

Up!

Accentuating the Positive

ISSUE 3 DECEMBER 2020

BUMPER CHRISTMAS EDITION!

Come inside and meet:

Blyth Valley Samba
Creative Calligraphy
A Skye Crofter
Bay Foodbank
and much, much more ...

**Making the world a better place -
one page at a time**



Photo by Steve Lowe

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Photograph by Annie Salter

Up Front!

Well here we are, hurtling fast towards the end of 2020! You know by now that we at Up! prefer to look at the positive side of life but let's face it, we'd be fibbing if we said 2020 has been a vintage year!

Life has thrown so much at us all in these past months. The deadly pandemic we've had to contend with would be enough in itself to mark this year as one not to revisit - and that's without even mentioning the uncertainty of the ongoing Brexit saga! We have lost so many of our fellow citizens this year, and even if we have been lucky enough to be unaffected directly, I'm sure we have all missed seeing friends and loved ones. There are also untold numbers of us suffering financial hardship caused by the outbreak and its knock-on effects.

But you know what? If you're reading this, then you're still here - and whether you feel it or not right now, these days are still rich with possibilities. Up! is our way of reaching out to you, and we encourage all our readers to do the same - at this time of year, pick up the phone or write to someone you haven't heard from for a while. We humans are a social species - we need contact with each other and you reaching out to someone else could have such a positive effect on them. We often never know the effect we can have on someone else's life, the difference we can make - it's all in the little things.

In this frame of mind, we wish you all the very best of everything for this festive period - health, happiness and love - and a much-improved 2021.

Merry Christmas and a happy and healthy New Year.

With love from Bridget & Harry x

Chirp Up!

GATHERING WINTER FUEL

Up!'s outdoor man, Steve Lowe, on winter birds

We are about to head into winter with its dark nights and mornings, its crisp and freezing weather and limited daylight. We are all getting prepared which in my own case means a heavy coat and a rotund figure where my “puppy” fat will reside.

It's much the same in the animal kingdom (not the crisps and chocolate fuel I consume) as winter is the toughest and most unpredictable part of the year where survival of the fittest becomes a reality.

In my small suburban garden, I can see the change already in early November. My sparrows are back from the fields, using the feeders and pairing up in the nest boxes under the eaves. Starlings spend the day squabbling over morsels, like teenagers. Blackbirds flit about turning leaves, sometimes chased by a robin, whilst goldfinches charm me from the whitebeam tree on the street.



A few weeks ago, none of this was evident. Suddenly the whole place springs to life. Why? My artificial feeding helps (they don't like bread by the way) but there are other reasons.

Most of us know that many birds migrate and in winter they do this primarily to find food or for less harsh weather conditions, both of which allow them to survive the shorter, colder days in the northern hemisphere.

However, lots of us are unaware that “your” robin or blackbird is most likely to have arrived from the continent, whilst local birds have undertaken a similar journey south.

Many birds move from arctic and sub-arctic areas where the winter cold makes it hard to survive and where there is little available food. Northumberland in mid-winter is “better” than Iceland, Greenland and Siberia!

This happens all across the countryside. Skeins of geese fly into our coast and wetlands, which are also full of duck, whilst our trees and hedgerows are alive with winter thrushes such as redwing or fieldfare, alongside those blackbirds.

Chirp Up!

GATHERING WINTER FUEL

Local coastal areas or wetlands also bristle with a wide range of wading birds such as redshank, turnstone or golden plover. Indeed, the Northumberland coastline is vitally important to an internationally important number of bird species, some of which are only here for their winter holidays (Brent Geese and Purple Sandpiper). They spend the day feeding or roosting depending upon the tide, desperately trying to maintain good body condition to survive and to refuel for the return journey.

These birds are exceptionally susceptible to disturbance. Every time they move away, they are forced to use up vital energy and if they are unable to replenish this then a decline in condition may occur.

More and more this is becoming a major concern sparked by the influx of visitors to their favoured feeding areas and especially to dogs off leads (although this can also be a problem during breeding season for ground nesters).



Of course, none of this is deliberate but perhaps a little bit more consideration would help. The alternative is to lose access to certain parts of the coast (perhaps) or worse, to lose these marvels of nature.

I bet you would be surprised by what migrates here too! My favourite story was told to me by a friend who worked offshore in the North Sea, on a tender boat. He was on watch, in thick fog, and when it cleared, he found over 40 long-eared owls sitting on the superstructure! Along with a number of smaller species such as the tiny goldcrest!

So, while we are stuck in the house for whatever reason, I think that watching the birds in the garden may be more entertaining than endless repeats of Bond movies? If we supply a few bits of food and, most importantly, fresh water then who knows what might turn up!

Up Beat!

BLYTH VALLEY SAMBA

Up! talks to Keith Blackburn, driving force behind a community group drumming up a storm

Tell us a bit about Blyth Valley Samba. How did the group get started?

Blyth Valley Samba School is a Voluntary Community Arts Organisation dedicated to encouraging an involvement in learning about and performing percussion rhythms from around the world. We began with a Council-sponsored taster course in 1996, and have maintained continuous fortnightly practice sessions as a self organised performing group until the lockdown in 2020 halted everything. We are an open access group and participation is free for core members.

