9 MARCH 1891: THE BLIZZARD IN THE WEST

March 2000

The West Country weather forecast for Monday, 9 March, 1891, was a typical one for the time of year: a fine morning with the possibility of some sleet or snow showers later. It isn't difficult to imagine the rather bleak sort of day that was promised.
What actually ensued was rather different. The predicted sleet began falling at about 11am. During the afternoon the wind grew to menacing proportions and snow began to settle. By 6pm four or five inches lay over southern England. What followed is succinctly described in *Doidge's Annual* of 1892:
`At night, about eight o'clock, the wind had increased to a hurricane, and the snow fell in blinding sheets; not light, flakey snow such as poets like to sing about, but fine, powdery snow that penetrated eyes and ears, made walking in the face of it next to an impossibility, and gradually piled up its tiny pellets into huge masses of a solid character many feet deep. Such snow has rarely been seen in this locality.'
A force 10 wind had swept in the blizzard. Plymouth took the main brunt. The iron seats on the Hoe were wrenched from their fixings and twisted into grotesque shapes by the elements. Chimney stacks crashed down and the air was full of flying slates and splintered wood. Just a few intrepid householders dashed out to collect the splintered timber for firewood. On Dartmoor the blizzard raged furiously. Great trees began to fall and smaller trees everywhere were torn up by the roots. Few people slept throught the deafening roar of the gale.
Tuesday's dawn revealed the extent of the disaster. Telegraph lines were severed and transport was at a standstill. The mailcarts were unable to move and every town, village and hamlet, isolated farm and mansion, was thrown back on its own resources. On the railways, drifts of over ten feet had piled up, almost covering the stranded trains. Some passengers were snowed up for over 36 hours, suffering cold, hunger and exhaustion. At St Germans about 70 people were confined to the Liskeard to Plymouth train.This little community included a Cadbury's representative who managed to brew hot cocoa for everyone from his case of samples.
The express from London had seized up at South Brent. Its passengers poured out into the little town only to find it already full of contractors' men unable to continue work on a new railway line. A search for provisions resulted in exploitation and overcharging (six shillings for a bottle of brandy), indignantly publicised afterwards in letters to the Western Morning News.
The hardships on land were nothing to the tragedies at sea. Wrecks were strewn along the coast from Start Point to Falmouth. It was impossible to launch a boat or fire a rocket. Many lives were lost, some in full view of the cliffs as boats were driven on to the rocky fringes below, and whole crews died trying to struggle from disintegrating vessels to the shore.
The morning of Wednesday, 11 March, brought brilliant sunshine that transformed the landscape into a radiant vista. Hopes of a quick thaw ran high, but the bitter wind persisted and by Thursday it was snowing again. But the worst was over and the work of recovery was beginning, along with the circulation of amazing stories of heroism, endurance, suffering, and the sheer freakishness of many incidents.The loss of stock was tremendous. Thousands of sheep, poultry and cattle had been buried in drifts and there were stories of lambs being born under blankets of snow. At Maristow, Bickleigh and Roborough, more than 50,000 trees had been destroyed. In some villages the snow was so deep that neighbours could speak to each other only from bedroom windows. Many houses were buried entirely so that their inhabitants had to be dug out. In Ringmore, the Reverend Francis Hingeston-Randolph, then rector of All Hallows, wrote: `1891 9 March. The memorable Blizzard began, roads and railways completely blocked, no letters or newspapers reached the parish for more than a week. Whole flocks of sheep lost in snow on every farm.'
A complete snowing-up of the leat in Plymouth resulted in the loss of the water supply to the city for the second time in ten years. A profoundly irate citizen wrote to the Western Morning News:
`Ten years since our leat was blocked with snow; since then the Council have talked and talked until they must be tired of talking.....During the discussion it was stated such a thing had never occurred before, and probably would not occur again in this generation; but in this comparatively brief period here we are again, supply stopped. Nothing but piping the supply to the intake will give us that security we need. We ought to have insisted on having this before the blocking was commenced, but now we must patiently wait until this is completed, and then, no doubt, the piping will be commenced. Yours truly, Robert G. Bird.'
We know the feeling, Mr Bird.
A remarkable feature of this whole phenomenon was its unexpectedness. It became known as `The Great Unforeseen'. Observatories in the USA had hinted at the possibility of a storm `at the end of March' and a few of the local weatherwise had spoken of `an atmospheric change of some sort'. But no official indications were given.
Curiously, as a reporter in 1892 pointed out, the only accurate prediction of the Great Blizzard in the West was found in *Old Moore's Almanack*.

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Dai Zhen's critical assault on the Neo-Confucianism of his predecessors is substantially contained in his book *Elucidation of the Meaning of Words in Mencius*. His critique takes its impetus from three things: his dedicated study of early Confucian texts: his adherence to empiricist methods of investigation; and his passion to discover the exact words and truths of the early Confucian sages. He was always ready to challenge any pronouncement that was merely authoritarian, and worked always to verify for himself anything that was offered as evidence for an assertion or belief. He wrote: 'To aspire to get at the truth, a man must purge himself completely of all his dependence'; and, 'A scholar should be deluded neither by others nor by himself.'[10]

Dai Zhen's fundamental objection to the received Neo-Confucianism of his time was that it erred from the truth in that it offered a dualistic rather than a monistic account of the ultimate nature of things. His own view, derived in part from his study of ancient texts, in part from empiricist methodology, was that the universe is an organized physical unity whose coherence and orderliness are embedded or immanent in its physicality rather than imposed by a principle external to it. Central to the Neo-Confucian debate on this topic was the elucidation and understanding of the meaning of the concept of Principle, or *li*, and its relationship to another major Confucian concept, Ether, or *qi*, the stuff or matter from which evolved the particular things of the world.

