

COUNTESTHORPE U3A

UPDATE AND CURFEW CHRONICLE No 13

Dear Member

Well, the 'new normal' is getting rather old now, and seems to be dragging on a bit with almost frequent changes as to when the restrictions may be eased. By now I guess that many of you will have had your first dose of vaccine, and that does help us to keep a positive mind-set as well as beginning to impart some immunity, although it is vitally important that we stay patient and keep to all the safeguards for now.

Thanks once again to all the contributors! I hope you will enjoy the selection for this month. Please do keep them coming in, as I have no idea how many more issues of the Chronicle there will need to be!

So, for now, I hope you are staying safe and finding ways to fill the hours. At least we can look forward to improving weather, and the gardens and parks will start 'waking up' to cheer us along. As I write I have been so happy to see the early bulbs coming out. Spring is on the way – virus or no virus!

Good wishes to you all.

June Hawkins

Information and Publicity Officer

*Chronicle contributions not later than 25 February, please,
to me by email at: jhawkins45@talktalk.net
or by post to 28 Mulberry Court, Enderby Rd, Blaby. LE8 4BU*

IMPORTANT NOTICE ABOUT MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS

Please note that renewals will cost **only £5** (full and associate members) for 2021/22 – no form is required, just send (with your name) to Barry Hillyard at 35 Station Road, Countesthorpe, Leicester LE8 5TA. **BUT PLEASE DO NOT SEND BEFORE 1 APRIL!** All new or lapsed (*check with Barry if you're unsure!*) members will need to complete the usual form and pay the full price of £15. Cheques are preferred, please, payable to "Countesthorpe U3A". Forms are available to download from the website, or contact Barry on 0116 277 4187. Please note that membership cards will no longer be issued, as little use has been made of them and this will save a little money! Programme cards will be made available to all members once our main meeting activities resume and we have details of speakers/dates/topics.

Unfortunately, this was received just too late for our New Year issue, but I'm sure that you'll enjoy Adrian's reflections on the 2020 festive season, and his positive note on . . .

LOOKING FORWARD

Christmas has gone, likewise the year,
 Somewhat thin on yuletide cheer.
 We all know why but I won't name
 The culprit that must take the blame.
 We tried our best in trying times
 And raised a glass to Big Ben's chimes.
 So to the attic tinsel's banished,
 Giving thanks last year has vanished.
 Soon in springtime hope will bloom,
 Outshining 2020's gloom.
 Now 21, we've got the keys
 To open life up as we please,
 But as I write, we're not there yet,
 Pray vaccines will see off the threat.
 For now, it's vigilance for all,
 As we wait for better times to call.



Written by Adrian Dobey



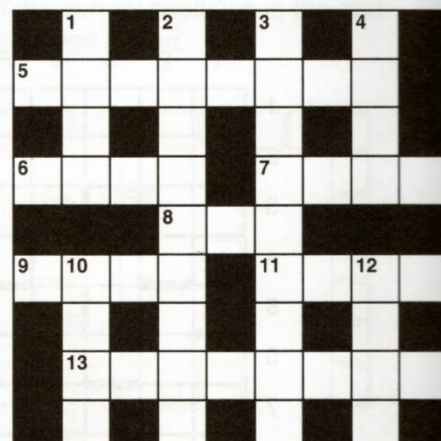
Quick Crosswords

ACROSS

- 5 Chemical mixture (8)
- 6 Heroic story (4)
- 7 Unguent (4)
- 8 Estuary fish (3)
- 9 At a distance (4)
- 11 Border, rim (4)
- 13 Opened (a wine bottle) (8)

DOWN

- 1 Poultry cage (4)
- 2 Storage device for turmeric etc (5,4)
- 3 Air (clothes) by machine (6-3)
- 4 False god (4)
- 10 Clan enmity (4)
- 12 Expanded (4)



POTATO PICKING

We were 13 years old, the girls of '43.
We studied declensions, life cycle of the bee,
learnt to speak nicely, hold our backs up straight,
be courteous, polite and never be late.
The Ministry of War said "Please assist",
enlisting our help. We didn't resist.
We didn't think of our education.
We had to help to 'feed the nation'.
We felt it our duty to defy the Hun.
So when matriculation work was done
we picked potatoes where they lay
in the countryside – miles away!

