

# DESERT ISLAND TIMES

*Sharing fellowship in*

NEWPORT SE WALES U3A

No.22

25<sup>th</sup> September 2020



*The Wye Valley looking south from Redbrook  
The famous "Autumn Tints" of the Forest of Dean and Wentwood*

*A MISCELLANY OF  
CONTRIBUTIONS  
FROM OUR MEMBERS*

## So Where Are We Now? – A quick update from the Chairman

Of all the questions that might be asked, this is probably the most difficult to answer!

Events are moving so quickly that I am glad that this page is always the last to be added to DIT. Had I written it when I started compiling this edition, it would have had to be rewritten now before publication! In the last few days the City of Newport has entered a fresh spell of restrictions which are, inevitably, going to cause further disruption to the partial activities that have restarted over the past few weeks. We should not leave the City nor enter it without good reason, which will impact on the informal and formal gatherings in Belle Vue Park. We cannot meet adults other than those in our households indoors, although we are still allowed to meet outdoors in groups of up to 30 individuals provided that social distancing is enforced. Any formal gathering MUST maintain an attendance record should it subsequently be needed for purposes of “track-and-trace” and this record has to be retained for at least 21 days.

This certainly does nothing to help us with plans for reopening U3A. I must reiterate that we simply cannot return to Shaftesbury Street while a 2 metre social-distancing rule is in place and even then things will not be easy to arrange until most restrictions can be lifted. Provisional plans have been discussed by the committee and a lot of work has been going on so that we can operate more efficiently when the time does eventually come. I receive regular information from the Welsh Government, which, although often quite lengthy, does at least provide relevant and up-to-date news of any changes which might affect us. I will pass on relevant information by email if it comes between DIT issues. Whatever you do over the coming weeks DO STAY SAFE!

I was proposing to issue DIT on a fortnightly basis from now – something which was largely as a result of a greater freedom which has inevitably led to a lessening of time for members to research and write articles! That may well alter now, of course, but I will continue with my original proposal unless we do go back into total lockdown

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**I now have very little material for future editions, so can I please ask all of you to do what you can to assist. To this end I have introduced another “challenge” (see page 26) which could well encourage anyone who doesn't feel up to full-scale research and writing to make smaller contributions, much as we did with VE Day and Coronation memories. Please contribute if you can!**

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## A Staycation Day Out - Caerleon by Mike Brown

We've all explored places like Wells, London, Oxford or Cambridge, so why not do a walking tour of Caerleon? Here are two options, both taken from tourism@newport.gov.uk's booklet 'Visiting Caerleon'.

### **Number 1.** The Sculpture Trail

The Caerleon Arts Festival started in 2003 as an imaginative way of drawing attention to the character of this old Roman town. Originally the focus was on an International Sculpture Symposium but now includes a much wider range of The Arts. Many of the sculptors' works can still be found around the town and below is a copy of The Sculpture Trail which doesn't need any more explanation from me.

### **Number 2.** The Historical Trail

Below is a plan of the Historical Trail and I am going to highlight some of the more interesting stories from the booklet relating to some of them.

**10.** Isca (as Caerleon was originally known) was founded in AD 74/75. It was the furthest outpost of the Roman Empire and one of three permanent legionary fortresses in Britain - the other two being York and Chester. Step back in time at the National Roman Legion Museum and discover what life was like then and how our lives today wouldn't be the same without them. (free entrance).

**6.** Frigidarium, tepidarium, caldarium and natatio - are all the facilities you would expect to find at Isca's Roman leisure complex. Nowadays, the Roman Fortress Baths uses imaginative technology to give the visitor a vivid image of its former grandeur. (free entrance).

**1.** Legend says that after the Romans left Britain, King Arthur set up court in Caerleon and that the Amphitheatre was his Round Table. Alfred, Lord Tennyson had a life-long fascination with the legend of Arthur. In 1856 he was working on his most important Arthurian work whilst he stayed at the Hanbury Arms. The window bay where he wrote is still known as Tennyson's Window.

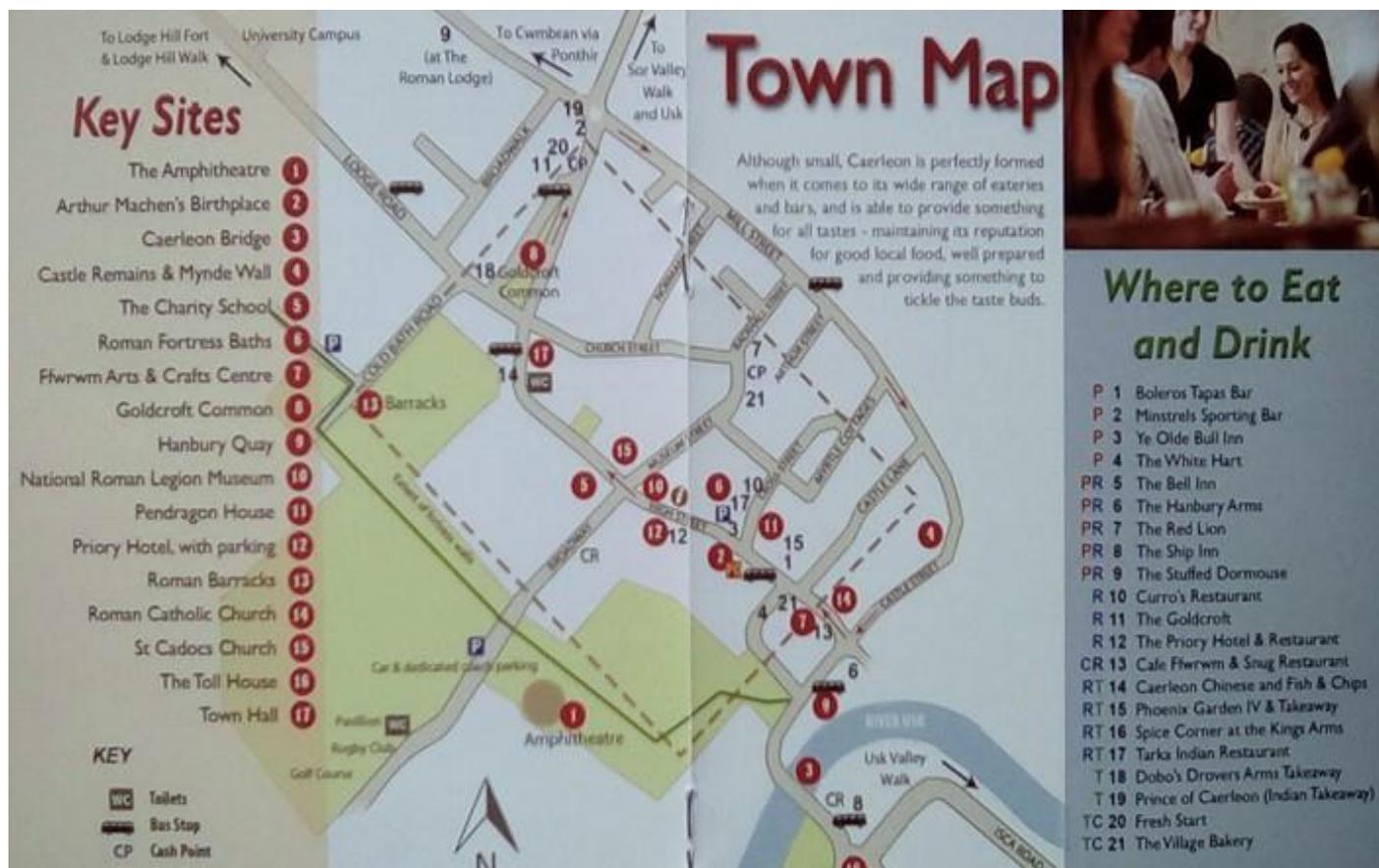
**12.** The Priory Hotel has great quality, character and history and is set in attractive, secluded grounds. Originally a Cistercian monastery in 1108, it later became a nunnery, and many of its finest features from the past have been preserved. These include the ancient flagstones and the rare 16th century glass medallions which surround the Nun's Court. There are also ornate oak panels dating back to 1622 and stained-glass windows depicting the history of the Radcliffe family who were the last private occupants of the Priory.

