

Up!

Accentuating the Positive

ISSUE 5 FEBRUARY 2021

Dive in and meet:

Nessie Hunter Steve Feltham

Rookie Sports

Button Box Cheese

Steve Crackett, Champion Wood Turner

and much, much more ...

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

Photo by Ad Meskens

Contents

Up Front! The Team	1
Feeling the Love	
Up Sticks! Steve Feltham	2
The endless quest for Nessie	
Write Up! Poetry Corner	5
Your 'love' poems	
Look Up! Steve Lowe	6
Delightful dolphins	
Read Up! Roger McGough	8
We spend Summer With Monika	
Up Swing! Rookie Sports	10
Where everyone wins	
Write Up! Poetry Corner	13
More of your 'love' poems	
Turn Up! Steve Crackett	14
It's all in the detail	
Eat Up! Button Box Cheese	16
No dairy? No problem!	
Draw Up! Competition Time	18
Win a portrait from Roz Gadd	





Photograph by Anne Burgess

Up Front!

Welcome to our latest edition. Putting the magazine together every month really is an ongoing labour of love, our small contribution to shining a light on all the good stuff.

Is it just us, or do we sense the first hints of Spring just around the corner? Let's face it, if we said the past twelve months have been a testing time we'd be in with a good chance of winning first prize in the Understatement of the Year competition!

But here we are, in the midst of a massive vaccination programme carried out by our beloved NHS. So, in the month of St Valentine, we'd like to take a moment to express our love and thanks not only to the NHS workers who are looking after the nation's health, but also to every single frontline worker. Whether you've spent this pandemic serving people at checkouts, driving vehicles, emptying bins or a myriad of other essential jobs, this issue is for you - thank you.

Now step inside, put your feet up and put the kettle on ...

Bridget & Harry x

Up Sticks!

NESSIE HUNTER STEVE FELTHAM

Up! takes a trip to Loch Ness to meet the man who knows everything there is to know about an elusive lady ...

Ok let's get the obvious question out of the way first! Have you spotted Nessie yet?

Not yet, it's a slow job and I'm in it for the long haul. Although I did once see a mysterious disturbance. All I can say for sure is something shot through the bay at Fort Augustus, putting up a considerable spray of water but I couldn't see what it was. It must have been just below the surface - and big!

So what drives a Home Counties man to up sticks to the shore of Loch Ness?

What drove me was an old mobile library van, which had been converted into a camper van! That was back in 1991, and that van has remained my home ever since.

What caused me to set off on this adventure was a lifelong interest in the story of Loch Ness, and a great desire to do something completely different to the normal expectations of steady job, marriage, kids.

I'd visited the loch on several family holidays as a kid, and had just fallen in love with the mystery and the majesty of the place. For as long as I can remember I had wanted to be a Nessie hunter, and to solve this world class mystery.

I had no idea how long this quest would last when I set off from Dorset, but I did know that if I didn't



give it a try then one day, many years in the future, I would look back on my life and regret not having given the pursuit of Nessie a try. I knew that I would be a disappointment to my future self if I didn't have the courage to follow my heart.

We know you live in your van on the shoreline. Tell us about an average day ...

When I arrived here, I wasted no time in introducing myself to various people around the loch. I pretty soon established about a dozen choice vantage points where I would be welcome to park my van on a regular basis. This meant I could move freely all around Loch Ness, picking and choosing where to park for a few days at a time - sometimes inspired by recent sightings in a certain location, and sometimes just on a whim. I carried on like this for the first ten years, a rare and joyful way to live.

I funded myself by making little Nessie figurines out of modern-day modelling clay. By gluing the sculpture to a rock from the shores of the loch, then baking the whole thing in the oven in my van, I found I could sell just about enough of these to keep myself afloat.

Up Sticks!

NESSIE HUNTER STEVE FELTHAM

To this day, my only source of funding generally is still through making these Nessie models. Nowadays there are collectors of them around the world. I'm often asked to guesstimate how many I've made over 30 years. I would dread to think - maybe 3 skip-loads? I don't know.

