



# GILWERN u3a NEWSLETTER

## *THE UNSOCIAL TIMES*



**Issue 13: December 2020**

### **Hello All and welcome to the Christmas edition of our newsletter.**

Despite the unprecedented events of the past year we, at Gilwern U3A, have continued to keep in touch with our members through our regular newsletter. On behalf of everyone involved I would like to express a huge "Thank you" to all our contributors. They have kept us informed, intrigued, entertained and amused with a wide selection of articles, anecdotes, photographs and puzzles. Please keep your contributions coming, they are essential if our newsletter is to continue. An extra "Thank you" also goes to David Hall who manages our website and produces the newsletter. His skill and commitment ensures that we are able to keep in touch with all our members.

December is a time for looking back at the events which have happened during the year and looking forward with anticipation to the events which the new year might bring. Recent news makes us hopeful that the new year will bring a successful vaccination and the possible resumption of more normal lives.

On behalf of everyone on the committee I wish a very merry Christmas and a healthy and happy New Year to you and your family. I hope that over the Christmas period you are able to indulge in the festive spirit and to spend quality time with family and friends albeit in a Covid safe manner.

Best wishes

Karen Harris  
Chair, Gilwern U3A

### **The hard work of Christmas**

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Kay B

In my childhood, Christmas started somewhere in mid-October with the preparation of puddings, mincemeat and cakes. Then about three or four days before The Day, two huge cockerels would arrive, fully feathered, as gifts from farmer friends. These had to be plucked, drawn and hung, allowing us kids to play with feet that still had tendons on them – quite gruesome but good fun.

Christmas Day at Gran's was a huge lunch, followed by tea around 4pm with Christmas cake, then around 7 o'clock the table would be re-laid for supper with pickles, cold meats, cheese and a sherry trifle. Nuts and port finished the meal for the adults. The problem was – Boxing Day was a total repeat, with the second cockerel, but this time at our house!

Never once did I remember seeing the menfolk of the households offering to assist their wives. It was expected that meals just appeared, whereas stoking up fires and supplying drinks was 'men's work'. Times have changed, thankfully, but I still enjoy the preparation of Christmas delights, admittedly, with oven-ready poultry and the assistance of food mixers.



Mice Crackers

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Mike J



**Micellany: Fun with Anonymouse in Lockdown**

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Mike J

Mice were chosen by Mike Johnson to illustrate particular points, and a few sketches were needed to illustrate 'panic', the 'Devil' and anything not covered in the existing collection. While he was drawing new mice, Nick Kingsford was developing a layout. Mike has produced a book, *Micellany*, which is mentioned on the News page of our web site. It's on sale at the Road House Narrow Boats Gilwern

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**Health, Safety, Equality and Glory shone around**

Lynda O'K

**Jingle Bells** - A risk assessment must be submitted before an open sleigh is considered safe for members of the public to travel on. The risk assessment must also consider whether it is appropriate to use only one horse for such a venture, particularly if passengers are of larger proportions. Permission must be gained from landowners before entering their fields. To avoid offending those not participating in celebrations, we would request that laughter is moderate only and not loud enough to be considered noise pollution.

**While shepherds watched their flocks by night** - The Union of Shepherds has complained that it breaches health and safety regulations to insist that shepherds watch their flocks without appropriate seating arrangements being provided, therefore benches, stools and orthopaedic chairs must be made available. Shepherds have also requested that, due to the inclement weather conditions at this time of year, they should watch their flocks via CCTV cameras from centrally heated observation huts. Please note, the angel of the lord is reminded that before shining his/her glory all around she/he must ascertain that all shepherds have been issued with glasses capable of filtering out the harmful effects of UVA, UVB and Glory.

**Rudolph, the red-nosed reindeer** - You are advised that under the Equal Opportunities for All policy, it is inappropriate for persons to make comment with regard to the ruddiness of any part of Mr. R. Reindeer. Further to this, exclusion of Mr R Reindeer from the Reindeer Games will be considered discriminatory and disciplinary action will be taken against those found guilty of this offence.

**Little donkey** - The RSPCA have strict guidelines with regard to how heavy a load that a donkey of small stature is permitted to carry, also included in the guidelines is guidance regarding how often to feed the donkey and how many rest breaks are required over a four hour plodding period. Please note that due to the increased risk of pollution from the dusty road, Mary and Joseph are required to wear face masks to prevent inhalation of any airborne particles. The donkey has expressed his discomfort at being labelled 'little' and would prefer just to be simply referred to as Mr. Donkey. To comment upon his height or lack thereof may be considered an infringement of his equine rights.





