

Chair's Report

On your behalf

I'd like to tell you about a little project that I've been involved with recently.

As Madam Chair of this u3a, and representing the interests of our 570+ members, I have written on your behalf to relevant parties in Parliament and Borough/Local Councils regarding the significant parking problems at West Malling rail station.

I have cited the negative impact this has on our opportunities to travel on certain days of the week, and on our wellbeing with regard to reduced activities for social interaction.

I have asked for responses in connection with plans to address this issue and proposed timescales. To date, I have received responses from MPs Helen Grant and Tom Tugendhat, and from local councillors Matt Boughton and Kim Tanner. They all agree that the situation is untenable and have personally experienced difficulties with parking. Helen Grant has recently held a round-table meeting for relevant parties and has kept me informed of the outcomes.

Sadly, whilst all parties seem to agree that something needs to be done . . . the outlook remains unchanged for quite some time. Nevertheless . . . I do believe that my letter has ensured that the topic was put onto various agendas for discussion . . . and has therefore brought the problem 'to the table'. As and when I have any further updates, I will share them with you.

In our thoughts

Sadly, Brenda Pretty's husband Phil has recently passed away . . . he will be remembered for his little projects . . . lately the Science for Grandparents sessions that he organised.

And sadly, Gaynor Trevett has also recently lost her husband, Paul. Both gentlemen were members of our u3a, and we are sad to say goodbye.

My last Committee Meeting

On a personal note . . . I was somewhat saddened to say farewell to my colleagues at my last Committee Meeting. They have been a great support to me during my seven years of office as Madam Chair . . . always reliable and supportive, and I am appreciative and grateful to them all.

I look forward to seeing some of you at the May Monthly Meeting and then the AGM in June.



My last Committee Meeting

Melanie Blewer

Next Monthly Meeting

MAY Monthly Meeting
Thursday 7th May, 1.45pm.
TONI MOUNT
RATION BOOK BRITAIN

How we lived in the 40s and 50s.

JUNE Monthly Meeting
Thursday 4th June, 1.45pm AGM.
EDDIE ASQUITH
GOOD OLD LONDON TOWN

An interesting talk about little-known facts of our capital city.

Groups Coordinator

BEEN SO lovely to see the sunshine lately
..long may it continue!

The new groups are up and running . . . the AI group has been very popular and currently has 26 members.

Both the Easy Classical Listening and London Walks 5 groups are well attended.

We currently have 64 active Special Interest Groups.

Any ideas or requests for new groups are welcome just contact me on groups@kingshillu3a.org.uk
Many thanks.

Eve Stephenson

Events team

A Date for your Diary!

Due to popular demand, we have great pleasure in announcing that we have organised a pre-Christmas dance and once again have booked Dan Dare and the Maniacs for Saturday 12th December.



Our venue once again is the Townsend Room at the Community Centre. Price and full details will be announced nearer the time.

Visits

Springwatch 2026

Following a popular event last year, we returned to Leybourne Lakes Country Park again this year, with 32 members attending over two days, some of whom came last year, and for others it was the first time.



Hannah, the Lead Ranger for the Park, started off by giving us the task of identifying different leaves of trees, which got everyone comparing notes and also getting to know each other. Hannah and Tamsin then led us on a gentle stroll around the Lakes, meeting delightful families of geese on the way, listening for birdsong and pointing out plants and trees. We were lucky with the weather, though the wind did make it slightly difficult to hear quite as much birdsong as usual – despite this, I think we

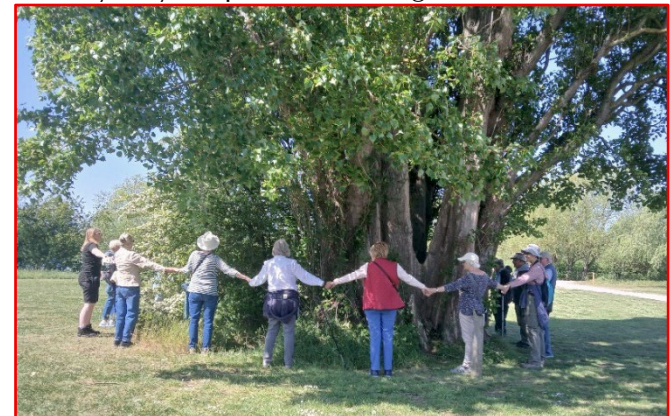


all managed to hear the Nightingales. Hannah explained their lifestyle and their extraordinary migration every year, 3,000 miles from sub-Saharan Africa to the same bushes in the park. While their numbers are declining, the Park here continues to support a good population, and we are very fortunate to have it on our doorstep.

We all enjoyed being out in the country surroundings, and also learning more about the environment from our knowledgeable leader. We also appreciated the work which goes into managing the Park so that it is as welcoming as possible to support all forms of nature, from clearing bushes to make suitable spots for Nightingales,



controlling the rather less welcome mink, and attacking the invasive Himalayan Balsam. All in all, a lovely way to spend a morning.



