

GRUMPY OLD MEN 2017

Views expressed on this webpage are not necessarily those of the U3A or the Webmaster.

JANUARY 2017

1. This country's current foreign aid policy in Pakistan and Africa.

After much discussion we feel a total overhaul of procedure and proof of use should be adopted with immediate effect.

We also welcomed the news that the *African Spice Girls* project has been terminated and the 9.2 million pounds of British taxpayers money should be returned. All overseen by Sir Mark Lowcock at the Department for International Development (DFID).

2. Official NHS advice says don't go to A&E unless you're dying.

Apparently some GP's surgeries are closing for up to 3 hours for lunch and even closing for whole days in the week for (training). This results in more pressure on the A&E departments.

3. Restaurants that serve food on planks, slates and other non-suitable surfaces

Most of your meal ends up on the floor or in your lap - please use plates

4. The abolition of the vehicle tax disc to save £14,000,000 and the subsequent loss of £35,000,000 per year in lost revenue. No one will stand up and take the blame for this fiasco. Bring back the tax discs.

5. Swipe cards,

There are now 92,000,000 in circulation and can be accessed by the use of portable swipe machines without your knowledge. Be warned. Also a checkout scam where paying by credit card. They add cash back to your bill, then pocket it. You will only find out if you check your receipt carefully, so check it at the store.

6. Other items discussed

- Yasmaks at the Paris opera house.
- Current fashion - Ripped or slit trousers for women???
- People who insist on leaving the TV on when you visit friends
- The number of people who play with their phones while walking down the pavement

We had a good turnout with 12 members attending .

Additions to the grumpy old bus this month were Diane Abbott and Sir Mark Lowcock

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FEBRUARY 2017

The Grumpy Dozen once again assembled at The Willowbrook, to vent our spleens (or anything else we can spare) at the news of the past month, as well as discussing the unbelievable, the absurd, and having a few belly laughs into the bargain.

We determined that politics must be an exceptionally well-paying business to be in with the news of yet another senior politician falling on their feet having landed plumb work with bodies with which they were dealing when in Government. I think we are all just jealous really!

Then there are those in the financial sector who, having been convicted of wholesale fraud at a level that makes us blanch, have the temerity to expect us, the poor taxpayer, to foot the costs of their defence.

Is our wine going to be watered down after the news that dieters are cutting down in the period immediately after Christmas? Leave it alone, at least until we have thoroughly researched the matter. Shall we say for the next few years?

On a much lighter note, we learned that vinyl records and printed books are making a resurgence as is 35mm film. Too many people are losing precious memories when their mobile phone, tablet or PC goes down the pan. Does anyone know if Boots are still able to process this film?

In Australia, a hotel chain is re-introducing metal keys after hackers cracked their computer system to lock all the doors. Do hope our Chairman is not delayed getting back as a result!

At our time of life; we are unlikely to interest kidnappers, as we would probably be the first released in a hostage situation; things we buy now won't wear out; we can live without sex, but not our glasses; and whatever you do, under no circumstances do not take a sleeping pill and a laxative on the same night.

For every new member signing up at our General meeting their wives comment that there should be a Grumpy Old Women's Group. We agree, so why doesn't one of them set their own group up?

Finally, back in olden days (OK, when we were youngsters) we would perhaps send our sweethearts a note with **SWALK** on the back – you know, Sealed With A Loving Kiss. We also remember that **LOL** meant Lots of Love. It's been hijacked by youngsters and texters now, to mean Laugh Out Loud. So, it's not really appropriate to use it in unfortunate circumstances!

Tarra!

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MARCH 2017

Well, we had a bumper bundle of members attending today, with 15 of us, including a couple of new faces. Doing what comes naturally to us at our age, grumping, we once again dealt with a wide range of matters which we felt were worthy of our attentions. We started early, discussing some of our health conditions and experiences, at least the early arrivals did!

Our first target was those annoying adverts that crop up between TV programmes. You know, the ones trying to sell you the latest idea in cleaners, and end up popping up, annoyingly, at every advert break. One solution used (other than the foot through the screen) was to pause the programme the second they start, wait until they are over and fast forward to the next part of the programme. If you get the timing right it works a treat.

We heard of 2 very definitely non-PC games, the first being an obstacle race for couples, over hurdles of hay bales, with the female partner being carried by the male. It makes me sweat to just think about the idea. The second we weren't sure whether or not the proposal was a Russian tongue-in-cheek idea, or if it is a serious proposal, but this was for football hooliganism to become a sport. Where will it end?

Not content with reducing everything from baggage allowances, food and drink and free toilet facilities, airlines are now proposing closing the gap between seating in economy class to a meagre 17.5 inches in order to profit from having more seats. Well that lets me out of travelling by air anytime soon. This is an increase from what they had been using! We can imagine that,

without any prompting from us, that the next step will be to have us all standing, thus packing in even more passengers.

Has anyone claimed the Married Person's Allowance? One member was most indignant because when his wife claimed and received this, he immediately found that he now owed Inland Revenue the same £200 she had just been given. Mind you, he realised that this was because he had already claimed the allowance!

Time for a bit of light-heartedness with some true complaints received by a well-known Tour Company:

1. *"On my holiday to Goa in India, I was disgusted to find that almost every restaurant served curry. I don't like spicy food."*
2. *"They should not allow topless sunbathing on the beach. It was very distracting for my husband who just wanted to relax."*
3. *"We went on holiday to Spain and had a problem with the taxi drivers as they were all Spanish."*
4. *We booked an excursion to a water park but no-one told us we had to bring our own swimsuits and towels. We assumed it was included in the price."*
5. *"The beach was too sandy. We had to clean everything when we returned to our room."*
6. *We found the sand was not like the sand in the brochure. Your brochure shows the sand as white but it was more yellow."*
7. *It's lazy of the local shopkeepers in Puerto Vallartato to close in the afternoons. I often needed to buy things during 'siesta' time – this should be banned."*
8. *"No-one told us there would be fish in the water. The children were scared."*
9. *"Although the brochure said that there was a fully equipped kitchen, there was no egg-slicer in the drawers."*
10. *"I think it should be explained in the brochure that the local convenience store does not sell proper biscuits like custard cremes or ginger nuts."*

Blimey! Is this really the British abroad?

