

NEWSLETTER - December 2020

Welcome to the December Newsletter

It does not seem possible that this is the last Newsletter of 2020. It has been a challenging year for everyone and this organization has lost good friends and valued members.

There has clearly been a growth in our skills and knowledge in relation to our use of social media. It has been impressive the way in which Group Leaders and members have risen to the challenge of maintaining contact and continuing to learn using all the resources available to us.

At our Executive Zoom Meeting earlier this month there was an opportunity to thank Committee Members for their hard work, thoughtfulness and compassion during the year. There has been a considerable amount of advice and information coming from government and the Third Age Trust throughout the year for the Committee members to read, understand and consider how this impacts on our activities. I have been very grateful for their support.

The Third Age Trust has informed us about links they have made with an organization called 'Independent Age'. The following information and link is from the Third Age Trust website:

Independent Age

<https://www.independentage.org/information/personal-life/staying-safe-online>

Staying safe online guidance from Independent Age, a charity offering free and impartial advice on the issues that matter: care and support, money and benefits, health and mobility.

We wish all members well at this time of year and we look forward to being able to meet with you, in person, at some point in 2021.

Seasons Greetings to you all,

Jannet Wright, Chair, Executive Committee



Groups

Art Appreciation

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Continuing world tour

Having toured the Far East looking at pagodas and stupas, the next leg of our tour took in domed buildings from Rome to India. We started with the oldest extant dome in the world that is still part of a building that is in everyday use, i.e. the pantheon, one of the few buildings on the trip that many of us may have visited.



We moved, via Red Square and the onion domes of St Basil, to the many domes, in a building that has seen many different uses since it was built, to Hagia Sophia on Istanbul. As these domes are attached to religious buildings, the next leg of the tour looked at some domes that were not constructed principally, or at all, for buildings for religious practice. We started in Baku in Azerbaijan, a city that probably has not been visited by many of us and has the distinction of being the world's lowest capital at 28 m below sea level. This building has many domes and is called the Palace of Shirvanshas but really, not much is known about its actual, original use – doesn't look much like a warehouse though. Functioning as such is why it has survived.



From Baku, we travelled to Isfahan to visit a pavilion – definitely a domed building with a wholly secular function. We finished with visits to two mausoleums: Tamerlane's in Samarkand and finally, probably the most famous domed building in the world the Taj Mahal. In between, we considered a controversial new sculpture: a memorial to Mary Wollstonecraft. Members have been asked to submit an art work that they love and one that they don't. I hope that we will have many so that there is something for you all to read about in the next newsletter.



Gardening

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Not a great deal happening in December for us gardeners I'm afraid. It's cold and wet and we would normally be meeting up for our annual Christmas lunch. Instead we are still keeping in touch by email and hopefully with the advent of vaccines on the horizon things are likely to be different in 2021. A merry Christmas and happy new year to all our members from all of us in the Garden Club. Below is one of our members gardens covered in that first sprinkle of snow this year.



History

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MURDER OF QUARRELSOME PRIEST

850 years ago, on 29th December 1170, four armed men smashed their way into a side door of Canterbury Cathedral where the Archbishop, Thomas Becket was waiting for them. They tried to arrest him, he resisted and they hacked off the top of his head, and mashed his brains with their boots. So ended the venomous quarrel between Henry II and his erstwhile friend, Thomas Becket.

Becket, Chancellor of England and Archdeacon of Canterbury, had been Henry's trusted friend and confidant and the King saw Thomas as an important bridge between the Church and State. During the twelfth century, Henry, in common with other kings across Europe, clashed with Popes over questions of jurisdiction and authority. So when Theobald, Archbishop of Canterbury, died in 1161, Henry saw an opportunity to appoint a more pliant figure into that role and the apparently worldly Becket seem to be an ideal candidate. On the 2nd of June 1161 Thomas was ordained a priest. The next day he was consecrated archbishop.

Becket had been parachuted into a world he was ill-equipped for. Almost immediately he started to distance himself from Royal policy, firstly resigning from the Chancellorship, protesting that he was 'unfit for one office, let alone two'. He then proceeded to pick fights with several powerful magnates; to quote the historian Dan Jones: *"Henry had expected him to grease the cogs of royal policy within Church ranks. Instead he was jamming his bony fingers into them. Becket confounded all the king's hopes and became for the rest of his life a pompous, disagreeable and obstreperous distraction from Henry's every effort at smooth government"*.

