



Pro Utilitate

St John Ambulance Historical Society of Australia

quarterly newsletter for the members

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'Preserving and promoting the St John heritage'

EDITION NO. 2021-1

Editor: Dr Ian Howie-Willis

LET'S HOPE THIS YEAR'S BETTER...

Welcome to the first edition of *Pro Utilitate* for 2021. We'll start by observing that the Historical Society had a tough year in 2020. Our scheduled annual gathering, which was to have been held in Sydney last November, didn't take place because the Covid19 pandemic necessitated the cancellation of the 2020 St John Ambulance Australia Members' Convention.

In the end we *did* have a history seminar and annual general meeting, but not those originally planned. We thank our President, **DAVID FAHEY**, and Secretary, **JAMES CHESHIRE**, for organising these video-conferenced events, which turned out to be the best possible during an Australia-wide lock-down, severe restrictions on travel and onerous social-distancing rules.

It's too early to whether or not we'll have a "normal" year during 2021, with the usual national Members' Convention and face-to-face seminar and AGM.

But whatever 2021 has in store for us, it's sure to be a welcome improvement over the year just past!

A SPEEDY RECOVERY, LEN

Our Priory Secretary, **LEN FIORI**, has recently undergone major surgery, as a result of which he's having an enforced time away from The Australian Office during February. Len is a great friend of the Historical Society; and it's his generous support that makes much of our activity possible. On behalf of our membership, your Editor expresses to Len our appreciation; and we assure him that we hope and pray he will recover swiftly and be able to return to work, as planned, in early March.

That's a picture of Len at the right, in the Priory Library with the famed "Pel Fesq" floral stained-glass windows behind him.



READER SATISFACTION SURVEY

Pro Utilitate No. 2020-4 included a "Reader Satisfaction" questionnaire which hoped to elicit your true opinion of this newsletter and its notorious "Jokes" supplement.

The overall aim of the survey was to improve *Pro Utilitate* to make it a better newsletter for communicating information about St John history to all our readers, near and far.

The good news is that five of our readers responded to the survey. And for that we thank **BRIAN FOTHERINGHAM**, **LESLEY KING**, **KATHLEEN MILLER**, **JAN SCHMITZER** and **IRENE SIMPSON**, who made the time and effort to complete the questionnaire and provide us with helpful feedback.

The "less good" news is that our 250 other members *didn't* respond. Why not? The low response rate can be variously interpreted. For example:

- Only 1.96% of our members (five out of 255) actually read the newsletter.
- More than that do read it but didn't get round to returning a completed questionnaire.

In this edition:

- * Edition No. 2021-1: Let's hope this year's better ...
- * A speedy recovery, Len
- * Reader satisfaction survey:
- * Farewell, Sam Vestey
- * The Tardis
- * Congratulations, awardees
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- * Lady Watson — an Eye Hospital benefactor
- * Thinking historically
- * Support the St John Eye Hospital in Gaza!
- * Late news: death of John Spencer AM, GCStJ
- * Membership renewals for 2021
- * And finally, ...

- Our readers are averse to participating in surveys of this kind and are resentful of their time being intruded upon.
- They're happy enough with the status quo, aren't greatly concerned with tailoring the newsletter to better suit their wants, and didn't see the need to tell us so.
- All of the above.

Whichever of these might perchance be true, it's a somewhat disheartening result.

That having been said, what did our five loyal respondents tell us? On the "plus" side of the ledger, their feedback informs us that:

- * Most of them read most of the newsletter most of the time.
- * They find it to be generally informative, stimulating and entertaining.
- * They think it's well written, attractively presented and easy to read.
- * They enjoy reading about what other St John people in other States/Territories are doing.
- * They appreciate learning how people elsewhere are promoting the St John 'History & Heritage' cause.
- * They agree that that the continued publication of the newsletter will be essential to the future success of the Historical Society.

Is there anything about **Pro Utilitate** that they **don't** like? Yes. The main criticism is that some articles are too long.

How can the newsletter be improved? There's consensus that the articles should be shorter and snappier. In addition, focussing more on **people** — telling readers what St John people round Australia are doing in their St John work — would make the newsletter more "reader friendly".

And what about the "Jokes" supplement? Mixed reviews here. One respondent admitted to not liking it and never looking at it. The others said they usually read at least some of it, generally enjoy what they've read, and think it should continue. **However**, ... they think it's far too long and should be cut back to about two pages.

Thank you, respondents, for your feedback. We'll take your views into serious consideration as we plan the future of **Pro Utilitate** in the coming months. We're aiming for a "new look" newsletter better suited to the needs and interests of you our readership. The views we've garnered via the survey will help ensure that that happens.

FAREWELL, SAM VESTEY

Sadly, we must report the passing of one of the truly great figures in the recent history of the Most Venerable Order of St John. We refer to **SAMUEL GEORGE ARMSTRONG VESTEY, 3RD BARON VESTEY GCVO, GCSuJ** (1941–2021, pictured left), a former Chancellor and Lord Prior of the Order.



Lord Vestey died on 4th February, six weeks short of his 80th birthday. His death was announced to the Order by our present Lord Prior, **PROFESSOR MARK COMPTON GCSuJ**, and then on 8th February to the Priory in Australia by our Chancellor, **CAMERON OXLEY KStJ**, in a special edition of **Spotlite**, the Priory's online newsletter.

The Lord Prior's announcement gives a comprehensive account of Lord Vestey's service to the Order and to the Royal Family, so we will not repeat that information here. Instead we focus on aspects of his life with which you our readers might be unfamiliar.

Sam Vestey's father, Captain William H. Vestey, was a Scots Guards officer who was killed in action in 1944 during World War II, when Sam was only three years old. His mother, **Pamela, née Armstrong** (1918–2011), was born in Melbourne. She was the daughter of George Armstrong, the only child of the great Australian operatic diva of the

turn of the
twentieth century,

Dame Nellie Melba (1861–1931) — the self-same Nellie Melba whose portrait adorns the Australian \$100 banknote. And that of course means that Lord Vestey was Dame Nellie's great-grandson.

Lord Sam retained strong links with Australia. The Vestey family owned vast cattle properties and meat processing factories in northern Australia; and Sam himself had a property outside Holbrook, halfway between Canberra &



Melbourne. The family also retains Coombe Cottage, Dame Nellie's retirement home at Coldstream near Lilydale, east of Melbourne. Dame Nellie is buried in the local cemetery.

On his trips to Australia Lord Sam visited the St John establishments here, more especially during his years as our Lord Prior. Unfortunately, your Editor never had the pleasure of meeting him, but our Priory Librarian, **JOHN PEARN**, met him several times. John remembers him as a powerful individual with a commanding presence.

Our Western Australian members will find various colour pictures of Lord Sam in the book *Reflections and Directions*, the 50th anniversary history of the Order's Commandery in Western Australia. He attended various of the functions conducted in Perth to celebrate the Commandery's Golden Anniversary in 1997. Photographs from that visit were included in the book.

THE TARDIS

BRUCE CASLAKE has been busy making another model — this time of the "Tardis", the "time machine" from the long-running *Dr Who* science fiction series shown on ABCTV.

Readers might recall Bruce's previous model-crafting enterprise, reported last September in *Pro Utilitate* No. 2020-3. On that occasion we told you about the large "Crusaders" chess set that Bruce had created and donated to the Victorian St John Museum in Williamstown. The "white" chessmen are Hospitallers and Templars; and the "black" pieces are Saracens. That's one of the rooks (castles) at the right — in the form of a Knight Hospitaller astride a rearing steed, St John banner waving aloft.

