

# DESERT ISLAND TIMES

*Sharing fellowship in*  
NEWPORT SE WALES U3A

No.20

29<sup>th</sup> July 2020



*"First with the Latest"*

*South Wales Argus vans ready to deliver the news, 1957*

*A MISCELLANY OF  
CONTRIBUTIONS  
FROM OUR MEMBERS*

## Where we are – our present position and the issues we face

Your Committee met (outdoors and socially distanced! – see page 4) last week to “catch up” on ongoing business and to consider our present position. To assist us we have co-opted Jackie Kerr to our ranks – her expertise will be invaluable. Obviously, we all want to get back to U3A at the earliest opportunity, but we have to ensure the absolute safety of all of our members before we can consider reopening the centre.

In common with all other U3As across the country we have not been able to hold an AGM this year – to be quorate we would need at least 70 members in attendance and, for reasons outlined below, that is simply not possible. We were agreed that technology would not assist in running such a large meeting. As a result it was decided that Sections 4 and 5 of the Constitution would be temporarily suspended (for the duration of the crisis at least), as it would not be possible to hold elections for the Committee. Members presently in post would stay until elections could take place.

In terms of finance and membership, we are in a good financial position as around 78% of last year’s membership have renewed. We do have on-going financial commitments, however, as we have to pay an amount per member to central U3A funds and also the costs of Third Age Matters. Additionally, it is highly likely that start-up costs will be high in view of additional safety measures that will be necessary.

Although many of our groups have not been able to take advantage of technology, some language groups and Creative Writing have “met” using Zoom and small groups of walkers and beginner ukulele players have met informally. I know that many of you have kept in touch regularly with other members throughout the period.

There are major problems with restarting. Under present restrictions operating in Wales and the particular circumstances applying in Shaftesbury Street we would have to comply with:

- social distancing – still at a distance of 2m
- the need for regular cleaning of all rooms and toilet areas – who would be responsible?
- the fact that use of the kitchen would have to be suspended
- the operation of a one-way system
- strict regulation of the sizes of the groups

There could be potential travel problems with restricted bus services and issues regarding car-sharing. Would members feel comfortable about coming in and joining larger groups at the moment?

With a 1 metre gap between people, we could allow 59 people in total into the building, but with a 2 metre gap only 31. Handling money would cause problems for groups like History, Gardening and at the door, where a new system of admission to the building would have to be put into operation.

For all of these reasons, the Committee felt we could not advocate restarting in September 2020, even if guidance from Government were to allow this. It must be said, though, that there doesn’t seem much likelihood of such a large policy change in the near future.

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**This will be the last issue of Desert Island Times for a few weeks. A Summer Special will be sent out around the middle of August. We have completed 20 editions, with a total of 524 pages. I take this opportunity to thank the 81 contributors who have submitted such a diverse selection of material for the enjoyment of the wider membership – if you are amongst them, then please keep up the good work! If not, please don’t continue to “hide your lights under a bushel” - let us hear from you – soon!**

**I also want give a huge “thank you” to my technical department – Gwyn Havard – for his unfailing expertise in ensuring that you have this publication delivered easily by email. Because of his expertise we have so many photographs each week. I’m sure you’ll agree that these add greatly to our enjoyment.**

*Our thanks go to our member **Ivy Forkin**, who is a Friend of the Newport Ship and who forwarded to me the Friends' July Newsletter. This contains much of interest including the following article by Andrew Hemmings BA(Hons) FCILT, who is a local author and researcher. It is reproduced here by his kind permission and that of the FoNS Secretary, Rob Kenny.*

### **The Discharge of a Torpedo – Alexandra Docks, Newport**

This incident in Alexandra Docks in April 1915 nearly led to war with Italy. A torpedo accidentally discharged by a Royal Navy destroyer narrowly missed a neutral Italian steamer loading coal in the dock. In the best tradition of wartime secrecy and deception, the guilty ship was deliberately misnamed in the subsequent House of Commons statement. The secret of who almost irreparably altered the course of the First World War remains undisclosed to this day.

The briefest of references in the edition of Hansard for 6 May 1915 reveals an incident at the docks that might have changed the course of the First World War. Sir Richard Cooper asked “if, on the evening of 21st April, a party of ladies was taken over the torpedo destroyer Lawton, whilst lying in Alexandra Dock, Newport (Mon), and a torpedo was fired by one of the party across the dock, narrowly missing an Italian steamer and burying itself in the dock side; if so, what is the value of the damage done, including the value of the torpedo; and if it is within the regulations for parties of strangers to be shown over naval vessels during war time?”

Dr McNamara responding for the First Lord of the Admiralty said “The facts are practically as stated, except that the accident was not caused by one of the party, but that the firing of the torpedo was due to gross carelessness on the part of one of the crew, disciplinary measures for which are now being considered. The party consisted of four friends of a chief petty officer, two of whom, I understand, being employees in the docks. The estimated damage has not been ascertained, and I do not think it would be in the public interest to give the value of the torpedo. The regulations admit of friends of the crew being shown around ships during war, at the discretion of the commanding officer.”

The Newport correspondent of the Central News wires showed commendable initiative in filing a fuller story that is quoted below:

“The accidental discharge of a torpedo in the Alexandra Docks at Newport to which the question addressed to the First Lord of the Admiralty in the House of Commons has reference, caused considerable excitement in the vicinity of the docks. The circumstances, it appears, were very simple but the consequences might have been serious. For some time past the Alexandra Docks have been used by the Admiralty as a base for torpedo-boat destroyers, and the officers have become exceedingly popular with the inhabitants of Newport. Many of the latter have from time to time been allowed to inspect the craft, the mechanism of which was explained.

Visitors Aboard – On the occasion referred to, a gentleman, his niece and another young lady were on board, and one of the gunners was explaining the working of the torpedo tubes and the discharging of the torpedoes. The charge itself had been removed and placed to one side. Meanwhile another gunner came along and, thinking that the explanation had been concluded, replaced the charge and went away. On his return, the first gunner, unaware that the charge had been replaced proceeded with his demonstration, and with the remark 'This is how the torpedo is discharged' pulled the lever. Immediately there was a report, and to the utter consternation of those on board the torpedo left the tube and travelled at the usual depth under water, leaving a trail by which its course could be marked, right across the dock, and making straight for a large Italian steamer lying at one of the coal hoists.

Italian Vessel's Escape – Everyone thought that the Italian steamer was doomed, but for some reason the course of the torpedo seemed to have been deflected, and instead of striking the steamer it crashed into

the sloping wall of the dock , some twenty feet astern of the vessel. The explosion, however, threw the water a hundred feet into the air, drenching the men working on one of the hoists and many of those on the steamer, and considerably damaging the bank. The feeling of relief of those on board the destroyer when they saw that so little damage had been done, and no personal injuries had been sustained, may be imagined.”

The incident obviously had the potential to cause great embarrassment to the British government. More seriously, the Allies were in secret negotiations at this time with the Italian government, seeking to persuade the country to join the war against Germany and Austria-Hungary (the Central Powers). The sinking of a neutral Italian ship with subsequent loss of life in a British port might have tipped the scales against the UK and French governments and induced Italy to side with Britain's enemies.

One of the undiscovered secrets is the name of the Royal Navy Ship involved. There is no evidence of HMS LAWTON in the First World War. My supposition is that Lawton is used as a collective reference to an 'L' or Laforey-class torpedo boat destroyer, to avoid giving too much information to an enemy. On 1<sup>st</sup> May 1915 L- class destroyers from Harwich took part in the Battle of Noordhinder Bank off the Dutch Coast.

### **A First .... We think!**

Your Committee met for the first time since we closed our doors on 13<sup>th</sup> March for the duration of the current hostilities. Bearing in mind all of the restrictions that are currently in place, the meeting was held in the open air – probably for the first time in the history of our U3A!

On Monday 20<sup>th</sup> July we met in Gwyneth Hawkes’ beautiful front garden where social distancing was easily achieved. Being rather “countryfied” meant that we weren’t too bothered by the sounds of passing traffic, although at one point proceedings were hindered by a somewhat tuneful mowing machine!



## Cryptic Crossword Pic'n'Mix Clues 3 - Numbers Representing Letters - Angela Robins

Many Cryptic Crossword Clues are 'Pic'n'Mix Clues' which are a mixture of 'The Dozen' types of clues, such as the Numbers Representing Letters Clue.

i.e. Nothing/ one/takes to fifty/ will lubricate (3) = O 1 L Combined with other clues they yield words or single letters to form a composite answer.

e.g. Recognise/ one /to knock/ whenever /daY ends (8). = 1/dent/if/y This one is a mixture of a number (1), word exchanges (dent/ if) and part word (y) clues.

Or - Cruel person is sad with one good person (6). = Sad/1/st Sad (text)/1 for one/ 'st' is an A-Z Abbreviation for saint.

Try these clues - they are a mixture but all include the Numbers Representing Letters Clue element and a definition of the answer required. The answers are on page 17.

- |  |                                |
|--|--------------------------------|
| 1. Figure that's approaching church is a fish (5).                         | A-Z Abbreviation               |
| 2. Re municipality with a hundred and four in charge (5).                  | A-Z Abbreviation               |
| 3. Cycled one kilometre in bed (5).  | A-Z Abbreviation/text          |
| 4. Bug that knocks for six, right - me and you (5)                         | A-Z Abbreviation/Word Exchange |
| 5. One in vehicle is fond of looking in mirror (4).                        | Word Exchange                  |
| 6. An agent of the best communist got it fixed (8).                        | Word Exchange                  |
| 7. Live first to support former partner (5).                               | Word Exchanges                 |
| 8. Come round/ always back/ about six (6).                                 | Word Exchange Reversed         |
| 9. Trysts of 51/ excellent/ boys (8).                                      | Word Exchange                  |
| 10. Skimpy costume? Cycling briefly wearing one (6).                       | Part of a Word Exchange        |
| 11. After brief surgery one consumed a drug (6).                           | Part Word/Word Exchange        |
| 12. Dirtiness of 50, no more, in plaza endlessly (7).                      | Part of a Word Exchange        |
| 13. Meet Spanish Man when/ I rave about/ after ten (6).                    | Anagram                        |
| 14. Dodgy trading /could be epic firing /about ten (5-6).                  | Anagram                        |
| 15. Canada is in trouble around five where Danes and Swedes live (11).     | Anagram                        |
| 16. One doing away with rainbow's colour (6).                              | Anagram                        |
| 17. Ancient tribe requires one nice change (5).                            | Anagram                        |
| 18. Opinion poll reveals a thousand leading original responses indeed (4). | Acrostic                       |
| 19. Exemplary one hundred leads overseas negotiations in Croatia (6).      | Acrostic                       |
| 20. A thousand begins one very interesting entertaining film (5).          | Acrostic                       |

### When Emma Met Runty by John Williams

" Hey, Gramps, look at the little piggies in the clearing."

"Yeah, they're really cute, digging in the mud like that."

"I love the little one, he has one brown eye and one blue one. Just like my poor Hoppy did."

"Here comes the farmer. See, he's carrying a bucket filled with cabbage stumps and mis-shapen carrots." A writhing scrummage of fat piglets buried their snouts in the bucket before it touched the ground.

I covered my ears to silence their squeals and grunts. The red-faced farmer cursed, heaved the bucket upward, shoed them away and threw the food toward the little one.

"Oh, that's not fair, Gramps. The big piggies are barging the smallest one out of the way and eating all the food," Emma said.

