



Coventry and Warwickshire Humanists Newsletter November 2024

Dear Fellow Humanists

Welcome to the November edition of the Coventry & Warwickshire Humanists Newsletter. I would assume that most of you are preparing for the Festive Season and all that it entails. However, the end of November this year will be an important time for Humanists with the reading of the first Bill on Assisted Dying proposed by Kim Leadbetter MP. There is more about assisted dying later in this Newsletter, but it is apparent that many religious groups are actively campaigning and raising funds to oppose the Assisted Dying Bill. By the time that you read this Newsletter the debate will have been heard. What is also alarming is the comments from certain leading MP's and Cabinet Ministers making comments before the debate in opposing the Bill. This is supposed to be an 'open debate' where MP's can discuss and vote on the motion according to their conscience without pressure from their respective parties and a 'Three-Line Whip'. So, it is unfortunate that some prominent politicians should appear to 'politicise' the debate. More about this later.

Going back to the Festive Season again, over the past two decades, the end of November usually signifies the start of 'Christmas shopping' with the onset of "Black Friday" where we are all encouraged to go and 'spend big for the Festive Season'. Again, more about this issue later in the Newsletter.

I do hope that we will see most of you at our Festive Celebration on Thursday 19th December at Waverley Day Centre.

Brian Goredema-Braid

Chair of Coventry & Warwickshire Humanists

Meetings:

Thursday 21st November: We had an excellent meeting with a talk on apostacy which was led by Terri O'Sullivan who is the Apostate Services Development Officer for 'Faith to Faithless.' Terri spoke about the peer support programme she runs as a service for Humanists UK. Terri trains service professionals on issues of apostates through the Apostasy Awareness courses. Terri also gave an interesting outline of her own story of the issues she faced when she left Jehovah's Witnesses in her late teens. Leaving a religion and losing contact with your immediate family is a heart-wrenching experience for anyone, let alone a young person. In 2007, Terri founded XJW Friends as a support group for former Jehovah's Witnesses. This group now has 2,000 members. One issue that I found interesting was Terri's comment that Humanists and atheists can cause harm to apostates with comments such as 'How could you believe that nonsense?' and, 'Why did you fall for all that rubbish'. Apostates like all of us have been socialised within our family and community and what those families and communities regard as a norm in our society. Criticism and implying ignorance will not help apostates in coming to terms with a different way of life. I felt that we could have listened to much more of what Terri had to say about apostacy. I hope that she visits us again in the near future.

Thursday 19th December: The Festive Social will be our last in-person meeting until March 2025. So, it will be good to see as many of you as possible at this event. The usual format is that we all bring an item of food to be shared. Our Social Secretary, Andrew Ireland will be sending out more information about this event, particularly a food list to ensure that we don't all bring mince pies! The general format of the evening will be a pleasant get-together, a few songs, maybe some comedy sketches and a quiz on issues and events during 2024. We will look forward to seeing you at this event.

Thursday 16th January 2025: During the winter months we usually have our meetings in January and February online through Zoom. This will be a meeting which will enable us to catch-up on events over the Festive Season and to suggest activities, meeting content and possible speakers through 2025.

Thursday 20th February 2025: I am hoping that Clare Elcombe Webber the Head of Humanist Care will be joining us to discuss Humanist Pastoral Care. This is one area of Humanist work that we need to develop further. I will confirm this by the next Newsletter.

Thursday 20th March 2025: This will be our first in-person meeting of 2025. We have invited Geoff Sallis of Humanist Climate Change to address the meeting. I am sure that issues of climate change and environmental protection is a subject that is close to the hearts of many Humanists. This should be a very interesting meeting.

Susette Garrett 1932-2024:

A few members of Coventry & Warwickshire Humanists attended the funeral of long-standing member of our Humanist group Susette Garrett. The funeral was held at Oakley Wood Crematorium on Tuesday 12th November. It was a very pleasant ceremony led by Humanist Celebrant Victoria Denning. The ceremony finished with one of Susette's favourite songs "Who do You Think You Are Kidding Mr Hitler" from Susette's favourite TV programme 'Dad's Army'. After the funeral, many of us gathered for a Wake at Kenilworth Cricket Club. Susette was a keen member of Kenilworth Bridge Club which also meets at the Cricket Club. Apart from us Humanists, there were representatives from many areas of Susette's life – the Bridge Club, Talisman Theatre, Waverly Day Centre and other fund-raising organisations in Kenilworth. During the Wake, it was interesting to hear different stories and anecdotes from Susette's life. There is no doubt that Susette was quite a character with many hidden depths.