We sat on a haystack in the sun,
always hungry, happy and young,
with bottles of Tizer, bubbly and red
and sandwiches made from homemade bread.
And apples from a scrumping tree
were made into tarts for my friends and me.
We saw a life outside our own.
We learnt of soil and ploughs and seasons
when food is picked, or plucked, or sown.
We knew of agricultural reasons
why some will flourish or simply not grown.
When Hitler came into Form 4A –
well, not himself, but what can I say –
Academia was replaced by black galoshes
and we talked to each other of carrots in cloches.

There was a lad on a tractor. Our school had no men,
only the caretaker. So, again and again
we dreamt of romance, untested, untried,
Cupid on wheels; we shrugged and we sighted,
"Give us a glimpse of romance please,
a special smile, a hug or a squeeze."
That's what we wanted in those wartime days
using our schoolgirls' winning ways.
The tractor driver – a handsome chap
with his well-worn boots and his farmer's cap –
ploughed by us every fifteen minutes
and whistled and flirted every time he did it.

We boarded the coach to take us away;
we were handed our wages, and
as we ate the rest of our food
dreamed of our 'romantic interlude'.
We put our tunics on next day
and house shoes and berets; we stood up tall.
We were back in the town in the school in the street
where starry-eyed dreams and reality meet.

Our war effort memory is often near.
And when we cook spuds (roasted or boiled)
thoughts of the ploughed field where we toiled
and harvested the crops that memorable year
are laced with the upturned earth and its smell,
a boy on a cart, giggling girls – who later would tell
"We picked potatoes between two sets of wood.
For the tables of England we did what we could."

*Written by Margaret Issitt, a published author and
a member of our Creative Writing Group*



FAMOUS BRITISH PEOPLE QUIZ

- 1 King responsible for the execution of Anne Boleyn
- 2 Female Prime Minister of the UK, 1979-90
- 3 Author of 'The Origin of Species'
- 4 First European in contact with the eastern coastline of Australia
- 5 Architect designer for much of London after the Great Fire in 1666
- 6 Composer of the 'Pomp and Circumstance' marches
- 7 Political activist and leader of the British suffragette movement
- 8 Painter of 'The Fighting Temeraire' and 'Rain, Steam and Speed'
- 9 Organised the first Continental holiday tour in 1855
- 10 Known for his invention of the telephone
- 11 Quaker family that founded a chocolate factory in York
- 12 Pioneer of antiseptic and sterile surgery
- 13 The inventor of the miner's safety lamp
- 14 British Prime Minister who played the organ and was a yachtsman
- 15 First and only Englishman ever to become Pope

Answers later in the Chronicle

And now for a fascinating account of Stewart Fergusson's . . .

VISIT TO JORDAN: CROSSROADS OF THE MIDDLE EAST

Churchill's Hiccup

Jordan was carved out of the wreck of the Ottoman Empire and I have always regarded it as among the most artificial states in the modern Middle East. If you look at a map of Jordan, for example, there is a strange indentation in its eastern border. There is no reasonable explanation for that indentation. No river runs through the area, no mountain range forms a natural division between the two states. There is a story that Winston Churchill, serving as British colonial secretary, drew Jordan's borders at the 1921 Cairo Conference. Years afterwards, he is said to have bragged that he "created Jordan with the stroke of the pen one Sunday afternoon." The sybaritic colonial secretary, known for large lunches washed down with quantities of alcohol, is reputed to have been drawing Jordan's border with Saudi Arabia and having over-indulged in drink he hiccupped, and his pen moved off the straight line he was drawing, creating the deviation. Some Jordanians refer to the line as "Churchill's Hiccup" to this day. But the artificiality of Jordan's boundaries, reshaped again after the war with Israel in 1967, belies a complex history, heritage and culture that has evolved to become distinctively Jordanian; as this fascinating trip demonstrated.