**3.** Caerleon Bridge was opened in 1806 as a replacement for a wooden structure which had stood for centuries. It was partially swept away by a flood in 1772 whilst a Mrs Williams was crossing it and she was carried downstream towards Newport. Her cries for help and the light of her lantern attracted attention and she was rescued before the timbers carried her out into the Channel.

**4.** Caerleon Castle was an 11th Century motte and bailey fortress and by 1270 had become a stone castle, but little remains of it now. From 1820, John Jenkins, a local dignitary occupied Castle Villa (later called The Mynde). During his time there the Chartist movement was gaining momentum, and feeling vulnerable, he had high walls built around the Castle grounds. Much destruction of the nearby Roman and Medieval ruins must have taken place in order to provide so much stone for the wall's construction. Who knows, if he hadn't plundered those monuments Caerleon might be even more popular than Chester or York!

**11.** Caerleon played a part in the Spanish Civil War when in 1937, 56 Basque children (Ninos Vascos) arrived at Cambria House. They were part of a contingent of almost 4,000 that were evacuated from Bilbao prior to its fall to Franco's troops. In 1939 thirty of the children moved into 18 Cross Street (now Pendragon House B&B) and were in the care of Mrs Maria Fernandez. The children either returned to Spain or settled in the UK.

9. From Roman times and into the Industrial Revolution Caerleon was a port. An iron and coal tramroad led down to the quay by the bridge. All that has gone, for there is now a 'New Port' downriver!



## **AUTUMN by Martyn Vaughan**

The year is turning once again  
as rust and sand invade the leaves.

The sun rises in a veil of mist  
and in pale skies birds turn to Africa.

I look out over these ochre trees  
and remember their green loveliness.  
Such a short while since I felt the first bud  
and dreamed of coming sun-kissed days.

The sun retreats, defeated, to the south,  
soon to hide behind the shadowed hills.

There is damp decay upon the winds  
that hints of greater griefs that wait their call.

And I too look upon my own Autumn,  
my own change from bursting bud to Fall.  
And yet – beyond the ice and dark there is hope,  
hope for golden warmth again for the bud  
And sun-blest kisses once more for her and me.

## **The Ex- Files - submitted by Pam Cocchiara**

Find the words beginning with ex..... as defined below. Answers are on page 8.

1. Clearly stated; direct or unambiguous.
2. Drive out or ward off an evil spirit using incantations or the name of God.
3. In accounting, the amounts paid out.
4. A journey or voyage to a particular place for a particular purpose.
5. Completely used up; tired out; drained of strength.
6. A display of something beautiful, valuable, saleable or of historic or other interest.
7. A travel in or a journey through an unknown or little known region.
8. To use for one's own selfish ends or profit.
9. A stage direction for actors to go off stage.
10. Bubbling over with joy, high spirits or enthusiasm.
11. To raise up in position or dignity; to praise highly; to give glory to.
12. A departure in great numbers.
13. To obtain by force, threats, deception etc.
14. To despatch with speed and efficiency.
15. To urge strongly.
16. To disentangle or set free.
17. Precise, rigorous, accurate.
18. Extremely painful, agonising.
19. To make complete atonement for.
20. On the spur of the moment, without preparation.

## **An Obituary submitted by Jan Howells**

Today we mourn the passing of a beloved old friend, Common Sense, who has been with us for many years. No one knows for sure how old he was, since his birth records were long ago lost in bureaucratic red tape. He will be remembered as having cultivated such valuable lessons as:

- Knowing when to come in out of the rain.
- Why the early bird gets the worm.
- Life isn't always fair.
- And maybe it was my fault.

Common Sense lived by simple, sound financial policies (don't spend more than you can earn) and reliable strategies (adults, not children, are in charge).

His health began to deteriorate rapidly when well-intentioned but overbearing regulations were set in place. Reports of a 6-year-old boy charged with sexual harassment for kissing a classmate; teens suspended from school for using mouthwash after lunch; and a teacher fired for reprimanding an unruly student, only worsened his condition.

Common Sense lost ground when parents attacked teachers for doing the job that they themselves had failed to do in disciplining their unruly children. It declined even further when schools were required to get parental consent to administer sun lotion or an aspirin to a student; but could not inform parents when a student became pregnant and wanted to have an abortion.

Common Sense lost the will to live as the churches became businesses; and criminals received better treatment than their victims.

Common Sense took a beating when you couldn't defend yourself from a burglar in your own home and the burglar could sue you for assault.

Common Sense finally gave up the will to live, after a woman failed to realize that a steaming cup of coffee was hot. She spilled a little in her lap and was promptly awarded a huge settlement.

Common Sense was preceded in death:

- by his parents, Truth and Trust.
- by his wife, Discretion.
- by his daughter, Responsibility.
- and by his son, Reason.

He is survived by his 5 stepbrothers:

- I Know My Rights.
- I Want It Now.
- Someone Else Is To Blame.
- I'm A Victim.
- Pay me for Doing Nothing.

Not many attended his funeral because so few realized he was gone.

If you still remember him, pass this on. If not, join the majority and do nothing

## **A Day at the Beach by Ian Lumley**

The summer sun was streaming in through the bedroom shutters as I awoke that morning. I just knew that there was a cloudless blue sky outside waiting for me, as was often the case here in the Charente-Maritime region of France. We were no more than a mile from the sea on l'île D'Oleron, in a little cottage rented from a colleague at work. Today was to be a little bit different.

Pat and David (along with their daughter Rachel) had shared the cottage with us before. Rachel got on well with Gillian, and the two of them were old enough to make their own 'fun', leaving the four of us time to enjoy the pleasures of 'La Belle France' at our leisure. We shared a love of simple activities. We were all happier eating some oysters (raw) or freshly cooked crevettes accompanied by French bread and a glass of sparkling wine, as a lunch rather than silver service at a grand hotel.

Sally, Pat and David's eldest daughter, was holidaying further up the same coast with her own family and it had been arranged that they would come and spend the day with us on the island. We were aware that Sally and Mark were going through what is commonly called 'difficult times' in their marriage and Pat – ever the mother – was very concerned for their future. When I heard some of the stories she had to tell about how things were, I was even more concerned about the three kids. Samantha (10), Oliver (8) and William (6) were all at very vulnerable ages, and I knew from similar instances which had arisen in my own family, that there is always a grave danger that the kids can get 'lost' in the friction which often surrounds the adults in this kind of situation.

We didn't have long to wait. They must have left at the crack of dawn to travel the sixty or so miles from their own campsite. Their arrival came with a large dose of chaos! Three young kids cooped up in a car for that length of time always have loads of energy when they are eventually released. We were soon walking through the last edges of the pine forest and then through the line of sand dunes on our way to the beach. The kids squealed with delight as we emerged onto the largest beach you ever saw. It ran, at least this part of it, for almost seven miles. There was nothing but water between us and the eastern coast of America.

While we all arranged our towels, in the way only the British on holiday can, the kids ran off to see who could get to the water first. Sally and Mark (her husband) left a bit of space between themselves and the 'oldies'. I noticed, but said nothing. It was also noticeable that, in spite of Pat's best efforts, their conversation barely rose above the monosyllabic. It left an awkwardness in the air that was difficult to avoid. We nevertheless tried to relax and hoped that the sunshine would work its magic on the mood of the day.

