



"HAPPY CHRISTMAS" from all who bring THE GOSSIP TREE to you. The Gossip Tree Committee and the Christmas Chimes team wish everyone in the parish health and happiness for Christmas 2018 and for the coming New Year

So, (a very 2018 word) this year Chimes looks back at some news cuttings that didn't feature the B word, knife crime, scandals, nor rail strikes, NHS (much), Neighbourhood Plans, a wedding, The Ryder Cup or Lewis Hamilton. Instead, please find snippets from 2018 on the weather obviously, trees of course, food, farming, animals, research, health and Christmas.

To begin, weather at the end of January helped make 2018 a golden year for goldfinches. Their numbers rose by 11% according to the **Big Garden Bird Watch** in which 420,000 people spotted 6.7 million birds. Conditions benefitted other small garden birds such as long-tailed tits and coal tits but numbers of blackbirds, robins and wrens went down. *On page 4 are instructions from Dorset Wildlife Trust for a special wreath.*

In February, the sea froze over at Bembridge Harbour, one of the most southerly points of the British Isles when the **Beast from the East** caused temperatures to drop so that boats were locked into their moorings and 2,600 schools were shut in England. Tesco workers at the company's distribution centre, who struggled through severe snow to reach their depot, were rewarded with a £1.52 meal voucher. A poem in Latin, discovered at the national archives in Kew and translated for the first time by a classics teacher from Scotland, tells of the anarchy which took over when the Thames froze in 1635. "The Thames ... offers her surface as a walkway to the traveller, and she feels the footsteps of the crowd. Lads fall upon older men, girls, allowed out, fall upon boys, and they drink on the way: it's not because of a desire to drink, but because of the novelty of their surroundings that they muck about."

Winds from the Azores brought the warmest April day since the 1940s, the hottest May for 25 years and the driest summer since modern records began 57 years ago. **'Sprouts off the menu for Christmas'** predicted that a year's worth of sprouts was at risk from dryness, with stalks 18" shorter than usual. There were warnings about Christmas trees too. An unfortunate coinciding of an international shortage of CO2 and the summer heat meant beer and cider had to be rationed, upsetting football fans and summer barbeques. Crisps were in danger of crisis because of both beastly easterlies and drought.

No room at the Inn? (with thanks to John Gadd)

From work we sometimes used to go out to the pub for a liquid-ish lunch and an exchange of stories. Tom Vallely, our company vet, had just taken his family to the children's Christmas play, mothers fondly if weepily anticipating how the little darlings would perform. Enter Joseph and Mary at the Inn. The door opens and a nine year old innkeeper says: "Yes, of course - plenty of room. Mummy will put the kettle on!" Consternation! The whole Christian ethos gone up in smoke and the point of the play cut off at the knees. A re-run was arranged with a less public-spirited young innkeeper, so all was well!

For Christmas 2017, the weather was generally rather mild and damp. After grey days with occasional drizzle, there was light rain in the wind on Christmas Day which increased to a gale in the afternoon and heavy evening rain. The maximum temperature was 11.2°C and rainfall was 13.0mm. There was no sun until Boxing Day when it became colder with a ground frost.



In Remembrance (From The Times)

"The entente between Britain and France may not be quite as cordiale as it used to be but the centenary of the end of the First World War has inspired a unique cross-Channel initiative to commemorate the western front that once divided Europe". A two-year campaign to create a 700-mile memorial pathway that traces the front lines of some of the bloodiest battles of the Great War has been successful after attracting wide European support. **Western Front Way**, called for formal approval for a tree-lined via sacre that will stretch from Canterbury in Kent, across the channel to Ostend on the Belgian coast through the battlefields of Ypres, Arras and Verdun, finishing at Freiburg in southwest Germany. The charity worked to fulfil the vision of a young officer, Second Lieutenant Alexander Douglas Gillespie, killed in 1915 at Loos. Just before his death he wrote to his headmaster at Winchester that, when peace came, he would like to send "every man, woman and child in western Europe" on a pilgrimage along the front lines "so that they might think and learn about what war means from the silent witnesses on either side". Within five years people from all nations will be able to walk the entire 700-mile path which in France will be called Le Voie de la Paix, the path of peace.

British grown **strawberries** arrived in Tesco in February. Mild winters and technological improvements are bringing forward delivery times but, for the British Summer Fruits Association, the main season starts on 1st May and lasts until the end of September. The record for the earliest sale of strawberries was set by a Welsh grower 10 years ago on 26th February.