### “You’re spending Christmas...WHERE?”

Kay B

Since leaving university, our younger son has worked for IKEA all over the world. He always enjoys Christmas ‘at home’ but there have been occasions when we have joined him wherever he was: Taiwan, The Netherlands, Serbia and Sweden. All very different cultures with different ways of celebrating Christmas and not on the usual tourist trails.

Christmas in Taipei was very different: they didn’t celebrate it at all but shops tried their best for Western residents. One shop created a Christmas tree from inflated rubber gloves, tied at the wrists, giving the impression of lots of fir tree branches – very clever. And then there was the shop window with a pyramid of open, green umbrellas topped off by a star and back-lit by a strong light. Someone this was extremely artistic, it’s a pity it was spoiled by their message “*Mary Christmas*” on the window!

Finding somewhere for an authentic Christmas lunch in Taipei was a problem. We ended up in TGI Friday’s, surrounded by serving staff all wearing backpacks covered in tinsel. The food was Western in style but with a very definite Eastern flavour, quite odd.

Serbia celebrates Christmas much later than us, using the Julian calendar, I think, and their celebrations are at Epiphany on 6<sup>th</sup> January not 25<sup>th</sup> December, so by the time it was their ‘Christmas’, we were back at home. It is a country whose roots are firmly fixed in the Eastern Orthodox traditions, and who politically still look to the East rather than the West.

Christmas in Delft was a much more laid-back affair as it had none of the rip-off commercialisation seen on TV and in our shops. The reason is because the Dutch celebrate earlier in the month on St Nicholas Day, 5<sup>th</sup> December. In Mid-November, according to legend, Saint Nicholas (Sinterklaas) arrived from Spain with many courtiers and servants, including his personal servant, Black Peter, and every year, on December 5<sup>th</sup> in Den Haag (The Hague) there is a huge carnival procession, led by the imposing figure of Saint Nicholas, with his long white beard and dressed in his bishop’s mitre and red cope, riding a white horse. Children put their clogs out on the night of 5<sup>th</sup> December in the hope that Sinterklaas will fill them with goodies.



More recently we’ve spent Christmas in Malmö where straw goats are seen outside every home! Apparently it’s goats that draw Santa’s sleigh, not reindeer, at least, that’s what Swedish children are told. Christmas Eve is the big celebration here, with Santa arriving late in the day and feasting continuing until the early hours. We are/were hoping for a family Christmas at home this year, but the way things are going, I think it will be a very quiet affair. At least there will only be the two of us to take our pick of the chocolates.





**Amazing Wales:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O0-JTcOEpNQ>  
How many scenes can you put a name to (excluding the cat!)?



## The Wisdom of Geese

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Lynda

### 1. Geese work as a team

As each bird flaps its wings it creates uplift for the bird immediately following. By flying in a “V” formation the whole flock adds 70% greater flying range than if each bird flew alone.

### 2. Geese share the leadership

When the head goose gets tired it rotates back in the formation and another goose flies point, so they take turns leading.

### 3. Geese cheer progress

Geese honk continuously to encourage themselves and each other on their journey.

### 4. Geese support each other when times are tough

When a goose is sick or wounded, two other geese follow it out of formation to lend help and protection. They stay with the fallen goose until it is able to fly. Only then do they catch up with the flock or join a new formation.

### 5. Geese are loyal to their purpose

Geese don't alter their migration route significantly and make a formation with those who want to go the way we want to go. As the goslings grow they learn from the older members and in doing so maintain the purpose of the flock year after year.



I think we could learn a lot from geese.

A perfect late autumn picture of our canal looking down from the newly shaped dual carriageway above, showing a recent sunset. Nights are drawing out and will continue to do so just before Christmas.

By Christmas time we can be happy that nights are drawing in. The cheering words of Shelley: “If winter comes can spring be far behind” give hope for a new and better year 2021.

The photograph was taken by our Chair, Karen Harris.