"When we come tomorrow, we'll bring some tender parsnips from the garden just for the runt."

" What's a runt."

" The smallest one in the litter."

I felt two small arms embrace me. "Oh, you are so kind, Gramps." The next day Emma was knocking on my door before the sun had cleared the hill. Her feet, clad in pink shoes and white ankle socks, were never still and always pointing to my door.

"And what do you want?" I said scratching my bald head to pretend I'd forgotten.

"To feed the runt, you promised yesterday."

"Oh, so I did. Just let me get dressed and we'll dig up some parsnips for him," I said patting her head.

On the way to the clearing, Emma almost pulled my arm out of its socket.

"Don't forget, throw the parsnip to the little pig."

Emma's brow wrinkled with concentration as she took aim. The parsnip looped through the air before bouncing off his head and fell at the feet of the other pigs, who jostled each other to get to the parsnip.

"Quick, throw another one while they're busy eating."

It landed at his front trotter and the runt chewed half of it, before moving away."

"That's odd Emma. I thought pigs loved eating."

"The others do. That's all they do."

"Perhaps the runt doesn't like parsnips, tomorrow we'll bring some lettuce for him."

"Yes Gramps, that's a great idea."

For months we visited the pigs every morning, but whatever food we gave the little pig he ate a little and left the rest for the others, who grew bigger and fatter. Soon, their stomachs dragged along the ground and their bodies wobbled when they moved but still, they ate and ate. Emma said they must soon burst.

One morning Emma ran towards Runty, as she called him, her blonde pigtail bobbing with each step.

"What happened to the other pigs?" I asked the farmer.

He turned to me and drew his finger across his throat and whispered in my ear. "They reached market weight, they'll be bacon by now."

We turned around at the squeals of delight from Emma and Runty as they chased around the field.

"What you going to do with the little one?"

He shrugged. "I wish I knew. He's never going to put on enough weight for the market and I can't keep him on the farm, but he's so cute with his odd coloured eyes. I must find a home for him. It's odd, farming is a business but we can't help getting fond of the animals, they almost become friends. See you tomorrow."

"Sorry, we can't make it. It's Emma's birthday. It'll have to be the next day."

"Emma lives in the Oaks, doesn't she? Would it be okay, if I gave her a nice surprise for her birthday?"

I leaned forward to shake his calloused hand.

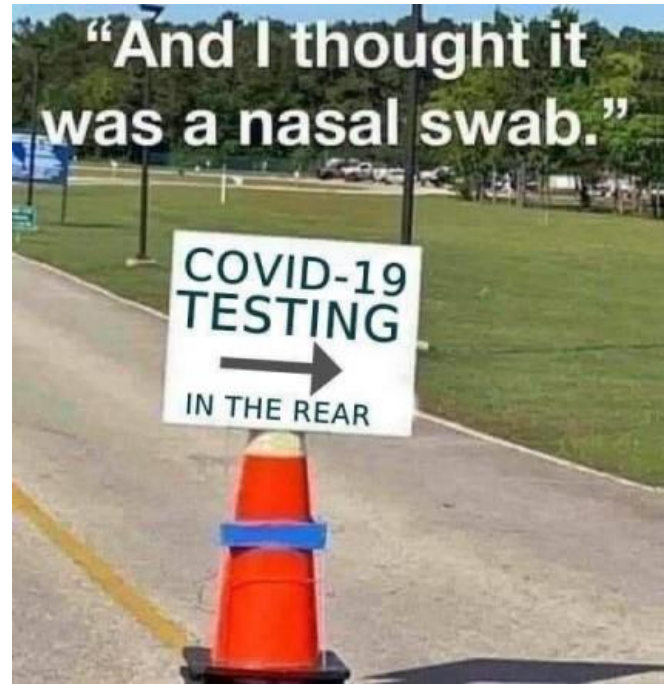
I saw his gaze was fixed on the small figures of Emma and Runty as they sat together and I nodded.

The frown on his weather-beaten face melted away and his face glowed with happiness.

The next morning, I was wakened by squeals of delight coming from Emma and Runty. They lived two doors away from me! It was good to hear that Emma was happy again, she been so heartbroken when her pet rabbit, Hoppie, had died last week. I'd thought she'd never laugh again. All she needed was some animal, like Runty to love.

I'll never know why Runty didn't eat like the other pigs, but I know he's alive and happy yet they are dead.

Some Sidelights on Covid-19 submitted by Hannah Parker



The Bridge Puzzle submitted by Nigel Bolter

Four people are on one side of the bridge. The bridge will be destroyed by a bomb in 17 minutes. Everyone has to get across to the other side before that. The problem is that it's dark and so they cannot cross the bridge without a flashlight and they only have one flashlight. Plus the bridge is only big enough for two people to cross at once. The four people walk at different speeds: one of them is so fast that it only takes him 1 minute to cross the bridge, another takes 2 minutes, the third guy takes 5 minutes, the last takes 10 minutes to cross the bridge. When two people cross the bridge together (sharing the flashlight), they both walk at the slower person's pace.

Can all the four people get across before the bridge blows up? if yes, then how?



## Sudoku

Each row and each column has to contain numbers 1 to 9 once only; each large square of nine smaller squares likewise. Do not guess numbers! Work out each by elimination.

The four puzzles get progressively more difficult.

No 1 is "Easy", No 2 is "Medium", No 3 is "Hard" and No 4 is "Evil". Good luck!

1. Easy

4	7				3	6	2	
3		6	5	1				
	2				6		3	1
			2		8	7		
	5		4		9		8	
		8	1		7			
2	4		9				6	
				2	5	9		4
	1	3	6				5	8

2. Medium

	4		8		3			
	8	6	9		1			
		9				4		5
						5	4	
	5		4	9	8		2	
	9	2						
7		3				8		
			1		7	3	5	
			2		9		6	

3. Hard

	5	4		1				
		7		8			4	1
6				3				
4		3		9				
	7	9				5	8	
			8			4		2
			3					9
3	9			7		1		
				9		2	3	

4. Evil

				1		9		
			4	6		2		1
		9			8			
	9	2			7		3	
3								7
	5		9			1	2	
			6			4		
9		3		7	5			
		8		9				



## **A Parallel Universe? by Stephen Berry**

Many of you will know of my very great interest in railways and railway history and I have already written about my dream holiday in 1963 when I spent a week travelling the railways of Wales (DIT 10, p6). I have also suggested that, as one of my great grandfathers was a railway navvy, this interest might well be in my genes!

What far fewer of you will know, though, is that my interest also stretches into a parallel universe – that of railway modelling. This was an interest which was planted at an early age – my father bought me a train set for my very first Christmas. This was merely a collection of pieces of track, two small engines, a few coaches and wagons and some miscellaneous bits and pieces, plus the electrical controllers. He had got it at a bargain price from someone with whom he worked and it was assembled on the floor of the living room in next to no time!

This lasted until I was nine when we moved to a larger house. By this time I had also acquired a collection of Dinky toys and, for some reason, had also developed a very rudimentary interest in providing buildings for the “streets” on which I ran my vehicles. These were odd boxes on which I had drawn doors, windows and shop windows. After the move my parents assigned the conservatory to my use and my father constructed a frame of baseboards which formed three sides of a rectangle on which I could lay a small, but more permanent, railway layout. Co-incidentally I also discovered Airfix buildings, plastic kits which built into houses, shops, pubs and the like and which meant I could expand the creative side of the hobby as well. This was the turning point!

Now adult railway modellers often get bad press – ‘grown men playing with toys’ is the usual opinion! So what is the difference between ‘playing with toy trains’ and ‘railway modelling’?

Perhaps the greatest difference over the years is that models have moved away from basic imitations of what most people would recognise as a locomotive, a coach or a wagon, but the purist would shun because of major points of inaccuracy. Nowadays the model is generally an almost exact scale model of the real thing. Indeed, there is now such a wealth of equipment and scenic additions commercially available, that it is quite easy to make a model of a railway in a realistic setting, although the cost is by no means small!

My layouts have always been 1:76 scale (00 gauge). However it is rarely possible to construct a scale model of even the smallest station - so compromises have to be made. The railway modeller will always want to construct a layout that embodies realistic railway practices, one that “looks right”, and will often base this on an actual station. This can be done either by taking an actual location and reducing what is included; or by taking an imaginary location and building a “might have been” layout. My first major layout was started shortly after we married (yes, Gill takes a great interest in this hobby as well!) and was a much-reduced model of Exeter Central station, one I mentioned in my memorable childhood holidays article in DIT 17, p28. We made a few site visits to photograph buildings at the “real” station and produced reasonable reproductions of the main buildings and the signal boxes. An old school friend also assisted in the running of this quite large layout (20ft long, 8ft wide) and we ran trains to the 1962 summer timetable.

Subsequent moves of house or location within a house have meant different locations have been used according to available space. All, however, have been based in the West Country and in locations where, by a slight distortion of history, both the Western and Southern Regions of British Railways (formerly the Great Western Railway and Southern Railway) could have justifiably been found and all have used that same timetable.

It was great to operate a large layout at the time when both my sons were at home or at least living locally, as the three of us (and Gill, of course) could be involved and fully employed. However, for the last 16 years the layout has been in our loft, something which was gradually proving more difficult for the two remaining team members and which came to a head last year when I had a minor fall from the loft ladder. Something had to be done – and lockdown proved to be our salvation!

Nominally we live in a three-bedroomed house, but since the last of our children (and my father, who lived with us for a while) departed, the two spare bedrooms became Gill's craft workroom and my overflow library. The library could be partially relocated to our substantial shed and the room rearranged to take a smaller, and therefore far more manageable railway layout, and this is now well on the way to being up and running, though far from complete – one never completes a railway layout!

Tastes change over the course of a lifetime. This new layout probably incorporates many aspects of my interests and will be far more scenic than previous layouts. It is largely down to an upsurge in the availability of new scenic additions, not the least being a beautiful set of 1930s Art-Deco "Odeon-style" station buildings (as found on the Southern Railway) – and a superb set of colliery buildings. The Southern Railway (later Southern Region) did, as its name suggests, cover the south of England – where could a coal mine be found there? There was a Kent coalfield, but that was far too far east of my chosen area, but by sheer luck (or serendipity!) I discovered that there was a coalfield at Bideford. There was not much information about it to be found on the internet but when I was in Bideford last year I went into a small bookshop and, almost apologetically, asked the sales assistant if by any chance she knew of a book about the coalfield. "Hold on," she said, went to a shelf and – bingo! – she produced a slim paperback (42 pages in A5 format) with a very-well researched account of this almost unknown industry. At £3.75 I felt that I was robbing the shop!

Just like Angela's Cryptic Crossword clues, a "pick 'n' mix" approach seemed possible. If I modelled Bideford as it might have been, it could satisfy most of my requirements. Bideford was served by railway, by a Southern Region branch from Barnstaple to Torrington. I planned the route of a possible railway from Bideford to Wadebridge in Cornwall via the coast. This was not beyond the bounds of possibility. Since the Western Region also served Barnstaple that too could be incorporated by a slight twist of truth. The station at Bideford was not in the town, but over the long bridge at the area known as "East-the-Water" – which is where the coal mines were situated. Now these mines were small, either outcrops (where the coal seams actually came to the surface) or drift mines which could be walked into from the surface. I wanted a "deep" mine, with the recognisable headgear for the shaft into the ground, so some greater pretence was involved at this point. However, the railway and colliery part of the model has turned out as I wanted – I can use the locomotives and rolling stock of both regions together and, with a complete and utter disregard for history on this occasion, incorporate rows of private owner colliery wagons in their distinctive liveries. The fact that the layout is set in 1962 and the last of these had been seen at least a decade earlier makes no difference to me. I am running this part of the parallel universe and I run it as I feel the real universe should have been run!

