

The magazine for older people in Leeds

# Shine

December/January 2021

## HO, HO, HO!

We meet Rasta Claus,  
Santa's cooler cousin

### WHAT A PERFORMANCE!

Behind the scenes  
with older people  
who dance, act and  
make music

#### PERSONAL STORIES

### A Lucky Man

Tony was in boy band  
The Dallas Boys –  
but there's more to  
him than singing

### Memories of Christmas

Our writers reminisce  
about Christmases past

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Older people  
without family  
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thoughts

#### IN CONVERSATION

## "IT'S BEHIND YOU!"

Comedian and  
panto star  
Billy Pearce on  
a life on stage

#### PLUS!

Advice, quizzes and more!

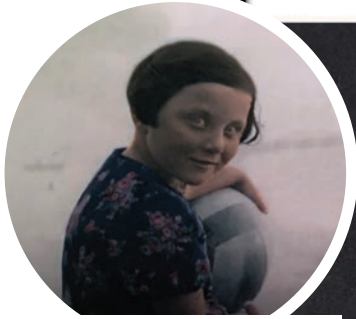


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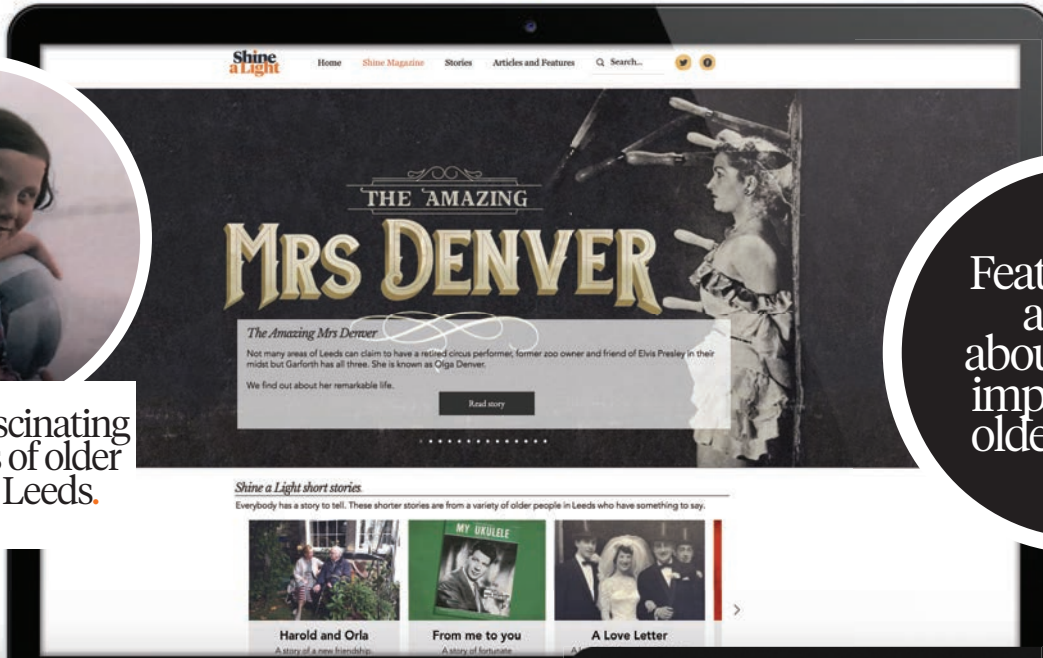


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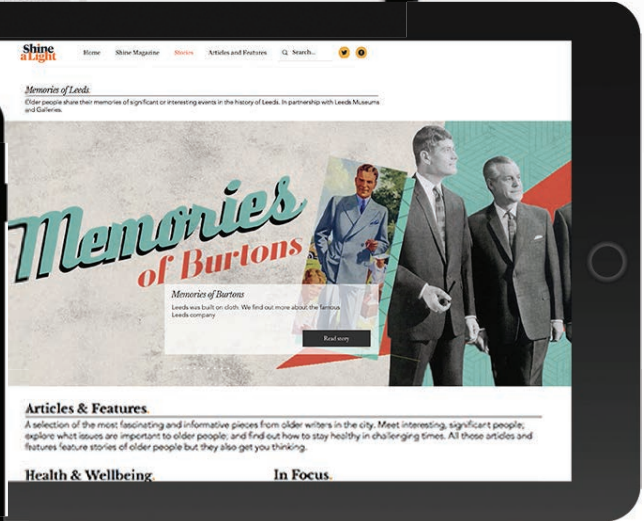


Discover fascinating true stories of older people in Leeds.



Features and articles about what is important to older people.

Memories of significant events in Leeds' history.



We chat to well known or local inspiring or interesting people.

Keep well with the best health advice and information.



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*Shine is a magazine by and for older people in Leeds. We're part of Time to Shine, which focuses on preventing isolation and loneliness amongst older people. Time to Shine funds various projects across Leeds that use creative ways to engage people – some of these projects feature in our magazine. Linda Glew is Time to Shine Programme Manager and she introduces each issue.*



**H**ello everyone. Here we are bringing you the Christmas edition of Shine - is it just me or has 2021 passed by in the blink of an eye? The days have suddenly just got very much colder. I do hope you are all managing to stay warm indoors and wrapping up well when you go out. It is certainly winter woollies time!

Last month we asked you all to complete the questionnaire to help us to make sure that Shine is all that you would like it to be. If you have not got around to that yet, it is not too late. The competition deadline has passed but you can still send us your thoughts. Dig out last month's copy and send it on to us soon. We want Shine to grow in 2022 and we need your help to do this.

**“I also hope - more than anything - that you have a peaceful, joyous and safe festive period.”**

This issue brings you an interview with the Leeds born comedian Billy Pearce, who has spent years starring in panto at Bradford Alhambra. Showbusiness is in his blood - he follows in the performance footsteps of his mother.

This leads nicely a special feature about performance, whether it be singing, dancing, playing instrument or amateur dramatics. The older people we speak to in this article all have one thing in common - the pure joy they find in performing.

Memories of Leeds this month becomes Memories of Christmas as our readers share with us their recollections of Christmases past. Many of us have special memories of this time of year; mine are full of music, Morecambe and Wise and Quality Street! Of course we could not have a Christmas issue without Father Christmas making an appearance - although you will read about a different member of the Claus family - Santa's cooler cousin Rasta Claus! This version encourages children to not only focus on what they got but also on what they gave too - a lesson for us all perhaps?

I hope that you enjoy this issue and I also hope - more than anything - that you have a peaceful, joyous and safe festive period.

**Linda Glew**  
Programme Manager  
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## Shine

At Shine we rely on our readers to provide stories. We're always looking for people to share their story. Do you have something to say? Maybe you're an aspiring writer, or maybe you just want to get something off your chest?

Send your story ideas to us in the following ways:

POST **Shine, LOPF**  
**24C Joseph's Well, Hanover Way, Leeds, LS3 1AB.**  
PHONE **0113 244 1697**  
EMAIL **hello@shinealight.org.uk**

You can also visit our website at [www.shinealight.org.uk](http://www.shinealight.org.uk)



# Shine

DEC/JAN 2021

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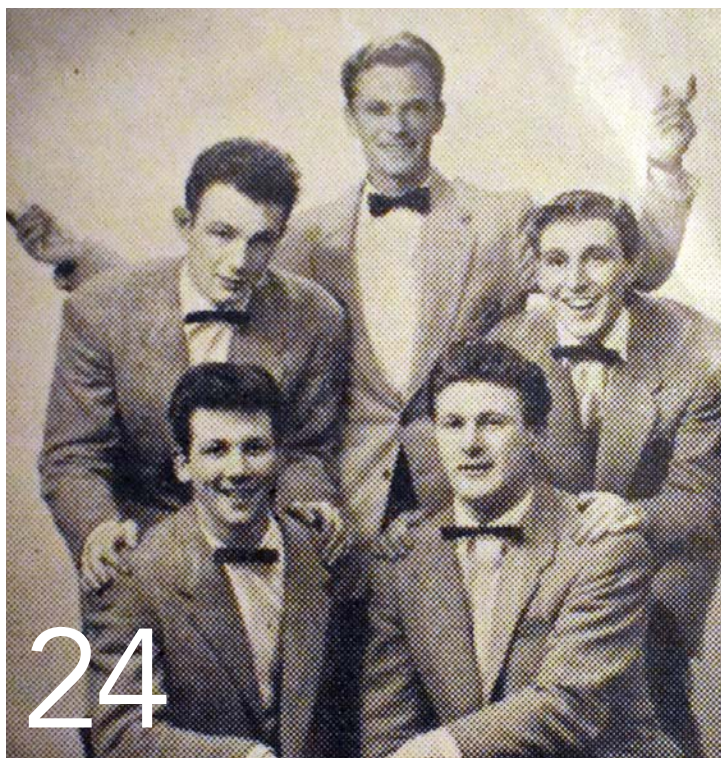
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Every month we talk to an inspiring or interesting older person and delve a bit deeper into what makes them tick. Sometimes a Leeds person, sometimes someone fascinating from further afield. This month we talk to comedian Billy Pearce.

“It just moves me. I love it. I love the theatre. And I love what I do”

**C**omedian Billy Pearce, 70, has been entertaining people all his life. His mother Jean Pearce ran the biggest dancing school in Yorkshire and Billy couldn't escape the pull of the stage. He started as a song-and-dance man and performed at Working Men's Clubs in Leeds and all over the country. He was a Redcoat at Butlins. "We used to catch people climbing over the fence," says Billy. "And then send 'em back to finish their holidays." Gradually he dropped the music in favour of comedy.

Billy found national success after appearing on *New Faces* in 1986. "It took me 16 years to be a New Face," he jokes. After multiple appearances at the Royal Variety Performances, Billy Pearce became a household name.

Billy has been appearing in Panto at the Bradford Alhambra for many years; *Sleeping Beauty* will be his 22nd show. "It's great for all the family," he says. "With a lot of innuendo – which is an Italian suppository." After 18 months when he wasn't able to work, Billy is now performing onstage to hugely appreciative audiences. We meet Billy to ask him about comedy, panto and his life in showbusiness.

***How does it feel to be back on stage, making people laugh?***

I've done a few gigs since we were allowed back. At my first gig back after 18 months, I had to do 2 hours of comedy. All I could remember of my set was "Good evening!" I didn't know if I could still do it, to be honest. I felt like Superman – but somebody had grabbed a big block of Kryptonite and shoved it down my knickers. So I'm not Superman any more. I'm just Man. But it was great actually. My first gig back was at the City Varieties in Leeds, so I had a lovely audience. And I love that theatre. I was panic-stricken, but it all went well. People need to laugh, it's part of humanity.

***Why do people love panto so much?***

I think it's because you can go with your family. All the kids, the mums and dads, the grandparents, the aunts and uncles – they all go and enjoy it. If you can get the kids laughing, the adults love it. I say they're all kids! What an introduction for young people to go into a theatre – which can be a daunting place – sometimes for the first time, and really enjoy it. Sit there, shout out, join in, understand the story – who the baddie is and who the goodie is. The special effects in ours are spectacular, West End standard. I love it. I always ▶







look through a little hole in the wings to look at the front row and I find a woman who I pick out and talk to. You can tell by their faces if they're up for it. You don't want to pick a misery! I saw this lady nudging her kid and telling him, "You boo that man, he's the baddie. And you cheer that lady, she's the goodie." But when I looked out a bit later on, she'd forgotten about the kid and she was shouting out and booing and hissing as loud as she could – you just get sucked into it! It's a wonderful family experience. And there's a beauty to all pantomimes at whatever level. It's not about the money. It might be the Rugby Club panto, or the local amateurs. There's always a charm and a beauty about pantomime.

This year the panto at the Alhambra is a bit different. No visitors backstage, and you have to wear masks. And no kids in the show, sadly. For the first time in a hundred or so years. Which is a shame because I absolutely adore the 'sunbeams'. It's a great experience for them and a lot of them go on to be successful in the entertainment business. There'll be some broken hearts this year because they can't take part. But it's too much with all the Covid restrictions. But I can't wait to get back on the stage there! I do have to be careful of Covid though because I had a motorbike crash a long time ago. Actually I've had a few. I like motorbikes – I just can't stay on 'em. But it left my body a bit mangled and I have to take care. I've had two thirds of my liver taken out, my spleen and my kidneys are damaged and I've got a rib missing. I was actually jumping 14 motorbikes in a double-decker bus – and somebody rang the bell...

***You like to take risks onstage too, don't you? You certainly throw yourself around in your act and in the pantos!***

I'm having to be a bit more careful now because I'm physically not as capable. I am knocking on a bit. But I'm still having sex at 70 – and I only live at 58! I'm not as fit as I should be at the moment because I haven't been working, but you soon get fit doing pantomime. It's all about energy, I think. You can't just shuffle about on stage. The kids want entertaining! If you act like a child, they identify with you. I've had loads of injuries in panto. Broke my ribs, my fingers, my toe. One year I knocked myself out. I was putting the bins out at 1 in the morning. It was all mossy and slimy – and I fell over and headbutted the patio. I had 8 stitches in my eyebrow. I was doolally for a couple of days after that. One year I had a thing called plantar fasciitis – they used to call it Policeman's Heel. It's where a stabbing pain goes right up your leg and up to your hip. So I had this funny walk. That went on forever. In fact, Colleen Nolan bought me some insoles – they worked a treat.



**Song & Dance**

Billy started off as a musician and dancer but found audiences loved his wisecracks.

***You've worked with loads of great acts.***

I kind of know everybody! I did Summer Season with Danny La Rue in Bournemouth in the 80s. He was an icon. He was very kind to me. He was so funny. I worked with him for a couple of years. I got very close to Danny and we became good friends. It was very sad when he passed away. Who else did I work with? Cannon & Ball. John Challis. John Inman – I loved him, he was very kind to me. I did another Summer Season in Blackpool with The Nolans, Kev Orkian, Jimmy Crickett and a full band. You'd never get that these days, it's all gone really. Les Dawson. I became a stagehand at the Grand in Leeds. Les was in the pantomime – this was before he became mega famous. He used to rehearse his piano going wrong in the pit between shows. But he was nice to me. In those days, a lot of the stars didn't speak to the stagehands. They looked down their noses a bit. But Les Dawson didn't. After that I got my union card and I became a dresser at YTV. Les was in a show called *Sez Les* and I was the dresser for the Syd Lawrence Orchestra – and for Les. And he remembered me! He was a star by then. A few years later we did *Blankety Blank* together. I was terrified because he was so brilliant. But he was so kind to me and I got to know his wife and his daughter. It was so lovely to meet him and to work with him. He was an absolute icon. I did a Summer Season in the early days with Tommy Trinder. I was so looking forward to meeting him. He was the first person to do *Sunday Night at the London Palladium*, before Bruce Forsyth. But he turned out to be a right misery!

***Your mum was also bit of an icon, wasn't she?***

All her life, my mum danced. She didn't have the confidence to go on stage herself, but she was a brilliant teacher. Fantastic at imparting her knowledge to kids. She just had the knack of getting the best out of every child. And every child loved her. For me, that gave me the best start. I used to get roped in to all the shows. I took my ballet exam and I was highly commended, but they put me in tights and I wasn't happy about that at all. I never did it again. How many times have I worn tights in panto?! I learned to tap dance and immersed myself in that. The only time I could see her was to get involved in the shows! I'm very grateful to my mum – I wouldn't be where I am without her. Sadly, my mum passed away with Covid over a year ago. She was in a care home and the staff were absolutely wonderful people. But I couldn't go and see her and I don't think that helped. Towards the end, they would wheel her down to a window and I'd wave from about 20 feet away. She was happy right until the end, even though she had dementia. We'd like to have a memorial to her when everything is settled down.

