

75th Edition

The Agiot

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Village News

By Dr. Lionel Mann

The village sleeps in the winter with a silence broken only by the screaming of passing hotted-up scooters, the screech of chain-saws through firewood and the barking of dogs regularly giving tongue. An occasional altercation between neighbours adds variety.

As is their custom the colony of cats that eke out an existence around the rubbish bins are sleeping in the warmth of the lights of the Nativity in the bandstand of the plateia, but this year Georgos has needed to protect the display with hurdles to keep out dogs. Bonno delights in chasing cats and Mandy is skittishly bouncing around all over the place.

The weather for Christmas was definitely soggy and cold. But everyone appeared cheerful despite the continuous heavy rain and howling wind.

By Paul McGovern

A postscript to the Nativity story is the cleverness of our new plateia stray dog-we call him NiceStray, the hotel calls him Booboo. A custom of mine each morning is to go to the deserted square very early morning, sometimes pre-dawn, with a bag of breakfast for the dogs. Our three race up ahead of me on the short walk, knowing this is a good time of day. Sometimes Alfie-the taverna dog-is there, and Booboo is stretching and wagging his tail, he is arising from his very comfortable straw bed next to Jesus. Giorgio's defences have failed miserably against this crafty canine. Bono likes to visit

From all in Agios

Jesus too, oddly he takes little notice of Mary, Joseph, the Wise Men or livestock attending the crib. Booboo extends a paw and then we dine- I skip the dog biscuits but I do have a coffee. Then the walk into the valley, Alfie is too lazy to come far, but the pack are keen for the adventure. The Afra stream is the target most days. On the way Bono wants to beat up any goat, sheep, cat, dog or even horse he comes across. The others just do doggy business. One day I was returning, later than usual owing to the Christmas sloth, and it was raining quite heavily. I thought, 'Only mad dogs and Englishmen would be out in this'. Sure enough, around the bend appears friend Adrian in Sou'wester with his dog Bella and his daughter's dog Woodstock. Two men, six dogs and the rain.

There is been a pool of flu around the family and village this Christmas, which kept us largely indoors from Boxing Day. Oh dear. More kilos. And the onslaught had started on the evening of the 21st when Dr Lionel gave his annual Carols night. It was a particularly jolly one. It was the best I have heard Lionel play for some time. The party of thirty six was jolly, and many sang or mimed perfectly. Lula delivered some really scrummy mincepies and pumpkin pie and other tasties. The mulled wine vanished. The camera was forgotten but I know Victoria from Brenda took some snaps. She is a friend of Sue Done. Sue, if you read this can you please ask Brenda to send in some jpegs. Thanx.

Christmas 2013



Christmas in town



"Bono - resting from incidents"



"Georgos' defences"

*Santa Claus
Alive and well —>
In Agios Ioannis*



Letters to the Editor

Dear Paul

Reading 'The World of Simon' in December's issue of the Agiot I was reminded of a conversation I had with one of those extraordinary characters of the post war era. (He'd been one of the very early Silicon Valley chaps and the little company he and some chums set up eventually became better know as Intel. Don't ask about the bicycle trip he made across Europe with a massive stack of cash in his panniers destined for Switzerland - and it wasn't his money). Leastways I ended up chatting to him and the subject turned to people such as Jean Marie le Pen, Pim Fortuyn etc. and one book he suggested I read was 'The Road to Serfdom' by Friedrich Hayek as quick explanation of how a depression can lead to such groups as Golden Dawn gaining popularity and ultimately, control. Those with

connections to Corfu/Greece may find it interesting given the current state of affairs.

I am more optimistic and believe that many Greeks recognise that GD and its ilk promoting xenophobia would result in a massive income stream deserting Greece and making a bad situation worse.

Best wishes - and keep up the good work with both the Agiot and of course, Agiotfest - the firecracker of festivals!

Neil Hendriksen

variously of Cowes, Isle of Wight and Vasilika, Corfu

PS One grain of comfort for those in despair of the state of the roads in Corfu - the Isle of Wight has some stretches of tarmac that make Corfu roads look as smooth as a

billiard table - and it took BT 2 weeks to fix my phone and internet.=

ED.

Thanks Neil for this,

It is always really gratifying and heartening to get letters in from our little publication; it definitely inspires us to continue with our efforts.

I'll pop your interesting answer into next month's issue and let us see if it elicits further response.

Kind regards, and thanks again,

Letters continued on Page 3

Letters to the Editor continued

A true Agiot's anthropological and geographic and historic input into the area known by us as the Cactus Hilton, but which we should always now correctly refer to as the NEW Cactus Hilton, to make distinct the former. and contemporaneous borders of this sacred plot.

Its the way I tell them!!

Yea not sure why I can remember all the crap that went down then so exact maybe coz I did walk to Mirt-teotisa and back every day (hitching on back of a moped with a whole family on it) to body surf with only 10 Drcs for one soft drink on way back and then in the evening all the AID's relied on the touristo's to turn their backs when we nicked their vinos; Mataxa; Ouso or anything they were trying to drink. But I was working with Dino in the day and sometimes the Garsonia at Kostas in the evenings.