Below is an overview of the ceremony from Bob Jelley and worthy praise of Celebrant Victoria Denning:

Yesterday, for I think the first time as simply a mourner, I attended a funeral for a friend and it was led by a Humanist UK celebrant. I have led ceremonies and I have sat in on ceremonies led by other celebrants, on peer review duties but here I was just a mourner, grieving the loss of a friend.

It was a warm, comforting experience.

The celebrant summed up friend Susette's, qualities, quirks included.

Mourners in front of me, nodded and murmured their agreement throughout the ceremony.

I didn't know (or have forgotten) and haven't used either of the readings:

'The Journey's End'

and

'An Individual Human Experience Should Be Like a River' – Bertrand Russell

but they added to a quietly splendid farewell to Susette, which, I am sure, she would have loved.

Thank you, Victoria Denning

Bob Jelley

Assisted Dying Bill:

There is no doubt that this is a landmark moment in the fight for a compassionate assisted dying law arrived this October with the introduction of Kim Leadbeater MP's Assisted Dying Bill. With support

from Prime Minister Keir Starmer and a free vote for all MPs, this is a once in-a-generation chance to offer choice and dignity to thousands of people.

Things are moving very fast with the bill and so by the time this Newsletter arrives in your In-Box, it may already be out of date! But at the time of writing, the latest situation is that the bill has had its first reading and is awaiting its second – which will be its first substantial debate. Humanists UK are urging all of its members to write to their MP to ask for their support ahead of the second reading on 29 November.

The title of Kim Leadbetter's Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill is now set, and will only apply to those with terminal illnesses. This is narrower than our longstanding policy, which includes the incurably suffering in addition to the terminally ill. Nevertheless, Humanists UK are backing the bill as it represents a unique chance to create a more compassionate law. With strong safeguards, it will guarantee choice at the end of life for people in England and Wales.



Kim Leadbetter MP

In Scotland, the Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults Bill introduced by Liam McArthur MSP represents a promising path to reform. In the Isle of Man, Dr Alex Allinson MHK's Assisted Dying Bill has passed the third reading in the House of Keys and its first stage in the Legislative Council, meaning it is now very close to becoming law. As well as this, a Lucid Talk survey in Northern Ireland, released in September, showed 67% of adults in Northern Ireland support changing the law. This is consistent with every major UK demographic survey of the last ten years.

You may have seen the story in the *Observer* about widespread religious funding and disguised religious lobbying against the Assisted Dying Bill. Many of the religious organisations are actively lobbying MP's to vote against the Bill. It is also apparent that many leading politicians are voicing their concerns before the debate – which goes against the spirit of a 'free vote'. This is a very clear description of what we as Humanists are up against, and just how much the deck is stacked against us.

The Key Issues in the Assisted Dying Debate

As MPs are due to vote on Friday 29th November on Kim Leadbeater's bill to legalise assisted dying in England and Wales. About 100 MPs are thought to be undecided and the outcome of the vote is uncertain. Many other lay persons are also undecided. Here are some of the key issues in the debate as outlined by Harriet Sherwood in the *Guardian*.

1) Can we really know if someone has six months to live?

The bill says only someone who has an "inevitably progressive illness, disease or medical condition which cannot be reversed by treatment" and whose death "can reasonably be expected within six months" will be eligible for an assisted death.

Most doctors agree that it is difficult to predict with accuracy when someone will die from a terminal illness. With cancer, prognosis is usually based on the type and stage of the disease, survival statistics, plus age and other health factors. Doctors usually give patients a range of time, but add that the person could die more quickly or live longer.

Critics of assisted dying say doctors may feel under pressure to give a prognosis of which they cannot be certain. They point to cases where people have survived for months, sometimes years, beyond a given time range for the end of life. But some studies have shown that doctors are more often over-optimistic, meaning patients are more likely to die more quickly than expected.

2) Would vulnerable people be protected from coercion?

The bill says that anyone who coerces or puts pressure on someone to have an assisted death will be liable to face a prison sentence of up to 14 years. This is to allay concerns that family members or

friends could put pressure on sick and vulnerable people to choose an assisted death. Such concerns have been consistently raised by opponents of assisted dying.

Wes Streeting, the health secretary and an opponent of assisted dying, said last month that he was “concerned about the risk of people being coerced into taking their own lives sooner than they would have liked, or feeling ... guilt-tripped, feeling like a burden”.

The penalty for this under the proposed law is severe. But a big challenge is that coercion and pressure can be difficult to detect and hard to prove. The victim may not acknowledge the coercion. Charles Falconer, the former lord chancellor, has said the evidence from jurisdictions that have passed assisted dying laws “shows that these laws do not lead to cases of coercion”.

3) Is palliative care fit for purpose?