The kids loved the water. There was only the gentlest of breezes coming in which raised only the smallest of waves. Perfect conditions to let youngsters have freedom in the shallows – and my goodness what shallows they were. We'd been to this stretch of beach on many previous occasions, and knew that – when the tide was out – the sand seemed to go on forever. Actually, it did go out for nearly a mile when fully at low tide. A few shells and some small pebbles existed, but the rest was all glorious golden sand.

Part of the fun for youngsters was to come back at regular intervals so that mummy could dry them off, and then they could run squealing down to the water to get wet again! Pat, full of mothering as always, tended to the boys, but Samantha only wanted her mum. The look in the little girl's eyes told me that she recognised the tensions that still pervaded the atmosphere without understanding the reasons. She just wanted reassurance that 'mum' was still there.

Oliver, the older of the two boys, needed to be noticed too. He came up to Mark after a while, wanting him to take a look at what he had found near the water's edge. Mark wasn't interested and pretended that he was asleep. As Oliver slowly turned away, I asked him to let me see what he had in his hands. It was the remains of the smallest crab I had ever seen. It was obviously new-born and hadn't lasted for long! Pure white in colour, the normal shell had not yet formed. How it had met its end was unclear, but

we tugged over it for a few minutes, before I asked if he wanted to give it a 'proper' burial. Samantha and William were also in attendance by this time and all said 'yes'.

We laid the body on a small pebble, while I arranged for Samantha and William to look for some more pebbles and pieces of wood to mark the grave. Oliver and I excavated a small area of sand to place the remains in. When they were all back, we wrapped the body in some tissue paper that Pat had in her voluminous bag and gently laid it at the bottom of the grave. After filling the sand back over the remains, the kids piled the pebbles on top and we put a wooden stick at its head. We then stood up and, under my instruction, we held hands and solemnly bowed three times to the fresh grave. I then said that we should sing something in memory of the crab before we finished the proceedings. They all agreed (why wouldn't they?) and I then had to quickly think of a song that was simple and one that I could remember! The best I could come up with was 'I see the Moon, The Moon sees me', but we managed to sing it all the way through – twice!

Then as the kids turned to walk away, I shouted 'NO, you never turn your back on a freshly-made grave!' They looked at me and so we all held hands again and slowly moved away from the grave – backwards – lowering our heads. The children's eyes never left me the whole time. When we were several feet away, I said that it was OK to turn and they ran to Mum and Dad – still sitting separately and in silence - to explain in large gulps, what they had been doing.

Several years later, the school psychologist was asked if she could help Oliver with some behaviour problems. One of her questions to the by now troubled fifteen-year-old was 'who among the adults you know would you describe as your best friend'? She then had to make further enquiries to find out about someone Oliver had not seen for nearly seven years.

Samantha can still sing 'I see the Moon' more than twenty-five years later.

Children may not always remember exactly what you did with them  
They may not always remember exactly what you said to them,  
But they will always remember exactly how you made them feel.

### **The Ex.... Files (page 5) - Answers**

- |                |                  |
|----------------|------------------|
| 1. Explicit    | 11. Extol        |
| 2. Exorcise    | 12. Exodus       |
| 3. Expenditure | 13. Extort       |
| 4. Excursion   | 14. Expedite     |
| 5. Exhausted   | 15. Exhort       |
| 6. Exhibition  | 16. Extricate    |
| 7. Expedition  | 17. Exact        |
| 8. Exploit     | 18. Excruciating |
| 9. Exeunt      | 19. Expiate      |
| 10. Exuberant  | 20. Extempore    |

### **Silver Line Helpline**

This charity was established in 2012 by Esther Rantzen following the success of Childline. It is a free, confidential helpline offering information and advice to older people and is available 24 hours every day of the year. It recently joined forces with Age UK to help more of the older generation who are struggling with loneliness and isolation; they can phone for free on 0800 470 8090. Silver Line offer friendship by matching their volunteers with older pensioners (based on their interests) and help connect them with local services in their area. So, if you fancy a chat or would like to be a volunteer, check out [www.thesilverline.org.uk](http://www.thesilverline.org.uk) or phone the above number.

## BEE - EAUTIFUL HONEY - Jane Parsons

In earlier editions of DIT I recounted how 'im indoors was able to bag a swarm of bees which had conveniently chosen to rest in the hedge in our back garden (Issue 11 of 29 May), and to accommodate them in an empty hive at our allotment. Later, (Issue 19 of 24 July) I gave an update on how they had fared in their new home, and how we had added an additional 'super' in the hope of being able to harvest a little honey this year.

This needs to be done before the summer ends so that there is still time, and sufficient food available, for them to replenish their stocks before the colder, windy, wet weather of autumn sets in. Having confirmed this would be worth the effort by a rough check on the weight of the 'super', we chose a dry, calm, mid-August day and went tooled up ready for a bit of housebreaking. Each 'super' contains 10 frames but we took only 4 from each of our two active hives so as to leave a good supply for the bees in the coming winter - the gaps left were filled with new, clean frames.

Since this was to be our first attempt to harvest any honey we had decided not to invest in costly equipment. Instead, we set up our own Heath Robinson system roughly comprising of a couple of cheap buckets (food grade of course), some everyday kitchen utensils, a couple of mesh laundry bags and baby muslins (for filters) and a lot of old newspapers in case of accidents.



The wax cappings were gently scraped from both sides of each frame into bucket 1 to expose the honey - this bucket had holes drilled in its base so that as much honey, but as little wax as possible, could dribble through. Bucket 1, with the now uncapped frames, was placed (a little precariously) over bucket 2 with a filter between them, the whole was covered to exclude unwanted visitors and gravity was left to run its course overnight.



The following morning, the lower bucket was weighed and we found we had garnered almost 19lbs - oh dear, we hadn't expected quite that much and had to beg extra jars from the neighbours to take it all! These were filled via a tap inserted in the bottom of this bucket and several of the borrowed jars were later returned to the donors full of liquid gold!

After that the bees were left in peace for a couple of weeks but the weather was proving to be unseasonably cold and wet and we wanted to give the hives a final check-over before autumn really set in to ensure there were no obvious signs of disease or invaders and no urgent repairs needed. We had decided to experiment this year by taking out the queen excluder for the winter. This is not essential and many beekeepers (apparently) never do it. The advantage is mainly in the event of a particularly cold winter when the workers, in moving up into the supers to fetch honey, may leave the Queen exposed to cold - with the excluder removed she is able to move up with them. The disadvantage is that

next spring we will have to shake the Queen back down into the brood box to prevent her laying in the supers.

So, the end of August saw us back again, this time thoroughly dismantling the hives, much to the annoyance of the bees - interestingly those of the swarm captured earlier in the year seemed less aggressive than those of the original hive. A quick look into the upper 'super' showed that much of the honey we had taken had already been replaced so we lifted it off and carefully placed it to one side to take a look at the lower one.

**LEFT - Separating the upper 'super' from the one beneath using a simple beekeeper's tool (and a few puffs from the smoker) to prise them apart - as well as honey and wax, bees make propolis, a thick, brown substance somewhat resembling resin which they use to fill every nook and cranny of the hive to keep out draughts and invaders - it makes very good glue!**



**RIGHT - Lifting one of the frames from the lower 'super' to check it.**



**LEFT - Checking a frame - this one is well filled with honey and neatly capped with grey/white wax.**

A sample of three or four frames were checked and everything seemed as it should be so this 'super' was also removed and laid aside to expose the brood box beneath.



**LEFT - Brood box showing the Queen excluder in place, in this case made of zinc. They can also be made of plastic but the only other metal which could be used is stainless steel which is expensive - other metals cause a chemical reaction with honey.**



**RIGHT - Checking one of the frames from the brood box - note the difference in colour between the cells in this frame compared to those from the 'supers'. A small, light coloured patch of capped cells containing honey, can be seen in the corner just above our intrepid beekeeper's right hand.**

As far as we could judge everything was as it should be, though as we are fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants amateurs that might not be saying much - time will tell. By this point the bees were becoming just a little irritated with us so, once we had checked a few frames and had a quick game of Spot The Queen (nobody won), we carefully put everything back in place and rebuilt the hive. Then the process was repeated for hive number two. The Queen excluders were left near their respective hives for a few days so the bees could retrieve any wax or honey on them and were then taken away for a good clean.



