

# 🎄 Newsletter 🎄

Hartlepool & District U3A  
Issue 67, Christmas Edition, December 2022

## Comments from the Chair



The first thing that sprang to mind when I started to write this Newsletter is just how quickly this year has flown by. It seems only yesterday that the sun was shining and blue skies abounded. Now autumn is here with a vengeance and very shortly will see the start of metrological winter. Let's hope these seasons pass by as quickly as summer seems to have done!

Change can be good, of course. We have seen a lot of changes in our u3a with three new members of the committee who have settled in really quickly and are doing an excellent job. They have given the committee renewed energy.

We are, of course always looking for new volunteers, not just on the Committee. We are always grateful to members who help to clear up after each meeting, and their efforts are always appreciated. We also need one or two of you to help to run the kitchen to provide us with tea and coffee. This is not an onerous task, particularly if is done by a small team rather than one person. If no-one is prepared to come forward then we will have to stop providing this service.

The committee is always looking to raise our profile and in January meetings have been arranged with Hartlepool and Stockton NHS and the Macular society where we will give a talk explaining what the u3a is and what our own u3a provides in particular. If we get new members as a result all well and good but the more people who know about us and what we do the better.

We are very lucky to have two of our own members, Barry and Ray, as our guest speakers this month giving us a talk on 'Memories of Christmas past.'

In January we will be having our second fuddle where we all bring along a dish to share with everyone. This might be home - cooked or bought.

Take care everyone.

Roger

# In Praise of Christmas Light

Barry Liddle

There is a sunrise and a sunset every single day and they are absolutely free! You just have to be in the right position at the right time to capture these perfect moments.

In the weeks leading up to Christmas the sky seems to get brighter and bolder. With colours ranging from pink to red, orange and even purple, the start and end of our days during these colder months are much more vivid than at any other time of the year. But why is that? Meteorologists say the answer is due to the interaction of three factors -the tilt of the earth, the type of clouds, and the cold air.

1. The tilt of the Earth at this time of the year means that the sun is lower on the horizon, casting a longer, weaker ray of light, hence the glow that we've come to love and associate with this season.
2. Having mid to high level clouds is also key to beautiful sunrises and sunsets. So that when the Sun starts to set or starts to rise, the angle of the Sun can hit up into the base of that cloud layer and refract back and give us those really beautiful colours as the light comes back down to the surface. The reason we get those sorts of cloud patterns in autumn and winter is because the angle of the Earth tilts a little bit further away from the Sun
3. Cold fronts which are a feature of Autumn and Winter also play a part in giving us the



cloud formations that enable spectacular sunrises and sunsets.

To illustrate the beauty of **sunrises**, I took a photograph from the porch of my house looking down Grange Road towards York Road. It's not

the best photograph in the world, but it does show fairly well how the rays of the sun bounce off the base of medium to high clouds to create a lovely pink glow.



In this second photograph of a **sunrise** over Grange Road, I used the maximum magnification on my camera to bring out the beautiful shades of pink and purple light behind a group of trees.

The third photograph shows a **sunset** over Saltholme Nature Reserve. I took this very close to



Christmas the year before Covid first struck.

*Sources:  
Wikipedia; Kimba Wong, meteorologist with the Queensland Bureau of Meteorology as quoted by Shelley Lloyd at [abs.net/news](http://abs.net/news)*

## Christmas

Ken Williams

Quite understandably, I suppose, the month of December is largely dominated by Christmas – cards, carols, decorations, presents, feasting – and so on.

One thing, however, that is perhaps not so widely appreciated is Christmas verse. There are many lovely pieces but one I would particularly like to recommend to you is the former Poet Laureate, John Betjeman's piece; typically, quite simply, entitled 'Christmas.'

The poem describes the traditions of Christmas and how they compare to the story of the birth of Christ. The poem begins with the speaker describing the lead up to Christmas and how everything in a church is decorated for Advent. These images start the poem on a warm and familiar note. The poem ends with two memorable lines '*That God was man in Palestine And lives today in Bread and Wine.*'

## Greetings from Russia at Christmas

Joan Hannon

Ron and Frank were my brothers-in-law. Ronald the eldest of three siblings, worked at the ICI in Billingham as an Industrial Chemist. Francis the youngest brother was a journalist at the Hartlepool Mail when it was situated in Hartlepool. My husband Tom was a maintenance fitter by trade.

One day during dinner Tom laughingly informed me that Ron and Frank were learning how to speak Russian and were attending night school at the local collage. I was puzzled, I could understand learning French or Italian but why Russian?

By sheer coincidence an article in the local newspaper stated that a merchant ship named The Captain Costello had docked at Hartlepool and one of the crew had taken ill with rheumatic fever. He had been taken to St. Hilda's Hospital; it was later revealed that all the crew on board were Russian.