Supporters of a change in the law say excellent palliative care must be provided alongside an assisted dying service in order to give terminally ill people genuine choice about the end of their life. Opponents say that if top-of-the-range palliative care is properly resourced, there is no need for an assisted dying law.

About 300,000 people were provided with palliative and end-of-life care in 200-plus hospices in 2022-23, according to Hospice UK. They cost £1.6bn a year to run, and only £500m comes from the government, with the remaining £1.1bn raised from donations, legacies, charity shops and other fundraising activities.

One in five hospices have been forced to cut services in the past year or are planning to do so, the charity said in July. Some are closing beds and making staff redundant.

In some areas, there are state-of-the-art facilities; in other places, hospices are woefully under-resourced or cannot meet demand. Provision of specialist palliative care in hospitals and people’s homes is also uneven.

An estimated 250-300 people a day die without the palliative care they need. And although palliative care can be first class, advocates of assisted dying say it cannot guarantee a pain-free death and does not offer control over timing.

4) What would assisted dying cost the NHS?

There has been no proper study of the costs of providing an assisted dying service in England and Wales. Last week, Streeting triggered a row by ordering a review of potential costs, saying such a service could have an impact on other NHS provision. “Any new service comes at the expense of other competing pressures and priorities,” he said.

But the Labour grandee Harriet Harman said such a review could “contaminate” the debate around assisted dying if it found that it was cheaper to the state than costly treatment and care.

In Scotland, where the Holyrood parliament is also considering legalising assisted dying, the government has estimated the cost of such a service at between £263,434 and £313,882 in its first year, and increasing each year. It said: “It is difficult to assess the accuracy of the estimated costs/savings ... given the uncertainty around the likely number of cases and, in particular, how they will increase over time.”

The costs include training healthcare professionals, providing administrative support and supplying medication. One analysis said three studies in the US and Canada showed assisted dying would reduce spending on healthcare and end-of-life care.

In Switzerland, where assisted dying is provided privately, not by the state, an assisted death can cost more than £12,000. Dignitas, a non-profit organisation, says it offers reduced or even waived fees for people in “dire financial circumstances”.

5) Would England and Wales be going further than other countries?

About 300 million people around the world have access to some form of assisted dying. The proposed law before Westminster MPs is broadly in line with the Oregon model – the US state’s 1997 Death with Dignity Act – which restricts assisted dying to terminally ill, mentally competent adults with a life expectancy of six months or less. Oregon’s law, the basis of laws in many other jurisdictions, has not been widened in the past 27 years.



Other jurisdictions have gone further. The Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg allow assisted dying in cases of an incurable condition or “unbearable suffering”. In the Netherlands, this allowed a 29-year-old woman with psychiatric conditions to opt for an assisted death earlier this year.

Canada, which legalised assisted dying in 2016, expanded its law after a court ruled in 2019 that restricting access to those who had a “reasonably foreseeable death” was unconstitutional.

However, it has shelved plans to expand criteria to include people suffering solely from mental illnesses. Switzerland is the only jurisdiction that allows non-residents to travel to the country for an assisted death. Leadbeater’s bill stipulates that two doctors plus a high court judge must be satisfied that the choice of an assisted death is freely made by someone with the capacity to make that choice. This is stricter than most laws around the world.

6) Could the law be expanded in the courts?

The UK courts have made clear that it is for parliament to decide the scope of an assisted dying law. But some say a law could be subject to expansion by the courts via discrimination-based challenges under the European convention on human rights.

The European court of human rights has never required a member state of the convention to extend its assisted dying regime. It has also said there is no right to die under the convention.

7) Has this debate been rushed? And if the bill fails, when will there be another vote?

Some people are concerned that discussion on this crucial, complicated and controversial issue is being rushed. The vote due next Friday would come two and a half weeks after the details of the bill were published, and would follow five hours of debate in parliament.

Others say public opinion backs legal change, the issues have been publicly aired and that it is time to test the mood in parliament almost a decade after MPs last voted.

It is possible that the Commons debate next Friday may not end in a vote. If that is the case, the bill would be unlikely to progress.

If the vote is in favour of the bill, it will be scrutinised line by line by a committee and may be amended by the House of Lords or the House of Commons before a final vote.

If the bill is voted down, it is very unlikely that the issue will return during this parliament.

Black Friday – or the Gateway to Christmas?

The first recorded use of the term “Black Friday” was applied not to post-Thanksgiving holiday shopping but to a financial crisis: specifically, the crash of the US gold market on 24th September 1869. Two notoriously ruthless Wall Street financiers, Jay Gould and Jim Fisk, worked together to buy up as much as they could of the nation’s gold, hoping to drive the price sky-high and sell it for astonishing profits. On that Friday in September, the conspiracy finally unravelled, sending the stock market into free-fall and bankrupting everyone from Wall Street barons to farmers.