We also heard the good news, which is sadly lacking from so much of the media these days:

The Giant Panda is no longer on the endangered species list; a clean-up of the world's oceans is beginning, to get rid of all the plastic that has been dumped there; China is to end its trade in ivory and endangered species; India planted 50 million trees in 24 hours; and China is to switch to cleaner energy. Let's have more of this sort of news, to cheer us up and make us less grumpy!

Back to grumpiness with a rhetorical question about why British inventions get exported, rather than being invested in over here, only for us to then start having to buy them back. This happened in the case of the Advanced Passenger Train, which was treated with so much derision by the media, with the know-how being sold to Italy. When one of our passenger company's wanted to start a service using the technology, they had to buy it back from – you guessed, Italy! Could the free bar for the media representatives, laid on by British Rail to help publicise the APT, possibly be the reason for reporting that they felt queasy, leading in part to the demise of another British invention?

Parliament needs a £7bn make-over. Couldn't they relocate to the Midlands and boost the local economies? Perhaps a more radical approach ought to be to strip out all the additions that have been made over the last 170-odd years and simply preserve the shell as a huge visitor attraction. There is good news on the Prostrate Cancer front with the news that a treatment which is considerably less invasive than current procedures, is on the way. Weeee!

And ambulances will soon be connected via tablet computers so that they should be able to have access to a patient's records and can provide details of the current situation ahead of arrival at

hospital. Mind you we were a bit concerned about how this sits with the state of disrepair of our roads which will make screen entries difficult.

We then had our lunch break from The Willowbrook's excellent menu and the odd "bevvv" to help wash it down and lubricate us for part two.

Part two took over from where we left off by questioning the monumental IT failures that organisations like the BBC and NHS, amongst others seem to allow themselves to drift into. There seems to be no proper check in the contracts agreed, where failure carries with it a penalty, not the usual shrug of the shoulders and attitude of leave it for the taxpayer to pay for.

One of our major bug-bears has been Overseas Aid. We have been vociferous in our complaints about the mismanagement of the vast amounts which are at stake. One of new members made us stop and think by pointing out that the biggest argument in favour of this continuing is that it is estimated that for every £1 of Aid, the country benefits to the tune of £8. Whilst acknowledging that there are too many instances of bad management of these funds, the overall return is perhaps worth it in the long run. We were all anxious to learn why it is that this sort of information remains hidden from the public at large, and is it just a cynical ploy by the media to see who can come up with the wildest stories?

Back to the light-heartedness of the Tour Operator complaints:

11. *"The roads were uneven and bumpy, so we could not read the local guide book during the bus ride to the resort. Because of this, we were unaware of many things that would have made our holiday more fun."*
12. *"It took us nine hours to fly home from Jamaica to England. It took the Americans only three hours to get home. This seems unfair."*
13. *"I compared the size of our one-bedroom suite to that of our friends' three-bedroomed bedroom and ours was significantly smaller."*
14. *"The brochure stated 'No hairdressers at the resort.' We're trainee hairdressers and we think they knew and made us wait longer for service."*
15. *"When we were in Spain, there were too many Spanish people there. The receptionist spoke Spanish, the food was Spanish. No-one told us there would be so many foreigners."*
16. *"We had to line up outside to catch the boat and there was no air-conditioning."*
17. *"It is your duty as a tour operator to advise us of noisy or unruly guests before we travel."*
18. *"I was bitten by a mosquito. The brochure did not mention mosquitoes."*
19. *"My fiancée and I requested twin-beds when we book, but instead we were placed in a room with a king bed. We now hold you responsible and want to be reimbursed for the fact that I became pregnant. This would not have happened if you had put us in the room we booked."*

We couldn't believe any of these. Are they wind-ups?

Donald Trump. We had too much to laugh about here for a proper record to have been made. We then ended on another positive note with yet more good news:

Canada's Great Bear Forest is to be protected; Measles has been eradicated in North, South and Central America; there has been a 67% drop in HIV in Malawi; Israel gets 80% of its water from desalination; hunger is at its lowest for 25 years; there has been an increase in the numbers of Tigers; Einstein's theory about gravitational waves has been proved correct; and Costa Rica gets 90% of its energy from renewable sources.

Will we be more, or less grumpy next time? Who knows!

Tarra!

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APRIL 2017

Once again, we welcomed a new member, but numbers were down to just 9 grumpies, probably due to the Easter Bank Holiday. We are beginning to think that, with all the laughter we shared, we are not as grumpy as we thought, and THIS WILL NOT DO!! We must be much grumpier to save our faces.

First on our list of complaints was the variable speed of our Broadband connections. Both Virgin and BT came in for some adverse criticism, as well as some praise and a neat little trick for getting prompt action from BT. One of our number had been suffering from reduced speed, even though he had a fibre optic connection, due to what turned out to be a kink in the cable, which must have been there from it being laid. Another member had been suffering from a poor wired connection over several years. Only a very recent visit by an engineer had it been discovered that the box cover on a connection on the supply pole had apparently been open for what appeared to be a long time. This member had found that after raising a complaint to CEO level some years ago, he had established that the Executive Level Technical Complaints in Newcastle provided very rapid responses. The call arranged had taken over 3 hours to resolve, but the right result had been achieved, so well done to BT for this. However, we are still somewhat perplexed that we still have to pay the same price even when we are not getting the expected service.

Another technical issue frustrated another member when his car key stopped responding properly. A visit to the main dealer for a replacement had ended with the suggestion that resolution could be achieved by a new key, and an engineer's visit costing in the region of £150! Having observed what was necessary to achieve the desired result during the visit to the main dealer, our member resolved the matter himself! Well done for fixing what turned out to be a simple loose connection.

Turning to the younger generation, a soft target for us oldies, we were astonished to hear that a recent report had revealed their lack of knowledge about simple matters which we had been able to resolve ourselves at an early age, following guidance from our elders at the time. It seems today's generation have no idea about changing fuses and, startlingly, light bulbs! A number of other issues puzzles them, when to us they are as simple as falling off logs.

Next, the lighter side of life with some extracts from Gervase Phinn's experiences as a Schools Inspector in his book *"Out Of The Woods, But Not Over The Hill"*, with some true answers given to examination questions:

Q: What is a seizure?

A: A Roman Emperor

Q: Under what circumstances are steroids used?

A: They keep the carpets from slipping on the stairs

Q: What is a "Caesarean Section"?

