

DESERT ISLAND TIMES

Sharing fellowship in
NEWPORT SE WALES U3A

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75TH ANNIVERSARY OF V E DAY, 8TH MAY 1945

*A MISCELLANY OF
CONTRIBUTIONS
FROM OUR MEMBERS*

V E Day Celebrations and events in 1945

Firstly, treat yourself to a short film show!

Use your computer, tablet or phone to view this – all you have to do is to click on this link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RnLcAxx96q0&feature=youtu.be> and you will be able to experience something of the atmosphere in Newport 75 years ago.

Now no celebration of V E Day would be complete without Vera Lynn singing “We’ll meet again”, so you can use this link to hear that song https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HsM_VmN6ytk and another which was a “must” was “White Cliffs of Dover” - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WAaxkAgVkhQ> – which two songs probably were the most popular of all of the WW2 songs, certainly in Britain.

Some personal memories of V E Day and the time around the end of WW2

Garry Williams: I was in top juniors in Abertillery Primary School. We were all very excited because we were going to have a sports competition against all the other schools. All the schools arrived at Abertillery Park wearing different colour kit and daps!!! These were new to us.

I remember taking part in the 100 yards and finishing 4th. However in the relay and tunnel ball we won. After the sports we went home and my Mam was laying tables for our street party We had a wonderful feast of sandwiches, cakes and jelly. We had an amazing time with all the children and our parents.

Most of the men there hadn’t been to war because of their jobs either in the steel works or the coal mines. My father was working afternoons -he was a bus driver As soon as he arrived home the men went into our house and carried out the piano for Cliff to play. I was put to bed about 11pm so not allowed to stay until the festivities finished about 4am. Although I was in bed I could hear Dad playing so felt I was still taking part until I fell asleep.

I imagine there were a lot of sore heads the next day!

Gillian Baker doesn’t remember anything about V E Day – it was her 1st birthday! What a 1st birthday party that must have been, though!-

Mary Purnell remembers two particular events. She was seven and lived in Friars Road. A large bonfire was lit outside the entrance to Belle Vue Park. There was a large black circle in the road for a long time afterwards. She also remembers going to a tea party in someone’s garage at the top of Dewslan Park Road. I think we will be enjoying similar parties at the end of the present crisis as well!

Gill Griffin missed V E Day by a few weeks, but can remember even post-war the blackouts being put up in her bedroom in the summer when going to bed. Her father was in reserved occupation so, in addition, trained for St John's Ambulance. Afterwards the stretchers were unwanted. Every time her parents had overnight friends, she and her sister had to sleep on these. They were extremely uncomfortable. And, if course, there was still rationing!

On **Gwyn Havard’s** VE day he was 9 days away from being born, sitting inside Mum Mira’s tummy, waiting to see what the wide world would look like. He says: My dad Morgan from Craig-Cefn-Park near Clydach, didn’t want to be a coal miner, the only local job option at that time. Anyway, he had lost his right arm in the Spanish Civil War fighting against Franco as part of the International Brigade. He learned to write again with his left hand, in a prison in Burgos northern Spain, where he also learned how to play chess. On returning to the UK in 1943 my Dad found that his first wife had sadly not been faithful to him. They divorced and shortly afterwards Morgan met my Mum Miranda in London where they married in 1944 after a whirl-wind romance. Looking back I really think that divorce was an amazingly important event from my point of view, without which I would possibly have been born elsewhere, maybe in Africa, perhaps as an earwig, a giraffe or a locust?! Or never born at all?

So on the contrary here I am, a real human being, and the first child of three from this new marriage, with the best odds of missing a war during my lifetime that you could possibly want, having started life just 9 days after VE day. Enjoying VE Day for me was basically being happily shaken around by my Mum's dancing, singing and celebrating! A few days later I could see the world from a hospital in Hammersmith, London, where my Mum, Dad and Uncle ran a removal business and furniture shop in King Street. I lived then in Pallister Road, Fulham, adjacent to Queens Tennis Club, but we later moved to live above our furniture shop opposite Latimer Upper School. My Dad gave me the name Gwynfor, though I prefer to be called Gwyn. My Welsh name reminded him of his roots north of Swansea.

Now here I am living in Newport, with a Welsh name and a London accent to boot - to confuse everyone, and with my 75th birthday coming up next week on 17th May. Thank you for my U3A Choir birthday card which arrived last week and let's hope I can sing again in the U3A choir before next VE day!

Alan Bigley (Shaftesbury Street organist): Yes, I can remember attending a street party in Hewertson street, the first street behind and parallel to Shaftesbury Street, where I lived, on the Marshes estate. There were flags at all the windows and bunting from one side of the street to the other and trestle tables down the centre of the street. I tasted my first banana there. In the evening when it was all cleared away, they built huge bonfires in the middle of the street and left big round burnt patches in the tarmac. I don't think we had Health and Safety in those halcyon days! I can remember the air raid siren was on the bend opposite the Rising Sun just opposite where I lived, and was deafening when it went off, showering the area with sparks.

Doug Watkins: Doug first came to Monmouthshire in September 1943 and transferred to Chepstow Grammar school, the move having been as a result of his father, who worked for the GWR, being "directed" to work at Severn Tunnel Junction engine shed. He had taken his school certificate in Glamorgan and found Monmouthshire education pretty unimpressive, as it was two years behind in Mathematics. A song sung to the whole school by the head girl was:-"Coming in on a wing and a prayer, recorded by Anne Shelton and Vera Lynn amongst others. He goes on to say: You couldn't imagine the relief that the war was over and although I can't remember there being any real food shortages, the three things I missed most were bananas ,ice cream and sweets, but that's another story! The things that were familiar were the RAF barrage balloons units at the end of the street and the EWS emergency water tanks dotted around the place. The two events that I do remember was the glow in the sky when Swansea and particularly the oil terminal at Llandarcy were bombed and soon after the oil terminal at Portishead that we watched when that was hit. We watched that by standing on the flat roof of the "bungalows" that we lived in until 1949.

But that was not all. My father took me to the then famous Swansea market before the war and I was able to travel to a still flattened market in Swansea after the war and see the still flattened market and city. In fact when used to travel to Weston super mare when I was in the Airforce from 1954 to 1956, some parts of Bristol were still in ruins. That's why Cribbs Causeway near Bristol was built. But back to the point. VE Day was celebrated with a big bonfire, built by neighbours borrowing a tractor and trailer from the local farmer, which everyone gathered around and sang songs. I do recall that most of the songs were American because they were more up to date than anything we had ,and the whole thing was repeated when the continuing war in the East came to an end when the second atom bomb at last convinced the Japanese that they had to surrender. It was only then that the full horror of the brutal and inhuman way that the Japanese treated both the Allied prisoners of war and the countries they had subjected to, came to light.

My daughter and her partner spent nineteen days in Japan recently and all she met was courtesy and kindness!. But then the Gestapo in Germany did no favours to the German image either. So yes I do remember both V days

Geoff Pritchard: I was almost 14 years old and I remember the excitement very well. There were street parties going on everywhere. I was living on a farm in Abergavenny and it was difficult to have a street party there so my mother let me go on my own by train to Newport to visit my father. He took me into the Town [as it was then] centre where we joined hundreds of people dancing in the High Street and outside the old Town Hall which was a lovely old Victorian building with a clock tower, knocked down in the 60's to make way for the new BHS store.

Great scenes of euphoria and relief that the fighting had finished. Improvised fireworks made from thunder-flashes and crow-scarers were the worst hazard. Didn't see any trouble in Newport that night - people were very well behaved.

Ivy Forkin: I remember VE Day - a day off school, not at all unusual. My sisters and I were excited and Dad (a Reserve Policeman) allowed us to fly a huge Union Jack from a bedroom window facing the road. We had been waiting a long time for this promised moment. Grandma cried because we had pooled our pocket money and given her a brooch to mark the celebration. We had some idea we needed to be patriotic.

This was an era when, in a community, we all knew each other both children and grown-ups. Grandma had been preparing for this Day. She had been playing whist in the barn at our local farm raising funds and so on the Day there was music - only the sound of our planes and German planes were noticed before - and dancing and drinking. I was goggle-eyed!

We kids raced against each other, ugh! never liked races may be because I never won. I had to be pulled away from the celebrations clutching my celebration gift mug, for bed.

What next? A trip to the Park to see red and blue fairy lights hanging between the trees. I'm sure half the town was there and what a cheer when they were turned on. There were street lights and full lights on buses, no need to carry a gas mask all the time or take a torch a night. Life was changing.

Those who returned from War wanted change too and hence a Welfare State - free education and free access to health services. Hurrah, hang out the flag!

Lorna Hughes I was a baby during the War, but I remember my Mother telling me that one evening she was bathing me in a tin bath when the Air Raid Siren sounded. She grabbed the bath with me still in it and ran to the Air Raid Shelter in the back garden. Not quite throwing the baby out with the bath water!

I remember we had a street party on 'VE Day. Lots of flags everywhere and neighbours doing a strange dance - the Hokey Cokey (a bit like line-dancing!).

Jean Ruskin: I was 9 years old on VE Day. I lived in Liverpool not far from the docks so we spent many nights in an air raid shelter in the street. Everything in those days was dark and drab.

VE Day was so exciting. My sister was home from the land army, my brother was in the Navy. Someone organised a party for neighbouring streets. The table was laid with sandwiches and cakes and lots of biscuits from the local Crawfords biscuit factory. We danced and sang "We'll meet again". Best of all someone had got hold of fireworks I had never seen them before and they lit up the sky in a good way. That night we didn't have to go into the dark cold shelter.

Colin Salmon: We lived in semi-detached suburbia on the outskirts of Blackburn with a grassy field close by used as a short-cut to the local bus stop. A neighbour, Harry (I think) had an advertising hoardings business and miraculously provided a lorry load of old railway sleepers which, laid criss-cross like kids building towers, formed the core of an enormous bonfire supplemented by the local kids scavenging the neighbourhood. Bonfire food appeared as the neighbourhood gathered around. Roast potatoes in the embers etc.



