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Editor's Note

Welcome to the final edition of The Magazine for 2020, and I'm sure you will all agree with me when I say it's been a challenging year for us all.

It's been a sad year for many, especially those of you that have lost family, friends and colleagues throughout the year – whether that's to coronavirus or to other causes. If that's you then you have my deepest condolences.

And it's not over yet – many more will suffer between now and the dawn of 2021 that's for sure and I expect there won't be many of us that won't be glad to see the back of 2020.

But it's not all doom and gloom. The British fighting spirit has come to the fore once again perhaps best exemplified by the exploits of Captain and now Sir Tom Moore, a story if ever there was one to warm your heart. But perhaps most of all, we should all take a moment to reflect on the fabulous efforts that we have seen from all those that work in our wonderful NHS – whether that's on the covid frontline, in our regular hospitals or in our community healthcare facilities. To them all we owe a massive sense of gratitude. No matter how much we complain, how much we moan, we should always remember that we are all lucky to live in a country where healthcare is largely free to all.

By the time you read this, the US Presidential Election will be over and we will either have four more years of President Trump, or we will have a new leader of the "free" world in Joe Biden. This is perhaps the most important presidential election seen in the US in recent years and will go a long way to determining the way the world heads in the years to come.

Talking of going in a new direction, I can't end the year without mentioning the dreaded "B" word that's almost become forgotten – and yes, that's Brexit. Whilst we still have no agreement, and we are, as I write this, heading for a no-deal Brexit I am sure we will all be glad to see the back of it. One thing is for sure, this country has come through difficult times before and I am sure we will do so again. Indeed, being the optimist that I am, whether it's a deal or no-deal Brexit I have every belief that the country will not only survive, but prosper once we have left the European Union.

I will see you again in 2021 with the January issue, in the meantime enjoy this one and stay safe. It just leaves me to wish you all as happy a Christmas as we can muster in these difficult times and a prosperous New Year. And if you don't celebrate Christmas then may I wish you a happy and peaceful holiday season instead!

Until next time.

Ed.

Contents

News, views & services	4
News: Royal Mail pensioners	6
News: Good news for pensioners	7
News from the CEO	8
Views: Malcolm Booth	10
Views: Adult social care	12
Julia Langdon on politics	14
Feature: Older workers key to post-COVID recovery	16
Community: Scams	17
Legal: Roots and branches	18
Health: Covid – an update	20
Health: Cholesterol	21
Health: Prostate cancer	23
Online with Brendon Wallace	24
NFOP membership benefits and services directory	26
Helpdesk	28
Care: Gareth Lyon	32
Joyce Glasser at the movies	34
Your letters	36
Views: Vital funding for the performing arts announced	37
Collecting: Pawnbrokers	38
Collecting: Cinema posters	39
Gardening: Mulch	40
Pastimes: Puzzles	41
Views: The great walk	42
At Home: Winter's nearly here	43
Book Reviews	44
Crafts: Christmas wreaths	46
Worth a Look	48
Puzzle page	50
Branch page	51



7
Good News for pensioners at last!



48
Worth a Look is back! What's on around the country

Make your own
Wreath for Christmas

46

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“In women, in particular, hormones can also be a major factor, hence why cholesterol levels in menopausal and post-menopausal women can be severely affected.”

Age is a factor

Unfortunately, like a lot of health related conditions age does tend to have an impact on the effects of cholesterol, although other factors can impact on your cholesterol levels just as much as age. Your lifestyle, including diet has a major impact as does your genetic make-up. Check if there is a history of high cholesterol in your family – if there is that could mean that you are also at risk.

In women, in particular, hormones can also be a major factor, hence why cholesterol levels in menopausal and post-menopausal women can be severely affected.

Watch what you eat

Whilst most of the cholesterol in your bloodstream is actually manufactured in your liver before being released into the body – some of it will then also be brought back and broken down as described earlier – your diet can have a major impact on cholesterol levels. For example certain types of seafood is known to be high in cholesterol such as prawns and squid as are egg yolks and also offal such as kidney and liver. Whilst we are not suggesting that you cut these out of your diet altogether, as they often have other health benefits, if you suffer from high cholesterol then you should at least be aware and moderate your intake of these types of food. As we all probably know already cheese is another food that falls into this category – but that of course is often very difficult for us to refuse!

