



Contents

Page 1 Chair's Blog

Page 2 Men: They come in all shapes

Page 3 Christmas Crackers

Page 4 & 5 Geoff's Pets

Page 6 Mistletoes

Page 7 Woodpecker Walking

Page 8 Events

Chairman's Blog

It seems a while ago that we had our AGM in mid-September and now we are looking towards Christmas. Where does the time go?

People ask me: "How do you like being Chairman?" in much the same tone as "Are you getting better now?". Well, I'm still upright and breathing and it hasn't been too arduous! Wearing my other hat, being editor of the Newsletter has been huge fun and I hope you are enjoying the articles. This edition will combine both December and January just to make life easier over the Twelve Days that carry us into the New Year.

Highlights so far have been a visit to Leyhill Open Prison to be presented with a generous donation from the LGBT+ prisoners group as part of their fundraising. I love seeing the gardens there and we had a nice chat about cake. GayWest looks forward to supporting them next year.

There was a visit to No.1 Royal Crescent to take part in a project to see how best to promote Beckford Tower. We were shown a book with William Beckford's handwritten notes inside. It brought him to life. I've named him our local patron saint of the gay community in Bath. I can see him looking sternly at me over one of his books.

If you haven't already done so, do book for the Christmas Celebration at the Royal Pavilion Cafe on 15th December, either online or at the Rainbow Cafe. It is billed as a Carvery/Bufferet at one of our favourite venues and it should be entertaining. Closing date for bookings is by 5th December in order to tell George at the Royal Pavilion Cafe.

If you are a Bath resident, you quickly learn to avoid the Christmas Market because of the crowds of visitors. This year I thought we'd be brave and dive in to take photos.

So when it all kicks off, the GayWest Committee wishes you a Happy Festive Season and Good New Year.

Michael Reid
(Chair)

Men: They come in all shapes and sizes

An amusing feature of the Gay Community is how it likes to describe itself in terms of body shapes - what is often described as 'Tribes'.

This has been promoted in particular by apps like Grindr, as it helps the younger men find exactly what they're looking for, but some labels go back to the magazines of the early 1980's.

Many of our members at GayWest could only be described as sophisticated urbane gentlemen, but in your wicked youth you may have leaned to one of the following:

Bears: the mainstay of Old Market Street, Bristol - noisy, dominant, and masculine. Often barrel-chested, and although neatly presented, hairy and bearded. You have the muscle bears, the roly-polies, the older grizzlies, and the younger version, the cubs.

Clean-cut: pure of heart despite a shady reputation, preferring vanilla-sex with no extras. Think Chairman!

Daddies: Salt-and-pepper or silver-haired guys who like to guide younger men.

Nervous Joes: otherwise known as the Discreet Brigade who may not want the wife or nanny to know what they're up to, or maybe just playing away while their partners are secretly doing the same.

Geeks: flirt with one of these, you have to take the book they're reading as well, or the IT programme they're working on, but behind closed doors they are a great surprise.

Sports Jocks: we've all seen them, the hunks in the jockstraps showing off in the gym. Do they stay there all night long? You can look but you mustn't touch.

Leather Boys: a great favourite of GayWest, they are a tribe but with many different subgroups, including fetish. There is a well-known Leather Bar in Old Market Street.

Otters: These handsome, younger men, neatly turned out in tight t-shirts and jeans, are a slender version of bears but sleeker in appearance. Throw them a sardine and they'll yelp for joy.

Wolves: a tribe not so well known, but certainly around. These are the slightly older men, often bearded, lean and fit, and hidden away in employment - such a waste.

Twinks and Twunks: These are the young, slender boy-men, with little or no body hair at the start of their careers on the gay scene. A more toned version is the Twunk.

We haven't mentioned bulls, farmboys and divas- but that's for a future article.

Michael Reid

SIX CHRISTMAS CRACKERS

I was asked to pen something for the December Newsletter, so I thought how about asking Google how many seasonal popular songs have “CHRISTMAS” in their title. Apparently there are hundreds !

So here are six of the most popular and widely recorded songs:

1. **WHITE CHRISTMAS** written by Irving Berlin in 1942: Bing Crosby’s version has sold an estimated fifty million copies! Beat that!
2. **HAVE YOURSELF A MERRY LITTLE CHRISTMAS** by Judy Garland in the film Meet Me in St Louis (1944). This is the ultimate and best version of all.
3. **ROCKIN’ AROUND THE CHRISTMAS TREE** sung in 1958 by fourteen year old Brenda Lee and it went on to sell 25 million copies and stayed in the charts seemingly for ever. Miss Lee was recently in the media celebrating her 78th birthday!
4. **CHRISTMAS ALPHABET**: sung by Dickie Valentine in 1955: it stayed in the pop charts for seven weeks, three of which at number 1. It is a delightful and whimsical song that beautifully captures the mood of festive days.
5. **THE CHRISTMAS SONG**: Nat King Cole: from this very popular singer there are no less than four different versions made between 1946 and 1961. So the choice is yours.
6. **I’LL BE HOME FOR CHRISTMAS**: sung by Doris Day 1964 on her Christmas album along with eleven other seasonal songs. This is one of the very best selling vinyls ever produced.