***You didn't set out to be a comic, did you?***

I don't really know how it all happened! I loved guitar and taught myself to play. My song and dance partner Andrew Beaumont and I, we did the Everly Brothers. One drank Everly, the other smoked Everly... We went on *Opportunity Knocks* in 1972 – with "Spewie" Greene. We tap-danced, played guitar, banjo, ukulele. It started when I had to make the time up so I'd tell a joke. In the early days I'd always be behind the guitar and it was a big step to take it off and walk around. It's wonderful making people laugh. It's like mass hypnosis. A perfect night for me is when everyone's had a right good night and left with a smile on their faces, and the man comes up to pay you and he says, "When are you coming back?" I drive home happy. I always like to make people happy and I don't like to upset anyone. I steer away from certain subjects and I don't swear too much. Some people want to be controversial or aggressive. I just want to be funny, make people laugh and forget their problems for a while. You know I'm terrified when I go to work sometimes. I think, "Why do I do this? Why do I put myself through it?" I suppose I can't do anything else. You know, I thought about packing it all in when Covid came along. But at one of the first gigs I did after the lockdown, I heard people laughing. And I thought, "What a beautiful gift, to be able to make people laugh like that." I've realised that what I've missed is "the fear". I've missed the rollercoaster. I drive to a gig, I'm terrified, nervous; I do the gig; they laugh; and I drive back relieved. All my life I've been terrified!

***There's something special about seeing comedy or a panto in a live venue, isn't there?***

I appreciate the theatres because I was brought up in them. I like the clubs, don't get me wrong, but you do take your life in your hands a bit! But the Bradford Alhambra, that's special. When you walk out on that stage, it's like home to me. I love it so much. In between shows, when everyone's gone out to get something to eat, they wash the stage down and set up for the next show. Everyone disappears or they have a sleep. The theatre's empty. It's all quiet. And I'll stand in the middle of that stage and just look out into the empty auditorium. You can feel it. She's asleep. You can feel her resting, breathing. You can feel all the emotions – the laughter, the tears – soaked into the brickwork over the last hundred-odd years. It just moves me. I love it. I love that theatre. And I love what I do. I say to the other actors in the finale, "Take the applause." That applause hits you like a blast of warm air. I wish I could bottle that. When you do showbusiness, you've got nothing to show for it. You don't make something you can take home. That atmosphere is gone in a fleeting moment. But if you could bottle it, then one day, when I can't do it anymore, when I'm too old and I'm laid down on a bed, I could just unscrew that bottle, open it up and take a listen.

***What's great about getting older?***

I was always the young one, coming up; now I'm the old one, looking back. I have a lot of respect now – but you have to work for it. It doesn't come overnight. Nobody gives me a contract any more because they trust me that I'll be there. They used to say, in the old days, you can't be a comedian until you're 40. When you're older people seem to have respect for you. "He's been around for so long – he must be doing something right!" ■

*This Christmas Billy Pearce is appearing as King Billy in Sleeping Beauty at the Bradford Alhambra. His co-stars include TV presenter Dr Ranj as The Royal Doctor. Expect the usual mix of mirth, mayhem and magic.*

For tickets ring 01274 432000 or book online at [www.bradford-theatres.co.uk](http://www.bradford-theatres.co.uk)



*Sleeping Beauty plays from 11th December 2021 – 16 January 2022.*

*Billy continues to perform live comedy across the country. For the latest information on his stand up shows, see his website*

[www.billypearce.com](http://www.billypearce.com)



# A place of my own

*Every month we hear from a different member of the Age Friendly Steering Group. This issue **Julie Badon** addresses the issue of housing. Julie uncovers what Leeds City Council is doing to support older people with housing needs and suggests some ideas to improve matters.*

**A** this time of year, we naturally think about getting together with family and friends in our home. One element of getting older is the increasing difficulty of ensuring we are adequately and affordably housed. Not only housed, but able to live in a place that genuinely feels like home. What do I mean by home? Firstly, there is an emotional home, defined as the place where you feel in control and properly oriented in space and time. A predictable and secure place. Alternatively, your spiritual home is the place where you feel that you belong, usually because your ideas or attitudes are the same as those of the people who live there. Finally there is a legal definition of home, which is a physical domicile or structure in which a person or household resides.

Whatever your definition, for many older people, having any type of home becomes more challenging, mainly due to life events like redundancy; death of a spouse or family member; divorce; or increased disability. A home that suited you earlier in life may no longer be appropriate or may no longer be available. Many older people find it harder to get what they really need to continue to live a happy and fulfilling life. I contacted Mandy Sawyer at Leeds City Council (LCC) who leads their policy on housing for the over 60s. She explained to me that the LCC policy had four main themes: supporting independence and social inclusion; providing adequate information and advice; providing specialist housing for those with additional needs; and improving new housing developments.

When considering how best to support independent living and social inclusion for over 60s, Leeds City Council will look at any physical changes required to a property. They often adapt the home to help frail individuals. They provide wellbeing activities and armchair yoga. There are positive alternatives to unsuitable family homes with no adaptations or where it is very difficult to make the necessary improvements. Whilst Mandy admitted this work was at an early stage, it was part of a planned process that seeks to avoid crisis situations for individuals. LCC

wants to provide timely, supported assessments. A strategy group that includes lots of agencies and professionals has recently been set up across Leeds to look at this.

In terms of giving information and advice Mandy recognised it was still a bit of a lottery. Many older people use the Leeds Directory and there is a questionnaire around housing needs. Mandy suggested that owner-occupiers were the biggest problematic group, because often they lack the money to fund necessary adaptations. The Leeds Extra Care scheme provides a number of self-contained apartments with communal facilities, 24/7 staff presence, and support packages. However, there are currently only two such schemes across Leeds – though three new ones are being developed. Finally, all new housing development builds have improved accessibility standards for people as they age, and by working with the planning department LCC has already increased the percentage of accessible homes. During this transition process the Council created a tenant voice panel - but there was no dedicated group looking at specific housing needs from an age perspective. Something Leeds City Council might wish to reconsider if they are serious about being an Age Friendly City.

One area of concern that also arose in our discussions was the WASPII women. These women were affected financially by the changes in state pension age. Many women aged between 55 and 66 - often those most likely to be made redundant in organisational changes - were badly impacted and many are finding it difficult to seek out suitable, affordable housing. As yet, no real progress has been made to address the special needs of this vulnerable group. Perhaps it is something that can be further considered by our MPs and Councillors in the coming year? ■

*The Age Friendly Steering Group meet monthly to share views, ideas, experience and skills.*

*For more info contact Sarah Prescott on **0113 244 1697** or [sarah@opforum.org.uk](mailto:sarah@opforum.org.uk)*

# Nosey Parker

*Paul Atkinson has noticed a recent phenomenon. Everyone on his bus is on their phones! They're either texting, swiping or having one-sided conversations that everyone can hear. Paul can't resist listening in. People tell amazing stories on the bus. Is Paul a Nosey Parker? You decide!*

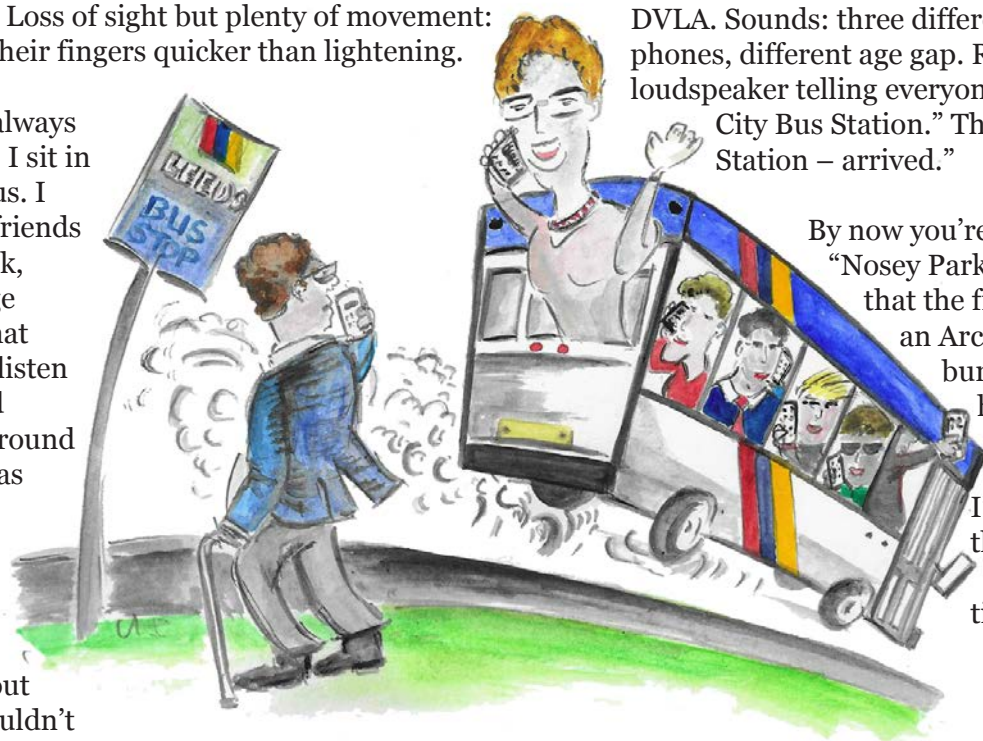
**A** Journey from Wakefield to Leeds on the 110 Bus. Before I board the bus, I am confronted with four people. They walk without a care in the world, mobile phones in their hands - looking down, twitching, at tremendous speed. I stop and wait. They walk around me without hesitation, without looking up. Then it begins, the nightmare unfolds. It's getting rather crowded on the pavements. People shopping, getting on the bus or train, doing what we think is a simple task. I go to the stand for my bus. Luckily, I'm in front of the four amigos. I start by paying the driver (or showing him my free pass). My 4 passenger friends are still behind, on their phones. Their sight seems to return, they efficiently show the driver their passes. Still in another world as they walk, one text message in front of the other. Ear-plugs in, lost to the sound of everyday life. Loss of sight but plenty of movement: they can move their fingers quicker than lightning.

I go upstairs. I always enjoy the views. I sit in the middle of bus. I notice my four friends going to the back, obviously college students. Not that I'm nosey but I listen to the one-sided conversations around me. Everyone has a story. First gentleman starts on job vacancies, asks a friend to contact him about some work. I couldn't quite hear all the conversation regarding the nature of the job. There's a young man sat near him ordering a takeaway. A takeaway, first thing in the morning! I think it was that anyway, he was a bit muffled. Now on to what Sheila did last night. That's not her real name, I've changed it for confidentiality reasons - not that she was that bothered about confidentiality. The whole bus could hear her! She's a teenager on a

massive phone. I moved closer to listen in. Was I too obvious? On to a smartly dressed lady. "The car's in the garage, I'll be in the office in 20 minutes." So, a chance to speak to a work colleague. The conversation's about a member of staff who works in the office - who (unbelievably) is always on the phone! I did break out in laughter as I was taking notes. The lady didn't realise.

More overheard conversations. Elderly couple speaking to secretary at doctors. Didn't listen in to that one for obvious reasons. Young man going to court. The case is regarding a driving offence. It wasn't his fault. It never is. I remember receiving two speeding fines in two days on the same road, travelling over fifty miles per hour - it wasn't my fault either.

The six points were a gesture of kindness from the DVLA. Sounds: three different types of music on phones, different age gap. Recorded message on loudspeaker telling everyone: "Next stop - Leeds City Bus Station." Then: "Leeds City Bus Station - arrived."



By now you're probably thinking "Nosey Parker!" Did you know that the first Nosey Parker was an Archbishop of Canterbury (born in 1559), who had a reputation for prying into the affairs of others? I'm not so sure of that description but I'll settle for the title. Mobile phones can be annoying, but for a writer they're gold. You get lots of new

stories! My tip for aspiring Nosey Parkers: when travelling by public transport, don't forget a notepad and pen. Like the scouts - always be prepared! A double-decker bus is a history lesson on wheels. You go from Emmerdale to The Great British Bake Off in a single journey. Sat upstairs, listening to people's one-sided conversations, you really hear it all! ■







# What a Performance



Carol singing; pantomime; charades;  
the *Nutcracker*; *I Wish It Could Be Christmas Every Day*  
at karaoke; the *Strictly Final*...

So much of our festive experience is wrapped up in watching and taking part in performance. What is it about performing that gives people a buzz? We meet some older people who love to express themselves through music, drama and dance to find out more.

WORDS **TOM BAILEY** IMAGES **PAULA SOLLOWAY**



## Special Feature

**Y**ou will have noticed that performances are back. Theatres, concert halls and music venues have opened after a year's closure. Some of you will have been the first to get back to seeing a play, a gig or a piece of dance. Others are, understandably, more reticent. However, it's not all about being in the audience; some of us take part in regular workshops and rehearsals, more and more of which have restarted after Covid restrictions have changed.

One such person is Shirley Hoyland. She's a member of LIDOS, which has put on amateur plays, musicals and pantomimes since the 1970s. LIDOS stands for Leeds Insurance Dramatic & Operatic Society - the group was formed by a group of theatre enthusiasts who worked in Insurance. Shirley is currently busy directing *Cinderella* at the Carriageworks Theatre, which will be on at the end of January 2022. When did Shirley first fall in love with the stage?

"As an 8-year-old pupil of Ingram Road School, each of the four Houses put on an end-of-year show," she says. "I was pushed forward to sing a solo. *Bless this House* was my song of choice, accompanied at the piano by one of the older girls - who on the actual day dropped out, resulting in me singing to the whole school unaccompanied! Undeterred by the event I loved singing and later joined the church choir. Throughout my teens I was captivated watching musicals at the Leeds theatres. I wanted to be up on stage emulating the performers, it was such a magnet to me. At the age of twenty, I joined the Leeds Gilbert & Sullivan Society performing at the Civic Theatre." Shirley then went on to join the Headingley Operatic Society. "Such exciting times!" she recalls.

### Performing

Shirley is convinced that the stage gives her something special. "There's something about performing on stage to a live audience which cannot be equalled," she says. "It's a two-way experience really, you feel their presence and it lifts the character being played." That relationship between performer and audience is vital.

Shirley started performing young; however some people take it up later in life. Jean Horsman (now 83) joined the Leeds People's Choir in 1990, shortly after it was established. "I joined to learn the South African National Anthem!" Jean says. Leeds People's Choir is the oldest community choir in Leeds; everyone is welcomed to sing, no matter their choral ability. However, performing in front of an audience isn't the focus for Jean. "It's not my background at all," she admits. "I joined to sing."



**“I’ve never been a dancer. I said I don’t fancy it, but I’ll give it a go. I’ve loved it ever since.”**

Jean finds that the act of singing is meaningful in itself, whether or not an audience is present. “It’s so therapeutic is singing,” she says “It’s got me through some difficult times. In the early days, when I first joined, my marriage was ending. And I was teaching. I had 3 children. So life was quite stressful. But after going to the choir on a Wednesday evening, I’d always feel strong and resolved to keep going for the rest of the week. It’s about the joy of singing. I don’t read music; I just like singing. I’m not religious but I do like singing hymns, which confuses some people!” The Leeds People’s Choir does perform in front of people and there are elements of the process that Jean likes. “I love the purpose of leading up to a performance. But I don’t often get nervous. We always get a really supportive audience.”

#### *Audiences*

Many of the performing arts groups that welcome older people do not put the emphasis on the public side of their work. However most do perform – and support members through the process with kindness and patience. Maureen is part of the Over 50s Dance Group in Woodlesford. The group meet weekly and welcome everybody. “When we started the dance group it was not the intention to dance in public,” Maureen says. “But we were asked to dance at the Town Hall. Everyone was very nervous and worried that they would not remember the steps. When we had finished, everyone cheered and told us how they enjoyed it. This gave everyone a boost and when we were asked again to dance in front of an audience it was not as scary. Our group does not look for dancing in front of people, but if we are asked, we can usually rely on some of our group to volunteer and have a fantastic time doing it!”