Alan Fry says: This does not look much of a place for a party, but on VE night this place was popping. I was aged 6, and remember walking to this square in front of Llanelli Town Hall after dark, no street lighting, but the atmosphere far from sombre. The area where the cars are parked was known as the bullring and was the official town car park. It was smaller than the traffic island outside my home here in Bassaleg. Torches provided some illumination and there must have been some form of public address system, over which music was being played. People were dancing, and the bullring was packed. I seem to recall that the usuals, like hokey-cokey and Lambeth Walk spontaneously broke out if ever the ballroom music stopped.

There were no fireworks, but I do remember that someone had boxes of coloured matches which were rather fat and about the length of cooks matches that when struck burned for about half a minute with bright red or green flames and gave off quite a bit of smoke. There were no stalls selling ice creams, sweets, candy floss, hot dogs and the like; these were to come in the future.

However a few days later at our junior school the local Italian cafe owner turned up with his ice cream, and every kid had the thickest wafer his machine could make. Now that I think of it he probably had no cornets because of the wartime restrictions. His name was Rabaiotti, and he came to our school because his daughter was there, in the same class as myself. He was one of five Italian cafe owners in the town and I still prefer Italian ice cream to any other.

Jean Pearce says: I remember the streets being decorated and then being judged. The one which came first was a short street with a blank end in Barnards Town - off Church Road (I can't remember the name). Glebe Street also did very well - either second or highly recommended. After the judging everyone would take a walk sighting the streets who won prizes. Simple pleasures!

David Phillips asked his mother what recollections if any she had about VE Day.

She told me that she did not want to continue her education so at the time of VE Day, she was working as a shop assistant in T T LLOYDS, a rather upmarket department store in Neath. She was aged 14 at the time. Everyone was given the day off and also given the princely sum of £5.00. There were no street parties in the village of Bryncoch but she can recall several celebratory bonfires. The father of one of her friends was a taxi driver and the highlight of the day was an evening trip to Pontardawe to see the lights. I asked her what the lights were in Pontardawe and she said they were all the street lights which had been switched off for so many years!

An interesting story sent via Odiham U3A: My Uncle Pip had left England and travelled to India to seek his fortune. He volunteered when war broke out and remained overseas serving his Country throughout the duration of the war. He achieved the rank of Temporary Captain with The Royal Corps of Signals by 1945

“The war was clearly coming to an end in Europe. I managed to get 61 days leave and travelled via Italy to Greenock where I arrived on VE Day.

We were regarded as the D Day Dodgers, who had been avoiding the war on the sunny shores of the Mediterranean, and every effort seemed to be made to frustrate us. Gang planks could not be found to let us ashore, customs held us up, although we had little more than what we stood up in.

When we finally got to the railway we were told that the only train South was the night train to King’s Cross. On arrival there we found that London was suffering from a hangover after the VE Day celebrations. I managed to get a lift to Waterloo on a fire engine which was going that way, and finally had a re-union with my wife and met my daughter now aged three and a half for the first time.

Years later I saw an essay she had written on meeting her Daddy and her predominant impression had been of big boots.”

Snippets taken from my family history files – submitted by Janine Gibson

Told in my Mum’s own words - her memories of WW2”

When we were first evacuated from my home in London, my Dad and Uncle were in Europe with the army, so my Auntie and her son were living with us. Things were getting bad and we needed to get out of London but the only place we had to run to was my grandparents’ home in Reading. On the Sunday morning, our neighbour came to say that he’d been called up and had to get to Reading so if my Mum could pack and have us all ready in time, we could go with him. So my Mum and Auntie packed a trunk, not knowing if we were ever coming back or what the future held for us all. My Mum was coking a joint of lamb in the oven at the time so actually took it out of the oven and wrapped it in a bed sheet to take with us! So my Mum, my brother and myself, together with my Auntie Florrie and cousin David climbed into our neighbour’s small car and fled London. On the way, our car was stopped by soldiers to check our security cards. My Mum showed them ours then Auntie Florrie realised to her horror that hers and David’s were packed away in the trunk in the car boot! Thankfully, when she told the soldiers, they said, “We can see you’re not spies” and waved us through!

I used to get letters from Dad with “holes” in – anything that may give a clue as to where he was had to be cut out in case it got into enemy hands. I first tasted Maltesers in the War – my Dad had them in his rations so sent them to me, knowing we had very few treats back home with the rationing. I had a tiny doll’s hot water bottle which I got Mum to send to my Dad to keep him warm! I can remember him writing a letter to thank me, saying how it would definitely keep him warm!

When serving in Europe, Dad’s Captain in the army was the film star, David Niven. When I saw him in films after the War, he came across as looking and sounding very distinguished. My Dad told me that he was just the same when he was their Captain and was always a gentleman who treated them well.

After returning to our home in London when the bombings calmed down, it all kicked off again with the “flying bombs”, commonly known as Doodle Bugs, coming across the English Channel to bomb London. As a result of our home being badly bomb damaged, we once again had to get out of London. This time there was only one place to go – my Auntie’s home in Manchester. So my Mum and Auntie packed our trunks once again and they headed off, with us three children in tow, to Euston Railway Station. As we sat on the train waiting for it to leave, so the Germans suddenly started swooping overhead and bombing the station. I remember my Mum urgently telling me and David to lie on the floor of the train and to stay there. We remained laying there as the train left, bombs exploding all around us, and journeyed on until we were eventually away from the bombing raids and it was safe to get up from the floor.

Told in my Dad's own words - his memories of WW2"

On the day of evacuation of children from the City of London, we were marched in our school uniform, to Wimbledon Station where we were herded onto waiting trains, and told to leave our train at West Byfleet. We were subsequently lined up in a local school playground, complete with our name label, gas mask, one haversack containing our one spare set of clothes and our food rations. Here, we were paraded to be chosen by our foster parents, who were being paid to house us.

I, at ten years old, was chosen by an elderly lady and gentleman, and duly led to their house where they showed me to my room - clean but very sparse with no curtains, carpets or rugs, just the bare floorboards and windows. I was told to "present myself for dinner at 1pm". This I did, and I strongly remember whilst they partook of delicious smelling steak and kidney pie, I sat beside them with bread and butter, cold corned beef and a glass of milk. As I ate, the couple listened to the news on the radio, which was giving dramatic reports of Germany bombing Warsaw. My new foster "dad" turned to me and said "They'll be doing that over London tonight"! I immediately had visions of my Mum and Dad in this horror! After dinner, my new foster "mum" dismissed me out of the door, telling me not to come back until 5.30pm. I decided I'd had enough! I was going home!

So I quickly walked back to the station where I had arrived only a few hours earlier, thankfully, with enough money in my pocket to buy myself a 1/2d ticket to Wimbledon. The Booking Clerk was highly suspicious and questioned me deeply but I spun him a yarn and he sold me the ticket. However, he was obviously not convinced by my tale as, unbeknown to me, he telephoned my ticket number up to Wimbledon Station where the Ticket Collector was waiting for me when I got off the train! He was accompanied by a very burly but very kind policeman who carted me off to Wimbledon Police Station where I told them my story. A policeman rang my parents to come and collect me and, whilst I waited for them, the police plied me with cream buns and sympathy for how I'd been treated.

Later that evening, it was reported over the radio on the news that "the evacuation of children from the City of London took place today and all went to plan except for one young boy". I was that "one young boy"!

From the age of 14, if you had your parents' permission and a bike, you could apply to be an Auxiliary Messenger who had to be available during air raids to carry messages across London and assist the A.R.P. and other auxiliary services should there be any enemy action problems, night or day. My Mum was horrified but my father's attitude was "if he has no fear of any problems, don't stop him". There was only one time I did feel scared when fulfilling this post, and that was the period of the Doodle Bugs. It was alright whilst you could hear them but it was when it fell silent that you knew you only had ten seconds before the explosion. I must admit there were many times in this period that I dived for the nearest cover with my bike and counted to ten.

I was 17 when peace was declared, and I can recall the wonderful emotions of VE Day, when my sister and I went with my father to the West End of London to join in the celebrations. I've never forgotten the immense feeling of pride when I stood beside my father that day at Whitehall, looking upwards and personally witnessing and listening to Winston Churchill address the British public from the Gallery Balcony at the Home Office.

May I offer a massive **THANK YOU** to our contributors for sending in these memories of the period around the end of WW2 and particularly the events surrounding V E Day.

As a historian I value these personal reminiscences above what can be found in text books. What is particularly fascinating is the memories of "local" events, which obviously differed in detail from place to place. There are clearly common themes – street parties, street lights again – that appear right across the country but I doubt you would find in any text book such a gem as Jackie's pram being requisitioned in order for her father to collect the beer for the party!

Easypeasy Cryptic Crossword Clues No. 7.

There are a dozen types of Cryptic Crossword Clues and today I'm going to revisit the Anagram clue which I featured in our Winter 2018 Newsletter. It is the most widely used clue.

We all know an anagram is a word or phrase formed by rearranging the letters of one or more words
eg. GUM = mug, OWL = low, A STEEP = peseta.

Some expressions that 'clue you in' that it is an Anagram clue are:

unruly, in error, change, possibly, makes, about, sort of, wildly, perhaps, new, cooked.

All of these terms and dozens more hint that letters in the clue are to be rearranged.

All Anagram clues have a similar structure and this consists of three elements:-

A definition of the answer, a hint that it is an Anagram clue and the ingredients or letters we need for the Anagram.

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

Sometimes the ingredients and/or the answer may consist of more than one word; if you see an odd combination of words it'll probably be an Anagram clue.

e.g. Tutor/ rearranged/ the race (7). = Teacher

American fully/ adjusted/ social unit (6,4). = Nuclear family

Have a go at these - the answers are on page 10.

