

December 2025 Magazine



Croydon u3a

(Operating as the University of the Third Age)

Croydon u3a Registered Charity Number 1029466

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Croydon u3a Management Committee 2024-2025

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| Chair | Jenny Wilson jenny.wilson@croydonu3a.org.uk |
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| Treasurer, Gift Aid, Membership | Paul Smith |
| Business Secretary & Interest Groups Co-Ord | Trisha Holmes |
| Travel Team and Bulletin | Linda Grigsby |
| Publicity & Community Outreach | Maggie Chan |
| IT and Comms | Steve May |
| Interest Group Assistant | Fenella Cardwell |
| New member Support & Welcome Team Co-Ord | Anne Tanner |
| New Member Support & Welcome Team Co-Ord | Angie Stagg |
| Travel Team | Karen Hook |

Croydon u3a has an army of volunteers apart from the members above, who have taken on various roles to make our u3a run well. See some of them on the Committee Support Team page on the website:

We must include our Group Leaders and their assistants, for without them we would literally fall apart.

We are always looking for volunteers to discuss starting a new group or offering a taster session or a short course. Please contact Maggie Chan if you would like to discuss this. The guiding principle of the u3a is:

Run by the Members for the Members

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Foreword

Hello all,

It's that time of year again and the Christmas panic is beginning to set in. As usual, I started my preparations with all good intentions, but I am sure I will still be doing last minute shopping (and gift wrapping) right up to the last minute. Thank goodness for the internet. I really can't remember how I managed before...

Have a great holiday season, keep warm and well-watered (!)

We have some lovely stories for you this time as well as the usual puzzle pages and a quiz to keep you puzzling until the new year.

Many thanks to all contributors.

The next edition will be in the Spring, when the days will be getting longer and, hopefully, warmer.

All contributions for the next edition will be gratefully received. Please send to: tess.smith@croydonu3a.org.uk by 20th November.

Editor – Tess Smith

Letter from the Chair

Dear Members of Croydon u3a,

u3a is a 'mutual aid' organisation run by member volunteers. This means that we all have a part to play in maintaining the - learn laugh live- principle. In other words, keeping learning and sharing what we know, laughing and enjoying life and living better and longer with purpose and friends.

We are always on the look-out for members to start up new groups, perhaps as a team initiative. There's no rule that says an Interest Group can only be run by one Group Leader. Some of our Interest Groups have committees to manage things. We also want to encourage more short courses so that starting something up can be done within a shorter time frame and thereby be a more manageable venture.

Remember the old phrase 'Laughter is the best medicine'? Well, it truly is. There is good medical research to endorse this claim.

Effects include benefits to cardiovascular health and mood. Benefits to mood in depressed patients have been found to be as good as exercise therapy. A study by Oxford University found that pain thresholds become "significantly higher" after laughter, compared to the control condition, and saw this as being due to laughter itself, rather than the mood of the subject. Deep 'belly' laughter promotes more efficient breathing.

So whenever you can laugh, laugh, laugh. It's good for you.

Every good wish for the season and the New Year. Keep safe and in touch.

Jenny

Jenny Wilson, Chair of Croydon u3a and London Region Council Representative E: jenny.wilson@croydonu3a.org.uk

News from the Groups

An Outing with the Historic Visits Group

On a fine September day, 9 members of the Historic Visits Group set off on their monthly outing, this time to Forty Hall in Enfield – a fine Jacobean manor house built in the 1620s. Now a Grade I listed building, it is owned and cared for by Enfield Council who, with the help of some Lottery Funding, have refurbished and now conserve the house and vast grounds, encouraging visitors to learn about its past. It has been opened as a museum and is free to enter.



The house is said to have been built between 1629 and 1632, by Sir Nicholas Rainton, a wealthy London haberdasher who was Lord Mayor of London from 1632 to 1633. In 1640 Sir Nicholas was imprisoned for refusing to help Charles I raise a loan.

