

MCG News

Newsletter of the
Mendip Caving Group

Golden Chamber, Upper Flood Swallet, 2004

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Founded 1954

A recent digging trip in Ogof Draenen

by Ben Cooper

We had an eventful digging trip in Ogof Draenen, Saturday 23rd October, 2004. It all went very well at first. We got underground at 11am, and noticed the high water levels. Unusually, by the time we made it to the Crystal Maze, I was cold from the large volume of water, despite the constant climbing. Julie was complaining of being exhausted, and we nearly decided to turn around at that point. If only we had!



Ben Cooper in Draenen, May 2004



Peat Bennett in the crawl, May 2004

Instead, we decided, having now made it to dry passage, to continue the half hour to camp in "Pontypool or Bust", where Julie could sit it out and rest while we dug. We got to camp, made it through the squeeze without difficulty (oversuit off for me of course), continued the next 200m of flat-out crawling through the old dig, and finally emerged at the current dig chamber. We made good progress digging out soft sand, 30 skips and about 2m distance. Tired, but satisfied, we came out of the dig, had supper at camp, and left camp at 7pm. All things being equal, we would be out in time for a quick half at the Lamb & Fox.



The crawl, May 2004



The dig in May 2004

We knew there was a problem when we emerged from the Crystal Maze back into Agent Blorenge. The sound of the water was thunderous. The waterfall below the eyelet was just awesome - a foaming roaring jet. We were all nervous about our chance of making it down any of the climbs in that power of water, and then Tim noticed that the water level below the waterfall was about 2'. Normally it is a dry sandy bank, but on the way in it was already 1' deep, and the corresponding level in Sewer I was just about head-width of airspace. So if the water had gone up 1', then the Sewer was sumped! Our exit was blocked.

It took a while for the reality of our predicament to sink in. We thought we could

From the Editor



Since you have been receiving the new format newsletter produced using Publisher, I have received lots of very positive comments. It would appear most of you like it. It's come a long way since my early newsletters produced first on a typewriter, then on a BBC Model B and later on the 286, 386 and 486. It's fun to do but it actually takes longer using Publisher... but that's progress for you!

I have received a few constructive suggestions which I have tried to take on board when I can, for example, I had a suggestion recently that the pictures would be better if they were bigger, which I have started doing where practical. Let me know what you think. All suggestions (and praise) gratefully received.

Yvonne

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MCG doings

Congratulations

to **Andrew Brander and Sarah** on the birth of Thomas Isaac William Brander on 06/11/04. Thomas weighed in at a healthy 8lb 12.5oz



A note for the diary...

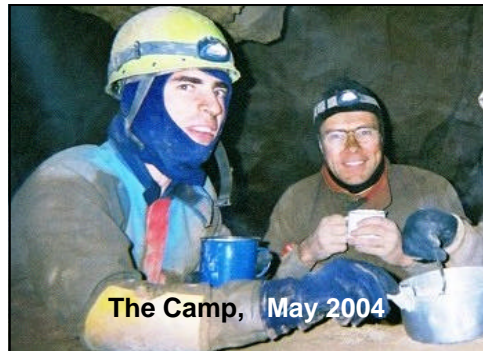
The AGM will be held on 9th April 2005 and the dinner will be at Lyncombe Lodge Hotel, Churchill.



We held the dinner there in 2003 and were very pleased with the food and facilities. The hotel is part of a activity centre offering skiing and horse riding, with local walks and caves / mines nearby.

Tickets and menu choices will be available in the New Year.

make the round trip instead, but it turned out we didn't know it well enough. Tim had done it once, and we duly spent about 2 hours trying to find a passage that matched his memory - in fact we were looking for the connection from Squirrel Rifts into Haggis Basher - but erroneously thought it went straight into Far Agent Blorenge, so looked there in vain. Afterwards, we discovered from the survey that we were very close - we had even found Haggis Basher without realising, but in fear of wandering ever deeper into the cave and becoming lost (60km of passage), we decided to save our energy and our lights and sit it out. Back at the Crystal Maze, Tim noticed the water levels had if anything gone up. It was 11pm, we had been in 12 hours now. If the worst came to the worst, rescue would be called out by about 9pm (Sunday) at the latest. We had at most 24 hours more to wait...



