

DESERT ISLAND TIMES

Sharing fellowship in

NEWPORT SE WALES U3A

No.21

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The Grandeur of Raglan Castle

A view taken from the north shows just how impressive this castle is

*A MISCELLANY OF
CONTRIBUTIONS
FROM OUR MEMBERS*

A Brief News Update

I mentioned in DIT 20 that your committee had met (outdoors and socially distanced!) towards the end of July to “catch up” on ongoing business and to consider our present position. I also reported that to assist us we have co-opted Jackie Kerr to our ranks. Jackie thought she ought to clarify her position, and photographed by Pat Fackrell, she can be seen doing just that by holding a placard (made by Pat)!



Jackie might only be “temporary” but already she, together with Gwyneth Hawkes and Jan Howell, have formed a sub-committee to look at and propose changes to the U3A timetable, so that we are prepared for the time when we can get back together again. We await negotiations with the Church Authorities (a meeting which was due to be held this month but which has, of course, been postponed), when we will be seeking an extension to our existing accommodation so that we can more effectively use the space we already hire and make more time slots available in what had become a crowded timetable. Watch this space for future developments!

Although, in common with all other U3As across the country, we will not be able to hold an AGM this year, we still wish our membership to make certain decisions, and relevant documents will be circulated in due course. To be quorate we need at least 70 members to approve these decisions. Can I therefore please ask you, when you do receive anything for approval, that you read it through AND MAKE A RESPONSE.

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. We are hoping to extend this facility in the coming weeks and to that end will be approaching Convenors by email to see what can be arranged.

At present I am still hoping to issue Desert Island Times weekly. This will, of course, depend on my receiving a continuing supply of material for publication! I am extremely grateful to our regular contributors, but can I appeal to you all not to “hide your lights under a bushel”. I cannot guarantee to publish immediately, but most submitted material appears within a couple of weeks. Any more urgent material can, if it is only a short paragraph, usually be squeezed in, provided that I receive it by the Monday of the week of publication.

All copies of Desert Island Times are now on the News page of our website <https://u3asites.org.uk/newportsewales/home> and will in future be published there. From now on you will receive just an email to advise you when a new edition is published.

4. Cryptic Crossword Pic'n'Mix Clues - Parts of Clues - Angela Robins

Many Cryptic Crossword Clues are 'Pic'n'Mix Clues' which are a mixture of 'The Dozen' types of clues, such as the Parts of Words Clue:

i.e. Remove centre of timBers to make clocks (6). =Timers

Combined with other clues they yield whole words or single letters to form a composite answer. There is also a definition of the answer as in a straight crossword.

e.g. **Zombie** Extremes, **a lost** adaptation for fanatics (7). =Ze/alots Extremes hints at a part word (Z e) and adaptation at an anagram (a lost).

Or - Air travel invests last of moneyY in Highland dance (6). =Fl/y/ing'Last of' suggests a Part Word (Y) and fling is a Word Exchange for dance.

Contact me on valdemos2@gmail.com if you would like to receive my group's easy weekly crossword with hints and answers.

Try these clues - they are a mixture but all include the Parts of Words Clue's element and a definition of the answer required. The answers are on page 8.

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------|
| 1.Likes upset by empty remark of Scottish town (7). | Anagram |
| 2.First of eight-wheelers moving to another place (9). | Anagram |
| 3.Summer drink to medicate poorly, ignoring first (4,3). | Anagram |
| 4.Shorter Marx Brother/ fluffing lines/ given flying cigars (9). | Word Exchange/Anagram |
| 5.Company ensured hot mulled wine (5,2,5). | Anagram |
| 6.Longed not to start, having been paid (6). | Word Exchange |
| 7.Rascal's shoe, not British (5). | Word Exchange |
| 8.State/ area has been shortened/ in opera song (7). | Word Exchange |
| 9.First of lads in gear, might be worn at 1 (4). | Word Exchange /other clue (1) |
| 10. Males/taking on/gang leader/about/50 dogs(7). | A-Z/Text/Word Exchange/Numbers |
| 11(D). First eastern/revolutionary/left/on/level (7). | Word Exchange/A-Z/Text |
| 12. Learner leaves fusspot with label(7). | A-Z/Word Exchange |
| 13. Gas is right to use in endless pain (5). | A-Z/Word Exchange |
| 14. Pity junction found in the map book (4). | A-Z/Word Exchange |
| 15. John loses one, indication of vacancy (2,3). | Word Exchange/Numbers |
| 16. A liquid measure is five sevenths of 25% (5). | Numbers |
| 17. One and the other take nothing from booth (4). | Numbers |
| 18. Slander about Billie dropping one (5). | Anagram/Numbers |
| 19. Be frugal with £1,000 twixt mid September and end of June(3) | Numbers |
| 20. No colliery at closing date provides a candidate (7) | Text/Word Exchange |

How Many Schools Can One Child Go To?

(..... and no, I did not get repeatedly expelled!)

by Janine Gibson

With it being September and the start of the new school year, it brought to mind my own school years, so I thought I would put my memories down on paper to share with you.

In 1964, at the age of five years old, I entered the door of my first school in total fear of what was to face me, so much so that I am told how my poor mother could hear me screaming for her as she walked home, whilst Mrs Gornell, the headmistress, held me tight to prevent me running after her, whilst trying to keep herself from being kicked by me! What a first impression I must have made. I apparently kept this up for a few weeks yet I only have fond memories of this school, proof of how our minds can be so selective.

Timperley Village School in Cheshire was a beautiful little building that only had space to house two classes in its one large hall, with each class being separated by a floor length curtain the width of the hall. Hence, we began our schooldays there aged five years but had to leave after two years to go elsewhere! There were only two teachers – Mrs Arnold who I remember loved anemones so I often took her a bunch from our garden in the summer to stay on the right side of her; the other was Mrs Gornell who taught Year Two and was also our headmistress as I've already written. They were both lovely ladies but there was something special about Mrs Gornell – she was so kind and motherly, in spite of the hard life she was going through, having lost her husband in the war, leaving her with their mentally handicapped son to bring up alone, and working full time to support themselves.

Whilst there was such a warm feeling inside my little school hall, beyond was freezing! The small cloakroom at the back of the building, adorned with little coat hooks for our coats and home-made drawstring P.E. bags with our names embroidered on, would be perishing cold when we arrived in the mornings; but the cute pictures of animals painted on the wall over each of our hooks depicting our own, somehow made it welcoming. There was a small playground at the end of which was a brick block housing two toilets – one for the girls and the other for the boys. "Perishing" doesn't even come close to how these felt in mid-winter! We were always made to queue up at the beginning of morning play and lunchtime to "spend a penny" as was our teacher's instruction, to try to avoid the need to go out there at any other time!

I remember lessons being quite fun. Who else remembers first learning to do sums with different coloured bricks of varying lengths? I used to love the box containing them all with such pretty colours; I recall the small white cube stood for 1, the blue brick twice the length of the white one was 2, the red one – longer again – was 3, and so on until the longest one which was brown (I remember not liking that one because of its colour!) stood for the number 10.

Then there was P.E. for which the curtain separating our two classes was drawn back and we all took part together, taking instruction for "Movement to Music" from a large wooden speaker transmitting a school radio programme – I can hear the voice now. I still have my writing and drawing books from this school, some of which make for hilarious reading, such as in our weekly Monday writing lesson about our weekend. Every Monday through the spring and early summer, I would write "On Saturday, I sat outside the pub drinking a pineapple juice whilst my Mummy and Daddy played." My poor Mum and Dad were mortified when, at their first Parents' Meeting with my teacher, they had the opportunity to see my work and read what I had written repetitively, implying that they left me outside a pub every weekend! They couldn't explain quickly enough how they played in tennis matches at the Village Sports Club every Saturday through the season, and that whilst they played, I - together with children of the other players - sat outside the Clubhouse playing our own childhood games together whilst drinking our juices!

The one lesson I struggled with was “Spelling”. I would go home with my narrow strip of paper with our words to learn written down on it; my Mum would duly practise them with me until come the day of the spelling test, I was always absolutely perfect. Yet, I was lucky if I got two words spelt correctly in the test. This went on for a few weeks until my Mum who was now totally flummoxed as to why this was happening, had a chat with my teacher. As they talked, they realised how differently they were pronouncing some of the words. With her London accent, my Mum had been asking me to spell such words on my strip of paper as book, bus, etc. However, when Mrs Arnold was calling the words out to us in the spelling test they sounded completely different to me, as with her strong northern accent she would pronounce them as “boook” and boos”. I didn’t stand a chance!!!