Being overweight and a lack of exercise can also contribute to high cholesterol levels so try and control your weight as much as you can and also try to take regular exercise. Weight loss and regular exercise will not only help control your cholesterol levels but will also have other knock-on beneficial health effects as well as being good for your mental health.

Can you have too much good cholesterol?

The simple answer to this question is yes you can.

How can I lower my cholesterol level?

As well as watching your weight and exercising more, the main way you can help to control, your cholesterol level is through diet. Here are some of the things you should consider:

- Take more notice of the traffic light labelling that you find on supermarket food packets. Try and avoid those foods that have a lot of red and instead try and fill your shopping basket more with those foods that have lots of green and amber on the packaging.
- Eat more fibre – around 30mg a day is considered beneficial. You can get more fibre into your diet by eating more cereals, pulses, fruit and vegetables. Oats and barley in particular are extremely beneficial as they contain beta-glucan which is cholesterol friendly.
- Watch what fats you eat. Try and cut down on the amount of saturated fat that you have in your diet – animal and dairy products tend to be high in saturated fat – whilst increasing your intake of unsaturated fats which you can find in oily fish, nuts and seeds. Instead of roasting or frying food then why not try grilling, steaming, poaching, boiling or microwaving instead as this will help reduce the amount of fat you consume.
- Eat more plant based foods and try and make sure you have at least your five a day.

What should my target level be?

It is estimated that two out of every three adults in the UK have a high blood cholesterol level, that is above 5 and many simply don't know about it. So have a blood test and see what the results are. Within the figure of 5, your LDL reading should be less than 3 and your HDL level should be above 1 for men and 1.2 for women. If you have high cholesterol levels then your doctor may look to prescribe a statin to help control the levels.

The biggest cancer for men

You probably won't be surprised to find out that this is prostate cancer. Official figures show that it accounts for just over a quarter of all new cancers diagnosed in men – some 26%. To put that in perspective, the second most prevalent cancer in the male population is jointly lung cancer and bowel cancer – both of which account for 13% of new male cancer cases.

It's also one of those cancers that has a high mortality rate for several reasons – firstly it can take a while before symptoms are seen by which time it can be so advanced that effective treatment is not possible. Men are also notorious in not coming forward and seeking treatment – sometimes feeling too embarrassed or actually being in self-denial telling themselves that there is nothing wrong and nothing to worry about – even when the signs contradict this.

There has been a surge in cases over recent years with experts putting this down partly to the fact that men are gradually starting to overcome that “embarrassment” fear. This is borne out by the number of men who are now getting checked for the disease which is on the rise, and is of course resulting in more positive diagnoses being made. This has partly been helped by the number of high-profile men who have spoken out in recent years after being diagnosed with the disease themselves.

However, if caught early, the chances of survival from prostate cancer are extremely good. Figures show that in excess of 80% of men who are diagnosed with the disease survive their diagnosis for ten years or more which is extremely good in cancer terms. But that still means that approximately 1,000 men a month are succumbing to the disease and dying.

No screening

Unlike breast cancer in women there is no national screening programme for prostate cancer which is a situation that surely has to change?

However, whilst there is a standard screening test for the disease, known as the prostate specific antigen blood test (PSA), this isn't always reliable. It will detect the cancer in some men, but it is just as likely to return a negative result when the cancer is actually present.

Get tested

However, it is important for all men to be aware of the prevalence and growth of the disease and to get tested if they have any fears or worries. As you would expect some sectors of society are more vulnerable to the disease than others. For example an estimated one in four black men will be diagnosed with the disease at sometime in their life whilst the number across men overall is one in eight.

What are the symptoms?

Unfortunately, prostate cancer does not usually cause any symptoms until the cancer is established and has grown large enough to put pressure on the urethra, the tube that carries urine from the bladder. However, some potential signs include the following:

- The need to urinate more often, especially at night.
- Needing to rush to the toilet more than you would normally.
- Difficulty in starting or when trying to pass urine.
- Straining or taking a long time when urinating.
- Having a weak flow and feeling that your bladder has not emptied fully.
- The appearance of blood in either your urine or your semen.

Other signs to look out for include the appearance of pain in either your bones or your back, a loss of appetite, pain in your testicles or the unexplained loss of weight.

If you notice any of the above then you should immediately arrange to see your GP. But be aware, that having some of the above symptoms does not necessarily mean that you have developed prostate cancer – this is because many men's prostates enlarge as they get older which is caused by a non-cancerous condition called prostate enlargement.