#### *Age Proud Festival*

Both the Leeds People’s Choir and the Over 50s Dance Group took part in the recent Age Proud Festival, organised by Time to Shine. For many older people, this event was the first time they’d performed (or for that matter been in an audience) for around 18 months. “Our ladies still talk about being asked to dance at the festival,” says Maureen. “People were worried because some hadn’t done the online classes and hadn’t danced for a long time. But they absolutely loved it and were so pleased to have been asked.” ►







Shirley Hoyland caught the performing bug when she was 8. It took Roger Smith until his 70s to realise he was a dancer! Roger attends dance workshops with Ascendance dance company. He has Parkinson's and Ascendance run specialised classes for people with movement disorders. The idea is to keep the mind and body active, as well as to increase confidence, mobility, balance and flexibility. "I started when the pandemic started," says Roger. "I used to go to a Parkinson's exercise class. That stopped and I got invited to this online thing on Zoom. I didn't realise it was dance! I've never been a dancer. I said I don't fancy it, but I'll give it a go. I've loved it ever since. I used to think it was going to be like *Strictly* and that sort of thing – but it's not. I think it's wonderful. It's the best thing that's ever happened to me."

Like the Over 50s Dance Group, the focus is on using people's creativity to stay healthy. But the group was able to perform in an online initiative that aimed to raise awareness about Parkinson's and the benefits of dance. The *Jersalema Dance Challenge* was an online collaborative piece that saw 13 dance groups performing together on Zoom "Jerusalem was brilliant," says Roger. "It was fabulous. I was at home, dancing to the music. We were joined up with a group in North America. That was very interesting."

### *Making music*

Performing alongside people all over the world is a phenomenon that has sprung up through Covid. Musician Terry Barnes believes that (in some ways) the pandemic has "brought people together". Terry plays keyboards and saxophone and creates oral soundscapes using digital technology. "I don't make songs in the conventional way," he says. "My music is quite laid back." He hasn't always been a performer either. "It was a bit of an accident really," says Terry. "About 30 years ago, I got really ill. Eventually I found out I had Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. I had to re-evaluate my life – and that's when I started getting into music. I started playing, went to college and studied. My first performance was to other people in college. I was a bit older than most of them. It was interesting and fun. It was good to do it and to get over those nerves, thinking, is this good enough?"

Before the pandemic, Terry was a regular at several local Open Mics, including the Cloth Cat night known as *The Mos Eisley Cantina* – named after the bar in *Star Wars*. But when the pandemic struck, these Open Mics had to close. "When I realised this Covid lark was serious, I went online to try and get in touch with other people," says Terry. "I found an international Open Mic based in Prague – musicians from all over the world." Cloth Cat's Open Mic went



online, which was a lifeline for some. Terry goes to a musician's networking support group on Zoom. "There are people from the UK, the Netherlands, America, Barcelona, Canada – we've had a woman on from Japan. That group came together because of Covid. It has put people in touch who would never have met."

Terry also makes music with people who he meets online. He's currently working on a concept album about nature, power and beauty. "I have a friend in the Netherlands who plays the flute part. I've got another friend on the Isle of Wight, she'll play the strings part. I've also got a friend in Nevada. She's a poet and was looking for a musician to collaborate with. She sent me a poem and we're going to work out what to do together. Covid has been horrible and everyone has been struggling. But that struggling has made me reach out to people."

### Going online

Many performing groups met online throughout the pandemic. But Zoom isn't everyone's cup of tea. Shirley Hoyland from LIDOS explains: "The company performed a virtual show for the audience to watch from their homes. The younger members adapted immediately to being filmed in their home or a garden setting – but it wasn't for me!" Jean Horsman at the Leeds People's Choir wasn't ready to go online. "I

didn't participate on Zoom," says Jean. "I had a major tragedy so couldn't really deal with meeting online at that time." Many people did attend Zoom sessions but couldn't wait to get back to face-to-face meetings. Margaret Bending is part of Performance Ensemble, a theatre company for older people. "I am really enjoying physically working with people again, rather than virtually," says Margaret. "It was great to be able to stay connected through the lockdowns and restrictions, but we were limited in what we could do."

It's not always easy get back to "normal" meetings. "It was a difficult decision about when to start our group again after lockdown," says Jenny, who established the Over 50s Dance Group some years ago. "Many of us said we were very nervous about dancing as a group again. The first few weeks were hard. We were (and still are) cautious - we take everyone's temperature, ask everyone to sanitise their hands and keep distances and the doors ajar for ventilation. Gradually most of our ladies have returned and we also have some people who joined us - we are all now enjoying a social hour and activities once again."

Roger from Ascendance agrees that 'real life' is better: "It's easier to talk to people in real life. If you are in a room together you get more feeling of presence. You can have a chat with your neighbour quite easily, but that's hard on Zoom." However Roger has a word ►



### Costume Party

Dancers and audience members conclude the Age Proud Festival with a communal boogie.



## Special Feature

of warning. “They were talking about packing in Zoom but I said that’s a silly idea. Because of being disabled, it’s difficult to get out to all the venues. Especially in winter. You’d look out of the window and think, ‘I can’t go out today.’” Ascendance now offer ‘blended’ sessions, where some people are in the room and some people are at home. “We call it Zoomers and Roomers!” says Roger.

Shirley is very pleased to be back in “proper” rehearsals for *Cinderella*. “There was a certain amount of trepidation,” she admits. “But in the rehearsal room it was like putting an old coat back on. We take twice weekly lateral flow tests and we ensure everyone is as safe as possible, mindful of ventilation and social distancing.” Jean at the choir has returned too. “I wasn’t sure about going back,” she says “But I could just creep back and join in. It wasn’t pressurised. It’s a lovely environment, some lovely people. Really supportive.”

All the people we spoke to find joy in the performing arts. And each of them has a different story to tell. “It’s that buzz,” says musician Terry. “Giving something out to people. It’s about expression and passion. There’s something about the saxophone. The sound comes from within, it starts from inside your diaphragm and it comes out of you. The ultimate thing is to achieve oneness with my instrument. It’s expression. It’s about connecting with people. It’s a great feeling.”

Roger is really enthusiastic about dance, despite his initial scepticism. “It feels fantastic,” he says. “I wish I’d done something like this before. It keeps you fit and keeps you moving.” Margaret, from the Performance Ensemble puts it simply: “I am involved in performance purely because I am having so much fun!” Mary, another member of the Over 50s Dance group, is upbeat too. “I find dancing takes my mind off my daily chores,” she says. “It’s challenging but great fun. Performing in front of a live audience gives me a buzz and it’s fabulous. Everyone is very friendly and supportive.”

**“It’s clear that the performing arts gives people something special. A buzz”**





Shirley from LIDOS is similarly enthusiastic about the social element of theatre. “It keeps me involved with lots of lovely people I’ve met over the years and in many cases, learnt from,” she says. “In fact we never stop learning.” Shirley doesn’t perform quite so much these days, preferring to direct. “The days of hectic dance routines may be distant,” she says “But I have wonderful memories. And I consider myself blessed to have been given the opportunity of treading the boards in many glorious productions.

It’s clear that the performing arts gives people something special. A buzz; a connection; a sense of fun. Whatever it is, and whenever you’re ready to return: enjoy it. ■



The photos from this article are from the first Age Proud Festival in Leeds that took place earlier this year. Older people in drama, dance and music groups had their first chance in 18 months to perform to an appreciative audience – in real life, not on Zoom! The Festival spreads the message that it’s time to feel good about ageing. Leeds is a great city in which to grow older and the range of performers who were involved is a testament to that. The finale of the Festival saw performers from Yorkshire Dance’s Dance On project don their best gladrags and strut their stuff on the red carpet. Elegant elders, retired rockers and punk pensioners united to strike a pose. At the fashion show’s conclusion, the audience joined in with a spontaneous boogie and Leeds Museum was overtaken by older and younger people dancing joyously together.

What a performance!

To find out more about the Age Proud Festival and the events that took place you can visit: [www.ageproudfestival.org.uk](http://www.ageproudfestival.org.uk)

Leeds Older People’s Forum hopes that the Age Proud Festival can be the first of many in Leeds. Watch this space!

Fancy getting on your dancing shoes, giving the ukuele a go, or just dressing up and having fun? Below are some useful contact details and links to local organisations:

**AVSED Bollywood Dance**

0113 250 1702  
info@avsed.org.uk  
www.avsed.org.uk

**Heydays – theatre, music, creative writing and dance**

0113 213 7296  
maggie.deruyck@leedsplayhouse.org.uk  
www.leedsplayhouse.org.uk

**Dance on at Yorkshire Dance**

hannahtreharne@yorkshiredance.com  
0113 2439867  
www.dance-on.org

**Collingham Band**

diana.r.lee1@gmail.com  
<https://www.collinghamband.co.uk/CONTACT>

**Ukulele Shape Shifters at Bramley Elderly Action**

email info@bramleyea.org.uk  
0113 2361644  
www.bramleyea.org.uk

**Ascendance Dance**

07933 685359  
classes@ascendance.org.uk  
www.ascendance.org.uk

**Cloth Cat**

0113 2442773  
enquiries@clothcatleeds.org.uk  
www.clothcatleeds.org.uk

**Leeds People’s Choir**

0113 2286553  
leedspeopleschoir@gmail.com  
www.leedspeopleschoir.co.uk

**LIDOS**

E\_lidos@yahoo.co.uk  
www.lidos.co.uk

**Over 50s Dance Group**

07833 745860  
hquigley0@gmail.com  
www.facebook.com/over50sdancels26

**Performance Ensemble**

0113 5246979 ext 800  
info@theperformanceensemble.com  
www.theperformanceensemble.com



# Ho, Ho, Ho!

*Every year families follow the tradition of going to meet Father Christmas. We go behind the beard to meet a couple of the people who perform as the jolly festive character - and find out more about why they do it and what it brings them.*

**C**leve Freckleton invented Rasta Claus some years ago as an alternative to the traditional Santa. Now Rasta Claus is a Leeds legend. Cleve tells us more.

## **Tell us about how Rasta Claus came about.**

I worked in a special school in Bradford some years ago, as a musician. They asked me one year if I'd play Santa. I'd never played it before. The truth is I'm not massive on Christmas. I was raised in a Pentecostal household but my parents never made a big thing out of Christmas. It was a day when your family got together, you had food – that was it. My mum, in particular, never wanted us to buy presents for her, she'd want us to get things for other people. I used to be a church minister and I was always a bit concerned about the commerciality of Christmas. When my kids were growing up, you'd start seeing adverts for Christmas toys in September! So I agreed to be Santa – but what concerned me at that time was that I don't necessarily look like the classic version of Father Christmas. Would it be ok? As a bit of joke I said, "I can't be Santa Claus. I'll make up a new character – we'll call him Rasta Claus!" It was totally off the cuff, strictly for that school. The parents, kids and teachers seemed to love it. But for me, it was a one-off, an acting role. I'm a musician, and I've appeared on television in a couple of different roles. My stage name is Reverend Chunky! I go on stage, I adopt a character, do my thing, then I'm back to being Cleve.

A couple of years later my friend who runs a children's events business approached me and said, "Cleve would you be Santa Claus for me?" I told her about Rasta Claus and she absolutely loved the idea. So again, I donned the robes and went out there. But this time I had a bit of a philosophy. I thought, what can Rasta Claus offer that Santa Claus can't? My first thought was he's different – which allows anybody else who's different to feel included. The second thing was I had to give him a back story. I came up with this idea that he's the son of Father Africa and Mother Time. He's Santa's cooler cousin. As opposed to this philosophy of *getting* something for Christmas, his motto is "Give a likkle back". Said in a very Caribbean way! Children would come and see me

and at the start they'd be handed a plastic gold coin. I'd show them a doll of Mama Africa, tell them the story about how Africa was a very rich place and over the years so many people have come and taken away from it. I'd say, "If only I could find someone who could put something precious back into the land, we could restore it and maybe we could make Christmas special again." And those kids, with their big wide eyes would say, "I've got a coin!" and they'd put it in – and at that point I'd say, "Because you've put a little back, now you can have a present." You don't get a present on the basis of expectation, but because you offered something, you gave a little.

## **How do children react to Rasta Claus?**

It's amazing. They love it. The truth is, I'm a character. A couple of families now – the children ask for me every year. There's been a couple of occasions when children have said, "That's not the real Santa!" What I say to them is, "No, the other guy's not the real Santa, I'm the real one! He's copying me!" The reactions are great. The adults really fascinate me. They embrace it. I love that. One of my favourite moments was in Leeds Market, a Muslim woman came up to me and asked if she could have a picture with me. Then she asked if she could give me a hug. When I look at that picture and what it represents, it's beautiful.

## **What else do you do with your life?**

I'm a musician by trade. During the lockdown that was affected massively. My passion has always been playing and singing. I still do concerts and gigs around Leeds. The greatest fun I have is busking. I've always operated on the idea that 1 out of 10 people might give you something. And if there's a thousand people that come by you in a day, you've done well. It could be 1 pence or 1 pound. It goes from the sublime to the ridiculous. I've been paid £50 to sing Happy Birthday to someone; I've also received a lollipop from a 3-year-old boy, which to me is worth more than £1000 because no kid gives away sweets! I've busked in Leeds, Italy, Spain, France, Portugal – but the place where I've made most money in the shortest amount of time is Bradford! I also work with adults who've had brain injuries. There's one particular chap who I work with, he's Jamaican by ►





**Santa's Cool Cousin**  
Cleve Freckleton  
strikes a  
pose in his  
Rasta Claus garb.



birth. I get to cook a month's worth of Jamaican food for him. It's massively nostalgic for me because that's the food I grew up with as a kid. I cook it for my own children and family. But it puts me in the zone. It's one of my favourite things!

**Tell us about your early life.**

I was born in London – in Chelsea, at a time when poor people could live there! I left South London to go to Jamaica when I was 9 but came back and lived in Leeds when I was 14. I lived in Chapeltown. My parents were musicians, brothers were musicians. I went to a gospel church where music was constantly being played. In Chapeltown there were bands all over, you could hear them rehearsing in basements and cellars. There was this incredible artistry. Chapeltown's amazing. Incredible dancers. I worked with David Hamilton from Phoenix Dance. Being a musician, Chapeltown was a great place to be.

The years followed on: I became a church minister; I went live in America for a while. In 1999 I was back here. I went full-time as a musician and that was fine up until the lockdown. I had a 10-year residency at the Wardrobe and now I play regularly at the Domino Club.

**What's going on this Christmas with Rasta Claus?**

There are a few things going on. I'm pleased to say we'll be having our first Rasta Claus grotto at Chapeltown nursery. That's open to anyone. My daughter does all the bookings – I just have to turn

**“Instead of asking, “What did you get for Christmas?”, we should be asking, “What did you give?” By giving something, you're opening up a gateway to receive ourselves.”**



**Give a Likkle**  
Rasta Claus brings different communities together in joy and laughter.

up in character! Because I grew up in Leeds 7, there's a part of me that's attached to that area. Chapeltown Nursery, the football club at Scott Hall – they're places that I choose to interact with. As Rasta Claus says, “Give a likkle back” – and that place gave me a lot.

I believe in what I do as Rasta Claus, because I offer something different. Anyone with an idea of how we want the world to change would see the possibilities there. We've got to think about things differently – and what better time to do that than Christmas? I'm taking my grandkids to a shelter on Christmas Day, so we can give something back. Instead of asking, “What did you get for Christmas?” we should be asking, “What did you give?” By giving something, you're opening up a gateway to receive ourselves. We get by giving. I say to the kids, “If you have toys left over from last year, give them away to charity or to other kids who are worse off.” Because by giving away, you're creating room to receive.

*Rasta Claus will be appearing at various venues across the city during Christmas 2021. You and your family can visit his very own grotto at Chapeltown Community Nursery on Reginald Street in LS7 on Saturday 18th December between 12pm and 5pm. Meet the man himself: give a little and receive a present in return! Tickets can be purchased on the website. You can also book a virtual Rasta Claus experience - check out the website for details.*

For more information go to [www.rastaclaus.org](http://www.rastaclaus.org) and search Rasta Claus on Facebook.