When Ivan's health started to improve Ron and Frank applied for permission to visit him in hospital.

Over several visits the brothers would try to converse in Russian. On one of these visits Tom also attended. Once Ivan was considered well enough he was transported back to his ship. A few days before The Captain Costello set sail, the three brothers received an invitation to join the crew on board to celebrate Ivan's return. I was told that the hospitality was wonderful with lots of food and drink.

The following Christmas a card arrived from Ivan wishing Tom and me A Happy New Year, apparently at that time Communists didn't celebrate Christmas.

# A Personal View on Christmas Number One Records

Barry Liddle

## Introduction

As we approach Christmas the playlist on the radio is dominated by former Christmas Number One songs. I thought it might be interesting to look back and see how the Christmas record charts have changed over the decades and see if we can discern any patterns and trends.

## The 1950s

The official UK Singles Charts began in the 1950s. In fact the year was 1952 and the first Christmas number one was Al Martino singing *'Here is My Heart'*, which spent nine weeks at number one.

As you can see from the table compiled by Wikipedia, the songs in the 50s were simply the most popular records in the charts in Christmas week. With the exception of Dickie Valentine's *'Christmas Alphabet'* there was as an absence of festive songs targeting the No1 position.

The song I can just about remember from that time was the 1958 comedy hit *"What Do You Want to Make Those Eyes at Me For?"* by Emile Ford and the Checkmates. Although I also recall Harry Belafonte's *"Mary's Boy Child,"* because it became a popular song on the radio for many years after and was later recorded by Boney M, who had one of the biggest selling Christmas Number One hits with it in 1978.

Year	Artist	Song	Weeks at No. 1
1952	Al Martino	"Here in My Heart"	9
1953	Frankie Laine	"Answer Me"	8
1954	Winifred Atwell	"Let's Have Another Party"	5
1955	Dickie Valentine	"Christmas Alphabet"	3
1956	Johnnie Ray	"Just Walkin' in the Rain"	7
1957	Harry Belafonte	"Mary's Boy Child"	7
1958	Conway Twitty	"It's Only Make Believe"	5
1959	Emile Ford and the Checkmates	"What Do You Want to Make Those Eyes at Me For?"	6

*Wikipedia*

## The 1960s

The 1960s was dominated by 3 consecutive Christmas number ones by the Beatles between 63 and 65 and a further number one in 1967 with *'Hello Goodbye'*. In addition, in 1963 & 1967 the Beatles had both number one and number two in the charts. The Beatles also released four films during the decade - *A Hard Day's Night (1964)*, *Help! (1965)*, *Magical Mystery Tour (1967)*, *Yellow Submarine (1968)*. The 1960s was certainly the era of Beatlemania.

Year	Artist	Song	
			9
1960	Cliff Richard and the Shadows	"I Love You"	2
1961	Danny Williams	"Moon River"	2
1962	Elvis Presley	"Return to Sender"	3
1963	The Beatles	"I Want to Hold Your Hand"	5
1964		"I Feel Fine"	5
1965		"Day Tripper" / "We Can Work It Out"]	5
1966	Tom Jones	"Green, Green Grass of Home"	7
1967	The Beatles	"Hello, Goodbye"	7
1968	The Scaffold	"Lily the Pink"	4
1969	Rolf Harris	"Two Little Boys"	6

*Wikipedia*

## The 1970s

A feature of the 1970s was the emergence of a serious contest for the Christmas number-one spot, which began in 1973, when the glam rock bands Slade and Wizzard deliberately released festive songs in an effort to reach the top of the charts at Christmas, with Slade's *"Merry Xmas Everybody"* beating Wizzard's *"I Wish It Could Be Christmas Everyday"* (source: Wikipedia). Stimulated by this competition, the Christmas Number One became a sought-after prize from this period on with considerable prestige going to the successful artist.

Bohemian Rhapsody by Queen released in 1975 and re-released in 1991, is the second bestselling Christmas number one of all time in the UK according to [www.officialcharts.com](http://www.officialcharts.com). It caused a sensation at the time and is now considered a masterpiece. I remember it made a big impression on me when I first heard it in my dingy student bedsit in Hampton Wick!

