

System and District

**u3a**

learn, laugh, live

DEC  
2023

# Vitality!

Official newsletter of the System and District u3a

CHARITY No 1180152



## **MERRY CHRISTMAS & A HAPPY NEW YEAR**

### **FROM OUR CHAIRMAN**

Hi Everyone

We are nearly there now. Hopefully, you all have written your Christmas cards and wrapped your presents ready to send to Santa.

I hope you enjoyed Bharat Patel's talk at our last Members Meeting and I thought it was very interesting to hear about his life experiences and career.

May I just remind everyone that our December meeting will be starting at 10.15am this time rather than 10.30am. Unfortunately, due to safety guidelines numbers will be limited. It would be lovely to see you all in your Christmas jumpers and hats at the meeting.

May I take this opportunity to wish everyone A Very Merry Christmas and A Happy and Healthy New Year.

I hope to see you all soon. Clive

# WE WANT TO LET YOU KNOW

## UPDATE ON SYSTON COMMUNITY CENTRE ROOM CHARGES

As groups using the Community Centre will have found, the actual increase in charges applied from 1<sup>st</sup> November was a little higher than had been indicated in the last newsletter. This is because the full Town Council voted to impose a different figure than that proposed by the committee overseeing the Community Centre.

The Jubilee Room, which is used by many of our groups, now costs £14.60 for a 2-hour session. The previous charge was £13.50 for 2 hours.

## GROUP NEWS

### NEW GROUP

#### PAINTING & DRAWING GROUP 2

A second Painting and Drawing group is planning to start up on the 15th January 2024. (The original group is full and currently has a waiting list.)

The group 2 will run alternate Monday mornings from January 15th at 10-12 in the School Room at the Community Centre. We are hoping to keep the cost around £2 per session.

If you want to improve your artistic skills or find out if you have any (sure you have!) come along. The aim is to get creative and enjoy yourself. 😊

We are hoping to have a table at the next members meeting where we can answer any questions and you can sign up.

If you wish to sign up now contact group organisers:

Marion Robinson    brooksidestudio8@gmail.com

Helen Disley        helendidley105 @msn.com

#### GENTLE YOGA GROUP 1

A series of gentle stretching and relaxing movements to help maintain balance, flexibility and positive thinking can be enjoyed at all our yoga sessions. Emphasising correct breathing, health, and mindfulness, we are focused on improving wellbeing and feel-good factors at all levels of ability (even if you are limited to a chair).

We pride ourselves on being a friendly, happy group of mixed ability who are just trying to improve our balance, coordination, concentration, and agility.

**We meet at Syston Community Centre** - No need to book, just register your name and u3a number and join us; no ability required apart from a need to take a break from the stress of everyday life and retain a sense of humour!

### **Simple Yoga Stretches**

Just turn up with your mat, relax and enjoy. Help to spread a little peace and wellbeing. The aim is to flex, stretch and feel better about yourself. See you there!

**Next meetings: 2024.... Wednesday 31 January and Wednesday 28 February 10.00am Syston Community Centre**

Any queries contact [phylvwilson@gmail.com](mailto:phylvwilson@gmail.com)

## **FAMILY HISTORY GROUP**

We had a session looking at how to cluster DNA matches (those we share DNA with) using colour coding. This process helps to group together those matches who share DNA with us and each other. It is particularly valuable for those who have a mystery parent or parents, or grandparents going further back. Even someone who was adopted and knows nothing about their biological parents, can potentially use the process to track them down. The other main point about the methodology is that it doesn't matter whether your DNA matches have a family tree of any sort.

If anyone has done a DNA test and wants to find out about colour coding, then ideally join our group to find out more, or if you aren't free on the third Tuesday of the month, get in touch with me email: [juliedjohnson@yahoo.com](mailto:juliedjohnson@yahoo.com)

The group will not be meeting in December as many members have other events to attend so close to Christmas.

