

# American Express Retirees Club



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## Newsletter – Q1 – 2025

### Editor's Welcome

Hello, my dear colleagues. We have made it to the beginning of another new year.

2024 saw a considerable number of elections, with some countries moving away from central policies to the right ( and the unknown impact after the inauguration taking place in January 2025 of the 47<sup>th</sup> President of the USA, a certain Mr. Trump (older than many of us, yet, the most powerful person in the world !)); multiple wars and the continuing consequence of global climate change. This peppered with discrimination, poverty, and the rule of law being ignored on so many occasions.

Do you sometimes ask yourself. "Well, what can I do about it ?" It is a question to which there is no comfortable answer.

Let's look at some of the positives. Paris 2024 Summer Olympics – brilliant .The shutting down of the last coal power station in UK- important; AI is now on every ones lips, and we use it day to day ( but may not realise it), Quantum Computing was an important enabler of AI,(the new computing chip capable of performing computations in under five minutes which would take traditional supercomputers an estimated 10 septillion years-(I don't even know how long that is!-see below). Even the production of this newsletter is now supported by my basic ability to gather information from the vast internet world !

As it's the beginning of a new, fresh year I will take the opportunity to ask , 'Is there any way we can make this newsletter more interesting ?; Is there a way we can get some input ? Sometimes I feel you are forced to read the 'diary of a Watkins', supplemented by the encyclopaedia of knowledge, otherwise known as Peter Smith ! Does an occasional letter from France, Vietnam or Australia interest you ? I really want to make sure that everybody feels they are getting value for money . Let me know !!

By the way ! Our new pension administrators requested that I make fundamental changes to contact details. Ready ? Well; no longer Buck but Gallagher ; no longer 'roll number' but 'pension payroll number.' Be informed !!

### Chairman's Report

Firstly, my apologies to our Editor, Richard Watkins, for being somewhat tardy in the submission of this article.

Usually, I try to send in the copy a few days before the end of the month preceding the month of issue, unfortunately a few things interrupted that timing this year, so I'm a few days into the New Year and the month of issue.

I could claim that Christmas interrupted the process but as it was nearly a full year coming, I had plenty of notice.

This year was as usual a very quiet for us, son number one was away with his girlfriend and family for the break, well deserved as he is a postman and has a particularly trying time this year with staff shortages and seasonal increases in volume, plus. reorganisation within the department. Please spare a bit of sympathy for our post men and women who often walk up to 30,000 steps a day, that's practically a couple of months for me.

We were at home on our own again this year with just the tv for entertainment, songs and charades aren't the same with just two, thankfully, a couple of jig saws given to us by so called 'friends' helped out. Not my favourite pastime but it was different and filled in some of the time.

Also, it's not worth cooking a roast for just two, so we settled, well chose actually, a favourite of ours, a thinly sliced rare steak in a buttered baguette with onions and mustard, ten minutes and its done, lovely, and very little washing up.

Mind you we have had our fill of turkey etc., many years ago, when we had a pub/restaurant. I think the record one year was twelve turkeys in 14 days, enough to put anyone off them for life. Luckily being in the country, we had local farm suppliers to keep us very nearly stocked, sorry stop reading if you are squeamish, occasionally they were still warm when they were delivered, plucked and trimmed.

This year however, we mis-calculated and found ourselves scrabbling round for a turkey for a late booking. We couldn't find one anywhere from our normal suppliers and thought we would have to resort to Tesco's or Sainsbury's frozen, I avoided these because once I accidentally let the giblets in when I cooked it overnight, not that it spoilt it. Thankfully one of our local butchers remembered he had a large turkey in his freezer that had been there for a couple of years. In desperation we took a chance but had to let it defrost for about three days in our spare bedroom because it was weighed about 35 to 40lbs. After it defrosted, I decided to de-bone it so I could make sure it was cooked through. After a slow cook overnight, it turned out to be the best and tastiest one over the whole period much to our relief.

Please accept my best wishes for the New Year.

## **Obituaries**

Mrs Nicola Jane White on 28 November 2024 who lived in West Sussex and did not leave a spouse.( We were notified by her brother, Paul White).