A: It's a district of Rome

Q: What was Hitler's secret weapon?

A: He used the dreaded Gazpacho

Q: What is a terminal illness?

A: It's when you are sick at the airport

Q: Explain what you understand by the term "artificial insemination"?

A: It's when the farmer does it to the cow instead of the bull

Q: In a democratic society, how important is it, do you think, to have elections?

A: Because if men didn't have them they couldn't have sex and produce children

This led to some recollections of bizarre multi-choice answer tests in which the answers were that obvious, only someone wishing to “send up” the examiner would answer incorrectly. Honestly!

A couple of our members decided to eat early, one of them having a sausage sandwich, which then attracted another member. However, on enquiry about the availability of having his own, led to the response that the other had been the last one!! This had us all, after a stunned silence, spluttering in our drinks. It is unusual for our hosts to come up with this excuse, but it does seem to be a sign of the times. Another bizarre experience was the café unable to provide sandwiches until the bread had arrived from the “cash and carry” source that was used by the establishment. This, when there are two mini-supermarkets opposite, and a number of other sources nearby!

We were startled to hear of the experience of a Japanese tourist in America being physically assaulted to remove him from his overbooked flight. It appeared that this not unusual action over the pond of overbooking flights, had meant that a “volunteer” was needed to allow 4 aircrew, travelling as passengers, to catch the particular flight. The tourist was apparently chosen at random and he not unnaturally refused to disembark as he wished to get home. Air Marshals boarded the plane and physically dragged the screaming gentleman off the plane. Several other passengers remonstrated and also filmed the episode which got posted on social media very rapidly. The CEO of the airline was forced to appear on TV to apologise for the action, but not before the tourist launched legal action against the company. First prize in the Customer Care stakes goes this year to United Airlines!

Back to the amusing tale told us about a vintage car trip which took place some years ago, from Paris to Peking (when it was Peking and not Beijing). As the car started to traverse the Gobi Desert the crew realised that they would not have sufficient spare tyres as they were getting through them at a rate that would soon see them stuck! An emergency call back to base resulted in the support team rounding up the necessary tyres and then approaching passengers at Heathrow (in the days before the excessive “security” we now enjoy) to ask them to take the tyres as hand luggage! You can imagine the scene – “Now sir, having agreed, stand still with your arms akimbo, whilst we adorn your outstretched arms with tyres and hang a few round your neck for good measure!”

A headline report that Parcel Force are “fining” staff £250 per day for being off sick, was discussed. It was eventually concluded that this is applicable to those who are classed as “self-employed”, rather than directly employed employees. Object lesson here is not to work for an agency who may send you to work for Parcel Force and you may be classed as “self-employed”. Not likely at our time of life, but you never know.

Once again, our green eyes of envy were turned on our delightful politicians, including those sitting in the House of Lords. With the latter being entitled to £300 per day just for turning up and then not necessarily doing anything else other than perhaps leave, this continues to make us wonder about this state of affairs. There is also the matter of former Government Ministers, who are now supposedly engaged full time, in work outside the Houses of Parliament. This would therefore seem to prevent them carrying out the work of an MP. When will this state of affairs end?

With schools now becoming independent of local government control, teachers, who are excellent in their chosen profession, are now being expected to become managers and accountants. They were not trained for this work and should never have been put in such a position. This is leading, in too many cases, to schools with falling standards. It is time to reverse this trend and let teachers teach, not try to take on tasks for which they are not experienced in. This is something that also pervades local government generally, where we see members of staff promoted into managerial posts for which they are not properly fitted. We have the spurious assertion from local politicians that they have to consequently pay high salaries to such individuals to retain their services. This fallacy needs de-bunking as these individuals could simply not compete in outside businesses as they have had too much cosseting in their work area, even though they may have moved from one authority to another.

In that other hobby-horse of ours, the NHS, the situation is different as those at the top simply have no idea about treating and dealing with patients and pressure the doctors and nurses with unnecessary paperwork and impose a tick-box regime. Let them look after the paperwork and cut their salaries!

Just before lunch we heard the suggestion that supermarkets should not be selling us their plastic bags as this is in fact blatant advertising! They should be selling plain bags, although many of us now ensure that we carry our own bags to avoid paying the tax!

A comment about lunch; following the debacle of the last sausage sandwich, one of our group thought they had ordered fish and chips (it was Good Friday after all!). Instead, what arrived was felt by many to actually be whale and chips as it was so large! Yummy!

Suitably replete, and liquidly lubricated, we resumed on a rather mixed front. Several of our group have been gun owners in the past, being properly licensed and responsible citizens, keeping their arms in the prescribed manner. They had been somewhat outraged at the overkill brought into force following the Hungerford incident, but had gone along with the requirements. Police control was somewhat varied as tales were told of the phone call to check that all was as agreed, to be then advised that the regulatory inspection had been carried out the previous day! At the other extreme, a proper inspection carried out had been dealt with in what was considered to be an excess manner. Why is there no middle ground? On a lighter note, in the good old US of A, a coroner asked the local Sheriff why a suspect had been found to have 169 bullet wounds. The simple reply was that they had run out of ammunition! Only in America.

Gender neutral toilets seem to be becoming the norm, with urinals no longer being provided. This led to a number of exceedingly ribald comments which cannot, for the sake of delicacy, be reported here.

We were dismayed that the truth about diesel vehicles was finally emerging and that there has been a complete and utter about face by the Government about how beneficial these are to the environment and that manufacturers have been guilty of disguising the truth. Some puzzlement was expressed about the validity of electric vehicles. The news is that electric vehicle only lanes are being introduced and a local bus company appears to have purchased a number of electric buses. This led to us wondering about how these would eventually be recycled at the end of their life. Mind you, we also felt that as our area only ever seems to get older, life expired public transport, we needn't worry too much.

We heard that there are over 50,000 foreign students who, having completed their studies, are still here, presumably in violation of their student visa conditions. Also, that there are more than 10,000 drivers still behind the wheel, despite them having convictions which should, by rights, see them using shanks' pony!

The news that new drivers will soon be required to navigate properly by using in-car sat-nag (oops that should be sat-nav) as part of their driving test, led onto some amusing and salutary lessons and experiences of using this means of navigation. This also underlines the conviction of your correspondent that he does not trust sat-nav, having had little difficulty (well, OK one memorable occasion navigating a route along what turned out to be a railway line – well it was in Ireland) in finding his way about many parts of the country to little known areas and destinations. The question was asked about what had happened to maps, or is this another skill that youngsters can no longer undertake?

