

# ALL THE TRIMMINGS

Residents, staff and friends from Abbeyfields up and down the country served up festive events and activities to celebrate Christmas in style.

Special guests, themed entertainment and sparkling decorations formed the basis of the festivities, with many going above and beyond to bring some extra Christmas cheer to their house or home.

See more Christmas highlights on pages 6-7 [↗](#)



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## A MESSAGE FROM OUR CHIEF EXECUTIVE

I hope you are well and that you have had an enjoyable start to the new year.

In this issue of the Voice, we recap the festive season and the way in which it was marked at Abbeyfield services around the country. I am delighted to see how residents, staff, volunteers, relatives and friends all came together to make it a truly memorable occasion, and how they evoked the spirit of Abbeyfield at Christmas, when our values of companionship and community are perhaps needed most and exemplified best. It is heartening to read how not only did our residents enjoy Christmas, but we also reached out to others who were otherwise by themselves at this time of year and invited them in, with a warm welcome, good food and pleasant company.

There are also many other notable achievements worth reading about in this issue. Our campaign for Starts at Home Day 2024, for which we invited MPs to visit and learn about our sheltered housing schemes, was once again a great success; we were singled out for praise by the Housing Ombudsman for our handling of complaints; and we were honoured, as a result of our patronage of HM King Charles, to receive an invitation for several representatives to attend the Westminster Abbey Together at Christmas Royal Carol Service.

These milestones, along with other behind-the-scenes improvements and the continued fantastic work by our staff and volunteers, enable us to improve and enrich our service provision for our residents and, in many cases, others in the wider community; and to continue to enhance our profile on behalf of current and future residents. On a personal note, I am delighted to see how our National Residents' Panel continues to enable residents to shape the way in which we deliver services for them, and I look forward to further developments in the year ahead.

With best wishes for a happy and healthy 2025!

**Paul Tennant** CEO, Abbeyfield Living Society  
Follow Paul on X @CEO\_Abbeyfield

## ONE RESIDENT, A VOLUNTEER AND TWO MEMBERS OF STAFF JOIN ROYALS AT CAROL SERVICE

A resident, two members of staff and a volunteer were thrilled to be invited to attend the Together at Christmas Royal Carol Service at Westminster Abbey on 6th December 2024.

Being granted places at the Abbey continues a longstanding tradition of royal support for our organisation, and we have enjoyed the patronage of His Majesty King Charles for 45 years.

We were invited to select four people to attend the event, hosted by HRH the Princess of Wales and supported by the Royal Foundation, the purpose of which was to 'thank those who have been there for others during life's challenging times, showing empathy, love and kindness.'

Proudly representing Abbeyfield were Valerie Bird, a resident at Hope Bank View independent living complex in Sunderland, who runs a weekly Knit and Natter group and bingo session for her fellow residents; Caroline Edis, who has volunteered for over two years at Pratt House care home in Amersham, lifting the mood with her positive attitude and sense of humour; Geraldine Maguire, the House Manager at St Finnian's sheltered housing scheme (part of the Abbeyfield Belfast Society), who has recently surpassed 30 years of working there and is a great champion of Abbeyfield in her local community;



**Our Abbeyfield representatives outside Westminster Abbey**

and Jay Ward, the Activities Coordinator at Abbeyfield House care home in New Malden, Surrey, who organises a fantastic programme of activities for the residents, strives to involve others in the community in many of his events, and organises a unique monthly coffee morning to create a community dementia support network.

Jay said, "It was an honour to be chosen to attend the carol service at Westminster Abbey, and I was proud to be there representing Abbeyfield; I felt like I was flying the flag for my fellow colleagues and the volunteers who help us, all of whom go above and beyond to support our residents continuously, especially at this time of year. It was a truly unforgettable occasion, a highlight in my career, and one I'll never forget."

## HOUSING OMBUDSMAN HAILS 'POSITIVE COMPLAINT HANDLING CULTURE'

The Housing Ombudsman has recognised Abbeyfield Living Society (ALS)'s exceptional performance when it comes to handling complaints.

The Ombudsman's recent report found no maladministration of six findings (complaints made against ALS to the Ombudsman) during 2023-24 – one of only two organisations in England where the Ombudsman made five or more findings and not one of them was upheld.

In addition, the report determined that ALS had 'performed very well when compared to similar landlords by size and type.'

