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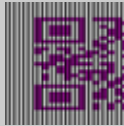
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Welcome to the December update from Warfield Parish Council

Christmas is coming to Warfield!

Please join us from 6pm on Friday 30th November for refreshments, carol singing and the lighting of the Warfield Christmas tree at the Whitegrove Community Centre near Warfield Tesco. The lighting of the tree will take place at 6.15pm

Review of the year

We have supported many local groups and charities throughout the year with awards of grants and other support. They do a fantastic job across a wide range of areas. We will be announcing next year's awards in January.

In July we hosted our biggest Summer of Fun event to date at the Warfield Memorial Ground. It was a gloriously hot summer's day and we had over 2,000 attendees enjoying the family fun. The 2019 event will take place on Friday 26th July.

October saw the 14th Arts Week held in collaboration with Binfield Parish Council and Winkfield Parish Council. Once again we had over 40 well attended events across the week with activities for young and old from children's pasta making to silver jewellery making to fabulous concerts. Thank you to everyone who attended. We have taken on board your feedback from this year as we look to make the 2019 event even better.

The Council participated in a range of activities to make the centenary of the end of World War 1, culminating in the lighting of a beacon at Cabbage Hill.

Work has continued to improve the communal facilities in the parish including the Whitegrove Community Centre and the Frost Folly car park next to the newly created park off Wellers Lane. A great place to go for a family walk on a winter's morning!

Parish/Borough Councillor Surgeries

The Parish Council holds monthly surgeries in the Parish Office when Parish and local Borough Councillors are available to enable residents to discuss any views or issues they have. Why not come along to the Parish Office to meet your Councillors on:-

Saturday 1st December 2018 10am – 12 noon

Saturday 5th January 2019 10am – 12 noon

The Councillors and Staff of Warfield Parish Council wish you a very merry Christmas and a happy new year!

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Top Toys for Christmas

In these days of iPads and online gaming do kids still play with toys? Yes of course they do. Toys have always changed to keep up with trends and technology and 2018 is no exception. Here we have six of the best.

Fingerlings Untamed Dinos (under £20)



Fingerlings are popular robotic friends which cling to your child's finger and respond to motion and sound. This year is all about the dinosaurs. There are several different Raptors, and word was out at time of

printing that there may be a T-Rex one released just before Christmas

LEGO Harry Potter Hogwarts Express (around £75)



The Harry Potter books remain perennially popular, and LEGO is always a hit so combine the two and you have a winning Christmas gift.

There is a Hogwarts Hall available but its super-expensive, so this is a good compromise with a nice solid train, five mini-figures plus Dementors.

Elasti Plasti (under £15)



So many kids love slime and this stuff is great. It's super-expandable and you can make giant bubbles with it. As a bonus it's non-sticky so parents will love it too, or at least not

hate it!



Monopoly 'Cheaters' edition or Fortnite Edition (£20-£25)

Almost everyone has at least one game of Monopoly at Christmas so ring the changes with the Cheaters edition. It encourages players to fake a dice roll, steal money and even skip rent. Ok...maybe it's not in the spirit of Christmas but it sounds more fun than

normal Monopoly. And if you want to prise your youngsters away from the computer this festive season, try tempting them with the Fortnite edition!

Ricky the Trick-Lovin Pet (£134.99)



Ok this one is pricey, but real pups are NOT for Christmas as we know, and when you factor in the cost and ongoing responsibility of a real puppy, including vet bills, and food, suddenly Ricky looks very good value indeed for a dog-loving child. He is soft and cuddly and has more than 100 sound and motion combinations. He can balance a biscuit on his nose and even give you a paw-shake! Frankly he makes my terrier look like a bit of a dunce. Ricky is perfect if your child is pestering you for a dog but you're not sure about the long-term commitment, and as a bonus, he doesn't shed hair!

GraviTrax Starter Set (around £50)



I love marble runs, never mind my kids, and GraviTrax is a super-cool marble run for the 21st Century. It

encourages the use of imagination in creating tracks and is educational too. It's great for teaching kids (and adults) about gravity, magnetism, and kinetic energy and it's so much fun. You can use the tasks and blueprints included to help you to get started but you'll soon be designing your own tracks. This is trickier than it might appear and is great for encouraging problem-solving skills. There's even a GraviTrax app to allow you build and test a track before building it in the real world.

