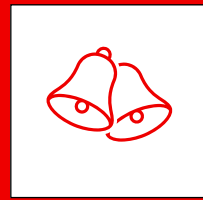




Newsletter



Hartlepool & District u3a

Issue 103, December (Christmas Special) 2025



Comments from the Chair

A warm welcome to the final Newsletter of the year which seems to have gone by at a rapid pace. It has been a good year for our u3a with new members joining month by month, great attendances at our monthly meetings, and a record number of interest groups available for us to choose from. I must thank everybody who has made this possible: our guest speakers; the committee; the two group coordinators, group leaders, the meet and greeters, sellers of raffle tickets, the kitchen volunteers, those of you who help setting up the meetings and put the tables and chairs back at the end, and all the members who attend our general meetings and interest groups. A special thank you to our Newsletter editor who does a magnificent job each month producing newsletters of the highest quality. Apologies to anyone I have missed out!

As I have mentioned, we have had particularly good turnouts for our guest speakers and I expect our next speaker to be no exception. On December 5th we are going to welcome Mark Braithwaite, the retired Chief Superintendent of Middlesbrough Police force who will be giving us a talk about 'Double Jeopardy'. Many of you will have seen the recent 4-part drama 'I fought the law' and Mark will be informing us about his connection with the case.

We start 2006 with a talk by David Hastings on the RNLI. This will be followed by Frances Wilson in February so a great start to the year is in store for us all.

It just leaves me to wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Thank you for all your support.

Best wishes

Roger

‘The 12 Days of Christmas’ Is There a Hidden Meaning? Barry Liddle

‘The Twelve Days of Christmas’ is a popular carol/song published in the late eighteenth century and is much loved for its structure, where each verse adds new gifts while repeating all the previous ones. This cumulative structure makes it similar in a way to some nursery rhymes.

The twelve days in the song are the twelve days of Christmas starting with Christmas Day to the day before Epiphany (6th January) which traditionally marked the end of Christmas celebrations.

How many gifts are given in total during the 12 days? Any idea? Well, the answer is 364. That’s because the gifts are cumulative and each day the recipient of ‘their true love’ gets a repeat of the gifts from the previous days. So, for example, as the following table shows by day 7 the recipient has 7 partridges in pear trees, 12 turtle doves, 15 French Hens, 16 calling birds, 15 gold rings, 12 geese-a-laying and 7 swans-a-swimming!

Number of Gifts After 7 Days

	1 PTPT	2 TD	3 FH	4 CB	5 GR	6 G-a-L	7 S-a-S
Day1	1						
Day2	1	2					
Day3	1	2	3				
Day4	1	2	3	4			
Day 5	1	2	3	4	5		
Day6	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Day7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Total	7	12	15	16	15	12	7

Do the 12 gifts have some significant other meaning or are they just appropriate to the theme of the carol/song? There is a lot of speculation and conflicting research available into the meaning of the gifts. As this is not an academic article, I will try to briefly summarise the key points without overcomplicating things by citing all the authors and sources which have been accessed. I have also taken the liberty of occasionally adding in my own thoughts on the possible meaning of the gifts.

Part of the problem in understanding the meaning of the gifts in this carol/song is that there are several versions of the lyrics in existence and in several different languages. There are also variations in what the gifts actually are in some of the versions of the carol/song and there is some dispute over its origins – all of which contribute to a lack of consensus over the meaning of the gifts.

Partridge in a Pear Tree. In all honesty there is no real consensus about the symbolism of a 'Partridge in a Pear Tree. Some think its origins are from French versions of the lyrics and in some printed versions the Pear Tree is replaced by the Juniper Tree. One of several theories is that the partridge represents Jesus while the pear tree symbolizes the cross. But who knows for certain.

2 Turtle Doves. Those looking for a biblical meaning say the two turtle doves represent the Old and New Testaments, which together represent Gods plan for the Earth. Whilst others see the birds as symbols of love and partnership, as turtle doves are known to be monogamous and mate for life.

3 French Hens. Some scholars suggest Three French Hens represent the Christian virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity. While others who think the carol is of French origin and suggest they are Breton Hens or represent the three colours of the French flag.

4 Calling Birds. Those believing in a biblical interpretation of the carol see the four calling birds as representation of the four Gospels in the New Testament. Others see the 'calling birds' as a later change to the lyrics from the original 'colly birds' an old English term for blackbirds.

5 Gold Rings. Those viewing the carol in biblical terms see the five gold rings as the five books of the Old Testament (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy). Others view the five golds rings as referring to ringed neck pheasants – which implies that all the gifts for the first five days are birds. However, an illustration from the first known publication of the 'Twelve Days of Christmas' in 1780 merely shows 5 gold rings.

