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Belfast Telegraph Saturday April 6 2019

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Life at the MANOR

James and Nicola Manningham-Buller open the doors of Ballymote House

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COVER STORY

It's now a luxury B&B but, as James and Nicola Manningham-Buller tell **Lorraine Wylie**, their Co Down manor has a fascinating history — and they also reveal how she has battled back from a serious head injury

Situated a few miles from Downpatrick, Ballymote House doesn't have the grand facade of other country manors in Northern Ireland. In contrast to the neo-classical design favoured by architects during the 18th and 19th centuries, there is nothing showy or flamboyant about Ballymote.

Built in a vernacular style, the two-storey, five-bay Georgian property is in keeping with its surroundings and reflective of its era. But when it comes to character and charm, Ballymote House is in a league of its own. Down through the centuries, it has been home to some fascinating characters.

And, as I discovered when I went to meet James and Nicola Manningham-Buller, its current owners are no exception.

Gathered around the kitchen table, James made coffee while Nicola told me about the origins of Ballymote House.

"It's very interesting because historically there's no record of a house ever having been here," she says. "Back in January 1991 when we bought the place, Dick (Richard) Oram, a conservation architect and then head of the Department of the Environment's historic monuments, told us it pre-dated 1730."

"We think it originally started out as a linen warehouse before being converted to a house. There's some evidence to back up the theory. For example, there was a field around here called the bleaching green as well as a lot of workers' cottages. At the time, linen was very much a cottage industry and there was some very beautiful sewing work and embroidery done in this area."

"We think that this place was once the manager's house. There are a lot of little clues. For example, upstairs one of the bedroom doors looks more like a front door and, in our room, there's a very elaborate ceiling rose that seems slightly too grand for a bedroom."

In the 18th century, the nearby village of Killough, then known as St Anne's Port, was one of Northern Ireland's major seaports. At the time, many of the larger properties in the area were used as 'letting houses' and rented out to corn merchants. It's likely that Ballymote also had a series of tenants. However, a 1911 census identifies one of its earliest owners as Captain John Bowen Colthurst.

"He was the very same Colthurst who was linked to the Skeffington murders in Dublin, during the 1916 Easter Uprising," James confirms.

The story of how Captain Colthurst arrested and subsequently executed writer and pacifist Francis Sheehy Skeffington, aka 'Skeffy', along with two other Irish journalists, during the disturbances is well-documented. However, James adds an interesting observation.

"Colthurst had been out at the Western front during the war and must have suffered shell shock because when they sent him to

Infamous murders, lost paintings worth a fortune ... and more recently a serious riding accident. Life through the years at Ballymote House

Dublin to deal with the simmering trouble in Ireland, records show he had a complete mental breakdown. Colthurst was eventually court martialled for murder, declared insane and sent to Broadmoor Asylum where he stayed for two years. He lived out his remaining years in Canada where in 1965 he died of a coronary thrombosis. But what interests me about the Colthurst/Skeffington affair, and something that no one seems to mention, is that Skeffington (who took his wife's name,

“Coming from a generation that went to boarding school, we didn't query it

Sheehy) actually grew up in Downpatrick where his father was a school inspector and his murderer, Colthurst, lived here at Ballymote, just a few miles away."

Compared to Colthurst, Ballymote's next owner lived a relatively uneventful life. His name may be absent from history's hall of fame but as Nicola reveals, he will never be forgotten or indeed forgiven, by art lovers, especially in Northern Ireland.



"He had some kind of an egg business going on," she explains. "He kept day-old chicks, in what is now my dining room. When we lifted the floor we found old pieces of grain etc. Anyway, at some stage the famous Belfast artist Colin Middleton had stayed here and left a huge amount of his drawings and pictures that were painted on card. They would have been worth a fortune. Anyway, not knowing what they were, this man decided to use them as egg packaging and bedding for his chicks. Can you imagine that!"

Nicola and James have clearly done their homework. Their knowledge of Ballymote's previous residents is both impressive and

entertaining but, as its latest custodians, I was keen to hear more about their own story.

Nicola, daughter of the late Sven (Lavens) Mackie, formerly of James Mackie and Sons, agrees to go first. "Originally, my father's family home was on the outskirts of Belfast, in a place called Rathfern, but after the war it was the subject of compulsory purchase to make way for a housing development. It's now the Rathcoole estate. I was born in 1961 in Johnston House at the Royal Hospital and grew up in a place called Snipe Island, out at Templepatrick. My parents had bought a beetling mill there and spent the Sixties renovating it as well as a full working water mill.

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STEEPED IN HISTORY: James and Nicola Manningham-Buller at home in Ballymote House. Right, from top, the exterior of the luxury B&B and an old family picture with children Edward and Camilla



bronze door with eight panels with illustrations, depicting the evolution of justice in the western tradition.

"On the second panel on the right, there's a picture of Coke telling King James that the judiciary is independent. That is partly what the American Constitution is based on it."

James almost added a new career to the family tradition.

"When I left school, I did various odd jobs and at one point I went down to the Labour Exchange to see if I could get anything that would cover the six months until I started my full-time employment," he remembers.

"They sent me to a job shop where there was a selection of cards advertising different jobs. One said they were looking for a 'pole' bearer and I thought it had something to do with scaffolding. I applied and put my suit on because I'd always been told to wear a suit to an interview. Anyway, I got the job. But it turned out, it had nothing to do with the building trade.

