



GILWERN u3a NEWSLETTER

***THE UNSOCIAL TIMES* (Anniversary issue)**

Issue 17: April 2021

Hello Everyone

As I write this introduction the sunshine is streaming through my kitchen window. As I look out onto the garden it is alight with the colours of daffodils, irises, croci and early tulips. Spring is well under way and we can all clearly feel the gradual change in the seasons as the days are getting longer. Spring is a time for new starts, about planning for the year ahead and especially for getting outside our homes after the long winter of hibernation.

Following the recent announcements of the Welsh Government our gardens will become even more of a haven as we can again meet up with friends and family members. As the Easter holiday approaches I hope you enjoy some time together and perhaps take time to read our latest newsletter in the spring sunshine.

Best wishes

Karen
Chair, Gilwern u3a

What do you really value?

Kay B

During the 24 years I owned Standby Secretarial Services in Abergavenny, I collected many articles which amused and interested me. Here is one of those articles:-

Imagine there is a bank which credits your account each morning with £86,400. It carries no balance from day to day, allows you to keep no cash balance, and every evening cancels whatever part of the amount you had failed to use during the day. What would you do? Draw every penny, of course.

Well, everyone has such a bank. Its name is TIME.

Every morning it credits you with 86,400 seconds. Every night it writes off, as lost, whatever of this you have failed to invest to good purpose. It carries over no balance. It allows no overdraft. And each day it opens a new account for you. Each night it burns the remains of the day. If you fail to use the day's deposits, the loss is yours. There is no going back. There is no drawing against the 'tomorrow'. You must live in the present on today's deposits. Invest it so as to get the utmost in health, happiness and success! The clock is running. Make the most of today.

To realise the value of one year, ask a student who has failed a grade.

To realise the value of a month, ask a mother who has given birth to a premature baby.

To realise the value of a week, ask an editor of a weekly newspaper.

To realise the value of one day, ask a daily wage labourer who has children to feed.

To realise the value of one hour, ask the lovers who are waiting to meet.

To realise the value of a minute, ask a person who has missed a train.

To realise the value of a second, ask a person who has avoided an accident.

To realise the value of a millisecond, ask the athlete who has won a silver Olympic medal.

Treasure every moment that you have! Treasure every moment you shared with someone special. Treasure the growing up and growing old together. Remember that time waits for no one. Yesterday is history. Today is a gift, that's why it is called the PRESENT!

Be careful whom you marry

Lynda O'K

I'm Irish by marriage but have never seen the sky over Ireland, and neither has my husband. Historically, his family came to the UK because of the Irish potato famine of 1845-1852.

I was aghast this week to read that our family name is included in a secret list of banned names that was used by Pontins to prevent undesirables such as gypsies and ne'er-do-wells from using their holiday resorts. Looking at the full list of names though, I think we were in good company.

The list would have excluded:

- Susan Boyle (singer) and Danny Boyle (stage director)
- Johnny Cash (singer) and Pat Cash (tennis player)
- Alan Carr (comedian) and Jimmy Carr (comedian)
- Spike Milligan (comedian) where would we have been without his quotes?
- Jimmy Connors (tennis player) and Sinead O'Connor (singer)
- All the Nolan sisters!
- Shayne Ward (singer and actor) and Simon Ward (actor)
- Not forgetting the ex boss of the Bank of England, Mark Carney

All I can say is "their loss", we'd have had a great time if they'd let us in, as the entertainment at Pontins would have gone up more than a notch!

A brief update on the start of my first bird listening Spring

Hilary L

I heard a Chiff Chaff for the first time this week. It is supposed to mean winter is on the run! Tell that to the latest weather front. You rarely see them, as they sing from high in the canopy and I have probably heard it before but I wouldn't have recognised it without my new 'bird listening skill'.



I wrote about the delayed arrival of the swallows in issue 5 of Unsocial Times in May 2020. Let's hope they have a better journey this year and I will post the date they arrive back in Maesygartha in 2021.

(image taken from RSPB web site)

SWEDISH MADE SIMPLE

Kay B

(From "Fork Handles – the very best of Ronnie Barker")

We will use only one letter for each word, for example, instead of putting *Hello*, you will see *L O – easy*.

To get the best from this lesson you must say the letters out loud.

SCENE: Restaurant with Waiter (W) serving Customer (C).