If I am diagnosed with prostate cancer what are the possible treatments?

The simple answer is that there is no universal treatment for prostate cancer, the treatment offered will vary dependent on your individual circumstances. In fact for many men that are suffering from the disease no actual treatment will be necessary. However, the statistics show that if prostate cancer is diagnosed at an early stage then the prospects of surviving the disease are generally good – hence why you should get tested.

The general approach to treatment is to either try to cure or control the disease to try and make sure that it affects everyday life as little as possible and that it does not shorten life expectancy. In many sufferers what is known as “watchful waiting” is often undertaken, and this approach tends to be taken for older men when it is believed that the cancer will not affect their natural lifespan.

If the cancer is in early stage and is not causing symptoms or problems then this approach will almost certainly be recommended. Doctors will often use hormone medication to help control the disease at this stage.

The next stage of treatment is what is known as active surveillance which aims to avoid unnecessary treatment of harmless cancers whilst still providing timely treatment as and when it is needed. Active surveillance involves having regular PSA tests, MRI scans and maybe biopsies to ensure that if the cancer does progress it can be spotted as early as possible.

If the cancer remains in the prostate gland and has not spread to other parts of the body then doctors could recommend removing the prostate through surgery.

November at the movies

Cinema



JOYCE GLASSER

What begins as a drama about the changing roles in a family, gradually turns into a nail-biting horror film as Edna's house, stuffed with physical memories of her life, seems to expand into rooms with no exit.

Relic

(now playing in cinemas and on digital platforms) Cert 15, 109 mins.

When the 2017 film *Get Out* turned a satire about race relations into a horror film, first time feature director Jordan Peele set the bar high, winning an Academy Award for his screenplay and enriching the horror film genre. Now another first-time feature writer-director, Japanese-Australian Natalie Erika James, has made a film in which three generations of women confront the horrors of Alzheimer's disease.

When widowed matriarch, Edna (78-year-old Robyn Nevin) disappears from the family home in the town of Creswick, her daughter, Kay (British actress Emily Mortimer) and granddaughter, Sam (Bella Heathcote) leave Melbourne to join the police search party. The desperate women learn that their young neighbour no longer visits Edna because the last time, Edna locked him in the closet. As suddenly as she vanished, Edna reappears in the kitchen as though nothing has happened, looking as worn and neglected as her house.

What begins as a drama about the changing roles in a family, gradually turns into a nail-biting horror film as Edna's house, stuffed with physical memories of her life, seems to expand into rooms with no exit, just as her mind is turning in on itself. Could she have been hiding in the labyrinth? After Kay's visit to a nursing home alarms Edna with grave consequences, and Sam realises that her offer to move in with her grandmother is fraught with peril, they struggle with their decision to abandon Edna to the monster she has become.

Makeup, prosthetics, animatronics, a three-woman stunt team and visual effects combine to transport Edna into her Alzheimer's persona, one as terrifying and sad as is the realisation that a loved one has become a stranger.

The Painter and the Thief

(now playing) Cert. TBC, 102 mins.

Many stories about artists and their muses end badly as a recent exhibition on "Pre-Raphaelite Women" revealed. But the most astonishing documentary of the year, *The Painter and the Thief*, tells a different tale, about the redemptive power of art. While surfing the net one day, director-cinematographer Benjamin Ree (*Magnus*) stumbled across a 2015 article about the theft of two paintings worth €20,000 from the Gallery Nobel in Oslo. The two thieves, who impressed experts by carefully removing 200 nails from the frames in record time to roll up the canvases, separated, with one painting each. What caught Ree's interest was that the painter approached the thief, Karl Bertil-Nordland, at his trial and asked to paint him.

And so began a complex, risky, but therapeutic relationship of mutual dependence and attraction as well as intuitive trust.

By the time Ree contacted the Czech painter, Barbora Kysilkova (who had just moved from Berlin to Oslo to live with her sympathetic older boyfriend, Øystein Stene), a friend had captured background footage of Kysilkova's Oslo show and audio recorded the trial. Ree took over, creating a gripping, non-linear narrative about the bond that grew before his eyes between two strangers whose common language is English. If Kysilkova's request is a ploy to discover the whereabouts of her huge, neo-realist double portrait, she is out of luck. Nordland, a drug dealer and addict, was so stoned on that fateful night, that he has no recollection of the painting's fate. The theft was spontaneous: he stole the painting "because it was beautiful". The moment when Nordland sees the finished portrait of him is equally beautiful, as the stunned, tattooed, skinhead breaks down in tears before falling into Kysilkova's arms. No one had ever looked at him – and seen him like that.

