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christmas countdown

Welcome to the December issue of The Solihull Index.

By the time this arrives I'm sure you'll all be counting down the days to Christmas, whether it's due to excitement or if you just want life to get back to normal! Apart from the excitement of the big day, there's always lots of other things going on at this time of year – check out page 25 to see what great new films are on at the cinema this month and what local pantomimes are playing. If you'd rather curl up in the warmth of your own home, why not try making pecan pie from our recipe on page 33.

For those of you that eat too much over Christmas and who want to help others, why not try the 25th Lions Festive Walk from Baddesley Clinton National Trust on 27th December (more details on page 6). There's a choice of different length routes so you can do what you're comfortable with.

I wish you all a very merry Christmas and a happy and healthy New Year.



Zoe Reece

Tel: 07557 220585

Email: zoe@dorridgedirectory.com

www.solihullindex.com



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Chartered Architects Gary Winn RIBA and Dean Poulton RIBA are Progression Architects and have been based in Solihull since 1992. They are about to celebrate 25 years in practice.

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community events

Christmas Party Nights

**St Johns Hotel, 651
Warwick Road, Solihull
1st – 31st December**

Bring your party to our party at the St Johns Hotel! 3 course meal with a glass of sparkling wine on arrival. Only £35 per person. Call 0121 711 3000 for more details.

Friendly Folk – folk dance group

**Elmdon Heath Community Centre,
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7.45 – 10.15pm**

Folk dance group established in Solihull for 30 years. Folk dancing is an activity which combines physical and mental exercise in a sociable atmosphere. Friendly Folk welcomes newcomers of any, or no, experience, with or without a partner. Cost £3.50 per



week, 1st week free. Call 0121 444 1492 for more details.

Peter Pan-to

**St. Mary's Hall, Hobs
Meadow, Solihull B92 8PN
14th – 16th December**

The Moat Players are proud to present "Peter Pan-to", based on the classic story by J.M. Barrie. This will be full of the usual panto fun, and tells of how Wendy and her two brothers travel to Neverland with Peter Pan. There they meet up with his band of Lost Boys and battle against Captain Hook and his pirates, along with

his sidekick, Smee. Tickets are £8.00 for adults and £6.50 for concessions, and can be booked by calling 07760 306605.

25th Lions Festive Walk

**Baddesley Clinton House
Wednesday 27th December**

Walk off your Christmas pudding. Bring your friends and relatives, just turn up and make a donation – That's the invitation from Knowle and Dorridge Lions. This year's special 25th FREE Festive Walk from Baddesley Clinton National Trust House offers a choice of 1.4, 3.9, 5.3 & 10.7 miles signed circular routes and an opportunity to help the Lions raise funds for the new Breast Cancer Haven, Headway Birmingham & Solihull, with half going to Lions locally determined causes. Details & registration form online at www.KnowleandDorridgeLions.com/walk or call 08458 335 894

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- **Councillor's Surgery** - these are face-to-face meetings held by councillors for local people to raise issues in their area. First and last Saturday of the month, 10.00am-12.00pm
- **Rhyme Time** - Wednesdays 10.15am to 10.30am, term-time only. A short interactive session for 0-2s that includes finger and action rhymes and songs. Come along and meet up with other parents/carers and discover what the library can offer your child
- **Meet and Play** - Fridays 10.15am to 11.15am, age 0 - 2 years (term time only). Our new

Meet and Play session offers the chance for young families to meet up, relax, chat, play, sing or make music together! The session is for families, led by families. Toys and musical instruments are provided. For more information contact 0121 704 6965.

- **Homework Club** - Tuesdays 3.45pm to 5.15pm, term time only
- **Silent Reading Cafe** - Held once a month on Thursday evenings, this is a chance to unwind and read in a cosy, informal environment without distractions. It begins with an hour of silent reading from 6pm with a chance to chat (if you want) between 7pm and 7.45pm.



