

introduced into Christian churches around 400 AD by Paulinus, Bishop of Nola in Campania. Their adoption on a wide scale does not become apparent until about 550, when they were introduced into France and Italy before spreading to Great Britain by monks and friars coming to join religious orders.

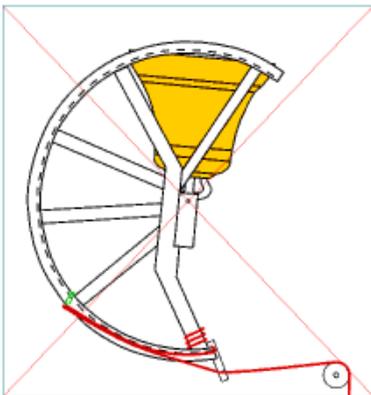
By 750, they were sufficiently common for the Archbishop of York to order all priests to toll their bell at certain times. St Dunstan, the then Bishop of London and Archbishop of Canterbury, hung bells in all churches under his care during the late 10th Century and gave rules for their use.

In the Dark Ages, bells were thought to have supernatural powers. During the 7th century it is said that the Bishop of Aurelia rang the bells to warn people of an attack. When the enemy heard them, they were said to have fled in fear. The people credited the bells with having saved them. In a world with little man made noise, the sound of bells was not only majestic, but could be deeply fearful.

The hanging of bells in British churches spread quickly with the Abbeys of Wearmouth and Whitby both recorded as having bells in 680.

Before the reign of Henry VIII and the Protestant Reformation, most bells in churches and monasteries were hung on a simple spindle and chimed by Deacons pulling a rope. Ringers began to experiment with new ways of hanging the bell to get greater control. The first improvement was mounting bell to quarter wheel with a spindle serving as the axle and the rope attached to the rim of the wheel. As this method grew popular, bells

During the Reformation the desecration of monastic abbeys and buildings often included the removal of many church bells.



Following the Reformation, many churches began to rehang bells, with most using the new technology of bells mounted on a whole wheel. This gave much greater control using the rope, but the final refinement was a stay and slider to be able to 'set' the bell. The ringer could now rotate the bells 360 degrees and stop and start the ringing at will.

The cost of maintaining bells and payments to the ringers, who at the time were paid for their services, could be quite a high proportion of running the Parish. St Margaret's, Westminster aid ringers one shilling each for ringing at the beheading of Mary, Queen of

Scots in 1857. Less than twenty years later, the same church paid ten times that for ringing 'at the time when the Parliament House should have been blown up'.



There was a long development period during the decades when the whole wheels were appearing, up to the mid-17th century when orderly ringing involving changing note patterns began to take place. The combination of the easier control using the whole wheel and the development of change ringing led to increased interest from the lay people, who took over the belfry from the clergy.

The Ordinances of the 'Companie of Ringers of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Lincoln' were sealed on 18 October 1612, making it the oldest surviving Association. There is evidence that ringers were paid by the Cathedral to ring in the late sixteenth century, making this Society the oldest to be able to trace a continuous existence for at least 400 years. The better-known Ancient Society of College Youths was founded in 1637 and continues to this day to provide bell ringers for St Paul's Cathedral and Westminster Abbey.

During the reign of James II (1633-1688) bell ringing became extremely fashionable amongst the aristocracy as it provided physical exercise and intellectual stimulation.

In the rural churches, however, bands of ordinary ringers strived to outdo one another. On days of competition the ringing was often preceded by a large meal at the local pub and followed by the presentation of a 'good hat' or a pair of gloves to each ringer in the band that had performed the best.

The recreation began to flourish in and around London during the late 17th Century which brings us back to Fabian Stedman. Since the publication of those books change ringing has developed considerably with thousands of new methods being devised by enthusiasts, particularly those with a mathematical mind. It is a fascinating hobby which can be enjoyed at all levels, though it takes time to learn the basics of bell handling and control. As well as ringing for church services there are meetings of local groups of ringers affiliated to regional Guilds and Associations. The social side of ringing is very important and no meeting is complete without a slap-

up ringers' tea! Outings are organized for groups of ringers to visit other churches. Once you can ring you can join in other practices and service ringing and can be assured of a warm welcome.