"It should have read 'pall bearer' so I spent six months working with the Tooting Royal Co-Operative Funeral Services!"

At this point, we decide to move the conversation from the kitchen to the sitting room. Passing the stairway, James points out a number of framed watercolours lining the wall. Beautifully detailed, the paintings depict a series of military scenes that, I discover, are the work of another of James's ancestors.

"They are by Colonel Coote Manningham, founder of the Rifle Brigade," he says. "You see, at the time, Army officers were taught to paint. There was no photography so this was how they captured events during wars."

James patiently explains each individual scene, singling out a painting for particular note.

"This one is Gibraltar, on the eastern side of the rock. It depicts the story of two soldiers who had deserted," he says, drawing my attention to the corner of the painting where the artist has painted a little symbolic flag. "One of the soldiers died and this tiny flag marks the spot."



GEORGIAN PROPERTY: James and Nicola and dog Nia take us on a tour of Ballymote House. Right, one of James' ancestor's paintings



transport to go to work. Apparently, ladies didn't do those things. I was given my own car parking space instead. They also gave me Friday afternoon off to have my hair done. Not me! Instead, I'd climb into my tiny Fiesta and go bombing off up to North Yorkshire to race horses. I never did go to the hairdresser."

She laughs at the absurdity of wasting precious time in a salon when she could be doing something fun, like horse riding.

"I was working in one of the very grand stockbrokers," she continues. "At just 23 I was an assistant director of the US Merchant Bank. In fact, even today, my very best friend is one of the very powerful girls in the City."

It's time for James to take his turn in the hot seat.

"I was born in Northampton in 1956, my grandfather was MP there," reveals.

"Indeed, all my family were either politicians, judges or in the military. My grandfather was Lord Chancellor in 1962. But if we go back to my great-grandfather, 13-times great, we find Sir Edward Coke, a Lord Chief Justice who was very influential on the judicial system.

"He made judges write down their judgements which created judicial precedents. Do you know, that if you go to the Supreme Court building in Washington DC, there is a

It was quite an idyllic childhood and later, I was sent off to boarding school in Ascot."

Boarding school stories are often laced with homesickness and loneliness but Nicola seems to have enjoyed the experience.

"Yes I did quite like it. To be honest, I really didn't think about it," she shrugs. "I suppose, coming from a generation that went to boarding school, we didn't query it. We accepted it and got on with things. I did miss my riding, though. In our circle of family and friends, everyone was involved with horses. My family competed, I competed internationally and our daughter also followed the family tradition. I was still entering competitions right

up until after James and I got engaged."

When she wasn't riding horses, Nicola was busy working in the City in London.

"Growing up, I had no particular career ambition but my father did a very sensible thing," she says. "He said I could take a gap year and then he sent me into the City. I was one of the first girls working in the Stock Market. Imagine, 750 men and me! Back then, in the early Eighties, it was a very different world. It seems incredible now but at the time, I wasn't allowed to use public

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

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Nicola contributes another little nugget of information. "They were painted on cloth, you know," she says. "They did it that way so that the paintings could easily be folded up and kept in the artist's pocket."

Just as we're about to enter the living room, I catch sight of another wall hanging, this time it's a framed cartoon.

"Oh that's George Thumb," James smiles. "Have you ever heard of the saying 'the rule of thumb'? Well, that's George Buller, my great-grandfather, five times removed. Judge Francis Buller reportedly made a ruling that you can beat your wife with a stick, as long as it's no bigger than the size of your thumb."

Really?

"Yes, but he never said how long your thumb should be!" he chuckles.

Like the rest of the house, the sitting room at Ballymote is tastefully decorated and comfortably furnished. Seated in front of an open fire, Nicola shows me a photograph of her and James on their wedding day and tells me how they met.

"It was 1983, I was on holiday in Cyprus, staying at the home of a schoolfriend. We were enjoying a lovely time on the beach when suddenly James, who was working in Cyprus at the time, came walking along. I remember feeling a bit irritated by the interruption!"

"I knew Charlotte, Nicola's friend," James explains. "I didn't notice Nicola at first but later, when we met up at the hotel, I thought she was an incredibly interesting person. I'd say there was a definite spark."

After the holiday, James contacted Nicola and before long the spark had been fanned into a flame.

"We were engaged pretty quickly," Nicola smiles. "The proposal was just before Christ-

“
The attitude was, if you want to get married, just get on and do it

mas and we were married in the cathedral in Downpatrick the following May, 1985. We had around 500 guests at the wedding, so it was quite big. In old families, an engagement was never a long drawn out affair. The attitude was, if you want to get married, just get on and do it. Weddings today are such major events."

And James chips in: "In our day, we didn't go in for all the fuss. The only time you appeared in the paper was in the event of a hatch, match or dispatch."

Hatch, match and dispatch? I'd never heard the saying but Nicola enlightens me.

"Yes, births, marriages and deaths," she says.

In 1989, the young couple decided to move to Nicola's parents' new place, Ballydugan House. By this stage James had found a job in Northern Ireland.

"I had been a Lloyds broker," he recalls. "After a while I'd been doing wholesale broking, fine art, gold bullion and jewellery. But I wanted to get out and build a business dealing with clients. I got a job in Belfast but later went out on my own, running my own



'I suffered a serious head injury... it was a long slog to recovery'



HISTORIC THEME: Nicola and James at Ballymote House. Below, a painting of George Thumb

insurance brokerage from here."

I wondered whether he found it difficult to adapt to life in Northern Ireland.

