

# Senior Citizens Forum Newsletter April 2020

## Message from the Chairperson, Celia Steventon

Hello again. I'm writing this just before Easter, today is lovely and sunny and the gardens are beginning to spring back to life and lighter nights are on the horizon, all very positive.

We are experiencing very difficult times but I'm sure if we follow the government guidelines, keep washing our hands, staying at home and looking out for friends and neighbours we will overcome this invisible challenge. Our thoughts are with anyone who has lost a loved one or is currently fighting this illness and we wish them a speedy recovery.

We're very happy that we're still able to send you our magazine, but we've cancelled all our events and activities. Along with our website and Facebook, we'll do our best to keep you informed about where you can get support.

The Forum is offering regular phone contact to help you feel a little less isolated (see page 5), so call us if you would like a friendly chat or are feeling a bit anxious.

Keep well and look forward to getting back to normal in a few months.

## Cancelled events & activities

Monday 27th April 2020  
Legally Speaking...

This event has been cancelled.

The Forum has suspended all its events and activities which bring older people together, until further notice.

We will attempt to hold the 'Legally Speaking...' event at a later date.

Also cancelled until further notice:

Computer drop in sessions  
Senior Social @The Wakes  
Seated Exercise Class at the Wakes  
Spring Celebrating Age event

## Newsletter Magazine

If we can, we will produce and send the magazine to our members every two months as usual. We aim to keep you updated about available news, where you can get support and ways to help everyone get through the next few months.

We will not be providing copies for collection within the community until some restrictions have been lifted.

Please encourage friends and relatives to subscribe to the Forum to receive a magazine, so we can keep as many people as possible well informed. (See pages 26/27 about joining the Forum)

## Self - isolation doesn't mean having to manage alone

Are you are struggling and need some help?  
Are you feeling anxious and alone?

Telford Senior Citizens Forum is offering telephone support to older people who are feeling isolated, worried and need some help.

We have a team of friendly volunteers ready and very willing to contact you by phone on a regular basis to chat and check that you're coping OK.

In the current situation it's very easy to feel anxious and unsettled. The daily news can add to our anxiety, along with concerns about getting the shopping and medications we need. We might feel OK some of the time, but have other days when it all seems too hard to cope with.

Many of us will be coping alone without anyone to maintain regular contact. Some will be coping OK but feeling a bit lonely and isolated, missing normal activities and being able to spend time with family and friends.

Whatever your need, we can help. Call us on 07932 828333 or 07552 975676  
Mon - Fri, 10am - 4pm (leave a message outside of these hours)

## Can you help?

Would you be willing to be one of our telephone befrienders? Could you spend some time every week supporting others with a friendly phone call?

We might not need everyone who offers their help, but if demand becomes high, we want to be able to offer the support that people need.

If you'd like to help, please call Chris 07932 828333 or Wendy 07552 975676 or email [enquiries@twseniors.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@twseniors.org.uk) to find out more.

## Where else can I get help?

Are you staying at home but have no-one to do your shopping and fetch your prescription?

### **Telford & Wrekin Council**

Support for people in urgent need of assistance who don't have other help and support.

You can call their Community Support Team on 01952 382030.

Lines are open Mon to Fri, 9am to 5pm, Sat and Sun, 9am to 1pm.

You can also request help online at [www.telford.gov.uk/coronavirus](http://www.telford.gov.uk/coronavirus) and a member of the team will call you back.

### **Age UK Shropshire Telford & Wrekin**

Telephone support and help with delivering groceries and medications.

Call 01743 233123, Mon - Fri, 10am - 4pm.

Age UK national helpline: 0800 169 6565

Lots of useful information can be found on the Age UK website:

[www.ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/coronavirus/staying-safe-and-well-at-home/](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/coronavirus/staying-safe-and-well-at-home/)

### **Telford Churches**

Support with food parcels, prescriptions, dog walking, telephone chats. Call Sharon on 01952 505108.

### **Citizens Advice Telford & Wrekin**

General advice, tel 01952 567193

Food parcels, tel 01952 567174

## What to do if you have symptoms

Do not go to a GP surgery, pharmacy or hospital.