Sadly that is a different world. Since mid-July we have been allowed to ring for services but in a very restricted way, observing all sorts of rules of social distancing and sanitizing. In our case we can ring four our six bells and comply. But we look forward to the day when we can resume our wonderful pastime and the bells of churches across the land peal forth once again.

Linda Drummond-Harris, Tower Captain, St Nicholas, Bromham, Wiltshire

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The Scottish Association of Change Ringers assures us that change ringing is a sociable team musical activity that keeps you fit, stimulates the brain and makes a glorious sound. *Pictures by thee Scottish Association of Change Ringers*

Bridge in Lockdown

Ann Edmonds, Innerleithen

Many of your members have been gardening, baking, walking or just reading a few more good books. I have to confess that these pursuits have only been done in extremis in our household and we have been kept busy playing bridge online.

Knowing that you have a match in the afternoon or evening really galvanises you into action and you find yourself busy getting a meal to enable you to make the most of your time before sitting down to make a slam or two!.

Some folk say 'but it must be so boring not being able to chat to your opponents - but you can chat - you just type it in and soon get used to a different form of play.

If you are a bridge player we can thoroughly recommend getting onto BBO - Bridge Base Online.

Failing this there is always online Scrabble which is great fun and can keep you in touch with your families and it is so competitive. I have a hard job beating my daughter who is very good and has an amazing vocabulary

So I suppose we should all be very grateful that the dreaded virus has given us the chance to hone our various skills - whatever they may be.

No Room at the Inn

Natalie McIntosh, Dundee

March 2020: After a busy Christmas and New Year things were back to normal at the two large hotels at St Andrews and Dundee, 14 miles apart, which I manage. When the fear and reality of Covid19 quickly hit the hospitality industry, the result was significantly fewer guests at both sites. The announcement of hotels closing was something we had never prepared for, and we had to act fast. It turns out closing a hotel is not a simple task, and there are things that needed to be considered that had clearly never been thought of. An example was the locking of the main doors in St. Andrews. One would think locking/unlocking main doors is simple, however, this was not the case. These businesses are designed to be open and operate 24/7, 365 days a year. It turned out locking the doors was easy with the electronic lock and two manual keys. However, getting back in was impossible due to there being no way to unlock the electronic doors from outside the hotel, so the first hurdle we faced was trying to securely close the business. A visit from an engineer to provide an electronic override lock on the external door was the fix we needed to securely lock the doors and regain entry back into site!

The next task was organising for each site to be closed safely which included tasks restaurant furniture cleared, tills closed, health & safety checks done, safe float removed, all kitchen appliances turned off etc. The perishable

food stock from all closed sites, together with all stock our suppliers couldn't deliver to closed hotels was donated to local food banks, providing approximately 130,000 meals to people in need across the UK - something good to come from the hotel closures.

Minimal teams were asked to volunteer to work throughout lockdown, with two teams working a night shift from 7pm as 'caretaking/security' at each site. I never thought I'd see the day where I was in a 148 bedroom hotel with just one other team member. Before Covid, these hotels would be running at high occupancy, often with 300 guests in-house so it was quite a culture shock to have every part of the hotel to ourselves. Having no guests in a hotel can allow for a very productive shift! From deep cleaning every inch of the rooms, reception, kitchen, office space - the hotels were ready to re-open as if brand new. I started a task I realised there was no going back from - take a bottle of bleach and a scrubbing grout brush on the grout in between the tiles across the whole restaurant/reception area. A time consuming task which occupied a few hours, but the difference was worth it. It was a task to break up the tedium of furlough paperwork!

