

In Contact



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Editorial

December already! Where has the year gone? Never mind, we have some good things to look forward to. Don't forget our meeting on December 8th at the usual time of 1.30 for 2.00pm. There will be entertainment from Shabbie Mac and cake from Mary. Neither of these to be missed. Then on the 15th is our annual Christmas dinner organised this year by Theresa and being held at the Honest Lawyer. It promises to be great afternoon.

Thank you to those of you who came to the AGM. Now that is out of way, we hope to have the little programme and contact cards ready for you before long. I noticed a stack of membership cards on the table last month awaiting. Please pick up at the meeting if you think one of them is yours – or ask a friend or Group Leader. We only post out to people who have sent an SAE.

The new arrangements with Dunelm seem to be working well. I gather we had quite a crowd at the Quiz and I know that people have attended other groups – in both directions. Let's keep that up and take advantage of these opportunities. Personally, I am planning to go out with the Dunelm Walking Group.

Some of you will have noticed that the website has been down – not just us but the Third Age Trust and all u3as as well. By the time you get this they should have migrated to a new server with at least a read only version from September. It might even be better than that. The whole problem – together with the very unhelpful message – is down to the TAT hosting provider.

Tina Naples Editor

MARCONI & THE CHRISTMAS ANGELS

A True-Life Treasure Hunt!

“Marconi is in the process of developing a machine that will record and play back the sound of the Angels singing to the shepherds in Bethlehem!” This was the astonishing claim made to my father by Marconi’s Chief Engineer on a ship in the middle of the Mediterranean, bound for Shanghai, in October 1921. **‘Marconi is convinced that sounds, once made, are never lost but remain in the atmosphere for ever, and can be captured,’**

My father, James Gilman, a young Salvation Army officer aged just 20, was China-bound on the French Messages Maritimes vessel ‘Paul Lecat,’ to take up his first posting as a Christian missionary in that far-off land. In the course of a month-long sea voyage he’d made friends with Marconi’s Chief Engineer, Richard Vyvyan, bound for Shanghai on his company’s business. The two spent many an evening in pleasant conversation while strolling the decks enjoying the balmy breezes. James was completely taken aback at this revelation. Just what did it mean?

Though a devout Roman Catholic, Marconi was no religious fanatic. He was a scientist, a physicist, an engineer, and the world’s number one expert in wireless technology. He would have been perfectly familiar with the properties of sound transmission from speaker to listener via the medium of vibrations travelling through the air – indeed, his company was a pioneer in recording the soundtrack of cinema films, as can be witnessed by the credits at the end of many of these early ‘flickers’. Consequently, he’d have been well aware that as air is constantly on the move, such sounds would be wiped out the moment they were made; they certainly couldn’t have survived for 2,000 years! Was Marconi on to something entirely different?

I’m told that wireless signals transmitted into Space via electromagnetic pulses go on for ever; but the Angels wouldn’t have been broadcasting to the shepherds on Radio Heaven! There are some interesting ideas floating around, however, which might have some relevance. The theory of **Morphic Resonance** suggests that everything in our world, mineral as well as animal, emits signals to the world around it; indeed, this is the reasoning behind the undoubted success of the practice of dowsing. One such eminent dowser, the late C. Lethbridge, published a series of booklets outlining his discovery of a range of such transmissions extending even to emotions. Could these be recorded in some way? And if emotions why not sounds?

The devotees of EVP – **Electronic Voice Phenomena** – claim to have recorded the voices of long-since dead people speaking, not from beyond the grave, but from out of their own past while still alive. I have listened to such recordings myself.

Whatever it was that Marconi was investigating, it was surely worth trying to follow up, I thought, and so some years ago I wrote to the Marconi family in Italy who confirmed that the company’s Chief Engineer in the 1920s WAS on that ship at that time, but they were unaware of the developments he’d spoken of to my father. All Marconi’s papers are now lodged in Oxford’s Bodleian Library, so that would have to be my target.