The scenics are currently in construction. They will incorporate some of my fondest memories – of the small West Country towns that climb up the hills on which they are built, the busy-ness of the streets with their ad-hoc parking arrangements, a nod towards the small Welsh mining towns with their colliery, and a small group of factories and works. Incidentally, I have a model of a small church, first produced in the 1950s by Airfix and still available. It is almost an exact replica of the small church at Bideford-east-the-water. Serendipity indeed!



Left: The chairman with his first "floor" model railway - 1955

Page 11 top left – Colliery

Page 11 top right – industrial area in planning

Page 11 centre left – General view of station

Page 11 centre right – Busy at Bideford – two expresses, a railcar and a goods train

Page 11 bottom – close-up of station and goods depot





It was considered the best photo of this century. A lioness and her cub were crossing the Savannah but the heat was excessive and the cub was in great difficulty walking.

An elephant realized that the cub would die and carried him in his trunk to a pool of water walking beside his mother. And we call them wild animals.

It's a great lesson for mankind who are fighting and dying for no reason. **Submitted by Anne Hawkins**

### **A Covid Carer's Lot – Jackie Mills**

My husband needs 24-hour care and I am his carer. I employ 2 people to help me look after him and give me a break so that I can go shopping, see friends and do some voluntary work every week. One of the 2 people comes to work on a bus and the other has another job in a hospital. In the week before lockdown was announced, we decided that we didn't want to put ourselves in more danger by having either of these people coming into our house while the virus was so prevalent, so I was left to cope alone.

Caring is very isolating at the best of times but when you have no means of escaping even for 10 minutes then life becomes very lonely. Social media and the phone became even more important than it was before the pandemic. You soon realise who your real friends are as they are the only ones to check on you every so often. We lost so many friends when my husband first became ill and a group of new friends were made, the majority of these also being carers. I know of many other carers in Newport who were in a similar situation to me. In order to keep their loved ones safe, they made the difficult decision to cope alone. Four months later the majority of carers are still coping in splendid isolation as even though the virus appears to be under control around here, their domiciliary care packages were stopped and they are unable to get them reinstated without new assessments of needs etc.

One thing I personally found very difficult was the total inability of the media to differentiate between care workers (whether working in care homes or out in the community) and carers such as myself. Every Thursday evening the whole country stood on their doorsteps clapping for carers (and key workers) but not one mention of the thousands of people in the country who are used to being invisible at the best of times but were finding it increasingly difficult to cope!

In the middle of June every year there is Carers' Week when the profile of carers is raised throughout the country. Special events are held to bring carers together either for coffee or to speak to professionals within social services and the health board about life as a carer, and some carers even appear on television. This year the theme was meant to be Making Carers Visible... need I say more?

## **ANGEL and DEMON by Martyn Vaughan**

Ever since Kowalski's guerrillas had taken over the village, we knew we were living on borrowed time.

Every week we would assemble in what used to be our village hall and go through the sadistic ritual that he enjoyed so much. One by one, each of the villagers would draw a card from the dog-eared pack that he placed before us. Each person would, with drawn features, turn the card over and stare at it, knowing that what he saw would mean life or death. Any standard card would mean another wretched few weeks of life, but one card ensured certain doom.

In typical savagery, Kowalski had chosen the Joker as the emissary of death. If when you turned over the greasy, dog-eared card, you were confronted by the smiling face of that purveyor of innocent fun, you knew that you probably had only seven days to live.

You were forced to wear that torn and tattered purple T-Shirt which many unfortunate villagers had worn before you and were thus marked for execution by Kowalski's thugs.

You had only one chance of life: on the sixth day, the one before your execution, you had to present Kowalski and his goons with a gift of some kind. If he approved of it, you could remove the tattered T-Shirt and receive the gift of another seven days of miserable existence.

Many villagers had tried to escape the firing squads by offering ever more elaborate gifts, but only one had actually been permitted to remove that dread item of clothing. And of course, a few weeks later he had turned over the Joker again and had not escaped the second time.

There were not many of us left in the village now; a few had tried to escape across the marshes but had always been caught and had been shot on the spot. So, no-one else tried and with bitter resignation they awaited their fate.

I'm not entirely sure why the guerrilla band hated us so much. They were all from the slums and disease-ridden alleys of the big cities and had nothing but contempt for we simple peasants. They treated us as if we were just some kind of pitiful apes – not human at all, and every one of them despised our country-ways and knowledge. "There's only one thing a man needs to know," Kowalski had said to me once as he rammed the muzzle of a submachine gun into my belly, "and that's how to handle one of these!"

And so, my time was nearly up. I had taken my gift late on the previous evening of the penultimate day of my period of freedom. It had been a gift of our simple foodstuffs: some wormy apples; some emaciated pears; some mushrooms; some eggs and a few thin, pale slices of bacon. "For your breakfast," I had said to the bored-looking killers that made up Kowalski's band of hired guns. One had looked at one of the apples, thrown it in my face and kicked me out. I could hear them bellowing with laughter as I limped away.

And now was the last day: the day that would almost certainly bring my execution.

I stood before the desk, which still bore the basket that I had used to deliver my gifts. I could see there was half an apple and one thin mushroom left inside it.

I looked Kowalski in the eye, wondering if I should speak first. He stared back.

Finally, I plucked up courage and asked: "Did you enjoy my gifts, sir?"

He stared silently for a while and then said: "It was filthy muck not fit for pigs."

"But you did eat it, sir?" I asked in a pleading voice.

"Oh yes, we all ate it," he rasped, "Seeing as there's little else in this backward crap hole."

"And?" I said, looking around at my would-be executioners, "Do I ...?"

"Live?" Kowalski roared and shared amused glances with his gang, "after giving us that pile of manure! What do you think?"

My shoulders slumped for a moment, but then I straightened myself and looked around the room at his gang of murderers, "I had hoped that you would enjoy my simple offerings, but it seems that some of you may have upset stomachs. A few of your gallant men look a little queasy."

And that was true: quite a few of the men were looking distinctly unwell and were shuffling awkwardly as if they wanted to leave the room.

Kowalski's grin disappeared instantly, and he stared ferociously at me. "How do you know that?"

I returned his stare, this time my spine was straight and my gaze firm.

"And how do you feel, sir? Is your stomach churning, is your brow slick with sweat? No need to answer, my lord, I can see it is from here. I think you may be ill, sir."

Kowalski was now thoroughly alert. "What have you done?" he roared.

I smiled. "You mocked our country ways sir, but if you had known a bit more of the ways of nature instead of bullets and guns, you would have been able to distinguish between the common Field Mushroom and the Destroying Angel. They are easily confused but the latter is, of course, invariably fatal. I believe all of you have about three hours to live. The last hour is quite painful I regret to inform you."

I don't quite know how I got out of the village hall; perhaps everyone was too stunned to react quickly.

I will head for the marshes and try to get away from that murderous band, but it is unlikely that I will make it. They know as well as I which are the only safe ways across those treacherous bogs.

But my life is not that important.

Kowalski and his thugs may be demons in human form, but I have achieved justice: I have visited the Destroying Angel upon them.

### **Cryptic Crossword Clues (page 5) - answers**

1. Ten/ch 2. C/IV/IC 3. B/1/k/ed 4. VI/R/us 5. Va1n 6. Rep/A1/red 7(D). Ex/1st 8. Re/VI/ve 9. L1/A1/sons 10. Bik\_/in/1 11. Op/1/ate 12. Squa/L/0/r. 13. X/avier 14. Price-fi/X/ing 15. Scandina/V/ia 16. 1/ndigo 17. 1/ceni 18. M/ori 19. 1/C/onic 20. M/ovie.

Contact me on [valdemosas2@gmail.com](mailto:valdemosas2@gmail.com) if you would like to receive my group's easy weekly crossword with hints and answers.

## Music Musings by David Jenkins

Titles of music tracks are in blue and are underlined. You should be able to click on the title to take you to the track on YouTube. Some of the videos may contain flashing images.

Many of the tracks are a somewhat different genre from light classics or songs from shows posted in previous issues of DIT. But as they say, different strokes for different folks.

Follow the advice of Spinal Tap and turn the volume up to eleven!!

### **Musical Musing 1**

I was browsing through a few music tracks, laughing to myself, as I noted some relevance amongst the titles to our current situation of a lockdown during the pandemic that's been stalking the streets. It took a while to find many which could be fitted into a view of our lives at the moment.

I only looked at song titles – checking lyrics would have taken far too long even when there's nothing else to do!

### **Lockdown Playlist**

So, when you get up, how are you feeling? Can you hear a wheeze in your breathing? Put a hand to your forehead. Do you feel feverish, or look unwell when you check in the mirror? Smell and taste are hopefully unaffected. Just recall government advice to stay alert, and keep your [Senses Working Overtime \(XTC\)](#). If all's okay, settle down in the room where you've been spending time rather than going out and about. Maybe it's decorated in soothing shades of green, or relaxing blues. Perhaps it betrays your inner Goth and it's red and black. Or it could just be a neutral-coloured [White Room \(Cream\)](#). Best to avoid switching on the TV to check the news, it's only full of [Doom and Gloom \(Rolling Stones\)](#). You could be left thinking the world's heading in one cataclysmic direction and that we're all on the [Highway to Hell \(Instrumental cover, no lyrics. 2cellos feat Steve Vai\)](#). But in spite of everything there's a brighter view that we can all get through even though it seems [Against All Odds \(Phil Collins\)](#).

The internet isn't much better. Lots of 'articles' about drinking vinegar, eating chillies, injecting bleach, to avoid or defeat the virus. Ignore them – they're all [Bad Medicine \(Bon Jovi\)](#). Mind you, the 'net might be overloaded by people working from home, or keeping in touch with friends and family, or updating their Facebook thingie. Same goes for mobile networks. So if you need to speak with someone, look for that largely outdated piece of equipment in the corner of the room, once you remember you still have a [Telephone Line \(The Electric Light Orchestra\)](#). Ideal to speak with those you may not have seen for some time, useful when you think 'I must speak with that [Sweet Child O' Mine \(Guns'n'Roses\)](#).'

Usually we can pass some time by visiting with friends, having a quiet day at home, or popping out for a food shop. The first might not be possible right now, but hey! [Two Out Of Three Ain't Bad \(Meat Loaf\)](#). So how about a trip to the supermarket? Take care to let your eyes acclimatise once you set foot outside or you could be [Blinded By The Light \(Manfred Mann's Earth Band\)](#). If you see a friend and you stop for a chat, you may need to remind them '[Don't Stand So Close To Me \(The Police\)](#).' Though if you know semaphore and want to stretch the gap a little more, tell them '[I Can See For Miles \(The Who\)](#).'

At the supermarket you'll discover that no matter how many people are in a household, the store has a limit for how many can do any shopping. It may be two – it might even be [One And One Is One \(Medicine Head\)](#). And when you get through the queue and into the store you might see arrows on the floor, a

reminder that they want you to [Walk This Way \(Run DMC feat Aerosmith\)](#). It's no pleasure shopping at the moment so be sure to just pick up the essentials – I recommend [Milk And Alcohol \(Dr Feelgood\)](#). - before heading home.