July 2020: opening two hotels is a very stressful process which I wouldn't wish to live through again. We are now back open, running almost full every night and I've never been so grateful to have my full teams back at work and speaking to guests! The new ways of working are interesting. To keep the site as safe as possible every aspect of service has been altered. An example of this is that any unopened individual teas/coffees/butter/jam left on tables after breakfast or in rooms are put into separate tubs in which these items 'quarantine' for 72hrs. After this time these items are safe to use. Condiments in quarantine is part of the new world! The team now model the '2020 attire' of face masks and disposable aprons which is another safety measure in place, and a fashion team has grown to (almost) love.

It's a strange world but the hospitality industry is slowly getting into a new normality. Teams are back at site, rooms are filled with guests and our mornings smell of toast again, with a hint of hand sanitiser in the air! It was a sad sight, seeing the buildings closed up for four months and a harsh reminder of the impact Covid19 has had. Team and guest safety is the most important aspect but here's hoping there are no more lockdowns!

Reflections in Lockdown

Ann Cook, Peebles

As I sat in the garden in the glorious sunshine that blessed us at the beginning of Lockdown I found myself reflecting on the changes the world has seen in the 80 odd years I've been around. The garden at Station Bank was so peaceful; no cars on the road, no aeroplanes in the sky; just birdsong all around us celebrating the burgeoning new life in the garden as though hearts would burst as well as hoping to find the perfect mate.

These thoughts took me back to my childhood holidays on my uncles' farms in Kent. Their war was fought keeping food on our plates and serving in « Dad's Army ». While my father was serving in the RAF my mother and I were able to spend many holidays on the farm where she was born and those of her other brother. Born exactly a year before war broke out, I was young enough to be blissfully unaware of the concerns of my adults. I remember being carried down the garden to the air raid shelter in the middle of the night, of seeing houses where walls had been blown away leaving furnished rooms open to the elements and of watching doodlebugs go over, waiting for the engine to cut out and wondering where they would land, but I never remember feeling afraid. I think that must have had a lot to do with my beautiful calm mother.

On the farms life carried on at a very tranquil pace. I would follow the dairyman to the shed where he milked the few cows kept for the house and I would help him carry the bucket back to the house in the anticipation of a glass of milk still warm from the cow! No fancy milking machines..... Round the other side of the yard were the pigs and, if there were babies, my happiness was complete watching these tiny silky piglets, twelve or so, scrambling over each other to find a teat. I had to be very quiet not to disturb the mother or she might accidentally lie on one. There was the traditional pond in one corner of the yard and across another side was my favourite place, a big old tarred and thatched barn (« just like the one on «The Repair Shop »). On the farm the sun was always hot?! and the barn was cool and shady. Climbing the straw bales with the warm dusty smell of animals and old machinery for company I would find a cosy corner to sit and contemplate until the next adventure or maybe the next meal called.

Some days I would cross the road and walk the mile through cornfields to play with the friends on the next farm. The skylarks sang overhead and the corn was golden, almost ready to harvest, bright with poppies and cornflowers, so if my 5 year old legs wearied I just had a little rest among the

tall grown stalks and listened to the gentle sounds of the natural world going about its daily life. Finally I wandered on to the old Tudor farmhouse where our friends and my young playmates lived. Gas lights had to be lit at Tickenhurst Farm as the light faded. There was no electricity at the flick of a switch! But there was always a jersey cow and my Auntie Peggy would carefully leave the milk to settle in wide pans before skimming off the top to fill a large jug with cream as thick as any I ever had in Devon.

On other days I would take courage and brave the cows in the meadow to reach the apple orchard. The Worcestersters were the earliest apples to ripen . Eaten fresh from the tree there is nothing crisper or sweeter. My mother often chose the ones the wasps had been at, saying they were the sweetest!

If my uncle had errands to do I would jump in the Landrover beside him and off we would go around the farm or into Eastry for supplies. His must have been one of the first land rovers in the country, definitely a workhorse quite unlike the monsters around today.