## **UKULELE GROUP**

My granddaughter is studying journalism at Sheffield Hallam University and a small group of them have got to organise and present a radio slot. Katie is doing her part about 'how people keep their minds active once they retire'. She came along to our ukulele group on Friday and recorded interviews with Len and Dave about why they chose to set up a ukulele group, and then she interviewed Pat, Steve, Maria, and Joy, she also chatted to one or two of the others. Once we started playing she recorded this for background to the interviews and was quite impressed with our playing and singing, never having heard us before. She said afterwards that she was really surprised by the chatter, laughter, and general noise, not sure what she was expecting, but she also told her mum when she got back that we're all crazy! I can live with that as I'm sure the rest of the group can. 😊

Pat Glover

## ART APPRECIATION GROUP

November's meeting of the Art Appreciation Group covered two very different subjects. Angie spoke about World War 1 Artists. Some of their very graphic depictions of the horrors of war were sobering but we discussed how their work was often used as propaganda despite this. Angie had also been keen to find examples of the few women working as war artists at this time. Mostly they were depicting the field hospitals or factories as they were not allowed to go near the front lines.



Then Tracy achieved the almost impossible task of condensing 1000 years of Medieval Art into a 30-minute presentation. She took key examples of works through the ages from paintings to tapestries, carvings to architecture. Such a wide variety of amazing skills mostly passed down from generation to generation of artisans.

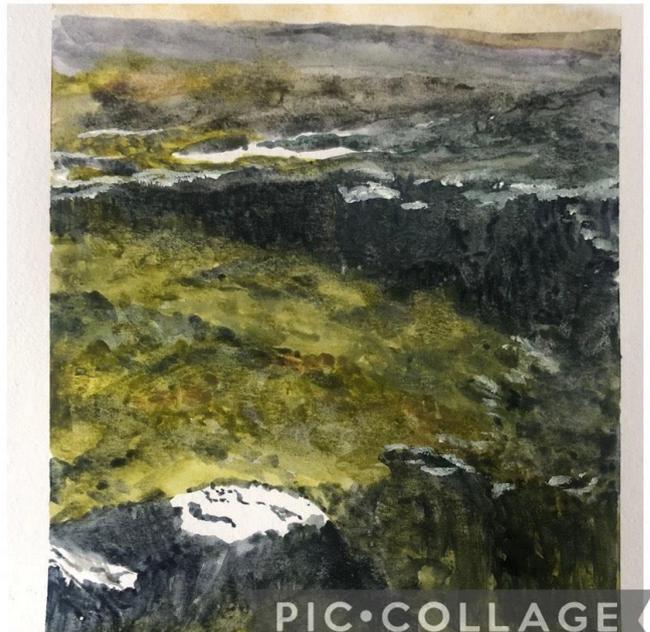


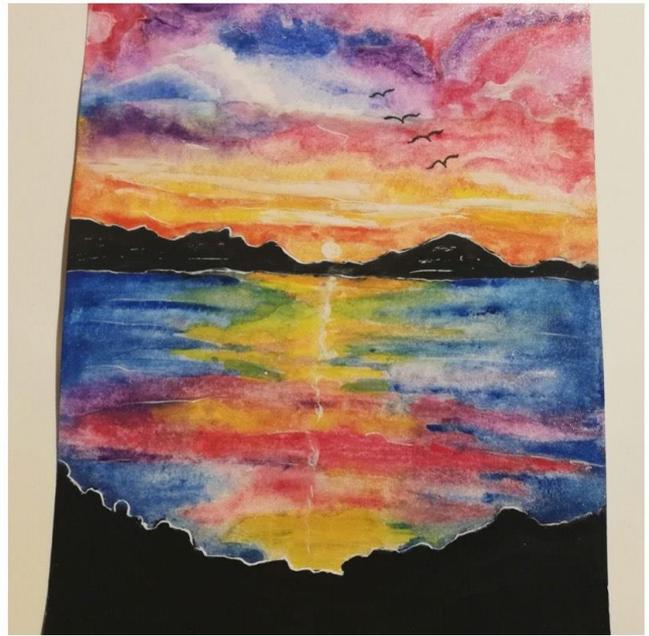
Our next meeting will be on Weds. Dec. 6<sup>th</sup> at 2pm at Syston Community Centre. We will all be talking about our personal favourite works of art.

If you would like to join us please contact Michael Wherton via the website.

## ART GROUP

The art group has been very busy trying to capture a good likeness to projects set by David. We have had rocky outcrops, lilies and an amethyst, there are also a couple of one-off pictures. In December Imelda has organised a Christmas dinner at the Grosvenor for us after our meeting which we are really looking forward to and so I would like to send a big thank you to them both for their efforts.





## IMAGINARIUM GROUP

Congratulations to those who made it through the storms on Thursday to come along to Imaginarium when we used the wonders of technology to drill into music that evokes both memory and imagination.

My favourite tale? How Colin combined music and poetry to grab the attention of unruly teenagers with David Bowie's '5 years.'

