

mirthy→

# EXPLORER



**MEMORY AND  
REMINISCENCE**

Issue.3

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2022

# EDITOR'S NOTE



*Dear Explorers,*

For me, winter always delivers feelings of deep nostalgia, and I believe it is a time for many to reminisce about the past.

Over the next couple of months, Mirthy will be celebrating and commemorating with you as we host all sorts of seasonal events!

This issue is jam-packed with community submissions and I have been so pleased to receive so many beautiful pieces from you all, so please do keep them coming for future issues of the *Mirthy Explorer*!

*Mahalia Connor*  
Head of Community Engagement



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# Women Writers who changed the course of English Literature

with **Kathleen Jones**



Tuesday 1st November at 11:30am

*'Tempests Dark and Wild'*

**Mary Shelley (1797 - 1851)**

Tuesday 8th November at 11:30am

*'A Heart Like a Singing Bird'*

**Christina Rossetti (1830 - 1894)**

Tuesday 15th November at 11:30am

*'A Self Behind a Self Concealed'*

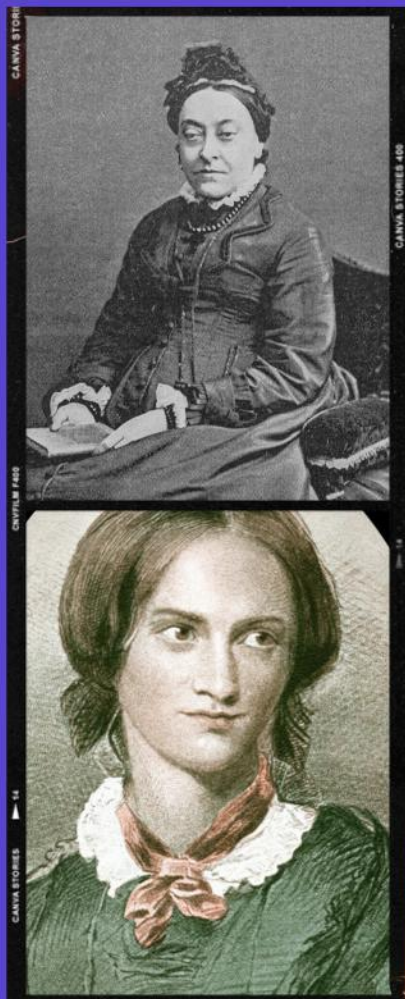
**Emily Dickinson (1830 - 1886)**

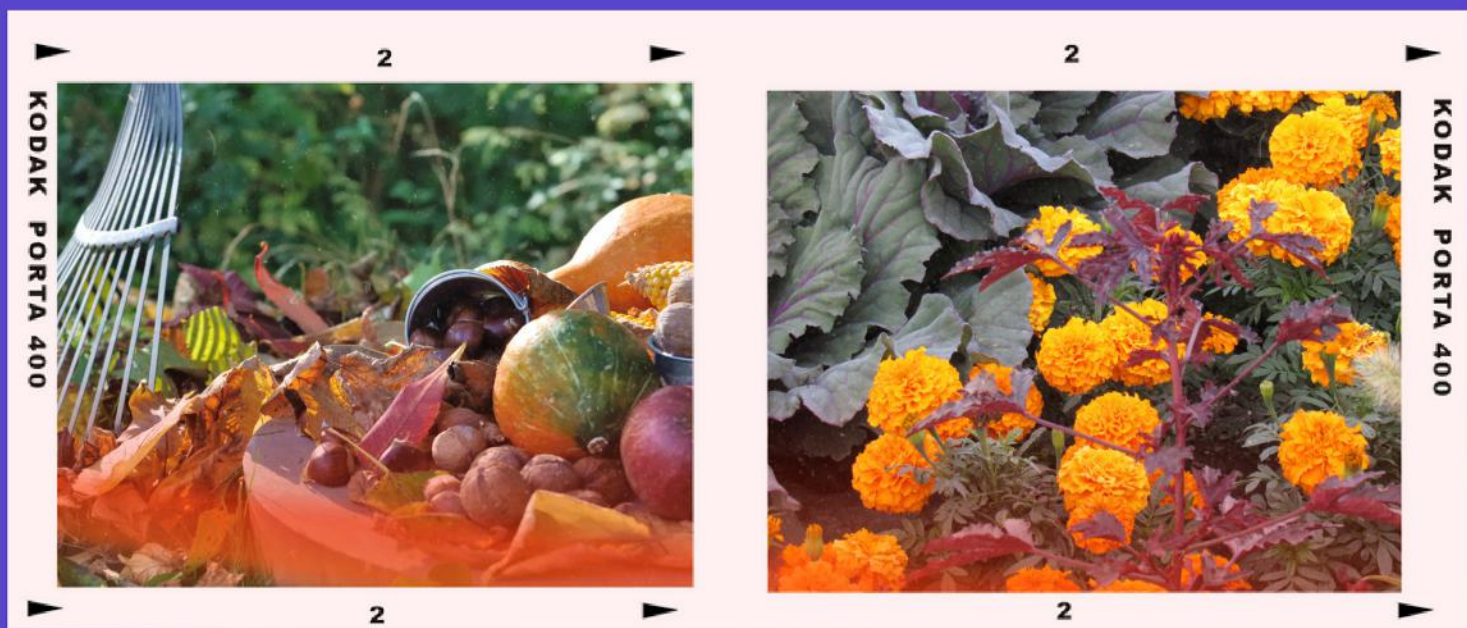
Tuesday 22nd November at 11:30am

*'The Business of a Woman's Life'*

**Charlotte Bronte (1816 - 1855)**

**04**





# Great English Gardeners

Discover some key characters in English horticultural history. We will learn how these designers created some of the most beautiful gardens around England. Get to know the people behind the plant and gain more of an understanding into how these designers have extended the creative limits in horticulture.

**Visit Warley Place:** *the vision of Ellen Willmott* (Tuesday 8th November at 4pm)

**Visit Hidcote:** *A 'place to get away from the world'* (Tuesday 15th November at 4pm)

**Visit Sissinghurst:** *A garden with a varied past* (Tuesday 22nd November at 4pm)



# Monarchy over the Millennia



*This three-part series looks at the global political system of monarchy through the ages. Starting with the first ever recorded King and taking you through to the still existing royal families around the world today.*

## **The Ancient World**

*Wednesday 16th November at 7:30pm*

We start with the ancient world where you get to find out about the first emperor of China and how democratic Athens and republican Rome originally had kings.

## **The Mediaeval World**

*Wednesday 23rd November at 7:30pm*

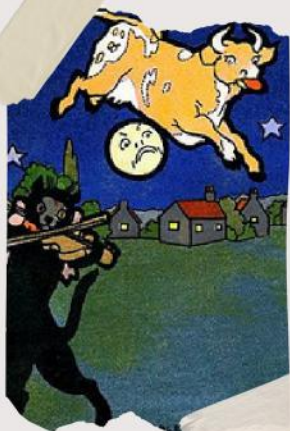
The second talk covers the mediaeval era where some were feared warlords and others were misunderstood poets.

## **20th century and beyond**

*Wednesday 30th November at 7:30pm*

The final part looks at the evolving position of monarchy in the 20th century and beyond. Some of them ended in violence while a few still thrive today.

# The History, Meanings and Origins of...



## Nursery Rhymes

Hey Diddle Diddle - History & Meaning  
of Nursery Rhymes

**Monday 28th November at 4pm**



## Sayings

Mad as a Hatter - Origins & Meanings  
of Sayings

**Monday 5th December at 7pm**

## Superstitions

Black Cats, New Moons & Ladders -  
The Origins of Superstitions

**Thursday 15th December at 11:30am**

## Christmas

When Christmas was Cancelled! - A  
History of Christmas

**Thursday 22nd December at 4pm**

with **Sandy Leong**

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# Remember Mr Motivator?

*Time for a throwback,  
with Mr Motivator's 'The  
Fizzical Experience' at  
Mirthy, every Wednesday  
at 6:30pm.*





# MOTIVATION CLUB

A movement class for all abilities and any level of fitness. A must for the whole family; it is about inclusion, no one is left out! It is safe, effective but most of all fun. A class that sizzles with laughter from learning about the position of your body, muscles and balance, this is an experience not to be missed!

Just try it once and you will be hooked. You can take part from a chair or standing. The choice is yours, follow Mr M or Palmer (Mrs M) and you will be inspired.

So what are you waiting for? Register now for this free experience!

Be there every Wednesday for 30 minutes of just what your body and soul needs and enjoy the curative power of exercise.



# Health & Wellbeing



At Mirthy we have something for your health & wellbeing every week day, from Monday to Friday. From Laughter Yoga to gentle Seated Pilates and Stretch Classes, to Meditation, Tai Chi, Standing Pilates and Singing Workshops!

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## *Morning Mindfulness*

Join Claire every Thursday at 9am

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When a friend or family member changes their phone or address have you noticed how hard it is to recall the new one? Learning new information often highlights how difficult it can be to replace old memories.

### *The Link Between Mindfulness and Memory*

Mindfulness is the ability to focus on the present moment and tune out distractions such as random memories, or worries about a job or relationship. It is frequently used to treat patients with depression, anxiety and other mood disorders, but recently a study found that it could also help relieve many other conditions, including age-related memory loss and post-traumatic stress disorder.