There is a wealth of interesting information in the permanent exhibition, including audio and visual displays, concerning the history of the house and its owners over the centuries.

We followed the directed route through the house via rooms on the ground and first floors and admired the features, some original, and some reproduction. The rooms have been beautifully restored with reproduction paintwork and plasterwork and woodwork, to illustrate details of 16th /17th /18th century furnishings and fittings.



In its more recent history, the Parker Bowles family were the last owners and residents, living there from 1895 until 1951, when it was sold to the local council.

Andrew Parker Bowles has visited Forty Hall and contributed his family's visitor book from their time there to the museum collection, and some of the family's history is also on display around the house.

There is a café and a gift shop in the house and around the house are formal gardens, a small lake and a magnificent Cedar of Lebanon, one of the 'Great Trees of London', and the county girth Champion for Greater London.

There are also nature trails around the extensive grounds – but maybe for another day, as it was time to return to Croydon, with two trains and two buses to catch!

Jenny Parry

Writing for Pleasure

The Writing for Pleasure Group continues to meet twice monthly, either FTF or by zoom.

This month's contributions were on the theme 'Under the Bed' and as usual produced a widely varied mix of stories. Some sad, some almost horror and some very funny.

We reproduce one of them below, with thanks to Trisha Holmes, followed by a poem from Janet Stokes, another member of the group.

Under the Bed

“I’ve got an STD!” yelled Peggy “and I’ve got a photo of it – it’s a lovely colour as you will see – I’m just emailing it to you.”

In mounting horror Madge held the phone away from her ear. Peggy’s shrieking was bouncing off her eardrum and her mind was reeling with what she had just been told.

“Peggy, now listen to me, calm down and start again. What is it you are trying to tell me?” Madge’s voice was stern and calm, but her heart was racing. Could her sister really have got a ... she couldn’t bear to even repeat it to herself.

“Has the photo come through yet?” screeched Peggy

Madge closed her eyes as she heard the phone make that pinging sound. She had mail, and presumably an accompanying photo.

“I found it under the bed,” chatted Peggy “and I remembered that I had put it there after the village fair and then I forgot about it. So, when I was putting my coffin away – under the bed is the only space big enough for it – there was the box with the STD. So I took it out and followed the instructions for stimulating it and it’s worked! Have you got the photo yet? Madge? Are you still there?”

“Why have you got a coffin under your bed?” enquired Madge, feebly.

“There was a ‘buy one get one half price’ deal, so I did.”

“Did what?”

“Bought our coffins! I didn’t think you’d mind as it was such a good deal. They’re made of cardboard, and my one has daisies all over it. I chose one with pineapples for you.”

Madge sat down.

“And where is my coffin being stored?” She heard the edge in her voice and tried to control her left knee which had started to jerk of its own volition.

“Well, that’s under the bed too, but I was meaning to get it couriered round to you – Clive’s Cars are always so helpful, I’m sure they’d oblige.”

“Peggy, I don’t understand how you can find a sexually transmitted disease under the bed! Is this some strange euphemism to explain the result of your liaison with Bob Bloat?”

“Wash your mucky mouth out, Madge Drinkwater! How very dare you cast perversions on my reputation! There I was, thinking I would cheer you up out of your moaning misery and this is the thanks I get! And I bought you a lovely coffin, too – I’ve a good mind to send it back.”

But you said you had a STD – that’s the initials for a ...well...what I just said.”

“You’re a church warden, Madge. I expected a bit better from you, but I see you have a mind like a drain.”

Peggy ended the call.

With fingers that trembled, Madge opened the attachment. A fuzzy photograph showed a blush pink flower, possibly an orchid.

The email provided further information – apparently the flower was named ‘Southern Tree Dendrodiun’ and it was, indeed, an orchid. Madge felt ashamed. Perhaps Peggy was right, perhaps she did have a mucky mind.

She walked upstairs slowly, intending to have a lie down and soothe her fractured nerves. Her phone rang. She had left it in the hall, so she retraced her steps and saw that the call was from Peggy. Madge declined to answer. The phone rang again. She ignored it.