The Housing Ombudsman, Richard Blakeway, wrote a letter to ALS CEO, Paul

Tennant, in which he stated, 'You and your staff deserve considerable recognition for this outcome,' adding that it 'indicates a positive complaint handling culture within your organisation.'

ALS Customer Quality Manager, Jonathan Earnshaw, commented:

"The report's conclusions are a boost ahead of vital work that we will continue to develop and launch in the months ahead, with a new training offer for colleagues, a dedicated complaints toolkit and opportunities to understand lessons learnt from complaints through the sharing of data and outcomes widely across our organisation."



# INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEER DAY PROVIDES OPPORTUNITY TO CELEBRATE ABBEYFIELD'S HERITAGE

Ever since our founding as a charity in 1956, we have benefited from the services of many committed and caring volunteers to provide support to the thousands of older people who call Abbeyfield their home.

Our founder, Richard Carr-Gomm OBE, was our first volunteer, and his values proudly underpin a 21st century Abbeyfield. The first Abbeyfield House in Bermondsey, East London, which Carr-Gomm established in 1955 to alleviate loneliness for local older people, was quick to attract support. More money was raised and more houses bought, and before long the organisation became a registered charity operating a variety of houses for older people around the UK.

International Volunteer Day, on 5th December each year, provides an annual opportunity for us to recognise the contribution our volunteers make, and to thank those who generously give their time to enrich the services they provide for their residents. For example, residents

at Abbeyfield House in New Malden held a special volunteer appreciation event, for which they put together some lovely hampers and made a cake; Hill House in Honiton gave thanks to their outstanding volunteer, Edward Hopkins, who helps in a variety of roles including befriender, photographer and taxi driver; and Hampton House in Solihull held an awards ceremony (see page 10), at which they honoured staff, volunteers, and also residents who themselves contribute to life at the home



Volunteers at Abbeyfield House, New Malden were honoured at an appreciation event

Resident, Richard Bunce, said, "We all really enjoyed the positive atmosphere, the laughter and sharing all the reasons why each person is special to Hampton House."

# WINNERSH SUMMER HOUSE OFFERED TO LOCAL CHARITIES



Abbeyfield Winnersh summer house and garden

Local charities have been given free use of a summer house at Abbeyfield Winnersh care home in Berkshire to hold meetings, support sessions and other events.

The home's Customer Relations Manager, Amanda Sykes, has offered the space as part of its efforts to advance the mutually beneficial work that other organisations do to support older people in the local area.

She explains, "The summer house is used a

lot during the summer months, but our residents find it more difficult get outside in the winter.

"By sharing the summer house with others, we can maximise use of our facilities whilst supporting other good causes in our neighbourhood. The space is fully accessible, with heating for the winter months, and therefore is ideal for organisations that work with older people.

"Our wonderful kitchen staff also provide refreshments, including homemade cakes and biscuits, for any group that uses it."

Age UK will be setting up sessions at the summer house, which overlooks Abbeyfield Winnersh's beautiful landscaped gardens, to support young carers to get into work and other carers (mainly husbands and wives) to find suitable care arrangements for their loved ones.

The Alzheimer's Society are also making use of the facility as a meeting space. Sarah Swift, the Local Services Manager, said, "It was lovely to have been offered the use of the summer house and it was a really calming location for our team meeting."

Amanda added, "We have also reached out to our community hospital to see if their memory clinic can make use of our facilities for their Maintenance Cognitive Stimulation Therapy (MCST) sessions, also run by Age UK. Our summer house and garden could provide the perfect sensory setting for older people experiencing cognitive decline or living with dementia. The sights, smells and sounds may help to rekindle memories of positive experiences to do with nature and the outdoors."



# UPDATE FROM OUR RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT MANAGER

Justin O'Brien, Abbeyfield Living Society's Resident Engagement Manager, has provided a run-down of the latest developments from our National Residents' Panel and how we are supporting our residents to engage with us on how we work.



## Digital training through Tpas

Abbeyfield Living Society (ALS) is now a member of Tpas, an advisory service for organisations like ours on engagement and participation, demonstrating our commitment to working collaboratively with residents to help drive improvements in our services.

