

# GayWest Newsletter - May Edition 2024

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## Chair's Blog

At last, May is here - Please can we have lots of sunshine! There were two notices at the Rainbow Cafe recently. We are in the process of updating and redesigning our website. We want it to reflect who we are and what we do in a cheerful, modern way and for it to be more of an information site focusing on the Cafe. We are lucky to have one of our members who will help with this and who has IT experience. The website will be out of action for maybe three weeks, but we can still communicate on the info@ email as before.

Age UK have moved to their new premises located at the end of James Street West. That's the street running next to Green Park Station and on past the Riverside Health Centre. It is a former yoga studio at Alexander House and newly refurbished inside.

There is a suggestion that Age UK move everything over to the new premises and close down St. Michael's Place - taking us with them if we want to go. I do stress that at present it is only an idea. I will find out by July what their plans are if I don't hear beforehand, so don't worry about it and we will keep you informed.

A riddle to keep you guessing while you iron your summer shorts and t-shirts: what links a park bench, a decent coffee, and Imperial Dragons? Keep reading to find out - and enjoy the merry month of May.

**Michael Reid**

## Gay West Picnics

You may know me as Pip. I have co-hosted the Rainbow Cafe many years ago from 2008 to 2012. In recent years I have helped to organise annual picnics for GayWest, checking the place beforehand, usually in early Spring. I have always planned for a dry day (normal) and a wet day (rare, usually a pub). We have had four dry 'Pip's Picnics' but last year in Bradford on Avon, we managed to escape under huge trees for the last part of the picnic as it was raining hard!

When I look back on the picnics that I have hosted, I was surprised that I have done five of them: Brandon Hill (19 Aug 2018); Blaise Castle (18 Aug 2019); Victoria Park (12 Sep 2021); Parade Gardens (24 July 2022); Bradford on Avon (26 Jul 2023). The first four were held on a Sunday, but last year it was on a Wednesday. Previously GayWest picnics was formerly held, and started originally, at Camers (beautiful private gardens near Chipping Sodbury) - this was looked after by a former excellent gardener who happened to be a GayWest member.

I did not mind organising the picnics because I quite enjoy hosting, and also to help the Gay West committee. So in recent years our annual picnics have become known as Pip's Picnics.

I have decided to have a break this year. The good news is that the committee will organise this year's picnic. Do not worry, I will be back again next year to organise a picnic for the summer of 2025 and I have even thought of a place to host it.

**Pip**

What is an Adult? A person who has stopped growing at both ends and is now growing in the middle.



### The Museum of East Asian Art

I visited this most interesting museum located in a modest town house in Bennett Street, just north of the Circus. The main collection is on the second floor and I was advised to start there and work my way down the stairs.. There are glazed ceramics, beautiful carved jade and rare bronzes covering a period of 7,000 years of Chinese and South East Asian history. Many of the items are much smaller than you think from the photos, but in intricate detail, and all collected by one remarkable man.

The museum's founder was Brian McElney OBE who had been born and brought up in Hong Kong. He became a prominent lawyer and life-long collector and expert on Chinese and Asian art, particularly at a time when there was a thriving art and antique community in Hong Kong.

I met him briefly in a small crowded cafe and he was kind enough to let me sit at his table. He told me that after retirement he had donated his collection by creating a museum in central Bath. There's a 30th anniversary exhibition on the first floor dedicated to Brian McElney's memory with the following quote: *"My intention has always been that the Museum display at all times some of the rare wonders of East Asian Art and particularly the marvellous arts of China."*

On the ground floor I found the dragons, an exhibition of items with the dragon motif. Apparently, the Imperial symbol of the dragon goes back 2,000 years, and before that they were shown as mythological creatures. In the West, we think of them as destructive, but in China they have a more positive and beneficial meaning. The Gift Shop is a haven and I had an interesting chat with the lady on the desk. We talked about cats! If you're wondering about that park bench, it's in Henrietta Gardens in memory of Brian McElney who sadly died last year. A highly recommended visit, with exhibitions throughout the year, including one on the Kimono from 5 July to 14 December. [www.meaa.org.uk](http://www.meaa.org.uk) **Michael Reid**

## The Old Theatre Royal - A Hidden Gem

I wonder how many people know that there are actually two Theatre Royals in Bath. The most well known one is in Saw Close and is very popular as an entertainment centre, with many of its shows either prior to, or direct from London, with top stars appearing frequently.