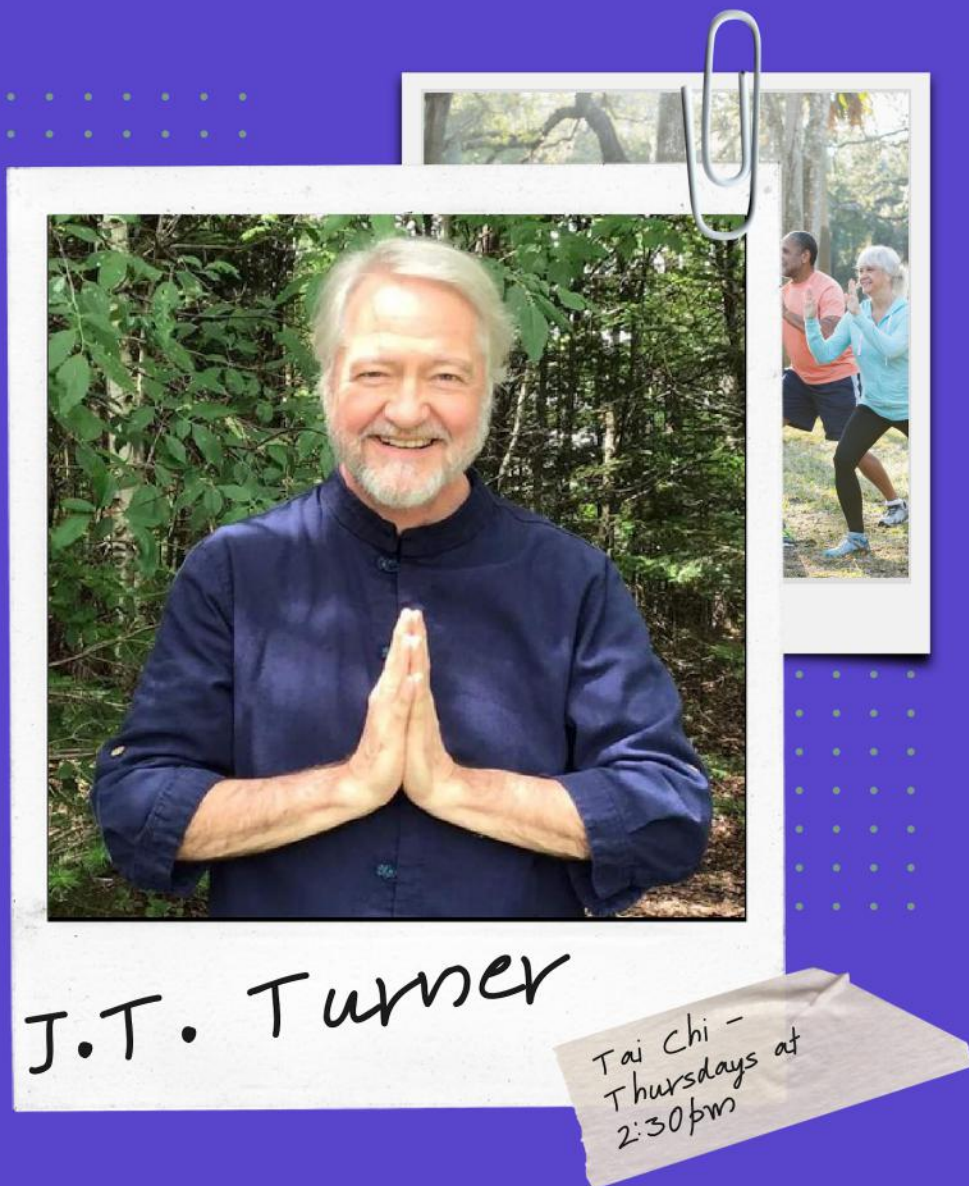
The study, found that mindfulness training boosts the density of the hippocampus, which is a region of the brain that plays a key role in both working memory and long-term memory.

### *Using Mindfulness to Promote Brain Health*

The link between hippocampus size and working memory in healthy adults is important because working memory influences many other cognitive functions, like problem-solving, language comprehension and reasoning. All of those vital brain functions could be improved by reducing proactive interference with mindfulness meditation.

In addition to helping improve memory, mindfulness has been studied & shown over & over again to help with low mood, stress, anxiety, sleep, chronic pain. The list of wellbeing benefits really does go on & on.

[\*Click here to sign up to Claire's monthly hellomindful mailing list to keep up to date with upcoming offerings\*](#)



# Can Tai Chi and Qigong help your memory?

Tai Chi is a mindful movement system from China. It has been used around the world for thousands of years to help reduce stress, prevent falls, and improve focus, balance, circulation, & mobility. This session will focus on simple Tai Chi exercises.

As a Tai Chi and Qigong Instructor, I am often asked about the benefits of these mindful movement practices. Research shows these practices to be associated with increased energy, aerobic capacity, and flexibility, as well as decreased joint pain, stress and anxiety. But can Tai Chi and Qigong also help memory?

Tai Chi and Qigong are gentle, non-impact exercises that can support well-being for all ages. Due to the type of movement involved, also called "moving meditation," Tai Chi and Qigong can be particularly beneficial for aging participants. We now have excellent evidence that memory improvement is among those benefits.

Both Tai Chi and Qigong include balance work, body awareness, and repetitions or sequences that have been shown to improve cognition in aging adults.

A study published in The Atlantic in 2012 looked at two groups of people in their 60's and 70's. One group was a control group, and the other practiced Tai Chi 3 times a week. The control group showed normal brain shrinkage for that age group, while the Tai Chi group showed a significant increase in brain volume, plus improved memory and cognitive test scores. The study concluded that Tai Chi practice could enlarge the brain, and assist older people to retain good memory skills, and prevent or delay the onset of dementia. Subsequent studies have supported these findings.

I am not a doctor, but have both personally experienced and witnessed in my students the many benefits of Tai Chi and Qigong. If we think about these practices, it makes sense that they can help our memory. Slow, repeated movements help our brain function, as does remembering a sequence or pattern that we want to follow in our movement. Deep relaxing breathing, also a component of Tai Chi and Qigong, can further boost brain function and memory.

One of the most common things that doctors suggest to help with cognitive function is regular physical activity. For some of us, physical activity can be a challenge. Tai Chi and Qigong are simple, gentle movements that can be adapted for any ability and body type. The exercises require minimal room and no equipment. For many people facing the challenges of aging, Tai Chi can be an accessible solution for getting increased movement.

So, as you think about preserving your memory skills: remember Tai Chi and Qigong!

*J.T. Turner*

# Memories of loved ones

Review from Laughter Yoga  
(3rd October 2022)



"My mother sadly passed away two weeks ago but just before her final weeks I shared Sylvia's class with her. This was the first time she had heard of Laughter Yoga. It was a joy to watch her belly laugh, something she had not done for a long time as she was in pain and struggling with her illness. As a result, I now have a really nice memory of the time we spent laughing and relaxing together. This I am sure will help me get over the sense of loss I currently feel. I was unsure if I could participate in today's class, but I did and found it so therapeutic. Seeing Sylvia and the other participants really lifted my mood."

**14**

**Jeannette Drever**

*In memory of Norah Jones*

*“Why should I take part in Laughter Yoga?”*

First of all, there's no should. There's never a should!

However, over the years I've been facilitating Laughter Yoga classes, I've been asked exactly that question:

“Why should I take part in Laughter Yoga?” Followed by: “I really don't like yoga. I'm not bendy enough, I am Christian and don't like the concept of yoga” – or indeed: “I already practise yoga at my local study or online with Mirthy”.

OK, think again.

Laughter Yoga is not really yoga!

Did that come as a surprise to you?

I admit, the name might be a bit misleading, because the emphasis is indeed on the laughter. So to clarify, it's laughter, some stretching with conscious in and out breaths and a short grounding meditation to finish the lesson.

In my classes we simply laugh joyfully just to increase our mood and overall well-being. Yes, it might feel silly and some people are conscious at the beginning of a class, but as laughter is so contagious, these participants generally join in after a while – which is delightful to witness.

The magic happens when you allow yourself to join in, laugh wholeheartedly and enjoy the process – just like a child who giggles for no reason and is having great fun. Simply forget the outside world for the half an hour that you spend with the Mirthy Laughter community.

And the rewards?

You'll get pleasure from doing an activity with like-minded people, I bet your mood will increase, your day might feel more easy-going and you will burn some calories as we also call Laughter Yoga an internal jogging.

So, who's up for a wee run?

***Join Sylvia on alternate Mondays (from 31st October) at 10am***

# Mirthy and Rock Choir team up to offer Vocal Yoga in November, as studies prove it counteracts memory loss



This November, we are proud to be working with Rock Choir once again to offer our members an inspiring and relaxing vocal yoga session with Rock Choir leader, Katie Hockley.

Many hundreds of Mirthy members are already enjoying the benefits of singing with Rock Choir online. We are excited to take this a step further and, on Friday, 4th November at 11:30 am, offer a specialised event in vocal yoga, which according to recent studies, has direct links to improved cognition and halting memory loss.

## *What is Vocal Yoga?*

The point of vocal yoga is to strengthen breath control and improve singing ability. Effective breath control is intrinsic to great singing, but more than this, controlling our breathing enables us to calm both the mind and body.

To ensure vocal yoga is accessible to everyone, it is predominantly a seated practice. During the sessions, the leader will work through breathing, stretching and meditative techniques to ensure you spend a little time on each area of importance. In addition, each session is book-ended with an uplifting Rock Choir song, either from the past catalogue or currently being taught in classes.

The session also uses breathing techniques to get into a space where the voice can step into its fullest expression. Then, together with specific vocal exercises, it can correct many physiological and psychological problems through the practice of strengthening and trusting our own sound.

## *Vocal Yoga Aiding Memory*

Fear and stress cause us to forget. We make light of 'brain fade' or 'senior moments', but long term, left unchecked, fear and stress can damage the brain, resulting in the loss of cognitive abilities.

Clinical studies suggest vocal yoga, meditation, and breathing exercises can help to treat memory loss, improving spatial-visual memory and verbal fluency.

Vocal yoga has also been associated with reduced anxiety. Meditation and breathing exercises practised regularly can reduce stress, calm the mind and help us to focus our mental resources on the task at hand. As a result, attention and concentration improve, allowing us to process information more efficiently, and learn new information more effectively.

Ultimately, the practices learned in vocal yoga allow us to settle the mind, and in a calm state, we can enable neural pathways the chance to re-fire with coordinated movement.

## *Just Keep Singing*

Scientists have long known that music helps increase cognitive functions, including memory, speech, attention and verbal intelligence. A 2015 commentary by Carmela Maltrone and Elvira Brattico, published in the Journal of Alzheimer's Disease & Parkinsonism, notes that practising music helps prevent the death of brain cells normally related to ageing.

Regular musical activities, like singing, also help reduce the risk of dementia in healthy older adults and delay the onset in those suffering from the disease already.

Scientists say this happens because the parts of the brain that process art and music are located near the places where memories are stored. Alzheimer's doesn't seem to affect those parts, according to studies, enabling advanced sufferers to sing songs from many years past, despite their debilitating disease.

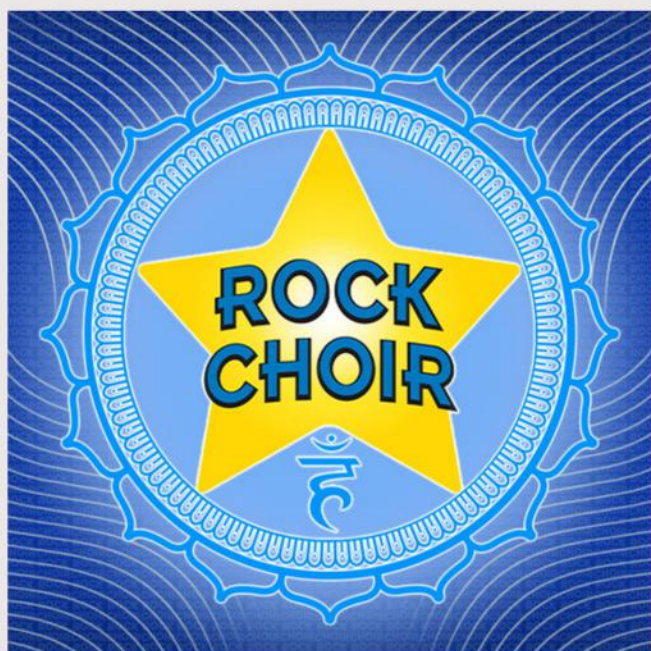
Vocal yoga combines the cognitive benefits of the two disciplines of music and tantra to offer recipients a tremendous boost to both physical health and well-being. In other words, vocal yoga is good for the mind and soul, regardless of age.