An hour later, Madge had had a pleasant nap and was halfway down the stairs when the doorbell rang. She opened the front door and found Clive, from Clive's cars, on the doorstep holding a vibrant flatpack package that was as tall as himself.

“Mrs Drinkwater – package for you – where would you like me to put it?”

“Under the bed” replied Madge, weakly, as she tottered to her sofa.

Tricia Holmes

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Notable dates in December

1st December 1135

King Henry I of England died at the age of 66 after falling ill seven days earlier. As the youngest of William the Conqueror's four sons, Henry had never expected to be king. He'd received a good education Latin and the liberal arts. – likely because, as the youngest son, his parents may have expected him to become a bishop.

As a result, Henry earned the nickname 'Beauclerc', which means 'fine scholar'. He was the first Norman king to be fluent in English and ruled for 35 years.

He married Matilda of Scotland, and they had two children who survived to adulthood, Empress Matilda and William Adelin, who drowned in 1120.

Q So who ruled after Henry?

2nd December 1697

Sir Christopher Wren's St Paul's Cathedral opened in London.

The original cathedral had been severely damaged during the Great Fire of London in 1666. While some repairs had taken place and services continued in the ruins, it became clear in 1668, when the nave collapsed, that a permanent solution was necessary.

Construction of the new cathedral took 35 years and spanned the reigns of five different monarchs.

Q. Who was Monarch when it was completed?

6th December 1921

The Irish Free State, which was made up of four-fifths of Ireland, was declared. This brought a five-year Irish fight for independence from Britain to an end, although, like other free nations of the former British Empire, Ireland remained part of the British Commonwealth – which, symbolically, made it subject to the king. However, the Irish Free State later cut its ties with Britain and was renamed Eire, aka the Republic of Ireland.

Q *Who is the current President of the Republic of Ireland?*

7th December 1941

Japan carried out a devastating, surprise attack on the U.S. naval base of Pearl Harbor, near Honolulu, Hawaii, just before 8am.

Over 2,400 Americans were killed during the attack, including civilians – and another 1,200 people were injured. The following day, President Franklin D. Roosevelt ordered Congress to declare war on Japan and thus enter into the conflict now known as WWII.

Q. *What time was the attack on Pearl Harbor?*

8th December 1980

Forty-year-old Beatles star John Lennon was shot and killed at the entrance of the Dakota Building, where he had an apartment, in New York.

Lennon was murdered by Mark David Chapman, a 25-year-old security guard from Hawaii. Chapman pleaded guilty to the murder and was sentenced to 20 years to life. He is still in prison, having been denied parole 14 times.

Q. *What is the name of John Lennon's son with Yoko Ono?*

10th December 1901

The first Nobel Peace Prizes were awarded in Stockholm, Sweden. Each award was worth \$30,000.

The ceremony occurred on the fifth anniversary of the death of Alfred Nobel, the Swedish inventor of dynamite and other explosives. Nobel had left behind a huge fortune and specified in his will that the bulk of it should be divided and used for prizes in physics, chemistry, medicine, physiology, literature, and peace to those who'd "conferred the greatest benefit on mankind".

Nobel never explained why he created these prizes. But it's widely believed that it was due to moral regret over the increasingly destructive and lethal uses of his inventions in war.

Q. Who was awarded this year's peace prize?

11th December 1936

After ruling for less than one year, Britain's King Edward VIII became the first English monarch to abdicate the throne. He decided to abdicate after the British government, the public, and the Church of England condemned his decision to marry the twice-divorced American, Mrs. Wallis Simpson.

On 12th December, his younger brother, the Duke of York, was proclaimed King George VI.

Q. How many Edward VIII coins were issued for circulation?

16th December 1653

Oliver Cromwell was appointed Lord Protector of England, Scotland, and Ireland.

After the execution of King Charles I in January 1649 following the English Civil War, England had been run by the remaining MPs from the House of Commons – now known by historians as the Rump Parliament.