"I've always loved it here," he says. "There is still very much a community spirit. Perhaps the best way to describe it is the 'net curtain' analogy. In England, people would often look out to see what so and so was wearing. Here it's more caring and, in the same situation, they'd probably be wondering why they hadn't seen a neighbour around. I think that caring interest tends to be lost in England now."

Since purchasing the house in 1991, the couple have made Ballymote their family home. But for the past decade, the place has been carving a niche in the hospitality industry. Situated in beautiful countryside, a stone's throw from Downpatrick, Killough and the popular Game of Thrones locations, it's among Northern Ireland's favourite bed and breakfasts. With just 11 acres, Ballymote may not have a lot of land but they do have an unusual feature well worth a visit.

"Our grounds are about 50% parkland with some fabulous specimens of trees, including a really unusual combination of ash and sycamore planted on purpose in the same hole at the same time," Nicola reveals.

"This was a very popular and trendy idea to do around the 1820s. There must have been some really special trees at one point but a previous owner cut vast swathes down in order to pay for the property. One tree that escaped is a variegated holly, and that has been estimated to be about 300 years old."

One of Ballymote's biggest attractions is Nicola's cooking skills. "I love cooking," she tells me. "When I was a child, we grew vegetables and raised food for the table. We ate things that were in season and hated waste. Nowadays, ingredients such as mangetout, coloured beetroots, yellow and pink carrots or even Jerusalem artichokes tend to be considered trendy or a little exotic. But back then, we were already growing and eating these kind of foods at home. I remember we had an elderflower lemonade which was really wonderful. Today, I make a lot of jams

such as nectarine and rose, really delicious."

Nicola offers to give me a tour of the upstairs, where I notice some of the bedrooms have been given a name. It's a style I've noticed elsewhere so, naturally, I ask where titles such as Archie and Trellis originate.

"Well Archie is named after my nephew, he was the first to stay there," she laughs.

What about Trellis?

"Oh that's easy," she opens the bedroom door and points to the trellis design on the wallpaper. "We just decided to name it after the wallpaper."

There's nothing pretentious about Nicola Manningham-Buller and her laugh, which comes often and easily, is infectious. Yet, Nicola has had more than her share of trouble. It isn't until I ask whether she still finds time to ride horses that she finally mentions her accident.

"I suffered a serious head injury in 2000 that left me in quite a bad way," she says with characteristic candour. "I lost my speech, in fact, I lost just about everything. I had to learn how to walk again and how to do things for myself. It was a long, hard slog. The thing is, I wasn't even properly riding at the time. I was only bringing the pony in from the fields and had hopped on when I was promptly bucked off. It was such a simple exercise, I did it all the time. But stupidly, I wasn't wearing a riding hat. So when I fell and hit my head, the consequences were major. I have to say, though, that I was very lucky. Here in Northern Ireland we are fortunate to have one of only two places with a community based rehab centre, Thompson House in Lisburn. They were wonderful. They came here three to four days a week for four years and worked with me. They're amazing people. Yes, I was so lucky."

The couple have two children, Edward (28) and daughter Camilla (25). Back in 2000 when Nicola had her accident, her son and daughter were still quite young — so how did she and James cope?

"Like all families in these kind of situations, we just had to cope," she says, keeping drama to the minimum. "I suppose you just get through it. We worked it out together."

When I ask if she's better now, she purses her lips and thinks for a moment.

"Yes but I still have my moments, especially if I'm tired, and then concentration is difficult. I also need to have a lie-down and rest for a bit. But other than that, I'm fine."

It's obvious she doesn't like to dwell on the subject and, considering her hectic schedule and busy workload, she doesn't let anything, not even a serious head injury, get in her way. Back downstairs, James asks whether I'd like to see Ballymote's 'Rogues' Gallery'. Naturally, I can't wait.

His rogues gallery turns out to be the downstairs loo and, as I've come to expect from Ballymote House, even it has a quirky, historic theme. The walls are covered in so many interesting photographs that visitors would be willing to spend more than a penny for the privilege of seeing them. Even the toilet, with its Victorian design of pull chain flush and decorative bowl, is a work of art.

As the interview comes to a close, and Nicola tells me about the tourist attractions in the surrounding area, it occurs to me that Ballymote House should be a destination in its own right.

For more information, visit www.ballymote-house.com

Celebrating a traditional Christmas in a

In the second part of our special feature looking at yuletide festivities in our grandest homes, today **Lorraine Wylie** visits two properties in Co Down

Ballymote House

Situated near Downpatrick, Ballymote House is home to James and Nicola Manningham-Buller and their two children, 29-year-old Edward and Camilla (27). Purchased in 1991, the two-storey, five-bay Georgian property has been in the family a relatively short period of time. But with a lineage dating back to the 16th century, the Manningham-Buller name is well rooted in history.

James and Nicola talk about Christmas traditions and how 'big house' residents all speak the same language.

"There were a lot of little words peculiar to the big houses," Nicola explains. "For example, when I was growing up we never referred to a 'chimney piece' — it was always a 'mantelpiece'. We didn't use the word 'perfume', we referred to it as 'scent', and as for Santa Claus, well he was never anything other than 'Father Christmas'."

Nicola (nee Mackie) recalls a family Christmas with a continental flavour.

"I grew up in a place called Snipe Island, near Templepatrick," she says. "In our family, Christmas Eve was more important than Christmas Day, similar to how it is on the continent. At precisely 3pm on December 24, staff put the tree up in the drawing room."