This in turn means that every resident is now also a member and can access the benefits, including a variety of free and discounted training sessions, free regional resident events, and opportunities to network and share good practice. To register, please follow these steps:

1. Visit [www.tpas.org.uk/member-search](http://www.tpas.org.uk/member-search)
2. Type 'Abbeyfield' in the search box and click 'Search'
3. Scroll down and click 'Join as a tenant'
4. Fill in your details and select a username and password

You can find more information about the membership benefits by visiting [www.tpas.org.uk/membership-benefits](http://www.tpas.org.uk/membership-benefits).

If you have any questions about our Tpas membership, please contact Justin on **07553 424 356** or email [resident.engagement@abbeyfield.com](mailto:resident.engagement@abbeyfield.com).

## Abbeyfield Residents' Network now available on WhatsApp

ALS residents can now join the Abbeyfield Residents' Network on WhatsApp, which enables us to bring residents together from across the country to share experiences, support each other and maybe make some new friends.

WhatsApp is free to download and use on any smartphone.



You can access the Network by completing an online application form, accessible by scanning the QR code, or you

can email [resident.engagement@abbeyfield.com](mailto:resident.engagement@abbeyfield.com) to request an application form is emailed to you. Please insert QR code alongside text. If you have any questions about the Abbeyfield Residents' Network please email [resident.engagement@abbeyfield.com](mailto:resident.engagement@abbeyfield.com).

## Feedback from residents

We know that resident feedback is essential to helping us improve the services we provide. We value all types of feedback and have a responsive resident feedback process to ensure we can respond to all compliments, complaints and suggestions as quickly as possible.

## Compliments

Compliments let us know where and how we are succeeding in providing good services, and give us examples of good practice that we are committed to sharing with our residents and throughout the organisation.

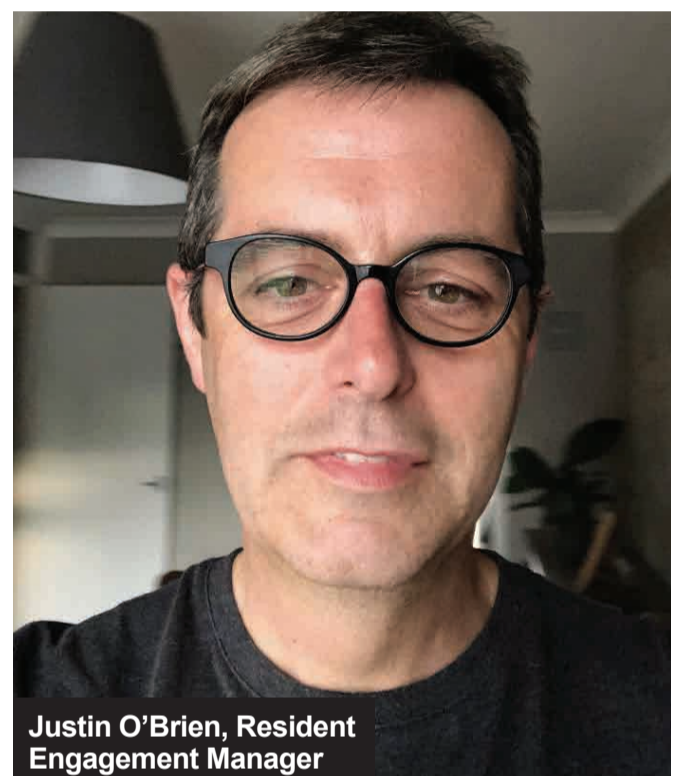
Please share your feedback with us by emailing [compliments@abbeyfield.com](mailto:compliments@abbeyfield.com) or by calling us on **01727 857 536**.

## Complaints

We'd like to think that we get things right most of the time, but we know that occasionally things may go wrong. We operate a two-stage complaints process for these cases. As an organisation that is committed to listening to our residents and improving our service, we really do want to hear from you if you've had a problem.

If something goes wrong, your first course of action should be to raise the issue directly with the relevant manager or staff member concerned. In many cases, they will be able to put things right very quickly and simply, and no further action will be required.