The world has felt strange. Streets almost deserted, ditto parks and such. Walk through a shopping mall where most of the outlets are closed up and it seems that [There's A Kind Of Hush \(Herman's Hermits\)](#) which has fallen over us. Though you may reflect on the fact that 'The Air That I Breathe (The Hollies) seems much cleaner right now.' That's down to lower levels of traffic pollution. As they say – every cloud has a silver lining!

I was thinking the other day of the housing I saw in the Welsh valleys as a child. Some of those homes had no front garden, and precious little room out the back. I doubt you could stay two metres from the neighbours, so you might have to stay indoors. If that house was in another location you could at least mark the passage of time by watching a [Waterloo Sunset \(cover version by Def Leppard\)](#).

At this time of year even under normal circumstances, we begin to think [We Gotta Get Out Of This Place \(The Animals\)](#) and have dreams of going off [Into the Great Wide Open \(Tom Petty & The Heartbreakers\)](#) for a holiday. That may be possible in due course. Or perhaps all of your holiday selfies will just be [Pictures Of Home \(Deep Purple\)](#).

It's been suggested that habits acquired at this time might continue. People might be more aware of keeping a distance between themselves and others, or avoiding large crowds. Perhaps wearing face masks might become [A New Fashion \(Bill Wyman\)](#). But once this virus passes, we can get back to some semblance of normality. The lockdown will be called off and there may be parties and [Dancing In The Street \(David Bowie and Mick Jagger\)](#). And we'll finally get back to the usual [Wild Wild Life \(Talking Heads\)](#)!

There must be many tracks not included here. Some I didn't think of. Some I just don't like. (Yes I'm looking at YOU, Gloria Gaynor!) Why not send in your own suggestion to the DIT?

## ***Musical Musing 2***

Music is with me all the time. Listening to it, tunes or guitar riffs running through my mind, or trying to ignore the latest earworm – that annoying piece of music that popped into my mind three days previously and is still there! Perhaps we're all like that. Or maybe it's just me. [*You're not alone, David!*]

I might be reflecting on the lyrics of a song. It's always seemed to me that producing song lyrics is a particularly difficult form of writing, but sometimes the results can be quite inventive and captivating. Anyone at all could write 'Life is shite' but it takes a talented lyricist to come up with the line 'It's like the Heartbreak Hotel, with the heartbreak but nowhere to stay...' That's a line from [Window Shopping For Blinds](#) by The Beautiful South.

A while ago my mind turned again to the matter of song lyrics. Or more specifically, missing song lyrics. We were watching the film 'Ghost' and got to the scene at the potter's wheel which is accompanied by the strains of the 'Unchained Melody' and I began to wonder – as I do every time I hear the song – why the title doesn't appear in the song's lyrics. For once I searched on the 'net and found the reason. But it also struck me that there can't be all that many songs whose title isn't in the lyric.



I came up with the following fifteen tracks (without using Google!). There must be more that I've missed, so why not send your own list in to the DIT?

[Unchained Melody](#) – The Righteous Brothers. Written as the theme song for a film titled 'Unchained'.

[Excerpt From A Teenage Opera](#) – Keith West. What happened to the rest of it?

[A Day In the Life](#) – The Beatles

[From The Underworld](#) – The Herd. Based on the Greek legend of Orpheus and his attempt to return his wife Eurydice from the depths of Hades.

[Alternate Title](#) – The Monkees. The story goes that the recording company insisted the song's initial title could not be used so it would need an alternate title (or they may have said an 'alternative' title) at which point Micky Dolenz said 'OK. Alternate Title it is.' The song could be considered a double-tap, as the words of the original title 'Randy Scouse Git' don't appear in the lyrics either.

[New York Mining Disaster 1941](#) – The Bee Gees. They got the year wrong for any such event in New York, but the song was actually inspired by the disaster at Aberfan.

[Bohemian Rhapsody](#) – Queen

[Junior's Wailing](#) – Status Quo

[Badge](#) – Cream. The lyrics don't make much sense and it's said many of them arise from drunken conversations between Ringo Star and George Harrison. It was written by Harrison and Eric Clapton. George Harrison wrote 'bridge' on the sheet of paper they were using to indicate the position of the instrumental break but Clapton couldn't read the handwriting and misread it as 'Badge'. The name stuck.

[Terrapin](#) – Syd Barrett

[Spanish Pipedream](#) – John Prine. Songs to make you smile, or think. Others to make you laugh or perhaps bring a tear to your eye. Sadly, this superb singer/songwriter was recently lost to the Covid-19 pandemic

[Embryo](#) – Pink Floyd

[Uncle Sam](#) – Lindisfarne

[D'Yer Mak'er](#) – Led Zeppelin. The title's derived from an old joke about two men discussing the fact that the wife of one has gone on holiday.

'My wife's gone to the West Indies'.

'Jamaica?'

'No, she wanted to go.'

Though apparently not pronounced quite the same it's felt the title is a reference to the track's reggae influence.

[Funk #49](#) – The James Gang. There were others, but not the entire 48 previous tracks!

### **A Response to 'Expectations Fulfilled' (DIT19, p2) by Gerald Lee**

Stephen, I see you like detective stories. They were a popular pastime between the wars, spurred by growth in libraries.

Edgar Wallace was, I think, the best-seller, on his own accounting for a sixth or more. Not read much now. I can remember seeing the serial 'The Green Archer' at a children's film show. He was a terrible gambler. He once wrote a book in a weekend to pay his debts. He may still be popular in Germany.

You mentioned some awful adaptations. Hitchcock's 'Jamaica Inn' is not his finest work, with Charles Laughton interfering, and as you say characters changing professions. Daphne du Maurier thought it so bad she was not going to let him film 'Rebecca,' which was actually filmed in California, not Cornwall.

Another writer was John Creasey. I read a couple of his stories but did not think they were that good. Denis Wheatley has faded too, not sure why. Like the rest some books better than others. I know someone who met him. He was surprisingly short in height. His autobiography is very interesting. I lent my copy to someone. I think it was lost in one of her divorces, either way, I never saw it again.

## **The Great White Palace by Mike Brown**

Like Stephen Berry, I am a long time fan of Agatha Christie which inspired my partner Angela to book a surprise short break at Burgh Island Hotel, South Devon, to celebrate my 60th birthday and Retirement some years ago.

Burgh Island is one of the most romantic locations you can find; twice a day the sea retreats to provide a glittering causeway of clean sand to make tracks towards the island. When the tides rise again, guests are conveyed back and fore on the unique and very necessary sea-tractor.

All of high society stayed here between the wars, when it had a reputation as a naughty and exotic venue. Edward brought Wallis Simpson to get away from it all, Noel Coward planned a three day break and stayed three weeks while Agatha Christie stayed regularly and was inspired to write 'And Then There Were None' and 'Evil Under the Sun.' Churchill and Eisenhower met here in less relaxed circumstances.

The hedges that border the narrow lanes of Bigbury-on-Sea are so high that we caught sight of the island quite suddenly; and there was the architectural gem with streamlined balconies, just like an ocean liner.

We parked our car in the secure private garage but were disappointed to find the sea-tractor was having a tyre replaced so we were conveyed to the island, wearing our Sunday best, legs dangling, on the back of a tractor hauled cart with that evening's provisions! Well it confirmed that the restaurant does serve fresh local produce; fish being a speciality.

Our accommodation, named Eddystone, was one of sixteen sea view suites individually furnished in Art Deco Style. It had all the comforts of the mid 20th Century, being mindful to preserve the 1930s English International Style.

A walk around the island took in the natural rock Mermaid swimming pool and the lookout hut where the Huer would cry out to the fishermen when a shoal of pilchards was seen frothing up the sea. Hundreds of small fishing boats would pull out to draw in tons of the fish. The pilchards supported the local families who lived along the foreshore.

We returned to our suite to freshen up and change; Black Tie and evening dress is absolutely 'de rigueur' for all guests. We made our way down to the 20s styled Palm Court where we were served oysters with cocktails whilst we sat under the stained-glass Peacock Dome. We were then shown to our table in the 30s Deco Ballroom.

We enjoyed a sumptuous candlelit dinner before we ventured onto the dance floor for some romantic moves to the live 1930s music from the jazz pianist and a crooner.

The next morning we drove to the quaint village of Dittisham and took the foot ferry across the River Dart to Greenway House to explore the home of Dame Agatha Christie, the Queen of Crime, which has some of the best views of the river. After a visit to Dartmouth and a walk along the beach at Bigbury-on-Sea, we did get to use the sea-tractor and headed to Burgh Island's Pilchard Inn for a fresh crab baguette. The inn has served the island for seven centuries and is open to the public. Pirates and smugglers frequently used the island; it's location and their knowledge of the tides and currents made it secure for their contraband.

After a Vintage Cream tea in the Palm Court we retired to our suite to relax on the balcony before preparing for a repeat performance of the previous evening.

The brief flourish of 'Dolce Vita' during this unusual and glamorous weekend made me feel so special and will be remembered amongst my favourite getaways.



## What We Were Doing ... - Angela Robins

Last year the Out and About Group set off for North Wales with a full itinerary of visits. En-route members visited Powis Castle and were overawed by the blooming Italianate terraces and towering yew trees, its history and tales of schoolroom ghosts.

The next morning they explored the horticultural gem of Bodnant Gardens, one of the most beautiful gardens in the UK. Its 80 acres above the River Conwy has sweeping lawns and grand terraces where the roses were a wonderful backdrop for the wedding they witnessed there

They then made their way to see the natural splendour of the Great Orme either on foot or by Britain's only cable-drawn road tram.

During a tour of the North Wales coastline they made the obligatory stop at Llanfairpwllgwyngyll ... (hmmm! - see the photo), then on to Portmeirion. Its stunning driveway, with every hydrangea imaginable, led to the picturesque gardens and quirky village buildings - but no sign of 'The Prisoner's' large bouncing white ball!

They continued to the quintessential Welsh village of Betws-y-Coed set in a lush valley on the confluence of the River Conwy and its three tributaries. There were many craft shops to visit and Victorian tea rooms where much rarebit and Bara Brith was consumed for their afternoon teas.

The homebound journey was broken with a visit to the Red Kite Feeding Centre at Rhayader, where hundreds of the birds (including a rare White Kite) were seen performing a breath-taking spectacle, circling around and swooping down to feed.

----- x -----

**Euan** said "One day my wife asked me if I was having an affair with a woman from Llanfairpwllgwyngyll gogerychwyndrobwlllantysiliogogoch? - I said to her - How can you say such a thing!"

----- x -----

Five years ago The Third Age Singers performed a varied programme of songs to a full congregation at St Woolos Cathedral. Many in the audience were family and friends who are not usually able to attend our daytime concerts. There were opera, religious and light-hearted songs sung in English, French and Welsh.

The audience's appreciation was demonstrated by the generous donations to the cathedral's restoration fund, which totalled £500.

Since then, numbers in the Newport U3A Choir (as it is now called) have doubled to seventy. We now have the numbers to sing in four part harmony comfortably and, until lockdown, our repertoire was expanding rapidly!

The choir has since performed at prodigious events at the Senedd (the Welsh Parliament building in Cardiff Bay) and Lysaght's Institute (for the Steel Remembered Project), Newport AFC's Carol Services, the Dementia Conference at the University of South Wales, and again at St Woolos Cathedral for the WW1 Centenary commemorations.

----- X -----

The Choir's tenor, **Euan**, is staying home - He's under Choir-antine!