The first hour was fine - we were warm and had plenty to chat about. The second hour was passed making tea (we had Tim's stove), but by the second cup of black tea (we had used up all our milk at camp) we had had enough of that. The third hour was grim. Cold, uncomfortable. We could have another 20 of these to endure. I was curled up in a little ball, trying to reduce my surface area and keep my body off the sand, but you can only lie just so for a while. Every hour on the hour, I got up,

usually with Tim and Julie (Peat was conserving energy like a superhuman) to view the water levels. At 1am, we noticed the "trickle" that we use to fill our water bottles had reduced from fireman's hose to a just a full tap pressure. That was encouraging. But the waterfall below was as thunderous as ever. We came back at 2am hopeful, and with relief saw that the waterfall was now also reduced. Let's just give it another hour...

The 3am check came. It was hard to tell, the waterfall was even more reduced, perhaps similar to when we had come in? Tim went down to look - good lad, because I for one did not want to get wet again, if we then had to sit again for hours. He came back smiling. Water levels down, now about 1'. We had no idea what the weather was doing, but expected more rain on the Sunday, so we daren't wait longer than necessary. It was now or never.

I entered the Sewer first and noticed the foam on the water, and a fresh foam high-water mark an inch from the ceiling in places, and in places on the ceiling. The Sewer had indeed been completely sumped. Even now, the airspace at the lowest point was as little as 6".

I won't bore you with our exit. Needless to say it was hard work. The water was higher than I have ever seen it. The climbs in Agent Blorenge were extremely tough. They would have been extremely dangerous earlier. The water in the Beyond a Choke streamway was unbelievable - up a good 3' in places. The wades were all rib-deep on me, chest deep on Julie. The small cascades that one usually steps from rock-rim to rim were completely submerged, making the going treacherous. The constant flow of heavy water against us was arduous. It seemed to go on unendingly. We were all completely knackered.

By the time I got to the entrance climbs, I was cold and exhausted. But somehow the cold water pouring over me (even the entrance stream was in spate) was refreshing, almost invigorating - or was it because of the thought of just a few more minutes of hell to endure? Finally, at 6:30 am, I pushed the door open to a clear starry sky. Relief!

In fact, our ordeal was not quite over - there was still the drive back to Mendip. We had two cars: I drove, and Tim drove, and we both struggled to stay awake. This was probably the most dangerous, and most foolish, part of our trip. We got to the cottage at 8:30 am, more than 24 hours since we had left it. What a night!

Mendip Caving Group subscriptions, 2005

At the recent EGM, subs for 2005 were set at £30 for a Full Member and £15 for an Associate Member (with a BCA Public Liability Insurance premium to be added when we are advised of the cost). These figures were decided following a discussion about the current finances and membership of the MCG. Unfortunately, we have lost some members this year who were not prepared to pay the increased PLI premium. Thank you to all the members who did pay with good grace.

We have been fortunate to have had some fairly inexpensive years, and subs have not increased since 1994 through careful financial management. However, you will be aware by now that we have to pay for two Beech trees to be removed from our property as they are diseased. This is going to cost approximately £1,000. We also have a lounge floor in need of attention. I was asked at the EGM what increase was needed to help cover the costs of these projects, and the figures above were accepted unanimously.

In real terms, this will only raise about £370 towards the cost of these expenses, so Members recommended that Members cottage fees were also increased to £2.00 per night to generate further income. A discussion ensued and it was clear that cottage fees were unrealistically low, particularly in comparison with other Mendip based clubs (Members cottage fees have been £1.50 since 1993). Again, this was accepted and the increase will come into effect from 1st January 2005.

We hope you accept these decisions, and continue to support the MCG – it really does still offer excellent value for money!

Jacky Ankerman, Hon. Treasurer

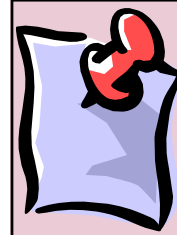
But is it art?

by Yvonne Rowe

Martin and I decided to go down Read's Cavern for a bimby Sunday photographic trip on the November members' weekend. We wanted to photograph the piece of folded rock which, many moons ago, had peeled off the roof like a layer of onion skin. We couldn't remember where it was but after grotting around (and it is pretty grotty) in most of the cave, we eventually found it back in the entrance chamber! It's quite amazing as it is literally a single layer of the fold just sitting on the ground looking a bit like a rock tunnel about 3 feet high and 6 feet long. Photography is so much easier with digital cameras for people like me who just like to snap things of personal interest and end up with lots of rubbish pictures. Now I can select the one or two good ones and simply delete the rest at no extra cost. Over the years I have seen lots of things underground that I would like a photo of but never had any success with a less-forgiving conventional camera, so I am now retracing my steps and getting those pictures, and quite successfully - for me, anyway.