1. Discontinue/ post/ in error (4).
2. Change/ models/ infrequently (6).
3. Possibly loves to figure out crosswords (5).
4. A bison wandering in the country (6).
5. Nicked in Solent, all at sea (6).
6. Lied about food retailer (4).
7. Aprons ordered for clergyman (6).
8. Sinatra became a skilled worker (7).
9. Madame Birch becomes cleaner (7,4).
10. Wiped out Red Sea (6).
11. Give Ned oat mixture (6).
12. And role freshly written for actor Mr Rossiter (7).
13. Turn bun around if not to be charred (7).
14. Sends a plea out for seaside walks (10).
15. Bewildered chap - I'm no Victor (8).
16. Problems in general will increase (7).
17. An old mother's about to be kidnapped (4,2,6).
18. Sci-Fi series replacing Doctor Who (9).
19. Domestic taverns refurbished (7).
20. Holds matinees possibly at three (7).

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

The Class Reunions

A group of 40 year old ladies discussed where they should meet for dinner. Finally, it was agreed upon that they should meet at the Ocean View restaurant because the waiters there were very young and very hot.

10 years later at 50 years of age, the group once again discussed where they should meet for dinner. Finally, it was agreed that they should meet at the Ocean View restaurant because the food there was very good and the wine selection was excellent.

10 years later at 60 years of age, the group once again discussed where they should meet for dinner. Finally, it was agreed that they should meet at the Ocean View restaurant because they could eat there in peace and quiet and the restaurant had a beautiful view of the ocean.

10 years later, at 70 years of age, the group once again discussed where they should meet for dinner. Finally, it was agreed that they should meet at the Ocean View restaurant because the restaurant had wheel chair access and they even had an elevator.

10 years later, at 80 years of age, the group once again discussed where they should meet for dinner. Finally, it was agreed that they should meet at the Ocean View restaurant because they had never been there before.....

'Lockdown lingo'

- are you fully conversant with the new terminology? Here are a few terms to get you in the groove.

Coronacoaster

The ups and downs of your mood during the pandemic. You're loving lockdown one minute but suddenly weepy with anxiety the next. It truly is "an emotional coronacoaster".

Quarantinis

Experimental cocktails mixed from whatever random ingredients you have left in the house. The boozy equivalent of a store cupboard supper. Southern Comfort and Ribena Quarantini with a glacé cherry garnish, anyone? These are sipped at "locktail hour", i.e wine o'clock during lockdown, which seems to be creeping earlier with each passing week.

Blue Skype thinking

A work brainstorming session which takes place over a videoconferencing app. Such meetings might also be termed a "Zoomposium". Naturally, they are to be avoided if at all possible.

Le Creuset wrist

It's the new "avocado hand" - an aching arm after taking one's best saucepan outside to bang during the weekly 'Clap For Carers.' It might be heavy but you're keen to impress the neighbours with your high-quality kitchenware.

Coronials

As opposed to millennials, this refers to the future generation of babies conceived or born during coronavirus quarantine. They might also become known as "Generation C" or, more spookily, "Children of the Quarn".

Furlough Merlot

Wine consumed in an attempt to relieve the frustration of not working. Also known as “bored-eaux” or “cabernet tedium”.

Coronadose

An overdose of bad news from consuming too much media during a time of crisis. Can result in a “panicdemic”.

The elephant in the Zoom

The glaring issue during a videoconferencing call that nobody feels able to mention. E.g. one participant has dramatically put on weight, suddenly sprouted terrible facial hair or has a worryingly messy house visible in the background.

Quentin Quarantino

An attention-seeker using their time in lockdown to make amateur films which they’re convinced are funnier and cleverer than they actually are.

Covidiot

One who ignores public health advice or behaves with reckless disregard for the safety of others can be said to display “covidioy” or be “covidiotic”. Also called a “lockclown” or even a “Wuhan-ker”.

Goutbreak

The sudden fear that you’ve consumed so much wine, cheese, home-made cake and Easter chocolate in lockdown that your ankles are swelling up like a medieval king’s.

Antisocial distancing

Using health precautions as an excuse for snubbing neighbours and generally ignoring people you find irritating.

Coughin’ dodger

Someone so alarmed by an innocuous splutter or throat-clear that they back away in terror.

Mask-ara

Extra make-up applied to “make one's eyes pop” before venturing out in public wearing a face mask.

Covid-10

The 10lbs in weight that we’re all gaining from comfort-eating and comfort-drinking. Also known as “fattening the curve”.

And of course, bashing your saucepans outside at 20:00 on a Thursday, creates a “pandemic”!

Cryptic crosswords (page 8) – answers

1. Stop
2. Seldom
3. Solve
4. Bosnia
5. Stolen
6. Deli
7. Parson
8. Artisan
9. Chamber Maid
10. Erased
11. Donate
12. Leonard
13. Unburnt
14. Esplanades
15. Champion
16. Enlarge
17. Held to ransom
18. Torchwood
19. Servant
20. Theatre

Home Alone – Pam Cocchiara

When told we'd be in lockdown, at first I shed a tear
At the thought of separation from all those I hold so dear,
But after all this time it's now becoming clear -
I can cope quite well being home alone.

I can contact friends and family on the phone or through broadband,
Whether they live locally or in some foreign land.
I can e-mail them or face-time them and talk to them first hand,
So I don't feel isolated though alone.

Over all my actions I've complete autonomy,
And though physically I'm cut off from all society,
I can't quarrel with myself so I live in harmony!
That's a bonus being on my own.

There's one good thing in leading a solitary life,
No demands are made upon me as a parent or a wife,
So there are fewer situations that can lead to stress or strife.
It's quite peaceful being on my own.

I haven't any worries about getting food to eat.
My son does shopping for me and he lives just up the street.
He gets the things I've listed and he often adds a treat.
There are benefits to living on my own.

I can cook what food I like and I can eat it off a tray.
If I don't feel like cooking I can get a take-away.
I can sit in my pyjamas and just slob around all day.
I can do that now I'm living on my own.

I can stuff my face with chocolate or anything that's sweet,
Or switch on a TV channel to catch some old repeat.
I can play a game of Patience and if I can't get out - can cheat!
It's liberating being on my own.

There's so many activities and things that one can do,
There's plenty on the telly (although some awful rubbish too
And some most peculiar programmes perhaps one didn't ought to view!)
It's been quite an education on my own!

There's the Open University with courses that are free,
There's jigsaws, CDs, books or I can write some poetry.
I can tidy all my drawers and sort out my lingerie,
There's no end of things to do now I'm alone.

If I've energy to spare I can get down on my knees
And scrub the kitchen floor or just sit back and take my ease.
I can be as energetic or as lazy as I please.
The choice is mine – because I'm on my own.

And if I get frustrated and start feeling bellicose,
I can shout and scream at all those stupid TV shows.
It's harmless and lets off steam without coming to blows.
It's OK to do that on my own.

If the weather's fine I'll get a deck chair out and I'll just sprawl
And decide what plants look good against the garden wall.
And if the weather's really hot, I shan't do b.....-all!
No-one can criticise me on my own.

So I've cleaned and I have tidied and the house is all germ free.
There's no fear of infection – cos there's no-one here but me.
So I'll pour a glass of wine, perhaps Malbec or a Chablis,
And enjoy it though I'm drinking it alone.

Brain Teaser – Well-Known Musicals submitted by Ann Lumley

Solve the cryptic clues to reveal the titles of well-known musicals, past and present

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| 1 Was it set in Rhodes or Crete? | 11 3d |
| 2 Not the North Sea | 12 Indian visions |
| 3 Love in a roundabout way | 13 Is it windy? |
| 4 A sea faring dress | 14 The best view of this street at dusk |
| 5 A violinist at the top of the house | 15 Everything starts, whatever |
| 6 A septuple wedding perhaps? | 16 64 squares |
| 7 The sad people | 17 The tale opposite east |
| 8 Haunting La Bohemia | 18 You get 15 minutes of it |
| 9 Tuneful noise | 19 A stony terror film |
| 10 Boys and girls | 20 Was it Anne Boleyn's favourite saying? |

Answers are on page 16

Message from the Beginners Spanish group convener Steven Atkins

We may not be able to go to Spain at the moment but there is hope. People in Spain are now allowed out to exercise. There is no doubt that the situation remains critical and that clearly we should not let our guard down but it is good to be able to keep our hopes and aspirations alive for the future and continue with our study of Castilian Spanish.

At the present time we may not be able to get on a plane out of the country, but that does not mean we cannot plan ahead for a time when we will have the freedom to go where we want and once again book that plane to ticket to our favourite destination. I am available to conduct meetings via Skype or other apps. I note that Jitsi meet is quite popular so why not give video conferencing a go? I look forward to hearing from you.

50 Mile Challenge - Around Cardiff Bay by Mike Brown

We look forward to this day out every September when we take the car to Penarth Road, Cardiff for its annual MOT and service. Along the way there are many Art Works to admire.

We catch a bus to the first stop on Windsor Road, Penarth, and walk back towards Tesco and cross the River Ely footbridge, stopping for a photo with Rob Brydon!! At the road, a short walk to the right brings us to the White Water Rafting Centre where we stop for a morning cuppa on their sunny balcony. Twice we have been lucky to see firemen practising emergency rescues for people trapped in a car in a raging torrent.

There are several car parks here for those travelling by car. After using the facilities turn right from the centre and walk straight ahead towards the Bay's lagoon and follow the footpath in a clockwise direction. If you keep the water on your right throughout the walk you shouldn't go wrong! Continue under the flyover and soon cross right over a road bridge, over the River Taff, and right again into Clarence Embankment. At the end of this street enter Hamadryad Park, take the central path which goes through a gate under the flyover. Cross a quiet road and enter an attractive park and Cardiff Bay Wetland Reserve, where you can take a breather on the 'Ship in a Bottle Bench' and admire the wildflower meadow. Carry on along the path passing between St David's Hotel and the lagoon until you come to Mermaid Quay. From here you can continue walking towards the Barrage past the Norwegian Church or take a water taxi there.