I have two special memories of my days at this school that have always stayed with me, again, one which had a shattering effect on my poor mother. To reach the playground from the school hall, we had to turn a corner as we went outside, so we were always told “Do NOT run around the corner as someone may be coming around it the other way and you’ll get knocked over.” Well I didn’t run, but unfortunately, the boy coming the other way did! The result was me being knocked over against the corner of the brick wall which sliced my head open. Mrs Gornell scooped me up, put me in her car and drove me straight to Altrincham General Hospital, where I was duly stitched up. However, at this time I had very thick long hair which reached my waist and every morning my Mum would brush it up into a pony tail from the crown of my head with a beautiful ribbon bow. So bear in mind, that she had last seen me like this when she left me at school that morning. At lunchtime, my headmistress knocks on our front door, for my Mum to open it and see her five year old daughter stood with her hair now loose and hanging over her face and down her back, with every strand bright red and matted with blood! It’s amazing she didn’t pass out on the spot! The next day, Mrs Gornell returned to our front door to ask how I was and to give me a present she’d been out and bought because “I was so brave at the hospital”. I think it was my Mum who deserved the present for remaining so calm!

My other memory is a good one! On a Friday afternoon, Mrs Gornell would collect all the children together and place her big jar of “special badges” onto her desk. These badges were for different school subjects, each depicting a picture of the subject such as a paintbrush for art, 123 for maths, etc. Each was awarded to the pupil who had done extra well that week in a specific subject and would have the badge to wear for a week. However, I won the “Reading Badge” every single Friday for the two years I was there – red with an open book on it. The day I left that school, Mrs Gornell gave me the badge to keep! And 54 years later, not only do I still love to read every day, but my little red “Reading Badge” still proudly sits in my jewellery box.

Come the age of seven years, I had to leave that delightful cosy little school to move to the larger primary school out of the village – Park Road Primary School; this brought a big change to my days as rather than have the comfort of my Mum walking me to school, I now had to catch the school bus there and back. The ride was only ten to fifteen minutes but it felt to me as though I was being taken miles away from my home and my Mum. Everything about this school holds bad memories for me in the main, beginning with the revolting uniform – dark dull bottle green pinafore dress, cardigan and gabardine (remember them? I can still remember the awful smell that came from the material when it was wet!). And just to add a little touch to make the look even worse, we wore a striped dark bottle green and mustard yellow tie! UGH!

The school was run on fear, not of our teachers but of our headmistress – Miss Lea was her name. An older woman with steely blue eyes and long grey hair always tied up in a bun which sat on the back of her head, and who always wore shoes with heels that clicked against the tiled floor of the corridors, instilling fear into us as we heard her approaching. Her voice was always icy cold with a threatening tone to whatever she may be saying – it was never praise! As if she wasn’t enough to scare us, she had a Pekinese dog that did the same job; it would follow her around the school, close at her heel, yapping constantly, and sharing that same threatening icy stare at us. At every daily morning assembly, Miss Lea would select

a pupil to serve the dog its lunch later that day – whilst we would absolutely dread being the chosen one, our headmistress saw it as an honour for us to be selected! At 12 noon, the chosen pupil would have to leave their class to collect the dog's dinner from the school canteen. It would be the same dinner as had been cooked for the pupils but served on a china plate covered with a metal dish to keep it warm, and placed onto a silver platter! The dread we felt as we climbed the stairs to her office, carrying the tray firmly in our hands in total fear of dropping it when leaving go to free a hand for knocking on Miss Lea's door. Her chilling voice would shout "Enter" and the yapping dog would immediately be at our ankles wanting its meal. We would be sharply instructed to place his plate on the floor, remove the cover and leave the room – we didn't need any telling of the third instruction! The feeling of relief as we walked back down the stairs and returned the tray to the canteen, knowing our turn was over for a while!

She was such a terrifying and intimidating person that our parents dreaded Parents' Evenings when Miss Lea would appear in front of them, as the unapproachable person of power at "Her" school! Years later, when Facebook materialised on social media, a "Park Road Primary School Group" was formed, and then, as is still the case now, the comments are always about the fear of Miss Lea and her dog which is now 55 years ago! The interesting fact though is that many teachers have added comments saying how they too were completely terrified of her and found walking up the stairs to her office just as fearful as we did. I have to say that our lovely teachers were quite the opposite of her and as I look back on those days, I realise that the treats they often gave us in our classrooms were perhaps in sympathy of what we had to endure. However, I am very grateful to have met a lovely girl there – Dinah - who became my lifelong friend and today, although living far too many miles apart, we remain best friends who feel more like sisters.

Dinah's and my prayers were answered when a new primary school was built in Timperley Village, just a short walk from our homes, so would allow us to escape the clutches of Miss Lea! What a welcome awakening this was to be, to how joyful school could be! Our headmaster was as kind as Miss Lea had been cruel, yet he still maintained good discipline from us whilst winning our respect and liking of him. Other than the wonderfully content time I spent here, my main memories include passing my "11 Plus" examination which would have gained me entry to the much respected Altrincham Grammar School but was sadly wasted as twelve months prior to my starting there, my family moved to Wales, and so I was entered into the comprehensive education system. My other two main memories are firstly of the entire school sitting in the Hall watching the Investiture of the Prince of Wales at Caernarvon Castle take place on television – we didn't know our school had a television until this day and were duly impressed! My last special memory there, is of my starring role as Mary in the newly opened school's first Nativity Play. I have never forgotten how my favourite teacher – Miss Hogarth, made me feel so very special by lending me her beautiful royal blue velvet evening cloak to wear for my acting debut – on me, it trailed on the stage behind me making me feel like a princess for my performance and so helping my confidence. Miss Lea could have learnt so much from her! Sadly, I was only there for a short time owing to having to move to Wales as a result of my father's job promotion.

I found the rest of my school years to be very difficult but never more so than in 1969 when I started at a new primary school for the last ten months of my primary education, in a completely new environment, and knowing no-one. All the pupils had long ago forged their strong school friendships and were past those younger years when little girls welcomed a newcomer into their "special group". In fact, much of their communication with me was to make fun of my northern accent, so yet again, my speech was my downfall. I felt I had to constantly find ways to win favour to make them "like me", whilst always feeling I had to tread very carefully when shown some form of wary acceptance, that I always felt could be taken away immediately. Hence, I never relaxed into friendships as I had done in Cheshire, and I never did for the rest of my schooldays.

Although Malpas Court Primary School was a very pleasant school in terms of its setting and its teachers, with a lovely headmistress, Mrs Cockerham, I was greatly surprised by the difference in level of education from where I had come from in Cheshire to what I faced in Newport. An example of this is that in Timperley, we had already been working with decimalisation for a year in preparation for Britain's conversion to decimalisation which was to come into force in 1971. Not only had the schooling here in Newport not yet begun teaching this, but the mathematical books we were given to work from still had farthings in!

The year 1970 saw the start of my comprehensive education, beginning at Newport Junior Comprehensive School at Brynglas House, where the first two years were to be spent before moving onto Newport Senior Comprehensive School in Newport town itself. This was such a beautiful old building full of history and lending itself completely to the scene of teaching staff walking around robed in their black gowns and mortar boards. The upstairs classrooms had originally been bedrooms and still had the beautifully decorative tiled open fireplaces set into the walls. The desks were very old with white ceramic ink pots set into their top wooden edge, lift up lids, and wooden seats attached to the desk with metal bars.

The Cookery Room was in the original old servants' quarters in the cold basement and so had great character; although it has to be said that our cookery teacher was not the best. I remember our excitement at the promise of attempting learning to cook followed by our deep disappointment when she said that she was going to teach us to make a trifle – not much in the way of cooking to that, we felt! However, it got worse when she instructed us to bring to our next lesson – wait for it – a Bird's Eye Trifle packet!!!

Another teacher, Mrs Phillips, was "in charge of the girls" at the school and wallowed in the never ending rules she made for us to follow; one being only permitted to wear "American Tan" coloured tights. They were so dark and did nothing for our young elegant legs and the image we wished to portray to the boys, which was obviously her reason for them! She would also regularly collect us together in the school hall, line us up and tell us to kneel. Mrs Phillips would then walk along the rows with a tape measure, to ensure that two inches of our skirt material was dragging on the floor meaning that when we were stood, our hems did not rest on or above our knees! Mrs Phillips' most self-important day though, was when she summoned all the girls in the school to gather in the hall, and then proceeded to close all the curtains to prevent the boys from seeing in to where we were, which of course, only served to increase their curiosity over what they were missing! Mrs Phillips then announced "I am going to tell you about menstruation"! None of us had a clue what she was talking about as we'd only been familiar with the word "period" until then! She proceeded to terrify the life out of us with her overly informative diagrams and descriptions, when until then, we had all felt reasonably calm about the forthcoming event in our lives! At the end of this seemingly never ending talk, Mrs Phillips told us that if the boys asked us what had happened, we were to tell them that she'd been giving us a lesson about the suffragettes! How thankful I am that times have changed for the better in the education of these matters, so giving today's boys the opportunity of understanding and being considerate to girls experiencing this necessity in life.