## Talking Turkey

Lynda O'K

Many of us enjoy turkey during the festive season, but a turkey's life cycle is not one to be coveted. Their sole aim in life is to be as plump and tasty as possible on the Christmas lunch table. Poultry farming welfare requirements ensure that turkeys are happy in their environment. If they are not, they get stressed, and peck each other causing damage to their feathers. In order to fatten them up for Christmas, they are fed extra oats which add flavour and weight. In non Covid times, I would have visions of already plump turkeys sitting around smacking their lips awaiting their oat supplement, eating pre-Christmas breakfasts of wholegrain oats with full cream milk making a 380 calorific porridge, washed down by "Venti Starbucks" vanilla latte with oat milk, a mere 438 calories per cup. However, this is Covid Christmas, and as a result of the "rule of 6" will there be little demand for extra-large turkeys? This year, I imagine obese turkeys on the turkey treadmills working hard to be a slim line version of their former selves to satisfy the new demand for smaller turkeys. Their only reward would be a large glass of water with a slice of lemon. The poultry keepers will have their work cut out trying to flatten the turkey curves while avoiding any stress for the birds. Would Bernard Matthews be turning in his grave?



## Transport Quiz – 2

Kay B

Leading on from last month's issue:

7/ What is a pendolino

8/ Who was the first principal engineer on the Great Western Railway?

9/ With whom does the cartoon dog Snoopy dream of having a WW1 dogfight?

10/ Which deserted ship was found in the Bermuda Triangle in 1872?

11/ Where did the Brown family first meet a spectacled bear from Peru?

12/ What was the name of the vessel sailed by Sir Francis Chichester in his solo circumnavigation of the globe?

Answers are on the last page.

## The Day After Twelfth Night

Lynda O'K

On the thirteenth day of Christmas I phoned my true love up. "Thanks for all the presents, it's amazing what you can get on Amazon these days. Did I manage to get any sleep last night? Not really. One of the drummers brought his bass drum, so the neighbours complained and threatened to get the police. At least I got rid of the pipers, they had another booking, so I gave them a tip and off they went. One of the lords stole the gold rings and leapt about shouting "I've always wanted to be lord of the rings!" I was adopted by the ladies dancing to even up the numbers and practised an all-female routine for the Strictly tour next year. They were thrilled to have even numbers as there was usually an odd one out. I couldn't get into the kitchen for the maids a milking and gathering goose eggs to practice for soufflé week on the Bake Off. The bathroom was off limits as the swans were in residence in the bath – where else could I put them? The calling birds lived up to their names and showed remarkable staying power till 4 am. Feathers flew when the French hens ganged up on the partridge, something to do with seed and cereal quotas. The turtle doves were no problem, they curled up on the sofa and fell asleep. Oh yes, the pear tree has wilted as I left it too near the radiator. Make mine a shopping voucher next year."



## Christmas simple things

Harriet H

I am as prone to the nostalgia occasioned by Christmas decorations as the next person. As the time comes to fetch out the battered box, I fondly remember the bauble cut out of cardboard and given to our eldest daughter by a schoolmate some 45 years ago, the delicate Laura Ashley gilt spheres bought by the middle one about 3 houses ago, and the battered ship made of beads threaded on wire that is the particular love of the youngest. It is so old that it may have been part of my own childhood. Any suggestion of changing items meets with howls from these three women all in their fifties: 'you can't change those, they're our childhood'.

## The u3a Christmas Quiz

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Kay B

1. Balsam, Douglas, Fraser and Noble are all types of what?
2. What name is given to a baby reindeer?
3. Which of the gifts presented to Jesus by the Magi was commonly used as an anointing oil?
4. What is the time difference between Lapland, Finland and London, UK in December?
5. Who is the Patron Saint of Children?
6. Who was crowned King of England on Christmas Day in 1066?
7. In which Christmas themed movie does Hugh Grant star as a British Prime Minister?
8. Which country donates the Trafalgar Square Christmas tree to Great Britain every year?
9. Can you name two missing reindeer: Dasher, Dancer, Rudolph, Comet, Cupid, Donner, and Blitzen?
10. In which C.S. Lewis novel was it 'always winter but never Christmas'?
11. What type of pudding do the carollers sing about in 'We Wish You a Merry Christmas'?
12. What type of tree is mentioned in the Twelve Days of Christmas song?
13. Christina Rossetti wrote a poem that was to become the basis of which famous Christmas Carol?
14. How many types of birds are mentioned in the Twelve Day of Christmas song?
15. In "A Christmas Carol" who is the first ghost to appear to Scrooge?
16. Who invented the Christmas cracker?
17. On what date is Christmas normally celebrated in Russia?
18. What are the two main ingredients of a snowball cocktail?
19. In Britain, what type of food originally consisted of a soup made with wine and raisins?
20. How many times does the number 2 appear on a standard Advent calendar?