**Rebuilding the hive - believe me, a 'super' full of honey is HEAVY especially when you're trying not to crush half the colony under it.**

All that was ten days ago and I'm glad to say neither hive seems to have suffered too badly from our ministrations. Young workers are still emerging and there is plenty of foraging going on particularly on warm, sunny days. Fingers crossed there should be more honey next year.

## Cryptic Crossword 5 - Pic'n'Mix Clues – Anagrams - Angela Robins

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

i.e. Gain control of/ unruly/stream (6). = Master

'Gain control means master which is an anagram of stream. 'Unruly' is the hint it is an anagram clue.

Combined with other clues they yield whole words or single letters to form a composite answer.

e.g. Softly a violin played in the exhibition building (8) = P/ avilion P is an A-Z Association (musical term) and a violin is an Anagram.

Or - In pit there's no rest unfortunately for soup (10). = Min/ estron/ e Mine, a Word Exchange for pit, contains an anagram of 'no rest.'

Contact me on [valdemos2@gmail.com](mailto: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 Anagram Clue element and a definition of the answer (as in a straight crossword clue). The answers are on page 14.

- |  |                              |
|--|------------------------------|
| 1. One Latin I travelled first (7).  | Numbers Representing Letters |
| 2. Not one bee's swarming - too fat! (5).  | Numbers Representing Letters |
| 3. Middle Eastern serial broadcast before one(7).                                  | Numbers Rep Letters          |
| 4. Caterer upset in a domestic row (7).  | Double Meaning               |
| 5. <a href="mailto:sophist@iced.mix">sophist@iced.mix</a> - pretentious moi? (13). | Punctuation                  |
| 6. Ask Queen to prepare and be host to an island ruler initially (7). Acrostic     |                              |
| 7. Decree head of carp swirled in ebbing tide (5).                                 | Part Word                    |
| 8. Steal platoon leader 's broken rifle (6).                                       | Part Word                    |
| 9. Rued mistake about leading dairies milk holder (5).                             | Part Word                    |
| 10. Sadly Freddy has no right to former Welsh county (5).                          | A-Z Assoc/Pt Wd              |
| 11. I care to get excited about large cake (6).                                    | A-Z Abbreviation             |
| 12. Dilute trade now developing around West (5,4).                                 | A-Z Abbreviation             |
| 13. That is sky possibly - Goodness Gracious Me! (5).                              | A-Z Association              |
| 14. Oil tribunal processed carbon capture (9).                                     | A-Z Abbreviation             |
| 15. Law broke after British Rail fight (5).  | A-Z Abbreviation             |
| 16. Promises after mad actor is shocking (9).                                      | A-Z Abbreviation             |
| 17. Lie about certainty when I'm taking things easy (7).                           | Word Exchanger               |
| 18. Ruse rep arranged by mobile message (7).                                       | Word Exchanger               |
| 19. Old lie about banishment (5).  | Word Exchanger               |
| 20. Clay shifting around edge by magic process (7).                                | Word Exchanger               |

## **Roman Finds in Wales**

### ***Major new study reveals aerial discoveries from Roman Wales, from the drought of 2018***

A new study of Royal Commission aerial discoveries from the widespread drought of 2018 in Wales has just been published in the journal *Britannia* at <https://bit.ly/3e7NLvm>. Written by Royal Commission Senior Aerial Investigator Dr Toby Driver, together with Roman experts Professor Barry Burnham and Dr Jeffrey L. Davies, the study sheds new light on what we understand about the military conquest of Wales by Roman troops in the first century AD, and its subsequent Roman settlement.

Discoveries include two Roman marching camps, three auxiliary forts and a remarkable series of stone buildings outside the fort at Pen-y-Gaer in the Brecon Beacons National Park. The aerial photographs also clarified the plan of several known villas as well as identifying some potential villa sites and farmsteads, probably dating from the Romano-British period, in south-east, south-west and north-west Wales. The recognition of a new Roman road alignment south of Carmarthen suggests a previously unsuspected coastal fort at or near Kidwelly, possibly now hidden by the medieval castle.

Dr Driver said: 'Aerial reconnaissance in the drought summer of 2018 was exhilarating and intense, with new archaeological sites appearing below the aircraft right across Wales. Over the last year we have done more intensive research on the many spectacular Roman discoveries and it is great to now share this new knowledge with a wider audience'.

'In particular, the Roman discoveries of a new fort and marching camp in the Vale of Gwent, south-east Wales, show the movement of the Roman army through hostile territory when there was still strong local resistance. Some 1900 years after these Roman fortifications were built, their plough-levelled foundations have re-emerged for a few brief weeks in drought-ridden grassland and crops.'

### **Marching Camps: Evidence of the Roman Conquest**



The 2018 drought in Wales revealed two new Roman marching camps, one near Three Cocks in the Black Mountains and one near the Roman town of Caerwent in south-east Wales. Marching camps were built by Roman troops on manoeuvres in Wales early in their military campaigns. In the 30-year struggle to conquer Wales, the Romans frequently clashed with the stubborn and warlike Silures tribe in south-east Wales. Marching camps were temporary overnight stops for troops who would 'dig in' to create a large rectangular defended enclosure filled with tents. They are still incredibly rare in south-east Wales – only three are currently known from the old county of Gwent – so the discovery of a new example near Caerwent in 2018 was very exciting. It is also the first camp in Wales to feature 'outurned' Roman defended gates, another rare feature for Roman Britain.

The new marching camp emerged in a field already recorded from the air for over 50 years; it's incredible how much archaeology is hiding 'in plain sight'. It was built to protect troops when this part of south-east Wales was still hostile territory; but it lies just west of the Roman town of Caerwent, Venta Silurum 'Market town of the Silures', where the pacified tribe was later settled.

Here is the link to the full article <https://bit.ly/3e7NLvm> - an interesting article on Roman finds in Wales during the dry summer of 2018. It is well worth making a cuppa, grabbing a biscuit and reading!

As well as sections above there is mention of Stoop Hill Villa, Caldicot, Monmouthshire, set on a low rise overlooking the Caldicot Levels, next to the M4 and the Severn Bridge.

There is also one nautical reference: "The road seems to have taken a much more southerly course than was formerly believed, thus linking the Flavian fort at Carmarthen and that at Loughor to the south-east. The implications of this discovery are clear: an estuarine fort must exist at or near the town of Kidwelly. Could it underlie the medieval castle, as is the case at Loughor? This illustrates the importance that the Flavian army placed upon seaborne supply in the maintenance of its garrison bases along the coasts of South Wales (viz. Cardiff, Neath and Loughor) and raises the strong possibility of another to the west in Milford Haven"

Our Barland's Farm boat is much later (3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> Centuries) than these finds, but it reinforces the importance of these vessels in Roman period communications.

This article appeared in the July Newsletter of the **Friends of the Newport Ship**, provided by our member **Ivy Forkin** and reprinted with their permission.

### **Cryptic Crossword Clues (Page 12) - Answers**

- |                    |                   |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| 1. 1 nitial        | 11. Ec/l/air      |
| 2. 0 bese          | 12. Water do/w/n  |
| 3. Israel/1        | 13. Yikes         |
| 4. Terrace         | 14. Lubri/C/ant   |
| 5. Sophistic(at)ed | 15. BR/awl        |
| 6. Enqu/ir/e       | 16. Atroc/i.o.u.s |
| 7. Edi/c/t         | 17. Lei/sure      |
| 8. P/ilfer         | 18. Pre/text      |
| 9. U/d/der         | 19. Ex/ile        |
| 10. Dyfed          | 20. Alc/hem/y.    |

## Wordsearches submitted by Barbara Phillips

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

No. 1 Can you find 12 FRUITS in this grid?