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SOLIHULL10

let it snow! let it snow! let it snow! let it snow!



A white Christmas is something many of us dream of, but how much do we know about snow?

Snow is made of a bizarre and complex substance which we take completely for granted – water!

Water is a liquid at room temperature, unlike other substances with similar-sized molecules, such as ammonia or methane – these are gases.

Water requires more energy to boil it than other liquids and unlike most substances which shrink as they freeze, water expands as it turns to ice. As it turns out this is rather important. Ice is less dense than water so it floats. If it became more dense like most substances lakes would freeze from the bottom up and aquatic life would die. But because water freezes from the top down, the floating ice forms a layer on the surface which insulates the water beneath allowing it to stay liquid and all the swimming creatures to survive.

Few people know that for snow to fall at temperatures higher than -40C a special particle called an ice nucleus is required. Snow seeds as they are known include fine particles of soil, dust, and volcanic ash. These 'seeds' pass through the clouds of water vapour in the upper atmospheres and it is on their surface that ice crystals form which become snow. Snowflakes are all different because of the way they attract new water to their 'corners'. As the crystals fall through the atmosphere they pass through different layers

of temperature and humidity, and get tossed around by the wind. The interplay between the snow seeds, random water droplets and their need to grow in a hexagonal fashion means that each snowflake grows rapidly in a unique way until they are large enough to fall as snowflakes.

The perfect snowflakes that we see on Christmas cards are actually quite idealised. Most snowflakes are imperfect, but they do have an underlying symmetry which has been noticed by humans for thousands of years. Most flakes are 1cm or less across but occasionally atmospheric conditions conspire to form giant snowflakes. In 1915 snowflakes 10cm across fell in Berlin, and in Montana in 1887 flakes 38cm (15 inches) across were recorded.

But if snow is made of ice (which is clear or possibly slightly blue), why is snow dazzling white? Well the reason is because of the complex structure of snowflake crystals. Light rays bounce around from one crystal of ice to another, randomly until they find their way out. Because of the very short distances between the reflective surfaces the light rays are efficiently scattered and none are absorbed, and if no light is absorbed then a substance appears white.

If we do have a few flakes this Christmas then you can amaze your friends with how much you now know about snow!

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a history of christmas decorations

Every year we go with the children to choose a new Christmas tree decoration.

We don't do themed trees in our house so our annual tree is a history of the kids' eclectic and often eccentric tastes down the years. Traditional inherited hand blown glass ornaments nestle alongside a plastic gingerbread man, a gaudy fairy in striped tights, a robot, a festive dachshund, and a host of other unlikely characters. Every year is a delight of discovery as my teens and preteens unpack, reminisce and tease each other over their past choices.

But where did the idea of decorations originate and how did they evolve into what they've now become?

Tinsel originated in Germany in the early 1600s. Back then it was made from real shredded silver. Tinsel makers hammered the silver until it was thin, then cut it into strips. It was so popular that tinsel machines were invented to keep up with demand. Clearly silver was a little expensive and eventually the plastic variety took over.

We have the Germans to thank for baubles. They were invented in the 1840s by Hans Greiner. His original glass fruit and nuts developed into beautiful ornate ornaments which so charmed Queen Victoria that she brought them back to Britain.

As they were all hand-crafted the first, baubles were very expensive. Improvements in plastic manufacturing meant that cheaper versions became available, and baubles became available to the masses.

The green fir tree was originally used by



Pagans and Christians to celebrate winter. Pagans used branches of the fir tree to decorate their homes during the winter solstice, as a reminder that spring would come again. The Christians adopted them later.

The tradition of Christmas trees seems to have originated about 1000 years ago in Northern Europe. They were often hung upside down from the rafters. In modern times improved manufacturing techniques have allowed for the production of artificial trees which can be very difficult to tell from the real thing!

