



GILWERN U3A NEWSLETTER

THE UNSOCIAL TIMES

Issue 11: October 2020

Hello All and welcome to edition 11 of our newsletter. We hope you enjoy reading it whilst making the most of the late summer sunshine we are enjoying at the moment.

As we contemplate the shortening days and the approach of autumn our thoughts turn to more time spent indoors. With concerns re the Covid pandemic still uppermost in many members' minds our monthly meetings for the time being have been postponed. However, we are exploring the possibility of holding either the October or November meetings via ZOOM. Details will be sent to all members via email and will also be on the website so "watch this space."

It is good to see that some of our groups have begun to meet again, both the walking and family history groups have met up albeit under strict Covid guidelines. The possibility of other groups meeting up is also being explored.

In the meantime keep safe, hopefully we will be meeting up in digital format in the near future.

Best wishes

Karen Harris

Chair, Gilwern U3A

"The Rule of Six"

Lynda O'K

Coronavirus and the new "rule of six" has caused mayhem and identity crises in the house of the Seven Dwarfs:

- Doc is now Dopey as he has just completed a straight 72 hour shift
- Sneezzy is now Grumpy as he's run out of soft tissues
- Bashful is now Sleepy due to lack of oxygen as a result of wearing a mask for hours on end
- Grumpy is now Bashful and trying hard to maintain a 2 metre distance from everyone
- Sleepy is now Sneezzy and has to go into 14 day quarantine
- Happy is now Doc as he considers himself medically qualified after binge watching House MD on Netflix
- Dopey is now Happy, he hadn't a clue what was going on anyway, and as the youngest dwarf (last in, first out rule applied), has had to move in with Snow White!

Transport quiz – 1

Kay B

1/ What was the name of the aircraft flown by Charles Lindbergh as the first solo crossing of the Atlantic?

2/ Which steam locomotive was built by George Stephenson in 1829?

3/ Which White Star liner sank on her maiden voyage?

4/ Which song by Bacharach and David sung by Dionne Warwick mentions three types of transport?

5/ What was the first commercial supersonic plane called?

6/ What was the name of the Royal Navy ship navigated by Sub-Lieutenant Phillips in "The Navy Lark"?

[Answers on the last page](#)

Gilwern's Bailey Bridge

David H

The closing of the Bailey Bridge prevents those of us from Gilwern getting quickly and easily onto the M40 at Glangrwyney, and it looks as though it will be closed to all but pedestrians and the odd two wheeled machine for some time. The approach road from the south has been viciously undercut by the winter floods and illustrates so well the power of water.

The Bailey Bridge was the work-horse of bridging for the Royal Engineers in the war, and also since then for many of us in our younger days. Sir Donald Bailey invented and developed it in Christchurch. It is a wonderful "meccano" type of bridge which as few as about eight people can assemble. We used to have Bailey bridge building competitions in the Royal Engineers, and it was a fine British invention which became used all over the world. I came across it in the Korean war and then in the Congo as a crucial crossing point in the United Nations work there. They can be found in the most unexpected places – including, of course, Glangrwyney, near Gilwern!



Many of us look forward to the opening of that helpful route from Gilwern. Is anyone willing to guess how long it will take for work to be completed, let alone started?

Choccywoccydoodah

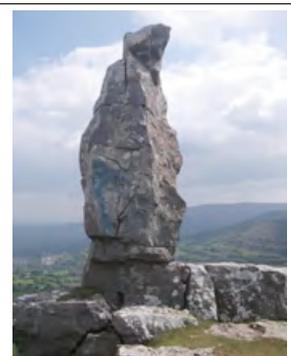
Lynda O'K

I have to admit to being a lifelong chocaholic and would be world class in the CDM medals awarded by a certain Dairy Milk company.