6 Geese-a-Laying. Some say Six Geese-a-Laying symbolizes the six days of creation, representing new life and Gods creative power. In the late eighteenth century when the carol was written, Catholicism was marginalised and faced restrictions and so some researchers suggest the carol is not a list of gifts, but a way for persecuted Catholics to secretly teach their children the story of creation and other aspects of faith.

7 Swans-a -Swimming. The ‘Seven Swans- a- Swimming’ are seen by some as the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit or the seven sacraments. This symbolism suggests that when one walks with God, the gifts of the Spirit flows as easily and gracefully as a swan on water.

8 Maids-a- Milking. Some researchers believe that the Eight Maids – a-Milking represents the eight beatitudes in the Bible which all begin with the word ‘blessed.’ A more secular interpretation is that milkmaids were chosen because they are a symbol of wholesomeness and romantic pastoral innocence.

9 Ladies Dancing. Whilst there is no consensus view, 9 Ladies Dancing are seen by some as the nine fruits of the Holy Spirit in the book of Galatians – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self -control. Or from a secular view, ladies dancing is the sort of thing you would expect to be part of the celebrations of the 12 days of Christmas.

10 Lords-a-Leaping. 10 Lords -a-Leaping is seen by some as representing the ‘Ten Commandments’. Such a view would add weight to the whole carol/song as being a coded Catholic catechism for children – at a time when this faith was oppressed in England. However, this view is also disputed by many.

11 Pipers Playing and 12 Drummers Drumming. Some interpret the 11 pipers piping as the 11 faithful apostles of Jesus, excluding Judas Iscariot. However, pipers playing and Drummers Drumming would seem to be an appropriate choice in a carol/song devoted to 12 days of Christmas celebrations.

Conclusions

1. I don’t claim to have any expertise in interpreting this carol/song, but if you asked for my opinion, I would say that this is just a carol/song. The original authors (there being several versions of the lyrics) merely chose the gifts for each day to symbolise the 12 days of Christmas celebrations.
2. The theory put forward by some that the persecuted Catholics of the late 18th century secretly used the carol/song to teach their children the story of creation and other aspects of faith does not really stand up to scrutiny. I am no scholar of the scriptures, but none of the Biblical references would seem to distinguish between catholic or protestant doctrines – so why would they have needed to be hidden behind the 12 gifts of the carol/song.

Sources: Various including Google/Wikipedia

Visit to Preston Hall Park

Liz Milbourn

The final Garden Group outing of 2025 was a joint visit with the Art and Appreciation Group to Preston Hall Park. The combined trip proved very popular, with enough members attending to fill two minibuses. Although there was not much to see from a gardening perspective at this time of year—Butterfly World and the Walled Garden are now closed for winter—there was still plenty to enjoy across the 100-acre park and inside all the Hall buildings.

For anyone who hasn't visited Preston Park recently, it is well worth a trip. A brand-new exhibition space was opened a few months ago, complete with an additional café, art gallery, and expanded museum area. One highlight was the impressive dried-flower installation,



many of the blooms having been grown in the walled garden.



Inside the Hall, the museum houses a vast collection of artefacts from the Stockton-on-Tees area. The replica Victorian street allowed us to step back into 1895 Stockton, complete with period shops—many staffed by resident “shopkeepers” who brought the street to life.



We were also lucky enough to see the Tees archaeological excavations on the site of the original 1825 Stockton and Darlington Railway line. A big thank you to Cliff, who was working on the site and showed us what was happening, as well as some of the fascinating objects that have recently been found.

Helen and I would like to say a big thank you to everyone who has supported our Garden Group trips this year. Your participation has enabled us to hire minibuses and venture further afield. Although there isn't a visit planned for December, we are having our Christmas lunch at The Raby Arms on 4th December.

We hope to publish our proposed 2026 Garden Group visits early in the New Year.

Photographs © Paul Eustace and Margaret Boddy

An Interesting Time at the Supermarket

Phil Jefferies

A funny thing happened at the supermarket a few weeks back. Well, two funny things actually.

I'd been to my grandson's birthday party on the Friday and was pleased to take 2 cup cakes home with me, along with the leftover coleslaw. Quite a lot of coleslaw actually, which is why I went to Aldi bright and early on the Sunday morning, looking for some pizza to go with it. Having found what I was looking for, I was about to head for the checkouts, pizza in one hand and white stick in the other, when a lady of u3a sort of age came up to me brandishing a packet of something and said: "Excuse me, I've left my glasses at home, can you read the date on that please?". I was indeed able to read the date and it met with approval from the lady, but I had to smile at the irony of a chap with a white stick being asked to read something in small print.

