

# The PAL Gazette

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Edition No. 58 February 2025



## Front Page Poems

Spread a little sunshine  
What I ask isn't hard.  
Send a little valentine,  
And maybe sign the card?

S.W.A.L.K. by A. C.



## Can You Read This Paper Clearly?

If you need a magnifying glass  
**phone or text Paul on  
07436 174793.**

We will send you one  
through the post for FREE.



## Quick-fire Phone Competition!

The 8th person to call **Lois** on  
**07595 261253** will receive a  
£10 Tesco voucher.

**Calls will be taken 10am-4pm, Monday-Friday.**

Competition closes 12th February.  
Winner announced in next edition.

The winner of January's Edition  
(Edition 57) was **Barbara Gowdy.**



# A FUNNY OLD MONTH

February is a funny old month. It's still dark and damp but shoots can be seen nudging their heads above ground and in garden pots.

The poet Ellwood Roberts put it well in his poem "February Days":

The icy northern blast sweeps by,  
From wild wastes of the Arctic snow;  
Above us droops a wintry sky,  
A bleak white landscape lies below.  
But, 'neath the chilly Polar blast,  
A low, sweet undertone I hear:  
"The wintry storms will soon be past,  
And pleasant Spring-time days are near."

The PAL Gazette asked readers for their favourite February things to do and here's your top five:

### Hunt for Snowdrops

Snowdrops are "hard perennial" flowers, meaning they survive average winter temperatures and can return for several years. Their appearance is one of the first signs of spring, often pushing through frozen, snow-covered ground. There are crops of snow drops in our city parks including Ormeau and Orangefield Parks.

### Hot Chocolate Brews

If you've been out in the cold air, a hot chocolate treat is well deserved. Sachets of drinking chocolate are great, but upgrading your drink is even better. Layer on shavings of your favourite chocolate, shaved with a potato peeler, or bashed up crumbs of your favourite choccy snack such as a 'Crunchie', sprinkled on top of whipped cream. Alternatively, place a square of your favourite chocolate bar or sweet (like a Lindt chocolate) into a cup and pour over an espresso or strong coffee. Give it a minute to melt, then stir and enjoy.



### Sow Wildflowers

Many wildflower seeds can be sown in February, either in gardens or pots. Wildflowers help our friends, the bees, without whom we'd be in trouble. It can take months for seeds to grow, but sowing wildflower seeds now is an investment in future joy and our environment.

### Get into a "stew"

It's still comfort food season. We are expert at stews over here, but there is an array of very interesting, more exotic stews we could try in these chillier months... Jamaican oxtail, spicy root vegetable, maple glazed sausage stew? The BBC Good Food website has wonderful recipes that can 'blip' on the stovetop or melt away in the oven – log on to:

<https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/collection/winter-stew>

Do you know the difference between a stew and a casserole? A stew is made on the stovetop, while a casserole is made in the oven, often in a designated casserole dish.

### Get your coat on

Make the most of your day and give some variety to your week. There is plenty to do and see in Belfast in February. Our top tips include: catch a movie at the Strand Cinema's temporary Connswater Shopping Centre home; go to the Ulster Museum and visit the collections and exhibitions; or attend the NI Science Festival - many of its events are free of charge. For more information log on to <https://nisciencefestival.com/>

February is a short month. Here's to making the most of it.

## PAL Gazette News

**GET INVOLVED!** Would you like to join the team that helps put the Gazette together? You can help by writing articles, collecting recipes, searching for competitions, even helping with the mail out.

Call Lois on **07595 261253** if you would like to join the PAL Gazette team.

In the meantime, keep sending in your stories! We love your recipes, special stories, and poems.

Call Lois on **07595 261253**. Or if you use email, send them to [info@engagewithage.org.uk](mailto:info@engagewithage.org.uk)



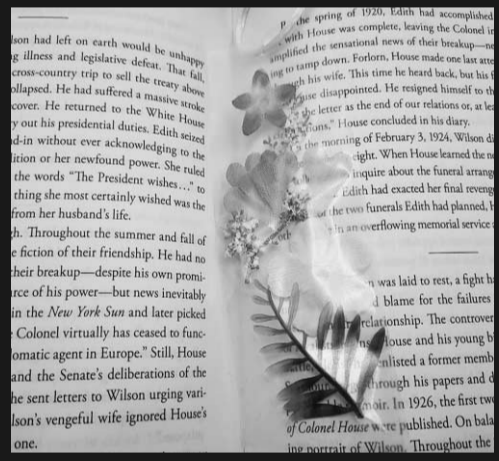
## Anne's Crafty Corner Bookmark

### What You'll Need:

- Transparent sticky back plastic
- Artificial flowers
- Safety scissors
- Hole punch
- Ribbon

