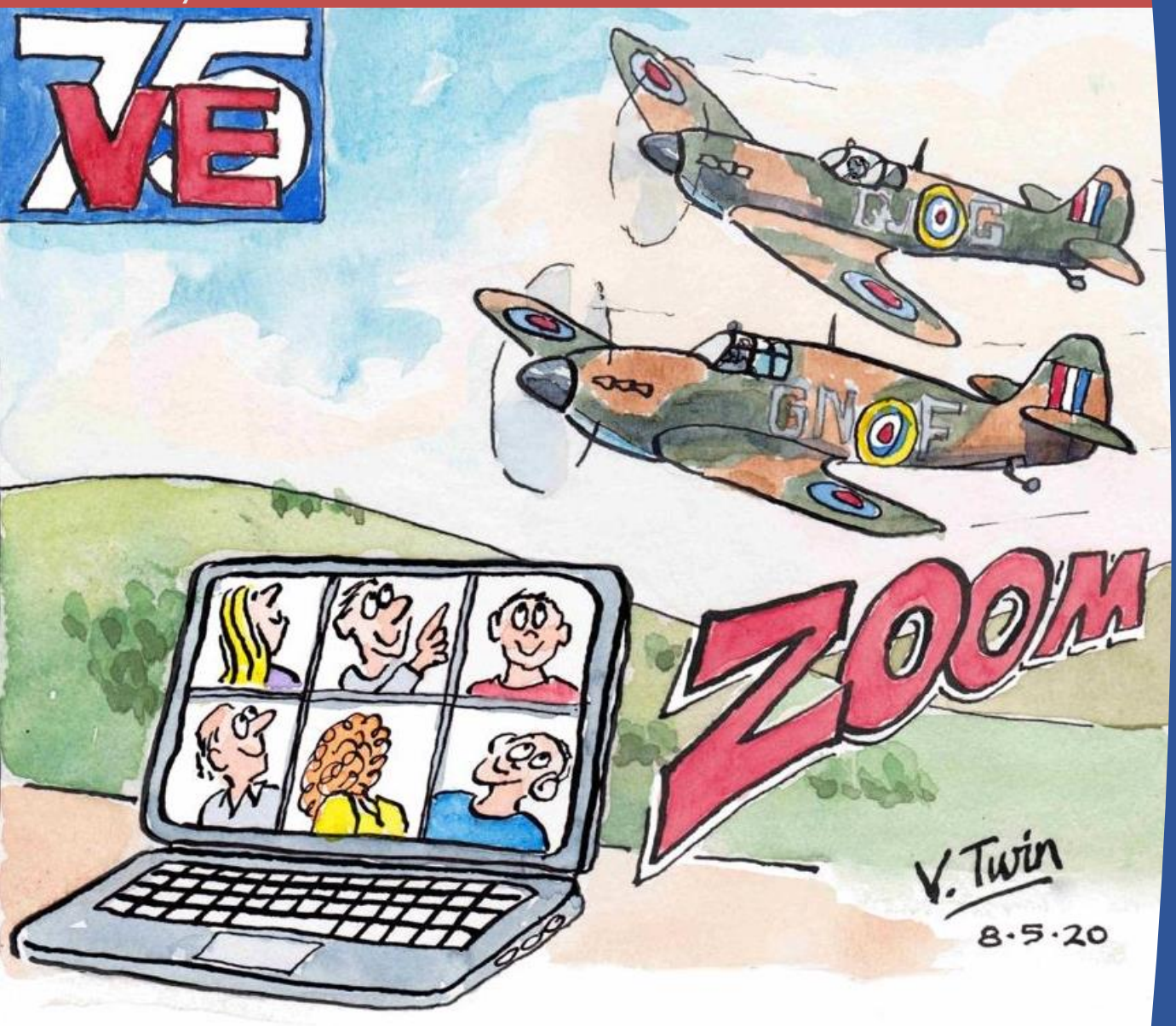
Nil *Desperandum*

May 2020 *Isolated but not alone*



SALUTING OUR LOCAL HEROES THEN AND NOW

The idea of **Nil *Desperandum*** came from the suggestion Brian Bridges made about cheering people up during these unprecedented times. He offered to provide an anecdote (see page 1 of April 2020 issue) to kick-start the first issue. We are looking for other contributors who have an interesting story to tell or a contribution to make this a meaningful publication. Please write to mpollins@onesmartplace.com

Humour from the past about the present

A scene from British sitcom ***Yes Minister*** has gone viral for predicting government response to the coronavirus pandemic.