At the beginning of this century, it was getting harder and harder to drag my old van through its annual MOT. I found I was spending greater amounts of time parked up on Dores Beach, and less time circling the loch. I had a feeling that Dores was increasingly becoming my base.

Back then the Dores Inn was owned by Ian Cameron and he was drawing up the lease for the new incoming tenants. In what must be the greatest act of altruism I've ever experienced, he decided to take the bit of land on which I was parked off the new pub lease, "just in case you wanted to spread out a bit and make yourself some decking, or a bit of a patio". Perfect! I could not have wished for more.

I now have probably the best view anyone could want. The front of my van looks right down the 23 mile length of the loch. I know it's the best view, and just to confirm my belief, if ever a company wants to make an advert or Hollywood want to film a Loch Ness movie, it is right here on the beach in front of me that they set up their cameras.

On my decking I have a massive round garden table (also donated). Unless the weather is ferocious, I can normally be found sat out here,



making my little sculptures, camera and binoculars at the ready. I don't plan much, I like to start the day in this fashion and see what happens.

During the summer I meet hundreds of people from all over the world. Every guidebook on Loch Ness written in recent years has a paragraph telling the reader that if they visit the Dores Inn there they will find the world's only full-time hunter of the Loch Ness Monster. I've met many amazing people.

All the windows on my van are now mirrored with foil film so that I can see out but people can't see in. So if I do get bored of answering questions I only have to go inside, shut the door and ignore the outside world.

I love to potter about. I generally have 3 or 4 different projects on the go, if I find myself getting remotely bored, I just do something else.

What is it about the quest for Nessie that continues to fascinate people, do you think?

The possibility that we haven't discovered every creature on this planet yet. That maybe, just maybe, there are a few big discoveries left to be made, and despite all the odds, one of the greatest most emblematic, enigmatic mysteries of them all may yet still have a positive outcome.

The character of Nessie as a shy but loveable creature carrying on a simple life in a Scottish loch, out of sight of mankind, is a story that every young child is told. Nessie has earned her place in our romantic hearts.

Up Sticks!

NESSIE HUNTER STEVE FELTHAM

We really love the fact you've followed your dream and made it happen. What advice would you give to someone considering a similar change in direction?

We have all only got one life, so do what makes your heart sing.

If you have a passion for something, then do all you can to make that passion your life. However, don't bother if you're not going to give it 100 percent. If you only go for it half-heartedly then it's not going to work. But if you pour your heart and soul into your adventure, the positivity that you create will attract other people to you, to help you. Ian Cameron would not have given me permission to spread out on his beach if he thought I was just mucking about.



I'm not saying get a van and come and help me find Nessie, please don't - I'm doing fine without your help!

Ultimately, it's about what you want to do with your life. If you don't follow your heart, then the only person that loses is you.

Find out more about Steve and his ongoing quest for Nessie at:

www.nessiehunter.co.uk



The two most important days in your life are the day you are born and the day you find out why.

Mark Twain

There is no passion to be found playing small, in settling for a life that is less than the one you are capable of living.

Nelson Mandela

'What if I fall?'

'Oh but my darling, what if you fly?'

It's a Wonderful Life

Write Up!

POEMS ON THE THEME OF LOVE

Love Poem

I love the cool simplicity of you
that you're not complicated,
that I know how to please you
and the shape of happiness today
will be the same in a year.

I love the way you wake and stretch
towards the promise of morning
that neither unkindness nor injustice
have tainted or diminished you.

You are spring dawn perfume
the suggestion of distant coastlines,
a wild enigma asleep in my arms
and it's unreal you're satisfied with me
when you could have the world.

John Short

Feasts

This is a flavour of love.
I want to show you that devotion
has a texture in the mouth,
that each meal is an iteration
of grace: "I will nurture us."
Each declaration is a work
and a joy, made by my hands
for your nourishment and mine.
I wield spoons and bang pans
and make a mess and from these
fervid rituals come my purest offerings:
this food I lay before us. Eat.

