained. Here within a year BMW started to produce the “New Mini” a far cry from the original Issigonis version designed at Austin Longbridge. Ironically the first car produced by BMW Aero Engine company in Germany, when during 1928 they acquired Fahrzeugfabrik who built the “Dixie”, under licence, was an Austin 7 designed by Herbert Austin himself.

Arriving at the museum and purpose-built visitor centre the group were each given a green hi-vis vest and a head set by Mike Webb, a former employee of Pressed Steel Fisher, the company which manufactured the bodies for the original mini at Castle Bromwich where the World War2 Spitfire fighter planes were built. Mike would be our guide for the 100-minute tour of the body assembly shop and production track. Mike (seen above with some of the group at the end of the tour), was an extremely experienced guide, having entered the industry as an apprentice and worked at plants all over the world until retirement. The tour began after watching two short videos one stating the mission of BMW regarding sustainability policy of BMW and the other the inevitable Health & Safety briefing. We started with the examination of a “body in white” unpainted 4 door body shell. The design features were described regarding the water ingress barrier, anti-corrosion using galvanised steel and the strength of the passenger compartment. The only part of the production process we would not see would be the paint shop, this would be shown on film at the appropriate point.

The heart of production at Cowley is the assembly of the body components and pressings which arrive ready formed from the supplier, BMW Pressings at Swindon where parts for the BMW’s other UK owned car company, Rolls Royce, are made. The cleanliness of the production areas is exceptional. The process is virtually fully automated using robots manufactured by the Swiss/Swedish consortium ASEA Brown-Boveri, each costing about £60,000. The robots, having all the degrees of freedom of a human arm, wrist and shoulder, pick and place a component in the jigs where they are held while they are accurately welded to another component. Watching these robots is a real “WOW” experience. There are a few manual operations where these have been costed to be more economic than investing in a robot. Every operation is electronically recorded and if a fault occurs after delivery of the car to the customer the whole production cycle can be analysed and which robot may have created the fault can be traced.

It is important to note that Cowley is an assembly plant, there is no heavy engineering carried out here, such as metal pressing and forming, casting or forging. The individual pressings which make up the body of the Mini, likened to a massive Meccano kit, are brought in from Swindon by road on 80 lorry loads per day. The complete petrol engine assemblies arrive from BMWs factory at Hams Hall, Birmingham, the diesel engines from Steyr in Austria, and the electric motors for the EVs from the Netherlands. Other suppliers of components are delivered on a JIT system (Just in Time) and so just the stock for the day’s production is held in the assembly area. Suppliers are contracted to keep a minimum of two days stock at their plant. Suppliers are paid as soon as the component is fitted to the car by an automatic monitoring process. The assembly plant produces 1052 cars per day during two 10-hour shifts and each process during assembly of the body takes less than 6 minutes. The finished cars are sent all over the world. There is a rail link to the network for trains taking cars to Harwich for export as well as car transporters for delivery across the UK.



The logistics of the assembly line is a fascinating process. When “Mr Smith” orders his car at the local dealer specifying exactly what he wants ie colour, coloured roof, trim, number of doors, sunroof/petrol/Diesel/EV. The buyer is given a date for delivery. On the day this car is produced all the components will arrive at the trackside stations - the correct body shell painted, less doors which were originally fitted when final welding took place, then removed. The correct engine, trim, wheels and other specified items will be in place. From start to finish the completed car will emerge at the final inspection point in 6 hours, ready for steering alignment. Problems on the assembly line with a particular car will be dealt with at the end of its production line, where the car will be placed in a holding area for the highly skilled technicians to work on. All specifications of cars are being built simultaneously on the one production track.


In some production areas, mainly on the track, there are many men and women working. They are well paid and motivated and can carry out many different tasks if required. They have excellent working conditions and benefits including medical care.

In the robot areas there are very few operatives other than maintenance personnel. Welding electrodes for example become ineffective and can rework themselves. When they need replacing the head itself sends a message to the maintenance department who will replace the electrode, ensuring minimum downtime.

A very enlightening tour demonstrating the technology behind producing a modern motorcar. Well worth a visit!  
**Colin Rowe**

## BOOK SWAP TABLE

At the monthly meetings, “Book Swap” continues to prove a success!  . Jigsaws

are also popular.  .No need to swap anything, just have a look and “Take A Book or Puzzle”

Now the weather is cold outside, there’s nothing better than a good read or a jigsaw you can’t put down!  
**Paula Smith**



## EVENING DINING GROUP – Report by Sue Dodds-Smith



November 29<sup>th</sup> at The George, Great Oxendon. I think there were 22 of us.

Always good to have dinner with friends!





## CYCLING GROUP – LATEST RIDES – Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> November

Paul, Jim, Sylvia, Kevin, Colin and new member Roger participated in the "Watford Gap Circular" today starting at the Fox & Hounds in Lower Harlestone. Welcome back Jim, you seem fully recovered!



We crossed the M1 4 times in all. There was a stiff Westerly breeze on the outward journey as far as Norton Park, 17-20 mph. On the return journey it was much easier riding heading east. We covered around 18 miles and averaged 11.5 mph climbing over 1700 feet in total. The temperature was mild and for most of the time we enjoyed clear blue sky.