Ree eschews the conventional first-person interviews and instead, in voice-over narration, has Kysilkova and Nordland tell us about each other, and also, what they hold back. Ree adds a therapy session between Kysilkova and Stene, who is increasingly worried about Kysilkova's obsession with painting – and Nordland, whom she continues to paint. This unusual approach pays dividends, as we discover that Kysilkova, too, has a dark past and self-destructive tendencies while Nordland has hidden talents and self-discipline. At the end, the act of putting a painting *into* a frame becomes one of the most emotionally charged scenes in recent memory.

Two of Us (Deux)

(in cinemas from the 13th) Cert. TBC, 99 mins.

Filippo Meneghetti's feature film debut is one of the best older-age love stories since *Amour*, and the best lesbian love story since last year's, *Portrait of Young Lady on Fire*. At its core is a passionate, forbidden relationship that is reflected in the configuration of the two women's flats, separated by a hallway and a lift. What is surprising is that the director of this impeccably cast, sensitively directed and intelligently co-written (with Malysone Boverasmy) French film is a young man.

Septuagenarians Nina Dorn (Barbara Sukowa) and Madeleine (Mado) Girard (Martine Chevallier) have been lovers separated by life. Madeleine married and raised a family and Nina travelled the world as a tour guide. They are reunited as neighbours in a drab provincial French town where Madeleine, now a widow and grandmother, is blamed by her priggish son (Jérôme Varanfain) for their father's early death, and

Stanly Tucci and Colin Firth
in *Supernova*



hairdresser daughter Anne (Léa Drucker), a divorced, single mother blames her mother for not standing up to him. When we meet Mado and Nina, they are plotting their escape to sunny Rome where they can reinvent themselves after years of hiding their love. When Madeline cannot bring herself to break the news to her family, Nina storms off. Madeline, devastated at losing her chance of happiness, has a stroke that risks separating the two women forever.

Ingeniously, Meneghetti shoots the film like a thriller. There is something of *Rear Window* in the way Nina, peeping through her door to see if the coast is clear, darts across to Madeline's flat under cover of night, dodging the creepy live-in nurse Muriel (Muriel Bénazéraf). There is the rebellion and dark humour of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* too, in Nina's desperate, undignified attempts to get Muriel sacked and Madeleine's cunning complicity in the rescue plan, despite being unable to speak, and physically impaired. There is more suspense when Anne, growing suspicious of Madeleine, turns detective, only to be repelled, then fascinated and finally, liberated by her discovery. But above all, there are four great characters and female performances in this story of atypical star-crossed lovers.

Supernova

(in cinemas from the 20th) Cert. 15, 78 mins.

The older, same-sex lovers from *Two of Us* and the distressing impact of dementia on loved ones from *Relic*, come together in English actor-turned writer-director Harry Macqueen's extensively researched chamber piece *Supernova*. There is no plot in this road movie for the road is as metaphorical as the title. Successful novelist and amateur astronomer Tusker (Stanley Tucci) and concert pianist Sam (Colin Firth) are holidaying in the lake district, headed towards the devastating explosion of a dying star.

'How about exploring the outer regions of 5th gear,' back-seat camper-van driver Tusker jibes as Sam sheepishly says, 'it felt like second.' Tusker, who was diagnosed with early on-set dementia three years earlier, is struggling with the map. He claims that the voice of the Sat-Nav woman reminds him of school, but we sense that he cannot admit defeat in reading the map. They sing along to Donovan's *Catch the Wind*, laughing wistfully at an intimate memory. Everything about these late-middle-aged men tells you they have been best friends and lovers for so long that they cannot imagine life apart.

The holiday is supposed to be a spontaneous nostalgia trip, but Tusker, aware that Sam has put his career on hold to care for him, has been using his last lucid months to prepare for his own future. He has arranged a birthday celebration at Sam's sister's mountain retreat, where all their friends have gathered.