Call 111 or use the 111 online coronavirus service to find out what to do if you have:

a high temperature

a new, continuous cough – this means coughing a lot for more than an hour, or 3 or more coughing episodes in 24 hours (if you usually have a cough, it may be worse than usual)

or you're not sure

## Coronavirus and Scams

by NATIONALTRADINGSTANDARDS

Be aware of scams and protect yourself and others

Coronavirus and Scams

Coronavirus testing kits - these are only offered by the NHS

- Vaccines or miracle cures - there is currently no vaccine or cure
- Overpriced or fake goods to protect yourself from coronavirus such as anti-bacterial products
- Shopping or medication collection services

- Offers to clean your home of coronavirus

Protect yourself and others:

If you are unsure, check with family and friends before accepting offers of help

Be aware of people offering or selling:

- Don't assume everyone is genuine. It's okay to reject, refuse or ignore any requests. If someone attempts to pressure you into accepting a service then they are unlikely to be genuine.
- Don't be rushed into making a decision, if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.
- Only buy goods or services from trusted sellers and think before parting with money or personal information.

For advice on scams call the Citizens Advice Consumer Helpline on 0800 223 11 33

To report a scam call Action Fraud on 0300 123 2040

Contact your bank if you think you have been scammed.

## 20 ideas to keep you busy

1. Do puzzles, a jigsaw or some colouring in.
2. Read books, write a book, keep a journal.
3. Binge watch a must-see boxset/film series or old feel good movies.
4. Make a photo album or scrap book.
5. Tidy the garden, mow the lawn, plant some seeds and flowers.
6. Try some new recipes, bake, make jams or preserves.
7. Learn how to knit/crochet, sew something.
8. Exercise, have a dance, go for a short walk.
9. Make a travel bucket list.
10. Learn a language.
11. Redecorate a room, fix something.
12. Call a friend or family member, video call your grandchildren.
13. Play a game, card games, board games, computer games.
14. Learn to play an instrument.
15. Bird watch, create a bird feeder.
16. Sort through paperwork, clear out your old clothes.
17. Research your family tree or a topic of interest.
18. Listen to a podcast, radio show or audiobook.
19. Try some arts and crafts, or some woodwork.
20. Create a home spa, a bubble bath, face masks, foot spa.

In other words, seek out activities that will uplift, entertain or educate you! Stay positive!

Why not write to the Forum? We'd like to hear how you're coping, what you're doing to keep busy - we may even publish it in a future edition.

## Keep yourself fit!

You can still go for a walk or walk the dog, preferably only once a day and keeping your distance from other walkers.

There is plenty you can do in the house and garden (weather permitting, of course). You can follow exercise routines on YouTube, dance to your favourite music or try the simple chair exercise below.

Sarah Gamble- Warner who runs our weekly seated exercise class has shared a simple chair exercise everyone can do at home.

Sit on an upright chair.

Point your right foot on the floor in front of you, and bring it back.

Do the same with the left foot.

Dig your right heel in front of you, and bring it back.

Do the same with your left heel.

Tighten up your abdominal (tummy muscles) and lift your right leg with the knee bent, and put it down.

Do the same with your left leg.

Take your right leg straight out and put it down.

Do the same with your left leg.

You can do this 4 times through then work the arms instead.

Point your right arm in front and bring it back. Same with the left arm.

Push your right arm out in front and bring it back. Same with the left arm.

Flex your right arm from the elbow and lower it, same with the left arm.

Take your right arm up past your ear towards the ceiling and bring back down. Do the same with your left arm.

Repeat 4 times. Have fun!

Find more simple exercises, like the one below, to do at home, at [www.saga.co.uk/membership/articles/workouts-and-exercises-to-do-at-home](http://www.saga.co.uk/membership/articles/workouts-and-exercises-to-do-at-home)

Face the Wall Press-up.

Stand about a foot away from a wall, with your feet hip-width apart. Place your hands flat against the wall and lean forward until your forehead is nearly touching the wall, then push back to your starting position. Repeat this move 12-15 times (or until you begin to feel as though you can't do another repetition).

## Get outside and enjoy the sunshine

While staying at home it's important to get some fresh air and feel the lovely warm spring sunshine. If you have a garden, make use of your time to get some gardening tasks done, providing exercise, fresh air and vitamin D from the sun. If you struggle to get out into your garden or you don't have one, open your windows, stick your head outside and take in a good lungful of fresh air, or open your front door and stand on the door step, keeping your distance from others.

If you are a keen gardener, many retailers sell and deliver plants, seeds, compost, pots, equipment to your door, if you order online or by phone. If you're not online, ask a family member to place the order for you.

Plant some seeds or plug plants that produce colourful flowers, we all need a bit of colour to brighten us up.

