



GILWERN U3A NEWSLETTER

THE UNSOCIAL TIMES

Issue 12: November 2020

Hello All

By the time you receive our latest newsletter the clocks will have moved back and our thoughts will be of shorter days, longer nights and the onset of winter. Although many of us dread the dark nights there is something wonderful about the ever changing seasons and the way in which the cycle of nature is reflected in our landscape, trees and even in our gardens. As we use this time to reflect on the joys of the beautiful area in which we live I hope this newsletter helps to bring some light into your day even if only in a small way.

As a means of keeping in touch we are hoping to hold a Zoom meeting on November 18th. Kay Blackwell has offered to be our first guinea pig in this new development. The title of her talk is "A Sunday School Teacher's Scrapbook: History in the making." There will be an opportunity for questions at the end of the talk. Details of how to join the meeting will be sent out shortly.

Best wishes

Karen

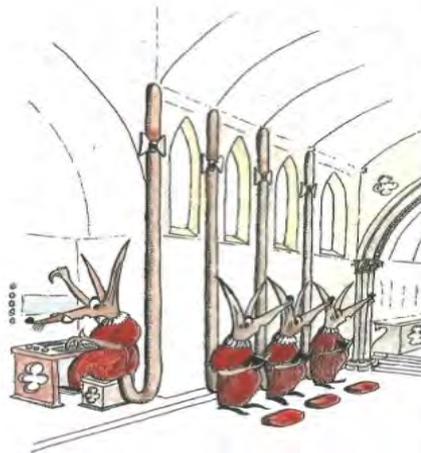
Chair, Gilwern U3A

Mousewash and Mouseorgan

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Mike J

Preparing for Christmas? Mousewash (left) and Mouseorgan (right)



Christmas is coming

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Harriet H

Chanting *Christmas is coming, the geese are getting fat* epitomised my childhood excitement in contemplating the festive season, but somehow the Christmases I remember in my youth were less enjoyable in reality. As December approaches though, I fondly remember my mother's muttered sarcasm in response to the adolescent cry of 'I'm coooooming', 'so's Christmas'. She put it into the mouths of our five cats too when they lined up desperate for supper. 'It's coming', 'so's Christmas they say'

Are your clocks right now?

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Kay B

"As I understand it the clocks go back at the end of October. The only problem is - I can't remember where we bought our's from"

Here we go again!

Just when we were all starting to think that life was returning to some form of normality, and a weekend break might be on the cards, COVID 19 had other ideas. Now face masks seems to be the norm and the prospect of renewed isolation looms, so what can we do?

Well, something that always works for me when I'm feeling down in the Autumn is a gardening catalogue. Now is the time to be thinking and acting about buying and growing those indoor bulbs for Christmas and the New Year. Yes, I realise that this year is going to be different, but hyacinths and paper whites don't know that and they'll flower as normal and fill your homes with glorious scents.

Then there's the anticipation of seeing what seeds can go on your wish list for next summer. What about trying a different variety of cosmos or sweet pea, or a dwarf bean you've never grown before? If there's one thing I have learned in life it is that Nature carries on regardless, and the joy of a garden is that you're always planning for the future, whatever it holds.

But one thing that has made me smile this autumn is the news that flu jabs, (when you can get an appointment) will be 'drive-through' at Cwrt-y-Gollen. I have a vision of rows of cars with elbows sticking out and a nurse, fully PPE-d, travelling in the opposite direction, hypodermic at the ready, jabbing at everyone as she passes. Modern day jousting perhaps?

Going Viral

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Lynda O'K

When we look back at 2020, will it be as the year in which we entered the Guinness book of records for the biggest ever number of new words and phrases relating entirely to a pandemic? Usually when there is a pandemic, the name of the disease enters into common speech, and eventually appears in the dictionary. However, with the recent outbreak of Coronavirus, it's not just the virus that has spread like wildfire. Words and phrases are created partly for humour, and partly for practical purposes, and these have been spread widely by people sharing them on social media platforms. In addition to common words that have been adapted to describe the situation like self-isolation, lockdown, furloughing, key workers and social distancing, we now have:

- Covidiot – someone who ignores public health advice
- Covideo party – online party on Zoom or Skype
- Covexit – how we will exit lockdown
- Blursday – unspecified day because of lockdowns disorientating effect on time
- Zoombombing – hijacking a Zoom meeting
- Staycation (or I prefer UKaytion) – holidaying in the UK instead of abroad
- Quaranteams – teams created in lockdown
- Coronacoaster – ups and downs of life during this pandemic

A glossary of Covid 19 terms can be found at this web address:

<https://www.ageuk.org.uk/bromleyandgreenwich/about-us/news/articles/2020/covid-19-glossary/>

**A presentation to our Art Group
 Melangell (Christine Williams)**


This is a picture kindly presented to the Art Group many months ago after Melangell came and demonstrated her method and skill.