Ms Lynn Patricia Martin on 13 November 2024, who lived in Essex and leaves a spouse, Mr John Martin

Mr Roland Bennett on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2024, who lived in West Sussex and left a spouse Jacqueline Bennett.

Mr Richard Lock on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2024, who was in receipt of a spouse benefit from Mary Lock who lived in East Sussex.

Mrs Maria Rosalia DeMello on 19 October 2024 who lived in Canada and did not leave a spouse (We were notified by her son Joe DeMello).

Mr Alun James on 16 October 2024, who lived in Dyfed and was widowed.

Mr Robert James Bailey on 13 October 2024, who was widowed and lived in Brighton.

Mrs Elizabeth Mary Nicoll on 9 October 2024, who lived in East Sussex and was widowed.

Mr Peter Lamaison over the weekend of 5 & 6 October 2024, who lived in London and leaves a wife Eva.

Mr Kenneth James Betts on 5 October 2024, who left no spouse and lived in Worthing.

Mrs Anna Evans on 28 September 2024, who lived in Brighton, East Sussex and was single.

Mr Graham Williams on 24 September 2024 who lived in East Sussex.

Mrs Linda Jane Alborough on 2 September 2024, who lived in Romford, Essex.

## **Letter from Hazel Crawford in France**

Well, our area in France (south) has had some very strange weather for Winter so far.

We have had a really bad storm that almost came into my house but strangely the rain came right up to the patio doors and turned away thank goodness! Neighbours were not so lucky. The Powers that be are trying to decide what to do, endless waiting as usual. In total contrast, we are having some wonderful sunny days, warm enough to sit outside, then came a couple of nights of horrendous Mistral winds, so loud that you can't sleep. The same winds give me the joy of raking the whole garden of next doors weeping Willow tree twigs and leaves that he refuses to cut! However, I am incredibly lucky to have 2 lots of lovely neighbours the other side of me, who help me if I need it.

2 other friends who live about 15 minutes away are sadly going back to England in 6 weeks at the request of their families. He helps me with all things Technical (not my best ability) She helps me with my phone anything Technical again. I will really miss them and especially their lovely cockapoo Molly

Now this last week we have had rock solid ice car windows!

France is generally in a state of who knows what politically, as is Germany. It is a worry for our pensions on the value of the euro. I'm going to need as much as possible as my hero- known to many of you Mr Manilow will not be travelling anymore but has accepted a lifetime of commitment at the Westgate hotel in Las Vegas! Not the cheapest place to get to or when there. At least my lovely neighbour looks after my cat when I do travel.

I was in the UK for a week a couple of weeks ago to see friends in Kent, the 3 of us going to the theatre in London to see 'The Curious Case of Benjamin Button at the Ambassadors Theatre. A man born old who got younger as the years went on!!!!

Next day I went to see La Clique in Leicester Square. I was concerned that it might be outdoors, but I was told it was in a heated tent - didn't improve my thoughts! However, it was brilliant. Clever, funny, all sorts of variety and entertainment. Next day was my shopping day and packing as the day after was my annual visit to the Panto at the London Palladium with some friends. Always brilliant and you never stop laughing, with Julian Clery and Nigel Havers and a well-known lady singer always and lots of dancing and costume changing - mostly by Julian!!

I made it home again with all the chocolate I could get into a suitcase along with M&S Extremely Chocolatey biscuits plus assorted boxes of Mister Kipling goodies and more!!

So I hope you have all had a good Christmas and I hope that 2025 will be kind to everyone.

Kind regards, Hazel Crawford, Roquebrune-sur-Argens, France

## **The Italian Reunion (Editor)**

Imagine my excitement; an opportunity to share an afternoon with dear colleagues from my Italian secondment, 1984-1989. The place, La Cascina, Rome, the occasion, Christmas; the date, 30<sup>th</sup> November, 2024.