### *Taking Vocal Yoga on Tour*

For over a year, Rock Choir members have benefited from the vocal yoga teachings of Katie Hockley, as an extra benefit to their membership, and it has gained a considerable following. In response, and to allow members to experience the full benefits of being immersed in vocal yoga, Katie recently started offering week-long yoga retreats to Greece (where she is based). Unsurprisingly, the first retreat, which has just taken place, has already sold out, but three further retreats are planned for 2023, taking place in spring, early summer, and autumn, with an exclusive discount for Rock Choir members. More details on the upcoming retreats will be available soon via the website - <https://www.karmaretreats.eu/>

### *Vocal Yoga Launching on Mirthy*

Mirthy members will be able to feel the full benefits of vocal yoga themselves first-hand this November, as we offer an exclusive hour-long event. Please join Katie Hockley for what will no doubt be an inspirational session on Friday, 4th November at 11:30 am, which you can access directly from your membership area.



**Join Katie on  
Friday 4th  
November at  
11:30am GMT**

# Still need convincing that singing is good for you?

Check what these studies discovered...

## *Music keeps your brain young*

After just three months of weekly 30-minute piano lessons, a group of adults (65-85) showed increased processing speed and memory retention compared to a control group that didn't have the lessons. In other words, with the only difference being a weekly music lesson, the participants slowed down were significantly brain-trained and showed 'younger' brain traits than those who didn't have the weekly musical input.

## *And it keeps your ears young too*

Researchers found that older musicians who listened to and/or made music on at least a weekly or bi-weekly basis didn't develop the usual aging in their ears that adults of the same age do. They were more likely to retain hearing well into their later years.

## *Sing lots and then listen lots*

In a study looking into the relationship between Alzheimers and singing, researchers found that those under 80 or with early or mid stage memory loss benefitted most from singing themselves - actually open their mouths and trying to sing along to vocal exercises or songs. But then, in the later stages, it was found to be more beneficial to just sit back and listen to music... so, sing all the more and then get some really good headphones.

## *Musical background makes no difference*

In the same study, the researchers found that whether the participants had a musical background or not made no difference to the benefits. In other words, pick yourself up and join in - because whether you've sung all your life or none of it - the health rewards are the same for everyone.



Alzheimer's Society are proud to be working in partnership with Mirthy to provide people with more dementia friendly online events. To be able to share Mirthy's events with those we support will give people affected by dementia so many activities that they previously may not have been aware of; activities that can help keep people active, informed, and add routine, amongst other benefits. With Alzheimer's Society training, we are pleased to say that Mirthy's group facilitators and administrators are more dementia friendly than ever before, and we hope that other people joining their events know that if they are concerned about dementia in any way, we are here to support them. We look forward to our continued collaboration with Mirthy going into 2023 and beyond.

*Alzheimer's Society*

# Five things you should know about dementia

## 1. It's not only about memory loss

Although problems with memory can be an early sign of dementia for many, it's not the only symptom:

- **confusion and needing help with daily tasks**
- **problems with language and understanding**
- **changes in behaviour**

The changes may begin very small, such as problems with familiar tasks.

## 2. Dementia is not a normal part of ageing

The changes caused by dementia are different and more serious than the ordinary forgetting of people's names for example. Dementia doesn't just affect older people. Over 42,000 people under 65 in the UK have young-onset dementia.

## 3. Dementia is caused by different diseases of the brain

Dementia is a group of symptoms. Different types of dementia damage different parts of the brain:

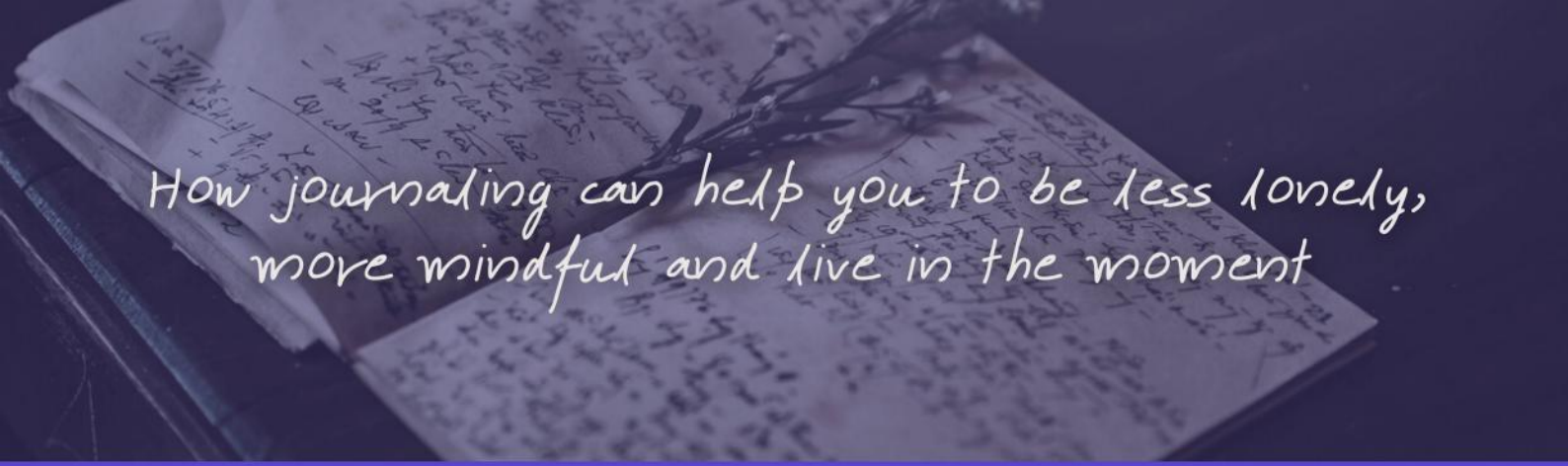
- **Alzheimer's disease** (the most common type of dementia)
- **vascular dementia** (the second most common type)
- **dementia with Lewy bodies**
- **frontotemporal dementia** (including Pick's disease).

## 4. People can still live well with dementia

Although there is no cure for dementia yet, scientists and researchers are working hard to find one. Support and treatments are available to allow people with dementia to lead active lives and carry on doing the things that matter to them most.

## 5. Alzheimer's Society is here for anyone affected by dementia

Call the Dementia Connect support line if you'd like to talk to someone for information, support or advice on 0333 150 3456.



## *How journaling can help you to be less lonely, more mindful and live in the moment*

Do you ever feel lonely? Although it is ok to feel lonely from time to time, the danger of loneliness is that it is often invisible to others but effects the person's mental and physical health.

Sometimes it is helpful to channel loneliness into creativity; journaling, drawing, or doodling are all very beneficial to mental health. Several studies support the theory that journaling can have a positive effect on your wellbeing. Process of reframing and positive shifts in changing mindset can promote peace of your mind and happiness. How can you be living more in the moment?

### *Observe your thoughts without judgement*

Mindfulness means to be in the present moment and paying attention to a purpose without judgement, moment by moment. This is probably more just in our head exercise, rather than in the journal, as a part of meditation. Take a deep breath in and out and observe your thoughts. Some of them are like balloons floating in the sky, unattainable and will just pass. Some of them even don't belong to us and are a reflection of other people's attitudes, problems, or current mood. If you hear the inner critic in your head, distance from it. The critical voice in our head is not us, it is not who we truly are. So, thank it for the concerns but move on. Try to sit through negative thoughts without judging, they will pass.

### *Show gratitude*

Try to find things you are grateful for, write a sentence in your journal, have a conversation with a friend, your mood eventually lightens up again. Don't let any thoughts spoil your day. Research professor and amazing storyteller Brené Brown in her inspirational Netflix Special TED Talk "The Call to Courage" mentions that "joyous people are the grateful people". Instead of constructing alarming thoughts about what might happen, be grateful for the good things you have now and write them down in your journal.

Sometimes in our everyday rush we lose a touch with beautiful things around us. It might be simple things such as a tasty food on our table or a beautiful view or sounds during morning walk in the countryside. It can also be found in spirit lifting conversation with our friends. Gratitude is a choice, where we can choose to be grateful, pass our gratitude on others and make the world little bit more caring and better place to live.

### *Write a letter to your younger self*

What would you advise to your younger self? What wisdom would you share? What struggles have you been through and overcome? Choose some difficult time you went through. Be kind to yourself as you would be to your friend. Try to pick some lessons you learnt from the situation. What moments in your life are you proud of? Give tips to yourself how to stop ruminating on things that seem completely insignificant in the present days. Use “you” and present tense.

### *Take care of yourself*

By getting enough sleep, exercise, going out for regular walks, expressing gratitude, and smiling, we are creating positive mindset and are more likely to be able to help others. Setting morning or evening routines and regular time for writing in your journal about things you are grateful for or made you smile, helps to create a positive habit, and improve your mood.

Wellbeing Journaling helps you to learn how to create pages from scratch using different materials with mindfulness approach as you are fully submerged in a creative activity, focused on the task to create. Creative lettering, doodling, and using colours helps with concentration and unblocks the feeling of being stuck. And it is not only about creating the page. That’s only a part of the story. The next step is to record the gratitude, achievements, and feel-good moments during the week. It is about stopping for a moment during the week and analysing what you are grateful for, what went and felt right during the week. It is like a pat on the back for the good work. But you don’t need to limit yourself to express just happy moments, any feelings are valid and equally important to express. Don’t hold yourself back. Ultimately journaling has the power to sharpen your focus as it requires your attention and release any tension. The whole experience is very rejuvenating.



Enid  
Candron

As the gates to my memory were opened my senses were also aroused. They say you only live once but as I wrote I could almost feel the sand under my toes as we played on the banks of that small stream by the wood, I could smell the mouthwatering aroma of home-cured ham and eggs filling my mother's kitchen and taste the dried egg that came in big tins in wartime... and I became a child again.

During the COVID lockdowns, and now a widow, I found myself feeling extremely isolated and increasingly lonely. Having dabbled with genealogy some years before, on a whim and in an effort to fill the endless days, I returned to researching my family tree.