Li is not a simple concept. Even at is most primitive level, and before it had acquired its full philosophical weight, it was of large importance in Confucianism and carried a range of meanings. In the teaching of Confucius *li* was the word for the religious rites and the rules governing familial respect and social relations: those structures of life which, in Chinese culture, were held to render all things well wrought, clearly defined and harmonious. Broadly speaking, the *li* were understood to be imposed from without on to natural human propensities in order to regulate them and achieve a mean in conduct. They were not seen as unchanging and so could vary according to circumstances. Nevertheless, they were not merely superficial rules of conduct expedient for the smooth running of society, but had profounder implications relating to the moral integrity of individuals and their relationships with the cosmos. For the committed practitioner, the external enactments of the *li* were the concomitants of a genuine inward disposition to exercise the virtues they formalize and to realize a harmony between heaven and earth.

After Confucius' own time, the term *li* gradually acquired more complex meanings and a metaphysical dimension. Instead of broadly

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The nationwide enthusiasm to commemorate the year 2000 by planting trees has reawakened interest in that most English of trees, *taxus baccata*, the yew.

The yew is a magnificent and sombre tree, seen mainly in graveyards. There it provides a protective canopy for mourners and graves, imparts a wonderful dignity to the scene and embodies profound meanings concerning both mortality and eternity.

Perhaps the yew's most impressive characteristic is its longevity. Some of the yews in southern England are estimated to be between 2000 and 9000 years old. These estimates cannot be precise because after about 400 or 500 years of growth a yew begins to lose its heartwood and its age can no longer be estimated by ring-counts. A 300-year-old tree growing in optimum conditions might well have a girth of 12 feet.

The two ancient trees in the All Hallows graveyard, although not as massive as yews on more sheltered sites, are probably coeval with the church. But it is possible that they are even older than the church since many ancient Druidic and Celtic burial grounds were planted with yews and were later consecrated for Christian use. All yews are difficult to date precisely because their growth habits are highly variable. Some appear to `rest' for long periods of time and then start into observable growth again.

Yew wood is extremely hard and it is said that it lasts longer than iron. In his *Flora Britannica* Richard Mabey tells us that there is in existence a 250,000-old yew-tree spear, found at Clacton in Essex. It is the world's oldest known wooden artefact. Yew wood was also used for making longbows, al though English yew was not in fact the best wood for this purpose and it is thought that Spanish and Italian yew woods were often imported for the longbows. In Derbyshire, near Ambergate, there is a yew in the cavity of which a family once lived. One of its boughs was hollowed out by a member of the family to make a cradle that subsequently - it is said - became the inspiration for the lullaby `Rock-a-bye Baby'.

A comparatively recent use for yew that is making it commercially valuable is in medicine. An alkaloid called taxol, apparently efficacious in the treatment of ovarian cancer, is present in the tree.Clippings and foliage are being bought by the drug companies.

The Conservation Foundation, the organization that initiated a scheme to replace lost elm trees, has been runnng a project called Yews for the Millennium. It provides parishes with young rooted cuttings taken from yew trees thought to be between 2000 and 4000 years old. Several varieties have been propagated to produce a very large number of cuttings for which over 6000 parishes, communities and organizations have applied.

Most popular nowadays, Mabey reports, is the Irish yew, whose branches `sweep evenly upwards, as if they had been bound into a bundle' and which, he says, are mostly descendants of two trees found on a limestone crag in Fermanagh in the 1760s. These Irish yews are tidier, more manageable specimens, able to be schooled into neat avenues or clipped into symmetrical, individual cones: rather different from the gnarled, mysterious, sprawling giants that have bestowed a special character on so many English and Welsh churchyards, including Ringmore's.

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head in the work of Dai Zhen, a philosopher who represents the culmination of the empiricist movement in Neo-Confucian thought. Dai Zhen replaced the broadly dualistic, abstract and speculative approaches of Zhuxi [Chu Hsi] and other Neo-Confucianists with a philosophy of material monism and a mode of investigation based on facts, evidence and inductive method. The movement of which he is such an eminent representative is often known as the Han Learning because it took the classics of the Han dynasty (206 BCE–AD 220)[2] for its basic texts and the Han interpretation of the concept of Principle (*li*)[3] as the order immanent in things for its central idea. Under Dai Zhen's influence Neo-Confucianism shed many of the Daoist and Buddhist ideas with which it had become imbued.[4] His development and consolidation of the burgeoning empiricism of the time earned him the title of Great Master of Investigation Based on Evidence.

The unassuming family of cloth merchants into which Dai Zhen was born lived quietly in Siuning at the southern border of Anhwei province. His scholarly and critical abilities became apparent when he was still quite young. It is reported that at the age of 10 he questioned his schoolmaster about the reliability of the Confucian text *The Great Learning*,[5] pointing out that during the many centuries that had elapsed since Confucius lived the numerous interpreters and transmitters of his work might have wrought considerable change in the Master's ideas. 'How', asked Dai Zhen 'do we know that this is what Confucius said?'[6] The anecdote certainly exhibits the boy's critical acuity, but what is more significant it hat it reveals the intellectual temper characteristic not only of Dai Zhen's own mind but of the whole approach and methodology of the Qing movement, the school of learning of which he was to become such an important member.

In his late teens Dai Zhen was sent to study with Jiang Yong [Chiang Yung], a learned and prosperous man who taught his pupil across a broad curriculum that included the doctrines of Sung Neo-Confucianism,[7] the school of thought Dai Zhen was later to oppose. His polymath ability soon began to manifest itself in the writing of books and treatises tat covered many topics[8] and for most of his lifetime he was known chiefly for his work in mathematics, waterworks, engineering, phonetics and the analysis and criticism of texts. In 1773 he was appointed to the Board of Compilers of the Imperial Manuscript Library, Siku Quanshu [Ssu-k'u Ch'uan-shu].[9] It was not until a century after his death that his philosophical writings, which had been largely ignored by his contemporaries, began to command the respect they merit.