Megan Pattie

Flight

These days, we only meet
between the covers of a journal.
When we split, you kicked shut
the door I tried to prop ajar.
I miss you now, but not as much
as when we were together, and you weren't there,
unavoidably detained by demons
crowding through the shutters.
When proofs arrive, there lie our poems,
splayed across two pages. Last shared as fledglings,
now these birds take flight, their ragged wings
beating,
beating,
beating.

Hannah Stone

Look Up!

STEVE LOWE

Up!'s outdoor man goes dolphin spotting - and invites us all along

Dark winter evenings are perfect for curling up in front of the latest high quality TV wildlife documentary, with a brew and a dunker.

Never more so than now, where the quality brings the viewer into virtual close up with the subject matter, whether that be Sea Iguanas evading snakes on the Galapagos, or Orca scooting up a beach after a tasty penguin snack.

TV brings the natural world right into our homes and viewing figures have never been higher. The medium also seeps into our brains, planting the seeds of information that grow into an increasing awareness of the peril out there “in nature”. David Attenborough was recently reported to be the most popular man in Britain, bringing us regular reminders that mankind is the real peril “for nature”.

The current imposition of lockdown measures due to the pandemic gave many of us even more reasons to venture into the great outdoors and to value the mindfulness provided by birdsong, the wind or crashing waves.

Along the north east coast, and largely thanks to social media, Mackems (for the uninitiated, that's folk from Sunderland!) and Geordies alike are marvelling at the antics of dolphins cruising ‘wor’ shoreline. Believing this to be a new thing, most would be amazed to know these animals are actually residents and are closely monitored by a group of dedicated volunteer observers. In many



cases, individual animals can be identified by searching for characteristic and individual markings.

In fact, one notorious individual, known as Runny Paint (because of a broad white stripe and some additional splashes along the base of her dorsal fin), is known to have originated from the Moray Firth, where she was a regular sighting until roughly 2001. In fact, other bottle-nosed dolphins (mainly female) have been traced back to this population and from this brilliant work, undertaken by the volunteers of the North East Cetacean Group, it is thought that up to 150 individuals are now regularly seen along the coast (*note 1*).

I have been an active cetacean spotter with NECP for many years, regularly frequenting the coast in search of these wonderful animals. Members also undertake work offshore, brilliantly supported by the Northumberland Inshore Fisheries Conservation Authority, one of the agencies charged with the sustainable conservation of our fantastic maritime environment. As such their work, although voluntary, is highly scientific.

Cetaceans, by the way, are any member of an entirely aquatic group of mammals commonly known as whales, dolphins, and porpoises. It

Look Up!

STEVE LOWE

will therefore be no surprise to find that the efforts are also resulting in numerous new discoveries, including a growing list of species being identified and recorded as part of local and national datasets (*note 2*).

All this volunteer and citizen science generated data is very important and drives evidence-based conservation action. It can be used to improve understanding of how species live, what they require and how they respond to environmental changes, such as conservation management or climate change.

The thing is that this is also EASY to join in with! Your own sightings are equally important and many organisations such as RSPB or BTO (*note 3*) run national surveys which can be undertaken from the comfort of the sofa (during lockdown of course). There are lots of free online resources, smart phone apps and also lots of opportunities to learn, including events such as BioBlitz's, where experts and beginners get together to share the wonder of nature. If we all took the time to look, many more natural marvels would be encountered. And the good news is that all evidence shows that getting close to nature is vitally important for helping relieve life's stresses, whatever our age.



Recently showing an extended family group the hagfish and shark eggs (mermaids' purses) that I found on the beach during my weekend walk was rewarded by huge smiles and lots of questions. That gave me a warm glow too, despite the bustling winds of Storm Darcy.

I personally believe the experience is way better with the wind and rain, sun and smells, so recommend it, just dress appropriately! It's more immersive than a fight over the remote control at the very least.



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.

1. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/NorthEastCetaceanProject/>
2. <https://www.ericnortheast.org.uk/>
3. <https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/gbw/join>

Read Up!