The most commonly repeated story behind the Thanksgiving shopping-related Black Friday tradition links it to retailers. As the story goes, after an entire year of operating at a loss (“in the red”) stores would supposedly earn a profit (“went into the black”) on the day after Thanksgiving, because holiday shoppers blew so much money on discounted merchandise.

Though it’s true that retail companies used to record losses in red and profits in black when doing their accounting, this version of Black Friday’s origin is the officially sanctioned—but inaccurate—story behind the tradition.

In recent years, another myth has surfaced that gives a particularly ugly twist to the tradition, claiming that back in the 1800s Southern plantation owners could buy enslaved workers at a

discount on the day after Thanksgiving. Though this version of Black Friday's roots has understandably led some to call for a boycott of the retail holiday, it has no basis in fact. The real history behind Black Friday, however, is not as sunny as retailers might have you believe. Back in the 1950s, police in the city of Philadelphia used the term to describe the chaos that ensued on the day after Thanksgiving, when hordes of suburban shoppers and tourists flooded into the city in advance of the big Army-Navy football game held on that Saturday every year. Not only were Philadelphia cops not able to take the day off, but they had to work extra-long shifts dealing with the additional crowds and traffic. Shoplifters also took advantage of the bedlam in stores and made off with merchandise, adding to the law enforcement headache. By 1961, "Black Friday" had caught on in Philadelphia, to the extent that the city's merchants and boosters tried unsuccessfully to change it to "Big Friday" in order to remove the negative connotations.



Shoppers in USA queueing for Black Friday bargains

The term didn't spread to the rest of the country until much later, however, and as recently as 1985 it wasn't in common use nationwide. Sometime in the late 1980s, however, retailers found a way to reinvent Black Friday and turn it into something that reflected positively, rather than negatively, on them and their customers. The result was the "red to black" concept of the holiday mentioned earlier, and the notion that the day after Thanksgiving marked the occasion when America's stores finally turned a profit.

The Black Friday story stuck, and pretty soon the term's darker roots in Philadelphia were largely forgotten. Since then, the one-day sales bonanza has morphed into a four-day event, and spawned other "retail holidays" such as Small Business Saturday/Sunday and Cyber Monday. Stores started opening earlier and earlier on that Friday, and now the most dedicated shoppers can head out right after their Thanksgiving meal.

'We buy things we don't need with money we don't have to impress people we don't like.' Chuck Palahniuk (*Fight Club*)

As we head into the orgy of consumerism once known as Christmas (and putting to one side the Christian co-opting of a pre-Christian winter festival), it is timely to reflect on some of the negative impulses behind and effects of excessive buying and consumption. The issue is not to reject or criticise consumption per se – we all need to consume – but consumerism, the threshold beyond which consumption becomes unhealthy or dangerous for people...and the planet.

Modern debt-based consumerism promoted by advertising is one of the key defining features of our modern economy and society. Do not believe for one moment that 'advertising does not work' – if so why is it a multi-billion-pound industry? Advertising and excessive consumption is a structural requirement of a capitalist growth-oriented economy to ensure there is always growing demand. Having 'enough', or reusing and repairing goods, goes against the grain of this understanding of the economy. Indeed, having more shared goods and services (such as libraries for tools, for example, as well as books) is also a threat to the economic status quo. And yet, if we want to address the climate and ecological crisis, and do so based both on the science and ethical principles of justice, those of us living in the minority world, the high carbon, high over-consuming world, will need to shift our shopping habits away from *more and mine*, to *enough and shared*.

Lest this come across as a dour Scrooge-like position that replacing more with enough means everyone has less, it actually means (from an ecological point of view) that so long as the macro-level of consumption is within 'safe planetary boundaries', many people even in the minority world need to increase their levels of consumption, while some, i.e. the rich, need to radically reduce theirs.

Advertising and the consumerism it promotes, can be said to be harmful in at least two areas, both of which should be of concern to Humanists:

Firstly, from an ecological and climate science perspective, it is clear that an endlessly growing economy, and endless consumption of goods and services (especially high carbon ones), are unsustainable. We have enough scientific and normative evidence that we, in the minority world, need to move beyond 'economic growth'.

Second is the less discussed issue of how consumerism and advertising harm human wellbeing and freedom by the connection between debt and consumerism.