All chosen at random, so settle back in your recliner and have a large gin & tonic and a seasonal wallow.

MERRY CHRISTMAS EVERYONE !

Love **VALENTINO**

The Greedy Pig Theatre Company is based in Bath & presents
The Stolen Winter Light—a bewitching & hilarious festive tale with LGBT+ themes
At the Rondo Theatre 13th—24th December.
Live music, humour, & Greedy Pig’s signature bold storytelling.

[Www.greedypigtheatrecompany.com](http://www.greedypigtheatrecompany.com)



Geoff's Pets or "Don't touch the bannisters!"

Herpetology is not the study of Herpes, it's the branch of zoology concerned with reptiles and amphibians which is a particular interest of mine, so I suppose you could say I am a Homo Herpetologist; Well that would cover the snakes, geckos and frogs in my collection, but there is another type of animal that I keep, one that many have an aversion to, Arachnids (spiders) in my case Tarantulas (I have three) from the very big to the very small.

Though I have a 6ft boa constrictor in my menagerie of animals I am no size Queen. I am equally enamoured by my collection of much smaller creatures including thumbnail dart frogs which as the name suggests grow no bigger than a human thumbnail.

How it all began: As far as I can remember I have always had a passion for nature and animals in general, I think this was sparked by my mother (she had a crush on David Attenborough, she thought he was wonderful) so we were always watching wildlife programs together.

As a child I grew up around the usual family pets like dogs, cats and other furry warm blooded animals e.g. gerbils (we started out with two and ended up with over 40) but I always wanted something more exotic, less domesticated, something that could be observed naturally in a habitat that mimicked its natural surroundings (well that counted out elephants and giraffes) though I always loved my trips to the zoo and would have brought half the animals back with me if I had the chance.

I've been inspired by the many zoo exhibits I've seen over the years, leading me to create naturalistic environments that house my smaller animals such as dart frogs. Here lighting, temperature, humidity, running water and a myriad of tropical plants are all combined to replicate a little piece of the Rainforest.



Some of my many animals: Giant Brazilian White Knee Tarantula, size up to 8.5 inches (well that's enough for any man). All spiders are venomous, but this particular species bite is no more deadly than a bee sting, though its fangs are like mini steak knives, so its gonna hurt if you provoke it. Like many tarantula species it can eject bristles from its abdomen. These bristles can embed themselves in skin or eyes, causing great discomfort.

A low maintenance pet? Tarantulas will typically choose not to eat for several months at a time and have the ability to endure up to two years without a meal (As you can imagine they don't use the bathroom much either). Its diet consists mainly of locusts and other large insects. Some people in South America roast these animals and eat them. In captivity female Tarantulas can live over 30 years. Males about five. Female tarantulas will often try to eat the male shortly after sex (that's enough to turn any spider gay)

Boa Constrictor (Kahl Albino): In 1983 four newborn albino boas were discovered in Colombia and imported to California where they were sold for \$10,000 each, the largest sum ever paid for snakes at the time.

(continued from page 4)

In 1983 Pete Kahl of Baltimore, bought one of these snakes (a male) for \$25,000. More albinos were discovered and Peter went on to buy six females to make up a breeding group (quite an investment). In 1990 Pete's snakes bred, but all the babies had normal colouration. As in humans, albinism is a recessive trait so it is possible for two people with albinism to have unaffected children. It took many years of line breeding for Pete to produce a reliable strain of albino snakes.

Wind on many years to now and they can be had for a few hundred pounds each. Boas give birth to live young. Boas don't have venom, they squeeze the life out of their prey instead (like so many over-zealous lovers). In general, boa constrictors can live 35 or more years. The longest-lived boa ever recorded was 40 years, 4 months.

Boa constrictors are native to Central and South America. In captivity Boas are typically fed frozen thawed rats, but some are large enough to eat rabbits. My boa is an adult female and needs to be fed once a month. The largest species of Boa, the Anaconda are big enough to consume adult deer, sheep, dogs and even Jaguars, though they rarely eat humans.

Pasco's Poison Dart Frog: One of the many smaller species of Dart Frog often referred to as Thumbnails on account of their diminutive size. Quite beautiful I think, but you need good eyesight to appreciate it. This is a mildly toxic poison dart frog, however some species have enough toxin in their skin to kill 20 adult humans. Thankfully this applies to wild caught animals only, which gain their toxicity from their diet of formicine ants.

All my animals are captive bred and are fed a diet of fruit flies so have lost their toxicity (So I can't help you dispose of your other half I am afraid).

When the eggs hatch the male carries a single tadpole on its back to a water source, usually a tiny pool of water that collects inside a bromeliad plant. The female will visit from time to time to lay unfertilised eggs in the water for the tadpole to eat.