*Tom Blears has had all sort of jobs and he's lived all over the world. A few years ago he found himself becoming Father Christmas. Tom tells us the story below.*

### **How did you become Santa Claus?**

About 5 years ago I worked at Lotherton Hall, at the gift shop. It was the first year they were doing the Christmas Experience. They had booked several Santas but there were occasions when they were short. So I was asked to step in. They issued me with a suit and all the gubbins that goes with it – and I found that I really enjoyed it. So now I do it every year. Except for last year, of course. That first year, I was thrown in at the deep end. You have to read the faces of the children. They give you a lot. The younger children can't hide their excitement. It's important that you interact with the parents and grandparents. I say to the kids, "I used to bring your Granny presents, but in those days it was only an orange and a sack of nuts." I sit down, tell stories – sing a carol sometimes!

### **What sort of reactions do you get?**

The majority love it, but occasionally you get a teenager who is dragged along and you have to change the way you talk to them! The hardest question I had was a young girl whose grandfather had passed away – she asked if I could bring him back, just for Christmas Day. That was hard to deal with. I had to think on my feet. It's very much flying on the seat of my pants. Other kids will have unrealistic expectation about what they want – they want the latest X-Box or whatever. I'll glance over to the parents and they'll shake their heads! So I'll say, "I can't promise! But I can promise something really special this year." On one occasion I had a child of 15 or 16, he had additional needs. We knew he was coming and he was allowed to be an "elf" for the day. I'm pretty handy at woodwork so I made him a truck so the other elves helped him to paint it. I've learned a bit of Makaton and I sign a bit. I do have children who tug my beard! My eyesight is failing so I rely on the elf to help me a bit. One trick we have is that the elf finds out the children's names outside the grotto and says them loudly so I can overhear. Then when the kids come to see me, I'll use their names – and they're astonished.

### **What do you do in the rest of your life?**

I'm not a thespian, just an average guy. I've had a varied life though. I'm originally from Bolton. It was quite a sparse childhood. We were in a terraced house. My father was a labourer – and he had a rag and bone cart. He taught me to have an eye for an



### **Christmas Experience**

Tom Blears dons his Santa costume every year at Lotherton Hall in Leeds.

opportunity. At 15, I left home and joined the army. I served with the Royal Engineers and served in Kenya, Dubai, other areas. When I came out of the army I did various jobs. I was a police officer for a while, though I had to retire because I had a heart condition. Then I was a prosecution advocate at Leeds City Council. After that I was a lorry driver. Then a motorcycle instructor until 2012.

Me and my wife are retiring to Lincolnshire. We've found a nice village with some shops and two pubs. I've lived in a busy city centre for 30 years and now it's time to go to the countryside. I love fishing and though I have macular degeneration I can still fish – thanks to my wife.

### **Tell us about Christmas when you were a child.**

We made our own decorations – paper chains. We'd make a Christmas Tree out of card and paint. I got a train set once – that was quite something! But we were quite hard up so we never went to see Father Christmas. Santa did come to our school once though! That was very special. ■

*The Christmas Experience at Lotherton is running from the 27th November – 2nd January. You can head over and visit Santa's Elf Village, meet Santa and his wife Mrs Claus, take part in Elf Crafts and take a walk through the brand new Festive Woodland Walk. More info and to book visit: [thechristmasexperience.co.uk](http://thechristmasexperience.co.uk)*





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**A LUCKY MAN**



*Tony started life in Leicester and as a young man found fame as a member of the boy band The Dallas Boys. However, there's more to Tony than singing. He's lived all over the world, and worked in restaurants and on oil rigs. Mally Harvey meets him and discovers how Tony has become a friend to the Kurdish community in Leeds.*

**T**ony Day, 85, says he is a lucky man who has had a 'good life despite lots of mistakes'. Tony grew up in Leicester and started life on the stage. He has been a singer, a performer in one of the UK's first boy bands, a restaurateur, a caterer in the North Sea oil fields, a carpet salesman in America, a model – and, due to a chance encounter on the streets of Great Yarmouth, an altruist. He's been involved with the Kurdish community in Leeds for over 25 years. He now regards them as his second family. We met Tony in his Burmantofts flat and he told us more about his extraordinary life, starting with his earliest musical memory and how he became a member of the hugely popular singing group, *The Dallas Boys*.

### **Musical Memories**

I remember my beloved younger sister tap dancing. She was about 4. We were a very musical family. She went to America, but I used to phone her when I could. It was very expensive then, a pound a minute if I remember correctly. When I was about 13 or 14, we used to perform in the Working Men's Clubs. I was still at school, but we went to school in the day and the Clubs at night. My older sister, she was in pantomime. But when the war started she had to come home, because of the bombing. I remember my mum saying, "She looks OK, but her neck's filthy." I had an older sister and brother, then me and then my younger sister, who I was closest to. All the family had theatre in their blood. I left school at 15 and went on the clubs. We sang everywhere. Engelbert Humperdinck, he was from Leicester - he was like me. I always remember being in the same queue as Englebert for the dole!

### **Becoming a Dallas Boy**

I was working in the Working Men's Clubs. They came up and said we need another Dallas Boy because [original member] Joe Smith had been called up. "Will you come and try out?" I said, "OK." It wasn't really me, but I said yes. I got on with the boys really well, but you see I had a problem with drinking. I was 17. I stayed with them four or five years and since then it's always been my life. "Oh! You were one of the Dallas Boys!" I get, "Oh, my grandma remembers you." I performed all over with them. The Bradford Gaumont, we did a summer season at Redcar - and Larry Grayson was in that show, although he hadn't

changed his name then. William White, I think he was. Being a Dallas Boy has followed me round all my life. People expected me to be funny and they expected me to entertain them. They'd say, "Here have a drink!" Which I did. I was the baby of the group.

After I left the Dallas Boys, I went back on the clubs, with and without my sister. I did Batley Variety and that was a big venue in those days. But here I am at 85 and still the Dallas Boys come along. I have done a lot of different jobs. It's kept me young at heart.

### **Oil Rigs & Face Lifts**

In the 70s and 80s I went on the oil rigs. One of my mates was working on the oil rigs and I bet him £50 that I could work on there. At the time I was freelancing and he didn't realise I had applied to go on. When I arrived, I found him and said, "£50 please!" I was in catering; I had been in the Army catering corps. We had to do safety training - we had to be in the body of a helicopter, which they tipped over in the sea. Everyone was terrified, but it was part of the training. We had to do it twice. I never wanted to do that again. But I did it.

We were on another rig when one of them exploded - Piper Alpha. We were listening to it on the radio; it was shocking. I can't remember how long I was on the rigs. I left to go to America to live with my sister who was there. I married my second wife there. We got married in Las Vegas. Life is complicated! My first wife was in England with our two children. I was in America for 5 or 6 years. I sold carpets. I used to say, "I don't know anything about carpets but if you want to know anything I'll find out!" Customers used to come in and say, "Where's the Englishman, can we have the Englishman?" I could turn my hand to anything. One of my daughters came over for a holiday and I returned with her and got a divorce. I went back on the rigs again. I have had 3 wives. I love wedding cake.

Then there was the time I went for cosmetic surgery. My daughter worked for these people, they were after a model and would pay for the cosmetic surgery. I went to Prague to have my teeth done and a face lift. I was 70 then and my friend came over for the weekend in Prague. We had a wonderful time. ►



I got my eyes done because it was free but when it came to the face lift, I passed out on the chair. I never got the face lift because I had collapsed! After that I went on *Facelifts & Boob-Jobs* with Richard and Judy for a makeover!

#### ***A Chance Encounter***

I had an Italian restaurant in Great Yarmouth with my best friend. I saw a man in the street and I thought he was from the Turkish restaurant. I tried to talk to him but he couldn't speak English. Aziz had dark hair and dark eyes and I thought he looked Italian, so I offered him a job as a waiter. I blagged my way, I thought the customers would think he was Italian.

The restaurant taught him English, it really was a learning curve for him. In 3 months he was taking the orders and everything. He is a bright man, very good with languages. One of Aziz's cousins was still in Kurdistan and Aziz was helping him to apply to come over here. We came out of the restaurant and moved up to Leeds. Once they were here that was it. Leeds City Council promised me they would pay the telephone bills to Kurdistan. So I used to help them get accommodation, sort out the electricity, schools. I signed their papers to stay here. I supported their applications. It went from helping one person to I don't know how many. Most of the people who I helped to come here have businesses now in Leeds. They are such hard-working people. They just worked and slept. They are such lovely people. They made themselves a better life than where they had come from.

Then I started going over to Kurdistan because the boys over here couldn't go back. This government said they could come in but they couldn't go back. I used to go back and let them know how their sons were doing. The stories they told me about their lives were horrendous. Saddam Hussein was chopping their heads off. I was going to Kurdistan to tell people that their husbands and sons were safe and well. I was the bearer of good news. They had all become my extended family. I was given the name of 'Tony Barani' or 'Haji Tony.' I will never forget the reception I received from all Kurdish people. There was food everywhere I went - too much for my appetite. I got very partial to a cup of 'Chi'. They treated me as their father because they didn't have one, because Saddam Hussein had killed them.

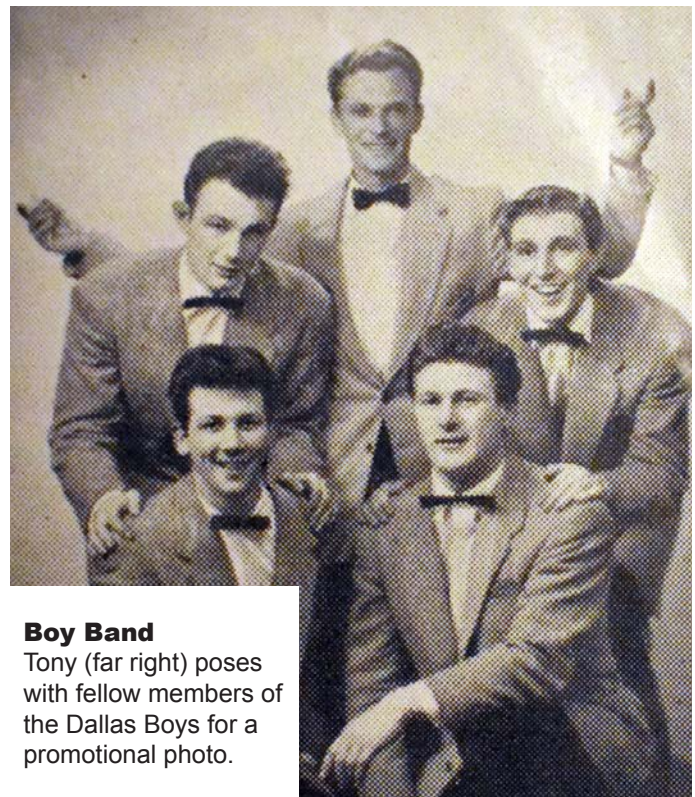
#### ***Kindness In Kurdistan***

I travelled to Massif the hometown of Mahmood, Abdulla, and Ahmed, the brothers of Aziz. I was able to travel to places on my own using taxis although my Kurdish friends were not at ease with this. One night

“I was on Kurdish TV and met their Prime Minister, Nechirvan Barzani. This was the start of my affection for this proud and welcoming people.”

at 3am I was woken by drums, whistles and banging. I was afraid something bad was about to happen. I went back to sleep when it went quiet. In the morning I asked what it was. My hosts all laughed. It was only the bread man selling his wares - it was the beginning of Ramadan and he was selling breakfast. They had forgotten to warn me. They still laugh at this.

I travelled from town-to-town, city-to-city, meeting families of Bazant Kurds now residing in the UK. I was on Kurdish TV and met their Prime Minister, Nechirvan Barzani. This was the start of my affection for this proud and welcoming people. I was a father figure, an uncle. Even now they come and tell me

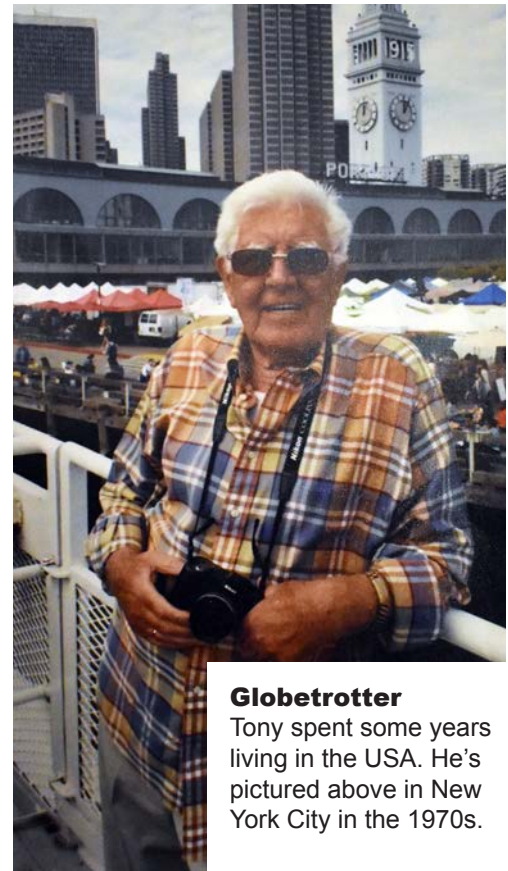


#### **Boy Band**

Tony (far right) poses with fellow members of the Dallas Boys for a promotional photo.



**This Charming Man**  
Tony in 2021 – he still has a winning smile.



**Globetrotter**  
Tony spent some years living in the USA. He's pictured above in New York City in the 1970s.

what I did for them. They look after me. If there is a fridge broken, they mend it; if the television is broken, they mend it. All free. I've said they have said they have treated me a thousand times over but they say they are returning my kindness. I have known the Kurdish people for over 20 years and I have a whole extended family out there, loads and loads of them. Every week I hear from them wanting to know when I am going to Kurdistan again.

I have been 6 or 7 times and I have never felt in danger there. It's a kindness that's been returned dozens of times. They bring me food and they sit on the floor and we eat. They are lovely. I want to be buried in Kurdistan but it depends on cost. They look after me, keep telling me I have to eat and drink lots of water.

I have been introduced to a whole different culture just by talking to someone in the street. I was nominated to go to Harewood House when the Queen was going to a garden party there and I asked Raza, a Kurdish friend to go with me. When we got there, we were waved through. I never met the Queen but we were there. Raza had to borrow a suit but he looked good. I told someone he was a prince and the old women couldn't get enough of him! We got him to sit on the chair the Queen had just sat on. I helped get Raza over from Kurdistan and he has never forgotten. He is a businessman now.

### ***Staying healthy***

I was never an alcoholic but I did drink a lot. I got through it. It petered out. I stopped smoking when my eldest daughter died of cancer. Cancer is a dreadful thing, my younger sister died of it too. The nurses said they had never seen anyone care for someone like I cared for her. I came off the drink because of Aziz, he doesn't drink.

I may have dementia, I am waiting for some tests. I told my daughter I may have it and she said, "Dad, you've just got to live one day at a time." She's right, but it's not easy to take. I'm not sure yet. I enjoy bingo, I go to the Mecca Bingo, it helps keep my brain going.

### ***Lucky Man***

I have been a lucky man. I've been very lucky with the bingo. I always seem to get the right numbers! This is the happiest time in my life, with my extended family - Aziz and all the others. I think I am making up for when my daughters were younger because I wasn't around. They are my life. I adore them. I never look back, I look forward. I think I am making up for what I lost in the early days. If I could change anything I would have my first wife back.

On the whole my life has been very amusing. I have never been famous but I have had 15 minutes of fame, over and over. And I am still open to offers! ■



# Cycling with Beryl

*Cynthia Chandler read our piece about champion cyclist Beryl Burton in a recent edition of Shine. Beryl was a local sporting hero in Morley and beyond. Our piece prompted memories of Cynthia's own life on the bike.*

I knew Beryl slightly by virtue of competing in the same Time Trial races a few times. When the race was local (starting from Wetherby or York) we would cycle out to the race on the morning. When it was further away we had to stay overnight and we usually all ended up in the same bed and breakfast digs - including Beryl. We cycled back home afterwards as a group and that also included her. No-one paid particular attention to her; she was just a fellow competitor. She joined in the banter and chat. We all admired her prowess on the bike. It was rumoured that before she took up cycling she was a keen swimmer - and may have become competitive in that sport instead of on the bike. We all wished she had done so!