I remember the delight of a harvested field, the stooks of wheat, oats or barley waiting to be taken to the yard on threshing day . The thresher was a noisy dusty orange coloured machine that « shuggled « the grain from the husks leaving the straw to be built into oblong stacks. A man would throw the bundles of straw up with his pitchfork while men on top, and very occasionally a lucky girl, would build the stack finishing it with thatching that kept the water out, you hoped! Then combine harvesters were invented that removed the grain as it cut leaving a bailer to follow and gather the straw into bales, nowadays they've become great cylindrical plastic blocks!

Having begun reminiscing so many memories come flooding back but this is the place my mind returned to first in the peace and tranquility of our Lockdown garden.

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Wrong-footed in Ireland

Liz Birse, Innerleithen

Don't imagine that before this pandemic life was trouble free. When on holiday driving 'The Troubles' in Ireland with Mr Richards from Southern England, we were enjoying a tour as much as we could cram into a week. Peter & Lee flew into Belfast and we crossed by ferry taking our car. So four people plus luggage plus purchases like Black China, Ketford Glass and Bush Mills made quite a load.

We went south to Eire via the Giant's Cuaseway, Fermanagh Lakes, various mountain ranges and finally a quick sortie into Eire. On our return journey to the airport we had some time in hand and as we crossed the Border into Northern Ireland, Ronald, my husband, saw a sign to Ballykingler, "Oh!" said he, "I did my Army Officer training there, I wonder if it is still a going concern? Let's find out". So along we drove and sure enough found a shop. The Ballykniler Post Office, abutting an Army Camp sign. Ronald got out with his video camera though warned that it was not a wise move. "I'm off to xxxxx Old Boy!"

Whilst he was doing this an army truck filled with soldiers and their rifles passed us and drove into the Army Camp. When Ronald made his way back to the car, the Army lorry appeared and stopped a couple of yards away from us and by the time Ronald appeared the soldiers and their officer were out of the truck and had formed a semi-circle around us with rifles pointing at us. The officer wanted to know exactly who we were, everybody out, boot searched, handbags and wallets opened and passports examined. We did manage to convince the Officer of our innocence of any mal-practice and were told in no uncertain terms of the stupidity of what Ronald had done. By this time we were back in the car and I wound down the window in the seat behind Ronald and said "He was warned not to do this, and when he gets back in the car he'll get Hell!" The Officer looked at me then said to Ronald "Sir, I think I am married to your wife's sister!" Fortunately the incident ended with laughter all around.

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Lockdown on the Peak

Richard Garrett, Hong Kong

As cool waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected all of us in Hong Kong to some extent so I will share with you how life in the East has evolved to cope.

I can't do much exercise these days as the golf course is closed because of the virus. Even before that I had to give up playing a full round as my standard had gone to pot. I will get out again when I can, as even just playing half a round in the fresh air is very nice.

The restrictions on travel have meant that I will not get to the UK this year. They have also created a problem with my writing, I was writing about the history of Shameen Island – the old British/French concession at Canton (Guangzhou). Well I have just about completed that but need to go

there to check on some final details and take some extra photographs – and I can't go. Annoying, as I had just renewed my China Visa. The other thing I got into writing about was Macau. I had done a small booklet – self-published – on the Praya Grande and decided to expand that to include the rest of the main peninsula of Macau. It's amazing what you find when you look into things. An example relates to the Dom Pedro theatre which was actually founded as part of a club. The Union Club came to an end because of a delightful scandal when an officer behaved inappropriately with a married woman there. Not the sort of union they had in mind when they named the club! The club was then reinvented as the Macau Club which is still there. Of course, I can't even get to Macau to check on anything there but I have sent the draft to the Macau Cultural Institute to see if they would consider publishing it.