May 2000

JOHN AUBREY

If Wiltshire is part of the West Country, Devonians may take pride and pleasure in the writings of a certain West countryman, John Aubrey, born at Malmesbury in 1625. Aubrey is best known for his book, *Brief Lives,* a wonderful collection of reminiscences and gossip about his friends and acquaintances. His way with words is little short of magical.
One Devonian known to him was Sir Walter Raleigh, the great sea-dog, explorer and courtier. He had, Aubrey tells us, `a most remarkable aspect, an exceeding high forehead, long-faced and sour eie-lidded, a kind of pigge-eie'.
Sir Walter was executed, and the night before the beheading he wrote to his relatives in his bible:`Beg my dead body, which living is denyed you; and bury it either in Sherborne or Exeter church'. He had already made an ingenious attempt to escape his fate and this was succinctly related by Aubrey: `By his great skill in chemistry, he made himself like a Leper: by which means he thought he might retard his journey to a Prison: and study his escape. Dr Heydock was sent for to give his opinion, if the prisoner might be carried to London without danger of his life. The Dr feels Sir Walter's Pulses and found they did beat well: and so detected the imposture.'
Aubrey was able to impart a whole personality to us in very few words. Consider his account of Katherine Phillips, poetess and infant prodigy. `She was very religiously devoted when she was young; prayed by herself an hower together, and tooke sermons verbatim when she was but ten yeares old...she was mighty apt to learn, and she assures me that she had read the bible through before she was full four years old...very good-natured; not at all high-minded; pretty fatt; not tall; red pumpled face; wrote out verses in Innes, or Mottos in windowes, in her table book.'
A pumpled face, whatever that exactly may have been (one can imagine), was not a rarity, and drastic treatment was meted out by a Dr William Butler to one sufferer, `a Gent. with a red ugly pumpled face'. Aubrey writes: `Said the Dr, I must hang you. So presently he had a device made ready to hang him from a beam in the roome, and when he was e'en almost dead, he cutt the veines that fed these pumples and let out the black ugley Bloud, and cured him'.
One of Aubrey's longer memoirs is of that supreme English philosopher, Thomas Hobbes, also born in Malmesbury. Hobbes, like Raleigh, like Aubrey himself, was a Westcountryman through and through; and `though he left his native country at 14 and lived so long, yet sometimes one might find a little touch of our pronunciation', (Sir Walter `spake broad Devonshire to his dying day'). Hobbes lived to the magnificent age of 91 and Aubrey describes his method of maintaining good health: `He had always bookes of prick-song lyeing on his table: which at night, when he was abed, and the dores made fast, and was sure nobody heard him, he sang aloud (not that he had a very good voice) but for his health's sake: he did beleeve it did his Lunges good, and conduced much to prolong his life.'
Aubrey's own life was a jumble of misadventure and insatiable curiosity. He enthusiastically investigated heraldry, architecture, astrology, numismatics, antiquities, fossils, church monuments, minerals, rivers, education, witchcraft, superstitions, animal husbandry, herbs, diet and geology. He was fascinated by Stonehenge and it was he who discovered the great stones at Avebury and immediately recognized their significance. He was wholly incompetent at managing his life and lived perpetually on the brink of both poverty and marriage whilst reeling in amazed delight at the teeming kaleidescope of fact, fancy and foible presented by the world around him. Without Aubrey we might not know that it was William Oughtred who invented the multiplication sign, that the great William Harvey, `Inventour of the Circulation of the Bloud', cured his gout by putting his legs in pails of cold water, that the philosopher, Descartes, did geometry with `a pair of Compasses with one of the Legges broken', that the political theorist, James Harrington, `grew to have a phancy that his Perspiration turned to Flies, and sometimes to bees', that William Shakespeare claimed that he never blotted out a line in his life, and that the great Sir Christopher Wren, whose machine to weave nine pairs of stockings in one operation made the weavers fear unemployment, `was so noble...he breakes the Modell of the Engine all to pieces, before their faces'.
It is all gossip and acute observation of the most marvellous kind, entirely free from rancour, venom and moralising, and it has survived because Aubrey gave large boxes of his notes to the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. Luckily for us, the boxes survived several robberies. And as Aubrey himself once modestly remarked, `How these curiosities would be quite forgott, did not such idle fellowes as I am putt them down.'

RHS INSERT FOR OCTOBER 2000

In the autumn, the thoughts of the English turn to lighting fires and entertaining friends. The tradition of feasting is revived once the long dark evenings make their presence felt.
But feasting is not on the scale it once was and the truly enormous banquet is now a rarity. Perhaps this is no bad thing. It may be that our international reputation for terrible food was acquired at such events. Mashed potatoes for five can be made into a gastronomic delight, but the same for five hundred is a daunting prospect.
The hazards of mass catering must have loomed large for Richard of Bordeaux's three hundred cooks as they struggled daily to prepare twenty-eight oxen, three hundred sheep and innumerable fowls for consumption by the court of that `best and royalist viander of all Christian kings.'
It is mind-boggling to think even of assembling the raw materials for such meals, let alone cooking them and getting them to table. But at least there were few cutlery problems for early feasts since knives and forks were not generally used until late in the fourteenth century. Until then, food was placed on trenchers: rounds or squares of baked bread.
This does not mean that meals were taken without ceremony or delicacy of manners. Great feasts were heralded by a trumpeter followed by pages bearing basins, ewers of water and napkins for the cleansing of hands. Table manners were important. Like Chaucer's nun, diners would have been `at mete wel y taught '.Such cutlery as did exist was of beautiful workmanship.
When platters were used there was one set for every two persons and drinking horns were similarly shared. Supplies of drink were copious. For the wedding of Eleanor of Aquitaine to Henry II, two hundred ships were required to carry the wine from France.
Historical writings abound in accounts of notable feasts, memorable more for their vital statistics than their palatability. Mrs Beeton began a set of instructions for a picnic with `Take a hundred eggs.....'. The gimmick was not unknown. In 1820, the Matthew Russells threw open the recently-restored Brancepeth to their friends at Christmas. For the occasion they had lovingly fattened a large turtle, and a procession went to the cellar, preceded by Patterson, the butler, holding a lighted candle for fear of foul air.
In old recipe books there are directions for setting gilded fish in jelly, recreating Solomon's Temple as a flummery and giant beasts in barley sugar. In Lancashire, bush eels (our grass snakes) were favourites at feasts. Elsewhere, thornbacks, bearbets, holberts and couzers - all kinds of fish - were consumed on high occasions. Black and white hogs puddings were popular, a single pudding often containing twenty eggs and a pint of cream. Oysters were no delicacy. Dr Johnson bought them for his cat at a shilling a barrel. Fruit was considered unwholesome.
In the twentieth century, although the scale of entertaining is usually modest, fried locusts, frogs legs, crocodile tails, ostrich cutlets, insect wings and octopus stewed in its own ink are not rarities on English menus. What motivates these adventures in edibility is the desire for good food and good company, and the pleasure of surprising and impressing one's guests. It's a pity that rampant globalization will soon make it more difficult to maintain the surprise element at convivial gatherings.