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A | P | P | L | E | N | E | C | L |
| D | U | O | A | O | B | N | Y | E |
| E | F | M | L | N | S | I | R | M |
| N | S | E | C | I | A | T | D | O |
| I | M | G | R | I | M | N | S | N |
| R | P | R | G | I | F | E | A | O |
| E | S | A | T | S | U | M | A | B |
| G | T | N | P | D | U | E | R | I |
| N | L | A | A | A | S | L | O | T |
| A | C | T | J | J | Y | C | D | R |
| T | E | E | E | G | N | A | R | O |

No. 2 Can you find 12 SNACKS in this grid?

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| C | H | E | E | S | E | D | Y | K |
| A | P | J | Z | F | N | P | S | O |
| R | D | E | R | I | E | N | N | C |
| R | S | U | C | A | O | Y | I | H |
| O | I | P | N | A | R | T | S | O |
| T | H | U | S | E | N | D | I | C |
| U | T | I | L | I | E | S | A | O |
| S | L | E | N | E | R | O | R | L |
| T | C | D | S | A | I | C | N | A |
| F | L | A | P | J | A | C | K | T |
| L | E | Z | T | E | R | P | O | E |

Answers are on page 27.

**Pets' Corner submitted by Barbara Phillips**

|  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. Which actor had a vulture called Maloney?   | a) John Barrymore<br>b) James Cagney<br>c) Lon Chaney<br>d) Douglas Fairbanks        |
| 2. Who wrote: "To sit with a dog on a hillside on a glorious afternoon is to be back in Eden"? | a) Jaroslav Hašek<br>b) Jerzy Andrzejewski<br>c) Ivan Klima<br>d) Milan Kundera      |
| 3. Who called her cat "The cat of all cats"?   | a) Marie Antoinette<br>b) Queen Victoria<br>c) Catherine the Great<br>d) Cleopatra   |
| 4. Who was bitten by her parrot Ping Pong?   | a) Elizabeth Hurley<br>b) Thandie Newton<br>c) Rachel Weisz<br>d) Kate Winslet       |
| 5. Which Prime Minister had a poodle called Rufus?   | a) MacDonald<br>b) Baldwin<br>c) Churchill<br>d) Macmillan                           |
| 6. Which maritime explorer had a cat called Trim?  | a) Francis Drake<br>b) James Cook<br>c) Matthew Flinders<br>d) Henry Hudson          |
| 7. What name did George Orwell give his goat?  | a) Benjamin<br>b) Clover<br>c) Mollie<br>d) Muriel                                   |
| 8. Who said "There are two means of refuge from the miseries of life: music and cats" ?        | a) Hannah Arendt<br>b) Arthur Koestler<br>c) Herbert Marcuse<br>d) Albert Schweitzer |
| 9. What was the name of King Arthur's dog?   | a) Hector<br>b) Lamorak<br>c) Gornemont<br>d) Cavall                                 |
| 10. Which artist owned a beagle called Pitter?   | a) Edward Hopper<br>b) Jackson Pollock<br>c) Norman Rockwell<br>d) Mark Rothko       |

Answers are on page 21

## **SERGIE RACHMANINOV - A MAN FOR ALL THE PEOPLE (part 2) by Neil Pritchard**

The Rachmaninov family stayed in Dresden until 1909, while waiting for the political situation in Russia to get back to normal, only returning to Russia for their summer breaks at Ivanovka. (Ivanovka is a village and country estate located outside Moscow). It was the summer residence of the composer in the period between 1890 and 1917, until his emigration. Despite occasional periods of depression, apathy, and little faith in any of his work, Rachmaninov started on his Symphony No. 2 in 1906, twelve years after the disastrous premiere of his first. While writing it, Rachmaninov and the family returned to Russia, but the composer detoured to Paris to take part in Ballet director Sergei Diaghilev's season of Russian concerts in May 1907. His performance as the soloist in his Piano Concerto No. 2 with an encore of his Prelude in C-sharp minor was a triumphant success. Soon after, Rachmaninov regained his sense of self-worth following the enthusiastic reaction to the premiere of his Symphony No. 2 in early 1908.

This is the final movement: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LcN1iLMiStk>

While in Dresden, Rachmaninov agreed to perform and conduct in the United States as part of the 1909–10 concert season with conductor Max Fiedler and the Boston Symphony Orchestra. He spent time during breaks at Ivanovka finishing a new piece specially for the visit, his Piano Concerto No. 3. The tour saw the composer make 26 performances, 19 as pianist and 7 as conductor, which marked his first recitals without another performer in the programme. His first appearance was in Massachusetts for a recital on 4 November 1909. The second performance of the Piano Concerto No. 3 by the New York Symphony Orchestra was conducted by the composer Gustav Mahler in New York City with the composer as soloist, an experience he personally treasured. Though the tour increased the composer's popularity in America, he declined subsequent offers, including that of conductor of the Boston Symphony, due to the length of time away from Russia and his family.

In composing the third piano concerto he sought to compose a "visiting card" to showcase his talents as a pianist and a composer, as noted by Jean-Jacques Groleau in his biography dedicated to the composer. Composed quickly, the concerto was rehearsed as he crossed the United States. Following the first performance in November 1909 in New York, Rachmaninov's fingers were so exhausted that he was unable to perform an encore. Despite a seemingly simple opening theme, the work requires a great virtuosity on behalf of its performers. Its structure is the most complex of Rachmaninov's four concertos. The concerto's reputation owes a great deal to the formidable cadenza of the first movement. Interestingly, the composer wrote two versions. Made famous notably by the recordings of Horowitz and Rachmaninov himself, the first version is the more widely known of the two. Though considerable in its difficulty, this is nothing in comparison with the second version, whose endless chord progressions require both strength and speed. The cadenza is towards the end of the movement and illustrates the fact that pianists take on this work "at their peril". This recording includes the second version of the cadenza:

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

Upon his return home in February 1910, Rachmaninov became vice president of the Imperial Russian Musical Society (IRMS), whose president was a member of the Russian royal family. For two seasons between 1911 and 1913, Rachmaninov was appointed permanent conductor of the Philharmonic Society of Moscow; he helped raise its profile and increase audience numbers and receipts. In 1912, he left the IRMS when he learned that a musician in an administrative post was dismissed for being Jewish. Soon after his resignation, an exhausted Rachmaninov sought time for composition and took his family on holiday to Switzerland. They left after one month for Rome for a visit that became a particularly tranquil and influential period for the composer, who lived alone in a small apartment (so he could compose) while his family stayed at a boarding house. While there he received an anonymous letter that contained a Russian translation of Edgar Allan Poe's poem The Bells by Konstantin Balmont, which affected him greatly, and he began work on his choral symphony of the same title, based on it. This period of

composition ended abruptly when Rachmaninov's daughters contracted serious cases of typhoid and were treated in Berlin due to their father's greater trust in German doctors. After six weeks, he returned to their Moscow flat, where he continued work on *The Bells*.

'All my life,' declared Rachmaninov in his reminiscences, 'I have taken pleasure in the differing moods and music of gladly chiming and mournfully tolling bells.' He gives two examples of their impact on the Russian soul. One is a vivid anecdote of author Chekhov hearing the Vesper bells and declaring they were 'all that religion has left me'. The other is how the 'four silvery weeping notes' of Novgorod's Saint Sophia Cathedral, familiar to Rachmaninov from childhood, found their way into his First Suite for two pianos and his opera *The Miserly Knight*. The bell-songs of Kolokola (to give *The Bells* its Russian title) are never far from two of Rachmaninov's other church-related fixations – the stepwise patterns of orthodox chants that dominate his symphonies, and the Catholic chant for the dead, the *Dies Irae*, used to macabre effect in the orchestral predecessor to *The Bells*, the 1909 tone-poem *The Isle of the Dead*.