Hong Kong is not fully locked down, but restaurants are very restricted so it's not easy to eat out. Thankfully, Grace is a good cook – she had a good teacher – so I am well looked after at home. The shops are open, but I never was one for browsing so just going in quickly for essentials is not too much of a hardship. Of course, everyone here wears a mask. It's required on any public transport and most public places and people are very good about it – no-one complains.

The drugs that I have been prescribed for my lungs seem to have given me a boost of energy so have been catching up jobs around the house. I have also finally got around to sorting out some things and have started to throw a bit away. An old computer, which had given up the ghost a few years back, finally hit the tip yesterday. I am going to get a new computer, there's nothing much wrong with my present one but the printer is playing up. When I went to buy a new printer, I found that the new models are incompatible with the old Windows. You just can't win. I shall just have to get up to date. Probably it will be good for me as I have been fighting nostalgia for some time now – I even stopped my subscription to *Slightly Foxed*.

Hong Kong has got off fairly lightly with the virus although restrictions are likely to last for some time yet – until someone comes up with a cure/vaccine. It doesn't affect me too badly and in many ways we are probably better off than most. Of course, the other thing that has affected Hong Kong is the Security Law. It all started off innocently enough. A young man murdered a girl in Taiwan and escaped back to HK when it was found there was no way to send him back for trial. So, the obvious thing was to

enact an extradition law. When that was proposed people suddenly thought that might mean that they could get extradited to China – heaven forbid – so they all took to the streets in protest. What an evil Government we must have to even think of it! Fairly quickly the proposed law was dropped but the protesters started calling for all sorts of other things including democracy and independence. Obviously, that wasn't going to go anywhere and things got out of hand. No wonder the Chinese finally said enough is enough and have come down with a heavy hand. It's a bit sad but it gives Trump and Boris something to rave about to try and improve their approval ratings. No doubt it will all die down eventually, and HK will get back to something like normal. It may be a new normal after the virus, but that is likely to be the case everywhere. So that's the situation in August 2020.

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Japan's Mystery

Though I am Japanese I have been in Scotland for nearly 11 years and I only read some news from Japan online and I don't know much about the pandemic situation in Japan so I am not sure if I am qualified to speak about this topic... but there you are.

It was earlier than the UK that the first wave of covid19 arrived in Japan. I think it was February when it became headline news in Japan. Since then Japan seems to be coping relatively well considering the fact that Japan has never been in lockdown. As of end of September the total deaths from Covid19 is 1564.

The Japanese government never made official 'orders' to wear facemasks, close shops or limit social gatherings between households. There is no penalty or fines for not following the guidelines. Then why do people still follow the rules? I think it is because Japanese society has strong social pressure to behave like others do - people wear facemasks if everyone else does,

they stop going to crowded places voluntarily, shops decide to close without 'orders' from government.

The handling of the pandemic by Japanese government has been shambolic so far by any standard. Even patient Japanese people are fed up with the slow response of the government so it was no surprise that Prime Minister Abe decided to step down before the end of his term.

In the early stages of the pandemic there was a shortage of facemasks so the government decided to provide 2 facemasks for 'each' house hold - whether there were 10 people in the family or just a single person! Then it took months for the masks to arrive at each house hold. By the time masks finally arrived there were much better quality ones in the shops anyway. The government masks were very old fashioned and small - people jokingly called them 'Abenomask' (Abe's mask) named after his famous economy strategy 'Abenomix'.

Despite the bad handling of the pandemic by the government the situation in Japan is not as bad as here. It is a mystery even to Japanese people why Japan has not been affected much worse. My family in Nagasaki is leading life pretty much as normal, just with the extra precaution of hand sanitising and wearing masks when they go out.