Tusker's plan to read a farewell speech and tribute to Sam he has written ends in humiliating failure, and Sam must struggle through a self-tribute, fighting tears. After a dinner that Sam cooks and Tusker cannot eat, Sam encourages Tusker to work on his new book, only later discovering unfinished sentences and blank pages. Sam wants to discuss the practicalities of life when they get home, but Tusker has no plans to return. He has left his medication at home. 'We both know they weren't doing any good,' he tells Sam, who pleads, 'we have to try.'

Tucci is completely convincing as Tusker, although you wish his profession were not so clichéd and his speech so overbearing. But it is Firth who reveals untapped depths in his greatest performance since *A Single Man*. This intense and beautifully shot (by cinematographer Dick Pope) two-hander asks who has the stronger claim to love and what that love means when one lover wants to die. It is an act of courage to choose to die with dignity but equally courageous to let go and stay behind.

Book reviews

KATE GOODMAN REVIEWS A LOCKDOWN LOVE STORY AND A LOCKED-UP DRAMA

A soldier of the great war...

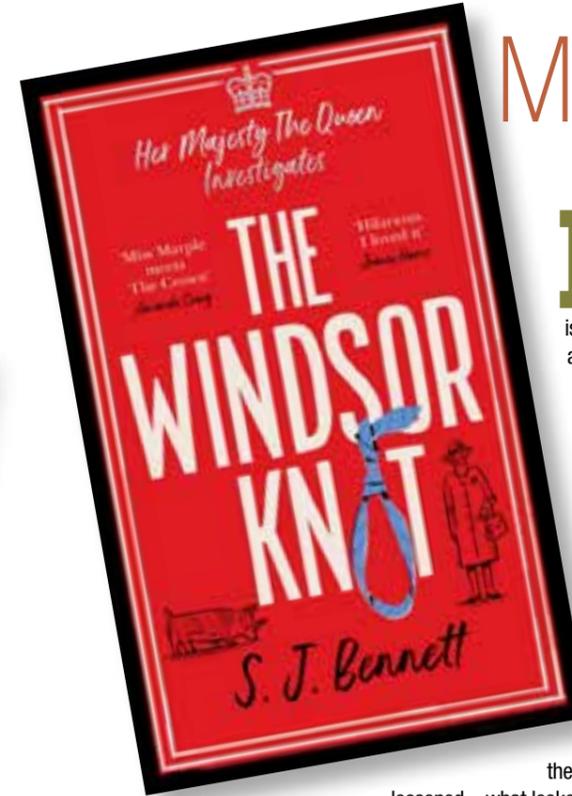
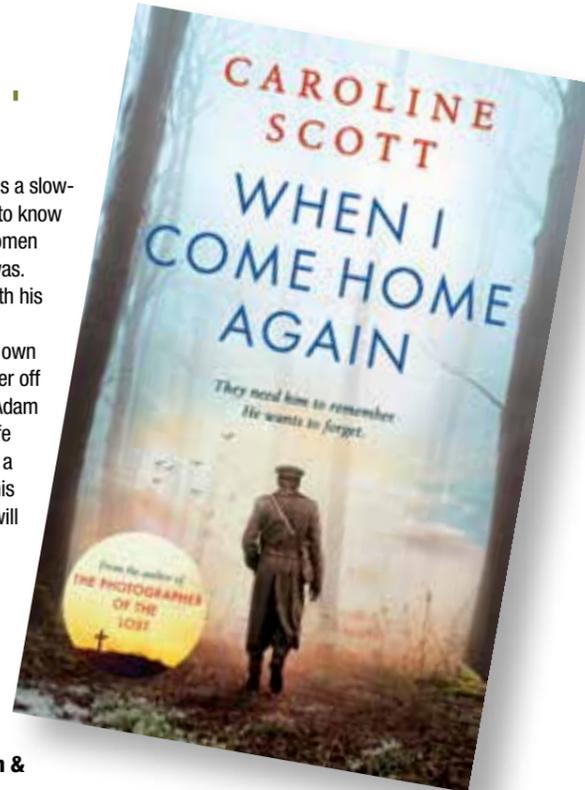
What makes a man who he is? Is it his name? His family? The experiences that shaped him from birth? For “Adam Galilee” it is none of these things – picked up from the streets of Durham in the closing days of WWI, the young soldier has no memory of who he is or where he belongs. Taken to a Lake District sanctuary, Adam settles into life at Fellside House, where his lyrical, artistic, musical side, along with a deep love of nature, soon manifests itself. As his doctor, James Haworth, tries to help him recover his memory, women around the country come forward to claim him as their own. Is he Anna’s husband Mark, or Celia’s son Robert or even Lucy’s brother, Ellis? He could be any – but he can’t be all, surely? The dilemma of Adam’s lost identity and the longing in each woman for him to be her own lost loved one beautifully encapsulates the bitter legacy of a war that left so many men without a final resting place, and so many women with unanswered questions.