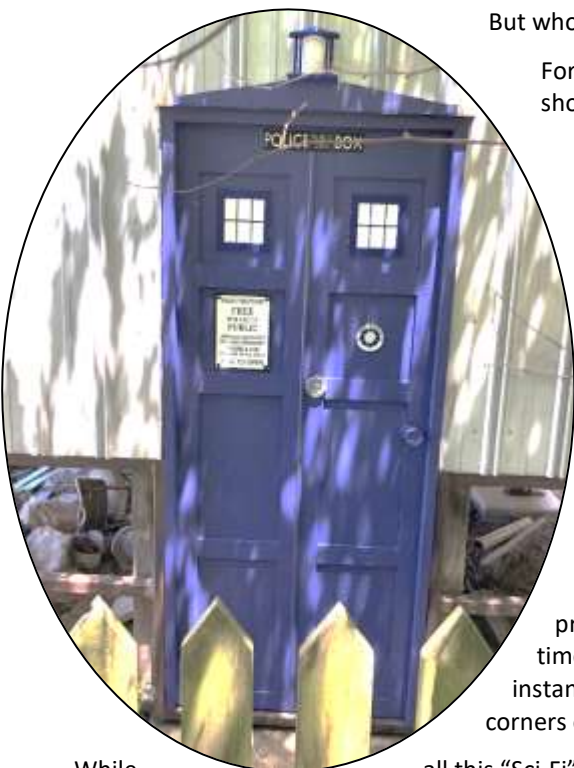


But who is Dr Who and what is the Tardis?

For those unfamiliar with the series, it is one of the all-time favourite British TV shows. Since it first went to air in 1963, over 860 episodes have been produced by BBCTV. About 110 million people in 86 countries regularly watch the show.

Dr Who the character is a "Time Lord" from a remote planet called Gallifrey. Time Lords can travel through time as well as space. Though they can be killed, they are effectively immortal. That's because whenever they "wear out" through an over-abundance of derring-do adventure, they can self-regenerate, being reincarnated in a different human form. Dr Who spends his time travelling from one galaxy to another and between epochs of time righting wrongs, preventing evil forces harming the innocent, saving civilisations from destruction and changing history (for the better).

Dr Who travels in a time-machine called the "Tardis", which is the acronym for "Time And Relative Dimension In Space". From the outside, the Tardis looks like a blue police box of the kind still common in British cities in the 1960s — a portable one-room depot and call-box staffed by a local "Bobby" who was available round the clock to help the populace and maintain a visible police presence. But from the inside, it's not a 1.5 metre square box but a vast, capacious time/spaceship with an astounding array of gee-whizz technological apparatus for instantaneously teleporting the Doctor through the aeons of time and to the furthest corners of the universe.



While all this "Sci-Fi" information is no doubt engrossing for *Dr Who* fans, for us St Johnnies the Tardis is important for other reasons. Namely, it gives us oceans of free publicity to a worldwide audience of 110 million TV viewers.

That's because the police boxes were also on-street first aid centres equipped with St John first aid kits; and the Bobbies who staffed them were St John-trained first aiders as well as police. For that reason, the front door of each police box bore a St John Ambulance logo.

And so every time the Tardis appears on-screen, which is often during each episode, viewers will see the St John logo.

The advantage of such worldwide publicity is incalculable. If nothing else, it keeps the St John name continuously before the public.

Anyway, be that as it may, Bruce decided to celebrate all the free publicity by making a life-size model of the Tardis. That's it in the picture above. Looks like it has just dropped in behind someone's picket fence from the depths of a far-distant warp of time/space.

And at the right you can see the interior of the Caslake Tardis, in Bruce's workshop, where he's putting on the finishing touches.

Congratulations on your imagination, ingenuity and finely honed craft skills. Long may the Caslake Tardis attract free publicity for, and interest in, St John Ambulance!

CONGRATULATIONS, AWARDEES!

At least three St Johnnies received awards in the Order of Australia honours list published on Australia Day, 26th January. Those whose names your Editor recognised were **MALCOLM HAZELL AO** of the ACT and **GERARD KING AM**

of Western Australia. There may well have been more than these; and, if so, we apologise for not including their

names here. We take this opportunity of congratulating Malcolm and Gerard and any other St Johnnies who were honoured.

NETWORK OF ST JOHN HISTORIANS

In his seven months on the job, **TODD SKILTON**, the Order Librarian (see left), has successfully accomplished a feat attained by none of the other Order Librarians preceding him over the past two centuries. Todd has succeeded in getting the Order's historians, librarians, archivists, curators, numismatists, genealogists, vexillologists (specialists in the symbolism of flags) and armorialists (specialists in heraldry) talking to each other.

Todd has done this by establishing an internet network of the said specialists in which they can exchange ideas, ask each other questions, give advice to each other and generally provide mutual support.

Congratulations, Todd. A wonderful achievement. May there be many more to follow!

A PRIORY HISTORY FOR SOUTH AFRICA

MARK GOODMAN is the Priory Historian for the South African Priory of the Order of St John. He is currently writing a history of that Priory, in connection with which he has been swapping emails with your Editor, a.k.a. **IAN HOWIE-WILLIS**, the Historical Adviser to the Office of the Australian Priory. Only good can come out of such dialogue when Priory Historians consult each other over the histories they're writing.

Not all Priories and Commanderies have published histories of themselves. Those which have are Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United States, Wales and Western Australia. As well as them, the St John Eye Hospital Group, which has Priory status within the Order, has produced but not yet published a history of itself. Apart from South Africa, those still to burst into print are England & the Islands, Hong Kong, Kenya, Scotland and Singapore.

One of your Editor's hopes is that he'll live long enough to each Priory's and Commandery's achievements celebrated by the publication of an official Priory/Commandery history.

Meanwhile, Mark Goodman's history of the South African Priory is coming along nicely and will be a worthy addition to official St John bookshelves. Let's know when you've published it, Mark, because the Australian Priory Library will be the first in line waiting to purchase a copy!

Finally, best wishes, Mark, for successfully completing your Priory History-writing project. Be assured that it will fill an important gap in Order of St John historiography.

SMOKING IN UNIFORM

TERRY WALTON, our UK representative, shares with us this item about pipe-smoking during the Boer War:

On 27 November 1899, the Brigade Commissioner in England, Colonel C.W. Boldler, issued a special memorandum calling for volunteers to act as auxiliary medical orderlies to the British Army during the Second South African (Boer) War, 1899–1902. These men were issued with a khaki army uniform with black St. John Ambulance Brigade buttons and a Brigade badge on their sleeve.



They were also issued with a kit bag with a washing kit, field dressing, eating utensils and a clasp knife. The weekly pay for volunteer officers was £1/18/6 (A\$3.40) and between one guinea (A\$1.90) and £1/3/4 (A\$2.00) for Ambulance Privates according to qualifications. As over 2,000 Brigade members subsequently served in various hospitals and stretcher-bearer units in South Africa, it is not surprising to find unofficial references to their work.

Kruger pattern briar pipes were given to wounded and sick troops not only to smoke, but also as 'occupational therapy'. Occupational therapy as such was non-existent at the time; and as this kind of pipe had a large bowl, convalescent soldiers could while away the time by engraving their pipe bowls with designs. Some of these were engraved with Britannia, as the pipe on the right, and other devices reminding the wounded soldier of home, to which they added the battles in which they had taken part and also their Regiment or initials.