If walking, as you approach the Barrage you will see yellow and black markings painted on the locks' structures. When you stand on the first metal square grid in the pavement these bands will come together and form concentric circles. It is only from here that you will see 'The Barrage Circles' and amazingly it has not been signposted! Visitors go past totally unaware of this mind-boggling art installation. From here you can walk through Penarth Marina and back towards Tesco. (2 or 3 hours level walking)

We usually make a beeline, from the barrage, up the hill to the New Pilot bar in Queen's Road, amongst the steep terraces. Here cosmopolitan dishes are served at reasonable prices. Then up again and into Penarth shopping centre for some retail therapy and maybe afternoon tea before returning to base.



A selection of Exam Howlers found on the internet

a range of the misspelt, misquoted and misunderstood, to make you smile or maybe, despair!

- Q. Explain how the process of filtration makes water safer for drinking.
A. It removes large pollutants like grit, sand, dead sheep and canoeists.
- Q. What happens to sewage effluent after it has been treated?
A. It is used to make toilet water.
- Q. Name a soil which is a well-balanced mixture of sand and clay.
A. Cement.
- Q. State a biological way in which a mammal reduces heat loss in cold weather.
A. A cold sweat.
- Q. Name a food suitable for pickling.
A. A branston.
- Q. What is gout?
A. Gout is a disease of affluence. Women rarely suffer from it.
- Q. Louis Pasteur was responsible for what important discovery?
A. One day he was drying dishes in his lab with a friend and he saw bacteria on the plates. It suddenly occurred to him that this could be prevented by pasteurising the plates.
- Q. What use is made of medical statistics?
A. So that medical care and anecdotes can be given to people.
- Q. Name two male secondary sexual characteristics.
A. Heavy breathing and sweat production.

The female uterus is hidden by the pelvic gurgle.

A TB patient should be given special care. His mistress and pillows should be put into the sun and washed with boiling water.

The light passes through the lens and is focused on the rectum.

A sixty foot tree can break wind for up to 200 yards.

Tapeworm can be cured by killing the host.

With cereals the process known as crap rotation is carried out.

White blood cells are found in the nymph glands.

Man is immune to diseases such as foot and mouth as he does not have hooves or trotters.

Death is very harmful to your health indeed.

Animals that are hunted for food may become extinct. E.g. turkeys and chickens.

Hens are now battery run. They do not get any exercise so they produce larger eggs.

The caterpillar then crystallises to a butterfly.

Labour is muscular contraptions.

Hormones decide what sex you are and when you want it.

And lastly, a couple of my favourites: Bile ducked; Ultra violent rays; Hair frolic hole

Found on the internet and submitted by **Pam Cocchiara**

Le Restaurant Quiz Menu – can you translate?

Soup

16th letter of the alphabet
Mother between two toes
Dove
Fly swisher
Organ of the body

Entrée

A woman's weapon
A sugared loaf

Fish

Locality
A Bride's dearest possession
Humanity's immortal part
Hen's resting place
Trade term

Game & Poultry

Break in the mountain
News carrier
Foreign power
Cricket score
Woman's crowning glory
What a grumbler does
Footballer's fear

Meat

1 8th Century essayist
What Eve was made of?

Vegetables

Son Of Noah
Bad for ships
A Scandinavian
Father cuts hair

Dessert

Chosen in No.10 Downing St.
Things of little importance
I cry for help

Cheese

Dr Foster went there twice
Strong castle

Wine

Pretended anguish

Can you work out just what is on offer on this menu? Answers can be found on page 25.

Submitted by **Judith Nash**

Another World in another Time – Alan Barrow

I remember “any gum chum”
when the Americans came
and things were never again the same.

But fair play they did throw
chocolates and sweets into our streets
as they passed truck by truck.
It was all down to luck
as like a disease
we kids and adults
scrambled for freebies.

When the evacuees came
again things would never
be the same again.

They lived in London
so we were told
and they had never ever
seen a Cow.
How can it be that you never ever
have seen a Cow?
They were frightened so it was said

to eat our laverbread.
How can you not love layer bred?
It was beyond me then and
it’s beyond me now.

At the back of our house
was a quick way to get to the park
or to get out after dark
when all the gates were closed.
So they joined our gang as we talked,
played and ran and planned to do our bit
to kill the prisoners of war ,the POWs
that we saw now and then
and those girls who thought it fit to follow
them.

Then the Great War was won
and prominent were the passions,
yet things were as before
we were still on rations.
In my home
5 boys and 1 banana
left for the youngest
who had never eaten a banana.
A gesture that went waste,
because the youngest sapling
did not like it’s taste.

War is a waste of people and time
and is inherent with sins.
But if you are going to fight
it’s best to be on the side that wins.

We owe a debt to all far and wide
who fought and for us died.

Brain Teaser – Well-Known Musicals (page 12) - Answers

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1 Grease | 11 Half a sixpence |
| 2 South Pacific | 12 Bombay dreams |
| 3 Carousel | 13 Chicago |
| 4 HMS Pinafore | 14 Sunset boulevard |
| 5 Fiddler on the roof | 15 Anything goes |
| 6 Seven brides for seven brothers | 16 Chess |
| 7 Les Miserables | 17 West side story |
| 8 Phantom of the opera | 18 Fame |
| 9 Sound of music | 19 Rocky horror show |
| 10 Guys and Dolls | 20 The King and I |

Making plans for the weekend?

Use this simple calculation to help you work out the ideal place or activity for you!

- ? Choose a number between 1 and 9
- X Multiply it by 3
- + Add 3
- X Multiply by 3 again
- + Add the two digit number you get together

The number you get is where you will be going!

1. Pub	7. Out for dinner	13. Football in the park
2. Cinema	8. Meet up with friends	14. The Zoo
3. BBQ in the park	9. Stay at home	15. Shopping spree
4. Birthday party	10. Round of golf	16. Swimming
5. Day at the beach	11. Gym	17. Road trip to Ireland
6. Playground	12. Long weekend away	18. Theatre



Travellers' Tale No. 4

As we are all confined to our homes – and as this week at least some of us should have been enjoying a five day holiday in Belgium - it's nice to remember some good U3A moments.

Three years ago Jackie arranged for a coachful of us to go on a five day trip to Europe.

We stayed in the beautiful half-timbered town of Monschau in Germany. Daytrips included visits to Aachen, then across the border to Valkenburg in the Netherlands, the Eifel National Park and the picturesque spa town of Bad Muenstereifel back in Germany, and a chocolate museum in Belgium. There was entertainment every evening and I'm sure many of you remember playing skittles throwing the balls backwards through your legs. Surprisingly some found they got better scores using that method! [I agree with that – doing it this way and not even looking produced some amazing results! (Ed.)]

The photo is of us at the meeting point of the borders of Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands.

I'm sure we are all looking forward to making more wonderful memories together again.



FINAL CALL by Nigel Speedy

It was a beautiful stretch of Welsh coastline, some would say the most beautiful, and a vision of it, as seen from Mark's childhood bedroom window, invaded his thoughts. In the foreground his smiling mother and father were urging him to join them on the coastal path.

Mark Roberts was born in 1973 on the outskirts of St. Davids, Pembrokeshire to middle class, Welsh-speaking parents. As an only child, he was very close to his parents yet fiercely independent.

The first bad hand that fate dealt Mark was on the day he received his A Level results. He was at home waiting to share them with his parents when he learnt that a lorry had crossed the central reservation of the M4 motorway, killing them both instantly.

After a snap decision on the day after the funeral he was accepted as an officer cadet, graduated first in his class from Sandhurst, and was commissioned as a second lieutenant into the 1st Battalion, Royal Welch Fusiliers. He spent four months training at the Tidworth base to become a troop commander before being deployed to Northern Ireland.

Army life suited Mark. He completed operational tours of Iraq and Afghanistan and attained a good working knowledge of Arabic.

But that was then! This morning, with his military career behind him, Mark sat on the tiled floor with his back to the wall and his legs splayed out in front of him, his weathered hands lying in his lap.

A little over 6ft tall and of medium build, Mark was deceptively powerful for his 45 years. He was a man of stature, with short chestnut hair, a clear yet tanned complexion, and a wide face with symmetric features and piercing grey eyes.

He was dressed casually in faded jeans, trainers, and an open-neck denim shirt.

He also wore a pair of snap-action handcuffs on his wrists.

In times of stress, when considering his options, his right thumb did what it always did, as it was now, slowly tracing its way back and forth across his fingertips, as though making sure they were all still present and correct.

That vision of the idyllic Welsh coastline of his childhood turned abruptly into a desolate nuclear wasteland, with his parents and all others in the image bearing hideous radiation burns. With an effort, he wrenched his thoughts from the scene, and they drifted back to the string of events that had led him here. He'd politely refused the initial approach made by his commanding officer in Afghanistan, but years later, when the offer was repeated in the grounds of Buckingham Palace, he was more receptive.

He was there to receive the Military Cross from the Queen for conspicuous gallantry during an operation to clear insurgents from areas of central Helmand.

"You won't get any recognition for this I'm afraid", he was told, "in fact, if you accept you'll be pilloried, but your service to Queen and country could be immeasurable."

He agreed to meet a very senior MI5 figure, who laid it all out for Mark.

“As you know, the UK has seen a dramatic upturn in the threat from Islamist terrorism. The attacks in Westminster, Manchester and London Bridge can’t even begin to compare with what may be in store for us,” the spy chief said.

“The threat is evolving rapidly and operating at a pace and scale we’ve never seen before. We’ve thwarted thirty plots in the last year alone. One misconception is that all the perpetrators are young indoctrinated Muslims, but they’re of all ages and backgrounds. We have our eye on three groups we think pose the greatest threats.”

“The first is a hit squad based here in London, highly trained, with an extremely fast response time. They’re quick to eliminate their own people for the greater Jihadi good.”

“We know very little about the second group, except that its Arabic name translates to Doom Battalion, and they deal in misinformation.