The deal that 4 hospitals appear to have struck with Google to share data was questioned, particularly as we had been asked some time ago by our GP surgeries, about whether or not we agreed to such sharing of our very personal data. What safeguards are there that we will not be flooded with gratuitous advertising, as well as the danger that such information would be shared with insurance companies to our cost.

A reminder to one and all that the “old” (we haven’t had it five minutes, so how is it suddenly old?) £5 note will no longer be accepted by shops after the end of May 2017, so we will all be using the new plastic one, which DOES shrink in the wash, as verified by one of the group who has achieved this feat! And whilst on currency, the new “threepenny bit” pound coin is now in circulation and the old one will cease being legal tender on 15 October 2017. What’s the betting on these new ones being forged?

Throughout this lot we got grumpier, more confused (not difficult at our ages), more almost riotous, back to being grumpy and ending on lighter notes. Quite how we managed to cover all this lot in three hours is a mystery, and an experience to be enjoyed.

Tarra

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MAY 2017

Once again, the Grumpy Dozen (or so) assembled at The Willowbrook for another packed programme of moaning, groaning and general grumpiness, with a bit of laughter on the side. Firstly, the important news that last month’s sausage famine has come to an end!!! Hurrah! Mind you the sausage sarnie lover got his order in soon after we started to make sure he didn’t miss out again.

Our first target was the cost of taxi’s and how we keep paying up when stuck in heavy traffic, or taken unreasonable routes to our destination. It would seem that there is an instant charge on all rides of about £2.50, which we can go along with, but when there are serious traffic problems we feel that we should not be charged for being stuck in traffic. Mind you one of our number related how on one occasion a cabbie did switch off the meter whilst stuck in traffic. It was our member who reminded the cabbie to put it back on when traffic started to flow again. There’s honesty for you!

There seems to be no sign of what Government are going to do about backtracking on using diesel vehicles, and since they were the ones actively promoting a change over, then they ought to be the ones who cough up now they have performed their U-turn. We are also dismayed at the sharp increases in vehicle tax rates, so we will all have to change over from our Bentley’s to a used Lada!

Our ire was also raised when we heard about the sudden introduction of Red Zones in parts of the City centre. Have we just become the London borough of Nottingham? As well as the seemingly chaotic parking situation at our hospitals, we are also concerned that when we arrive at the forecourt of the QMC, bearing in mind that it supposed to be for sick people, including presumably, those with breathing problems, we are faced with a fug generated by the taxi’s and ambulances, that leave their engines ticking over instead of turning them off. We also see smokers in the same area when the WHOLE of the hospital campus is supposedly a smoke free zone!

Moped robbers are becoming a serious problem in London, with upwards of 1000 incidents per week happening. Let’s hope they keep it “dahn souf”!

Teaching standards came in for some criticism, but it was also acknowledged that part of the problem is undoubtedly a lack of parenting skills by those who should be taking that responsibility! Whilst on the subject of teachers, we hear that there is marked reluctance from some of them to apply sun cream, (does the sun EVER shine in this country) when necessary for fear of being accused of child abuse! Where will it end??!!

Our perennial aunt sally’s, those darling Politicians, again came in for their share of stick from us, particularly as they will be all over everywhere with the election coming up.

One of our number related their experiences of signing-on at a job centre. An opening had arisen for our friend, but he needed clearance from the job centre to be able to take the job offer up. They took so long making a decision that the offer was withdrawn and given to someone else. Is this the way to deal with people looking for work?

The recent programmes about Freemasonry promoted some sharp comments from those of our number who belong to them. They didn't share the humour with the rest of us when one asked if the Scottish Lodges still use a goat in their initiation process. One wonders what that is all about! This led to the rhetorical question of whether the cost of 4 legs of venison was too dear. (Answers on a postcard)

Whilst discussing matters north of the border, we were surprised that the land of the strap as corporal punishment, is now considering introducing a blanket ban on children being smacked. It never did us any harm and if we went home and complained to our parents that we had been clipped round the tab by a policeman or teacher, we got another one for good measure from them.

At our time of life, the question of our funeral arrangements came to the fore. We debated how we might cut down on the costs of our funeral when we finally shuffle off this mortal coil. Should the occasion be solemn or a celebration? We all seem to have our own opinion, but were surprised to learn that the fellow who invented crosswords is buried in Carlton. His grave is three down and four across!

A couple of scientists who got their sums and conclusions wrong have been responsible, apparently, for mistakes in up to 6000 cases. This could lead to the situation that some convictions may be overturned as a result of the mistakes. This is fine for those who were perhaps wrongly convicted, but what about those who's conviction was sound and now find themselves with a convenient way of pleading innocence? How much will this cost us all?

Recent discoveries show that life began on Earth on land, not in the sea. How much will it cost to change all the text books?

When we have Government Ministers pressing us to make savings by changing our energy suppliers, then one would perhaps expected the Energy Secretary to have not revealed that he has failed to do so. Is this person the right one for the job?

Smart Energy meters were subject to some criticism (how unusual) as, at present, those installed by one supplier will not necessarily be compatible with another supplier if you chose to change over. Mind you, one of our group explained how he had managed to get his supplier, one with a terrible customer care record, had made this supplier pay him for a series of astonishing failures on their part.

We wound up with a report that given our various investments and contributions to the EU, particularly where schemes have spectacularly failed, we should be expecting a large pay-out on Brexit, rather than the doom and gloom arguments that assert that it will cost us money to leave. Since the situation we find ourselves in has not previously occurred, how does ANYONE know what is likely to happen?

The views expressed were not always unanimous, but we argued without acrimony and after the first aid box had been closed, we quietly wended our way home.

Tarra!

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JUNE 2017

We found ourselves a somewhat subdued, well temporarily anyway, and a little puzzled as to what had gone wrong. Weren't we due to wake and be told about a landslide victory for one side in the Election? Instead we were surprised to hear that someone had badly misread the signs and we have a hung Parliament. Will this mean that we must go through the whole thing again before very much longer? How long will the incumbent hold onto their position of Prime Minister? Blow it – we said, lets grump in our usual way and have a few, well a lot actually, of laughs instead!