C: L O
W: L O
C: R U B C?
W: S, V R B C
C: F U N E X?
W: S, V F X
C: F U N E M?
W: S
C: OK – M N X. F U N E T?
W: 1 T?
C: 1 T
W: OK – M X N T
(Shouts to kitchen) M X N T 4 1!
Waitress: V F N 10 E X
C: U Z U F X
W: Y F N U N E X?
Waitress: I F E 10 M
W: Stupid woman

The Creative Writing Group will this month write about someone who has been really important to them. Details can be found on their web page.



A dog's tale

Lynda O'K

Many a dog owner will tell you that their dog can almost talk to them, such is their love and understanding. The following notice was seen along the canal at Gilwern which leads me to believe that not only can they talk, but they can read too!

Every dog has its census day

Lynda O'K

The ten yearly census was on 21st March, and mostly it was done digitally, but I can recall two occasions when I worked as a census officer in 1981 and 1991. In 1981, I was allocated the Beaufort area in Ebbw Vale. In those days, the census forms were hand delivered and then collected at a later date with the hope that they had been fully completed by the residents. We had to check that every section had been completed before we accepted the form back. This was both interesting and time consuming. At one house, I can vividly remember being bitten on the hand by an angry dog.

In 1991, I was allocated Bedlinog and Nelson areas, and although there were a few streets in my area, most of the area consisted of outlying farms. Wary of fingers being bitten again, this time, I wore gloves. It did me no good. On the first farm I visited, I was chased by a flock of nasty looking geese. Fortunately, as an ex-county hockey player, I was able to outrun them and swerve successfully to avoid being caught. I wasn't so lucky at the next farm, where, when I approached a farmer's wife opening a barn door, a sheep dog flew out and attached itself to my knee with its teeth. In the dog's defence, it was protecting it's young in the barn. I limped back to my car and drove straight to A & E where I was patched up and given an anti-tetanus jab in the other leg. I didn't know which leg to limp on. All I can say is thank goodness for modern technology – online census is fine by me.

What a sad life!

Kay B

What a variety of sad stories our *Absinthe Drinker* evoked, giving the new Creative Writing Group an opportunity to unleash their imaginations. And unleash them, they did!



It's obvious that the woman in the painting is unhappy, so in one story she's planning to run away from a loveless marriage; in another, she was grieving the loss of a child whilst becoming addicted to absinthe. Another had her widowed and trying to avoid the unwelcome attentions of her father-in-law, and one story even had her meeting her on-line date for the first time!

Who she really was, we'll never know, but Degas didn't realise what he was starting when it comes to creative writing and Gilwern u3a. That's the beauty of creative writing – no limits are set on the imagination.

The challenge for the 18th March meeting was poetry, and using the title of a Judith Viorst poem "***If I were in charge of the world,***" is to write your own poem in any format, telling everyone what you would do if you were in charge of the world. (And no, you can't use the lyrics to Harry Secombe's song "*If I ruled the world*", even if it would help).

The next Zoom meeting of the Creative Writing Group will be on Tuesday 1 April, so if you would like to join in and spend a very pleasant hour or so, please contact Kay Blackwell on newkaybee1806@aol.com. Recent efforts can be seen on the Creative Writing page of the web site with links to the stories. They are all so different and interesting.

A child's London experience in WW2 (Age seven to thirteen)

Maurice G

My parents lived in an Aldwych Building flat, part of the London County Council social housing scheme. The location was excellent, near the Winter Garden Theatre stage door allowing us to see famous stars and sometimes get their autographs, Lincoln's Inn Fields and Covent Gardens etc. all providing a good environment for a growing child.

My first wartime experience was at the age of six when the LCC decided that all children should be evacuated. We were first bussed to a small town near Cambridge for a couple of weeks where I was billeted with an old lady who spoiled me rotten. We were then transferred to Cambridge where myself and another boy were billeted with a family with two girls of their own. I missed the old lady but I can now say that I was educated at Cambridge.

My father's employers purchased a small holding in Hampshire, possibly to avoid call up for the army since they would be classed as farmers. They moved my parents to the farm and I was rescued from evacuation. For the next few years I was a country boy learning to live in close proximity to pigs, goats and poultry and where we had to walk a mile and a half to school where the boys urinal consisted of a trough filled with dried horse manure. I have since learned from a recent TV programme that in ancient times this was how one of the ingredients of gunpowder was prepared (makes one think).