**Location – self-explanatory!**



**Location – St Woolos Cathedral, Newport**

## **The Strangers Tale by John Murray.**

Our dogs were friends before we were. They would run towards each other, tails wagging, a duet of friendly barking, a bout of play fighting, a good sniff, as dogs do, before deciding that they had had enough and settle down. I felt embarrassed by their antics. Merlin, my black Labrador, was usually well behaved, but I thought his behaviour upset the other dog owner. He never said so, but his facial expression showed he was annoyed.

I was enjoying my retirement taking Merlin for his morning walk around the lake and into the adjoining woods. The other gentleman would be walking an old collie that answered to the name of Bess. He looked a lot older than me, by 20 years at least. Of average height, he had a pronounced limp and walked with the aid of a stout cane. Trim figured, his eyes were sharp and alert, his thick white hair matched that of a neatly trimmed beard. He was always smartly dressed in a jacket and collar and tie. There was an air of good breeding and purposefulness about him.

Our first encounters consisted of a nod of the head in acknowledgement of each other, which over time progressed to a "good morning." This level of exchange continued until one day we were both caught in a heavy summer shower as we approached the woods.

I was wearing a waterproof cagoule; he was dressed in a lightweight summer linen jacket. Finding a suitable tree I managed to avoid the worst of the rain, I suggested that he did the same. We stood together, our dogs at our feet. Removing my cagoule, I held it over our us, attempting to stop the water running down off the leaves and onto our heads.

He objected, saying it wasn't necessary, I insisted. I decided it would be a good time to introduce myself. "I'm Richard." I said offering him my hand. At first I thought he hadn't heard. He looked at me as though he didn't trust me, weighing up whether he wanted to reply. The pause was long. "My name is Gordon".

Further conversation was non-existent, other than for Gordon to say "I think it's stopping, I'll be on my way, thank you, young man" and away he walked with Bess following close behind. "How strange," I thought, "perhaps even rude." I stayed a little longer, Merlin appearing not keen to continue in the now lightly falling rain.

We continued to meet on our daily walks, but I noticed he now carried a rolled up pac-a-mac. Gradually our conversation increased to "nice day", "it's a bit cold" and so on, but always about the weather.

One day we didn't meet at our usual spot, I found him further along the path seated on a log by a small stream within the woods. I enquired if he was OK. "Yes" he said, and without his usual pause, "I am watching a sparrow hawk on that branch over there," pointing to a large ash tree. I could see the bird; it was busy feeding on the remains of a small squirrel. "How cruel," I said. Without his usual pause he looked at me and said quite sharply, "It is what it must do to survive."

He patted the log for me to join him. We spent a pleasant half hour, two old men with two old dogs, not saying too much, just enjoying being there. From then on our friendship developed. On fine days we would sit on that same log in the woods and talk, covering many subjects of no importance, just letting the world pass by, our dogs resting by our feet.

After a few weeks, when I thought our friendship had reached that certain point of familiarity, I asked Gordon what he used to do before he retired. He didn't answer straight away, remaining silent, as though he was thinking what to say. His reply of "a schoolmaster" came as no surprise, then he quickly changed the subject. He never asked me what I did, but I told him anyway. "I was a freelance investigative journalist" I said. "Interesting" he replied, as he stood up, an indication that today's conversation was over.

And so we continued for over a year during which time I always had the impression that Gordon wanted to talk, but was holding back, perhaps he was afraid to. He never spoke of himself or his family, only about the weather, the woods, the lake, and occasionally, current events, but only if they were of sufficient

interest to him. On a particularly cold day I had brought along a small hip flask to share as we sat on the log. I offered it to Gordon. "Would you like some fine French Cognac to warm you up?" He took the cup off the top of the flask and poured himself a small measure. "Thank you, very warming," he said handing me back the flask. "Have you ever been to France?" I asked out of curiosity. My question was met with his usual pause. "Yes" he eventually answered. "Holiday?" The pause was even longer. "No, work." His tone told me to ask no more questions, today's conversation was at an end.

One-day Gordon didn't appear, nor the next day and the day after that. I will admit that I was a little concerned and I missed his presence. My walk felt lonely, it had almost lost its purpose. A week later, Bess greeted me. She came bounding towards Merlin and I, her old tail wagging in excitement. I looked for Gordon but instead an attractive fair-haired woman in her early twenties appeared, holding Bess's lead. "Hello Bess" I said, making the usual fuss of her. The young woman stood watching as Merlin joined in. "Where's Gordon?" I asked. She paused before answering, "I'm Ffion, Gordon's granddaughter, I am sad to say he passed away a few days ago." "I am sorry to hear that, he seemed in good health when we last met." I was really shocked.

Ffion and I carried on our walk together in a sad silence. When it came time to part company I asked when was the funeral as I would like to attend. "Grandad would like that, I would like that" she said, "It's on Thursday at 10 am" naming the local church.

Thursday arrived, and I made my way to the small church. My closing of the large oak door sent an echo through the cool ancient building. A long-lost feeling of familiarity about the place took me back to the time of the funeral of my late wife in this same church almost twenty years ago. Cancer had taken her; I still miss her. Her coffin had stood in the same spot as my friend. The flowers that remained on the altar from Sunday's service were beginning to fade, a faint scent of incense added to the sadness of the occasion. Gordon's coffin rested on trestles, draped in the Union Flag and adorned with a single wreath of white roses.

"Grandad, R.I.P. Love Ffion. XXX" was all the card said.

Watching the flame of the candle I had lit, flicker in front of the statue of the Virgin Mary, I said a few long-forgotten prayers as my thoughts turned to my friend in the coffin. How little I knew of him, how I had enjoyed our meetings, even though the conversations were somewhat constrained. He always managed to control them, only talking about what he wanted to. It was only now I realised it. I gave a wry smile. My walks would never be the same again.

The silence and my thoughts were disturbed by the opening and closing of the church door followed by the sound of people approaching. Four smartly dressed middle aged men, each carrying a wreath, walked slowly down the aisle, bowed their heads to the altar for a moment as though in prayer, then placed their wreaths on the coffin. Shortly after Ffion arrived, suitably dressed in black, taking her place on the front pew beside her Granddad's coffin.

The service was short. The local priest, a man of about Gordon's age, who I noticed was wearing military medals, said a few prayers for the dead, but no eulogy, which I felt was somewhat strange. I felt a sadness for my friend, leaving this life with so few people to mark his passing. The pall bearers appeared, shouldered the coffin and began the slow walk out to the cold graveyard, the priest leading the way. Ffion walked behind the coffin, the four strangers, with heads bowed, joined the small procession. I followed up at the rear. The whole ceremony had taken about ten minutes.

At the already dug grave, a small contingent of old men from the Royal British Legion, standing proudly to attention, had assembled as an Honour Guard. Prayers were said, holy water sprinkled on the coffin, the Last Post sounded by a lone bugler, the Union flag folded for use on another occasion, and Gordon's coffin was lowered into his last resting place. A feeling of sadness overwhelmed me as I shed a tear for my friend.

Ffion went to speak to the four gentlemen, taking each of their hands in turn, then watched as they drove away. I paid my last respects to Gordon using the opportunity to read the cards on the four wreaths, that

like the limousines that had brought the strange quartet, carried the flag of their nation, France, Poland, the United States of America, and Great Britain. Each wreath had the word "Raptor". I paused, wondering at its significance.

Ffion and I were alone. I felt I should say something, but Ffion spoke first. "Would you like to come back with me to the house? Grandad has left something for you." On the short walk I took the opportunity to ask about the four men, they were obviously from their nation's embassies, and what was the significance of the wreaths they had left. Ffion, like her Grandfather, seemed reluctant to talk other than to say she assumed the priest must have informed them of the funeral, as he was the only person with whom she had discussed the arrangements; they had offered their condolences and nothing more.

An excited Bess, confused at the absence of Merlin, greeted me at the house, once again enjoying the fuss I made of her. Ffion made a cup of tea while I took the opportunity to look around the small living room. It seemed to mirror my late friend. Neat, very tidy. A few books in a small bookcase, covering various topics, some pictures of landscapes on the wall, one or two ornaments, a small television set and a dining table and two chairs. There were no photographs on display, nothing to indicate family, I thought it was odd.

Ffion returned with the tea and we began to talk. She explained that she knew very little of her Grandfather's past life, other than he had served in the war, he would never talk about it when I enquired, she said sadly, perhaps that was why the Royal British Legion were at the graveside. She restated she had no information as to why the four men were at the church. It had been nearly three months since she had seen her grandfather, as she was away at university, but they kept in touch by telephone almost daily as well as the occasional letter. Last week she had received a telephone call from him asking her to come home as he wasn't feeling well, but sadly she was too late. I could see she was fighting back the tears.

Ffion was easy to talk to, she spoke freely and openly, unlike her Grandfather. She explained that he had brought her up, both her parents having been killed in a motoring accident when she was three. He had arranged for her to attend boarding school, meeting up during the holidays as he was a master in a Public School where he taught modern languages. She hesitated for a moment, as though afraid to say what was on her mind. "You were my Grandfather's only friend, he spoke of you often," she said with sadness. "As I am away at Oxford, he has asked, in the event of something happening to him, if you would look after Bess." I was extremely touched, and of course I agreed.

Then she handed me a letter with a hand-written note attached to it. *"Ffion, please take Bess for a walk around the lake at 10 o'clock each day, there you will meet a gentleman, his name is Richard and he will be walking a black Labrador called Merlin. Please ensure he receives this letter, Grandad"*

I was shocked, so like Gordon, precise to the end. I opened the letter.

*"My dear friend,*

*On our walks I was very reticent to talk about myself and you were extremely polite in allowing me my long silences and privacy. There were many questions to which I am sure you wished to seek answers, that would have been natural for a journalist. Those questions you did ask, I chose to be evasive in my answers. You will become aware that whereas you were trained to ask questions, I was trained to avoid answering. I am offering you an opportunity to return to your former profession. All the information you require is contained within a box that Ffion has in her possession, you will find there all that I did not wish to talk about. I bequeath its contents to you my friend, as recompense for your patience and understanding. There is a story there for you to write, write it well my friend. Also, contained within the box, is an additional package which should be given to Ffion, it contains personal items that belonged to her Grandmother. Her name was Justine who I was in love with whilst carrying out my work with the resistance in France. We had a baby daughter called Josephine. As you go through the contents of the box and unravel my story I am sure you will understand why it was necessary that in June 1944 I was unable to return home with*



*Justine. It is a sadness that has stayed with me over the years. It is time Ffion learns the truth, and I ask you to tell it, I was never brave enough to do so. Write kindly of me. Thank you for being my friend. Gordon."*

I was shocked by what I had just read, no wonder he was a man of so few words.

Ffion left the room after reading the letter leaving me alone with my thoughts. On her return the tell-tale evidence of her tears was still visible. With Bess resting her head on my lap, Ffion and I opened the box in silence. We spent the rest of the day and long into the evening studying the contents, stopping only for cups of tea and sandwiches. Gordon had been very meticulous in the way he had assembled the contents contained within the box, it was presented in layers, not unlike an archaeological dig, each layer separated by a sheet of brown paper, neatly fitting the dimensions of the box exactly.