That took us nicely into poetry, which is to be the subject of our next meeting on December 7<sup>th</sup>. Again, please indicate whether you plan to attend, as we get bigger it may not be possible to remain meeting around the dining room table I'll book us a room elsewhere.

Here's the first poem I learned by heart. (See poetry corner towards the end of the newsletter)

For whatever reason, this has stuck in my memory since the age of 9 when I was mesmerised by the excitement of travel and treasures through three different ages. John Masefield was the poet laureate at the time, and Cargoes does read rather differently now with our clearer understanding of what's not OK to do.

The challenge to members is 2-fold.

1. Update the poet to modern times – what would you see in terms of the vessels and the cargoes if a verse is added now?
2. Think about a poem that sticks with you and consider why that is. Come ready to share it with us.
3. Come ready to giggle!

## EVENTS – PAST, PRESENT & PLANNED

### Have an iPad or iPhone but don't really make full use of it?



At a recent meeting for new members, it was apparent that some people would like to use their computers / ipads / iphones more in order to have better communications within the U3a etc.

Therefore, would you be interested in a workshop explaining the basics, showing you some things you can use it for, and attempting to answer any questions you may have?

If so, please get in touch ([dpalmer192@btinternet.com](mailto:dpalmer192@btinternet.com) or 07710 448253), and if there is sufficient interest, I'll organise a session, usually approx. 2 hours

It would help if I could have prior notice of any questions you may have so I can try to prepare the answers!

There might be a minimal charge to share the cost of any room hire.

Dave Palmer

## Tree Top Mini Golf

Having had a good time at the driving range, the next challenge, planned for 30th January 2024, is Mini Adventure Golf with TreeTops on Shires Lane, Leicester, an easy walk from the St Peter's Lane Park & Ride Bus stop on the Birstall 303 route.

We are intending to get there just after it opens at 11am, to take advantage of the early bird special - one round costs £8.75 for over 60's, and if you tee off before 1pm you can play two rounds for the price of one.

There are two courses - The Tropical Trail and Ancient Explorer, each with 18 holes and accessible to everyone. Each round takes approximately 40 minutes to complete, all clubs & balls provided, and there are free lockers for bags, coats etc. There are a couple of places to get a drink or a snack between your rounds in the premises itself or elsewhere in the Highcross.

There's also a 19th hole, where you could win a free game, if you've still got the strength. If you're interested, please let me know, with your names, membership number and email, or phone number if you don't have an email address.

Ghislaine Wood email: [woodlet7@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:woodlet7@yahoo.co.uk)

## **An evening at the dogs. Monday Nov 20<sup>th</sup>**

On November 20<sup>th</sup>, 34 members of Syston u3a assembled for an evening at the dogs.

Previous years journeys to the Racecourse had been somewhat adventurous due to the dilapidated state of the coaches we had hired but this year with a different company, the group arrived relaxed and ready to enjoy themselves after a smooth, comfortable journey.

At the stadium, some people like to have a close-up view of the races.



But our members preferred to sit in the warmth of the restaurant, at reserved tables next to the windows, enjoying a 3-course meal while watching the races.



We were served our meal with a table bar service and before every race members of staff came to our tables to see if we wanted to make a bet on the next race. It would have been rude to say no, so with the help of screens showing us the odds some of our members laid bets based on the form, others had a favorite track colour. It didn't seem to make any difference. Some tables enjoyed themselves losing their bets.

Other tables enjoyed themselves and celebrated their wins.

All in all – a good time in good company was had by all.

## **NEW MEMBERS COFFEE MORNING**

Following on from our open day in June, we recently held a new members coffee morning. We were pleased to see 45 new members had enrolled over a 5-month period. An invitation was sent to all, not all came but those who did said they had learnt a lot. We served coffee and biscuits and explained the concept of the U3A.

Our I.T. expert was on hand with a laptop for people who wanted to learn more about accessing information.. Soon Dave was surrounded by members keen to try.

We had a survey for members to fill in if they wished. This has shown the diverse skills and knowledge many have. All seemed willing to share their expertise and knowledge. As the survey we handed out has been so successful we are thinking of having them to hand at our general meetings for those who would like to fill one in. One thing which became clear, people want to get out and meet other like-minded folk. They are willing to get involved and share their knowledge.

Our strap line,

*Everyone in the U3A should be an involved member not a customer being served*

Really does ring true with these new members.