Merry Christmas.

By Alison Foster

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Making strides - Volunteer Led Countryside Walks

Walks start at 10:30 unless otherwise stated. No booking or payment required.

For more information visit www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/parks-and-countryside/events

Leisurely – up to 2 miles (1 hour)

Moderate – up to 4 miles (1 3/4 hours)

Rambler – up to 5 1/2 miles (2 1/4 hours)

18 December – The Mince Pie Trail (R)

A longer walk with refreshments and a festive mince pie afterwards

Meet: Frost Folly car park, Weller's Lane, Warfield, Bracknell RG42 6EN

Main Programme

Booking and pre-payment is required for all our events unless otherwise stated.

www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/parks-and-countryside/events

Heathland Magic at Wildmoor Heath

Saturday 15, 10.30am-1.30pm

Try your hand at harvesting birch trees to help conserve this precious site. Enjoy a bonfire, marshmallows and possibly take home your own Christmas tree.

Tools & refreshments provided. Please bring work gloves. Suitable for all.

Meet: Wildmoor Heath car park, Crowthorne Road, RG45 7PP.

Cost: Free. Booking required: www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/parks-and-countryside/events

Christmas Treasure Hunts

Solve a series of festive clues to win a chocolate prize! Morning or afternoon events available (10am-11.30am or 1pm-2.30pm). Early booking recommended to avoid disappointment. Cost £4 per child. Booking required.

Saturday, 15 December at South Hill Park

Meet: Gazebo on rear field at South Hill Park, Ringmead, Bracknell, RG12 7PA.

Book a morning or afternoon slot: www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/parks-and-countryside/events

Sunday, 16 December at Lily Hill Park

Meet: Giant Picnic Table, Lily Hill Park, off Lily Hill Road, Bracknell, RG12 2RX.

Book a morning or afternoon slot: www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/parks-and-countryside/events

Bracknell Forest Natural History Society Talks

Venue: South Hill Park. Talks start at 7:30pm and end at about 9:30pm (Doors open from 7:15pm) Entrance fee for members £1; visitors £3; under 16 free (annual membership £12). No booking required.

December 10: Birds in Winter by Brian Clews

For further details about these events visit: www.bfnathistsoc.org.uk/meetings.html or contact Gill Cheetham on 01344 423440

Event Booking

Please pre-book events where stated by contacting the number provided. Events are free unless otherwise stated. Payment can be made prior to the event or on the day. This is non-refundable.

Events may be filmed and/or photographed - please specify if you do not wish to be included in this.

For outdoor events please wear suitable clothing and footwear. All children under 16 must be accompanied by a responsible adult.

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Garden View

This month - Plants for Christmas

With Christmas just around the corner I'm often asked what houseplants I recommend as gifts. Here are my top five, plus one non-houseplant.

Hippeastrum / Amaryllis - is a remarkable bulb, which produces 60cm / 2ft tall, fleshy drainpipe stems and flamboyant trumpet flowers up to 20cm / 8in across. 'Red Lion' with deep scarlet flowers; 'Apple Blossom' with pink-tinged white flowers, and 'Christmas Gift' with plain white flowers, are readily available. You can buy them as DIY plant-it-yourself kits, or as ready-planted gifts.

Citrus bushes make interesting presents. Sold at this time of year with both flowers and developing fruit, they are deliciously scented. Lemon varieties 'Meyer' and 'Four Seasons' are lovely but also consider calamondin oranges. The plant should be kept in a light, frost-free spot over the winter with a minimum night temperature of 5C, then in the summer the pot can be moved outside.

Cyclamen persicum is wonderfully decorative. The flowers range from white, through pink, to red. This is probably a gift for a more experienced gardener as persuading it to flower again can be a challenge, but it can be done. Keep it in full light in winter, at a steady 13C-16C. Give it a liquid feed fortnightly while it is in flower. Water less as the stems start to bend and collapse, then keep it completely dry for three months during its dormant period. Gently introduce water again as new leaves appear.