We can observe the infantilising impacts of consumerism, with debt short-circuiting the normal/healthy and adult response of 'delayed gratification'. We want something now but do not have the finances, but rather than delay the purchase until we have the money, we can use our credit cards to buy it now. Private debt is a powerful way of disciplining a population. If you are in debt you are forced to work, are much less likely to be engaged in politics, are less connected to your community, and have less time or energy for anything but work or consumption.

Debt is fundamentally a way of creating profoundly unequal power relations between those who have the (private) power to create money as debt and those to whom they lend it. It is easy to see how people on low income can often dread Christmas and its 'compulsory consumerism'. For many, Christmas is anxiety producing, as it means a struggle to find enough money to participate in socially expected activities such as gift buying and expressing their love and care for family and friends. So, the question for us Humanists (and everyone) is how we can experience pleasure, joy, communicate our love for family and friends without either getting into debt, wrecking the planet or exploiting people. And while we're at it, what should we replace 'Christmas' with? Saturnalia? Winter solstice? 'Buy nothing week'?

Challenge yourself to do something different!

What is it you like best about Christmas? For me it is gathering our extended family and seeing the grandchildren so excited to be together. What I like least is the ridiculous waste that is generated. So, I challenge you to *buy less stuff*. 'Killjoy' I hear you shout, but I would say, 'not at all'. The best presents are ones that are thoughtful and personal so here are some ideas that I have found greatly appreciated by my friends and family.

- Tickets for a pantomime or other entertainment work for adults and children alike. Cheap local pantomimes can be much more fun than the ones with 'stars'.

- Memberships can save the recipient money and provide a year of entertainment. The National Trust, English Heritage, The National Gallery, The Royal Academy, The Royal Horticultural Society and many other organisations offer memberships. The trick is to work out what would be most aligned with the recipient's interests and make time to go together.
- Beauty treatments from manicures to overnight spas are popular. Don't buy a voucher, rather offer to arrange the treatment or even better go together. Massages are particularly appreciated by many adults regardless of age or sex.
- Making or taking someone out for a meal or cream tea.
- Offering to give money to a charity they support.

The presents I have enjoyed most are being taken out for lunch by my friends or family. It is important to remember that giving time is often the most appreciated gift of all.

A Few Notes of Concern?

In editing this Newsletter, I always try to maintain a neutral stance on party politics. However, as I have been putting the Newsletter together I have been concerned about a current news item which does not look good for our democratic structures. A petition has been circulating on social media, especially 'X' which is owned by multi-billionaire Elon Musk. Apparently, a pub landlord has started a petition calling for an immediate General Election. As you know we had our latest 5 yearly GE in July and the Labour Party was elected into government by a sizeable majority. Whilst we may all have grumbles about 'the government' regardless of its colour, there is a potential threat about the possible consequences of this petition. Although a private individual has initiated the petition, there is no doubt that Musk, Farage and members of Reform Party are publicising this petition for their own objectives.

It is also apparent that many of the 'so-called' two-million signatures are from a variety of nations across the world, including Russia and China. Hardly British in any way or matter? This sort of political interference has been brushed aside by the Prime Minister. Nevertheless, it is a dangerous position that obviously identifies that there is or could be direct foreign interference in a British General Election? Equally, while a multi-billionaire who clearly has the ear of the next President of the United States, has made many accusing and offensive comments about the United Kingdom and its current government is a dangerous situation which could also affect the democracy of this and other nations. There is no doubt that the current trend of billionaires pouring huge amounts of money into the political process is a dangerous precedent for a democratic society.

On a more basic and practical side of this issue, it is worth remembering in that just over the past three and a half years, Prime Minister Johnson was told to resign by his own party, as did Truss who nearly bankrupted the country, and the Conservatives then had no option but to choose Sunak, who many of them did not want. Despite this upheaval over the past three years, there was no General Election. The Labour Party have only been in power for five months, and despite their apparent mistakes – and there are plenty! It is hardly enough time to make a judgement and call for another election.

For Mr Farage, rather than this call for a new election as the 'peoples petition', maybe he should recognise that there is already another 'peoples petition' of a few million British signatures calling for a new referendum to join the European Union! For Mr Musk, I would advise that he now has the opportunity to do some good in the USA with his undying support for President Trump.

(I needed to get this off my chest)

Poetry Corner:

This month's selection from Audrey Raishbrook is from William Butler Yeats – very appropriate for the winter months

Mad as the Mist and Snow

Bolt and bar the shutter,
For the foul winds blow:
Our minds are at their best this night,
And I seem to know
That everything outside us is
Mad as the mist and snow.

Horace there by Homer stands,
Plato stands below,
And here is Tully's open page.
How many years ago
Were you and I unlettered lads
Mad as the mist and snow?