The storage of chocolate has been a subject of debate for years, but in our household, it is religiously kept out of the fridge. In fact, it is stored on a shelf adjacent to the hob so that it is suitably soft when the mood takes me. Luke Smith, who owns a chocolate cafe in New Zealand advises that storage in a fridge should be avoided at all costs as it stops the flavour from being released. Chocolate also takes on other flavours, so tread carefully if you have fish or other strong smelling foods in your fridge. The extremely warm weather of late has caused a bit of a problem, as I recently found myself delving into my usual treat only for it to drip down my front before I could get it to my mouth. Such waste! My advice would be not to worry about storage at all, and just eat your supply as soon as you buy it. As American cartoonist and wit Terry Moore says, we should all try the "twelve step chocolate programme, i.e. never be more than twelve steps from a bar of chocolate".

A photograph of a sign with a humorous message. The text on the sign reads: "STUDY FINDS PARENTS CAN DO 1/3 OF THEIR KIDS' MATHS, BUT STRUGGLE WITH THE OTHER 3/4". The sign is white with black text and is mounted on a wall.

Found by Kay B



The Walking Group has started again. If you wish to join, contact Rhiannon Williams on 830785. See the News and Walking pages of the web site. Also near the end of the Newsletter for a report and images.

Keep email addressees as safe as you can

David H

When replying to a message sent on a wide distribution, it is wise to use "Bcc" rather than "cc". "cc" will list all the addresses of the group for all to see, where "Bcc" will not. Better security! "cc" stands for "carbon copy", and "Bcc" stands for "Blind carbon copy". How wonderfully old fashioned!

Belarus – charity in the rough

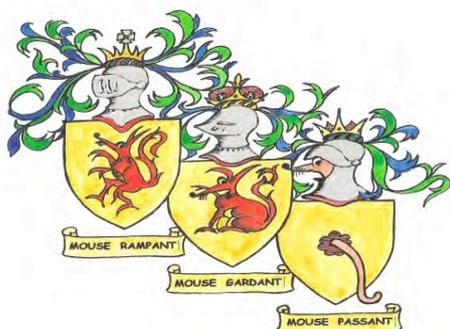
Hilary L

As the Belavia flight descended, the luggage restrained by the cargo net behind us and in the overhead rope netting shelves (similar to those on buses in the 50s), strained to escape as the pilot decided that he was still flying military manoeuvres. From the trolley that had no wheels, abominable food, the toilets which were locked and the unfriendly stewardesses this had been a flight from hell.

Belarus is much in the news these days, and I must say I have been surprised that it has taken so long for the population to protest. This was my first visit and a colleague and I were accompanying 16 healthcare students who had started a charity to support an orphanage just outside Minsk. We 2 staff were mainly there for the protection of the students; to assess the health and safety of their work placements but also to advise on the best care they could provide for the children.

This visit was in 2000, -14 years after Chernobyl but Belarus, because of the proximity to its borders and the wind direction, was still suffering badly. At the reception on our arrival, the wife of the British Ambassador told us that she carried a Geiger counter when shopping and not to buy any of the fruit etc. being offered on the streets.

Despite the support of the Embassy we were housed by a local charity on mattresses in a school closed for the summer and the only allowance made for us non-students was that we had our own classroom! Central Heating in Minsk meant just that with a central boiler system. Due to the economic pressure of the times the supply was rotated monthly to different districts. Although the orphanage was currently supplied the school was not, so there was no heating, but more importantly no hot water. So after a long and tiring journey (and from then on returning daily from 'work') we had to have a cold hand shower in a makeshift bath.



THERE'S ALWAYS ONE!

This amusing series on mice is produced by Gilwern U3A member, Mike Jackson. We still have a few left in store for future issues of the Newsletter.

Write a Future E-mail to yourself!

Linda S

As a family historian I have often thought how wonderful it would have been if our ancestors had written a letter to their descendants? If you could go back in time, would you ask them about their lives, some of the major events of their time, and information about their parents and grandparents? *Well, you can now write a letter for your descendants and one online site even simplifies the process.*

FutureMe.org is designed to store email messages and then send them at a future date that you specify, (that's if old fashioned email will even exist in the twenty-second century?)