The restaurant is located on the via Tuscolana, (near to the GRA, the M25 equivalent), about twelve kms from the centre of Rome. We found an unbelievably cheap flight from Gatwick, minimum hand luggage only, flying on 29<sup>th</sup> November. Our second decision was to find a reasonably priced hotel, near to the centre but easily accessible to public transport routes to the restaurant. My wife,

Diana, found us a place near to Piazza di Porta San Giovanni. It is about 40kms from Fiumicino Airport.– Unfortunately, she contracted this horrible flu-like bug and so had to remain in UK.

OK, 'flying solo,' but I was up for it. First blip, however, was that the Rome public services announced that there would be a one-day strike on 29<sup>th</sup> November – sh... As time got closer, there were more positive messages advising that the Government had negotiated with the unions (and threatened heavy fines for strikers) and so the strike would be limited to four hours. Only in Italy ! I arrived at about 18.00 and whisked my way down the one kilometre walk to the train ticket office. I tried to use the automatic ticket machine but failed. I walked gingerly over to the ticket office and bought the tickets. A 40-minute journey in a posh, multi-tier, express train in prospect. But no ! The train unions felt that a one-day strike was what was needed and so no trains. Not to worry, a replacement bus service was available – you know how those work in the UK- try negotiating the same in a dark evening in a foreign country, where the strike notice had only been announced in the past few hours. Back to the airport to seek out the location of the Roman chariots that would be taking me near to my hotel. A polite travel assistant pointed me to a near empty coach parked a distance from, seemingly , the travel hub. I showed my ticket to the driver who shrugged his shoulders and invited me into the empty coach. I used the 'down' time to check my Google Maps app , only to discover that the bus journey will take at least two hours and then a twenty-minute walk. Some time later , we start our journey ( it is now 19.30). A navigator gentleman also boarded, and he chatted with the driver , and, occasionally pointed in the direction needed to be taken. After a long journey, following the train line route, we arrived at via Ostiense ( some 13kms from my paid-for destination) when the driver announces that this is his final stop. This was already a two-hour coach journey. A quick check into my app I see that there is no direct public transport route to my hotel and that a combination of metro and bus would take at least another hour and a half – but no buses. Losing the will to live I decide that further investment was needed and so found a taxi to take me the rest of the journey to the hotel. I arrived at 22:00, twenty euros poorer, but grateful.

No strikes on the 20<sup>th</sup>, so things can only get better !

Reunion day- a good night's sleep and even more invigorated by an unscheduled visit to an Italian barber shop. All was good. No chances taken on transport as I organised for a taxi to take me to the restaurant.

I arrived at 12:30, for a 13:00 lunch appointment. The restaurant was enormous, round in design, divided into two semi-circular sections. I was directed to the Amex designated half, neatly laid out with several large round tables encircling a rectangular table in the centre. I was first to arrive, ( English) so waited patiently for my colleagues of forty years ago to arrive. How would I recognise them ?

The first gentleman of a certain age arrives, and we politely exchange names, me with my rusty Italian. He explains that he was employed from the 1970's and, like me hadn't had contact from many years. Several more people arrive, and we politely exchange greetings- I had no idea who these people were but did the usual ' how are you, how is the family' shallow conversation, without referring to their names – as I didn't know who they were.

Eventually, a lady walks in who recognises me ( I was the only non-Italian employed in the early years). She graciously tells me her name and asks if I remember her. I had to admit 'no.' She, of course, speaking to me in English-how embarrassing. She then looks at the assembled group and just confirms that we are attending the ex-Amex reunion. They all laugh, shake their heads, as they were not ex-employees and , in fact, were attending a different reunion. They walk off, and we are down to three !

Eventually, the 'real' colleagues arrive and amass to over fifty people. I, having learnt my lesson, stayed close to each person arriving to hear their names when being greeted by other colleagues' !

I am pleased to say that, after a couple of prosecco's, I was able to enjoy immensely the reunion, and it was so beautiful to spend a few quality hours with people who made such a brilliant contribution to my business life all those years ago. And we shared fond memories of events and dear colleagues, unfortunately, no longer with us.

Needless to say, that travel 'blip' became just a slight impediment compared to the reward of meeting so many lovely people.