Cromwell's reign as Lord Protector proved the most stable since the Civil Wars. He served as Lord Protector until his death in September 1658.

Q Who succeeded Oliver Cromwell?

16th December 1689

The English Parliament passed the Bill of Rights.

The Bill established the principles of having free elections, regular parliaments, and freedom of speech within Parliament. Together, these ultimately gave Parliament power over the Crown.

Many historians regard the Bill of Rights as the main law that kickstarted the move towards a constitutional monarchy and democracy in England.

Q. What is regarded as the other most important document in the English constitution?

19th December 1843

Charles Dickens' classic work, *A Christmas Carol*, was published. Dickens produced this iconic work in a six-week flurry of writing that began in October 1843 and finished on 19th December. By December 24th, the first edition of 6,000 copies had sold out and by 2nd January 1844, a second edition of 3,000 copies had also been sold.

Q. What is the name of Scrooge's late business partner?

19th December 1848

Emily Bronte, an English author who wrote *Wuthering Heights*, died of tuberculosis aged only 30.

Emily's sisters, Charlotte and Anne, also wrote poetry and romantic fiction. As women, all three wrote under fictional names. Emily was Ellis Bell, Charlotte was Currer Bell, and Anne was Acton Bell.

Q. What is the name of the female protagonist in *Wuthering Heights*?

25th December 336

The first recorded celebration of Christmas took place under the first Christian emperor, Constantine I.

The date coincided with the pagan festival of Saturnalia, where, paying tribute to Saturn, the Romans would take time off work, exchange gifts, and light candles. The traditions and celebrations of Saturnalia were upheld when the Roman Empire began to embrace Christianity.

Q. Which winter festival was celebrated by Germanic peoples, such as the Anglo-Saxons?

25th December, 800

Charlemagne was crowned Holy Roman Emperor by Pope Leo III at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. This made him the first recognised emperor to rule Western Europe after the fall of the Western Roman Empire around three centuries earlier.

As a result of his achievements in uniting European territories, Charlemagne is often referred to as the father of Europe.

Q. By what other name was Charlemagne known?

25th December 1914

During the First World War, when British soldiers heard German troops in the trenches opposite singing carols on Christmas Eve, a World War I Christmas truce was reached.

British and German soldiers met in no man's land; they exchanged gifts, took photographs, and played impromptu football games. Both sides also took time to bury casualties and repair trenches.

The truce wasn't observed everywhere along the Western Front, and in some areas the fighting continued. This was largely because officers feared that a truce would undermine the fighting spirit.

After Boxing Day, the friendly meetings in no man's land ended and the war continued.

Q. What day did the war between Germany and the Allies officially end?

28th December 1918

The results of the first General Election in Britain in which women were allowed to vote, resulted in David Lloyd George becoming Prime Minister. After years of campaigning, 8.5 million women had become eligible to vote. However, this was still only about 40% of the British female population.

Q In what year was full emancipation for women achieved?

29th December 1170

Four knights of King Henry II murdered Thomas Becket, the Archbishop of Canterbury, in Canterbury Cathedral.

When Henry II became King of England in 1154, he appointed his good friend Becket to be Chancellor – later promoting him to the position of Archbishop of Canterbury as well.

However, a disagreement between the friends arose after Becket insisted that the Church was above the law, rather than the other way around. Henry is said to have uttered the words, “Will no one rid me of this turbulent priest?”, which four of his knights took as an order to act.

The Christian world was shocked by Becket’s death, and in 1173 he was made a saint. In 1220, Becket’s bones were transported to Trinity Chapel at the east end of Canterbury Cathedral, which became a religious pilgrimage site.

Q. What is the name of the current Archbishop of Canterbury?

Answers on page 32

UNWANTED CHRISTMAS PRESENTS

Please don't send me a present each year,
Just a letter or card would be fine,
I have plenty of bath salts and hand cream,
And boxes of chocolates and wine.

