

Ramblers Gems



A Spring Vale Rambling Class Publication

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Happy New Year to all our members and friends

Thank you to all of our readers who have supported us during the 18 months we have been publishing Ramblers Gems.

- Tomorrow is the next day of your yearbook so write a good one. Fill it with new experiences.
- Here's to another year full of joy, laughter, and unforgettable memories with an unforgettable friend!
- Take a leap of faith and begin this wondrous new year by believing you can walk miles.

The editorial team sends their heartiest new year wish to you all! Stay safe and keep walking.

Michael C

Who we are.

As we enter a new year, our walking programme is still following the walks as scheduled in the 2021/22 syllabus. If you are new to Spring Vale Ramblers, then you are welcome to come along to one of our walks. The following are the dates and meeting places for January and February. All meet times are 11.00 am
08/01/2022 Meet at Graining Wood Darwen
22/01/2022 Meet at Town Hall Padiham
05/02/2022 Meet at Rambles Café Tockholes
19/02/2022 Meet at Sabden Village Car Park

If you are unfamiliar with our long history of walking and how it all began, then here is a brief insight into our early days.

The Spring Vale Rambling Class was formed in 1896 by the late Mr J.T. Fielding a Methodist preacher at Spring Vale Church Darwen. Mr Fielding was a teacher by profession, born in Great Harwood in 1858 and came to live in Darwen in 1881. During his working life he taught at Sandhill School on Lark St and Hollins Grove both in Darwen. He was also a keen naturalist-biologist and formed the rambling class in 1895 for men only. The first ramble took place in 1896 with 10 men attending. While on the rambles, specimens of flowers, leaves, minerals etc. were collected, these being shown and discussed at classes during the winter months.

It was in 1901 that ladies were first invited to attend a walk, but not until 1917 were all rambles open to ladies. It was the ladies who kept the class going during the 1930's. While nowadays the walks are led by our experience leaders, the ethos of the Class remains the same. We believe that walks should be welcoming, educational, and just plain enjoyable.

Glenda B

Tea - the Drink of Emperors

Most walkers will recognise that feeling of pleasure when they have completed a hard days walk, found a good cafe and there is a seat there just for you to enjoy your cup of tea and cake. Most walkers prefer their tea strong, in fact the stronger the better usually with milk and sugar.

But most people will not be aware of the intriguing story that sits behind the humble cup of tea. Do you prefer Indian or Chinese? How did the great Opium Wars fit into this triangle of countries?

All tea originated from Southwest China as a medicinal drink dating back to the 3rd century AD. During the 16th century priests and merchants introduced it to Western Civilisation with tea drinking becoming popular in Britain in the 17th century. In the early 1820's Britain introduced the production of tea to India in order to compete with the Chinese monopoly on this commodity, Assam and Darjeeling being grown solely in India, on the foothills of the Himalayas.

By the turn of the century Assam became the leading tea growing area in the world. Tea producers became renowned for the many different ways of stealing tea plants and seedlings from China. One way was to use a Wardian Case or vivarium to transport the seedlings on the long journeys out of China. India grown tea became a high-status drink not just for its strength but as a patriotic product of the empire. As prices fell it became popular with the working class too. The Temperance Movement promoted tea drinking as an alternative to beer drinking for boiling water, necessary for tea, rendered polluted water safe to drink. The working class found Chinese tea to be insipid and the lower price of Indian tea was appealing, often going without other foods in order to afford it.



Black Pu'erh Tea Cake in presentation box

Great Britain was desperate to have Chinese made luxury goods such as silks, porcelain and tea which was in great demand, so it exported opium grown in India and sold it to China. Meanwhile opium addiction became widespread in China taken orally at first but, as smoking of tobacco became popular, this changed to the smoking of opium and this increase led to social and economic problems. By the 1790's the emperor banned opium imports and cultivation, but the trade continued to flourish.

Although the Portuguese established the importing of opium to China, Great Britain soon became the leading suppliers to the Chinese markets establishing a monopoly in Bengal, India. An imbalance of trade was clear. The West was not producing anything that China needed so Europeans would pay with Silver or Gold for Chinese luxury goods if it were not for the Opium. "Country traders" took the opium to China who sold it to smugglers along the Chinese coastline for Silver or Gold which was then given to the East India Company who used the money to buy luxury goods. Armed wars continued to ensue between Britain and China with huge warehouses of opium being destroyed but all to no avail. Eventually this led to the dynasty being toppled in favour of a republican China in the 20th century.