However, if you do not feel comfortable doing this, or if you are dissatisfied with the initial response, you can make a complaint. The simplest way is by contacting our Complaints Team at [complaints@abbeyfield.com](mailto:complaints@abbeyfield.com) or by writing to the Complaints Manager at the address on the back cover of this magazine. You don't have to put it in writing if you don't



Justin O'Brien, Resident Engagement Manager

want to, and you can instead call us on **01727 857 536**, after which your complaint will be passed on to the Complaints Team. The Complaints Team will acknowledge your complaint in writing within two working days of it being received, and the investigating officer will provide a full written response within 10 working days unless a later date is confirmed with you.

In late 2024, we launched our complaints lessons learnt approach to help to learn from complaints, help prevent future complaints and drive service improvements. We will regularly be sharing the outputs from this process, alongside other initiatives we are implementing to further enhance how we handle complaints, with the National Residents' Panel and through the reports available on our website.



# MPs COMMIT TO SUPPORT AFTER ACCEPTING STARTS AT HOME DAY INVITATIONS



**Dan Aldridge MP meets residents and staff at Abbeyfield House in Weston-Super-Mare**

residents to discover how living in sheltered housing has enhanced their lives, and to staff about the day-to-day running of the houses and how residents are encouraged to retain their independence and take advantage of the various social and engagement opportunities on offer.

In these difficult times, the challenges that ALS and other sheltered housing providers face nationwide were also

A number of our sheltered housing schemes have received visits from their local MPs to mark Starts at Home Day.

Starts at Home Day is a national celebration of the value of care and support services and the difference that having a safe and secure place to call home can make to people's lives. It is an opportunity for sheltered housing providers such as Abbeyfield Living Society (ALS) to raise awareness of what they do and build political support.

ALS sheltered housing schemes in Bembridge, Blackpool, Gosport and Weston-Super-Mare, plus two in both Nottingham and Southampton, invited their MPs for a tour of the facilities and to find out more about the services they provide and how they engage with the local community to bring benefits to the area.

The MPs were encouraged to speak to

highlighted, including issues such as inflexible funding models and meeting the complex needs of an ageing population, which are compounded by rising operating costs, inflation and challenges with staff recruitment and retention.

Weston-Super-Mare MP, Dan Aldridge, said, "I was able to hear first-hand from the residents about their experiences of the immeasurable benefits of sheltered housing as a safe and secure home, giving them the opportunity to engage socially with their fellow residents and others in the local community, and the value of retaining independence and choice in later life.

"The challenges that housing providers face were also made clear, and I look forward to seeing how I can support organisations like ALS in the future, so that they can continue to provide an excellent service to their residents and the community."

Our involvement in Starts at Home Day follows our sponsorship of an inquiry into the regeneration of outdated sheltered housing, conducted by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Housing and Care for Older People, which recently published its report. The report found that much more investment is needed to ensure that sheltered housing is fit for purpose and can continue to fulfil the needs of residents. It appealed to the government, Homes England and the Greater London Authority to recognise the value of investing in the refurbishment of existing sheltered housing, and provided several recommendations on the best way forward. This report was used to inform a subsequent report published by the Older People's Housing Taskforce, which made further recommendations to the government.

Visit [www.abbeyfield.com/shelteredhousing](http://www.abbeyfield.com/shelteredhousing) to find out more about the benefits of sheltered housing and to browse our houses across the country.

**Joe Robertson MP enjoys a cup of tea at Poplar Lodge, Bembridge**



# BRAMHALL RESIDENTS TAKE A TRIP DOWN MEMORY LANE

Remembrance Sunday, which was observed on 10th November 2024, is often a time for reflection and to remember those who have given their lives for their country.

For residents at Abbeyfield House care home in Bramhall, it was also an opportunity to cast their minds back to their own memories of wartime.

One resident said, "I was five years old and when I went to bed I could hear the drumming sounds of the German aircraft. I also

remember the Anderson shelter at the back of my garden where we used to go to be safe."

Another resident recalled, "I was a schoolgirl when the war broke out and I stayed with my family in Liverpool. I remember the ration books, and my mum was a wonderful cook. There was also a man who used to walk around every night making sure the curtains were closed and that there was no sign of anyone's lights on."



When I was 5 I went to bed. I could hear the drumming sounds of the German aircraft. I remember the Anderson shelter at the back of my garden where we used to go to be safe.





# MORE CHRISTMAS HIGHLIGHTS

Here are just some of the hundreds of photos we received from our services of Christmas activities, events and celebrations.







To see more, please take a look at our website, and our social media feeds on Facebook, X and Instagram.