"The family had to wait until after dinner before we could go in to see it."

"The tradition was to open presents the night before Christmas. Now, we compromise by opening one on Christmas Eve and keeping the rest for the next day."

Growing up in a stately home in Northampton, James had a more formal upbringing.

"Children stayed in the nursery wing where they were looked after by nannies," he recalls. "When we were old enough to use a knife and fork, we were allowed to join the adults at the

dinner table. That was a very special occasion. My earliest memory of Christmas was waking up on Christmas Eve to find my father's hunting sock at the end of the bed, stuffed with little presents."

What kind of presents did they get?

"It varied but usually practical ones," Nicola smiles. "It depended on what was needed. For example, riding was a way of life in our house so a Christmas gift could be anything from a pair of riding gloves to a new pony."

James knew exactly what to put on his Christmas list.

"When I was a boy, I had a large train set in the attic," he explains. "I started it from one engine, two wagons and a guard's van. Every Christmas I'd get something to add to it but later people began giving me money to choose my own pieces. They could be very expensive. But I loved them!"

James goes on to explain how big house menus were tasty but practical.

"A lot of people prefer goose but a goose doesn't have a lot of

meat," he remarks. "With as many as 35 people for Christmas lunch, turkey was a more economical choice. Christmas pudding was a bit rich for my great-aunts so we always had an alternative dessert on offer."

Children were allowed a few Christmas privileges but while rules were relaxed, they weren't abandoned.

"We were taken down to have tea with my parents and allowed to play for half an hour," James says. "At some point, an aunt would signal to the nanny and we'd be ushered back to the nursery so that the adults could change for dinner."

It sounds an unnecessary chore but, as James points out, changing for dinner had an interesting social implication.

"It was very important," he says. "The family would have been concerned that if they didn't dress up, staff might think standards were slipping."

For Nicola, lack of staff at Christmas meant all hands on deck.

"None of the staff worked on Christmas Day, including the farm workers," she reveals. "But animals came first. I have a vivid memory of me outside, with my



Manor born: Nicola and James Manningham-Buller outside Ballymote House, with their dog. Nicola's first gift, with their children when they were young and the treasured family stockings.

good dress tucked into my pants, shovelling silage!"

In James' household, December 26 began with a morning 'shoot' for the men. And the women appreciated another Boxing Day tradition — breakfast in bed.

"The women joined us at around 11am," he says. "We'd all go to the gamekeeper's house where lunch was laid out on a big trestle table."

How is Christmas celebrated in the Manningham-Buller's home today?

"It's very low-key," Nicola says. "Our tree doesn't go up until Christmas Eve and we still put candles on it. I have a little 'decoration pot' that I add to every year. We also use the same Christmas stockings."

She shows me four beautiful hand-embroidered stockings which she made for her family.

"I made this one for James in 1985, our first year together," she reveals. "When Edward and Camilla came along, I made a stocking for each of them."

One of the stockings, made from a gorgeous royal blue material, is a perfect backdrop for the delicate needlework.

"This one is mine," Nicola says, running her hand over the tapestry. "My grandmother made it for me and I've been using it for almost 60 years. It's very special to me."

The Manningham-Buller's gifts remain thoughtful but practical.

"When the children were young, most of their toys were

made from wood," James explains. "We like things that last and can be passed down through the generations."

Nicola refuses to allow her children to be spoiled.

"I'm sure I must have seemed a horrible mother," she says. "On Christmas morning I'd take half their gifts away immediately. With fewer toys around, they could focus and actually play with just a few things. We also taught them to look after their toys. I mean, our children are incredibly privileged, but with that comes responsibility. They have to take care and appreciate what they have."

Toys are no longer on the Christmas wish-list but Edward and Camilla are always sure of a unique gift.

"Edward absolutely loves dogs," Nicola says, reaching for a plywood cut-out that depicts a young Edward, accompanied by a dog, seated astride a horse. "He really liked that photograph so we had it cut out and gave it as a gift. He also collects snuff boxes so we've given him a few of those over the years."

"We also give them both watercolours, prints and lots of books," James adds.

Nicola does all the Christmas cooking including salted beef for breakfast.

"We have it with boiled eggs, but I quite like it fried," she says. "This year, we'll be having goose for lunch, my favourite!"

Find out more about Ballymote at www.ballymotehouse.com

Grey Abbey House

Tucked away on the eastern shores of Strangford Lough, surrounded by ancient woodlands, and beautiful gardens, Grey Abbey is considered the finest Georgian house throughout Northern Ireland and the Republic. The property was built in 1762 but the site has been in the Montgomery family from as far back as 1606.

Today, it is home to William and Daphne Montgomery. Throughout the year, the couple welcome visits from a variety of horticultural and historical groups — but December is always a special month.

Having just celebrated their 54th wedding anniversary on December 4, Daphne and Bill are now looking forward to the next highlight of the year — Christmas with the family.

"I love Christmas!" Daphne beams. "We have 10 grandchildren and they're all coming to us for the holiday. It's so much fun when we all get together."

The youngest daughter of Mary Bridgeman and the Honourable Geoffrey John Orlando Bridgeman MC, once an eminent ophthalmic surgeon at St George's Hospital in London, Daphne, who was born in Kent, shares her memories of Christmas past.