I then proceeded to the checkouts but none of them were staffed and the self-service checkouts were cordoned off. I acted in true British fashion and stood there looking helpless for a few moments, when a lady with a floor polishing machine said: "We don't open until 10". I checked my watch and replied that it was twenty to 11 and she replied: "No, it's 20 to 10, the clocks changed last night". Arrggghhhh, it's about 20 years since I last made that mistake! I had the grace to smile sheepishly and concede that she was correct.

So I stood there in penance and waited for the hour of 10 to arrive. A chap who appeared in a hurry joined the queue behind me and enquired what the holdup was. I explained the problem and he had a face of thunder for a few seconds before starting to laugh. So we waited in silence together, like naughty schoolboys outside the headmaster's office. I wondered whether the staff would take pity on us and open one of the tills but realised they couldn't. Sunday trading laws. Hey ho.

There were a dozen or so of us when 10 o'clock arrived, mostly of a similar age but with a few youngsters too. Are youngsters savvier than oldies? Were they elsewhere doing park runs and suchlike? Or perhaps still abed? I guess we'll never know.

Anyway, all's well that ends well and I can report that pizza and coleslaw with a side salad went down very well that evening. Having no Italian wine in stock, I washed it down with a Portuguese red and that was very nice too.

Christmas Breakfast Menu

Barry Liddle

Most of us are eating variations of the same thing for Christmas lunch, but Christmas breakfast is an opportunity to try something completely different and hopefully, special. Last year I surprised myself by having a glass of whisky followed by a bacon sandwich. To get your festive tastebuds going (without the whisky), here are a few suggestions based on my own bumbling experiments in the kitchen:

Bircher Muesli. I haven't made this for many years; I must start making it again because it makes a nice fresh but substantial start to the day. You can find all different types of recipes on the internet with precise measurements for ingredients. I used to just place one portion of porridge oats in a bowl and cover with good quality apple juice -just enough so that overnight in the fridge the oats absorb the juice. At breakfast time I would then remove the fruity porridge mixture from the fridge and add the contents of an individual pot of fruit yogurt, then stir well and top with blueberries or grated apple.

Breakfast in Bread. A favourite with my brother and his wife. Basically, selected elements of a cooked breakfast (fried egg, bacon, sausage and black pudding etc) are served in a small stottie cake of baguette. (Keep a napkin handy for the inevitable spillage).

French Toast. Not sure why it is called French, but it is a satisfying start to the day served on its own with ketchup/brown sauce or with a side order of bacon. To make, briefly soak slices of bread in seasoned mixture of beaten egg and a little milk, then pan fry on both sides in oil and butter until golden brown. (Top tip - thin sliced bread is too flimsy for French Toast, try something more substantial like sourdough for better results).

Good Old-Fashioned Kippers. You can fry them or bake them, but my preference is for a variation of the jug method. Place the kippers in a deep baking tray and cover with boiling water and leave for a few minutes. Drain and serve with bread and butter and a large mug of tea. After many years I rediscovered the taste for kippers after spending a week in the Northumberland village of Craster with my friends Andy and Margaret. Our cottage was a few yards away from L Robson and Sons Ltd home of the famous Craster Kippers, which we enjoyed every morning for breakfast.

Hot Smoked Mackerel. An acceptable alternative to Kippers. Buy some ready smoked fillets, remove the skin(optional) and place on a shallow baking tray in a medium oven for about 15 minutes. As with kippers, serve with bread, butter and tea.

Smoked Salmon and Scrambled Eggs. Scramble the eggs to your liking (I prefer the eggs to be just set) then serve on hot buttered sourdough toast with the smoked salmon draped over the eggs. Serve with a wedge of lemon and as this is celebratory breakfast, it goes well with a glass of bubbly.

Ying and Yang on Toast. Butter two slices of toast. On one place a large slice of mild cheese (such as Gauda, Edam or Mozzarella) and on the other marmalade or jam. Eat in that order with good coffee or tea. Simple and satisfying.

Special Cooked Breakfast. Elevate your regular Sunday cooked breakfast by introducing a new ingredient. For special occasions I like to add White Pudding (made from pork, suet oatmeal and other ingredients). The last time I looked Asda and Morrisons both sold white pudding and there are specialist produces online. Cook the same way as black pudding, Potato Scones (also known as Potato cakes and in Scotland Tattie Scones) are readily available in supermarkets and make a nice alternative to toast or fried bread.