Q. Why do polar bears have fur coats?
A. Because they would look silly in an anorak

Q. How many tickles does it take to make an octopus laugh?
A. Ten tickles

Q. What did Adam say on the day before Christmas?
A. It's Christmas, Eve

Q. What colour socks do bears wear?
A. They don't wear socks, they have bear feet

Knock knock
Who's there?
Cook
Cook who?
Have you been eating bird food?

An unexpected result of the Second World War:

In 1942 the British Special Operations Executive was called upon to save the remnants of the French navy, then based on the Isle of Wight, from the blandness of English food. 300 sailors told the landlord of their favourite pub, The Painters Arms, that they couldn't fight unless they had **garlic**. The landlord could not find a single bulb so he contacted the Special Operations Executive at RAF Tangmere, home to 161, the Cloak and Dagger Squadron which usually flew SOE agents and supplies to the French resistance. The SOE took the request seriously, sent a flight into France which returned with two sacks of garlic bulbs provided by a French farmer. The garlic found its way to the Painters Arms where the landlord, who was head of the local gardening club, cultivated it and started feeding it to his customers. Despite its reputation as a French staple **Britain now consumes more garlic than the French** much of it grown on the Isle of Wight where the bulbs flourish in its warm climate.

More than kind warmth, the hot summer and massive swings in weather had a challenging effect on crops of wheat, potatoes, carrots and onions. In September The Guardian discussed how little of the rise in food prices, 5% or £71.50 on a monthly food bill, went to **farmers** who this year have to meet Christmas demand despite increased animal feed prices, depleted feed reserves and wet crops.

Farmers in Wimborne and Child Okeford were targeted by sheep rustlers and Farmers Weekly ran a campaign for a police response that would improve on the 0.75% conviction rate. Organised crime affected imported crops too (see page 4).

This time last year The Gossip Tree included an explanation of the mishap that befell a **coppiced hedge**. This letter to The Times in February is relevant: "There is good reason for not flailing hedges every year, and for varying the time of year when they are flailed. Hedgerow shrubs such as Hawthorn flower on two-year-old wood, so an annual trim prevents growth of any haws which are essential winter food for farmland birds. A trim in September will also remove fruit that has developed, unlike a cut in the new year. Annually flailing a hedge to the same point each year can create "zombie hedges"... Once formed these are unlikely to recover. As was done in the past, the best way to rejuvenate hedges is to coppice to ground level and plant between the gap". The Centre for Ecology and Hydrology agreed and said that cutting every three years with the bars set a little higher and wider greatly increased hedges value for wildlife, supporting larger numbers of pollinators, butterflies and moths and more mammals and birds.

Managing well without trees, the British Trust for Ornithology found that **Peregrine falcons** have extended their range into uncraggy East Anglia and are using electricity pylons as nesting sites. This inventiveness on their part helped numbers of breeding pairs to rise by 22% , that is to 1,769 pairs.

Moving indoors to moths - in Wiltshire, revealed this year to be one of the worst places for their presence and damage. In April, English Heritage launched a research project to find out why fine fabrics in its properties were coming under increasing attack by the moth larvae. As part of unimaginatively named **Operation Clothes Moth**, moth traps were handed out to 45,000 visitors at sites including Stonehenge and Hadrian's Wall. English Heritage learnt that the moths prefer stately homes and that they have a regional preference for upmarket properties in the south.

Q. How does an elephant get down from a tree?
A. He sits on a leaf and waits till autumn



The summer heat caused an **oak tree** named after Agatha Christie to collapse in Barton, Torquay - the author used to watch cricket under its shade. On Offa's Dyke the Buttington Oak, planted as a boundary marker, fell down in February from old age and after 1,000 years. With a girth of 11 metres it was a pollard and had not grown in the field naturally but would have been planted to mark the site of the Battle of Buttington in AD893 as well as being part of the dyke.

A different 1,000-year-old oak was included in a celebration of **20 of the most beautiful trees** chosen by the Woodland Trust in October. Three of them are in our region. Wyndham's Oak at Silton, Dorset, was already famous enough to be the subject of an engraving when George III was on the throne. Named after Sir Hugh Wyndham it was used to hang defeated rebels after the Monmouth uprising of 1685. In Somerset, the Ashbrittle Yew was mature when Stonehenge was being built. Weathered, its central trunk is hollow with age but it has a vast sprawling canopy. It is thought that the mound on which it grows is an ancient burial site for a pre-Roman chief. The 300-year-old Tolpuddle Martyrs Sycamore was chosen for its brilliant green canopy as much as its history.

Maybe seeds collected through the **National Tree Seed Project** launched by the Royal Botanic Gardens will grow when planted, to equal them. Since it began three years ago, 10 million seeds from trees and hedges across the UK have been collected from 7,623 trees of 60 different species and banked at Kew's Millennium Seed Bank in West Sussex. As a consequence, woodlands may be protected from the spread of diseases and pests through securing genetically diverse collections of UK native trees and shrubs.

