



The Celts celebrated their new year with fire, as they believed light and life sprang from death and darkness. In Celtic times smoke was believed to ward off evil spirits and fire to entice the sun’s return. Fire rituals remain central to festivals in Scotland and Northern England. On New Year’s Eve in Stonehaven, Grampian, a parade of kilted marchers with pipes and drums swirl balls of fire on wire ropes around their heads whilst in Allendale, Northumberland, a procession of men in fancy dress called ‘guisers’ carry tubs of flaming tar above their heads to the town square where they are launched onto a bonfire.

In the religious and political turmoil of 17th century Britain, a Puritan order banned Christmas until the restoration. The Scots, however, continued to frown on Christmas, focusing on the secular feast of Hogmanay on December 31st. This has remained the case for over 300 years!

It was customary for bells to chime at midnight on New Year’s Eve, accompanied by ships’ horns in ports and people running onto the streets banging pots and pans. Today, the clock tower at the Palace of Westminster and the chimes of Big Ben are icons of the British New Year.

Most places in Britain have a spot where crowds gather at major events. In London, the earliest documented gathering on New Year’s Eve was in 1878 at St Paul’s Cathedral when people came to hear the newly installed bells ring in the New Year. Over the years the crowds grew and became more uproarious until the Cathedral authorities tried to stop them, albeit unsuccessfully. After the Second World War, the London gathering place moved to Trafalgar Square. Since 2004, the gathering place includes the banks of the Thames in view of the London Eye – a good place to view the New Year’s Eve firework display.

British superstitions, to be attended to before midnight on December 31<sup>st</sup>, include cleaning the house, taking out the ashes from the fire and clearing all debt. New Year’s Day in many communities is marked with a public swim to start the new year afresh. Such traditions reflect the inherent symbolism in passing from one year to the next. It’s a time for reflection, taking personal stock, renewal and looking forward with hope. But, making and breaking New Year’s resolutions remains an established part of British culture.

New Year’s Eve is a normal working day. New Year’s Day was made a public holiday in 1974 - now regarded as the end of the festive season and a counterpoint to the family focus of Christmas. Brits may often spend Christmas with family and see friends on New Year’s Eve. Since the Millennium, many cities put on grand public firework displays. Typically, a countdown to midnight is followed by Auld Lang Syne with people greeting and embracing each other.

So, “Should auld acquaintance be forgot .....” **HAPPY NEW YEAR 2022 to all our u3a members.**



**And from our own, our very own - Mr Terry Moseley**

Hello From Devon

Well I finally made it to Devon and what a lovely place to live, sorry if I am making you jealous!!!

Why would I leave some very good friends I still have behind and move 214 miles away? As I said before, I have always wanted to live in the Country, the opportunity came up and I took it.

I am sure most of you have experience of moving? Not one of the best experiences in life however once you get into your new property and get some sort of order you forget the trauma of the move itself.

So apart from the move what has happened to me since becoming a “Blow-in”, that’s the name given by the locals to new people that have come into the area.

So far, I have been a judge at a Halloween party, been co-opted onto the Village Hall Committee, had an induction for the South Devon Railway (although not done any duties there yet). I've had an induction for a Front of House Steward at a theatre in Teignmouth, joined a Probus Club and hope to join Chudleigh u3a if I can get in touch with someone to find out when they are having meetings again! Oh also tried out a small choir (not so much fun as the Evergreen Revellers, a bit serious!) I will give it a go though.

As you will be reading this article after Christmas 2021, I would have done seven sessions of Santa in my local Area and one back in Dartford, sang Christmas Carols with some of the locals in two villages, played King Herod on a farm with live animals at a Crib Service. Life is different here but just as hectic.

My next-door neighbour is great. It is usually afternoon tea either in his house or mine; he does make a mean tea loaf though.

Slowly getting my house sorted out. My first visitors popped in recently. Still more to sort out but then there is no hurry.

One thing I noticed where I am now is the peace and quiet, just a lot of crows around.

I am very lucky to have a bus route within minutes of my house. Half hourly to Newton Abbot, hourly to Exeter very handy! The only trouble is if you want to go to either of these places for a night out, the last bus leaves Newton Abbot at 19.50 or 00.15?? No, I don't know why either. However there are three pubs in Bovey, two I have tried and both sell a good pint.

I guess this is not everyone's idea of living but for me, I'm now glad I made the move to Devon. I will admit at the moment I do miss a lot of people I know in Bexley but there is always the telephone and now Zoom, text, emails, so they are not so far away.

I hope to continue my story of living in the Country later in the year.

I wish you all a very Happy NEW YEAR,

Stay safe, well and keep smiling.

Terry From Devon

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### **Christ Church - Ladies Group**

Our Group is not a u3a group but many of our members are also u3a members. The group leader, Patricia Croft has been a chairperson for many years and is herself a u3a member.

We meet once a month at the New Room at Christ Church where we have interesting group speakers.

Our December meeting was a special one; about 28 of us gathered at 2pm for a festive meeting which included a Cream Tea and the Rev Trevor Wyatt on the keyboard to entertain us. The tables were set for 6 and 8, covered with decorative tablecloths and Christmas decorations.