I cannot use more than one diary,
Or calendars.... with beautiful views,
The house is choking with candles,
And with gifts that I never will use.

I have more tins of biscuits than Tesco's,
I don't need the latest cookbook,
I 'm not very keen on stollen cakes,
And a Christmas jumper is not a good look.

I dread being given a Poinsettia,
Those red leaves..... I just cannot bear,
But most of all please.... I beg you,
Don't buy me the paperback SPARE!

Janet Stokes

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Get out and about this season.

It is all too easy to hunker down indoors, preferably wrapped in a duvet, during the winter. But getting out into the fresh air and enjoying nature can be a boon to your health and mood.

Croydon is blessed with some lovely open spaces and hopefully every member lives within reach of at least one of them. As well as the large open areas of Farthing Downs, Riddlesdown Common, Addington Hills and Selsdon Woods, there are lots of smaller parks which are quite tucked away, and you may not know they exist unless you live in the immediate area.

Here is a non-definitive list of some of the less well-known parks and open spaces, though parking may be a problem at some of them.

Heathfield house and gardens, Ballards Way – car park entrance in Riesco drive. The Manor House, previously owned by the Riesco family, is now owned by the Council and used as a training centre by them. The formal gardens are best in spring, when the rhododendrons are in flower, and the view over the fields towards Addington is stunning.

Coombe Wood Gardens, Coombe Road. Some street parking in the access road and a car park opposite in Oaks Road. Formal gardens {which are now showing the effect of cuts to the Park Department's budget} a lovely pond with huge Koi carp, a large rhododendron area and lovely beech woods. The mounted park rangers were once stabled here – but no more. The café is very good and very popular. Unfortunately, the toilets at the old stables leave a lot to be desired (if they are open).

Millers Pond - Situated between residential streets in Shirley, this is a little oasis with a large open green and a lovely duck pond. Access from Shirley Way or Farm Lane. On street parking only.

Hutchinsons Bank – just off Featherbed Lane, Selsdon. An open green area on a steep hill, with grazing sheep! Selsdon Woods and Nature reserve is nearby. Muddy when wet.

Wandle Park - access from Cornwall Road where there is a car park, or from the tram stop. This park is another oasis of green with a riverside walk, edged by the new high-rise flats off the Purley Way. There is a skate park.

Grangewood Park, Thornton Heath. Access from Ross Road or Wharncliffe Road. A large park with ornamental gardens, woodland and a children's playground. There are also tennis courts and a bowling green.

Park Hill Park, between Barclay Road and Coombe Road. No onsite parking. This is a long, fairly narrow, park with spacious play areas, tennis courts and a small café near formal walled gardens.

Dollypers Hill Nature Reserve, Caterham Drive Coulsdon. Run by the London Wildlife Trust, this wonderful wildlife area has beautiful woodland and a wetland area.

1. Addiscombe Railway Park, Dalmally Road. This park was created on the disused railway site between East India Way and Dalmally Passage. It is designed to create a habitat for birds, wildlife and plant. A footpath and cycle way extend along its length.

For more information the [Parks and playgrounds directory | Croydon Council](#) provides full information on all the parks and open spaces in the borough, or a quick Google search will show you the parks nearest to you.

Set yourself a challenge to make it to as many previously unvisited parks as you can this winter and feel the benefit.

Puzzle pages

Sudoku – easy

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

The numbers 1-9 must appear in every row, column and 3x3 square

Sudoku – medium

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

Put all the letters of SNOWFLAKE into the grid below, following the normal Sudoku rules.