In some ways, Adam is the living unknown warrior, representing grief and loss, but also

courage, hope and resilience. This story is a slow-burner – the scene is set so that we get to know the Adam who is, before we meet the women who might tell us about the Adam who was. But is it really a good idea to try to unearth his repressed memories?

Sometimes, even Dr Haworth with his own wartime nightmares, thinks Adam is better off as he is. As the story gathers pace, and Adam discovers his own new sense of self in life in the gardens at Fellside and visits from a beautiful woman who may exist only in his imagination, we’re left wondering if we will ever find out who this gentle, perplexed man really is – but also asking ourselves whether it really matters as he strives to build a future in which, as the author so beautifully puts it, the war has no echoes.

When I Come Home Again by Caroline Scott is published by Simon & Schuster in hardback, RRP £18.99



Move over, Miss Marple!

Meeet Her Majesty Elizabeth II as you’ve never seen her before! This is a queen who Googles autoerotic asphyxiation on her iPad – as well she might when young Russian pianist Maksim Bradsky is found dead in a Windsor wardrobe, wearing just his birthday suit. HM is naturally saddened – dancing with him at a small royal dinner party just the night before, she’d been enchanted by his rhythm and youthful zest. But her sorrow turns to concern when police and security staff’s investigations reveal that if Maksim had

tried to hang himself,

the carelessly tied knot would have loosened – what looked like accidental death is now confirmed as a murder.

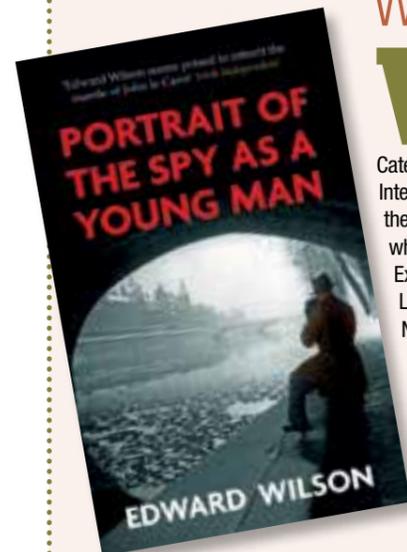
Given the man’s nationality, the MI5 boffins think Putin has ordered a hit, and are convinced there is a double agent among the palace staff. But the Queen disagrees, and sets out to solve the case with the help of her assistant secretary

Rozie Oshodi, who becomes her eyes and ears. For Rozie, it’s a revelation to discover that her nonagenarian boss has solved many a palace mystery over the years, and she enters into the investigations with zest, courage, and of course, circumspection.

For no-one must ever suspect that Elizabeth II is a detective of the first order, puzzling out the information brought to her, dropping hints in the right ear about where the investigation should lead, and drawing it to a conclusion, without drawing attention to herself. What a refreshing delight this murder-mystery is!

The plot itself is tightly woven, with subtle clues scattered to tantalise and keep you guessing. But the sheer audacity of the author in placing the Queen in the starring role takes it to another level. SJ Bennett keeps it real – Her Majesty is the woman we imagine, dedicated, dutiful, a fond wife, mother and grandmother, and loyal employer, but the author’s clever pen and razor sharp wit makes it entirely convincing that she’s also a detective who could take on Poirot, Morse or Rebus in solving any case! It’s sharp, funny and satisfying, and I’m happy to say there’s a whole series planned. I can’t wait!

The Windsor Knot by SJ Bennett is published by Zaffre in hardback, RRP £12.99



What’s in a name?

With echoes of the Gunpowder plot fresh in our minds at this time of year, you’d expect a man called Catesby to be a traitor, wouldn’t you? But William Catesby is just the opposite! A member of the Secret Intelligence Service for his whole distinguished career, the one-time agent looks back over his wartime service, when he was handpicked for the Special Operations Executive and parachuted into France, to assist the Limousin Maquis in their resistance against their Nazi occupiers.