## **Time Trialling**

It was taken for granted that she would win any race she entered into.

We reckoned that in a 25-mile race she could win by a margin that left her time to have a puncture and change the tyre - and still win the race. What we really liked was that her Time Trialling times were faster than most of the men; none of them were very thrilled about that. Some even suggested she was a man! This despite the fact she had a young daughter, Denise. Competition can be quite bitchy sometimes. Beryl herself had no side and did not see herself as phenomenal. She rode every Time Trial race to beat her own personal best time.

## **Kirkgate Cycling Club**

I started to enjoy riding a bike in my teens. We lived in the same street as Alan Edmondson; he was a friend of my brother and later became the Sprint Champion on the track. Alan's uncle started to take a group of young friends out riding every Sunday and we became the first C.T.C. Junior Cycling Club. I

moved away from the area and went to work in the offices at the Yorkshire Copperworks. They had a Sports Day every year, which included bike racing around the track. I met up again with Alan. He was competing and was well on his way to becoming the Track Sprinting Champion. Alan belonged to Leeds Kirkgate Cycling Club and invited my husband to join them on the club runs every Sunday. After a while I joined them as well. The club members were all track racers but I soon found out I was no sprinter, although I would race to make up the numbers now and again. There were weekly competitions on the grass track at Roundhay Park every week and at holiday periods. I joined the Yorkshire Women's Cycling Federation which ran Time Trials of 10 miles, 15 miles, 25 miles, 100 miles and a 12 hours race each year. Beryl rode in the 12-hour race but was away doing road racing when the other events were staged.



Cycling was not only a sport but a way of life. The club was like a big family. We even went on holiday together to Butlins'. There were lots of other things for the men to get involved in besides cycling - including a knobbly knees contest. When the racing season finished, the clubs all held prize-giving dinners and dances and we all supported each other's events during

the social season. We still went on Club Runs in all weathers. We would go for a ride, then meet afterwards in an Otley café- one with a juke box. Wherever we went we always left our bikes outside, unattended - without doubt that they we would find them just as we had left them. ■

*You can read more about Beryl Burton in the October issue or at [www.shinealight.org.uk](http://www.shinealight.org.uk). If you read an article in the magazine that sparks memories for you, please let us know. Recently we have covered topics as varied as Leeds Childrens Day, and the Lost Pubs of Leeds - and we'd love to print your memories.*

# Sylvia's Seacroft Stories

*Sylvia has lived in Seacroft for over 70 years. She shared some of her stories on the Chapel FM Care to Air show, which is a radio show for older people in Leeds. Sylvia's tales range from terrifying people in a screening of Dracula to seeing the Queen when she visited Seacroft in 1966. Some highlights from the conversation are below.*

**I** moved to Seacroft when I was 13. They moved us into a house. And what a shock I got! There was a kitchen, there was a bathroom – I'd never seen a bath! [Beforehand] we only had a tin bath. My dad used to heat the water up in a boiler and put it in the tin bath. On a Sunday we had us wash in the bath. I now had my own room. I used to sleep with my brother – it was only an up-and-a-down. And it had a garden. I'd never seen a garden. It was only paving stones and cobble stones that I knew.

## Marriage

I got married at 20 in St James's Church. We crossed over the road to have the reception at the Village Hall. And three years later they gave us a house behind the Hall. I've lived up here all my life and seen all the changes. The biggest changes I've seen are in Seacroft Centre. When it was the old Seacroft Centre it was great. Every shop going, the market. Whereas this Centre now. I don't think there's as many shops as we'd like. And we had a bowling alley.

And picture houses! Down at Cross Gates there was the Regal. And then where The Station pub is, there was the Ritz. It was right next to the railway. And if you sat there watching the picture with your boyfriend, all of a sudden the lights'd start shaking! I liked musicals – *South Pacific*. One picture – I went with my boyfriend – they'd put us upstairs. They used to wear long raincoats in them days. They sat us just by the balcony. The picture was *Dracula*. My boyfriend put his raincoat on the rail but it didn't stay there, it flew down [to the auditorium below]. There was such a scream! The lights went on and the ushers came running!

I started work when I was 15. I was a dressmaker, on a machine. I've done overlocking, button-holing; you say it, I've done it. This was on Regent Street. The building's still there. Then I left to have my baby. After that, I went for an interview for a job in the Village Hall and worked at a Thrift Store in the new Seacroft Centre. We were stood on the parade to see the Queen and Prince Phillip as they went by – this was

when they opened the new centre. Then I went to EG Arnold's book distributors, just up Call Road. I was an invoice clerk. I worked there 10 years. Then we got moved and I didn't like it – and that was when I got into Asda.

## Retirement

I was at Asda for 40 years. I remember when I went for my interview. It was Mr Taylor. He said, "Do you think you'll be here for 10 years?" 40! Everybody knows me round here. If I go into the Arndale for a coffee – "Ooh! Sylvia!" I was never quiet in the shop. I had the longest queue – because I'd talk to all the customers. A right chatty person, I was. I got in trouble with it once – they put a record on called Silence is Golden!

I left last year. I worked 'til I was 80. My daughter says, "Why can't you go back one day a week – it'll do you good!" [When you leave] they give you flowers and money that they get for leaving, but I shot out the door before they could do that. I was in the car and I was off. I made a lot of friends there. A lot of my friends have passed. But I was happy there. I wouldn't have stayed all them years if I weren't. ■

*Sylvia is a regular contributor on the Chapel FM Care to Air radio show. Care to Air is a co-production between Chapel FM, Age UK and Shine and aims to share the voices and stories of older people in Leeds. The programme can be downloaded from the internet and is broadcast live on the last Sunday afternoon of every month. To listen to previous programmes go to [www.chapelfm.co.uk](http://www.chapelfm.co.uk)*

*Do you have a story to tell? It could be a memory, a family tale or a story of how you've coped over the last year. Send it to us at Shine:*



Email - [hello@shinealight.org.uk](mailto:hello@shinealight.org.uk)

Phone - 0113 244 1697

Post - Shine, LOPF

Joseph's Well,  
Hanover Way, Leeds,  
LS3 1AB.



SHINE  
MEMORIES OF  
CHRISTMAS



# OF MAS

**R**emember the Christmas you got a brand-new bike under the tree? Or when Dad burned the turkey? How about the time you got slightly worse for wear at the seasonal work night-out? We all have a story about Christmases past; we asked some older writers in Leeds to share theirs. Secrets, hilarity, anticipation, generosity, grumpiness, drunkenness, joy: these stories are funny, moving, odd, dramatic, light-hearted and poignant. They are guaranteed to spark a memory of a significant Christmas from your own life.

### Digging up Secrets by Mally Harvey

**W**hen we lived in rural Lincolnshire we had always ordered a fresh turkey from a local farm producer; now in urban Leeds we decided to get this year's bird from a similar source. With some research we managed to find one and we collected it two days before Christmas day. The table was set and the bread sauce was gently warming. The aroma of cloves and spices filled the air. The house was beginning to smell like Christmas. We got the turkey out of the fridge; it was rancid. Under the wings and legs it was green and completely inedible. My husband quickly buried the foul thing in the garden. But what to do now? We were expecting 9 for lunch, 11 including us. We knew the local Asda was open so we dashed there. The shelves were pretty empty but we managed to buy a turkey crown and a joint of pork - the skin promised some good crackling.

We decided the family didn't need to know of our disastrous purchase and we managed to get everyone sat down and eating by 2.30pm, which was quite a feat. We had pulled the crackers, filled the wine glasses and were tucking into the food when there was a shriek from one of the grandchildren. There at the large bifold doors was our dog Alf; in his mouth was the foetid carcass. Alf wagged his tail, looking extremely pleased with himself. He was always an energetic digger with a keen sense of smell, and he had dug up the offending creature. The dog was covered in dirt and had white maggots across his nose. Getting the carcass off him proved a difficult job. My husband chased him round the garden, much to the delight of the grandchildren - who were rooting for Alf. Eventually we resumed our Christmas feast, although probably with less enthusiasm than when we started. The following year we had some wonderful rhubarb planted over the turkey. Now when my husband buries unwanted bodies in the garden, he puts a concrete slab over them. Never lift a slab in our garden. ►



**Memories of the 1950s By Ruth Rogers**

**D**o you remember as a child trying to get to sleep so that Father Christmas would come? I was quite sure I could hear sleigh bells! In the morning, my pillow-case was lumpy with presents. We'd go to church on Christmas Day – a quiet nod to the Child in the Manger whose birthday we were celebrating. Then it was time to get ready for the dinner. My Nanny and Grandad and Auntie lived in the upstairs flat and here we pushed two tables together and spread the best white cloth. Then my Auntie and Uncle and cousins arrived. That made fourteen because there were always two special guests who stayed over Christmas – my other Grandma and my Mum's friend Hilda. The dinner was amazing. Dad carved, asking everyone, "White or brown meat or a leg?" Then there were more presents - and on one memorable Christmas a bike.



After the presents there were games of charades and Consequences. Each story is told in stages with prompts: "He was wearing", "She said to him". You write a part, fold the paper over and pass it on. At the end you write something for: "The consequence was..." When read out, the stories were hilarious. Was there no end to this day of delights? I mustn't forget to mention that Grandad (who preferred a quieter life) did all the washing up – what a hero!

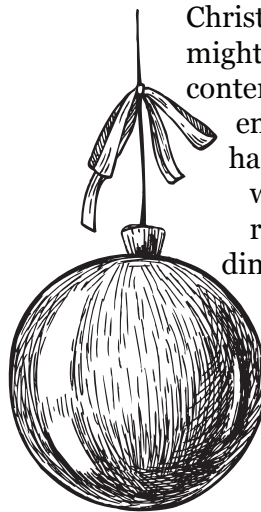
**Charades By Gail Mosley**

**I** hate charades. The parlour game. I've always been extremely shy, which might explain it, but there have been exceptions. There was Christmas at my cousin's house, aged 8 or 9. As the grown-ups relaxed and grew louder over sherry, we would escape into the quiet hallway to search for the remaining chocolate Santas on the Christmas tree, unwrap our books from Uncle John (*The Famous Five* for her, *The Secret Seven* for me), and start planning charades. We knew who would be willing to join in with us: Auntie Marion an eager certainty; my Mum unusually biddable; Uncle John putting aside his bluff head-masterly manner. Together we made little plays for each chosen word and syllable; handbag, necklace, gatepost. My cousin and I directed the proceedings and after many pretend guesses and spluttered mince-pie crumbs the afternoon drew to a close. Time for

goodbye hugs, the search for coats hats and scarves and the starlit frosty walk home. Thinking back I wonder if it was charades or our true selves that we played. And me without a trace of shyness.

**Festive 'Flu By Michael Young**

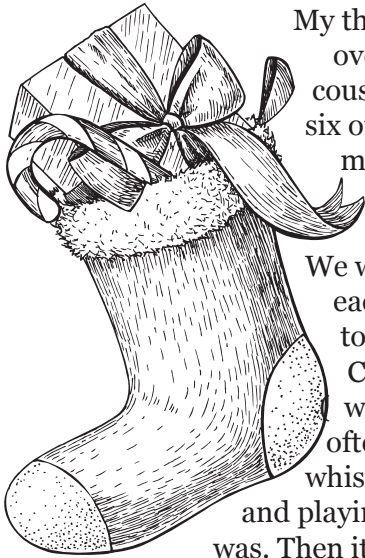
**L**ooking back at Christmases past, I find they are much of a muchness, with only a few standing out. All usually of the same pattern with my role and attitude changing depending on age, marriage and paternal responsibility. It is a great time for families to get together – providing everyone is fit. Which brings me to the stand-outs: three doses of 'flu (four if you count Mam and Dad separately). The first must have been in the late 40s. I remember sitting with my big sister on the coconut matting in front of our coke-fired range, playing with my new toy fortress and lead knights in armour; my Mam came past, still in her dressing gown even though we had been up for ages. I imagine she told us to keep the fire going, then went through to the scullery to fill the kettle for hot water bottles for herself and Dad. They were both staying in bed with a dose of 'flu each. I can remember the feeling of disappointment, but I can't remember much sympathy for my poor parents. The second occasion was on our first Christmas after our wedding a month before. A fond new wife cooked her first



Christmas dinner; only her husband might as well have been eating the contents of an ash tray for all the enjoyment he derived from it. Flu had struck again! It struck once more we were a family and seated round the table for Christmas dinner. I was just saved from falling face-first into my food by a warning shout from my wife. "Michael! Go to bed!" Fortunately the following festive seasons have been flu-free. Hurray for the annual vaccination!

**On the Farm by Susan Jay**

**I** remember the excitement building as Christmas approached. On Christmas Eve our numerous cousins arrived and in the evening we would walk along the pitch-dark country lanes to our nearest neighbours to sing carols at their doors. A good stretch of the legs it was, traipsing along holding parents' or aunties' hands and arguing over who got to shine the torches. We knew the words to all the most common carols of the time: The First Noel, We Three Kings etc.



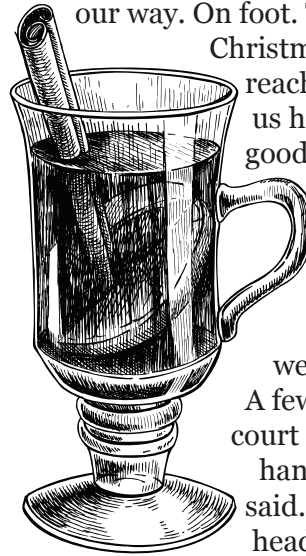
My three siblings and I were overjoyed by having our cousins sleeping, sometimes six of us in the attic room and more in the numerous first floor bedrooms of the rambling old farmhouse. We would lay out a dad's sock each, trying to stay awake to see Father Christmas. Christmas Day itself began with opening the stockings often at 5 a.m.), blowing the whistles, eating the sweets, and playing with whatever this year's was. Then it was time to get the cows in for milking – life on a farm doesn't stop for a single day, not even Christmas. Then taking hay or silage out to the fields and feeding the pigs and hens. The eggs would be collected as part of the afternoon routine before evening milking time. My old granny did that sometimes, piling the trays up in a wheelbarrow to bring home from the sheds.

More family members would arrive, day-tripping from London, one aunt complaining of the dirt in the farmyard and the drafts in the house. Lunch had to happen at 1 o'clock to allow time for present-opening in the afternoon before calling the cows at 4. Presents were all wrapped and piled under the tree (a branch cut from the woods) and there was a ritual handing out the gifts. In the evening we had a raucous time singing carols round the piano. My dad couldn't read music but could play anything by ear – and we'd join in with violins, recorders, my sister's clarinet and a blast on the trumpet from the youngest. This was followed by the highlight of country dancing to gramophone records of jigs and polkas. Despite our teetotal families we had such amazing fun, although my mum would occasionally have a glass of cider. "Well," she'd say. "It's just fermented apple juice."

### Drunk & Disorderly *By Betty Bemsion*

**R**ichard and I first met ballroom dancing in the City Hall. It was 1979 and in those days we enjoyed the live music as much as the dancing. Richard had been brought up his grandparents in a small town 12 miles away from me. At the end of our evening dancing, I would walk him over to his bus stop and then across the city centre for my bus home. On Christmas Eve 1981, we met in our favourite pub with friends to celebrate the festive season – and our engagement. After a few hours Richard had had too many celebratory drinks and I decided to walk him over to his

bus stop. It was very late and I decided to relieve him of his wallet and watch. To this day I don't know why! Then I went home. The next morning was Christmas Day. After opening a few presents, Mum and I went to church, leaving my younger brother still opening his gifts. We walked in the house an hour later and my brother met me with the news that a policeman had been – and would I go to the station to collect Richard? After the initial shock, Mum and I made



our way. On foot. There were no buses on Christmas Day. A mere 4 miles. On reaching the station, the police told us he had been arrested for his own good; he was found sleeping on the pavement at the bus stop. Not only that, but he had been robbed. I explained what I had done. Richard and the policeman were relieved and we were allowed to take him home. A few weeks later he appeared in court and was issued with a fine. "Thank goodness it's all over," we said. Next day, the local paper's headline read: "Young man apologized to the court and thanked the police for their care". It went on: "Richard Davies (of 21 The Avenue, Hayes) stood up in court today apologising for being caught drunk and disorderly on Christmas Eve." We had to dash to his house before his grandfather found out where he had been on that fateful night. Anyway, we went ahead with the wedding 6 months later. All's well that end well!