Something on Toast. Toast two slices of sourdough bread, spread with butter and then add either a mashed banana or mashed avocado. Alternatively for a hot breakfast top the toast with fried tomato slices or sautéed mushrooms. Good options for veggies.

Poached Eggs on Gammon. Grill a slice of gammon, top with a nice poached egg. Simple.

Fruit Salad. A light and refreshing start to Christmas morning. Take a selection of your favourite fruits (the more the merrier) and cut the larger fruits into smaller pieces and serve over cereal and milk or on its own with a dollop of Greek yogurt and a drizzle of honey. Alternatively add chilled apple or orange juice to the fruit salad and serve in a glass bowl (it is Christmas after all) – makes for a really zingy start to the day.

Cakes and Pastries. For a lighter, sweeter breakfast, then why not enjoy a selection of pastries with good coffee or tea. With no preparation required, this is a light and easy Christmas Breakfast. Choose from amongst others - Danish Pastries; Donuts; Apple Turnovers; Fruit Muffins; Cinnamon Rolls and Pain au Chocolat. (Please *note at Christmas none of these pastries contain any calories!*)

Baked Eggs. Eggs are the most versatile of breakfast ingredients. They can be boiled, fried, poached, scrambled, eaten as an omelette and so on. I recently tried a Baked Egg. Grease a small ramekin with butter, break an egg and season well. Cover in a little cream and bake in a low oven (gas mark 3) for 10 minutes or until the egg is set. Serve with buttered toast.

Christmas Porridge. Porridge is an everyday breakfast staple, but on Christmas morning why not make a seasonal version by adding chopped figs and dates to the oats and as an optional extra – a small pinch of cinnamon or nutmeg. When cooked, top with a little milk or single cream and a drizzle of honey. Christmas in a bowl.

Pitta Bread Omelette Toast a pitta bread until it swells, then cut along one side to make a pocket. Meanwhile, make a one or two egg omelette in a small frying pan- when cooked to your liking fold in half and slide into the pitta bread. Add ketchup or brown sauce to taste. Light, tasty and not too filling.

The Tuesday Book Club & Christmas Books

Rose Pickering, Mary Waldmeyer & Margaret Chappell

Rose Pickering writes:

A newcomer to town, I was keen to meet likeminded people and decided to start with the U3A Tuesday Book Club. Receiving a very warm welcome at the September meeting, I enjoyed discussing 'A Month in the Country' by J.L. Carr, followed in October by 'James', a recent novel by Percival Everett. Two very different, thought provoking and enjoyable books, neither of which I would have chosen had I not joined this group.

On a seasonal note, the Just William Christmas stories by Richmal Crompton deserve a mention. In 'A Busy Day', William wakes up on Christmas Day, happy in the knowledge that the large jar of sweets and pirate book he has bought for his father and brother can easily be stolen back. In the early hours, he helps his small cousin Jimmy to find the escaped snails which he has collected as presents. Next, he starts to repair a 'broken' clock, using his new book 'Things A Boy Can Do'. By the end of the day, unsurprisingly, the book has joined William's other treasures in his father's locked cupboard.

I'm looking forward to more book discussions in the coming months, and to helping plan the reading list for next year.

Mary Waldmeyer writes:

We are so pleased to welcome Rose to our group and glad that she's enjoyed the first books we've read together (though that won't always be the case, I'm sure!). I shall look for that Just William story.

My Christmas book recommendation is Sally Nicholls' "The Silent Stars Go By", set in a country vicarage during Christmas 1919. Margot, the respectable vicar's daughter has returned home and so has Harry, her fiancé who was missing in action on the Western front three years before, when Margot discovered she was expecting his child. The child, James, has been brought up as Margot's little brother, all unbeknown to Harry, who can't understand why Margot hasn't answered his letters. It is all going to unfold.

Sally Nicholls made her name as a children's writer but this is Young Adult Fiction, with thought-provoking themes and a real sense of the time and place.

And, from Margaret Chappell

This time of year, I like nothing better than getting cosy with a spine-chilling gothic read. At the moment I am reading Laura Purcell's new one, "House of Splinters", a follow up to "The Silent Companions", which was a BBC Radio 2 book read.

Lined up after that are "The Haunting Season" and "The Witching Hour", described as ghostly tales for the darkest nights.

For Christmas Eve I am looking forward to reading a cosy crime novel, "Death in Ambush", a Lost Christmas Murder Mystery, by Susan Gilruth. It's a classic country-house Christmas murder mystery written in 1952 and now republished as one of the British Library Crime Classics. I couldn't resist the cover to this one.