ROGER MCGOUGH

In a special for our Valentine's issue, Up!'s Harry Gallagher revisits a poetry classic he fell in love with many moons ago

*They say it was an average
ordinary
moderate
run of the mill
commonorgarden
Summer*

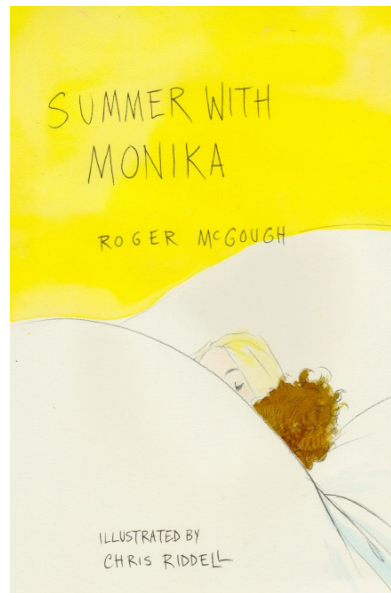
but it wasn't

*For I locked a yellowdoor
and I threw away the key
and I spent Summer with Monika
and Monika spent Summer
with me*

Whenever I'm asked how long I've been into poetry – and this does happen quite a lot - I give a variety of answers, all based around "Ooh...erm....dunno really, probably most of my life, it's always just....been there". Fastidious about words, me.

But if I thought for just one moment, I could answer quickasaflash, as the man himself might put it, "That's easy – I've been in love with poetry since the first time I picked up Summer With Monika by Roger McGough."

Summer With Monika, for the uninitiated, is a book of poems which tells the story of a love affair, from initial passions (milk bottles turning to cheese on the doorstep, left there by the couple consumed only with each other), through the stages of quarrels, jealousy, recriminations



and boredom, to the point where love is as nice as a cup of tea in bed.

These days Roger McGough (and why isn't he Poet Laureate, by the way? I actually like to think he turned it down) is known as that guy who was in

the Scaffold with Paul McCartney's brother, presents *Poetry Please!* on Radio 4, and is equal parts witty and diffident. But I knew none of this when I picked up *Summer With Monika*. Perhaps I was the right age for it – mid-late teens from memory - but from the first poem, it was as if a loud bell went off inside my head and the echo of it spread through the rest of me like a smile. In the end it settled in my heart, where it still tinkles quietly away.

The poems are everything that makes McGough the great poet he is. By turns they're clever, playful, funny and full of joy. And then every now and again there's a line which makes you think "Oh no! Don't say that!" as the couple's love waxes and wanes. In retrospect, it's very 60's and seems totally at home in the *Summer Of Love*, but since when was that a bad thing?

One other thing – it's full of slightly off-kilter phrases; words that shouldn't quite fit together fall into one another like lovers and somehow he makes it all work perfectly. We all understand what's going on – because we're in McGoughWorld and know everything's going to be alright. To illustrate this, when I mentioned the book to a poet pal recently, he exclaimed

Read Up!

ROGER MCGOUGH

“The teathings!” What he was referring to is this mid-book poem, a crisis point for the couple:

*monika the teathings are taking over!
the cups are as big as bubblecars
they throttle round the room...*

...and so the poem careers around their home, a series of queasy, unsettling images with inanimate objects coming to life with seemingly malevolent intent, culminating in:

*i overheard the knives and forks
'it won't be long' they said
'it won't be long' they said*

Yet for every tear-stained poem about the fag-end of a love affair, there are couplets like this:

*It all started yesterday evening
as I was helping the potatoes off with their jackets...*

The poem goes on to comically address a list of household appliances he imagines Monika to be having a fling with behind his back, culminating with this mad beauty:



*I saw you making love with the gas cooker,
I distinctly saw you making love with the gas cooker,
My gas cooker.
My mistake was to leap upon you crying,
Monica, spare the saucers.
For now I'm alone,
you having left me for someone with a bigger
kitchen.*

For all its wonkiness and whimsy, *Summer With Monika* is anything but lightweight, a tag often unjustly thrown at its author. It's about the workings of the human heart, what drives us and makes us unique.

