

COTSWOLD VOICE

Adam Edwards



Revelling in the joys of a modern Christmas

'Cirencester was forgotten and beige-coloured while the actual countryside was populated with bigoted Bufton Tuftons in red corduroys and Margo Leadbetters from *The Good Life*'

In the same week that last month's 'nostalgia' issue of Cotswold Life was published, in which my editor ruminated fondly on subjects as varied as Vesta beef curries and the Morris Marina, an academic study from Warwick University pointed out that 1978 was Britain's unhappiest year. The boffins may well be right, but that will not stop most of us continuing to wallow in yesteryear, particularly in this the most festive of months.

And yet I'm with Warwick University. Bah humbug I say to nostalgia.

Life in Britain, and in particular in the Cotswolds, is better now than it ever was at any time in the second half of the 20th century, and I particularly include Christmas in that statement. But before I get to the season of goodwill, let me briefly mention a few of the joys of living here in 2019.

Fifty years ago, for example, the A419/417, the trunk road linking the M4 to the M5, was a grim two-lane rural byway with more roundabouts than a fairground. In those far-off days it took twice as long as it does now to reach the heart of the Cotswolds from either the East or the West. Then we listened to a car radio, if it hadn't been nicked (who pinches car radios now?), with wayward reception. Nowadays the A419/417 is a speedy dual carriageway (naturally I'm excluding the dirt track past the Air Balloon pub) and we have full in-car entertainment plus Satnav. The trains to Gloucestershire in the late 20th century were as bad as the roads. British Rail was a national moan and privatisation didn't improve it. Now it is electrified and the trains are mostly on time.

Furthermore, when you did finally get to the Cotswolds in those affectionately remembered days it was more primordial boondocks than sophisticated idyll. Cheltenham, for instance was obsessively provincial (Montpellier was a shadow of its once grand self, and GCHQ was in its infancy.) It was the West Country's 'Disgusted of Tunbridge Wells'. Cirencester was forgotten and beige-coloured while the actual countryside was populated with bigoted Bufton Tuftons in red corduroys and Margo Leadbetters from *The Good Life*. There were no Waitrose or Tesco superstores in any of our towns (the small Tesco in Cirencester was nicknamed 'Polish Tescos' because it had so little on its shelves). Coffee shops, farm shops and



What's not to like about a 1970s Christmas?

gastro-pubs had yet to be invented. The restaurants that did exist were Indian, Chinese or over-priced continental nonsense.

Television reception then was particularly duff in our hills. The lofty aerials would, if you were lucky, pick up one or two channels, both of which could only be seen through 'snow'. My local news came from Wales and I was more likely to get the yet to be invented Netflix than Channel 4.

Mobiles got a signal but only if you walked to the very top of a hill; the internet was non-existent, or where it did exist it was as practicable as the Sinclair C5 in a ploughed field; while

Bluetooth was a dental problem.

And then there was Christmas in the Cotswolds. There was, to give one example, the bad patch in the Eighties and Nineties when everyone had fake designer Christmas trees that looked like green traffic cones. In the Seventies there were the inedible Yule logs, the undrinkable Mateus Rose and the mean Christmas crackers with plastic toys that would have been rejected by a child in a Grimms' Fairy Tale. There were also those awful years in the late Sixties and Seventies when the Christmas record reached its apogee. Half a century later we are still being driven to distraction by the saccharine dirges such as Slade's Merry Xmas Everybody and Wizzard's I Wish It Could Be Christmas Everyday. In the magical past we had to watch a bad James Bond film on Christmas Day, shop at the cheesy Woolworth's for stocking fillers, be content with cheese and pineapple on a stick for celebratory nibbles and drink canned lager and Babycham. Real ale bottled beer had not been invented. Prosecco didn't exist.

And so this year I shall dispense with nostalgia. I shall revel in joys of a modern Cotswold Christmas. I shall buy my presents from Amazon, get my specialist fois gras and wild smoked salmon delivered by DHL, send paperless Christmas cards, listen to carols on Spotify, Skype my relations and watch a box set on Christmas Day. And next year I shall ask Alexa to cook the turkey with all the trimmings. ♦

contact adamptickers@icloud.com
@cotswoldhack