# FESTIVE DECORATION CHALLENGE WINNERS ANNOUNCED

As is customary at Abbeyfield, Christmas time brings with it our favourite of all competitions, the Festive Decoration Challenge. We challenge our residents, staff and volunteers to transform their houses and homes into a festive winter wonderland.

Reviewed by a panel of independent judges, prizes and plaquidts go to the best dressed buildings. We are delighted to announce this year's winners:



## Abbeyfield House, Bramhall

Residents in Bramhall contributed the heart and soul to Abbeyfield House's Christmas display, adorning their home with home-made decorations. They also made cards for their loved ones whilst enjoying mince pies and hot chocolate, chose gifts from a mobile Avon shop, and even enjoyed a performance from a bagpipe player!

## Esk Moors Lodge, Whitby

The tree at Esk Moors Lodge is one of the best we've seen. The residents clearly enjoyed decorating it themselves to add that extra bit of homely feeling to the festive season. It looked great lit up in the evenings, and we loved the customised advent calendar with a chocolate orange in the middle.

## Lee House, Wimbledon

Using a mix of plastic, fabric, balloons and real foliage, Lee House residents Hilary and Pat and activity coordinator Yvonne Ellis created an eye-catching range of floral arrangements which brightened up the lounge, and a window display of holly and berries. For an eco-friendly element, they also used the leftover bits to create a small wreath.



Congratulations to all our Festive Decoration Challenge winners! If you would like to see more fantastic decorations hung around our houses and homes, please take a look at our social media channels.



[@AbbeyfieldSociety](https://www.facebook.com/AbbeyfieldSociety)



[@TheAbbeyfield](https://twitter.com/TheAbbeyfield)



[@abbeyfield\\_society](https://www.instagram.com/abbeyfield_society)



# HILL HOUSE TREATS GUESTS TO CHRISTMAS DINNER TO HELP COMBAT LONELINESS



Hill House care home in Honiton laid on Christmas dinner for a number of people from their local neighbourhood, in order to help alleviate loneliness in the community.

The home invited 10 guests who would otherwise have spent Christmas Day alone, including eight relatives of current residents and a family member of a former resident who had passed away.

The day began with a visit from Father Christmas and his elves, who brought presents for everyone (as it transpired that everyone was on his 'good list!'), followed by a rendition of The Superman Song with all the actions.

The guests then sat down alongside 25 of the home's residents and staff for Christmas dinner with all the trimmings. They were joined by a longstanding volunteer, Edward Hopkins, who had lunch with a resident, Joan, whose family were unable to visit her.

Hill House also welcomed back Steven, who had spent time at the home for respite care – a short stay designed to provide a break for a person's carer, help with post-hospital recovery, or serve as an introduction to long-term residential care.

He said, "I feel honoured to have been invited.

"I would normally have been on my own on Christmas day, but here I have had such a lovely afternoon."

Melody Taylor-Brown, Care Home Manager at Hill House, explained, "Many people would prefer to be with others at Christmas,

and we wanted to ensure that those who could not spend the day with family or friends had somewhere to go for pleasant company, a good meal and a festive atmosphere.

"Organising events like this, which help to build friendships and put us at the heart of local society, is something that comes naturally to us. We are always delighted to welcome visitors through our doors, and to bring a bit of Christmas cheer to people's lives."



# HADDENHAM SCOOPS DOUBLE AWARD AT LOCAL AND NATIONAL LEVEL



Abbeyfield Haddenham residents and staff with their awards

The Abbeyfield Haddenham Society, which manages Stonehill House care home in Haddenham, is celebrating success after having been awarded a brace of Prestige

Business Awards, recognising it as one of the best homes in the sector.

Abbeyfield Haddenham beat off stiff competition to claim the Care Home of the Year 2024 Award in the Buckinghamshire regional contest, followed by the Lifetime Excellence in Elderly Care Award 2024 at national level.

The judging panel of industry experts were extremely impressed with the home's performance, giving Stonehill House an exceptional score of over 95 per-cent. Highlights of their review included: overall performance and qualifications; customer votes and feedback; social media pages; client reviews; fundraising activities and charity contributions; and a highly

successful mystery shopper experience.