1970	Dave Edmunds	"I Hear You Knocking"	6
1971	Benny Hill	"Ernie (The Fastest Milkman in the West)"	4
1972	Jimmy Osmond	"Long Haired Lover from Liverpool"	5
1973	Slade	"Merry Xmas Everybody"	5
1974	Mud	"Lonely This Christmas"	4
1975	Queen	"Bohemian Rhapsody"	9
1976	Johnny Mathis	"When a Child Is Born (Soleado)"	3
1977	Wings	"Mull of Kintyre" / "Girls' School"	9
1978	Boney M.	"Mary's Boy Child – Oh My Lord"	4
1979	Pink Floyd	"Another Brick in the Wall (Part 2)"	5

*Wikipedia*

## The 1980s

The 1980s Christmas market was dominated by Band Aid. Band Aid were a charity supergroup brought together at short notice in 1984 by Bob Geldof and Midge Ure to raise money for anti-famine relief in Ethiopia. They released the song "*Do They Know It's Christmas?*" for the Christmas market of that year. According to [www.officialcharts.com](http://www.officialcharts.com) this is the biggest selling number one of all time in the UK. A subsequent version produced by Stock Aitken and Waterman, who produced many of the most successful records in the 80s and 90s, also topped the charts in 1989. After the millennium, the record was re-released on two further occasions in 2004 and 2014 – funds from the latter were used to ease the Ebola crisis in West Africa.

Linked to the 1984 Band Aid single was the legendary 'Live Aid' concert in 1985 - a multi-venue transatlantic benefit concert held on Saturday 13 July 1985. They say you can often remember where you were on the day of major events, in my case I remember vividly watching some of Live Aid at a friend's house in Nottingham after going on to Trent Bridge to see the England cricket team play Australia in that summer's third Test Match.

1980	St Winifred's School Choir	"There's No One Quite Like Grandma"	2
1981	The Human League	"Don't You Want Me"	5
1982	Renée and Renato	"Save Your Love"	4
1983	The Flying Pickets	"Only You"	5
1984	Band Aid	"Do They Know It's Christmas?"	5
1985	Shakin' Stevens	"Merry Christmas Everyone"	2
1986	Jackie Wilson	"Reet Petite"	4
1987	Pet Shop Boys	"Always on My Mind"	4
1988	Cliff Richard	"Mistletoe and Wine"	4
1989	Band Aid II	"Do They Know It's Christmas?"	3

Wikipedia

## The 1990s

Whitney Houston spent more weeks as the Christmas number one (10) than any other artist with '*I will always Love You*' but in terms of the number of songs at number one, the 90's was dominated by the Spice Girls'.

That well know singer 'Mr Blobby' also featured, maintaining the rich tradition of the novelty records becoming Christmas number ones.

1990	Cliff Richard	"Saviour's Day"	1
1991	Queen	"Bohemian Rhapsody" / "These Are the Days of Our Lives" <sup>l</sup>	5
1992	Whitney Houston	"I Will Always Love You"	10
1993	Mr Blobby	"Mr Blobby"	3
1994	East 17	"Stay Another Day"	5
1995	Michael Jackson	"Earth Song"	6
1996	Spice Girls	"2 Become 1"	3
1997		"Too Much"	2
1998		"Goodbye"	1
1999	Westlife	"I Have a Dream" / "Seasons in the Sun" <sup>l</sup>	4

Wikipedia

### The Years 2000-2022

By the time we get to 2000 and the Millennium celebrations, my interest in the Christmas number one's begins to wane. This is in part is a reaction against the way in which talent shows on TV in the weeks leading up to Christmas were able to use their momentum and some astute marketing to engineer a Christmas hit for the winner of the contest. This trend began when *Popstars: The Rivals* and continued with the winners of *The X Factor* - who took the number-one spot on seven occasions.

There was a reaction against these Talent shows from the mid -2000s, but since then novelty and Charity records have tended to dominate the number one position.

### Summary

The Christmas number one first became a prestigious achievement back in the 1970s when Slade's "*Merry Xmas Everybody*" competed with Wizzard's "*I Wish It Could Be Christmas Everyday*" back in 1973. These two songs have been played repeatedly on radio over the Christmas period ever since amongst other former Christmas number ones.

It is also worth noting that some of the most memorable and durable Christmas songs over the decades never reached number one status; these include Mariah Carey (*All want for Christmas is You*); Aled Jones (*Walking in the Air*); The Pogue's featuring Kirsty McColl (*Fairytale in New York*) and Middlesbrough lad Chris Rea singing (*Driving Home for Christmas*).

### Sources

Wikipedia; [www.officialcharts.com](http://www.officialcharts.com)



# How to Keep Poinsettias for More Than One Christmas

Barry Liddle

## Introduction

In the wild in Mexico and South America, Poinsettias can grow to eight feet tall with blazing red leaves. Nature's own alternative Christmas Tree. However, we are more familiar with the cultivated version which is a house plant considerably smaller and more manageable to look after.



Poinsettias make excellent Christmas Gifts.  
photograph: (c) Andy Rees

Poinsettias are bought in huge numbers at this time of year as a welcome addition to festive decorations or as a popular gift for friends and family. They come in a range of colours from white, pink to the traditional deep red.

Poinsettias are easy to look after if you follow a few basic guidelines. To keep the plant in good health try not to let the room temperatures fall much below 55°F (13°F). Poinsettias also prefer a well-lit location such as a windowsill. Always water them thoroughly but wait until the compost is quite dry before watering again. Overwatering is the most common cause of failure in poinsettia as with most indoor plants. Follow these simple guidelines and Poinsettias will keep in good condition for two or three months.