The last time I went down Read's was in March 1984 which, if my memory serves me correctly, was shortly after a fairly major collapse within the cave. I had gone down with my old gang which included (amongst others) Geoff Barton, Ian McKechnie, Roy Kempston, Dick Housego and Linda Gates (now Milne). We had gone to see what changes had occurred and found many of the 'tourist' routes blocked by boulders and rubble. We, and I suspect others, lost interest in Read's as a serious caving trip after that.



Change of Cottage Warden

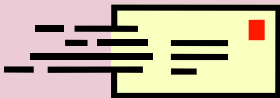
As some of you may be aware, at the last

AGM Wayne Hiscox continued on the Committee as Cottage Warden due to the lack of any other nominations. Recently (and to Wayne's delight!) Doug Harris has expressed his willingness to take over as Cottage Warden. Therefore Wayne has officially resigned. Our thanks go to him for all his past hard work.

At November's Committee meeting Doug was co-opted to the post. Doug will take on the role of looking after the maintenance side of the cottage. Members should contact Doug for Cottage keys and Cotags and any matters arising to do with the cottage.

Joan Goddard has volunteered to take on the role of cottage bookings (Members and Guests) to help Doug out, and free him up to spend more time on the maintenance side. Please note that Joan's role is not a Committee post.

Lee Hawkswell

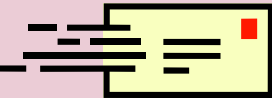


From: Jonathan Roberts
Date: 07/11/04
Subject: Laze

The local cavers have found part of the underground river beyond Laze towards the Ljubljanska river, before Logatec. Slovenia likely to be hugely interesting in next 5 years as extensions are made. Book your bunks now!

As any of you who have been on my archaeology walks might remember, there was a major collapse in the cave during the Early Iron Age (c700BC), mostly confined to the entrance arch and entrance chamber where Iron Age man (and woman) had set up home. Since then there have been many archaeology digs, evidence of which can still be seen in the huge entrance chamber with stratification numbers around the walls where artefacts and other archaeological detritus has been found.

A big disappointment for me was the person who thought it appropriate to daub many of the larger boulders in the entrance chamber with graffiti. Not just any graffiti, but 'cave art' graffiti. There were concentric circles, cup-and-ring designs and various zig-zag patterns. The disappointment being that whoever did this has a knowledge (even an interest) of real cave art, so I would have thought also a respect for this archaeologically ancient and hallowed place. I include a photograph of the fallen rock fold, but would not lend credence to the modern cave artist by photographing his handy-work.



From: Steve King
Date: 05/11/04
To: All cavers
Subject: Bolt Replaced

The loose P-bolt at the Swildon's "Twenty" was removed Thu 04/11/04 and you may be interested to learn that it was only extracted after some considerable effort. A new P-bolt has been placed.

Steve King
 Hon. Secretary CSCC

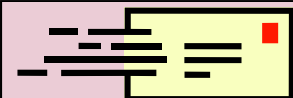
A diving trip to Swildon's sump 9

by Fiona Crozier

On Tuesday 2nd November I had another excellent diving trip down to Sump 9 in Swildon's Hole. Jim Lister came down from the CDG Derbyshire Section to dive with me. He had not dived in Swildon's Hole before so I was able to give him a tour. Sump 6 had unusually clear visibility as I did not have to plough my way through the mud. For the first time I could see what sump 6 looks like from the inside. The dive in 6 can be quite interesting at times because the line sometimes traps under a piece of rock blocking your way through; the line goes through but you are unable to follow it. One has to feel to find where the hole is and gently move the line over then carry on.



Swildon's is a lovely cave, there is so much more passage beyond the sump that has not had the traffic and hordes of cavers passing through. The cave becomes much less polished and the shapes of the rocks become much sharper making it look fresh and undamaged. It's a nice feeling as you venture further in the system as one knows that there is only a small handful of other cavers that venture in this far. It is a privileged place to visit. I will soon make the journey to 12 and keep you all posted when this happens.