In Victorian times, Christmas trees were been decorated with candles. In 1895, an American man, Ralph Morris, was so concerned about the fire hazard of candles and Christmas trees that he invented the first electric Christmas lights, which are similar to those still in use today.

Over the years there have been glass and plastic variations of reindeers, stars, fruit, butterflies, birds and even festive dachshunds (see above!) but the debate still rages about whether there should be an angel or a star on top of the tree.

Merry Christmas.

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Mindbenders
Can you find the festive phrases?

night night night
night night night
night night night
night night **night**

XMAS

answers on page 37

a taster of what's on in december & january ...

CINEMA



Wonder
from 1st December

A boy with a facial deformity joins a new school. 'Wonder' is the heart-warming story of Auggie Pullman, a young boy with a facial deformity who's spent his life in and out of hospitals, as he joins a new school.



The Man who Invented Christmas
from 1st December

The story of how Charles Dickens wrote 'A Christmas Carol'. 'The Man Who Invented Christmas' is the true story of how Charles Dickens wrote the beloved classic novel 'A Christmas Carol', and created a holiday tradition by doing so.

Star Wars: The Last Jedi
from 14th December

Picking up right where 'The Force Awakens' left off, 'Star Wars: The Last Jedi' finds Rey, after finally discovering Luke Skywalker, beginning her training in the ways of the Force. Starkiller Base may have been destroyed, but the First Order are far from defeated and the war between them and the Resistance grows ever more fierce. The Resistance could really use a Jedi Knight on their side – but Skywalker has decided that it's time for the Jedi to end.



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THEATRE

The Core Theatre, Solihull
(formerly Solihull Arts Complex)

Jack and the Beanstalk
Various dates between 8th and 31st December

Solihull's own 'Mr Panto' Malcolm Stent is treating audiences to one final dollop of sparkling fun and silliness as he takes to the stage in his panto finale... Jack & The Beanstalk - after an amazing 27 year pantomime run.



Lily and the Little Snow Bear

Wednesday 20th – Sunday 24th December

There are just two more sleeps until Christmas and it's snowing already! Lily discovers a trail of soft little footprints, so she's in for a very big SURPRISE! This funny, heart-warming tale of friendship is the perfect treat for Christmas with exquisite puppets, enchanting music and a magical snowy setting. For ages 3+.



The Syd Lawrence Orchestra – Golden Night of Swing

Wednesday 17th January

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the jigsaw revival



I was Christmas shopping recently and for the first time in many years found myself browsing jigsaw puzzles. I was mesmerised by the number of different types and designs.

There were funny ones, quirky ones, puzzles with irregular-shaped pieces, gloriously beautiful reproductions of famous works of art, extra-tricky pictures of boxes of sweets, or baked beans, and some fabulous three-dimensional puzzles. These were not the jigsaws of my youth. The jigsaws I remember came in faded boxes with boring photos of country cottages, or a generic blue-green landscape on the lid. No, these jigsaws looked enticing and exciting. A jigsaw revival seems to have taken place and I had somehow missed it.

Jigsaws actually originated in the late 18th century, when European map makers pasted maps on to wood and cut them into pieces. They were a useful way to teach children about geography.

Puzzles as an adult pastime emerged around 1900. They were expensive because each piece was cut individually, but they quickly became popular social pursuits in country houses for weekend parties.

As production became cheaper they became popular with the masses too. In the interwar period of the 1920s-1930s many companies used them as advertising gimmicks. Lots of jigsaws from that period depict black and white photographs of factories and workers or products. We aren't talking high art here but if you come across them in charity shops they possess their own charm.

Jigsaws can be a silent and calming activity, or done in pairs or groups they can be sociable

affairs. They are also gloriously cheap compared with other forms of entertainment, which explains why weekly cardboard puzzles became a national obsession in the US after the economic crash of 1929; in fact so many people wanted them that there was a national jigsaw famine!

