

CHARITY CHRISTMAS PUZZLE 2025

MARY, MARY, QUITE CONTRARY

Welcome

This year marks the 35th annual Christmas Puzzle I have set to raise money for charities. The Puzzle receives entries from Australia, New Zealand, Cyprus, Malta and Ireland as well as from the UK. The Puzzle should appeal to people who enjoy solving quality newspaper crossword puzzles and this one is designed to help you finish - the Puzzle has an underlying theme so that, when things start to get a bit tough, you should get more information to help you. Over the years the Puzzle has raised almost £150,000 distributed among over 100 good causes, including donations totalling of £8,000 last year. As a result of this and other activities I was awarded a British Empire Medal

Prize money – Every entrant could be a winner!

Everyone who enters will be entered into a draw to win one of five prizes, each of £10. In addition, I will award three prizes each of £50 to the three highest scorers; if there are more than three potential winners I will conduct a draw.

Charities

As usual, I will forward all the money you donate, except for the prize-money, to charity. The resulting money raised will be distributed equally between St Mary's, Eaton Bray, where I am the Reader, and four other charities – Thames Valley Air Ambulance, Royal Hospital for Neuro-disability, The Therapy Garden, The Canal & River Trust. All the charities have been nominated by Puzzlers from the UK. I do hope you will be generous in your donations, supporting the work of these charities (see next page) - last year the average donation was over £25.

The Puzzle

As usual, the puzzle is made up of 40 clues that narrate a story. Each clue contains three definitions that lead to three answers and for each of these answers you are given the position of some of the letters to help you. The number of remaining letters to be found for each word is indicated by dashes. An example could be as given below.

_____ ERR _____ RIN _____ UTA _____

Sea/sons / greetings

The answers being MEDITERRANEAN, OFFSPRING, SALUTATIONS although having markers to show where each definition begins and ends makes things a little easier than the actual puzzle.

Answers, except for various proper nouns, are as defined in Chambers Dictionary. (Don't expect to find all the words in Concise Chambers or Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary. Expect a few really obscure words - but 90-100 of the answers should be in many peoples' vocabulary.) In setting the puzzle I try to run one definition into the next; occasionally this has required the use of a linking word or conjunction. In most cases these should be fairly obvious - no clues in the puzzle start with a conjunction. Do not assume that punctuation, spacing or context can be relied upon to be helpful - it may be safer to assume the opposite.

Part of the pleasure for me in setting the Puzzle, and for you doing it, is to try to get you thinking so please don't be disappointed if the use of an electronic dictionary doesn't immediately provide you with all the answers, and please don't spoil other peoples' fun by resorting to public Puzzle Solver sites until after the New Year.

As usual, I shall be strict on spellings that are not found in Chambers and will only mark the answer you present in the spaces provided; you won't be penalised for valid alternative words to those I am expecting you to find.

You may find that some answers defeat you and you end up with what seems only a moderate score.

Nevertheless, please send in your entry with a donation - otherwise you will have had your fun for nothing and the good causes will not benefit; whatever your score you could still be a prize-winner. Anyway, it's the taking part that matters, not the winning. In judging the entries my decision will be final - even when I am wrong.

This year's theme

I hope to help you complete the Puzzle by providing information about the starting letters. Please read the introduction on Page 1 of the Puzzle – you will find the Puzzle more difficult (impossible?) if you don't use this information, which, once you have filled in enough definite answers, should enable you to deduce the starting letters of all 120 answers in their correct positions.

Christmas Puzzle on the Web

Electronic copies of the Puzzle can be downloaded from www.christmaspuzzle.uk. This site will also be used to warn you of any errors found in the puzzle. You can also see some of the wonderful words the Puzzle has used over the years, the Rolls of Honour for 2024 and a record of your previous scores. Within 2 weeks of submitting your entry I should have marked your entry and you can find out your score for this year.

A further feature on the website is the ability for you or your friends to register to receive next year's Puzzle electronically. You can do this at any time during the year by submitting your E mail address and you will automatically be sent an electronic copy of the Puzzle on 8 December. Once you have registered you will receive a copy each year unless you notify me otherwise – if you change your E mail address you will need to re-register.

Distribution to friends

The aim of the Puzzle is to raise as much as possible for the good causes so please feel free to distribute it to your friends - take a photocopy, download a copy from the website or contact me.

Returning your entry

Please try to ensure that I receive your entry by **Sunday 25 January 2026**; the draw to select winners will be made on the following Sunday and all entries received by that day will qualify. Historically, many Puzzlers have made their donation by cheque but, as with so much of this modern world, things are changing rapidly. The banks don't necessarily help and I now incur a charge for every cheque paid in; it will therefore aid the charities if you can use BACS transfer. If you are doing this for the first time you should note that, at the request of my bank, the account I use for temporarily holding donations, called 'Gordon Gray Charity Account, is a Business, not a Personal Account.