Its gaze is kind, original and profound – what else could you want from poetry?

***Summer With Monika is published by Penguin Books
and available from all good bookshops***

And for a little bonus McGough, here's one of the nation's favourite poems - a later, slightly more jaded look at love!

Cake

*I wanted one life
you wanted another
we couldn't have our cake
so we ate each other.*

Up Swing!

ROOKIE SPORTS

Up! speaks to Mark and June Shone who, along with Lead Coach Tom Lyons are Rookie Sports - the community group breaking down barriers through fun and friendship.

Tell us a bit about the history of Rookie Sports, how did you get started?

We originally set up a website (rookiegolf.com) for youngsters wanting to start playing golf. It was an instant success and received messages of support and enquiries from all over the globe. We established an on-line *rookiegolf* club that they could join, and gained the support of Mark James, former Ryder Cup captain, who provided tips on the site on how young people could improve their game. We're delighted that several of those who joined went on to become well-known professional golfers and are still achieving great success playing on tour.

Working with PGA professionals, we then set up physical clubs locally, so children could learn the basics in safe environments before venturing onto a golf course. This proved really popular with their parents, who felt it was a great way for them to learn.

Eventually we developed a range of equipment so that groups could practice indoors, with a lot of fun games to teach the basic skills. Working with Newcastle Schools Sport Partnership, we delivered a 3-year indoor *rookiegolf* programme across Newcastle. As different organisations heard about our work, we were asked to work with older people living in sheltered accommodation. We adapted our games to suit their limited mobility and sourced different equipment, then did some trial sessions. The reaction from the people who took



part was quite staggering – they loved it and found it so much fun because it was so different to their traditional activities, which mainly consisted of seated exercise and bingo sessions.

From here things snowballed, with requests to work with other community groups. We realised how much fun all age groups were having, so developed a variety of games to be played as a fun, standalone activity even for people with no interest in playing traditional golf. In 2005 we set up Rookie Sports as a not-for-profit social enterprise to work with groups often excluded from sporting and physical activities. We now work with people from 3 years old - and our oldest participant is 103!

We found that people taking part were very competitive, and enjoyed friendly challenges with one another, so we organised competitions within groups. Then we developed an inter-generational programme, with teams from schools buddying up with a nearby care home or sheltered housing scheme.

We now organise 3 or 4 large scale events at leisure centres and community halls. Different groups of older people form teams and take part in a range of *rookiegolf* games to compete for trophies. These events are followed with refreshments and a chance to socialise and make new friends. The atmosphere is always brilliant, with great feedback from players and volunteers alike!

Up Swing!

ROOKIE SPORTS

From initially focusing on young people, our programme for older people is now our busiest work. As well as working with care homes, sheltered housing and community organisations, we provide a specialised programme for adults with learning disabilities that runs throughout the year.

So, a lovely variety to our work, but the aim is always for people to have fun, make new friends, and improve their health and wellbeing.



Have you been able to continue providing services during the pandemic?

Most of the people we work with don't have easy access to the internet so putting activities online wasn't really

an option. However, we've kept in touch with our groups with regular phone calls and by putting together activity packs for them.

Plus, thanks to Lottery funding, we've been able to compile activity boxes which are then loaned out to care homes for a few weeks before being swapped for a different one. This idea provides an easy-to-access range of activities for the residents, saving their Activity Co-ordinators vital time planning and securing resources. The feedback we're getting from all those involved is brilliant. The games and activities provide fun and stimulation for residents, helping reduce feelings of isolation and depression.

You mentioned your intergenerational work earlier on. What's the benefit in encouraging different age groups to mix?

Our intergenerational activities are specially tailored to allow people of all ages and abilities to take part at the same level. This means we can form teams with players of different generations. Many intergenerational activities are often one age group talking to, or teaching, another age group rather than all taking part together.

