

AT YOUR SERVICE: Home shopping deliveries bring instant gratification on the part of the customer. What's not to like?

Our chief lockdown hobby? Buying things



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SOMETIMES I'd be lost for a Tuesday topic if it weren't for the frequent publication of surveys. This week I found one strangely relevant to our current communal situation of tension-generating uncertainty.

According to United States, United Kingdom and Chinese psychology sources, we seek to allay anxiety by accumulating material things. Being surrounded by 'stuff' creates feelings of comfort and safety.

This, they aver, explains why people purchased so much during the pandemic.

Apparently, scared people buy more material things. Fear increases the desire for safety and hunger for possessions. Psychologically, owning things gives us status, pleasure and advantage over others.

We barricade ourselves in with our stuff as protection against danger, threat and harm. The more material goods we possess, the more secure we feel and 'self-gifting' has proved to be the new panacea for all Covid-related ills.

This probably accounts for the number of 'white van men' cruising daily up and down our roads dropping parcels on doorsteps.

A double thump on the front door, plonk the package on the front step; take a snap of it in situ to prove delivery and back in the van and away before the recipient of the item is halfway down their hall. Instant gratification on the part of the customer. What's not to like?

Have you noticed that the size of the package is rarely related to its contents? My last delivery was a foot-long cylindrical carton. Inside it a single palette of eyeshadow one and a half inches square, rattling about like a lost thing.

Access to the goods is like opening Fort Knox, guaranteeing the ruination of kitchen knives, scissors and fingernails.

I have a garage landscaped with cardboard containers of every dimension, bales of bubble wrap, polystyrene blocks and beads rising above foothills of scrunched brown paper. Neither the blue bin nor I can cope.

Our chief lockdown hobby has been buying things – and the internet is more than happy continuing to feed our voracious appetite. Such variety! Such choice! A scan, a click. So convenient! It's a bleak day that doesn't bring a little something.

Even with the recent easing of restrictions, we don't have the conscience now to put on a coat and go out in the cold to support our struggling-to-survive local traders who have served us so faithfully and well in the past.

The only prospering business I can see is the Post Office, queued to the door daily with people making 'returns' – though that's such a faff it's less trouble to keep the goods, which is why I have so many shoes, perfect in every respect, except size. We live in a climate where 'need' and 'want' have become synonymous.

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Now, here's an interesting thing. A different set of scientists have warned of the mental stress that too much choice brings.

The media bombard us with advertising that subliminally entices us to espouse the 'new, improved and state-of-the-art' whether we need it or not.

I'm only one generation removed from the idea that a suite of furniture was a once-in-a-lifetime purchase and 'white goods' were expected to last nearly as long.

Today's retail trade vocabulary, "bigger, better, more efficient, more functions", is silkily persuasive. It results in perfectly serviceable good quality stuff being discarded at the whim of fashion, shunted to dusty oblivion despite still functioning perfectly.

The concept of 'make do and mend' is sadly obsolete. Today, domestic design has the lifespan of a fruit fly and the 'repairman' has joined the ranks of rare breeds.

The 'instant boiling water tap' for example, is an elegant kitchen installation, till it breaks down and you have to borrow a kettle from the pensioners next door.

I'm content to sit tight and wait till fashion's rapidly revolving carousel turns, as it inevitably does.

My vintage three-piece suite, riotously upholstered in a Mary Quant daisy pattern, but now decently shrouded in tasteful plain grey loose covers and relegated to the conservatory, will once again have its day.

I spotted its near-double in style magazine last week. Ho-hum. What goes around, comes around....

ON THIS DAY

November 23 1921

Orgy of Carnage

CONTINUOUS disorder of a desperate character prevailed in the East End and North Queen Street and York Street areas of Belfast yesterday.

As a result of the disturbances, seven persons lost their lives by bombs and bullets and three were asphyxiated. The wounded number over sixty.

The trouble, as on the previous day, was most serious on the County Down side of the river where sniping was indulged in from half past five in the morning until after darkness fell. An attempt by incendiaries to fire Catholic houses in Seaforde Street in the morning was frustrated by the plucky action of a number of local young men. In the evening, however, the incendiarists burned down the sexton's lodge at St Matthew's Church. While a huge crowd was assembled in the vicinity gloating over the exploit, a bomb was thrown into their midst, killing one man and wounding forty-five others.

Later a bomb was thrown into a tramcar proceeding up Corporation Street with shipyard workers. Two men were killed .

Three Asphyxiated

A DREADFUL tragedy, involving the loss of life of three persons and directly attributable to the work of Orange gunmen, was discovered in Thompson Street.

A bullet passing through the premises severed one of the gas pipes, allowing an escape of deadly fumes. The victims are Mr Neil McConvey (55), Mrs Catherine McConvey (56) and Miss Minnie Kelly (20). The late Mr McConvey, who owned a spirit grocery premises in Thompson Street, was a railway guard on the Belfast and County Down Railway. Mrs McConvey and Miss Kelly (from Draperstown) looked after the shop.

'Secret Army' Plan Dropped

YESTERDAY Sir James Craig sent a telegram to Sir Dawson Bates [Minister for Home Affairs]: 'My attention has been drawn to the terms of Colonel Wickham's circular of November 9 in regard to recruiting for Class C Special Constabulary which I approved in the event of the Truce being terminated and for their formation into regular military units. The Constabulary having been transferred to the Government of Northern Ireland, recruits may be taken as police but not into any military force.' Prof Eoin MacNeill wrote to Mr de Valera expressing his 'fear that Mr Lloyd George contemplated what he chose to call "civil war" in North East Ulster.' **(The deadly escalation of sectarian violence exactly coincided with Lloyd George's efforts to force Craig to accept an all-Ireland parliament. While the Unionist leader was forced by the British to drop his plans for a military strike force, Nationalist leaders suspected that the Belfast violence was being orchestrated for political purposes.)**

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