I aim to return marked entries, with solutions, by the end of February. Best wishes to you all for a happy and peaceful Christmas and a successful New Year, not least in solving the puzzle.

CHARITY DETAILS

Royal Hospital for Neuro-disability – The hospital provides specialist inpatient assessment, rehabilitation and long-term care and support for adults with complex and profound disabilities due to acquired brain injury or disease. Charity No.205907, www.rhn.org.uk

Thames Valley Air Ambulance – Serves everybody in Berks, Bucks and Oxon our community the best chance of surviving and recovering from an emergency. Together, we do everything in our power to protect, save and revive lives with the best critical care at the scene and beyond. The organisation is not government or NHS funded, so it relies on the generosity of our community – and people like you. Charity No. 10849101, www.tvairambulance.org.uk

The Therapy Garden – The Therapy Garden works to have a positive and significant impact on the lives of people facing challenges in life. Whether by giving a sense of purpose to children with special needs; or by reducing the isolation of a young person with autism or someone older living with dementia. Whether by building confidence in adults recovering from a stroke; or by helping to equip young people who have additional learning needs for a possible future in the workplace. We change lives for the better and we do this by creating a safe place to enjoy the power of gardening and to connect with nature Charity No. 1076055, www.thetherapygarden.org

Canal & River Trust – Habitat loss, invasive species and climate change are putting devastating pressure on the wildlife we love. Now nearly one in six species is endangered- and the number is rising. Our canals have become a lifeline for nature. But these habitats don't look after themselves Without constant care, the wildlife disappears. Charity No. 07807276, canalrivertrust.org.uk

St Mary's, Eaton Bray – A church that celebrated its 800th anniversary in 2019 and where Gordon is Reader. Charity No. 1129952, www.stmaryseatonbray.org.uk.

CHARITY CHRISTMAS PUZZLE 2025

MARY, MARY, QUITE CONTRARY

This year's theme: The Puzzle's title provides a clue to the starting letters the starting letters which spell the names of 17 varieties of plant

Answers to the Puzzle include 4 words (proper nouns) that do not have a definition in Chambers.

The Puzzle once again includes homophone definitions; for example, an answer might be defined by 'pair'; possible answers could include 'COUPLE', 'AVOCADO' and 'SHAVE'. In total the Puzzle has 8 homophone definitions – Questions 1 to 5, 6 to 10, 11 – 15, etc., each contain one such definition.

___ ANT ___ ___ YLL ___ ___ EST ___

1. ... A blue lily, native to S Africa, and the belladonna lily are growing wild in the cultivated land ...

___ EEN ___ ___ ROC ___ ___ ORA ___

2. ... sheltered from the south wind and with a wide view of ...

___ MES ___ EGE _____ ___ LLY

3. ... the river that flows through London like the fiery river of Hades. It's genuinely ...

___ OYA ___ ___ RIC ___ ___ PEC _____

4. ... delightful to bask in the sun looking at ...

___ USE ___ KAK ___ ___ VAS _____

5. ... red kites and ducks ...

___ UIS _____ ___ LES _____ ___ BIT _____

6. ... progressing smoothly at speed or flying in a circle over ...

___ ANI _ ___ ENS ___ NES

7. ...crops grown without fertilisers or pesticides – cabbages, thousands of kg of them. ...

___ UGI _____ ___ ERN _____ ___ SSI _____

8. ... Growing in salty soil below plants of the turnip family ...

___ MBR _____ ___ TEL _____ ___ END ___

9. ... ice plants are a companion to anything with pale lilac flowers and ...

___ EAN ___ ___ SCA ___ ___ RAC _____

10. ... rose-laurel thick foliage – an alluring place from ...

___ BIL ___ AMI ___ ___ ICU ___

11. ... which to inspect naked ladies ...

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___ POR ___ ___ HUS _____ ___ TTY

12. ... frolicking ardently in the pool. ...

___ DWY ___ ___ EES ___ ___ ESS ___

13. ... at the west end a group of three ladies and ...

___ DAL ___ ___ ADI ___ ___ ASO _____

14. ... a Spanish noblewoman were studying sound waves at a frequency too high to be audible to their ...

___ CKE ___ ___ BRE ___ PIE _

15. ... slavish servants who played a game using a pack of forty cards with Bilbo and ...

___ LDA ___ SER _____ ___ KET

16. ... Mrs Marcos – a scene of noisy merry-making and if I'm ...

___ IMO _____ ___ RIB ___ ___ PAT _____

17. ... feeling bitter, dreadful, full of hostility I take...