A big benefit of our format is that there's a lot more chatting, laughing and interaction between the age groups. So much of today's media portrays negative images of the young, so the elderly are often wary of young people, while the young often think that once you become 'old' you can't do much and don't have any fun. Through fun games they all join in together and support one another, regardless of age or ability. It breaks down stereotypes and a lot of perceptions are changed. Younger players come away saying "They might be older than us but they're still really good!" Older players talk about being surprised about how helpful and caring the young people in their team were.

When everyone is having fun, the focus is on what you have in common and that's so powerful. Involving volunteers in our work also brings in another generation and they often tell us how their perceptions are changed by seeing people in their late 90s still having fun and remaining active through these events.



Up Swing!

ROOKIE SPORTS

Work like yours must bring a lot of job satisfaction. What's your favourite thing about what you do?

Seeing the enjoyment people get from taking part in the activities and meeting up with friends, especially as a lot of these friendships have been made through playing the activities. Also, the breaking down of barriers between different groups who previously wouldn't mix but are now helping fundraise and support each other.

What does the future hold for Rookie Sports?

We will always want to work face-to-face with groups when we are allowed to again but in the meantime we'll look to provide more activities remotely.

It's so important to stay in contact with people during times like this – and that's what we'll keep doing!

If you'd like to find out more, you can contact Rookie Sports as follows:

<https://www.facebook.com/rookiesports> or by email at info@rookiesports.co.uk



If you want to lift yourself up, lift up someone else

Booker T. Washington

Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much

Helen Keller

If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together

African Proverb

Write Up!

POEMS ON THE THEME OF LOVE

Fine Wine

Champagne fizz
of young love
and first kisses
subsides to a
gentle effervescence
where little bubbles
of fond memory
rise quietly
here and there
popping and tickling
year on year
still enough
to make us smile

John Wilkins

Next month's theme is:

'Childhood Memories'.

**Send up to 3 poems to:
talktoup@gmail.com**

Hangovers

Last evening, I got drunk with my mate,
under Monday-night umbrellas, in the rain,
two metres distant in the wet back yard;

we sat beneath the back-door burglar light,
that twitched its slow strobe
each time the cat leapt o'er the fence,
and we drank and talked together for the first time in months,
and we laughed, and did not care
about the drip, drip, drip of storms,
like little boys gone camping,
or awaiting carp,
like two old fellas, who would hug,
were it not so medically inadvisable,
were it not even more awkward
to display some physical affection
in times such as these;

and the happy hours flew by
and shooting stars pierced the city light pollution,
and we guzzled supermarket ales
from disinfected tins
and did not care
about the neighbours listening in;

and we talked
around the houses, in and out,
remembering forgotten rooms,
and moving around the furniture of life,
trying to make space for new furniture,
trying to figure a new future,
and reaching the slurry limits
of our tolerance;

and then the clouds lifted
and my friend wobbled home on his bicycle
and I woke up this morning
so grateful
for the foggy thumping in my head.

Jonathan Croose

Turn Up!

STEVE CRACKETT
FINE WOOD TURNINGS

Up! talks to prize-winning wood turner,
Steve Crackett

Wood turning seems such a fine and specialist craft. How did you first get into it?

I first tried wood turning at school - about half an hour in a woodwork lesson. It didn't go well but did pique my interest. About 10 years later, and living in a flat, wood turning was not really an option. I had some basic wood working tools and would make things in the kitchen or back yard, weather permitting. This spurred me on to get a shed where I could set up a small workshop and put in a lathe found in the Classifieds. I've never looked back from then.

Can you expand a bit on the materials you use? How do you source the woods etc?

Yes, I mainly use native wood, sycamore being my favourite for turning due to the very smooth finish that can be produced, making it suitable for the decoration that I typically supply. I also like ash, elm, oak and beech, although most regional woods are good for turning.

I try to source wood from wind falls or from friends and family cutting down trees from their garden. I think being sustainable is really important, especially with rare timber. A lot of South American and African woods are now banned from being imported - and rightly so. There are a couple of specialist timber suppliers I use, one in Hexham and one in Snainton, near Scarborough. These both supply good quality hard woods that are sustainably sourced.



