

# Ramblers Gems



A Spring Vale Rambling Class Publication

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### Gathering Storms

Storm Arwen, the name given to the first of our winter storms was “an event the likes of which we haven’t seen for 60 years” and we all need to be prepared for more extreme weather due to the climate crisis. This weekend sees the latest storm, which has been given the name Barra, battering our shores and countryside.

Three people died in the storm, which saw exceptionally strong winds of almost 100mph damaging power lines that required an enormous restoration effort by electricity engineers. The most severely affected areas were up in the North East around County Durham and Northumberland, the north Peak District and the south Lakes, and Aberdeen and Perthshire in Scotland. Whole communities were left without water, electricity so no hot food or drinks or in certain cases no heating as well. In some instances, this was up to 11 days plus! Certainly not an enviable position to be in. And people were not the only things affected. Nature took a bashing too.

The storm’s gale force winds also brought down thousands of trees, including irreplaceable specimens, according to the National Trust. The Trust has said that the full extent of the damage is still being assessed but was likely to cost at least £3m to repair. More than 50 trees were uprooted at the trust’s Bodnant Garden in North Wales, including a 51-metre tall coast redwood, as well as many of the hybrid rhododendrons that are unique to the property.

The storms will have also damaged many of our older established trees if they haven’t already been knocked over. Branches have been snapped off, falling to the ground, or many have been weakened and may still be lodged high up in the trees canopy. These are now deadly and could come crashing down at any time due to even the slightest wind.

So, at this moment try to avoid walking under or by trees, to prevent you from having an accident. Council and estate workers are looking out for these damaged trees during their effort to remove the felled trees that are littering our woods.



Michael C

## Animals that use their legs other than for walking

Kangaroos move by hopping on their hind legs at speeds of up to 40mph, using their tails for steering and balancing. When the kangaroo is moving slowly, the tail is used as an extra leg to support the animal. Most kangaroos can only move both back legs at the same time and not independently.



Grasshoppers 'sing' by rubbing their legs against their forewings. One of these has pegs on it, the other a hard ridge, giving off a sound similar to that of a distant stringed instrument. It is mainly the courting males that we hear giving off their songs, although to some species the female also has a quiet answering song.

Moles have stubby, broad, shovel-like front feet, which are extremely well adapted for digging.

Crustaceans have ten legs that perform specialised tasks. Their three middle legs are for walking sideways on the seabed, and their front pair, the strong pincer claws, for defence and predation. The remaining pair, the hind legs that resemble paddles, enable the animal to swim, hence the crab's LATIN NAME, Callinectes or 'beautiful swimmer.'



Glenda B

## North East Lancashire Coach Rambles

The Ramblers have just been to Knaresborough where we offered a choice of three graded walks and had an opportunity to visit the Festive Market, watch the street entertainers and enjoy the firework finale. This was the first time since the pandemic that we have been able to run two coaches and 67+ people made the trip.



We have launched our 2022 programme and whilst we normally go on the first Sunday of every month, we are making a couple of changes to avoid Bank Holiday traffic and crowded destinations.

So, we will be back on the 9th January to Grassington (*Ed. now cancelled*). Then (first Sunday of the month) 6th February to Grange-Over-Sands, 6th March to Llangollen, 3rd April to Helmsley. We will then be on the 2nd Sunday of the month - 8th May to Ashbourne, 12th June to Conwy, 10th July to Richmond. For the rest of the year, we will be back to the 1st Sunday of the month, - 7th August to Chatsworth, 4th September to Sedburgh, 2nd October to Coniston, 6th November to Buxton and on the 4th December we will be returning to Otley for the Otley Victorian Fayre.

If signs are more positive bookings for the Grange over Sands trip will be taken via telephone and online from 9am on Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> January. You will be able to book online via TicketTailor up to 9pm on the 30th January 2022.

For more information visit <http://www.coach-rambles.org.uk/> If you would like to subscribe to our e-newsletter complete the form on the coach rambles website.