From: Ursus spelaeus
Date: 20/09/04
To: MCG
Subject: Subterranea Croatica

We are speleo club "Ursus spelaeus" from Karlovac, Croatia. We are publishing speleo magazine "Subterranea Croatica" and if you are interested in exchanging your magazine please send us e-mail. Our magazine is in Croatian language with English summaries and articles are about exploring in Croatia. Many greetings. (Ed: this exchange now been arranged.)

Logbook extracts, September 2004 – November 4004

04.09.04 – Upper Flood (Martin Peck, Malcolm Cotter, Lee Hawkswell, Doug Harris) Down to Golden Chamber. Malcolm photographed/videoed the new chamber. Very tight getting into it. Lee and Malcolm made it bigger than it was. [?MP] Area taped around mud flow from dig. Suggest approach passage be enlarged and mud removed before any more probing. Well done, diggers! [MOC]

11.09.04 - Upper Flood (Ben Cooper, Tim Francis, Peat Bennett) Very low water and there was hardly a stream at all. It's certainly nice to get to the Red Room virtually dry. Ben and Peat snapped away in Golden Chamber – photos, not stal. so hopefully we'll have a decent photographic record before the massed hoards go in there. Nosed around in the floor of boulder chamber - there is definitely a draught here so it looks like the way on is down in the floor. Checked the roof but there doesn't seem to be much doing. Finally we opened up the stream soakaway

in the Red Room. This should prove/disprove the theory that Puddle Lake can be lowered. A heavy downpour will be needed to clear the silt banks though.

12.09.04 – Waterwheel (Tim Francis, Peat Bennett) Went for a bimble down Waterwheel to look at the new engineering. First time I've seen a lake at the bottom of the pitch now the dams have been repaired. Wonder how long gour pools are going to last under the first dam with the huge torrent of water that comes out of the outlet pipe? [PB]

19.09.04 – Upper Flood (Tim F, Louisa Minahan) Digging in the choke. Started to enlarge the muddy crawl between the choke and Golden Chamber. Plenty more work needed but it's easy going. My first look at Golden Chamber, very impressed with the crystal shelf and all the straws. The digging was pretty dull though and I wasn't in the mood – horrible cold and sore throat [LM]

25.09.04 – Draenen (Pontypool or Bust) (Peat Bennett, Tim Francis, Duncan Horne) Spot of speed caving on this trip. In/out within 9 hours including 30 buckets of spoil. No time for food, just a cup of tea.

25.09.04 – Rod's Pot, Read's Cavern, Goatchurch (Fiona Crosier + others) Excellent trip. [FC]

02.10.04 – OFD1 (Brenda Wybrow, Geoff Beale). A quick dash to Penwyllt to stay at SWCC. I know for the purist that this was BCRA weekend, but I couldn't face the long drive up there so opted for a trip into OFD. It had been raining so there was plenty of wet stuff around. Took photos between the entrance and the main stream area, and then out. [GB]

10.10.04 – Upper Flood (Martin Peck, Julie Hesketh) Down to the Red Room and the new chamber to see what all the fuss was about. Fantastic find – really beautiful, particularly the false floor and crystals. Removed mud from the chamber that is being dragged in through the breakthrough point. Need to be very careful there – unfortunately a trickle of muddy water is puddling on the pristine stal on the left hand side of the chamber. Very difficult to avoid, I fear. Left some spoil at the breakthrough point for the next trip . . . [JH]

10.10.04 – Browne's Hole (TimF, LouisaM, RichardC, JulieH, JackyA, LeeH, LindaM, JoanG, Andrew) Mad dash around the entrance maze that is Browne's Hole. Eventually the way on was found and the lovely muddy tube followed. That's why it's called Browne's Hole! Couldn't get to the end as the Corkscrew was almost sumped off.

10.10.04 – Stoke Lane Slocker (Tim, Richard, Lee, Andrew) Went for a splashy crawl to the sump and back. Tim suffered FX-ion failure again, hurrumph) Crawl, crawl on the way out – bad for the knees.