The Journey South

We flew into Amman at midnight, just a stopover before heading south. A pity we could not spend time in this ancient city - Alexander the Great's Philadelphia - now a melting pot of native Jordanians and the Diaspora of refugees from Palestine, Kuwait, Syria and Iraq who have brought an entrepreneurial mix, and in the case of the Kuwaitis, much needed investment, to this cosmopolitan city.

The next morning we headed south along Jordan's arterial desert highway that runs parallel to the Hejaz railway made famous in the First World War as the main target for Lawrence of Arabia and his motley band of Bedouin fighters. It is now only used for freight but there are plans for investment so it can carry passengers and support the tourist industry. The highway itself was undergoing a major expansion to support Jordan's important carrying trade from the free port of Aqaba. As we drove south processions of large trucks were carrying the yellow phosphates, potash, and feldspar that are important Jordanian exports.

Wadi Rum and the Arab Revolt

After about 4 hours we reached the desert and mountains of Wadi Rum. Ever since I read T E Lawrence's Seven Pillars of Wisdom as a teenager and saw the eye-popping vistas of David Lean's epic film with Peter O'Toole's impish, echoing

'Rumpty Tumpty Tumpty Tum' I have wanted to visit Wadi Rum, and I was not disappointed. It is the birthplace of modern Jordan in two senses. Out of this desert vastness came the Bedouin tribes that give Jordanians the sense of themselves, a self-image badged by the red and white tasselled kufiya headscarf. This was a souvenir purchase much in favour with our party of travellers. For modern Jordan Wadi Rum was also the cradle of the Arab Revolt of 1916-17 that triggered the formation of the modern state.



At Wadi Rum we experienced the beautiful desolation of its unique landscape. The valley floor varies from firm tracks to undulating dunes in which you sink up to your ankles in shifting sand.

The overall impression is like seeing the world through an ochre lens occasionally with a long view in which the sand shades from red to yellow to purple. The valley is framed by imposing sandstone crags and bluffs. Surprisingly there were slashes of green in parts of the valley formed by shrubs such as White Broom and White Saxaul that also clung to cracks in the sandstone crags. I had with me a copy of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, part autobiography and part biography of landscape and flora, and delighted in its descriptions of the desert landscape around us. Lawrence offers a particularly evocative and emotional picture of Wadi Rum - "The crags . . . gave the finishing semblance of Byzantine architecture to this irresistible place: this processional way greater than imagination . . . In truth I liked Rum too much". It is no surprise that Wadi Rum was chosen as the setting for Ridley Scot's film "The Martian".

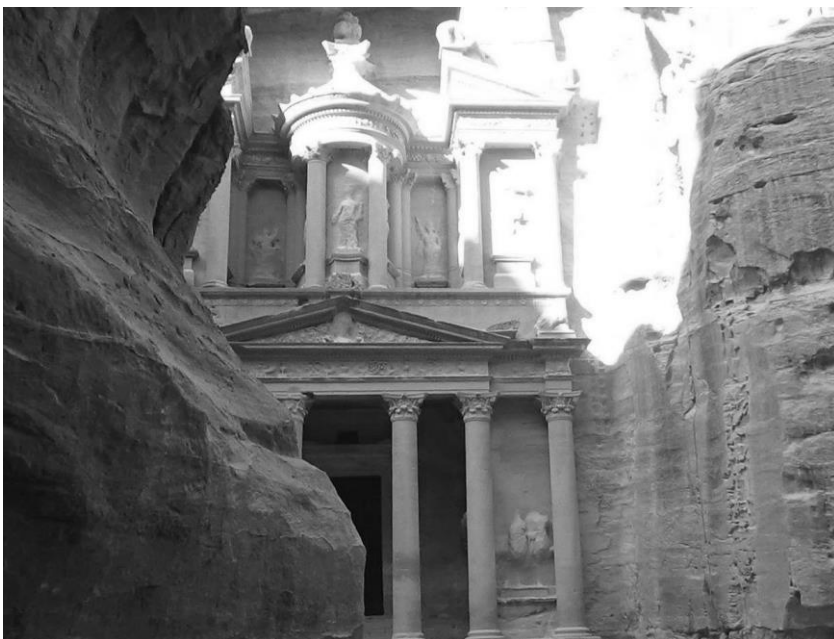
The afternoon and sunset were spent on a safari in the footsteps of T E Lawrence, (or was it really Peter O'Toole!) It is easy to lose the sense of where you are as tracts of shifting sand dunes and bizarre rock formations rise up out of the valley floor and, as the sun began to set, shadows played tricks on the steep craggy cliffs. During the trip we rested at a semi-permanent Bedouin encampment where our guide gave a suitable paean to his British audience on Lawrence's influence and impact on the Arab revolt. Although, in front of crude images of Lawrence and the Arab leaders of the revolt, Emir Faisal and Auda Abu Tayi, he raised the suspicion that maybe Lawrence was really another perfidious Brit intent on carving up Arabia for Imperial advantage. Over the ubiquitous glass of tea, a mark of Jordanian hospitality, I discussed with him whether we base too much of our opinion and