Stonehill House Registered Manager, Lindsey McGibbon, said, "We pride ourselves in giving individual care to our residents and get to know their family and friends well. These awards highlight the exceptional standard of care provided at Stonehill House and underscore the importance of personalised attention in enhancing the quality of life for our residents.

"We remain committed to maintaining these high standards and continuing to serve the community with compassion and excellence."





# HAMPTON HOUSE RECOGNISES RESIDENTS, MEMBERS OF STAFF AND A VOLUNTEER AT “UPLIFTING” EVENT

Hampton House in Solihull held a special awards ceremony in late November to thank the residents, members of staff and volunteers who help to create the unique, homely atmosphere and friendly spirit that characterises the independent living complex.

34 residents, eight members of Hampton House staff, 13 from Advanced Healthcare (who provide care services) and a volunteer were recognised at the event for the roles they play, with each one receiving a personalised certificate.

Special guest, singer-songwriter Gemma Nelson, who has written for and sung with multiple chart-topping acts and recently completed a tour on Broadway, helped to present the awards, and treated everyone to a few songs in between the presentations.

Activities coordinator, Sarah Allen, said that she came up with the idea for the event to acknowledge the many individuals “who

bring a little something to the house, making it what it is.”

Among the residents who were recognised was Richard Bunce, who commented, “Everybody here, from staff to residents, are all special in their own way, and us all coming together to recognise that was really uplifting.”

Of the members of staff who were presented with awards, special acclaim was given to those starting out in their careers but who have already made a considerable difference to the residents’ lives, including 17-year-old general assistants Kaila Carolan and Jacob Wright, who Sarah described as “a credit to their generation.” You can read Kaila’s thoughts on her role on the back page.

Volunteer Carole Page, who continues to organise the weekly coffee morning and quiz even after her mother, a former resident, passed away, was also recognised.

Following a special request by several people,

one of the resident’s dogs, Boo, was also included in the ceremony for the ways he improves the residents’ mood.

“He is so well behaved and absolutely adorable,” said Sarah, “and the room lights up when he strolls through for his walk.”



Richard, Gemma and Sarah

# SPEEDWELL COURT SEEKS COMMUNITY SUPPORT TO SECURE CRUCIAL FUNDING FOR DEMENTIA LUNCH CLUB



Speedwell Court care home in Southampton has successfully applied to the Co-op’s Local Community Fund to have their Community Lunch Club shortlisted as a local good cause eligible for funding.

The Community Lunch Club is run every month, welcoming people living with dementia and their carers for a three-course meal. Free to attend, the club also gives attendees the opportunity to meet others in the same situation. Lunch is followed by a dementia-friendly activity.

Speedwell Court’s Customer Relations Manager, Justine Owen, said, “As a free service run by a charity, we would struggle to sustain the club without support from our community. It would be a tremendous loss to the many current and potential future attendees if the club was to close.”

To help the Community Lunch Club receive as much support as possible, Co-op Members will need to choose it as their preferred local cause, which they can do by visiting the Co-op website and searching for The Abbeyfield Society (or cause number 89967), and selecting it.

Members will receive one entry to a prize

draw for every £5 they spend. 10 winners are drawn every month, who will receive £500 cash, with their chosen local cause receiving £5,000. The Community Lunch Club will also receive a share of a further £6,000 at the end of the funding year (October 2025), depending on how many people choose it as their preferred local cause.

Co-op membership costs £1, and you can sign up in-store, online at [www.coop.co.uk/membership](http://www.coop.co.uk/membership), or in the Co-op app, after which you can select the Community Lunch Club as your chosen local cause.

“In doing so,” Justine continued, “you will help us to raise the vital funds we need to keep the club free to attend, help it to grow, and continue to support people living with dementia and their carers for many years to come.”