We are looking to repeat our new members coffee morning in the future.

Many thanks to all who helped on the day.

Christine, Dave, Barbara, and Gill

## WHAT'S ON NEXT

### GENERAL MEETINGS

In the Brookside Room at the Community Centre – talks usually start 10.30am

Tea/coffee and mingling from 10.00am



**13<sup>th</sup> December 2023: John Constantine - That's Magic!**

**An insider's view from a professional magician on what magicians do including some live magic!**

*An entertaining illustrated talk from magician John Constantine about all aspects of what magicians do - including a section from his live act for your entertainment!*

**PLEASE NOTE THIS TALK WILL START AT 10.15AM**

**10<sup>th</sup> January 2024: John Constantine - That's Magic!**

**Magicians who've DIED... performing! An illustrated history of magicians whose last performance was fatal!**

*Professional magician John Constantine returns with a **second illustrated talk, this time about magicians who have made fatal errors whilst performing.***

*As before, John will include some live magic - hopefully without any similar errors*



### February 14th, 2024: Paul Reynolds

**Paul Reynolds** (retired fire fighter) and now a volunteer at Bradgate Park, talks about his fire service experiences over many years with the local service (incidents, humour etc).

## NATIONAL U3A ITEMS

### u3a TALKS



#### When Art and Literature meet at Christmastide

Catherine Stevenson of Newcastle u3a looks at the connections between art and literature at Christmastide.

Tues 5 December at 10am

Free – Online via Zoom



#### Exploring World Faiths: Christmas

Although Christmas is regarded as a Christian Festival celebrating the birth of Jesus, we will explore how other faiths celebrate Christmas.

Mon 11 Dec at 10am

Free – Online via Zoom



#### How to better insulate your home

The best and greenest ways to treat all parts of your home, where possible, for minimum heat loss, and with minimum outlay by Martyn of Southampton u3a

Thurs 4 Jan at 2pm

Free – Online via Zoom

Book [here](#)



Book [here](#)

#### Tuesday 16 January, 2-3pm Barry Claydon, u3a AI Subject Advisor

Are you ready for Artificial Intelligence to be everywhere and in everything?

You might be familiar with the Internet, satnav, and smartphones, but what else might be in store in 2024?

Join Barry for our first Future Lives online event for 2024 Register [here](#)

Book [here](#)



The u3a radio podcast, set up in 2020, showcases the amazing things happening across the movement. It's created by a team of u3a members who all have radio experience and features interviews with members, interest group leaders, Trustees, national volunteers, and Subject Advisers.

The entire series is available to listen to on our [YouTube channel](#), and since January 2022, has also been available to listen to on podcasting platforms including [Spotify](#), [Google Podcasts](#) and [Apple Podcasts](#) .

The team are always looking for more stories – [please get in touch](#) if you'd like to contribute.

## **NOT u3a BUT YOU MIGHT BE INTERESTED**

### **NEIGHBOURS NEED YOUR HELP**

For the first time in its 40+ year history, the Syston and District Volunteer Centre is having to turn away urgent requests for help because of a shortage of volunteer drivers. A waiting list of over 40 local residents in urgent need of transport, which has now had to be opened, is growing on a daily basis.

Through its Social Car service, subsidised by County and Borough grant support, the Centre is able to help the elderly, disabled and isolated residents of Syston and neighbouring communities to sustain a measure of independence and their community and family ties. Many u3a Members depend upon and make regular use of the facility.

This vital service is almost totally dependent on a team of volunteer drivers who can either use their own cars, in return for a generous mileage allowance, or one of the Centre's own specially adapted vehicles.

In a typical month (July 2023), the current panel of 20 drivers gave 902 hours of volunteer commitment, clocking up 6089 miles completed involving 830 separate journeys. Demand for the service is growing as a result of the withdrawal of rural bus services and the effects of the cost-of-living increases begin to bite. With the current panel of drivers working at full stretch, many deserving cases are having to be turned away.

Now that summer months have finished, if you are looking for ways to fill the time otherwise spent on outside hobbies and interests, why not consider volunteering your services to help over the Winter months when demand is as high, if not higher, than the Summer? Any number of hours you can offer - on any irregular pattern of availability - will be warmly welcomed. Any necessary support and training will be given.

Volunteers already involved speak of the deep sense of satisfaction and fulfilment their involvement gives.