| | | | | | | | | |
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| O | | | | | | N | | |
| S | E | | | | | | | |
| | | W | F | | A | L | S | |
| | | | | | N | | O | |
| | | S | K | | E | N | | |
| | | W | | O | | | | |
| | | A | W | K | | E | L | |
| | | | | | | | S | W |
| | | | E | | | | | O |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| 1 | 20 | 25 | 4 | 17 | 26 | 25 | 13 | | 14 | 25 | 24 | | 6 | 23 |
| 20 | 18 | | | | 17 | | 9 | 26 | | 21 | | | | 20 |
| 25 | | 22 | 20 | 4 | 26 | 9 | 18 | 17 | 7 | 19 | | 10 | 9 | 12 |
| 21 | | | 21 | | 26 | | | 5 | | 12 | | 17 | 3 | 26 |
| 1 | 20 | 9 | 12 | 26 | 19 | 12 | 8 | 9 | 7 | 26 | 19 | 12 | | 7 |
| 20 | | 23 | 19 | 4 | 12 | | 9 | 7 | | | | 24 | | |
| 19 | 8 | | 1 | | | | 10 | | | 22 | | | | 2 |
| 21 | | 1 | 20 | 19 | 7 | 26 | 25 | 17 | 21 | 9 | 6 | 11 | 19 | |
| 21 | | | 25 | | 9 | 16 | 9 | | | 8 | 14 | | 21 | 17 |
| 25 | 8 | 25 | 26 | 9 | 26 | 19 | | | | 22 | | 10 | 25 | 4 |
| 9 | | | 19 | | | | 2 | | 10 | 9 | 5 | | 26 | |
| 11 | 9 | 20 | 24 | 9 | 6 | 11 | 19 | | | 12 | | | 16 | 9 |
| | 4 | | | 11 | 19 | 9 | 24 | 7 | | 7 | | 10 | | 15 |
| 4 | 25 | 9 | | 26 | | | 7 | 9 | 5 | | | 16 | 19 | 25 |
| 13 | 11 | 23 | 3 | 17 | 17 | 24 | | 4 | | 10 | 9 | 2 | 19 | 24 |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----------|----|----|----|----|----------|----|----|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | <i>S</i> | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | <i>L</i> | 12 | 13 |
| 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 1 | 26 |

A Codeword Puzzle designed and submitted by Colin Read. Answers on page 31.

General Knowledge Quiz - Mad Dogs and Englishmen.

This 20-question quiz has an added bonus. The first letters of each correct answer spell out the sub-title above.

1. Into which sea does the Nile flow?
2. Three continents lie on the Tropic of Capricorn, South America is one, name any of the other two?
3. In American currency 10 cents make a what?
4. Afrikaans was developed from which European language?
5. An Ortanique is a cross between a tangerine and what other fruit?
6. What Italian word for 'Scratched Drawing' can be found on walls all over the world?
7. What musical features 'Some Enchanted Evening' and 'There Is Nothing Like A Dame'?
8. What was the name of the first manned lunar landing mission in 1969?
9. Which boxer was nicknamed 'The Dark Destroyer'?
10. What was the name of Ritchie Valens' girlfriend?
11. What is the procedure called where an anaesthetic is injected close to the spinal cord?

12. What poisonous oily liquid occurs naturally in tobacco leaves?
13. Who had his first UK top 10 hit with 'Wichita Lineman'?
14. Which sign of the Zodiac is represented by the Scales?
15. In which country was Rudyard Kipling born?
16. What is the gemstone for September?
17. What instrument has been nicknamed the 'Mississippi Saxophone'?
18. One and a half litres of champagne is known as a what?
19. In alphabetical order name the three particles that make up an atom?
20. What is the common name of the 'Auora Borealis'?

Bonus Questions:

Who wrote the song?

Who had an album of the same name?

Answers on page 31

A LIVING HELL ON THE ISLAND OF SODOR - Colin Read

I went to visit Thomas the Tank Engine the other week. It was not a pretty sight. He was stuck at the back of a dingy loco shed on an obscure heritage railway in the Midlands. He was unloved and covered in cobwebs. A family of chickens had taken up residence in the firebox, and a grey squirrel was living in the chimney. Pigeons in the rafters made sure that he had a liberal sprinkling of droppings, which were piled high on his boiler. The familiar 'face' on the smokebox door appeared to be scowling.