On the assumption that these would be in Italian (which I don’t speak!) I wrote some 3 years ago to the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Westminster with an account of this story, enquiring as to whether he had any Italian-speaking priests able to visit the Library to investigate further. Cardinal Nichols kindly replied that he was **“rather taken by the idea!”** and said he’d forward my letter together with a request of his own to a Dominican Order based in Oxford, asking them to visit the Bodleian to look into the matter. He later confirmed that such a visit had been made and that I would

hear from the Order as to the outcome; but I never did. I then took up the matter with the Bodleian direct, and learnt that the papers were in fact in English, and included Marconi's diary, which seemed to me to be the most likely place in which to find any references to his experiments in this field.

And there the quest has stalled! At 90, spending time in Oxford pursuing this further may well prove beyond me; but should any of you youngsters feel like accepting the challenge, I'd be happy to pass on to you some useful Bodleian websites to help progress the investigation.

Happy hunting! And may you one day find yourself listening to the message of the Bethlehem Angels on that first Christmastide long, long ago ago!

757 words

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Surely worth a shot and an excuse for a visit to Oxford. Any takers? Ed.

Circle Dancing

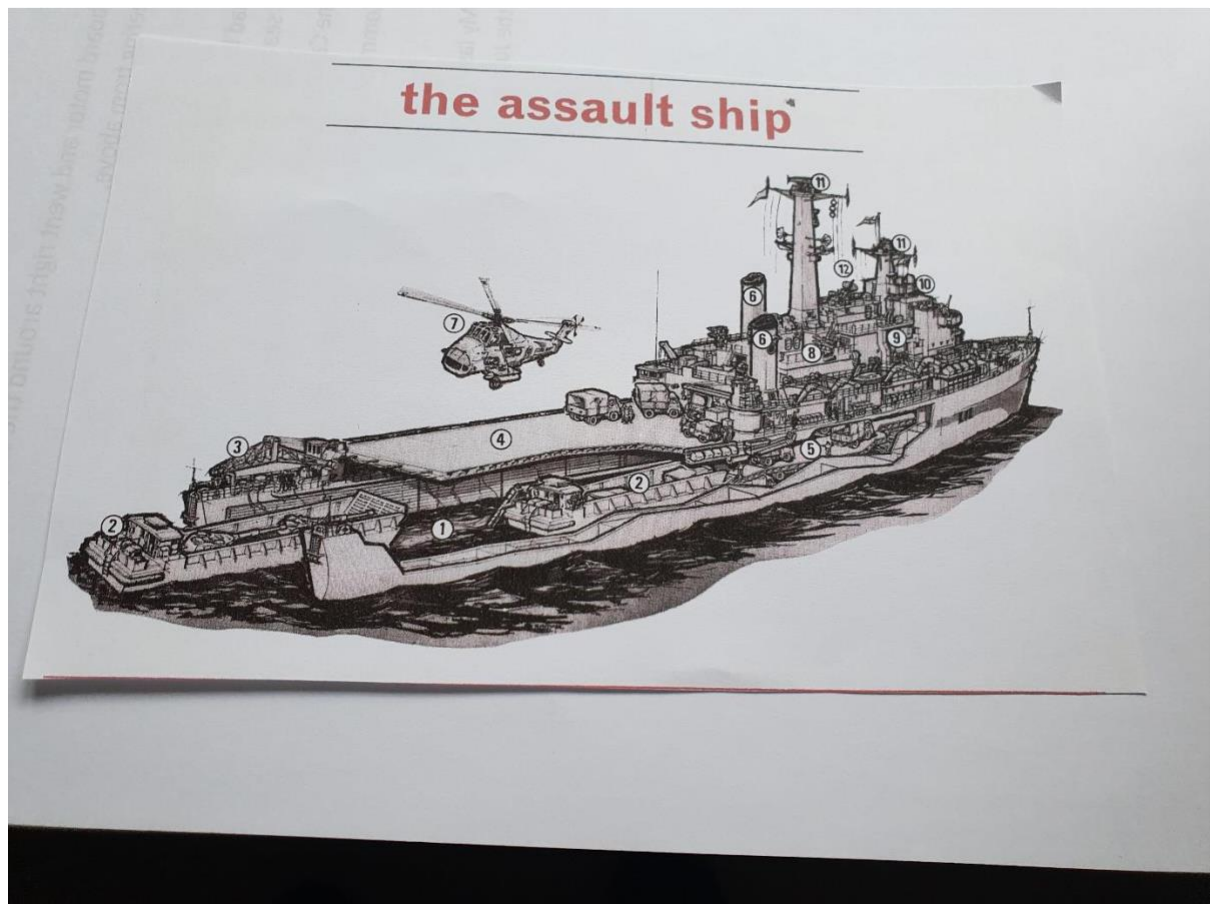
I wasn't able to put this picture in at the time, but it is so joyful and happy that it suits the season perfectly. Many thanks to Linda Murdie who organises the group and our lovely teacher, Mary – who comes all the way from Darlington (not Bethlehem). By the way, there are usually two men dancing and always room for more.