For those who aren't familiar with samba drumming, perhaps you can explain a little about where it comes from and what different drums are used.

Samba percussion originated in the favelas (shanty towns) in Brazil combining the ethnic music traditions from Africa and Portugal. They developed a catalogue of internationally accepted rhythm patterns.

A variety of instruments are used to create low bass tones and higher pitched rhythms with interesting variations. The traditional bass drum is called the *surdo* and higher pitched drum is a *repenique* (which in Brazilian pronunciation is *hepenique*). Typically there is a mixture of a double toned *agogo bell*, shakers called *rocar*, a snare drum called *caixa* - and we use percussion from Africa, Europe and other parts of the world too.



The traditional Brazilian styles originated in Africa, were brought to the New World by slaves and played when they were allowed to celebrate carnival on Shrove Tuesday in common with many parts of the world. In England it is the traditional day for many towns and villages to hold chaotic football matches and in New Orleans the world-famous Mardi Gras is of course 'Fat Tuesday'.

There is a Federation of Samba Schools dedicated to performing and encouraging participation worldwide.

We understand that Blyth Valley Samba plays at a variety of events, throughout the region. Can you tell us about some of them?

In our 24 years together we have played in many settings all across the region. Since 1997 we have been a regular feature at Heworth Interchange for the great North Run. We led the Tall Ships parade when it came to Blyth, we have supported several Bedlington Picnic events and once we even participated in a Guinness World Record performance event at Woodhorn Museum. We have recently been a permanent inclusion in the Hindu Nari Singh Multicultural events at the Customs House in South Shields. In November 2018 we led the Reclaim The Night domestic violence march at Eyemouth. We are also doing cabaret style events for local organisations, bringing together music and song and colourful presentation. We have a repertoire that can ensure a tailor made performance practically anywhere.

Up Beat!

BLYTH VALLEY SAMBA

Up! knows first-hand that being part of any music group has huge benefits for mental health and general wellbeing. What do you think people get out of drumming in particular?

There is research that has revealed that many health benefits can come from participating in good community percussion. It is very accessible, a new member can be an effective participant very quickly. It is an activity that raises a group spirit through co-operation and inclusivity.

On an individual level it is reported that an hour of continuous drumming activity has been recorded as creating a measurable alteration in the immune system, which should be of considerable interest as we try to help ourselves out of the Covid prison. It is a transcendental relaxing activity because it gives your mind a rest from thinking about words, which is quite a powerful therapy - the objective of meditation practices.



Samba drumming must make a heck of a noise! Where do you practice?

Before Lockdown our group, some of whom have been playing together for over 20 years, rehearsed compositions fortnightly at Headway Arts in Blyth. We welcome new members and are focused more upon being an inclusive activity for adults. We believe that there is more reward in playing sweetly and softly to appreciate the interplay of rhythms, rather than just creating a wall of sound. We also combine vocals with the drums to perform for audiences.

Sadly all our normal activity and bookings which were looking very positive for 2020 were wiped out by the pandemic. We would welcome any enquiries for performances or workshops for when things return to normal. We also are able to provide drum circle workshops for any interested groups with the advantage of meeting social distancing requirements.

You can find details of Blyth Valley Samba on their Facebook page where you'll also find 8 video percussion exercises to try out in the comfort of your own home. There's even a CD (price £5) the proceeds of which will help the group continue their great work.

<https://www.facebook.com/Blyth-valley-samba-425136150848120>

Up Sticks!

BRUNIGILL FARM, ISLE OF SKYE

Up! talks to the force of nature that is Annie Salter about the graft and craft of a crofter's life

Tell us how a lass from southern England ended up living on the side of a mountain in Skye with her whole family!

We used to come up to Skye on holiday every chance we got. We'd look at properties, go back home, do the maths and Richard would say, "No we can't possibly do it". The last time he said it I said, "Right! I'm not going to Skye again, I can't bear it." Needless to say, we did visit again and found our perfect place.

I'd always wanted a small holding, but the prices down South were prohibitive. We wanted a property on Skye that could give us a small income, maybe a B&B, preferably one that would see us mortgage-free. Well, we found a small farm, or croft, which also had a self-catering cottage on the property, ended up with the biggest mortgage we had ever had - and just jumped!



Richard stayed down South, working for 6 months to make sure we had a safety net. Our daughter, who was 19 at the time, came with us and our son Adam stayed down South with his girlfriend. Our income came from the self-catering cottage, selling organic eggs to the Three Chimneys Restaurant and to our local shop.

Our daughter secured a job in a hotel in the nearest village and the proprietor asked if I'd like to work part-time too, so I served the breakfasts each morning.

When Richard eventually joined us, he was also asked if he'd like a waiting job in the evening! So with lots of little incomes coming in we managed.

My father was always visiting, coming for a week and ending up staying a month! After two years the little croft house next door came up for sale while he was staying here, so he ended up buying that and we moved him up. A couple of years after that, we moved Richard's parents into our letting cottage, they were elderly and in need of some help. One Christmas, our son and his wife, who were living in Gloucestershire, said they were thinking of moving nearer. "Where?", we asked and they replied, "Here!"

Up Sticks!

BRUNIGILL FARM, ISLE OF SKYE

Wow, that's some story! How has the farm evolved since you first arrived?