You ask what makes me sigh, old friend,
What makes me shudder so?
I shudder and I sigh to think
That even Cicero
And many-minded Homer were
Mad as the mist and snow.

William Butler Yeats

I thought that I would chip in with a poem this month from James Baldwin, obviously referring to the segregation laws in 1960's United States. I thought that these words would also be appropriate for what we are witnessing in Gaza on a daily basis:

Every Bombed Village is my Hometown

And every dead child is my child.
Every grieving mother is my mother.
Every crying father is my father.
Every home turned to rubble
is the home I grew up in.
Every brother carrying the remains
of his brother across borders
is my brother.
Every sister waiting for a sister
who will never come home
is my sister.

Every one of these people are ours.
Just like we are theirs.
We belong to them
and they belong to us.

James Baldwin

Film Preview:

Wicked: Part one of the film adapted from the successful West End Musical. An aspiring sorcerer finds acceptance at a magical school until higher authorities try to misuse her powers. Great performances from Cynthia Erivo and Ariana Grande

Gladiator II: The sequel to the first Oscar- winning Gladiator. After his home is conquered by the tyrannical emperors who now lead Rome, Lucius is forced to enter the Colosseum and must look to his past to find strength to return the glory of Rome to its people. Excellent film with great performances from Paul Mescal, Pedro Pascal and Denzel Washington, even though they are left to make the best of a cumbersome script. Well worth seeing.

Dahomey: A dramatised documentary account of 26 royal treasures from the Kingdom of Dahomey (in modern-day Republic of Benin), which were held in a museum in France. The film explores how the artefacts were returned from France to Benin, and the reactions of Beninese people. Mainly at Warwick Arts Centre (WAC) and Midland Arts Centre (MAC)

All we Imagine as Light: In Mumbai, Nurse Prabha's routine is troubled when she receives an unexpected gift from her estranged husband. With Kani Kusruti, Divya Prabha. Only at WAC & MAC

The Last Dance: A Hong Kong drama the film exploring themes related to Hong Kong's death-care and follows a wedding planner who enters the funeral industry through a partnership with a traditional Taoist priest, seeking to understand the meaning of life and death through funeral rituals. Starring Dayo Wong, Michael Hui. Mainly at WAC & MAC,

Queer: A romantic drama based on the 1985 novella by William S. Burroughs. Set in 1950s Mexico City, the film follows an outcast American expat who becomes infatuated with a younger man. Starring Daniel Craig, Drew Starkey and Lesley Manville.

Nightbitch: An American black comedy body horror film written, based on the 2021 novel by Rachel Yoder. The film concerns a magical realism-style story of a stay-at-home mom who sometimes transforms into a dog. Starring Amy Adams and Scoot McNairy

Moana 2: An epic sequel and animated musical and a brand-new crew of unlikely seafarers. After receiving an unexpected call from her wayfinding ancestors, Moana must journey to the far seas of Oceania and into dangerous, long-lost waters for an adventure unlike anything she's ever faced. An ideal Christmas treat for the grandchildren.

It's a Wonderful Life: It is the Festive Season – so it must be the time for this excellent timeless moral tale starring James Stewart

Heretic: A psychological horror film. Two missionaries from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints who attempt to convert a reclusive man and realize he is more dangerous than he seems. Starring Hugh Grant, Sophie Thatcher and Chloe East. (A great film for Jehovah's Witnesses before they go door-knocking?)

Kiss Me Kate (West End): Filmed directly from the West End a simple love story about two people who just can't stand each other. Starring Adrian Dunbar (Line of Duty) and Broadway royalty Stephanie J. Block in her West End debut. Available mainly in December at most cinemas.

The Importance of Being Earnest (NT): Oscar Wilde's most celebrated hilarious story of identity, impersonation and romance, filmed live from the National Theatre in London. Starring Sharon D Clarke and Ncuti Gatwa. At the main circuit cinemas and WAC & MAC during January and February

Macbeth: Shakespeare's tragedy of a war hero who encounters witches who foretell his kingship. Starring Ralph Fiennes and Indira Varma. Still available at most cinemas. Still on the Circuit:

Paddington in Peru: Paddington in Peru is an upcoming live-action/animated adventure comedy film directed by Dougal Wilson. Based on the stories of Paddington Bear, created by Michael Bond, it is intended to be the third instalment in the Paddington film series, and a sequel to the previous Paddington films.