A much more pleasant experience we regularly had in the hall was thanks to a lifelong friendship between our headmaster, Mr Reynold Thomas, and Johnny Morris who was famous at the time for his television programme called "Animal Magic" which I know many of you will fondly remember. Johnny Morris came to Brynglas House several times to give us talks about animals, and the programme itself, and was a lovely, humorous gentleman, just as he appeared to be on the television.

During my two years at Brynglas House, it was announced that a new comprehensive school was to be built at Bettws to replace both Newport Junior and Senior Comprehensive Schools, and to house them in one new school. This building was the result of a worldwide architectural competition and all I can say is, goodness knows how bad the losing entries were if this was the winning one!

Within days of us moving into this new school in 1973, then named Newport (Bettws) Comprehensive School, it became commonly known as “Colditz” by both staff and pupils. It was a miserable grey concrete monstrosity, with the wind howling along the endless open corridors causing the rain to blow in sideways along them. The school was built in numerous blocks joined by the corridors but the blocks were identical giving us no way to identify between them to navigate ourselves from one classroom to another. This resulted in classes meeting their teachers for each lesson in a pre-arranged courtyard, where the teacher would then lead us in, locating our classroom together, for they were as lost as we were! Within a year of being there, the majority of the original staff, who were older in years, had resigned! Following this, the school could only attract staff straight from university, with no experience, yet with none of our experienced staff left for them to learn from. As a result, the discipline became virtually non-existent, the toilet facilities occupied all day every day by gangs and drug users, with the staff being understandably too afraid to confront them, having had two head teachers beaten up for trying! I wanted to go to university and train as a primary school teacher but by the end of the first year of my A Level education I realised I was fighting a lost cause, as the required entry qualifications kept rising, whilst the education in the sixth form was as poor as the preceding years had been. Our tutors would regularly not turn up to lessons – one used to always use our lessons to work on his car mechanics in the school carpark! It was so bad that I had enrolled myself in evening classes to try to keep myself up to the standard required to gain the grades I required. But eventually I had to admit defeat which is probably why I have grown not to admit defeat at anything since, especially with the health my problems have brought me, for I know the heartache it caused me to have to do it that once. My father always told me that he was amazed I came out of there in one piece, let alone with good qualifications, and that he knew it was down to my own steadfastness and determination that I had done so, which meant a great deal to me. It was so upsetting for me to have to go through these years with the knowledge that I could have been at the lovely Altrincham Grammar School and I still begrudge it to this day with the added curiosity of what might have been.

And so my schooldays came to an end in 1976. Many say their schooldays were the best days of their lives but I can honestly say mine never were. I left the Sixth Form to move onto the South Gwent College of Further Education – Nash Tech to you and me! I did a one year secretarial course, was one of six successful candidates to sit the exam for the British Steel’s Secretarial Training Scheme, and from 1977 to 1986, I worked my way up to become the Personal Assistant to the Personnel Director of eight of the British Steel Works around the UK. From there, I moved to the British Heart Foundation Headquarters where I was PA to their Managing Director for Wales, and my final job was to be the Personnel & Financial Administrator of a large Care Home.

Once my son started at Junior School, I worked as a Learning Support Assistant first in the primary schools then at Caerleon Comprehensive School, which meant I eventually did get some teaching experience, all of which I so enjoyed and found to be so satisfying. During this time, I was told by many teachers that I was a “born teacher” due to how I related to children of all ages along with “my natural ability to teach”, which gave me comfort to know that had I pursued my dream career, I would have been the type of teacher I had hoped to be. As they say, c’est la vie.

Cryptic Crossword Clue (page 3) - Answers

1. Selki/rk
2. E/lsewhere.
3. Iced tea.
4. Zepp(o)/elins.
- 5.Co/tesDu Rhone
- 6.(Y)earned
- 7.(B)rogue
- 8.Ari/zon/a
- 9.Ki/l/t
- 10.M/on/g/re/Ls
- 11(D).E/che/L/on.
- 12.Stick(L)er
- 13.A R gon(y)
- 14.A/t/las
15. To(1)let
- 16.Quart(er).
- 17.Bo(0)th
18. Libel.
- 19.e/K/ e
- 20.No/mine/e

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

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

2. Medium

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

3. Hard

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

4. Evil

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

Test Your Knowledge of Music – Nigel Bolter

Firstly, the composers and their pieces, and secondly, the groups or artists and their albums have become jumbled – can you sort them out? Answers are on page 30.

Try NOT to use Google!

COMPOSERS	PIECE OF MUSIC	CORRECT COMPOSER
Bizet	Emperor Concerto	
Wagner	Music for the Royal Fireworks	
Johannes Strauss the Younger	Adagio in G minor	
Schubert	Hungarian Rhapsody no. 2	
Ciurlionis	Enigma Variations	
Beethoven	The Rite of Spring	
Tchaikovsky	Dido and Aeneas	
Albinoni	The Trout Quintet	
Britten	Carmina Burana	
Elgar	The Pearl Fishers	
Mozart	Porgy and Bess	
Handel	Nutcracker Ballet	
Stravinsky	Lakme	
Richard Strauss	Lohengrin	
Henry Purcell	Peter Grimes	
Carl Orff	Leningrad Symphony	
Delibes	Blue Danube Waltz	
Shostakovich	An Alpine symphony	
Gershwin	In the Forest	
Liszt	The Impresario	

GROUP OR ARTIST	ALBUM TITLE	CORRECT GROUP OR ARTIST
The Beatles	ESP.	
Electric light orchestra	18 Till I Die	
Bon Jovi	No Exit	
Arctic monkeys	Come Fly with Me	
Bee Gees	The Invisible Band	
Bryan Adams	A Rush of Blood to The Head	
Madonna	Let it Be	
Blondie	Heaven On Earth	
The Rolling Stones	Definitely Maybe	
Genesis	A New World Record	
Travis	This is my truth Tell me Yours	
Belinda Carlisle	Baby One More Time	
REM.	Slippery When Wet	
Tina Turner	Houses of the Holy	
Coldplay	Automatic for the People	
Manic St. Preachers	Favourite Worst Nightmare	
Oasis	Invisible Touch	
Britney spears	Private Dancer	
Frank Sinatra	True Blue	
Led Zeppelin	Sticky Fingers	

Alone by Martyn Vaughan

Jacobs was sure he was alone but why did he have the feeling that he was being watched?

He had accepted the bet that he could survive the night in Tregowan Manor without going insane and he had been there an hour and already he was starting to feel a little nervous.

Yet he was alone – he knew that. He had waved good-bye (or surely it was *au revoir*?) to the group that arranged these ghost evenings and had watched them drive away, stopping only to close the mighty iron gates behind them. But being the man he was, he threw off the nervousness and gave a big grin as he looked around.

And he was alone. The only noises were the ticking of the large grandfather clocks, of which there were several throughout the great house, and the clicks and faint bangs as the wooden structures began to cool and contract after the heat of the day.

That was all - he was alone. Absolutely alone.

Well, no doubt there was an occasional mouse taking an evening stroll somewhere in this vast pile but they didn't count.

He glanced at his watch. Two hours to midnight – the time he had decided that he would sink into the enormous four-poster bed and have a dreamless sleep and wake, refreshed and energetic, more than ready to collect his £2,000 prize plus the return of his £50 entrance fee.

Money for nothing! And just for spending the night alone in a big, crumbling house!

He stretched out in the big armchair and looked up at the huge painting of the 5th Earl of Tregowan which hung above the enormous fireplace.

Miserable looking sod, he thought to himself, *money didn't seem to have brought him happiness.*

But it will me! He added smugly. He took another sip from his tumbler of warm milk.

He would have preferred whisky but he didn't want any possibility of waking up in the middle of the night, as often happened when he had over-indulged.

He put the tumbler down on the little table by the side of the armchair and walked over to take a closer look at the painting. The Earl's face was still some distance from him, due to the size of the portrait, but from what he could see of the man's face, it was thin and cold and the lips seemed to be twisted in an unpleasantly sardonic smile. Jacobs had read up on the history of the Manor before accepting the challenge and knew that the portrait did not lie; the Earl had indeed been a cruel and rapacious landowner. He had extracted every penny he could from his tenants and when they could not pay, there had been no mercy; he would evict them without a second's thought or a backward glance.

Of course, if you were young and female there were other means of payment – payment in kind, shall we say. One poor maiden had paid the required fee and discovered that the Earl was not a man of his word. After her, and his, child had been delivered into the world stillborn, she had thrown herself into St Piran's Mere and that had been the end of that particular tragedy.

Jacobs shivered involuntarily. Thank God that monster had gone from the world; although the idea of payment in kind was one he could learn to live with!

He turned back to get another sip of his milk before it became too cold.

He stopped, looking around in puzzlement.

The tumbler was not on the little table.

He looked around in growing irritation before he espied it a little further away on a larger table. His brow furrowed: he did not remember placing it there. Why would he have done that when he wanted it nearby so he could drink from it when he wanted it?

He knew that people grew absent-minded as they aged but he was only thirty-five for God's sake!