This free service can be used to send email reminders to yourself or messages to others within the next few years and is available at <http://www.FutureMe.org>

Food for thought....?

U3A Personal Members' Activity Checklist - (Pre-attendance) **The following is advice from U3A Headquarters**

All participants to review their own personal health and circumstances and refer to the NHS Website in Wales for further information if you are at higher risk of getting seriously ill from coronavirus.

Consider the health risk category of anyone else you are living with in your household.

Review the risk check list for the activity you intend to take part in (completed by your U3A group organiser), and consider if it is the right decision for you to take part without adverse risk to yourself or household at this time.

Do not take part if you or someone else from your household have Ceovid 19 symptoms. These include a high temperature, a new continuous cough and the loss, or a change to your sense of smell or taste.

Last Train

Lynda O'K

Lock down walking has provided ample opportunity to explore the local vicinity, and recently my husband and co-walker managed the dizzy heights of the historic Gilwern Halt on Station Road. This led me to wonder where the railway line ran to and from, and what a feat of engineering it must have been at the time it was built in the 1860s. I have marvelled at the complex engineering involved in the widening of the A465 Heads of the Valleys Road, but this must pale into insignificance compared to building a railway line that ran along similar terrain from Abergavenny to Merthyr Tydfil. The journey took one hour and forty minutes and involved fifteen stops along the way.

I grew up in Merthyr and remember well running over railway bridges in the area and being engulfed in grey swirling steam as a train passed underneath. I also remember waving with my family as the last passenger train went by in 1958.

Most of the route disappeared when the Heads of the Valleys Road was built, but there is plenty of evidence to be found, including some buildings like the house at Gilwern Halt. The trackbeds now provide long distance national cycling routes and walking routes for people to enjoy. The following links give an insight into the history:

<http://www.industrialgwent.co.uk/e31-mtar/index.htm>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Merthyr,_Tredgar_and_Abergavenny_Railway

It should take far less time to get from Abergavenny to Merthyr when the road duelling scheme is completed – but it will surely be far less romantic than a bygone age of steam.

Beaufort, the Reluctant Racehorse Part 1

Harriet H

Beaufort came into our lives when I was about 10. We were on holiday in Sussex and attending an amateur gymkhana organised by a local riding school when my mother spotted an enormous, emaciated, thoroughbred horse being ridden in a fancy-dress competition. She made instant enquiries and discovered that his ancestry could indeed be traced through the stud book, a volume she knew backwards, and that he had once belonged to Dorothy Paget, a wealthy owner of race horses. When his front legs failed to work as they should, he had been sold into the slavery of riding schools where he could only be ridden if starved.



.....Next month point-to-pointing with Beaufort

A foaming torrent



Lynda O'K

Torrential rain over the last few weeks have transformed the gently meandering river Clydach into a mighty foaming torrent of a river in full spate. Debris has been carried from upstream including this full-sized tree trunk* which is now lodged across the top of the waterfall. If you look from the bridge across the river, you can see how big it really is, and that it is stuck against a rock preventing it from going over the top of the falls.

Understand your plastics disposal

Hilary L

So we come to PLASTIC. Do you remember Planet Earth's alarming expose of the quantity of plastic in the sea? Plastic pollution has been found in 100% of sea turtles, 59% of whales and 40% of sea birds examined. Even fish caught for human consumption now contains plastic!

Most plastic is single use and contributes to significant pollution. Also, did you know Ceovid-19 lives on plastic for up to 3 days? Currently, of the 7 categories of plastic only 2 are covered by the MCC purple bag collection. 2 other types, used mostly in building materials, can be recycled, but rarely are and that leaves 3 types of commonly used plastic largely being thrown out.

Low Density Polythene (LDPE) e.g. plastic bags and 6 pack rings, & Polypropylene (PP) e.g. the inside of a paper coffee cup, can both be recycled but of the former only 5%, and for the latter only 1% currently are in the UK. Polystyrene e.g. fish and chip containers and packaging, is very difficult to recycle.