The second day was just as enjoyable, and once again we were all able to hear the nightingales singing. We also joined hands for a u3a 'Family Tree', as you can see from the photo.



We will probably be repeating our 'Autumnwatch' event later in the year, in response to demand!

And is anyone interested in an evening Batwalk in August? If so, let me know, and I will try to organise it.

Elaine Scutt



rest in second class (it was hard to tell the difference between the two).

We were then taken by Bill, the owner, into the amazing workshop/engine shed where we viewed, and were given, full details and history of the unique locomotives, static steam pumps, tractors, vintage car and model railway, etc. He explained how they were obtained and worked on. I think we were all stunned by their history and well-preserved condition.



Apparently, Bill has travelled to various corners of the globe to view and purchase these machines. After being amazed by this amazing collection, we



A WALK FOR ALEX

Tuesday 2nd June 10AM

Join us for a walk around Ocean Lake, followed by some cake at the café in memory of Alex Heselgrave, health walk leader for 12 years. Alex played a key role in creating the community we have in the park and so his memorial walk has become an annual tradition: A Walk for Alex

Meet in the main car park at 9:50AM

tactive
LEYDOURNE LAKES COUNTRY PARK

Tonbridge & Malling
Leisure Trust
Working in partnership
with:



Alex Heselgrave was an active member of Kings Hill u3a in the past.

Bredgar and Wormshill Light Railway

On a beautiful sunny day, Ian McGill, our leader, took us on a trip to visit the Bredgar and Wormshill Light Railway. It is a 24-inch gauge rail line.

After a welcome coffee break, we were given a very informative introduction to this wonderful, unique railway. It was then all aboard the train for a ride through bluebell woods with Ian assisting to drive. Some of us were in the first-class carriage; the



left the workshop for another train ride before our welcome lunch break.

Without exception, we were all gobsmacked with this experience and many thanks to our learned guide Ian McGill for arranging this adventure.

Tony Metcalfe

AUDLEY END, SAFFRON WALDEN

Bringing the past to life. A fascinating day out – Monday, 15 June 2026

Price £35 per person, to include group entrance fee, travel by executive coach and driver's gratuity. If English Heritage Member (take your EH card) and you will pay for the coach and driver's tip £16 pp.



Visit this large and most opulent of houses built in Jacobean England. The interiors can be admired, and your visit must be completed by visiting the lovely spacious grounds designed by Capability Brown, including the beautifully restored parterre and organic kitchen gardens.

Here you can experience the Victorian servants' life whilst in the kitchens, dairy and laundry, and discover what life was like above and below stairs at a very large country house.

The coach will be leaving from outside King's Hill ASDA at 8.30 am promptly, and will be leaving Audley End at 3.30 pm approximately, enabling us to be home by 5.30 to 6.30 pm.

For car parking, you need to book online either Horizon (£2.50), which has limited parking at ASDA, or Just Park (£4.50), also at ASDA.

Book your place by contacting trips@kingshillu3a.org.uk, giving your contact number for the day. As usual, payment is preferably by bank transfer to: Account name: KHAD U3A. Account number: 00025484. Sort code: 40 52 40. Quote ref: AE and your Surname

Please take note of the contact number of the organiser, for use on the day, Patricia Bell 07773 591463.

There will be no refunds after the cut-off date of Monday, 9th June 2026

Pat Bell

News from our Groups

Digital Photography 2

LOW IN numbers at the meeting this month but we had a full complement of photos from the members. Always enjoyable to see how the subject matters are interpreted.

The first Subject was 'Faces' and Ian on a u3a London visit to the Globe Theatre and the *Golden Hinde* saw this wood carving on the ship. It was a great day out, very informative. The face was a bonus.



We decided to combine the last of our alphabet 'Letters X, Y & Z'. Jan presented a photo of the Signs of the Zodiac, again taken on a London Visit. Helen M, on the other hand, took her jacket off and took out her camera.



For the subject 'Small' Helen O saw this Peacock Butterfly just out of its chrysalis drying itself before flying away. The colours are spectacular.



Finally, we had to have the subject of 'Spring', and again Jan presented a very good example of a beautiful Spring day. Note the soft aesthetic, out-of-focus background blur, known as Bokeh. It is



derived from the Japanese word for 'haze or 'blur'.
A great afternoon as usual.

Ian McGill

Wine Appreciation 2

OUR THIRD meeting of the year was held at Terry and Sheila's house where the theme of the evening was Italian, complete with various accompanying delicacies. As usual it was a boisterous evening starting off with an Italian Prosecco welcome drink.



Four examples of Italian wines were tasted ranging from the Adriatic coast in

the North to Sicily in the South.

Wine 1 was a Pinot Grigio, Forchir Bianchi which was surprisingly good and secured above average marks.

Wine 2 was another white wine, this time from the shores of Lake Garda, with crisp acidity and citrus notes. Although Turbianca is not a well known grape, it beat the first wine by one point in the ratings.