Answers on last page, but have a good try first!

## Fantasy fruit bowl?

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Lynda O'K

Recently, it was reported that one in twenty adults consider that wine counts as one of their recommended "five a day" intake of fruit and vegetables, as it is made from grapes. This could be extended to include cider (apples), gin (berries) and vodka (potatoes) to name but a few. Maybe the brain needs to engage with the liver to confirm this fact. This made me wonder what other food and drink people consume under the misconception that it is good for them. After some thought, my delusion of choice would have to be Fry's 5 Centre Cream. Readily available when I was a child in the 1950s, this chocolate bar was first manufactured in 1934. The five flavours were orange, raspberry, lime, strawberry and pineapple. Unfortunately discontinued in 1992, maybe this chocolate bar needs to be resurrected to take its place in my fantasy fruit bowl. With the festive season rapidly approaching, as a chocolate lover, and partial to a glass of ice-cold grape juice (preferably the Chardonnay variety!), this diet sounds just the thing to brighten up the second Covid wave - consider me in! Now who was it that said, "Self-delusion is pulling in your stomach when you step on the scales"?

What would you have in your fantasy fruit bowl?

## Christmas in New York

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Harriet H

At the end of October 1962, I flew to New York, leaving a badly paid job selling beautiful glass in a prestigious London shop, to take up a similar one selling children's books in a grand New York bookshop situated in the most fashionable part of Fifth Avenue. I was 20 years old and apparently oblivious to the drama of the Cuban Missile Crisis in full flow at the time. Christmas in those days did not get going so early, but soon enough New York had festive window displays and Father Christmases on every corner ringing bells to attract donations for various charities. Having well-connected parents, I went garlanded with introductions, one of which led to my being invited to a party at which copious facsimiles of Campbell's soup tins were on display. I shook hands with Andy Warhol, but did not realise the honour until many years later. I was baffled by the art. Much more exciting and congenial was being invited to a Christmas Eve party by the poet Wystan Auden who had been at Oxford with my father. I was way out of my depth and the only woman there, but will always remember Wystan becoming nostalgic as the evening went on and insisting on listening to records of trains travelling through Devon countryside.

I think my Christmas Day invitation came from a family called Lewin who lived out of the city, but I remember only their kindness in inviting me and the shiny red sports car, a Christmas present to their 17 year old daughter who came to meet me at the station in what might have been Rochester.



Before travelling, I dutifully went to Church, very anxious about the ethics of taking the bottle of whisky I had bought for my hosts into hallowed precincts. No punishment descended and, as far as I can remember, I had a nice day. The next day I was back at work – most indignant at the absence of Boxing Day.

### My strange Christmas

David H

At the end of 1963 I flew to Libya because I wanted to put a long desert escarpment more accurately on the map, by hiring camels and guide, Ahamed bin Dau. I arrived in the capital, Tripoli, on Christmas Eve, and could only get a bus as far as Garian, not half way to the oasis of Mizda, 100 miles from the coast. I then started walking, thinking that there would be a bus on Christmas Day (a Muslim county). I spent much of the day walking along the track enjoying being out in the desert again. No bus came. In the late winter afternoon I came across a dwelling, and the owner kindly offered to give me shelter for the night. In wonderful Arab generosity he shared a delicious meal of pasta, tomato puré and a small amount of goat meat. How lucky I was to find him and have such a delicious Christmas supper. I slept well on the ground, and to my delight and relief the bus came on Boxing Day. I was able then to do my survey. (over 50 years ago!)

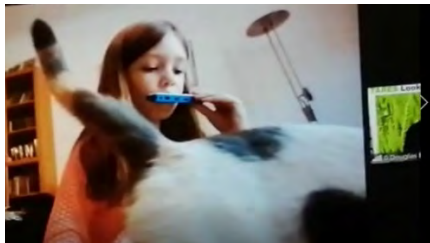
### Upstaged

Lynda O'K

During Covid restrictions, avid current affairs and news bulletin fans will have been treated to sneak previews of interviewees kitchens, libraries and lounges as a backdrop on Zoom or Skype. As a lifelong fan of "Through the Keyhole", this makes the above programmes all the more interesting for me. It's also been really amusing to see serious interviews being reduced to a farce by small children and animals. Particularly entertaining was the Polish historian who carried on with an interview with his cat standing on his shoulders.