Some thing I can't remember any of the crowd that you identify as 'old Agious' Cactus Hilton team (none of them are! they are mostly all 80s Damage and Nick never stayed there and Paul G maybe a night here and then) what we have not talked about is that every morning around 6 or 7am sometimes earlier in the middle of the night but before Kosta and Nitza got up and the Sq was deserted 4 or 5am even, one or two of the real Cactus Hilton residents Bum Bastard Degenerates etal had to get up and would crawl out in rags of their dilapidated tents they had scavenged from the broken holiday dreams of the Touristos and like blood splattered Zombies (*not called the Cactus Hilton for no reason every one had scares all over their bodies,*

great entertainment when someone miscalculated and walked into the cactus drunk and stoned and got trapped the rest who would gather round sit on tree stumps drinking what was left for hours of fun watching if they/you could get themselves out of the Cactus, many were left till after dawn when gulls would swoop down and pluck out their last??? luckily the locals took their cries of pain as a dog) the Road Kill Zombies would start crawling over their own foetus and piss outside their 'friends' tent (of course never outside your own) towards the rich pickings of the 'Abandoned Tables Of Kosta' some say this is Myth they are wrong! The tables were there! and could be laden with a treasure trove of half empty bottles of wine; Ouzo; Retzina and packs of cigarettes; lighters and clothes!!!! jackets pullovers and scarfs which were hidden until we suspected the owner had f.... off. And on many occasion a resident of the CH could be found under one of the tables after their amorous chat up was rejected, then we would remove their shoes and clothing and leave them for Kosta to 'talk to'. It was a great educational experience for all! no money, no chance of a parent or anyone else sending dosh we were all skint on our own and it was up to us and that was how all of us went on to Pakistan, Afcanistan, India and the Far East Aussy etc with no back up plan, it is all too safe these days.

The real CH was not the whole piece of land that is assumed now to be CH ie Paul and Sally house is on the Gorbals, next door to Easterhouse. The true CH was only one quite small piece of land with a horse shoe shape of BIG cactus 'trees' and not there any long-

er, where the Nottingham Boys me Haigy and TT put up nicked tents, it was for protection basically from the Afra and Agious boys Yea joke they were more scarred of us they just got pissed of coz we were kamakying all the touristo capellas and they were all married. Hope that has been helpful ask Kosta why he thinks I have the memory??

Will be in touch before Christmas



Luv Piki

'When Nitsa Was Young'

Because of coughs and colds it was not possible to interview Kostas Halikia for his continuance of 'When Nitsa Was Young' so this will now be pinned next month we hope. Kostas celebrates his 86th birthday on the First day of 2014.

Agiots Nostalgia Corner



Here are some more snaps of yesteryear in Agios Ioannis. Please mail in and identify the culprits. The first correct and corroborated identification of the ‘bus crew’ will entitle the identifier to a free flagon of Vino Calapso at Spiti Sofia next summer!

The 100+ Club

The 100+ Club draw coincided with the evening, which added to the foam. Last month’s winners Les and Chris Woods, of Ellesmere Port, kindly donated their 70 Euros winnings to the Greek Orthodox Church, to buy a food parcel for the soup kitchens the Church administers in Town. Thank you Les and Chris for this fantastic gesture, coinciding with this special time of the year. Please go to <https://www.facebook.com/groups/the100plusclub/?fref=ts> for regular updates.

R.I.P. Kostas Garnavos

B.B.C. (Big Bad Costas – Kostas Garnavos) was not from our village of Agios Ioannis; he was from neighbouring Afra.

Nonetheless, he was well-known hereabouts and owned a small bar on the main road, just down from Time-Out.

Following a struggle with liver cancer which had spread to his other organs quite rapidly, he took himself to bed the weekend before Christmas and quietly turned off the light.

Many of the Agiots from the halcyon days of the New Cactus Hilton will remember him and join this farewell. I knew him a little for a few years here. He was a ‘bad boy’. I liked him. He had a good heart. Like most of us, he was a mixture of shadow and light.

As long as we draw breath he will be remembered.

Corfu Weather Statistics

	Max	Avg	Min
Temperature			
Max Temperature	22 °C	16 °C	9 °C
Mean Temperature	17 °C	11 °C	8 °C
Min Temperature	13 °C	5 °C	2 °C
Degree Days			
Heating Degree Days (base 65)	19	14	2
Cooling Degree Days (base 65)	0	0	0
Growing Degree Days (base 50)	12	2	0
Dew Point			
Dew Point	14 °C	7 °C	-4 °C
Precipitation			
Precipitation	18.0 mm	1.6 mm	0.0 mm
Snowdepth - - -			
Wind			
Wind	48 km/h	6 km/h	0 km/h
Gust Wind	66 km/h	51 km/h	37 km/h
Sea Level Pressure	1034 hPa	1022 hPa	1004 hPa

Read more at:

http://www.wunderground.com/history/airport/LGKR/2013/9/1/MonthlyHistory.html?req_city=NA&req_state=NA&req_statename=NA#PFq1VRYHlbugcTGf.99

Hilary's Ramblings

By
Hilary Paipeti

The little valley which is my Corfu home is squeezed between the conifer-covered ridge of the Theotoky Estate and the west coast hills between Ermones and Giannades. The valley starts as a wide grassy plain with the Ropa River as its southern border, and gradually narrows northwards to its apex watershed at Tristrato Crossroads, becoming more leafy and lush in the process. The narrow road along the valley carries little more than local traffic, mainly at this time of year hunters, residents of the half-dozen houses which border it, and Vatos residents transporting their kids to and from school.

It's a pleasant walk along this quiet byway, but for some rambling variety - and for interesting canine scents - I have gradually scouted out a cross-country route through the pastures and plots between the road and the river (on the other side of the watercourse, the Corfu Trail takes a parallel line by way of a grassy lane). The entry point for the new route is through a belt of deciduous trees which border a spring-fed brook, then on across fields defined by shallow ditches and wild hedges of shrub, cane and reed. Onward, a vast pasture overlays the fossilised remains of tilled fields; two more hedge-gaps, and the way skirts an olive grove, dives over a band of reeds and winds through a copse, suddenly emerging into an extensive vineyard which slopes gently from the road to the riverbank. At the bottom corner of this demesne (I am guessing it is part of the Theotoky holding) I came upon a way across the river - a glissade down the bank and a scramble up

the other side. It gives access to the hunters' paths in the fields on the eastern side of the valley, and onto the lane which carries the Corfu Trail. This crossing point is a rarity, since elsewhere along the watercourse the banks are choked with dense thickets of bramble and cane.