We passed through the sleepy village of Brockall along the gated road before returning to our starting point via Flore, Little Brington and Upper Harlestone. Five of us dined, after a long delay, at the Fox & Hounds.

Thanks to Paul for the photographic record of the group having a coffee break at the Heart of the Shires and to Jim for providing the tripod!

## FRENCH GROUPS – report from Hazel Petersen

The combined French groups met up for our annual French themed lunch on Monday 11<sup>th</sup> to celebrate the end of another enjoyable year of challenging our little grey cells. We all contributed food and drink and even did a little French in the form of a silly quiz.

Thanks to all who came along and made it so jolly and special thanks to Paula, Rob and Janet for hosting and doing the donkey work. Our groups are full of good humour and mutual support, as I'm sure are all our excellent U3A groups - long may they continue!

**Photo by Viv**



## GARDENING GROUP – Programme from Annie Curtis

All meetings start at 2 pm.

Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> January "The Arts and Crafts Garden" by Chris Rowe  
Scaldwell Village Hall

Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> February Visit to see the Snowdrops  
136 High Street, Irchester

Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> March "Restoring the Lost Gardens of Canons Ashby" by Laura Malpass  
Scaldwell Village Hall

Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> April Visit to Bosworth's Garden Centre, Burton Latimer, NN15 5QA

Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> May Visit to the gardens at 23 Cotton Road, Long Buckby, NN6 9RF



**Rodmarton Manor garden –  
photo by Chris**

## **REMEMBRANCE DAY POPPY SALES**

Well Done Brixworth U3A!!

Recent Poppy Collections mainly at various U3A Meetings managed to raise the total sum of:-£203.89

Other collections around Brixworth have raised a final total of just over £14,000.00.

**Brian Robertson**



## **LIBRARY DISPLAY**



In September and October B&D u3a took over the display cabinets in Brixworth Library. Our group leaders provided many pictures, books and various appropriate artifacts to show what the u3a is all about – and hopefully attract a few new members.

I would like to thank all the group leaders who contributed and Jackie for coordinating it all. It was fun to do and we are planning to have another opportunity to showcase our u3a next Spring.

**Chris Rowe**

## **NEW GROUPS**

The **Greek Conversation** group is now up and running at the Group Leader's home. As well as guiding members through the Greek alphabet, Pauline Judge is introducing grammar and pronunciation which is essential when trying to converse on your summer holidays! Please speak to Pauline at one of the monthly meetings to find out more, or send a message via Pigeon Post to the Interest Groups Co-ordinator (Jackie Bird) who will pass the message on.

Our **Chess** group will start in the New Year with Barry Norton getting it started. Please contact him via the Pigeon Post on the website if you would like to join the group.

## **MONTHLY MEETINGS**

The monthly meetings are held at Brixworth Village Hall on the first Wednesday of the month at 2 pm. Come and join us for a talk/presentation from interesting and varied speakers, followed by refreshments and an opportunity to catch up with friends old and new.

- 3<sup>rd</sup> January "More Tales of a Tour Guide" with Jo Golby (Carter)
- 7<sup>th</sup> February "Would you Adam and Eve it" more tales from the Met with Colin Hill
- 6<sup>th</sup> March "Alan Turing and Bletchley Park" with Michael Kushner
- 3<sup>rd</sup> April John Constantine, Magician and Comedian

Full details of future meetings is on the B&D u3a website under "What's On".

## **NEW MEMBERS**

A very warm welcome to our new members who have joined (or re-joined) us recently. We hope you find your membership of B&D U3a very rewarding and we look forward to seeing you at the monthly meetings and when you join any of our interest groups.

Norah Daykin            Keith Featley            Sylvia Dunster            Bryan Dunster  
Ann Adams            Jane Hill            Jonathan Ireland

## **THEATRE TRIPS** – News from Tim Smith

Now that the Derngate Theatre is once more operational we are pleased to announce the offer of tickets. The first availability is for – **"A Ghost Story" on Wednesday 10th January at 2.30pm and tickets cost £24.00.**

This edge-of-your-seat new stage production is fresh from success on the West End and the cast includes many TV celebrities- Jay McGuiness (The Wanted), Fiona Wade (Silent Witness, Emmerdale) and George Rainsford (Call The Midwife)

**Further tickets will be available for productions of Grease, Sister Act and Pretty Woman -more details to follow.**

Any member interested in attending should first contact Greg (Northampton U3a) at [gregbuc63@icloud.com](mailto:gregbuc63@icloud.com) stating that you are a member of Brixworth U3a. Once he has confirmed tickets are available please make payment asap to Brixworth U3a account. If you require further details of the account please contact Tim Smith at [timsmith1707@aol.com](mailto:timsmith1707@aol.com)

## **CHRISTMAS LUNCH**

Over 70 members gathered at the Northampton Golf Club at Harlestone to enjoy our annual excellent and delicious Christmas lunch, organised by Yvonne and Tim Swallow. Huge thanks to them for all their hard work for arranging it all. I think we probably all ate too much, but it was all beautifully cooked and presented – although the jokes in the crackers seemed even more groan-worthy than last years! A few photos (taken by Colin) are below and will be shown on the website too if you'd like to see larger versions!

**May I wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a happy and healthy New Year!**

**Chris Rowe**