Try growing some veg in pots from seeds or from plug plants, herbs, salad leaves, spinach, beetroot, dwarf French beans, potatoes and dwarf carrots will all do well in containers.

If you can, mow the lawn, re-edge it, rake the moss out and get rid of those weeds. Clean the greenhouse, sort out the shed, paint the fence.

Feed the birds – send off for some feeders and bird food and get started or sow some native plants into a container or in a corner of your garden.

Send off for some strawberry plants, or have a go at growing tomatoes, add a good dose of organic fertiliser to give them a good start.

Or just sit on your patio, read, do a puzzle. Have lunch outside, or sit with your coffee, tea or glass of something stronger, feel that lovely sunshine. It'll lift your spirits and help us look forward to getting back to normal.

## When was toilet paper invented and what did people use before?

As coronavirus takes over our daily lives, there seems to be one thing that people around the world cannot go without the most.

The Ancient Greeks used shards of clay or pottery; the Romans, in their communal toilets, shared a sponge on a stick rinsed out in a bucket of saltwater (or a vinegar solution); and in pre-colonial American civilisations, let's just say that they didn't just use corn cobs for eating. In some societies, cloths or materials like wool, lace and hemp became the wiping choice for the wealthy, but, seriously, humans used anything. Not even mentioned yet are stones, seashells, fruit skins and fur (well, it's good enough for animals).

As for paper, perhaps it should come as no surprise that the first to see its benefits in the bathroom were the Chinese. The earliest-known record comes from AD 589, when an official named Yan Zhitui wrote that he "dare not use" any paper on which has been written quotations from the Five Classics (seminal texts in Confucianism) or the names of sages for "toilet purposes". In the 14th century, the emperor issued a decree calling for paper measuring two feet by three feet for his bathroom needs. Best not to think on why he needed such large sheets!

Yet it would still be centuries later that toilet paper truly got on a roll, as it were. People had begun using old magazines, but, in 1857, New York-based entrepreneur Joseph Gayetty started selling the first commercially packaged toilet paper. Marketed as "The greatest necessity of the age!", his 'Medicated Paper' came in single sheets infused with aloe and had been intended as a medical treatment to cure haemorrhoids. On each sheet was Gayetty's name, although why he wanted people to clean themselves with his name is best left known only to him.

His sheets weren't strong, however, and it took more than two decades or so before toilet paper came in perforated rolls. That said, the quality of the paper meant splinters were a common problem – 3-ply, ultra-soft toilet paper was a dream that wouldn't be realised until the 20th century.

(Taken from historyextra.com)

## Environment & Transport Action Group, by Dave Wright, ETAG Chair

During this worrying time with COVID-19 impacting on our lives there are still people out there who want to take money or our identities from us illegally. The Driver Vehicle Licencing Authority (DVLA) has released some of the cons being used by scammers to trick motorists into handing over their money. New figures show a 20% increase in scams reported to DVLA, in the last three months of 2019.

The DVLA has released information to help motorists be aware of what to look out for and to issue a clear warning - if something offered online or by text message appears too good to be true, then it almost certainly is.

Scammers are targeting unsuspecting customers with links to services that don't exist and fake messages about tax refunds, as well as offering driver and vehicle documents for sale on the internet. The estimated cost of fraud to the UK is £190bn a year. Be Aware DON'T LET IT BE YOU.

### Quick tips

Ensure you are using the GOV.UK website. Avoid other sites that offer help with licenses, vehicle registration and road tax.

The DVLA never sends emails asking for personal or payment information.

Look out for sites and messages asking you to call premium rate numbers. DVLA numbers start with 0300.

Avoid sharing images of your registration plate online.

DVLA never send texts about tax refunds.

Report suspected scams to Action Fraud on 0300 123 2040.

More details at [www.gov.uk/government/news/7-tips-for-motorists-to-stay-safe-online](http://www.gov.uk/government/news/7-tips-for-motorists-to-stay-safe-online)

## What if my MOT is due?

Your car, motorcycle, light van or other light vehicle's MOT expiry date will be automatically extended by 6 months if it's due on or after Monday 30 March 2020. This means that your vehicle will still have a valid MOT certificate for an extra 6 months. You do not need to do anything, however, you must keep your vehicle safe to drive.

## Chickens and man flu top tax evaders' excuses.

DVLA (Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency) has released some of the more inventive excuses that people have used this year for not taxing their vehicles.