The Centre is based at 18 School Street where Manager, Andy Shelton, will be happy to welcome you. He can be contacted by phone: 0116 2607 888 or email: [info@syston-vc.org](mailto:info@syston-vc.org). The Centre's web site: [www.syston-vc.org](http://www.syston-vc.org) (currently undergoing a re-design) also provides additional background information.



## Twelve Days of Christmas at Belvoir Castle

Take the magical journey through the Twelve Days of Christmas at Belvoir Castle.

18 Nov 2023 to 2 Jan 2024

**Where:** Belvoir Castle, Belvoir, Grantham, Lincolnshire, NG32 1PE

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[here](#)



## Archaeological Finds Day

Have you found any small archaeological objects?

Join us for the final Archaeological Finds Day of the year! Whether you are a seasoned metal detectorist, or you have made a chance find in your garden, you are invited to bring your archaeological...

9 Dec 2023 Open 10:00 - 16:00

**Where:** Newarke Houses Museum, The Newarke, Leicester, LE2 7BY

**Contact details:** 0116 225 4980

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## Ratby Co-operative Brass Band Christmas Concert

Live Band Music

A Christmas concert featuring all the Ratby Co-Operative Brass Bands.

Format: Theatre Style Seating

Doors Open: 2.00pm

Show Times: 3.00pm - 6.30pm

Tickets: Adults: £12.00 / Concessions: £10.00 / Under 12's: £6.00

Wheelchair...

10 Dec 2023 Open 15:00 -

**Where:** Mountsorrel Memorial Centre, 105 Leicester Road, Mountsorrel, LE12 7AJ

**Contact details:** 01162 304877



## A Christmas Carol In Concert

This unique adaptation uses traditional folk tunes and Christmas melodies to retell Dickens' classic heartwarming tale exclusively through song. It brims with warmth, wit and wonder.

Tickets £14 or £12 for under 25s.

10 Dec 2023 Open 19:00 - 21:00

**Where:** The Guildhall, Guildhall Lane, Leicester, LE1 5FQ

**Contact details:** 0116 253 2569

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**Christmas**  
*Craft Fair*

Saturday 9th December  
10:00 pm - 3:00 pm

At  
**Queniborough Village Hall**

Beautiful crafts, pretty things and Christmas gift ideas for sale.  
Tea and cakes by Queniborough Village hall Committee

Start 10 AM

Queniborough  
Craft Fair

Free Entry



## Christmas Market and Cafe

🕒 9 Dec 2023, 10 a.m. for 5 hours

📍 Syston: St Peter & St Paul

St Peter & St Paul Church Upper Church Street Syston Leicester, LE7 1HR, GB

📍 Free Entry

Bacon Rolls (10am-12pm), Soup (12-2pm)

Hot drinks and mince pies

Stalls, raffle, music and activities for children

Theme: Animals in the Bible

**St Hilda's**  
**Christmas Tree Festival**

Stalls & Refreshments  
Friday 8th December 5pm

St Hilda's Church ❄️  
East Goscote

**Christmas Concert** ❄️

**CAROLINE SHARPE**  
**SINGERS** ❄️

🎵

FRIDAY 15TH DECEMBER 2023 ❄️  
7PM

🎄 concert followed by refreshments ☕

*Free entry with a retiring collection for local foodbank. Donations of tinned and packaged goods welcome.*

# FROM OUR MEMBERS

## THE STORM AND THE STAG

The car engine spluttered and died. Susanne managed to steer it to the side of the lane using the remaining motion. It refused to restart. Shafts of lightning lit up the area at intervals, piercing the canopy of trees that were several deep, and lined both sides of the lane. The nearest on each side leant towards each other, branches intertwining in their higher reaches, like friends reaching over a barrier to embrace each other. In summer, the sunlight barely crept through, so dense was the covering of leaves, it kept the lane in shade. It was late October now, most of the leaves had faded from their riot of autumn colour and fallen. The wind was stripping any remaining foliage away, and seeking out the dead timber, nature's pruning mechanism was at work.

David was going to be really annoyed at being called out in this foul weather, maybe she should call the AA instead. The rain had been lashing down so hard, she hadn't realised that she had been gripping the steering wheel tightly in her efforts to see where she was going. She released her hold and shook out her hands. Then she took out her mobile phone, only to find that there was no signal. She cursed under her breath. She was no mechanic, but she used the light from her phone to examine the dashboard, in the hope of identifying why the car had stopped. No expertise was needed, the fuel gauge was on empty. She struggled to comprehend how this could be. David had taken the car out yesterday to pop down to the shops, instead of moving it and taking his. She had told him it was getting close to needing a fill up, and he said he would call in at the garage. Come to think of it, when he came back, he said he had, so how could it be empty?