RHS INSERT FOR NOVEMBER 2000

November is the time for planting the corms of that wonderful bulb, garlic. It is one of the oldest of cultivated herbs and features importantly in the history of food, medicine and agriculture.

Fragments of garlic were discovered when the ancient city of Jericho was excavated. In BC 1500 some garlic bulbs were put in the tomb of Tut-ankh-Amen and are now to be seen, perfectly petrified, in the Cairo National Museum.

Garlic is eaten in almost every part of the world. It probably came to Britain with the Romans and quickly became part of the staple diet of soldiers and the poor. Until the seventeenth century it was a component of innumerable recipes for salad, vegetable, meat and cheese dishes. It then fell from favour except in cottage gardens and was scarcely mentioned in Victorian cookery books. A certain Mrs Earle, writing in 1897, made so bold as to mention its virtues as a flavouring, but with a wincing delicacy characteristic of the era:

`Garlic, which is excellent as a flavouring to most sauces, is such a dangerous thing to use in the kitchen that the way I manage it is this: Put five or six cloves of garlic into a wide-necked bottle and cover them with good spirits of wine. When wanted, stick a skewer or fork into the spirit and use a drop or two. The spirit evaporates and the taste of garlic remains. But even in this way it must be used carefully for English palates.'

Mrs Beaton was equally squeamish about this noble flavouring. But in the mid-twentieth century garlic came back to Britain at a gallop. More exactly, it was brought back on ferries from France, by holiday-makers, by enraptured readers of Elizabeth David cookery books and by the itinerant French onion sellers.

Accounts of the medicinal, healing, restorative, magical, domestic and cosmetic properties of garlic are legion. An early writer declares that:

`It hath a sharp, warming, biting qualitie, expelling of flatulencies, and disturbing of the belly, and drying of the stomach causing of thirst, and puffing up, breeding of boyles in ye outside of the body, dulling the sight of the eyes...Being eaten it drives out the broude wormes and draws away the urine...It is laid upon such as are bitton of a mad dogge...It doth cleere the arteries...it doth assuage old coughes. Being drunk with a concoction of Origanum [marjoram] it doth kill lice and nitts....the stamping that is made of it and black olive together doth moul the urine and open ye mouths of ye veines and it is good also for the Hydropicall.'

The efficacy of garlic in the treatment of coughs is well-established. An old Scottish remedy for whooping cough is `Garlic beat to a pulp with Sow's Grease and put on a cloth as a Cataplasm [a plaster] to the Feet, but not if the Child is Feverish'.

Garlic pulp and juice are antiseptic and cleansing for wounds. In World War I the British government paid a shilling a pound for garlic and bought many tons of it for use in conjunction with sphagnum moss as dressings for the wounds of soldiers. Sphagnum, because of the structure of its cells, is twice as absorbent as cotton wool and in combination with garlic must have saved the lives of many of those wounded in the trenches.

The wild white garlic (Ramsons) that clothes many of the roadside banks in Devon has been widely used to counter disease in cattle. It has been prescribed in various forms for the treatment of ringworm, eczema, mange, mastitis, bovine abortion, wooden tongue, lung and intestinal worms, Johne's disease and Joint-ill. Its ingestion has not been confined to animals. It used to be eaten green with cheese or boiled bacon and was thought to promote good health if eaten in early spring. It was sometimes distilled in brandy and taken as a medicine.

Gardeners are advised to be aware of the alleged powers of garlic. Discreetly planted beneath rose bushes it is said to stimulate their perfume and cure black spot. Between carrots it deters blackfly. Planted beneath a peach tree it is said to mitigate the horrors of peach leaf curl. It deters ants and aphids but is inhibiting to the growth of beans and peas. There is scientific evidence to show that a garlic solution will kill the Culex mosquito and that garlic planted alongside onions will prevent onion fly.

There are some interesting legends about garlic. It has been claimed that ghosts may be warded off by rubbing oneself with garlic, and fairies may be prevented from souring churn butter if garlic is hung on the kitchen doorpost. Unbelievably, `garlic held in the palm of the hand cures toothache'.

And of course, anyone wishing to keep a vampire at bay must wear a necklace of garlic. What has to be remembered is that it will probably keep non-vampires at bay as well.