"I can't tax my van because it's full of chickens..." was just one of the excuses people used this year for not taxing their vehicles, according to information published today by the DVLA.

Some of the more inventive excuses are listed below (spoiler alert, none of them worked):

"I'm about to start a prison sentence, so is there any way you could hang on to my ice cream van for six months 'til I get out?"

"I would've taxed my van but my bitter ex put four live chickens in it."

"I know it was untaxed, but I didn't think you'd clamp cars in a heatwave."

"I forgot to tax it as I was looking after the kids (aged 19 and 26)."

"I couldn't tax my car as I've had man flu and have been stuck in bed for 4 weeks."

"I would've taxed the car, but you clamped it so early in the morning (the car was clamped at lunchtime)."

DVLA Chief Executive Julie Lennard said: "While we know that the vast majority of motorists tax their cars on time, there are still some who choose not to. Taxing your car is so easy to do online, so there really is no excuse - even if it is filled with chickens!"

The DVLA still send reminders to motorists when their vehicle tax is due. However, they can also check when their vehicle tax is due 24 hours a day, 7 days a week by going to the Vehicle Enquiry Service on GOV.UK.

It's possible to check when vehicle tax is due on Amazon Alexa and Google Home, Android mobile phone or Android tablet on "Talk to DVLA" or "Ask DVLA".

Motorists can also tax their vehicle online or by phoning 0300 123 4321 on the automated 24-hour service.

## New local charity offers free one-to-one help for those who struggle to read.

It is taken for granted that we all went to school, learned to read and write, and that we all have the same level of reading ability. However, many thousands of adults missed out on the opportunity to during the short period in their lives when the basic foundations of this skill are acquired. In fact, research shows that over 7% of adults never learned to read at school! In Telford and Wrekin alone, this figure is 8,000 + adults.

It may be one thing not to enjoy the pleasure of reading a new title by your favourite author, but stop for a minute and think how different things would be if you were excluded from reading altogether and struggled to do some of the everyday things that most of us take for granted. Just imagine how your life would be if you could not read forms, follow medicine instructions, understand letters from your electricity supplier or read bedtime stories to your child or grandchild?

It is never too late to learn

Help is at hand, Read Easy Telford and Wrekin, a branch of the National Literacy Charity Read Easy, has recently been set up to provide free one-to-one coaching for people in Telford and Wrekin who struggle with reading.

Read Easy understands that, throughout their lives, many people struggling with reading have found ways to avoid situations where their ability might be on display to be seen by others. They understand that many people will want to learn to read but feel too embarrassed to seek help, especially if it brings back memories of their childhood classroom experiences, which is why their service has been designed to help new readers feel as comfortable as possible about taking the brave step to learn.

Read Easy matches up a new reader with a trained reading coach to help them work together through reading manuals, at a quiet private location, at a time to suit them both. It is as easy as that and it is free! Reading sessions last half an hour and take place twice a week. Some people complete the course in as little as a year, while others can take more than two years. The important thing is that everyone can learn at their own pace without feeling rushed. The service is designed to be flexible to suit the individual and there are no targets or exams to worry about.

Learning to read transforms people's lives

Through learning to read people grow enormously in confidence, self-esteem and independence as well as being able to navigate through the world of the written word.

How to get in touch

Read Easy Telford and Wrekin supports readers throughout the Telford and Wrekin borough.

If you would like to find out more, or you know someone who would like to learn to read contact Jane Reeves on 07875 307981 or email her at [telfordandwrekin@readeasy.org.uk](mailto:telfordandwrekin@readeasy.org.uk)

If you would like to become a volunteer contact [alan@readeasy.org.uk](mailto:alan@readeasy.org.uk)

National Website: [www.readeasy.org.uk](http://www.readeasy.org.uk)

Due to the Covid-19 situation, Read Easy has confirmed that one to one activity is currently suspended but enquiries are still welcome.

## Could you build a dementia friendly community in your area?

Dementia-friendly communities work best when they're led by local people. They are vital in helping people live well with dementia and remain a part of their community. Small steps, such as raising awareness of dementia can make a real difference and help people to understand the symptoms as well as diminish the stigma still associated with it. In Telford and Wrekin, Newport is already working to become a dementia friendly community but where you live could be a great place to start another one!!!