Chinese tea fall into 6 groups Green, Black, Oolong, Dark, Yellow and White with these falling into a number of types, white needle, pu'erh tea in addition to the numerous scented types like Jasmine.

What is a cake of tea — compressed tea called tea bricks, tea cakes or tea lumps are blocks of whole or finely ground black tea, green tea or post fermented tea leaves that have been packed into moulds and pressed into block form handy for transporting and for selling.

With no other hot drink competitor such as coffee, cocoa and Bovril not appearing until the 1970's tea ruled.

So, at the end of your next walk and you are looking forward to tea and cakes, remember that 300 years ago that little phrase had a very different meaning.

Enjoy!

Glenda B

January Musings

January was established at the first month of the year by the Romans. Names after the god Janus (Latin for door), Janus has two faces, which allow him to look backwards into the old year and forward into the new. He was the “spirit of the opening”.

However, the very earliest Roman Calendars only had 10 months and the new year stated on 1st March. Even when January was added, the New Year was kept as 1st March.

The Anglo-Saxons called the first month Wulf Monath, because wolves came into villages looking for food. The January full moon is also known as the Wolf Moon, because wolves were more likely to be heard howling at this time. The wolf moon this year is on 17th January.



Traditions and Customs.

First footing. A custom supposed to bring good luck to people for the coming year. As soon as midnight has passed on 31st December, people would wait behind their doors, for a dark haired person to arrive, carrying coal, bread, money and greenery. These were all for good luck, coal for warmth, bread to ensure everyone in the house would have enough food, money for wealth and greenery for long life. The visitor would take a pan of dust or ashes out of the house to signify the end of the old year.

(The visitor would find plenty of dust at my house!)

Superstitions: In Medieval time superstitions surrounding prosperity were rife. A flat cake was placed on one of the horns of a cow. The farmer and workers would sing and dance around the cow until the cake was thrown to the ground. If it fell in front of the cow, it would be a good year, if it fell behind a poor year could be expected.

2nd January was considered one of the unluckiest days of the year, according to an old Saxon belief, and any unfortunate born on this day could expect to die an unpleasant death.

St Agnes Eve, 20th January – this was another day when girls who wished to dream of future husband perform rituals before going to bed: walking backwards up the stairs, fasting all day then eating “dumb cake” before bed. Dumb cake – made with friends in complete silence. In Scotland girls would meet in a field, thrown grain onto the soil and pray:

“Agnes sweet and Agnes fair,

Hither, hither, now repair,

Bonny Agnes let me see

The lad who is to marry me”

Feast Days: St Hilary feast day is on 13th January and has gained reputation as being the coldest day of the year due to past events starting on or around this date. In 1086, a great frost started spready over the country on St Hilary’s Day. One of the most severe winters in history began around 13th January in 1205, when the Thames in London froze over, and ale and wine turned to solid ice and was sold by weight!

Festivals and Traditions

Jan 5th Twelfth Night: The evening before Epiphany and marks the end of the medieval Christmas festivities.

Jan 6th Epiphany or Twelfth Day: Also known as Old Christmas Day, some countries exchange gifts on this day. Christians celebrate with visit of The Magi to baby Jesus.

Jan 7th St Distaff’s Day: Traditionally the day on which women had to return to work with the distaff (spindle) after the Christmas break. Also known as Plough Monday was the day after 12th night when labourers returned to the land.

Jan 25th Burns Night: Probably needs an article all to itself! Scottish folk honour their great poet Robert Burns, born 25th January 1759 and wrote his first song aged 16. A traditional Scottish meal of neaps, tatties and haggis is served, washed with whiskey. The haggis is “piped” into the room, and a poem extolling its virtue is recited over it before being served.

Jane C

Nature in January

We are in the tree planting season so you could plant a wildlife friendly shrub or tree. Hawthorn, blackthorn, guelder rose and field maple provide food, nesting sites and cover for small mammals and birds. Don't tidy your garden and prune or cut back plants. Leave them for insects and other wildlife as food or habitats.