*The Bells* was clearly the next step on that symphonic path, not only because it too has its roots in Russian religious music, but also because Rachmaninov explicitly called it a Choral Symphony, not a cantata. He had already sketched a plan for a purely orchestral symphony before an anonymous correspondent sent him the verses by Edgar Allan Poe, which I mentioned earlier. Settling in Rome for the winter of 1912–13, and occupying at first the very same rooms overlooking the Piazza di Spagna that his beloved Tchaikovsky had used as a retreat in the late 1870s, he worked at fever pitch on *The Bells* from early morning to sunset every day. He also conducted the St Petersburg premiere on 30 November 1913, and the reception was unusually searching, one critic noting that those familiar 'concentrated shades of hopeless anguish and despair, pessimistic passion and sublime tragedy' which Rachmaninov had inherited from Tchaikovsky stood revealed with 'unusual clarity' and 'special force'. This is my personal favourite of his works. He considered it his finest work. On this occasion I'm including the whole piece, on this recording it's sung in English: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zH0B-xN\\_-5k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zH0B-xN_-5k)

Rachmaninov had a very deep and personal religious faith which he expressed beautifully in 1915 through his unaccompanied set of choral vespers. They are separated into two parts – the evening Vespers and the morning Matins, both full of exquisitely rich harmonies, these turned out to be some of the last works that he composed in Russia. His life was to change dramatically with the advent of the 1917 Russian Revolution. It meant the end of Russia as the composer had known it. On the day the February 1917 Revolution began in Saint Petersburg, Rachmaninov performed a piano recital in Moscow in aid of wounded Russian soldiers who had fought in the war. This was followed two months later with a visit to Ivanovka, where he found the house in chaos after a group of Socialist Revolutionary Party members seized it as their own communal property. Despite having invested most of his earnings on the estate, he left after three weeks, vowing never to return. It was soon confiscated by the communist authorities and became derelict.

Amidst such turmoil, Rachmaninov received an unexpected offer to perform ten piano recitals across Scandinavia which he immediately accepted, using it as an excuse to quickly obtain permits for his family to leave the country. In December 1917 he left Petrograd for Copenhagen, and then to America. Eventually they settled in Switzerland beside Lake Lucerne, in an attempt to recapture the peace and beauty of the vistas which had so inspired Rachmaninov. After leaving Russia, he was financially obliged to concentrate on performing. He became celebrated as one of the greatest pianists of the 20th century. "His emotional world was shut off somehow for a long time," says the pianist and conductor Vladimir Ashkenazy. "He had to get used to different circumstances. He was a very nostalgic person; he missed Russia. The estate where he composed is wonderful, with such space, endless steppes and valleys and fields and his music is very often like those endless fields".

During the Scandinavian tour, Rachmaninov received three offers from the US: to become the conductor of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra for two years; to conduct 110 concerts in 30 weeks for the Boston Symphony Orchestra; and to give 25 piano recitals. He declined them all, worried about such a commitment in a country he hardly knew. Yet he now considered the United States as financially advantageous, as he would not earn enough to support his family through composition alone. He was unable to afford the travel fees, but his fortunes changed when Russian banker and fellow emigre Alexander Kamenka agreed to give him an advance loan for the journey. He also received assistance from friends and admirers. On 1 November 1918, the family boarded the SS Bergensfjord in Oslo bound for New York City, arriving eleven days later. News of Rachmaninov's arrival spread, causing a crowd of musicians, artists, and fans to gather outside the hotel where he was staying. (You will notice, in reference to the composer, on some of the notes/comments on Youtube, there are different spellings of his name: Rachmaninov or Rachmaninoff? His family, spelled the surname the first way originally but changed it on leaving Russia for the West in 1917).

In 1920, Rachmaninov signed a recording contract with the Victor Talking Machine Company which earned him some much-needed income and began his long-time association with the record company RCA. That same year he purchased an apartment on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, overlooking the Hudson River. There too he maintained a Russian atmosphere by observing Russian customs and serving Russian food. Rachmaninov's first visit to Europe since emigrating to the US occurred in May 1922 with concerts in London. This was followed by a hectic 1922–1923 concert season of 71 performances in five months. For a while he rented a railway carriage that was fitted with a piano and belongings to save time packing and unpacking suitcases. Demanding tour schedules caused Rachmaninov's composition output to slow significantly. Between his arrival to the US in 1918 and his death in 1943 he completed just six compositions, plus some revisions to previous works and piano transcriptions for his concert repertoire.

The composer later admitted that, by leaving Russia, "I left behind my desire to compose: losing my country, I lost myself also". In 1926, after concentrating on touring for the past eight years, he took a year's break from performing and completed the first two of the last six pieces he composed, the Piano Concerto No. 4, which he had started in 1917, and Three Russian Songs. By 1930, his desire to compose had returned and he sought a new location to write new pieces. He bought a plot of land in Switzerland near Lake Lucerne and oversaw the construction of his new home, naming it Villa Senar. Rachmaninov would spend the summer at Villa Senar until 1939, often with his daughters and grandchildren, with whom he would take part in one of his favourite activities, driving his motorboat on Lake Lucerne. In the comfort of his own villa, Rachmaninov completed his Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini in 1934 and Symphony No. 3 in 1936.

The pianist Stephen Hough has been a great advocate of the composer's music and, in this video, before he plays a Proms performance of the Paganini Variations, he explains how the music evolved from the original Paganini violin work. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c33q87s03h4>

In 1931, Rachmaninov and several others signed an article in The New York Times that criticised the cultural policies of the Soviet Union. The composer's music suffered a boycott in Russia as a result, from the backlash in the Soviet press, lasting until 1933. In October 1932, Rachmaninov began a demanding concert season that consisted of 50 performances. The tour marked the fortieth anniversary of his debut as a pianist, for which several of his Russian friends, now living in America, sent him a scroll and wreath in celebration. The struggling economic situation in the US affected the tour, and the composer who performed to few sold-out audiences, lost money in his investments and shares. The European leg in 1933 saw Rachmaninov celebrate his sixtieth birthday among fellow musicians and friends, after which he retreated to Villa Senar for the summer.

The 1939–40 concert season saw Rachmaninov perform fewer concerts than usual, totalling 43 appearances that were mostly in the US. The tour continued with dates across England, after which Rachmaninov visited his daughter Tatiana in Paris, followed by a return to Villa Senar. He was unable to perform for a while after slipping on the floor at the villa and injuring himself. He recovered enough to

perform at the Lucerne International Music Festival on 11 August 1939. It was to be his final concert in Europe.

He returned to Paris two days later, where Rachmaninov, his wife, and two daughters, were together for the last time before the composer left a now war-torn Europe on 23 August. Throughout his life Rachmaninov displayed a generous spirit to friends and good causes. An example of this was his support for the Russian war effort against Nazi Germany throughout the course of World War II. He donated receipts from many of his concerts that season to charities supporting the war effort, and to the Red Army. Upon his return to the US, Rachmaninov performed with the Philadelphia Orchestra in New York City with conductor Eugene Ormandy. The final concert on 10 December saw Rachmaninov conduct his Symphony No. 3 and The Bells, marking his first conducting post since 1917. The concert season left Rachmaninov tired, despite calling it "rather successful", and he spent the summer resting from minor surgery at an estate near Long Island in New York. During this restful period Rachmaninov completed his final composition, Symphonic Dances. It's the only piece he composed in its entirety while living in the US. Ormandy and the Philadelphia Orchestra premiered the piece in January 1941, which Rachmaninov attended.