There seems to be no convincing us that the influence senior civil servants hold over our politicians, who after all are our elected representatives (for good or otherwise), is unhealthy for the vast majority of us. The scenarios we saw on “*Yes Minister*” and “*Yes Prime Minister*” are too close to reality for some of us and underline how unelected officials have too much control over those who we have elected.

After a number of visits over several weeks, one of our number expressed concerns about the level of pollution at the QMC. On arrival at the place where most people are going for treatment, one is faced with a plethora of taxis, ambulances and private vehicles, all pumping out unreasonable amounts of fumes and pollution. Given that the hospital authorities have taken steps to largely eradicate smoking on the premises, particularly at the main entrance, to continue to permit this pollution in such close proximity to the reception area is extremely puzzling.

Whilst talking about taxis, we were all surprised that the hospital authorities have decided to convert the scarce resource of disabled parking slots and convert them to taxi bays! What a retrograde step. This then led onto the matter of parking as a scarce commodity at hospitals and the question as to whether or not modern hospitals are becoming too large. Then we thought that there should be a return to Matrons having a large say in how hospitals are run. Perhaps we need some clones of that well-known matron, Hattie Jacques!

Why is it, we asked, that when there is an incident, particularly involving a bus, the City seems to end up in gridlock? Given that the previous traffic control for pedestrians in the middle of Parliament Street, outside Boots, has been replaced by a pedestrian crossing with no control, the number of buses taxis and delivery vehicles can mean that we soon end up with the area at a standstill. This can then have a much wider impact across the City. Time for the City Council Planners had a rethink of how things operate we suggest.

Philosophical as usual, our views at times have been a little less than PC, but this time we had some hard thinking to do when talking about integration. The observation was made that the British abroad are guilty of creating similar, isolated communities to those we sometimes complain about that develop here. The phrase “sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander” came to mind. Our dealings on a one to one basis with people from other communities has been largely positive, but it is too easy to fall into generalisations.

Cold calls on the phone are fraught with danger, and it is our generation that can find itself being targeted as easy prey. We heard about how robotic type answering systems are used to initiate calls and the mistake that can be made by saying “yes” when a question is posed. The best thing is to remain silent and see what happens next, and then declining to become engaged – just don't say “Yes” at all.

Bullying using social media is a worrying prospect, but we were wrong to think that it only involved young people. A recent case of a pupil entrapping a teacher via spurious exchanges using social media was brought to our attention. Views were expressed from both sides – should the teacher have not known better or should the pupil have faced some sort of punishment?

How many railway stations have you visited? It would appear that a young couple (isn't everyone else young to us?) have decided to travel to all the 2,563 stations on the rail network. As I write this (12 June) they have now been to 1057, leaving 1,507 left to go. The couple have raised the

funds necessary to document their exploits through “crowd funding” that has reached over £34,000. I want to be crowd funded to take me round the world – any takers?

Apparently, we have been under a misapprehension about Legionnaires Disease only being contractible at public facilities like hotels. Despite some scepticism we have to think again according to the latest information we have heard. It can also develop in our domestic showers when they have not been used for several days. When we have been away on our three-month winter sunshine breaks, we should, on returning home, go into the bathroom/shower room, hold our breath and turn the shower on and leave it running for several minutes, having held our breath until out of the room. We should then, hold our breath and go back in to turn the shower off and still holding our breath, leave the room again. Don't forget to close the door each time we go out. After 30 minutes the droplets where the disease can be held will have dissipated and we should be safe! You have been warned.

Medical mysteries, where people recover after suffering what has been diagnosed as terminal illness, then recover following what appears to be an unusual treatment, never fail to astound us. We also heard some other tales of dogs indicating serious illness, helping a treatment regime to be commenced.

Finally, for us Old Gits, we had some “Old Git Wit” from various well-known people, but because it happens at our age, I can't remember what they were! Sorry guys.

Another packed session, with a meal and a pint to refresh ourselves with.

Tarra!

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JULY 2017

As it is now the holiday season, we found ourselves in reduced circumstances, well at least reduced numbers, and wondered if we had enough to keep us in the grumping to which we have become accustomed.

We started early, and a couple of us started comparing notes about the History Group visit to Leicester, for the Richard III experience, and concluded that it had been well worth the visit and very well presented too.

Although there are many complaints about Windows 10, MSN were praised for their excellent customer service in sorting out user's problems. Some of us have experienced this, with call backs and patient, understandable and clear instructions to help us through our difficulties (we need it at our age!!). By contrast however, one of us had a bizarre and unsatisfactory encounter with Virgin. Our chum told us how he had started first of all with someone in Mumbai and was eventually passed to someone in Quebec! This antipodean encounter left him feeling most unsatisfied.

As we age, various faculties start to fail some of us. One serious condition is Macular Degeneration and one of our chums is dealing with this in his customary relaxed manner and is receiving good quality aftercare from our NHS. See, there is some good news from the NHS, after all our complaints.

We were perplexed at an addition to our famous bus as it was one of our hosts staff, but we couldn't for the life of us recall who it was, why they were on and who made the request! Typical of our age!

A recent survey of over 50's (beware all surveys!!) allegedly found that, despite all the modern technology and gadgets we have these days, more than half think life was better in “olden” days.

Only 19% think present day is better. We all agreed. One of our number reminded us that the old Mars bar had been a measure of the effects of inflation, until they started reducing the size and increasing the price at one and the same time. Another pointed out that these days swearing, which we only came to know (in a very limited form) when we entered secondary education, has now been coarsened and is now heard on the street from people of all ages, from the very young upwards. Mind you, we still believe that our generation tends to be more discreet in using such language. Still with coarseness to the fore, we had an in-depth exchange about lzal toilet paper – remember those days? End of story!

Well it's official. More men suffer from Grumpy Old Man syndrome when they hit 70 years of age. It's being blamed on being aware of our mortality, struggling with wearisome health problems and having no aspirations or goals to achieve (haven't they heard of U3A?), but your writer reminded the group that he had been a Grumpy Old Man most of his life, and just continues in the same vein still.

A recent official document has revealed that between 1980 and 1981 patients were consciously put at risk by being given contaminated blood. It is estimated that around 2000 people died as a result. An inquiry has been announced.