Catesby’s a fictional character, but many of the men and women he encounters are real characters from history, including resistance hero Jean Moulin, the Communist Maquis leader “Lo Grando”, and World War II heroine and martyr Violette Szabo. In a thrilling story, we’re treated to the minutiae of Catesby’s training for his mission, the passion,

excitement, danger – and sometimes even boredom – of his life with the Maquis, and his horror at the real-life terrible atrocity of Oradour-sur-Glan where over 600 defenceless men, women and children were massacred in their place of worship.

Though written in the third person, this reads like a memoir, in which Catesby is more of an observer than a hero of his own story, and is a fascinating insight into a tumultuous world where brave men and women risked their lives for their ideals. Youthful and idealistic at the time, Catesby is dropped into a twilight world where nothing and no-one can be trusted, and he has to grow up fast. But throughout the story, his emotional honesty shines through and softens the brutality of his experiences for the reader.

Portrait of the Spy as a Young Man by Edward Wilson is published by Arcadia Books in hardback, RRP £14.99

Grin and bear it!

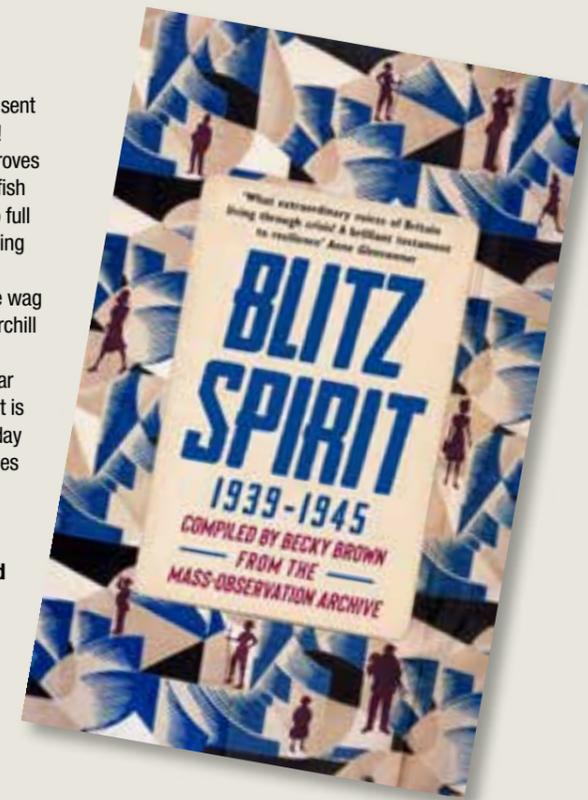
And so to the homefront! In these strange times, when we’re all urged to pull together – and can even buy Blitz Spirit hand-sanitiser on Amazon – it’s easy to imagine our parents’ and grandparents’ experience of life on the homefront as noble and exalted. But did they really laugh in the face of bombs, shrug off shortages and accept separation from loved ones with the “grin-and-bear-it” attitude we imagine?

Discover the truth in this fascinating new collection from 1939-45, when a volunteer group of around 500 people from around the UK kept diaries that are now stored in the Mass-Observations archive. These extracts show ordinary people’s response to extraordinary times, and how reassuring it is to discover that, facing a national crisis, they react just like us! From the young typist who complains that “the war has come just now, to spoil the best years of my life” to the anecdote of a lad who believes

the “experts” when they say the Germans sent German Measles, this book is full of gems!

Under enemy attack, one diarist disapproves of neighbours holidaying in France as “selfish and unpatriotic”, another discovers a shop full of tinned goods and jokes that she is keeping its location a secret. Some question the government’s handling of the war, and one wag observes, on coal rationing that “I bet Churchill and Wootton aren’t freezing themselves.” Shades of Dominic Cummings! As the linear narrative takes us through the war years, it is a privilege to get a glimpse of the day-to-day life of people making the most of sometimes truly horrible circumstances. One for the Christmas gift list.

Blitz Spirit by Becky Brown is published by Hodder & Stoughton in hardback, RRP £16.99



Adorn your door this Christmas – make your own wreath – here’s how!



Above: Picture by Corina Andrisca

Now that November is here, for many of us, thoughts start to turn towards the upcoming festive season, the celebrations we are going to have, the people we are going to meet and the decorations that we are going to put up in our homes.

