
Audley St George's News

Incidental bits and pieces from our Edgbaston community

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Eileen's answer to SOS Puffin

With so many species of Britain's wildlife under threat these days it's good to hear of a success story in the fight to protect one of them, the breeding puffins of the Firth of Forth. Fifteen years ago their numbers on two islands, Craigleith and Fidra, were declining because of the spread of an invasive plant, tree mallow. And our own **Eileen Shields** played a major role in turning the losses around through a project called SOS Puffin. Tree mallow was brought from the Mediterranean to Craigleith over a century ago where its leaves were used for medicinal purposes. Helped by milder winters and soils enriched by nitrogen and phosphates, tree mallow spread - slowly at first and then more rapidly until by 2006 at least 90% of Craigleith was covered with an impenetrable jungle. It spread to Fidra, 4 km to the west, until it covered more than half of that island. Puffins tend to return to old burrows to nest, but as the tree mallow became denser,



access to their nests was blocked. As a result puffin numbers on the islands declined by three-quarters in less than a decade. Through the Scottish Seabird Centre in North Berwick the SOS Puffin project was set up to bring the pest on both islands under control.

From 2007 when the weather allowed, volunteer work parties regularly crossed to the islands to cut the dense growth back. Eileen was so taken with the project that she signed up in 2009 to make the regular trip, involving for her two train journeys from her home near Stirling to North Berwick. Landing on the islands was not easy



and from time to time trips were cancelled because of the weather. The volunteers tackled the pest with loppers and shears, cutting the 3m tall plants close to the ground to kill

them. The work continued throughout the year except for the breeding season between April and August when the birds must not be disturbed. Eileen kept a diary of her regular



visits, and between 2009 and 2021 she made a total of 67 trips. During that time she could see the difference in puffin numbers as the project halted the decline and turned it around. Eileen told us: "It was the most wonderful experience, and I loved it all. It was a great opportunity to indulge my passion for wildlife and I learned so much from other volunteers." Our picture shows some of the volunteers at work (with Eileen on the right). During her many visits she also recorded sightings of gulls, guillemots, cormorants, peregrine falcons, bottle-nosed dolphins, and many other species. It is pleasing to

report that much of the tree mallow has now been cleared, but the work continues today to keep regrowth under control. Although she is no longer involved, Eileen speaks of her involvement in the project with fond memories and pride. And we can understand why.

Akhtar's travels

We continue the story of Akhtar Gould's travels with her husband Krishan after he had had a medical procedure to prepare him for regular dialysis:

In August 1997 we were due to celebrate our 30th wedding anniversary and while both of us had been to the Niagara Falls, we had not been together. We agreed to make the trip, basing ourselves in Toronto. Krishan was still on dialysis twice a week, and as Canada did not have the same free medical arrangement as the countries in Europe I paid for two sessions of dialysis at \$400 each in advance. I also booked the hotels, including one at Niagara overlooking the falls, and a car for our trip. After our arrival, and a session of dialysis for Krishan, I drove us down to Niagara. After settling in at our hotel, we went for a meal in the hotel, and were able to see the falls all lit up. It was just magical.



The next day we saw more of the falls by daylight, and took the famous *Maid of the Mist* ferry for a closer look. The ferry goes alongside the American Falls and takes passengers into the mist of the Horseshoe Falls.

After our wonderful trip to see the Niagara Falls we returned to Toronto for a second session of dialysis, after which we toured the city looking at the sights. That night we caught our return flight to Birmingham – just six days after setting out for Canada. Just before we landed, the captain brought us the sad news of the death of Princess Diana in a car crash in Paris. The whole aircraft was stunned at this news, and some passengers were even moved to tears – this provided a sobering end to our wonderful trip to the Niagara Falls.

To be continued

The art of growing old

Our piece on growing old by Michael Morpurgo in the last issue drew quite a lot of interest from our village community:

Harry Harper observed that Michael Morpurgo had not yet reached 80. “Young, like yourself,” he told us. And he compared Morpurgo’s comparatively youthful age with his own, and some of our neighbours. He remembered particularly Graham Winteringham, Harry’s first tutor, who died recently at 99, and also some of his own family. “I have a sister who will be 103 later this month, plus a cousin who died earlier this year at 106.” Harry wryly commented: “By that measure, Morpurgo has barely started.”

*And this from **Peter How**:*

The talk by Michael Morpurgo quoted in *St George’s News* reminds me that meetings between young and old benefit both. In the 1950s, as a young member of Round Table whose aims included community service, I regularly visited an old folks’ home (as we called them then). One of the elderly residents was a Miss Drinkwater and over the months I got to know her well. She told me that as a girl she had been taken to London to see Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show, which also included Miss Annie Oakley, the sharp shooter. This must have been around 1900. I couldn’t have been more impressed! I never got to know Miss Drinkwater’s first name.

Last year, I was invited to give a talk to some schoolgirls and their parents at my old boarding school. My subject was about life in my House (it was all-boys then) in the 1940s. They found it interesting and several wanted to chat with me afterwards. They could hardly believe that we were allowed only 4 inches of water in our baths to save fuel.

Betty Webb, a 100-year-old Bletchley Park worker, is still invited to give talks to youngsters about her life there and later at the Pentagon. This brings history to life for them and gives her another interest. (Betty attended the coronation of King Charles).

Life is about give and take, isn’t it?

And as always, Mark Twain had an appropriate epigram about advancing years:

“Do not regret growing older. It is a privilege denied to many.”

But perhaps we should also reflect on growing old in a predominantly young city:

Birmingham is actually the youngest city in Europe with a higher proportion of people aged under 15 than any other city of our continent, and with 37% of the population aged under 25. And they all seem to congregate on Broad Street on Saturday evenings.

Global boiling

Europe's recent extreme heat wave reminded me of a visit I made 50 years ago to the central Saharan desert town of In Salah, 1,000 km south of Algiers. It's said to be one of the hottest places on earth, with peak temperatures then regularly reaching 50 degrees C. With the settlements of Adrar and Reggane, In Salah forms what local inhabitants call the 'Triangle of Fire'. Half a century on, and with the arrival of what the UN Secretary of State describes as 'global boiling', I can only imagine just how hot In Salah might be today.

Tony Brett Young

A day out in Weston

Thanks are due to **Howard Sayles** of the Audley Social Committee for suggesting an outing to Weston-super-Mare. A full coach-load of 16 set out (although unfortunately Howard was not able to come) and enjoyed perfect weather. There's no doubt a day at the



beach can bring out the child in anyone and the visit included ice creams, rides on the big wheel, Weston-super-Mare rock, and walks on the beach. And by asking the locals **Junie Rabone** found the best fish and chips outlet (Papa's). A group also visited the Grand Pier, the pavilion of which was destroyed by fire in 2008, but restored and reopened two years later. A number of fire engines raced to the pier during our visit, but fortunately it was no more than a false alarm.

*We had sand in our eyes and the
ears and the nose
And sand in the hair, and sand
between the toes.*

*Whenever a strong nor'wester
blows*

*Our Audley group are certain of
sand between the toes.*

*With apologies to A A Milne,
and thanks to **Coby Schrijver**
for the top picture.*