He shrugged and collected the tumbler from the other table and sat back down.

He sipped at it while he allowed his mind to flash over his plans for spending the money. £2,000. It wasn't a fortune; it wasn't life-changing but it was a start. He had a new car to buy, now that he had reluctantly agreed that his current one was falling apart. Or a holiday; a holiday somewhere far away from grey, rainy England. The money that he had swindled from all those pensioners was adding up to a nice, tidy sum and a further £2,000, just for a nice night's sleep, would be the icing on the cake.

He put the tumbler down and let his mind drift away into visions of tropical beaches, with coconut palms framing the dazzling blue sea which merged delightfully into the dazzling blue sky.

It was so real he could almost feel the sun beating down on his bronzed skin.

He reached for his tumbler to finish the last of his nightcap.

His fingers closed on air. It was not there.

This time he sprang up and looked around, angrily at first, but then with a growing sense of unease.

This time the tumbler was nowhere to be seen. It was not on either of the tables.

The room he was in was large with many items of antique furniture and even a few suits of armour, and it took him some time to search it. But to no avail. The tumbler was not in the room.

For the first time, he began to feel a cold concern gradually creeping down his spine. He could not be so absent-minded as to remove the object from a room this size and not remember doing it.

Something was wrong.

He walked back and forth for a few minutes, trying, in increasing alarm, to remember all his recent movements. It was no good; he had done nothing to explain it.

He stopped in front of a large mirror; a mirror so large it covered most of the wall it was hung upon. He studied his reflection to reassure himself that he looked normal and in control.

He studied the reflection for some time, turning his head from side to side so he could see as much as possible of his features. He looked a little concerned but apart from that, it was the same old Edward Jacobs that he knew and loved.

He was just turning away from the glass when he thought he saw something in the mirror in his peripheral vision. He turned back and focused reluctant eyes on what he thought he'd seen.

And he had. There in the corner there were two red eyes looking out at him, two eyes lit by an almost tangible inner glow of hatred.

He spun around to find the owner of the eyes but there was nothing behind him. He was alone.

He spun back to the mirror. The only things in it were the reflection of him and the room. Once again, it was clear that he was alone.

For a moment he was seized in the jaws of fear. He must get out at once, away from this dreadful Manor, back to civilisation!

Then rationality returned. He sat back slowly and carefully in the armchair and thought it through.

Obviously, the organisers weren't going to hand over £2,000 for nothing. There must be a catch in the arrangement somewhere; some tricks to make the poor punters panic and give up. Thus guaranteeing them a steady flow of £50s.

But not this punter! He was no mug!

Without thinking, he put his hand out to pick up the tumbler.

It was there.

He leapt to his feet and flung the tumbler into the semi-darkness.

'Alright!' he shouted, 'I know you're there! Game over – you're not going to scare me away! I'm getting that two thousand quid so get used to it!'

His voice reverberated through the great house; echoing and re-echoing.

But no shame-faced prankster emerged sheepishly from the shadows.

He was alone.

He stood staring into the gloom for some time and then shrugged.

'OK. If that's the way you want to play it. I'm going to bed.'

And he did.

Being an unimaginative kind of guy he fell asleep very easily. The four-poster bed was warm and luxurious; he felt like he was sinking into a soft, comforting cloud.

And then after a lovely dream about having sex on a tropical beach with a lithe, blond cutie, he woke up suddenly, feeling strangely cold. The reason was not hard to find: his coverlet had been thrown back and he was lying there, exposed to the cool Cornish air.

He frowned. The dream had been a very exciting one and no doubt he had thrashed about in his sleep, perhaps re-enacting the thrashing about that he had been doing on the sun-kissed beach. Without another thought, he pulled the coverlet back and was soon deeply asleep again.

When he awoke the second time to find the coverlet lying on the floor, he got out of bed.

This was now conclusive: contrary to his earlier belief he was alone in this massive house, someone was in here with him, determined to deprive him of his winnings.

He reached for the bedside lamp but did not flip the switch because at that moment he heard a deep, masculine chuckle and then a strong voice said: 'No need for your electrical device. I will let you see me now.'

And to his utter amazement, he saw a spectral shape beginning to form in the darkness; the shape of a strongly built man dressed in what looked like period costume. The figure was translucent; he could see the wall behind it and the manifestation shone with a queer bluish light.

The man looked strangely familiar and as Jacobs fought to keep calm he suddenly was able to identify his weird visitor.

'You're – you're the Earl!' he spluttered.

The apparition nodded. 'Bravo. You are not as stupid as most of the men of your time seem to be. I am indeed Charles Fitzwarren, fifth Earl of Tregowan. And all the time you have thought you were alone I have been watching you and, as I normally do, playing little tricks upon you to test your strength of character. I must say you have done well. Most of my uninvited guests would have run from my abode long before this. Very few get as far as staying the night.'

'So it was you who moved my drink and threw the bedclothes off.'

'Of course. I had a few more tricks up my sleeve, of a gradually increasing degree of unpleasantness, but something about you made me wish to speak directly to you. I felt a similarity, a recognition of a kindred spirit. Your selfishness, your greed, your lack of remorse. I admire that.'

Jacobs felt his unease begin to drain away; this being, this spectre, this ghost, did not appear to pose any danger to him. And that meant that the two thousand quid was in the bag!

He essayed a smile, a smile that showed he too recognised the similarities; a smile that a man of the world gives when he encounters a member of his own club.

'Yeah. I heard you were a bit of a boy in your day.'

The Earl nodded. 'Yes, I miss those days. I am alone in this house now, of course, but I console myself with the memories of the tears on the faces of my tenants as I was dispossessing them. How they wailed, how they begged! How they appealed to my better nature!'

'Which you haven't got of course,' Jacobs grinned.

The apparition slapped his thigh soundlessly and his head was thrown back with the power of his laughter. 'Capital! Capital! I knew it would be good sport to talk with you. It is very lonesome here on one's own.'

Jacobs was feeling more and more comfortable with this bizarre situation. He obviously was made of stronger stuff than the usual contestant in this competition.

'What other tricks did you have planned? – if I'd started to crumble, I mean. Those red eyes in the mirror; I must admit that they did startle me for a second.'

The smile vanished from the spirit's translucent, bluish face.

'Red eyes in the mirror? You saw red eyes?'

Jacobs nodded unconcernedly. 'Yes – they were quite spooky, I'm glad you stopped there, I'm telling you!'

For some reason, the wraith that had been Charles Fitzwarren began to look around in all directions, as if trying to discover some approaching danger.

'I did not put those eyes there! But who di ...'

To Jacobs' amazement there was suddenly another voice in the dark room, that of a young woman, a young woman who seemed on the brink of tears.

'No my lord it was I who put them there. I, Sally Trevannion, the same girl who you ravished and forced to bear your bastard. That sweet, innocent spawn of sin who did not tarry long in this world but fled from you to be with the angels!'

And another shape began to form in the gloom; the form of a young woman, also bluish and translucent but sufficiently clear to show that she was dressed in torn rags. And that figure was pointing a thin finger at the Earl.

'You thought you were alone in your mansion of evil my lord Earl, but I have also been here, watching you, watching you torment these strange folk of this strange age.'

'And I also have not been fully truthful. I put those eyes in the mirror but they were not mine eyes.'

The Earl's spectre sprang to its softly glowing feet. 'But whose were they? No, not, not ...'

The girl appeared to be laughing although no sound could be heard.

'Yes it is he! The Demon of Retribution who has come to take you from your lair to the Place of Punishment that has been long prepared for you. And lo! – he comes!'

Jacobs recoiled as the bluish gloom was suddenly illuminated by a red glow that began as a small smoky ball but rapidly grew until it formed a huge scarlet orifice, shot through with curling black streamers of smoke.

Dark figures could be seen moving in an obscure distance which lay behind that orifice.

And then two terrible red eyes could be seen through the smoke, growing larger as if some dreadful creature was approaching. Two massive arms, seemingly composed of smoke and sparks, came into the room and the silently screaming Earl was dragged through the orifice which immediately closed and disappeared.

There was silence and the figure of the maiden remained still for some time.

Jacobs had collapsed onto the bed and stared up at her with a heart that seemed to be hammering its way through his chest. Finally, she turned and gazed down on him with a gaze that held no concern, no gentleness, no mercy.

'And you, Edward Jacobs, you have spent some time in conversation with the spirit of the man who you did not know was your direct ancestor. You also are stained with the taint of his wickedness, his evil. You too have oppressed the helpless and I tell you this:

'It will not be long before the Demon of Retribution comes for you also.'

And with that warning, she vanished, not slowly, with no flash of light or cascade of sparks.

It was just that she was no longer there, as if she had never been there.

And finally the dawn broke over Tregowan Manor.

And in it was Edward Jacobs, completely alone.

And completely insane.

Magic by Alan Barrow

The quick slight of hand
is no magic but merely a trick.