## How to Keep Poinsettias for More Than One Christmas

When the leaves eventually begin to fade and discolour in the New Year, it is customary to dispose of them via the compost or recycling bin and replace them with new plants next year. However, an old friend of mine Andy Rees, tells me that it's possible to keep these festive plants for another year.



Andy's Poinsettia on 1st Nov. 2022.

The secret according to Andy is to cut them back quite hard. He pruned his Poinsettias last summer and he has sent me photographs on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> of November to show how the plant is regenerating as we approach Christmas.

He has also given them a regular feed. On the basis of the photographs, he will have fully regrown plants sometime over Christmas and the New Year.



Andy's Poinsettia on 22 Nov. 2022

Now that I know you can keep Poinsettias for a second year, I've done a little research and the consensus of opinion seems to be that if you want to guarantee the plant will be fully rejuvenated for Christmas then you should prune back the plants to about 4 inches in April and maintain them at a room temperature of about 55°F (13°F). In May, the advice is that the plants should be re-potted with a mixture of three parts compost and one part grit. However, as Andy has so clearly shown, even without

repotting, a successful outcome can be achieved as long as you provide them with some feed.

### Christmas Challenge

If you buy or receive a Poinsettia this Christmas, your challenge is to follow the guidelines above and grow the plant for a second year. Perhaps, at this time next year, you could let me know how you got on and please send a photograph if you can.

## Limericks

John Grange

A beauty therapist called Clare,  
Got terrible knots in her hair,  
She would brush day and night,  
To sort out her plight,  
But had to give up in despair!

A deaf miner called Trevor from Kelloe,  
Couldn't talk low, he would bellow,  
His mates tried to explain,  
His shouting was a pain,  
But he thought he was a decent fellow!

Little baby Sue was such a delight,  
Keeping herself in the spotlight,  
But her gums would ache,  
As her teeth started to break,  
Keeping everyone awake all night!

Peter the cricket umpire,  
Decided he needed to retire,  
But the summer months dragged,  
And with that time on his hands,  
So he decided to sing in a choir!

Linda the baby Llama,  
Used to cause so much drama,  
When people came to see her,  
At the yearly country fair,  
Oh she was such a charmer!



# Down Christmas Memory Lane

Barry Liddle



The U3A Luncheon Group took a block booking at the Grand Hotel in 2016 for a Christmas lunch.



The Gardening Group used to hold indoor activities and talks at the Grange Road Community Centre. One year, all the voluntary and community groups at the centre were invited to submit a giant Christmas card promoting their group. This is the U3A Gardening Group's entry. We didn't win the prize, but we were mentioned in dispatches!



Members of the Craft Group making Christmas Table Decorations

# Directory

## List of Committee Members for 2022/23

**Chair –**

Roger Say

**Vice Chair–**

Wendy Borthwick

**Secretary –**

Phil Jefferies

**Treasurer –**

Cliff Cordiner

**Membership Secretary –**

Wendy Borthwick

**Group Co-ordinator –**

Pauline Williamson

**Minutes Secretary –**

Linda Sargent

**I.T. Support (Website and Beacon) –**

Phil Jefferies

**Committee –** Keith Alder; Irene Archer

Don Taylor.

### Roles of Non- Committee Members

**Newsletter Editor-**

Barry Liddle

**Speaker Organiser –**

Jessica Scott

## Interest Group Leaders

- **Archaeology/History Group.** Chris McLoughlin.
- **Board Games.** Irene Williams.
- **Bowls:** Ray Elliston.
- **Bridge:** Phil Jefferies.
- **Chess Group.** Roger Say.
- **Creative Writing Group.** Roger Say.
- **Family History:** Ray Elliston.
- **Film Group.** Contact Phil Jefferies.
- **Fun with Fabrics.** Ann Say
- **Gardens and Gardening Group: Vacant** (Not meeting at the moment.)
- **Luncheon Group.** Jacky Armstrong (Not meeting at the moment.)
- **Music Appreciation Group.** Barry Liddle (Not meeting at the moment.)
- **Natural History Group.** Group Leader role shared.
- **Photography for Fun Group.** Ray Elliston.
- **Quiz Team** John Campbell.
- **Reading Group** Irene Williams
- **Shibashi Exercise Group.** Marjorie Reynolds.
- **'View to Vue'.** Roger Say.
- **Walking Group.** Keith Alder

## Copy Wanted for This Newsletter

Articles, Short Stories, Interesting Photographs (with captions), Limericks & Poems.

All contributions to the next Newsletter are most welcome.

Copy deadline for the next issue is 20 December 2022.

**Barry Liddle, Newsletter Editor**