There was a moment when it dawned on me that my children knew very little of my early life and I decided I needed to put this right. And so I began to call on my earliest memories of my childhood. Soon the memories began to surface and it was as though a floodgate had opened. I was amazed, as I concentrated my thoughts, on just how sharp and clear these memories became. They filled my head, each one clamouring to be heard and to find their rightful place in my timeline. The more I wrote, the more I remembered and things I had almost forgotten came back clearly. I sat for hours at a time, lost in thought. I honestly had to summon up the willpower to stop as jobs got neglected in my urgency to record everything as my memory was stimulated. All this I later transferred to my iPad and printed it off. I found that my story up to the age of 16 had filled 14 x A4 sheets of paper

# Decimalisation

by Enid Cawdron

It was now almost exactly 50 years since we changed to decimal currency in 1971, and looking back, at that moment we lost part of our heritage. A small part of our language that defined us as Brits, that part which made us unique and proud to be so.

We had used the crown as part of our currency for centuries and all remnants of that were now gone. The green pound note and the brown ten-bob note, the 20 shillings in a pound, the half crown and the two shilling piece or florin, the ha'penny, a tanner or sixpence, the chunky dull- gold coloured thru'penny bit sporting its portcullis, and the diminutive farthing with its beautiful little wren. Things of my childhood and long ago now lost forever. Today our currency is much the same, all referred to as pence and delineated only by size and a nod to shape. And all this it seemed to me courtesy of the fledgling Eurozone.

Back then everyone seemed to fear that decimalisation would lead to a price rise bonanza and indeed this seems to be exactly what happened. When we first married in 1959 my husbands wage was £4.10 shillings a week for 40 hours. How things have changed.

Those of us who were taught the old system of weights and measures found it impossible to understand. We knew about feet, inches and yards, pints quarts and gallons, ounces, pounds, hundredweights and tons and land area in acres.

But, I am told some small remnants still remain. Although hospitals note a newborn's weight in kilos, the parents are still told the weight of their new baby in pounds and ounces.

I consider myself a reasonably intelligent person. I still know how much a 2 lb bag of sugar weighed, I know what a pint is and can judge the length of a foot or a yard almost exactly. I have a conversion chart taped to the back of one of my cupboard doors in my kitchen and still need to refer to it if I am faced with a recipe in grams instead of ounces or litres instead of pints. To me these weights and measures are imprinted on my brain and are as indelible as the ABC. Now we are faced with metres and hectares. Even after 50 years I had no idea how large a hectare was- a revelation which prompted a full and diagrammatic explanation from my daughter to wing its way into my mailbox.

# 'Granny's Teeth', as told by Marley the Jack Russell

by Debbie Millard

I keep hearing the word 'Mirthy' from my human mummy, and so I thought maybe I could muscle in on the act too. I am Marley the Jack Russell and I live with the Millard family, plus extras who seem to appear from time to time, on the edge of a lovely big dog friendly area – the New Forest . Do any of you have a breed called a "grandchild" who appears in your home from time to time? I have to say I am beginning to relish the visits of our grandchild because he seems to be a very good source of food and treats!

I thought I would tell you the story of an event that happened a few years ago and seems now to be repeated at all family events . I must remember to ask for payment next time I am the star of these recollections – a dog treat per minute should suffice.

Back to business, my human daddy had a lovely mum, called Joyce, who we used to go and visit regularly and she and I had a good arrangement regarding food. At meal times I would go under her dining room table and position myself near to her and she would then slip to me, on a regular basis, all the vegetables she had been given that she didn't like and I loved!

One particular day my human mum Debbie and my human sister Katherine took me to see Joyce. Joyce was always pleased to see us, but today was definitely different. Although Joyce was sitting at her usual place at the dining table, she seemed extra relieved to see us. Without even pausing to say "hello" and without even offering me a biscuit, she immediately began to say "I can't find..." which had an odd effect on Debbie and Katherine who dived under the dining table (which I thought was very rude as this was my domain), and could be heard muttering "Joyce must have dropped her glasses- lets find them". Well this game continued for a few minutes but with no result. Still Joyce was saying " I can't find..." and before the rest of the sentence was finished Debbie and Katherine resumed their game but this time muttering "we must be looking for hearing aid batteries".

By now my stomach was gurgling and I was getting impatient for a treat so I decided I needed to join the game. So, I took a running dive under the dining table and after a mere few minutes I had found the missing article and carefully put it in my mouth. I was so pleased with myself for retrieving the missing article so quickly that I was somewhat surprised that, rather than a reward for my brilliance, I was greeted by two human family members in fits of laughter – how very rude!

So what had this very clever sleuth of a Jack Russell retrieved? I had found Joyce's missing bottom set of dentures which I had carefully picked up in my mouth giving me a wonderful big smile! Joyce was so delighted and said to me "you clever boy Marley! Now give me back my dentures so I can put them back in my mouth please". For some reason Debbie sprang into action immediately and rather rudely took the dentures away from me saying, "Joyce you can't have the dentures after Marley had had them in his mouth. I will sterilise them for you". I was rather insulted that Debbie was implying that the dentures which I had had in my mouth were not suitable to be in a human's mouth!

My other annoyance was that as Debbie was creased up in fits of (unnecessary) laughter, she did not take a photo of me with my trophy in my mouth. I think I should have had a picture of this amazing fete of retrieval and a certificate of thanks with my name emblazoned on it. This I could then position near my dog basket to enable me to remember "Granny's teeth and how I, Marley, saved the day".



Marley the Jack Russell

*This story is a true event – my mother in law, sadly no longer with us, lived about twenty minutes drive away from us so we would visit often. On the day described, she genuinely seemed extra pleased to see us and yes Marley did retrieve her dentures carrying them so carefully in his mouth which resulted in him appearing to have a very wide smile. Joyce did request that she be given her denture set back – did I oblige? I think you will know the answer to this – all I wish is I had stopped laughing long enough to photograph Marley with the teeth in! This story was included in Joyce's funeral service and is loved by all who hear it.*



# *Cecily's Tears*

by Gillian Attack

Izzy Anderson stopped digging. She gazed into the deep, sandy hole, and then around her, hoping she had remembered the location correctly. To the right, weaving along the cliff side like the tail of a long grey sea monster, was a makeshift path. It comprised a jumble of rocks and the remnants of old concrete wartime pillboxes, dislodged and broken apart by the power of the North sea. The path, made treacherous in places by a carpet of moss and seaweed, ended when it opened out onto the seaward section of Filey Brigg, a long neck of stones and boulders. As children, they were forbidden to venture along the path without their parents. She gave a sad smile. Robbie did, but not her. The smile vanished. Not until circumstances gave her no choice.

Her gaze switched to the left at the first of many small inlets carved into the clay and sandstone cliffs. After checking she was in line with its centre, she picked up the spade and continued digging deeper and deeper until a small pool of water appeared. Wiping her brow, she peered up towards the horizon, where the setting sun, a buttery ball of fire, sat on top of the ocean, as if surveying its kingdom. The nearby rocks cast long shadows across the sand. She dropped the spade, her pulse racing, and pulled from her pocket a blood-red star-shaped crystal with a golden domed centre. Her palms, damp with sweat, made it slide in her fingers. She closed her fist around it, shaking it like a snow globe, making five floating translucent tear-shaped specks shimmer. They hung there, a quintet of beautiful twinkles trapped inside a golden prison. They looked so inviting. Izzy winced. Appearances could not always be trusted.

Tears pricked at her eyes. With a furious determination, she forced them back, knowing what damage they could cause. If only she had known when she first found the crystal.

She recalled that day, the second day of their annual summer holiday in Filey, her parents setting up their striped windbreak and tartan blanket close to Coble Landing where food, drink and toilets were on hand. Every year they chose this spot, even though her mum always prepared a picnic in their hotel room straight after breakfast every morning. She was seven years old, and the beach made a perfect playground for her and eleven-year-old Robbie, so long as they did not have to play together.

Izzy was digging a hole with Jenny Jones, whose parents owned the Cricklewood hotel where, each year since she could remember, they stayed.

‘Do you think I can reach Australia?’ Izzy asked, throwing out spadefuls of sand with the enthusiasm of a dog digging up a bone.

Jenny, perching on the edge with Izzy’s favourite chatty Cathy doll, giggled. ‘Maybe. How about we change places? I’ll dig and you sit with Chatty.’

Eager for a rest, she jumped out, sprawling on her stomach, pulling Chatty’s string. ‘I love you,’ said the doll, flapping her glassy blue eyes. After Robbie pulled the head off Chatty the first, she was unwilling to let this replacement out of sight. Chatty the second already bore a war wound inflicted by him; a blob of blue felt-tip pen on each cheek. With Chatty pressed to her side, she watched Jenny go into overdrive.

‘Faster, Jenny, faster.’ she yelled, pulling Chatty’s string. ‘I want a cuddle.’ Izzy giggled and held her close, stroking the doll’s tousled blonde locks.

A harsh, familiar laugh made Izzy spring up, drawing Chatty closer. Robbie rolled a football on the sand, a snigger dribbling from his mouth. ‘Australia.’ He spat the word before picking up the ball and kicking sand into the hole, covering Jenny, who leapt out, indignation setting her jaw.

Pointing the spade at him like a sword, her eyes became slits of vicious intent. ‘Get away from that hole!’ She bared her teeth, parrying in his direction. Despite

be

being two years younger than him, she was several inches taller, and when she swung it perilously close to his midriff he backed off, glowering.

His voice lowered to a growl. 'Stupid cow.' Then he turned to Izzy. 'You're never going to reach Australia.'

Jenny's brother James watched, tall, lean and smirking. Izzy's cheeks burned as the twelve-year-old scrutinised them. Then, with a loud guffaw, he patted Robbie on the shoulder. 'Let's play football. They're silly little girls who know nothing about geography or much else.' Then his gaze flicked to two bikini-clad girls around his age, and he licked his lips. 'Although they get more interesting.'

The boys wandered off, James' neck craning past ninety degrees as the girls in bikinis strolled past in the other direction, Robbie, head down, dribbling the ball away from them. Jenny trailed the spade along the sand. 'Let's ask your parents if we can dig near the Brigg away from our horrible brothers. They returned to the striped windbreak. Her mum sat lily-white legs facing the sun, engrossed in a book with a man and woman kissing on the front cover. Her dad lay flat out with his hands resting on his rounded, hairy belly. They

lifted when he inhaled and fell when his mouth expelled a snore which might have been mistaken for a foghorn.

'Mum, can we go over to the Brigg?'

Izzy's mum looked over the rim of her sun-glasses and then at the human foghorn. 'When your dad wakes up, he can take you.'

Another snore escaped from his mouth, and Izzy groaned. 'He might be asleep for hours.'

Jenny dropped to the sand in front of Lou, an earnest expression spreading over her face. 'I'll look after her, I promise. And from here you can see us if we stay near the cliff. The tide's going out and we'll keep away from the sea.'