The painting is put together using bees wax. She melts and blends exquisite colours in pure, pigmented beeswax. It provides a very fine and unusual three dimension effect with striking colours.

Christine Williams, the artist, has chosen her name, Melangell, to honour the Celtic patron saint of small, wild creatures who is buried in Powys. Paintings range from small cameos, exclusive greeting cards up to large, framed paintings.

www.artinwaxwales.co.uk

Taking a break

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P H

Cheer yourself up and look at hotels. There are some across the Severn in the Cotswolds.

https://www.goodhousekeeping.com/uk/lifestyle/travel/g29362663/garden-holidays/?utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=social-media&utm_campaign=socialflowFBGHUK&fbclid=IwAR3aQifrh97g3dv6Zncmhd9brGx6icCqgzBe8hP_0qLqmEbvhlj1_UJzSQ

The Orphanage, Belarus (2) The Orphanage 2000 (follows last month's issue) - Hilary L
 I remember the metal bars – on gates, beds & cots, the locked doors and dinginess and an awful smell as the children in this unit ate and toileted (on a potty or commode) all in the same corridor. We were used to seeing children with problems display stereotypical behaviours e.g. rocking, hitting their head, scratching until they bled however, the level and variation here was overwhelming. It felt Dickensian. We bathed, washed, dressed, toileted and fed the 12 children in Unit 3. The children smiled and laughed at the attention they were being given. It became clear that what was of most value was time spent with the children caring, loving and playing which altered their behaviour even if temporarily.

This was a student led project and the second year that volunteers had visited the orphanage. They had initially been supported by a charity called ABC. Two permanent staff were employed by them in one of the other units. The charity also raised funds back in the UK so we had taken with us basic equipment such as toothbrushes, cleansing products, clothes, shoes etc. plus some toys. Little had we realised how much they were needed but many things quickly disappeared. It was difficult to blame staff as they were undervalued, underpaid and living in poverty themselves.



The majority of the children were in fact 'social orphans' as parents gave up their children in a society that provided no social support but did attach a massive stigma to those with disabilities.

It is unclear whether the attitude of the society has changed although through the work of various charities, with some local based support, the facilities have been much improved. There is now a sensory room and the building and playground are more cheerful. There is more structured play. The orphanage is still supported by a Cardiff based charity *Leaves of Hope*. University of South Wales nursing students visited in 2019.

After a presentation at a 2002 medical conference by the Cardiff students a new charitable organisation SKIP (Students for Kids International Projects) was set up. Firstly, only including Cardiff and Birmingham Universities but now a UK wide healthcare student organisation with projects around the world.

Stick man

Lynda O'K

Those of you who are grandparents may be familiar with Julia Donaldson's character, "Stick man", who lives in the stick family tree with his "stick lady love" and his "stick children three."

"Stick man" becomes separated from his family and the story is about his quest to find his way back to them.

While out walking recently, we came across our very own version of "Stick man". He can be found on the new cycle path adjacent to the A465 Heads of the Valley Road between the Sale Yard and the Navigation pub at Gilwern.

If anyone can find the "Stick lady love" or the "Stick children three", please send in a photograph with co-ordinates of where they can be found.



Gilwern Stickman
 Julia Donald's Stick family



Beaufort, the Reluctant Racehorse Part 2

Harriet H

Point to pointing

Horrified by his state and with my father absent, my mother paid £60 for him – a considerable sum in the fifties, and arranged for him to be shipped to Buckinghamshire. Once my father's rage had subsided, he cheerfully announced that he had always wanted to ride in Point-to-Points and that if he did not do it by the time he was 45 he never would. So Beaufort, no longer lame, was fed properly, which made him extremely difficult to manage, taken out hunting and trained to jump steeplechase fences by my scary Glaswegian riding teacher. One of my father's female admirers knitted him 'colours', a white sweater with cherry red sleeves and collar, and he set out to get himself fit along with Beaufort.