The current MCC purple bags, alongside metal packaging, are for plastic bottles & tops, empty aerosols, yoghurt pots, plastic punnets, margarine tubs and ready meal trays (unless black). These materials are then separated, cleaned, sorted by colour, shredded, melted and reformed into pellets for re-use e.g. football shirts, fleeces and more plastic bottles.

MCC is committed to becoming plastic free and some towns are already working towards that (plastic free Abergavenny, Chepstow & Monmouth). But this cannot happen without the help of the public. So the advice is: correctly recycle, demand that companies use different packaging, pick up plastic wherever you see it (use gloves) and use refillable water containers?

The Joy of Simple Things with acknowledgement to Hannah-Jane Parkinson.

Harriet H

I am shamelessly borrowing the idea of writing about the simple, unremarkable things in life from Ms Parkinson's weekly column in the Guardian Magazine, having much appreciated her thoughts over time. It seems to me, that with a gloomy forecast for the next few months, some consideration of moments that give us a lift might help to provide a brief respite.

My first items are indeed simple, being the dunnocks that live in our garden. This year these unassuming grey/ brown birds have been particularly prevalent, breeding in the hedge that provides multiple occupancy for our bird population, and are now gently pottering about mouselike at the back of the flowerbed emerging to collect the seeds thrown out of the feeder by their profligate cousins. While the sparrows are bossy and the tits literately flighty, the dunnocks are calm, move gently and are unphased by our presence. They regard the more colourful creatures above them with interest and occasionally ask for more seeds to be thrown down. I find them very comforting.

It would be interesting to know what small things other people find uplifting and cheering.

Police two liner!

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Kay B

Shop assistant fought off armed robber with his labelling gun. Police are now looking for a man with a price on his head.

A Walk in the Woods

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Dave H

On Monday 20th September the Walking Group had its first outing since the lockdown. After a briefing on the Covid19 *Guidance for Walkers*, all seven of us set off from the canal bridge on Church Road. We walked up to Llanelly Church and took in the view across the valley. We had a cloudless blue sky with warm sun and a slight haze, but wonderful views of the Sugar Loaf and Black Mountains.



After a short section along the road west we climbed again across fields to the Iron Age Fort above Tyr Gunter where we took a break in the shade of the fine old trees that surround it.

We then descended westwards past Pen Y Graig to the woods at Coed Graig Leici. Here we walked west through the woods with high ferns speckled with Himalayan Balsam in full flower. Again there were glimpses of the hills across the valley through gaps in the trees and this walk will be lovely next spring when the bluebells take over again. With a further break at the end of the woods, we descended a steep rough track to join the road by Pen Pedair Heol Marina on the canal. Then it was just a stroll along the canal path back to the start. There was a brief discussion then about which walks we would do for the next long walks on Thursday 15th October and Thursday 19th November.



Anyone interest in joining can contact Glyn Davies or Rhiannon Williams, contact details are on the web page.

Further Photographs on the walk, all by Gwyn May



Lockdown comment.

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Kay B

I asked Alexa what the weather was going to be like today. Her response was: "What does it matter? You are not going anywhere".

Flat Earth

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Kay B

The COVID19 situation has been especially stressful for the Flat Earth Society. They fear that the social distancing measures could push people over the edge!

Stress-free travelling

Taking a summer holiday has been difficult this year, but I've managed to get away to Japan, S E Asia, Greece, France and Cornwall – all without the hassle of passport controls and quarantines. Yes, a good book can take you anywhere.

"Miss One Thousand Spring Blossoms" by John Ball (better known for his Virgil Tibbs' detective novels), tells of an American IT expert's visit to Japan and his experiences when coming up against centuries-old customs and culture. A riveting and intelligent romance – pure escapism – plus a chance to learn some basic Japanese.