Izzy's mum exhaled, her mouth relaxing into an amused smile. 'You're like a mother hen, Jenny.' She held up her hands in submission. 'Okay, but stay where I can see you, or we will go straight back to the hotel. Do you understand?'

Jenny nodded, her chin bouncing off her chest, but Izzy's eyes narrowed into a confused frown.

Her mum stroked her unruly hair. 'What's wrong, lovey?'

'Why is Jenny like a hen? She doesn't cluck or lay eggs.'



# ABOUT MIRTHY'S INK



Mirthy's Ink is an informal group of budding writers who meet once a month to share and discuss creative writing. If you enjoy writing and would like a supportive space to explore your writing further, join us and come along to one of our monthly meetings!

*Want your story to feature in the next issue of the Mirthy Explorer?*

Email your submission of up to 1000 words to [mahalia@mirthy.co.uk](mailto:mahalia@mirthy.co.uk) by Monday 5th December for your chance to be featured in the next issue, out January.

# Reminiscence

by Paula Short

When I was a child I lived near this castle and it was a complete ruin.

4 years ago English Heritage took it on and via fundraising and with the help of volunteers have transformed it into a living museum.

In spite of the pandemic the project carried on and the castle was ready to open to the public this year.

I visited it recently and the years just fell away...I was back in my childhood stomping ground. The memories flooded back.

The castle is Hylton Castle in Sunderland, Tyne & Wear





## Send in your stories and photographs

Is there a place that transports you back in  
time? How have the places around you  
changed?

*We would love to hear your stories!*

Email submissions to [mahalia@mirthy.co.uk](mailto:mahalia@mirthy.co.uk) for your  
chance to be featured on our website or in a future  
issue of the Mirthy Explorer.

# Tales of a Time Trespasser

It's blowing hard outside: whipping withered leaves over the grass, and sending clouds scudding across a sullen sky. It's warm in here. And quiet. Only the stertorous snoring of Ada Brown, my elderly Yorkshire terrier, as she lies blissfully asleep next to me, breaks the silence...

I blink and before my eyes opens a vista of wide blue sky and sunshine. A small version of me is crouched on the roof of one of the pigsties on the neighbour's farm where I spend most of my young life. My hands can feel again the roughness of the old patchwork of tiles and the bit of corrugated iron, which roughly covers the hole near the ridge, is sticking into my knee. Below is not the slumbering dog but the sleeping sow, Sally suckling twelve piglets.

Usually docile she can be ferocious when she has a litter of new babies to look after. I look down at myself: I'm wearing my favourite green West Street Hunt tee shirt, a scruffy pair of jodhpurs and my old wellies. That tee shirt was discarded when I decided that chasing foxes with a pack of hounds for sport was immoral. I do a quick calculation.

That would have to make it the early sixties. In the distance I see the two boys who help out on the farm during the school holidays – brown skinned, curly haired Bobby and ... I can't remember the tall, blond one's name – they're several years older than me and much, much bigger. They wave at me grinning widely. Shoving me up on the roof is one of their favourite games.

'Let me down,' my youthful self yodels indignantly.

They turn and disappear into the patched up pigswill shed which is almost as much of a mishmash as the stuff it houses. The sickly sweet smell of the boiling swill drifts out of the open doors and I can picture the stoking of the fire and the poking of the mess cooking in the boiler that's taking place inside. I'm probably better off up here as, more than once, I've been a target for the odd piece of soft fruit or rotten tomato as I've strolled past on my way to the ponies. Very funny.

I look beyond the stables with its two Doric columns at the entrance – one sporting a blue flash where the tractor whacked it – and across the little rutted lane to the paddock. My adored old roan pony, the plump and faithful Kitty, is grazing – how wonderful to see her again. Alongside, Beauty, the dark bay show pony is dreamily resting a hind leg and lazily flicking at flies with a twitch of her tail. The two show jumpers, Fizzer and The Buzzo, are nowhere to be seen: they must be inside out of the sun. In the yard the horsebox stands with its ramp down and straw bedding in place. It looks ready for an outing. I think it must be a Friday afternoon. Saturdays are show days when we all cram into the front seat and head off – three passengers and the driver, no seat belts – I almost fell out one afternoon when my elbow inadvertently pressed on the door handle as we took a sharp bend in a country lane.

In a field in front of the kitchen garden the ancient Massey Ferguson is ploughing up and down I can hear the soporific sound of its engine above the slurping and grunting of the suckling piglets. I can't see who's driving but, from the erratic furrows that stream out behind like the wake from a ship, I would guess that it might be Anne. The back door of the farmhouse opens and out steps the solid figure of her father, the farmer Mr Spain. I wave my arms furiously – I want him to get me down – I want to go and see Kitty before I'm whisked away. He opens the door of the sty and stands foursquare in the clean straw.

'Jump,' he says, 'don't worry, I'll catch you.'

I crawl to the edge, close my eyes and let myself fall.

I come to earth with a jolt. I've landed, not in Mr Spain's outstretched arms but back in my conservatory circa 2022.

Nostalgia clings to me. No longer do farms and orchards separate the Thanet towns; housing estates have gobbled up the green fields and main roads replaced the potholed paths of my youth. Yes, much has gone but will not be completely lost if we become trespassers in time and remember.

*by Maria Brown*



# Mirthy's Book Club

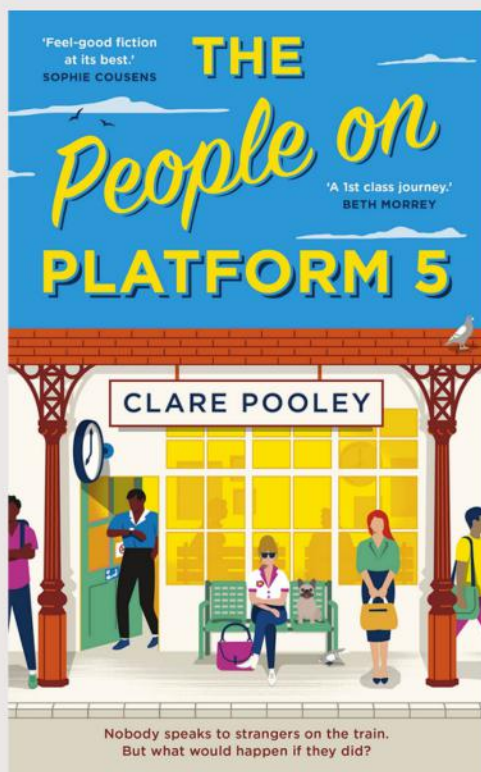
Brought to you by

Reader's  
digest

Join our monthly book club chats to talk about our favourite reads. We will be discussing the Book of the Month and chatting about books generally. This is a chance to meet other bookworms in the community.

## November

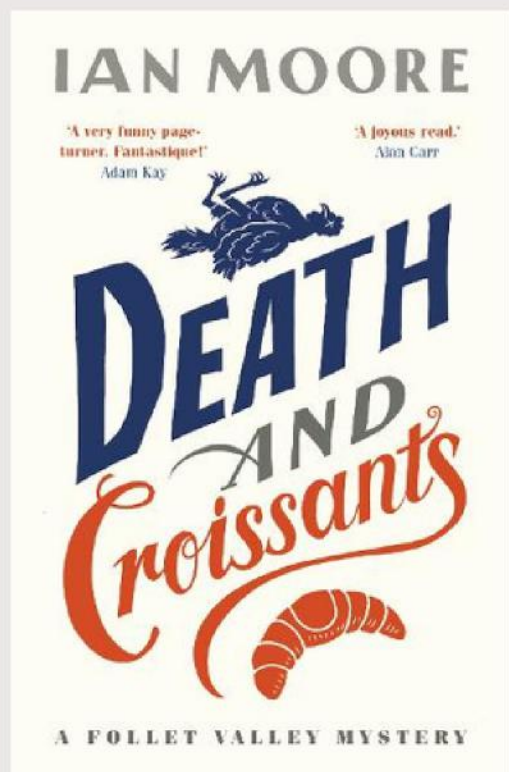
The People on Platform 5  
*by Clare Pooley*



Friday 25th November at 4pm

## December

Death and Croissants  
*by Ian Moore*



Friday 16th December at 4pm



# Children's Literature Book Club

## Community Group



*What was your favourite book as a child? Was there one that changed your life? Is there one you still read now? Or one you couldn't wait to read to your children or grandchildren?*



The Children's Literature Group is a place to share all the memories of books you loved growing up, to talk about your favourite authors in childhood, and perhaps find some new ones?

Monday 12th December at 4pm



## Little Women

*by Louisa May Alcott*

# Clare Pooley

Clare will be joining us for our Book Club Q&A on Friday 25th November at 4pm. Get a sneak preview of what to expect here...



*What are you currently reading?*

I'm reading *The Whalebone Theatre* by Joanna Quinn. It's a wonderful, sweeping novel set between 1920 and the end of the Second World War. I'm not so much reading it, as being completely enveloped by it.

*What inspires you to write?*

I started writing as therapy. In 2015 I realised that my alcohol addiction was spinning out of control, so I quit drinking and started a blog called *Mummy was a Secret Drinker*. That blog saved my life, and transformed the lives of thousands of people who read it. Writing became my new addiction, and I still use writing as a way of understanding and dealing with the world.

*Can you describe your ideal writing spot?*

I love looking out on the ocean, as it gives me a sense of perspective. I particularly love a wild, Cornish sea. However, I'm not sure how much I'd get done with a beautiful, distracting view in front of me, so perhaps I'm better off writing at my kitchen table as I usually do, or hidden amongst the fabulous book stacks of the London Library.

*Who would you invite to your perfect dinner party (fictional and 'nonfictional' allowed!)?*

Ooh, what fun! I think I'd have a women only dinner, where we could really put the world to rights. I'd invite Emmeline Pankhurst, Michelle Obama, Jilly Cooper, Hilary Mantel, Nora Ephron, Elizabeth Zott (from *Lessons in Chemistry*) and Iona Iverson (from my latest novel). Wouldn't that be fun?

*What would be on the menu?*

I'd ask each woman to bring their favourite comfort food. Then we could start the dinner by talking about where the dish came from and what it means to them. I bet that would lead to some incredible stories, as well as wonderful food. Actually, wouldn't that make a fabulous idea for a novel?

*Could you give the Mirthy Book Club a taster of what to expect as we read 'The People on Platform 5' as our November Book of the Month?*

The People on Platform 5 is the story of an eclectic group of people who have nothing in common except their morning commute. They often see each other on their journey, give each other nicknames and make (usually heinous) assumptions about each other, but they never speak, because the first rule of London commuting is that you never, ever talk to strangers on the train. Then, one morning an obnoxious banker chokes on a grape and nearly dies. A fellow commuter saves his life with the Heimlich Manoeuvre, and this starts an extraordinary chain of events...