### Remembering Christmas at Nana's *By Angie Smiles*

**M**y Nana lived in Darlington in a 2-bed semi with an outside toilet. Every Christmas Day we would visit her for our festive lunch. The journey took 2 hours. I felt sick in the back of the car. I used to help her to make the fire in the parlour with plaited newspaper, sticks and coal. She had a gas jet she turned on to light the fire, which heated the water as well. We had to wear vests and jumpers all the time. I helped Nana to set the table. The centrepiece was an igloo made of cotton wool, filled with presents. Models of Santa and his reindeers pulled a sledge out of the igloo to reveal the gifts. We had to eat all the food on our plates before we could pull out the sledge. After we'd opened our presents, we sat in the sitting room on a large uncomfortable settee made of hard knobbly fabric. When anyone sat down, dust rose from the settee. My mother played the honky-tonk piano and we sang carols. Nana didn't have a TV but she had a radiogram. We usually didn't ►



have an appetite for the trifle and pork pie Nana had made for afternoon tea, so we took it all home. I had to hold the trifle on my knee and my sister had the pork pie on her lap. She nibbled on the crust on the journey home.

### A Christmas of Grief and Generosity By Julie Gill

**M**y mum sadly passed away from a brain tumour when I was 6 years old. She passed away Halloween night. With Christmas fast approaching it must have been a really stressful and emotional time for my dad. He was left along to look after a family of 4. Me at 6, my sister Denise at 8, my brother was 10 and my eldest sister was 12. That year one of the local charities turned up to the house Christmas Eve with several large boxes of toys, some second-hand toys and some brand new ones. I think they came from Salvation Army. The joy these donated gifts gave us all that Christmas was much appreciated that year, it took our minds of the grief of losing our lovely mum for a short while. As a 53-year-old adult I still remember opening the huge box filled with girl toys just for me.

### Aunt Bluebottle By David Blakeley

**O**ne year all our family went to stay with my Aunt Doreen and her family for Christmas. I had given her the nickname of Aunt Bluebottle because she often wore a blue overall. She was an excellent baker. During the Christmas dinner my dad said to Aunt Bluebottle, "There's something different about you Doreen, but I can't put my finger on it." My Aunt in one breath replied, "I've had all my teeth taken out and had a new fireplace put in!" We all laughed; she even laughed at herself once she realised her mistake. Even now, it makes me chuckle!

### Family Traditions By Maureen Kershaw

**A**s a child in the 1950s, Christmas was excitedly anticipated the minute Bonfire Night was over. I couldn't wait to visit Lewis's Grotto, its windows displaying pantomime characters or woodland creatures, all illuminated and glistening in their snowy scenes. Christmas really began with food shopping with Mum: first to Newton's Pork Butchers on Kirkstall Road for a stand pie. Shoppers would queue down the road. Then to Dufton's confectioners near Hyde Park for their fancies.

Our Christmas Tree was always a real one. Mum hated the artificial variety, she said they looked like they were made from flue brushes! On Christmas Eve

the smell of baking mince pies and other delicacies was wonderful. A pillowcase lay at the end of my bed, hopefully to be filled with presents overnight. We didn't have a lot of money but I was so lucky to receive an assortment of brightly wrapped parcels. Always an annual from a favourite comic; chocolate selection box; once a miniature set of drawers holding coconut mushrooms and other sweet delicacies. My 'big' Christmas present was always downstairs in the dining room by the tree. One year a doll's house: I loved it, especially the tiny lights in each room. Another year, a sledge which Dad painted bright red. The most exciting present I ever received was a beautiful Silver Cross doll's pram, complete with satin quilt set, pram bag and navy fringed sun canopy. I was an extremely lucky little girl and was so proud of my pram.



Christmas Dinner was always eaten late afternoon when close relatives arrived. The large chicken was roasted beforehand, sliced and served with all the trimmings – with accompaniments from the buffet table, including the delicious stand pie. I still have the cut glass dish which held Mum's homemade apple sauce each year. Trifle followed, Mum's Christmas cake,

Cheshire cheese, mince pies, and of course Dufton's popular fancies. It was one of the rare occasions during the year that the front room would be used, with the coal fire roaring in the grate. Mum would play the piano and Uncle George the banjolele. Soon it was time for Uncle Jack to leave (having "had enough of family now") and Grandma to be driven home. Another Christmas – almost – over, but with lots of lovely memories made.

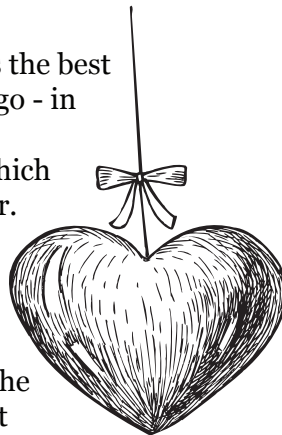
### Wartime Memories By Hazel Trewin

**W**hen the second world war was on, we didn't get much for Christmas: maybe a selection box 2nd lucky bag. Times were hard. We might have got an apple and an orange, but we couldn't get bananas and we didn't have a Christmas Tree. We had rations (even at Christmas), but sometimes my grandma made a little fruit cake. We had nowt really, but as kids we didn't really miss what we didn't have. On Christmas Day mum used to play the piano for us and we all joined in singing 'We'll meet again' and other songs. We listened to the wireless - there was no TV when I was young. My dad let us listen to the news but he turned it off after this had finished, even though we would have liked to listen to music as well.

**Our Gin Christmas *By Nicola Down***

**A**t 75 years old, I have many memories from yuletides across the decades. There were the ones when my parents were still alive, which involved music and grandparents visiting. Then the ones was free and single and was out partying for a good five weeks each year, usually wearing something very glittery. Then all the ones with my husband and family since then, with plenty of story-telling and colourful decorations around the house, inside and out.

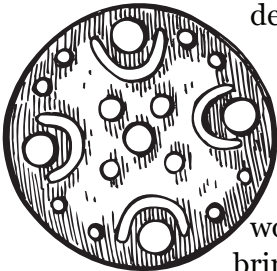
However, in some ways, perhaps the best Christmas was just a few years ago - in 2016. I had been under-taking chemotherapy for six months, which ended in the middle of December. So it was just joyful that I got my taste buds back, and some stamina returned in time for the Christmas period. During the chemotherapy I had found that the only flavour that could just about cut through the sour taste in my mouth all the time, was lemon, so I became addicted to gin and tonic, with ice and lemon. 2016 was our gin Christmas - and very nice too.



In 2020 as we approached Christmas, I was not sure I wanted to get out all the decorations. It seemed like a lot of work for the sake of just us. However I am really glad I did; it raised our spirits and made it feel a little like a normal Christmas. We shall do the same this year.

**Christmas in Zimbabwe *By Pam Mills***

**I** have just turned 90 and spent most of my life in Zimbabwe, where Christmas can be hot or rainy - December is the rainy season. My Christmas mornings started with going to one of my son's houses for breakfast. One year at Carl's another at Shaun's. This could be a barbie in the garden with delicious eggs and bacon - unless of course it's raining, then we'd find somewhere dry to gather! Family would start arriving at my house around 3pm and would gather on our large veranda. The men would play snooker then I would bring out my homemade 'crunchie' mince pies (with my secret ingredients) straight from the oven and we'd all sit outside together to have tea. We would enjoy the Christmas evening meal around 7pm by candlelight with gentle carols playing in the background.

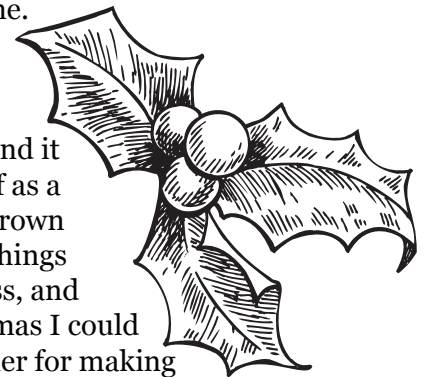


**Light in the Darkness *By Ruth Steinberg***

**I** was brought up in a Jewish home and my experience was a little different to the majority here in England. December 25th was just another day. We didn't put up decorations or dress the tree or have Christmas dinner. I did know all the carols because we sung them in school, and I loved joining in. My parents did give us presents on Christmas day, so we didn't feel left out; but it was Chanukah that we celebrated. Most cultures have festivals in parts of the world that experience an increasing darkness and cold. Most have an element of light in the darkness. In the Jewish world, Chanukah is our festival of light. It is not a major festival but it is enjoyed across the Jewish worlds. We play dreidel (a spinning top betting game) and eat oily food such as doughnuts and potato pancakes (latkes). It lasts for eight nights and we light candles in an 8-branch candelabra called a Menorah, or Chanukiah. On the first night we light one candle, the second 2 and so on until all 8 candles are shining. The light increases as does our joy. It only takes one small candle to banish the darkness: how much more so at Chanukah, in the darkest time of the year. Everyday we shed a little more light.

**Helpless Laughter and Learning Forgiveness *By Kim Birch***

**I** have always enjoyed playing silly games at Christmas, and I can still hear the helpless laughter echoing through time. Charades was my favourite, and even now I enjoy acting. During the evening various guests would arrive from who knows where. Relatives that I didn't even know I had. But all were made welcome and joined in the fun as much as they were able. Old family squabbles were laid aside until another time. We could be good-hearted for at least a day. Of course there is that word 'Christ' behind it all. I don't label myself as a Christian, but I have grown ever fonder of his teachings of good cheer, kindness, and forgiveness. At Christmas I could forgive my older brother for making me do naughty things. I could forgive my elderly Aunt Ethel for being so forgetful. I could forgive my mother for burning the sausages. I could forgive Santa for not getting me a bike. ■



*Thank you to all our contributors for your wonderful memories. We wish a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to all our readers.*



# On Your Doorstep

*In this special feature we've teamed up with the **Centre for Ageing Better** to meet older people who are active in their communities and find out a bit more about them. Often we meet people at home – on their doorsteps. However this month, we have stepped over the threshold of the Leeds Playhouse to find out more about the Heydays project. On arrival at Heydays you'll be greeted by Ros and Patricia, who volunteer to run the reception desk. We spoke to the effervescent pair and discovered why they love the Playhouse so much.*

**L**eeds Playhouse has been running Heydays for over 30 years. Every Wednesday, the theatre opens its doors to a huge group of people aged over 55. Members get involved with all sorts of creative activities. The atmosphere is vibrant, noisy and energetic. Part of the reason why the project is so successful lies with the greeting you get by the women on the reception desk. Ros and Patricia are friendly, welcoming – and they're always laughing. But behind the humour, both of them are serious about community. Heydays is a community that offers creativity, connection and care. Ros and Patricia explain more below.

## **Who are you and what project are you involved with?**

*Ros:* I'm Ros and we're at the Leeds Playhouse. I'm a member of Heydays that has been going for over 30 years. I've been coming to the Playhouse for about 18 years. Heydays is for the over 55s. We have a reception desk on a morning and I man that desk, making sure that everyone's okay when they're coming in. If they need any questions answering, we're there to help them. And basically, I do that until lunchtime.

*Pat:* My name's Patricia and I come to Heydays at the Leeds Playhouse every Wednesday. I just love it. I work on the desk with Ros, meeting people. We always like to make people feel at ease when they come. And happy. We're always happy-faced. And making a noise with laughter. It's just fun. It's a relief in life from the humdrum. It's something totally different. I love it!

## **Who comes to Heydays and what do they do?**

*Ros:* It consists of people who want to do Artwork (it might be painting, drawing, needlework); Talk Talk; Play Reading (in which you can all read part of a play

each); Singing (I just love the singing); Drama. Quite different things.

*Patricia:* The people that come to Heydays are 55 and upwards. It's for everybody over 55. Whatever they want to do. Even if they just want to come and chat, they can come and chat. It's a social gathering. It's just a nice place to be. I joined, it's not long ago, about 5 or 6 years ago. I just want to come every Wednesday because we go home laughing in the car, about things that have happened. It's a happy feeling, it's a lovely atmosphere.

## **How did you get involved?**

*Ros:* When I first came to the Playhouse, which was many moons ago, I didn't think it would be for me. It was a friend who said to me, "You'd love Heydays." I said, "Why would I like Heydays?" She said, "Well, you like singing, you like meeting people. I'm sure you'd like it. So I did. And I've never looked back."

*Patricia:* It was Ros's daughter; [she] got in touch with my daughter – and that's how it all started. Ros gave me a ring and said, "Come and join us." And I did. And, like Ros, I've never looked back either.

## **Why is community important to you?**

*Ros:* I live in a small village and it's big on community. There are all different groups going off in the village. You don't have to be lonely. It just gives you a chance to see people and pass the time of day with people. If anybody's got any worries, they'll maybe not see anyone else, but they can share it with you. This is why Heydays is such a big deal. Because it's community. First and foremost, it's community. It's not only coming on a Wednesday and joining in the different activities you can do, but Heydays plays a big part in the outside community. Not long ago they did the International Piano Competition at the Town Hall. There was a ►



“We’re always  
happy faced.  
And making a  
noise with laughter.  
It’s just fun”



## On your doorstep

memo came round asking if any of us would like to join and basically dress a piano up! I mean, that is not me at all. I'm not arty. But I was asked to go along and Pat came with me. And the piano that's up there [in the Playhouse foyer], the one with the graffiti on, is what we did. And we're so, so proud of it. But that's not the only thing; there are other opportunities you can do here.

*Patricia:* It was amazing! Both of us decided we'd do it. I coaxed Ros to come along, I said, "Even if you just come along and watch." But she joined in. It was so funny and exciting, something we'd never, ever done squeezing paint. We dressed in boilersuits. It was just amazing. You couldn't see who it was, underneath it all, which I was grateful for.

### **Why do people come to Heydays?**

*Patricia:* It fills a gap in your life. Especially people who are lonely or on their own. You don't have to say "I'm so-and-so age". Age doesn't matter! If people come in who are upset about anything, we always have a smile and a laugh. We change their attitudes. They say they like seeing us. We're familiar to them. It's a brighter look to life. There is more to life than sitting at home watching television. This is a massive thing to come to and we love it. I mean, I never used to go to the theatre. Very rare. We've come quite regular now and enjoyed performances together. It's amazing, it's just so nice.

*Ros:* I quite agree with Pat. It's a very, very friendly atmosphere. You can come to the theatre and watch all the shows. You do see a lot of the performers, the actors, coming in and out. You think, "Ooh, I've seen them on the telly!" I'd never been to the theatre. I thought, "It's for posh people, it's not for me." And I absolutely love it. The people who have come here have wonderful stories to tell.

The people that do come here, the majority are young at heart. They get on with life. But if they do have a bad time, there's always somebody there that will listen. Sometimes you can see somebody who normally comes in and they're laughing and joking. And they come in with their head down. Me and Pat will say to one another, "She's not right." We'll discuss it and we might approach them, very gently, and say, "Is there anything bothering you?"

### **How did it feel to get Heydays meeting in person again?**

*Ros:* I couldn't wait. I was very apprehensive. But it's not going to control me. Covid is a terrible, terrible thing that we've had to put up with – and we're still putting up with. But it's not going to tell me I can't go out. Obviously, you're careful, wear your mask and take all the precautions. But I'm going to live my life.

*Patricia:* I couldn't wait. I didn't do any Zooming, it just wasn't for me. 2 years is a heck of a long time. And



#### **Giving Voice**

As well as working on reception, Ros and Pat sing in the Heydays choir.

we've all got 2 years older! Part of your life was closed and it's so open now. It's great.

**What do you love about Leeds?**

*Ros:* I was thinking about this question. You know, it is the museums, is it the stately homes?