“The third is made up of disaffected members of our armed forces with links to the other two groups. You served with one of its members in Iraq. Do you remember Colin Bradbury?”

Mark did indeed. He had known Colin quite well. He remembered that the Jihadis had him for a couple of months before an unrelated air strike set him free. Maybe they’d turned him then, he thought.

“We think something big is coming up very soon, on a par with 9/11 or most likely far worse, and with you on the inside, countless civilian lives might be saved.

Mark agreed to the proposal, and the next day he was undergoing intensive SAS training to upgrade his close quarter combat techniques.

In retrospect, the infiltration had been remarkably easy. MI5 had prepared the ground with a newspaper story:

**SHAMED ARMY MAJOR TO BE STRIPPED OF GALLANTRY AWARD
The Queen is to strip Major Mark Roberts of the Military Cross
after an investigation cast doubts on his service exploits**

A few days after the news broke, Mark bumped into Colin in a pub in Camden, and they got drunk together reminiscing about old times. He was introduced to the group, and after some reservations, they accepted the ‘disgruntled Major’ at face value.

A month after joining them Mark passed on intelligence showing that the Doom Battalion was more than a disinformation group. It had field operatives linked to atrocities in various middle eastern war zones and seemed intent on drawing Britain into a war with Russia.

Then, earlier that day, he’d taken the opportunity to enter his group’s London office, and, while copying their email inbox to a memory stick, he saw an unread message disappear from the screen. Had it been sent by mistake and recalled by the sender? Curious, he found that the message, in Arabic, had been copied to his memory stick before being recalled.

He learnt that it had been the Doom Battalion, and not the Russians, who had carried out the Skripal poisoning in Salisbury. He was so absorbed with the message that he stayed longer than planned.

The group were supposed to be at a meeting, but two of them entered unexpectedly. He knew from their expressions that it would be useless trying to bluff his way out of the situation. His responses were far quicker than theirs, however, and he dealt with them quickly and efficiently.

The painful lump on the back of his head reminded him that a third member of the group must have entered the flat during the scuffle. As the sound of a man's voice slowly penetrated his consciousness, he opened his eyes and looked around the room.

The two bodies were still there, and the third man was sitting at a table facing Mark. It was Colin. He finished his call, shrugged but said nothing, and put the phone down. The gun in his other hand remained pointing unwaveringly at the centre of Mark's body.

Mark's voice was calm, but insistent. He had to make him understand that if they didn't act quickly they'd both be killed, as well as royalty and countless innocent civilians.

"Calling it in was a mistake Colin. They'll send people to eliminate us," he said.

Colin let out a silent laugh, but his eyes narrowed, and his head leaned forward slightly, waiting to hear more.

"They'll be unsure how much you know, but they'll assume the worst. They're probably instructing their hit squad at this moment."

The gun didn't waver, but the man briefly checked the street through the window. A good sign, thought Mark, but it wasn't enough. His only chance was to reveal the enormity of the plot and rely on the man's better nature.

"We've worked together before Colin. You wouldn't be a party to this if you knew the whole story. The Doom Battalion has a supply of Russian Novichok. It enters the body by being ingested, breathed in, or through the skin, and targets the nervous system causing paralysis, convulsions and death. It's far more potent than Soman, Sarin or VX, which is why half of Salisbury's still cordoned off, and as planned, the Russians got the blame."

"It's a simple matter using scent sprays to contaminate surfaces touched by high-profile personalities and public alike and quickly create massive casualties. The stuff was designed to be undetectable using NATO chemical detection equipment, so once deployed it can't fail. The Russians will be blamed, and public pressure will mount on the government to retaliate. They weren't quite ready for the recent Royal Wedding, but Buckingham Palace, the Houses of Parliament and dozens of major visitor attractions around the country remain on their list."

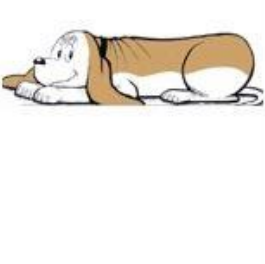














Colin seemed to be wavering, but Mark paused for it to sink in before playing his last card.

"The bottom line is - at best, it'll be a massacre, and at worst we'll have a full-scale nuclear war on our hands."

"Nobody can stop this but you Colin. The clock's ticking, and it's your call."

Nigel entered this short story in the 2018 U3A writing contest.

Spot the Dog

				
1	2	3	4	5
				
6	7	8	9	10
				
11	12	13	14	15 & 16

(www.kensquiz.co.uk)

Answers on page 28

Submitted by **Barbara Phillips**

RADIO 4 EXTRA

Many of you will be aware of this BBC channel, but for those of you who aren't, let me recommend it thoroughly, especially during these very trying times. It doesn't broadcast new programmes but gives you an opportunity to listen to many of the great shows from the 50's, 60's and 70's with some more contemporary material. It is especially good at showcasing some of the great comedies; this week, for example, you could listen to reruns of The Goons, Hancock's Half Hour, The Men from the Ministry, Dad's Army, Steptoe and Son, Frankie Howerd, The Ken Dodd Show and Round the Horne, with the inimitable Kenneth Williams starring. Good modern comedy shows include Milton Jones and John Finnemore who are quite distinctive.

The channel also gives you a chance to hear again really good programmes like Desert Island Discs and Great Lives, which give fascinating insights into people's lives. So, give it a try if you haven't come across it so far...if you can't face the news at 10 p.m., try Radio4 Extra as there is usually a comedy programme in at that time.

Good Listening!

Rob Wilkinson

Bittersweet by Hilary Lester

My father sadly passed away on Friday. It would have been his 91st birthday on May 8th!

Life in the retreat is bittersweet today.

As I make my morning prayer I am listening to the birds singing but thoughts go to my Dad who sadly passed away on Friday.

Bitter that I could not be with him but sweet that my sister had visited only a few hours before and we had had a telephone call.

A man I was proud to call my Dad for my sixty two years. I was adopted by my parents at six months and can remember from a very early time knowing this. I have never felt a need to trace my biological parents. My middle sister was also adopted and that was definitely a case of nature versus nurture. She could not have been more different.

My Mum was thirty nine when her pregnancy with my youngest sister was diagnosed

My Dad was authoritarian in his approach to parenting but always very fair. If we had to share something i.e. a piece of cake then he would make one of us cut and the other one choose. I can cut a piece of cake to perfection!

My Dad left school at 15 and after time of working on a farm he joined the RAF. He was posted to Singapore. When he returned to the UK he used his skills to take on his new career as an air traffic controller. This, for him was an extremely stressful job and involved shift work. I remember as a child my poor mother trying to keep two children quiet while he slept. Recorder practice was done in a walk-in larder.

He was an extremely practical man and even at 90 was reluctant to get anyone in to fix things. He loved doing his own services on his cars and lunch would have to be held if he were mid oil change. Any other time then lunch had to be on the table at 1pm and woe betide my poor mother if it were one second over and plates were not hot.

He was a man for everything in its place and very minimalistic. Coffee mugs were never left anywhere and papers never left around.

He was an avid stamp collector and bridge player. My mother did play alongside for him a while but did not like the scrutiny of the game afterwards so that partnership did not last long!

After a very rain-soaked holiday in Cornwall he vowed holidays would never again be in the UK. Our first holiday abroad was in 1976 in Lido de Jesolo. Bizarrely we had rain and the UK had a heatwave. This did not deter him and his last trip was to Namibia.

As I reflect on his life I wonder what qualities I have inherited from him. I think timekeeping, his stubbornness and his love of travel.

I have not got his love of cars, card playing and definitely not his tidiness!

However I am comforted by the fact that he brought me up well and I will miss him.

Hopefully one of his bridge partners will be up there with him along with my long suffering mother.

The thoughts and sympathies of all of your friends in Newport SE Wales are with you, Hilary.

The Hidden Country by Ian Lumley

Peter wasn't looking forward to the next few hours. He had done this before and had always felt a bit like a spare part. Nancy needed to see her Mum, who was now ensconced in the local Residential Home, and make sure that the old lady was still happy - if happy was the way to describe her present situation. His job was to get her there - and back again.

Nancy's mum had moved into the Home just over a year ago when it had become apparent that she was no longer able to sustain an independent lifestyle. Living so far away from her mum had been hard for Nancy, and not because she had to make all the arrangements for this final change in her mum's living arrangements. She also had to rely on others to keep her in the picture about her Mum's state of health and general well-being. 450 miles to get there and, then a few days later, another 450 miles to return home, was not easy.

Peter had often in the past said as a joke that, while her Mum was increasingly frail, there was nothing wrong with her tongue. He couldn't say that anymore. He had actually said to Nancy when he was driving up here on the last occasion, that her mother was beginning to lose all memories of her past life. Her mind was becoming a hidden country - even from herself. Nancy looked askance when Peter had said after no more than half an hour of listening to her trying to elicit any response, never mind a coherent one, from her Mum 'Well I think I'll take a little walk in the grounds'. He went out, expecting to be away no more than few minutes.

It was a sunny day, although you would never have guessed it from the temperature inside. Some of the residents were in wheelchairs just outside the front door, basking in the sun, but close enough to beat a hasty retreat in the event of a shower of rain. Most were dozing, but one or two still had enough life in them to nod to him as he walked past. Peter had once said to Nancy 'they all have a different life story to tell, but most don't have anyone left to tell it to'.

One of the men was clearly waiting for him as he returned. He gestured to him to sit on the wooden bench beside his wheelchair. Peter was reluctant to sit down. He didn't know the man, and he knew the reaction he would get from Nancy if he was away too long. He also knew, however, what he would be doing when he eventually went back inside. He sat down.

'Seen you before' the man said without preamble.

'Yes, I bring my wife in to see her mother. We live a long way away, so we don't get the chance to come often' Peter replied, and lapsed into silence.

The man went on 'where's a long way?' Peter replied 'Wales' and, to forestall the obvious next question, he said 'our daughter and grandchildren live there, so it's family isn't it?'