You can expect misunderstandings, misconceptions, a whole host of hidden problems, plus a fabulous, eccentric heroine, found friends, life lessons and even a love story.



Clare Pooley spent twenty years in the heady world of advertising, working hard, playing hard and drinking even harder. In 2015 she realised that she had to say farewell to alcohol, and she started a blog - Mummy was a Secret Drinker - by way of therapy. That blog became a memoir - The Sober Diaries, which has transformed the lives of thousands of people around the world. Clare then used her experience of telling the truth about her own shady life to inspire her first novel - The Authenticity Project, an international bestseller and winner of the RNA debut novel award.

“Silently, one by one, in the infinite meadows of heaven,  
Blossomed the lovely stars, the forget-me-nots of the angels.”

— Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Remember

A close-up photograph of several blue forget-me-not flowers. The flowers have five petals each and a bright yellow center. The background is a soft, out-of-focus blue and green. The word "ember" is written in a white, cursive script across the middle of the image.

ember

# Lest we forget

11th November at 2:30pm  
with Christopher Joll



## Remembrance in Rhyme

*by Stewart Clay*

Can somebody please tell me, why the First World War was considered Great?  
The body count can surely be the only superlative, to which that word relates  
However, great Poets and their Poetry, recorded all the horror and the gloom  
Greats like Rupert Brooke, Wilfred Owen, John McCrae, and Siegfried Sassoon

Brooke's 'The Soldier' reads, "some corner of a foreign field that is forever England"  
Owen's 'Dulce et Decorum Est' cries, "Gas! Gas! Quick boys - an ecstasy of fumbling"  
McCrae begins "In Flanders Fields the poppies blow, between the crosses row on row"  
Sassoon's "Suicide in the Trenches", ends "The hell where youth and laughter go"

Poetry so eloquent  
Sentiments still relevant

Join Malcolm Meadows for his moving talk,  
'Poets of World War I'  
Friday 11th November at 11:30am

# Remembrance Day

*by Pene Rowe*

Mine is the last generation that knew  
The soldiers and sailors, the airmen who flew,  
And in this parade come the last of 'The Few'  
Who remember lost comrades the enemy slew.

Beside them are youngsters in uniforms new,  
Marching with flags as they come into view.  
They enter the church, where I sit in my pew,  
To honour all those who wore khaki or blue.

On the memorial, names give a clue,  
A list of the fallen that steadily grew.  
The standards are lowered. A hush falls, on cue,  
And blood-scarlet poppies recall them anew.

# Afghanistan

*by Christine Ashby*

I thought I was the good guy, but you looked at me with hate.  
We did not share a language, explanations had to wait.  
I thought I'd join the army with my mates, it seemed so clever  
But things I've seen, and friends I've lost, will stay with me forever.  
I cannot sleep, I drink, and every day I hate to find  
New nightmares that Afghanistan has etched into my mind.  
So now I'm back in England and I'm homeless, on the street.  
A shattered shadow of a man who used to be complete.



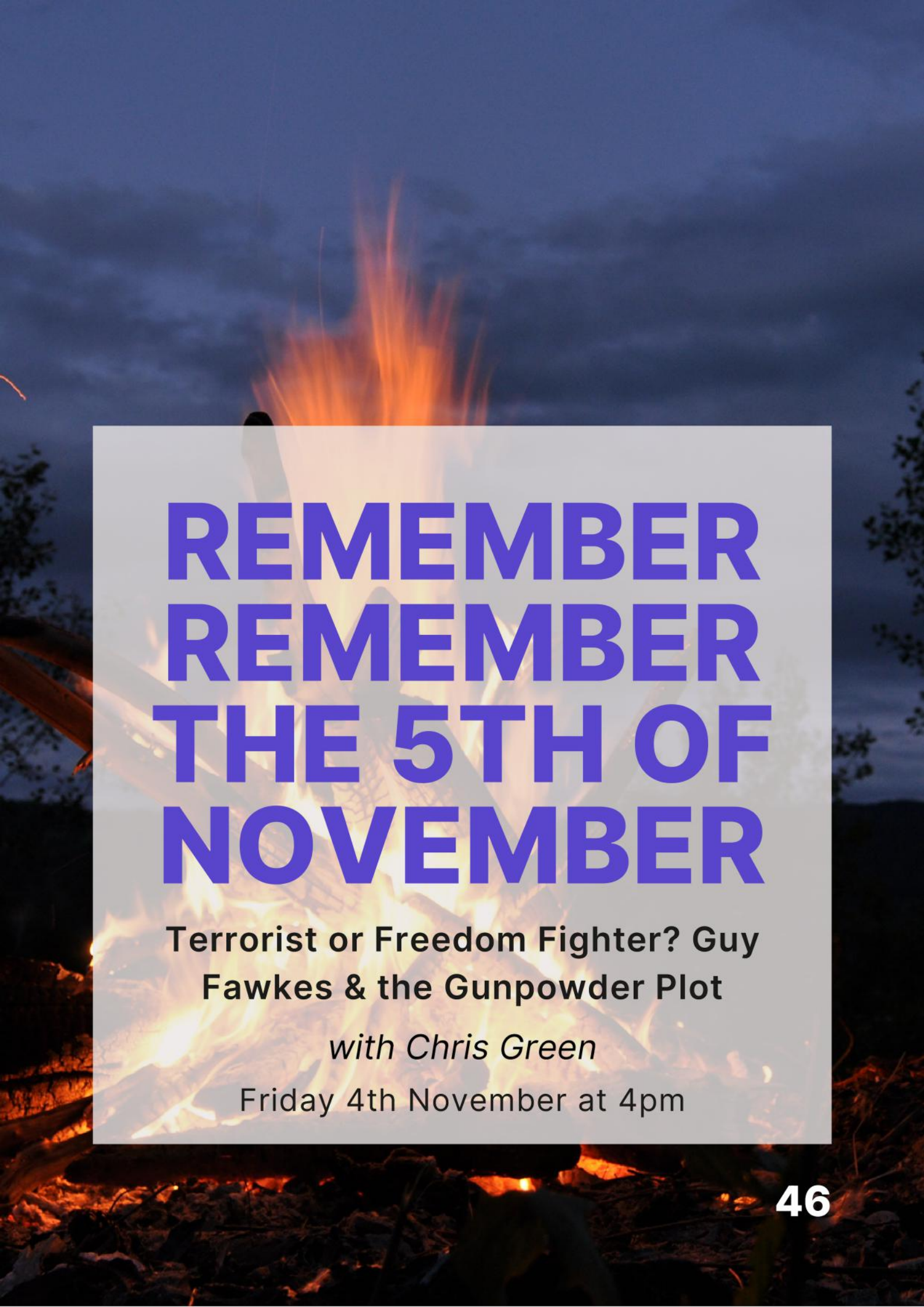
# Commence

"Life is a lot more interesting if you are interested in the people and the places around you. So, illuminate your little patch of ground, the people that you know, the things that you want to commemorate. Light them up with your art, with your music, with your writing, with whatever it is that you do."

— Alan Moore



innovate



# REMEMBER REMEMBER THE 5TH OF NOVEMBER

**Terrorist or Freedom Fighter? Guy  
Fawkes & the Gunpowder Plot**

*with Chris Green*

Friday 4th November at 4pm

# LESSONS IN ETYMOLOGY

Where does the word  
'bonfire' come from?

## Is it just a 'good' fire?

The use of 'bon', meaning 'good' in French, has long led some to believe that this is where the English word 'bonfire' was derived from. British lexicographer Samuel Johnson suggested this particular etymology in his 1755 Dictionary of the English Language, in which he defined 'bonfire' as "a fire made for some publick cause of triumph or exaltation," and derived the word from the French bon and the English word fire. Noah Webster believed the same. However, the etymology was corrected in the 1890 Webster's International Dictionary.

## The true origin: Bonefire

In fact, the true etymology of 'bonfire' comes from the Middle English 'bonefire', literally "a fire of bones." The earliest known instance of this appears as 'ignis ossium'—Latin for 'fire of bones' in the Catholicon Anglicum, an English-to-Latin bilingual dictionary compiled in the late 15th century.

## So how do we know this is the true origin?

Well, to begin with, the hybrid of French and English would be very unusual for the early lexicographers, the word 'fire' is purely Anglo-Saxon and therefore this theory is hard to rationalize. Secondly, as we know that the word dates back as early as the 15th century, it would have likely have evolved to 'boonfire', as 'boon' is the English form that developed from the French 'bon'. Furthermore, the spelling in its earliest case is 'banefyre', with 'bane' being a spelling of bone which long continued to be common in Scotland.

# Poetry Challenge

## Community Submissions

### 1950's Bonfire Night

*Stewart Clay*

Logging in began in early October  
Mountains of wood to watch over  
Take your turn to guard the stash  
Lest rivals turn your stash to ash  
November fifth arrived at last  
Time to ignite the stash amassed  
Littleys have their Sparklers to wave  
Dad lights a Fountain or Cascade  
Local yobs cause chaos, running amok  
Their fireworks just missiles to chuck  
Hurling Bangers and Roman Candles  
Obnoxious nasty Rip-Rap vandals  
Order restored by Dads and a local bobby  
Back to Parkin Cake and Treacle Toffee  
Out of control our fire spells danger  
What Elf and Safety! Do me a favour!

### Bonfire Night

*Lynne Hammond*

Penny for the guy!

My how the months fly by  
and once again  
it's that time of year

Lock up your felines  
canines  
before the wheel spins around  
for Catherine  
bangers whizz-bang  
sparklers fizz  
ribbons of light  
fly  
into the black velvet sky

Bonfire's lit  
people in bobble hats flit  
to and fro  
burgers and hot dogs in hand  
pass the mustard. ...

Look at those rockets go!

Chestnuts roast  
melt-in-mouth marshmallows toast  
it's all the most enormous fun  
and when we're done  
we'll do it all again, next year

It'll soon be here

## Bonfire Blues

*Stephanie Pemberton*

Bonfire night, treacle toffee,  
Frozen toes, lukewarm coffee.  
Spare scarf and mittens, rolled-up mac,  
Soaked wet through in my old backpack.  
And the cost of it all - because nowts for free,  
To freezes my whatsits off under a tree.  
While health and safety strut and pose,  
Oversized egos in high vis clothes.  
You can't do this, that, or the other,  
Begg the question - why bother?  
For the little faces in the crowd.  
For the lights so bright, the bangs so loud.  
So, I sip my coffee and just keep stum  
It's what I do cos I'm a mum.

## Bonfire Night

*Pene Rowe*

The sounds and smells and tastes and sights  
Peculiar to Bonfire Nights:  
The sputter and fizz of sizzling fuses,  
Static, white noise as each sparkler amuses.