Blitz: In the face of nightly air raids, an East End mum grows increasingly worried about her son George's safety. Under the counsel of her father, she makes the heart-wrenching decision to send him to the countryside. But a few hours into his journey, George alights the train, determined to return to Stepney Green and his family. Starring Saoirse Ronan, Paul Weller

No Other Land: Gripping documentary No Other Land follows a Palestinian activist, who films his community of Masafer Yatta being destroyed by Israel's occupation, as he builds an unlikely alliance with an Israeli journalist who wants to join his fight. Only at WAC & MAC

Layla: A complex relationship between Palestinian-British drag performer Layla and their white, straight-laced new love interest. Thrown together by fate, their enjoyment of each other is increasingly complicated by urgent questions of difference. Mainly at WAC & MAC,

Conclave: The Pope has died. Cardinal Lawrence must lead the Conclave to select the new leader of the Catholic world. But as high-ranking cardinals gather, he discovers sides have been drawn and secrets that might destroy a future pope, perhaps even the Church itself, threaten to be revealed. Starring Ralph Fiennes, Stanley Tucci and John Lithgow. At most cinemas

Small Things Like These: Cillian Murphy stars as a conflicted soul grappling with his town's complicity in the mistreatment of local women housed in a Magdalene Laundry in this intimately inhabited adaptation of Claire Keegan's novella. At WAC & MAC and some cinemas

Bird: Young Bailey feels caged in her Gravesend squat home. Reckless, wannabe drug dealer dad Bug plans to marry his new girlfriend. Older brother Hunter plots to elope with his underage partner. Meanwhile, across town, Bailey's near-feral younger siblings are menaced by her mum's new and violent lover. Small wonder she's intrigued by the enigmatic Bird, a flighty free spirit searching for his own roots. Mainly at WAC & MAC.

TV and Film Preview: (The usual Christmas films are beginning to make an appearance!)

Friday 29th November:

20.00 – BBC1: Return to Paradise – This Australian comedy detective series appears to be following on from the 'Death in Paradise franchise.

21.00 – BBC1: Have I got News for You? – Victoria Coren Mitchell is in the chair while Stacey Dooley and Andy Hamilton join regular panellists Ian Hislop and Paul Merton

21.30 – BBC1: Only Child – An interesting new comedy idea starring Gregor Fisher (Rab Nesbitt) and Greg McHugh. An adult son comes home to look after his eccentric dad

22.15 – BBC4: Country Music Awards 2024: If you like Country Music, then you will like the first time this annual extravaganza has been broadcast on mainstream TV. Highlights from the 58th annual Country Music Awards, hosted by Luke Bryan, Peyton Manning and Lainey Wilson.

22.40 – BBC1: Graham Norton Show: This week's guests include actress and singer Cher, Michael Fassbender, double Oscar nominee Keira Knightley and actor Josh Brolin. Music from Jalen Ngonda.

23.45 – BBC4: Kenny Rogers in Concert: If you enjoyed the Country Music Awards, you will also like this concert from the late Kenny Rogers

00.05 – BBC2: Bones and All - Romantic horror drama starring Taylor Russell, Timothée Chalamet and Mark Rylance.

Saturday 30th November:

19.05 – BBC1: Strictly Come Dancing: It is the quarter finals this week

20.30 – Channel 4: Legendary Comedy: I am enjoying this series where Lenny Henry interviews a range of comedy performers. This week it is Romesh Ranganathan

21.00 – BBC4: State of Happiness: I am pleased that the third series of this excellent Norwegian serial of the oil industry has returned. Set in the 1970's this is episode 3. **Episode 4 is at 21.40**

21.15 – BBC1: Moonflower Murders: Another episode of this charming murder mystery starring Lesley Manville and Daniel Mays

23.00 – Channel 4: Bad Boys for Life: Comedy thriller starring Will Smith and Martin Lawrence.

23.55 – BBC2: Luzzo: A man risks everything to provide for his wife and new-born son by entering Malta's black-market fishing industry. Drama, starring Jesmark Scicluna, Marlene Schranz and David Scicluna. In Maltese and English

00.35 – BBC4: Henry VIII's Enforcer: The Rise and Fall of Thomas Cromwell – If you are enjoying Wolf Hall at present, you may like this documentary where Diarmaid MacCulloch reveals another side, arguing that Cromwell was a principled idealist and revolutionary whose radical evangelism laid the foundations for the modern British state

Sunday 1st December:

18.20 – BBC1: Asia – Another episode of David Attenborough's excellent series of animals in Asia

17.30 – Channel 5: The Holiday – This is currently my favourite Xmas film. A lovely story of two women who do a house swap from Hertfordshire to Los Angeles. Starring Kate Winslet, Jude Law, Cameron Diaz and Jack Black.

19.20 – BBC1: Strictly Come Dancing – Results of the quarter final and who moves on to the semi's

19.20 – BBC4: Old Grey Whistle Test – Ralph McTell – Many people will remember when Ralph McTell was one of the most popular folk singers in the UK. This nostalgic concert from 1976 should bring back some memories.