So, if you are interested in making your area more dementia friendly and know other people who would be interested in helping, get them involved. Your group can get support from the Alzheimer's Society 'Dementia Friendly Communities Officers' as well as from the Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin Dementia Action Alliance. You can also get national recognition of your efforts through the Alzheimer's Society 'Dementia Friendly Communities Programme'.

To find out more, e-mail Mary Latter, Chair of the Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin Dementia Action Alliance at [marylatter@live.co.uk](mailto:marylatter@live.co.uk) or Kat Horner, Dementia Friendly Communities Officer, West Mids at [Kat.Horner@alzheimers.org.uk](mailto:Kat.Horner@alzheimers.org.uk)

## Poems

I heard a little rumour....

I heard a little rumour,  
I don't know if it's true,  
That the world is going to be at peace,  
For at least a month or maybe two.

I heard that folk must stay at home,  
and spend time with their kin,  
Slow down relax and take a breath,  
And find some peace within.

And though we may be worried,  
About money, jobs and bills,  
We will notice beauty everywhere,  
Blue skies, fresh lakes, green hills.

And when a month or two is over,  
And we can all go back to our lives,  
People will show gratitude,  
That their loved ones all survived.

(Unknown)

And the people stayed home.

And the people stayed home. And read books, and listened, and rested, and exercised, and made art, and played games, and grew gardens full of fresh food, and learned new ways of being, and were still. And listened more deeply. Some meditated, some prayed, some danced. Some met their shadows. And the people began to think differently.

And the people healed. And, in the absence of people living in ignorant, dangerous, mindless, and heartless ways, the earth began to heal.

And when the danger passed, and the people joined together again, they grieved their losses, and made new choices, and dreamed new images, and created new ways to live and heal the earth fully, as they had been healed.

Kitty O'Meara

## A Little Poem For Seniors

Another year has passed  
And we're all a little older.  
Last summer felt hotter  
And winter seems much colder.

There was a time not long ago  
When life was quite a blast.  
Now I fully understand  
About 'Living in the Past'

We used to go to weddings,  
Football games and lunches..  
Now we go to funeral homes  
And after-funeral brunches.

We used to go out dining,  
And couldn't get our fill.  
Now we ask for doggie bags,  
Come home and take a pill.  
We used to often travel  
To places near and far.  
Now we get sore asses  
From riding in the car.

We used to go to nightclubs  
And drink a little booze.  
Now we stay home at night  
And watch the evening news.

That, my friend is how life is,  
And now my tale is told.  
So, enjoy each day and live it up...  
Before you're too damned old!

(Unknown)

## Cancelled holiday plans? What are my options?

### Cancelled flights

All flights on EU carriers within, or into the EU, and all flights starting from an EU airport, are protected by the EU's "denied boarding" rules, which requires refunds or rerouting when flights are cancelled. That hasn't stopped a number of airlines offering alternative flights or vouchers with refunds only being processed by customer services which, of course, is impossible to contact.

In the face of a no-refund policy, what should I do?

Taking the offer of replacement vouchers is highly risky, as the lockdown may continue and some airlines may not be around in six months. While vouchers seem better than nothing, it's worth insisting on a refund. The difficulty comes with enforcing your rights at a time when airlines and travel companies are struggling to survive. If your flight cost more than £100 and was booked using a credit card, you can contact the card provider for help.

Will travel insurance cover it?

As the government has advised against all but essential travel, most travel insurance policies should pay foreign trip cancellation claims, but only if you bought your policy before 11 March. If the airline fails, only about half of travel insurance policies include scheduled airline failure insurance.

What about accommodation?

If you booked accommodation in the UK, and the owner is refusing to give you a refund, there is sadly not a great deal you can do. The threat of legal action to reclaim denied payments, may be enough to force a refund. Ultimately, you may have to go to court to get the money back, but who knows when that will be possible. Airbnb is offering the chance to cancel without incurring fees for bookings made before, 14 March, with a check-in date up until 14 April 2020, although this will most likely be extended.

I booked a tour package, can I get a refund?

You are much better placed, if your package holiday has been cancelled, to get a full refund. Also, if the tour operator collapses before it is able to compensate you, the government backed ATOL scheme is there to step in.

What about trips later in 2020?

For trips from July onwards, it's best to wait and see. There is little to be gained by cancelling now.

What about the trains? Can I get ticket refunds?

You are entitled to a refund if the company cancels your train, if you need to cancel because you're staying at home, contact the rail company or the company the ticket was bought from.