The shrill of a Katharine wheel, whirring around,  
And the whoosh of a rocket departing the ground  
To die with a scream before tumbling down.  
Cacophony that can be heard across town.

Giant chrysanthemums light up the night  
With glittering fountains and colours so bright.  
The flames of the bonfire leap, licking the 'Guy'  
'Midst woodsmoke and sulphur awaiting, to die.

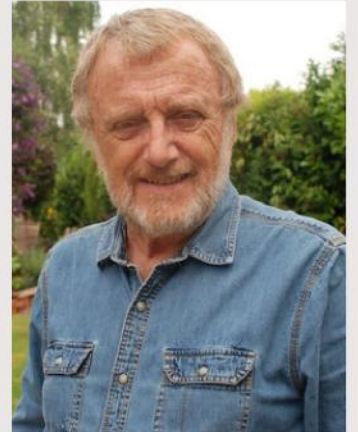
Produced from the ashes, a feast we can swallow,  
Potatoes, roast chestnuts, and 'parkin' to follow.



# 'HANGED FOR ADULTERY': THE TRAGIC FATE OF EDITH THOMPSON

*Chris Forse*

A retired teacher and administrator, Forse spent 33 years in Hong Kong where he was also a columnist and radio panel guest. He has travelled widely and globally and enjoys travel photography and self-publishing.



The ninth of January 2023 marks the centenary of a major miscarriage of justice, the hanging, in Holloway Prison in London, of Edith Thompson (nee Graydon), a twenty-nine-year-old upwardly mobile woman, convicted of being an accomplice in the murder of her husband Percy. The suspicion has long been held that she was hanged not for murder but for adultery. Her lover, a nineteen-year-old merchant seaman Freddy Bywaters, stabbed Percy to death in a fit of passion in October 1922. He hanged on the same day as Edith. Percy who Edith married shortly before he departed for service in the Great War, was later revealed to be a controlling and abusive husband.

Edith was condemned by the letters she wrote to Freddy. No evidence was found to support the charge that she participated in her husband's murder. She was also condemned by the attitudes of the day. This was a time when women were granted the right to vote and were slowly making their way in the professional world. Edith was a free spirit; she smoked, she enjoyed theatre, she danced, she managed an office in the City... and she took a young lover. Even those among the nascent feminist movement condemned her for bringing her gender into disrepute, a brazen hussy who corrupted a minor and incited him to murder. Ultimately, she was condemned by a judge's summing up. All attempts at a pardon failed. Her executioner, racked by guilt, later hanged himself.

In later reconstructions of the case, judges have concluded that the verdict of 1922 was unsafe. A home secretary has admitted that Edith was probably the victim of a miscarriage of justice, but she has not been posthumously pardoned, despite the efforts of a small band of committed people who continued, and continue, to demand JUSTICE FOR EDITH one hundred years later.

Chris Forse has a special interest in this case. He grew up in the same street in East London as Edith, attended the same primary school and the church in which she was married. Some of his neighbours remembered Edith as a young woman, forty years later. The fate of Edith was part of the story of his street.

In November 2018 Chris attended Edith's funeral. She was, after nearly a century, permitted to be laid to rest with her parents, having previously been interred in a mass grave for condemned women.

This is four stories in one: a murder mystery, a commentary on the mores of her time, of a continuing search of justice, and a celebration of the short life of a remarkable young woman. As evidence emerges of Edith as a skilled penwoman we can speculate on how, in more enlightened times, she might have found great fulfilment in life, a life that was tragically denied her.

*Chris will be at Mirthy in January with his talk on Enid Thompson.*



Селес



# vate

“Dance madly as if all of life is meant  
for dancing and celebrating.”

— Osho



# GETTING READY FOR SANTA

by Kath Reynolds

"Christmas isn't what it used to be" – we've heard that said so very often especially in relation to commercialisation.

Christmas certainly has changed over the years. You've only got to think about our ever changing climate...betting on a white Christmas fifty years ago would have been a dead certainty. The definition that the Met Office uses to declare a White Christmas is for one snowflake to be observed falling in the 24 hours of 25 December somewhere in the UK. Sadly, it doesn't often happen nowadays! However, "white" still characterises our Christmas; snow on cards, fake snow drifts sprayed on to windows, but no real snow!

The sending of Christmas greetings to friends near and far has long been our tradition. The first printed UK Christmas card was created and sent in London in 1843. It was sent by artist John Horsley who created the card for Sir Henry Cole, the friend who had first given him the idea. Sir Henry was the civil servant in charge of the Post Office! I dare say many folks curse Cole and Horsley for their idea but I still think it's rather nice to make that extra effort to get in touch during the festive season.

Christmas card designs have changed somewhat over the years; you rarely see a card with just festive bells or a single candle adorning it nowadays. Of course, the robin would have featured prominently on early cards. Victorian postmen wore bright red suits and were often nicknamed "robins"; hence the image of the robin delivering the Christmas mail. Special issue Christmas stamps didn't start here until 1966. Remember the clamour to get special edition stamps when we were all fervent stamp collectors!

We credit Prince Albert with bringing the Christmas tree into British homes although it was actually Queen Charlotte who first introduced the German tradition, Albert merely popularised it.

It was, however, Albert's countryman, theologian and Protestant reformer Martin Luther who first came up with the idea of the Christmas tree. Back in 1536, Luther was walking through a forest one winter night when he looked up to see the stars sparkling through the trees. He was struck by the beauty of this image and

brought a tree into his home which he lit with candles to remind his children of God in the glittering heavens above.

Think back to your childhood Christmas tree; if you had one! A few baubles and maybe a scrawny string of tinsel at best. For many there would have been candles on the tree; candles which were lit for an hour on Christmas Eve and an hour on Christmas Day... and that would be your lot!

You might have been posh and had a set of twelve lantern lights purchased from Woolworth's...lights that plugged into the "big light"!

A home-made tin foil star would almost certainly have adorned the top of the tree, unless you were very lucky and had a pretty fairy.

No one would put their Christmas tree up until Christmas Eve – now, as I travel around the Midlands and Northwest sharing talks, I'm on the lookout for Christmas trees from the end of September onwards but there is certainly a flood of them once Bonfire Night is passed!

Making and hanging decorations was a family activity. Whether you were making paper chains from scraps of paper, or pushing the boat out with crepe paper streamers; sitting down together to cut, stick (flour and water paste) and then Dad would hang your colourful creations around the room. Of course, the streamers would have been punctuated by a balloon or two...balloons would have slowly become sad, wizened and dusty messes by the end of the festive season!

We then moved onto the rather glorious, if somewhat gaudy, foil streamers and those delightful, dangling ceiling decorations. Classy! Don't forget the holly and the mistletoe – a tradition reflecting our pagan past.

Then came Blue Peter; masters of the art of creating your own decorations. Remember the coat-hanger advent? There was much public outcry over suggesting that children light candles attached to a tinsel tangled coat-hanger! Clearly I was ahead of my time, I substituted baubles for the desperately dangerous candles from the outset.

The toilet roll nativity scene was also immensely popular...many folks are still proudly displaying these works of art every Christmas fifty years later!

On Christmas Eve, children would be busy putting pen to paper, writing their letter to Santa. Nowadays the letter to Santa has been replaced by an email; an email which Santa will reply to! However, for most of us it would have been a simple note, posted up the chimney. We might have been requesting a doll, a train or books and pencils but all requests would have been scribed in your best handwriting; lest Santa couldn't read it!

The build up to Christmas would not have been complete without carolling. Sunday school groups, Girl Guides and Boy Scouts would have taken to the streets in orderly form; singing their hearts out

under the lamplight. You may also recall the excitement of the Boys Brigade band parading around towns and villages; playing their instruments as they marched. All this and four foot snow drifts to contend with too!

The Christmas cake and the plum pudding would have been baked and stowed away months ago. Everyone would take a turn stirring the cake or the pudding, or maybe your job was to drop in the sixpence? Whichever, you would have made a wish over the pudding mixture. The occasional glug of brandy would be administered to keep cake and pudding moist whilst being stored.

Christmas Eve would have been reserved for preparing for Christmas and producing batches of mince pies. Many ladies had their own special mincemeat recipe. No mince pies, not even Mr Kipling's, ever tasted as good as your own mum's!

One very special mince pie would have been set out on a plate for Santa to nibble on whilst he was putting out your presents. Washed down with a glass of mother's sherry or father's whisky. Maybe a carrot for the reindeer too. Nowadays, several safety-conscious parents encourage their children to leave Santa a glass of milk in place of an alcoholic tippie. We can't have Santa driving under the influence!

Before bed, the stockings would be hung. Where did you hang yours? On the end of the bed or from the mantle shelf? A cup of Horlicks (or were you an Ovaltiney?) and it was

off to bed. After all, 'twas the night before Christmas and Santa would be loading his sleigh, readying his reindeer and soon be on his way...

Peering excitedly through the bedroom curtains hoping for a glimpse of the jolly chap dressed in red, your parents would remind you that Santa doesn't come if you're not asleep! Now you can even follow Santa on his journey around the world on one of the Santa Tracking websites! How life has changed.

Now get to sleep or Santa won't come for you!



# Christmas Memories

by Debbie Millard



"Mum, Mum  
your hair..."

Join us for one of our most memorable Christmas lunches.

Picture the scene – my family gathered around the dining table turkey barely dented awaiting the arrival, with anticipation, of mum with the "Piece de la resistance" the flaming Christmas pudding.

Duly mum rejoined us placing the "flaming" pudding down and stood back. It was now that the aroma of brandy was joined by an unknown "aroma" It took us all but a few seconds to realise our mother had flambéed her fringe which was still on fire!! After what felt like eternity we managed to stop mum talking, no mean feat, and enlightened her of the situation – "MUM YOUR HAIR IS ON FIRE!"

Calmly she picked up her strategically placed oven gloves using them to extinguish her burning locks.

Then, as if flambéing her hair was a daily occurrence she, luckily in no way hurt, served us Christmas Pudding!

Meet Fairy Ollie

Little did I know that a comment I made to my parents would lead to a family tradition that would continue for nearly 60 years!! Picture the scene in the late 1950's.

Christmas approaching saw my father putting up our Christmas tree with me dancing around it. Innocently I asked "daddy where did you get the tree from?" His reply came "from Ray Ollie". My eyes lit up and I started singing "from Fairy Ollie from Fairy Ollie".

Now both my parents were doubled up in hysterical laughter and I was not impressed!! What had I done?! When eventually they could speak my father explained that "Ray Ollie" weighed over 23 stones so his sitting on the Christmas tree was not going to happen! I was having none of this – I insisted that Fairy Ollie was our fairy and sitting on the tree he would!! From that day on Fairy Ollie joined our family Christmas tradition– he brought us presents every Christmas which he hung on the tree, unseen by us but aided by my father, every Boxing Day. When I married and had my own family Fairy Ollie came to our home too!