Indian Ocean Christmas

On 18th July 1967, Britain announced that it would withdraw its troops from Singapore by the mid 1970s. Six months later the deadline was brought forward to 1971. My ship, HMS Intrepid, was one of many involved in this.

Just before Christmas 1970 we were preparing to take vehicles and other non-combatative equipment back to the UK. On the Jetty I saw an MGA car and learned that the owner could not be bothered to sell it as most buyers would know he HAD to sell it. I asked my Captain if I could crane it aboard and store it in the tank deck. (The Ship was built to carry tanks and other military equipment). He said OK go ahead. Then I saw a battered Fletcher design speed boat which had holes in the hull and in a very dilapidated state. Again, I asked if I could hoist it onboard so that I could repair it. He said I could so long as he could help me with the repairs and if so, I could store it on the upper deck high up on the ship where he had his private space. I might add I found out later that the captain was an excellent carpenter. The finished article would never have been such a success without his help.



We were then ordered to leave Singapore for Bahrain to pick up military hardware for transportation to the UK. A few days later we were in the Indian Ocean when the captain said that the car HAD to go as all available space was needed in the tank deck. I suggested to the captain what if we hoisted it up by helicopter attached flare on the wheels and drop it from a height during the evening? Good idea he replied – make it so! All oil and other harmful liquids were drained out and then most of the crew assembled on the upper deck to witness this ending of and MGA. (About £28,000 these days)

Because the captain was still helping me with the boat building and repairs, we naturally talked about Christmas in the middle of the Indian ocean. Traditionally, the youngest person on board became “Captain” for the day and went around all the mess decks to wish everyone a “Happy Christmas” so I suggested asking the Chief Cook to organise a cake for the best decorated mess deck on that day. I then said I could also be on the inspection team in the guise of a fairy (“Fairy Gruff Enuff”)? So, it was decided.



On Boxing Day Evening, the Ship's own Dramatic Society (SODS) gave a show with lots of talented people. I was in a sketch as an evil chaplain (Padre in Navy slang). So, the day before from a Bosun to a fairy to a padre!

I had a call booked to the UK via Portishead Radio to speak to the family. Up till this point I had never been at home for Christmas since 1966. I was not alone; two and a half years away was only stopped recently. This explains the reasons why means had to be found to keep the morale of the crew in good shape.

The end of the story – we were in the Isle of Man having been to Liverpool first, the speed boat was finally craned and lowered into the water – amid lots of jokes as to whether it would float or not. I attached the rebuilt 40hp Evinrude outboard motor and went right around the ship at speed to cheering from above. I had by now bought water skiing equipment and had loads of sea room to ski.