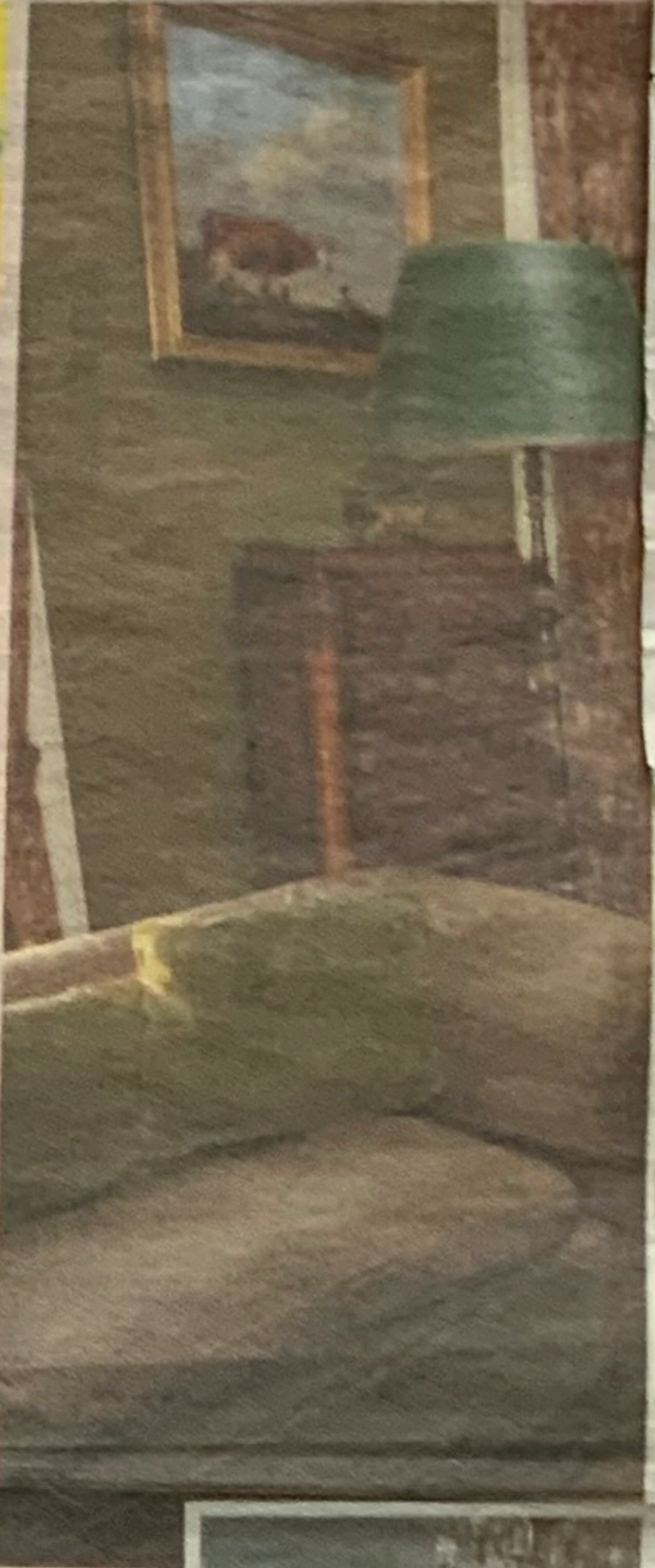
"My father was a wonderful man with a great sense of humour," she recalls. "He had this family joke where he'd stand with a gift in one hand and a wastepaper basket in the other. If the gift was no good it could go straight in the basket! It was very amusing."

"We had a Christmas tree and sang carols, but it wasn't like it is today. I suppose, looking back, you could say that there weren't the festivities we enjoy now."

"Even when Bill was a young lad, Christmas wasn't a big affair except for a beautiful tree which was lit with real candles and of course they loved exchanging presents and opening their stockings on Christmas morning."

Following her marriage to fine art and property consultant William Montgomery, Daphne arrived in Northern Ireland and set about creating her own brand of Christmas magic. Even today the old-fashioned blend of parlour games, songs and even a touch of thespian entertainment is still a winner with the family.

"Celebrations begin when the family arrive a few days before Christmas," she says. "The stairs are all festooned in holly but the tree doesn't go up until Christmas Eve when all the grandchildren are here. We put it in the music room and although Bill



and I do a little bit of the decorating, the children insist on doing the rest. The theme of our decorations is winter birds and the colours are gold and silver. It really does look marvellous when it's finished. We also have a little nativity crib in the hall which lights up."

Like many 'big houses' today, Grey Abbey employs a small number of staff.

"We have a small team who are wonderful," Daphne says. "They don't work on Christmas Day so we do all the cooking ourselves. That is always great fun. We all pitch in and, somehow, the turkey always makes it to the table on time."

One of Daphne's favourite traditions is the Christmas play.

"Oh that is great fun," she says. "Every year the children get together, dress up and put on a play. We've had a few different ones including 'It Ain't Half Hot' and 'Goldilocks and the Three Bears'."

The couple have four children — Hugo, Rose, Frances and Flora.

Given that Flora Montgomery is a well-known actress, perhaps a little drama is to be expected. Indeed, in 2014, Greyabbey village was treated to a showbiz



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"I had been a Lloyd
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later went out on my ov
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formal but fun way



Georgian splendour: Daphne Montgomery at Grey Abbey House (also below) which overlooks Strangford Lough
FREDDIE PARKINSON



thrill when Flora married London restaurateur Soren Jensen at the old 12th century Cistercian Abbey on the estate and included Hollywood film star Orlando Bloom among the guests.