We told that the solicitor who persuaded Iraqis to claim abuse at the hands of British Forces has been struck off, having made a very healthy living at the cost of the public purse. This will prevent him from putting his name officially to work which would only be carried out by a solicitor, but still allows him to carry on in the same sort of work. We thought that a more punitive sentence was necessary in this case.

Our Hollywood reporter advises us that there is news of Quentin Tarantino, maker of the two "Kill Bill" films, is approaching actors to star in a movie about Charles Manson, the convicted murderer, along with his "family", of the horrific slaying of actress Sharon Tate when she was pregnant. We felt this was the height of bad taste, even from this particular sensationalist movie maker.

Our philosophical moment came when we discussed exactly who is responsible for war and how far up the chain of command responsibility lies, particularly when atrocities occur. As with many of our discussions, we came around to the many absurdities involved and so we shelved it!

Whilst we can put a man on the moon (allegedly according to some), make kangaroo flavoured crisps (uek!), but we can't make a supermarket trolley that goes in a straight line. Is there any hope for mankind?

Apparently, discussions are going forward for wills to be made via email, voicemail and text messages. We felt that this would be a solicitor's charter to print even more money than they do currently. We were reminded of the illustration from the 19th Century call "The Law Suit", of a farmer pulling the head of a cow, whilst his neighbour was pulling the tail, and the solicitor is on his stool, milking it!

Did you know that the modern name for a chimney sweep is a flueologist? No, neither did I!

And the National Grid has advised that with the advent of electric cars, we will need five more Hinckley Point Nuclear Power Stations by 2050. Why not just put a solar panel or two on top, or a wind generator? Bring back horses!

Whale and chips anyone?

Tarra!

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AUGUST 2017

We assembled in the main body of The Willowbrook along with 2 new members – welcome Tony and John.

First on the agenda was the unfortunate decision to impose a £25 charge for use of the side room in the hostelry that has been our very happy accommodation over the last few years. Not unnaturally, our group was unhappy (almost grumpy) about this, but we may have salvation if Tony's discussion with one of his contacts goes well – watch this space.

At a recent NHS dental check-up lasting all of 8 minutes from start to finish, our outraged member was appalled to be charged over £20 for a check-up and descale. A license to print money if you work out the maths! Also on NHS matters, there are rumours circulating about charging for visits to the Doctor. As many of us have been paying our taxes all our working lives, and continue to do so even now, why should anyone think of such a thing, other than to strip us of even more of our well-earned savings?

Leicester City Council have introduced contactless payments at some of their car parks, but, we wonder, how secure are these? How will the information, that will undoubtedly be collected, be used. Beware! Big Brother is watching.

The cost of clean-up operations after the departure of Travellers, who have been illegally parked, often on private land, has been emphasised by the case in London of how one group left 250 tons of rubbish. This is going to cost the landowner £110,000 to deal with it.

Can you remember when you predicted the weather with a pine cone, or a piece of seaweed? Well I can and some of still follow this time-honoured practise because we find it much more accurate than the forecasts we get from the current batch of meteorologists. We all remember that "Michael Fish" moment – hurricane? What hurricane? Well, are they really going to do any better with their new super computer at a cost, to us of course, of £97m? Just to cheer us all up even more, it has already predicted that we can look forward to a decade of record downpours! Well, thanks very much!

Just how many British Inventions have we seen exported at now benefit to the country? We can think of a few like the Jump Jet, Hovercraft, High Speed Tilting Trains, and of course there are many more. It seems to be that America and China just grab what they want and if we don't like it, we can lump it!

There was a split decision about the latest offering from Kenneth Branagh in his film *Dunkirk*. The historical inaccuracies abound, as in all films of this type, which always annoys those of us who know a bit about what really happened, but one of our number, well acquainted with Weymouth, found the continuity people had left in all the modern additions there, rather than editing them out!

Have you paid an outrageous take-out price of £11 for a portion of Fish and Chips? Well if you go to Padstein, oops that should be Padstow, in Cornwall, that is what you are faced with coughing up. "Celebrity" chef, Rick Stein has many eateries in the town and seems intent in trading in on his name, and even a sachet of sauce will set you back 35p!

A piece of good news is that American researchers have developed an electronic chip the size of a penny into which they have shot DNA. When applied to an injured leg it repaired the wound. The work is taking place on animals at present, but if found to be positive for humans it should be a great benefit. One of the ideas is to use it to regenerate cells damaged after a stroke.

Apparently, in an effort to get her kitchen floor sparkling clean, a mother mixed bleach and ammonia, creating chlorine gas, which we all know, is highly corrosive and poisonous. Fortunately, the woman recovered after treatment at hospital. The moral of the story is use a single product and don't mix 'em!

Not content with the inane rubbish that is churned out for us as entertainment, we now have the ridiculous cookery program with ludicrous ingredients and recipes it is impossible to follow. Let's get back to some semblance of normality and bring back Bullseye or the Generation Game!

Haven't you just got to admire the gall of the Brussels bureaucrats who have tried to avoid publishing the expenses? They have been fighting tooth and nail for two years to prevent publication, sighting the excessive cost of administration to do it. Recent documents show that the 28 commissioners have already spent nearly half a million pounds in two months. A smart trick they have developed is to label the cost of hiring a private jet as an air taxi! Makes one wonder, doesn't it?

And finally... one last barmy report that scouts should no longer sit on the grass as it is dangerous! Well it didn't do any of us any harm, apart perhaps the odd case of ants in the pants (I kid you not). Why are the 'Elf & Safety police so intent in mollycoddling young people today? I ask you, what next!

Tarra!

SEPTEMBER 2017

There were calls of "foul" when we were interrupted by a female spouse interloping into our gathering on the paltry excuse that they had the wrong keys! I ask you, what a nerve - it is a Grumpy Old Men's group after all!

Having been persuaded by the imposition of a £25 charge to use the room at The Willowbrook, we took advantage of the kind invitation from the Gedling Inn & Kitchen, to make use of their Snug area. We made ourselves comfortable and thought that we would make our move permanent by a unanimous decision.

Our first discussion was around of the Succession to Her Glorious Majesty. We were agreed that the Heir Apparent and his current spouse would not be able to provide the sort of guidance we have enjoyed from our current Monarch, and that the country would be better off if the Succession jumped a generation. Mind you, we also recognised that a) our opinion didn't really count for much and b) we probably wouldn't be about when the decision needed to be made! What would be made if any decision to invite the person who possible has the greatest right of inheritance to the Crown from our antipodean cousins in Australia!