Magic is as an unaccountable
enchanted, impossible of
transplanting or implanting.

Forget about witches
with their curses,
or the overladen riches
of the rich with their
overladen purses.

Do not look
for magical elves,
for Magic lies within
the best part of ourselves.

In my Magic
there is no magic carpet,
no magic eyes,
and it's no surprise
no magic lantern, nor the doom
of the magic mushroom.

Magic comes and Magic goes
but truly Magic is there
to help those
who bleed, plead and need.

True Magic
is within the mind,
there you will find grief
is the greatest time
for its belief.

Magic does not help,
the sinner or the sin
but it can change
the man, the man within.

There are some who
believe in Magic,
but regret
there is not a lot.

In our part of Wales,
may I say
we are just one
stone's throw away
from Camelot.

But the real important
thing I want to say,
is you take your
Magic with you
where 'ere you go each day.

The greatest wealth
is to find
the Magic in yourself,
then without a care
you will find
Magic everywhere.

What We Were Doing This Week - Angela Robins

During our summer breaks things quieten down - but only a little. A few groups like to carry on their activities such as our Listening to Music Group. In addition to supporting live music and choirs together at local venues, the members continue their meetings at each others' homes.

The sessions are longer and more relaxed with sociable chats between recordings. Members listen to a wide range of music; generally classical but they often include a folk, rock or jazz track and even humour! Occasionally a member will compile their own Desert Island Disc selection: this is the group for those who want to let out their inner DJ. Tracks are usually played on CDs, but at these meetings we can heighten our enjoyment by using DVDs and YouTube.

There is always a tea break mid morning and afterwards we stroll to a local inn together for a leisurely lunch.



----- X -----

Whilst sightseeing in Vienna, **Euan** said to his wife, as they passed a cemetery "Can you hear music being played backwards?" **Juanita** replied "Oh, that's just Beethoven decomposing!"

Wordsearch submitted by Barbara Phillips

Can you find the 11 words associated with LINCOLNSHIRE in the grid below?

As always, words can run forwards, backwards, diagonally or vertically, but always in a straight line.

C	U	P	N	O	T	S	O	B
S	S	P	A	L	D	I	N	G
T	S	K	Y	L	S	K	R	W
A	N	E	E	D	O	A	E	Y
M	E	L	L	G	N	U	B	R
F	F	O	O	T	N	S	T	E
O	W	E	H	C	M	E	C	H
R	R	A	A	I	N	T	S	E
D	M	U	R	R	I	I	A	S
E	T	G	P	E	C	D	L	L
M	A	H	G	N	I	M	M	I

Answers are on page 22

Examples of two fine pieces of work undertaken in our Arts group and Crafts group by member Jean Thomas



SERGIE RACHMANINOV - A MAN FOR ALL THE PEOPLE (part 1) by Neil Pritchard

Sergie Rachmaninov is a composer whose life and music has always fascinated me, so I thought I would share with you my admiration for this most romantic of all romantic composers. While some composers suffer from being unjustly neglected, Rachmaninov's problem is quite the opposite. It's not simply that he's too popular; but more precisely, that certain pieces, notably the Second and Third Piano Concertos, are so popular that they are played endlessly, as are a small selection from his huge output for solo piano. Those works seem to have squeezed the rest of his music out of the concert halls. The works include solo songs to substantial symphonies, choral music and operas. Meanwhile, many critics and music experts remain sceptical about anything quite so popular and immediately appealing, considering his music to be lightweight, and not worthy of consideration alongside the likes of Mozart, Beethoven, Wagner and Brahms.

There is so much superb music that remains comparatively unknown, beyond those few famous pieces. It's also important to remember where Rachmaninov came from. He is really the last of the great Russian romantics - he was inspired very much by Rimsky-Korsakov and Tchaikovsky. Like them he is in many ways a 19th century Russian and this identity lies at the core of his music. To illustrate the point here are two of his less familiar songs, composed in the 1890s, at the outset of his musical career:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uyXwuwp-LcE>

What delightful songs, both of them rarely heard today, along with most of the other songs he composed throughout his life. You'll have noticed the subtle piano accompaniment which reflects his deep love for the instrument. While his reputation as a composer only came later in life, Rachmaninov's skill as pianist was well-known and highly respected throughout his life; he often performed his own works as soloist. He was one of the greatest pianists of his generation, having legendary technical skills and amazing rhythmic drive. His large hands were able to easily cover an interval of twelve keys on the piano. His piano concertos are among the most demanding ever composed, as he sought to challenge both himself and other pianists to greater heights.

Rachmaninov was born in 1873 in Semyonovo, in north-western Russia, into a noble family which had been working in the service of Russian Tsars since the sixteenth century. His father, an army officer and his mother, an heiress, were both amateur pianists, and he had his first piano lessons with his mother at their family estate. His parents soon noticed his outstanding talent on the piano. Because of financial difficulties due to his father's gambling, his father ended up squandering the family fortune and deserted the family when his son was only nine years old. He and his mother moved to Saint Petersburg, where Rachmaninov studied at the Saint Petersburg Conservatory before moving to Moscow. There he studied piano under Alexander Siloti (who was his cousin as well as a former student of the composer Franz Liszt). He also studied harmony under Anton Arensky, and counterpoint under Sergei Taneyev, both well-known composers at the time. It should be noted that in his younger days, Rachmaninov was found to be quite lazy and spent much time skating because his schooling was not challenging enough. Eventually, it was the strict regime of the Conservatory that instilled discipline in the boy.

Already in his early years he showed great skill in composition. While still a student, he wrote the one-act opera Aleko (for which he was awarded a gold medal in composition), his first piano concerto and a set of piano pieces. In 1892, he composed the popular and famous Prelude in C-sharp minor. After 40 years of performing it as an encore at his piano recitals, due to popular demand, he came to detest the piece. Rachmaninov confided his desire to compose more to his current piano teacher Zverev, requesting a private room where he could compose in silence. However, Zverev saw him only as a pianist and severed his links with him. After the success of Aleko however, Zverev welcomed him back as a composer and pianist. His first serious pieces for the piano were composed and performed as a student at the age of 13

during his residence with Zverev. In 1892, at age 19, he completed his Piano Concerto No. 1 which he revised in 1917. This is the final movement: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3aS_hPkxoSk

In 1893, Rachmaninov spent a productive summer with friends at an estate in Kharkiv Oblast where he composed several pieces. In September Rachmaninov returned to Moscow, where Tchaikovsky agreed to conduct his recently composed Tone Poem 'The Rock' for an upcoming European tour. During his subsequent trip to Kiev to conduct performances of his works, he learned of Tchaikovsky's death from cholera. The news left Rachmaninov stunned; later that day, he started work on his Trio élégiaque No. 2 for piano, violin and cello as a tribute, which he completed within a month. The music's aura of gloom reveals the depth and sincerity of Rachmaninov's grief for his idol. The piece debuted at the first ever concert devoted to Rachmaninov's compositions in January 1894. Rachmaninov entered a decline following Tchaikovsky's death. He lacked the inspiration to compose, and the management of the Grand Theatre had lost interest in showcasing his first opera (Aleko) and dropped it from the programme. To earn more money, Rachmaninov returned to giving piano lessons, and in late 1895 agreed to a three-month tour across Russia with a program shared by Italian violinist Teresina Tua. The tour was not enjoyable for the composer and he quit before it ended, thus sacrificing his performance fees.

He devoted most of 1895, when he was 22, to composing his enormously ambitious First Symphony, a work that would surpass everything he had yet achieved. 'I believed I had opened up entirely new paths', he recalled many years later. The work was accepted for performance by the Russian Symphony Concerts in St Petersburg, a series devoted to the promotion of new Russian music under the joint direction of composers Rimsky-Korsakov and Glazunov. Perhaps Rachmaninov would have done better to get his symphony performed in Moscow, where he was better known, but he was no doubt pleased at the thought of a prestigious first performance in St Petersburg, where Glazunov had already conducted a performance of his Symphonic Poem The Rock. The symphony, however, was another matter: both Rimsky-Korsakov and Glazunov expressed doubts about it, and although Glazunov was a fine composer and all-round musician, he was not an inspiring conductor, and certainly not the man to bring out the best in music which he didn't particularly like.

The symphony's rehearsals were completely inadequate (there were two other first performances also on the programme) and the performance in March 1897 is one of music's most notorious disasters. Rachmaninov walked out of the performance early and was crushed by the overwhelmingly negative response. He covered outside the hall, barely able to recognise his own music. As always happens when a new work fails, the composer gets all the blame, rather than the conductor (who, other failings aside, may have been drunk). Rachmaninov's self-confidence was shattered and he had a breakdown. He was unable to compose any important new work over the next three years (though he was very active in other fields during this period, when he laid the foundations for his career as a pianist and conductor).