But it isn't only the Montgomerys who are blessed with talent. As Daphne reveals there's a fair amount of young stars in the local primary school.

"I'm particularly fond of Grey-abbey Primary School and always make an effort to attend the various functions," she enthuses.

"But this year's Christmas show was outstanding! I was absolutely amazed by the standard of talent. It really made my day and set the mood for Christmas. I've always supported local events and, actually, have just re-introduced the annual Sunday School party. We hosted it for years but then the children grew up and it fizzled out. Now

there are 12 new children (from the Sunday School at St Saviour's Church, Greyabbey) so the Christmas Sunday School party is back on track with a bonfire, marshmallows, sausages — and then we go into the music room for a game of musical chairs."

What else is on the Montgomery family's Christmas programme?

"We all go to morning worship at Holy Trinity church in Kircubbin," Daphne continues. "We like it there because it has a children's service. Then, after lunch, we'll go for a walk, and then it's home to supper, song and music."

As many parents know, young children and musical instruments often equals noise. But for the Montgomery clan, it's a real treat.

"Our grandchildren, who are aged up to 15 years old, are very talented," reveals Daphne.

"As well as singing carols, between them they play the oboe, the French horn, the piano and even the recorder. It's wonderful to listen to them."

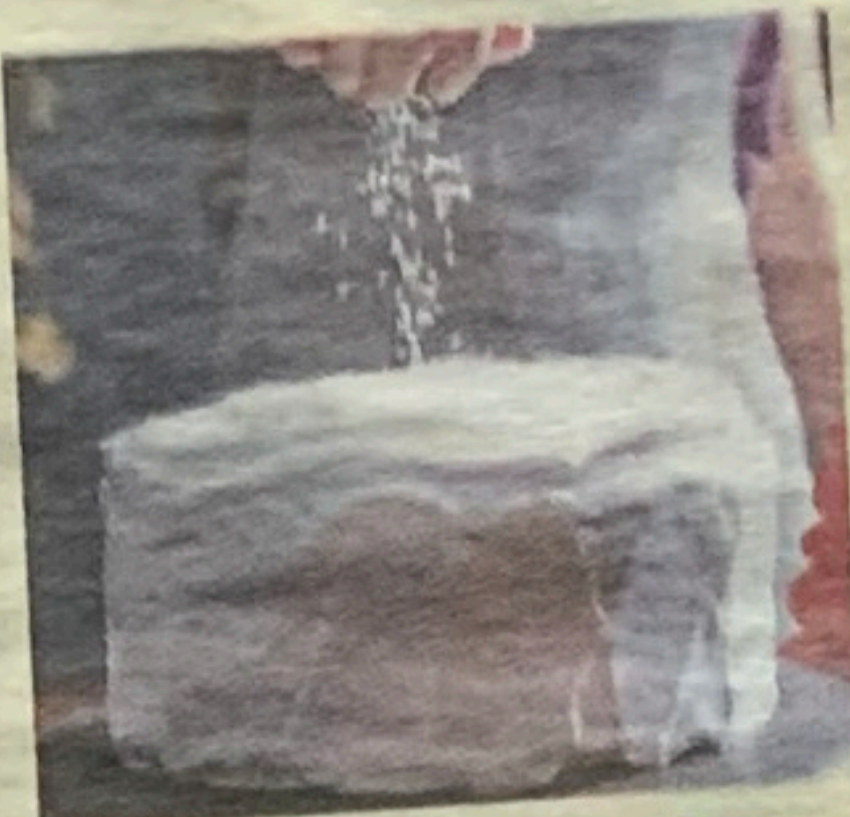
What is Daphne's contribution to the Christmas party?

"I'll be reciting the poem King John's Christmas, by AA Milne!" she laughs. "But I haven't learned it yet so I'll have to get moving!"

One of her favourite traditions is also an old one and played out in many homes across the country.

"Charades," she confirms. "We love it. Bill and I sit down together and make up the names or titles. It can be anything from Ding Dong Merrily on High to Henry VIII and his six wives or even King Lear!"

For information about Grey Abbey Estates visit www.greyabbeyhouse.com



Snowball cake

Makes: 1 x 23cm (9") cake

This vegan showstopper has a light and fluffy meringue topping and coconut sprinkle finish:

What you'll need

- 375g vegan baking margarine
 - 600ml soya milk
 - 50ml white wine vinegar
 - 600g self-raising flour
 - 450g caster sugar
 - 3tsp baking powder
 - 2tsp ground ginger
 - 2tbsp mixed spice
 - 200g vegan mixed candied spice
 - 2 oranges, zest
- For the filling:
- 400ml soya milk
 - 150g caster sugar
 - 2 orange, juice
 - 75g cornflour
 - 150g icing sugar
 - 60g vegan baking margarine

METHOD

Pre-heat the oven to 160C fan (180 conv) Gas mark 4. Melt the vegan margarine in a microwave or in a pan over a low heat, put to one side. Pour the soya milk into a bowl, stir in the vinegar and leave to one side. Place the self-raising flour, caster sugar, baking powder, ground ginger, ground mixed spice and the orange zest in a bowl and mix well. Make a well in the centre and pour in the melted vegan margarine then the curdled soya milk and the vegan candied peel. Stir well until incorporated. Divide the mixture between the tins and place in the oven at 160C for around 25–35 minutes or until risen and soft. Check by inserting a skewer into the middle to see if it comes out clean. Leave to cool before removing from the tins.