When we first arrived, we inherited a small flock of sheep and 70 hens. Over time we increased the hens, and also bred quails and sold quail eggs. These days we only have a few hens. Adam has taken over the running of the farm and we have taken a step back. I'm still involved with the sheep though; we've crossed some of our Shetlands with a Gotland. We're interested in getting a really good fleece for hand spinning. We want a good selection of colours, with a fine soft fleece.

We have a studio on the farm now, where we sell a range of items all made by family members. Between us, we cover quite a range, from wood turning, leatherwork, knitting, weaving and, of course, our own hand-spun wool and fleece for hand-spinners. Adam has planted a variety of native trees and a selection of apple trees. He has also introduced bees, quite a challenge here because of the weather. And we've planted quite a lot of willow, it's very good for wind breaks, and an early food source for the bees. I also make baskets, so it's a useful resource to have.



Having been lucky enough to visit your beautiful home, Up! has first-hand knowledge of the sheer amount of hard work and dedication required to keep everything going. Where on earth do you get your energy from?!

Keeping the farm going takes an awful lot of time and energy, and we are beginning to slow down! Living here can be very challenging, battling the weather and wildlife can be quite frustrating. However, you prioritise the jobs that are essential - the animals' needs and welfare. After that you just get to the jobs as and when you can.

The seasons play a big part in our lives, and during the winter, when the weather is rough and dark, we've learnt to slow down with the season. A time for enjoying the warmth of the open fire and working indoors.

Your life will seem idyllic to many readers. What would you say to anyone considering upping sticks and changing their lives in such a dramatic way as you have?

When we told friends and family what we were going to do, I'm sure they thought we were mad or stupid! We'd lost a couple of colleagues under tragic circumstances, just as they were looking forward to their retirement, so it really made us think about what we wanted from our lives, and we seemed to be spending quite a lot of our time sat in traffic.



Up Sticks!

BRUNIGILL FARM, ISLE OF SKYE

We knew money would be extremely tight, but we also knew we'd rather try to achieve our dream and fail than wonder later on "What if?". Life is still busy and things don't always go to plan, so have realistic expectations.

Our lives were completely changed. We didn't go out for a cup of coffee, we didn't buy unnecessary clothes, shoes or anything that wasn't essential. We didn't mind what employment we took, as long as it fitted in with our new lifestyle and gave us some money. Our treats were waking up to an amazing view, whatever the weather, hiking up the hills, breathing fresh air ... and the silence.

We've always been struck by the friendly nature of folk on Skye. How important is community in what could be seen as quite an isolated location?

We were always made welcome from the start. Folk were so helpful to us when we needed to learn their ways and skills. We didn't pretend to know everything, we had a very steep learning curve.

The beauty of living and working in a small community has so many benefits. Although we don't live in each other's pockets, we watch out for one another. We know that there is always somebody that will come to our aid or offer help if needed, just a quick phone call and someone will arrive. That's a very comforting feeling.



***Check out the family's craft business - Dragonfly Studio - on Facebook:
<https://www.facebook.com/Dragonfly-Studio-372295422792499>***

***Annie has 2 lovely holiday cottages available for rent:
Annie's Cottage in Edinbane, and Stag's Cottage on the farm in Dunvegan
Further details at www.cottages.com***

Write Up!

POEMS ON THE THEME OF FESTIVE CELEBRATIONS

Holly

Holly says: Hope
and Wait and see.
A red berried mantle
celebrates me.

Holly says: Hope
and Wait and see.
Under white winter
grows a green tree.



Holly says: Hope
and Wait and see.
In my spiked heart
a bird sings free.

Holly says: Hope
and Wait and see.
Come, gentle, enter.
Rest in me.

Linda Goulden

Christmas in the Christie

You're on strike against hospital food since Staff Nurse orders you out of bed to take lunch at the table in the Day Room. You can't spend all day in that bed she says, down-plays the pain that sears your groin when you sit on the hard chairs. We bring roast chicken sandwiches from home. Four days into recovery Streptococcus arrives, a stealth missile intent on wiping you out. Inguinal lymph nodes gone, resistance is shot. Oral and intramuscular antibiotics are useless but administered intravenously for five days they begin to do their job.

Christmas Eve comes and goes. You wake on Christmas Morning still on the ward. We come to spend the day with you, bring you a Christmas stocking filled with things Santa used to leave you as a child: Beano annual, board game, Cadbury's selection box. The ward staff give you Royal Jelly toiletries wrapped in festive paper, tied with a silver bow. None of them cheers you up. You only want to go home. Just before midday, Father Christmas turns up disguised as your brother. He's driven from the fens to wish you Merry Christmas. Like the little drummer boy, he has no gift to bring; but that's OK. He's all the present you need.

Rachel Davies

Feeding Up!

BAY FOODBANK

Up! talks to the people making a difference at the sharp end this Christmas and every other day of the year



It must be very difficult for people to ask for help with the basics. How are you usually approached? Are people referred for example or do you get direct approaches?

Clients are referred to us by support agencies such as Job Centres, Citizens Advice Bureaus, North Tyneside Council, doctors' surgeries. We don't take what we call self-referrals as we rely on the support agencies to ensure that their client genuinely needs help.

A lot of people's knowledge of foodbanks comes from watching the film *I, Daniel Blake*. How true to life were those scenes?