Schlumbergera x buckleyi, the Christmas cactus is a perennial favourite. It has protruding stamens at the end of succulent, flattened leaves, and pretty flowers. It likes high humidity while flowering so mist it regularly with a fine spray of clean water, and feed it monthly with a high-potash feed. When it's finished flowering put the plant in a light spot and keep the compost just moist.

Hyacinthus orientalis 'Ostara' is a stunning hyacinth with deep-blue flowers, powerfully scented and particularly nice when planted as a trio in a bowl or basket. Christmas hyacinths are 'forced' to flower earlier than they would naturally. They need a cool spot, preferably no more than 13C, so that they do not flop. No-one wants a floppy hyacinth! The bulbs can be planted in the garden afterwards so will continue to provide pleasure in future years.

Viburnum x bodnantense 'Dawn' is not a houseplant but it makes a fabulous gift. It flowers from November, while the leaves are still on, through the winter. The pink flowers are scented and a few sprigs in a small vase at this time of year are just joyous. Even better it is totally hardy so is great for the non-green-fingered, and can be planted out of a pot at any time, if the ground isn't frozen.

Don't wrap plants, just tie a big bow around the pot. It's a thoughtful touch to provide printed or hand-written instructions for aftercare. Make sure any living plant is well watered before you hand it over. They will probably be a bit neglected over the festive period, but a good watering should make sure that they last past New Year.

Happy festive gardening.



By Rachael Leverton

CHRISTMAS WITH AUTISM



My oldest son has a diagnosis of High Functioning Autism (what used to be called Asperger Syndrome). When he was younger Christmas nearly tipped both of us over the edge. Even without autism Christmas can be a special kind of hell, but if you're the parent of an autistic child, or a child with sensory issues, Christmas can come with a super-sized side-servicing of stress and meltdowns.

Autistic kids often find comfort in routine. Christmas means change: decorations, Christmas music, crowds, balloons, pop-up markets and parades, disruption to the normal school timetable. There's a lot of potential for upset. Identify possible changes and pre-warn your child. It can be helpful to show them photos or create a social story to help them understand the sequence of events and what will be expected of them. If your autistic child is old enough and / or verbal enough, involve them in planning which events they want to be part of, and which events they'd prefer to skip. For events they can't avoid, what will help? A fidget toy? Noise-cancelling headphones? This approach encourages them to develop their own coping strategies as they get older.

A visual method for counting down to Christmas is useful. My son found a

chocolate advent calendar too stressful, so we found a fabric one where a Christmas-themed item is added each day with the use of Velcro. Simple but effective.

Many ASD kids don't like surprises so it might be better to pre-discuss gifts. When our son was younger he didn't like wrapped gifts, even ours. We left his unwrapped, but my husband and I explained that wrapping was part of our Christmas to each other and it was important for us. We felt it was good for him to see that sometimes he needed to compromise too.

Discuss the Christmas Day schedule in advance. Who will arrive, when and how they should be greeted. Some kids (even those without ASD) hate hugging relatives so prewarn guests if this is an issue. It might be prudent to go through the etiquette for receiving a gift too. We explained to our son that if we don't like a gift we should still say thank you to show our appreciation of the thought. Be prepared for the odd slip-up! On receiving a scratchy woollen scarf from his Auntie one year he glanced at me and asked, "Do I thank her for the thought even if it was about how to make my neck as itchy as possible?" which left me smiling weakly at my bemused sister-in-law.

Finally, if they don't want to eat the Christmas food and would rather have a sandwich, or a pizza, let them. It's a small thing, don't sweat it. In the grand scheme of things it's not important. And things change. My fifteen-year-old autistic son now tucks in with the rest of us but for three years between the ages of four and seven he ate cheese on toast for Christmas lunch (because that's what he ate for lunch every day!). We look back now and smile fondly at the memory.

Merry Christmas.

By Alison Foster

Yoga Mats

Which is the right one for you?

Yoga is hugely popular now, with classes and YouTube tutorials dedicated to making our cores stronger and our bodies more flexible.