In the early 1940s, Rachmaninov was approached by the makers of the British film *Dangerous Moonlight* to write a short concerto-like piece for use in the film, but he declined. The job went to Richard Addinsell. He came up with the *Warsaw Concerto*, which is very much influenced by Rachmaninov. In early 1942, Rachmaninov was advised by his doctor to relocate to a warmer climate to improve his health after suffering from lumbago, neuralgia, high blood pressure, and headaches. Shortly after a performance at the Hollywood Bowl in July 1942, Rachmaninov started to suffer from lumbago and fatigue. He informed his doctor that the upcoming 1942–43 concert season would be his last, in order to dedicate his time to composition. Later that month he complained of persistent cough and back pain; a doctor diagnosed him with pleurisy and advised that a warmer climate would aid in his recovery. Rachmaninov opted to continue with touring but felt so ill during his travels to Florida that the remaining dates were cancelled and he returned to California by train, where an ambulance took him to hospital. It was then that Rachmaninov was diagnosed with an aggressive form of melanoma. His wife took Rachmaninov home where he reunited with his daughter Irina. His last appearances as a concerto soloist—Beethoven's First Piano Concerto and his Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini—were in February with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, and his last recital, given on February 17 at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, included ironically the Piano Sonata No. 2 by Chopin, which contains the famous funeral march.

Rachmaninov's health rapidly declined in the last week of March 1943. On 26 March, the composer lost consciousness and he died two days later, four days before his seventieth birthday. In his will, Rachmaninov wished to be buried at Novodevichy Cemetery in Moscow, but his American citizenship could not see the request through. Instead, he was interred at Kensico Cemetery New York. In August 2015, Russia announced its intention to seek reburial of Rachmaninov's remains in Russia, claiming that Americans have neglected the composer's grave. The composer's descendants have resisted this idea, pointing out that he died in the U.S. after spending decades outside of Russia in self-imposed political exile. "A composer's music should express the country of his birth, his religion, his love affairs... It should be the sum total of his experience," said Rachmaninov. He declared that he aimed to communicate directly with his listener's emotions, bypassing the intellect in favour of the heart. This approach accounts for his tremendous appeal, but also, perhaps, for the disdain of some critics. Palmer points out, however, that he has never met a musician who does not take Rachmaninov tremendously seriously.

The clues are in the masterly crafting of the music itself, which you will hear to great effect in the last movement of his Symphonic Variations, his last work: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Egy4JBZcTP0>

## 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

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

2. Medium

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

3. Hard

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

4. Evil

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

### Pets' Corner (page 16) – Answers

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. John Barrymore</li> <li>2. Milan Kundera</li> <li>3. Catherine the Great</li> <li>4. Elisabeth Hurley</li> <li>5. Churchill</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. Matthew Flinders</li> <li>7. Muriel</li> <li>8. Albert Schweitzer</li> <li>9. Cavall</li> <li>10. Norman Rockwell</li> </ol> |
|--|--|

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

. . . last year the All Day Walkers Group travelled to Slad Valley in Gloucestershire. It's a steep-sided valley just north of Stroud and is the setting of the novel 'Cider With Rosie'.

They walked in the footsteps of its author, Laurie Lee, whose legacy has left a protection from the encroachment of housing schemes for which he actively campaigned.

The landscape is a variety of country lanes, pasture and woods and the trail meanders through a succession of nature reserves, marked here and there with posts displaying Lee's locally inspired poems.

With the royalties from his book Lee purchased Rose Cottage within staggering distance of his favourite haunt, The Woolpack Inn. (I hope our walkers dropped in to raise a toast to Laurie!) He is buried between the inn and the church as he requested; "So that I can balance the secular and spiritual".



-----X-----

**Euan** was out hiking when he came upon a huge hole in the ground. He was amazed at its size; he couldn't even see to the bottom. Finding an old gearbox in the undergrowth he heaved it into the hole. As he stood there counting the seconds to impact a goat shot past and jumped into the hole.

An old farmer sauntered up to the stunned Euan and asked "Have you seen my goat?" Euan replied " Yes, he came running out of the bushes and jumped head-first into this hole!"

The farmer said "No mate, that's impossible, I had him tethered to an old gearbox!"

Hence that old adage; When in the countryside take only photos and leave only footprints.

## **Dennis Wheatley by Gerald Lee**

Dennis Wheatley was described as 'The Prince of Story Tellers' yet, although his books were read by princes, he never received an honour.

His name is particularly associated with black magic stories such as 'Strange Conflict' and 'The Devil Rides Out.' In my own assessment of his writing, his greatest achievement is his historical novels, particularly the Roger Brook stories. His autobiography shows his own life was equally fascinating and could have made a great novel on its own.

Wheatley's family were wine and provisions merchants. The business was founded by his grandfather, who was known as 'Ready Money Wheatley' for the way he operated. Young Dennis was a problem child to his parents. Once he ran away from home. In his own words, 'Dennis really was a menace.' After being expelled from Dulwich College for forming a secret society, he was sent to be educated on HMS Worcester, a school to prepare young boys for service in the navy. He is not over-critical of the school, despite recalling some of the food was rancid. He became an avid reader and storyteller. His favourite author was Dumas, and he freely admitted he drew on the stories and characters of the Three Musketeers in his own writing.

He joined the family business and on the death of his father took complete ownership. There are many comparisons with Winston Churchill in his life. Both loved military history, played war games and were amateur bricklayers. Another similarity is that both felt the need to have parental approval. The young Wheatley felt his father was disappointed in him, until many years later a family friend told him his father had been proud of him and saw his potential.

During the First World War he served with the City of London Regiment and the 36<sup>th</sup> Ulster Division. His love of bricklaying was useful. He was able to make his billets more accommodating and so enjoyed more comfort than most. After being gassed at the Battle of Passchendaele he received a medical discharge. At reunions he was always on good terms with his former comrades, which led him to believe that he was probably a popular officer. At court martials he always tried to be fair and took an interest in the welfare of his men, another similarity to Churchill.

During the interwar years, the wine business prospered. He introduced many innovative ideas such as an easy to remember telephone number. His lifestyle was particularly bohemian until, as a result of the Wall Street Crash, his business collapsed. He felt bitter that his father-in-law did not offer help. The business and he himself were virtually bankrupt.

It was then he took to thriller writing. His first published book 'The Forbidden Territory' was an immediate success. It went into seven reprints and established his reputation as a popular author. His next novel, 'The Devil Rides Out,' is a classic of this type of thriller and has influenced many other writers. Most people's concept of black magic emanates from this book and the 1968 film. He continued writing prolifically. At the time of his death all his books were in print. At the peak of his popularity in the 1960s he was selling a million books per year.

He had many connections in high society, from whom he drew inspiration and detailed information, among them Aleister Crowley, once called the most evil man in England. Although he did not have aristocratic lineage himself, Wheatley admired the aristocracy and the monarchy, almost to the point of being a sycophant. A typical story he enjoyed was of a duke who lived next door to a hotel. The proprietor asked the duke if he was interested in selling the house to allow the hotel to expand. The duke replied he had been thinking of making the hotel an offer as he wanted to build a tennis court.

Among those whose company he cultivated was Maxwell Knight, head of the secret service. He gave Wheatley stories of secret operations and the confidential information about the personalities of leading figures in politics and society. Wheatley used these in his novels, recasting the plots in earlier periods of history to avoid direct comparisons to living persons.

Tom Driberg was another associate. Despite being a left-wing Labour MP, he wrote the William Hickey column in the 'Express' with all the society gossip. An active homosexual, he once avoided arrest because the policeman was a William Hickey fan. In return, Driberg made him a gift of a book token.

My personal favourites among his books are the Roger Brook series. Roger Brook is cast adrift from his family in England at the time of the French Revolution. Through his ingenuity he becomes a master spy. The character is based on Sidney Reilly, the spymaster who tried to destroy Bolshevik Russia.