It’s fair to say that Christmas this year will be different. As yet we don’t know what restrictions we will be living under and we don’t know how we will be allowed to meet family and friends and where. But don’t let that put you off.

With a bit more time on your hands rather than buy your Christmas decorations this year, why not have a go at making them yourself? One of the most effective and welcoming decorations I always find is the Christmas wreath that many people buy and hang on their front doors, after all it’s the first thing that visitors to your house see.

But you would be surprised at just how easy it is to make your own. Rather than splash out £30 plus for a wreath, why not have a go at creating your own – you are reading this in November so there is still plenty of time to go.

Getting started

To get started you should gather together a few of the things that you will need to help you make your wreath, but don’t worry, these are relatively few and are readily available – some of them can even be acquired for free which is even better!

The basics that you will need are as follows:

- A wreath ring – you can buy blanks of these from most garden centres and good craft shops. They come in various sizes and cost a few pounds each. Try and get one with a diameter of between 25cm and 30cm to start with.
- A spool of florists wire – again available from the same outlets as your wreath ring.
- A pair of pliers or wire cutters to cut the florists wire and a good pair of secateurs – you will likely have these already, especially if you are keen on DIY or gardening.
- Some gardening string and also what is known as stubbing wire – this is slightly finer than standard florists wire and is typically used to help tie in your various pieces of foliage that you will use.
- A pre-bought moss sheet if you want to use moss that is.
- Some ribbon for decoration and hanging.

Other than the above, the only other thing you will need is some foliage to attach to the ring and help make your wreath. For this you can take a walk around your garden or your local countryside and see what is available. Good foliage for Christmas wreaths includes cuttings from a holly bush, especially if you can get it with those lovely bright red berries on. Cuttings from conifers are also effective and plentiful and even from a box or privet hedge.

When considering the foliage you will also need to look for other things that you can add in. Large and small pine cones are always effective, especially if you spray them silver or gold, strategically placed rosehips, plentiful this time of year, can also add another splash of colour and some seed heads or thistle tops will also work well. In fact experiment – you will soon see what looks good and what doesn’t, and the great thing is that if you forage something and don’t like it, you can just get rid of it – it’s cost you nowt as they say!



Left: Picture by Andrea Roberts

“If you want a bit of a festive aroma raid your herb cupboard and tie in a couple of cinnamon sticks or stick in some cloves.”

What to do?

So when you have got all the basics that you need, it’s time to set about assembling your wreath which is where all the fun starts. First of all trim all the greenery that you have collected – remove any dead bits and particularly sharp edges and make sure that what you keep looks reasonably in proportion to the size of the wreath ring that you are using.

Once you have done this you then wrap the moss sheet around the ring and secure it lightly with some wire. The next step is to secure the end of your florist wire to the wreath ring itself and then wrap it around the ring about half a dozen times gradually starting to go round the ring itself. You should leave about an inch between each wrap. When doing this ensure that you pull the wire tight and make sure that it is secure – however, whatever you do, don’t cut it as you will eventually need to wrap the wire all the way round the ring as you proceed.

Once you have secured your wire in this way, take your first bundle of foliage and lay it on top of the wreath base, securing it by wrapping the florists wire a couple of times and pulling it tight to make sure that it is firmly fixed in place.

You then take your second bundle and repeat the exercise, securing each bundle as you go along gradually working your way around the wreath ring as you go, making sure that the wire remains taut at all times and that the base of the ring is fully covered so that you can’t see it through the foliage. You should make sure that each bundle that you lay overlaps the previous one, making sure that you hide the wire in the process.

When you get to the end tuck the last bundle under the first one and then secure this by wrapping the wire round the wreath base several times securing it firmly before finally cutting the wire. Once you have done this look at the wreath and see if there are any gaps visible – if there are don’t worry – you can cover these with your decorations. This is the time

to add those pine cones, rosehips or seed heads that you have collected.

To add a bit of colour you can attach some ribbons and if you want a bit of a festive aroma raid your herb cupboard and tie in a couple of cinnamon sticks or stick in some cloves – it’s amazing just how much of a smell they will give off, especially in the early days.

Finally, add a bit of green string, or use one of those ribbons, take the wreath and hang it on your front door and then stand back and admire your handy work – it really is that simple!

Below: Picture by Belinda Fewings