Beaufort is fourth from left

Healthy and bad-tempered, Beaufort was entered into three meetings, but Point-to-Point races were four and a half miles long and Beaufort was adamant that four miles was his absolute limit. He did manage to finish one race, had to be pulled up before the finish in another, and fell spectacularly in the third. Watching from a distance, my mother and I could not see what happened, but my father gave a graphic account of how he had pushed Beaufort into the third fence from home thinking that the horse was being idle as usual, how the horse failed to rise properly hitting the middle of the fence with his chest and how he had been swearing at himself to roll away before he hit the ground so that Beaufort would not land on him. He was unhurt, but the horse lay outstretched and unmoving. One of the officials passing my mother said cheerfully: 'that your outfit down there?' When she wanly agreed, he rode on saying, 'well we thought he had broken his back, but he's eating grass so we think he will be all right'. Thinking for a moment that my father had gone mad, she realised that in racing circles the horse always mattered most. Beaufort had been observed eating grass out of the side of his mouth whereupon he got a firm nudge in the belly and leapt to his feet returning to his box thoroughly pleased with himself. My father had fulfilled his ambition, but it had nearly bankrupted us and Beaufort was found a home in Belgium with Peter Townsend, the lover of Princess Margaret. When last heard of he was refusing to do anything, simply lying down if anyone appeared with a saddle.

A whiff of history

Lynda O'K

We tend to remember events in our past visually, aided by photographs and videos, but if you think about your most powerful memories, the chances are that there is an evocative smell attached to them, e.g. sun cream on a sunny beach or the heady smell of lavender in a summer garden.

With more historical events we are aided by museums, photographs, books, and Internet pages. We imagine what the events looked like, but there is no sense of the smells of the time.

Take for example the Titanic, I was interested recently to discover articles about how the ship smelt. The passengers would have been greeted with the smell of fresh varnish, leaded paint, and newly sawn wood, along with whiffs of smoke from the coal driven engines. Also wafting through the air would have been the more pleasant roasted duck, lamb and beef which were on the menu on the fateful night of April 15th 1912.

All normal things that you would expect from a luxury liner of the time, but one other smell permeated the air in the early hours, that of a mineral odour with a metallic edge – an iceberg! Who would have thought that an iceberg would smell, but apparently, they pick up their scent from their surroundings such as seawater and sea dwelling creatures, resulting in a faintly metallic smell. Reportedly without binoculars, so unable to see much in the darkness, the lookouts and even some of the passengers on deck reported the smell of the iceberg, just before the impact. I suppose if you are close enough to smell an iceberg, it's too late, unfortunately, to avoid a collision with it.

Art course on line

PH

An interesting look in detail of some aspects of history shown in the Queen's pictures. The first one covered the Tudors. The talks are every Wednesday at 1030 am on Zoom.

<https://www.freepressseries.co.uk/news/18806457.eight-week-art-courses-monmouthshire-move-online/>

Avoid being scammed

Lynda O'K

David's account of being scammed by phone by someone posing as Amazon Prime was very worrying. Scammers are extremely clever, sharp and persistent. There are telephone services that can screen calls, and most providers have a free protection service, e.g. Sky "Shield", Talk Talk "Callsafe". There is also the Telephone Preference Service (TPS) that will prevent unwanted phone calls.

Amazon Prime scams are also doing the e mail rounds. Today I had an e mail from Dylan at Amazon Prime saying that they had received my order for over \$6,000 worth of goods. This e mail came with all the usual Amazon "bells and whistles", so looked authentic, but on closer inspection, there were several give away alarms. Firstly, my name was not on the Amazon account, usually they say something like "Hi Lynda", secondly, it had a delivery address in Birmingham Alabama. The order date was a month in advance of the current date. At the bottom of the e mail in red letters was the message "If you didn't place this order, ring the Fraud Protection Service on the following number"

I then had another one from Dylan "Confirming the order," with the same type of panicking links to click, and telephone numbers to ring.

The aim is to entice you to click on a bogus link, or ring a bogus telephone number, so don't do either of these things. Remove the e mails to your Spam folder which will disable the links, and add the senders address to the "Blocked Address List", hopefully preventing any more e mails from the same sender.

What the walkers saw

Glyn D

Follow this walk by the description

Eight members of our U3A walking group met on 16 October for our walk to Crickhowell.



Since the road has been closed to traffic after storm Dennis in February, it's perfectly safe and enjoyable to use the causeway and Bailey bridge to Glangrwyney where we crossed the A40 and joined the footpath to Llangenny.

At Millbrook bridge we admired the ancient Sweet Chestnut tree, splendid in its autumn glory. We then followed the bridleway upwards to a minor road, from which another bridleway led us towards Belfountain Park. Taking the

footpath through fields above Graig Wood heading to Crickhowell, we looked across the valley towards Gilwern Hill, the Bloreng, and the magnificent Llangattock escarpment. Behind us above the trees we had a view of the summit of the Sugar Loaf. We are so fortunate to have such quantity and quality of local walking opportunities.