For the filling, place the soya milk in a pan over a medium heat, bring to the boil then reduce the temperature down to a simmer. Pour the orange juice into a bowl and add the cornflour and caster sugar. Mix to a smooth paste. Pour the cornflour mix into the soya mix and beat until thick and smooth, making sure the mixture gently simmers for a couple of minutes. Leave to cool.

Place the cooled filling in the bowl of your mixer, add the icing sugar and baking margarine and whisk until light and fluffy. Sandwich the cakes together using the filling mix. Place the aquafaba in the bowl of your mixer and start to whisk on full speed. While it's whipping, start to make your sugar solution. The aquafaba should be at stiff peak stage when the sugar is ready.

Place the sugar and 75ml water in a saucepan over a high heat. As soon as it boils reduce the heat slightly, continuing to simmer until it reaches a temperature of 121C. Remove from the heat and pour slowly into the whipped aquafaba with the whisk still going on medium until all added. Whisk until cooled and then use to coat the sides and top of the cake. Sprinkle the desiccated coconut along the meringue sides and top, ensuring an even coverage.

Spoil yourself with these festive treats

Try these delicious National Trust recipes for a last-minute showstopping Christmas menu

Pork and turkey pies

Makes 6 mini pies

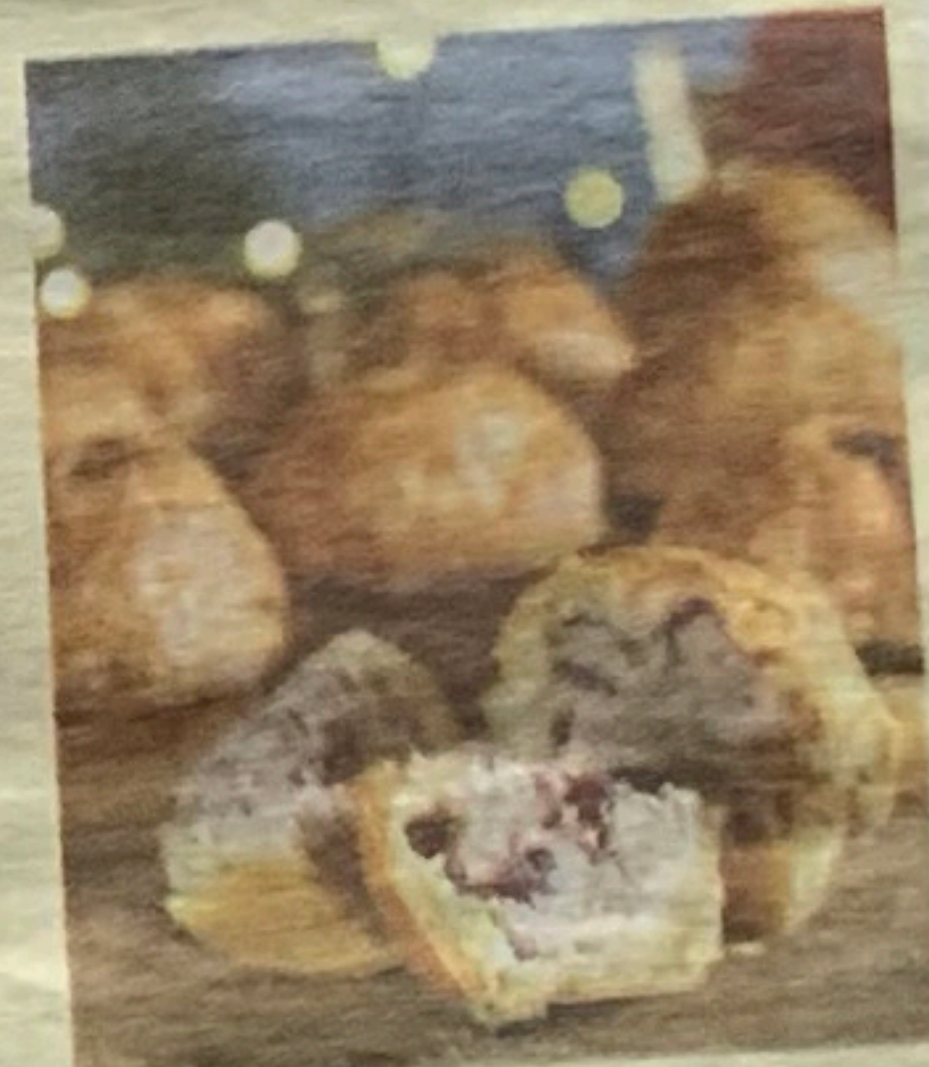
These filling festive pies are packed with rich flavours of pork, sage and cranberry:

What you'll need

- 250g diced pork, finely chopped
 - 100g sausage meat
 - salt and ground black pepper to taste
 - 125g turkey breast, finely chopped
 - 25g dried cranberries
 - 25g smoked bacon, finely chopped
 - 5g dried sage
- For the pastry:
- 125g lard
 - 175ml water
 - 300g strong white flour
 - Salt to taste
- For the glaze:
- 1 egg, beaten

METHOD

For the filling: Place all the filling ingredients into a bowl and mix thoroughly. For the pastry: Place the lard and water into a pan and heat until the lard has melted. Tip in the flour and salt and mix until combined and a soft dough has formed.