Christmas Notice Board

Dates for Your Dairy

November 24th

New Group
Computer Group
The Peoples Centre between
1pm and 3pm
Bring your laptops, tablets
etc. with you.
For more details contact Jan
Jenner

November 26th

Stroll and Chat group.
Our first walk was a great
success and all those who
attended were able to walk at
their own pace.
The next walk is planned at
The Headland. We will meet
in the Hartlepool Borough
Hall carpark at 11am.
For further information
contact Helen Eustace

December 1st

New Group.
Camera Club.
Meets at Newcastle Building
Society York Road, 2pm.
Bring your camera or mobile
phone. Free tea and coffee
provided. For more details
contact Jan Jenner

December 4th

Garden Group.
Christmas Meal. 12.30pm at
the Raby Arms.
For further information
contact Liz Milbourn or Helen
Eustace

My Word of the Month

Frankincense

With it being Christmas, my festive word of the month is Frankincense, which as everyone knows is a fragrant used in ancient times and was one of the gifts brought to Jesus by the three Wise Men.

Frankincense was traditionally burned in the temple (to create incense) as an offering to God and by bringing this gift, the Three Kings or Magi affirmed Jesus was no ordinary man.

Source Google

Barry Liddle

Christmas Edition of Who am I?

Compiled by Barry Liddle

1. I'm a pantomime character.
2. I'm a dame played by an older man.
3. My character has been played by Les Dawson, Danny LaRue and Terry Scott.
4. The story behind the pantomime is based on *Arabian Nights*.
5. Wishy-Washy is my son in the pantomime.
6. My surname is named after an inferior grade of green tea – the implication is that I'm past my best.
7. My character is secretly lazy despite complaining about being overworked.
8. In the pantomime I run a laundry business.

Answer on Page 20

Dates for Your Dairy

December 5th

General Meeting
Meet at St. Josephs
Church Hall 2pm.
Mark Braithwaite now
retired from Cleveland
Police will give a talk on
the Double Jeopardy case.

December 9th (Tuesday)

Stroll and Chat.
Meet at 11am at
Summerhill.
Further details contact
Helen Eustace

December 9th

Poetry Group
2pm until 4pm at the
Newcastle Building
Society
Further details contact
Margaret Chappell

December 11th

Archaeology and History.
People's Centre 10.30am.
Bernard Hope presents
'It's a wonderful Life'
based on Dickens 'A
Christmas Carol'.
For further information
contact Chris McLoughlin.

December 19th

u3a Christmas Meal.
12.30pm. Indoor Bowls
Club.
This event is now at full
capacity.
For those going and need
any further details contact
Jacky Armstrong.

Turkish Delight

A Christmas Gift That Keeps on Giving

Turkish Delight is always associated with Christmas in the Liddle household because my dad was presented with a packet of *Turkish Delight* every Christmas for decades.

Looking back, I now think he didn't even like it, but because he accepted the first pack gracefully – everyone thought it was his favourite! So, every year he got another pack– which he always stored in his wardrobe for several months to mature, before bringing it downstairs and encouraging everyone to have a piece. Perhaps he was getting his own back.

Turkish Delight can come in premium varieties with chopped dates, pistachios, hazelnuts or walnuts. But the *Turkish Delight* dad received was a down-market soft pink goo, cut into small cubes, dusted with icing sugar and tasting of rosewater.

Barry Liddle

Sellotape

I suspect the annual peak sales of Sellotape take place in the run-up to Christmas. All those parcels need wrapping and what better to secure the wrapping paper than several strips of sticky Sellotape.

Sellotape is actually a brand name (other brands are available) that has become synonymous with clear sticky tape, rather like the word Hoover for vacuum cleaners.

Sellotape was not invented in the UK until 1937, so before that Christmas parcels would presumably have been secured with string or twine and for the more affluent, ribbons.

Source: Wikipedia

Barry Liddle

Dates for Your Dairy

January 2nd, 2026

General Meeting
St. Josephs at 2pm
A talk on the RNLI by David
Hastings

February 6th, 2026

General meeting
2pm.
A talk by Frances Wilson

**Compiled by Helen
Eustace**

Mysterious Christmas Drinks

Christmas is a time when we often visit old friends, in-laws and relatives. Some of whom take this opportunity to offload strange bottles of alcohol, bought on impulse and then confined to the back of a dusty cupboard. It was an occasion like this that I first came across *Advocaat* – which I later found out is a Dutch liqueur the colour of Bird's Custard. If you like that sort of thing, it is thick, creamy with a custard like flavour and texture. I would prefer a wee dram any day!