### **Books at Christmas ! (Editor)**

Thought I'd give an update on my current active library for your information. It is very varied !

**Tim Harford, 'How to Make the World Add Up.** It's a Times Book of the Year-This is a book about statistics, and how to understand them better.

**Catherine Ashton, 'And Then What'**-What does a diplomat actually do? Ashton takes us behind the scenes of major crises in Ukraine, Iran and more to reveal how modern- day diplomacy really works. So much of modern-day diplomacy still takes place behind closed doors, away from cameras and prying eyes. So, what does this vital role really look like in today's world – and what does it take to do it well?

**Misha Glenny, 'Dark Market'** draws on interviews, court records and website archives to craft this chronicle of a new and invisible form of crime made possible by the Internet. Unlike ordinary criminals, identity thieves, credit-card fraudsters and other cyber criminals engage in activities that are virtual, transnational and so technical in nature that they are difficult to prove in court. By 2004, with most countries and companies taking a haphazard approach to network security, sophisticated criminals were stealing millions from institutions worldwide. Glenny's main focus is Dark Market, which became the world's top English-language cybercrime site, a digital "supermarket" that sold stolen identities and credit-card data that cost the banking industry tens of millions.

**Anne Applebaum, 'Autocracy Inc.,'** the Pulitzer Prize-winning historian takes account of the financial institutions and trade deals that have helped spread tyranny across the world.

**Dr.Maggie Aderin-Pocock, 'Webb's Universe,'** The book is structured into three sections - the first is about the telescope itself, beginning with its predecessors, including, for instance, some interesting material on the pros and cons of using a Lagrange point for a telescope. The second looks at Webb's mission - what it's intended to capture and how it will do that. And the last section, around twice as big as the other two added together, takes us through the already impressive range of Webb imagery.

**However, the most fascinating author's work I have found recently is that of Timothy Snyder;** his latest book being 'On Freedom.'

A prominent historian and author, he often discusses the impact of social media on society and individual relationships, particularly in the context of his book *The Road to Unfreedom* and related writings. He contrasts social media interactions with the depth and authenticity of real-world relationships. Here's a summary of how Snyder might compare them:

### 1. Superficial vs. Deep Connections

Social media tends to foster superficial connections, often focused on likes, shares, or fleeting interactions. In contrast, real-world relationships require time, effort, and emotional investment, resulting in deeper, more meaningful bonds.

### 2. Algorithmic Influence

On social media, algorithms prioritize engagement over authenticity, often leading people to interact in ways that are performative or driven by curated content. Real relationships are shaped organically, without the external manipulation of an algorithm.

### 3. Echo Chambers vs. Open Dialogue

Social media often creates echo chambers where users are exposed primarily to ideas that reinforce their existing beliefs. Real-world relationships, on the other hand, expose individuals to diverse perspectives, fostering empathy and understanding.

### 4. Loneliness and Fragmentation

Snyder warns that social media, despite its promise of connection, can increase feelings of loneliness and societal fragmentation. Real relationships provide emotional support and a sense of belonging that virtual interactions cannot fully replicate.

### 5. Political Manipulation and Distrust

Snyder emphasizes how social media can be exploited for political purposes, spreading propaganda or disinformation to undermine trust. Authentic relationships help build trust and resilience against such manipulation.

In summary, Snyder views social media as a tool that can undermine the depth and authenticity of human connections, whereas real relationships are essential for personal growth, trust, and a healthy democratic society.

And, if you really want to immerse yourself, in *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century*, Timothy Snyder includes a recommended reading list in the appendix. These works serve as historical, philosophical, and literary guides to understanding and resisting authoritarianism. Here are the key recommendations:

#### 1. Hannah Arendt

- *The Origins of Totalitarianism*

A foundational text on how totalitarian regimes arise, focusing on the conditions that lead to fascism and communism.

#### 2. George Orwell

- *1984*

A classic dystopian novel exploring surveillance, propaganda, and the suppression of truth.

#### 3. Václav Havel

- *The Power of the Powerless*

An essay examining how individuals can resist oppressive regimes through truth and moral integrity.