At various times Rachmaninov thought of revising the symphony, but when he emigrated in 1918 the score was left behind in Russia and subsequently disappeared. It was only in 1944 that the original orchestral parts were rediscovered, allowing the symphony to be reconstructed and performed in Moscow in October 1945. Two things became clear when the symphony was brought back to life: that this was the boldest and most interesting Russian symphony in the decade after Tchaikovsky's 6th Symphony (Pathétique), and that its hostile reception changed the course of Rachmaninov's composition, for he never again allowed himself the expression of such raw passion and such blatantly tragic gestures. (A note of trivia: the theme from the symphony's 4th movement was used for a time during the late 1960s as the title music of the BBC television programme Panorama). Here's the dramatic 4th movement: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i5OA0KTRQsU>

Rachmaninov's Second Piano Concerto was written after this very dark period in the composer's life, three years after the symphony, in the year 1900. The premiere of his First Symphony had been poorly received.

Most reviews were scathing, one critic wrote: 'This music leaves an evil impression with its broken rhythms, obscurity and vagueness of form, meaningless repetition of the same short tricks, the horrible sounds of the orchestra, the strained crash of the brass, and above all its sickly perverse harmonies'. Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov told him, 'Forgive me, but I do not find this music at all agreeable'. After the disastrous First Symphony, Rachmaninov sank into a deep depression. When he finally premiered his Second Piano Concerto his career was saved. He dedicated the concerto to his therapist Dr Nicolai Dahl, a Russian neurologist and musician. After Rachmaninov's breakdown, Dr Dahl held daily sessions of hypnosis and positive suggestion therapy, enabling Rachmaninov to rebuild himself and begin composing again. After the second and third movement of the Piano Concerto premiered in December 1900 with Rachmaninov as the soloist, the entire piece was first performed in 1901 and was enthusiastically received, the concerto reaffirming his status as a world-class composer.

In 1970, the London Symphony Orchestra recorded the piece with principal conductor André Previn and piano legend Vladimir Ashkenazy. Ashkenazy is reported to have said that, in playing Rachmaninov, he wishes that his fingers were a little longer. It's notoriously difficult to play as the piece requires a large handspan, particularly in the first movement with its wide-spread piano chords. It has been speculated that Rachmaninov had Marfan's syndrome, a disorder of the body's connective tissues which allowed him to spread his fingers so wide and to compose and play such challenging pieces. I must admit this is a condition I had not come across before. The concerto is probably the most famous, and most played, piano concerto ever composed. The work has made numerous appearances in big blockbuster films. You might remember hearing the piece in David Lean's *Brief Encounter* and in *The Seven Year Itch* starring Marilyn Monroe. The concerto has also spawned many a pop classic. The piece was rearranged by Frank Sinatra for his 1945 song *Full Moon and Empty Arms* and by Eric Carmen in his 1975 power ballad *All By Myself*, resulting in another famous cinematic outing for the concerto. I don't think this copycatting diminishes its stature as one of the finest piano concertos ever written. Here's the magnificent slow movement:

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

Though met with roaring success, the concerto did divide critics and public alike. The former criticised the composer's excessively emotional and lyrical approach, whilst the latter praised the Russian composer and his ability to bring his melodies to life. The pianist György Sandor has said that "Many perform Rachmaninov concertos differently to how he suggested. They are far too sentimental, despite the fact that Rachmaninov was not. He was romantic, full of emotion, but never in poor taste, never excessive". Rachmaninov's spirits, after the success of the concerto, were further raised when he struck up a relationship with Natalia Satina. She was also an accomplished pianist, which no doubt made her a sympathetic companion for Rachmaninov. Their desire to wed, however, posed some obstacles: it was against the law of the Orthodox Church, and to make matters worse, Rachmaninov was not a regular churchgoer. Through family connections, they made arrangements to be wed at a military barracks, because barracks priests reported not to the Holy Synod, but to generals (such was the weird relationship between church and state in Imperial Russia). There was one last hurdle to clear, however; they had to receive permission from the Tsar during the ceremony in order for their marriage to be legal. Fortunately, the telegram came through and everything went off according to plan. After the rather business-like ceremony, the newly married Rachmaninovs sped away in the summer of 1903 for a three month honeymoon in Austria and Germany. As far as we know, their marriage was a happy one, and they had two perfectly healthy daughters.

Rachmaninov composed a staggering 143 solo piano works from 1887 (when he was 14) until 1941. In other words spanning the whole of his career as a composer, which is not surprising given that he lived for the piano, from the word go, and he developed into one of the finest pianists of his generation. Rachmaninov also possessed an uncanny memory—one that would help put him in good stead when he had to learn the standard piano repertoire as a 45-year-old exile from Russia, at the time of the revolution.

He had the remarkable talent of being able to hear a piece of music, even a symphony, then play it back the next day, the next year, or a decade after that. His piano teachers would give him a long and demanding piece to learn, such as Brahms' Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Handel'. Two days later Rachmaninov would play it "with complete artistic finish."

Alexander Goldenweiser the pianist said, "Whatever composition was ever mentioned—piano, orchestral, operatic, or other—by a classical or contemporary composer, if Rachmaninov had at any time heard it, and most of all if he liked it, he played it as though it were a work he had studied thoroughly." I've chosen an example of his solo piano music, one of his preludes, composed in 1903. The preludes are the most important works he composed for the piano. There are 24 preludes that cover all 24 major and minor keys. These were, however, written and published at different times, not as a unified set. Of all the composers who wrote sets of 24 pieces in all the keys, Rachmaninov seems to be the only one who did not originally set out with such a goal in mind. They are some of the most original and beautiful works ever written for the piano. This is the prelude in G minor number 5:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GhBXx-2PadM>

Wasn't that a delightful performance by somebody with a deep feeling for the music and incredible technique. By the year 1904 Rachmaninov's rising reputation as both composer and pianist soon began to take him on foreign tours through Europe and America. In that same year, in a career change, Rachmaninov agreed to become the conductor at the Bolshoi Theatre for two seasons. He earned a mixed reputation during his time at the post, enforcing strict discipline and demanding high standards of performance. Influenced by Richard Wagner, he pioneered the modern arrangement of the orchestra players in the pit, below the stage, and the modern custom of standing while conducting. He also worked with each soloist on their part, even accompanying them on the piano. In the course of his second season as conductor, Rachmaninov lost interest in his post. The social and political unrest surrounding the 1905 Russian failed Revolution was beginning to affect the performers and theatre staff, who staged protests and demands for improved wages and conditions.

Rachmaninov remained largely uninterested in the politics surrounding him and the revolutionary spirit had made working conditions increasingly difficult. In February 1906, after conducting 50 performances in the first season and 39 in the second, Rachmaninov handed in his resignation. He then took his family on an extended tour around Italy with the hope of completing new works, but illness struck his wife and daughter, and they returned to Russia. Money soon became an issue following Rachmaninov's resignation from his posts as music teacher at St. Catherine's and Elizabeth schools in Moscow, leaving him only the option of composing. Increasingly unhappy with the political turmoil in Russia and in need of seclusion from his lively social life to be able to compose, Rachmaninov with his family, left Moscow for Dresden in November 1906. The city had become a favourite of both Rachmaninov and Natalia, presenting them with a more vibrant musical atmosphere and favourable opportunities.

(The conclusion of this fascinating story will appear in the next edition of DIT)

Wordsearch (page 18) – Answers

BOSTON
SPALDING
WOLDS
LINCOLN

STAMFORD
IMMINGHAM
GRANTHAM
GRIMSBY

FENS
LOUTH
SKEGNESS

Cold Steele by Pam Cocchiara

The name's Steele, Steele with an 'e'. Aptly named I've been told, maybe because of the way in which I approach my assignments, carry them out in a deliberate, ruthless fashion. Or maybe it's just that I appear cold and friendless, as I suppose I am. You don't get close to any friends in my line of work, especially girlfriends. There was one, once, that I thought was special. Let her move in with me. Came home one day to find her packing her bags. She'd been looking in drawers, found some of the paperwork, instructions, etc. issued by HQ.

"You should have told me what you do" she said.

"Curiosity killed the cat," I told her, "Remember Bluebeard?"

She didn't answer, just picked up her bags and left. Since then I've been on my own. I don't tell anyone what my job is, what I do. If they find out, well, let's just say there's always repercussions.

At present I'm on a special assignment. This quarry's a big one. I've been keeping track of his movements for a while now. I've made detailed notes of when and where he goes. That's another thing I'm known for – my preparation, every item clear and precise. Accuracy is vital; all info. required by HQ must be indisputable. I've already had him in my sights once or twice but each time he's managed to get away. I'm told he's untouchable but I'll catch up with him eventually.

Today I know just what his movements will be and where to find him. I make my way along the crowded street, careful not to catch anyone's eye. Then I see him approaching. The car is big, sleek, expensive, and he parks carelessly in a restricted area. From a shadowed doorway I watch as he gets out of the car, clicks the remote automatic lock with a careless backward flick of the wrist and walks confidently away.