**Coach Ramblers**

## What Did You Do BEFORE You Went Rambling?

I spent my time on the high seas! I was a yachswoman. How did this happen I hear you ask? I met a sail training instructor who was serving with the Royal Navy – yep, a tall man in a uniform asked me to go sailing with him. I told him I would try it once. After all, I explained, being all at sea is not quite the same as watching from beyond the touchline when you play rugby!

We set sail from HMNB Devonport near Plymouth. My sailing adventure was all of 28 nautical miles as we were storm bound on the southern bank of Newton Creek at Noss Mayo for several days before we made it around the coast, over the dangerous sand bar and into the Kingswear Estuary and Salcombe.

I was hooked and apparently that was the first and only time I got on a yacht for someone else. The man in uniform was a member of the Royal Ocean Sailing Club and a competitive sailor so after one of his two-handed races I joined him in Santander, Northern Spain. With hardly any experience I began a trip on 'SNAFU' for a coastal sail to San Sebastian, followed by an eventful 344 nautical miles across the Bay of Biscay to Brest/Roscoff.

The best bit was the wild and windy *Pointe du Raz*, France's equivalent of Land's End, its raging waters and a pod of dolphins swimming alongside us. The notorious Raz de Sein is well-known to sailors, with its two lighthouses, La Vieille and Tévenec. That day I spent six hours as helmsman on the first and second dog watches and the first watch (4pm to 10pm) in visibility of less than 100 metres, rain and wind.



Me being winched up the mast in St Peter Port to sort out some rigging that had got twisted around the spreaders.

This trip involved a lot of tacking and jibing, chart reading, hoisting and lowering sails, tying knots and my favourite skill 'pilotage'. Pilotage is navigating anywhere you can bump into things. If you are in

sailing waters where it is shallow enough to run aground or you are near the coast, then you need to understand how to pilot your vessel. Charts, pilot books, photos, Almanacs, tidal stream atlases and a pilot plan are all needed to get you safely into harbour and moored up.

Where did I learn these skills? On three years of Monday nights from 7-9pm doing theory and RYA exams at Fleetwood Nautical College and on practical courses at Southern Sailing, Southampton run by the legendary John Goode.

Me with the Fastnet Lighthouse in the background



I have crossed the channel many times on my way to and from Alderney, Guernsey and France encountering the notorious shipping lanes in dense fog, calm waters and mostly overnight. From Southampton, via Cowes, to Crookhaven on the most southwestern tip of Ireland and then Dingle Bay I tackled the infamous Fastnet course aboard Starduster. Think Simon le Bon and his 71ft yacht Drum capsizing during the Fastnet race in 1985. Calm as a mill pond on the way there for us but they say it you do this route the bad weather gets you on the way there or back. It caught us on the way back from Crosshaven, Cork when we found ourselves struggling with a Force 10 storm as we rounded the Lizard Peninsula, Cornwall. I say 'we' but by this point seven of the crew were off watch with sea sickness and it was down to yours truly and the skipper to do a double watch of eight hours before we reached the safety of Falmouth Harbour.

On my way back from Cork before the storm hit.



Now that was scary. You don't get that sort of weather on a SVRC walk!

**Barbara S**

## Beachcomber

by George Mackay Brown

from *Fishermen with Ploughs* (Hogarth Press, 1971), and included in *The Collected Poems of George Mackay Brown* (John Murray, 2005)

Monday I found a boot –  
Rust and salt leather.

I gave it back to the sea, to dance in.

Tuesday a spar of timber worth thirty bob.  
Next winter

It will be a chair, a coffin, a bed.

Wednesday a half can of Swedish spirits.  
I tilted my head.

The shore was cold with mermaids and angels.

Thursday I got nothing, seaweed,  
A whale bone,  
Wet feet and a loud cough.

Friday I held a seaman's skull,  
Sand spilling from it  
The way time is told on kirkyard stones.

Saturday a barrel of sodden oranges.  
A Spanish ship  
Was wrecked last month at The Kame.

Sunday, for fear of the elders,  
I sit on my bum.  
What's heaven? A sea chest with a thousand gold  
coins.