### Steps:

1. Cut out two strips of sticky back plastic. The strips should be bigger than you need for the bookmark.
2. Remove the backing from one strip of the contact paper and place it on the table with the tacky side facing up.
3. Apply artificial flowers, leaves, and other decorations.
4. Remove the backing from the other strip of contact paper.
5. Place it with the tacky side down on top of the flowers.
6. Smooth the bookmark so it lays flat.
7. Use the scissors to trim the bookmark to the size you prefer.
8. Use the hole punch to add a hole at one end.
9. Thread a ribbon through the hole and tie it.
10. Add the bookmark to a favourite book or give them to family and friends.



# HERE TO HELP

To reach the Engage with Age team see numbers below.

We are always happy to receive your phone calls so our mobile numbers are:

**John McCandless 07729 516576**  
**Colin McKinty 07468 695593**

**Sharyn Ruseckas/Sarah Gordon 07423 702721**

**Paul Hendry 07436 174793**

**Anna Albrzykowska 07425 627531**

**Our telephones are available during office hours and weekdays.**

If you phone and we can't answer, please leave a message and we will return your call.

## The Questionnaire

**Name:** Margaret Steenson

**Role:** Volunteer for the KIT Groups in East and South Belfast.

### Favourite pastime:

I help with my church regularly, helping them with their activities, with the children in the congregation, and I also help with the bible study with some of the older people. There's one wee lady who I collect and take her along to bible classes, and then we go for lunch afterwards. I like reading and I also like watching TV. I've got into Netflix recently. This is an odd combination I suppose, but I like romantic movies, and also horror and disaster movies. I think you could say I've a wide range of tastes.

### Why are your pastimes important?

I want to meet up with other Christians and people outside our congregation too. We have afternoon teas and we invite different people to come along. We do film nights and have breakfast get togethers. It's mostly women who meet up. I think the social side of things is very important.

### What is the best thing about living here?

I suppose it's not too big a place over here. If you think about places

overseas, they can be massive but I like smaller communities - it's easier to get to know people. I love Portrush and places like that. I love Belfast and the people here. I think here we're a friendly people, and I like living here in Northern Ireland.

### Favourite Food:

I would say chicken curry. I like going out to restaurants. I like curries and pizza. I enjoyed going out to Pizza Hut when it was here, though there don't seem to be many Pizza Huts over here now. They used to do great desserts, and I am a real dessert person. My husband doesn't eat desserts so when we are both served them I'll have some of his.

### Favourite Film:

I think my favourite film that I really like is called "The Wedding Singer". I like films that have nice romantic endings to them and also have a bit of fun. I like the old suspense movies, like Hitchcock films, or films with Betty Davis in them like "All About Eve".

### Tell us something that not many people know about you?

It took me four times to learn to drive. I can't tell you what my mother gave me to calm me down for my first test but I was amazed I didn't go off the side of the road with it. I got my test eventually. The last test I took I stalled



on the hill at the start and thought I had failed, so I relaxed for the rest of the test. I was in shock when the instructor told me I had passed. The other thing I am proud of is that I've lost a lot of weight recently through Slimming World. I am thoroughly enjoying going out and buying new clothes. I went to a formal recently and had great time shopping for a new dress. I'm quite proud of myself!

### What advice would you give to a young person?

I suppose to stay in school and do your exams because you want to get a good job and try to give yourself the best opportunities in life that you possibly can. Do your best and keep going. Go to different events and get to know other younger people so that you can integrate into your community.

Margaret is a volunteer with the PAL Project. We need some help to run our PAL Project groups, so if you can spare a few hours once a week, please call Paul on 07436 174793.

## Have Your Say with the G6

## Belfast Stories



While the G6 addresses issues that are important for older people, it also routinely provides input into other projects. One of the recent initiatives it has been assisting is the "Belfast Stories".

"Belfast Stories" is a developing visitor attraction for Belfast, planned to be housed in the old Bank of Ireland building at the top of Royal Avenue. It has been rightly identified that Belfast is a place full of character and characters, stories and history. The "Belfast Stories" project has been collecting personal stories, aiming to create a colourful and vibrant portrait of the city and its people.

The project has progressed over the last few years, with the appointment of a design team and concept development teams, and in November 2024 a public consultation was launched by the Lord Mayor of Belfast.