John Lewis's idea to set up test apartments in three cities so that potential customers can spend a night testing their beds and furniture in a home environment, brought forth some old chestnut comments, like, well having tried them out they could sleep on it! As was pointed out, we were talking about the idea so it's served its first purpose, getting it discussed. Our thoughts then went on to whilst the one thing that this company do at present is to provide good food, and an example of helpful staff was given to us when a member of staff offered to help a customer with obvious difficulties, by carrying their tray to the table. However, from experience, one of our members was able to say that wages and bonuses there are not what they were and in general with too many retail businesses, they were being hard pushed by sales made over the internet. The introduction of seven-day shopping is simply spreading what people have to spend over those seven days rather than over 5 or 6½ days, as used to be the case. The available amount of money is just being spread more thinly. There was also the impact of Charity shop on the retail market. A good example of a business with a good record of excellent customer service was given as Lakeland – a family business.

Somehow or other this got us onto the Burton Road bus plug, and why it isn't being properly restored (money the problem as always) and the new fleet of so called environmentally friendly City Transport buses. We have probably all seen the coloured buses for the different routes, but

also some grey buses too. It would appear that these grey ones are the reserves that have to go out whilst the dedicated buses are back at the depot being refuelled. Apparently, the new fleet does not have a large enough tank capacity to do a full day's journeys and have to be relieved part way through the day! Is this progress?

Our education system came in for inspection when we heard that children in comprehensive schools with a grammar school culture, discipline, smart uniforms competitive sports and the teaching of classics, amongst other things, leads to pupils achieving greater academic progress. Respect for teachers, from both pupils and parents has gone out of the window, leading to ill-discipline amongst both groups. Those parents who expect the benefits system to support them are only encouraging their children to follow the same lead. All this is not helped by the litigation culture that has been developed in many fields.

We found ourselves very happy that supermarkets have now been forced to address the problem of children standing in supermarket trollies. It is going to be interesting to see how the supermarkets handle this one!

This was more up our street – a new beer carrying record has been set in Germany. Apparently, the man who achieved this carried 27 litre steins over a distance of 131 feet. Was this just one round or was it for one person? We reckoned that this must have been the equivalent of 110 pound in weight.

Political correctness has now been extended to shops no longer having boys and girls clothing, just so that the little darlings aren't gender stereo typed. Part of this also seems to include the making of hijabs a part of school uniform and a regime of no skirts! I think that if I were a parent today, I would take great delight in sending my little boy to school in a kilt! Hey, Jimmy!

The aggressive policy adopted by some councils to waste collections concerns us. There are threats of protection notices and warning letters for those who, overload their bins, put the wrong waste in the wrong bin for recycling, putting bins out too early on the day of collection and for not moving bins back onto their own property too late after collection. Sound like the creation of more "jobsworth" posts to me.

New proposals would see criminals being able to censor their previous history when applying for jobs, so that a new prospective employer would not be aware of the background of employees. Just imagine if Ronnie Biggs could have come back to this country and applied to Royal Bank of Scotland for a post moving money about or giving Harold Shipman a job back in the NHS.

It would appear that in an attempt to emulate another dodgy ex-prime minister, our previous prime minister is now reduced to selling tickets for a speaking engagement for a fiver. How the mighty have fallen!

Not a very good advertisement for our arms industry, but Frankfurt recently had to evacuate 65,000 people following the discovery of a WWII bomb dropped by the RAF. It was successfully defused, but I wonder if they would let us have it back?

It was observed that the decision to abandon our oil fuelled transport and change over to electric power will have quite serious effect on our power supplies if this is really a serious idea. We would have to build an estimated five more Hinkley Point Nuclear power stations to cope with the demand!

What sort of descendants will be following us do you think? Today's little preciouses seem to be so self-centred that one has to ask what went wrong? The reason is that some of those at University seem to have a warped sense of their own importance, like, for instance the graduate who felt they should have had a First simply because all essays were delivered on time; or the one who felt they should be able to take their finals at home, on a laptop and with an invigilator sitting

in the corner; or the one who was demanding extra time simply by reason of being a very, very slow reader. I ask you!

Are we about to see the final demise of our great Nottingham Evening Post? Of particular concern to one of our number was the shamefully minimal coverage given to the Nottingham Panthers who have recently become the first British Ice Hockey team to win the Continental Cup against some seriously wealthy European competitors. Compared with coverage afforded to the two soccer clubs and the cricket club, coverage of the Panthers excellent achievement had been effectively relegated. Despite trying to engage the editor in a discussion about this, our member had been effectively stonewalled and denied the courtesy of any sort of response. It then came to light that the paper, having been sold, printing moved to Derby, is now due to be exported to Liverpool! Things like Bygones, a popular feature will go solely on-line. The voice of the City will be lost. Another member reported how the paper had done a similar hatchet job on a charity event, involving 40 charities and led by the Masons, and no report of the event, held in Market Square appeared.

After all this grumping, we were well satisfied with our new surroundings and look forward to long relationship with the Gedling Inn. Thanks Andy!

Tarra!

OCTOBER 2017

Taking this first submission out of order in our conversations (Yes, I'm taking a bit of a liberty I know!), but when we got onto one of our new favourite hobby horses, gender neutrality, we struck up the idea of a slight change to our group name. Firstly, we came up with GOGN, but having slept on it, I'm taking another liberty (authors prerogative!) and suggesting GONG*, which I hope will not be agreed to!

Anyway, enough triviality (?), on with our discussions, which this month included the mysterious appearance of another gender trying to muscle in on our territory. Yours truly took a bit of chiding from the membership as they thought that I had been responsible for this aberration and had a hard time convincing them otherwise!

The idea being put forward at present for everyone to be an organ donor, unless one opted out, was met with approval by the vast majority. Some concerns, the minority, were expressed about organs being sold abroad, rather than being used for the benefit of residents in this country, but it is hoped that this would be properly dealt with through appropriate legislation.

We were somewhat outraged at the advert placed by an hotel in Hemel Hempstead for a non-English speaking cleaner, with only a specified language was to be used. Surely, working in a country when you do not speak the local language, particularly in such a service industry, some knowledge must be necessary to be able to communicate with members of the public? Some of us felt that under our Equality laws this was surely illegal.