knowledge of the Arab Revolt on Lawrence's self-serving autobiography. The conclusion we both came to was that he was like Gordon of Khartoum, another lonely romantic British outsider, who loved desolate places and was caught between the cynical politicians of Britain and France and the pragmatists of the house of Hashemite. He was certainly not a traditional product of the staid British military. Rather he was an intelligent, but infuriating and insubordinate intelligence officer and mapmaker who devised an effective form of guerrilla warfare with the mobile, freewheeling and semi-anarchic Bedouin tribes. Ho Chi Minh and the leaders of the Viet Cong drew their tactics directly from Lawrence and Faisal's military playbook. As Lawrence arrestingly summarised the approach of these Arab irregulars equally applicable to the Viet Cong: "Armies were like plants, immobile, firm rooted, nourished through long stems to the head. We might be a vapour, blowing where we listed."

At the end of our desert safari we stayed at a Bedouin encampment unobtrusively sited in the lee of one of Wadi Rum's crags. The unpolluted night sky turned the Wadi into a mysterious place of dark shadows and luminous hillocks of rippled sand. Under the stars we watched the preparation of a Zarb, a delicious treasure of Bedouin culture. It is a sort of BBQ of meats and vegetables slowly cooked together in a sand covered underground earthen or metal oven. The following morning at sunrise I ventured out into the dawn silence with no hum of traffic, no call of a muezzin for morning prayers or busy humans to break the stillness; a final experience of this unique, eerie place where Jordan's Bedouin clans had carved out a life since the 14th century.

Petra and the Nabateans

We left Wadi Rum and headed north along the 'Kings Highway'. A winding road that snakes its way north through the rugged hills and valleys of southwest and west Jordan. It follows the escarpment above the Dead Sea Rift Valley dividing modern



Jordan and Israel and originated as an ancient trade and pilgrimage route, part of the complex 'silk road' network. It dates back 5000 years and is mentioned in the Old Testament (Numbers 20:17-20) as the route Moses planned to follow out of Egypt to Canaan but was refused passage by the Edomites. In Roman times it became a principal highway named for Trajan as the Via Traiana Nova.

We were heading for Petra the capital of the Nabatean kingdom that is another important strand in the history of modern Jordan. Petra is promoted as the highlight for any visitor to Jordan and the visit was the most anticipated by our group of travellers. We wanted to delay our planned visit until early the next morning to avoid the melee of tourists, mostly from cruise ships calling at Aqaba, who travel up from the port to arrive in the middle of the day. As a foretaste, however, we stopped off at 'Little Petra' near the Nabateans capital. Like Petra the buildings are carved out of the sandstone canyons lining the narrow valley. One of the surviving places is a painted Biclinium or dining room (named from the typical Roman dining couch) with well-preserved wall paintings suggesting that Little Petra was probably used as residential suburb for well to-do Nabatean merchants and as a stopover for caravans plying their trade along the highway.