Avoiding the centre of Crickhowell we enjoyed a break by the castle, which dates from 1121, early in the Norman conquest of Wales. The castle was knocked about by Owain Glyndwr around 1403 and subsequently recycled by the local population. The equipment in the playground was tested, the toddlers' rocking horse threw its rider, who wishes to remain anonymous (RW).

Suitably refreshed, we continued down Bridge street to the Bridgend Inn, another victim of "Storm Dennis" currently under refurbishment (open by Christmas?). From the old chapel on the left we followed the river Usk downstream, across fields where stiles have been replaced by splendid new gates, much easier to use than the former stiles. We walked a short distance along the A40 back to Glangrwyney and then retraced our route back to Gilwern.



Many thanks from everyone to Karen our "gate keeper" for compliance to U3A Covid 19 rules when using gates.

Rhino in the Sahara a sign of past climate changes -

David H

I was taking three months leave to explore a small part of the Southern Sahara, when Marmounta, a Tuareg acquaintance, took my colleague and me to see some rock carvings a number of day's camel journey from the oasis of Iferouane.

We crossed the most hostile ground on foot, coming eventually to easier ground for the camels to carry us, arriving eventually at a dried river bed with massive boulders on the side. To our surprise we found mysterious carvings, including that of a Rhino. An authoritative archaeology professor In Paris told me that it was the farthest north he had seen such evidence of rhino. The carvings of animals depicted a much wetter climate some thousands of years ago.



The rough desert encountered en route



The rhino and other beasts

The study of past climates plays an important part of looking at the future. The deserts tell us a great deal because they are naked, and parts are packed with information going into the past.

The Joy of Simple Things – continued -

Kay B

In the October issue (No 11), Harriet H wrote about simple things that gave her pleasure, and asked if others had similar experiences.

In summer 2019 my family asked what I would like for my birthday, and when I replied that a bird bath for the garden would be great, they all thought Mum had lost the plot! But what a joy that bird bath has been, watching our feathered friends flying in, sometimes alone, more likely in numbers, anything from sparrows to pigeons.

Sparrows, I've decided, aren't fussy. Six, seven, even ten of them at a time crowd into the small bowl, fluttering their wings and generally making a lot of splash. One day in July they were creating so much spray that we got a mini rainbow arcing just over them all – and I didn't take a photo! And then after bathing, and doing unmentionables in the bath, they all had a drink – lovely.

This morning I spotted a blackbird having a real bath. He was in there over ten minutes on his own, splashing water over each wing in turn, then almost looked as if he was swimming round and round before flapping wings, scratching either side of his head, and then stepping out as if waiting for someone to hand him his towel. He looked sleek and refreshed.

My bird bath has given me hours of pleasure just watching the birds from our windows.

Hosting a Zoom meeting – a simple video

It is good to learn that our Committee has decided to pay a subscription to Zoom, adding facilities, with none of the tiresome business of being suddenly cut off after 40 minutes. The Committee is truly conscious that there are members who do not have Internet. Try this video about arranging a meeting It's really quite simple:

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

Two liner

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.

Not “mushroom” for error!

Lynda O'K



It's strange how some fungi are regarded as super foods, e.g. shitake, oyster, porcini or morel mushrooms. All are thought to have life enhancing properties. However, their aptly named cousins, e.g. deadly web cap, death cap (historically the preferred choice for poisoning emperors and kings) and fool's funeral are all likely to cause death if eaten in even the smallest of quantities.

How healthy are mushrooms?

<https://melmagazine.com/en-us/story/ranking-types-of-mushrooms-by-how-healthy-they-are>

How deadly are mushrooms?

<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/blog/2018/11/poisonous-mushrooms/>

I took these two photographs of tree fungi on the road which leads from St Elli church to the Heron's Rest Marina near Crickhowell. I think we'll assume they are of the poisonous variety, so quite stunning to look at, but not so good to eat!

Editor's note: I think the one on the right might be what fishermen call 'amadue'. A small piece is carried to dry the fly when fishing with artificial flies.

Art Challenge October 2020 – Winner “Misty, Moisty Morning” by Tony Godfrey.

All paintings were judged by Sarah Hoddy, Chair of the Abergavenny Group of Artists. She had a number of good and interesting paintings to select from. Her comments on Tony's work were:



“This does what it says on the can! We are immediately transported to a misty, cold autumnal morning. I especially love the way the water is glass-like in the morning light. There is depth and interest in this picture. The shadows of the boats are especially pleasing.”

The subject for November's Challenge is “The Night Sky's the Limit”. See News page of web site for details. Submissions by 25 November 2020