My granddaughter was taking part in an online church service when one of the family cats decided to take centre stage. While my granddaughter, reading from sheet music on a stand, bravely played "Morning has Broken" on the mouth organ, Squidge the cat, circled the area before positioning herself between my granddaughter and the music sheet, bringing the performance to a stop. The rector and other church officials can be seen trying to maintain a straight face, while the cat was gently shoved away, and the music calmly continued.



### First Talk to Gilwern u3a on line

Though the title of the talk given by Kay Blackwell was 'Sunday School Teacher's scrap book', from the scrapbook emerged the most fascinating and extremely well informed story of the building of the new Coventry Cathedral next to the shell of the old one. The considerable and detailed research done for the talk was clear. The illustrations gave the talk real life, and here is an example, the sculpture of St Michael and Devil by Epstein which is above the magnificent broad Queen's Steps.



NIGMASSHT	STUN	TURKEY S
CE FRANK NSE	CCCCC FESTIVE	<b>CHRISTMAS</b>
PRE SENTS	HELLO SPRING HI SUMMER HIYA AUTUMN HEY WINTER	PPPPPPPP ON EARTH
STELL	A3 TORTILLA A4	<b>NIGHT</b>
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNPOQRSTUVWXYZ ABCDEFGHIJKLMNPOQRSTUVWXYZ	FIR HERE <u>HERE</u> HERE	NIGHT <u>NIGHT</u> NIGHT NIGHT <u>NIGHT</u> NIGHT NIGHT <u>NIGHT</u> NIGHT NIGHT <u>NIGHT</u> <b>NIGHT</b>
MISTLETOE XXXXX	WINTER WALKING WONDERLAND	
YYY MEN	WISHING 	DONKEY donkey 

<https://hiveofactivities.files.wordpress.com/2013/10/christmasdingbata.pdf>

**16 December talk on Zoom**

Our next talk on Zoom will be at 2pm on Wednesday 16 December, and will be given by David Skilton. It is entitled: "There is a fascination frantic in a ruin that's romantic".

**Old Lives Matter**



Gilwern u3a matters too, and seeks new members. In these difficult times when there are many living lonely lives, sometimes in lockdown, Gilwern u3a can bring interests and new friendships.

'Old Age Matters', so please seek out those who might benefit from outside involvement, even if only receiving the Newsletter and, if 'on line', benefiting from the lectures on Zoom.

Please help friends who might have difficulties with Zoom.



**Art Group and all Members:** The next Challenge is for December: **"Christmas Unwrapped"**

See the News Page of the web site for details.

**The Winner of the November Art Challenge is Anona with her 'In the heart of Texas'.**

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 Anona's work were:

*"This delicate pastel drawing shows the night sky over a lake in Texas. The sky is the focus of this picture which meets the brief. We have some texture in the landscaped edges of the lake but they do not detract from the main focus. Our attention is drawn immediately to the moon in the upper right focus point and the trail of clouds leads the eye around the picture and back to the moon. We miss nothing! I have not been to Texas but this is exactly what I imagine it to be like!*

*This month my choice is Anona's 'In the heart of Texas' for its skilful use of the medium. I love the way she has drawn those clouds flitting across the moon. Well done!"*



**Answers to The Transport Quiz:** 7/ Tilting Train 8/ Isambard Kingdom Brunel 9/ The Red Baron 10/ Marie Celeste 11/ Paddington Station 12/ Gypsy Moth (1V)

Answers to The Christmas Quiz Fir Trees; Calf; Myrrh; +2 hours; St Nicholas; William the Conqueror; Love Actually; Norway; Prancer and Vixen; The Lion; the Witch and the Wardrobe; Figgy pudding Pear; In the bleak midwinter; Six types of birds: partridge, turtle dove, French

hens, Calling birds, Geese and Swan; Jacob Marley; Tom Smith; 7<sup>th</sup> January; Advocaat and lemonade; Christmas pudding; 8

**Christmas Dingbats Answers:** Midnight mass: Mixed nuts: Turkey left over(s): Frankinsence: Festive season(cs on): White Christmas: Opening presents: Seasons greetings: Peace on earth: Tinsell( t in sell): Wrapping paper(wrap in paper): Holy night: Noel noel: Presents under the tree: 12<sup>th</sup> night: Kissing under the mistletoe: Walking in a winter wonderland: Hoe hoe hoe: Three wise men: Wishing on a star: Little donkey.



**HAPPY CHRISTMAS!**

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