Good news for everyone:

*A few minutes gardening or walking each day helps cut the risk of early death by 17% (UCL) and a lifetime of vigorous exercise will let you keep the body of a twenty-year old (University of Birmingham). Retirement is a boon for men's health, though unfortunately the same does not necessarily apply to women. (Institute of Labour Economics, Berlin). In May, Tommy Charlton, footballer, played in the over 60's side against Italy at the age of 72 at the Amex Stadium, home of Brighton and Albion. It was a game of walking football.

*Brownies will be able to work towards a dedicated badge that will require girls aged 7 to 10 to learn about basic principles of flight and build their own model aircraft. (Girlguiding)

*A robot was built in Singapore to successfully assemble pieces of IKEA furniture from a flatpack (Nanyang Technological University)

*Teenage alcoholic drinking in Britain decreased by 80% according to the World Health Organisation, the biggest fall in teenage drinking in Europe. It was suggested that more time on social media, greater health consciousness, better parenting and a backlash against the drunkenness of previous generations helped to bring about this happy state of affairs.

*Sales of hardback books have been rising over recent years – 18.5m in 2010 to 22.2m last year whilst ebooks which previously had a 40% share of the market, saw sales fall to 29%. The change was attributed to book publishers offering more attractive covers, illustrations, better quality paper and also to Dan Brown's book 'Origin'. (Publishers Association). At the same time men in their 20 and 30s are increasingly listening to audio books as they commute because, it was suggested, listening appeals more than reading (Neilson Book Research International). Nearly half of all women are avid readers (the Guardian said in 2014!)

Uugh: Did You Just Eat That? by Paul Dawson and Brian Sheldon, published in November, examined what happens when we share food. Their experiments showed that when salsa, chocolate and cheese were double dipped (i.e. part eaten, then dipped in communal food) they contained between 100 and 1,000 more bacteria per millilitre than when dipped without first nibbling. Blowing out candles on a cake caused the icing to contain up to 12,000% more bacteria than before it was blown on, though that did depend on the sloppiness of the blower. Laminated menus in public eateries were found to be widely contaminated by bacteria; E.coli was detected on plastic menus for 48 hours after handling. Public hand dryers blew bacteria at least three feet away and 19.5% of bacteria on hands and 66.2% on scoops is transferred when placing lemons and ice in drinks.

In very different research on bacteria, scientists at State University of New York developed a **biodegradable battery** fueled by bacteria and activated by saliva. Made by printing thin layers of metals and other materials onto a paper surface covered by freeze dried "exoelectrogens" i.e. bacteria, the battery is activated by water or saliva. They hope their work has the potential to power medical devices in poor countries.



These **Anchovy Straws** by Marcello Tully taste good without dipping into bowls of bacteria



Using a packet of ready-rolled shop bought **puff pastry**, cut in half and lay one piece on a floured board.

Place **400g of drained anchovies** in four rows across the pastry leaving space between each row.

Brush beaten **egg yolk** on either side of the anchovy rows and around the four sides of the pastry then place the other half of the pastry on top.

Use your hands to press the pastry down on either side of the anchovy rows. Tidy up the pastry edges so that you have a neat rectangle.

Brush the top with a **second egg yolk** and cut horizontally into 1cm strips. Place the strips on a lightly greased tray and put the tray in the fridge for 20 mins.

Bake in 160 degrees oven for 15 mins or slightly longer, until they are golden brown.

Not such good news:

*The death rate for new born babies in Britain was higher than in Cuba (Unicef)

*Britain was named as being among the ten most gridlocked countries in the world. Motorists spent 31 hours a year stuck in peak time traffic which cost the average driver £1,168 in lost time and fuel (Inrix, traffic data company)

*Broadband speeds in rural areas were up to three times slower than those in neighbouring cities. More than two thirds of England's counties were below the national average speeds of 45Mbps (County Councils Network)

*Antarctica has lost an area of ice the size of greater London since 2010 as warmer water erodes its floating edge (University of Leeds). Better news is that the ozone layer, damaged by the use of CFCs until the 1897 Montreal Protocol, is expected to have made a full recovery within 50 years. The Antarctic ozone hole will take the longest to close. (UN)

* Over-production of bricks caused the Lego company crumbling profits. The market for construction toys was said to be saturated but Lego is confident that, because parents are encouraging their children to play with manual toys rather than to watch screens, it will recover.

