

Christmas concert, tour of Europe, picnic on the beach

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Gerry's Diary

The highlight before Christmas for me this year was a concert in the Cathedral. My choir was singing with an orchestra and some brilliant young solo singers from the music college in Manchester. We sang part of "The Messiah" by Handel, as we say - or Händel, as they used to call him in Germany before he came to London. "The Messiah" is the favourite piece of classical Christmas music in Britain, but we also sang some other Christmas music. The most interesting piece for me was South American. It's the first piece of written music from South America. When the Spanish conquered [2] South America they brought with them Christianity, of course, but also European musical culture. This piece is a Christmas carol [3] – a Christmas song – from the early 17th century. The text is in Quechua with some Latin words as well. Quechua was the language of the Incas and is still an important language in the Andes. If you want to hear this carol look for the name Hanacpachap – it's the first word of the text. We just sang part of the song, and we sang it with just a drum [4] to accompany us – Boom, bom, bom, boom, bom bom. It sounded fantastic – South American and European at the same time.

Quechua seems to be an interesting language. When the Quechua speakers say "we", for example, they can choose between a word for "we", which means we including you, for example "I'm sure we all like chocolate;" or a word for "we" which includes me and my group but not you, for example "We had turkey on Christmas Day."

Our Christmas guests this year included my niece Danielle and her partner. Danielle lives in Oregon, in America, but she and her boyfriend are spending about a year travelling around Europe. Danielle has a French passport, because her father is French, so she can travel in Europe without any problems. Her partner had to go home to the States to get a new visa in the autumn but he's now here again and we enjoyed their visit to us over Christmas. They have bikes [5], so some of the time they're touring [6], and there's a special online network for cyclists called Warm Showers – it's a list of private homes where cyclists can stay – for free [7]. Danielle tells me they met lots of interesting people that way. The other thing that Danielle and her boyfriend are doing is using another network called Workaway. This is a list of people who need help. You can go and work for them for a week or two. There's no pay [8] but you get free accommodation [9] and food. Danielle has stayed with small organic farmers, people who are renovating [10] old houses, people who need help with big gardens – all kinds of places in different countries across Europe. She also went to work as a volunteer [11] in a refugee [12] camp in Greece. Really interesting experiences.

Do you remember my last pub quiz question last year? Before Christmas I asked you: Why are there so many old graves [13] in British cemeteries [14]? I think this is the first time that I got no answers to a pub quiz question, but thanks to Franz for his message, and congratulations! The question was probably a difficult one, and, of course, I'm sure you were all very busy with other things. Anyway let me tell you my answer to that question. Usually in Europe, when somebody dies, you buy a plot [15], as we say, in a cemetery: a place to bury [16] a body or bury somebody's ashes [17] after a cremation [18], and a place to put a stone in memory of the person who has died. But in Switzerland and in lots of other European countries, as I understand it, you only buy the plot for a certain number of years, for example 30 or 40 years. Then, at the end of this time, the family can decide to pay more money to keep the plot and the stone, or the plot becomes free [19] and it can be used by another family. The situation in Britain is different: if you buy a plot in a cemetery, you buy it for ever [20]. And when a cemetery is full, we have to make a new



one. In my little town, we have the old cemetery on Church Island, but it is now more or less full. And there's a new cemetery that's about 50 years old and that's where most people are now buried.



The old graves in British cemeteries can be interesting: you can see more of the history of a place in the cemetery. But British cemeteries are not as tidy [21] as Swiss cemeteries because nobody looks after the old graves. In fact this is a big problem. A lot of the old grave stones are not very safe – they can fall over [22]. Who's responsible for them? It should be the families but often the families don't live in the town any longer, and the modern family doesn't want to pay for some old grave. In our town the new cemetery belongs to [23] the town, so the town council is responsible for looking after it, but the old cemetery belongs to the church. The church hasn't got much money these days to look after cemeteries, so that's why we have our Association of Friends of Church Island. We help to look after the island and the old cemetery.

At the beginning of the show I talked about singing a Christmas carol in Quechua – a South American language from the Andes. About 25% of modern Peruvians, I read on the internet, speak some Quechua, and there are perhaps 10 million speakers of this language in South America. There are only about 550,000 speakers of Welsh but it's still the second biggest language in Britain, after English. But what's the third biggest language in Britain today, with nearly as many speakers as Welsh? That's my pub quiz question for this time. I'd like to know: Which is the third most common language in the UK, according to the 2011 census [24]? Send me your answers and any comments on the show to the website podclub.ch, or you can use Twitter. My Twitter address is @gerrypod.



You can also find us on Instagram with the hashtags #gerrysdiary and #podclubgerry. And don't forget the PodClub app, where you can find the vocabulary learning programme. 2018 is now well under way [25]. We already celebrated our first family birthday. It was Owen's birthday and he wanted to go for a picnic, so there we were on the beach on a freezing day having a picnic lunch. An unforgettable experience, I think we can say. The grandchildren loved it! I hope your 2018 will also be full of interesting experiences! I'll be back with my Diary on February 16th. Take care!

Glossar: Gerry's Diary

[1] **niece**: the daughter of your brother or sister

[2] **to conquer**: to defeat, to win against (a country in a war)

[3] **carol**: a Christmas song that in some way tells the story of Christmas

[4] **drum**: a musical instrument (made with a tight skin over a round container) that you hit with a stick or with your hand

[5] **bike**: bicycle

[6] **to tour**: to go on a (long) journey where you visit different places for a holiday (or, if you are a musician, to give concerts)

[7] **for free**: with no cost (you don't have to pay)

[8] **pay**: salary, money for working

[9] **accommodation**: a place to sleep (for example, a room in a hotel)

[10] **to renovate**: to make new again, to repair (here: to make an old building good to live in)

[11] **volunteer**: somebody who works for no money

[12] **refugee**: a person who is looking for somewhere safe to live (a person who is escaping from a war or other bad situations)

[13] **grave**: a place where you put a dead body

[14] **cemetery**: graveyard, a place with graves

[15] **plot:** a piece of land for sale (for a grave, or a house, etc.)

[16] **to bury:** to place something under the ground

[17] **ashes:** what is left / what remains after you burn something in a fire

[18] **cremation:** the burning of a body after death

[19] **free:** here: available (for somebody else to use)

[20] **for ever:** for unlimited time, for always

[21] **tidy:** well looked after, not messy

[22] **to fall over:** if something does this, it means that it is no longer standing up and is now lying on its side

[23] **to belong to:** to be the property of

[24] **census:** the collection of information about all the people who live in a country

[25] **to be under way:** to move forward