As we hear many of the stories behind why food parcels are needed, we were able to recognise many of the scenes in the film. The film's Director, Ken Loach, actually visited us so we were able to share some of the background stories, and he's been well-known for many years as a film director who portrays real-life situations.

Working at the foodbank must be very 'full-on'! Describe a typical day....

Busy!! From before opening hours, the van does the store collections from supermarkets and any other collections needed. Cars and walkers are dropping off donations. The phone is going all day with referrals or donation queries, which also come in via email. Plus the warehouse is a hive of activity as the workers date, sort and stack the donations, pack parcels ready to go, and rearrange space as needed. Phew!

Sometimes when people donate to charities, they might worry that their donation doesn't reach the intended recipient, but that's not the case with BAY is it? Every item donated is passed onto someone who desperately needs it....

As you know, we supply food parcels to people in our area who require help, but we also supply to local schools who hold breakfast clubs, after-school clubs or holiday clubs, and also other local charities who we work with. Every donation is precious to us and very much appreciated. We could not exist without the generous donations from supporters, who help us to feed people in our area who simply need assistance at difficult times.



Feeding Up!

BAY FOODBANK

Let's say one of our readers would like to help out. Apart from leaving food at their local supermarket, how else could they get involved? Is there a national foodbank database for example?

We're an independent charity, so we rely on donations from local people and businesses, all of whom are extremely generous. We do take financial donations, and we also have volunteer application forms on our website. At the moment we are unable to take many new volunteers because of Covid restrictions but trust us, we are very grateful for any help we receive!



Up! is sure lots of our readers already help out where and when you can, but if you're keen to find out more about BAY foodbank, check out www.thebayfoodbank.org.uk

For more details about foodbanks nationally, check out www.trusselltrust.org



*If more of us valued food and cheer and song above hoarded gold,
it would be a merrier world.*

J.R.R. Tolkien

*There are people in the world so hungry that God cannot appear
to them except in the form of bread.*

Mahatma Gandhi

No-one has ever become poor by giving.

Anne Frank

Up Stroke!

CREATIVE CALLIGRAPHY

Up! learns more about the ancient art of calligraphy from expert Angela Reed

Can you tell us how you first became interested in the art of calligraphy?

My art teacher at secondary school was a calligrapher and he set up a lunchtime calligraphy club. My favourite subjects were Art and English, so it brought the two of them together and I've been hooked ever since.

Is it true that calligraphy originated in China?

People have been making marks to communicate since the dawn of time, from cave paintings to Egyptian hieroglyphics. Chinese calligraphy, which is written with a brush, dates back to the Shang dynasty (c.1600BC-1046BC), becoming more common during the Han dynasty (202BC-220AD) where all educated men and some women were expected to be proficient at it.

Western calligraphy has its roots in the Latin writing system. The Romans typically wrote on long rolls of papyrus using reed or quill pens. They carved Roman Capitals into stone and decorated walls with Rustic Capitals.



Later, Christian churches developed writing through the copying of Biblical texts and other manuscripts, which were produced in the hundreds of thousands during the Middle Ages. Various calligraphy styles developed over time until the advent of print in the 15th century and beyond led to these skills being made largely redundant. However, calligraphy enjoyed a renaissance towards the end of the 19th century via the Arts and Crafts Movement, with British craftsman Edward Johnston in particular credited with reviving the art of penmanship.

Many people assume that calligraphy can only be used on paper. Does it work on other materials too?

If you have the right tools, you can write on pretty much anything. The work I do is mainly on paper, but I've seen people write on sea glass, agate slices, wood, glass, mirrors, chalkboards, leaves. It's just a case of finding out what works best on the surface!

We have to ask – what happens if you make a mistake halfway through a piece?!

For me, that would mean starting all over again! I tend to plan everything out to a final draft stage before committing pen to paper on the final piece though, so fortunately mistakes are few and far between.

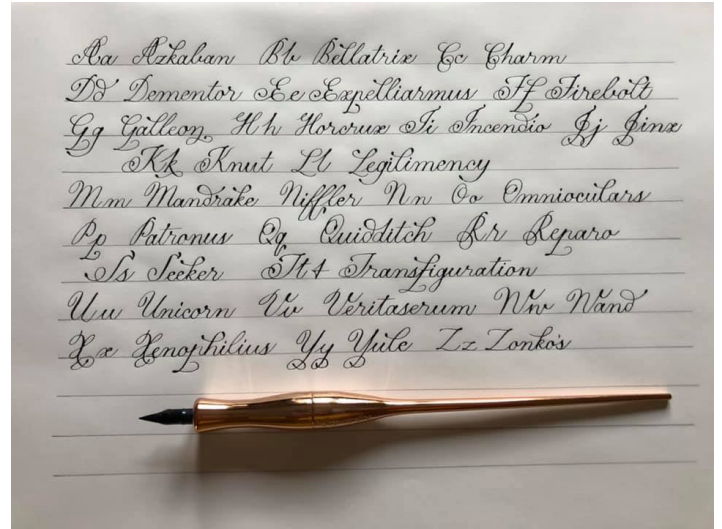
Up Stroke!

CREATIVE CALLIGRAPHY

There seem to be so many different styles of calligraphy. Do you have a favourite, and is there a style you would recommend to someone wanting to try calligraphy for the first time?