The 1980s series, a satirical show written by Antony Jay and Jonathan Lynn, follows a politician whose clueless party suddenly takes control of government.

See if you think it is funny: Click the video link below.

Video.mov

The Coder with a fantastic voice

This little story is about a 19-year old Brighton girl who wanted to be an opera singer. Sadly, it was not to be and during her time in the WRNS during WWII, she served as a coder on HMS Cabbala, a land-based ship used as a Royal Navy signals training centre. Trainees came from all across the country to be trained in top secret methods of sending and receiving codes, especially the use of Morse Code.

HMS Cabbala was based in Lowton St. Marys, Leigh, Lancashire. On Trafalgar Day 1943, the BBC recorded a programme involving the entire ship's company. There were two famous guests that day: celebrated opera singer Mae Craven from Sydney, Australia who sang Madame Butterfly and the comedian Will Hay. The Brighton girl had a solo spot followed by the ship's company choir in harmony.

Fast forward 66 years to 2009, when my youngest son Matthew was seconded by his law firm in London to work on a project at the BBC. Whilst there, he learned that they were digitising old programmes and shows and enquired whether the HMS Cabbala recording was available. It was, and at the family Christmas lunch in 2009, the music was played as a surprise to the Brighton girl, who by then was in her 86th year. She, and the entire family, shed many emotional tears at the poignancy of the occasion.

The Brighton girl was Doreen Mary Alice Hines (formerly Braine), my wife's mother.

Story by Martin Pollins

New Guidance released

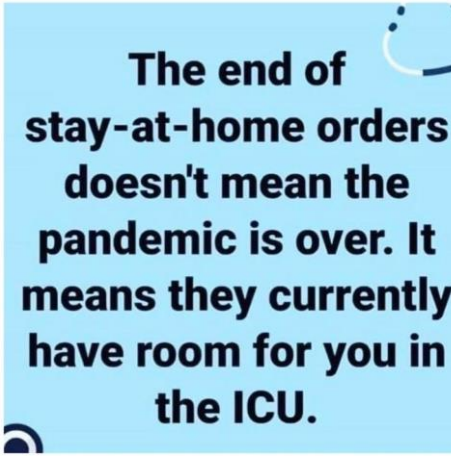
Following Prime Minster Boris Johnson's announcement on Sunday 10 May about limited easing lockdown restrictions, the government published various guidance documents to businesses on 11 May to assist with the process of returning to work.

The official page launching the guidance can be found here.

Subsequent to that, eight sector specific documents have been published, and these can be found at the following links:

- Construction and other outdoor work
- Factories, plant and warehouses
- Other people's Homes
- Labs and research facilities
- Offices and contact centres
- Restaurants offering takeaway or delivery
- Shops and branches
- Vehicles (ie those who work in or from vehicles)

Thought for the day:



More about Flt/Lt Maurice Mounsdon

Haywards Heath & District Probus Members will recall the very moving account given by Adrian Mounsdon at the November 2019 lunch regarding his uncle Flt/Lt Maurice Mounsdon, a fighter pilot who was shot down and bailed out during the Battle of Britain.

Although badly burned, Flt/Lt Maurice Mounsdon eventually recovered and returned to fly later in the war.

Sadly, Maurice died aged 101 years about one month after Adrian gave his account. Following this we carried out some research and discovered that his Hurricane fighter crashed in Essex when souvenir hunters removed certain items. One such item, a landing light, is now on display at the Kent Battle of Britain Museum at Hawkinge near Folkestone.

The Ice-Cream Man

Cycling from Tunbridge Wells police station after the early turn shift at 2pm, my route to home at Rusthall in the 1960s took me across the Common where, in the summer months, Ernesto DiMaschio parked his vintage ice cream van.

DiMaschio, an Italian middle-aged man, always smiling and pleasant, manufactured and sold his own delicious ice cream which was truly second to none in flavour.

Occasionally, I would purchase a two-shilling tub, quite sizeable in those days, to take home. Having been tutored at training school not to accept gratuities, I was initially a little concerned that whenever I paid DiMaschio with a two-shilling piece, he immediately returned the same value but in different coinage: say a one-shilling peace and two-sixpenny pieces, a procedure which never varied despite my protests.

The original van, recently restored

Prior to 1948, Tunbridge Wells had its own Borough police force and some of the original Borough men were still serving in my time in the force. One day, I mentioned my concerns to one of the Borough officers who stated that I should always accept the free ice cream and he went on to explain why: Many of the officers prior to 1938 had been recruited from Guards regiments largely because they were usually 6 feet tall and well able to look after themselves.