Yoga doesn't require a lot of equipment or space, which means it's easy to practice between sessions on your own. But if you're going to do this you will need a mat. There are all manner of different mats with prices ranging from £5-£100! Your choice should be based on the following:

Thickness: Thickness equates to comfort, but thicker is not necessarily better. While thicker mats are more comfortable to kneel on they can make it harder to balance and your tree pose may topple. A standard mat is 3-4mm thick. I find 5mm is a good compromise, that extra 1mm makes all the difference to comfort, yet allows me to feel the floor for good balance.

Material: This dictates the texture, stickiness, eco-friendliness, and sponginess (how much it yields to body-pressure), and how it wears over time. Most standard yoga mats are made of PVC. However newer, more earth-friendly options include natural and recycled rubber (avoid these if you are allergic to latex), jute, and organic cotton. Sponginess can vary widely with different blends of materials, but in general, PVC has the most "give" of any yoga mat material, while jute and cotton have the least.

Texture: The texture of your mat dictates how much traction it provides. Some people can't tolerate certain textures so it's as well to find one you like. I had a jute mat once which made me feel queasy when my skin rubbed against it. I prefer smooth bumps. My partner on the other hand loves the rough stuff and happily adopted my cast-off mat as his own!

Eco-friendliness: Practising yoga

has connected me more to my body, the air I breath, the food I eat and the world in which I live. Many people who are drawn to yoga care about their environment so practicing on a yoga mat that will ultimately end up as landfill can feel wrong. Earth-friendly yoga mats are typically made from natural or recycled rubber. They may incorporate natural materials, such as jute or organic cotton. If eco-friendliness is important to you avoid PVC mats.

Price: A basic 3-4mm plain solid-colour PVC yoga mat will be toward the low end of the price range. From there you may pay more for patterns, logos; extra thickness; antimicrobial treatments; and textures, especially raised tactile patterns. Eco-friendly yoga mats tend to be toward the higher end of the price range.

Size and style: These are personal choices. If you're tall you might need a longer mat. If you're a larger build you might prefer a wider one. As for style, I rather like a complex geometric pattern in soft colours as it allows me to see at a glance whether my feet are aligned, and gives me something nice to focus on in longer holds. But you can choose your favourite colour, or one that matches your decor, or even your yoga outfit!

Namaste.



By Tracey Anderson

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

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(solution on page 22)

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The Origins of Odd Christmas Traditions

Christmas is all about traditions, but why do we hang stockings, eat chocolate logs and drink eggnog (why would anyone drink eggnog?!)

Stockings – Noddy Holder belting out, 'Are you hanging up your stocking on the wall?' is a Christmas tradition in itself. There's no official explanation of why we hang socks up for Santa though. It probably derives from a tradition of leaving out hay-filled shoes on December 5, the eve of St. Nicholas' feast day. Children would wake to discover that the hay they left for St. Nick's donkey had been replaced with treats or coins.

Snacks for Santa – Whether it's milk and a chocolate digestive or sherry and mince pie, when we leave goodies for Father Christmas we're possibly participating in a tradition that some scholars date back to ancient Norse mythology! According to legend, Odin had an eight-legged horse named Sleipnir. Kids would leave treats for Sleipnir, hoping that Odin would favour them with gifts in return.

Carolling – You might suppose this is a centuries-old tradition but although the songs go back hundreds of years, visiting neighbours to bid them good luck and good cheer by singing for them didn't happen until the Victorian era.

Evergreen decorations – Before Christianity people decorated their homes with evergreens in the winter as a reminder that spring would return. Christians adopted the tradition and decorated evergreen trees with apples to represent the Garden of Eden. The practice really took off when the public learned that Queen Victoria had a decorated Christmas tree as a nod to her German husband's heritage.

The Yule Log – Yule logs also predate Christianity. As part of winter solstice celebrations, Gaels and Celts burned logs decorated with holly, ivy, and pinecones to cleanse themselves of the past year and welcome the next one. The practice

changed over time and eventually edible representations of the log appeared, which is why we eat chocolate logs today!

Eggnog – Surely the most revolting of traditions. However, historians agree that 'nog' was probably inspired by a medieval drink called 'posset', a milky drink made with eggs, milk, and sometimes figs or sherry. These were all pricey ingredients, so it was a bit of status symbol to offer it to guests. No-one seems to know for sure why it's called 'nog', but it maybe from the old word 'noggin' which was slang for a wooden cup.