'My son's dead' was the immediate flat response 'no other family, and we didn't really get on anyway.' The old man lapsed into silence again, as if those few words had been an effort.

By this time, Peter was beginning to wish he had stayed beside Nancy after all. He couldn't bring himself to just get up and go though, and when one of the carers came out with tea for everyone, he ended up taking a cup as well. He knew as he took the first sip that he was resigning himself to what he thought was going to be another long spell of boredom.

'Been in here long?' he said to the man.

'Aye' the old man said slowly and sipped his tea noisily.

Peter was about to make his excuses and leave, when the man roused himself.

'You retired?' he queried.

'Yes' said Peter, falling almost unconsciously into the short one-word answers that the old man seemed to favour.

'Whatcha do before then?'

'I was a Civil Servant.'

'Bloody pen pushers.'

'I suppose I was, at least some of the time.'

'Whereabout?'

'In the Ministry of Defence, in London most of the time.'

The man perked up, showing something akin to interest for the first time.

'Whatcha do there?'

'I made sure the supply chain kept working for our guys out in the field, that they always had enough equipment to do their job'.

'Make some mistakes, eh?'

'I suppose I did from time to time.'

'What happened to you then?'

'Nothing much, really. Got told off once or twice - no big deal.'

'Did you ever go out into the field yourself?'

'No.'

'Bloody pen pushers.'

Peter was beginning to wish he hadn't sat down in the first place. He gulped the last of the tea and put his cup down on the wooden table between them. He was about to get up when the man said 'I was in the Army. It's where I lost me leg' he said, moving the blanket that covered his body from the knees down. Peter slowly sat back. Getting away was not going to be as easy as he had hoped.

'Where did that happen?' Peter asked. The answer shook him.

'Sword Beach'

Peter didn't need to be told anymore. He knew that Sword Beach had been the British - and Canadian - landing area during the D-Day landings.

'Do you remember the unit you were with?'

'Course I do, do you think I'm simple in the head or something? I was with the 1st Special Services Unit. They changed the name to the 1st Commando Brigade a few months later, when they realised the Germans had a special services unit too. As if changing the name changed anything else.

Bloody pen pushers.'

'How did this happen, then?' Peter asked, pointing at the missing leg. Finally, the man showed some animation. As he went on, Peter couldn't help himself. Some of the things he was saying were unbelievable and Peter realised that it was all likely to be just an old man's ranting. He didn't believe for a minute that he had killed Germans with his bare hands. The old quote sprang into his mind:

'The young have aspirations of things that will never come to pass - the old have reminiscences of things that never happened.'

Peter was just about to interrupt the surprising flow of words and make his good-byes, when one of the carers came up to the man in the wheelchair and said, 'come along Bill, time for your medicine'. Peter stood and shook hands with the old man.

'I've got to go now anyway; my wife will be wondering where I am'.

As the man was being wheeled away, Peter realised that he hadn't even asked the man what his name was.

It was nearly three months later before Nancy asked him to make the drive back up to the home to see her mother again. As he followed her into the building, the manager came out of her room.

'Mr Cook' she said. He turned.

'You spent time when you were here last talking to Bill Thomas?'

'Was that his name?' Peter said'

'Yes' she said 'he died a few days later. He had no family, so when we were cleaning his room out, taking all the old clothes and other personal belongings either to charity or just putting them out as rubbish, we came across this little box. You'll see he has asked for it to be given to you.'

Peter looked at the note written in a spidery hand. it said:

to Pete, you listened.

Later that night, as Nancy was getting ready for bed, he opened the box. Inside was a note and a Medal inside a blue velvet bag. The Medal was inscribed on the reverse 'The Distinguished Conduct Medal'. Peter opened the note and saw that it was a military citation. It read:

'For conspicuous Gallantry
in the face of the enemy.

Corporal William J Thomas of the 1st Special Services Unit is awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal in recognition of his actions on the 8th June 1944, when he led his unit against the German line above the beaches at Courseulles-sur-Mer. There he continued to advance and, in spite of ammunition shortages and being grievously wounded in his legs, killed three of the enemy using his bayonet. He continued to exhort his men forward even when unable to walk further himself.'

The words 'ammunition shortages' leapt off the page at Peter. Another time and another place, he thought, but the same problems and - if he was honest - the same outcomes.

Bloody pen pushers.

Le Restaurant Quiz (page 15) - Answers

Soup

- 1 PEA
- 2 TOMATO
- 3 TURTLE
- 4 OXTAIL
- 5 KIDNEY

Entree

- 6 TONGUE
- 7 SWEET BREAD

Fish

- 8 PLAICE
- 9 HERRING
- 10 SOLE
- 11 PERCH
- 12 COD

Game & Poultry

- 13 PARTRIDGE
- 14 PIGEON
- 15 TURKEY
- 16 DUCK
- 17 HARE (hare)
- 18 GROUSE
- 19 FOUL (Fowl)

Meat

- 20 LAMB
- 21 SPARE RIB
- 22 HAM

Vegetables

- 23 LEEKS
- 24 SWEDE
- 25 PARSNIPS

Desserts

- 26 CABINET PUDDING
- 27 TRIFLE
- 28 ICE CREAM

Cheese

- 29 DOUBLE GLOUCESTER
- 30 ROCHFORD

Wine

- 31 CHAMPAGNE

Ulsterisms Part Four – Gerald Lee

When I started to write about Ulsterisms, I surprised myself how, once the door was opened, so many words and phrases flooded back. In preparation, I bought some books on Amazon by a wonderful columnist from the 'Belfast Telegraph,' John Pepper. On a Saturday he published a selection of expressions that readers had sent to him. He often collaborated with a brilliant cartoonist, Rowel Friers. I had thought of a talk on both as depictions of Ulster life. Instead circumstances have led to these articles.

In this article I am drawing more on the John Pepper books. The essence of Ulsterisms, as with Wenglish, or any other dialect, is that if you took the time to think you would see the anomaly. John Pepper makes the point that, provided a fellow Ulsterman, or any other speaker in dialect understands, there is no reason why anyone should contest its validity.

Some words are peculiar to an area because of their roots. Ballymena is a gold mine for such researches. The accent is pure Lowland Scots. Many phrases are common, such as 'piece,' which means your packed lunch and 'wee' for small. The origin of the term 'piece' is said to be the practice of taking slices of cold porridge to eat during the lunch break.

The French influence is found in phrases like 'desabelles, meaning not fully dressed, or being in good or bad form, to describe a mood. 'A wee bit of plout' is obviously derived from the French 'il pleut.' 'Spitting rain' for a light shower is in common use. 'It is raining shoemaker's knives' is not one I ever heard, but which John Pepper records.

Grammatically to say 'I am just after doing it' is probably from another linguistic source. Also, probably from Scots, it is very common to hear 'waiting on.'

In his books John Pepper categories these expressions into certain situations such as bad health, death, directions or misplaced compliments. Otherwise they are just slightly contradictory, slightly because you usually can tell what is intended. 'My cat is as sick as a dog' is probably contrived but is a good expression. Similarly, 'I'd know Jimmy if his feet were sticking out of a barrel' sounds as if someone might say it. Rowel Friers used this for a very funny cartoon.

My mother often used the word 'Skite' for someone badly behaved. 'If you could have your dead end at someone' it meant you had to watch him or were exasperated with him. A similar expression to express exasperation is to say, 'he has my head turned.'

A stressful situation might have you 'up the pole.' John Pepper quotes one case of someone feeling unwell saying, 'my guts is up the pole.' If you were destressing, you were 'having your head showered.' Another word my mother used was 'throughother,' usually to mean unsatisfactory or untidy. 'Fernenst' meaning among is probably of Scottish origin, as is to 'red out,' meaning to tidy.

A daft person is 'no goat's toe.' Like the 'bull's foot' I do not know its origin, but my father used to say, 'as sure as there is an eye in a goat.' Why a goat? Another term for a dull person is a 'skillymalink.'

Malapropisms are a wonderful source for humour. 'He died with all his facilities' has a meaning even if it is the wrong word. On the other hand, if a doctor heard, 'I felt worse many a time when I was half as bad' it would thoroughly confuse him.

Hardly anyone uses the correct word to describe housing problems. Hence houses are filled with 'compensation.' Baths are unfit 'for human consumption.'

A complaint about a faulty cupboard door was, 'When I close it, it is still half open.' I had a desk like that myself during my civil service career.

A deceased was described thus by a relative, 'the last time I saw him he was waiting in the casualty dressed to kill.'

Parts of the body are often placed out of context. Women wearing trousers came relatively late to a conservative society like Ulster. A woman makes the point thus, 'I don't usually wear trousers. This year I haven't had them off my back.'

Clothing in the days before mix and match was a problem to many of us who never quite fitted standard sizes. 'Drowning in that suit' is an experience I know well, but would a tailor understand if you said, 'I want a suit I can laugh in?' Yet it describes just what the customer wants.

At school we resisted having to wear a cap. Would a teacher threaten, 'Put your cap on, or I'll knock your head off.'?

A phrase that would confuse a doctor at first would be the patient asking if he had anything for a 'gum boil on his hip.'

An obviously ill person would be described as 'having nothing on him.' In Ulster a person who starts to look ill is described as 'failed.'

It is anatomically impossible for your heart to be scalded.' It means you had suffered bad luck. 'Near yourself' means a narrow escape. Another use of the word 'near' to mean stingy is found in Dickens, as well being used by my mother in that sense.

Mixing body parts and functions in impossible situations give rise to amusing phrases. Rather than to be in the snow bareheaded an Ulsterman would be 'shovelling snow with his bare head.' Gossiping is a universal pastime. Such people could talk for 'another row of teeth.' A lovely phrase. A warning might be to 'keep your eyes on your tongue.' However, someone who enjoyed attention might suffer this fate, 'When I see her again, I won't look at her. I'll look through her. I won't even ignore her.' Another anatomical impossibility is 'I could cry with my feet.' Mixing expressions gives some amusing results. 'Awl' is a word often added with no real meaning. There arises the phrase 'My awl boots are on their last legs.' In the heat, 'my shoes are full of feet.' Foreign travel has its problems, 'I flew to Spain. It was terrible warm. My feet kept sticking to me.'