# PUZZLE PAGE

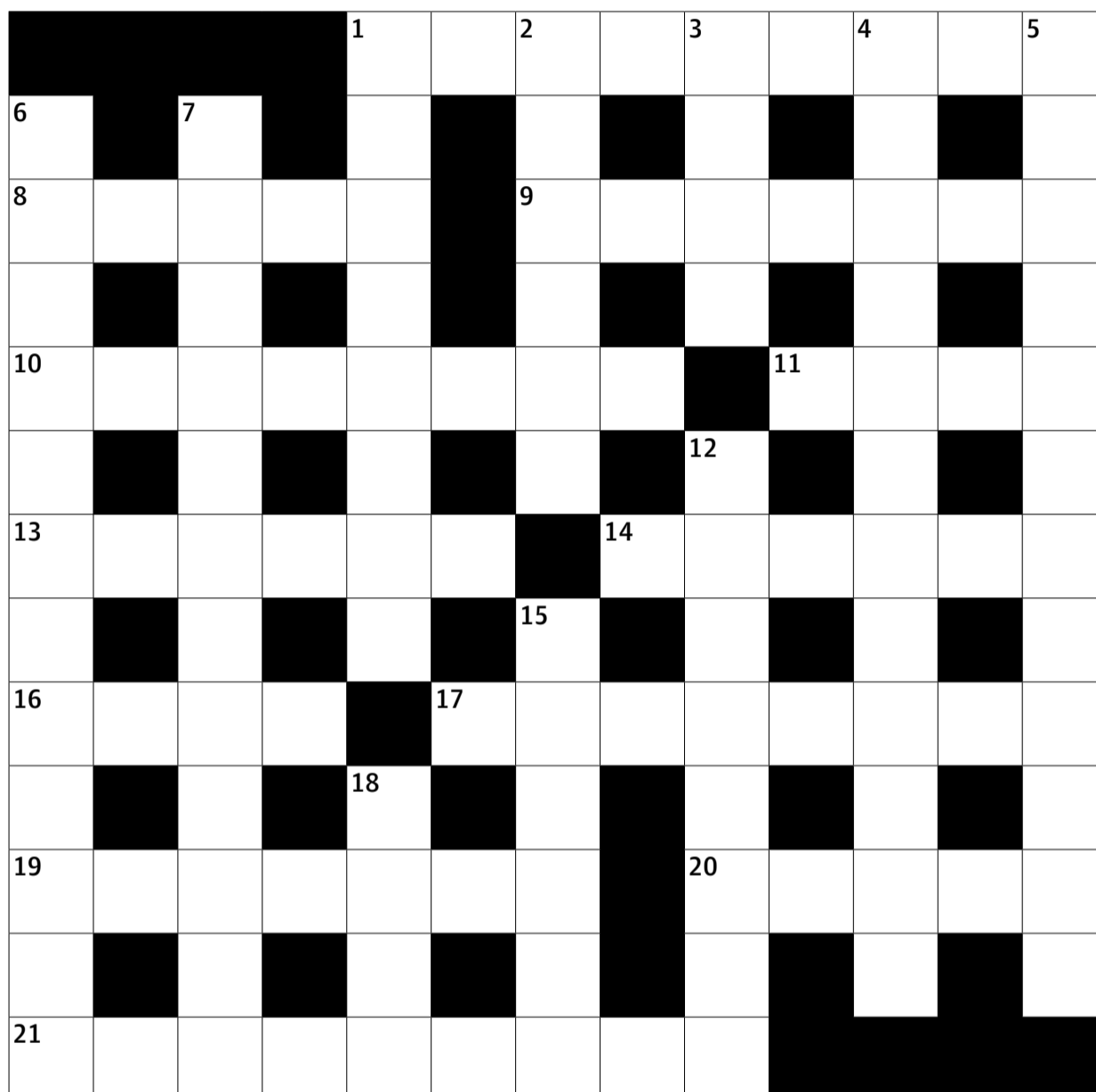
## CROSSWORD

### Across

- 1 Kind of moustache (9)
- 8 Expect (5)
- 9 Make less heavy (7)
- 10 Hot (in a frying pan?) (8)
- 11 Charity (4)
- 13 Bright - brilliant (6)
- 14 Worthless (2-4)
- 16 Head - bread (4)
- 17 Stronghold (8)
- 19 Portable anti-tank weapon (7)
- 20 Carmen or Fidelio? (5)
- 21 Mid-morning snack (9)

### Down

- 1 Basil Fawlty for example (8)
- 2 Stockings made from sheer material (6)
- 3 Play bricks (4)
- 4 Device for accessing beer (6-6)
- 5 Position close to the action? (8,4)
- 6 Controversial attention-grabbing issue (5,7)
- 7 Showy or exciting display (6-6)
- 12 Highly complicated - full of twists and turns (8)
- 15 Quagmire (6)
- 18 0 (something one can make) (4)



## SUDOKU: MEDIUM

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## HARD

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