He disappears into one of the buildings. I move quickly until I'm standing by the side of the car. I check the details. Registration, make, colour, yes, it's his alright. I check the time, 10.38 precisely. All in order. This is it. This is the day when I'll get him. I move back against the angle of an adjoining building and wait.

At last here he is. I step out of the shadows, let him see me approach, watch his eyes widen in shock and recognition. His hand goes to his pocket. He pulls out his keys but he's too late. He's spotted my calling card, in its little plastic pouch, tucked neatly under the windscreen wiper blade. He pulls it free, cursing as he reads the details on the ticket.

As I pass him I allow a slight smile to flicker over my face, just for an instant. Then I nod my head and wish him "Good morning Sir".

It's been a good day – assignment completed and no bloodshed. Now, let's see what tomorrow holds.

'The Mask of Dimitrios' and the writer Eric Ambler by Gerald Lee

Stephen mentioned in an earlier newsletter, writers from the past, whom we still remember with pleasure, even if they are not household names today. Two examples are Leslie Charteris and John Buchan. In my school and college days I had much enjoyment reading their adventure stories as an escape from school textbooks.

The thriller writer I admire most is Eric Ambler. Other writers have acknowledged his skill in telling a good story and holding the reader's attention. Graham Greene certainly admired him, calling him 'unquestionably our best thriller writer'. John Le Carre described him as 'the source upon which we all draw'.

A common device Eric Ambler uses is to place an unsuspecting individual in the middle of a conspiracy, and then by his own ingenuity, and with some good luck, he manages to save himself and outwit the conspirators. Graham Greene uses this technique in his comic spy thriller 'Our Man in Havana,' the plot of which Eric Ambler might have equally well devised.

After World War One many ethnic groups in Eastern Europe found themselves displaced and without a definite nationality, and sometimes even stateless. One of his most popular books, 'The Light of Day,' which became the movie 'Topkai' with Peter Ustinov, has as its main character Arthur Simpson, born in Egypt with a father who was a sergeant in the British army, who may or may not have married his Egyptian mother. In two books he tries unsuccessfully to claim British nationality.

It is this mystery of nationality and not belonging that adds to the air of uncertainty in a Europe heading towards a second war. The historian A J P Taylor was a fan of Eric Ambler for this reason. 'The Mask of Dimitrios' was one of his favourite films.

In the opinion of many it is his finest book. It was written in 1939 and set in this interwar period. In 1944 it was made into a film with Peter Lorre and Sydney Greenstreet. Zachary Scott had his first film role as Dimitrios.

Watching the film again, it is a story into which Humphrey Bogart might easily have fitted. Peter Lorre and Sydney Greenstreet were almost a double act in cinema. They made nine films together, and of these three included Humphrey Bogart, 'The Maltese Falcon,' 'Passage to Marseille' and 'Casablanca.' Peter Lorre has a sinister, even sleazy, demeanour. Sydney Greenstreet being the larger man is that bit more intimidating, with a deceptively cultivated manner.

This time Peter Lorre is the main character, Cornelius Leyden. Rather than a small-time crook, he is a Dutch academic who has found a second career as a thriller writer. After meeting a senior Turkish policeman, who is also a fan of detective stories, he learns that a body has been washed ashore. The clothing and identity papers suggest it is that of an infamous criminal, known as Dimitrios, but who has also used other names such as the Turkish name Talek. Leyden asks to see the body and becomes intrigued by the history of Dimitrios.

From the murder of a Jewish merchant, for which his accomplice was hanged, his name is associated with an assassination attempt on a prime minister, drug smuggling, espionage and blackmail. He has never faced justice. In the words of the police chief, Haki, 'this type of man does none of the dirty work himself'. There is not even a photograph in police files.

Using the excuse that he is researching for his next book, Leyden sets out to follow the trail of Dimitrios through the Balkan states of Eastern Europe.

He learns from Haki that Dimitrios had double-crossed his ex-lover and then disappeared. He then became part of an espionage racket to obtain vital naval plans. Having blackmailed a minor official, whom he has lured into heavy gambling debts, he drives him to suicide and then double-crosses his accomplice, Grodek, and sells the plans to the Italians.

On a train journey Leyden meets the mysterious Mr Peters. Although it is the first time they have met he already knows Leyden's name. He recommends a hotel. When Leyden then returns to the hotel, he finds Peters searching his room.

Peters then explains he too is searching for Dimitrios. He does not believe he is dead and wants his revenge after being betrayed when they were engaged in a drug smuggling operation together. He suggests they co-operate, with a view to obtaining a large sum through blackmailing Dimitrios.

Eventually they find Dimitrios, or he finds them. He has clearly no intention of paying Peters. In a confrontation they end up killing each other. Only Leyden is left to tell the story of how Dimitrios really died.

As with all Eric Ambler's stories, it is a well-structured plot, which is told through the recollections of the various characters with whom Dimitrios has been involved.

The outstanding character is Peters. He wants his revenge and a form of justice. His nationality is Danish. His name was originally Peterson, but he can no longer visit his homeland. He mentions he has bought a passport for a South American country, from which typically he is banned.

Sydney Greenstreet mixes geniality, cunning and menace in the role. Although a career criminal he repeats the platitude, 'there is not enough kindness in the world'.

The story is so well constructed that it was easy to convert into a film without major changes. For some reason, however, the ending is different. As in the book, the story ends with a confrontation between Dimitrios and Peters with Leyden as the witness. Both Peters and Dimitrios are armed. Peters seems more interested in destroying Dimitrios than in the blackmail money.

Dimitrios shoots Peters, but not fatally. Leyden intervenes, which allows Peters to shoot his enemy dead. In the film, Peters survives. As he is taken away, he asks Leyden to write the story and expects to have plenty of time to read it, presumably in prison.

The book and film are excellent examples of that type of thriller like 'Casablanca' based round characters adrift in the world without a real home. Personally, I find Peter Lorre is not quite convincing as a novelist. His typical role is that of the rather sleazy character he portrays in the 1934 version of Hitchcock's 'The Man who knew too Much'. It is an interesting piece of trivia that Peter Lorre was the first James Bond villain on screen, when he played Le Chiffre in a TV adaptation of 'Casino Royale' on American television in 1954.

Like other writers the experience of cinema influenced Eric Ambler's novel writing. He worked extensively in cinema, most notably writing the screen play of 'The Cruel Sea,' based on the novel by Nichols Monserrat, and 'The Way Ahead,' starring Davis Niven in one of his finest roles.

I am not a fan of the film 'Titanic.' I find it too long and it takes too many liberties with the true story. The best film based on the disaster is one I remember from my childhood when I used to go regularly with my brother to the Stadium Cinema in Belfast.

'A Night to Remember' with Kenneth Moore is a wonderful story of heroism. Kenneth Moore is the great British hero, like other Eric Ambler characters rising to the challenge he did not invite or wish on himself. The film of 'The Mask of Dimitrios' crops up occasionally on TV Channels dedicated to vintage cinema. I hope I have encouraged you to watch the film, or maybe even read the book. You will not be disappointed.

CRAFT GROUP MEETING IN BELLE VUE PARK by Convenor, Ros Lee

We all had a lovely time when we met in Belle Vue Park on Friday, 4th September. We all social-distanced and sat outside. The weather was fine and we were able to have tea and coffee from the tearoom where there was also a nice selection of various sandwiches and cakes available from the tea room to take outside.

We had a lovely treat for our first meeting together from Carol, who had kindly baked homemade Scottish pancakes, cooked on a traditional griddle, which were very tasty with different fruits.

We also had biscuits from Gwen and someone had also brought chocolates too.

The best part was seeing everyone face to face and having a good catch up with the things we had been doing over lockdown.

Pat's collection of colourful knitted squares to send to Africa, is going well, and they are still being added to, with many colourful contributions.

Our project for display is also going well and we are all planning and working on our own parts of the display. As always, the craft ladies are still knitting for charities and making some lovely cards too. If the weather holds out next week, we're hoping to have another informal get together. The photograph below shows our meeting on Friday.



Remember when? submitted by David Pugh



It took 5 minutes for the TV to warm up.



Mum was at home when you got back from school – and you all ate a meal together.



You'd pick up a penny from a muddy gutter – and immediately spend it in the nearest sweet shop!



.... came in two pieces!



Male teachers wore ties and blazers and female teachers wore skirts and perms!



A Ford Zephyr was everyone's dream car.



Kids could play in the street without fear.



The family spent evenings at home.



Milk was delivered in bottles with foil tops.



78s

If you can remember most or all of these, then you have LIVED!!!!

Porthcurno and The Minack Theatre by Mike Brown

Fifteen years ago Angela and I stayed a few days at Sea View House, one of a few quaint B&Bs in the small but fascinating village of Porthcurno. It is a bay near Land's End with a fabulous beach and a hi-tech history as an international telecommunications centre.