Pesto Cenorr

## Bangs of Expectations

The cracker is a traditional at Christmas that we all love to tolerate. They were first made in about 1845-1850 by a London sweet maker called Tom Smith. He had seen the French 'bon bon' sweets (almonds wrapped in pretty paper) on a visit to Paris in 1840. He came back to London and tried selling sweets like that in England and also included a small motto or riddle in with the sweet. But they didn't sell very well.

In 1861 Tom Smith launched his new range of what he called 'Bangs of Expectation'! Legend says that one night, while he was sitting in front of his log fire, he became very interested by the sparks and cracks coming from the fire. Suddenly, he thought what a fun idea it would be if his sweets and toys could be opened with a crack when their fancy wrappers were pulled in half.

However, looking into the history of the Tom Smith company, it's thought that Tom actually bought the recipe for the small cracks and bangs in crackers from a fireworks company called Brock's Fireworks. The story of him sitting by the fire was probably added to help sell his new items.

The Christmas Crackers that are used today are short cardboard tubes wrapped in colourful paper. There is normally a Cracker next to each plate on the Christmas dinner table. When the crackers are pulled - with a bang! - a colourful party hat, a toy or gift and a festive joke falls out! The party hats look like crowns, and it is thought that they symbolise the crowns that might have been worn by the Wise Men.

Crackers are famous for their very bad jokes!  
Here are some corny Cracker jokes!

Who is Santa's favourite singer? *Elf is Presley*

What does Santa suffer from if he gets stuck in a chimney? *Claustrophobia!*

Who is Santa Claus married to? *Mary Christmas!*

Why is Santa so good at karate? *Because he has a black belt!*

Michael C

## A Ghost Story for Christmas

LET'S turn the clock back and visit 13th Century Accrington and a very famous street called Abbey Street.

Robert de Lacy the Lord of Blackburnshire (1170-1211) gave land around the Accrington area to the Abbot of Kirkstall Abbey, near to Leeds. This was by way of compensation for the grange at Cliviger which had been recovered from them by Richard de Elland. In around 1200, a brethren of monks moved across and built a grange (a small-scale abbey) in the area that is now Grange Lane and Black Abbey Street near to the old police station in Accrington.



The monks who built the grange removed the local inhabitants to make room for the building. The occupants were very displeased and took revenge by setting fire to the new building, destroying everything in it and killing the three lay brothers who were in charge.

But this gruesome tale is not the origin of our ghost story.

The grange was later rebuilt and again occupied by a brethren of monks who by their holy orders were forbidden to have any contact with females. Fate and passion would contrive to bring together a handsome monk called John and a beautiful young lady called Ursula, the daughter of a wealthy landowner.

John and Ursula would meet in secret in an area near the abbey known as the Black Tower, a building not too dissimilar to a light house with a twisting stone staircase. and it was there that they would embrace and make love.

The Abbot heard about this meeting and informed John that he had committed a crime against God and his faith.

“You will never see her again,” he roared.

Word also filtered back to Ursula's father, and he was furious, but the love between these two was so strong that not even the power of the Cistercian faith, and a concerned father, could sever the bond.

On one Christmas eve, John climbed over the wall of the abbey and made his way to the tower. Ursula came rushing up the stone stairs and straight into the arms of her lover, but they heard the sound of footsteps coming up the tower.

Ursula hid in a recess at the back of the tower while her father and five men appeared carrying large bundles of firewood and a collection of chains.

John was assaulted and tied up with the chains before bundles of firewood were placed under his body and were set on fire. As they fled Ursula came rushing to John's assistance but to her horror she was met by a wall of fire. Although in deep pain from his burns and close to death he shouted, “save yourself my love, save yourself”.

Ursula tried in vain to pull the chains off John's riving body, her hands were burnt to the bone, In a desperate attempt to save the one man who had loved her so dearly, The flames took effect and both perished together that Christmas Eve all those years ago.

There have been many ghostly sightings of Ursula in the very area where she lost her life which is now a car park situated in Abbey Street. Apparently, Ursula's ghost can only be seen on Xmas eve, a young lady who lost her life for the love of John.



**Eleanor**