



GILWERN U3A NEWSLETTER

THE UNSOCIAL TIMES

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Hello Everyone and a Happy New Year

I hope everyone enjoyed the holiday celebrations, possibly with family and friends, in a very small bubble, along with time for relaxation and reflection. Now is the time when many of us reassess our busy lives and think about what we want to accomplish or do to balance our lives in the coming year. How many resolutions are still in place??!!

Following on from the strange and dreadful year that 2020 has been we are filled with gratitude for the goodness in our lives and much anticipation for the future.

2021 has been declared the international year of peace and trust and as we look forward to the hope that the new vaccination brings may your journey through 2021 keep you in good health and bring you much happiness.

Best wishes

Karen
Chair, Gilwern u3a

Shielding

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Lynda O'K

As we continue through the Covid pandemic, mask manufacturers have had a field day and there are now masks of every shape and size available to the general public. I invested recently in a face shield which is basically a piece of Perspex attached to a plastic glasses frame. It's worth noting that before you first wear the shield, you have to remove an opaque film which can be on one or both sides when you buy them. Don't do as my neighbour did and complain to the manufacturer that she couldn't see through it. After several attempts to wear the shield, I've found out a few things:

Disadvantages:

- They are useless in the rain as you need windscreen wipers to clear them
- If, like me, you need reading glasses to read labels or anything else when you are out, then it defeats the object as you have to take the shield off to put your glasses on(although, in fairness, you can still put the shield on over your own specs)
- They do not count as a mask, so if you go inside anywhere, you have to wear a mask too
- With a shield and a mask on, it is difficult to recognise other people. I had a lovely conversation with a lady in Raglan the other day(she initiated it), and it was only after five minutes of conversation that she said, " I'm sorry, I don't know who you are!"

Advantages:

- They give you confidence that you are protected
- They are great for use at home if you are peeling onions as they prevent any tears

Putting the 'fun' in fund-raising

Hilary L

As a family we have been associated with RDA (Riding for the Disabled Association) for over 40 years. So of course there have been many calls for fund-raising a lot of which have involved horsey activities.

There was the time 25 of us rode from Brynmawr to Abergavenny on a largely mountain route, camping over night in an indoor school before riding home via the other side of the valley. It was an extremely hot weekend and on top of the Bloreng one sweaty pony decided to roll with its rider triggering a domino effect. Luckily there were no injuries. A number of other shorter sponsored rides followed.

Then for a change we designed a cross country course on land in Blaenavon and for three years held a competition with the entry fee raising the money. As organisers we weren't allowed to enter but we had to test it didn't we? Similarly, a Horse and Hound class at local shows was a great success although my 'hound' refused all fences!

On foot family and friends completed the Reading Half Marathon. Gosh we were so fit and of course said we would continue to run – well a few did and do! Another small group of us walked the 100 mile Beacons Way (Holy Mountain to Bethlehem) that was developed following the foot and mouth crisis. That was the first time I met our new Chair, Karen who joined us for a day. We said we would repeat it in the other direction as there was no time to turn around for a different view! Anyone up for it?

Even street collections can be 'fun'. One Christmas in Brynmawr the idea was to have a festive pony and carriage slowly circling the town to encourage people to drop their coins in the collecting boxes. However the pony had other ideas and would take off like a streak of lightning at the bottom of the street, repeatedly allowing just a brief glimpse of tinsel and the thunder of hooves.

Moremice

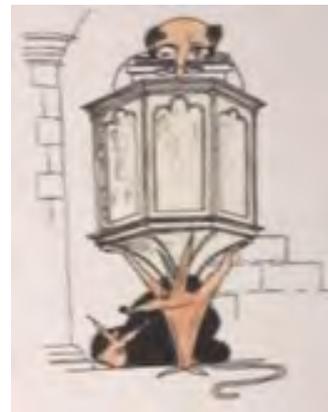
Mike J

In the November issue we had marvellous sketches of the mice preparing for Christmas, and in December they were frantically pulling a huge cracker. Today, with Christmas over, the mouse is giving a serious sermon – so serious that many of the congregation are fast asleep!

Mike Johnson has produced a book of his mice entitled **'Micellany – Annonymouse in Lockdown'**.

It's available at Road House Narrow Boats Gilwern.

All profit to charity.



Penguins

Lynda O'K

As mid- winter bites, and you are toasting your toes by a cosy fire, spare a thought for the cold footed penguins with nothing to stand on but the freezing ice and snow. Did you know that 20th January is Penguin Awareness Day? Oh yes! I kid you not! Everything you need to know is on the following web site, and there is also an online quiz that will test your knowledge of these lovely creatures.

<https://www.daysoftheyear.com/days/penguin-awareness-day/>

Gilwern u3a keeps active

Various groups such as the Walking Group, and the Art Group are continuing to keep active when and as far as they can. Many are making good use of Zoom.

Two faces of January

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Lynda O'K

Welcome January, a time for reflection and forward planning. Fittingly named after the Roman god of beginnings, doorways and endings, Janus, who guarded the gates of heaven and held access to heaven and other gods. He is usually depicted with two faces, one looking backwards and the other looking forward, since he looked into the past and the future. January can be a month of regrets about something that has happened in the past year, mixed with optimism for the future as we make new plans. After a year of Covid, maybe last year will be a year to forget. With a vaccine on the horizon, let's hope 2021 will be a year to move forward with our lives.



If you are struggling with issues that you regret or are lacking in the future planning department, then take a leaf out of the Cookie Monster's book: "Today I will live in the moment, unless it's unpleasant in which case I will eat a cookie!"