Firstly the information related to Ffion. There were school reports, a few photographs of a young Ffion, some on her own, some school groups and the occasional one with Gordon. Judging by the look on Gordons face, he was obviously not keen on being photographed. Ffion studied each photograph, occasionally smiling. Some were viewed in silence, others she engaged with me in conversation, explaining about the occasion. It was clear from a number of the photographs that Ffion excelled at school, particularly at sports. Her mood changed to extreme sadness when I found a newspaper cutting dated November 1971. "Couple killed in multiple accident on M4, daughter, aged three, survives." I read the article in full, studying the picture of Ffion's parents and thinking how much she resembled her mother. The same fair hair, the same shaped face, the same beauty. The article explained how the couple, Josephine and Andrew Morgan had been visiting her father in Cardiff and were returning to Bristol. I passed the article to Ffion before making an excuse to leave the room. I could hear her sobbing as I stood outside gazing at the evening sky.

All that was contained in that layer of the box, Ffion gathered together and took to her room. On her return we started on the second layer. This related to Gordon. Some photographs of him as a young man at the Public School where he had taught. His hair was fair but there was no beard. As with Ffion, some were single pictures, others were typical year group photographs. Gordon wasn't smiling in any of them, he looked quite stern. I noticed in each photograph he was supported by a walking stick. I bet he was ribbed by the pupils for that, I thought. Ffion studied each photograph in silence as they were obviously unseen by her before now. She commented on how handsome he was in the photographs of him up at Oxford, shrieking with pleasure when she found he had attended the same college as herself. There were group photographs of Gordon and friends at parties, occasionally he had a pretty girl on his arm. Two of the photographs showed him in uniform next to an aircraft, there was no walking stick. Some papers referred to his academic achievements, which were considerable, a double first in French and German Studies, awarded in 1939.

No reference was made to a wife but there were copies of the death certificates of his parents. His father was listed as an Agricultural Engineer. We had now reached the second layer of brown paper. Not much to show for his life, I thought.

Both Ffion and I were completely unprepared for what we found under the last layer of brown paper. As Gordon had said in his letter, there was a box with Ffion written on it. I handed it to her, quite expecting her to open it, but she put it to one side saying she will open it later. I was disappointed, I was curious as to its contents. Most of the papers were in French, a few were in German, written in Gordon's copperplate hand. Fortunately, Ffion was able to translate, being fluent in both languages. The information they contained explained why Gordon did not wish to talk about his past. There were sketches, hand drawn maps, targets, escape routes, a dog eared book of poetry and a faded prayer card, radio frequencies and broadcast times, names, reports of operations, French and German newspaper cuttings, and two wanted posters, both offering a reward for 'Raptor'. The sketched faces looked remarkably like a young Gordon. Two sets of identification papers, in both French and German, had the same photograph, Gordon, as a Gendarme and as a Gestapo Officer. A cardboard box contained a number of medals and a photograph of

Gordon, in the uniform of an S.O.E officer, at Buckingham Palace, accompanied by his parents and a young Josephine. I could not comprehend that this was the same old man who I used to talk with as we walked our dogs. It was Ffion who noticed the single faded and creased photograph of an attractive fair-haired girl, to which she bore a strong resemblance. On the back was one word, written in pencil, 'Justine'. The last items in the box were a Luger pistol, a single round in the magazine, and an empty cartridge case.

We agreed to meet next morning by the lake, we both needed time to think about what we had found. Sleep did not come easily that night, my mind raced, trying to take in all the new information on my late friend.

Ffion and Bess were by the lake the following morning as agreed. As she approached I took the opportunity to study her face, it was certainly beautiful, it certainly resembled the newspaper cutting of her mother and the photograph of Justine.

"Good morning" said Ffion, cheerfully, as our dogs carried out their usual greeting. We talked as we strolled round the lake until we came to the woods. I invited Ffion to join me on the log where Gordon and I had watched the sparrow hawk and used to pass the time. "Have you given any thought as to what we should do with the information we now possess", I asked. She paused before speaking, how like Gordon I thought. "I think Grandad assumed you would know what to do with it, after all, isn't it what you used to do, deal in information." I laughed out loud, my clever friend knew what he was doing, he wants me to tell the story he could not tell. I think Ffion saw the funny side as well.

Ffion returned to Oxford, we kept in touch, meeting up at the end of term times. Bess came to stay with me, all of Gordon's information was taken to my house. Once again I was back to working as a journalist, but what lay ahead I did not consider work as I began to write "The Strangers Tale."

## **"IF MUSIC BE THE FOOD OF LOVE PLAY ON" by Neil Pritchard**

It's time to give yourself a Lockdown Tonic, so before you pour that glass of "plonk" here's a musical feast to accompany it. I have to say foods nothing to joke about? Or is it! Question: What did the hot dog say when his friend passed him in the race? Answer: Wow, I relish the fact that you've mustard the strength to ketchup to me. Ugh! - that was too saucy for me. Food and drink, as you well know is all around us, and don't we love it, perhaps a bit too much during lockdown. So let's pause a while to see how food and drink play a role in the world of music. The relationship between food and music has a long history. Many great composers and performers were connoisseurs, and some even contributed to the world of recipes. Food and wine often inspired new works and influenced the creative process of the composer; both have been the subject of many musical works from drinking songs to the savoury gastronomical and culinary references in the operas of Mozart, Rossini, and Verdi. I'm going to split the music for this culinary journey roughly "down the middle" between the Classical and the Popular. Enough for all tastes, with a little bit of food for thought!

Would you believe that food has often served as payment for musicians, or has been part of their payment. In both Western and non-Western cultures, food and music are at times part of the same ritual, and both may encourage a sense of community, meditation, or inebriation. Food has been a decisive factor in instrument making, as ingredients have been used as raw material or for repair. Two examples are the use of egg white to seal the soundboards of keyboard instruments (a little bit egg-tra perhaps!) and the use of ham fat to grease the slides of jazz trombonists instruments. I'm not sure whether that still goes on - it certainly sounds rather weird. One assumes it must have been effective? Would you believe there is actually a Vegetable Orchestra. No kidding "The Vegetable Orchestra" is an Austrian musical group who use instruments made entirely from fresh vegetables, I kid you not! Here's a video to show how they create the ultimate musical food experience <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ZQqu8M-EGs>

To begin the musical delights of food and drink, let's whet your appetite with Verdi. He gave us a well-known Drinking Song from his opera *La Traviata* composed in 1853. Based at the start of the 19th century in Paris, *La Traviata* boasts one of Verdi's most popular musical scores storylines and scenery. *La Traviata* ('The Fallen Woman') tells the story of the tragic love between Violetta and Alfredo Germont. Highlighting the hypocrisy of upper-class society, their love threatens to shame Alfredo's family. Violetta takes matters into her own hands. She performs an act of self-sacrifice which leads her to paying the ultimate price for love. Between the themes of tragic love, self-sacrifice and family politics comes the lavish party scenes that truly celebrate the lighter side of Verdi's often intense composing style. Opening the first act of *La Traviata* is a Brindisi song (*Libiamo ne' lieti calici*) which is a type of drinking song. (Brindisi songs have been used in operas for many years, with a character usually introducing a toast and the chorus joining in to celebrate).

Verdi's playful *Libiamo ne' lieti calici* is a prime example of an operatic drinking song. Translated into 'Let's Drink from the Joyful Cups' the duet is a lively song that strongly encourages the drinking of wine and other alcoholic beverages. Performed in the first act of the opera during a late-night party at Violetta's house, the duet is sung by the two leads – Violetta and Alfredo. The premise of the story starts from this song, with Alfredo starting the song because he is in love with Violetta. He is convinced by his friend Gastone that he should show off his voice to Violetta, so he begins the song and is later joined by both Violetta and the chorus. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UZvgmpiQCcl>

Saint-Saëns was a composer who enjoyed the company of others and delighted in the pleasures of food and drink along with friends and family. He had a wonderful sense of humour - not a feature of a lot of Romantic composers - which shows itself in two of his most popular pieces: *Carnival of the Animals* (a "grand zoological fantasy" for two pianos and orchestra) and *Danse Macabre* (a tone poem in which skeletons are raised from the grave and perform a dance on All Hallows' Eve). But it is his serious, abstract works - especially his chamber music - that show Saint-Saëns at his French best and ensure his place among the great composers.

This Frenchman was a remarkable figure by any measure. To start with he may have been the most impressive child prodigy in the history of music. At the age of two-and-a-half he was picking out tunes at the piano, at three he composed his first piece, at five he was studying the orchestral score of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and gave his first piano recital. In addition to becoming a brilliant pianist and organist, Liszt considered him the finest organist of the day, Saint-Saëns was also one of the most widely cultured composers of all time. His interests included astronomy, archaeology, geology, botany, and mathematics; he wrote poetry and a play as well as music criticism; he was also a restless world traveller (he died while on vacation in Algiers). It's a wonder he ever slept!

Saint-Saëns' lifetime of 86 years spanned nearly the entire Romantic era as well as the dawn of twentieth-century modernism. Born seven years after Beethoven died, in 1834, he lived long enough to attend the premiere of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* in 1914 and became the first important composer to write movie music (for a 1908 silent film). He left an immense musical legacy behind with over 200 works. These included five symphonies, five piano concertos, several operas (and operettas), incidental music, a wide breadth of chamber music, and numerous works for solo piano and solo organ. One of his pieces with a "food connection" was the "The Valse-Caprice" for piano and strings, from 1886. The work was a wedding present for the composer's pianist friend Caroline de Serres. It's a little gem and beautifully written. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M-i7nvxfDIE>

Next we are entering the world of Puccini's *La Bohème* (composed in 1896) with probably the most famous operatic scene with food and drink centre stage. Puccini's timeless story of love among young artists in Paris stakes its claim as the world's most popular opera. With all the joy and sadness of romance, with comedy and tragedy, with scenes ranging from the intimate to the grand, *La Bohème* depicts the full

scope of human experience. It's got it all, wealth and poverty, art and commerce, deception and devotion. But at the centre of it are the small, often subtle, personal moments that make up our everyday lives. To sum the story up in a nutshell: It opens with four struggling bohemians - a poet, a painter, a musician and a philosopher who are living together in Paris, when one freezing Christmas Eve their lives are changed forever. A girl named Mimi knocks on their door looking for a candle light, and she and Rodolfo fall in love. However, the rush of love at first sight soon gives way to something much darker - it becomes clear that Mimì is desperately ill, and that Rodolfo, in his poverty, cannot provide for her. Our bohemians try to find their way, but are soon sharply awoken to the harsh realities of life.

The excerpt I've chosen (the opening of Act 1) begins with Marcello painting while Rodolfo gazes out of the window. They complain about the cold so in order to keep warm, they burn the manuscript of Rodolfo's drama. Colline, the philosopher, enters shivering and disgruntled at not having been able to pawn some books. Schaunard, the musician of the group, arrives with food, wine and cigars. He explains the source of his riches: a job with an eccentric English gentleman, who ordered him to play his violin to a parrot until it died. The others hardly listen to his tale as they set up the table to eat and drink. Schaunard interrupts, telling them that they must save the food for the days ahead: tonight they will all celebrate his good fortune by dining at Cafe Momus, and he will pay:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QX0m4ob8m74>

What about music for a feast! Handel did his bit for feasting with his oratorio *Belshazzar*. But the English composer William Walton topped that work with his choral work "*Belshazzar's Feast*" composed in 1929. The BBC commissioned Walton, who by now was widely regarded as the young star of English music, to write a small choral work. Walton's friend Osbert Sitwell suggested a cantata on the Biblical story concerning the lavish feast thrown by the Babylonian king Belshazzar. The Leeds Festival was the setting for the first performance. The Leeds Festival Chorus had considerable experience of performing large works but the choir found Walton's unfamiliar, dissonant harmony and jazzy cross-rhythms exceptionally demanding, and some of the sopranos and altos objected to singing the word 'concubines', much to the composer's amusement. However, the first performance in 1931 caused a sensation and was a huge critical and public success.

