



Contents

Page 1 Chair's Blog

Page 2/3 A stroll around Clifton

Page 4/5 Gloves & Strings

Page 6 Back Story

Page 7 A splash of colour

Page 8 Snippets and Events

Welcome to your February Newsletter to welcome in the New Year

Chair's Blog

Our Christmas party went very well and I had good comments about it. I think everyone enjoyed the relaxed atmosphere at the Royal Pavilion Cafe, so a huge thank you to everyone that took part. Sadly, we've just learned that George Lippiartt will be closing down his cafe in mid-February. We've had such good times there and his cafe will be missed.

We are now approaching February - and it's freezing. There is a garden in Coombe Down with fully grown, fat snowdrops. In its muddled way, Spring is trying to tell us it's on its way. In the pagan world it starts on 2nd February at Imbolc. In our more cautious, modern world we'll have to wait until the end of March. So keep your hot water bottles filled.

2024 is going to prove what our pundits like to call an 'interesting' year, but whatever it throws at us, remember what we do at GayWest: *We Stay Calm and Carry On.*

We were going to kick start the year with an auction, but the advice I was getting from several quarters was that it was a lot of effort for little return. So we won't be doing that this year. If any member does have something for sale, do let us know and we can always advertise in the newsletter or at the Rainbow Cafe.

I have discovered in talking to members at our Cafe just how interesting their lives are when you start digging. So if you see me loitering at your elbow, I'm after your secrets. Particularly for a one-page article for the newsletter. For example, not many people know that I used to be deeply knowledgeable about rare maps - yes, and saunas! So have a think about what you might contribute, it could be memories, experiences, or a collection of photos. Have your turn in the spotlight, you deserve it.

So, we are all going to be very positive, face this new year and appreciate the good things in life: cake, coffee and a good chat among friends.

Michael Reid

A Stroll around Clifton



Clifton is the affluent area above Bristol overlooking the city. It stretches all the way from the former Bristol Zoo Gardens down to Hotwells.

I thought it a good idea to explore a little of this area to welcome in the New Year. Rather than spend time at the Clifton Suspension Bridge which I've never liked, I went instead to Slidey Rock on the pathway leading up to the Observatory. It's been a long tradition for Bristol youth to slide down this rock and it certainly looks well polished.

Then down Sion Hill, past the Priory and the Avon Gorge Hotel, towards the Paragon. You need to keep an eye on the pavement, because it slopes gently downhill and then suddenly, without warning, swoops downwards via steep shallow steps. If you didn't know they were there you could have a nasty accident.



I nipped across the road after spotting more stone steps leading up to a terrace. This was the grand sweep of Royal York Crescent, one of the longest terraces of its kind in Europe. A railing on one side gives a magnificent view of south Bristol and beyond. The Crescent doesn't have a number 13, but halfway along lived the celebrated novelist Angela Carter.

I spoke to a woman who said that Clifton Wood no longer existed. It's now just a name on the map, mostly given over to halls of residence for the University.

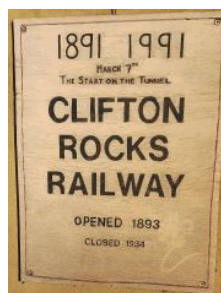
Back into Regent Street, the main shopping area with its estate agents, and then up towards Waterstones. Here I discover Clifton Village with its nooky shops, pubs and an interesting antique emporium, more preloved 'vintage' than antique. I discover a hidden private road leading to Caledonia Mews with its row of pretty cottages.

Along Princess Victoria Street to return almost opposite the Avon Gorge Hotel. This has a splendid terrace at the back, overlooking the Gorge. You can see the river all the way from the Suspension Bridge up towards the entrance to the Harbourside marinas.

I spoke to another elderly resident about the wisdom of walking down the Zig Zag Path next to the hotel. I didn't fancy being mugged. This was originally a goat track that literally zigzagged down the side of the Gorge to Hotwells.

Did I go down that sinister path after my stroll around Clifton?

Guess.