Our hotel for two nights was the unusual Old Village Resort. As the name suggests the hotel was originally a village settled in the 1800s by the Al Nawafleh clan. They built a complex hydraulic system of piping and cisterns to move water from the Moses Spring - Wadi Musa - to grow olives and other fruit. The village was slowly depopulated as people moved to the growing tourist town of Wadi Musa so the Al Nawafleh turned the deserted homes into a unique hotel complex for the burgeoning tourist trade associated with Petra. The hotel is still owned managed and staffed by the entrepreneurial Al Nawafleh extended family and was by far and away the most interesting and best hotel we stayed at.

The next morning we left early for Petra to beat the crowds. The Nabatean capital is a remarkable survival from over 2000 years ago. Based on an inscription at the site the Nabateans knew it as Raqmu but the Roman emperor Trajan gave it the autological name Petra, the ancient Greek for rock.

What survives from antiquity to inform us of ancient cultures is, in practice, quite arbitrary, objects based on luck and the durability of their materials. Very little visual art survives. Paintings wear away (a noted exception being the vivid wall paintings in the hermetically sealed tombs of the pharaohs). Tombs are looted. Paper and textiles rot. Tapestries fade. Pots are smashed. Metal tools corrode. Gold survives but changes in taste have taken advantage of its pliability to remodel it or convert it to ingots or coins. The exception to this decay is stone and mosaic tesserae. Ancient buildings open up past civilisations. Often the surviving places are fragmentary as the quarried stone used to build castles, temples, palaces and homes are reused for new buildings by successive generations inhabiting the same places. In this respect Petra stands out as unique. It sits secretly in an enclosed valley accessible only by a narrow gorge and it is hewn out of the rock face of the valley sides not built from quarried stone, making it poor pickings for stone raiders. Its great enemies have been earthquakes, erosion from rainwater, flooding and sand laden winds; and of course most recently the tramp of tourists.

The deserted remains of the Petra we see today were mostly built between the first century BCE and the first century CE and it marks the high point of the civilization of the Nabateans. These are a people and kingdom that had been little known to me before this visit, as mysterious as those Old Testament kingdoms that appear in the Bible - Edom, Moab and Ammon. The Nabateans were a nomadic people probably originating from the Hejaz in modern Saudi Arabia. In their wandering they came upon the fertile valley today called Wadi Musa, watered by the 'Moses Spring', said to have spurted forth when Moses struck the rocks with his staff. The spring is now housed in a three-domed building. Close to the spring was the secluded valley ringed by high mountains and accessible only by a single mile long narrow gorge that was to become the site of Petra. In settling this fortress valley the Nabateans hit a goldmine. It was close to the rich trade route of the Kings Highway and through some deft hydrology the Nabateans harnessed the spring water and flash floods to create a valley oasis of fine buildings, fountains and flowing water. It was a green oasis not a barren desert valley. A secure settlement and a trading crossroads where key 'Silk Road' routes passed from Mesopotamia in the north to the Red Sea and the Arabian peninsula in the south and from Persia in the east to Egypt and the Mediterranean in the west. From the third century BC to the first century AD Petra grew to be a great cosmopolitan city of over 20,000 people, capital of a kingdom that spread its influence west to the Negev, north to Damascus and south to Aqaba, subsuming most of modern day Jordan. The Nabateans made their mark with their monopoly of the trade in incense - frankincense and myrrh - that was widely used in temples and ceremonies across the Roman world. This wealth funded the massive and unusual building programme of magnificent tombs and temples carved out of the rock faces on the side of the valley. But not even the Nabateans could resist the creeping power of Rome. Trajan, who presided over the greatest military expansion of the Roman Empire, annexed the Nabatean kingdom in the first century AD and made Petra the centre of his new province of Arabia Petraea. What you see today is the remains of this Nabatean/Roman city.

