

Bun, Cuppa and Chat

Veterans' Group



NEWSLETTER

February 2026



Despite the persistent rain, and a half-day snowstorm, there are definite signs of Spring, with the usual carpet of snowdrops in the Old Rectory grounds and lovely clumps by the beck, vigorous daffodils bursting through on our drive border, and the birds pairing up and singing their hearts out. Always on the lookout for 'last survivor' stories, I was intrigued by this obituary headline in *The Times*, 'Last survivor of the 1925 diphtheria outbreak in Alaska relieved by an epic dog-sled relay ...' so, although it is not military related, I give the full story in this Newsletter. It is well-documented, but something even as a historian, I had never heard of. As they say, every day is a school day!



To A Snowdrop

Lone Flower, hemmed in with snows and white as they
But hardier far, once more I see thee bend
Thy forehead, as if fearful to offend,
Like an unbidden guest. Though day by day,
Storms, sallying from the mountain-tops, waylay
The rising sun, and on the plains descend;
Yet art thou welcome, welcome as a friend
Whose zeal outruns his promise! Blue-eyed May
Shall soon behold this border thickly set
With bright jonquils, their odours lavishing
On the soft west-wind and his frolic peers;
Nor will I then thy modest grace forget,
Chaste Snowdrop, venturesome harbinger of Spring,
And pensive monitor of fleeting years!

William Wordsworth

Bun, Cuppa and Chat News

It is with great sadness that we report the deaths of two of our Bun, Cuppa and Chat folk, Juliet Sprague and Sheena Duncan. Juliet and her late husband Brian (who was also a long-term RBL member) were regular attendees, and Juliet continued to join us, even after her move to Diss. She had a severe stroke last summer and passed away earlier this year. Norman and I have been friends with Sheena and her long-term companion Margaret, who died last year, for many years but last week Sheena too suffered a severe stroke and passed away in hospital a few days later. Norman and I were with her the night before she died. We shall miss them both.

We are delighted that Daphne (pictured on right) has moved permanently into a care home in Attleborough, where she is receiving excellent care. We celebrated her 90th birthday with her early in February.

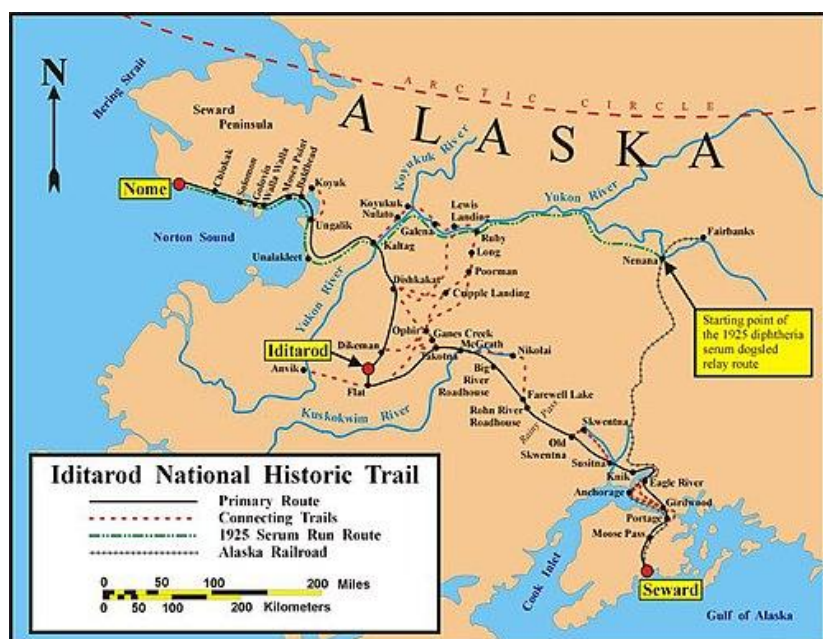


Our next afternoon meetings are Thursdays Feb 26, Mar 26 and April 23, at the Mariner's Galley, Rushall, 2.30-4pm, as usual.



The Great Race of Mercy or the Great Serum Run

Jirdes Winther Baxter was born in Alaska in 1924, the daughter of Johan and Ragnild Winther, Norwegian immigrants. She died on 5 January 2026, aged 101, the last survivor of the outbreak of diphtheria in Nome, Alaska, in 1925, which was relieved by an epic dog-sled relay carrying antitoxin over 674 miles of frozen tundra.



Nome lies just two degrees south of the Arctic Circle, and at that time was inhabited by about 455 Alaska Natives and 97 settlers of European descent. The town was icebound and inaccessible by sea between November and July; in 1925, supplies and mail were mainly brought in by dog sled along the Iditarod Trail during the winter.