A few years ago Fairy Ollie sent me a letter- written in Fairy dust, requesting to be allowed to retire – so now he no longer visits us but as a family we all remember the "tale of Fairy Ollie"

# Which of these played a part in your childhood Christmasses?

## 1940s Christmas Tree

1

The first artificial trees were manufactured using the same equipment as toilet brushes!



## Tree Candles

2

Candles that would have sat in holders which clipped to your tree



## Christmas Lights Plug

3

The plug that went into the "big light"



## Nursery Rhyme Lights

4

Set of Nursery rhyme Christmas lights from the late 1940s





# Crochet your Christmas!

This year, why not try crocheting some Christmas decorations? Or maybe give gifting your crocheted creations a go?

Crochet Tea and Chat host Marlys is on hand with some inspiration and instructions to get you crocheting in time for Christmas!

For virtual crochet instructions, visit Marlys's [website](#).

by Marlys Vaughan

Crocheting is often viewed as “something my grandmother did” but take a look around. The world is full of people wearing their handmade garments. Skirts, sweaters, hats, scarves, and shawls are all on display. People flock to sheep and wool festivals to view all the beautiful yarn and notions, stocking up on supplies and adding to their stash. Who can resist the soft squishy feel of merino or alpaca! You can crochet with yarn, thread, fabric and even metal wire. Each of these will give you a different effect, creating items with a wide variety of uses.

I started my crafting journey when I was just seven years old, and I have been creating ever since. My mother is an avid crafter and both of my grandmothers enjoyed hours of crocheting. My grandmother on my father's side favored thread crochet, making doilies with tiny steel crochet hooks and very fine cotton thread. My grandmother on my mother's side enjoyed crocheting with yarn, making many afghans and pillows over the years. I still have the afghan she made for me when I was about twelve years old. They wear well and are such wonderful keepsakes, filled with fond memories and wrapped in love.

One of the first clothing articles I made was a vest in light blue and white yarn. The front and back were a large granny square type pattern that looked like a white flower with a light blue border and simple straps for the shoulders. Once I finished it, I tried it on, wore it for about an hour then promptly decided I didn't like it and frogged it. What do I mean when I say I “frogged” it? I ripped it out ... rip, rip, rip. Yes we have funny little terms we use in crocheting and knitting. Frogging – taking something out or ripping back, also known as tinking. Then there's the WIP, or Work In Process, and Time Out for a project that we've stuffed into a corner or closet somewhere, for whatever reason, to be finished at a later date. We weave yarn with a hook and somehow magically create a Finished Object, or FO.

Crocheting can be calming, especially if you have a repetitive pattern and you softly repeat the pattern whether out loud or to ourselves. The concentration on the pattern, the stitches, and the flow of the yarn through our hands are all very relaxing and can be therapeutic. It gives our minds something to concentrate on and let the stresses of the day melt away or simply be pushed to the back of our minds - if only for a little while. I find time to crochet every day, even if it's just for a few minutes before bed.

Charts, graphs, and written instructions can be confusing, but that shouldn't stop you from trying to learn to crochet. With a good instructor you can gain the knowledge you need to understand patterns and stitches, and before long you'll be enjoying the art of crochet!

# *Finding light in the darkness*

**Sarah Parker**

After the blaze of autumn passes, we are more aware that night has crept into the day, as the sun has now moved its attention to the other side of the world. Many cultures and religions have celebrations that focus on bringing light into the darkness at this time of year. There's Diwali in India, Santa Lucia day in Scandinavian countries, Yule throughout Northwestern Europe, Winter Lights Festival in Reykjavik, and many more, old and new. In the darkest days, people bring in light as a symbol of hope, a symbol that we can get through these dark times.

Through these winter nights, it's important to think about the ways in which we can bring light into our lives. This may be making your home cosy with candles, meeting a friend for coffee, taking the time to do the things we enjoy, or finding a new hobby to bring us lightness. Finding those things that bring a spark into your life will light your days until the sun is able to do that for you.

*Sarah is an art therapist and artist living in the North York Moors. She has a passion for nature, soothing activities and finding ways to feel connected. She reconnected with art-making 20 years ago after becoming ill and found that art-making and soothing activities made a huge difference to her emotional and physical health. This led her to train as an art therapist, graduating her MA in 2011. Bringing a sense of soothing and feeling connected has remained her primary focus in her work and life.*

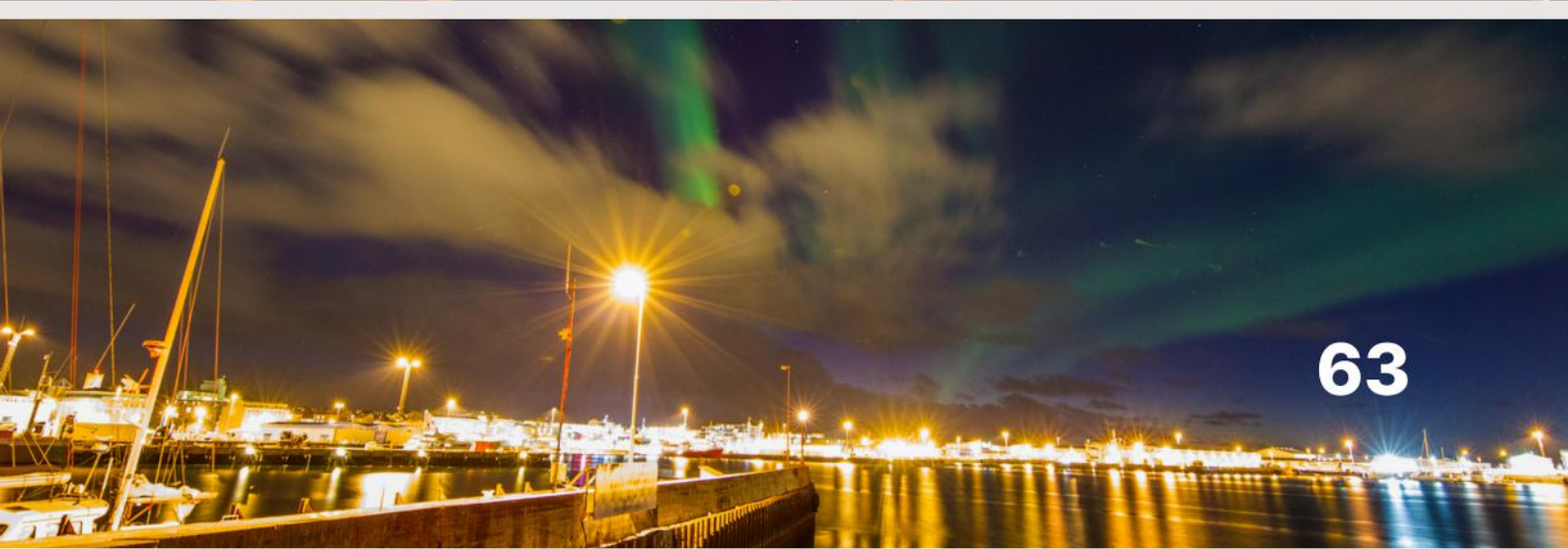
## *Making Art Through the Seasons*

**Tuesday 13th December at 2:30pm**

Our focus for this December workshop is bringing light into these dark days and will include breathing techniques, led visualisations, art making and sharing. Rather than developing technical art skills, this course will support you to connect to yourself and the seasons.

You do not need to feel that you are good at art to do this course, the focus is on the process of art-making and what you learn from doing it.

You can use whatever art materials you already have and a quiet space will help. If you can, bring a small candle and something to inscribe it with (not essential).



What food or recipes give you a sense of nostalgia? Are there any meals which transport you back to another time or place?

**Debbie:** "It has to be my mum's coffee cake and watching her make it and hoping to be allowed the cake beaters to lick"

**Louise:** "Coming in from school on winter days. Always the smell of ironing (mum had lot to iron for us all!) a freshly made pot of tea and a proper beef stew simmering (with dumplings of course)"

**Wendy:** "Borscht with meat balls with boiled potatoes. Childhood. And waking up on Saturday morning to the smell of cholent that has been in the oven overnight. A couple of baked potatoes from it for my breakfast"

**Paula:** "Coming in from school on a cold winter's day to mam's Panackelty"

**Clare:** "I love flapjack and as a child always thought when I grow up, I'm going to make a batch and eat it all before it's baked"

**Carol:** "Pork roast with sauerkraut"

# ParsleyBox

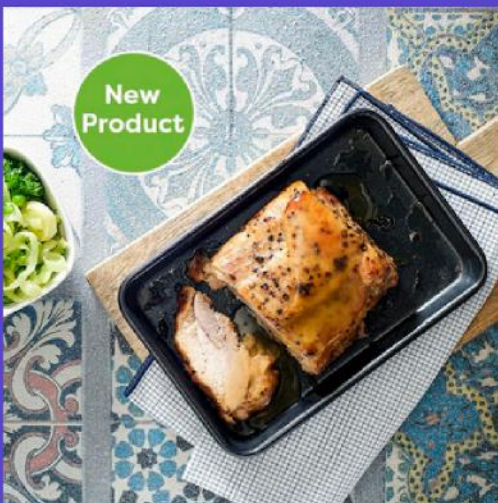


## Beef Stew

Slow cooked British beef brisket with carrot, potato and swede in a rich beef gravy

## Jumbo Oat Flapjack

Two individually wrapped soft and moreish flapjacks, made to a simple, traditional recipe with jumbo oats.



## Pork Belly with Cider Apple Sauce

British pork belly seasoned with a sea salt and smoked Applewood rub, slow cooked until tender with a scrumpy cider apple sauce.

# Christmas Gifting

For our readers...

An annual subscription  
to Reader's Digest  
**£22.99**



For our gardeners...



1

1 'In The Garden'  
Tea-Break Hand  
Essentials  
**£18**



2

2 'Planting for  
Honeybees'  
**£12**

**66**

## For our rock stars...

Rock Choir E-Voucher  
to be used towards  
membership fees  
**£50 or £100**



## For our wine connoisseurs...



**1**

**1** Canned Wine Co.  
White, Rose and Red  
Selection  
**£15**



**2**

**2** Bourgogne Pinot Noir  
and Duck Terrine  
**£25**

## For our foodies...

**1** Parsley Box Best  
Picks Selection  
**£35**

**2** Tastes of the  
World  
**£38**



Want to get involved in  
upcoming issues of the  
Mirthy Explorer?

Email submissions to  
[mahalia@mirthy.co.uk](mailto:mahalia@mirthy.co.uk)