#### 4. Czesław Miłosz

- *The Captive Mind*

A profound exploration of how intellectuals rationalized their support for communism under oppressive regimes.

#### 5. Timothy Snyder's Own Work

- *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin*

A detailed history of the atrocities committed in Eastern Europe under Nazi and Soviet rule.

#### 6. Other Authors and Texts

- Philip Roth: *The Plot Against America*

A fictional account of an alternate history where fascism takes root in the United States.

- Leszek Kołakowski: *Main Currents of Marxism*

A critical analysis of Marxist ideology and its consequences.

- Zbigniew Herbert: *The Collected Poems, 1956–1998*

Poems offering reflections on history, morality, and resistance.

- Albert Camus: *The Plague*

An allegorical novel about resistance to tyranny and the human spirit in the face of oppression.

These works collectively provide a historical, philosophical, and ethical framework for understanding authoritarianism and defending democratic values.

## **Ten Major Global Events Scheduled for 2025 (Editor)**

### Inauguration of the 47th U.S. President

On January 20, 2025, Donald Trump is set to be sworn in as the 47th President of the United States, marking the beginning of his second term.

### Expo 2025 in Osaka, Japan

Running from April 13 to October 13, 2025, Expo 2025 will be held on Yumeshima Island in Osaka, Japan. The event is expected to attract over 28 million visitors, including global leaders and decision-makers.

### Eurovision Song Contest 2025

Scheduled for May 13–17, 2025, the Eurovision Song Contest will take place in Basel, Switzerland, bringing together musical talents from across Europe.

### FIFA Club World Cup 2025

From June 15 to July 13, 2025, the United States will host the FIFA Club World Cup, featuring top football clubs from around the globe competing for the prestigious title.

### World Aquatics Championships 2025

Taking place from July 11 to August 3, 2025, in Singapore, this event will showcase the world's best swimmers, divers, and water polo players.

#### World Games 2025

Chengdu, China, will host the World Games from August 7 to 17, 2025, featuring a variety of sports not included in the Olympic Games.

#### World Athletics Championships 2025

Scheduled for September 13–21, 2025, in Tokyo, Japan, this event will bring together the world's top track and field athletes. G20 Summit in Johannesburg, South Africa

On November 22, 2025, Johannesburg will host the G20 Summit, marking the first time this significant economic forum is held on African soil.

#### COP30 in Brazil

In 2025, Brazil is set to host the 30th UN Climate Change Conference (COP30), focusing on global environmental and climate policies.

#### ASEAN and East Asia Summit in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

The 2025 ASEAN Summit, along with the East Asia Summit, will be held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. These meetings will address regional economic and security issues, with dates to be announced.

These events highlight a diverse range of political, cultural, and sporting activities that will shape the global landscape in 2025.

### **Quiz Time (Editor)**

- 1.To the nearest mile, how many miles of nerves do we have in the human body?
- 2.True or false ? Babies are born without kneecaps.
- 3.Of the 300k different edible plants on earth, how many do we eat ?
- 4.What colour is snow on Pluto ?
- 5.What is the dot on the letter I called?
- 6How many presidents of the USA died on 4<sup>th</sup> July ?
- 7,What does Pinocchio mean in Italian ?
- 8.What are the six official languages of the UN ?
- 9What city was Italy's first capital ?
- 10.What does an average human head weigh ?

### **Topical Jokes (Editor)**

Why do retirees refuse to write down their New Year's resolutions? (Because their eyesight isn't what it used to be, and who needs the extra pressure of trying to read the fine print )

Why don't over-sixties bother making New Year's resolutions ? (Because you've earned the right to say "I'm perfect just the way I am")

What's the best part about being over sixty on New Year's Day ? ( You're already used to groaning when you get out of bed, so the hangover's nothing new !)

Why did the over-sixty crowd love New Year's Eve ? (Because it's the one night they can stay up until midnight ... as long as they take a nap at 8).

Why do the over-sixties love New Year's Eve ? (Because it's the only night they can say "Let's get wild" – and no one questions if that just means taking off their socks in bed !)

### **And Finally (Peter Smith)**

'Grandad what are you getting Grandma for Christmas?'