A less than enthusiastic report of a continental holiday was, 'it was all right, but the sea was boggin'.

The off-hand compliment is a source of much humour. There is the story of a couple engaged to be married. Rather candidly the groom admits he is not an oil painting. The rather insensitive wife to be replies, 'Never mind, you'll be out at work all day.'

Someone marrying a bit late has 'let her cheese get too hard before she put it in the mousetrap.'

Other times the meaning is there, yet it sounds stupid. 'It is a lovely dress. It would have fitted me if I could have got it on.'

Everyone has a favourite expression for inebriation. One often heard is 'working too hard.' As students our 'local' was the Club Bar on the Malone Road. The landlord's name was Agnew. Missing a tutorial due to such a distraction was 'attending Dr Agnew's surgery.' John Pepper quotes another one, which sums

up the state where you have to grab tightly to a wall to stop falling. 'Measuring the walls' sums the state many a hard drinker would recognize.

Some phrases are just amusing. Someone who complained of tiredness was told 'he must have dreamt he was working.' This reminds me of my time as a Civil Servant, when a manager spotted a less than efficient member of her team standing by filing racks. She shouted at him, 'What are you doing? Doing an impression of filing?'

In a sporting society everyone would grasp the meaning of someone being 'as useless as a man short.' I have known many such people.

James Callaghan when Chancellor of the Exchequer used an expression, which he called a 'Ballymena answer.' Asked about the economy he used a version of the phrase John Pepper quotes about an unfortunate visitor asking directions. The less than helpful reply was, 'In your shoes I would not start from here. I would go down the other end of the street.' Another John Pepper quote on directions concerns the wait for a bus. Time is relative as we all know, so the question, 'Do you mind if I wait here? My bus doesn't come for a whole half hour. It doesn't take long to wait for half an hour' perhaps has a deeper truth.

There are also some expressions that are just regional. If something is not worthwhile you would be advised 'not to bother your barney about it.' In this context I would say 'barney' means head, although a more common meaning is an argument. Anything correct is 'dead on.' A teacher at my school paraphrased this as 'mort sur.'

'Brave' is often added to an expression for emphasis, just as 'desperate' to less pleasant characteristics. If you ask the price in a shop, you would usually say, 'How much are you looking for it?'

The John Pepper books have been an inspiration in reminding me of my early years in working class Belfast and how attending university widened my horizons, not just in education, but in the diversity of speech, even in a relatively small community like Northern Ireland.

I hope these essays have been interesting, and perhaps also amusing. My biggest inspiration was listening to my mother, so I shall finish with one of her favourite expressions. If you were idle when you should be busy, she would say, 'I am sat here with my two arms the one length.'

I would guess this meant with your arms folded or hanging by your side. Like many in Northern Ireland she would say 'smoothing' rather than 'ironing,' hence, 'The smoothing waiting to be done, and I am sat here, with my two arms the one length.' On occasion she might also use the phrase to mean empty handed.

I hope in the current situation you never find yourselves sat with your 'two arms the one length' and find some useful activity. We must thank the efforts of our U3A organisers, especially Stephen Berry, for keeping us mentally stimulated. Let us hope it will not be too long before we are able to meet again in our various groups at Shaftesbury.

Spot the Dog answers

- | | | |
|--------------------|---------------------------|----------------|
| 1. Fred Basset | 7. Doogal | 13. Wellard |
| 2. Lassie | 8. Shep | 14. Scooby-Doo |
| 3. Rowlf (Muppets) | 9. Sweep | 15. Tramp |
| 4. Nipper (HMV) | 10. Goofy | 16. Lady |
| 5. Snoopy | 11. Toto | |
| 6. Gromit | 12. Santa's Little Helper | |

Flora Day by Barbara Phillips

Stephen asked for memories of VE Day. As my memories don't go much past the Falklands*, I thought I'd share some rather different recollections of 8 May.

**This is totally untrue, but please don't tell anyone!*

What do the late Terry Wogan, the film *Brassed Off* (made in 1966) and HMS Seahawk have in common? I'll give you a clue: "A quaint old Cornish town". Of course it's the Floral Dance, more correctly, I am told, called the Furry Dance. If you haven't seen it, *Brassed Off* is about a Yorkshire colliery brass band during the miners' strike and their repertoire features the Floral Dance. HMS Seahawk is a land base just outside of Helston. Most people will have noticed RNAS Culdrose on their way to the Lizard, Seahawk just across the road, was more for admin & accommodation. I often went there to parties and Sunday Lunch ... and some events my mother fortunately never found out about!

Flora Day traditionally takes place on 8 May, the Feast of St Michael (unless this is a Sunday or Monday, which was market day). I would imagine that this year people will be dancing in and out of their own paths and gardens rather than through the town. A very sad welcome for summer – and of course the emmets won't be there to swell the population and thus the B&B coffers ... so a lean year to follow, regardless of when the lockdown is lifted.

Flora Day itself has several distinct parts, the 7am Morning Dance, the Hal an Tow at 8.30 and 9.30 followed by the Children's Dance at 10, then the big one, by invitation only in those days, The Mid Day Dance; gentlemen in top hat & tails, ladies in posh long frocks and big floppy hats, gloves of course. 5pm saw the Evening Dance, a lot less formal and more akin to the early morning one. Needless to say, the pubs did a good trade all day, so everyone was more relaxed by 5pm! Then of course there was the funfair, down by the boating lake. Always a magnet at the end of the day and into the evening. Of course I was a good little girl and went straight home afterwards, no paddling or candy floss for me (and if you believe that you'll believe anything!)

To start and end the day, then, young men in white shirts & grey trousers, a sprig of Lilly of the Valley in their button holes, young ladies in cocktail dresses and (what I thought of as) silly shoes, dancing up and down the hilly and sometimes cobbled streets.

The Children's Dance involved all the local schools, primary and secondary, so thousands of the little dears, including me. The boys in white shirts, Lilly of the Valley buttonholes just like the grownups, the girls in white frocks and shoes. Each school had a different flower emblem in their school colours, that the girls wore in their hair, little red roses (usually paper in early May!) bluebells, forget-me-nots, buttercups ... All the dances were led by the Helston Silver Band but with this number of dancers it was necessary to repeat the music at strategic intervals along the route, with a second band - imagine the confusion in the photo below: the band at the front, another one slightly out of sync in the middle and a portable gramophone even more out of time at the back ... then you dance up the street, turn around at the top and dance back past them again. The grown-ups were expected to waltz but we children could only hold hands. Just as well, really. Treading on your partners' feet would stop the whole procession and carnage would have ensued.



The highlight of the day was the Mid Day Dance. You used to have to be Helston born or invited to take part. At one time there had been a couple of years of spectacularly bad weather on the 8th blamed on the “furriners” who had joined the dance! By that I mean people who had only lived there for 20 years or so.



It looks like he’s just stepped on her foot – again ...

Hal and Tow is a loose retelling of the story of St George and the Dragon with some imaginative additions over the years. Padstow's Obby Oss staked some prior claim to this phenomenon, but most old Helstonians don't give any credit to these Johnny come lately declarations, whatever Rick Stein might say. (A lovely man, I won't hear a word said against him!)

Believe it or not, living in Helston for 6 years, I never got to see the Hal and Tow! Mum and I ran a B&B and what with giving the visitors breakfast and getting me ready for the Childrens Dance I always seemed to miss it, even though there were at least two performances in different parks & gardens during the morning. It looks great fun.



The Floral Dance - Music and lyrics by Katie Moss, 1911

As I walked home on a Summer night
 When stars in Heav'n were shining bright
 Far away from the footlight's glare
 Into the sweet and scented air
 Of a quaint old Cornish town
 Borne from afar on the gentle breeze
 Joining the murmur of the summer seas
 Distant tones of an old-world dance
 Played by the village band perchance
 On the calm air came floating down
 I thought I could hear the curious tone
 Of the cornet, clarinet and big trombone,
 Fiddle, 'cello, big bass drum,
 Bassoon, flute and euphonium.
 Far away, as in a trance
 I heard the sound of the Floral Dance
 And soon I heard such a bustling and prancing
 And then I saw the whole village was dancing
 In and out of the houses they came
 Old folk, young folk, all the same
 In that quaint old Cornish town
 Every boy took a girl 'round the waist
 And hurried her off in tremendous haste
 Whether they knew one another I care not
 Whether they cared at all, I know not
 But they kissed as they danced along.

And there was the band with that curious tone
 Of the cornet, clarinet and big trombone
 Fiddle, 'cello, big bass drum
 Bassoon, flute and euphonium
 Each one making the most of his chance
 All together in the Floral Dance
 I felt so lonely standing there
 And I could only stand and stare
 For I had no boy with me
 Lonely I should have to be
 In that quaint old Cornish town.
 When suddenly hast'ning down the lane
 A figure I knew I saw quite plain
 With outstretched hands he came along
 And carried me into that merry throng
 And fiddle and all went dancing down.
 We danced to the band with the curious tone
 Of the cornet, clarinet and big trombone
 Fiddle, 'cello, big bass drum
 Bassoon, flute and euphonium
 Each one making the most of his chance
 Altogether in the Floral Dance.
 Dancing here, prancing there
 Jigging, jogging ev'rywhere
 Up and down, and around the town
 Hurrah! For the Cornish Floral Dance

THE recording of this song was made in 1934, sung by the Australian Bass-Baritone **Peter Dawson**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ndzHEoLgQpl>

THE FINAL SACRIFICES - a short story by John A. Guy

Time was not on his side as he stood in the muddy trench. He clutched his rifle close to his body. His stomach turned over and he could taste and feel the remaining particles in his mouth of his last meal of bully beef and biscuits. He glanced neither to the right nor left as he knew full well that there were many frightened men standing close by him. He sniffed to try and clear his head but he only succeeded in drawing in the smell of the trench. The trench smell was made of many ingredients, mud, stagnant water, human excrement, sweat, body odour and body decay. That final smell came sweeping into the trench from the moonscape land above and beyond him. In the last battle four hundred men had been mowed down by machine gun fire and artillery shells. What was left of their bodies was strewn above and beyond him.