RHS INSERT FOR DECEMBER 2000

Christmas cards have been part of Christmas celebrations for only a century and a half. The first card was privately designed and issued in 1843. It was printed by a London firm and the copies sold at a thousand for a shilling.
By 1894 at least 200,000 other designs had been placed on the market in England alone. The expanding printing industry, the introduction of the common postcard and a fifty per cent reduction in postal charges rapidly established the new Christmas custom.
About twenty years after the genesis of the Christmas card, a dark-eyed girl in her early teens enrolled as a student at a London Art School, and a few months later a number of new designs for Christmas and Valentine cards appeared on the market. They became popular immediately.
The dark-eyed girl was Kate Greenaway and the new designs were hers. They started a vogue for an art style that has endured to the present and that has become famous all over the western world and beyond.
The Christmas card was the perfect medium for Kate Greenaway's special talent. She was entranced by the dress styles of the late eighteenth century and many of her card designs show delicate, dimpled children wearing the charming adult clothing of that era. Ever a perfectionist, she designed and stitched all the exquisite garments worn by her child models.The public found her ideas enchanting and original, but she was amazed at the success of her work.
Perhaps the secret of that success was that the lovely, ethereal children she painted appealed to the Victorian adoration of the pure and innocent. And by using eighteenth century costume she evoked that sentiment of nostalgia with which Victorians, sweeping forward on a tide of Progress, regarded the past.
1878 and onwards saw Kate Greenaway in the front rank of a group of artists who were taking advantage of the widening scope of the Christmas card. Her work, previously unsigned, began to bear the initials `K.G.'. With her reputation established and popularity assured she began to develop every facet of her talent, producing children's story books, calendars, cards, birthday books and almanacs. Dressmakers slavishly imitated her designs for dresses and suits for children. This young, soft-eyed spinster was seriously famous. She enjoyed a full social life and was a close friend of the great John Ruskin with whom she exchanged many letters.
These were the years when Christmas cards were Christmas cards; before, as one writer put it, the advent of `the large number of makers who delight in producing imitations of unlovely objects, luggage labels, cork soles, slices of blanket or of bacon, burnt ends of cigars, extracted teeth and other horrors reproduced in realistic imitation to accompany a message of goodwill to their friends.'

SIR JOHN HARINGTON

Jan 2001

In the year 1561 Queen Elizabeth the First became godmother to a son of the West country: John Harington, born at Kelston, near Bath.

The young Harington grew into the courtier known as `the merry poet'. At Eton he was famed for his happy disposition and brilliant scholarship, and at Cambridge for his devastating wit. When he married he settled in connubial and bucolic bliss at the family seat at Kelston, and there ran the estate in a vigorously inventive, highly organised and benevolently disciplined way. Absence from household prayers `without lawful excuse' was punished by a fine; so was bad language and failure to make one's bed. All such fines went into a fund that was `bestowed upon the poor or other godly use'.

The master of Kelston did not find rural life wholly absorbing. Occasionally he fled to London and the court where he could display his scintillating wit. At times, we are told, the taverns along the route from Bath to London overflowed with his entourage and his abundant hospitality.

When the Queen came westward on a royal progress Harington's ingenuity surpassed itself. To his already magnificent house at Kelston, designed by an Italian architect, Barozzo of Vignola, he added one of the newly-fashionable `swimming-places'. Quite why this was done in honour of Elizabeth, the spinster, is not entirely clear, since the sport was a male monopoly and the swimmers were naked. But it was only one among many extravagant innovations contrived for the visit.

Harington's greatest invention was, undoubtedly, the flush water closet. He wrote a whole book on the topic (one of many on all kinds of matters) entitled *A New Discourse of a Stale Subject, Called the Metamorphosis of Ajax*. `Ajax' is a pun on the old English noun, `jakes', a privy or earth closet. The book contains a diagram showing the detailed working of this fabulous new contraption, and the cost of the whole was thirty-three shillings. This included a huge brass sluice and an overhead tank on which the artist drew several fishes. For some reason Her Majesty was annoyed by the new invention. Nevertheless, she promptly had one installed in Richmond Palace. (Only one!?) Meanwhile Harington skulked quietly in Somerset until the noises of his new cistern died away and letters from court told him the Queen had softened.

His life of fifty-one years was packed with variety. To the qualities of scholar, poet, courtier and country gentlemen he added those of the hardy soldier and budding politician. He sought for himself, but did not secure, the Lord Chancellorship of Ireland and even the Archbishopric of Dublin. After Elizabeth died, a deeply personal loss for him, he wrote more poetry and tutored the young Prince Henry, son of James I. The Prince's death, at the age of eighteen, was another great sadness for him.

Harington died of a stroke and was buried by `dearest Mall', his wife, in the chancel of Kelston church.

CANDLEMAS

FEB 2001

The festival of Candlemas falls on February the second. In the Christian year it commemorates the occasion when Mary and Joseph, in accordance with Jewish law, went to the Temple in Jerusalem in order to present their firstborn son to God, and for Mary to receive purification. The law decreed that this should take place forty days after the child's birth.

Like many other Christian festivals, the rites of Candlemas contain much that has pagan origins. The original, pre-Christian Candlemas was a heralding of spring and a celebration of Februa, the mother of the god, Mars. In Rome it was marked by a massive procession of citizens carrying burning torches and candles. And because the people so enjoyed these pagan revelries, it was deemed better to embody them within a Christian structure than to abolish them entirely. Francis Bacon relates that:

'There was a pope called Sergius, and when he saw the people drawn to this false maumetry and untrue belief, he thought to undo this foule use and custom, and turn it unto God's worship and our Lady's, and gave commandments that all Christian people should come to church and offer up a candle brennying, in the worship that they did to this woman, Februa, and do worship our Lady and her sonne, our Lord. So that now this feast is solemnly hallowed thorow all Christendom.'

Candlemas is also associated with the customs of St Bride's Day, celebrated on February the first. The Day of St Bride is an old Celtic festival of spring that welcomes the first tender green shoots and the signs of balmier days to come. The Saxons called the month Sprote-kale, for obvious reasons. Calving, and its accompanying abundance of milk, often took place at this time and after the long, hard time of Yule, Bride came in, touching the earth with the promise of plenty and bringing new life to the land. Like the pagan Candlemas, Bride was of vital importance to people who depended on the soil so she,too, was canonised by the Church.

Traditionally, Candlemas Day is the day to forecast weather:

'If Candlemas day be dry and fair
The half o' winter's to come and mair.'

And there is an old English song:

'If Candlemas be fair and bright,
Come, Winter, have another flight;
If Candlemas bring clouds and rain,
Go, Winter, and come not again.'