There are certainly lots of styles and variations on a theme when it comes to calligraphy - some are written with a broad-edged nib and some are written with a pointed nib. I love writing with a pointed nib, so copperplate is a personal favourite, although I have fallen in love with Italian Hand and Pointed Pen Uncial, which I've had the pleasure of learning from Heather Held and Joy Daniels respectively this year.

Copperplate is also a sound basis for more modern calligraphy styles, where the technique is the same, but the rules are different in that there aren't any! For beginners wanting to learn a traditional, broad-edged style, I would recommend either Foundational Hand or Uncial to begin with.



Creative Calligraphy was established by former journalist Angela Reed in May 2014. Based in South Shields, she accepts commissions from all over the world and runs workshops at venues throughout the north east of England. For more information, visit www.creative-calligraphy.co.uk and follow @creativecallig on Facebook and Twitter and @creativecalligraphyuk on Instagram.



*All I need is a sheet of paper and something to write with,
and then I can turn the world upside down.*

Friedrich Nietzsche

*Raise your words, not your voice. It is rain that grows flowers, not
thunder.*

Rumi

No matter what anybody tells you, words and ideas can change the world.

Robin Williams, Dead Poets Society

Planting Up!

STEVE LOWE

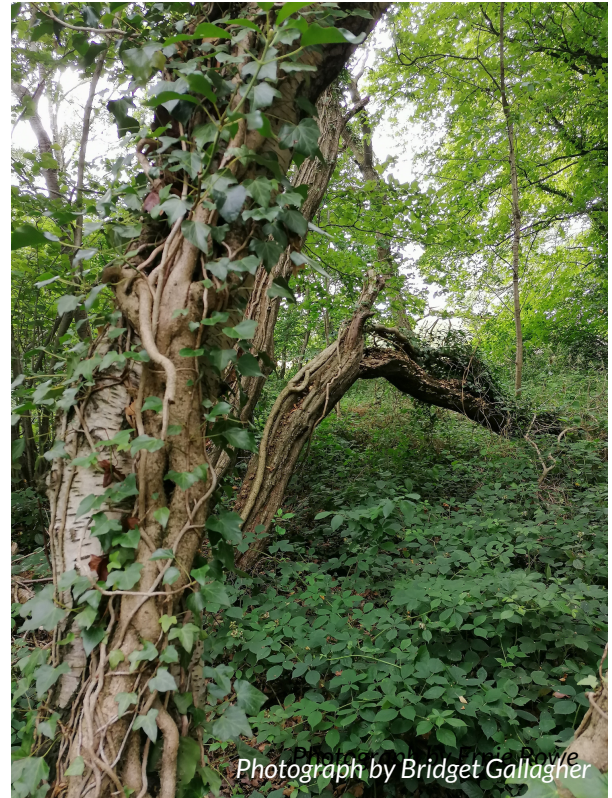
Up!'s outdoors man on the roots that really matter

Plant A Tree In '73. Who remembers this Government-sponsored national campaign in the United Kingdom, aimed at encouraging the population to participate by planting trees during the peak of Dutch Elm Disease, which was sweeping the country, killing millions of trees?

My own love affair with trees may have been sparked by that, as I had just moved to the North East, with a different accent, different football team and an inability to work in French at my new school.

I suspect that the opportunity to explore new areas and to become involved with nature through a WATCH Club (now Wildlife Watch) allowed me to settle in. I would visit my local woodland at Holywell Dene (by choice this time and not as a result of some mid-winter cross country school run in shorts and a vest) and spend time enjoying the space, the sounds and the changes through the year.

Nature gives me immense comfort every day, whether it be the birds in the garden, a pounding sea or the solitude of the hills. But nothing beats a proper British woodland, those immense and entirely natural recycling facilities that just do it for us and promote so much life during all seasons. Sit and close your eyes; once you learn to ignore the human noise, you will feel refreshed.



Photograph by Bridget Gallagher

Trees must be a massive part of our plans for a sustainable future. Tree huggers like me know that, but it seems as if governments are starting to wake up to that as well, with new schemes to encourage planting specifically for carbon storage. Great in principle, but we need to be really serious about it. And I mean SERIOUS.

Images of ancient trees being ripped out, and the loss of ancient woodland - all for HS2 - simply serve to undermine the otherwise laudable measures. Campaigners, more power to your elbow on this, it really matters. I also think that every single one of us must act to keep what woodlands we have - and to make them bigger. Linking them together will be even better. Putting the right tree in the right place is essential and use of local stock is preferable. Growing them from local seed is great but even better is allowing Mother Nature to take back control (this might require some areas to be in public ownership forever).

Planting Up!

STEVE LOWE

Planting a tree is a fulfilling task, knowing that it is likely to be there long after we have gone. Doing this in a group and especially with children can leave a legacy well beyond the act itself (if I am any kind of indicator). There are many opportunities to make your own contribution to global sustainability (just get the tree the right way up!).

In Northumberland, there are plans for large areas of planting, some on private land but undertaken by charities (and volunteers). There are woodland burial plots, meaning you can continue to be useful long after you have gone. And why not plant trees to remember a life sadly lost? It's a great alternative to releasing balloons or putting short lived cut (or plastic) flowers onto a bench or memorial.