GayWest Social Evening

Wednesday February 14

Valentine's Day

Join us for our social evening at **"The Lodekka"**

Tramway Rd, Brislington, Bristol, BS4 3DS

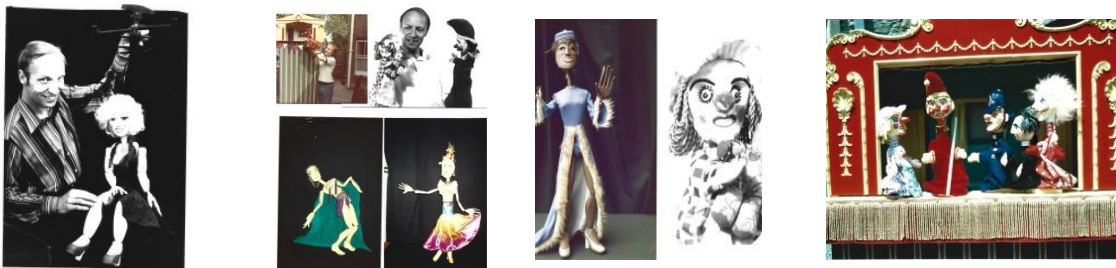
Meet from 8pm for a chat, a laugh and

to put the world to rights.

The venue is part of the Green King chain and

the food is good and reasonably priced.

GLOVES AND STRINGS



Latterly in my life from the 1980's, I worked as a Punch Professor and as a professional entertainer for both children and adults.

I owned my first Pollocks Toy Theatre at the age of four, and the magic still remains with me today. I remember my very first puppet show – totally improvised – which I did for classmates at Holbeton Primary school in Devon. My sister very kindly played the piano as an introduction, and from that day onwards there was no looking back.

Whilst working in London, I attended the Stanhope Institute in Bloomsbury to learn how to make puppets, and I soon had the clear intention of producing my own show and entertaining audiences. And so, focusing on the traditional story of Mr Punch and his wife Judy, I sat down and wrote my own script, then I designed and made all the characters – eleven in number and by name:

PUNCH; JUDY; BABY; CLOWN; POLICEMAN; CHINAMAN; VICAR; GHOST; HANGMAN; the seasonal FATHER CHRISTMAS, and the irrepressible CROCODILE who became everyone's enemy. To get a basic pattern for a glove puppet costume, I literally drew around the shape of my hand, and because constant usage of a puppet could be tough, I made duplicates and had four of the PUNCH character.

It was great fun making the puppets, especially the CROCODILE who was really scary and in due course made young audiences shriek and yell for Mr Punch to "LOOK OUT! HE'S BEHIND YOU!" Sometimes there was a near riot.

All the puppet facial features had to be over-emphasised so that the character could be easily identified at a distance. I used hard wearing enamel paints, which I then varnished. I also had to master the use of a swazzle to get the high pitched voice for Mr Punch. dialogue for these shows was done live – by myself, and as soon as I had a puppet on my hand, the voice would somehow evolve.

(continued from page 4)

I have vivid memories – most of which were good, but there were some which were otherwise. On one occasion a lady said to me after a show “Thank you, but who was helping you?” which was indeed a compliment. There was a near catastrophic occasion in a park, when I momentarily left the booth unattended to use the toilet facilities. On my return just minutes later, a boy had wheedled his way inside the booth and was using *my puppets* to do a show. I was mortified and told him so, whilst his parents stood nearby beaming but otherwise quite unconcerned.

I went on to make many more puppets. I was asked to produce other plays for children, and was commissioned to produce a full scale production of *Hansel and Gretel* for a summer festival, held in Bournemouth, to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the death of the classical composer, the original, Engelbert Humperdinck.

Later on I started making large cabaret size marionettes – up to 30” tall, and some of these had as many as 14 or 15 strings – depending on what I wanted the puppet to do. I had a flamboyant Carmen Miranda; a sensual and lithe Josephine Baker; a slinky Street Walker; an Old Father Thames figure and a very jolly and clever Clown. There were many other puppets in this larger troupe and I usually ended a performance with a Marilyn Monroe look-a-like puppet rendering that “Diamonds are a Girl’s Best Friend”.

I worked for many prestigious organisations from popular theatres, stately homes, garden parties, department stores, plus countless numbers of private parties. I gave talks and did demonstrations and workshops in schools - after which the children could take their own glove puppet home with them.

So all in all, it was a most gratifying second career with the unpredictable happening from time to time.

I end with the immortal words of Mr Punch “That’s the way to do it!”

Antony Russell, aka Professor Panda

Woodpecker Walks will return in March
with full details in the next Newsletter,
the route planned by Colin O’Brien.

Back Story

Well here we are in a new year and probably looking back on the past year, maybe even further. This got me thinking how important history can be.

I find history a fascinating subject, not necessary a study of dates, like you had to learn at school, but how the knowledge of the past can influence our lives today.