He looked up into the dawn-breaking sky and could feel the cold drops of a fine rain gently touching his face. Beads of rain were trickling down his steel helmet and running down into his clothing from his neck. He glanced down onto the wooden walk-boards and could see the slight movement of rain meeting stagnant water. He moved his feet to try and keep his circulation moving. Yes, he thought to himself, before long, your legs will have to move quickly. My whole life depends on you.

He looked straight in front of him at the packed sides of the trench and his mind swept back to his homeland. Like a swallow his mind and his thoughts soared back to the Welsh valley from where he had originated. He remembered the houses nestled deep in the valley, all packed together in their long terraces; the Chapels and the Churches; the shops all positioned together in the main street. The pit, with its metal structure proclaiming the importance of the mine; the mounds of discarded rock, shale and dust looming on all sides of the village.

His mind went deeper into the hearts of the community. The rugby club where he had helped his father Lloyd to fill the baths with hot water for the muddy Cwmfellinifach players to bath after their hard fought battles in the local Monmouthshire derbies. The fish and chip shop where as a small lad he went with his halfpenny to buy scrumpies from the Italian owner.

He saw the Sunday school where his mum and dad sent him after their meagre Sunday dinner held in the Primitive Methodist Church where they would sit on the hard wooden chairs listening to the Minister Mr. Thomas, telling them about Jesus.

The mine he remembered. He started work down there at the age of seven. He first helped the dram men to tend the drams as they were moved by the pit ponies from the coal face to the pit bottom. He tasted the dust that got everywhere and the smell of the pit ponies that spent all their lives under the ground, moving the mounds of black gold.

He remembered the stories told by the men as they sat eating their snap. The laughter as they made fun of each other sitting deep in the bowels of the earth.

He tasted the hunger when the strikes and lock-outs started. Deep hunger caused by no money and four brothers and sisters to feed. He remembered the coal picking on the coal tips to get fuel for the fire to keep the family warm in the depth of the very cold winters. He remembered being chased by the pit bobby employed by the local mining company. He felt the despair of dropping the proceeds of hours of coal picking in order that he could escape the hands of the law.

He pictured Glenys and the first time that they had walked up over the mountain to the Church. He felt the first kiss and caress in the tall ferns with the hot sun on their backs. He visualised the long walk back down into the valley. His steps were light as if on cushions of air and his mind on cloud nine.

He remembered it all.

He remembered the first mention of war in the local papers it was. Everyone was expected to do their duty. It was the most important point of talk on every valley corner and in every valley tavern. Friend to friend, uncle to aunt, cousin to cousin, all talked about the Germans and that they should teach them a lesson. Young and old rich and poor, all caught up in the fever of war. Posters appeared on public buildings. People flocked to Newport to the town hall and recruiting offices. Boyfriend and girlfriend, father and son, wife and husband all to do their bit, all to prove that they were the persons to fight the fight for a war to end all wars.

He remembered going down to Newport with Ron, his friend. They walked all the way stopping at his Nan's at Risca for a bite to eat before leaving with praises ringing in their ears from their proud relatives. He signed on the dotted line at Newport town hall recruiting office. What a fine building that was. The lines of young men outside all waiting their turn to sign up and take the King's shilling. He remembered the hard stare from the colour sergeant as he questioned him about his age. The flush of youth on his face and only the small stubble of beard showing. Yes I am eighteen, he had lied. He had signed but the questioning had not been that intense.

He walked along to the drill hall at the bottom of Stow Hill to be fitted out with the basic kit of the regiment of the 1st Mons. The excitement had been intense. All this was very strange for young men, who were boys at heart in the strange ways of the world. A group of them had left the hall to do the rounds of the pubs and sample the local brews. Eight pints he had drunk that night, all paid for by various well-wishers in the many public bars which they had visited. Back to the drill hall for the rest of the night or what was left of it and then the cold reality of morning. On climbing from the makeshift army bed to the basic breakfast of porridge, toast and tea he began to realise that his life was now going to change. Leave Newport that was one thing, but leave his home town of Cwmfellinfach sent a shiver down his spine.

The train left Newport at 8 o'clock. All the carriages were filled to overflowing, heads hanging out of windows. All laughter and chatter and kisses passing from mother to son. Stolen sad glances and cuddles between boyfriend and girlfriend, wife and husband. Clouds of steam and a whistle sounding as the train pulled away from the station. Towards Paddington, London and the start of an army adventure for all concerned. On route it was all talk and laughter, pushing and barging as young men roamed the corridors, searching and restless for adventure on the start of their journey.

At Paddington station they were met in large groups and placed into buses and Lorries for the long journey to Aldershot for the start of their army training. As they made their way through the streets of London, many queues could be seen outside public buildings as other young men waited their chance to sign and take the King's shilling.

He looked from the mud wall in front of him as his mind was jolted by the sounds of shells exploding above him to both front and rear. He could smell the cordite in the air. Terrifying screams drifted into his ear drums. The screams of death. However months of trench war fare had made his conscious thoughts strain away these horrible ingredients of war. A piece of shell casing buried itself into the trench only feet away. From the corner of his eye he saw a figure stumble into the trench mud with the upper torso parted completely as if by a giant scythe.

"Stand firm." he heard in the background. The voice of the section sergeant proclaimed. "Stand firm." He stood but not because of courage but this was the normal action of a seasoned soldier protecting himself with the shield of hope. A stretcher party ran past him and the remains of the soldier were placed on canvas and poles. His name he thought what was his name but he had long ago pushed away such inconsequential points from his mind. So many of his mates had died screaming left out in the desert of no man's land.

He enjoyed the basic training. The drill, the physical fitness, the rifle and shooting practice. The food he had not enjoyed but it had been plentiful and better than he had at home. The company sergeant major had shaped their stature from young boys to young men full of confidence of the world.

His first trip on a boat he could well remember. It was rough very rough. How sea sick he had felt as the troop ship made its way across the English Channel. The ship was crammed full of troops, all kitted out in the basic front line kit. Rifle, steel helmet, great coats, blankets, groundsheets, kit bags and all the other odds and ends. He remembered trying his first rolled cigarette on the voyage. The first puff made him feel very sick, but it helped to soothe his nerves as the ship battled against a cross channel storm.

On disembarking from the ship at Calais the lines of soldiers seemed to stretch as far as the eye could see. Some order was obtained from absolute chaos as the men were formed in their respective units of command. France he had thought did not seem all that different from England or Wales. All the locals seemed to breathe, walk and go about their business in a similar way as at home.

His mind wandered back and he looked down into the trench and he saw that the muddy water was now colouring pink around his muddy boots. Down the trench towards Company `B` he could hear the sound of a man crying. Many of the men who cried were often large strong type persons, but trench war fare had scant respect for stature. What controls a man in these conditions is his mind. The cry now turned to more of a sob like that when he attended the local primary school. Then it was the cry of a small boy when a fist hit him in the mouth because his marbles were taken by a school bully.

The first days of alert had been quite enjoyable. No firing, absolute peace and quiet in the French countryside. No guns large or small firing. He was moved into a reserve company to wait whatever direction might be proclaimed by the General at his Headquarters far away from the front. Unlike the French soldiers they had enjoyed the digging into the chalk soil around them; he heard the sound of the shovel against the hard soil. Down they had dug. "Dig deeper," had ordered the section sergeant, his name Byron Davies from Merthyr Tydfil. Deeper they had dug and wider, until in each direction could be seen the network of trenches, crisscrossing around the ridge hidden from aeroplane and barrage balloon by a wood of large oak trees.

The shells were coming in quicker and faster, big shells from the giant guns hidden many miles away. The Germans were hitting the area with tremendous fire power. All around his trench, mud, stones and water were spraying into the air. Trees were breaking off and falling. Around him he could see the sharp broken points of trees pointing up into the sky. The sound was completely unbearable. It was as if his ear membranes had been covered with the skin of some gigantic drum. The daylight of early morning had changed to darkness of night as shell upon shell burst into the area. Showers of mud, stones, tree trunks, branches and large fragments of shells tore through the air. He felt parched, his tongue was dry, and he gulped with fear. He knew that soon that he would get the order to go over the top. He had done it many times before but each time there was always the prelude of fear. A fear only known only by a man in his particular situation. Each time the thoughts were, will this be the last time, or will I survive. Soon the whistle would blow, and then his life, hopes and whole wellbeing would be in the hands of others.

The whistle blew and, in the trenches as far as the eye could see, soldiers began to climb ladders on the steep sides of the dank trenches. He pulled his helmet down over his eyes to protect his vision as he came out of the trench and onto the hard shell-shot earth above. Shells were still bursting around the area as he started to run towards the German lines. Dust, mud and cordite filled his lungs as he gasped for rare clean air. He clambered over strands of barbed wire and dodged around parts of a dismembered body and he then skirted around a large shell crater filled with the remains of a German Machine gun crew blown into many pieces.

He never heard the actual shot, but he felt a savage pain in his temple and fell. His steel helmet fell off and his whole body slumped onto the packed earth. He rolled onto his side. Before he actually died, his mind and thoughts rolled back into the valley that he loved. The mountains, the pits, the chapel and then the ember of manhood left him as the blood from his temple reddened the mud around him. The soldier from the valley was dead and so were his memories as he lay in a foreign country away from his beloved land.

It was weeks later when the letter arrived at 21, Foundry Terrace, Cwmfellinfach. It readI regret to inform you that Richard Evans was killed in action.....