The old Theatre Royal is in Old Orchard Street, behind Marks & Spencer, and is not easily recognisable as a theatre as its façade resembles a terraced Georgian house. But enter in and you will find something quite different and fascinating.

We had booked for an organised tour of the building and promptly at 2.15 pm the doors opened and an advertising board was placed outside on the pavement. Our guide Mike, was a positive and cheerful person whose heart was totally in the Mason's Movement who now own the property.

In 1750, the building opened as the purpose-built St James Theatre and presented Shakespeare's Henry IV. Royalty regularly attended, and the venue became so popular, it quickly outgrew itself and urgently needed enlarging. In 1767 a new wing and frontage were added - which provided much needed space. Seven years later, further changes were made to the building, and a production of MacBeth was presented. A Miss Sarah Siddons joined the Company.

As the population of Bath grew tenfold, the theatre was overcrowded and sold out every night, and in 1805 the Company moved to a new theatre in Beauford Square.

The old building fell into disrepair and remained empty for four years, when it was refurbished and became a Catholic Chapel and remained as such for the next fifty-four years. Then the Masons made the building their lodge and raised enough finance to purchase the property outright.

Today the Masons hold regular meetings and continue to be a thriving philanthropic organization. As well as the impressive Masonic Hall, the Regency Dining Room and the Basement Museum, there are many original features of the old theatre still to be seen.

The Main Hall is transformed back into an auditorium for frequent live performances. The public are very welcome to visit this unique Georgian building which is steeped in the rich history of Bath and I would certainly recommend a visit.

## Valentino

What is a Secret: Something you tell to one person at a time



## Glory of the May

I think that last year (2023) was the first time I have really noticed the hawthorn. I'm not sure whether it was the blindingly hot summer from the year before ripening the wood or the vast removal of ash trees from our local area. I must say that they literally flowered their socks off and filled our countryside with scent in May and June.

The hawthorn is a native tree to the British Isles and has been here since the last ice age. There are two types of native hawthorn in the UK. *Crataegus laevigata* (midland hawthorn) and *Crataegus monogyna* Mayflower. The difference between the two is minimal, but the leaves are slightly different and *Crataegus laevigata* has a more upright habit and is less common than *Crataegus monogyna*.

The tree grows from seed and takes many years to grow before it produces its wonderful flowering period in May predominantly. Then in the autumn we are treated to an amazing display of crimson berries that last well into winter and are usually eaten by blackbirds and waxwings in the mid to late winter. It is also worth noting that hawthorns are very thorny. When they are in our native hedging, next to roads, the thorns from these plants can easily puncture tyres.

There are a few hawthorns that we can plant in our gardens noted for their different flower colours.

**Stephen** [www.gardening-coach.co.uk](http://www.gardening-coach.co.uk) or email to [gardencoach2022@gmail.com](mailto:gardencoach2022@gmail.com)

**A Monthly Conundrum: Which would you choose?**



The fish'n chips are mine, the pie & chips are delicious, and God knows what the other one is, but somebody ordered it. There are lots of other meals to choose from.

**The GayWest Social Evening at *The Lodeka***

Wednesday 8th May from 7.30 pm onwards.

Good bus connection back to Bath

**Venue: The Lodeka, Tramway Road, Brislington, Bristol BS4 3DS**

and did I mention the custard and sticky toffee pudding to follow -  
it's nothing but temptation.

And one last thought for the Month of May:

What are Wrinkles? Something other people have, similar to my character lines