In January 2025, members of the G6 participated in the latest round of consultations on the project. Several members undertook a site visit to the Bank of Ireland venue, and also participated in a walking tour of the city centre. G6 members will take information out to their respective forums to ensure older people are represented in this large-scale flagship project for the city.

A public consultation is taking place at the Crescent Arts Centre 11am-12noon on Thursday 13th February 2025, and advance booking to attend this is required. You can also contribute through a website at: <https://yoursay.belfastcity.gov.uk/belfast-stories>

If you would like more information or would like to attend the consultation, contact Belfast Stories on telephone 029 9032 0202 extension 6018, or email [belfaststories@belfastcity.gov.uk](mailto:belfaststories@belfastcity.gov.uk)

## G6 Action Plan Update

**Transport:** Belfast City Council has been very supportive of seeking to address issues raised by the G6 concerning use of public transport, and the council is helping organise meetings with transport providers.

The Belfast City Council Reference Group on Older People met recently and Alderman Sonia Copeland has been confirmed as its Chairperson. The group progresses issues important for older people within council.

**Health Sub-Group:** A group of G6 members met recently to plan activities to promote and address the health and mental health needs of older people in Belfast.

"The Grapevine" continues to go from strength to strength, offering a warm welcome to older people every Tuesday at the 2 Royal Avenue venue. See the What's On section for further information.



# WHAT'S ON

## WALKS

There will be walks in East Belfast every Wednesday afternoon at 2.00pm. If you are interested in taking part, contact Paul on **07436 174793** or email [palproject@engagewithage.org.uk](mailto:palproject@engagewithage.org.uk)

South Belfast Walking Group, weekly on Mondays at 11.00am in Botanic Park. To join in, contact Paul on **07436 174793** or email [palproject@engagewithage.org.uk](mailto:palproject@engagewithage.org.uk)

## THE KEEPING IN TOUCH GROUP (KIT GROUP)

Every Thursday 2.00pm. Dee Street Community Centre, 12-16 Dee Street, Belfast BT4 1FT.

Every Friday 2.00pm at Finaghy Community Centre, 1-6 Geeragh Place, Belfast BT10 0ER.

To join in, contact Paul on **07436 174793** or email [palproject@engagewithage.org.uk](mailto:palproject@engagewithage.org.uk)

## T'AI CHI

Every Friday 11am at Dee Street Centre, 12-16 Dee Street, Belfast BT4 1FT.

## DANCE GROUPS

Every Friday at 2.00pm. Contact Engage with Age for details on this fun dance group.

Tuesdays, 2.00pm at Morton Community Centre, Lorne Street, Belfast BT9 7DU (Line/Sequence Dancing)

## Dementia Friendly Coffee Morning

11.00am Thursdays 13th and 20th February 2025.

To attend, RSVP to Paul at [palproject@engagewithage.org.uk](mailto:palproject@engagewithage.org.uk)

In all instances above, please phone Paul first on **07436 174793** or email [palproject@engagewithage.org.uk](mailto:palproject@engagewithage.org.uk) for details

## 'The Grapevine' - Connection Hub

Tuesdays 11am - 1pm in 2 Royal Avenue, Belfast City Centre. Drop in event each week. An opportunity to enjoy a chat, meet new people, become involved in events and learn about new services.

## ONLINE EVENTS

### Chocolate Bingo

7.30pm Thursday 6th and 27th February 2025. Via zoom. Contact [eamon.quinn@engagewithage.org.uk](mailto:eamon.quinn@engagewithage.org.uk) for the link.

### The Pub Quiz Without the Pub

7.00pm Thursday 20th February 2025. Via zoom. Contact [palproject@engagewithage.org.uk](mailto:palproject@engagewithage.org.uk) for the link.

### Free IT Assistance

If you are over the age of 60, live in Belfast, and have a computer, laptop, tablet or smart phone, you are eligible. The training is provided by Ignite IT and can help you with your email, getting online, online safety etc.

To avail of this, call Paul on **07436 174793**.

# WHAT IS ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE?

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a term that is often heard in the news, but many people still wonder: what is AI, and how does it impact our lives?

## What is Artificial Intelligence?

Artificial Intelligence refers to machines or computer systems that are designed to perform tasks that typically require human intelligence. These tasks can include things like problem-solving, recognizing speech, understanding images, and even making decisions.

AI is about teaching computers to "think" in a way that mimics human intelligence.