"You know what I wanted to be when I came out of Darlington loco works back in 1923?"

"Tell me" I said.

"A superb 4-6-2 Pacific express locomotive specially designed for racing up and down the East Coast Main Line between London and Edinburgh, just like Mallard and other similarly magnificent machines.

I'd be finished in racing blue livery, with my name SIR THOMAS, perhaps, displayed proudly on brass plates on either side. I'd give the other locos a run for their money – just you wait and see.



The engineers had other ideas. I was awakened from my reverie when the underframe arrived at the works. A bit short I thought! Then the wheelsets – just three on either side. What's this I thought? – surely not an 0-6-0! And no tender. I'm going to be a soddin' tank engine!"

Sure enough, many years of pootling around the north-east followed for Thomas, hauling coal wagons, shunting sidings and acting as station pilot giving passenger trains a push, just to get them started, before he was shunted into a siding until needed again. It was certainly not what he had dreamt of.

"I mean, I couldn't go too far", Thomas continued, "with such a tiny coal bunker. Just menial tasks, as I've outlined. And as for getting to London or Edinburgh – in your dreams!"

This was where the Rev. Awdry arrived on the scene. 'Magnificent' he said as he spotted Thomas languishing in some siding.

'I must adopt you for my very own creation. Henceforth you shall be known as Thomas the Tank Engine. I shall write some books about you, describing your adventures and introduce you to other types of locomotives: some similar, some express types as well. And I'll introduce some carriages and humans to drive you and operate the signals. I could make quite a lot of money out of this!'

"Don't get me wrong," Thomas continued, "the Reverend was a perfect gentleman and we got along very well, but my ambitions in life in the fast lane – or should I say fast-track – had clearly gone down the tubes, if you'll pardon the pun – you see there's these tubes inside my boiler – oh, never mind, what's the use?"

Thomas went quiet for a bit.

"So Awdry took me under his wing, had me painted light blue, with a big cheesy grin on my smokebox door, would you believe?"

What could I do about it? Then the children's books started: Thomas and this, Thomas and that, Thomas and this (here, say that quickly and it sounds like rail joints!) The kids snapped them up like hot cakes.

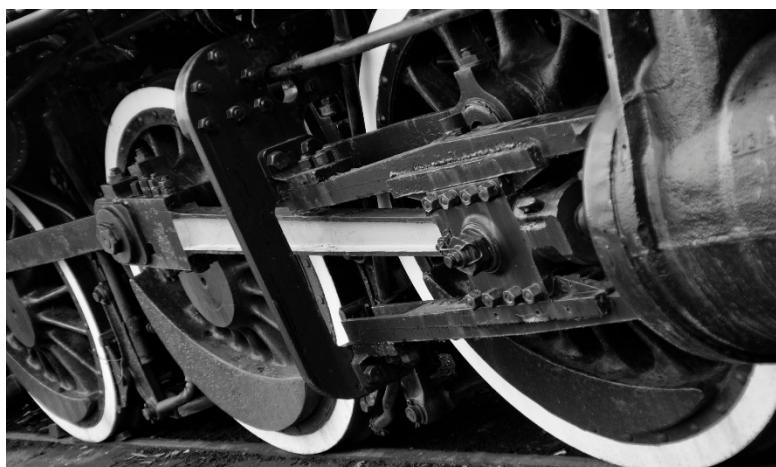
Ornaments followed. Toys, souvenirs, Thomas train sets, even Thomas bubble-bath holders, then television rights. When that got going Ivor the Engine wasn't in it! You name it – it had my face on it!

And did I get anything out of it? – a nice polish up, regular oiling or a nice batch of good Welsh steam coal – did I? – fairy cakes!

Awdry eventually sold the rights to another company, but that's another story and I - unloved and unwanted - was flogged off to a heritage railway.

Here I sit in this lousy old leaky shed – at pushing 100 years of age. The cold does nothing for my rheumatism. I don't suppose you could get me a tarpaulin or give my motion a quick oil-up?"