She sat wondering what to do next. Cracks of thunder were closely followed by lightning; the storm was directly overhead. Great, she thought, in amongst trees, not the best place to be. The shafts of light on the tree trunks seemed to animate them. She thought she saw other movement amongst and behind them. Don't be silly, she told herself, this may have similarities with the old horror movies, but get a grip, you're not that far from civilisation, and the chances of being struck by lightning are slim. She would just have to hope a vehicle came along, and if it didn't, she would have to sit it out until the storm abated. Maybe she would be able to get a mobile signal then. She began to feel sleepy, though she was puzzled why. She reached over and pulled the blanket from the back seat to wrap around her, as she turned back, another bolt of lightning illuminated the area. She was startled to see a magnificent red deer stag staring straight at her through the windscreen, he was just feet away. After a few seconds, he headed off into the trees, but stopped and turned to look at her again before disappearing. She remembered that there were red deer in the area, they were from the estate that used to encompass these woods and following its' demise had colonised the wider area. Drowsiness overtook Susanne, she wrapped the blanket closely round her and fell asleep.

David called the local police around midnight. He had called her mobile several times, only for it to go straight to voicemail. The police hadn't been too concerned, she was probably just holed up somewhere waiting for the weather to break, visibility was very poor, give it a bit more time they said. If she didn't contact him, or wasn't home, after the storm died down, call them again.

Susanne woke several hours later, she felt very lethargic and she had a thumping headache. The storm had passed and it was strangely calm. She picked up her mobile phone from the seat beside her, she struggled to focus on the screen, when she did, she saw with relief that it showed a signal. She called home, why was there no reply, except the answerphone? David was a light sleeper, and they kept a handset upstairs. She tried his mobile instead, maybe he had come out looking for her. After a few rings, it went to answerphone. She rang the AA and explained the situation, although she found it difficult to do so, her brain felt like cotton wool. They would get someone out to her right away. During the wait Susanne rang home, and David's mobile, several times, answerphone and voicemail was all she heard, she gave up trying. She was startled when she looked up from her phone, the stag she had seen during the storm was again looking directly at her through the windscreen, she was sure it was the same one. He wheeled away and off into the trees again, but she noticed he was limping on a hind leg. The AA man was quite concerned that Susanne wasn't well and wasn't fit to drive. She managed to get over to him that she hadn't been able to contact her husband, but she wasn't fully coherent. He decided to ring the police.

The woman PC that arrived looked closely at Susanne, she asked whether she had been drinking or had taken any medication or drugs. She said she hadn't, but the PC decided she wasn't in a fit state to drive, and to take her back to the local station. As they drove there, they passed another parked patrol car, with an ambulance in attendance. A car had gone off the road and hit a tree. "Stop!" Susanne shouted, "That's my husband's car!". The patrol car pulled up and reversed, as Susanne stumbled out, the ambulance crew were carrying a fully covered stretcher to their vehicle. The PC took her arm and persuaded her back into her vehicle. Susanne saw her talking to the policemen attending the scene, and the ambulance crew, before she re-joined her. "Can you confirm your husband's full name?" she asked, "David Edward Marshall" "There's no easy way to say this, but it appears your husband has been killed as a result of the accident here" "Can I see him?" she asked, "No, not just now, we'll deal with that later. I've had a word with the ambulance crew, they suggest we get you back to the station and get the duty doctor to have a look at you".

The doctor agreed that Susanne appeared to be suffering from the after effects of a drug or drugs, though she insisted she had taken nothing. She was baffled as to why she had slept for several hours in her car, apparently long after the storm had died down. Blood samples were taken, these later confirmed that there were residual sedatives in her system. Within a short time, the effects had worn off, and she was left with the aftermath of David's death to deal with. She was devastated and blamed herself, if he hadn't come searching for her, he wouldn't have had the accident. However, her mind went back to the mystery of why she had run out of fuel, when David clearly said he had visited the garage. She mentioned it to the police when

they came asking all sorts of questions, both about David, and about her movements on that fateful evening. Why were they asking questions about David? It was obvious he had come out looking for her and lost his life in the process. Did he normally carry flexible hose in his boot? How did he know a Richard Morris? He was the barman at the community centre where the yoga group met, he had served her on the night of the storms. There had been several calls and text messages between Richard and David in the weeks before his accident. No, she wasn't aware they knew each other at all, let alone well enough to be in contact by mobile phone. It was only later that she learned something of what the police had established, having interviewed Richard Morris, and thoroughly examined the mobile phone.