After a brief business meeting the Tea was served by a few members. Each of us was given a plate with a scone, butter, cream and a small jar of jam. The cups of tea and coffee were also brought to each table and finally sherry with mince pies.

Once the Tea was over, the vicar played festive music and finally we all joined in singing Christmas carols.

The Christmas lights and decorations along Bexleyheath Broadway, all the way home, completed the pleasant feeling of the festive season.

Thank you to Patricia for a perfect, spirit-lifting afternoon. **Tomira Carson**

### ***Still busy living and loving life - I'm a Boomer***

I was a bit fed up with Radio 2. During the pandemic, the radio had been a good source of noise and amusement but the content of Radio 2 just wasn't doing it for me. Then in the *Third Age Matters* last year I saw an article about BOOM Radio - for the Boomers who are '*still busy living and loving life* (their catchy, rather familiar tag line). I re-tuned my DAB radios and there it was!

*Upon its launch BOOM Radio described itself as "a new radio station for an adventurous generation".*

Yes, that sounds about right!

Thank you TAM, I'm glad I found BOOM. MJ (Ed.)

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### Book Reviews

*From Cynthia:*

#### The Split by Sharon Bolton

This has been described as the *Most Gripping, Twisty Thriller of the Year*, also as *Balm to the Soul*. I was not sure how it could be both, so I decided to find out.

For me, it was an intriguing, compulsive read.

Felicity (Flick) is a glaciologist, currently working in South Georgia, a remote and inhospitable British Overseas Territory in the southern Atlantic Ocean. She is trying to discover what happens when glaciers melt and collapse.

An unknown but malevolent someone has been pursuing her, so a terrified Felicity is making plans to flee.

The book then takes us back to Cambridge nine months before, where Felicity has been consulting a therapist in an attempt to discover what has happened in her past to make her feel petrified by this, as yet unidentified, pursuer.

Although the book did not provide me with "balm to my soul", it was indeed gripping and with a serpentine plot.

#### Rock Paper Scissors by Alice Feeney

As I read many books in the Crime and Thriller genres, and watch such programmes on television, I am pretty adept at guessing the villain. I even managed to guess the murderer in a Lee Child novel *before* she had committed any murders. This book was different. There is a twist near the end which took me completely by surprise. It was obvious that this had been meticulously planned by Feeney *before* setting pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard), so the reader does not feel cheated.

I highly recommend this novel and I shall definitely be reading more by this author.

*From Hilary:*

Pretty Things by Janelle Brown.

This is set in current day USA around Los Angeles and Lake Tahoe. Nina, in her twenties, is a grifter, conning and stealing from rich people in LA. Then her mother's cancer returns so she has to make a lot of money to pay for treatment. She and an older male grifter called Lochlan, who is her lover, target Vanessa the rich sister of Nina's teenage boyfriend.

The story is told from Nina and Vanessa's point of view so that you get the background story of both. It was an easy read with some unexpected twists.

*From Norma*

A Day like This by Kellie McNeill

This is not an author I've come across before.

Annie has a loving husband, beautiful house and adorable daughter. On a day like any other she takes her daughter to the paediatrician and has a car accident. When she wakes up and asks for her daughter, nobody knows what she is talking about. Everything she remembers of the last 5 years apparently never happened, but she is haunted by memories of their happy family life, which don't match the reality of her broken marriage, her childlessness and her surprising status as a successful artist living in Manhattan.

Annie is desperate to find evidence that her daughter exists and researches stories of people who seem to have lived alternative lives alongside their real life, as though the strands of their lives had overlapped.

It's an intriguing theory and makes an interesting story, based on ideas like "the road not travelled" or "what if....." which we've probably all thought about at one time or another. The ending was unexpected. It did bring it all together but still left me wondering about memories and *deja vu*. It was a good read.

*From Maureen:*

The Lady Elizabeth by Alison Weir

Published in 2008, this is quite an old novel but nevertheless extremely enjoyable. Alison has drawn on recorded conversations and incidents for the storyline of Elizabeth 1st's early life. The story begins with the execution of her mother, Anne Boleyn, and traces the years leading up to the death of Mary's and Elizabeth's final ascension to the throne.

Elizabeth was noted as being a particularly intelligent and forward child who developed a love of learning, excelling in Latin and Greek. She, apparently, adored her father King Henry VIII. Her life was difficult, the royal court full of intrigue and double dealing. Several times she was banished from court, and much later imprisoned in the tower by her sister Queen Mary who distrusted her, fearing she would try to seize the throne.

In her early teens, the episode with Thomas Seymour (Katharine Parr's husband after the death of Henry VIII) is dramatically described. Alison Weir says, in the book's epilogue, that she had taken licence to describe Elizabeth's supposed pregnancy, when the princess was in her early teens, through an affair with Thomas. There were rumours at the time, although no actual proof, that Elizabeth suffered a miscarriage.

Excellent book, bringing that particular period of history to life in an easily readable way.

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All contributions for **February** newsletter to be submitted by

Midday ***Monday 31<sup>st</sup> January 2022***

Please ensure you contribute before the cut-off and have an email acknowledgment from me that I have received your contribution! Thank You