A similar belief prevails in American folklore. In the USA, February the second is Groundhog Day, the day when the groundhog emerges from his winter hibernation hole to look for his shadow. If he sees it, he takes it to be an omen of bad weather, and returns to his hole. If the day is cloudy, and so shadowless, he remains above ground.

Perhaps we should do as the groundhog does.

APRIL copy

THE GIANTS OF PLYMOUTH HOE

More than half a millennium ago, the people of Plymouth regularly paid for the cleaning and scouring of two giant figures cut in the turf of Plymouth Hoe.
Details of payments covering almost a century can be found in Municipal Records. Two of them are as follows:

1486 It pd to Cotewyll for ye renewyng of ye pictur of Gogmagog upon ye howe
1567 20d new cutting the Gogmagog

The Gogmagog figures were associated with a Cornish ruler, Corineus, who was said to delight in wrestling with giants. Legend relates that to Cornwall came numerous giants who were unwelcome elsewhere, among them `a certain hateful one, by name Goemagot, twelve cubitts in height, who was of such lustihood that when he had once uprooted it, he would wield an oak tree as lightly as if it were a wand of hazel'. Goemagot was duly confronted by Corineus and the two wrestled on the Hoe. Three broken ribs, inflicted by the violence of Goemagot, were sufficient to enrage Corineus to the extent that `he gathered up all his strength, heaved him [Goemagot] on his shoulders and ran with his burden as fast as he could for the weight to the seashore nighest at hand. Mounting up to the top of a high cliff, and disengaging himself, he hurled the deadly monster...into the sea, where, falling on the sharp rocks, he was mangled all to pieces and dyed the waves with his blood, so that ever thereafter that place from the flinging down of the giant has been known as Lamgoemagot, to wit, `Goemagot's Leap'...'.
It has been maintained by some that originally there was one figure only, that of the giant, cut in the turf of the Hoe. They cite two further Municipal Record entries that could be taken to refer to just one figure:

1500-1 Item pd for makyng clene of gogmagog apon ye howe viijd
1541-2 It pd to William Hawkyns baker for cuttyng of Gogmagog the picture of the Gyaunt at howe viiijd

By 1602, when Carew's *Survey of Cornwall* was published, there were certainly two figures. Carew writes: `Upon the Haw at Plymouth there is cut in the ground the portrayture of two men, the one bigger, the other lesser, with clubbes in their hands (whom they term Gog Magog) and (as I have learned) it is renewed by order of the Townesmen when cause requireth, which shld infer the same to be a monument of some moment.'
By 1630, the effigies have a name apiece. Westcote, writing in that year, says of them: `These they name to be Corineus and Gogmagog'.
Conjecture about the figures is extensive, and inconclusive. Much might be learned if they could be excavated, but it is largely assumed that they were destroyed or covered over when the Citadel was built in 1671. Yet a glimmer of hope remains. Heath, in his *Account of the Islands of Scilly*, written almost 80 years after the building of the Citadel, declares that `the inhabitants of Plymouth show you a portraiture of two men, one bigger than the other, with clubs in their hands, cut out upon the Haw ground, which has been renewed by order of the place as they wear out'.
Perhaps, then, the figures remained in existence alongside the Citadel and even now are vestigially present beneath the turfy slopes rather than covered by the great granite structure. But again, perhaps not. Heath's words in his *Account* are suspiciously similar to those of Carew, already quoted above, and one cannot help thinking that in writing them he may have been guilty not only of a little armchair plagiarism but also of failing to check Carew's statement of 1602 against the facts of 1750.

May copy

SUMMER IS ICUMEN IN

Whatever happened to proper picnics?
I mean the sort of picnic at which the main achievement is the slow ingestion of delicious food in beautiful surroundings; where a tablecloth is spread in dappled shade near a running stream that is gently cooling the bottled beverages; where rugs and cushions abound and tempting comestibles are unpacked from sturdy wicker baskets that have been effortlessly carried through woods and fields by handsome men.
It's a curious word, `picnic', and no more than 200 years old. In its earliest days it referred to any more-or-less random assembly of bits and pieces. Sir Walter Scott once called a collection of prose and verse items `a piece of picnic'. Jeremy Bentham described the Catechism of the Church of England as having `a picnic formation'. It wasn't until the mid-nineteenth century that it became the word for a meal eaten out-of-doors, one consisting of a variety of offerings.
The notion of outdoor eating had immense appeal for the Victorians, ever eager to improve their characters by rising to the challenge of contending with the exigencies of the inevitably bitter English summer weather, the racing black cumuli above and soggy pasture beneath. Miss Weeton, the nineteenth century diarist, for example, at the age of forty-nine, climbed Snowdon on a few slices of bread and butter. But sometimes a lurking hedonism could overwhelm the passion for self-improvement through trial. The Devonshire Association for the Advancement of Science, Literature and Art once succumbed disgracefully to the seductions of the softer side of picnicking. In their Transactions concerning an archaeological expedition we read:
`This barrow was opened on August 20th 1869 on the occasion of the visit of the British Association to Exeter, a party of whose members made an excursion to this hill. So large a slice of the afternoon, however, was consumed at the splendid collation at the tent near the six-mile stone, together with many other slices of a variety of good things, that there was no time left to complete the examination of the barrow or even to open the kistvaen..... It was intended to open the kistvaen in the presence of the visitors, but they did not visit the spot.'