Barry Liddle

Desperate Dan and Christmas Pudding!

As a small boy I was an avid reader of *'The Dandy'* comic, published by the Dundee based DC Comics. You may remember that at one of our U3A monthly meetings we enjoyed a talk by one of the artists who worked for DC Comics.

My favourite character in *The Dandy* was always Desperate Dan – the world's strongest man- who ploughed his way through Giant Cow Pies in each episode of the comic. But at Christmas, he always consumed a giant Christmas pudding, which was huge, perfectly round and topped by a white sauce and a sprig of holly. I was always fascinated by the roundness of the pudding.

Barry Liddle



A photograph taken
some years ago at
RSPB Saltholme - a
few days before
Christmas Day

© Barry Liddle



Pondering Life's Little Choices

Irene Archer

Co-Leader: Art Appreciation Group & Natural History Group

Full English or cereal & toast?

Cereal and toast at home. Half an English on holiday.

Holiday abroad or Staycation?

Usually have a couple of holidays abroad and one in this country.

Dog or Cat?

Wouldn't want either, too tying.

Christmas Day or Boxing Day?

Both, because we have a lot of family to see.

Wine or Beer?

Usually, a beer while I'm watching tv.

Beatles or Rolling Stones?

Beatles, I loved Paul McCartney.

Meat or Lentils?

I love a vegetarian when we eat out. Most of the time I eat meat but include fish twice a week.

Dr Who or Star Trek?

Watched Dr who when I was little and recently started watching it again. Think it's changed a bit.

Cappuccino or Espresso?

Latte

Night in or Night Out?

Usually, night in but try and get out as much as possible.

Coronation Street or Eastenders?

Don't watch either.

Football or Rugby?

Recently enjoyed the female rugby but generally neither.

Cheese & Onion or Salt & Vinegar crisps?

Cheese and onion, I hate the latter.

Shopping or Anything Else?

Don't enjoy shopping, would rather go for a walk in the countryside.

Garlic or No Garlic.

I love garlic but this can cause problems because my other half doesn't like it.

Pudding or Cheese & Biscuits?

Usually too full for afters but sometimes I can squeeze a nice piece of cake.

Cash or Card Cash for small purchases,

Card for bigger shops.

Whisky or Gin & Tonic?

Definitely Gin. I have a selection of different flavours. Family knows what to buy me.

Night Owl or Lark?

Neither.

White or Brown Bread?

Brown seeded bread

The Flintstones or Noggin the Nog .

Neither. From my answers you can probably gather that I haven't been a big tv watcher.

Ketchup or Brown Sauce?

Neither, spoils the flavour of the food.

Morris Minor or Ford Anglia.

What?

Tripe & Onions or Liver & Onions

Liver and onions with a bit of bacon in.

Darts or Snooker.

I like watching snooker.

Sherry or Cocktail.

I don't like sherry, I'm not old enough yet!

Social Media or No Social Media.

Social media. I use Facebook a lot because I have joined quite a few interest groups.

Avocado on Toast or Beans on Toast.

Usually, beans but I have Avocado sometimes when I eat out.

Mods or Rockers?

Rockers. I used to have a leather jacket with all the badges from motorbike rallies.

Crossword Puzzles or Sudoku?

Sudoku, but not very good at it.

Indian Takeaway or Chinese Takeaway?

Chinese usually

Strictly Come Dancing or Bangers and

Cash?

Don't watch either

Salad Cream or Mayonnaise?

Mayonnaise.

Regular Exercise or No Exercise?

Regular exercise at the gym and enjoy table tennis.

Is your glass half full or half empty?

Half full, keep trying to fill it and end up doing too much!

Poetry Corner

Autumn Days

Changing days
Cool days
Chilly days
Sometimes stormy
Occasional respite
With blue skies
Wind, rain, clouds, sun
All to be acknowledged
And embraced
As nature moves
Through its cycles
Riding the waves created
By unwelcome intrusion
From those who should
Know better.
Autumn
A season
Full of beauty
Where trees
Discard their leaves
After a glorious display
Of deepening colours
Where some birds
Fly south
While others
Return for winter.
Autumn
A time of change
A time of renewal
Time to stop
Time to take a breath
Enjoy the wonder
Of life

Roger Say

Down Memory Lane North East Land, Sea and Air Museum



Photographs © Barry Liddle

The Worst Christmas Present Ever Received

2000 Survey of Hartlepool u3a Members

Barry Liddle

In 2000, when Covid struck and no one could meet, we took the opportunity to conduct an informal survey of members attitudes to Christmas. One question which everyone attacked with gusto, was 'What was the worst Christmas present you ever received'? I've reproduced the answers to that question for a bit of fun and to encourage members who joined after 2000 to consider how they might have answered the question.