(Based on an article in the Guardian. Please check with the travel companies, the situation and their policies may have changed by the time you read this)

## Online resources to help you through the next few months.

'Going out' now means leaving the sitting room!

Saga have set up a new section of their website called the 'notgoingoutclub' featuring ideas about things to do and useful advice for those for whom 'going out' now means leaving the sitting room.

The weekly blog includes 'Wildlife Watch', suggestions for good TV, quizzes, puzzles and exercise tips.

Find it at [www.saga.co.uk/membership/categories/communities](http://www.saga.co.uk/membership/categories/communities)

Other websites offering lots of articles, items of interest, things to do, include:

[www.silversurfers.com](http://www.silversurfers.com)

[www.maturetimes.co.uk](http://www.maturetimes.co.uk)

Gransnet - [www.gransnet.com](http://www.gransnet.com)

Gransnet is a busy social networking site for the over 50's with a range of forums where users can chat, debate and support each other through tough times and share a laugh. It's free to join and you don't have to be a grandparent. You don't have to register to read the forums, but once you do, you can post and join in the conversation.

Stitch - [www.stitch.net](http://www.stitch.net)

Stitch is for over 50's and helps you to connect to others to find friendship with people with similar interests across the world. (Subscription payable to connect to others)

togetherfriends - [www.togetherfriends.com](http://www.togetherfriends.com)

This is a free friendship site just for women, helping you to find new friends with similar interests and outlooks.

Dating sites

There are many dating sites that help match you with friends, and are not just for those looking for romance. Make sure you check the subscription fees and their cancellation policies, and do a lot of research before choosing a site.

## Video Calling

It's not as difficult as it sounds!

At times like this, it's more important than ever to keep in touch with family and friends. While regular phone calling and messaging help us to stay connected and feel less lonely, video calling can be an extra bonus, allowing you and the person you are talking to, to see each other. You can even have a group chat.

Using a computer

You don't need to install anything to use Skype or Zoom, for example, as you can set up a free account on their websites, and the person who you want to speak to just needs to make sure they have an account as well. They can then send you a link to join a video chat.

If you would like to initiate the video calls yourself, you will need to download Zoom or Skype to your computer. You can do this for free via their websites.

Apple devices

If you and the person you want to call both have an iPhone, iPad or Mac, you can use FaceTime, which is already installed on the device.

## Tablets and smartphones

You can download apps on your tablet or phone that enable you to make video calls, such as WhatsApp, Skype and Facebook Messenger.

Make sure you are connected to WiFi before doing a video call as they use a lot of data and could result in additional charges from your mobile phone network if you are not connected to WiFi.

Ask your family and friends to help you set up if you're not sure.

Age UK has a simple guide with video demonstrations that make things easy to follow.  
[www.ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/work-learning/technology-internet/video-calling](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/work-learning/technology-internet/video-calling)

## No excuses.....get on with it!

As a number of you will know I am a keen walker and try my hardest to carry out this activity every day, sometimes twice a day. I find it's not only good for my physical health but does amazing things for my mental health alongside, giving me thinking space which in my line of work is invaluable.

This morning I woke to see that once again it was raining! I dressed for my walk but secretly wondered if this activity would be realised given the conditions. The phrase my youngest son uses from time to time kept going through my mind. "There is no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing".

After doing as many unimportant jobs as I could find to put off the inevitable task in hand, I set off armed with broly to conquer my daily 'fix it factor'. After about 5 minutes it rained and continued to do so for the rest of my walk. I did consider after the first lap that I could cut it short justifying to myself that due to the weather this was okay. But actually, as I came to the point where this would be possible I fought desperately with "should I, shouldn't I".

The whole process reminded me of the many reasons, excuses I hear on a very regular basis from both myself, my friends/family and more importantly clients!

Often, the split decision (in my case, should I even set off for my walk and once embarked should I continue for 2 laps) made about whether to ACTUALLY do something is what often takes you on your future course. And, might even change your life path, in the short term anyway. For example, if I had chosen to stop at the halfway mark not only would I have felt disappointed with myself for not continuing but after this my mindset would have a negative bias. Leaving me lacking a sense of achievement.

Getting my drift? Pushing yourself just for that few minutes more (my example. Just past the halfway mark) then determines the rest of the journey, in my case finishing 2 laps.

Ironically, since returning from my walk the weather has been dry!! However, the main thing is I achieved my objective in spite of the conditions I found myself in. Sounding familiar?