We heard of the falling out of favour of some social media as they seem to be making profits out of allowing abuse. Perhaps it is the influence of having the world's allegedly most powerful man, resorting to sneering, if not abusive, remarks through these means is a reason for its falling popularity. Younger people are starting to realise that such means of communication have a number of pitfalls and they are beginning to fall out of love with Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and the rest. Hurrah!

Getting the bit properly between our teeth, we attacked the increasingly powerful gender lobby, that now seems to have persuaded Government to consider including options for recording gender in the 2021 Census. A suggestion was that one of the options should be "convertible"! We feel that children should not be faced with having to make a decision whether or not to continue to be

the gender they were born as, until they have developed, properly, the skills to be able to make such a decision without parental, media and peer pressure. Rather than trying to influence a gender selection, parents should be exercising proper parental control of their children, in terms of their behaviour.

We then wandered off, as is often our wont, into reminiscences about old pubs in the area, like the fall and rise of the old Fox and Grapes, aka Pretty Windows and Peggers. How you could take stroll along Carlton Road, from the ice stadium to Porchester Road, calling at a pub every few hundred yards or so. And how Political Correctness had forced the recreating of the Black's Head at Carlton Square, which was named originally for the head of what was then known as a Blackamoor (and a fine sign it was too) into the head of a black horse.

Who controls the home heating was debated as one of our number was getting fed up with having to turn the heating down when "she who must be obeyed" had turned it up behind his back. The answer was that another layer should be worn to keep energy consumption costs down. After quite a bit of debate it was concluded that in the main, "she who must be obeyed" generally had the last word.

Smart meters too, took a bit of a pounding as there is no clear industry standard. This means that you could end up having to pay for a new meter if you change suppliers and the technology is not compatible. When they come up with a standard is the time start promoting their installation.

It was then revealed that spending on advertising by the junk food industry (no names, no pack drill, but we're looking to the good old US of A) in this country is 27 times more than the Government spend on promoting healthier eating. This latter was some £5.2 m against the industry spending some £143m!

Finally, we were warned that anyone internet banking should change their password, as an American hacking scandal in May had possibly affected 15.2 million, not the original 400,000 original claimed.

Tarra!

*Haven't you guessed yet? Grumpy Old Neutral Gender!

NOVEMBER 2017

Not normally a group known for taking our subjects too seriously, this month, in light of what has developed at that den of iniquity (sorry, the Palace of Westminster), our discussion was much more serious than usual. Our debate was vigorous, but never antagonistic, and, hopefully we all had a chance to express our personal views.

We were at a loss to understand why some of the accusations have been held back for so long and opinions expressed included; is it the climate that we now have that means people feel freer to come forward; are they being vindictive following someone's success; are they just seeking their own fame/notoriety; or perhaps an exaggeration of what actually happened?

There is a strong feeling that what we have is trial by social media, and that perennial influence, the media. This means that some people are being accused of wrong doing, without being informed what the issue is. The consequences of this, particularly for the innocent, can be catastrophic, and ruin peoples' lives. We used to have a situation in this country where you were innocent until proved guilty, but that no longer seems to apply and inertia seems to have allowed this happen.

One lighter musing was one of our group relating how, on a voluntary session at a Care Home, he had been "goosed", something that we now seem to find is a very definite "no, no", particularly a

man doing such a thing to a woman. So what is the position if it is a woman doing it to a man? Is it still "sexual harassment"? Does it matter that the lady in question was 90 years old? We did conclude and agree that, as in many controversial matters, common sense has been thrown out of the window. There needs to be a degree of stepping back and discussing these matters in a calm manner without resorting to rhetoric and making unsubstantiated claims. Perhaps the influence of Facebook and the like, as well as the media, will never allow this to happen. Who knows?

Anyway, we went on to Grump, as is our wont, about other things too and a great deal of ire was saved for the local council who, whilst quite happily closing a local road for a whole day, for the delivery of beams to a housing development, tell us that manpower is not available to close the roads around the Memorial Hall on Armistice Day. Perhaps they are too scared of seeing local supermarkets have their profits affected on such a solemn occasion. Shame on them.

Then we heard about a retired nurse, taking part in a protest against fracking, had set up trestle tables, with her husband, to hand out, free of charge, tea and cakes to the protesters. Along come the local constabulary with a force of 12 men to forcibly remove the said lady, for her own safety, even though she was set up on her own property! Obviously, Pitt the Elder's 1763 definition of "castle" "The poorest man may in his cottage bid defiance to all the forces of the crown. It may be frail - its roof may shake - the wind may blow through it - the storm may enter - the rain may enter - but the King of England cannot enter" no longer applies. This is a right, going back to before the 15th Century.

A mystery that took us back to the days when crop circles were all the rage, with their supposed links with alien visitations, has had social media addicts and the National Police Air Service (have they nothing better to do?) asking if anyone knew who had been responsible for the sudden appearance of a message written in a field near Oxford, "Sue X". Conspiracies abounded until a local farmer admitted that it was his apology to his wife for being moody. He told a local radio station "I'm not quite as grumpy and old as perhaps I make out occasionally". Hmm, obviously not a member of our group then.

The so called "Paradise Papers" had us in another heated discussion about the moral position of those involved, from Royalty at its highest level, to "celebrities" and people with far too much money for their own good. Are we jealous? You bet your sweet bippy we are!

When the ban of using gas and electricity comes in, will we have to leave our bodies for the bio-digestor?

Do men have "Bromances", preferring the company of their male friends down the pub, at the match, fishing or helping a mate with some DIY, over that of their wives and girlfriends? You bet!

It's all very well clothing shops providing changing room facilities for transgender people, but how exactly will it work. If they are all now to be gender neutral, how will ladies feel about a big, fat, hairy bloke barging in to the area to try some trouser on? If I do this, am I at risk of being condemned as being some sort of pervert? Probably in today's climate, so I think I will just stick to buying online.

The long-standing dispute on Southern Rail has finally come to an end with the divisive agreement with ASLEF to pay drivers of driver only trains a salary of £63,000 per year. Sorry about this, but I'm just going to move down there and re-join the railway if the rewards are that high!

And finally, the antidote to the symptoms of arthritis is said to be a vegetable curry! Apparently the painful joint inflammations can be eased by eating a diet rich in spices and vegetables, and two portions of oily fish per week. Does it count if I fry my battered cod in oil to go with my chips?

Tarra!