Curtis Welch was the only doctor in the town at that time and discovered that the hospital's stock of diphtheria antitoxin had expired so he sent for new supplies but they did not arrive before the port closed for winter. In December 1924, Welch treated several children for sore throats but discounted the possibility of

diphtheria as they seemed isolated cases, whereas diphtheria was usually highly contagious. Welch's concerns grew though as the number of cases increased and he diagnosed the first case of diphtheria in mid-January, with Winther diagnosed at the end of the month. The town council implemented a quarantine. The nearest supplies of antitoxin were at Anchorage, 1000 miles away. Despite the quarantine, by the end of January, there were 20 confirmed cases and many more at risk. Welch used the expired serum in the hope that it would limit the spread of the disease; Jirdes Winther received the second to last of the old batch, and at their mother's insistence, her brother Johnny, the last.



Leonhard Seppala. Togo, far left

The authorities in Anchorage sent their limited supplies by rail to Nenana, the nearest railhead to Nome, and at 9pm on 27 January, "Wild Bill" Shannon set off on the first leg of the relay with a team of nine huskies, covering 52 miles. Another 19 mushers, some Alaskan Natives, with their dog teams, mostly Siberian huskies and Alaskan malamutes, transported the precious 9kg package of serum across the Alaskan interior for a further 622 miles. The conditions were severe, with the lowest temperature recorded -53°C , winds up to 65mph, blizzards and storms. Leonhard Seppala, with his lead dogs Togo and Fritz, travelled 170 miles **from** Nome over four days to meet up with the relay, taking the short cut across the Norton Sound, and picked up the serum just outside Shaktoolik. He turned around into the teeth of the storm and crossed the 20-mile sea ice in Norton Sound again in a blinding blizzard before climbing to an elevation of 5000 feet over 8 miles. After two short rest stops, Seppala and his team completed the longest leg of the relay (91 miles) and handed over the serum to Charlie Olsen on 1 February. The

final leg of the Run was made by Gunnar Kassen with his lead dog Balto, arriving in Nome at 5.30am on 2 February.

At least five dogs died during or because of the relay, and many of the mushers suffered from severe frostbite. There were about seven recorded deaths from diphtheria in Nome, but Welch estimated a further 100 or so died in the Eskimo camps outside the town.

In 2005, Winther became an honorary musher, for 15 minutes, during the annual Iditarod sled dog relay from Anchorage to Nome, describing it as one of the most painful experiences of her life. She said, 'It's kind of an honour to be part of Alaska history, but I don't like all the fuss.'

With acknowledgement to Wikipedia and The Times





Dickleburgh and Long Stratton District Poppy Appeal

The final total for the District for 2025 is £6386, nearly £800 more than we raised last year. Thank you so much to all who collected for us, and to all those who donated. It was a splendid achievement.

We are thinking of marking Armed Forces Week in June—further details will follow.

Dickleburgh Poppy Cascade

I'm sure many of you remember the wonderful Remembrance poppy cascade which hung outside the church and, in later years, was extended along the wall by the war memorial. Indeed, many of you knitted poppies or helped to assemble it. After being in storage for some years, a group from Dickleburgh has unravelled it, removed all the poppies and washed them, and are planning to sew them back onto the netting (they were attached by wire which has now rusted) ready for the cascade to be rehung in November. Please come along to the Great Dickleburgh Sewing Bee on 6 March in the Dickleburgh Church Rooms if you would like to help.

At present no further poppies are required, but we may put a call out later in the year, if it is decided to create some additional elements! Our Bun, Cuppa and Chat poster girl, Sylvia, who sadly passed away last year, was one of our star knitters the first time around, both red and purple (in memory of the animals who have died in wars).



The 1918-2018 Centenary version

The Bad Salad of William Archibald Spooner

Why do I always watch my birds?
 I know that statement sounds absurd
 but today I reached an all-lime toe
 when I received a blushing crow.

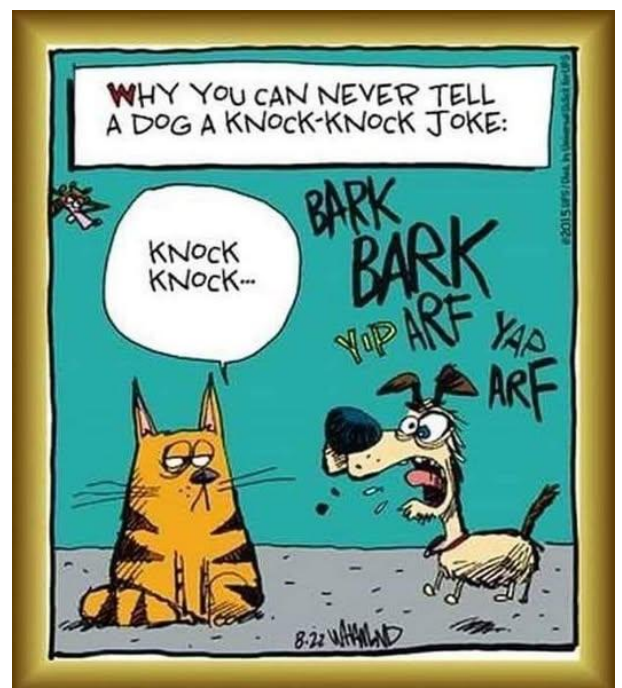
It's wetting gorse – and here's the crunch:
 my conversation packs a lunch.

