

The Circle of Life

A Bottle of Sherry and a Mince Pie

Xmas 2021

The invisible enemy COVID 19 has stolen much of 2020, it's a year most will be glad to see back of. Who could ever have imagined that when we sang ' Auld Lang Syne ' last New Year what misery this wretched disease held in store for mankind and what damage it would wreak on the world. Thankfully recent news seems to hold out hope that as the year ends there at least a glimmer this dark chapter may , just may, be coming to an end.

I know many people dread singing. ' Auld Lang Syne ' it a real tear jerker. We've all joined hands awaiting the bongs of Big Ben; the first verse would make the hardest person watery eyed.

- 'Should auld acquaintance be forgot and never brought to mind? ' Should auld acquaintance be forgot And days of auld lang syne ' It difficult to sing it at any time, but after a bereavement during the previous year, it's impossible not to show your emotions, however hard you try, because the words are the exact opposite of how you feel.

However, we approach the start of a new year and I go down Memory Lane - again, as I get older it's a place I visit more often. perhaps too often. However, I don't think I'm alone, particularly at this time of year in remembering times and people from the past. Parents, relatives and those we met along life's journey, after all it's those events and people shape who we are today. Little things bring memories flooding back, maybe a song or favourite hymn of a loved-one no longer with us. My Mams favourite hymn was ' Sweet Heart of Jesus ' when I hear it, I can tell you it really tugs at the heart strings! Everyone will have a trigger that takes them rushing back to days of yore ..

All sorts of seemingly mundane reminiscences stir the emotions, in my case a particular peculiarity, I never eat a mince pie without thinking of my Auntie Annie; whist most people associate this

confectionery with Christmas, my Auntie always baked batches for all her extended family for New Years Eve.



My Auntie Maggie invariably had a bottle of Sherry for New Year, bought from Knights Chemists in Scholes. During the Christmas and New Year period there was a notice in the shopwindow ' Wines from the Wood', you took your own bottle and it was filled from a cask; that was recycling before we knew what recycling meant. Older readers from the Scholes and district will recall during the festive season queues spilling from the shop on to Scholes itself. I must say the slightest whiff of Sherry and I'm immediately transported back in time to ' Hogmanays ' in days gone by.

In your youth it seems difficult to envisage that idiosyncrasies, such as those mentioned above will ever mean anything to you. However as years roll by and the years take their toll, we also think more about loved ones gone from the family, then these seemingly trivial recollections become precious; more so with every passing year. It is said the young dream the old look back with rose-tinted spectacles. We must never forget, eventually - we will all reach for those 'specs'! The emotion in this paragraph and indeed the article, could perhaps be encapsulated up by a song from 'The Lion King'- 'The Circle of Life' !



Thinking of 'Hogmanays' past, many of the old traditions have largely disappeared - Hot Pot not to be touched until after midnight, the first footer (the first person over threshold) would bring a piece of coal and a slice of bread to symbolise the house would have warmth and food in the coming year; strange to think that Wigan a town with such a mining past, and today you'd have a job to find a piece of coal !

There is no doubt we have lived through a difficult year to say the least but our forbears have lived through turbulent times too, not least the horrors of two world wars, I had hoped to look through The Wigan Observer archive to see how the New Year's Eve after each war was reported, unfortunately because of COVID I was unable to access the copies; that's a project for next year. In the absence of the archive I looked to the internet and found some fascinating photographs, by Wigan's intrepid photographer Frank Orrell he was out and about camera in hand to capture the atmosphere of 1969 New Year Celebrations.



His photographs take you immediately back to those days, he really has a great gift for capturing the moment! By the way the archive is available on microfiche at The Museum of Wigan Life, its a

fantastic facility, the staff at The Museum are extraordinarily helpful and willing to help anyone unsure of how to access this outstanding resource. Hopefully it won't be too long before it's opened to the public again.

Also available on the internet this snippet it from The Daily Mail 1945, 29 days after the armistice, it reported - Twelve million bananas would arrive at Bristol on New Years Eve they will be rationed and allowed to under 18s only, incidentally sweets only came off rationing February 1953, the last thing to come off rationing was meat in 1954, 9 years after the war ended . Such were the privations of the war years.

I hope you don't think I've been over sentimental in this article, but I'm sure you'll agree, especially at this time of year, and for all sorts of reasons the heart rules the head, and I for one am quite content to let it. When I started work (here I go again, harking back.) the workroom manager used to say incessantly 'Onwards and Upwards' and I mean incessantly.