In 1942 with the blitz easing up my parents were moved to a house in Welbeck street Marylebone. This was an up-market district, two streets down from Harley street and around the corner from the Wigmore Hall and the Times Book Club. We lived in the basement and the residents were in serviced flats above. They were a very mixed lot and some were very memorable. On the top floor was a Mrs M, an upper-class sex worker providing evidence of adultery for divorce cases, amongst other things, and "Dizzy" a ballet dancer and a kept woman who's mentor lived in the hotel opposite. Each week she posted her rent through the main door in an envelope, also Ms H who managed an American bar in Berkeley Square and married a Yank but died on Ellis Isle waiting to enter America.

Others were more normal but did include Ms P and her partner Squadron Leader C W who became the British Air Attaché in Ceylon and Mrs B who gave harpsichord concerts at the Wigmore Hall.

To be continued in the May Newsletter.

Anyone else willing to give a similar account?

HOUSEBOUND HUGS No 17 Creatures of Habit

by Kay B

Most of us run our lives along time-honoured routines, and lockdowns have accentuated just how boring these routines can be. In 'normal' times, we could set our clocks by the 7.50am departure of a neighbour taking students to college, or at the other end of the day, the 5.40pm return of another neighbour from work.

But one steadfast routine has been a neighbour's morning walk with his dog – rain or shine, summer or winter – and as he passes along the footpath above us, he always waves and continues on his way, never, NEVER, returning along the same path. This intrigued us initially, until we learned that he did the same circuit every day.

But after Christmas, something changed.

In early January he walked past and waved as usual but after only a few minutes later, he went back the way he'd come – most unusual. "Perhaps he's forgotten something," we thought. The next few mornings were normal, but the day after, he passed us and immediately about-turned and returned home. Why?

The next morning, while eating our toast and marmalade, we carefully watched his progress, and then glimpsed a black shape closely followed by a black and white one streaking after him and his dog. He was being followed!

The answer was simple. Two kittens had joined the family just before Christmas and these went everywhere the dog went, shadowing his every movement. On spotting his followers and worrying that the kittens might get as far as the road, the dog walker retraced his route to take the kittens home. It hasn't worked, apparently, as one kitten now accompanies him and his dog every morning and completes the circuit with them.

We do so enjoy watching out for them every breakfast time because we're all creatures of habit in some ways.



One day we will see the grandchildren again!

Mike J

Tea in the Sahara

David H

On arrival in Agadez, a main oasis in Niger, the Southern Sahara, my friend and I lived some way out of the oasis under a lone tree, going into the oasis every day to obtain visas etc before setting off North into the desert mountains of Tamgak. A Tuareg family came and talked to us in the evenings, we speaking bad French, and every day learning more Tamashek (language) from them.

They taught us their customs such as their very formal greetings and that of drinking tea. When on camel we would offer or be offered tea to the very occasional Tuareg we came across in the desert. Tea and sugar were vital commodities to them. We would squat round a fire, perhaps charcoal if available. In brief, the rich black tea would be boiled in the small pot as in the photograph, and ample sugar would be added, and then the host would pour the contents into small glasses. Appreciation of the strong, rich tea is shown with loud sipping noises while slowly drinking and talking. After a while the pot is refilled with water sometimes mint or ground nuts being added. Finally there is the third and even weaker glass for all, often much sweeter and even more delicious. It is rude to leave before all glasses are empty and cold.



The tradition is similar in the Arabic north of the Sahara, as I was to discover on various camel expeditions. I recall that earlier in life, in Tokyo as a national serviceman on leave from the war in Korea, having the opportunity of a tea ceremony there, with even stricter protocol, but that's another story! Please, how about some accounts from members of other customs learnt?

Bluebirds

Kay B

Anyone who enjoys knitting knows how boring knitting a sweater or scarf can be. But what about knitting a pheasant or, like this photo, a great tit on the nest feeding young?

The clever knitting pattern designer is Alan Dart and his patterns feature woodland creatures, dogs, cats and many more. Visit his website at alandart.co.uk to see his wonderful creations, and get inspired and have a go!