Mistletoe - This was associated with fertility and vitality by Celtic Druids because it blossomed even during the most frigid winters. Quite how we got from that kissing under the mistletoe is a mystery, but we do know that it began in the 18th Century and started with guests kissing the hand of their host under the mistletoe, then became progressively more personal over the decades that followed!

Advent calendars - The modern advent calendar, with its little doors containing sweets or small gifts, began with Gerhard Lang in the early 1900s. His inspiration was a calendar that his mother made for him when he was a child, featuring 24 coloured pictures attached to a piece of cardboard.

Christmas Cards – In these days of high postage costs, texts and emails, plus more environmental awareness this tradition may be at risk of dying out. Christmas cards are a surprisingly recent tradition anyway, with the first formal card only hitting shelves in 1843.

By Tracey Anderson



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Victory Field - much loved by footballers, families, tennis and basketball players, skateboarders and dog walkers alike - has received a huge boost, thanks to the refurbished pavilion.

At no cost to the Council taxpayer - funded by developers' Section 106 contributions, the pavilion has benefitted from a £200,000 reconfiguration and upgrade. This is the biggest project undertaken by Sunninghill and Ascot Parish Council this year.

Action was vital as the former building didn't meet current safe-guarding standards: There was no lobby between the showers and the outside doors, the windows, doors, flooring and insulation were inadequate, sanitary wear was out-dated and there was no hot water.

Now, post upgrade, park users will have daily use of the accessible toilet, as requested. Also new, is a community room for clubs and meetings, equipped with table and chairs. The room is big enough for 12 to 15 standing people. Facilities even include a kitchenette - which may encourage a refreshments 'kiosk', to make any visit to the park complete!

Visually, the pavilion is now an asset to the Field, with its attractive wooden cladding, smart windows and doors and user-friendly look.

Chairman of the Leisure and Cultural committee Robert Ellison said: *"We are very happy with this major upgrade of the pavilion. It has been many years in the planning and promises to be a real asset to our parish. We are very keen that all members of our community old and young sporty and non-sporty will make use of this wonderful facility. The whole area is being improved, Tom Green's Field to the rear of the Victory Field is part way through a ten year plan of improvement and has become a pleasant area to walk and well worth exploring."*

And the sprucing up of the Victory Field doesn't stop there; the Parish Council is hoping to work with the Royal Borough to improve the footpath up to Oriental Road, with better steps and resurfacing.

It is most appropriate that this park is so favoured in this WWI centenary year. As well as the pucker pavilion, it is to be the focus of this year's Remembrance tributes: Victory Field was named to commemorate the Allies victory and was constructed by returning WW1 soldiers. The major earth-moving exercise was financed by a local landowner, to create work for the unemployed veterans.

Parish Chairman, Cllr Allison Sharpe, says she is delighted with the results of the upgrade: *"All Parish Councillors deliberated long and hard over what would be the right thing to do - and we truly hope that visitors to the Field can now appreciate a great new facility."*

An opening ceremony will mark the pavilion's official opening, in January. Watch this space for further details!

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7	9	2	1	6	5	8	3	4
1	5	8	3	4	7	9	6	2
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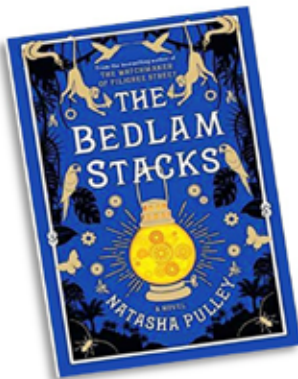
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A Good Read



The Bedlam Stacks by Natasha Pulley

If you like a novel that feels like a luxurious meal in a restaurant where you can enjoy each course at a slow pace, then this is the novel for you. This slow-burner is in

no rush to reach its conclusion and invites you to indulge in the world of 19th century Peru.

Pulley skilfully mixes facts and historical fiction with fantasy as the novel turns in a way that you don't expect.