Where do you find your inspiration? Do you decide on the design beforehand or does something emerge as you work the wood?

This is not easy to answer, because it's a bit of both! I get inspiration from so many different areas. I try not to look at other turners' work but focus instead on trying to make more individual pieces, looking more at ceramics, art and - among other places - motorbike airbrush designs. I often do start with an idea in mind, but it doesn't always end up the way I predicted. A nice grain might appear which changes things, or the shape might present itself during the process, or a bark inclusion may fall out and leave a hole that needs to be corrected. I do often look for the nasty gnarly pieces of wood because they usually have the best grain, but it is nature that decides that, so it's not always predictable.



Turn Up!

STEVE CRACKETT FINE WOOD TURNINGS

A lot of my pieces are enhanced with paint, stain, hot wire burning and piercing, or a combination of all the above. If the grain of the wood is stunning to start with, I would not do much, only trying to enhance what nature has started.

We know you accept commissions as well as producing items for retail. What's been your personal favourite piece so far?

I think my favourite commission was for a birthday present for a friend of mine who had recently lost her husband. Their daughter asked for a bowl with a triangular Celtic motif that was on the gravestone. I came up with a design and they loved it, so it became part of my standard collection.

My favourite non-commissioned piece might be the pierced vase that was so well-received at the shows I have attended. This also became my signature piece. The other personal favourite is the red finial vase in the thin cutaway stand, this was made for a competition at the Northumbrian Wood Turners Association.



It must take an awful lot of time and toil to produce some of the beautiful, prize-winning work we've seen. What's the longest time you've ever spent on an item?

I try to keep the designs to within a day to make. Because I have to make a living from it, if a piece takes days to make, it just becomes too expensive to sell. There have been a few that have taken 10 or 12 hours of constant work (i.e. nearly 2 working days) to make, but these are usually prototypes that can take longer, working out how to make it as I progress the piece. If it goes into production, I have ironed out the process and things tend to go a bit quicker. The piercing does take a lot of time and concentration to do, but is also really enjoyable if I'm in the right frame of mind. I just put on some nice music and settle in until it's finished!



**You can see more of Steve's work at:
www.stevecracketturnings.com**

Eat Up!

BUTTON BOX CHEESE

Up! meets Ross, Roisin & Carol Embleton - the team behind the north-east's newest vegan cheese range

Where did the idea for Button Box Cheese come from?

By 2018 we were all following a plant-based diet, but really missed good cheese. It can be difficult to find a decent vegan cheese, so in 2019 Carol gathered the ingredients and set about having a go. Ross and Roisin visited that same day, back when just turning up to say 'Hi' was socially acceptable and legal! They tried the cheese for the first time, and Ross said "I'd pay for that. It's really nice!"

After an afternoon discussing how to improve the recipe and what flavours could be a good match to add the little 'something extra', Ross had a restless night dreaming up a business plan. Over the next few days, we had long, excited discussions and the business partnership was born. Carol uses a lot of buttons for her craft projects, so the name 'Button Box Cheese' came easily.

We developed our own version of the recipe. This took lots of research about the mixing of ingredients and experimental attempts to create the best version of the cheese. Soon after, we added flavours that we enjoyed, drawing on our previous love of flavoured dairy cheeses. We were excited and on track to launch Button Box Cheese in March 2020, but Covid-19 threw us for a loop along with everyone else. It took an additional six months to further develop flavours and to start creating other recipes to show how the cheese could be used in pasta, pies, and pastries.

We officially launched the business in September and quickly acquired our first local stockist.



As you say, finding good quality vegan soft cheese is like searching for the holy grail! Tell us your secret ...

The process takes three days on average, as all of our cheeses are handmade. The main ingredient currently is cashew nuts, as per the original craft recipe. We grind the nuts into flour, so there can be a fair bit of processing to be done at the beginning of each batch. Each stage of the process takes a few hours and allows the perfect amalgamation of flavours before cooking, cooling and packaging.