If you want to embark on a new path in your life and fear there may be some hurdles along the way then contact me and we'll embark on it together!

Visit: [www.smart-lifecoach.co.uk](http://www.smart-lifecoach.co.uk)

Email: [dianne.srsmart@gmail.com](mailto:dianne.srsmart@gmail.com) Tel: 07896 955 911

## Great War Poets and Authors Part 4 - Lance Corporal Francis Ledwidge

by Dave Wright

In this the last of the series of Great War Poets and Authors we are looking at an Irish poet, Francis Ledwidge (19 August 1887 – 31 July 1917), born in County Meath, he was the 8th of 9 children born to a very poor family.

“Oh what a pleasant world t’would be  
How easy we’d step through it  
If all the fools who meant no harm  
Could manage not to do it”.

Ireland’s war poet was the author of these wry words, being an observation of a very human phenomenon. He ultimately sacrificed his life in the muddy trenches of the First World War. Generations of Irish schoolchildren were made aware of the so called “Poet of the Blackbird” through his poem “June” which drew vivid pictures of the countryside in mid-summer as the school year ended.

Francis’s father died when he was just 5 years old forcing his mother Anne to work as a field hand. With 9 children to feed, as soon as the children were old enough, they were asked to find work wherever they could. Francis left school when he was 13 and started working in a variety of manual jobs, farm labourer, road worker and miner but loved learning and reading, which helped him grow his love for literature and writing.

At the outbreak of WW1, the Irish Volunteers split into 2 factions, those in favour of joining Irish regiments in support of the allies and those who were not. Francis, a keen patriot and nationalist, was initially reluctant to join an Irish regiment, however he changed his views and joined Lord Dunsany’s regiment, 5th Battalion Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers. This may have been due to falling in love with a local young lady called Ellie Vaughey, although she rejected him in favour of another.

In April 1915 his company was sent to participate in the shambolic Gallipoli campaign where he was wounded and sent to an army hospital. While he was recovering in Cairo, he heard of the death in childbirth of his beloved Ellie who had married the year before. He wrote several poems to her, including “To One Dead” after hearing of her death.

In 1915 Francis served in the Balkans during a very cold winter and said that the only thing that kept him going was his writing. By December, it was obvious the campaign was going badly and the Army had to withdraw, meaning the soldiers had to do a brutal six day march to Salonika.

Francis collapsed and was sent to a military hospital in Salonika, then onto Cairo hospital and finally to Manchester for urgent medical care. It was here he received news of the defeat of the Irish Nationalist Easter Rising in Dublin.

He was sent home to Slane where, on learning of the execution by firing squad of poets Thomas MacDonagh, his friend, and Joseph Mary Plunkett, he wrote “Lament for Thomas MacDonagh”, the first four lines of which are inscribed on Francis’ memorial.

His realisation that soldiers wearing the same uniform as himself and stationed in Richmond Barracks, had executed his friends gave him much cause for distress, which expressed itself in several acts of indiscipline, for which he was court-martialled and punished. He wrote a poem "After Court Martial". But his beliefs and experience didn't cloud his eyes to man's inherent goodness which comes through in the poem, "To a German Officer" which was lost and not published until well after his death.

Ledwidge was obviously a good soldier, and despite his disciplinary offences was promoted to the rank of Lance Corporal and took part in the Battle of Arras in late 1916. In early 1917, his unit was sent to prepare for what was to be the third Battle of Ypres.

On the 31 July 1917, he and 5 comrades were repairing a road at Pilkem northwest of Ypres, when a random enemy shell killed them all. They were all buried where they were killed at a place called Carrefour de Rose. Ledwidge's body was subsequently reinterred in the nearby Artillery Wood Military Cemetery.

He became a Trade Union activist and was sacked from the copper mine for organizing a strike for better conditions. As he got older Francis developed a keen interest in Irish Nationalist politics and joined the Irish Volunteers, dedicated to pursuing and defending Home Rule, by arms if necessary.

From his early teens Francis had a talent for writing poetry and had some of his early works published in the local newspaper, using his native Boyne Valley and its beautiful countryside as his inspiration.

He started to send samples of his work to Lord Dunsany, an author in his own right. Lord Dunsany liked Francis's work and soon adopted him as his protégé, inviting him to Dunsany castle where Francis had the full use of the substantial library and writing facilities. Lord Dunsany also gave him literary advice and access to his circle of writer friends from Dublin like William Butler Yeats.

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