___ AND ___ ___ MMU ___ ___ URE

18. ... a circuitous walk and get in touch with the essence of the garden and ...

___ EAR _____ ___ UAR _____ ___ OST ___

19. ... look for a sign of a song-thrush ...

___ RED ___ ___ EDA ___ TTA ___

20. ... in the screen behind the altar in the greenhouse; ...

___ PAR _____ ___ ESS ___ ORR _____

21. ... just by an alcove there were piles of ...

___ ROP _____ ___ MER _ ___ RIE ___

22. ...snails' ear shaped shells – a hungry ...

___ OLE ___ LHO _____ ___ MAI ___

23. ... bird's noonday meal's leftovers. On ...

___ TAR _ ___ CCI ___ ___ YAL

24. ... the 4th Sunday in Lent we have a coffee sale; - all ...

___ SSI _____ ___ DRA ___ RIU _

25. ...2.7 acres of land with a manifold evil at no 39 including a ...

__ SAR _ __ __ ESS _ _ _ _ __ __ QUA _ _ _ _ _

26. ... rose garden is within reach facing all ways which is ...

__ USU __ __ __ BEC _ _ _ __ __ ILI _ _

27 ... remarkable. Black eyed Susan, our dog bred to be useful, She ...

__ __ LIG _ _ _ __ __ OVI _ _ __ __ AWA _ _ _

28. takes great pleasure in herding Australian shorthorn cattle after ...

__ __ AKF _ _ _ __ __ CEL _ _ __ __ ROP _ _ _ _ _

29. ... the first meal of the day made where there is a good supply of Nitrogen ...

__ __ RAC _ _ _ __ __ MON _ _ __ __ RES _ _ _ _ _

30. ... derived from NH3 or similar ...

__ __ TUR _ __ __ LED _ _ _ _ _ __ __ REM _ _ _ _ _

31. ... blend of mashed potatoes and cabbages or turnips in a dish of waste matter ...

__ __ GFI _ _ _ _ __ __ ECK _ _ _ __ __ AST _ _ _

32. ... The halcyon is spotted on very hot days; ...

__ __ EED __ __ ATC _ _ _ __ __ LOM _ _ _ _ _

33 ... in sooth, birds that hack at nuts and seek insects in the bark of trees collect together on the...

__ __ MED _ __ __ ATI _ _ _ __ __ ARL _ _ _

34. ... walk between rows of poplars and busy Lizzies up a stair of ...

__ __ ENC _ __ __ LAB _ _ __ __ MEI _ _ _ _

35. ... what is golden – (the Spanish word was the inspiration of Sir Clough Williams-Ellis ...

__ __ REV _ _ _ _ _ __ __ EAK __ __ GOU _ _

36. ... O.B.E., S.A.D.) to say in an unintelligible language. ...

__ __ TIE __ __ RBL _ _ _ __ __ EFU _

37. ... The linnet and other small birds are worth looking at. Other creatures...

__ __ SIB _ _ __ __ INE __ __ UGH _ _

38. ... can be seen - a stoat, with its prey ...

__ __ LUD _ _ _ __ __ SIE _ __ __ EDY

39 ... comprising hen and chickens that help ...

__ __ RAC _ __ __ AUD _ _ _ __ __ FLE

40 ...to entice a tailless green woodpecker.

ENTRY FORM

Please try to ensure that I receive all entries by Sunday 25 January 2026.

To: Gordon Gray, Oakins, 9 Eaton Bray Rd, Northall, Dunstable, Beds, LU6 2EU

From: NAME

ADDRESS

(Block capitals please)

.....

POSTCODE

E Mail address

Entry may be by CASH, CHEQUE or BANK TRANSFER (**Please circle the method chosen**).

I will be grateful for any donation, but, for your information, the average donation last year was over £25.

My donation is

Make cheques payable to 'Gordon Gray Charity Account'.

Bank Transfer to SORT CODE: 40-28-12, ACC NO: 51495550, REFERENCE: Your postcode

☐

Please tick this box if you would like your marked entry, a copy of the puzzle solution, names of winners etc. and have enclosed a s.a.e. for that purpose. The solutions will be distributed around the end of February. Note: the answers will not be posted on the website.

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Please tick this box if you have registered (or are already registered) on www.christmaspuzzle.uk to receive an electronic copy of next year's Puzzle

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Please tick this box if you would like to receive a paper copy of next year's puzzle and have enclosed a s.a.e. for that purpose

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Please tick this box if you have a friend or relative who would like to take part next year and have enclosed a s.a.e. with his/her name and address for that purpose.

N.B. Self-sealing envelopes are very helpful to me.