It is 1859 and Merrick Tremayne is asked to undertake an expedition to Peru by the East India Company. As an ex-opium smuggler, and a gardener, they want him to supervise the search for cinchona trees. The bark of these trees produces quinine, a much sought-after treatment for malaria. Despite knowing that it is a suicide mission, since others have tried and failed, he agrees to go to get away from his miserable life at home. Once in Peru he travels to a mysterious village, given the name Bedlam Stacks. Three large pillars of rock rise into the sky with homes and shops built on to the sides of them.

And this is where fact (the expedition did take place, led by Clement Markham, who accompanies the fictitious Merrick) and historical fiction meets fantasy and you realise that the novel is not going where you thought it might. A line of salt that no one can cross, statues that move, and a priest with knowledge far beyond his years. What will Merrick discover, and will it ultimately be more valuable to him than the precious quinine?

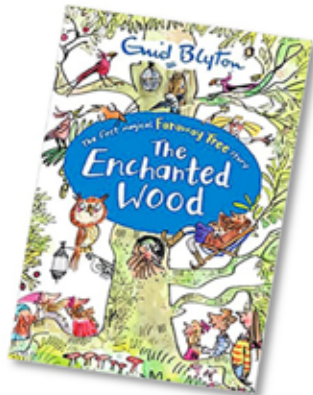
The Enchanted Wood by Enid Blyton

Enid Blyton is an author that most adults will be familiar with and now her books are finding a new generation of readers. Whilst not as well-known as her Famous Five series, or any of her boarding school series, this is nevertheless well loved and fondly remembered.

Woods can be mysterious places, full of old trees. Some are older and bigger than others and one such tree is the Magic Faraway Tree. When siblings Joe, Frannie, and Beth move to the outskirts of the wood, they go exploring and discover the tree. Unable to see the top they decide to climb it and find that it is inhabited by many magical creatures. There is Silky the fairy, Dame Washalot who spends her time washing laundry and throwing the dirty water down the side of the tree, and Moonface, a happy man with a face like the moon who befriends the children.

At the very top of the tree is a ladder and here is the most magical thing about the tree. Each time that the children visit they can climb the ladder and visit a magical land from the Land of Birthdays to the Land of Do-As-You-Please. Some are pleasant, some are not, but whatever they are the children know that they must not stay too long lest the land moves on to another tree in another wood.

Just as the children never know what they will find at the top of the tree, neither does the reader. All the reader knows is that adventure will be had, and their imagination ignited.



By Willow Coby

The Perfect Cheeseboard



How much cheese? - Allow about 100g-125g (3½-4oz) cheese per person if your cheeseboard is being served after a meal, or slightly more - 150g (5oz) per person if you're serving it as a snack/light meal.

Which cheese? - Three or four cheeses is enough – more than that and there's too much for the palate to enjoy. The cheeses should be different styles, textures and flavours. Cheddar, Stilton and Brie is a classic combination, as it mixes a hard, soft and a blue. Why not go totally British with a traditional West Country Farmhouse

Cheddar matched with Cropwell Bishop, a wonderful robust blue, and maybe Bath Soft Cheese, which is gorgeously gooey and mushroomy in flavour. It's nice to put one wild-card cheese on the board like a citrusy goat's cheese or meaty smoked cheese like St James.

Crackers - A good oat biscuit, cracker or artisan bread will complement the cheese. Add a chutney - look for unusual brands at farmers' markets, and some apples or grapes.

Drinks - After a meal a sweet fortified white wine is always good. You could even try a whiskey, or a gin and tonic. If the board is going to serve as a light meal, then beer or cider is a good choice.

A note on storage - Store in a cold room or the bottom of the fridge, wrapped in waxed paper if possible. This allows the cheese to breathe. Let the cheese to come up to room temperature for about 20 minutes before serving for maximum flavour.

By Tom Hancock



Steve Coventry

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Smør Bullar

Festive Scandinavian cookies, though no-one seems to know their exact origins. These small spheres of butter, flour, powdered sugar and nuts, dusted with more powdered sugar for good measure are a Christmas delight.

Makes: 20-24 cookies

Preparation time: 20 minutes

Cooking time: 8-10 minutes

Ingredients

225g Butter

60g Icing sugar

300g Plain flour, sifted

¼ tsp salt

1 tsp vanilla essence

100g Pecan nuts or walnuts, chopped fine

Extra icing sugar for dusting.