'Oh, I'm not sure, I'll pop down to Tesco's and probably get her a new frying pan.'

'You can't get her a frying pan..... Tell you what I'll get her something, when I go out, that you can give her.'

Whispered aside by Grandad 'Works every time!'

\*\*\*\*\*

Joe is a dairy farmer who farms just outside our village, it has been a few weeks since I saw him last, then I met him in the local Post Office.

'Hi Joe' I said, 'how are things down on the farm?'

'Not too bad' said Joe 'but as you know Mary and I have been married for more than 30 years now and the spark has gone out of marriage if you get my drift.

Not only that but that new prize bull I bought has turned out to be a real disappointment. He just stands around all day chewing on the hay and shows no interest in the ladies, I think I might have to sell him.'

'Sorry to hear that, Joe. I know he cost you a small fortune, you had better call the vet before you make the decision' I replied.

A few weeks went by before I saw Joe again.

'How's things going now' I asked, 'between you and Mary and what about that prize bull, did the vet sort it all out?'

Joe said 'Oh yes things are much better now at home, and the vet gave me some powder to sprinkle on the hay to pep the bull up. Made a world of difference, within 24 hours he had covered all the dairy herd and then I found him down the bottom of the field. eying up next doors herd.'

'Hey that's fantastic' I said, 'I wonder what was in it?'

'I've no idea' said Joe 'but it tasted like peppermint.'

### **Quiz Answers**

1. 45 miles : 2. True : 3. 200 : 4. Red : 5. Tittle : 6. 3, (John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, James Monroe): 7. Pine Eye : 8. English, French, Arabic ,Chinese, Russian & Spanish : 9.Turin : 10. 8 pounds.
- 2.

### **Measuring Time /Computing Speeds !**

I know you need to know the answer !

Billion years, 10 (9), 000,000,000

Septillion years, 10 (24),000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000.

Today's computers process information in the form of binary numbers, 0 or 1. The basic unit of a quantum chip is a qubit, which can be 0,1, or a combination of both (superposition state). In 2019 Google demonstrated a 53 qubits-powered computer ( called Sycamore) which processed, in 200 seconds, calculations that would require 10,000 years using the world's fastest computer. In 2025 IBM will develop a computer, Condor, comprising 1,000 plus cubits !! The future is endless !!!

#### **PENSION ADMINISTRATION - PLEASE NOTE THE ADDRESS BELOW**

##### **Contact address for retiree's, relatives & Opt-Out Policy**

The Retiree Club **does not** keep any records; you need to use the contact details shown immediately below.

To reduce any delay; All change of address requests and, matters pertaining to the distribution of the Newsletter or any other items pertinent to a pension payment must quote a pension payroll number, an authorized signature is required and be referred to.

American Express UK Pension Plan, Gallagher, PO Box 319, Mitcheldean, GL149BF

Helpline 0330 123 9584. Non-UK Residents +44 1179 101100. Or e-mail: [amexadmin@buck.com](mailto:amexadmin@buck.com)

**WE REGRET THAT THE RETIREES CLUB IS NOT ABLE TO DO THIS FOR YOU.**

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Events

TBA

### **Newsletters**



**Monthly eNewsletter by email, items only;** please email the Editor Ann McNorvell at address above.

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**Quarterly Newsletter items only;** please email the Editor Richard Watkins at the address above.

**NEW RETIREES ONLY** - If you are recently retired and seeing this Newsletter for the first time – welcome to The Retirees Club. You are invited to attend any of our events and this invitation is extended to your guests. Details of our events together with all other Retiree news can be found on our website [www.theretirees.co.uk](http://www.theretirees.co.uk). Where you can also sign up for the monthly eNewsletter. **PLEASE NOTE THAT YOU MUST OPT IN IF WISH TO RECEIVE A COPY** after receiving your first copy.



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Many Club Members post their comments on the Club and on current events. You too can participate; all you need to do is to register with one of the administrators on the site. Membership

is for anyone who is a current, past employee or who has past connection with American Express. **Please join us on Facebook!**