In our own current slow economy and extended period of austerity jigsaws seem to be gaining in popularity again. Like adult colouring books they are absorbing and stimulating but not overly demanding so can be seen a mindful activity and as such may be beneficial to our mental health.

Dame Margaret Drabble the author became a fan of jigsaws when her husband was undergoing extensive treatment for cancer. She couldn't concentrate on books or crossword puzzles but jigsaws helped her to focus. She says they gave her an illusion of control, creating order from chaos during a period of intense stress, and she feels they actually saved her sanity. She wrote a book, 'The Pattern on the Carpet,' about her personal experience.

Our own queen is said to be a huge jigsaw fan. Apparently she borrows regularly from the The British Jigsaw Puzzle Library. This wonderful institution (of which I knew nothing prior to researching this article) houses thousands of beautiful hand cut wooden jigsaw puzzles, which can be borrowed. Membership for the jigsaw enthusiast in your life, along with Drabble's book might be a rather inspired Christmas present this year perhaps?

Happy puzzling.



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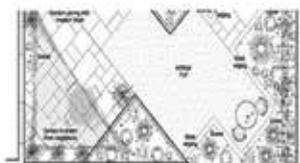
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Gillian Cain, Audi Birmingham, 31 July 2017



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COMPETITION



WIN 2 tickets

to see **An Audience with Rev. Richard Coles**

Tuesday 30th January, 7.30pm

The Core Theatre, Solihull (formerly Solihull Arts Complex)

For your chance to win these tickets, worth £40, visit the Core Theatre website page for this event - www.thecoretheatresolihull.co.uk - to find the answer to this question:

With which chart topping 80s band was Richard Coles a member of?

Email your answer to: thecoretheatre@solihull.gov.uk – and please put 'Rev. Richard Coles' as the subject line

Closing date for entries is 31st December and the winner will be drawn at random and notified by email after this date.

About the Show:

Join Strictly's latest dancing star as he recounts his experiences both on the dance floor and backstage with the stars. Richard has a delightfully enquiring mind but with an eye finely tuned to absurdity. His voice will be familiar to Radio 4 listeners as he co-hosts Saturday Live, and is a contributor to Pause for Thought on the Radio 2 Chris Evans Breakfast Show. His face is also recognisable from plenty of panel shows like Have I Got News For You and QI, and as the co-host of BBC1's The Big Painting Challenge with Mariella Frostrup. In other reality TV news, he finished fifth on Celebrity MasterChef last year. In this ever popular evening, alongside his Strictly reminiscences, he'll tell a story that is as real as it is unlikely. He connects the euphoria and mayhem of being on Top of The Pops in the 80s to his present circumstances as Church of England priest, radio broadcaster and television show panellist, answering amongst many burning questions: "How do you go from pop star to priest? And why?"

a good read

reviews By Willow Coby

The Runaway Jury

by John Grisham

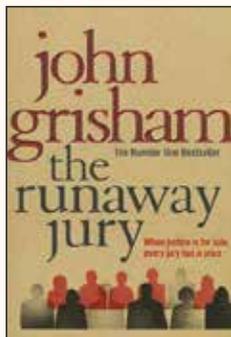
Whether you read legal fiction or not you have most likely heard of John Grisham. One of the biggest selling authors in the world, Grisham was a lawyer before he turned to writing and his expertise is evident in his novels.

As the title may suggest this novel focuses on the jury in a trial. Whilst we like to think that trial by jury is fair and gives both sides an equal chance, what if it was manipulated from the beginning?

A major case is brought against a tobacco company by the widow of a smoker who died from lung cancer. A verdict against the tobacco company would have huge implications – and cost - for the industry so naturally they are prepared to fight hard. But it would seem that one person is determined to get a guilty verdict. A young man called Nicholas Easter is selected at random for jury service and ends up in the final twelve.

However, when a man employed by the tobacco company to find out more about the jurors tries to look into his background, it appears that he has no background and his selection may not have been random after all.

And Easter is out to ensure that he gets the verdict that he wants – no matter what the cost.



Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children

by Ransom Riggs

15-year-old Jacob lives in Florida and dotes on his elderly grandfather, Abe. From the age of six Jacob listened to his stories about his life during the war. He escaped from monsters in Poland and was sent to live in a mysterious house on an island just off the coast of Wales run by Miss Peregrine. Abe recounts tales of the other children he lived with and shows



Jacob what they looked like using a mysterious set of photographs. As Jacob grows up he comes to view the stories as fanciful and made up, and the images as nothing more than trick-photography. Everything changes when Abe dies in a violent manner and Jacob alone sees the strange creature in the woods that killed him. Struggling to cope with the death, Jacob discovers a 15-year-old letter from Miss Peregrine and persuades his parents to take him to the Welsh island to put together the pieces of Abe's life.

Here Jacob discovers that the monsters his grandfather fled from in Poland were more than Nazis and that the stories were maybe not so fanciful after all. The children his grandfather lived with were very peculiar indeed.

This first novel (and first in a trilogy) is a fascinating read. Spread throughout the book are authentic photos collected by the author which are weaved into the story. Definitely one for older readers (marketed as young adult and rightly so) this original story will have you reaching for book two immediately.

Pecan Pie

A Traditional American Favourite



Preparation time: 20 minutes + chilling time

Cooking time: 1 hour 15 minutes

Serves 8-10

Ingredients:

500g pack ready-made sweet shortcrust pastry
 75g unsalted butter, softened
 100g golden caster sugar
 175g golden syrup
 175g maple syrup
 3 eggs, beaten
 ½ tsp vanilla extract
 300g Pecan nuts halves
 Double cream, or good quality ice cream to serve

Method

Lightly flour the work surface. Roll out the pastry and use to line a 23cm loose-bottomed tart tin. (Top tip - I always keep left over pastry in case I need to fill any cracks after

the blind baking!) Prick the pastry base with a fork then chill for 30 mins.

Heat oven to 190C/170C fan/gas 5. Line the chilled pastry case with greasproof paper, fill with ceramic baking beans and bake for 15-20 mins until the sides are set. Remove the beans and parchment and return to the oven for 5-10 mins until the base is set and the pastry is golden. Leave to cool.

Increase the oven temperature to 200C/190C fan/gas 6. Beat the butter and sugar together with an electric whisk until light and fluffy. While the beaters are still turning pour in both of the syrups. Gradually add the beaten eggs, 1/4 tsp salt and the vanilla, and whisk until combined. Then stir through the nuts and pour all of the mixture into the tart case. Bake for 10 mins. Turn heat down to 160C/140C fan/gas 3 and continue baking for 30-35 mins - the pie should be golden brown but the filling should wobble a little in the centre when shaken. Leave to cool completely in the tin. Serve with cream or ice cream.

toys! toys! toys!

The song goes, 'It's the holiday season, And Santa Claus has got a toy, For every good girl and good little boy...' But which toys?

Luvabella: Unless you are completely doll-phobic (the word is pediophobe people!) this will enchant any little girl and probably a few boys. This is an AI Furby-made-human. The more she's played with the more she responds. She moves her arms and legs and has an amazingly expressive face. She will even start saying a few words.

VTech Kidizoom Flix: If you are not enamoured with the creepy little Luvabella then try Flix. He's a funky friendly little alien with face recognition software installed so he can recognise your child. You can change his eyes and skin colour and he has a camera and video so you can carry out secret reconnaissance missions. He detaches from his tripod and comes in pink or blue.