Geoff



Puckering up

Mistletoe has approximately 1,500 species around the world. All of them are semi-parasitic living off a host or off each other. Of these 1,500 only one is native to the United Kingdom and that's **Viscum album**.

These semi-parasitic shrubs are evergreen and grow in trees and create spherical balls up to a meter in diameter. The leaves stems and berries are poisonous to human life.

Mistletoe contains chlorophyll (the green) and can make their own food but derive the majority of their water and food from their ornamental and fruit trees. Commonly within the United Kingdom, mistletoe is found on apple and popular trees. However, other trees can be used like lime. The plants root as such use the vascular system of its host tree. Often there can be many spherical growths with one tree and these are all one plant.

The flowers on mature spherical balls are small and green and occur during the late spring. The fruit to begin with is green but over the summer months it turns white. The seed within the white fleshy berry is black and hard. The seed from mistletoe is transported by birds either stuck to their bills as the fleshy berry is very sticky or through their digestive system to other trees.

It is believed through the Middle Ages that mistletoe had a variety of magical properties, such as keeping witches at bay or warding off evil spirits. The Victorians believed that that a seed from mistletoe only grew if the seed passed through a mistle thrush. In Norse culture mistletoe was a sign of love and peace. In France, mistletoe was seen as a good luck charm and was often given as a New Year gift.

The tradition of kissing under mistletoe started in ancient Greece during the festival of Saturnalia, and later in marriage ceremonies as it was associated with fertility and vitality. By the 18th century, it had been incorporated into Christmas celebrations, how this jump was made is open to debate. The kissing tradition started with servants in England but soon spread to the middle classes. Part of the early custom, men stole a kiss from a woman under the mistletoe and to refuse was considered bad luck. The Victorians were big fans of “puckering up” under bunches of the plant around Christmas time and the tradition has stuck ever since.

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Woodpecker Walking

In late October, a small group went on one of Colin's woodpecker walks. Keynsham is an interesting area because although formally much of it was agricultural land that has now been developed with new homes, there's still a lot of local history to be seen.

Colin promised that there would be no mud, so we skirted around Abbots Wood, now managed by The Woodland Trust, and followed a neat, tarmacked path through the Meadows Estate. These are attractive houses with small gardens and very quiet as it was Sunday morning. We soon passed a row of restored mill workers cottages that could only be described today as desirable properties.

What had originally been the Keynsham Workhouse from 1837-1948, then became the local hospital which closed in 2006. We were a little puzzled as to why a hospital was demolished only to have a new health centre built in its place.

We then reached a grand complex of private apartments with rooftop gardens. This is the Albert Mill development where you can see the large grinding stones at the entrance to the main courtyard. There was a race going on with marshals directing the runners through the narrow walkways. We had a bit of a lark pretending to join in, gasping for air and clinging to the wall. We may have been disqualified.

Originally, the Albert Mill was known as the New Brass Mill. It was the last working dyewood mill in the country, closing down in 1964. Different types of imported timber were crushed down to powder to be sold to cloth producers to make dyes. Now it's a residential heaven, but the water still runs past the water wheel.

Crossing over the river Chew, beside Steel Mills Lane, with cottages once owned by the Bristol Brass Company, we climbed a steep, narrow lane. We wondered if we were going to make it, but we reached the main road overlooking the meadows of Chewton Keynsham. In one of the houses opposite, had been the surgery of Dr. Christopher Bailey. It was his son, Mark Robert Bailey, who later became the well known musician and comedian Bill Bailey. Nicknamed Bill at school by his teacher, because the boy could play on his guitar the old song 'won't you come home, Bill Bailey'.

Soon, we strolled by the Keynsham Cricket Club which nurtured the early skills of a famous local cricketer, Marcus Trescothick. Then thankfully downhill, we descended a country lane to Chewton Keynsham, once the home of a small mining community. The local manor there was bought by Thomas Warner in 1815 who built cottages for his workers and a village school. The black-glazed 'Bridgwater' roof tiles are still famous.

We reach Chewton Place House in its idyllic setting of tall trees and gardens. It looks like the original Georgian house, but in fact has been artfully restored and beautified. You can still see the original garden tower, a kind of folly or bird croft. Colin describes it as the leaning tower of Keynsham.

Not too tired, we return to Colin and Jim's home, to be greeted with tea and home made scones, jam and clotted cream. Absolute bliss!

A perfect early autumn walk and not an ounce of mud.

(based on Colin O'Brien's walking notes, with thanks.)

Bath Christmas Market 2023



GayWest Social Evening Wednesday 13th December 2023 & on 10th January 2024

Join us for our social evening at “The Lodekka”

Tramway Rd, Brislington, Bristol, BS4 3DS

Meet from 8pm for a chat, a laugh and
to put the world to rights.

The venue is part of the Green King chain and
the food is good and reasonably priced.



**GayWest would like to
wish you all
A very merry Christmas
And Happy New Year**