It took a few trials to figure out the perfect mix of ingredients - reducing the oil, increasing a certain herb or spice - for perfect flavour and managing the balance of agar for a more solid consistency to the overall cheese. The cashews now go through a two-stage grinding process to produce a finer flour for a smoother texture.

We imagine it's a big step from making food for yourself to producing a commercial product. Has this been a challenging process?

It's been extremely challenging! Cooking a product to be consumed by the public is vastly different from simply cooking at home for the family. Carol took a Food Preparation and Hygiene course, at present she is the only cook, but we need to ensure we are following all the guidance of the Food Standards Agency.

Eat Up!

BUTTON BOX CHEESE

We also had to research how long the cheese would last, to determine a 'use by' or 'best before' date. This took several weeks and was a difficult process because it was just so tempting to have a nibble! We had cheeses in packaging, without packaging, in the fridge and out of it.

Our own plant-based journey started for environmental reasons, so we are all passionate about ingredients and packaging from local, sustainable sources where possible.

You have a growing range of flavours available. How do you go about deciding what to go with?

At the beginning we chose flavours we liked ourselves as we were experimenting with the recipe just for our own enjoyment. We offered tasters to friends and family and had great feedback from them, even the omnivores! It was difficult to know which flavours the public would prefer, which is why we created the taster pack which contains all five flavours. Our Garlic and Chive, and also the Cranberry and Cinnamon have been our best sellers so far.

We are always happy to hear ideas and take requests for new flavours we can play around with - in fact, we have a couple we are trialling currently which we hope to release this year.



So, what's next for Button Box Cheese?

We are staying local for now but look forward to expanding further afield in the future. As well as planning to bring out a new flavour for each new season, we also plan to produce catering packs as we've had a lot of interest from local cafes looking to expand their vegan options.

We are researching a soy-free version of our cheese to eliminate another allergen and may also mix things up with different types of nuts.

We are also developing a recipe blog to demonstrate how our cheese can be used in new and exciting ways.

We are all excited to be on this venture as a family-run, local business and when the world returns to a form of normality, we'll definitely be at local markets to meet more of our wonderful customers face to face.



**You can find out more about
Button Box Cheese here:**

**<https://www.buttonboxcheese.com/>
<https://www.facebook.com/buttonboxcheese>**

Draw Up!

COMPETITION TIME

Artist Roz Gadd is all set to produce another of her wonderful portraits for the lucky winner of this month's competition. To be in with a chance, all you need to do is unscramble the anagrams below to reveal the names of 3 British myths / legends:



HEARD EGG ON TO DANGER (6,3,3,6)
THRONE AIMS FOOT, MOBBED (3,5,2,6,4)
I'M IN A DRAMA (4,6)

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

Many congratulations to the winner of last month's competition, Gloria Fletcher, who won herself a portrait by correctly unscrambling these famous ship anagrams:

MY WOLF ERA - Mayflower
CHIVY STORM - HMS Victory
MICKS BAR - Bismarck

Roz Gadd lives happily in Durham, surrounded by poets and fur babies!
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The arts are not a way to make a living. They are a very human way of making life more bearable. Practicing an art, no matter how well or badly, is a way to make your soul grow. Sing in the shower. Dance to the radio. Tell stories. Write a poem to a friend, even a lousy poem. Do it as well as you possibly can. You will get an enormous reward. You will have created something.

Kurt Vonnegut

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

Coming Up!

NEXT MONTH

And just like that, another issue is done and dusted! We hope you enjoyed reading our 5th Up! magazine. We are so grateful to all of our readers and wonderful contributors - without you there is no Up!

Once again we wish you and your loved ones good health and happiness. Let's all keep looking out for each other and we'll see you back here next month.

Much love
Bridget and Harry xx



PS Speaking of next month ... the sharper-eyed among you may have spotted that we'll be looking at childhood memories next month. Can you guess who we'll be interviewing? The "old saggy cloth cat, a bit loose at the seams" (pictured above) may provide a clue ...