On the far edge of the vineyard, across a deep ditch and two embankments, new scenes materialise - a mature olive grove, a fenced ploughed plot, and a shady avenue leading back to the road. Here my onward exploration was curtailed by the Christmas downpours, but I am sure that I shall find another cunningly concealed cranny, passage into yet another landscape; and ultimately I shall arrive cross-country at Tristrato.

To locate the various throughways between fields, groves and coppices remains the biggest challenge of these explorations. Sometimes a patch of ground appears to be a dead end, with no path out through the bordering growth. But then you spot a vague ground-trail made by hunters' footsteps, showing the way to another through-passage.

Strangely, the process reminded me of the computer game Bugdom. In this romp through ten levels (I'm on Level Four as I keep getting eaten by a low-flying bat), each enacted in a different part of a garden (the Lawn, the Pond, the Forest etc), you are a beetle whose task it is to free Ladybugs, whilst fending off angry ants, poisonous caterpillars, brainsucking mozzies (nasty ones, these), and ferocious bees. You have to find keys for gates into other sections of the garden, and a coin to pay the ferryman across the pond - and you must search out hidden passages through reeds or stands of

sunflowers, taking you into new landscapes, and to new rewards and new hazards.

Very like my scout along the valley.

But at least in real life I don't encounter bigger-than-me ants armed with clubs and zappers, nor giant slugs - and the only peril is mud.

For now the torrents have arrived, and until another dry spell allows the land to drain, the way through the fields is impassable. Game Over!

MouseHouse

MouseHouse Ltd is a major sponsor for Agiotfest

This is a brilliantly-run company operating in the north of England from the Peak District area.

Ocay Services has dealt with MouseHouse Ltd for a number of years now and would highly recommend them being the first people to contact in the UK for all types of scaffolding jobs. A recent Contract they successfully completed was in conjunction with major re-roofing at Chatsworth House. But no job is too small for their consideration and advice.

Managing Director Diane Carden says;

'We have over 60 years combined experience in scaffolding We provide a cost effective and friendly service We are conversant in all the latest regulations concerning scaffolding We have a very good reputation within the scaffolding industry We strive to help at any time - even out of hours'

Fleishpots Of The North

By
Mark Thompson

Here in Corfu there many things I enjoy over the winter in the absence of the 'tourist'. If you are involved in a car accident, say, you're more than likely to be acquainted with the perpetrator. That was certainly true in my case in that Nikos is a near neighbour. Since Nikos is in his 80s and clinically blind I really had no excuse to be on the road at the same time as him. Despite my best efforts to manoeuvre up the banking and out of danger he followed me across the road to ensure a collision. I could but do little but admire his determination.

Since the accident we've become firm friends and the processing of my claim taught me a lot about how insurance works in Greece though I'll say nothing more of that here. The roads, in the main, are more peaceful at this time of year and given that the dog needs exercise we try to get out every day.

Nowadays it's also a pleasure to be able to walk on the beach with the dog and not be chased by angry, naked Germans-but I won't tell you which beach! I appreciate that there are health issues at stake, but I always go armed with plastic bags for the necessary. It's just those tanned and not so tanned 'wobbly bits' sometimes put me off my lunch.

Our dog, Chloe, loves both to run and dig on the beach. She usually covers twice the distance I do and this is the sort of 'dog walking' I like. This gives me time to indulge in another of favourite past-times, beach-combing. I'm given to collect-

ing unconsidered trifles, for instance a number of floats from fishing nets adorn the fences around my patio. They're of no value and the adornment serves no purpose, though the shape and colour of floats pleases me.

Further beach-combing that I enjoy and can turn to a profit is collecting what I call the 'Jewels of Corfu', knowing as I do beaches where rough, uncut emeralds, opals and sometimes even sapphires are there for the taking. Unfortunately I can't tell which beaches, for obvious reasons.

I regularly send a packet of uncut stones to my contact in Amsterdam, Meneer Heineken, who arranges for the jewels to be polished and cut. Some are sold in gems markets of northern Europe and others returned to me here in Corfu. I have contacts amongst the more discerning jewelers in town to which I sell direct thus cutting out any number of 'middle-men'. So ladies take another look in your jewellery box if you have any rings, bracelets, necklaces, or tiaras etc., bought in Corfu the gems may have been sourced by yours truly. Well it keeps me in tea and crumpets over the winter!

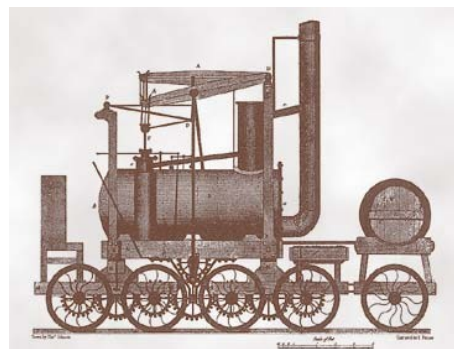
Now for some news, albeit from an unlikely source, relating to the development of the Corfu Light Railway (CLR) accompanying this article is a series of photos that might be of interest to those following the building of the railway. The first picture shows a topographic representation; OK with a little poetic licence, of the view from what

will be Aleimmatades Junction looking towards Palaiokastritsa Halt.