The modern visitor enters Petra through the Siq, a spectacular natural narrow corridor in some places only ten feet wide that splits the mountains to give access to the valley beyond. The entrance was originally marked, in the Roman way, by a triumphal arch but only remnants remain after an earthquake in 1896. Before its collapse it was recorded in the atmospheric lithographs of David Roberts that are a staple of the stalls that line the wider parts of the gorge. The winding way through this narrow part of the gorge contains sacred stones or baetyli, some anthropomorphic, others simple carved blocks representing the Nabatean's complex polytheistic religion. Narrow water channels run along both walls, some still with the remnants of the ceramic piping, used to bring water to the City. The Siq twists, turns and descends as the modern walking surface gives way to the original Roman paving. The sheer sandstone cliffs curve and lean almost kissing at the top with layered strata in hues from grey, through deep red, russet, ochre and yellow.

Then suddenly we turned a corner and ahead there appeared a bright yellow pillar of sunlight as the shady gorge opened out revealing Petra's misnamed 'Treasury' or Al

Khazna. It is not an ancient Petraen bank but a royal tomb and is the totemic image of Petra made famous by such films as Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade, The Mummy Returns and Aladdin. Threading our way through the growing number of tourists preoccupied with the desire for a 'selfie' in front of this 'film set' the way now opened out past more monumental Nabatean tombs and a unique ancient theatre the only one known to have been carved in the side of a mountain. It was so placed to be at the foot of the high place of sacrifice and could seat 4000 people for the Nabatean's religious rites. We now entered the valley proper where the people of Petra and the passing caravans lived worked, traded and worshipped. On the eastern edge of the valley were four elaborate royal tombs with courtyards and colonnades. At the heart of the old City was a Nymphaeum or public fountain, a colonnaded shopping street, the Great Temple and a temple dedicated to Dushara, one of the Nabateans' principle gods. Petra continued as a thriving city through to the Byzantine period as attested by important religious buildings to the north of the valley and up into the surrounding hills. One of the Royal Tombs had been grand enough to be re-purposed as a Byzantine church in the fifth century CE. There are the remains of another church also of the fifth century CE probably destroyed by an earthquake but with fine mosaics indicating it's significance. For the intrepid hiker a two-hour brisk climb would take you to the Monastery - Ad-Deir - another grand tomb comparable to the Treasury later used as a Byzantine church.

Our discovery tour of Petra was exhausting and rewarding. That iconic image of the 'Treasury' carved out of the rock face will now evoke the gifted Nabateans rather than Indiana Jones! The trek back to the entrance under the hot sun needed frequent rests and much water. A particular risk on our return walk was the two-wheeled carriages for those disinclined to walk. They careered round the corners of the Siq, horses hooves slipping and skidding on the Roman pathway as the drivers hurried for the next lucrative fare of anything from twenty to fifty Jordanian Dinar (roughly £21 to £53), depending on the demand from the lazy, the tired and the gullible.

To be continued in the next issue of the Chronicle



HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

On the day you were born the world became a better place - probably just a coincidence, though.

No wisecracks about your age, no snide remarks about another year gone. It's just a friendly birthday reminder that this is the day you were born, years and years and years and years . . . etc . . . etc . . . etc . . . ago!

Sent in by Tricia Brown

A DOG NAMED BRUCE – REMINISCENCES

Part 2 – A fully-fledged family member!

Whatever activity was taking place – Bruce, our cocker spaniel, would always look for a way of “joining in”. Two examples – if I was making the beds and put a pillow on the floor, then he would lie on it so it was difficult to retrieve; if I was sent to sweep the garden slabs, then he would endeavour to sit on the yard brush so that when you picked it up to sweep he had to be hoisted up with the brush.

Bruce was very quick to learn new tricks and David and I were very proud of ourselves when we taught him to “sit up and beg”. This was a big mistake because he loved food, particularly the food we were eating, and he used this ploy during all meals, not only at home, but wherever he saw food. One warm afternoon we took him to Bradgate Park where there were many families enjoying picnics and when we let him off the lead he ran round from group to group to join in their picnic as he sat up begging, his mouth watering, in their midst. This was one of the embarrassing occasions when he would not obey the call to “come here”.