Snow, rain, hail and sun make January an unpredictable month. Hazel catkins may start to blow in the breeze pollinating the tiny crimson female flowers and snowdrops start to spill out of copses.

Robins are actually tough as nails with fire in their belly as well as on their chest. A good feeding patch is well worth defending, and that is exactly what they are doing when you hear them singing in mid-winter or see them chasing off anything that might have an eye on their worms. Another of our smallest birds, the wren, is easier to spot at this time of year as they'll be out frantically searching for insects to eat. The lack of insects and their small size makes them particularly vulnerable to cold weather, and in the most severe winters populations can dramatically decline.

In the bleak mid-winter short eared owls can be spotted gliding over coastal marshes and wetlands hunting for small birds and mammals such as voles. What's more, they are commonly seen during the day, sometimes in small groups, as they seek out, spot and then dive on their prey.



Short Eared Owl

On lakes and reservoirs, rafts of winter wildfowl include pochard, tufted ducks, mallard and wigeon. Mistle thrushes sing from treetops on gusty days and over reed-beds and shrubberies; huge flocks of starlings swirl in the evenings.

Wigeon



January is the peak of the breeding season for foxes and on still evenings you may hear the unearthly scream of a vixen calling to attract a mate. Roe deer, fallow deer and muntjac are easier to see with the trees bare of leaves, especially early in the morning or late afternoon.

Insect life may seem hard to find, but droneflies, which mimic bees, bask in the winter sun. Look under logs for invertebrates such as woodlice and centipedes, but don't forget to replace logs as you find them. On elder trees look for the dull purple ear fungus, which looks and feels like a clammy human ear!

Dronefly



The mountain hare's coat turns white between December and March. The Peak District, including the National Trust's Derwent Valley and Kinder Scout, has seen a steady increase in the mountain hare population, but numbers are declining in Snowdonia and Scotland.

When all is quiet inland, you can be sure of plenty of activity on the seashore. Seaweeds grow all year and marine snails don't hibernate so now is a good time to head to the coast and look in rock-pools around Britain.

On brighter days watch the sun rise and set. Wrap up warm and take a walk to see what you can find and notice if new life is starting to emerge. Nature Reserves are good places to visit.

Jean G

In the Outer Hebrides

by Alistair Elliott

As you walk north, the Atlantic on your left
muttering, stretching out its wrinkled skin,
your eyes half-closed against the oystery light
of the open world, you might sit down
on the sharp reluctant grass, a dry white dune,
and lean back, with your fingers in the sand.

I did, and found the empty shell of a whelk,
and then another, and soon so many shells
I realised I was sitting on the midden
of a family who had lived here once,
in some much earlier season. Now I wonder
why they collected all their shells together...

These summer people thought to save their feet
from sharp revenge of molluscs they had eaten?
Were they competing with some other gourmets?
Or was it tidiness, to heap
their smelly calcium downwind on the beach?
If so, the village should be over there.

One of them thought that shells might come in useful
some day: necklaces; counters in a game;
a bank of money of the northern kind;
the makings of a shelter, full of light,
to keep us safe, as dry as we could be
in this wet world, open to air and sea.



Contributor Pesto Cenorr

Anniversaries in January

- 1st Jan: The BBC established by Royal Charter as the British Broadcasting Corporation. 1927
- 1st Jan: Traffic policemen were introduced in Great Britain 1931
- 9th Jan: Income Tax was first introduced 1707 by William Pitt the Younger at 2 old pence in the pound on incomes £60 and 2 shillings on incomes over £200
- 10th Jan: The London Underground began operating 1863
- 17th Jan: Robert Scott and his party reached the South Pole in 1912
- 27th Jan: Mozart born in 1756 in Austria
- 28th Jan: 1807, Pall Mall in London became first street in the world to be lit by gas lights.
- 29th Jan: The Victoria Cross originates from this date in 1856. The first medals were made from metals of guns captured in the Crimea.

Jane C

Answers to Just for Fun from December Issue 51

1. As the dog was always running twice as fast as Charlotte, who travelled 10 mile, then the dog must have run 20 miles.
2. CRESCENT WALK
CRESCENT MOON and MOON WALK
3. WO^{King}ODS High King in the Woods
Hiking in the Woods
4. Walk it Walk away from it.
5. STEP PETS PETS
One Step forward Two steps back

Michael C