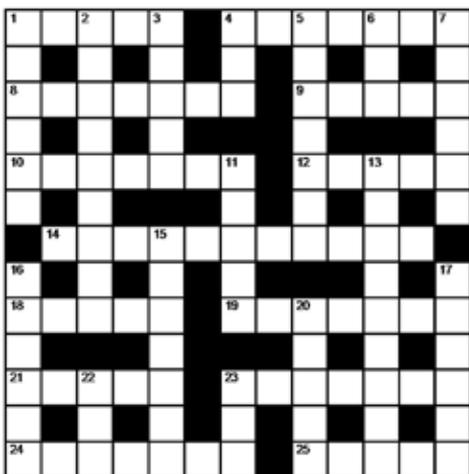
Lego: You cannot go wrong with Lego, for any age and either sex. The trend for programmable toys this year continues with Lego Boost. Five models - this is Vernie the robot - which can be brought to life by coding using a free app.

Experimake Sludge and Slime: A great take on the science kit. Icky gooey experiments that kids and lots of adults will enjoy playing with.

SoundMoovz: One for the whole family. Wearable, app-connected motion-activated musical bandz. Move your wrists and ankles to create beats, rhythms and music, layer your beat onto a song and connect to a wireless speaker for even louder fun. Watching Grandma showing off her moves will add to the holiday spirit.



crossword



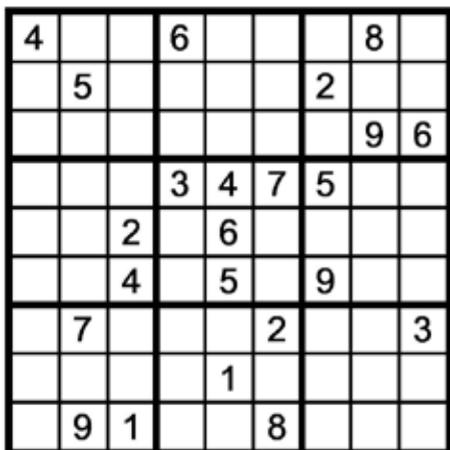
clues

Across

- 1 Melodious sounds (5)
- 4 Attain, accomplish (7)
- 8 Royal ruler (7)
- 9 Latin American dance (5)
- 10 Astonishing, impressive (7)
- 12 Large bird of prey (5)
- 14 Thrift store (7,4)
- 18 Officially register (5)
- 19 Delivers mail (7)
- 21 Occupation, vocation (5)
- 23 Faltering speech (7)
- 24 Discord, disunity (7)
- 25 The taste of toothpaste (5)

Down

- 1 Milk-producing animal (6)
- 2 Person lying outside to get a tan (9)
- 3 Royal dog (5)
- 4 Burnt remains (3)
- 5 Female party-giver (7)
- 6 Type of tree (3)
- 7 Rubbed-out, removed (6)
- 11 Rise from bed (3,2)
- 13 Male wedding attendants (9)
- 15 Soothe, assuage (7)
- 16 Thawed, defrosted (6)
- 17 Vitality, dynamism (6)
- 20 Large group of bees (5)
- 22 Donkey, burro (3)
- 23 Group of items (3)



how to play sudoku

It's simple!

Fill in the grid so that each row, column and 3x3 box, contains the numbers 1 through to 9 with no repetition. You don't need to be a genius. These puzzles use logic alone. Watch out! Sudoku is highly addictive.

answers on page 37

useful numbers

Health

NHS non-emergency	111
Grove Surgery	0121 705 1105
Northbrook Group Practice	0121 746 5000
Hobs Moat Medical Centre	0121 742 5211
Solihull Hospital	0121 424 2000
Spire Parkway Hospital	0845 850 1451

Council

Solihull Council	0121 704 6000
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Utilities

Electricity power cut	0800 6783 105
Gas leak	0800 111 9999
Severn Trent Water	024 7771 5000
Severn Trent Water (emergencies)	0800 783 4444

Travel

National Rail Enquiries	03457 48 49 50
Network West Midlands (buses)	0345 303 6760

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kawild@solihull.gov.uk

Councillor surgeries these are face-to-face meetings held by councillors for local people to raise issues in their area. Held at The Core Library, Solihull on the first and last Saturday of the month, 10am – 12 noon.

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