Richard admitted to having spiked Susanne's drink at the community centre but explained that he had done so at the request of David Marshall, for an agreed payment. He didn't know why David wanted his wife drugged. The arrangements had been made several weeks before, but David had indicated that he would contact Richard when he was ready to put whatever plan he had into action. He had called the day before. In the meantime, Richard had contacted him on several occasions, as he had expected the request to come sooner, and was anxious to get the rest of the agreed payment. Half had been paid when the bargain had been struck, the other half to be paid when the deed had been done. Richard had confirmed by text that he had spiked the drink that evening. Enquires confirmed that David had not bought any fuel for her car the day before the incident, and equipment in their shed suggested that some additional fuel had been syphoned out of the tank. The flexible hose was found to be the right size to fit the exhaust of Susanne's car. There was also a new roll of duct tape in David's boot. His concerned call about her whereabouts had been traced. A neighbour, who was something of a night owl, had also seen him leave in his car after that phone call. It had stuck in her mind, it being such a foul evening.

Susanne was incredulous at the suggestion that these pieces of evidence indicated that David had intended to kill her. How could he have calculated that she would run out of fuel in the area she had? The police admitted that being precise would have been difficult, but they felt it would have been possible to syphon out the fuel and only put back enough to ensure she did run out somewhere on the country road part of her journey. The flexible pipe and tape would have been connected to the exhaust, and fed into the car, in the hope of making the event look like suicide. Had both David and Richard had the chance to dispose of the pay as you go mobile phones they had used to communicate; the incriminating messages and calls would not have come to light. His death would have been seen as a tragic accident, and the drugs in her system might have remained an unsolved mystery.

The phone also revealed another series of calls. They had started several months ago. It had been another shock to discover that David had been having an affair. She genuinely had no idea before the police liaison officer told her. The name Catherine Upshall would have meant nothing to her, but she had been present at David's funeral. She was in fact a work colleague of his, part of his team, so Susanne had thought she was purely there because of that. Turning things over in her mind, she had noticed that he wasn't quite as attentive as in the early years of their marriage, but he had remembered their anniversary only a couple of weeks before,

given her flowers, taken her out for a special meal. Things had perhaps become a little predictable in the bedroom and less frequent, but she had put all that down to a normal change that happened between a couple over time. She shuddered inwardly at the realisation that he had come to their bed having been with this other woman.

So, what had caused him to crash? She learned that in examining the scene, and his SUV, the police had established that he had swerved off the road, no other vehicles had been involved. Traces of animal skin and tissue, on the front offside of the vehicle, were found to be from a red deer. They concluded that he had been trying to avoid a collision, but had caught the animal a glancing blow, not enough to kill it. Indeed, someone had found a stag with an injured leg in the woods, a local animal rescue group were looking after him at their centre nearby.

Susanne decided to visit the rescue centre. Staff were surprised when she asked to see the injured stag. She explained that the animal had been the reason her husband had swerved and hit a tree. They were a little concerned that she bore the stag some malice but granted her request. The member of staff who had been looking after him was surprised, the creature ignored him when they approached. Instead, he stared straight at Susanne, and then came within a few feet of where she stood. He stood looking her straight in the eye. She had no doubt whatsoever that this was the deer she had seen twice before. The vet had expected him to have fully recovered by now, but he still carried a limp, so they had been reluctant to release him back into the wild. They had expected the stag to be anxious to be back in his own territory, it being the middle of the rutting season, but he showed no inclination to leave. Having stared at her for a few moments, the stag turned away and walked off, all trace of a limp had suddenly disappeared. He then gathered speed, easily cleared the fence around his enclosure, and headed for home.

## DECLUTTER DEN

Do you have anything sitting in a cupboard, or on a shelf, that you no longer want? Might one of our members or groups be able to make use of it?





Stephanie Sharpe has these items available

Compost bin

Metal bins with a drainage hole in each

Cross-trainer – heavy item

If you are interested in any of them please email

[sharpe.s.117@gmx.co.uk](mailto:sharpe.s.117@gmx.co.uk)



If you have something that you are prepared to give away – **strictly no items for sale!** Let me know and I'll put it in declutter den and hopefully we can help each other free up some space, whilst giving others something they have a use for, even if we don't.