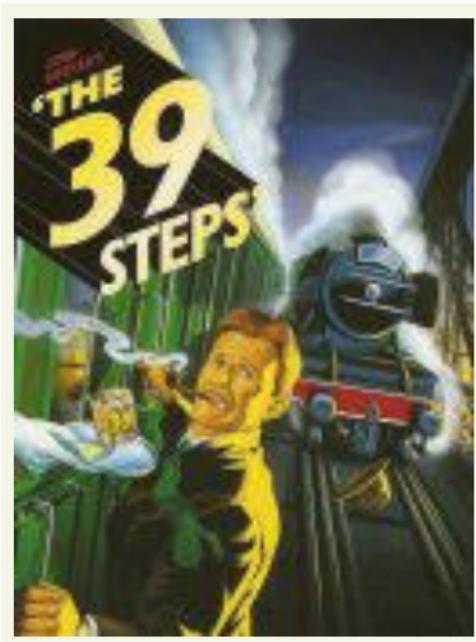
I am hoping that this pandemic will be over soon so I can go back home to see my family!

Muted Museum

A small museum at the centre of the High Street in Peebles, well supported by local volunteers and popular with locals and visitors was forced to close at the end of March by the introduction of the lockdown restrictions and has remained closed ever since.

Dedicated to the life and legacy of John Buchan, well-known author, diplomat, historian and statesman who died in 1940 while he was Governor-General of Canada, having spent much of his early life in the upper Tweed Valley, and later in life was created 1st Baron Tweedsmuir.

The Museum displays a comprehensive selection of items and in the absence of a live visit, there are many items displayed, including a virtual tour, on the website (www.johnbuchanstory.co.uk) and YouTube in the *JohnBuchanStory* account.



The hero of John Buchan's best-known novel, the Thirty-Nine Steps, was Richard Hannay. When lockdown came, he was dozing quietly, thinking it was time to get out of bed when suddenly the telephone rang. It was the Prime Minister who, with agents of the Intelligence Service begged for Hannay's help in tracking down the sinister villains intent on capturing a vaccine known to counter the Covid-19 virus. Quickly packing his laptop, mobile phone and facemask he raced to Edinburgh airport and flew to Heathrow where he was picked up and driven to an inconspicuous

villa in the leafy suburb of Barnes. Here he was briefed by the Security and

Intelligence Services and was given special access to 6G, the fastest and most integrated broadband service in Europe. Fully briefed, Hannay, a skilled computer hacker, soon established that the villains knew the vaccine was stored in a secret warehouse in Europe and that the entire stock was destined for an unfriendly nation. He then established that a substantial amount was due to be flown to a neutral country first, so working flat out on his laptop, Hannay was able to crack the code and divert the unmanned carrier drone to land near London at an RAF base, known for its high-level security clearance. From there the vaccine was distributed to major chemical companies for mass production and distribution, in the hope that it would control and finally eliminate Covid-19. And the sinister villains? They never knew who had thwarted them...

Richard Hannay, never one to seek publicity, discreetly took a cab to King's Cross, caught the night train to Edinburgh and was soon back in his retirement home in the centre of Peebles, weary but content, within the glass fronted display case in the John Buchan Story Museum



Dentistry in Lockdown

Richard Turton, Peebles

As a dentist in a 'family dental practice' the emergence of a potentially fatal respiratory virus was very unwelcome to say the least! Every interaction with a patient involves working in the vicinity of salivary fluids which can contain the Covid-19 virus, so we are classed as being in a high-risk profession. As the virus is carried in saliva, dental procedures that involve distributing saliva into the air are the riskiest. They are called AGP's-airborne generating procedures. When we use the 'high speed' drill water is sprayed onto the dental bur to cool it down, when we dry teeth with the air syringe we naturally spray saliva and the hygienist's ultrasonic scaler requires water cooling too.