10.10.04 – Shatter Cave (Jacky, Linda, Louisa, Joan, Julie) "Girly" trip into Shatter – my first trip there in many years. My first girly trip in many years too, come to think of it. Took in all the pretties and did pretty much the full guided tour. Out in time to meet the boys who had just wandered over from Stoke Lane. [JH]

23.10.04/24.10.04 – Ogof Draenen (PeatB, JulieH, Ben Cooper, TimF) A trip of epic proportions. The usual trip to Pontypool or Bust turned into a 19.5 hour trip due to some inclement weather outside. We had noticed that it was wetter than usual on the way in but not enough to worry about. 30 buckets of spoil removed from the dig which is looking good and draughting nicely. Beef noodles for dinner, lashings of tea and off to the Bloreng to exit. Except that the usual trickle of water at the top of the Bloreng streamway was a torrent and the downstream climbs impassable, meaning that the sewers were probably sumped. So we had a conflag and decided to see if we could exit via the round trip which Tim had done once, many years ago. Much furling later the group despondently decided that we had not a clue where the round trip was and decided that as we were in the longest UK cave, we would be safer returning to the start of the Crystal Maze and await a drop in the water levels. Luckily we had fuel, lots of water and teabags so we kept our spirits up with tea and chatter. It only took 8 hours for the water levels to drop enough for us to have a crack at exiting the way we came in. The Bloreng was tremendously wet and the climbs extremely 'sporting'. Good job we were all reasonably fit – it was quite a serious undertaking. We passed the



Theft of Petzl equipment

On 02/11/04 a consignment of Petzl equipment was broken into and considerable stock was stolen from a lorry which had parked up for the night in Warrington, Lancashire. We would ask you to help in our 'crime-watch' by keeping a look out for anyone offering any Petzl goods from the following list:

Petzl Myolite E31P headtorch; Myo 3 Belt E29P headtorch; Petzl Tikka Plus E47P headtorch; Petzl Myo 3 E27P headtorch; Petzl Zoom E22NOI headtorch with dark headband; Petzl Charlet Quark U19P ice-climbing ice axe; Petzl Navaho Complet C711 industrial full body harness; Petzl Navaho Vario C792 industrial sit harness size 2; Petzl Spatha S92L Folding knife (large); Petzl Spatha S92S Folding knife (small).

Should you hear or see anything unusual or suspicious relating to any of these items, please contact the Warrington police direct and ask for: Detective Constable Mike Robinson: Tel. 01244 613886. Or, if you prefer, contact us direct at Lyon Equipment, Tel: 015396 25493 and ask to speak with Carol, Ben, or Tina.

Thank you for your assistance. *Lyon Equipment*

Yv's droppings

MR: "It's the screen that's out of focus" (heard at the slide show).

YR: "The food was lovely, it was just that it was inedible" (about some Slovenian food)



Our £500 golden pot

The auction and raffles held during the 50th anniversary year raised £500 for MCG. The committee would like to use this to provide something special for the Group or cottage and have suggested putting the £500 towards the purchase of two new dining tables. If anyone has alternative suggestions the committee would like to hear them. Or if anyone knows of some strong, traversable tables going begging, again, let someone on the committee know.



Remember, remember, the 4th of December

As there was livestock in the field adjacent to the Cottage on 06/11/04, the fireworks party was postponed. Well, it was raining anyway, and there was also the Slovenian meal to go to, so nobody minded much.



Not to be outdone, there will be an Xmas fireworks party instead, on Sat 04/12/04 to coincide with the MCG Xmas dinner at the cottage.

Sewers – that had clearly sumped off during our 8 hr wait. It was the streamway which was hard going, though – over an hour of rib-high wading against fast flowing water. Knackering. Exited the cave at about 6am. A salutary lesson in learning escape routes well!! A longer trip than anticipated but a good team that made sensible decisions and got out safely. Next time in Draenen we will take a look at the round trip route for future reference!! Bed by 9am. [JH]

06.11.04 – GB Cavern (Bob Templeman, TimF, RichardC, LeeH, MartinRowe) Bimby bounce around GB – Gorge, Bridge, White Way, out up the Gorge. Bob had brought a monster light for spotting stal in the roof. On the way out we bumped into Bristol Uni, Reading Uni and UBSS. [TF]