The more interesting engraved pipe, the one on the left of this picture, has the St. John Cross with lions and unicorns with "The St. John Ambulance Brigade" surrounding. Below, in a scroll, "Boer War 1900" and either side the names of two battles "Ladysmith" and "Wynburg". The mouthpiece, centre, was set at an unusual angle, so that if the patient was lying down in bed, the bowl of the pipe is at just the right slant for smoking. The top of the bowl has a silver metal top that twists and operates a type of camera iris that can be opened for lighting and closed when smoking. This device appears to be for preventing either the dry veldt or hospital bedclothes being set alight!

After I gave up smoking due to flying to and fro between London and Perth WA, I donated these tobacco pipes to the Ian Kaye Eddie Heritage Centre of the St John Commandery of Western Australia, where they may now be seen.

Thanks, Terry, for donating the carved pipes; and thanks for telling us about them.

MYSTERIOUS GONG FROM 'ENZED'

TODD SKILTON has sent us this photo of the most mysterious bronze St John medal we've ever seen. Todd, who's an eminent numismatist, doesn't know what the medal is; and so far, no one in his worldwide network of St John historians has been able to provide answers.



As you can see, the reverse (back) face of the medal has this inscription: "Serg^t R. Barron — 1939". The obverse face (front) is a roundel displaying the Badge of the Order (Maltese Cross with the "Queen's Beasts — lions and unicorns passant — alternately placed between the arms of the cross), with the Order's two Latin mottoes, *Pro Fide* and *Pro Utilitate Hominum*, top and bottom. And you'll also note that there's a ring at the top of the medal, so presumably it was meant to hang from a ribbon or chain.

Todd tells us that the medal is 28 millimetres (1¼ inches) in diameter, and that Sergeant Barron was a member of the St John Ambulance Brigade Wanganui Ambulance Division. Further, there are actually two such medals because there's another dated 1938.

Zealand has ever seen anything like it before, Todd has asked his internet network of St John history-and-heritage specialists for advice. So far no one has been able to provide clues as to its purpose.

Your Editor therefore refers the matter to that great authority on all matters pertaining to St John history, namely the in *Pro Utilitate* readership. Are any of you able to enlighten us? Your Editor is confident that at least one of you will know what the mysterious Wanganui gong is.

THE CHALLENGE

ALLAN MAWDSLEY has set the next Challenge for *Pro Utilitate* readers. Those who rise to the challenge will identify the Maltese Cross medal at the right.



Here are the clues we can give you: (1) it probably belonged to someone who served in the Australian armed services during World War II because it's paired with an 'Australian Service Medal 1939–1945' (i.e. the round, blue-scarlet-beige ribboned medal to the left of it); (2) it has alternating Scotch thistles and lions passant between the four arms of the cross; (3) and at the top of the black ribbon is an elaborate gold bar bearing what appears to be an inscription (which is indecipherable).

Your Editor has seen similar Masonic medals before, but they've all had four lions, not alternating lions and thistles.

And to show that they're thistles, not some other emblem, at the left you'll see a zoomed picture of one of them.

We recognise that this is a tough challenge. As usual, those correctly identifying the medal will receive an author-signed copy of *A Beacon of Hope* (2022), the 140th anniversary history of the Order of St John Jerusalem Eye Hospital.

PREVIOUS CHALLENGE

Pro Utilitate No. 2020–4 showed you the pair of medals at the right; and challenged you to identify them. As part of The Challenge, you had to tell us: (1) what each medal is; (2) why the Maltese Cross medal on the left missing one arm; (3) why the ribbon of that medal has a narrow white centre stripe; and (4) bonus points if you could say whose medals they once were.

The medals photo was provided by our Sydney Editor, **MATTHEW GLOZIER**, who gave you these clues: (a) both medals are miniatures; (b) the medal on the left was issued by the Venerable Order of St John; and (c) the medal on the right bears the image of Queen Victoria.

We can't say whether or not The Challenge was too easy; but very swiftly FOUR members called in with correct answers. The first was **FRANK DUNSTAN** in the Northern Territory, who provided answers within a half-hour of the newsletter being distributed. Frank advised us that: *The medal on the left is a bronze Donat's badge. Associate members of the Order had a vertical white stripe on their ribbon to signify their status as associates, so one can presume that Donats had the white stripe plus the three armed cross to signify that they were not members of the Order. They could become members of the Order, and in that case they wore the badge of their grade and removed the Donat's badge. The 1888 Statutes state that there is no badge for a Donat, so it obviously came in later, but I don't know when. (I'll have to chase that one up.) The other gong is Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee medal, instituted in 1887.*

The very next day our UK representative, **TERRY WALTON**, emailed from London to say: *I'm a scientist not a historian – so here is a correction or three. The Badge of a DONAT – a demi-cross which should not exceed 2½ inches. The 1888 Royal Charter refers to this grade of the Order and it also mentions a list of Donats who gave £1 or more and as such they received a copy of the Annual Report. The award was issued in gold, silver and bronze. If the ribbon of any medal of the Order has a white strip in the center it indicates the holder is not a member of the Order but has been recognised for services to the Order. A full size Donat's medal may be seen in the Heritage Centre of the WA Commandery in Perth. Regarding the medal bearing Queen Victoria's profile, two Jubilee Medals were issued, identical except for the year dates 1887 and 1897, also the style of anniversary on the reverse. The obverse showed the crowned Jubilee head of Queen Victoria surrounded by 'VICTORIA D.G. REGINA ET IMPERATRIX F.D.' The reverse of the 1887 reads 'IN COMMEMORATION OF THE 50th YEAR OF THE REIGN OF QUEEN VICTORIA 21 JUNE 1887'. The 1897 has 60th and 1897. The ribbon in the picture was somewhat distressed; it was originally a darker blue. Due to the photograph being of a miniature medal it was not possible to date which of the Jubilees it was – Golden or Diamond. Both medals are worn on the left breast. I was unable to read the inscription on the medal conclusively if it's the 1887 or 1897.*

The third, **PHIL BLACKWELL** of Tasmania, also emailed to identify both medals; and hot on the heels of that email came a phone call from **MALCOLM LITTLE** of Sydney, who also correctly named them.

The only thing the four identifiers don't seem to have got right is that the QV Jubilee Medal was for the Diamond Jubilee in 1897, not the Golden ditto in 1887.

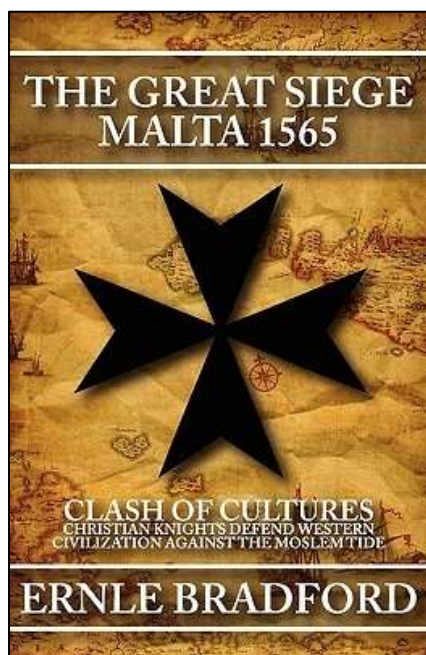
Oh, and the original owner of the medals was Captain Charles Ansell Emanuel of the 1st Hampshire Volunteer Artillery. Capt. Emanuel was an eminent Southampton solicitor who was first commissioned as a Second Lieutenant on 8 April 1893. Born in Southampton in January 1867, he practised law there and died in Southampton in September 1947. To have been awarded the Donat's medal of the Order, he must have given at least £1, which mightn't sound very much nowadays but would then have been worth about \$235 in present-day Australian dollar values. And because Capt. Emanuel's medal ribbon had a white stripe, he must have been a non-Christian. From his surname, it's probably safe to assume he was Jewish.