We were instructed on 23rd March that we must close our surgery to all patients. From then on, we had to triage patients by phone and devise new ways of treating their problems without meeting them. For patients with broken teeth we could tell them to try to file rough bits with an emery board, to stick blue-tac or the red wax coating of a 'Babybel' over the rough bits! I resorted to leaving packs with a few cotton rolls and some temporary dental cement in a plant pot for the patients to collect and do DIY dentistry. For patients in pain I could advise them of which and how much of an 'over-the-counter' analgesic was appropriate to relieve the pain. For patients with severe pain or swellings suggestive of dental abscess I left a prescription for anti-biotics in the plant pot for them to collect and take to a pharmacy. In normal times I would see the patient and either extract the tooth or carry out the emergency part of root canal treatment to relieve the pain and save the tooth. As we were not able to see patients this meant that dentists, in general, were daily giving out many more anti-biotics than normal. Dentists generally try to avoid prescribing antibiotics unless absolutely necessary as we do not want to increase the risk of anti-biotic resistance in future, but in these strange circumstances we had no option.

Dentists and dental nurses are used to wearing PPE-the acronym for Personal Protective Equipment that has become common place in most people's vocabulary since March 2020 -as we always wear fresh gloves and face masks for every patient, but the usual protective equipment was deemed to be insufficient to combat this new threat, so we had to be 'fitted' for new masks with a FFP3 rating. This means Filtering Facepiece level 3, so it filters airborne particles to an efficiency of 98%. The fitting involves wearing a sample of the mask and then a hood that looks like a bee- keeper on top. A liquid is sprayed inside the mask and then the individual must

carry out a regime of specific movements to confirm that they cannot taste the liquid, so proving that the mask is forming a satisfactory seal around the mouth. (The masks subsequently supplied by Scottish Government had an expiry date of 2014!)

Later during 'lockdown' there were 2 emergency clinics organised the Scottish Borders so happily there was somewhere I could refer the patients in extreme pain. The dentists working at the clinics could still not do any of the AGP procedures, so any patients referred there with severe pain unfortunately had to accept extraction of an otherwise saveable tooth.

On 13th July we were informed that we could return to our practices to see patients, but the NHS has deemed that AGP procedures cannot be carried out until in Scotland we enter phase 4 of the risk assessment-basically 'back to normal'. We are permitted to carry out these procedures on private, non-NHS, patients if we have carried out a full risk assessment of the procedure-I still don't fully understand why it is different either-politics regarding who is the governing body overseeing dentists in NHS and private practices! For these procedures we must wear a thick gown and the FFP3 fitted masks throughout the procedures and we then must leave the surgery empty for 1 hour before we start to clean it. Thus, these procedures are only carried out at the end of the morning and end of the day so severely reducing the number of patients we can treat.

I am happy that we are now able to see patients in the surgery for routine examinations so we can assess them for oral diseases and oral cancer but without the use of air to dry teeth we are not able to do 'proper examinations'. We can treat a limited number of patients for definitive treatment, but it appears that it will be a while yet until we can return to a normal service.

When the Music Stops

Simon Barratt, Teddington,

As an international stage manager running arena shows across all continents, including world tours for major artists, all of which are complex and expensive affairs. At times things do not always go to plan, so it is not unusual that we have to take speedy corrective action to keep the show on the road, but the Coronavirus pandemic is something none of us could anticipate or correct. Our industry collapsed overnight in mid-March and

there is still no sign of it returning from Lockdown. We were the first to go and will be the last to come back

Working with artists such as Sam Smith, Will Young, Sam Ronson, Hugh Laurie and Eartha Kitt in large venues including Wembley Stadium, Madison Square Gardens, Sydney Opera House, Princes Street Gardens in Edinburgh at Hogmonay and inside the Kremlin at the end of another year, all capable of accommodating audiences in excess of 10,000, it can take some 18 months to arrange a world tour. The logistics of any tour involves the venues, people, equipment, transport and support services such that what seems a small problem in any link in this complex chain can throw the entire tour into disarray. Until recently we have always managed to cope, but when simultaneously all venues are declared inaccessible, air transport is globally grounded and virtually all other services are closed indefinitely, all as the result of the world-wide reaction to the Coronavirus pandemic, the effect was catastrophic. My industry collapsed overnight in mid- March and there is still no sign of it coming back, we were the first to go and will be the last to come back.