07.11.04/08.11.04 – Training weekend (Cara Allison, Fiona Crozier, Linda Milne, Jacky Ankerman, Louisa Minahan, John Crowsley (Trainer)). Ropes and ladder work. Really informative session from our very own professional instructor. We learnt to assess risks and rig accordingly with lots of handy hints on knot-tying. We had some hilarious 'cats cradle' moments but we learnt loads about rope safety. Cara, Fiona and Linda had chance to practice at the 40ft in Swildons, followed by Jacky and Louisa in Goatchurch. Thanks to John for a great weekend [LM]

Training weekend, 7/8th November

By Linda Milne

The opportunity to receive some professional training was not to be missed. So, at the November members' weekend we (Cara, Jacky, Fiona, Louisa and I) went back to the drawing board and learnt all about 'ropes and ladder work'. John usually teaches paying clients so we were keen to make the most of it. We started with a discussion on what we wanted to get out of the session and found that we pretty much wanted the same thing - to be confident at rigging ladder pitches and lifelining.

Confidence comes with practice so we spent the morning having a go at doing the basic 2-anchor point system on the chair legs in the library (using the bowline, clove hitch, Italian hitch, and figure of eight) and then in the afternoon we put it into practice on the 'Tower' at the Wessex's Hut. We compared the difference between hanging off a lifeline in just a belt (arrgh I can't breath!) and then on a harness (quite comfy). It's important to have your harness at least attached to your belt to stop you falling out if you go upside down. And Fiona gave us a quick tour of the Wessex hut.....

The next morning one team went to Swildon's to ring the 40' with the other team going to Goatchurch in the afternoon. It's always much more fiddley when you're in the cave and it took quite a while to allow everyone to have a proper go but it was worth it to have your efforts assessed. We learnt lots of other things along the way about safety, assessing risks, anticipating problems as well as understanding the weakness in, and proper use of, our equipment.

John is happy to run another course next year. Numbers will be limited but the subject can be set at any level on any subject e.g. SRT or Cave leader – so make the most of it!

Library additions

Speleoguide – Ariege Pyrenees by Flo Guillot & Phil Bence. (donated, I think, by Tony Knibbs). In French. Attractively presented paperback includes an introductory section on geology of the region and then individual cave descriptions arranged by area. Clear surveys, tackle requirements, access and location details.

Mushrooms and Toadstools by M Lange & FB Hora (1963, repr.1978). A useful addition to the natural history section of the library (donated by Yvonne Rowe).

Madagascar 1991/92 and 2003 by Schuit & Laumanns (2004). This publication summarises two German and one Dutch expedition. Numerous surveys and good bibliography.

The Mendip Hills AONB Management Plan 2004 - 2009 (March 2004). Very glossy, nice photos and worth a look.

In the Streamway – a collection of poems published by ISSA (2004). Here's an abstract from a poem which says it all!

Why?

*'Can't move in suits that don't fit right,
Can't fit down holes that are just too tight,
Can't go forward, can't go back,
Can't get through this ruddy crack.
Can't believe the aggravation
Just to see some sad formation.
And squeezing through a letterbox
Just to see some coloured rocks?
Doesn't really blow my socks
Off.*

*I hate the spiders,
And all that crawling
And the feeling that you're sometimes falling
And when I'm stuck and can't get straight
I hate the fact that I've put on weight.*

*I hate to shuffle on my bum
And I'm so relieved when my caving's done*

But I go again, coz it's such good fun'

Phew!

Melanie Lloyd

MCG socials

At least 22 people turned up for the **Slovenian meal** on Saturday 06/11/04. Yvonne



made a mushroom soup, Joan cooked the pork, Jacky provided a venison casserole, and Jane the apple pie. Brenda and others helped out in the kitchen.



Geoff had a novel experience—cleaning the floor after spilling Joan's cream for the pudding. Normally, he has others who clean up behind him, but the girls bullied him into doing it himself!



Louisa and Tim put together a slide show of MCG's summer meet to Slovenia, and Martin gave a Photo-story presentation. He also provided the dreadful ethnic music.

December's social, on the 4th, is an **Xmas dinner** (see advert opposite).

MCG CHRISTMAS DINNER
4th DEC 2004

Menu
Roast Turkey, with all the trimmings followed by Christmas pudding.
Veggie option

Party Hats and crackers
Please bring your own drink

For under a fiver!



We need to know numbers by the morning of the 4th but advance notice would be appreciated!



Volunteers needed for cooking and preparation!

Contact Linda for further details