When war broke out, many were still on the army reserve lists and were immediately recalled to their former regiments.

Some while later, whilst serving in North Africa and being transported to the front line, there appeared a large column of Italian prisoners walking in the opposite direction. Suddenly, some of the ex-policeman noticed DiMaschio amongst their number. They called him out of line and he explained that he had returned to his home in Italy at the end of the 1938 summer season and had promptly been conscripted into the Italian army. He added that he had no wish to fight anyone, least of all the British.

After a quick conference with their commanding officer, it was agreed that DiMaschio would be employed as a steward in the officers' mess where he remained for the rest of the war. His gratitude for this accounted for his decision never to charge Tunbridge Wells policeman for his ice cream.

By Brian Bridges, May 2020

History Lessons

Did you know that they used to use urine to tan animal skins, so families used to all pee in a pot and then once a day it was taken to and sold to the tannery.....if you had to do this to survive you were "*P#### Poor*". But worse than that were the really poor folk who couldn't even afford to buy a pot.....they "*didn't have a pot to pee in*" and were the lowest of the low.

The next time you are washing your hands and complain because the water temperature isn't just how you like it, think about how things used to be. Here are some facts about the 1500s:

- Most people got married in June because they took their yearly bath in May, and they still smelled pretty good by June. However, since they were starting to smell ..... Brides carried a bouquet of flowers to hide the body odour. Hence the custom today of carrying a bouquet when getting married.
- Baths consisted of a big tub filled with hot water. The man of the house had the privilege of the nice clean water, then all the other sons and men, then the women and finally the children. Last of all the babies. By then the water was so dirty you could actually lose someone in it... Hence the saying, "*Don't throw the baby out with the Bath water!*"
- Houses had thatched roofs-thick straw-piled high, with no wood underneath. It was the only place for animals to get warm, so all the cats and other small animals (mice, bugs) lived in the roof. When it rained it became slippery and sometimes the animals would slip and fall off the roof... Hence the saying "*It's raining cats and dogs.*"
- There was nothing to stop things from falling into the house. This posed a real problem in the bedroom where bugs and other droppings could mess up your nice clean bed. Hence, a bed with big posts and a sheet hung over the top afforded some protection. That's why canopy beds came into existence.
- The floor was dirt. Only the wealthy had something other than dirt. Hence the saying, "*Dirt poor.*"
- The wealthy had slate floors that would get slippery in the winter when wet, so they spread thresh (straw) on floor to help keep their footing. As the winter wore on, they added more thresh until, when you opened the door, it would all start slipping outside. A piece of wood was placed in the entrance. Hence: a thresh hold.
- In those old days, they cooked in the kitchen with a big kettle that always hung over the fire. Every day they lit the fire and added things to the pot. They ate mostly vegetables and did not get much meat. They would eat the stew for dinner, leaving leftovers in the pot to get cold overnight and then start over the next day. Sometimes stew had food in it that had been there for quite a while. Hence the rhyme: *Peas porridge hot, peas porridge cold, peas porridge in the pot nine days old.* Sometimes they could obtain pork, which made them feel quite special. When visitors came over, they would hang up their bacon to show off. It was a sign of wealth that a man could, "*bring home the bacon.*" They would cut off a little to share with guests and would all sit around and chew the fat.
- Those with money had plates made of pewter. Food with high acid content caused some of the lead to leach onto the food, causing lead poisoning death. This happened most often with tomatoes, so for the next 400 years or so, tomatoes were considered poisonous.
- Bread was divided according to status. Workers got the burnt bottom of the loaf, the family got the middle, and guests got the top, or the upper crust.
- Lead cups were used to drink ale or whisky. The combination would sometimes knock the imbibers out for a couple of days. Someone walking along the road would take them for dead and prepare them for burial. They were laid out on the kitchen table for a couple of days and the family would gather around and eat and drink and wait and see if they would wake up. Hence the custom of holding a wake.
- England is old and small, and the local folks started running out of places to bury people. So they would dig up coffins and would take the bones to a bone-house, and reuse the grave. When reopening these coffins, 1 out of 25 coffins were found to have scratch marks on the inside and they realized they had been burying people alive... So they would tie a string on the wrist of the corpse, lead it through the coffin and up through the ground and tie it to a bell. Someone would have to sit out in the graveyard all night (the graveyard shift.) to listen for the bell; thus, someone could be, saved by the bell or was considered a *"dead ringer."*

And that's the truth... Now, whoever said History was boring?