Another learning point was that as well as creating play he wanted to be treated exactly the same as the family; so, if we were sitting in an easy chair he wanted to do the same! This was borne out early on Sunday evenings. Do you remember “What’s My Line?” Well, my brother David, Dad and I used to sit on our easy chairs (of which there were four) watching TV until Mum arrived home towards the end of the programme. When her key was heard in the front door, Bruce, who was occupying the spare easy chair immediately started growling. We could not understand this reaction because his usual response to any member of the family arriving home was to give them a very warm welcome! It was only when we realised that he always got turfed out of the remaining easy chair that we understood!

He used this method of showing his displeasure on many occasions, eg on Tuesdays we had the remains of the Sunday joint in the form of a stew and the dog got the leftovers. One day David decided he would like a second helping and when Mum brought the saucepan to the table to spoon more on to David’s plate, this growling noise was heard! On another occasion a friend of my Mum’s, who was very fond of Bruce, said she would look after him whilst we were on holiday. Her young son took to Bruce straight away and asked if the dog could sleep in his bedroom with him overnight. All was well until Peter had a call of nature and went to the bathroom. When he returned the dog was in his place in bed and would not let Peter back in! (During the week that Bruce was staying with Mrs Robinson he also managed to get into next door’s garden and eat all the hearts out of the lettuces and when her elderly Aunt came to tea she left her straw hat decorated with many flowers in the front room. To avoid the dog begging for food Mrs Robinson shut Bruce in the front room whilst they had their tea. On leaving, the Aunt could not find her hat anywhere – it was eventually found on the floor with all flowers and

decorations strewn around the room and all had been well and truly chewed up!
(Mrs Robinson never again offered to have him whilst we were away)

Another lesson for me was the dog's wide understanding of what was being said. I remember the occasion we four were having breakfast in the back dining room. If the dog was not in sight then we wondered what mischief he was up to! On this occasion no-one had seen him for some time so my Mum said very crossly to us three, "Where's that dog gone to now?" Nobody knew but a second or so later there was the distinctive sound of the dog jumping down from one of the easy chairs in the front room. The dining room door opened and the dog's head appeared round the door looking straight at my Mum as if saying "What do you want now?"

As I said, the dog prioritised household members and it was not too long before he graduated from the "landing" to a corner of Mum and Dad's bedroom. Unfortunately, in those days we did not have central heating and the room was extremely cold overnight. Bruce was not going to sleep downstairs and so some nights he could be heard pacing round the room shaking with cold. Eventually he developed pneumonia and had to have injections to save his life. Even Mum was up all night keeping the fire going and making sure Bruce was kept warm. When he recovered he got his own bed in the bedroom. It was in his favourite corner and consisted of old pillows and eiderdowns on the floor with yet more eiderdowns to act as a cover. There was only his head showing when he was covered up and I felt sure he would move and need to be re-covered during the night, but this was not so – he had the sense not to move all winter nights!

There is no doubt that Bruce would have preferred to be one of the human race and to sit at the table for his meals. So it was that if we were told to sit at the table and there was a spare chair the dog could be relied upon to sit there until ordered "down". A favourite trick of mine was to use the knitted tea cosy as a hat for the dog; it fitted perfectly and conveniently had 2 holes (spout and teapot handle) to place each of his rather large ears through. I would then tie an apron round his neck and put some glasses on his nose with the ear pieces hooked through the knitted tea cosy. As long as the dog thought he was going to get something to eat he would sit and wait!



We had the dog for many years until he died of old age and you may wonder how he survived Mum's predictions of "being a nuisance" – he had such an attractive face and eyes and everybody loved him including Mum. We were all very sad indeed when we lost him – from my point of view I had certainly learnt so much, including that a dog is truly a friend for life!

Contributed by Jenny Mills

And now a little 'stream of consciousness' ramble through the lockdown:

WHOEVER SAID LOCKDOWN IS DULL?

Well, whoever it was should think again!
Think of all the untouched jobs that have lingered over the years!
Then you find that lockdown has given you the precious gift of time.
Time to tackle all those jobs, though the motivation may be hard to find.
But followed by the sheer feeling of satisfaction with a job well done -
So sit in the chair with a cuppa, feel smug – you deserve it!