It is hoped that views such as these will attract substantial inward investment from multi-national corporations, fund managers, venture capitalists etc., which will ensure the installation of further, lengthy stretches of the 'permanent way' and also whet the appetite of the tourists. Such pictures will appear in lavish brochure, under construction as I write, offering such delights as; race-day specials, dance excursions, picnic parties and so forth. It is hoped that other such artist's impression will become available, as funds come to hand, thus enabling the brochure to be completed in good time.

The next picture show an example of the likely 'standard' rolling stock fuelled by olive wood and lubricated with olive oil a smooth efficient ride should be guaranteed.



Continued on Pgs 7

Fleishpots of the North
Continued from Page 6

Finally there is an example of the likely 'narrow-gauge' rolling stock for use on those vertiginous valley sides known to us all on Corfu. For instance, as from the picture mentioned above, the run down into 'Palaio'. Also on the Strinilas to Kassiopi spur, via Barbáti, taking in as it does the notorious 'Agni bend' known to foot-plate men persons far and wide, and with good reason, as 'Dead Man's Curve'.



For these sharp descents and indeed ascents the line switches to

narrow gauge that employs, for extra safety, the rack and pinion system, which originated in Leeds-naturally, though there maybe some inevitable delay with the transfer of passengers, luggage, freight etc. However this being Greece such hold-ups are to be anticipated and will, in any event, be factored into the timetable.

Working with our friends at the National Railway Museum at York it is hoped in due course that a full-scale exhibition can be staged. This will feature further pictorial representations of the likely rolling stock, the livery for CLR, when colours are agreed, examples of uniforms, equipment and so forth. In addition the museum will maintain a permanent display of the artist's impressions above mentioned as they are completed.

It is intention of all parties that the exhibition should coincide with a major race meeting at York Races,

say the Dante Stakes-an important Derby trial, so it will not so much *Surf & Turf* as *Turf & Track* or indeed (Race)Track& (Railway)Track. So the Fat Controller is also looking into the possibility of combined reduced price ticket covering both events perhaps a romantic weekend for two or three, we are a 'broad church' after all, or even a 'Honeymoon Special', so watch this space.

Now a 'one-off' quiz to help blow away those post-Christmas blues: what links Ballindalloch Castle, Banffshire, Scotland, home to the Macpherson-Grants since 1546 and Lidl supermarkets? The unusual prize for this unique quiz is a packet of frozen Brussels' sprouts, one for each of the two lucky winners. What more incentive do you need?

Aunty Lula's Love-bites

Leek and Cheese Crepes

Ingredients
(makes about 8)

Pancakes:
100g plain flour
¼ tsp salt
2 eggs
300 ml milk

Filling:
400g butter
700g leeks (trimmed and chopped)
2 garlic cloves (peeled and crushed)
225g Greek Mizithra crumbled
100g Edam cheese
Salt, pepper
Oil for frying

Go:

To make the pancakes: place flour, salt, eggs and milk into a food processor or liquidiser.

To cook the pancakes: Heat a little oil in a 20cm (about) pan and swirl enough batter over to thinly cover the base of the pan. Cook for 1 minute until lightly golden.

Pre-heat oven to 180°C.

To make the filling: Melt 25g of the butter in a frying pan, add the leeks and garlic and cook until tender.

Stir in the cheeses and cook until the Edam melts. Add seasoning.

Divide the filling between pancakes.

Fold pancakes in half and half again to make a cornet shape. Arrange in a shallow dish, dot with remaining butter and bake for 10–15 minutes until piping hot and golden.

Bon appetit!

The Church of Pantocrator at Agios Markos

By
Aleko Damaskinos

A short distance above the old village of Ag. Markos is the old barrel-vaulted Church of Christ Pantocrator Lord of the Universe) dating from 1577 with paintings by the monk Ioannikios Bogdanos.

The Church is particularly interesting for its frescoes most of which belong to the sixteenth century. The most noteworthy frescoes, starting from the East end of the South wall (left to right) following the horizontal division of the whole into four parallel sections.

In the first (lower) sections are St. Cyril and Christ Pantocrator painted over in their upper part, while Saints Christopher, Andrew, Anthony, Efthymios and Savvas follow on the South wall.

St Paraskevi and St. Marina can be seen on either side of of the door. On the North wall St. Theodore holds a sword in his right hand and a sheath in the other, while St. Demetrius holds a spear in his right hand and a sheath in the other.

In the second section we have the Prophets Aaron and Isaiah and St. Tryphon (martyred in 249), Constantine the Great and St. Helen are represented on the West wall and Saints Catherine and Kyriaki on the right.

The ascension covers the entire width of the vault.

In the third section from left of the South wall we see the betrayal of Jesus, Jesus being judged by An-

nas and Caiaphas. Pilate washing his hands and Christ on the road to Calvary. The West wall shows the Presentation of the Virgin Mary at the Temple and the Dormition of the Vorgan.

The North wall portrays the Crucifixion and the Lamentation. The frescoes decorating the iconostasis of the Church of Pantocrator belong to the nineteenth or twentieth centuries. THE CHURCH OF PANTOCRATOR AT AGIOS MARKOS.

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The Church of Pantocrator
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Ocay Villas and Ocay Services look forward to a busy 2014.

The Villas for your holidays site at www.ocayvillascorfu.com continues to add holiday destinations continually.



For selective villas we have some tempting early January rates, not published and only available by contact through the site above. You may be pleasantly surprised.



Paramonas Seaside Villa

On the property front there are some very good bargains and we have capacity for build and or improvement. We are tending to specialise increasingly in matching buyer with specific dream; this is a customized service, and we believe, quite unique on this island. Also, it does not cost an arm and a leg, as it shouldn't.