For me it's Leeds itself. It's the town. I come in about twice a week. I've seen a lot of change in the years that I've been coming into town. There's an awful lot of things that are not there any more. Me and my husband, we often say, "If Grandad was here now, he wouldn't be able to find where he's going." There's an awful lot of things that Leeds offers you. There's culture, there's theatre, there's shops, there's nightlife: a very big amount of variety.

*Patricia:* I was born in Leeds and I've always stayed here. I live in the next village to Ros. It's a small village but it doesn't have the community that Ros's has. So this [Heydays] is big for me. When I was younger, as Ros says, Leeds was different. Totally different. I don't often come into Leeds now, only to the Playhouse. Only because I don't like wandering around! I wouldn't go anywhere else. I like being here.

**How do you feel about getting older?**

*Patricia:* I'm not! I'm not! I am as I am. When I'm sat down talking to you, I'm a young person - I'm not an old person. It's only when you stand up and you think, "Ooh - ahh!" [she clutches her back] I am getting older, but what's in a number, what's in an age? It varies so much. Age doesn't matter. You are you. You are an individual.

*Ros:* I agree with Pat. Age is in your mind. We're lucky in that we don't feel old. We feel young. We're young at heart. I work with a few communities in the village I live in. And it might be only 4 or 5 years ahead of me, but the deterioration... I think to myself, "I have to grab it now, while I can." And do what I can - because you don't know what's round the corner.

**What would you say to readers who are looking for something to do on Wednesdays?**

*Ros:* Get yourself to Heydays. Get yourself down and have a good laugh. Have a good sing-song. And tell a story. Because the people that come here have wonderful stories to tell. All I'd suggest to people is just to give it a chance. If you don't like it, that's fine. But please come and give it a chance.

*Great advice! Thanks Ros and Pat.*

**Quick Q & A with Pat & Ros**

**What's your favourite place in Leeds?**

*Patricia:* The Playhouse! It is! We look forward to coming every Wednesday. I pick up 2 friends en route and we're always early. Because I park in the disabled parking and if we don't come early we can't get parked!

**Who are your heroes or heroines?**

*Ros:* My parents. They had very good morals and standards. My father was a disciplinarian - not too strict. But you knew you had limits.

*Patricia:* The same. My parents. You had discipline and morals.

**When did you last laugh?**

*Patricia:* Just now! But crying - I try not to do that. I'm at home on my own and feel a bit sad, I turn the sound up on the television. I just keep going. Just so I don't get down. Because when you go down, it's difficult to get back.

*Ros:* We have a good laugh here every week. People tell us to keep it down! It's contagious! I'm not a crying person, but there's two new Christmas adverts that really set me going! Crying at adverts!

**What gets you out of bed in the morning?**

*Patricia:* Life! I'm alive! I'm grateful I'm up and can live another day!

*Ros:* For me it's the heating going off! Ha ha! But life's good. It's what you make of it.

*Heydays at Leeds Playhouse is always looking for new members. If you are aged 55 or over and are interested, contact Machteld De Ruyck on 0113 2137296 or find out more at [www.leedsplayhouse.org.uk](http://www.leedsplayhouse.org.uk)*

*Thanks to the Centre for Ageing Better for sponsoring this feature. The Centre for Ageing Better has a vision for society where everyone enjoys later life. Find out more about the great work they do at [www.ageing-better.org.uk](http://www.ageing-better.org.uk)*





**C**hristmas is family time. You want to be with your family at Christmas, don't you?" These are widely shared views about Christmas, views we hear regularly from friends and colleagues. While the run-up to the festive season is usually a sociable time outside the family - almost any organisation you belong to is likely to put on a Christmas 'do' of some kind - when we reach Christmas Day, Boxing Day, and the days following, the door of the family is likely to remain closed. It isn't necessarily what everyone wants or enjoys, but it is a very powerful cultural expectation, a sense of obligation to our 'nearest and dearest'. So, what about those older people who don't have any family, who risk being left out in the cold at Christmas?

I spoke to Jean Basson and Monica Stewart, who lead a group called Ageing Without Children (AWOC) in Leeds. I already knew Jean and Monica because like them I am an older person without children and a member of the group.

I asked first how AWOC was set up. Jean recalled that Kirsty Woodard (who had been involved professionally, and had no children herself) had started the organisation in London several years ago. Jean read about it in a newspaper and, with others, formed the Leeds AWOC group in 2014. "At the time I was a carer for my mother and hence very aware of the issues," said Jean. "I came across the article by chance; it was a bit of a light bulb!" She got in touch with Kirsty, who came up to Leeds. Monica also became involved at that time, along with people from Sheffield and York, and a network of local groups was set up.

While the title is 'Without Children', the key point is being 'without family support'. Some childless people do have support, from nieces and nephews for example. While AWOC is open to them, it's recognised that the real need is felt by those who lack any family who can help them, for whatever reason. So: older people

**“She'd seen an event advertised 'for grannies'! Not all older women have grandchildren”**

whose children are living at a distance; or who are estranged; or who predeceased them; or who are themselves vulnerable, for example because of disability. All these are also eligible to join.

### *Practical and emotional*

There are specific problems older people without children or family support face. Jean explained that these could be usefully classified into the practical and the social or emotional. On the practical side, there is a need not only for everyday support but for advocacy. "The key one for me is advocacy," said Jean. "Who will speak for me when I can't personally navigate the system by myself?" She refers to the 'bureaucracy of care', which can be daunting.

Monica spoke of the problem of not having an emergency contact or next-of-kin. She looked after her husband when he was ill. After he died Monica realised she was on her own. "When somebody asks for a next-of-kin or an emergency contact, there's nobody to put down on the form," Monica explained. "It's quite embarrassing."

Power of attorney is also a problematic area. "Everybody told me: Get your power of attorney done!" Monica said. "Great! But who is my power of attorney? I haven't got anybody. Any relatives I've got, who are all at a distance, are all my age or older."

On the social and emotional side, Jean spoke movingly of being an 'outsider', and not a priority or key person in anyone's life. "Families take precedence at all times," she said. "If family issues came first, naturally I know where the pecking order is."

The advent of grandchildren exacerbates this focusing on one's family. These difficulties link with the social stereotyping of older people as a homogeneous group; the preconceived ideas that many people have. Jean mentioned an event she'd seen that was advertised 'for grannies'! Not all older women have grandchildren - and some don't have any family members.

### *Legacy*

Another concern for Jean and Monica is 'legacy'. At a basic level, who is going to inherit our family photographs? More broadly - who will remember us and our contribution? What 'legacy' can we leave when it seems we will never be part of anyone's family story? Within our own lifetimes, the concern is that if we develop dementia, there will be no younger relative around who really knows the person that we were or can tell our story. Jean said, "The whole business of your life and what it amounted to, often, is defined through the next generation."

# LONELY THIS CHRISTMAS

*We tend to associate Christmas with family.  
But what about older people who live  
on their own and don't have children or  
other family members?*

***Lorraine Harding** looks into the issues and  
meets two women who are doing something about it.*





### Home Alone

Spare a thought for some older people who spend Christmas without family.

I asked Jean and Monica to elaborate on the activities that AWOC has organised. Before the pandemic, there were live meetings focusing on various topics: Who will speak for me?; Power of Attorney; Discharge from hospital; Housing options; and Making a will. Talks were delivered free by speakers, including solicitors, who were often keen to attend. AWOC is a member of Leeds Older Peoples' Forum and has been pleased to find representatives of various agencies attending AWOC meetings. More recently, sessions have been held online via a Facebook page, which can also provide a base for information and discussion. AWOC also played a part in the recent Age Proud Festival in Leeds in September 2021. AWOC is open to the possibility of small social support groups, and one has recently been set up in North Leeds.

“We decided quite early on that our main focus would be information-giving and sharing,” said Jean. That is, with people without family, but also agencies and services who support people in that situation. It should be stressed that AWOC has no funding and is not a “provider organisation”. This means it does not provide services or specific practical help. It can act as a signpost to services and give information, but primarily it aims to influence the agencies who do provide, and to raise general awareness.

There has been a good response to AWOC, but it could be we are ‘preaching to the converted’. Monica agrees: “I think like a lot of groups, we’ve probably reached

the people who are thinking about it already. I think that a large number of the people who come are those who will find ways of managing through the problems.” There are others, however, who haven’t even thought there’s a problem. They may face worse difficulties as they age. Monica mentioned people in their 90s, who have been single all their life, only now waking up to the fact that being without family is a problem. There’s another issue: do men without children and women without children experience their situation differently? While men are less likely to be without a current partner, there are certainly some single and childless older men who need support, and Monica was glad to report that they were now joining a widows’ group she links with, in greater numbers.

Finally, we came on to the topic of Christmas. We concurred that, while there is plenty of activity for older people without family in the approach to Christmas, between Christmas Day and New Year’s Day there isn’t much happening. “It’s like the country has gone to sleep!” said Monica. Both statutory and voluntary services seem unavailable. Monica and Jean both reported widespread insensitivity to the situation of people without family at this time. However, it isn’t easy for those who might want to help us older people without children. People may invite us for Christmas, but often one can feel uneasy, like a ‘bystander’ at other people’s family celebration. Jean stressed the range of responses found: “From people who are desperately lonely because they’re

not included in a family Christmas, to people who'd rather not be!" Monica is usually on duty at church on Christmas Day. People there will talk enthusiastically about the family Christmas they are about to enjoy. "I get fed up with people saying: I'm going off to family; what are you doing?" Monica thinks to herself, "Don't you know by now that I don't have any family?" Monica, Jean and I agreed that people in a more 'normal' situation can have real difficulty getting their heads around the idea that someone 'has no family'. The problem is very individual, though, and some people without family don't mind working or being on their own on Christmas Day. Their attitude is: "it's just another day".

"It's a bad time for me personally," said Monica. Her husband was very ill at this time of year. "I really don't like the 'Happy Family' image of Christmas. Sometimes I wonder if we could get away with not having Christmas at all!" A lot of people might agree with Monica, especially if the festive period brings back bad memories. "I just get through it," she said. Jean's tactic to get through the season is interesting. "I usually decide to do something practical in the week before that I've been putting off for ages," she said. "Or I go walking locally. I don't find Christmas traumatic, but I can see that others might."

I feel Jean and Monica are doing excellent work in running AWOC in Leeds. While currently any formal meetings are held online, we all look forward to resuming live meetings eventually. However, AWOC's role in raising awareness is probably the key one. We want society to be conscious that not all older people are embedded in a family network - at Christmas, or at any other time. Looking at the numbers, one estimate is that in the UK there are 1.2 million people aged over 65 who have no children. A minority, but still a large number of people, who should not be overlooked.

### ***Making assumptions***

To conclude on a festive note: the position is varied. Some people may find a substitute family in friends and neighbours; some may be content to be alone. Personally, I have not had to spend Christmas Day or Boxing Day alone, thanks to kind friends - although the week following can be grim. We must look at the individual, that includes thinking about how they feel about Christmas and what they like to do at that time. But finally, a plea. Let's not make assumptions that everyone is in the same situation. And let's avoid casually asking anyone we meet: "Will you be spending Christmas with family?" ■

*For more info on AWOC see [www.awwoc.org](http://www.awwoc.org)*



Many older people won't see anyone on Christmas Day. Aireborough Voluntary Services to the Elderly (AVSED) is doing something about it! Sharon Denton volunteered to be part of the AVSED Christmas scheme last year:

"I've volunteered at AVSED since I retired 2 or 3 years ago. I was a nurse and had to take early retirement. I help to run sessions at AVSED. During the pandemic I've done shopping and dog-walking for people who can't get out.

Last Christmas, the AVESD office put out the call to see if anyone could help. I'm extremely lucky that we always have a big family Christmas lunch, though it depends on who is working and who can be there. It broke my heart to think there could be somebody in my neighbourhood who would be completely alone on Christmas Day. Just to make a little bit more food, plate it up and take the lunch to someone - it wasn't a big deal at all. But honestly, it made my day as much as it made hers. Dorothy was so grateful. My son drove me over and we had a bit of a chat at her door. Honestly - it was nothing. But it did mean a lot to her. People talk about Christmas being so materialistic and this just seemed to be the right thing to do. It was so easy! Why can't more people do this? Dorothy was quite emotional - and I found out that her birthday was the same as my Dad's. I promised her a birthday lunch in January!

Hopefully I'll be able to do the same thing this year. I love being around older people - they are so interesting, and they have so much to say. We have such a laugh!"

*If you live in Aireborough and you want to know more about AVSED, call them on 0113 2501702 or [info@avsed.org.uk](mailto:info@avsed.org.uk)*





# WINTER FRIENDS

*Winter Friends: Keep yourself and others warm and well this winter!*

**F**or some people, winter means one thing: Christmas. But for others, winter can be a really difficult time of year. Cold weather, short days, icy pavements: all of these can conspire to make these months more isolating for older people living on their own. Often it's a struggle just to get out of the house. Even when we don't factor in Covid restrictions, many older people find their health declining over the winter. Sometimes it's because of the cold, sometimes it's because they're isolated or lonely. It's not just coughs and colds that are a problem; when we're on our own with nobody to see, it affects our mental health too. Wouldn't it be good if people had a friend to help them out over the

next few months? Someone to look out for them and see if they are ok?

Winter Friends is a new scheme from Leeds City Council that aims to connect people up to make sure we all stay warm and well this winter. There are lots of helpful and good-hearted people who live in Leeds. The scheme aims to make sure these people know what to do to help older people where they live. Over the page we hear from Helena Hamilton about all the details of the scheme. But first, we meet Kim and Peggy, who are part of a supportive community in the form of a Luncheon Club. They are both part of the Winter Friends scheme in Oakwood.



### Winter Friends: Kim, Peggy and Mary

*Kim volunteers at the Oakwood Luncheon Club which is based at Oakwood Methodist Church. Since the pandemic hit in March 2020, she has been helping the members to keep them from feeling isolated. She's helped Mary with her weekly food shop so she was able to self-isolate. She's also kept in touch with Peggy over the phone and run errands when she can. Although they have been unable to meet in person as they usually would, Kim has kept in touch with all Luncheon Club members over the phone, text or email, which has been greatly appreciated. One particular member has sadly had several falls over the past year and has found lockdown particularly isolating, but Kim has been keeping in touch and also contacting her son if she has any particular concerns so she can get the support she needs. The Luncheon Club is now back to meeting face-to-face, but Kim still acts as a Winter Friend to all the members. We spoke to Kim and Peggy and asked them to share their thoughts:*

*Peggy:* I'm 92 and I was born in Leeds. I've lived here all my life. I wasn't born at this side of the city. I was the youngest in quite a large family. My mum had 7 children and became a widow. They've all passed on now. I just have my son, but he lives in the USA. He does very well and comes over when he can, depending on the government restrictions. I last saw him in October. I live in Oakwood now; I've been here on my own for over 20 years.

Kim runs the Luncheon Club and I go every Thursday. The object of the Luncheon Club is to meet other people and to listen to people who might be isolated. People who are in a similar situation to me. I do very well. Someone always helps with the shopping. I'm in a block of flats and people are very good there.

The Luncheon Club is very important for the elderly. We keep up to date with anyone who can't be there because they're ill. If someone isn't there who normally is, you want to know where they are! You find out about other things that are going off too. Last week someone came in to do exercises with us, which was good. I'm hoping to go back to church again very soon.

*Kim:* I go to Oakwood Methodist Church and over the years I've been involved with all sorts of things. I currently take Home Communion to a lady in a nursing home and to another elderly couple. I got involved in volunteering in about 2017 with the Luncheon Club and took over the running of it in 2019. Just to do my bit, really!

### Love and Friendship

Kim Wood runs a Luncheon Club for older people in Oakwood.



By profession I'm a nurse. I haven't worked for a while because my 3 children are my full-time job. But my love is older people's nursing and end-of-life care. This role came along and was perfect for me. I love working with older people! I could sit and listen to their stories forever.

We've got about 30-odd people on the books of the Luncheon Club. Over Covid, we had to close but I kept in contact with people every week or two over the phone. People were really thankful of a conversation over lockdown. I took a little gift for everyone round last Christmas and put the Winter Friends information in with that.