*Belshazzar's Feast* is cast in one continuous movement divided into three sections. The first section deals with Elijah's prophecy concerning the enslavement of the Jews, and laments the loss of Jerusalem. A baritone recitative then describes the splendour of Babylon, whilst hinting also at its decadence. The second section is a wonderfully colourful portrayal of the lavish feast and parade of gods, and the outrage of the Jews at the desecration of their holy vessels. The second recitative is one of the most dramatic parts of the whole work, with a spine-chilling depiction of the writing on the wall, which is followed by the sudden death of Belshazzar, reinforced by the famous choral shout, 'Slain!' - a Walton masterpiece. The final section is a song of praise celebrating the fall of Babylon, with a brief lament for its passing. The work culminates in a triumphant final 'Alleluia'. Here's the second section including the lavish feast:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D3WS1LR0isg>

That's a glorious way to have a feast. What about parties? We move on to a well-known example of a Tea Party - "*The Mad Hatter's Tea Party*" from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. I wasn't aware until very recently that there is a ballet in three acts based on *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. It was commissioned by The Royal Ballet and the National Ballet of Canada, and had its world premiere in February 2011. The music by Joby Talbot is the first full-length score (1 hour 40 minutes) commissioned by the Royal Ballet since 1990. Joby Talbot (born in 1971) is a British composer. He has written for a wide variety of purposes and in a broad range of styles, including instrumental and vocal concert music, film and television scores, pop arrangements and works for dance. The ballet had its third consecutive run with The Royal Ballet in March 2013 and has thus far been successfully toured to Los Angeles and Washington DC, by the National Ballet of Canada. The 2012 and 2013 productions received very good to

excellent reviews, and Talbot was praised for his "sublimely witty score, which seems to use every instrument to match the sounds from the pit to the action on the stage, creating a lush soundscape that drives the action". I think you'll agree when you see this video that this is a very imaginative and funny ballet. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kq8zqhqiUlo>

The themes of food and drink have featured prominently in popular music for many a long time, which is no surprise given the essential role it plays in all our lives. Musicals have often included very direct references to food, a good example is the drinking song in "The Student Prince". The film version is an adaptation of the 1924 operetta of the same name composed by Sigmund Romberg. It tells the story of Prince Karl Franz who is heir to the (fictitious) German kingdom of Karlsberg. He has grown up fatherless, under rather gloomy military conditions of castle life. He has been educated by tutors, in particular, kindly Doctor Engel. Karl Franz has been promised in marriage, since childhood, to the Princess Margaret, but he has never met her. His grandfather, King Ferdinand, sends him to the University incognito, to live as an ordinary student and improve his social skills. Karl Franz sets off under the watchful eye of Doctor Engel, accompanied by his snooty valet Lutz.

At Heidelberg, Herr Ruder keeps the rustic Inn of Three Gold Apples. His beautiful niece Kathie waits tables in the inn's beer-garden. The inn is very popular with the students, who go there to drink and sing ("Drink! Drink! Drink!"). This short number written in waltz time is also known as the "Drinking Song" and is arguably the world's most famous drinking song. In the 1954 film version it was performed by Edmund Purdom, but the voice was actually that of Mario Lanza. (You might like to know that in the end Karl Franz resolves to marry Margaret without further delay, but Kathie will always be his true love). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y1bfcWrijgc>

How could I possibly do a voyage through the wonders of "musical food" without including the most popular food song ever. You've got it - "Food Glorious Food" - from the musical Oliver by Lionel Bart. Lionel Bart's classic musical is of course based on the Charles Dickens novel, Oliver Twist. The Tony and Olivier Award-winning show is one of the few musicals to win an Academy Award for Best Picture and is widely hailed as a true theatrical masterpiece by actors and audience members alike. There are still many amateur performances of Oliver, including a local production that two of my grandchildren were involved in last year. It's definitely a musical that's a winner with both children and adults.

In case you are not familiar with the story: The streets of Victorian England come to life as Oliver, a malnourished orphan in a workhouse, becomes the neglected apprentice of an undertaker. Oliver escapes to London and finds acceptance amongst a group of petty thieves and pickpockets led by the elderly Fagin. When Oliver is captured for a theft that he did not commit, the benevolent victim, Mr Brownlow takes him in. Fearing the safety of his hideout, Fagin employs the sinister Bill Sykes and the sympathetic Nancy to kidnap him back, threatening Oliver's chances of discovering the true love of a family. Sure, Dickens' story and Bart's music and lyrics are all about abandoned orphans and child gangs, but once you get "Food Glorious Food" it takes on a more light hearted fashion, at least for a while. Oliver is proof that sometimes the darkest subject matter makes for the greatest of musicals. Oliver is a musical theatre masterpiece, perfectly showcasing the talents of a large ensemble cast as they bring these classic characters and score to life. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ly7PONiKGUs>

Another dark musical that hits the heights is "Sweeney Todd" - the ultimate "Meat Pie experience"! One of the darkest musicals ever written, Sweeney Todd (A Musical Thriller) is the unsettling tale of a Victorian-era barber who returns home to London after fifteen years of exile to take revenge on the corrupt judge who ruined his life. When revenge eludes him, Sweeney swears vengeance on the entire human race, murdering as many people as he can, while his business associate Mrs. Lovett bakes the bodies into meat pies and sells them to the unsuspecting public. Perhaps composer/lyricist Stephen Sondheim's most perfect score, Sweeney Todd is lush, operatic, and full of soaring beauty, pitch-black comedy and stunning

terror. It's one of the signal achievements of the American musical theatre of the last fifty years. Here's Angela Lansbury and Len Cariou making a meal of it! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ggapHRAqnfk>

As you can see, and hear, Food and Drink has played a prominent role in the world of music over the years. This should come as no surprise given the scope they have for musical interpretation. I'm going to end with a food marathon - 34 video clips of jazz and blues songs. Don't worry you can turn this into a "food trip round the block" and hook onto 2 or 3 of these foodie songs, dipping into the rest at your leisure - if that's what turns you on. I don't think you'll be disappointed. Enjoy.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l1VODGNY32w&list=PL2flzjdDCSPxni8VVeSfx0v7ExD04d0cK>

And now It's about time, after all this food temptation, to get down and enjoy the real thing. I hope I've given you some ideas for culinary delights. I don't know about you but I've got a real appetite, so I'm off for a coffee and a slice of my wife's homemade fruit cake. Yummy!

### **'Hard Times' by Charles Dickens by Gerald Lee**

Part of my university course included a study of Victorian novels. For most of us, the age is associated with one writer, Charles Dickens. Perhaps being forced to read Dickens at too young an age deterred many of us from reading further.

The real flavour of Dickens comes from live readings. As a young man he went to a different play every night. He enjoyed acting, in particular a play he wrote with Wilkie Collins, 'The Deep,' which he performed before Queen Victoria. The melodrama and exaggerated mannerisms are unique to Dickens. Perhaps this is why comedians admire Dickens and are best at portraying his characters.

He threw himself into public performances, the exhaustion from which led to his death in 1870. Particular favourites were 'A Christmas Carol' and the death of Nancy from 'Oliver Twist.' Audiences became quite emotional and wept, as did Dickens himself.

'Hard Times' is different in some ways from other works. Most of his books appeared in monthly instalments. To boost sales of his magazine 'Household Words' he wrote 'Hard Times' in twenty weekly instalments, so the story has more pace. It is shorter than most of his other novels, and the only one not set in London.

The inspiration for the novel came from a visit to Preston, where Dickens also witnessed a strike. The opening pages describe a polluted town, of 'red brick turned to black' due to 'smoke and ashes.' It was a town of 'machinery and tall chimneys,' with a 'black canal', a 'river that ran purple with dye.' The inhabitants like the streets were 'equally like one another.' Life was depressing. 'Every day was the same as yesterday and tomorrow.' 'The jail might have been the infirmary, the infirmary might have been the jail, the town hall might have been either or both.'

The book is an attack on Utilitarianism, that put reason above people. An example was the Poor Law and the Workhouse, with its inhumane treatment of the poor, including children such as Oliver Twist.

The two most memorable characters are Gradgrind and Bounderby. The novel opens with Gradgrind addressing local schoolchildren: 'Now, what I want is, Facts.' The pupil named as 'Girl number twenty' is to play a major role in the novel. When she says her name is Sissy Jupe' he tells her it is not a name, she must call herself Cecilia. He tells her to define a horse. Whilst she says her father belongs to the

'horse-riding' and breaks horses in the ring, she cannot define a horse. Another pupil provides the answer, 'Quadruped. Graminivorous, Forty teeth, sheds coat in spring.'

The other representative of this philosophy is Bounderby, a rich manufacturer and banker. He regales all with stories of his upbringing. He claims to have been born in a ditch, spent his tenth birthday in a pigsty, and to have been deserted by his mother, to be raised by an alcoholic grandmother. For a cot he had an egg box. Like many Dickens characters he is defined by a mannerism or phrase. He accuses the workers of wanting to dine on 'turtle soup and venison, with a gold spoon.'

There is at certain points in the book the contrast between life among the circus people of Sissy, and the life in an industrial town such as Coketown. When Sissy's father, a clown is depressed by hissing and poor audience reaction, he deserts her, perhaps intending to return. His last words are to buy him a bottle of 'Nine Oils' for pain in his joints. In hope of his return Sissy keeps the bottle safe.

Gradgrind offers her a home, based on logical reasoning rather than Christian charity. She has to choose between a life with his family or at the circus. Her father wanted her to have an education, so she enters the Gradgrind household.

Two of Gradgrind's children show how this atmosphere destroys them emotionally. There is an affection between Louisa and Tom, but neither can lead a happy life. Tom behaves badly towards Louisa despite her faith in him.

Basing his opinion on logic, Gradgrind suggests Louisa marry Bounderby, telling her by reason a thirty-year age gap is not an obstacle. Tom wants Louisa to marry Bounderby, looking only for personal benefit. It is not a happy marriage.

Another character called John Hobhouse, an adventurer looking for a parliamentary seat like Gradgrind, tries unsuccessfully to seduce her. She cannot express feelings or emotion despite her beauty. Eventually she leaves Bounderby and returns to her father. She tells her father, 'I have never had a child's heart. You have trained me so well, that I never dreamed a child's dream.'

The difference between Bounderby and Gradgrind becomes apparent through the events in the book. Gradgrind realises he has failed his children and begins to bend.

Bounderby gives Tom a position at his bank. He has little regard for his brother in law. His lack of conscience comes to the fore in his behaviour towards Stephen Blackpool, a poor weaver with an alcoholic wife. He is respectable and has a friend Rachel, whom he would like to marry. He is in trouble with his fellow workers because he refuses to join a trade union and is shunned by them. He seeks Bounderby's advice. It is likely Dickens was addressing an issue that mattered in his own life. There had been a reform of the divorce law. Bounderby's description of the law means divorce is beyond the resources of the common man. At the time Dickens' own marriage was in difficulty. It is easy to feel sympathy for his wife. She was almost permanently pregnant and bore him ten children. He avoided scandal, although he had set up home with a young actress and her mother. It is possible she bore him a child that died.