Place a ball of pastry, approximately 50g in size, in each hole of your muffin tin. Shape each ball into the tin, trying to keep the pastry an even thickness, with a little lip above the top of each hole. Pack with filling, pushing down to keep it as compact as possible, and mound the top slightly. Take a ball of pastry, approximately 30g in size, flatten into a disc, and place on top of the filling, pressing the edges down on the pastry lip. For the glaze: Smooth the edges, make a small hole in the top with a knife, and glaze with the egg wash. Place in the oven at 160C for 45–50 minutes, until the pastry is golden and crisp, and the filling is cooked. Allow to cool slightly before removing from the tin.

Chocolate hazelnut torte cake

Serves 12

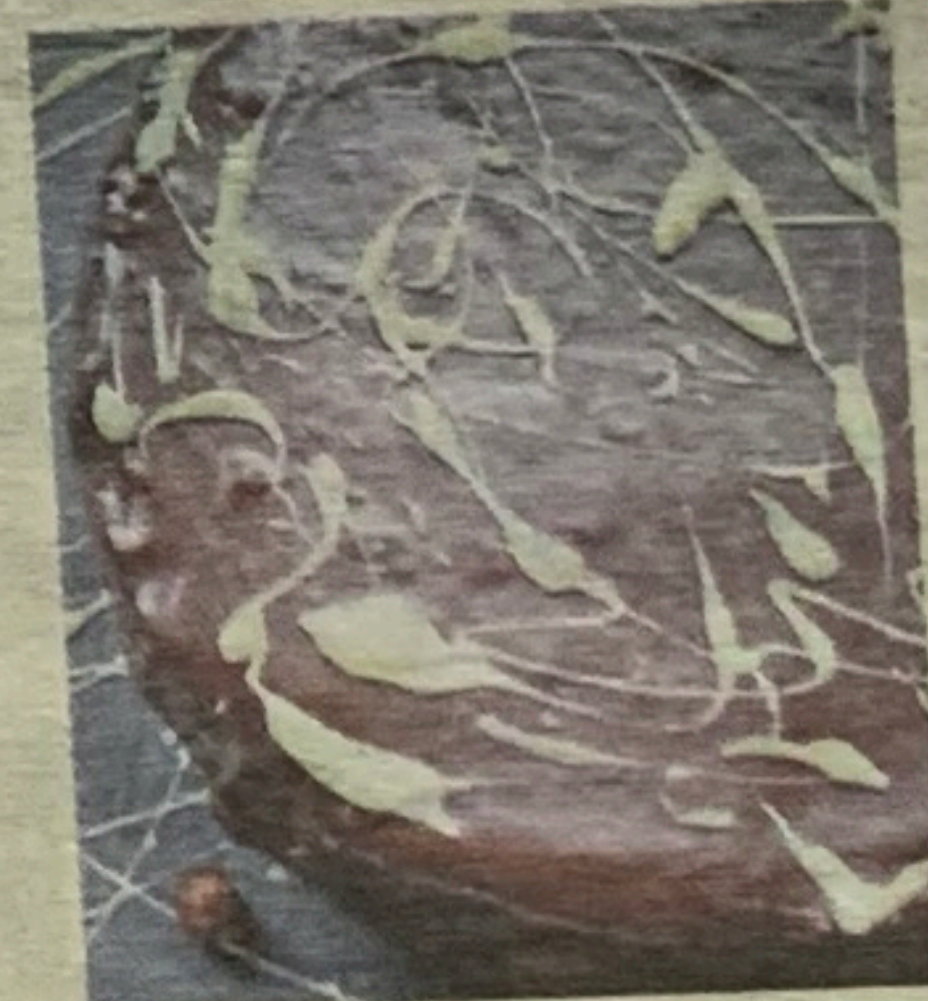
A mouth-watering explosion of white and dark chocolate, this gooey cake will bring added glamour to Christmas Day or a New Year's Eve party:

What you'll need

- 180g dark chocolate
 - 200g margarine
 - 10ml vanilla flavouring
 - 100g hazelnuts, toasted and blitzed until fine
 - 50g cocoa powder
 - 5g baking powder
 - 5 eggs
 - 150g caster sugar
 - 1tsp salt
 - 1tsp white wine vinegar
- For the ganache:
- 100ml double cream
 - 100g dark chocolate
 - 20g white chocolate

METHOD

Melt the chocolate and margarine together and add the vanilla flavouring. Leave to cool while you whisk the eggs. Place the hazelnuts, cocoa and baking powder in a bowl and mix together well. Place the eggs and sugar in the bowl of your mixer, attach the whisk and start to slowly mix, add a teaspoon of salt and the vinegar and continue mixing. Increase the speed of your mixer, continue to whisk until when you lift the whisk over the mixture the batter falls slowly forming a ribbon that will hold its shape for



a few minutes. Remove the whisk and slowly pour in the cooled chocolate mixture, stirring with a metal spoon until incorporated. Sprinkle the hazelnut mixture over the top of the mix and gently fold through until incorporated. Pour into a 9" sandwich tin and tap once on the worktop to remove any large air bubbles.

Place in the oven at 150C and bake for around 45 minutes, or until risen and a skewer inserted in the middle comes out clean. Remove and leave to cool.

For the ganache topping: Place the cream in a pan and bring to a boil, immediately switch off the heat and add the chocolate, stir until melted and smooth.

Pour the ganache over the top of the torte, letting it drip down the sides.

Melt the white chocolate and drop randomly over the top of the cake, use a spoon to swirl gently. Leave to set before serving.