As a tradesman, learning how your trade has developed over time is important to how you work today. Take meteorology, how we can just click on our smart phones and get a weather forecast that's up to date and so accurate.

Looking back and seeing how we got to this stage is looking at the history of meteorology. How the Jet Stream that we all hear about was only taken seriously, after being first discovered by a Japanese meteorologist in the 1930's. Its influence finally realised in 1944 when the B2 bombers would be so off course, because they were flying at the same level as the winds called the Jet Stream. The pilots, not understanding this, were trapped in these winds and no instruments on the planes could detect this at the time, so they were dropping bombs way off target.

This year we celebrate 100 years of the Shipping forecast on the BBC, but it was first set up by using telegraphs in 1867.

History's influence is everywhere: in art, music, languages, you name it. Even with how nations of the world have changed and developed, including the movement of peoples around the world.

So why is it, as the dominant species on our home planet, do we seem to forever repeat the many tragedies of the past?

Take the quiz shows on TV, many correct answers will require some knowledge of history, but a lot of contestants seem to have no clue or very little knowledge of the past. Generation after generation ignore the importance of the lessons of history, making the same mistakes individually and collectively.

Take the problems in the world today and most conflicts have a long back story, (World Wars I and II) that has been neglected, and so the same problems reappear. Think of political ideologies that result in disasters time and again.

The Christian Crusades also have a lot to answer for. They travelled to the Middle East, pushing their "oh so right" beliefs, and we are still living with those consequences today.

It appears we are still making the same mistakes that we have always made, rather than studying the lessons of the past to benefit our futures.

Oh well, have a good New Year and mind how you go.

Colin O'Brien.

A splash of colour



February, is a marvelous month for one of our best loved winter flowering plants to peak in this month. This marvelous plant being the humble snowdrop. You can visit many gardens, the length and breadth of the country, looking at great swathes of snowdrops flowering in woodland situations, on a (warm) day plus 2 degrees and the sun is shining through the trees. Most snowdrops produce a pleasant scent. However, look closer and not all snowdrops are the same.

We commonly grow in our gardens two varieties of snowdrop (Galanthus). These being Galanthus nivalis and Galanthus nivalis floro plena, and many of the gardens we visit at this time of year are predominantly of these two varieties. Some gardens that open to the public have more than these two varieties.

Ever since the 19th century, Snowdrops have been crossed and bred to produce literally hundreds of varieties from around twenty wild species, and then the hybrids from these crosses have been hybridized too. Even here in Somerset, we have a man James Allen who was the first person to start hybridizing wild snowdrops. Although James Allen created more than 500 varieties, some you can still buy today and those being Galanthus Merlin and Magnet. To learn more about this amazing man and the snowdrops he created go to the Shepton Mallet Snowdrop Festival, 12-18th February. You can buy many types of snowdrops from specialist growers at this festival.



You can get snowdrops flowering as early as October and the last flowering late March. Snowdrops fall into four main groups single, double, green and gold.

As wonderful as seeing sweeps of snowdrops flowering, there are other plants that flower at this time that help complement the snowdrops in all their glory and makes our seeing the more enjoyable. Such plants as Crocus tommasinianus, Eranthis hyemalis, Cyclamen Coum and Hellebores.

Stephen Lee's website: www.gardening-coach.co.uk

email: gardencoach2022@gmail.com

Snippets aka delicious gossip

* A mobster smashed a display case at the Judy Garland Museum and stole her iconic ruby slippers as worn in *The Wizard of Oz* (1939). He thought the slippers were covered in real rubies and was a tad jaded to find that magic only stays in Oz. After a 13-year investigation, the FBI finally pounced and returned the slippers to the museum.

* President Macron has appointed Gabriel Attel as France's first ever gay prime minister, and the P.M's ex-partner as foreign minister. Vive La France.

* 'Daisy & Bean' is a gay-friendly cafe in Gay Street Bath, open 7-days a week and recommended. It's just a few doors up from the Jane Austen Museum.

Sing Out - Bristol

The south west's largest LGBT choir
performing at St. George's, Bristol

Legends & Legacies

(Great George Street, Bristol)

Sat. 13 April 2024 at 7.30 pm

Tickets: www.stgeorgesbristol.co.uk/what's-on/sing-out- Bristol

Outstories Bristol will be

Celebrating LGBT History Month

At the M-Shed, Bristol Harbourside

Sat. 24 February. 1.00am-4.00pm

GayWest will have a stall

so come along and say hello.