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## POETRY CORNER

### CARGOES by John Masefield

Quinquireme of Nineveh from distant Ophir,  
Rowing home to haven in sunny Palestine,  
With a cargo of ivory,  
And apes and peacocks,  
Sandalwood, cedarwood, and sweet white wine.

Stately Spanish galleon coming from the Isthmus,  
Dipping through the Tropics by the palm-green shores,  
With a cargo of diamonds,  
Emeralds, amethysts,  
Topazes, and cinnamon, and gold moidores.

Dirty British coaster with a salt-caked smoke stack,  
Butting through the Channel in the mad March days,  
With a cargo of Tyne coal,  
Road-rails, pig-lead,  
Firewood, iron-ware, and cheap tin trays.

**DECEMBER** by Harvey Carson Grumbine

High like skeletons grim  
The trees hold up their arms;  
The last leaf's hurried from its limb  
By the tempest's wild alarms;  
The river ripples gray and cold,  
And autumn's o'er like a story told.

Deep in the lonely wood  
The leaves lie thickly strown;  
The timorous rabbit finds him food,  
The snow-bird seeks his own;  
The cricket long has ceased his song,  
For the breath of winter's cold and strong.

Close to the level plain  
The snow clings like a sheet;  
The chimney moans as if in pain,  
Lashed by the hissing sleet;  
And all good men are glad to be  
Where the Yule-log sparkles merrily

**DECEMBER** by Rebecca Hey

As human life begins and ends with woe,  
So doth the year with darkness and with storm.  
Mute is each sound, and vanish'd each fair form  
That wont to cheer us; yet a sacred glow—  
A moral beauty,—to which Autumn's show,  
Or Spring's sweet blandishments, or Summer's bloom,  
Are but vain pageants,—mitigate the gloom,  
What time December's angry tempests blow.  
'Twas when the "Earth had doff'd her gaudy trim,  
As if in awe," that she received her Lord;  
And angels jubilant attuned the hymn  
Which the church echoes still in sweet accord,  
And ever shall, while Time his course doth fill,  
'Glory to God on high! on earth, peace and good will!'

## And finally.....

Whilst turkey and Christmas pudding are regarded as traditional Christmas fayre in Britain. The same is not universally true, even in countries our ancestors moved to populate.

In the US roast ham joints with pineapple are more likely to grace the Christmas table. That said, mince pies are an Australian favourite. Whilst Canada reflects its dual British and French origins, with *Bûche de Noël* sitting alongside mince pies. New Zealand shares our love of mince pies and Christmas pudding, but pavlova is also a favourite.

Across the channel, France has borrowed some of our cuisine and vice versa. *Bûche de Noël* being more commonly known here as Yule log. Roasted capon and turkey served with chestnuts, along with goose, appear on tables both sides of the water. Fois gras and oysters are more of a French indulgence over Christmas, but smoked salmon is popular in France as well as here.

Roast goose is likely to be seen in Germany as opposed to turkey, but venison is a favoured choice and carp cooked in beer is also traditional. Stollen or Christollen has made its way into British stores over recent years.

Italian Christmas cuisine varies as you move from north to south, but roasted capon is popular countrywide. Ham is also served all over, often in a pastry case with glace fruits. Panettone is now a regular sight in Britain.

Pork is the traditional meat in Romania, including sausages and ham, and they have their own version of panettone called cozonac.

In Spain they love their roast lamb at Yuletide, the classic Christmas recipe is roast lamb prepared with wine, water, bay leaf, lemon, oil, and garlic.

Their neighbours on the Iberian Peninsula Portugal prefer fish. The main dish is delicious cod, or *bacalhau*. The traditional way to prepare this for Christmas is boiled with potatoes and vegetables.

In Hungary roast goose and duck feature, along with stuffed cabbage and fish soup. Whilst neighbours the Czech Republic and Slovakia favour cabbage soup, and everyone makes and exchanges sweet biscuits.

Roast turkey is popular in Iceland, along with ptarmigan (a member of the grouse family), but they also favour a variety of small cookies.

Christmas ham will be found on Jamaican tables, goat curry is traditional, but they share a love of heavy fruit cake with the UK.

In Japan turkey is virtually unknown, but the popularity of KFC's fried chicken at Christmas is such that orders are placed as much as two months in advance.