Nick the Clock's World

There are only nine questions.

This is a quiz for people who know everything !!

I found out in a hurry that I didn't. These are not trick questions.

They're straight questions with straight answers.

1. Name the one sport in which neither the spectators nor the participants know the score or the leader until the contest ends.

2. What famous North American landmark is constantly moving backward ?

Answers To Quiz:

1. The one sport in which neither the spectators nor the participants know the score or the leader until the contest ends: **Boxing.**

2. North American landmark constantly moving backward: **Niagara Falls..** The rim is worn down about two and a half feet each year because of the millions of gallons of water that rush over it every minute.

3. Only two vegetables that can live to produce on their own for several growing seasons: **Asparagus and rhubarb.**

4. The fruit with its seeds on the outside: **Strawberry.**

3 Of all vegetables, only two can live to produce on their own, for several growing seasons. All other vegetables must be replanted every year.

What are the only two perennial vegetables ?

4. **What fruit has its seeds on the outside ?**

5. In many liquor stores, you can buy pear brandy, with a real pear inside the bottle. The pear is whole and ripe, and the bottle is genuine; it hasn't been cut in any way.

How did the pear get inside the

5. How did the pear get inside the brandy bottle?
It grew inside the bottle. The bottles are placed over pear buds when they're small, and are wired in place on the tree.

The bottle is left in place for the entire growing season. When the pears are ripe, they are snipped off at the stems.

6. Three English words beginning with "dw":
Dwarf, dwell and dwindle.

7. Fourteen punctuation marks in English grammar:
Period, comma, colon, semicolon, dash, hyphen, apostrophe, question mark, exclamation point, quotation mark, brackets, parenthesis, braces, and ellipses.

bottle ?

6. Only three words in standard English begin with the letters ' dw' and they are all common words.
Name two of them.

7. There are 14 punctuation marks in English grammar.
Can you name at least half of them ?

8. Name the only vegetable or fruit that is never sold frozen, canned, processed, cooked, or in any other form except fresh.

9. Name 6 or more things that you can wear on your feet beginning with the letter 'S.'

8. The only vegetable or fruit never sold frozen, canned, processed, cooked, or in any other form but fresh:**Lettuce.**

9. Six or more things you can wear on your feet beginning with 'S':
Shoes, socks, sandals, sneakers, slippers, skis, skates, snowshoes, stockings, stilts.

How CLEVER were you, Gentle Reader? Pray mail in and tell us

The World of Simon

By
Simon Baddeley

Clear skies for Christmas Day in Handsworth.



As Linda and Dot worked in the kitchen getting ready for lunch, I cycled with Oscar to our allotment and raised a couple of pounds of Jerusalem Artichokes from the clogging earth, washed them clean under the tap by the plot, and took them home to bake with the rest of our Christmas meal. Three generations



Lin and I, Christmas lunch - Richard's picture

I took my turn in washing up before, in falling dusk, my son-in-law and daughter and I and Oscar strolled about Handsworth Park, having the place almost to ourselves - an oasis of quiet amid the muted hum of traffic; the calling of duck and geese, black dots on the still water; window lights glimpsed

through the branches of leafless trees. Oliver fought sleep so we did a second round of the pond getting home in darkness, to sit down again for Christmas pudding, flamed with blue-burning brandy, laced with cream. Oliver wakes. We rise and go next door where there's a coal fire and sparkling tree. We share presents. For me a jar of *Marmite* that'll last half a year, *Patum Peperium* pots, thermal underwear, chocolate and several police procedurals from other countries.



Oliver seemed to like his Christmas present - the toy cooker we've made out of a wooden locker left in the street and collected by *Handsworth Helping Hands* a few weeks ago. Washers, handle, nuts and bolts, hinges and screws came from a small ironmongers up the *Lozells Road*; cookware from *Poundland*; cooker rings, used DVDs; controls sawn from a discarded broom handle. Into the evening the boy struggled to stay

awake; the first Christmas he will remember? At last he, and then his father, fell asleep.



Christmas 1940

By
Dr. Lionel Mann

I cannot pretend that my war-time Christmases were in any way typical. Early in 1940, although aged only twelve, when my school music master had been taken seriously ill, I had been “conscripted” into becoming organist-choirmaster of a choir of twenty-four boys at a suburban church with a local reputation for the high quality of its music.

Until I went to St. Martin’s my experience as a church chorister, from the age of six, and indeed the ethos of my home, had been somewhat austere and gloomily Protestant, but my new place was very much Anglo-Catholic. From my very first encounter I was totally enthralled by the glorious music, the dignified ceremonial, orderly observance of seasons and festivals, beautiful vestments and exquisite furnishings. All was akin to emerging from murky mist into sparkling sunlight. The impressive liturgies for Holy Week, Easter and Whitsun had been a stunning revelation, but whenever I remarked upon them I was told, “Wait till you see Christmas!”

Now Christmas had come. After Evensong the previous Sunday, walking down the darkened church to the choir vestry to dismiss the boys, I had been seized by a keen sense of anticipation. The solemn music and ceremonial of Advent was finished and our next appearance would be accompanied by all the brilliant music that we had been rehearsing for weeks. In those days Christmas did not start until midday on 24th December; it was “just not done” to perform Christmas carols in public before then, except at school where we should

not attend at all during the festive season. However, the war had led to “Post early for Christmas” with shops displaying seasonal wares much earlier than usual so that parcels might be sent in good time to troops serving overseas.