Method

Preheat oven to 200C / Gas mark 6

Cream the butter and sugar together thoroughly. Add flour, salt, vanilla and pecans, and mix well. Cover dough and chill for half an hour.

Form dough into small balls (about 1 inch / 2.5cm diameter). If the dough seems too crumbly don't be tempted to add water or the resulting cookies will be hard, just let the heat from your hands gradually bring it all together. Place 2 inches / 5cm apart on an ungreased baking sheet.

Bake until set but NOT brown (8-10 minutes). Allow to cool for 3 minutes before removing from baking sheet, then roll in icing sugar. When completely cool, roll in the icing sugar again. They make lovely festive handmade gifts in pretty boxes



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THE HISTORY OF CHRISTMAS BAUBLES

Every year we go with the children to choose a new Christmas tree decoration. We don't do themed trees in our house so our annual tree is a history of the kids' eclectic and often eccentric tastes down the years. Traditional inherited hand blown glass ornaments nestle alongside a plastic gingerbread man, a gaudy fairy in striped tights, a robot, a festive dachshund,

and a host of other unlikely characters. Every year is a delight of discovery as my teens and preteens unpack, reminisce and tease each other over their past choices.

But where did the idea of decorations originate and how did they evolve into what they've now become?

Tinsel originated in Germany in the early 1600s. Back then it was made from real shredded silver. Tinsel makers hammered the silver until it was thin, then cut it into strips. It was so popular that tinsel machines were invented to keep up with demand. Clearly silver was a little expensive and eventually the plastic variety took over.

We have the Germans to thank for baubles. They were invented in the 1840s by Hans Greiner. His original glass fruit and nuts developed into beautiful ornate ornaments which so charmed Queen Victoria that she brought them back to Britain.

As they were all hand-crafted the first, baubles were very expensive. Improvements in plastic manufacturing



meant that cheaper versions became available, and baubles became available to the masses.

The green fir tree was originally used by Pagans and Christians to celebrate winter. Pagans used branches of the fir tree to decorate their homes during the winter solstice, as a reminder that spring would come

again. The Christians adopted them later.

The tradition of Christmas trees seems to have originated about 1000 years ago in Northern Europe. They were often hung upside down from the rafters. In modern times improved manufacturing techniques have allowed for the production of artificial trees which can be very difficult to tell from the real thing!

In Victorian times, Christmas trees were been decorated with candles. In 1895, an American man, Ralph Morris, was so concerned about the fire hazard of candles and Christmas trees that he invented the first electric Christmas lights, which are similar to those still in use today.

Over the years there have been glass and plastic variations of reindeers, stars, fruit, butterflies, birds and even festive dachshunds (see above!) but the debate still rages about whether there should be an angel or a star on top of the tree.

Merry Christmas.

By Tracey Anderson

The Jigsaw Revival

I was Christmas shopping recently and for the first time in many years found myself browsing jigsaw puzzles. I was mesmerised by the number of different types and designs. There were funny ones, quirky ones, puzzles with



irregular-shaped pieces, gloriously beautiful reproductions of famous works of art, extra-tricky pictures of boxes of sweets, or baked beans, and some fabulous three-dimensional puzzles. These were not the jigsaws of my youth. The jigsaws I remember came in faded boxes with boring photos of country cottages, or a generic blue-green landscape on the lid. No, these jigsaws looked enticing and exciting. A jigsaw revival seems to have taken place and I had somehow missed it.

Jigsaws actually originated in the late 18th century, when European map makers pasted maps on to wood and cut them into pieces. They were a useful way to teach children about geography.

Puzzles as an adult pastime emerged around 1900. They were expensive because each piece was cut individually, but they quickly became popular social pursuits in country houses for weekend parties.

As production became cheaper they became popular with the masses too. In the interwar period of the 1920s-1930s many companies used them as advertising gimmicks. Lots of jigsaws from that period depict black and white photographs of factories and workers or products. We aren't talking high art here but if you come across them in charity shops they possess their own charm.