Sue Perkins' *"East of Croydon"* transported me to parts of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia that I would find personally challenging, particularly when it comes to sanitation and food. And to be honest – so did she!

Moving westwards and upwards into the Mediterranean, I found myself in the Greek city of Thessaloniki, and a fascinating tale based on the forced repatriation of Greeks and Turks over 100 years ago in that city. *"The Thread"* by Victoria Hislop is a vivid and uncomfortable read at times, but one which is rewarding at the same time.

For a far more relaxed journey, *"A Year in Provence"* by Peter Mayall doesn't need any explanation. Do you realise that it's more than 30 years since we all wanted to go and live in the South of France after reading it? Even though I almost know the book word-perfect, it still makes me smile and acted as the best substitute for missing seeing our French friends this year.

And lastly, *"Frenchman's Creek"* by Daphne Du Maurier, took me to the creeks around Fowey and memories of a summer holiday when it rained for 7 days non stop and we didn't even get to a beach!

All this wonderful world is waiting for us in books. **When does the Library re-open?**

Transport quiz 1 answers

1/ The Spirit of St Louis

2/ The Rocket

3/ Titanic

4/Trains and boats and planes

5/Concorde

6/ HMS Troutbridge



Winner of art Challenge September

Anona is the winner of the September Challenge with the marvellous bird of prey shown on the previous page.

Comments from the judge:

This wonderful sketch is beautifully drawn. The bird fills the picture and seems to embrace the landscape in the background.

Each feather is meticulously portrayed and the whole image has motion. A moment in time.

If one was picky one could ask for the tonal range to be increased across the picture. Otherwise a well thought out composition and portrayal of the high flying raptor with a birds-eye view.

Warning to all – this might happen to you!

David H

Last week I was duped! I had bought something from Amazon and feared that I had not read the small print resulting me being put onto Amazon 'Prime'. I think that I sent word that I didn't want it, and I rather left it at that.

Later I received a call from someone claiming to be from 'Amazon', wanting to credit my account. I was, of course, delighted that they were cancelling Prime, and I followed his instructions. He asked me to enter a link onto my computer, and like a fool I followed so that he could create a form for me a form to fill in. (I learnt later that he was making it possible for him to read my computer). He spoke fast and urgently, making it difficult to keep up with him. I was doing my best which probably prevented me from thinking wisely. Eventually, after about half an hour's difficult communication, he asked me to fill out a form giving my bank details which included the three vital figures on the back of my bank card! I still thought he was genuine, but I was unhappy. He pushed very hard, and I thought of a poor Amazon employee having wasted half an hour's earning time, but I just refused over full bank details. Here was the first moment when wisdom came to me! His speech came faster and faster and louder and louder, pressing me to complete the transaction. I put the phone down. He rang back, and I put the phone down at once. That is how easy it is to be taken in! I feel utterly ashamed that I allowed anyone to get as far as this rogue did.

I called my credit card and my bank explaining what had happened and was sent new cards etc.

About a week later my screen suddenly went black with the words "Computer Help" and a strange arrow on it which at one point I saw moving about. At this point I called the great James who rescues us and also Gilwern U3A when we have computer problems. He told me to switch off the Internet at once. He then came out and discovered the small file that the rogue had injected into and hidden deep in my computer. He cleaned things up and before leaving gave me valuable pointers, some of which are listed separately below. I don't seem to have lost any money – thanks to James!

Three lessons from James

1. No matter who calls, never let anyone tell you to do anything to your computer - such as going to a website, or typing in some numbers.
2. If they're continuing to pressure you, and you aren't comfortable hanging up on them, tell them you don't own a computer. It isn't guaranteed to end the call, but it will throw them off their stride.
3. If the caller claims to be from your bank, internet provider or the police, say you will call them back on the number you already have for them. In the case of your bank or internet provider this number will be on your statement or bill. For the police this would be the 101 non-emergency number. A legitimate caller will agree this is a good idea, a scammer will try to keep you on the phone or give you a different non-reputable number to call.