Our last choir practice before the great day was on the Monday evening. Although it meant turning out during the blackout, these practices always received full attendance. “In this choir voluntary means you must do it; compulsory means you’ll be kicked out if you don’t,” the Head Chorister had unsmilingly imparted when apprising me of local customs. Seven- and eight-year-olds thought nothing of walking alone a mile or two in the dark, even in pouring rain; despite the constant threat of air-attack Britain was a much safer place for the elderly and the young in those days than it is today. Too, the infectious enthusiasm of those choristers and their pride in being members of St. Martin’s Choir is now rarely encountered.

The next morning, early at the church in order to practice my organ music for the festival, I found the place already a hive of activity: severe Advent purple being replaced by festive white, silver and gold; holly and ivy being draped upon every projection; candles and incense cones being placed in every recess. Nobody objected to my playing. “It’s just what we need to start Christmas.” In mid-morning I went to join everyone in persuading a large tree through the door and erecting it in the front north corner of the nave.

Back at home, my grandparents’ because mother had left us and father was away building airfields, I was dismissed from the bustle in

the kitchen with a hot mince-pie until lunch was ready. In the meantime I donned my finery in preparation for a very busy twenty-four hours and then retired to the lounge where an aunt had just finished decorating the tree, real small coloured candles being part of the decorations, carefully placed to avoid fire hazard. After lunch, having satisfied grandfather’s meticulous inspection, I caught a bus into the city.

I often wondered what other members of the congregation at the Cathedral thought at seeing a little squirt wearing the scarlet and gold blazer and tie, grey shirt and shorts, grey socks with scarlet and gold turn-down of the junior forms of the city grammar school, being solemnly virged into a place beside the choirstalls by none other than the Head Verger. For months I had attended there at Saturday afternoon Evensongs in order to familiarise myself with the great music of the Anglican liturgy and had become known as a “regular”. Moreover they always arranged that copies of the music should be provided for me to follow. The Head Verger was the uncle of one of my St. Martin’s choristers. Was it the merest flicker of a wink that he bestowed upon me when we gravely bowed to each other as I took my place?

That Christmas Eve at the crowded Cathedral was my first acquaintance with the splendour of the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols and from the very first magical impact of a distant solo boy’s voice singing the opening verse of “Of the Father’s love begotten” to the concluding torrent of sound from the second-largest organ in Britain crashing out Bach’s prelude on “In Dulci Jubilo” I was completely captivated.

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Afterwards, apart from pausing briefly in the nave to admire the massive Christmas tree decorated with coloured electric bulbs, a recent innovation, I hastened home for tea, impatient to reach St. Martin's in order to try out some ideas given me from having heard "The Doctor", as he was known all over the county, performing at the Cathedral.

Although it was midwinter, daylight was only just fading when I set out on my bicycle for St. Martin's at soon after five o'clock. Summer Time had been retained through winter during the war and Double Summer Time introduced during summer in order to give people daylight after work to "dig for victory" in their gardens and allotments. At home our tennis court and ornamental gardens had all been converted to vegetable plots. After the war it was years before I could again face a turnip, swede or parsnip!

The congregation at First Evensong of Christmas at St. Martin's was made up of even more children than usual, more than two-hundred. As on all big festivals the double doors at the west end of the nave affording access to the Church Hall were fixed open and rows of chairs arranged, thereby about doubling our seating to five-hundred, yet we had reached standing-room-only by the time the service started. Nevertheless I was able to play only softly beforehand because it was unthinkable that mindless chatter should disturb the sacred serenity.

Many persons had arrived quite early; entry, and exit after the service, was a rather elaborate exercise owing to blackout regulations. Supervised by the duty sidesman about twenty would cram into the porch, lighted only by a single blue

bulb high up inside the outer door, which would then be bolted. Only then would the inner door be opened allowing entry to the nave, lighted dimly from chancel at the far end. When the porch was empty the inner door was locked and the sidesman would open the outer door for another group to enter. Punctual attendance was encouraged as entry was forbidden once a service had started and the nave lights were switched on. St. Martin's was one of the few churches in the city that had an efficient blackout system enabling us to hold services during hours of darkness; every window of church and hall had tightly fitting outside shutters that our Verger closed at appropriate times.

Six musical chimes of the sacristy clock broke the expectant silence, the nave was flooded with light and I played softly just three notes, D, F sharp, G. "Once in Royal David's city ..." sang the Head Chorister from the entrance to the choir vestry at the back of the nave. "He came down to earth ..." Everybody joined in the second verse, a veritable roar of sound, while the eight pairs of choirboys were led down the centre aisle by crucifer and two taperers, bearing cross and candles. When they had taken their places in the chancel choirstalls a second procession emerged from the door beside the organ, a swarm of acolytes followed by two priests, our own Fr. Morgan being assisted at greater festivals by elderly Fr. Lucas who came out of retirement for such occasions.

Anglican Evensong, the envy of many other Christian churches (yet today ousted by muddle-headed illiterate "informal worship"), proceeded upon its orderly course, psalms, lessons, office hymn, canticles, Creed, responses, prayers, anthem, a little carol. Then, "Let us

proceed in peace," was intoned by Fr. Morgan, to which all responded, "In the Name of the Lord. Amen." We burst into the first verse of "O Come All Ye Faithful" as crucifer and taperers led off in a ceremonial procession down the north aisle with the two churchwardens carrying their staves of office moving ahead to clear the way through the overflow congregation. Following the choristers came two more taperers, the thurifer swinging his censers, accompanied by his diminutive boat-boy with the boat of incense granules and spatula, another acolyte bearing a bowl of holy water and his partner with the sprinkling rod, the "bookboy", yet two more taperers and then Fr. Lucas, Fr. Morgan.