BOOK REVIEW

Dr **ELIZABETH ELLIS OSTJ** reviews another "book which St John history enthusiasts should try to read". This time she considers Ernle Bradford's *The Great Siege: Malta 1565* (New York: Open Road Integrated Media, 2014). That's a picture of the front cover



of the book at the left. As Elizabeth's review suggests, you can't really consider yourself well informed about the Knights of Malta until you've read this book. Here now is her review:



*This book, originally written in 1961 is perhaps the most comprehensive compilation of the events which surrounded the Great Siege of 1565. It starts from 1564 and finishes with the death of La Valette in 1568. It is a precursor to his companion book **The Shield and the Sword**, which followed in 1972 and was a more complete history the Crusades and the Knights Hospitaller of St John of Jerusalem (1071 – 1970).*

Ernle Bradford has the wonderful knack of combining historic fact with page turning narration. Rarely does he deviate from the historic record and yet somehow these books, and this book in particular, are hard to put down. The historic record is handled with an evenness and without overt glorification of the events. Bungling is described in as much detail as valiant victories. Whether or not some parts of this history have become questioned more recently, these books have become part of the Hospitaller canon.

The first several chapters set the stage, giving the reader: the background to Suleiman (Ch 1); describing the geography of Malta and a little of the organisational structure of the Order (Ch 2); the background on the Grand Master La Valette (Ch3); describing the defences of the Island and what had to be done to strengthen them (Ch 4); the more extensive preparations for a siege on Malta including warning beacons, provisions, arsenals and armed forces as well as the preparations being made by the Ottomans (Ch 5). These background chapters are important as they layout the character of the two leaders and also some of the strategic factors in the events surrounding the siege. These

included the division of the command and the order that the two supreme commanders of the Ottomans 'must work together in everything' (p. 45). Chapter 5 concludes with the setting off of the armada on the 29th March 1565 with 181 ships and a final, ironic note in that chapter that some of the galley slaves may well have been Knights or men-at-arms of the Order.

When Bradford speculates like this, he flags it as such. When he is confident of his facts he writes with more certainty. When it cannot be confirmed he says so. He includes a comprehensive Bibliography and at the end of the book, includes those sources that he is referencing. On page 238 he makes a note that none of the dialogue in the book was invented but taken from the earliest available sources.

The next section (Chapters 6-8) and Bradford again deals openly with the discrepancies and contradictions in the existing literature, particularly that dealing with the size of the armed forces on both sides. It does however, describe in detail the forethought on both sides reflected in the nature of the last-minute preparations. The Ottomans knew how sparse Malta was and ensured that they had 'Sacks of wool, cotton, cables, tents, and horses for the Spahis, and sails – as well as provisions'. Valetta was doing his final preparations, razing the areas outside the walls, bringing in every animal, vegetable and spring crop and sent most of the population to Mdina. In mid-May he called all his brethren together for a church service and address which left them exulted. Chapter 7 tracks the movement of the great fleet around the south of the island to its final landing point in Marsasirocco in the south. Chapter 8 discusses the final strategies of both forces and the first engagement along the post of Castille. Two captured Knights had led the Ottomans to believe this was a weak point in the city's defences, which it was not. After significant losses to the Ottomans and only 21 Christians killed, both sides retired and the two Knights paid with their lives for their subterfuge.

Chapters 9 through to 18 chronicle in detail the ebb and flow of attack for over 30 days on Fort St Elmo. These chapters are full of military detail, interpersonal intrigue, courage and mistakes on both sides. None greater than the error on behalf of the Ottomans to try and take St Elmo before anything else, assuming that it would fall within 3 days. It is typical of the evenness of Bradford that he includes the historical criticism of La Valette for his final action of this period, that is, the firing back of the heads of the Muslim prisoners. He does however, place this action in the context of the nature of the warfare they were engaged in (p. 142).

While many people mistakenly equate the siege of Malta with that of the siege of Fort St Elmo, Chapters 19 to 28 remind us in detail, of the following three months [23rd June – 8th September] where the siege centred on Birgu and Senglea and even involved Mdina briefly.

Thank you, Elizabeth. We're sure that those who haven't yet read the book will now be stimulated to do so. Various editions of the book are readily available. The Penguin edition seems to be continually in print. The book is also available in electronic format for 'Kindle'-type devices, and as a "voice-book".

SWORD AND SCIMITAR

Pro Utilitate readers will be interested in a novel your Editor received as a Christmas present from his Scottish historian friend, **ROSS KENNEDY**. Ross, who's a member of the Historical Society and has published articles in our journal, **St John History**, is currently finishing a PhD in Mediaeval History at the University of Glasgow.

Ross's thesis topic is the taxation concessions ("exemptions") granted to the Knights Hospitaller and Knights Templar in England under the Angevin dynasty monarchs, King John and his son King Henry III. It's a fascinating topic, because both the military orders proved very active litigants in pursuing their territorial and financial interests. As Ross demonstrates, they weren't just the bold Crusaders of legend, defending the Holy Land with their very lives. They became active "corporate citizens" of England, vigorously engaging with their neighbours, tenants, local officials, the courts, and the kings, as they lived on and managed their estates.

The Christmas present from Ross is an exciting 2012 novel about the Great Siege of Malta in 1565. The novel is ***Sword and Scimitar***, a picture of the front cover of which is at the right.

The author is an acclaimed British writer of page-turning historical thrillers, one **SIMON SCARROW**. Mr Scarrow is best known for his ***The Eagles of the Empire*** series of 17 historically accurate novels about the ancient Roman Empire during the middle years of the 1st century AD, i.e. at the time of the Emperors Claudius and Nero. This series follows a pair of tough, campaign-hardened Roman legionaries, Quintus Licinius Cato and Lucius Cornelius Macro, in their various military postings on the frontiers of the Empire. The locales of the novels range widely across the Empire, between Britain, Judaea, Germany, Egypt, Crete and Spain as well as Rome itself. (If you can lay hands on a copy of one these novels, you'll find you won't be able to put it down; and reading them can become addictive!)

Same goes for ***Sword and Scimitar*** (London, Headline Publishing, 2012), which represents a change of theme for Mr Scarrow. Instead of ancient Rome, he writes about the Knights of St John on Malta and the native Maltese people. Like Ernle Bradford, whose book is reviewed above, he focusses on the Great Siege of 1565.

Here now is what the publicity blurb says about the novel:

1565, Malta: a vital outpost between the divided nations of Europe and the relentlessly expanding Ottoman Empire. Faced with ferocious attack by a vast Turkish fleet, the knights of the Order of St John fear annihilation. Amongst those called to assist is disgraced veteran Sir Thomas Barrett. Loyalty and instinct compel him to put the Order above all other concerns, yet his allegiance is divided. At Queen Elizabeth's command, he must search for a hidden scroll, guarded by the knights, that threatens her reign. As Sir Thomas confronts the past that cost him his honour and a secret that has long lain buried, a vast enemy army arrives to lay siege to the island...