## Everyday Examples of AI

- 1. Voice Assistants** (e.g., Siri, Alexa, Google Assistant) can help you with tasks like setting reminders, checking the weather, or even playing music.
- 2. Smartphones** like facial recognition to unlock your phone, predictive text to help you type messages faster.
- 3. Online Shopping**, online stores like Amazon use AI to recommend products based on what you've looked at or bought before.
- 4. Navigation Apps** (e.g., Google Maps, Apple Maps) These apps use AI to provide real-time traffic updates and guide you to your destination.
- 5. Health Monitoring Devices** like fitness trackers or smartwatches.

## How Does AI Work?

AI is powered by vast amounts of information. Computers analyse this information to recognize patterns, learn, and make decisions.



## How Can AI Benefit Older Adults?

Here are some ways AI can be helpful:

- 1. Smart Homes devices**, like smart thermostats, lighting systems, and security cameras.
- 2. Health and Wellness** AI can help manage chronic health conditions, monitor medication, or provide reminders.
- 3. Social Interaction** AI-powered social robots, like the "companion" robots used in some nursing homes, can help reduce feelings of loneliness.
- 4. Financial Assistance** Some AI tools can assist with managing finances, for example, monitoring spending or even help you make decisions about saving and investing.
- 5. Improving Communication** AI can assist in communication for those with hearing or vision impairments. Speech-to-text

applications can transcribe conversations for easier understanding, and voice-activated devices help users with limited mobility to communicate.

## How to Get Started with AI

If you're interested in using AI in your daily life, a few simple ways to begin include using Voice Assistants, Smart Devices and Health Apps.

## Conclusion

Artificial Intelligence is no longer a futuristic concept; it's already shaping many aspects of our daily lives. It can help improve your quality of life, stay connected with loved ones, and even boost your health and wellness.

*Editor's note: this article was written by AI/ Chatgpt, following an instruction typed into the computer to "please write an article about artificial intelligence for older adults."*

## Chinese New Year

By the time this edition of the PAL Gazette has been published we will have had the Chinese New Year, which fell on 29th January 2025. As members of the Chinese community would say: Wan Shi Ru Yi (万事如意) - may all your wishes come true).

Northern Ireland has a prominent Chinese community, with over 9,000 people of Chinese descent living here. Belfast has a Chinese community of over 4,500 people, making up 1.4% of the Belfast population. The Chinese community is diverse, coming from a range of regions including Hong Kong, Guangdong, mainland China, Malaysia and Singapore. The community is active in a range of sectors including catering, medicine and education.

Chinese New Year has a history going back 3,500 years, with some believing it originated in the Shang Dynasty in 1600-1000 BC. The date of the start of Chinese New Year is the day of the first new moon in the Chinese lunar calendar. The date changes every year but is usually between the dates of 21st January - 20th February.

Traditions associated with New Year include cleaning houses to symbolise sweeping away bad luck. Red is a prominent colour, symbolising energy and prosperity. Celebrants put up red decorations and give red envelopes with money and gifts inside them. Other traditions include shared meals, gatherings, and staying up late on New Year's night.

Animals are central to the New Year celebrations, symbolising the cycle of the year and the passage of time. The animals are believed to have emerged from an ancient Chinese poem telling the story of 12 mythical animals, descended from the heavens to help people celebrate the coming of spring and new crops. There are also five elements from Chinese culture which are earth, wood, fire, water and metal. They are all woven into New Year traditions. 2025 is the year of the wood snake, which is believed to be wise.

In Belfast there are celebrations at the Ulster Hall, Titanic Quarter, the QUB Students' Union, and other dances and events such as cookery demonstrations. At this dark and cold time of the year it is wonderful to have a festival that looks forward to more bountiful, brighter times.



# WORD SEARCH



**Enter our Word Search competition for a chance to win a £10 Tesco voucher.**

Find the following 9 words hidden in the word square above:

- FEBRUARY • MINISTRONE • SPAGHETTI
- CELERY • HEARTS • LOVE
- VALENTINES • WREATH • PUZZLE

To enter, phone Lois Kennedy on **07595 261 253 on weekdays, 10am-4pm.** Please note due to the popularity of competitions all correct entries are placed in a draw and the winner chosen at random.

The winner will be announced in the next edition of The PAL Gazette.