It's no surprise to find that, where picnics are concerned, Mrs Beeton is unashamed in her advocacy of the pleasure principle. Her suggestion is that three dozen quart bottles of ale, two dozen of ginger beer, soda water and lemonade, six bottles of sherry, two bottles of brandy and an unspecified quantity of champagne and light wines are the indispensable accompaniments to picnic viands.
A century earlier, an English nobleman was unwittingly giving his name to a gastronomic invention now of unsurpassed familiarity. Lord Sandwich, First Lord of the Admiralty, on a notable occasion, spent twenty-four hours at his gaming table, during which time his only refreshment was slices of cold beef placed between pieces of toast. Desperation and expediency thus produced a universal art form which, depending on its ingredients and its assembler, has either graced or debased many a picnic.
Perhaps the radical difference between the picnic of dreams and what now passes for a picnic is that nowadays the open-air consumption of food is rarely more than a minor adjunct to some kind of foray into that amazing but impalpable construction,`the environment', while the picnic feast of nostalgic dreams, whether it is all cold collations, pheasant pies and flummery, or simply bread, cheese and grapes, is the culmination, the high spot, the raison d'etre, of a day of enjoyably inhabiting a special piece of the natural world.
Of course, we need both forms of outing; that is, the picnic as adjunct *and* the picnic as raison d'etre. But the hope cherished here is that strong hankerings for the latter kind have now been generated and will result, this summer, in some memorable instances of it.

UP AND DOWN THE DEANERY by the Dean Rural *Kingsbridge Gazette* April 1888

Our little Parish lies in the very bosom of Bigbury Bay; just in the midst, between its extreme headlands, Stoke Point, towards Plymouth, and Bolt Tail, looking towards the East. The cliff line is magnificent; tall, bold, rugged, and wonderfully varied in colour and outline. And we have three deeply-cut coombes and coves; Challaborough and Westcombe, East and West, and Aymer in the midst. Our soil is extremely good; what old Devonshire Writers used to call "a fertile glebe". So that, altogether, ours is a favoured land; and it is no matter, therefore, for surprise, that we find evidence of its having attracted settlers at a very early date. Settlers always look out for pleasant places.....

On the high ground, towards Modbury, some two miles from the Church [All Hallows], I have a detached piece of glebe [land owned by the Church], two large fields called Higher and Lower "Sevenstones".Four main roads meet here and the place is known as "Sevenstones Cross". a short mile westeward is a considerable state, Langston, now broken into two, South-Langston, in Ringmore, and Lower-Langston, in the Parish of Kingston. Between these points is a straight and level road, running along the ridge of the hill, and forming throughout its whole length, the boundary between the two Parishes, a fact which proves the road to be a very antient "Way" indeed, for it must have been made before the two Parishes were formed, that is to say, before Saxon times. Of the "Stones" nothing remains to us but their names....

Coming into the domain of History we find that "Our Parish" was well "settled " in Saxon Days; for we learn from *Domesday Book* that in the day on which Edward-the-Confessor was living and dead, it contained two Manors - Reimore" (as Ringmore was written then) and "Ochenberie" - a name but little changed in form, and not different in form from our modern "Okenbury". Judhel de Totenais was the great Landowner, or "Capital Lord" then, and of him "Radulfus" (also written Randulphus *i.e.* Randulph or Ralph), held both the Manors.

for May Newsletter
2001

June 2001

IN JUNE 1665

Almost three and-a-half centuries ago a young law student in London received a present from his mother: two pairs of riding stockings, a box of pies, cheeses and `biskates'. Along with the presents came a letter exhorting him to take good care of his health, because London was `so sikely a place'.
It was indeed a sickly place. Disease was rife and epidemics were frequent. Rats flourished everywhere.
Then, in June 1665, after an unusually dry winter and spring, without warning, bubonic plague swept through the narrow lanes and alleys of the city, moving swiftly from east to west; an infection borne by rodents, transferred to humans by fleas, and thought to have originally come to England with the black rats on board the ships of returning Crusaders. Precautionary advice and restrictions on movement were issued, but were largely ignored. People continued to abandon garbage in the street and live in a generally careless way that invited the spread of the disease. Attempts were made to isolate stricken areas and afflicted houses were marked with a red cross. At night, carts trundled through the lanes, collecting the dead for common burial outside the city.
No effective treatment was known. Aromatic herbs were much sought after as they were believed to ward off the infection. They were worn in jewels, pouncet boxes, pomanders and cane heads. The price of rosemary went up from 12 pence an armful to 6 shillings a handful. In the first week in July, 1100 died; in the third week, `above 2000'. In the first week in August, 4000; in the second, 5000. Trade was at a standstill, the streets were deserted and lawlessness prevailed. John Evelyn's diary entry for 7 September states `there perishing now neare ten thousand poor creatures weekly'.
Meanwhile, at Cambridge, the university had closed and a student called Isaac Newton was spending the time in the country with his widowed mother. Sitting in the garden towards the end of that scorching summer he watched the apples fall and pondered the problem of gravity. At sea, war was being waged against the Dutch, a matter of grave concern to Samuel Pepys who was then Secretary to the Admiralty. Pepys's diary reveals much about the Plague months: that the rich and clean who could absent themselves by going to the country had a very good chance of avoiding the sickness entirely; that the poor and the underfed had no chance against it, for the clothes of the dead were needed for the living and bedding was too precious to be sacrificed to the fire.
The Plague raged on and smallpox, `very rife and mortall', came to accompany it. A year later, in 1666, the Great Fire raced through the dying city, cleansing it for a while and ending the great pestilence.

RINGMORE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

HISTORICAL HOWLERS

(Culled from the exam papers of a West Country school)

Thousands signed [the petition] but many signatures were found to be bigamous.

Scattered farms were built in the middle of fields for easy excess.

Charles called for a parliament, but no one came.

Cotehele is a form of speaking rather like Swahele.

The Third reform Bill gave the vote to all except Royalty and people in metal homes.

In 1534 Henry the Eighth sent Thomas Cromwell to enquire into the monasteries. As a result, many monks were disillusioned.

(copy) March 2001

ALONG THE BEETON TRACK......

Ringmore Historical Society

SPRINGCLEANING - LET'S DO IT PROPERLY THIS YEAR!

HOUSE AND HOME

1. To Expel Rats
Catch one in a trap; muzzle it with the assistance of a fellow-servant, slightly singe some of the hair; then smear the part with turpentine, and set the animal loose; if again caught, leave it still at libery, as the other rats will shun the place it inhabits. It is said to be a fact that a toad placed in a house-cellar will have the effect of expelling rats.