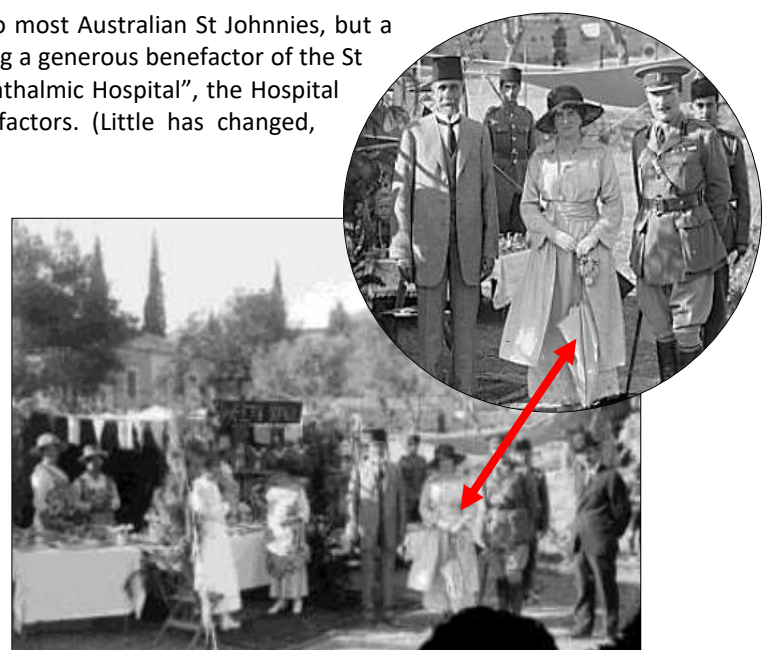
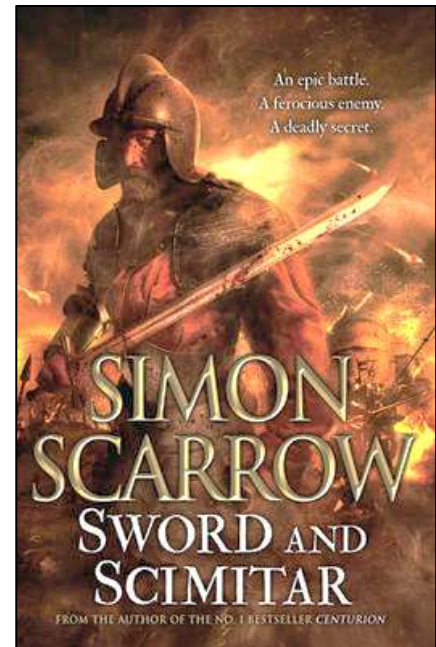
If you're interested in reading an interview with Simon Scarrow, in which he discusses the history of Malta and of the Knights' time there, follow this link: www.simonscarrow.co.uk/simon-scarrow-news/2014/07/03/interview-with-simon-sword-and-scimitar/.

LADY WATSON — A HEROINE OF THE ORDER OF ST JOHN

GENEVIEVE, LADY WATSON (1854–1936) will be little known to most Australian St Johnnies, but a century ago she was famous across the Order of St John for being a generous benefactor of the St John Eye Hospital in Jerusalem. Then known as the "British Ophthalmic Hospital", the Hospital was wholly dependent on the generosity of numerous benefactors. (Little has changed, because that's still the case!)

The picture and inset at the right is the only known photograph of Lady Watson, a great benefactor of the British Ophthalmic Hospital. She is pictured here on 11 November 1919, the first anniversary of the Armistice ending World War I. With her is the Mayor of Jerusalem, Musa Kazim al-Husayni (left) and Colonel Ronald H.A. Storrs, the Military Governor of Jerusalem (right). They are attending a YWCA fête at the American Colony, Jerusalem, to commemorate the Armistice. (US Library of Congress image, 'Lady Watson, the Mayor and Col. Storrs at the YWCA fête Nov. 11th 1919. First Armistice anniversary'.)

Without benefactors like Lady Watson, the Hospital could not and would not survive. In your Editor's opinion, Lady Watson was one of the all-time great heroines of the Order of St John.



Your Editor's list of heroines of the Order is fairly short. In chronological order, the list includes these women:

- * Annie, Lady Brassey (1839–1887), first aid evangelist
- * Genevieve, Lady Watson (1854–1936), Ophthalmic Hospital benefactor
- * Edwina, Lady Mountbatten (1901–1960), Superintendent-in-Chief, St John Ambulance Brigade
- * Dr Geraldine Archer (1905–1992), General Practitioner & St John Ambulance Tasmania benefactor
- * Miss Beryl Fegan (1908–1988), St John Ambulance Brigade senior officer and historical authority in South Australia
- * Miss Amelia ('Millie') Field (1914–2006), historian of St John Ambulance in Victoria
- * Mrs Betty Stirton (1930–), St John NSW Archivist-Curator-Librarian, co-founder of the Historical Society, and many other key roles too numerous to mention here.

And here are their pictures. Left–right & top–bottom are: Annie Brassey, Edwina Mountbatten, Geraldine Archer, Beryl Fegan, Millie Field & Betty Stirton.



Lady Watson was the widow of an early Chairman of the St John Ophthalmic Hospital Committee, Sir Charles Moore Watson (pictured next page in his full-dress military uniform), a career Army officer who died in 1916. Because he spent most of his Army years in the Middle East, he was widely known as 'Watson Pasha'.

Genevieve was the daughter of a clergyman, the Rev. Russell S. Cook. She was of French Huguenot descent. She married Watson in 1880 at the age of 26; he was ten years her senior; they appear to have had no children. She was a popular London hostess and an accomplished linguist. Apart from these details, however, little is known of her earlier life.

At the end of World War I, at age 64, Lady Watson relocated from England to Jerusalem. By 1919 she had taken charge of the Hospital's Linen Room, which stored the bedclothes and garments for in-patients. The Hospital had been closed for the four

years of the war, but as soon as it reopened in 1918 it had the voluntary services of Lady Watson. As the Hospital's 1919 *Annual Report* noted:

Lady Watson, whose devotion to the Hospital is well-known to members of the Order, is living in Jerusalem and gave ungrudging voluntary help.... She is busy in providing clothing for the in-patients, and has also collected a sum of money which, kindly supplemented by the surgeon-in-charge, has provided the Hospital with a donkey, a gift much appreciated as its profitable uses are many.



Lady Watson continued working voluntarily at the Hospital for the next 17 years, until her death at the age of 82. She died as the result of an accident she had suffered while walking to the Hospital for her weekly duty in the Linen Room. Her habit was to walk from her home in the Muristan, out through the Jaffa Gate, then south along the Bethlehem Road for a kilometre to the Hospital. Unfortunately, on this last excursion to the Hospital, she was knocked over by a heavily laden donkey. Her femur fractured. She was taken to the Government General Hospital in Jerusalem, where she died during the last minutes of 31 December 1936.

Left: Sir Charles Moore Watson, husband of Genevieve.

The Hospital gave Lady Watson a grand funeral. She was buried in the Protestant cemetery on Mount Zion in a service conducted by the Anglican Bishop of Jerusalem, Francis Graham-Brown, a Sub-Prelate of the Order. The pall-bearers included the Warden, Sir John Strathearn, and Sub-Warden, Dr Norman Wren, both wearing their official robes and accompanied by their wives. The Matron, Miss Gwendolyn G. Peyton-Jones (an Australian nurse, from Melbourne), and the nurses all attended. The local dignitaries included the Director of Government Medical Services, Colonel (later Sir) George

Wykeham Heron (1881–1963), a Knight of the Order, and Mr R.G.B. Spicer MC, the Inspector-General of Palestine Police, a Commander of the Order. The High Commissioner, Sir Arthur Grenfell Wauchope, was represented by his aide-de-camp.