Many will say that their home has never looked so clean and tidy – no 'glory holes' now;
Attics, cupboards, drawers all tidy – but can you still find anything now?
A few bags might wait in some quiet cupboard for the charity shops to re-open.
And outside, the gardens are so well tended and look immaculate,
Waiting through the winter chill before blooming once again.

Yesterday, in desperation, I cleaned the detergent/conditioner dispenser from the washer/dryer; what joy!

Today, I met a friend for a walk in the freezing fog, even risking a flask of coffee on a bench

(No, we didn't get arrested, just had a brief chat with a passing postman)

Tomorrow, I'll find something else to do – I'm sure I'll find a lot if I really look!

Tomorrow *may* be the day that I finally tidy up the sock drawer if can I stand the excitement!

Oh, the anticipation! I'll sleep on it and dream of tomorrow's task.

Many have found new hobbies or rediscovered old ones.

So many books have been read, films and box sets watched, and computer games played!

Jigsaws abound; crochet, knitting, cooking, playing instruments and on it goes.

People are walking more – it may catch on!

It remains legal - at the moment, anyway.

Did you notice that the days are getting longer? No longer dark at 4 in the afternoon.

The snowdrops are emerging and daffodil bulbs are thrusting through the cold, damp earth.

One day soon, perhaps come the spring, I'll emerge fully vaccinated from my cosy Covid cocoon and then . . .

Become the social butterfly I once was – unless I've grown too old;

Or should that be too fat, too lazy, or even too 'past it'!

Never! See you soon, I hope!

C O D E W O R D

The solution letters have been replaced by a number from 1 to 26. Each letter of the alphabet is represented by a different number. Crack the code to complete the grid. Three letters are given to start you off.

15	8	9	16	19	1			25		7		20	A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z	1	14	
	26		8		19		24	10	1	14	6	11		2	15	
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3	19	12	4	8	9		6		6		3			12	25	
12		4		3			6	11	11	15	19	21		13	26	
			N	D	O											

SOLUTION TO QUICK CROSSWORD:

ACROSS

- 5 Compound
- 6 Epic
- 7 Balm
- 8 Eel
- 9 Afar
- 11 Edge
- 13 Uncorked

DOWN

- 1 Coop
- 2 Spicerack
- 3 Tumbledry
- 4 Idol
- 10 Feud
- 12 Grew

Here is another poem from Margaret Issitt, based on her memories as a 3-year old of her mother hanging out the washing in September 1939. Her mother, of course, remembered the First World War.

IS THIS THE CHILD?

Cold fingers in Winter,
tap water in Spring
and magical days in May
bring exciting months in view:
tennis, Summer shoes.
No snow

But in Autumn
peace is shattered.
Washing put out to dry
is wet with weeping.
The child begins to grow.
The future she would discover,
the past might be blown away,
the summer fields become winter
and the daisies are bullets.
That is the child I knew.



ANSWERS TO FAMOUS BRITISH PEOPLE QUIZ

1	King Henry VIII	9	Thomas Cook
2	Margaret Thatcher	10	Alexander G Bell
3	Charles Darwin	11	Joseph Lister
4	Captain James Cook	12	Henry Isaac Rowntree
5	Christopher Wren	13	Humphry Davy
6	Edward Elgar	14	Edward Heath
7	Emeline Pankhurst	15	Nicholas Breakspear - Adrian IV
8	J W Turner		

POINTS TO PONDER

The different pronunciation of words that end in 'ough' – cough, bough, rough, dough, through, though

Is the 's' or the 'c' silent in scent?

Why does 'fridge' have a 'd' in it, but refrigerator doesn't?

Why are Zoey and Zoe pronounced the same way, but Joe and Joey are not?

You can drink a drink, but you can't food a food

The word 'queue' is just a 'Q' followed by four silent letters

Why is a 'W' called a 'double-U' when it is clearly a 'double V'?

Why are Kansas and Arkansas pronounced differently?

Contributed by David Hebblewhite

My wife said when I pass she would
go the extra mile to give me the burial
I deserve...



THAT'S ALL FOR NOW. SEE YOU NEXT MONTH!