Though we were using the extended version of the hymn I yet needed to "improvise" between verses (prepared and written out in advance - I knew my youthful limitations!) in order to spin out the duration of the hymn. Halfway around the back of the nave the procession stopped and closed up for the Blessing of the Crib. A beautiful model of the stable with exquisitely-moulded figures of the participants in the Nativity was censured, sprinkled with holy water and blessed, and then the procession resumed. Before the last verse came another break while Fr. Morgan, surrounded by acolytes, chanted the Christmas gospel from the top of the chancel steps.

The sermon followed. Our priest never preached for more than five minutes; "If you can't strike oil in five minutes, stop boring!" People (even the choirboys, than which there is no higher accolade!) listened to his sermons and remembered them.

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The singing of "While Shepherds Watched" accompanied the Offertory and "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing" provided a hearty conclusion after the Blessing.

When I finished playing my voluntary at least half the congregation was waiting patiently to leave through the "light-lock", but I found the choristers waiting rather impatiently for me; we all had an important engagement to keep. With the assistance of the Sacristan we "pulled a fast one" using the sacristy as our private "light-lock" and avoiding delay.

Moving rapidly we made for our Head Chorister's home about a half-mile from the church. There Chris's mother with four or five other "choirmums" was waiting to feed the hungry hordes. How they managed at that and the following wartime Christmases to provide such plenty, despite stringent rationing, I cannot imagine. A large variety of sandwiches, sausage rolls, mince pies, cakes, jellies, tinned fruit, cream, custard, soft drinks was quickly depleted and yet some was left "for later". Throughout the evening groups chatted, played board games or went up to one of the four bedrooms to slip off shoes and lie down to snooze.

Soon after eleven o'clock sleepers were wakened and the remainder of the bounty was consumed. Attendance of probationer choirboys at the midnight and early morning service was voluntary, but has anybody ever tried to keep a boy in bed at Christmas when excitement is offered? Making our way back to the church we joined a steady procession of pedestrians all going in the same direction, calling out the season's greetings to one another. Throughout the war we

discovered that very few nights are so dark that "it is impossible to see your hand in front of your face". Too it was apparent that both the R.A.F. and the Luftwaffe had a holiday at Christmas; no drone, whether even of friendly or uneven of hostile aircraft, infringed upon the stillness. A long queue had formed at the "light-lock". Extra buses ran across town to St. Martin's at festivals, crewed by volunteers who wanted to attend services. Again we used our privileged access through the sacristy.

The nave was already full when we arrived and the hall was filling. Acolytes were busy lighting the myriad of candles placed upon every convenient ledge and the incense cones in the window recesses. In 1940, as in every year for the following sixty-five, whenever playing for Midnight Mass I performed J.S. Bach's "Pastorale" (BWV590) beforehand, its delicate thirteen minutes perfectly suited to the occasion.

The sacristy clock tinkled midnight and I played two notes, C, F. At the far end of the church the boys, conducted by the Head Chorister, sang unaccompanied the first verse of "O Little Town of Bethlehem". The nave lights flashed on, organ and everyone joined in the second verse while choir and then servers and priests processed to their places. The local army barracks was not much more than a stone's throw away so there was always a substantial male presence in our congregation, often adding the tenor and bass that the choir lacked. The resultant welter of sound was probably audible back at the barracks!

The hymn finished and immediately, while Fr. Morgan censed the altar, the choir chanted the glorious Christmas introit psalm 19, "The heavens declare the glory of God,

..." For the Mass itself we used a three-part setting by an obscure Italian early classical composer, probably written originally for a convent. Its simple gaiety made it a great favourite with the boys, and we trotted it out on most great festivals. The text was in Latin, but in those days all educated people knew at least a modicum of that language, and anyway our congregation had the English translation in their prayer-books.

Our priest never preached at a midnight service. "They don't want to be kept from their beds while I exercise my tonsils." He merely imparted Christmas greetings, and then we launched into "O Come, All Ye Faithful" for the Offertory.

The chancel at St. Martin's might have been designed with the size of our choir in mind; with a bit of a squeeze all twenty-four choristers and I, kneeling side by side, fitted along the altar rail to receive communion. Then we performed most of the Christmas carols in our current repertoire while the congregation was communicated; even with two priests ministering it lasted nearly a half-hour. Conforming to the Book of Common Prayer we sang the "Gloria in excelsis" at the end of the service and again concluded with "Hark the Herald Angels Sing". All lights in the church were switched off, apart from a couple in the chancel and the organ console lights, providing a dim glow throughout the building, and both inner and outer porch doors were opened allowing the congregation to disperse without hindrance.

In those days I always played a transcription of the "Hear, King of Angels" chorus from Bach's "Christmas Oratorio" after Midnight Mass; it lasted not much more than three minutes.

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Even so only two choristers remained when I went into the vestry to remove cassock and surplice. (Nobody was allowed into the chancel unless wearing ecclesiastical robes.) The pair were my "escort" part of the way home and we usually met up on the way to church too. We always left our bicycles in the same place behind the church so that we could easily find them in the dark. Our front lamps were screened by cardboard discs with a narrow slit about an inch long across the centre, throwing a slender beam of light on to the road about four yards ahead. We had red reflectors on the rear mudguards and wore small fluorescent discs pinned fore and aft to our clothing.

About a mile from the church my companions turned right into a new housing estate and I veered left beside the old, disused aerodrome, across the heath, through woodland, downhill and home. More than half the walls of my bedroom over the front porch were windows and it had been deemed impossible to blackout. The gas light (grandfather thought electricity dangerous) had been fixed off and I learnt to dress and undress in the dark, always placing clothes meticulously in the same order and position. Actually it was often so bright with moonlight that I could surreptitiously rise when everybody else was asleep in order to copy out, seated at my dressing-table, instrumental parts of music that I had written for the school orchestra but had lacked time to prepare during a busy day. On this night I crept quietly to my room and was asleep before two o'clock.