2. To Take Stains Out of Marble
Mix unslaked lime in finest powder with the strongest soap-ley, pretty thick, and *instantly* with a painter's brush lay it on the whole of the marble. **In two months time** wash it off perfectly clean; then have ready a fine thick lather of soft soap, boiled in soft water; dip a brush in it and scour the marble. This will, with very good rubbing, give a beautiful polish. Polish the marble with a piece of coarse flannel, or what is better, a piece of an old hat.

3. To Restore Whiteness to Scorched Linen
One ounce of dried fowls' dung; half pint of vinegar; two oz Fuller's Earth; the juice of two large onions; half oz of soap.
Boil all together to the consistency of paste; spread the composition thickly over the damaged part, and if the threads be not actually *consumed*, after it has been allowed to dry on, and the place has subsequently been washed once or twice, every trace of scorching will disappear.

FOR A NICE SPRUCE-UP AFTERWARDS.....

1. Varnish for Boots
Six parts of eggs (the whole of a yolk) well beaten; one part of treacle; one part of isinglass; five parts of water; lamp black. Dissolve the isinglass in water, and then add to it the other ingredients, using sufficient lamp black to give the required colour. If there is need tor restore the colour, take a small quantity of good black ink, mix it with the white of an egg, and apply it to the boots with a soft sponge.

2. Pomade Divine for the Hair
Clear one-and-a-half pounds of beef marrow from the strings and bone, put it into an earthen pan or vessel of water fresh from the spring, and change the water night and morning for ten days; then steep it in rose-water 24 hours, and drain it in a cloth till quite dry. Take an oz of each of the following articles, namely, storax, gum-benjamin, and odiferous cyprus powder, half oz of cinnamon, 2 drachms of cloves, and 2 drachms of nutmeg, all finely powdered ; mix them with the marrow above prepared; then put all the ingredients into a pewter pot that holds 3 pints; make a paste of white of egg and flour, and lay it upon a piece of rag. over that must be another piece of linen to cover the top of the pot very close, that none of the steam may evaporate. Put the pot into a large copper pot with water, observing to keep it steady, that it may not reach to the covering of the pot that holds the marrow. As the water shrinks, add more, boiling hot; for it must boil 4 hours without ceasing a moment. Strain the ointment through a linen cloth into small pots and, when cold, cover them. *Do not touch it with anything but silver.* It will keep many years.

AND FOR YOUR PARTY FROCK ON THE BIG NIGHT.......

To Wash Silk
For a dress to be washed, the seams of the skirt do not need to be ripped apart, though it must be removed from the band at the waist, and the lining taken from the bottom. Trimmings or drapings ... should be undone so as to remain flat. A black silk dress, without being previously washed, may be refreshed by being soaked during twenty-four hours in soft,

clear water. If dirty, the black dress may be previously washed. When very old and rusty, a pint of gin or whisky should be mixed with each gallon of water.This addition is an improvement in any circumstances, whether the silk be previously washed or not. After soaking, the dress should be hung up to drain dry without being wrung. The mode of washing silks is this:- The article should be laid upon a clean smooth table. A flannel should be well-soaped, and the surface of the silk rubbed one way with it...When the dirt has disappeared, the soap must be washed off with a sponge and plenty of cold water, of which the sponge must be made to imbibe as much as possible. As soon as one side is finished, the other must be washed precisely in the same manner....Silks, when washed, should always be dried in the shade, on a linen-horse, and alone. If black or dark blue, they will be improved if , when dry, they are placed on a table and well-sponged with gin or whisky.

CHEERS!

(The recipes are from *Mrs Beeton's Book of Household Management* (1893) and Mrs Rundell's *Modern Domestic Cookery*)

Jan 2000

RINGMORE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

THE DEVON BREAD OVEN

There are probably old Devon bread ovens concealed within the thick walls of several Ringmore cottages; and, no doubt, some that are not concealed but nicely spruced up as alcoves for displaying *objets d'art*, books and flowers.

Nearly always, these cottage or farmhouse bread ovens were set deep into the side wall of a large open fireplace, their doors sideways on to the hearth and the main chimney. The oven usually had a domed or beehive roof, a thick slate or brick floor and a heavy, well-fitting door. To heat the oven, faggots, kindling and dried bracken were burned fiercely on its floor, usually with the door open so that any smoke found its way out and was drawn up the main chimney. When the oven was very hot, sometimes with its bricks glowing red, the ashes were quickly raked out, and the oven made completely clean by being wiped out with a damp rag on the end of a stout stick. All this had to be done at the greatest speed in order to lose as little heat as possible. Then the dough loaves, already risen in the ambient warmth, would be quickly placed inside and the door securely fastened for about an hour's baking.

A high temperature was vital for the production of good bread and there were several approved means of testing the oven temperature. One was to throw a handful of flour against the wall of the oven. If the flour burned up in a blaze of sparks, the oven was ready. Another means for testing was to note the change in colour of the hot bricks. Yet another was the `watch and tell-tale', a small pebble, built into the oven wall, and specially chosen for

its propensity to change colour significantly when heated. The loaves were put in place with a `peel', a kind of flat battledore with a long handle, which was also used to remove them once cooked.

The clay ovens made in the Barnstaple, Bideford and Fremington potteries were of the highest repute and were being produced as late as 1890. Many were exported from Bideford to South Wales, Ireland and America and were highly-prized. Considerable skill was needed in their production so that heat could be rapidly generated and then ~~evenly radiated and~~ sustained for as long as it took to bake the loaves with a good crust. Writing in the eighteenth century, Hannah Glasse, author of *The Art of Cookery Made Plain,* offered the following advice:

` In the building of your oven for Baking, observe that you make it round, low roofed and a little Mouth; then it will take less fire, and keep in the heat better than a long oven and high roofed, and will bake the Bread better.'

And in Llewellyn Jewett's *The Ceramic Art of Great Britain* (1883), we read of the old Devon ovens that `the bread baked in them is said to have a sweeter and more wholesome flavour than when baked in ordinary ovens'.