Bounderby then dismisses Stephen, who has to leave Coketown. Louisa offers him £5 to help, feeling sorry at her husband's treatment of him. Reluctantly he accepts only two pounds. Tom sees an advantage and asks Stephen to wait at the bank in the evenings. Tom then steals £150, and uses Stephen's being seen outside, to incriminate him.

Dickens also uses the treatment of Stephen to attack trade unionism. Slackbridge is based on 'The Thunderer of Lancashire,' Mortimer Grimshaw. Dickens has no sympathy with radical agitators. As seen in 'A Tale of Two Cities,' he is suspicious of revolutionaries. Slackbridge too denounces Stephen as a thief.

Clearly the reader is meant to sympathise with Stephen, who is the eternal victim despite his personal integrity.

Stephen is persuaded to return when suspicion moves away from him. He dies when he falls down a mine shaft, which lax regulations did not require to be covered. Rachel and Louisa manage to find him, but it is too late to save him. He dies after being rescued.

At the conclusion of the novel Bounderby is exposed as a fraud. He had a caring mother who is still alive, but whom he pays not to visit him. He did not live in the poverty he claims, but in a caring home.

Gradgrind also realises he has created a heartless son in Tom. Sissy helps Gradgrind find him. He is hiding in the circus disguised as a performer. Although against his professed beliefs, he helps Tom to leave.

The circus people with their own expressions and warmth are a contrast to Utilitarians. Mr Sleary at the circus is a comic figure. He struggles with a speech impediment and asthma, but sums up life when he says, 'people must be amused,' unlike the Teetotallers and other societies who frowned on any entertainment. Whereas Britzer, the indoctrinated pupil who defined the horse, would betray Tom out of self-interest, Sleary is willing to help out of kindness.

Sissy's father does not reappear, but his dog Merrylegs does, leading her to suppose he has died.

Dickens is not always good with endings. At the end of the book he tells the fate of the main players. Bounderby dies in a fit in the street. Like the two sisters Merry and Cheery Pecksniff in 'Martin Chuzzlewit,' Louisa deserves some happiness but does not receive it. She learns to share affection with Sissy, who played a role in preventing a disastrous involvement with the worthless Hobhouse. Nevertheless, Louisa is never intended to have a happy life of her own, still caught up with her husband Bounderby even if the marriage is dead. Like Stephen Blackpool, she is caught in an impossible divorce law.

Some regard 'Hard Times' as a major work. The problem for many, such as Bernard Shaw, was that although it draws attention to social injustice, it also rejects trade unionism and any form of agitation to combat it. In this, Dickens is not really that distant from his fellow novelist, who also portrayed industrial England and its injustice in novel form, Benjamin Disraeli, the future Tory prime minister.

Disraeli talked about the 'extension of privilege,' a nonsensical phrase meaning the aristocracy should use their wealth to help the poor whilst keeping class distinction. A cynic might say Dickens' only solution is the spirit of Christmas all year round.

Reading the book again, I wondered if the Monty Python sketch of the Yorkshireman comparing their hard upbringings, ending up with one 'living in a shoebox in middle of road' was inspired by Bounderby's descriptions of himself.

The best dramatization was that with Timothy West and Patrick Alan as Bounderby and Gradgrind. The comedy series 'Brass,' in which Timothy West portrays Bradley Hardacre, is clearly a caricature of his role in 'Hard Times.'

It is one of Dickens' shorter novels. If at times by modern tastes the prose is heavy it is well worth reading aloud. With diverse characters, vivid imagination and flair, Dickens will always make great theatre and television.



## DID YOU KNOW? by Gwyn Havard

Did you know that every 3 metre by 3 metre square on Earth, including all the oceans, countries and seas, has been assigned a unique 3 word English name? It's a bit like a postcode but much more specific to just 3 metres. It is used by the emergency services and the military in many countries including the US and the UK. It is used when needing to pinpoint a very small area, perhaps where there has been an accident, someone is needing rescue on a mountain slope, or where a drone needs to strike to eliminate terrorists or buildings in a war zone. If an emergency service needs to communicate a precise location to another team, they just say "please make your way to **umbrella shovel princess**", or whatever it happens to be.

Where I usually sit in my flat's lounge in Newport is surprisingly called **monday lovely common**. My off-street car parking space is called **folds violin finishing**. My bedroom is called **sobs activism award** and my bathroom is **struck lazy rams**. When cooking in my kitchen I am located at **dozen shack chop**.

Do you want to know the unique three word phrase for the rooms in your house, or for any other location of interest on Earth? Well, all you need to do is to visit the free website called [what3words.com](http://what3words.com). Simply click on the magnifying glass (top left), then enter your postcode or the name of the nearest village, town or city to your target. Then use your mouse as follows:

Roll the mouse wheel forwards or backwards to zoom or un-zoom. Click left or right with your mouse and hold down your finger while moving the mouse around and you can adjust your position in any direction. There are also + / - symbols to click on if your mouse has no wheel (bottom right of screen). When zooming-in you will begin to see a grid of 3 metre squares appear all over the screen. Zoom-in further and select the square which coincides with your target, e.g. your garden shed or whatever. Your three word phrase will magically appear on the left of the screen. If you don't like your names, try an adjacent touching square – it's only three metres away but is usually called by three totally different words, which you might prefer. You can also zoom-out all the way to viewing a map of the world!

Next time you visit the website you can quote the three words you now know, to speed things up a bit. For example I can go straight to my bedroom by selecting the following website (you must insert the dots):  
<https://what3words.com/sobs.activism.award> (the https:// prefix is optional)

Then from there you can manoeuvre elsewhere as you wish. If you use the link above, you too can go straight to my bedroom! Or send me your three words and I can go to yours! I find all this very fascinating and one day I might need to help myself get rescued. I could use this website on my smartphone to find out exactly where on a mountain-side I have broken my leg, so I can communicate the location to others. The ambulance service in the UK is already geared up for this three word location-pinpointing directive.

Experimenting further with the [what3words.com](http://what3words.com) website, I discovered the following three amusing facts:  
**jolly excellent fish** is the label for a 3 metre square in the Arctic Ocean, just north of the Norway coast, near an island noted for its fishing!

**enjoyable romantic experience** is the label for a 3 metre square in the Pacific Ocean east of the Philippines and south of Japan - a perfect location!

**steam trains forever** is the label for a 3 metre square in the town of Taizz in Yemen (one for Stephen).

If you want to avoid your assets being labelled with three word phrases you will have to move to Mars, another nearby planet or moon, or go somewhere else out there in the universe!

Now I wonder how many of you are immediately rushing to find out your own unique three word phrases? If any of them are interesting and not too rude, perhaps Stephen will publish some of them in DIT21? Please amuse us!

### **Out of India - Part 3 by Ann Anderson**

Back in February when we were free to wander the world and the virus that has made such changes to our lives was still at a distance, Michael and I were still enjoying our visit to Hyderabad. I had no idea when we arrived in Hyderabad, about which I knew very little, what an amazing roller-coaster of visits to historic buildings awaited to amaze and catch my imagination. My daughter, Karen, who is at present, with her family, still in semi-isolation in India due to the virus, took us on a visit to Golconda Fort. Golconda is one of the most magnificent fortress complexes in India. It was initially called Shepherd's Hill meaning Golla Konda in Telugu language. According to the legend on this rocky hill a shepherd boy had come across an idol and the information was conveyed to the ruling Kakatuya king at that time. The king constructed a mud fort around this holy spot and so the story of the fort begins.

The Rajah of Warangal later fortified the hill between the 14th-15th centuries. The fortress rests on a granite hill 120 metres high, while huge crenellated ramparts surrounded it. All I can add to the story is to say that I was speechless, gob-smacked to put it impolitely, at the vast amount of history that had taken part in these ruins. Golconda became the principal capital of the Qutub Shahi kings that took over the fort. As I told you in my previous sagas this was all financed by the Golconda mines and the vast wealth that was accumulated from the diamonds mined there. The Qutub Shahi reign at Golconda ended in 1687 when it was intentionally left in ruins when it was overrun by Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb. Golconda still boasts of mounted cannons, four drawbridges, eight gateways and majestic halls. The inner fort contains ruins of palaces, mosques and a hill top pavilion which rises above 130 metres high and gives a birds eye view for miles around. It is a vast containment of centuries of historic memories. If I told you it took us over half an hour to walk to the top of the fort up a steep path passing at different levels, fortifications and even a still practicing mosque, you can begin to imagine how vast this fort is and how powerful the kings were who ruled the area from this vast 3 square kilometre fort.

At the outermost enclosure called Victory Gate (Fateh Darwaza) one can witness fantastic acoustical effects, which is one among the many famous engineering marvels at Golconda. Clapping your hands at a certain point near the dome entrance, it reverberates which is heard clearly at 1 km away at the hill top pavilion - this served as a warning of impending danger. Today, of course, it now amuses the many visitors who, us included, are told to clap their hands as they enter.

However, even powerful kings do not live forever and I did not realize that gazing down from the hill-top pavilion at Golconda I was seeing in the distance the tombs of these once powerful magnates.

About a week later we made a visit to the tombs at the Qutub Shahi Heritage Park. All except one of the Qutub Shahi dynasty are buried here in these magnificent tombs, that since 2013, are gradually being restored by the Telangana State and the Aga Khan Trust. I will attach a photograph to give you an insight into how amazing this park is. Most of the tombs and mosques are on raised platforms. In the centre of each tomb is a sarcophagus which overlies the actual burial vault in the crypt below. The domes were originally overlaid in blue and green tiles. The tombs were held in great veneration. However they became neglected after the Qutub Shahi period (16th century) and it was not until the late 19th century that restoration began. A garden was laid out and it is now a place of serene beauty and peace to visit.

The Mortuary Bath, which is situated near the gardens, was built to facilitate the ritual washing of the bodies of the dead kings before they were carried to their final resting place. The practice followed was to bring the body out of the fort, through the Bangara Gate to this bath, before carrying it away for burial with ritualistic pomp that was required for the occasion. The bath is one of the finest existing specimens of ancient Persian or Turkish Baths. The Tomb Gardens of the Sultans of Golkonda was known as "Lagar-e-Faiz Attar" (a place of bountiful entertainment), because in the days of the Qutub Shahi rulers, every evening songs, dances or even a play were staged here, free of cost, to entertain the poor.

We hope to return to Hyderabad with all of its unusual and amazing places to visit next year and hope that by then it will be safe to do so.



# Seenager

I **JUST** discovered my age group! I am a **Seenager** (senior teenager).

I have everything that I wanted as a teenager, only 55-60 years later. I don't have to go to school or work. I get an allowance every month. I have my own pad. I don't have a curfew. I have a driver's license and my own car.

I have ID that gets me into bars and the wine store. I like the wine store best. The people I hang around with are not scared of getting pregnant, they aren't scared of anything, they have been blessed to live this long, why be scared? And I don't have acne. Life is Good!

Also, you will feel much more intelligent after reading this, if you are a **Seenager**. Brains of older people are slow because they know so much. People do not decline mentally with age; it just takes them longer to recall facts because they have more information in their brains. Scientists believe this also makes you hard of hearing as it puts pressure on your inner ear.

Also, older people often go to another room to get something and when they get there, they stand there wondering what they came for. It is **NOT** a memory problem; it is nature's way of making older people do more exercise.

## **SO THERE!**

I have more friends I should send this to, but right now I can't remember their names. So please forward this to your friends; they may be my friends, too.