The focus of Henry's energies was criminal clergymen, those who stole, maimed, raped or killed. Perhaps one in six Englishmen in the late 12th century was technically a clergyman but most of them were in lay orders and were not and never would be priests.

The Church demanded the right to discipline criminal clergy, but punishments were considerably lighter under canon law than they would have been in the secular world. The king saw this as a serious abuse and the issue became a major focus of his quarrels with Becket. After nine years of continuing disputes, exile and failed reconciliations, Becket finally returned to England in November 1170. Obstinate and unbending as ever he preached an incendiary sermon from the pulpit of Canterbury Cathedral on Christmas Day.

When news of Becket's latest exploit reached Henry's ears he reacted with a phrase among the most infamous in history: *"What miserable drones and traitors have I nurtured and promoted in my household who let their lord be treated with such shameful contempt by a low-born clerk!"* (Often incorrectly rendered as 'will no one rid me of this troublesome priest?')

The four priests who murdered Becket seemed to have believed that Henry wanted them to do it and that belief spread across a shocked Europe; suddenly Henry found himself a pariah. The following four years for Henry were marked by family quarrels and state disturbances and for many it appeared that this was punishment for the martyrdom of Becket. Realising that regaining peace would demand an act of penitence, the king went to Canterbury and humbled himself with public penance at Becket's tomb.



Two years after Becket's death he was canonised by Pope Alexander III.

A major exhibition to commemorate the 850th anniversary of the murder of Thomas Becket: **Murder and the Making of a Saint**, is planned by The British Museum, 22nd April to 22 August.



Italian for Beginners

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We held our last Zoom meeting for the Autumn on Monday 14th December. We have found that, on the whole, Zoom has worked well for us as a group.

The plan for each session is sent to members by email and then we work through the activities when we meet. When everyone is present there are nine of us online. When using Zoom it is necessary for us to be a bit more formal in the sense that only one person can speak at a time. This is hard when members of the group are enthusiastic and know what they want to say in Italian. In these circumstances one of the Group Leaders just has to take charge and decide who will speak!

Buon Natale a tutti

Literature

Lead: Sheelah Reynolds, Telephone: 01636 892348,
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Our book for December is 'The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie' by Muriel Spark. This is our third, and most well-known, Spark novel. The movie starring Maggie Smith was a huge success and M. Spark commented, tongue in cheek, "All that fuss over M. Smith's performance would make you think she had written the book".

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A much-needed rallying Christmas message has been requested, so hope Tennyson's uplifting poem fits the bill as it welcomes in the New Year.

'RING OUT, WILD BELLS'

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Ring out, wild bells, to the wild sky,
The flying cloud, the frosty light:
The year is dying in the night;
Ring out, wild bells, and let him die.

Ring out the old, ring in the new,
Ring, happy bells, across the snow:
The year is going, let him go;
Ring out the false, ring in the true.

Ring out the grief that saps the mind,
For those that here we see no more;
Ring out the feud of rich and poor
Ring in redress to all mankind.

Ring out a slowly dying cause,
And ancient forms of party strife;
Ring in the nobler modes of life,
With sweeter manners, purer laws.

Ring out want, the care, the sin,
The faithless coldness of the times;
Ring out, ring out my mournful rhymes,
But ring the fuller minstrel in.

Ring out false pride in place and blood
The civic slander and the spite;
Ring in the love of truth and right,
Ring in the common love of good.

Ring out old shapes of foul disease;
Ring out the narrowing lust of gold
Ring out the thousand wars of old,
Ring in the thousand years of peace.

Ring in the valiant man and free,
The larger heart, the kindlier hand;
Ring out the darkness of the land
Ring in the Christ that is to be.

ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON

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# Photography

Lead: Paul Bass, Telephone: 01636 892057  
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The Photography Group met and shared images this month again using video conferencing. Our theme was "Circles".

Our theme for our next meeting will be "Looking Forward". This will test group member's creativity and hopefully reflect our expectation that 2021 will be a better year than 2020 was.

The group wishes everyone a Great Christmas,  
Paul Bass



Monochrome Bauble by Phil Leckenby



Electric Lamp by John Geeson



Santa Specs by Colin Snith



Threads by Gill Bass



Water Feature by Les Murray



Lemon and Carrots on Ice by Paul Bass



Polo Mint Olympics by Roger Davis

# Sunday Lunch Group

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To all the Sunday Lunch Group I wish you all a Very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.  
And I will hope we will be back to normal soon, so we can enjoy our Sunday Lunches

Stay safe and get the vaccine.

Cheers

Marion.