Photograph by Steve Lowe



Photograph by Sophie Lively

By the way, it's not just the tree that is important, it's the ecosystem. We need woodlands, not just trees constrained by plastic tubes that no-one ever takes off (a pet hate of mine and one shared by colleagues at Northumberland Rivers Trust).

Finally, if any extra justification is needed, it's that trees do more than just capture carbon. They also fight the cruel effects of a changing climate including flood prevention, reducing temperature and pollution (especially in urban areas), provide shelter and fuel and - here's the punchline - produce oxygen, essential to all human life.



Steve is at his happiest outdoors, especially in his adopted county of Northumberland. An experienced wildlife professional, he has fingers in "pies of many different flavours"! He is currently working as a freelancer with Northumberland Rivers Trust as well as undertaking work with volunteers on local heritage and archaeology projects. His hope is to leave the world a better place.

Write Up!

POEMS ON THE THEME OF FESTIVE CELEBRATIONS

Christmas Present

For my eighth Christmas
Santa delivered a Post Office Set
with an oval metal post box, facsimile postal orders,
a rubber stamp and an ink pad that left guilty fingerprints
until it dried out on twelfth night.

Now I use big scissors, glue
and scrat for stamps in emptying address books,
scurry to last collections
hope drying cards aren't left to hibernate
over Christmas, in an oval metal post box.

For my ninth Christmas I surprised a boxed shooting game
stretching a rectangular pillowcase.

Before breakfast I'd bagged the lot,
rifled corks at endangered species whose pictures fell to reveal
50 for a tiger and a lion worthy of 100.
Yesterday I made bird-food cakes
of fat in yoghurt pots,
got frozen fingers hanging up savoury stockings.

This year with a bathroom cabinet bristling
with past gifts of shaving gear with attachments for ears
the mirror on its door will reflect the Christmas child
who looks more like Santa Claus each passing year.

Steve Harrison

Secret Santa

Thanks for the cheap bath salts
that fizzled and gripped
onto the bath
then set fire to my nether regions.

Thanks for the stale chocolates
that hard and fossilized
buried m appetite
under an avalanche of fusty frost.

Thanks for the musky candles
that pungently marked
my home territory
reminiscent of a Tom cat's aerosol.

Thanks for the acidic wine
that went for the burn
down my throat
racing through me like a Porsche.

I've picked your name out of the
hat this year ...
It's pay back time.

Deborah Moorhouse

Global Round Up!

SOPHIE LIVELY

**From Newcastle to Nigeria -
connecting communities**

2020 - an unprecedented moment in time: a pandemic. We were faced with a national lockdown, coupled with tremendous amounts of uncertainty and the added prospect of loneliness for untold thousands of people across the country. On different levels these feelings have remained but burgeoning from this initial fear has come a growing sense of solidarity.

Smiles, connecting with households locally, shopping for vulnerable neighbours, rainbow pictures lining windows bringing fleeting moments of delight to passers-by, sharing the flour, pasta, eggs and toilet roll! Some families were fortunate in being able to spend quality time with loved ones. Reconnecting with old hobbies and discovering new ones. We were introduced to Zoom and many of us dabbled in things which we previously felt we lacked the time to engage with. Gathering on our doorsteps at 8pm on a Thursday evening to clap for the incredible key workers and our wonderful NHS staff is something I think will stay with many of us for the rest of our lives. We kept communities going and we created new ones. Community gave us hope, reassurance and momentum; the momentum we needed, and still need, to keep going.



Community not only provided us with comfort during the initial emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic, but it has also proved to be a catalyst for change. Nationally we saw over £32 million raised for the NHS on the back of the incredible Captain Sir Tom Moore's fundraising efforts. In addition, the public support of footballer Marcus Rashford's free school meals campaign shows us the power we, as individual members of communities, can collectively wield. Many months on there has been an innumerable amount of mutual aid and local initiatives which have helped, and continue to help, individuals affected by the pandemic. Together communities are powerful - a shared phenomenon.

Crossing borders and in a vastly different political landscape to what we are used to in the UK, Nigeria was a country under military dictatorship for 16 years. Uneven power relations and a history of inequality have left many people there in poverty and destitution, unable to meet even basic needs. However, the dedication and diligence of individual citizens, communities and ground level organisations in parts of Nigeria has shown how progress and real change can still be made, even in communities largely unsupported and ignored by governing bodies. These individuals and

Global Round Up!

SOPHIE LIVELY

communities in Nigeria, along with diaspora organisations made up of people who have migrated from Nigeria and come together whilst abroad, work collectively. They share knowledge and skills, contribute to the donation of equipment and provide monetary contributions, to continue progress in their ancestral homeland. Identity and a sense of belonging is the motivation, and London is home to numerous such Nigerian diaspora organisations. Their commitment is not going unnoticed. Former Nigerian President Obasanjo has publicly commented on the role of diasporas and the hope that they will be able to help economically, aid in political wellbeing and contribute to the softening of, often ruptured, relationships in Nigeria.

Although there are questions to be raised surrounding where the responsibility for development within the country lies, inequalities within relationships and the role that some of these diaspora organisations play,



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what is clear is that those individuals and community groups are mobilising. They show passion and determination for what they believe is a beneficial cause. Their efforts have already borne fruit and in a kingdom known as Ayege, the first secondary school and hospital have been built as a direct result of collective effort between informal 'traditional authorities' in Nigeria and London based diaspora organisations.

