



➤ Head distiller Ben Murphy at the Ad Gefrin distillery and museum in Wooler, Northumberland

got a tremendous team together to build this.

Soon, Ad Gefrin will start to advertise for around 50 roles ahead of its opening in the spring.

Eileen continued: "It's creating around 50 full-time equivalent jobs but we believe that the benefits will also spill over in to the high street and all the other businesses involved in tourism and retail in Wooler.

"We had many ups and downs along the way, but it's the people who have worked with us that have made it possible and we're about to start recruiting more people to be part of the Ad Gefrin family.

"We hope everybody will be as passionate as we are about this amazing project and that it's not only going to be a tourist destination on its own, but it will benefit Wooler and the other tourist destinations in Northumberland."

Indeed, Ad Gefrin has already made a splash with its inaugural whisky Tacnora, which means 'Standard Bearer' in Old English.

It was named by Forbes magazine

as one of the "New British spirits to try this winter," though it wasn't distilled on site.

Ben Murphy, director of distilling said of the Northumbrian blended whisky: "So far, the reaction has been overwhelmingly positive, we're getting feedback that it's a good blend from the general public.

"We have started using the distillery and making the whisky is going well, we've got a month of production under our belts which has been really productive and efficient in terms of what we're hoping to achieve.

"We've got a long way to go yet, but as first attempts go in a brand-new set up in a brand-new building, it's gone well above and beyond expectations."

It may be at least three years before Ad Gefrin is able to put its name on a single malt, but it's just a matter of months before the doors to the distillery and the museum are thrown open to the public. For more information on Ad Gefrin, visit <https://adgefirin.co.uk/>

Celebrating this Christmas really beats splooting

WHAT word would you use to sum up 2022? Each year Collins dictionary publishes a list of its top ten 'Words of the year', that tell us something about the past 12 months.

The entry at number 10 on this list for 2022 is 'vibe shift', a change in how we think.

One vibe shift is that due to the Covid-19 pandemic people are less work-obsessed, leading to 'quiet quitting' - not actually leaving a job or refusing to do something, but just doing the bare minimum.

Maybe we 'quiet quit' to watch football - I'm sure many readers enjoyed Newcastle United's success this year, or went through the usual ecstasies and agonies of following England at a football tournament.

Was this spoiled by the knowledge that it was all part of another word on the list - 'sportswashing' - spending loads of money buying a football team or staging a world cup to cover up human rights abuses?

The oddest word for me was 'splooting' - according to Collins, this is 'lying flat on the stomach with your legs stretched out' and apparently it's become a thing this year.

My black Labrador Molly does that but I don't know why people would.

Half the words on Collins' list are about how bad 2022 has been.

'Partygate' was a scandal over government ministers telling us all to stay indoors while they were having a whale of a time with wine and cheese parties, suitcases full of booze, and Christmas quizzes.

Because of the awful war in Ukraine and bad government policy here, we've got a cost-of-living crisis, so the term 'warm bank' entered the dictionary.

It's a heated building where people can go if they can't afford to heat their own homes.

Like many churches, charities and community centres across the region, we at Wallsend Baptist Church open once a week to welcome people in to a warm building for a cuppa and chat.

All these crises - war, politics, poverty, pandemic - led to the number one word of the year, 'permacrisis'.

This means lots of crises going on together that never seem to end. It's a great description of how life feels at the moment, isn't it? Maybe splooting does make sense after all.

Nick Megoran



➤ Martin Freeman and Ashley Jensen in festive film favourite Nativity

Permacrisis is also a very good word to help us understand Christmas.

The Biblical writer Luke opens his Christmas story with the words 'At that time Emperor Augustus ordered a census to be taken throughout the Roman Empire. When this first census took place, Quirinius was the governor of Syria.'

These Romans had come, with their ruthless armies, and had invaded and occupied Jesus' home country, Palestine.

They were making people desperately poor by stealing their money in taxes.

Their local henchman, King Herod, was a particularly nasty piece of work. Because he saw the baby king Jesus as a threat to his rule, he ordered all baby boys in Bethlehem to be killed.

One of my top Christmas films is Nativity. I'm a teacher so Mr Poppy is my favourite character, but after

him I like Gordon, the headmaster of the private girls' school.

He puts on a graphic Christmas play about Herod slaughtering the innocents. Adding genocide to war, poverty and oppression - this was a permacrisis.

What, according to the Bible, did God do about that? Did he send a new prime minister, or an Elon Musk-type techie businessman, or a whole pile of fancy weapons to arm the resistance?

No, that first Christmas, God himself stepped into our world as the baby Jesus. He didn't leave us alone to suffer.

Instead, because of his great love for each and every one of us, he came into our world, lived amongst us, taught us how to live, and that first Easter died on the cross and rose again to forgive all the bad things we've done, wipe the slate clean, and reunite us to God.

All who receive him now can live a new life, knowing his life and love in our hearts every day.

At the end of time he will come back and will remake the universe, ending the permacrisis: there will be no more death, fear, exam-stress, bullying, disease, war, tears, loss, or suffering.

And that's why Christmas is such good news. It shows us that there is hope, that life is rich with meaning and worth celebrating, that everyone is loved by God.

So Christmas parties, movies, dinners, gifts and carol services are good and hopeful things to do.

They remind us of Jesus' first coming, and also point forwards to his return. Celebrating Christmas is just so much better than 'splooting'.

Therefore, even in 2022, even in a permacrisis, we can truly join with the angels, and Mary, and the Shepherds, and the wise men, and say, happy Christmas, peace on earth, goodwill to all.

■ Nick Megoran is Minister of Wallsend Baptist Church and Professor of Political Geography at Newcastle University.

“Christmas shows us that there is hope, that life is rich with meaning and worth celebrating”