The historical detail is impeccable and his knowledge of military history equally impressive. Into this he brings the gift of storytelling. The novels move at a fast pace with a climax at the end of each chapter. To add authenticity, historical figures are introduced into the story as characters. William Pitt, Napoleon and Josephine appear in the Roger Brook stories.

Black Magic and the Occult occasionally form a part of the action, but the books should really be enjoyed primarily as first-rate historical fiction. Generally, in one book within each series, there is a direct confrontation between the hero and the forces of Evil.

He wrote many other novels. In the Gregory Sallust stories his hero penetrates Nazi Germany. Leading Nazis such as Goering are characters in the story and again the Occult plays a role. His knowledge of the military history and life in war-time Germany is as convincing as his description of life in Revolutionary France.

It is fair to say that among most of the public, his name is associated with Black Magic. His greatest novels of this type are undoubtedly 'The Devil Rides Out' and 'Strange Conflict'. Both feature the Duc de Richelieu, a man Wheatley would probably have liked to have been himself. He has a vast knowledge of life, philosophy and religion, and is a fearless combatant against evil, and above all, a true aristocrat.

To appreciate these books, you must accept that in Wheatley's universe Evil is an active force. In 1968 'The Devil Rides Out' was made into an outstanding film with Christopher Lee dominating the action as the duke. The scenes where the duke from within a salt circle fights the forces of evil is both convincing and terrifying.

The film regularly appears on television. Wheatley gave the film his personal approval. Less successful was 'To the Devil a Daughter'. Probably to give the film international appeal the lead character is played by the American actor Richard Widmark. Sadly, the overall result is a disappointment. Wheatley threatened to withdraw permission from Hammer to make any further productions of his stories.

During World War II Wheatley received a commission in RAF VR to work on deception and cover. His work included planning for D-Day. This produced two non-fiction books 'Stranger than Fiction' and 'Deception Planners'. I have not read these books, but he mentions in another book a plan to float an iceberg to Britain, which sounds rather farfetched to me.

An idea which was commercially successful at the time was to produce a combination of a book with a crime dossier of clues. The readers would then have to deduce the identity of the criminal from the clues, with further clues in each section of the book, until the solution was provided in the last chapter.

Dennis Wheatley's politics are most definitely to the right. Along with his friend Peter Quennell he founded a Right Book Club to rival Gollanz. The intellectual drift was however in the other direction. The Right Book Club does not register in any history of the period. He had a morbid fear of Communism.

Socialism was dangerous because it would ultimately lead to the same result. In his book on William Joyce, Lord Haw-Haw, Nigel Farndale names Wheatley as a possible collaborator if Britain had been forced to accept a negotiated peace. Possibly he would have been Commissioner for London. It is not possible to guess his real views. Ostensibly he opposed the Nazis and Communists as evil forces.

In 1947 he left a time capsule in his house, a 'Letter to Posterity', which builders found after his death. He foresees a Britain in decline as the natural rulers are weakened and the emphasis on distribution of wealth overwhelms the natural social order. Institutions will fail and anarchy or dictatorship follow.

His own attitude to the Occult, as he professed publicly, was a warning not to become involved. In his autobiography he only admits to attending one ceremony in South America. Most probably the detail in his novels came from his extensive reading and research.

People who met him in person were surprised how short he was, despite his claims to have been a serious philanderer when his business prospered between the wars. He collected first editions and works of art and never discarded any receipts or letters.

In his autobiography he gives some indication of his own religious beliefs. Reincarnation allowed those who had suffered in this life a second chance. Evil and Good are positive forces in eternal conflict. The Lord of Lights gives his tutelage to those who reject evil and he will help them fight it. Wheatley admits to praying to the Lord of Lights as one would in any religion with a Supreme Being. Of course, the problem with such a world view is that concepts of good and evil can change.

Before his death, however, he reconciled to Christianity. In a foreword to the final volume of his autobiography his friend Cyril Eastaugh, Anglican Bishop of Peterborough, writes that before Wheatley's death he took him through the stages of returning to the Christian Faith.

Today his novels are heavily criticised on many counts. He displays a casual racism, which, it has to be said, was prevalent in much of the literature of the period. John Buchan, for example, routinely make anti-Semitic remarks. Even in a 'William' story the 'N' word appears. Certainly, native peoples are not regarded as equals and are portrayed unfavourably.

There is also a great deal of snobbishness. One character, Gifford Hilary, criticized the hygiene of the lower classes. Perhaps he should have considered the quality of housing in which many people lived. He praises the aristocracy for sending their sons to war, without mentioning that recruits came from all classes. After the war they returned to poverty and unemployment whilst by his own admission he enjoyed a hedonistic lifestyle.

It is an argument that is still pertinent today, as crowds pull down statues and even great names such as Churchill and Bernard Shaw are castigated for views that were unremarkable at the time.

Returning to the description of Wheatley as a prince among storytellers, he had a unique talent for the adventure novel. He was much more than a writer on the Occult.

He leads the reader to a dramatic climax at the end of every chapter, inducing him to turn the page. Unlike Leslie Charteris, for example, he never uses unusual words, which is possibly why his books are accessible to all classes of reader.

His autobiography reads like a thriller. Sadly, I lost my own copy many years ago, the moral being not to lend books you treasure.

I hope I have succeeded in sharing my interest with you. May I offer my thanks to Stephen and the production team for this opportunity to recall a great writer who has given me much pleasure.

## Talking Points – Started by Stephen Berry!

I have long been a fan of the “Then and Now” series of pictures in the South Wales Argus and I wonder if something similar might not only be of interest to readers, but might also prompt some short responses for publication in future editions.

What I propose is slightly different in that I will not offer comparison photographs but simply include a few historic photographs of Newport and surrounding area. I will not give the location, so there is an element of quiz involved - identify the location and, if possible, write a few sentences (or more, if you have more to say!) to share your memories of the place itself or the area around it. Even though some photographs may be 100+ years old, the locations will probably be quite recognisable if you have lived in Newport for any length of time.

Here’s an example to start the ball rolling:



Q: Where is this Newport location which, although changed, is still recognisable today?

A: Officially known as Queen’s Square, this is the lower part of Bridge Street with Baneswell Road branching off to the left. The Queen’s Hotel is still recognisable today. To the right the large building is the Lyceum Theatre, formerly known as the Victoria Hall. The shops to the right still exist, though somewhat altered! The Lyceum has happy memories for me as, at the age of seven, I saw my first stage musical there. It was 1956 and the musical was “The White Horse Inn”, performed by Newport Operatic Society. Throughout my childhood, though, we made an annual visit to the Lyceum to see the Pantomime, with the added bonus of always sitting in the front row of the stalls where I was able to get an excellent view of the orchestra!

“The White Horse Inn” was set in an actual location – at St Wolfgang in Austria. One of my minor claims to fame (of sorts!) is that I was a staff member of a school trip to Austria, when we stayed in the Hotel Post, next door to the WHI. The school staff had a “snug” for the evenings after the pupils were in bed and it had an upright piano, which of course I was called upon to play. One evening the proprietor of WHI was talking to his counterpart in our hotel and he asked me if I knew the WHI music. I did – and could play a decent selection of it. He then invited me into his hotel to play the music on his rather more magnificent grand piano! So I have played the music in the setting of its inspiration.

One of the shops in the picture was Davies Music Shop – another of my frequently visited shops in the early 1960s. Unfortunately, both theatre and music shop disappeared from Bridge Street at this time. I can't seem to do anything in just a few sentences, but I'm sure that you'll get the idea from my ramblings! Here is this week's easier photograph:



... and a harder one!



### Word Searches (page 15) – Answers

**Fruits:**

Apple, Pomegranate, Tangerine, Melon, Fig, Satsuma, Lemon, Orange, Date, Clementine, Banana, Lime.

**Snacks:**

Cheese, Carrot, Fruit, Chocolate, Pretzel, Peanuts, Raisins, Celery, Seeds, Crisps, Pecans, Flapjack.