So, I did what I could for Thomas. He was very grateful and, as I left the shed, did I detect a tear in his massive painted eye or was it just a trick of the light?



Memories of Croydon Cinemas and Theatres

(In the early 1950s)

South to North:

The Regal in Purley was part of the ABC chain, linked with the Savoy. It was one of two cinemas in Purley, which also boasted either a dance hall or an ice-skating rink depending on the era.

The Astoria in central Purley was much better and it had a accompanying café. It got the films direct from the West End and most films tended to carry a less good supporting feature, the B film. Showings were continuous so one could arrive at any time of the afternoon or early evening and watch the programme right round to where you came in. You could even watch a film twice and no-one would know.

In South Croydon, there was a little cinema called the Classic. Prices were one shilling for the front stalls, and one and six for the other stalls or 2 shillings and 3pence for the Circle. One could buy a cheap ticket and move back when the film started if there were spaces.

The centre of Croydon had three theatres and four cinemas. The largest of the former was the massive Davis Theatre, which closed in 1959. It was home to the travelling Italian Opera and played films when no theatre was available. There was also the Grand, smaller than the Davis and which was home to local am-dram productions. That, too, closed for redevelopment. The third was the Croydon Empire, a variety theatre which would have shows with such people as Wilson, Keppel and Betty and fading variety stars like Evelyn Laye topping the bill. When this music hall closed, it became a cinema specialising in foreign films (not always of great quality.)

At the southern end of the main road were the Palladium and Hippodrome cinemas with the Scala and Odeon towards the centre of town. The Scala was subsumed into Allders, which is itself now defunct, and was the cinema where David Lean saw his first film at the age of six. The Odeon became part of the Whitgift Centre in 1985.

In the northern part of town there were two big cinemas, the Savoy (which was actually the ABC) and the Granada, in Thornton Heath,.

There were also some very small theatres which were short-lived and few of the above survived the redevelopment of Croydon in the 1960s. They were replaced by the Fairfield Halls as a concert venue, which incorporates the Ashcroft Theatre – named after Dame Peggy Ashcroft who opened it in 1962.

David Talbot.



Answers to Quiz:

1. Mediterranean
2. Australia, Africa
3. Dime
4. Dutch
5. Orange
6. Graffiti
7. South Pacific
8. Apollo XI
9. Nigel Benn
10. Donna
11. Epidural
12. Nicotine
13. Glen Cambell
14. Libra
15. India
16. Sapphire
17. Harmonica 1
8. Magnum
19. Electron, Neutron, Proton
20. Northern Lights

Bonus questions: The song was written by Noel Coward, and Joe Cocker had an album with the same title.

Codeword Solution:

1=Q; 2=Z; 3=W; 4=X; 5=G; 6=B; 7=S; 8=M; 9=A;
10=F; 11=L; 12=R; 13=C; 14=K; 15=V; 16=H; 17=O;
18=P; 19=E; 20=U; 21=N; 22=J; 23=Y; 24=D; 25=I;
26=T.

Answers to December questions:

1. King Stephen (After a war with Matilda who had been proclaimed heir by her father – known as The Great Anarchy)
2. Queen Anne
3. Catherine Connolly
4. 7.55 am
5. Sean Ono Lennon. His son with Cynthia is Julian Lennon.
6. Maria Corina Machado of Venezuela
7. None. Patterns were prepared but the coins were not released and most of the patterns were destroyed. A few samples are in private hands but most are in museums or the Royal Collection.
8. Richard Cromwell, Oliver's son. King Charles II was restored as King in 1660.
9. The Magna Carta, signed by King John in 1215.
10. Jacob Marley
11. Catherine Earnshaw
12. Yule
13. The fighting ended on 11th November 2018, when Germany signed an Armistice. However, on 28th June 1919 the Treaty of Versailles officially marked the end of hostilities between Germany and most of the Allied Powers.
14. 1928
15. Sarah Mullally