**Entries for this edition's word search need to be in by 12th February 2025.**

**The winner of January's Edition (Edition 57) was Richard Sloan.**

## Send your letters to:

The PAL Gazette, Engage with Age,  
East Belfast Network Centre,  
55 Templemore Avenue, Belfast BT5 4FP.  
Or you can email: [info@engagewithage.org.uk](mailto:info@engagewithage.org.uk)



## Night Blessing

Submitted by Audrey Lynas

May you be given wisdom to speak words of peace and kindness to those you meet. Your words have the power to crush them or to care for them. Even if what you say is right, remember how you say it matters too. May you be a person of peace.

#niteblessing

# Tea Time Quiz

Answer each of these five questions correctly for your chance to win a £10 Tesco voucher.

1. Who famously gave the "We shall fight them on the beaches" speech?
2. What does GP stand for?
3. How many players does each cricket team have?
4. In which stadium does Manchester United play?
5. Which author wrote *Pride and Prejudice*?

To enter, phone **Lois Kennedy on 07595 261 253 on weekdays.** Please note due to the popularity of competitions all correct entries are placed in a draw and the winner chosen at random.

**Entries for this edition's quiz need to be in by 12th February 2025.**

Winner of January's Edition (Edition 57) was **Heather Montgomery.**

**For all quiz lovers, join in The Pub Quiz without a Pub, 7pm Thursday 20th February 2025.**

For zoom link email [palproject@engagewithage.org.uk](mailto:palproject@engagewithage.org.uk)

**The answers to August's quiz were:**

1. North America 2. Cherry Blossom or Chrysanthemum 3. Jaws 4. Banksy 5. Athens, Greece

## Recipe Minestrone Soup

This budget minestrone is the classic Italian soup made with cannellini beans and broken up spaghetti. Feel free to stir in extra vegetables, depending on what you have in the fridge.

### Ingredients

- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 carrots, peeled and chopped
- 3 large celery sticks, chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- 2 tbsp tomato purée
- 400g tin chopped tomatoes
- 1.2 litres/2 pints vegetable or chicken stock, made from stock cubes
- 400g tin cannellini beans, drained and rinsed
- 100g/3½ dried spaghetti, broken into short lengths
- ¼ head green cabbage, finely shredded
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper

### Method

1. Heat the olive oil in a large, saucepan with a lid over a medium heat. Add the onion, carrots and celery, season with a little salt and pepper and cook for about 10 minutes, stirring occasionally until the vegetables have softened.
2. Add the garlic and fry for another minute. Stir in the tomato purée and cook for a further minute.
3. Tip in the tomatoes and stock.

Cover with a lid and bring slowly to the boil. Reduce the heat to a simmer and cook for 15 minutes.

4. Add the beans and pasta and cook for a further 10 minutes, or until the pasta is cooked. Add the cabbage and cook for another 2 minutes. If the soup is too thick, add some hot water to reach your preferred consistency.
5. Season to taste with salt and pepper before serving.

**Top Tips** - You can freeze this soup to reheat at a later date.

Serve with a lovely slice of wheaten bread.

This recipe is vegetarian – but you can add bacon or lardons for extra protein.



## Stopping Scams:

help to stop scams no matter how they are sent

- Forward text messages for free to **7726**
- Forward emails to [report@phishing.gov.uk](mailto:report@phishing.gov.uk)
- Report scam websites at [www.ncsc.gov.uk/section/about-this-website/report-scam-website](http://www.ncsc.gov.uk/section/about-this-website/report-scam-website)

[psni.police.uk](http://psni.police.uk) Report online. Call 101. In an emergency call 999

we care we listen we act **Police Service of Northern Ireland**

## Are you a man aged 65?

Remember to attend for AAA screening when invited as it could be life saving.

HSC Public Health Agency

AAA Screening

## General signs and symptoms of cancer

Being aware of general signs and symptoms of cancer is important. It can help in earlier detection and treatment. Here are some of the common signs and symptoms you should ask your doctor to check out:

1. Coughing up blood
2. Blood in your urine
3. A change in bowel habits that last for three weeks or more
4. Unexplained weight loss
5. A lump anywhere on your body
6. Changes to your skin or on an existing mole

For more info, visit [www.becancerawareni.org](http://www.becancerawareni.org)

HSC Public Health Agency

Engage with Age thanks its supporters and funders:

HSC Public Health Agency

HSC Belfast Health and Social Care Trust



Belfast City Council

HALIFAX FOUNDATION for Northern Ireland

COMMUNITY FUND

## OLD JOKES HOME!

Submitted by our Anonymous Phone Caller who loves a joke.  
I just burnt my Hawaiian pizza.  
I guess I should have put it on aloha temperature.



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