Jigsaws can be a silent and calming

activity, or done in pairs or groups they can be sociable affairs. They are also gloriously cheap compared with other forms of entertainment, which explains why weekly cardboard puzzles became a national obsession

in the US after the economic crash of 1929; in fact so many people wanted them that there was a national jigsaw famine!

In our own current slow economy and extended period of austerity jigsaws seem to be gaining in popularity again. Like adult colouring books they are absorbing and stimulating but not overly demanding so can be seen as a mindful activity and as such may be beneficial to our mental health.

Dame Margaret Drabble the author became a fan of jigsaws when her husband was undergoing extensive treatment for cancer. She couldn't concentrate on books or crossword puzzles but jigsaws helped her to focus. She says they gave her an illusion of control, creating order from chaos during a period of intense stress, and she feels they actually saved her sanity. She wrote a book, *The Pattern on the Carpet*, about her personal experience.

Our own queen is said to be a huge jigsaw fan. Apparently she borrows regularly from the The British Jigsaw Puzzle Library. This wonderful institution (of which I knew nothing prior to researching this article) houses thousands of beautiful hand cut wooden jigsaw puzzles, which can be borrowed. Membership for the jigsaw enthusiast in your life, along with Drabble's book might be a rather inspired Christmas present this year perhaps?

Happy puzzling.

By Sarah Davey

STAY SAFE ONLINE

Use the latest OS (Operating System) -

The most recent OS is generally the safest. Microsoft's Windows 10 is their most up-to-date OS, and anything earlier should really be upgraded. Don't forget that free software updates are issued all the time. Take advantage of these and update regularly.

Install security software - The main threats to your online security are hackers, viruses and spyware, (this last one is a programme that may be used to log your credit card details). Ideally you should have a firewall, plus antivirus and anti-spyware software as an absolute minimum. You really need all three, because individually they won't protect you against every attack. Be sure to update them regularly.

Ditch the SPAM! - As far as possible don't



open anything you think is SPAM. Use 'disposable' email addresses for registrations on sites with which you're unfamiliar and use SPAM filter software.

Wi-Fi Wisdom - Wireless networks can offer an easy way for people to eavesdrop on your PC.

Because they use radio waves, anyone within range can pick up the signal, making them a target for hackers who could be after your financial details, as well as freeloading unauthorised users who might piggyback your signal to access your broadband connection. Use an up-to-date router. Make sure you rename your network to make it more difficult to find, create a unique password and always turn on the encryption.

Backup! Backup! Backup! Just in case. Back all your data up regularly, and from time to time check the backups.

By Sarah Davey

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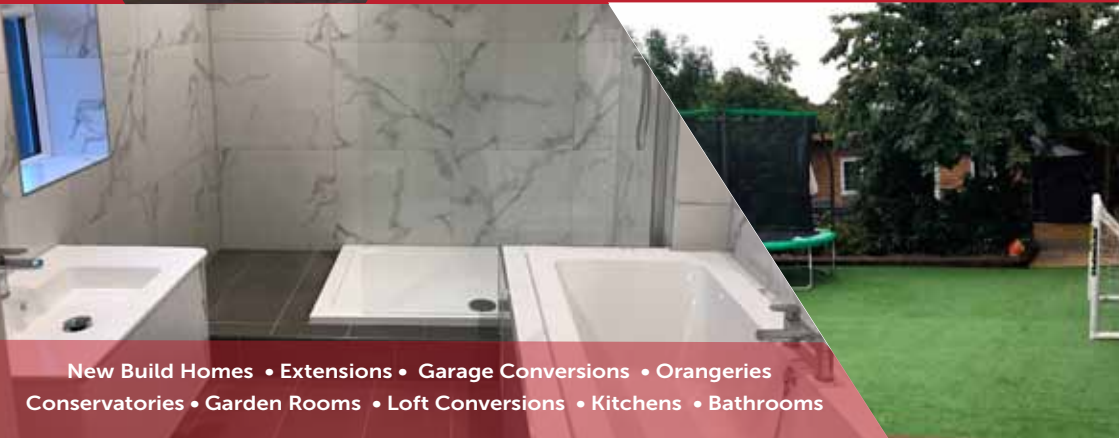
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