I'll do a little bit of shopping for Peggy if she needs bits and bobs. I've also done shopping for another lady from church [Mary] since 2020. Doing a bit of Pharmacy pick-up, posting letters, doing a bit of dry cleaning – just odd bits. Letting people know that I'm here if they need me. You don't want people being lonely and isolated. Sadly, a lot of older people have had falls and have lost a bit of confidence. Some people don't want to come back to the Club yet. So I keep in touch with them. You just want to be a helping hand really.

The Winter Friends concept is brilliant. A lot of people don't have family close by. So coming along for a chat and a hot meal really helps with isolation. There are all sorts of groups at the church – there's loads going on – and I'm always trying to help our older members get involved. This week at the Club we're celebrating someone's 100th birthday! It's lovely, really lovely.

Oakwood Luncheon Club takes place every Thursday from 11.30am. Contact Kim for more information on **07803 124517** or email **luncheon@oakwoodchurch.info**





# Winter Friends

## 1. Looking Out for Others

It's never been more important to look out for other people in our own communities - and that's what Winter Friends is all about. Winter can be tough, but for some it's a real struggle, plus with the added difficulties caused by the pandemic, many are facing isolation and loneliness once again this year. The Winter Friends campaign encourages people across the city to look out for others.

## 2. It's for everyone!

Anyone can be a Winter Friend! In fact, many people already are without even realising it. A Winter Friend is someone you can count on - a friendly and helpful member of the community who genuinely cares about the wellbeing of people around them. It's sensing when someone needs a bit of support and offering a helping hand without expecting anything in return. Perhaps this sounds like you? Our campaign would like to champion those amazing people in our city who look out for their neighbours. We want to share and encourage that neighbourly spirit, as it's often the simplest acts of kindness that go a long way to making someone feel cared for and that truly can make a big difference to someone's life.



*Helena Hamilton explains how getting involved in the Winter Friends scheme can help both you and other older people you know. Keep warm and well this winter!*

## 3. What can I do?

We've seen examples of Winter Friends collecting and dropping off well-needed provisions or teaching someone to set up an online shopping account; more frequently people are checking in on their neighbours, and street WhatsApp groups have been created to keep in touch and stay connected. Many have gritted and cleared pathways for older, less mobile or pregnant neighbours during bad weather. There's also been lots of helpful local knowledge shared about winter wellness, mental wellbeing, as well as some lovely family recipe sharing too!

Nothing is too big or small - what could you do to show someone you're there and could help? We welcome Leeds as a pioneering city for wellness and health, and know we have some of the most caring communities around so

whether you're already doing something great, or are thinking of reaching out to someone for the first time, being a Winter Friend is an easy way of showing your support.



## 4. More Info

You can access some brilliant resources on our website from useful information to share with family/friends, or a printable calling card to leave your contact number with a neighbour should they need your help.

To find out more or to show your support head to [www.winterfriends.org](http://www.winterfriends.org) or look for Winter Friends Leeds on social media.

If you want to find out more about the Winter Friends scheme call the coordinator Michelle on **07739 635458**.



**Sudoku**

The goal of Sudoku is to fill in a 9x9 grid with digits so that each column, row, and 3x3 section contain the numbers between 1 to 9. At the beginning of the game, the 9x9 grid will have some of the squares filled in.

6	8	1			9		2	4
9						5		7
5	7	3	4	2	1	8	9	6
						1	6	8
	3	4				7		
	2		1	5				
				3				
	1	7	2	9		4	8	
4	6			1	5		3	9

**Wordsearch - Panto Characters**

A	T	R	Q	B	Y	R	I	A	F	D	O	O	G	N	L	E
S	O	P	H	I	I	A	O	I	N	I	D	N	A	D	R	T
L	T	R	A	L	A	D	D	I	N	Y	S	C	U	O	E	D
E	O	I	O	O	T	D	R	A	Z	A	N	A	B	A	E	T
E	W	N	U	G	L	Y	S	I	S	T	E	R	S	U	H	U
P	L	C	A	S	L	M	O	T	H	E	R	G	O	O	S	E
I	E	E	L	Q	N	O	M	C	S	B	K	V	A	E	A	C
N	D	C	L	V	E	O	H	Q	I	D	I	V	K	G	W	I
G	A	H	E	C	O	M	T	O	T	Z	T	C	E	N	E	L
B	M	A	R	A	F	S	A	T	R	O	D	T	E	Y	E	G
E	E	R	E	T	D	U	A	E	U	N	E	X	E	F	H	L
A	K	M	D	R	P	R	N	P	J	B	V	M	E	N	S	A
U	V	I	N	U	U	C	U	U	G	W	P	X	N	D	I	M
T	R	N	I	B	O	S	N	O	W	W	H	I	T	E	W	G
Y	M	G	C	Y	K	N	A	W	T	W	O	D	I	W	W	E

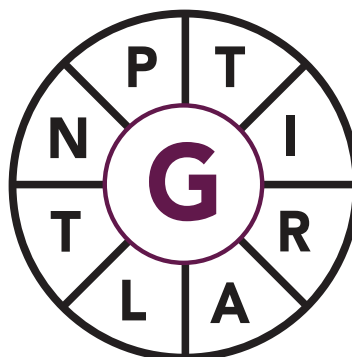
Abanazar Aladdin Buttons Cinderella  
 Dame Dandini Good Fairy Mother Goose  
 Prince Charming Sleeping Beauty Snow White  
 Ugly Sisters Widow Twanky Wishee Washee

This month's puzzle page is brought to you by Home Instead Senior Care. You can find all the answers on the bottom of page 39.



**Cycling Quiz**

1. Which country started the tradition of putting up a Christmas tree?
2. How many ghosts appear to Scrooge in A Christmas Carol?
3. How many gifts were given in total in 'The Twelve Days of Christmas' song?
4. How many of Rudolph's fellow reindeers' names start with 'D'?
5. What is traditionally hidden inside a Christmas pudding?
6. Which city has been donating Trafalgar Square's Christmas tree to London every year since 1947?
7. What time is the Queen's speech traditionally broadcast on Christmas Day?
8. What colour suit did Santa wear until Coca Cola rebranded him in red?
9. What decoration do elves traditionally have on their shoes?
10. Miracle On 34th Street centres on what real-life department store?
11. According to tradition, when should you have your Christmas decorations down by?



**Word Wheel**

Your target is to create as many words of four letters or more, using the letters once only and always including the letter in the middle of the wheel.

Personal care

Home help

Dementia care

Live-in care

The best home to be in is **your own**

Maintaining independence and quality of life is key to ageing well.

Home Instead provides high quality, personalised care in your own home



Covering Wetherby and Leeds, please call our specialists on **01937 220510** or visit **www.homeinstead.co.uk/Wetherby**

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# Christmas Gingerbread Cookies



*A delicious festive treat or perfect for any time of year. Simple to make and delicious to share.*

## What you'll need

### Ingredients

525g plain flour  
2 tbsp ground ginger  
2 tbsp ground cinnamon  
½ tsp ground cloves  
1 tsp ground nutmeg  
½ tsp bicarbonate of soda  
1 tsp salt  
75g black treacle  
75g golden syrup  
200g unsalted butter  
180g light brown soft sugar  
1 lemon – zest and juice

### Equipment

Mixing Bowl  
Small Saucepan  
Wooden Spoon  
Lemon Grater and Juicer  
Rolling Pin  
Clingfilm  
2 baking trays  
Baking Paper  
Gingerbread Men Cutter  
Palette Knife

## Method

### Step 1.

In a mixing bowl, mix the flour, spices, salt, and bicarbonate of soda.

### Step 2.

Put the butter, golden syrup and sugar into a pan and warm gently until the mixture is melted. Take the pan off the heat, then add the lemon juice and lemon zest. Wait for the mixture to cool a little.

### Step 3.

Gradually add the butter mixture to the flour mixture and use a wooden spoon to stir it all up. It should eventually form a sticky dough. If it's too soft, add a bit more flour.

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### Step 5.

Line 2 trays with baking paper and heat the oven to 180°C/160°C fan/Gas Mark 4.

### Step 6.

On a floured surface, roll the dough into a rough square about 5mm/ inch thick. Use your cutter to cut out the gingerbread men. When you run out of dough, ball it all up and roll it out again! Use a palette knife to transfer your gingerbread men on to the baking trays.

### Step 7.

Bake for 10 – 15 mins. The longer you leave them, the crispier they'll be! Some people prefer them soft so you decide.

### Step 7.

Leave the gingerbread men to cool, then decorate them. You can use Fondant Icing (icing sugar and water) and stick on chocolate buttons or liquorice allsorts – or whatever you like!

*TIP: You can get festive themed cutters in most supermarkets. How about Gingerbread Santas, angels – or even donkeys! Just use the same recipe.*







# The Home Page

*There's no place like home is there? In this advertising feature we focus on different things around the places we live, in partnership with Home Group. This month we focus on ways to stop older people feeling lonely. Lindsay Courtney is Home Group's Head of Clinical Practice. She explains how the housing association is working to combat social isolation and loneliness.*

The pandemic highlighted some clear disparities within society, but one that's always been close to my heart is the threat of social isolation. According to Age UK, "loneliness often begins when people lose the opportunities to engage in ways they find meaningful." People are more likely to be lonely if they are unable to do the things they want or feel that they do not belong in their neighbourhood. The need is pressing. The number of older people living in England who admit to often feeling lonely has been static for the last decade but, with an ageing population, it means that by 2026 the number could be as high as two million.

Our approach to extra care includes our community wellbeing services. They are designed to connect people and offer a place for multigenerational interaction. We want people to feel empowered and encouraged to

maintain and develop their skills, as well as learn new ones. Within our community wellbeing services, we create areas for local people to use as well, including salons, cafés and activity spaces, allowing residents to better integrate and build relationships with the wider community, rather than becoming increasingly isolated.

Everything we do is steered by our customers; we encourage those living in our services to inform how they spend their time - whether that involves us providing the space, materials and practical assistance, or finding an external partner to facilitate. But what we love to see the most is customers running their own activities. That might be bingo calling, a 'knit and natter' group, poetry or film nights; we want to make sure there's always plenty going on. While there's still a lot to be done, our work is a statement of our commitment to tackle the challenges caused by social isolation.

## Quick Q & A: Roy

*Roy lives in a Home Group property in Yorkshire.*

### What do you love about your home?

It's nice, warm and cosy. Everything is convenient and the location is ideal for me. I like that I live high up and get to look down into the garden. There is nothing I don't like and it's the best move I ever made.

### Where have you lived in your life?

I lived in Manchester until 1996 then moved to Whitby. Whitby was nice and scenic, but I feel more at home here. I used to live right on a main road, and it wasn't very nice. I like living here as it's nice and quiet.

### Tell us about some of your favourite things

I love antiques and finding them in charity shops. I'm a retired Horologist but I still enjoy working on my own clocks and watches.



### What's good about living at Home Group?

I enjoy coming down for coffee morning every Thursday for a drink and a chat.

I'm planning on doing a slideshow on the Swiss and Austrian Alps because I've done it in the past and enjoy doing it. I always enjoy sharing my knowledge. There is always some type of activity each night to join in if people are keen.

*Home Group are one of the UK's largest providers of high quality housing and integrated housing, health and social care.*

For more information:

Tel: **0345 1414663**

Email: **contactus@homegroup.org.uk**

Web: **www.homegroup.org.uk**



**Leeds Older People's Forum:**

**0113 244 1697**

*LOPF can direct you to Neighbourhood Networks and older people's services in your area.*

**Leeds Coronavirus Hotline**

**0113 376 0330**

*For anyone unable to leave their home because of coronavirus, and worried because they don't have family or friends who can help.*

**Universal Credit Hotline:**

**0800 328 9559**

**Dementia Connect:**

**0333 150 3456**

*Alzheimer's Society's new personalised support service for people with dementia and their carers.*

**Covid-19 Bereavement Support Line:**

**0113 218 5544 or 0113 203 3369**

*For anyone who has a friend or family member who is seriously ill or who has died from Covid-19.*

**Leeds Directory:**

**0113 378 4610**

*Leeds City Council's Information Service that offers a range of local community care and support services and activities.*

**NHS:**

**111**

*For all non-urgent medical care*

**NHS number**

**119**

*This is the new number for Covid related calls -if you have Covid symptoms, want a test or are over 70 and not yet had your vaccine.*

**The Carers Advice Line for Leeds**

**0113 380 4300**

*If people are one of the 74,000 unpaid carers in Leeds and need some advice, help or support*

**100% Digital**

**0113 535 1170**

*Help with digital stuff or help to just get online*

**Leeds Gay Community (LGC):**

*Men's group. [lgc@mesmac.co.uk](mailto:lgc@mesmac.co.uk)*

**Sage:**

**[sage@mesmac.co.uk](mailto:sage@mesmac.co.uk)**

*Group for 50+ year old LGBT+ people*

**Friends of Dorothy:**

**[info@friendsofdorothy.org.uk](mailto:info@friendsofdorothy.org.uk)**

*Group for 50+ year old LGBT+ people*

**Leeds LGBT+ Women's Space:**

**[lgbtwomensspace@gmail.com](mailto:lgbtwomensspace@gmail.com)**

*Group for LGBT+ women aged 40 years or older.*

**Silver Pride Social:**

*A new WhatsApp social 'chat' group with a fast-growing membership of 50+ year old LGBT+ people.*

**Quiz corner solutions**

6	8	1	5	7	9	3	2	4
9	4	2	6	8	3	5	1	7
5	7	3	4	2	1	8	9	6
7	9	5	3	4	2	1	6	8
1	3	4	9	6	8	7	5	2
8	2	6	1	5	7	9	4	3
2	5	9	8	3	4	6	7	1
3	1	7	2	9	6	4	8	5
4	6	8	7	1	5	2	3	9

A	T	R	Q	B	Y	R	I	A	F	D	O	O	G	N	L	E
S	O	P	H	I	I	A	O	I	N	I	D	N	A	D	R	T
L	T	R	A	L	A	D	D	I	N	Y	S	C	U	O	E	D
E	O	I	O	O	T	D	R	A	Z	A	N	A	B	A	E	T
E	W	N	U	G	L	Y	S	I	S	T	E	R	S	U	H	U
P	L	C	A	S	L	M	O	T	H	E	R	G	O	O	S	E
I	E	E	L	Q	N	O	M	C	S	B	K	V	A	E	A	C
N	D	C	L	V	E	O	H	Q	I	D	I	V	K	G	W	I
G	A	H	E	C	O	M	T	O	T	Z	T	C	E	N	E	L
B	M	A	R	A	F	S	A	T	R	O	D	T	E	Y	E	G
E	E	R	E	T	D	U	A	E	U	N	E	X	E	F	H	L
A	K	M	D	R	P	R	N	P	J	B	V	M	E	N	S	A
U	V	I	N	U	C	U	U	G	W	P	X	N	D	I	M	
T	R	N	I	B	O	S	N	O	W	W	H	I	T	E	W	G
Y	M	G	C	Y	K	N	A	W	T	W	O	D	I	W	W	E

**Word wheel**

**4 Letters** GAIN GAIT GILT GIRL GIRT GNAT  
GRAN GRIN GRIP GRIT LING PANG PING PRIG  
RANG RING TANG TING

**5 Letters** ALIGN APING GIANT GLINT GNARL  
GRAIL GRAIN GRANT PRANG

**6 Letters** PALING PARING RATING TAPING

**7 Letters** PARTING PATTING PLATING PRATING  
RATTING

**8 Letters** RATTLING

**9 Letters** PRATTLING


**Christmas Quiz**

- 1.Germany 2.Four 3.364 4.Three - Dancer, Dasher, Donner 5.A coin 6.Oslo, Norway 7.3pm
- 8.Green 9.Bells 10.Macy's 11.January 5th





**NHS**



**If you or  
your family  
need help,  
the NHS is  
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**Don't delay, contact us to get the care you need.**

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HELP YOU**

GET THE CARE YOU NEED

[www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)