The Government has put up money to save the venues which is admirable but unfortunately venues don't create shows, they are just an empty space and there is a huge supply chain of self-employed workers and companies that actually build the shows. Most people think that when they go to see a show at Wembley everything is already there and the band just turn up and perform, so let me lay out what happens on a show day at Wembley Arena for example.

6am: our production team arrive with anything up to 25 large trucks.

The first few trucks are put on the loading docks

Our mobile kitchen and chefs load in to prepare breakfast for everybody

Our production office loads in and sets up.

Our dressing room team load in all the wardrobe cases and dressing room furniture for the artists.

Our rigging team load in up to 100 electric chain motors and hoist them in to the roof structure on ropes which will support the lighting rig and video screens.

Our staging team load in the stage at the other end of the room and start building the stage while the lighting and video screens are being prepped on the floor, ready to be raised up to the roof.

At about 11am the lighting and video screens are flown off the floor by the motors and the stage which is on wheels is rolled across the room and underneath the lighting rig.

All this activity is achieved by the 80-100 people travelling with the tour and living on the 12 tour busses parked outside, assisted by 100 or so local humpers that unload the trucks and help each department to set up the gear

Usually around midday the sound department load in and set up a few truck-loads of loud speakers. At the same time the carpenters complete the stage set, then finally the band equipment is positioned on the stage. Technical checks, testing and problem solving take until 4 pm when the band musicians arrive for an hour of soundchecks. Finally there are more problem solving and technical testing, while the merchandising team set up their stall at the entrance for the sale of T-shirts, caps, CDs etc until doors open around 6 pm.

Our catering team now serve a three course dinner to over 100 in a mobile restaurant , with a choice of three mains.

Show starts, support band performs

Main show follows

The second the show is over we start ripping everything out and re-loading the trucks with our 100 local helpers

Finish dis-assembly around 1 or 2 am....wash & shower...caterers load the busses with late night sandwiches and snacks

Crawl into our bunk beds on the buses, drive overnight to next venue and do it all again tomorrow.

Maybe three shows in a row followed by a day off in a hotel.

There are thousands of people across the UK who make this all happen, they get no sick pay, no holiday pay and work on a hand to mouth basis, all have experienced lean times without work, which is par for the course, but this Lockdown situation is devastating. If the Government don't extend furlough for people doing this kind of work, the supply companies which make these events happen are going to start collapsing like dominoes, so in the end even when we get the green light to work there won't be any loudspeakers or lights or video screens or busses and trucks or caterers left or experienced staff to get the shows up and running again. If you realize that putting a world tour together on paper alone takes around 9 months you can see this is a massive problem

As a safeguard, I am currently re-training in case my job never comes back, meaning that 25 years of experience and a unique skill-set that cannot be learned in a classroom may be lost and gone forever; very sad.

We all understand what we do isn't really important at the end of the day, or is it? It is fairly clear that music and song play some role in helping many get through the day, it may also offer therapeutic aid to the mental health of some.

Although the major tours with internationally recognized artists provide work for hundreds across the world, the music and entertainments sector provide events of all sizes, A wedding at Mount Stuart House on the Isle of Bute for an American couple who flew in with an air-plane of guests and where the ring was delivered to the arm of the waiting groom by an owl, a special 50th party on a sunny Eastern European beach for a successful Midlands business-man, and a memorable fancy-dress birthday party for a young Royal at Windsor Castle, gate-crashed by someone dressed as Osama bin Laden and many more.

Even if peripheral to many, this industry is a multi-billion pound earner, it supports the families of hundreds of thousands of people around the world and generates a very substantial tax income for the UK Government.

Despite the upsurge of a second wave of Coronavirus infections, it is hoped that eventually we will emerge from lockdown to a socially inclusive norm, but in the meantime.....

We need saving!



.....and there is lods more to come in the book

Lockdown Life

Still time to contribute ---within the next week

Out in time for Christmas