The Captain was William Staveley who went on to become Commander in Chief of the Fleet and First Sea Lord. My last meeting with him was on board HMS Hermes during the Jubilee Spithead Review in 1976.

Charlie Callus

Christmas Old and New

We all know that Christmas began over 2,000 years ago with the birth of the baby Jesus in Bethlehem, a hot and dusty town in Palestine under severe Roman occupation. His parents were devout Jews and brought up their son in the same tradition. Most of you will know of the day he went missing as a small boy (imagine his mother's panic!) and was found calmly sitting in the temple discussing things with the priests. Most of the renaissance artists depicted Mary and Jesus in the western European tradition rather than the dark-eyed semitic look of reality – but of course Jews were unwelcome in many countries. I don't understand it myself but nevertheless, Christmas in a hot, dusty country is not my idea of fun. I've experienced this in Malawi and it was very hard to get in the festive mood. I've no idea how Australians do it every year.

The Christmas we know today is largely down to the Victorians and so brainwashed are we into their view that we find it hard to imagine anything else. What does Christmas have to do with snow, robins and Christmas trees? Or cards come to that. Nothing, is the answer, but that does not stop us enjoying it this way. Would *A Christmas Carol* work if Scrooge sent a nice salad and a tray of cold drinks to the Cratchits? It would probably have never been written nor would many of the songs, carols, and poems that always emerge at this time of year. And what about all the shmaltzy films that we love to watch replete with turkey and pudding, and of course, snow falling on Christmas Eve?

Of course, some devout Christians go to Bethlehem at Christmas to pray and pay respects. But what about the rest of us? Should we just accept that our enjoyable family get-togethers and presents are nothing at all to do with Christmas? The word itself comes from the Old English Cristes-messe meaning Christ's Mass; but does the commercialised festival of the present day both demean Christian beliefs and remove any remaining traces of Jewishness? Perhaps we need a new name that has no religious connotations. Any ideas? I vote for a Winter Solstice celebration – on the 21st December.

Tina Naples

(With apologies to any scholars reading this)

AGM Feedback

Despite the dreadful weather and the enforced change of date we thankfully had a quorum and were able to proceed.

Your new committee is:

Chair	Tina Naples
Vice-Chair	Anne Bothwell
Secretary	Maureen Bennett
Treasurer	Theresa Mulkerrin
Speaker Finder	Jean Bainbridge
Membership Sec.	Maureen Craik
Group Co-ordinator	Paul Newby
Catering	Mary Adcroft
Website	Alan Thompson
Assistant	Noreen Freeman – for membership and finance

I have been advised that someone out there would like to see the nomination forms – these are readily available from the Secretary – as are the Committee minutes.

Feedback from Consultation with Groups

Thank you to all those Group Leaders and members who came up with ideas to try and make our monthly meeting more attractive to members. All the ideas have been discussed with the committee and this is what we have come up with:

1. **Location.** There was a suggestion that Bowburn is not easily accessible to people in certain parts of the city for people who do not drive. We are going to trial a system of lifts for those who need them. Maureen Craik has volunteered to co-ordinate this. Please email her if you either need a lift or can offer a lift. We need both for this to work. She is at mcraik-40@hotmail.co.uk. Please give your address and post code (for drivers' satnavs).
2. There is no immediate prospect of a move of location but options are being explored.
3. **The talks.** It was suggested that people would be more likely to come if they had an idea of what the talks are about. From January we will be printing a synopsis here in In Contact so do please make sure you read it.
4. The length of the talks was raised with a suggestion that they should be restricted to 40 minutes with questions curtailed. In fact, all our talks are booked on the basis of 45 minutes plus questions. Apart from an occasional overrun, we do manage to keep to this.
5. A suggestion to have hybrid meetings with the talks being live streamed on Zoom or a similar platform. The Committee do have a lot of experience of attending hybrid meetings – very little of it positive. What we will do, however, is explore the potential for recording the talks to be watched at your convenience. No promises on this but worth checking out.
6. **The Hard of Hearing.** We know that some people find it hard to hear what is going on, even with the use of mics. First of all, we do encourage you to sit close to the front and wear your hearing aids if you have them. I have been able to get hold of a neck/lapel mic which avoids the waving around of the mic problem. I intend to investigate the availability of a smaller room which is similarly equipped with electronics, but which will be smaller and less echoey. I shall also be asking about a loop system.
7. **Gender Imbalance.** This was a hard one to respond to. It is certainly true that we have a greater proportion of women members. However, we also try very hard to make sure that the talks and events are attractive to both sexes and that we have both male and female speakers. If the person who raised this topic has some ideas about attracting more men, we would love to hear them (feel free to email me) – perhaps you might like to start a group that might be attractive to men such as carpentry, wood turning, mending stuff (obviously women would not be excluded and do please excuse the gender stereotyping, but we do have all other types of groups). Why not invite your friends along and tell them about all the smart and beautiful women they would meet. Phew! Thank goodness this is not on social media!
8. Of course, the committee recognises that many of you are busy people with other commitments. We hope that everyone has a happy and fulfilling retirement and that the u3a can be a part of that. There is no substitute for finding friends and enjoying time together and we want to play our part in that.

What's on in December

You can also consult the Groups section on the website and contact Group Convenors from the Contacts page.

8.12.22 Entertainment and refreshments	Durham Monthly Meeting	Bowburn Community Centre	1.30 for 2.00pm
No Meeting	Dunelm Monthly Meeting	Bowburn Community Centre	1.30 for 2.00pm (Take membership card)
5.12.22 The Marquis of O and Michael Kohlhaas by Heinrich von Klaus	Book Group	Contact Terry Birchmore for venue on 0191 378 0563	10.00 am monthly.
Every three weeks	German	Contact George Schlesinger for venue on 0191 384 9056	
6.12.22	Topical Discussion	The Beefeater, Broomside Park.	10.00 am monthly.
Winter break – back next year.	Walking Group	Contact Ken Naples or see the website for details. 07711 979098	10.30 am
Wednesday 2.00 pm and Monday 10.30 am (Conversation)	Middling French Last meeting on Mon 19 December.	The Gala Cafe	Both meetings weekly
1.12.22 Please note change of time.	Circle Dancing	Sacriston Methodist Church	1.00 pm monthly.
Thursdays at 9.45 am. Last meeting 15.12.22	French	Contact Elizabeth Morgan for venue on 0191 384 6874.	9.45 am <u>weekly</u> except 2nd Thursday
12.12.22. Subject – Sonnets	Poetry	Gala Theatre Cafe	2.00 pm monthly
8.12.22 – Festive selections (not just Christmas)	Shakespeare Study	Gala Theatre Café	10.15 am
19.12.22. A Bespoke Murder by Edward Marston	Monday Crime Club	Lanchester Garden Centre	10.30 am monthly
N/K – contact Maureen Craik	Scrabble	Contact Maureen Craik for venue on 0191 371 9521	2.00 pm monthly

No Meeting	Music Appreciation	Carrville Methodist Church	2.00 pm monthly
Check with Sylvia for December outing	Pub Lunch	Variable arrangements. Contact Sylvia Buxton on 0191 373 1644	As Arranged
No Meeting	History	Sacriston Methodist Church	2pm monthly
19.12.22	Quiz	Sacriston Methodist Church	2pm monthly
No Meeting	History Too	Sacriston Methodist Church	10.00 am monthly
As Arranged	Cinema	Odeon Cinema, Durham Contact Paul Newby on 07814 518100.	As Arranged

And Finally.....

Don't forget you can contact me at the address below if you have something to contribute. I have space in the next edition. In the meantime, have a lovely Christmas and a Happy New Year and we look forward to seeing you all in January.

Tina Naples (tina.naples@aol.com)