I'm not sure when all this began
 but I think I need a plaster man
 to help me when my stouth gets muck,
 I should sit, perhaps, and bead a rook,
 fight a liar, or flick some powers.

No, I think I'll go and shake a tower.

Brian Bilston

This poem resonated with me – at our wedding, I said how splendid the men looked in their hot taps! (Ed)

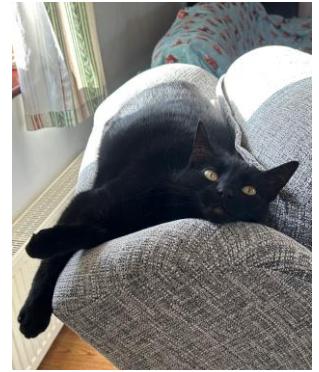


Norman's Chuckle Corner

- ✚ A woman has twins and gives them up for adoption. One of them goes to a family in Egypt and is named 'Amal.' The other goes to a family in Spain, they name him Juan'. Years later; Juan sends a picture of himself to his mum. Upon receiving the picture, she tells her husband that she wished she also had a picture of Amal. Her husband responds, "But they are twins. If you've seen Juan, you've seen Amal." '
- ✚ I saw this bloke chatting up a cheetah; I thought, "He's trying to pull a fast one".
- ✚ My mother-in-law fell down a wishing well, I was amazed, I never knew they worked.
- ✚ Two aerials meet on a roof - fall in love - get married. The ceremony was rubbish - but the reception was brilliant.
- ✚ Police arrested two kids yesterday – one was drinking battery acid and the other was eating fireworks. They charged one and let the other off.
- ✚ I went to the zoo the other day, there was only one dog in it, it was a shitzu.
- ✚ I said to the gym instructor, 'Can you teach me to do the splits?' He said, 'How flexible are you?' 'I can't make Tuesdays,' I said.
- ✚ I can't remember how to write 1,1000, 51,6, and 500 in Roman numerals. I'M LIVID!
- ✚ A new restaurant has just opened on the moon – food's great, but no atmosphere.
- ✚ What did the pirate say when he turned eighty, 'Aye Matey '
- ✚ I stopped at a roadside café that said 'Lobster tails £2.00'. I gave the owner my two quid and he said, 'Once upon a time there was this lobster...'
- ✚ A French guest in a hotel in Washington phoned room service asking for some pepper. "Black pepper or white pepper? Sir" asked the voice on the other end. "Neither, toilet pepper."
- ✚ A friend of mine left to pursue a career in miming, and I have not heard from him since.
- ✚ What is the difference between Roast Beef and Pea soup? Anyone can roast beef.
- ✚ What is the French for dentures? Aperitif

Musings from Nacho and Sugie

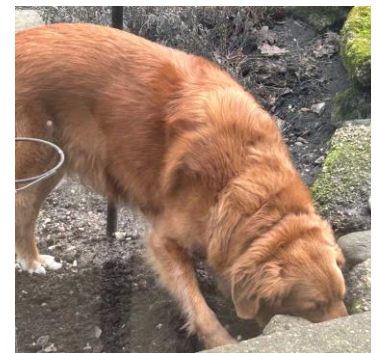
Sugie here. I have been banished from the bedroom at night, since the Missus found a small, dried-up turd under her bed. It was probably not sensible of me to suggest that if she cleaned the bedroom more often, she would have found it sooner! I think I made matters worse a few days later when I was sick in both the Missus's walking boots. Since then, I have taken the opportunity to sleep where I wish during the day and look cute and photogenic!



Nacho here. Combining my favourite occupations of hunting and chasing balls, I managed to drop my ball down a rabbit hole the other day. I did try to get it out, but it went further in and the missus had to help with a long stick. Thanks Missus.



We are currently overrun with rats by the pond so I kindly caught the Big Daddy for the Missus the other night. Then when she pointed out two youngsters on the bird tray, I killed one of them too. But when she directed me to three more on the bird tray, I lost my head and missed the lot. She has now sacked me and called in the Rat Guy (he really is called Guy) who works with a combination of an air rifle, garlic mayonnaise, traps and ferrets. But I come cheaper and am sure I can get some more before he starts!



The Bun, Cuppa and Chat Group is part of the Benefice of Dickleburgh and the Pulhams,
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