Most of the village was created by the Cable and Wireless Company when it built homes, leisure facilities and an international training school for the staff of its overseas telegraph operations in 1870. Porthcurno is where the first transatlantic telecommunications cables came ashore in Britain when the age of copper wire connected up the world and built a new industry. More recently many sub-sea fibre optic cables have been brought ashore here to connect Britain with vast volumes of data, meaning that bathers on the beach are literally sitting or (more appropriately) surfing on top of the internet! At the top of this National Trust beach is what looks like a bathing hut but is, in fact, the Cable Shed. The door is left open so that visitors can view the cable terminations through a security gate.

When C&W closed the Cable College in the 1990s, the buildings were sold. Some have been converted to holiday apartments and a few became the Telegraph Museum. We thought we would save visiting that for a rainy day and were so glad there were a few showers because it is a fascinating place to spend a few hours. We learnt that Brunel's 'Great Eastern' ship (that was plagued with bad luck) was the only ship large enough to hold the cables once she had been gutted. In nine years, like some industrious spider, she wove a web of over 30,000 miles of cables worldwide.

Porthcurno is more famously known for its Minack open air theatre; an amphitheatre that is built into the granite rocks, perched on the cliff-top above the sea. It also has an interesting museum which explains that in the 1930s the owner, Rowena Cade, designed this incredible place and undertook a lot of the building and decoration work herself, with the help of her two gardeners. She was involved with the local theatre group and they needed somewhere to perform its plays. The Minack has been selected as one of the most spectacular theatres in the world.

It has a full Summer season of outdoor performances including comedy, Gilbert & Sullivan, Shakespeare and Moliere; all of which are often sold out. Most years the Newport Playgoers Society performs one of the week-long productions and we went to see them perform Tom Jones by Henry Fielding. It was a magical evening and our minds couldn't help but wander occasionally to the beautiful 'backdrop' of the sea.

Another day we walked for 5 miles along the coastal path to Land's End. It is the most westerly part of England with fabulous cliff-top views of a turquoise sea and sandy coves. We caught the local bus back to the village despite our host's offer to pick us up! How accommodating was that?

The photo is of Newport Playgoers' production of Tom Jones.



Pictures are an Emotional Experience by Ian Lumley

My first exposure to films was pretty much the same as all my friends in the coal-mining area we were raised in - a Saturday visit to the ABC morning matinee where just for an hour or so, we could be transported to a land that we all knew we would never experience in our real lives. Buying an ice cream from the lady carrying the illuminated tray around the cinema was an added bonus. Gene Autry, Hopalong Cassidy and Roy Rogers were our heroes. When Roy came over the ridge on Trigger, with Bullet bounding along at his side to take down the baddies, the audience were on their feet shouting 'they're over there, behind the trees!'

I became one of the very first members of the Roy Rogers Fan club and got all sorts of wonderful gifts as a result. Gene Autry also sang occasionally, but on screen when my hero Roy sat down at the end of an episode and sang a love song to Dale Evans, his wife, I was taken to yet another world. Strangely the only song of his that I still remember was when he sang to his animal companions. 'A four-legged friend, a four-legged friend he'll never let you down. He's honest and faithful right up to the end, that wonderful one, two, three, four-legged friend'.

Those trips gave me a feeling for the emotions that moving pictures can create in an audience. A love of music as well as films and film making, was born in me in those very early days. However, schooling, hospitalisation and a lack of money kept many of those feelings in check for some long time. Reading, mainly of science fiction novels, took their place and held my interest for that period. Robert Heinlein, Ray Bradbury and, particularly Isaac Asimov, all combined to make me wonder what was 'out there'.

I still remember as a young teenager going out by myself and watching the film version of a novel by another Science Fiction 'great', John Wyndham - 'The Day of the Triffids' - with Howard Keel in the star role. Coming home late on a Saturday night after watching it, gave me one of the biggest frights of my life, and showed how much emotions can take hold of you after a visit to the cinema.

Everyone else in the house was already in bed so, after I had had a drink, I washed the bottle of milk out in the sink and put it upside down on the ribbed metal draining board. As I turned and put the light out, I heard a 'tttt tttt'. The same noise the Triffids made as they started attacking humans in the film! I hurriedly put the light back on and looked around - nothing. I put the light off again and turned to leave the kitchen. 'tttt tttt' there it was again! Light on once more and, although I was shaking a little, I opened the back door and looked out at the dark back garden. 'tttt tttt'. By this time, I was almost at screaming point. I wondered if they were coming to get me - if the Triffids really did exist! Then I heard it again and, realising that the sound was coming from inside the kitchen, I looked around more carefully. The bottle washed in hot water a few moments before, was moving ever so slightly on the draining board as the hot water I had used to clean it, ran down the inside and escaped out onto the metal. 'tttt tttt'!

I started to go out with Ann in my later teenage years and as we both had much younger children in our families, we soon found our way to the local cinema giving them, in their turn, a taste of the magic of the big screen. In those days, of course, we were privileged to get two movies for the price of our tickets. Often the 'B' movie was more interesting than the main feature, at least for someone like me who always looked for an emotional experience from the visit. On one occasion we took the kids to see 'The Man from UNCLE' - a big screen adaptation of the popular TV programme. I sat bored through it all - until that is, the 'B' movie came on. 'The Hank Williams Story' told of the life of the American Country and Blues singer. It had me in tears long before the lights went up. Ann just looked at me and shook her head when she saw the state I was in. That reaction of hers has been repeated many times over the years!

Music in films has always been an added attraction for me, and none more so than the story behind a family's attempts to get away from the war in Europe and go to the United States. 'The Sound of Music' had such an effect on me that I actually paid to go and see it – twice! Can there be any greater praise from a tight-fisted Scotsman? I can still remember all the words from every song sung in it, and still, thanks to the USA choir, perform them regularly.

Moving to London in 1966 for my first work experience, I came up against a world of sexual freedom quite foreign to anything that had gone before. I had the usual amount of erotic thoughts, thoughts which led me to go to the cinema in Leicester Square and watch 'Straw Dogs' which was rated as a must see by my colleagues at work. I did go, but left well before the end. Violence, particularly against women, is never nice and to see it portrayed on screen as if it were some kind of entertainment was frankly revolting. I wondered then, and still do so today, why many people saw it as 'titillating' and then tried to emulate what was portrayed there. I began to recognise the force for evil that film making can generate as much as any pleasure.

On another visit, I watched a rather mundane film about the French Foreign Legion entitled 'The Legion's Last Patrol'. Music came to my rescue again, and I can still remember – vividly – the melody that was the recurring theme music. While the much more famous Stewart Grainger played the lead role, Ken Thorne and his orchestra backing up Ray Davis playing a haunting tune on a trumpet, was enough to give me a memory that will stay with me forever.

Two other films that I saw in those early years had a profound effect on me. Again, linking music to film, I was blown away with 'The Jolson Story' and then the sequel 'Jolson Sings Again'. I still have copies (on DVD now of course) and can, and do, sit back and enjoy them as much as I did on their first viewing. It took me several years to accept that Larry Parks was just an actor! Once again, I can still sing most of the songs the films contained although I never heard them being performed anywhere else. Political correctness would, I'm sure, prevent such a film being made nowadays. Can you believe that the twisted world we now live in would allow Al Jolson to sing 'Mammy' or 'April Showers' painted as a (whisper it) black man? How many strident 'offended' voices would be raised?

We are all the poorer for it.

Test your knowledge of Music (page 10) – Answers

Bizet	The Pearl Fishers	The Beatles	ESP.
Wagner	Lohengrin	Electric light orchestra	18 Till I Die
J Strauss	Blue Danube Waltz	Bon Jovi	No Exit
Schubert	The Trout Quintet	Arctic monkeys	Come Fly with Me
Ciurlionis	In the Forest	Bee Gees	The Invisible Band
Beethoven	Emperor Concerto	Bryan Adams	A Rush of Blood to The Head
Tchaikovsky	Nutcracker Ballet	Madonna	Let it Be
Albinoni	Adagio in G minor	Blondie	Heaven On Earth
Britten	Peter Grimes	The Rolling Stones	Definitely Maybe
Elgar	Enigma Variations	Genesis	A New World Record
Mozart	The Impresario	Travis	This is my truth Tell me Yours
Handel	Music for the Royal Fireworks	Belinda Carlisle	Baby One More Time
Stravinsky	The Rite of Spring	REM.	Slippery When Wet
R Strauss	An Alpine symphony	Tina Turner	Houses of the Holy
H Purcell	Dido and Aeneas	Coldplay	Automatic for the People
Orff	Carmina Burana	Manic St. Preachers	Favourite Worst Nightmare
Delibes	Lakme	Oasis	Invisible Touch
Shostakovich	Leningrad Symphony	Britney spears	Private Dancer
Gershwin	Porgy and Bess	Frank Sinatra	True Blue
Liszt	Hungarian Rhapsody no. 2	Led Zeppelin	Sticky Fingers