Having sorted through the answers there were 3 approaches adopted by our members.

1. First, a few members chose the high moral ground and perhaps despite receiving some terrible presents over the years, they choose to see beyond them to accept all presents with grace and gratitude. **Our U3A Christmas Saints** therefore include Sandra Williams; Irene Archer; and Sheila Walsh. Meanwhile, Susan Jackson, with one eye on the future, refused to name her worst ever present in case it offended Santa Claus.
2. A second larger group of members received a present that was intrinsically OK, it was just that it was entirely the wrong present for them. Rather like buying a year's supply of black pudding for a vegetarian. Members in this second category include: Jacky Armstrong, who received a **Candelabra** – a perfectly reasonable present you might say, but according to Jacky "...I hate the things, and they always need cleaning!" Sharron Readman expecting an exciting surprise was most underwhelmed to receive a set of **Flannelette sheets**. Our rugged chair Roger Say was left perplexed and bewildered one year when presented with **A Voucher for a Beauty Salon**. Linda House's worst present was a **Bottle of Red Wine**, obviously a present welcomed by many but if you don't drink red wine then I can see where Linda is coming from. Lesley Jones complains about receiving a **Dishwasher** – eminently practical but not very romantic. For Lyn Allison the worst present was a tube of **Facial Hair Remover** – perhaps a useful thing for some, but not a very tactful gift. For Sue Burton the worst present she receives is **Toiletries**, because "I'm allergic to most". Geoff Law remembers recoiling at a **pair of Socks embossed with the Simpson's cartoon motif**. Lastly a selection of impersonal and mundane gifts **Ginger Sweets** for Jean Douglas; **An Ordinary Tablecloth** for Marjorie Hardy; and a **Tin Tray** for Sybil Yeoman.

3. Now dear reader we get onto the third category of truly terrible and horrible presents. Joan Nicholson received a **Bar Towel** one year (let us hope it didn't smell of beer). Jessica Scott's worst present was a hideous **broach with an evil ruby eye on the face of a flying duck**. For our Treasurer Phil Jefferies the worst present ever was a "**rather hideous beer stein** from my late aunt." For Barry Liddle, two presents stand out for their awfulness- a **plastic jug, shaped as a laughing pig, filled with wooden spoons** – which he received as a 14-year-old teenager ("*what was I supposed to do with it?*") and two decades later an **unwrapped tatty tie from a second- hand shop**. For Christine Robinson it was "not getting a **train set** ever, because I'm a girl and girls don't get train sets!" For David House it was a "**very bright RED pullover knitted by my wife**" –although in the interests of marital harmony the real problem seems to have been the choice of pattern rather than the quality of the knitting. Linda Scott says "I had a Scottish auntie who used to win the prize for worst present every year. Don't know where she found them, but they were usually **figurines of children, fairies, angels, animals, and birds** with no artistic merit at all!" Finally, a special mention for Josie Watts who received a perfectly lovely **Doll**, but she had to share it with her twin. How perfectly sad.



U3A Christmas Party Prior to Covid

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A Journey Around the World Quiz

Compiled by Barry Liddle

Q1 In the novel Around the World in Eighty Days, Phileas Fogg was accompanied by his valet. What was his name?

- a) Pierre
- b) Passepartout
- c) Passmeifyoucan

Q2 What are the colours of the Polish Flag?

- a) White and Blue
- b) White and Green
- c) White and Red

Q3 At the height of the British Empire, the world map was covered in

- a) Blue
- b) Military green
- b) Pink

Q4 What name is given to the informal settlements in Brazil which are home to millions of people and are associated with poverty, crime and poor infrastructure?

- a) Barrios
- b) Favelas
- c) Pueblo Joven

Q5 In the late 1800s the Klondike Gold Rush was a migration by c 100,000 prospectors to which area?

- a) Northwest America
- b) Northwest Australia
- c) Northwest Canada

Q6 The former city of Madras in India, is now called?

- a) Chennai
- b) Kolkata
- c) Mumbai

Q7 Which State in the USA is nicknamed the Lone Star State for the single star on its flag?

- a) Georgia
- b) Texas
- c) Vermont

Q8 What is the capital city of New Zealand?

- a) Auckland
- b) Christchurch
- c) Wellington

Q9 In which country would you find 'Death Valley'?