Though globally, the challenges we face may appear to be vastly different, what has been apparent through this pandemic is just how interconnected we all are. What we have in common is that, in the face of adversity, there is always hope. Its presence is reflected in the remarkable individuals that make up a community.

Hope is a trigger for change. It is global. Community makes us.

Read Up!

BOOKS TO CURL UP WITH

Up!'s Vic Watson with six of the best books to keep you company on a chilly winter's evening.

The Darkest Evening - Ann Cleeves

Vera Stanhope's ninth outing sees her becoming disoriented in a blizzard and losing her way but, in her indomitable way, Vera ploughs on until she sees a car slewed off the road. Going to help, Vera thinks the driver will have sought shelter but she's stunned to find a toddler strapped in the back seat.

Taking the child, Vera continues on the road and arrives at Brockburn, a decrepit stately home that was once the home of her father, Hector. A party may be in full swing inside but outside there's a young woman lying dead in the snow. *The Darkest Evening* is a classic country house mystery with contemporary preoccupations.

If I Can't Have You - Charlotte Levin

Constance, a receptionist at a private medical centre in London, fancies Samuel – the new doctor – immediately. When he returns her affections, Constance is thrilled but when he cuts their affair short, Constance's affections don't wane, taking her deeper into obsession. Charlotte Levin balances real drama and dark misdeeds with a dry sense of humour, her writing fizzles on the page and I didn't want my encounter with Constance to end. She is the most compelling, realistic character I think I have ever read.



The Break - Marian Keyes

Hugh and Amy are taking a break. Not a mini-break, though. Hugh says it's not a permanent separation, he still loves his wife but he wants a break from his marriage, his children and from their life. He's off to South East Asia to lose himself. But what about Amy, and their kids? *The Break* is a lovely, thought-provoking read with well-rounded characters. It tackles some pretty timely issues and concerns with a beautifully light touch that only Ms Keyes can provide. Her ear for dialogue and keen understanding of people makes her books an absolute joy to read.

Read Up!

BOOKS TO CURL UP WITH

Three Hours - Rosamund Lupton

A school is under siege in rural Somerset. Pupils and teachers barricade themselves in classrooms, the library and nearby outbuildings. Outside, a police psychiatrist must identify the gunmen and bring this attack to an end. While desperate parents wait for news, the headmaster lies wounded in the library while the perpetrators continue to stalk the campus.

This novel is breathtaking in its imagery and its impact. The empathy Lupton creates for the characters in this novel is incredible. I was so invested in the characters in this novel that I shed more than a few tears.



Photo by @bibliophile.belle

One Christmas Night - Hayley Webster

On Newbury Street in Norwich, Christmas is ruined. Residents have found that presents have been going missing from their homes. Rumours abound that its one of their own who's the thief. Christmas cheer has been replaced by suspicion and the presence of the police is keeping everyone on edge. This ensemble piece is perfect for those of you who want to read compelling characters full of heart.

Fear - Roald Dahl

Continue the centuries-old tradition of ghost stories at Christmas by reading *Fear*, a collection of Dahl's favourite ghost stories. It's perfect to read in front of a fire but beware, you'll still be chilled to the bone! I read this collection at the height of summer but still regularly found myself with goosebumps thanks to the creepy stories in this collection. My favourites were: *Harry* by Rosemary Timperley and *Ringling the Changes* by Robert Aickman.



Victoria Watson is a writer, reader and host of *Noir at the Bar* in Newcastle, connecting readers and writers from all over the world. She runs creative writing groups through her business, *Elementary V Watson*.

She is also a copy editor and proofreader.

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Close Up!

PHOTOS ON A THEME -
FESTIVE CELEBRATIONS



Photograph by Stevie Harrison



Photograph by Linda Goulden

The photo theme for next month
is New Beginnings.



Photograph by Mike Sekowski



Photograph by Nicky Goodwin

Pitching Up!

MORAG HENRIKSEN

A family holiday, a remote Scottish island and a legend. Meet Storab ...

Sometime around the end of the seventies we took our two boys camping on Raasay. From our house in Portree we could see a dark shelter-belt of fir trees on the island that lies alongside the Isle of Skye. We were told it was called Glam. Glam was a Viking – Glam-vik – Glamaig. He moored his longship below the mountain, had adventures and left his name behind.

Everywhere you go on Skye there's a story; everywhere on Raasay too, probably. We were off to explore.

Once over the ferry we drove along the narrow road until the mouth of Portree Bay began to open up and the lights of the town began to twinkle in the early evening. At a bend in the road was a gate and a flat, dry space beyond. A fank.

"This'll do."

There was no crofthouse in sight; not a living soul, not even a sheep, so we set up our tents and made camp. Harry built the fire and the sooty green coffee-pot was soon bubbling and hissing and promising tea. Bacon and beans were already in the pan when a man came towards us out of the dusk.

He came, tall and slow and stood observing us silently.

"Oh-ho! Here's trouble!" I thought, uneasily aware we were camping without permission.



"Leave this to me", I said to Harry.