Probation Part 3 – Bow Street Magistrates Court

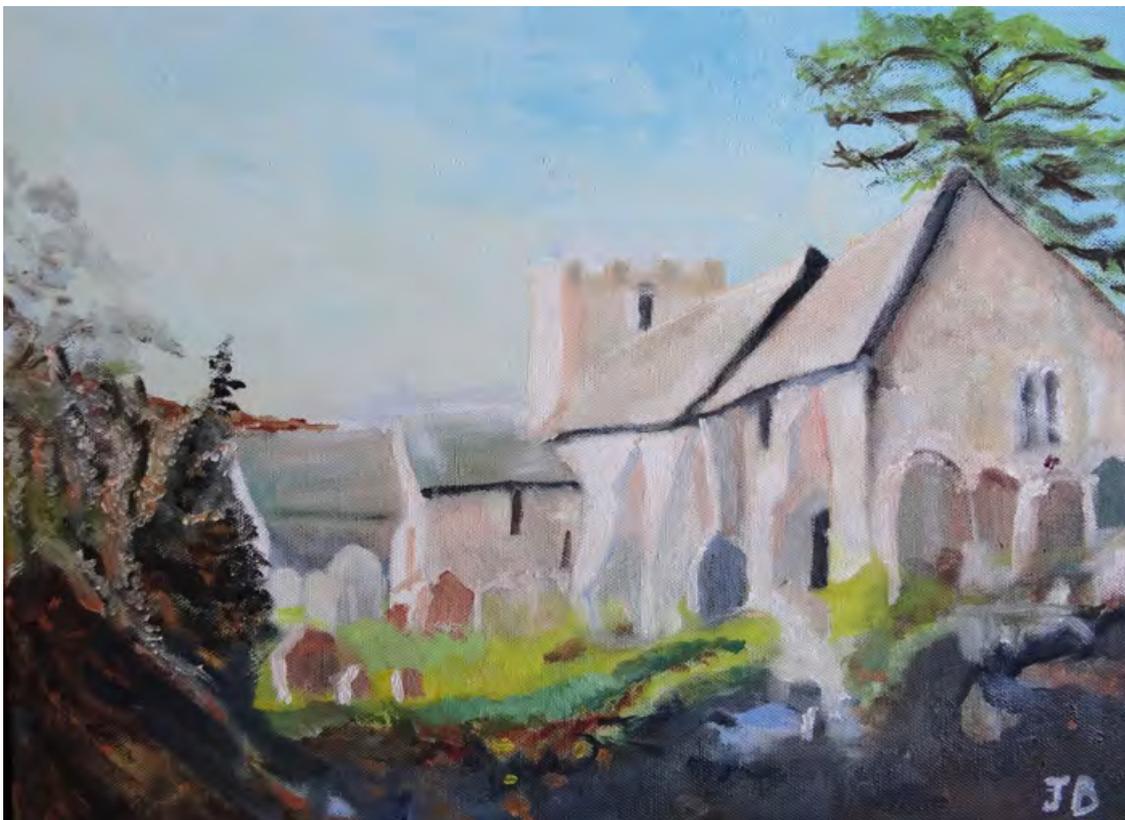
Harriet H

I found myself in a crowded and unprepossessing office in Longacre, handy for Soho, the opera and Drury Lane. I was a member of a court team, but as a new probation officer, I had to carry a caseload as well as doing court duty and writing what were then Social Enquiry Reports. Bow Street, hallowed by its history and the supervision of Sir David Hopkin, the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate, actually saw very little serious crime. Being drunk was then still a crime, and as many as 30 could be on the list on any given morning, most of them given a small fine 'or one day' meaning they were immediately released since they had spent at least part of the night in the cells. Occasionally, one would become hopeful of reform and Sir David would demand that they be assisted, but it hardly ever worked. Otherwise, there was a stream of drug addicts and petty thieves, many of them homeless and struggling in 1980s London. We scooped up those that we could and tried to introduce some stability into their lives, but it was an uphill struggle. Drug addicts were, of necessity, devious, and ran rings round me. Many were like poor Stevie who was Denis Nilson's final victim. Rare real crime belonged to the Chinese who would be in court for being part of large gambling 'triads' or murder, never for ordinary things like theft and burglary. There was a group of men charged with a massive VAT fraud involving gold on their way to the crown court who kept breaching their bail conditions where the sums concerned were eye popping, and there was George Best sitting shrunken in the dock to be given three months for driving while drunk. I tactfully refrained from brightly asking if there was anything I could do for him as was customary for those sent down.

Please share some of your reflections of earlier life through this Newsletter. Editor.

Monthly Art Challenge, March: Judge's decision and comments

Jim introduces the picture with a shaded foreground and lets us advance into the picture towards the church and the sunshine. There is just a hint of mountain scenery beyond to entice us into the churchyard. The colour palette is warm and pleasing. A most enjoyable picture that meets the brief. For my choice this month I take Jim's Cwmyoy Church. Lovely Picture!"



The challenge for April

It will be "Down by the riverside", and Lynda will be preparing the usual helpful notes for us very shortly. They will appear on the News page of the web site. Open to all!