20.00 – ITV1: Who Wants to be a Millionaire? An opportunity to see the 'nicer' face of Jeremy Clarkson

21.00 – BBC1: Wolf Hall – Another episode of the prize-winning serial of the Hilary Mantell trilogy

23.00 – BBC2: Cape Fear - Thriller starring Robert De Niro, Nick Nolte and Jessica Lange. After 14 years behind bars, a brutal rapist is free to exact revenge on the man who could have kept him out of jail.

23.06 – BBC4: Cynthia Erivo: Legendary Voices from the Proms - A concert with the multi award-winning singer backed by the BBC Concert Orchestra as she pays tribute to the female vocalists who inspired her, including Nina Simone, Shirley Bassey, Billie Holiday and Gladys Knight.

23.30 – Channel 4: Gemini Man - An aging assassin is targeted by a mysterious young operative who seems able to anticipate his every move. Starring Will Smith and Clive Owen

Monday 2nd December:

21.00 – BBC2: Renaissance – The Blood and the Beauty - Dramatised documentary of how some of the greatest art works of all time were born of war and bloodshed.

23.05 – ITV1: Mr Bates vs. The Post Office: The Impact - After the drama series Mr Bates vs The Post Office, this follow-up documentary, the former sub-postmasters and subpostmistresses involved talk about the impact of the drama,

Tuesday 3rd December:

21.00 – BBC1: The Listeners – Another episode of this interesting drama series

21.45 - BBC1: Cheaters - Three more episodes of the comedy drama about infidelity starring Joshua McGuire and Susan Wokoma. The next episodes are at **22.40 and 22.55**

23.25 – BBC4: Ministry of Evil: The Twisted Cult of Tony Alamo - Brainwashing, polygamy, necromancy - the life and crimes of televangelist turned cult leader Tony Alamo. His celebrity hid shocking abuse as he made millions from his followers. The next episode is at **00.05**

Wednesday 4th December:

20.00 – BBC4: Winterwatch 1963: The Big Freeze – I remember this well – it was my first winter at work in a garage dealing with frozen radiators, breakdowns and punctures etc. Chris Packham introduces a documentary from the BBC archive that takes a look at the worst British winter of the 20th century.

00.10 – BBC1: The Best Man Holiday - Comedy drama about a college friends get together for a reunion after 15 years, but old rivalries and romances soon rear their head. Starring Terrence Howard, Taye Diggs

Thursday 5th December:

20.00 – BBC4: The Fall of the Roman Empire – Historical epic from 1964. The Roman Empire falls into the hands of corrupt Commodus, starring Sophia Loren, Stephen Boyd, Christopher Plummer

22.00 – BBC3: Absolutely Fabulous: The Movie – Always a good laugh to see Jennifer Saunders and Joanna Lumley reprising their TV roles.

23.05 – BBC2: Sound of Metal - A drummer in a heavy metal band, begins to experience hearing loss and is told his condition will deteriorate over time. Unable and unwilling to stop playing, he lashes out, driving a wedge between him and his bandmates. Starring Riz Ahmed and Olivia Cooke.

Some Funnies to Finish With:

Two men were in a pub eating sandwiches and the landlord said, 'You can't eat your own food in here!'

So, they swapped sandwiches

My kids say they want a cat for Christmas. Normally I do a turkey – but if it makes them happy?

I was so bored I swapped all the sweets into different wrappers

My wife isn't pleased – she got her Snickers in a Twix

If you are afraid of driving alone – become a bus driver

My favourite band is called Cockles and Mussels. I saw them alive alive-o in concert.

I am that skint – I just opened a door on my advent calendar and a bailiff was standing there

I bought my wife a fur coat made up of 3000 hamster skins. I took her to the fairground and I couldn't get her off the Big Wheel for 2 days

A man goes to the doctors complaining of stomach pains.

The doctor says, 'I can't find anything wrong with you – it must be the drink'

The man replies, 'Never mind – I will come back when you are sober!'

Someone said to me, 'What are your dogs' names?'

I said, 'Calvin and Klein'

He said, 'Isn't that a brand of underwear?'

I said, 'Exactly, they're boxers.'

My grandad always said, 'As one door closes, another one opens'

He was a lovely man, but a terrible cabinet maker

Apparently stress balls are not intended to be thrown at people that are stressing you out?

I woke up startled and worried that I was going to be late for work.....luckily I was at work.

I hate it when people repeat themselves. I mean really. Enough is enough is enough.

I'm naming all my friends after high street shops. You could be Next.

A Few Cartoons