- a) Ethiopia
- a) Iran
- b) USA

Q10 What is the world's smallest country?

- a) Monaco
- b) San Marino
- c) Vatican City

Q11 Patagonia is a region between Chile and Argentina. It has a large settlement of people who originated from:

- a) Ireland
- b) Scotland
- c) Wales

Q12 What was the nationality of the famous Polar explorer Roald Amundsen, the first man to reach the South Pole?

- a) Finnish
- b) Norwegian
- c) Swedish

Q13 Where is Mount Everest located?

- a) On the border of Nepal and China
- b) On the border of Nepal and Bhutan
- c) On the border of India and Nepal

Q14 What is the capital city of Nigeria?

- a) Lagos
- b) Nairobi
- c) Port Harcourt

Q15 Washington, D.C. is the capital city of the United States. What does D.C. stand for?

- a) District and City
- b) District of Columbia
- c) District and Capital

Q16 Which Italian city is home to car manufacturers Fiat and Lancia as well as Alfa Romeo, Maserati and Pininfarina?

- a) Genoa
- b) Rome
- c) Turin

Q17 How many countries are there in Africa?

- a) 24
- b) 34
- c) 54

Q18 The infamous Papa Doc Duvalier was president of which country from 1957 until 1971.

- a) Dominican Republic
- b) DR Congo
- c) Haiti

Q19 Fado is a mournful form of music characterised by melancholic ballads often about longing, loss and destiny. Where did it originate from?

- a) Basque Country
- b) Latvia
- c) Lisbon

Q20 Mount Vesuvius is regarded as the most dangerous volcano in the world. Where is it located?

- a) Ethiopia
- b) Gulf of Naples, Italy.
- c) The Hawaiian Islands

Answers on Page 20

**Merry Christmas
Everyone!**

Directory

Committee Members for 2025/26

Chair, Speaker Finder & Web Admin.

Roger Say

Vice Chair–

Paul Eustace

Business Secretary –

Wendy Borthwick

Treasurer –

Cliff Cordiner

Membership Secretary –

Andrea Reid

Beacon Admin.

Pauline Williamson

Group Co-ordinators

Pauline Williamson & Helen Eustace.

Minutes Secretary

Paul Eustace

Committee –

Keith Alder,

Roles of Non- Committee Members

Newsletter Editor-

Barry Liddle

Interest Group Leaders

Archaeology/History Group: Chris McLoughlin.

Art Appreciation: Co-Leaders: Irene Archer, Andrea Reid.

Backgammon Group Ann Gardiner

Bridge: Phil Jefferies.

Camera Club: Jan Jenner

Chess Group: Roger Say.

Coffee & Chat Jacky Armstrong

Computer: Jan Jenner

Creative Writing Group: Roger Say.

Events: see notice board

Family History: Co- Leaders: Jacky Armstrong, Pat Rutter.

Fun with Fabrics: Ann Say

Gardens and Gardening: Co-Leaders: Liz Milbourn and Helen Eustace

Lawn Bowls: Ray Elliston.

Music: Vacant

Natural History Group: Co- Leaders: Irene Archer, Margaret Andrews and Beryl Turnbull.

Play Reading: Carol Currie

Poetry: Margaret Chappell

Quiz Team: John Campbell.

Reading Group: Andrea Reid

Shibashi Exercise Group: Marjorie Reynolds.

Stroll and Chat: Helen Eustace

Tuesday Book Club: Mary Waldmeyer

Walking Group: Keith Alder

Who Am I? Answer: Widow Twankey

Quiz Answers

Q1 b) Passepartout; **Q2** c) White and Red ; **Q3** b) Pink; **Q4** b) Favelas; **Q5** c) Northwest Canada; **Q6** a) Chennai;**Q7** b) Texas; **Q8** c) Wellington;**Q9** b) USA; **Q10** c) Vatican City; **Q11** c) Wales;**Q12** b) Norwegian; **Q13** a) On the border of Nepal and China;**Q14** What is the capital city of Nigeria? b) Nairobi; **Q15** b) District of Columbia; **Q16** c) Turin; **Q17** c) 54; **Q18** c) Haiti; **Q19** c) Lisbon; **Q20** b) Gulf of Naples, Italy.

Copy Wanted for This Newsletter

Articles, Short Stories, Interesting Photographs (with captions), Limericks & Poems.
Items for the Newsletter's 'Notice Board' are also welcomed.

All contributions to the next Newsletter are most welcome.
Copy deadline for the next issue is 20 December 2025.

Barry Liddle, Newsletter Editor