HOUSEBOUND HUGS

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Kay B

New Year Traditions

Until I was well into my 20s, I had never attended a New Year's party, having seen in new years in a totally different place, the ringing chamber of our parish church. My father was Keeper of the Tower at Nuneaton, and together with the Captain of the bellringers, he would climb into the bell chamber on New Year's Eve morning and attach muffles to the clappers of the bells. The muffles can best be described as leather 'kneecaps' that are fitted around half of the spherical clapper, so that when rung through 360°, one side would be metal against metal (open) and the other leather against metal (half-muffled).

We would ring half-muffled from 11pm until 11.45pm for the Watchnight service, to honour the dying of the year. Then during the quarter of an hour until midnight, Dad and the Captain would do the dangerous job of removing the muffles from bells that were in the upright position, ready to ring out and welcome the New Year. Health and Safety was not even considered!

There were always complaints from the people in the flats opposite, but the Vicar responded by saying the church had been there centuries before they built the flats. At midnight, as well as 'our' bells, we could hear others from other churches, and these would be joined by sirens and hooters from factories in the area.

Footnote: bells are only rung fully-muffled, ie with leather 'kneecaps' totally covering the clapper, for the death of a monarch or Bishop of their diocese.

Quotes from famous people

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Kay B

I had a rose named after me and I was very flattered. But I was not pleased to read the description in the catalogue: - 'No good in a bed, but fine against a wall.'

- *Eleanor Roosevelt* -

Last week, I stated this woman was the ugliest woman I had ever seen. I have since been visited by her sister, and now wish to withdraw that statement.

- *Mark Twain* -

The secret of a good sermon is to have a good beginning and a good ending; and to have the two as close together as possible

- *George Burns* -

More quotes to come!

A crowded New Year in the desert

David H

On my second Christmas holiday trip to the Libyan Desert in the early 1960s to map the long escarpment of the Hamada el Homra in the Libyan Desert, my guide and I with our two camels found ourselves three days walk from the oasis of Mizda (about 100 miles from the coast). We noticed when ten miles away from a desert water hole under the escarpment that our two male camels were going faster and faster. Eventually we discovered why. A herd of female camels was being fed on a patch of pasture beneath the escarpment. It was difficult to get our bull camels past the female herd. However, once safely past, my camel became ever more shirty and suddenly without warning charged forward and bit Ahamed's camel on the backside, at which poor Ahamed was thrown into the air, happily landing back in the saddle with no injury or damage to either Ahamed or camel. We travelled on peacefully to the next known water supply.

That night, at the well, we replenished our goat skin water bags and found a rather rough gang of six working to give the well a concrete surround. We stayed there the night with them, all huddling in a circle round the fire in their 'room' under a huge overhanging rock – almost a cave providing shelter from the cold wind. However, we wished we had gone on and camped separately, for while Ahamed got local news from these ruffians, the large part of the evening was devoted to the boss fiddling with the new fangled, tiresome transistor radio, maximum volume, changing station the whole evening, killing conversation dead. The noise destroyed the beauty of the desert night. This was clearly a huge change to the way of Bedouin life in the early 1960s.



Next morning we bade our farewells and continued with the rough survey in the peace the desert can hold. Perhaps my map will be shown in the next issue.

Ahamed always insisted on loading my camel

Give it Some Wellie

Lynda O'K

Recently deciding to invest in a new pair of wellingtons in preparation for a wet winter, my husband and I made a trip to Nicholls in Crickhowell to consider the options. Finding a suitable one to try on, the assistant directed me to a small leather stool amongst the displays which I could sit on. After a brief moment, and deciding that they were the correct size, I tried in vain to get the boot off. As my husband enthusiastically tried to help remove the wellington, I found myself, along with the stool to which I now clung, being dragged across the shop by my foot much to the amusement of another shopper. She bent over and whispered that she had a pair of the same wellies, and although they were very comfortable when on, they were devils to get off. She recounted that on one occasion when she was at home alone, she had managed to get one wellie off but had been trapped in the second one until her son came to release her. The advice from the sales assistant was to invest in a "wellie jack".

Has anyone else been trapped by clothing?

New Year in New York

Harriet H

Following my New York Christmas, the beginning of 1963 was less auspicious. It had its good points though. I had found a successful flat-share with two nice, well off and generous women who bequeathed me food. In return I did the housework – something to which they were strangers, demonstrated when I switched on the steam iron only for cockroaches to crawl out over my hand. 'Roaches' were ubiquitous in New York buildings. At Scribner's Bookstore, the Christmas rush being over, I was not needed in the children's section, but was on the general floor which, in the dreary post-Christmas period, was boring and only enlivened by the company of Dolores, still selling children's books, and Art from the packers' department. We were a happy and united trio – once playing tag on fifth avenue during the lunch hour.

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The news from home was worrying though, and not only because of the appalling weather. I was finally told that the operation my mother had had just before Christmas was for breast cancer, and while I was assured that it had been successful, her less frequent letters suggested otherwise. At the beginning of February my father rang and told me that she was dying, and in an adrenaline-fuelled burst of efficiency I cleared the necessary paperwork, and flew home. I had met David just before I left for the States and we had been corresponding. Now, he and a colleague had cleaned the house ready for my return and David had arranged a vase of Freesias in my room. I arrived the day before my mother's funeral, my sadness leavened by a happy courtship.

Winner of the Art Challenge December

The winner was Tony Godfrey. His *Christmas Unwrapped* is called "Yuletide unwrapped" and does what it says on the tin!

The Judge's comments are:

The composition keeps your interest and then some with so much to look at and digest. The Christmas wrapping paper landscape reveals the nativity scene in delightful detail. Reminding us of the core of this celebration. The Santa, decorations, trees, stockings and robin remind of all the things we love about this season. Great picture Tony.



The art challenge for January will be "A Winter Wonderland"

To all our Members and readers:

**A HAPPY
NEW YEAR
&
Stay safe!**