My alarm woke me at seven. I was far too excited to feel tired.

Grandmother was already up preparing Christmas dinner and she always insisted that I should never "go out on an empty stomach". A round of toast and meat-dripping, washed down with a cup of tea, satisfied her requirements. The route to church was marginally more uphill than the return, taking me about twenty minutes. I needed to wait only briefly for my "escort" at our rendezvous.

It was still dark when we reached church, daylight saving in reverse, yet already people were streaming in through the "light-lock." Although probationer choirboys were excused attendance at the eight o'clock Mass, three or four turned up and were rewarded with being given surplices to wear over their cassocks and allocated places in the full turnout of singing-boys and choristers on this occasion. The music was slightly more simple than at midnight, but communion took just as long because our congregation at this early hour was equally as large as it had been earlier. All our carols had another outing!

To save going home for breakfast I accompanied Chris to his house where we were treated to a great feast. His father was away commanding a North Sea M.T.B.; his mother and sister ministered to our needs. Soon after ten we left for the "final fling".

High Mass on Christmas Day was always the absolute highlight of the festival. Well over six hundred crammed into St. Martin's. Three or four double-decker buses were parked in the streets near the church. As well as all the music we had used at midnight there was a ceremonial procession to the Crib. I found it all immensely inspiring, enjoyed every minute, thrilled to produce such exhilarating sounds from the beautiful instrument at my disposal. Afterwards in the choir

vestry I found all twenty-four boys lined up and being given their Christmas present, a little pocket-torch, by Fr. Morgan. The elderly Colonel and his family from the nearby barracks was also there; he pressed a half-crown into every hot sticky little hand, a custom he observed every one of those wartime Christmases. Needless to say that he was great favourite of the boys! I must admit that I liked him too; he always took me aside and graced my hand with a crisp pound-note.

Back at home everyone was awaiting my return before gathering in the lounge to hand out the presents piled around the base of the tree. Then at about two o'clock we sat down to Christmas dinner: grandfather, grandmother, my father and sister, two uncles, four aunts, myself. It was always turkey with all the trimmings, followed by Christmas pudding with white sauce. Home was a strictly "alcohol-free zone"; I cannot remember what we drank, probably water or maybe fruit-juice.

Grandmother always prepared at least a dozen Christmas puddings but we never ate one of them; they were grandfather's presents to his most valued employees who had been with him since he first set up "on his own account". Instead a friend of the family who had been "in service" as a cook and now lived in London always sent us one. On one of those wartime Christmases we needed mine-detector when eating the pudding; almost every bite yielded a little silver sixpence. Before we had finished the telephone rang. It was the cook. Please would we save all the coins? She also prepared a pudding for their local orphanage and had sent us the wrong one. I had never before seen grandfather laugh so much!

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Christmas 1940
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At three-o'clock we always listened to the broadcast of the King's Christmas Message, delivered in a rather hesitant but attractively intimate style, and then we all left grandfather alone for his "quiet snooze". Punctually at four, as also on Sundays, he would come looking for me. "Are you coming, Lionel?" We would set out on his "constitutional", walking at a brisk pace round the "four-mile-square" of roads around the village. He would regale me with anecdotes from his past, and impart his business ethics and his philosophy of life. I was his oldest grandchild in Britain and, although he encouraged my ambition for a musical career, I think that he never ceased to hope that I might succeed to his business. Brought up in the country, he had a keen eye for nature and would point out animal and bird tracks, showing what they revealed of whatever had made them, or any other phenomena.

Evensong on Christmas Day was said and not sung unless the day were a Sunday, which never happened during my time at St. Martin's. I had no need to turn out again that day.

"High Tea" on Christmas Day also consisted of many delicacies. Grandmother, a little slip of a thing, smaller than thirteen-year-old I (and I was small for my age!), had been given six months to live at the age of eighteen. She actually lived to be ninety-six, having produced twelve children, surviving sturdy, robust grandfather by nearly thirty years! She was also a divine cook, which obviously weighed greatly with one of grandfather's physique! Her pork-brawn that always graced our festive tables melted in the mouth. Does anyone make it these

days?

Throughout the war we frequently received food parcels from our numerous relatives in Canada. Despite rationing I seemed never to go short of anything much, except for bananas and oranges, but now I realise that other members of the household must have stinted themselves in my interests. On Boxing Day we relaxed between meals while grandfather spent some hours striding around the locality, distributing largesse to his employees.

Choir practices at St. Martin's followed their usual routine except that during school holidays they took place at four in the afternoon instead of seven in the evening. Daily I went to the church for organ practice. The last of the great season's events was the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols that replaced Evensong on the Sunday after Christmas. That 1940 occasion was my introduction in that celebration. For very many years I could never eat a full meal before playing for any big occasion and I am certain that such must have been the case for that event. As Organist-Choirmaster I was required also to read the Third Lesson, a requirement that I found more daunting than playing all the music needed for the festival! Again the church and hall were crammed to capacity. One of the highlights was the old Colonel's dramatic declamation of the Eighth Lesson; one was almost impelled to applaud. Herod was certainly denounced as an utter rotter! Years later, when as headmaster I was required to read that lesson at my school's Carol Festivals, I attempted to reproduce the C.O.'s florid style. The pupils loved it!

Afterwards I went to Chris's place with some of the older choristers to celebrate the end of a very successful, and in my case excitingly

revealing, few days. Its delights are still very fresh in my memory.



A prize for Mr Woods