In an obituary, the London *Times* newspaper opined that the death of Lady Watson represented an 'almost irreparable loss' for the Hospital. The comment was accurate because as well as supervising the Linen Room, she had made clothing for the in-patients and chaired the Hospital's local fundraising auxiliary. She took in paying guests at Watson House, her home in the Muristan area of the Old City (site of the original St John hospital established by the Blessed Gerard during the early 12th century); and, being 'an excellent linguist', gave language lessons. 'Every penny' of these enterprises went to the Hospital. She also served as the Hospital's local treasurer in Jerusalem. She and her auxiliary raised large amounts annually. In the period 1921–1936 the auxiliary contributed a total of £3,578 to Hospital income, an amount equivalent to £235,612 (Aus\$420,570) in present-day values. The annual average was £224, the equivalent of £14,726 currently (Aus\$26,410).

Lady Watson's greatest legacy to the Order, however, was gifting to it her house in the Muristan, overlooking the site of the original great hospital of the Knights of St John. She had acquired the house on moving to Jerusalem, but presented it to the Order in 1927 as a memorial to her late husband. The sole condition was that she be allowed to remain living in it until her death. As "Watson House", it remained a property of the Order for the next 34 years. During the period 1948–1960, after Israeli forces had occupied the original Hospital on the Bethlehem Road, Watson House served as the main hospital building until the opening of the new (present) Hospital in Sheikh Jarrah in 1960. It subsequently became a Lutheran guest house for pilgrims to the city, a function it still serves.

During Lady Watson's life, the Order acknowledged her generosity by bestowing various honours upon her. She was often commended in the *Annual Reports*; for example, in 1925 she received this tribute:

Lady Watson has continued to give the Linen Room the full measure of her practical wisdom and liberality. Her advice and help in other matters have been much appreciated. She manifests a love for the Hospital and an interest in its welfare which can only find a parallel in the records of the devoted lives of some of the Sisters [nuns] famous in the annals of the [ancient] Order.

A Dame of Grace of the Order, Lady Watson's other honours included a rare "Medal for Conspicuous Service" presented to her by the Chapter-General of the Order in 1927. The following year she received the Service Medal of the Order, an award given after 12 years' continual service and only infrequently to people who were not members of the St John Ambulance Brigade.

THINKING HISTORICALLY

This is the 13th episode in our ‘What is History?’ series. This time, *Pro Utilitate* considers two important historiographical issues — firstly, the matter of ‘historicity’; and, secondly ‘the historian’s task’.

(1) Historicity

We all have a fair idea that ‘history’ is the discipline involving the study of the past. Many of us will understand that ‘historiography’ has to do with the theory, methods and practice of history. But what about ‘historicity’?

Most dictionaries tell us that ‘historicity’ refers to ‘historical authenticity’. In other words, it means whether or not reported events are factually correct and truthful.



For example, someone saying that “the historicity of the four Gospels of the New Testament is reliable” is really claiming that the events described in the Biblical books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John did certainly occur early in the first century AD, as related in the four Gospels, and aren’t therefore fictitious.

Wikipedia, the online encyclopaedia, has an excellent extended definition of historicity. It says that: ‘*Historicity is the historical actuality of persons and events, meaning the quality of being part of [history](#) as opposed to being a historical myth, legend, or fiction. The historicity of a claim about the past is its factual status. Historicity denotes historical*

actuality, authenticity, factuality and focuses on the truth of claims made about the past.’

Wikipedia then goes on to give a simple example of historicity by referring to George Washington, the first US President. One childhood story told about the future president is how he chopped down a cherry tree at the family’s ‘Mount Vernon’ estate in Virginia with a hatchet he’d been given. When his father asked him about this, demanding to know what had happened, the six-year-old George owned up. “I cannot tell a lie,” he famously said; “it was I who cut down the tree.” As this story suggests, he accepted responsibility for his misdeed, knowing that he’d probably be caned for doing so. Instead of thrashing his son, however, Washington Snr. embraced him, saying that he’d sooner have an honest son than a thousand cherry trees.

A touching story, isn’t it? Unfortunately, it has no historicity at all. It’s a myth invented by Washington’s first biographer, Mason Locke Weems. Weems was more concerned with turning Washington into a secular saint than achieving historical authenticity. The only historicity in the tale is that ‘Mount Vernon’ was a Washington family estate which George later owned. He didn’t grow up there but on another nearby family estate. There’s no evidence he ever cut down a cherry tree there or anywhere else.

As with the cherry tree story, the task of the historian is to separate historicity — the “what really happened” — from the myth. And that now bring us to ...

(2) The task of the historian

Your Editor recently came across this quotation by Martin Crotty, an Associate Professor of History at the University of Queensland. In writing a single paragraph about the task of the historian, Ass.Pro. Crotty scored a ‘hole in one’. Here’s what he said:

*‘All historians wrestle with their material as they attempt to convert sources, notes and ideas into a coherent narrative or argument. It is an attempt to impose sense and meaning onto the chaos of the past, to make a story out of the fragments of material that are left to historians. It can be tortuous, and the results are not always satisfactory. Historians have a commitment to truth-telling, and at the end of every piece of writing ask themselves (or should) whether they have conveyed the past “how it essentially was”. But they also have consciences and political and research agendas. With rare exceptions, historians will avoid causing needless offence, will shun unnecessary controversy, and will then avoid writing history that clashes with their inner convictions, ideological commitments and political outlooks. It can be a difficult balancing act when the imperatives do not all point in the same direction.’**



As a journeyman historian for the past 50 years or so, your Editor was immediately impressed by this statement about how historians tackle their work. It’s as nice a summation as he has ever seen; and it certainly reflects his own experience.

* Martin Crotty, ‘The Book That Never Was’, in Peter Browne & Seumas Spark (eds.), *‘I wonder’: The Life and Work of Ken Inglis* (Monash University Publishing, 2020), pp. 178–179.

SUPPORT TRAINING AT THE ST JOHN EYE HOSPITAL IN GAZA

Dr DAVID VERITY, the Hospitaller of the Order of St John (i.e. the portfolio office-holder with responsibility for the St John of Jerusalem Eye Hospital Group [SJEHG]), has contacted us to publicise a teleconference he will be conducting on 6th March. The teleconference will focus on the SJEHG's work in Gaza through its Gaza satellite hospital. David writes as follows:

I am writing to ask for your support. It's about Gaza, where I was working twice last year before lock-down. It is an incredibly tough place.

On Saturday March 6th the Order of St John is hosting a virtual meeting [a teleconference] on our work there, with an overview of St John's eye care generally in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

I wondered if you would share this note with your networks of supporters who might consider supporting our medical and nursing training in Gaza?

The online tickets for the teleconference cost £25 (Aus\$45) and donations are welcome. All proceeds go towards developing our postgraduate opportunities there for young nurses and doctors, and all funds are distributed from London. The recording will also be available post-event, as 1700 GMT in London will be very early on Sunday morning in Australia.

The link, via the website of the St John Ophthalmic Association, is: <https://www.soa.global/events-bookings/>.

Pro Utilitate earnestly enjoins all Historical Society members to support this most worthy of St John causes. The SJEHG is a cause most dear to your Editor's heart. In the 41 years he has now been a St Johnny, he has always known that the very best work of the entire Order of St John is done by the SJEHG.

In saying this, your Editor points out that he has himself already registered for the teleconference and made a donation by following the above link. Easy-peasy! 'Twas done in a trice!

PS: It's no secret that your Editor and his two great St John chums, Matthew Glozier & John Pearn, have written the 140th anniversary history of the SJEHG, due for publication in June 2022. The main title of the book, '**A Beacon of Hope**', is actually a quote from one of the nurses at the SJEHG Gaza satellite hospital. When she was asked why she had wanted to train as a nurse and work at the Hospital, her reply was, "*For us Gaza residents, the Hospital is a beacon of hope!*"

LATE NEWS: DEATH OF JOHN SPENCER

In news just to hand, we regret to report the death on 10th February of **JOHN SPENCER AM, GCSTJ**, a member of the Historical Society of heroic stature. We will run a fitting obituary for John in **Pro Utilitate** No. 2021–2.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS FOR 2021

It's now the second week of February 2021. This means that if you haven't already renewed it, your membership subscription needs renewal. To help you renew, please find the generic membership application/renewal form on the next two pages. Follow the instructions given on the form.