Harry was from Leith and although he had taken to life in Skye like a scart to water he was not trailing generations of Highland ancestry behind him as I was. He did not have the voice.

I drifted over to meet the man. He was a very Highland gentleman, tall and spare with silvery hair and a moustache. A crofter. He looked at me solemnly.

"Are you not afraid to sleep on Storab's grave?" he said.

"Storab? No. Who was Storab?"

There and then he began on a saga, telling it as if it had happened yesterday. It was myth and it was middle earth; it was history and it was fantasy. It was truth and it was an open-weave tapestry of old memories and pure imagination. On a hillside on an island beside an island we heard the hot news about Storab as the dark closed in around our firelit faces.

Storab was a Viking, like Glam, a Lochlannach. He came with his crew of Norsemen to raid Raasay or maybe even to settle. They breached their longship below Inverarish but the locals were having none of it and put up a strong defence. They killed all the invaders but Storab. The last man standing, he got away and ran for his life up the slopes of Dun Caan.

Pitching Up!

The hunt was up. The furious Ratharsaich gave chase, determined to have his blood. As they closed in on him he took refuge on a small island in one of the lochans on the side of Dun Caan, one of the kettle-holes of meltwater left when the glaciers scoured the rocks of Raasay. The Raasay-men could not swim but they would not be beat: they began to drain the loch (if you look with a seeing eye, you may find traces of the different water levels as the lochan sank, leaving marks like rings on a dirty bath).

Storab saw safety draining away from him so he made a mighty leap for the shore and ran like a stag down the hill and along the course of the burn, pursued once again by his enemies. They hunted him down and cornered him at last above Inver and pinned him with arrows to an ash tree where he hung dying like Odin, the chief of the Gods of his own Norse religion.

“And he is buried there in the ash-grove and the place bears his name and the loch bears his name to this day” said the gentleman, knocking the dottle out of his pipe on our hearthstone. Our eyes were wide and dark.

“Now it would have been good if you have asked if you could stop here.”

“Ah but we looked and didn’t find anywhere to ask and the boys were getting tired and hungry” I said in a voice as soft as his own. I knew he was trying to work out who we were.

“I’m sorry if we are offending. We will leave in the morning if that’s alright...”

“Och. No. No. We won’t be needing the fank just now. Have you come far?”

“No. Just from Portree. We’re within sight of home.”

I was playing with him and his polite oblique questions. I could have told him straight out who my father was and been instantly accepted because of their similar church connections but I wanted to be independent of that.

Then suddenly his face cleared. “You’re the art teacher at the high school!” he said to Harry. “My son enjoys your class. He has a very good word to say about you. Oh! Then!”

Rapport was established. I told him who my people were and from then on we were more than welcome to stay as long as we liked – or until they needed the fank. We were invited to tea, given gifts of eggs, lettuces from the garden, stories about old days in Raasay, kindnesses galore.

But it is Storab’s story that stays in my mind and grows like the dusk round the fire; Storab with his lust for life, dying on a tree like his own Norse God, who hung in the branches of Yggdrasil the World Ashtree for nine days and nine nights, a sacrifice to himself.

And who was the man who made the Storab story so vivid and immediate? He was James Gillies of Balmeanach, Seumas Iain'n Raon. Very few people seem to remember the story so I am glad of the chance to pass it on. When I looked Storab up on the internet I discovered that Harrison Birtwhistle, the famous modern composer who lived on Raasay from 1975-1983, knew the story and has written two pieces of music called Duets for Storab. You can find them on YouTube but I warn you, they are eerie.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Morag_Henriksen

Morag's books are available here:

<https://www.skyemakers.com/makers/literature>

Draw Up!

COMPETITION TIME

Another fantastic opportunity to have your portrait drawn by a professional artist! Or maybe you'd like to see your pet immortalised on canvas?



Artist Roz Gadd has kindly offered to produce another of her wonderful portraits for the lucky winner of this month's competition. All you need to do is unscramble the anagrams below to reveal the names of 3 popular Christmas carols:

HEEL BEFELL TOO WITT MONTH
BE A DEER MILK THIN TWIN
A LOCKED SING SONG, WE

Send your answers to us at: TalkToUp@gmail.com before 1st January 2021 when we will draw the lucky winner.



From being a small child, the transformational ability of art has been magical to Roz. Her first loves were animals, tea, martial arts & drawing. Being an artist allows her to combine these passions. She says "A great portrait can show glimpses of your personality, your soul, as well as your outside.

Every living thing is magical, beautiful & unique."

Roz Gadd lives happily in Durham, surrounded by poets and fur babies!

www.rozgadd.co.uk FB: @RozGaddArtInstagram : rozgaddTwitter: @GaddRozEmail: info@rozgadd.co.uk

Coming Up!

NEXT MONTH

And there it is, another issue done and dusted.

We'd like to thank all our brilliant contributors for once again sharing their stories and photographs with us.

However you spend the festive period, whatever your beliefs, we wish you a joyful Christmas and a happy and healthy 2021!

Much love
Bridget and Harry xx



For our next issue we'd love to see your poems and photographs on the theme of *New Beginnings* - and we'll publish our favourites.

As always feel free to interpret the theme however you wish, just remember we're all about accentuating the positive!

Please send your contributions to: TalkToUp@gmail.com