Good news for Dogs: The Fontmell was awarded the title of Best Dog-Friendly Pub with Rooms in 2017 by PetsPyjamas though it was only announced this year.

Whereas canine guests may be loyal labradors or upcoming French bulldogs, the breed which attracted huge attention on the Kennel Clubs 'Find A Puppy site' in 2108 was the White Swiss Shepherd, a newly recognized breed. The popularity of the Berger Blanc Suisse was attributed to a car advert. PetsPyjamas are the "award winning No1 pet lifestyle website."

Make a Christmas wreath for birds

wildlife
watch

You will need:

- Pine cones
- Long twigs
- Garden wire
- Soft lard
- Mixing bowl
- Holly and other leaves
- Bird seed, breadcrumbs and grated cheese
- Dried fruits or unsalted nuts

1 Twist together bundles of long twigs and fasten with wire into a ring.

2 Squish lard into a soft paste in a bowl. Mix in bird seed, breadcrumbs or grated cheese.

3 Smear over pine cones and decorate with dried fruits and nuts.

4 Attach the cones to the ring with twisted wire.

5 Decorate with festive greenery and hang up your wreath.



www.wildlifewatch.org.uk

With thanks to Dorset Wildlife Trust for allowing us to reproduce their wreath guide.

Saturday Night at the Bethlehem Arms

By Gareth Owen:

Very quiet really for a Saturday.
Just the old couple come to visit relations
Who took the double room above the yard
And were both of them in bed by half past nine.
That left me with that other one, the stranger.
Sat like he was set till Domesday at the corner of the bar
Sipping small beer dead slow and keeping mum,
Those beady, tax-collector's eyes of his
On my reflection in the glass behind the bar
Watching me, watching me.
And when he did get around to saying something
His talk was like those lines of gossamer
That fishermen send whispering across the water
To lure and hook unwary fish.
Not my type. And anyway I'd been on the go since five.
Dead beat I was.
Some of us have a bed to go to, I thought to myself
I was just about to call Time
When a knock came at the door
At first I was all for turning them away:
We only have two rooms see and both of them were taken
But something desperate in the woman's eyes
Made me think again and I told them,
They could rough it in the barn
If they didn't mind the cows and the mules for company.
I know, I know soft that's me.
I yawned, locked up, turned out the lights,
Rinsed my hands to lose the smell of beer.
Went up to bed.
A day like any other.
That's how it is.
Nothing much ever happens here.

The impact of a cyclone, drought and the activities of criminal gangs on the surging preference for authentic **vanilla** was the subject of article in April. A third of Madagascar's vanilla crop was wiped out and Madagascar supplies 85% of the worlds' vanilla. A kilogramme of pods became worth more than their weight in silver. Previously sold for £65 to £75, suppliers began asking £580 per kilo which has had an unhappy impact on up-market coffee and ice cream shops. The high price was an incentive for organised crime gangs to carry out armed raids on plantations forcing producers to sleep in the fields to protect their crops. Growers turned to picking pods before they matured which resulted in a lower quality product. A jar of vanilla pods not too far from where I write this is dated 2000. Should be fine.

Oops: Britons are eating 50% more food than they admit according to the first official use of a biological test to measure **calorie intake**. Men consumed 3,119 calories not the 2,065 they owned up to whilst women took on board 2,393 instead of the 1,570 they confessed to. That, the National Diet and Nutrition Survey concluded, meant that the average person exceeded official health recommendations by the equivalent of a 'big mac' a day.

More encouragingly, a study carried out by a Californian university found that eating half a standard size bar of dark chocolate with a high concentration of **cacao can improve stress levels, mood and memory**. The benefits are thought to come from flavonoids in the cacao which you probably knew, but it's helpful to be reminded at Christmas time.

Waiter, waiter, there's a fly in my salad.
I'm sorry sir, you should have told me
you are vegetarian

Q. What do ghosts like for dessert?
A. I Scream

Returning to sprouts, here are some answers to **sprout questions** from an expert (Tony Turnbull) from last Christmas:

Q Is it too controversial to do Christmas without sprouts? No-one likes them.
A Yes, because without sprouts there will be no Boxing day bubble and squeak and I think we can all agree that is the main point of Christmas.
Q Why do people criss-cross sprout bottoms?
A Because that's what their mothers did.

So, at the end of this edition of Chimes, an idea for 2019. The Blackmore Vale Magazine featured '**We Need That!**' a directory of rubbish matched with not for profit organisations who can use it. The charity **Ideas2Action** has linked up with Dorset Waste Partnership to produce a printed or downloaded directory of places to donate biscuit tins, flower pots, pallets, buttons, beer bottle caps, paint and more. See www.ideas2action.org.uk