Please renew right now; and don't let that task drag on for months to come.



AND FINALLY, ...

That's it for **Pro Utilitate 2021–1**, dear readers. More next issue, no. #2021–2, round about early June.

(Canberra Editor)



ST JOHN AMBULANCE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA MEMBERSHIP FORM

Fees were payable by
31 December 2020.
This payment covers the
2021 calendar year.

PLEASE TICK ONE

☐ new member

☐ membership renewal

NOMINATION – New Members

The Historical Society *Constitution* requires that new applicants for membership are nominated by a financial member of the society. If you don't know a financial member, leave this section blank and it can be signed by a member of the Executive Committee.

Nominator
Signature.....
Date

MEMBER STATEMENT – All Members

I am ☐ applying for ☐ renewing membership of the St John Ambulance Historical Society of Australia. I consent to my nomination/renewal and I agree to abide by the Society's rules. I agree to pay the prescribed membership fee by the due date, which shall be at the rate set out below.

Signed
Date

MEMBER DETAILS

Title Given Names Family Name.....
Grade in The Order (if applicable)
Street Address / PO Box
Suburb State Postcode Country
Email Phone Mobile

MEMBERSHIP FEES

☐ single person \$20 ☐ family \$30 ☐ group (libraries, associations etc) \$35 ☐ single international \$AUD 30
☐ I would like to make a further donation of \$.....

PAYMENT DETAILS – please complete prior to submitting

☐ please send me a receipt

☐ **Direct Deposit (preferred)** BSB 062 922 Account Number 101 233 48
Account Name St John Ambulance Historical Society of Australia
please specify your *name* and *state* as the reference for this transaction

☐ **Credit Card** (Visa or Mastercard only)

Card Number CCV Expiry

Name on Card

Amount \$ Signature Mobile

☐ Cheque \$ Cheque No.

SEND YOUR COMPLETED FORM AND PAYMENT TO

Membership Officer, St John Ambulance Historical Society of Australia

email (preferred) history.membership@stjohn.org.au address PO Box 292, Deakin West, ACT, 2600

Your personal contact and payment details are confidential. They will be managed under the SJAA 6.1 *Privacy Policy* (17.6.2019) and the 6.6 *Information Management Policy* (4.7.2019), as obliged under applicable laws, regulations and standards. Please contact your State/Territory Office if you want a copy of these policies.

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*Preserving and Promoting
the St John Heritage*



The Expiring Pandemical

Pro Utilitate's most popular insert — humour, oddities, tall stories, musings & reflections plus items quaint & bizarre for those who continue reading...



The Expiring Pandemical (as its name suggests) anticipates the end of the worldwide catastrophe of Covid-19 infection at some point in the year ahead. To celebrate, we display the photo at the left, taken during the last great pandemic a century ago. That was the "Spanish 'Flu" pandemic of 1918–1920, which killed about 50 million people worldwide. The picture shows a team of US female stretcher-bearers standing at the ready beside their ambulances, prepared to go fetch the 'flu-infected and cart them off to hospital.

We trust that none of our readers have had to be similarly carted off to hospital suffering from Covid-19. If, unfortunately, you were infected, we hope that you have recovered and are now immune. If you're reading this, you obviously haven't expired; but hopefully the pandemic soon will be!

The Expiring Pandemical's first cartoon for 2021, at the right, was provided by our Publisher, Gabi Lhuede.

Gabi's cartoon concerns some re-arranging at her local book shop.

It strikes a vibrant chord with your Editor, whose local store, Dymock's, is forever changing its categories.

Last time he went looking for a book there, Julia Baird's *Victoria*, a biography of the C19th Queen, he found it in the 'Travel & Geography' section.

Currently doing the rounds in London

Terry Walton, the London representative on our management committee, sent us this one, which came from the transition period between the Tump and Biden Presidencies in the USA.

Let's be thankful we don't live in the USA. It's all gone crazy there!

Donald Trump was walking out of the White House on his last day as President, and heading towards his limo, when a would-be assassin stepped forward and aimed a gun.

A secret agent new on the job shouted, "Mickey, Mouse". This startled the assassin and he was captured.

Later the secret service supervisor took the agent aside and asked, "What the hell made you shout 'Mickey Mouse' at the former President? That was very disrespectful."

Blushing, the agent replies, "I got nervous. I meant to shout 'Donald, duck!' instead."



The Twelve Days of Christmas

We know Christmas has been and gone, but one of our avid readers has sent us this song about “The Twelve Days of Christmas”, which he implores us to share with you. You can forget outmoded lines about “a partridge in a pear tree”, “two turtle doves” and “eight maids a-milking”, because this version of the song is right up to the minute:

On the **first** day of Christmas, my true love said to me,
“I’ve bought a big fresh turkey and a proper Christmas tree!”
On the **second** day of Christmas much laughter could be heard
As we tucked into our turkey, a most delicious bird.
On the **third** day of Christmas came the people from next door;
The turkey tasted just as good as it had the day before.
On the **fourth** day of Christmas, some wine and cheese we had –
We were bright and happy. The turkey? A little sad.
On the **fifth** day of Christmas, outside the snowflakes scurried,
But we were nice and warm inside and we had the turkey curried.
On the **sixth** day of Christmas, the Christmas spirit died,
The children fought and bickered – we had the turkey fried.
On the **seventh** day of Christmas, my true love he did wince
When he sat down at the table and was offered turkey mince.
On the **eighth** day of Christmas the dog had run for shelter –
He saw our turkey pancakes and the glass of Alka Seltzer.
On the **ninth** day of Christmas, by lunch time Dad was blotto
As he knew the bird was back again, this time as a risotto.
On the **tenth** day of Christmas, we were drinking home-made brew –
As if it wasn’t bad enough, we were eating turkey stew.
On the **eleventh** day of Christmas, the Christmas tree was moulting,
And even with chilli and oyster sauce, the turkey was revolting!
On the **twelfth** day of Christmas, we had smiles upon our lips –
The guests had gone, the turkey too, so we dined on fish and chips!

The confessional

David Heard tells us about the last time he went to confession.

I went into the confessional box after many years of being away from the Catholic Church.

Inside I found a fully equipped bar with beer on tap. On one wall, there was a row of decanters with fine whisky and crystal glasses. On the other wall was a dazzling array of the finest cigars and chocolates.

When the priest came in, I said to him, “Father, forgive me, for it’s been a very long time since I’ve been to confession; but I must first admit that the confessional box is much more inviting than it used to be.”

The Reverend Father replied, “You moron, you’re on my side!”

Random words of wisdom

We don’t know who said ‘em first, but whoever was responsible for the following 20 sayings was very wise.

1. When one door closes and another door opens, you are probably in prison.
2. To me, “drink responsibly” means don’t spill it.
3. Age 60 might be the new 40, but 8:00 pm is the new midnight.
4. The older I get, the earlier it gets late.
5. When I say, “The other day,” I could be referring to any time between yesterday and 15 years ago.

6. I had my patience tested. I'm negative.
7. Remember, if you lose a sock in the dryer, it comes back as a Tupperware lid that doesn't fit any of your containers.
8. If you're sitting in public and a stranger takes the seat next to you, just stare straight ahead and say, "Did you bring the money?"
9. When you ask me what I am doing today, and I say "nothing," it does not mean I am free. It means I am doing nothing.
10. I finally got eight hours of sleep. It took me three days, but whatever.
11. I run like the winded.
12. I hate it when a couple argues in public, and I missed the beginning and don't know whose side I'm on.
13. When someone asks what I did over the weekend, I squint and ask, "Why, what did you hear?"
14. When you do squats, are your knees supposed to sound like a goat chewing on an aluminium can stuffed with celery?
15. I don't mean to interrupt people. I just randomly remember things and get really excited.
16. When I ask for directions, please don't use words like "East".
17. Don't bother walking a mile in my shoes. That would be boring. Spend 30 seconds in my head. That'll freak you right out.
18. Sometimes, someone unexpected comes into your life out of nowhere, makes your heart race, and changes you forever. We call those people cops.
19. My luck is like a bald guy who just won a comb.

Showing how cross one feels

A car full of nuns is sitting at a traffic light in a big city somewhere near you, when a bunch of rowdy drunks pulls up alongside of them.

"Hey, ya bleedin' penguins." shouts one of the drunks; "shouldn't ya be back in ya convent clickin' rosary beads?"

Quite shocked, Mother Superior turns to Sister Mary Immaculata and says, "I don't think they respect us sufficiently. Show them your cross and that should instil greater respect in them."

Sister Mary Immaculata rolls down her window and shouts, "Shove off, ya moronic little piles of excrement, before I come over there and plant me boot where the sun never shines!"

She then rolls up her window, looks back at Mother Superior quite innocently, and asks, "Did that sound cross enough?"

Some Wacka, Bazza and Ocker yarns

Wacka was driving home after a hard night's drinking at the pub. He's well over the legal limit, but thinks he's capable of driving home safely. Suddenly he has to swerve to avoid a tree.

Then he has to swerve sharply to avoid another tree, then another and another.

A cop car pulls him over as he veers about all over the road.

Wacka tells the cop about all the trees in the road.

Cop says "For crying out loud, you dil, that's your air freshener swinging about!"

Bazza went on trial for armed robbery.

The jury foreman came out and announced, "Not guilty."

"That's fantastic!" shouted Bazza. "Does that mean I can keep the money?"

Ocker confessed to Bazza that his wife was driving him to drink.

Bazza responded by telling Ocker he's very lucky.

"How come?" asks Ocker.

"Well, my wife makes me walk," replies Bazza.

Wacka phoned the maternity ward at his local hospital.

"Quick!" he yelled. "Send an ambulance. My wife is goin' to have a baby!"

"Tell me, is this her first baby?" the obstetrician asked.

"No, this is her husband speakin'," Wack replies.

Knowing how to speak politically to personal advantage

David Heard tells us this instructive tale of how a Russian of Jewish heritage was finally allowed to emigrate to Israel.

At Moscow airport, a customs official found a Lenin statue in the emigrant's baggage and asked, "What is this?"

The man replied, "What is this? Wrong question, comrade! You should have asked: 'Who is he?' This is Comrade Lenin. He laid the foundations of socialism and created the future and prosperity of the Russian people. I am taking it with me as a memory of our dear hero."

The Russian customs officer let him go through the check-point without further inspection.

At the other end of the journey, at Tel Aviv airport, the Israeli customs officer also asked our immigrant friend, "What is this?"

The immigrant replied, "What is this? Wrong question, fellow Israelite. You should be asking, 'Who is this?' This is Lenin, the monster who persecuted us Russian Jews and caused me, a Jew who maintains the ancestral faith, to leave Russia. I take this statue with me so I can curse him every day for the wrongs he did to our people."

The Israeli customs officer said, "I apologise, Sir. Welcome to the ancestral homeland. You are cleared to go. Enjoy your new life in Israel!"

Settling into his new home, the immigrant placed the statue of Lenin on a table. To celebrate his settlement in Israel, he invited his friends and relatives to dinner. One of his friends asked, "Who is this?" He replied, "My dear friend, 'Who is this?' is the wrong question. You should have asked, 'What is this?' This is ten kilograms of solid gold that I managed to bring with me from Russia, without paying any customs duty or tax to either country."

MORAL: Politics is telling the same stuff to different people in different ways so as to get everyone's approval at no cost to yourself.



Testing time

The following questions were set in last year's GED (General Education Development) examinations held in the USA. The GED is an examination taken by 16-year olds in Year 11 of School. The answers, we are told, are genuine.

Q. Name the four seasons.

A. Salt, pepper, mustard and vinegar.

Q. How is dew formed?

A. The sun shines down on the leaves and makes them perspire.

Q. What are steroids?

A. Things for keeping carpets still on the stairs.

Q. What happens to your body as you age?

A. When you get old, so do your bowels and you get intercontinental.

Q. What happens to a boy when he reaches puberty?

A. He says goodbye to his boyhood and looks forward to his adultery.

Q. Name a major disease associated with cigarettes.

A. Premature death.

Q. What is artificial insemination?

A. When the farmer does it to the bull instead of the cow.

Q. How can you delay milk turning sour?

A. Keep it in the cow.

Q. How are the main 20 parts of the body categorised (e.g. the abdomen)?

A. The body is consisted into 3 parts - the brainium, the borax and the abdominal cavity. The brainium contains the brain, the borax contains the heart and lungs and the abdominal cavity contains the five bowels: A,E,I,O,U.

Q. What is the fibula?

A. A small lie.

Q. What does 'varicose' mean?

A. Nearby.

Q. What is the most common form of birth control?

A. Most people prevent contraception by wearing a condominium.

Q. Give the meaning of the term 'Caesarean section'.

A. The caesarean section is a district in Rome.

Q. What is a seizure?

A. A Roman Emperor. (As in Julius Seizure.)

Q. What is a terminal illness?

A. When you are sick at the airport.

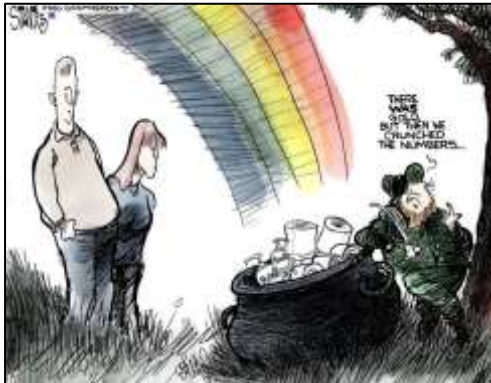
And here now is the best, saved for last....

Q. What is a turbine?

A. Something an Arab Shreik wears on his head. Once an Arab boy reaches puberty, he removes his diaper and wraps it around his head.

The best of the Covid-19 cartoons

Yes, indeed, there've been some great ones. Here are four of our favourites:



At a pet shop near you

And, finally, we'll let David Heard have the last word with this engaging tale of the "Widdle Wabbit".

A precious little four-year-old girl walks into a PetSmart shop and in the sweetest little lisp asks, "Excute me, Mithter, do you keep widdle wabbits?"

As the shopkeeper's heart melts, he gets down on his knees so that he's on her level and asks, "Do you want a widdle white wabbit, or a thoft and furwy, bwack wabbit, or maybe one like that cute widdle bwown wabbit over there?"

She, in turn, blushes, rocks on her heels, puts her hands on her knees, leans forward and softly says in a shy voice, "Pleathe, Mithter, I don't think my python will be weally contherned about what colour the wabbit ith!"

And that, dear readers, is that ...

... for this edition of *The Expiring Pandemical*. More next time, about April. Meanwhile, may all your days, weeks and months be Coronavirus-free!