Wine 3 was the star of the evening from Southern Italy, Nero Oro Riserva, one of the better known Italian reds. With sweet ripe tannins and a rich and luscious finish, it managed a score of 88% satisfaction.

Wine 4 was a Negrar Appassimento Rosso from Southern Italy, rich red grapes with a luscious taste of mature red wine with a mellow flavour. Again, scoring above average marks.

Overall, it was agreed that the wines contributed to a jolly evening.

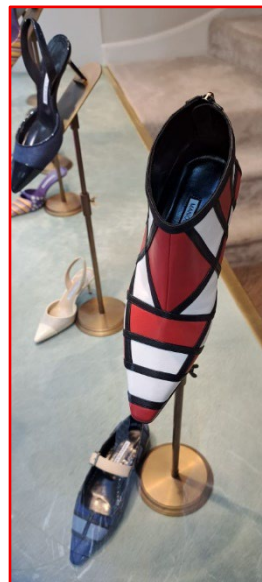
Terry Hatton

London Walks 3

ON TUESDAY, 7th April, we met at Charing Cross Station and walked to Trafalgar Square, stopping for a coffee at Noce. We then gathered outside the National Portrait Gallery, where, having entered, we discussed the painting St George and the Dragon by Paolo Uccello (c.1470), a painting I had previously used to explore relationships.



We wandered into St James's, visiting Paxton and Whitfield, a cheesemonger for over 225 years, before heading along Piccadilly to Fortnum and Mason, where we had a quick visit but resisted making any purchases. Then on to view the jewels in Burlington Arcade.



Lunch awaited us in Shepherd Market, a hidden gem, at the King's Arms, with time beforehand to explore the interesting history of the area.



Our final stop was outside Leconfield house that had been the home of MI5 for many years.

Frances Friswell

Cycling Group

A GROUP OF seven cyclists enjoyed a short but very rewarding cycle ride from Penshurst to Tonbridge and back again – a woodland cycle ride of 11 miles mostly off-road. Although the distance sounds modest, just 11 miles in total, the route felt like a real countryside adventure.

From the start, we headed out on paths that were almost entirely off-road, making for a calm and steady journey without the stress of heavy traffic. The scenery set the tone almost immediately.

For much of the ride we moved through woodland, where the trees formed a natural canopy and softened the light. The trail conditions were ideal; we were riding in the dry, which is always a welcome change for cyclists who know how quickly



weather can turn a pleasant outing into a muddy slog. This time, it was also warm, and that extra bit of comfort helped everyone settle into a relaxed pace.

As we continued, we passed through a national park area, and the landscape opened up in places to reveal some very big lakes. Seeing large stretches of water after the darker woodland paths was a real highlight. The lakes looked peaceful from the saddle, and the surrounding views made us want to slow down and take it all in.

The ride also brought plenty of human company. En route, we encountered many dog walkers, strolling calmly along the paths and enjoying the fresh air. There were also young mothers with push chairs, moving along at their own steady rhythm and adding to the sense that the countryside belongs to everyone. We passed several walkers chatting on their phones, and it was strangely comforting to hear familiar everyday conversation drifting across the paths as we cycled by.

Of course, the wildlife was the star of the show. We saw many wild birds – including swans, geese, and ducks – and it was lovely to spot them in their natural surroundings. One moment in particular was especially memorable. A heron flew over us, gliding smoothly overhead as if it had all the time in the world. We all looked up at the same instant, and for a few seconds, the ride felt completely connected to the landscape around us.

By the time we reached Tonbridge, the route had delivered exactly what a short ride should: a friendly atmosphere, beautiful surroundings, and plenty of moments worth remembering. It was the kind of outing that leaves you feeling energised, not exhausted—refreshing in its simplicity, and satisfying because it was so immersed in nature.

If you're thinking of joining the next group ride, this one is a perfect example of how enjoyable cycling can be – even when the distance is small. The best part was realising that, with the right route, you can get a genuine countryside experience without needing to travel far. We're already looking forward to the next ride together.

Barry Evans

London Walks 4

FRESH FROM her fascinating talk to the monthly meeting on the abstract architect Zaha Hadid, Tricia led us on a tour of the modern London. Not for her Roman walls and Norman churches. Her interest in the capital seems to start with the Post Office Tower in the 1960s and her love for street art.

We started as soon as we had stepped off the train at the new London Bridge Station, completed in 2018 at a cost of £1billion, and the Rail Clock unveiled last October. How many times since have we passed under it without looking up: it splits the red double arrow of the National Rail sign into two which race around the clock to complete a minute.

We stayed on the south bank of the Thames for a while to admire the skyline of the City of London



opposite. Tricia explained how the White Tower of the Tower of London was the tallest building in the capital for 650 years until St Paul's Cathedral took the title in 1710. The skyscraper craze in cities like New York did not take hold here until the Blitz cleared areas for development and height restrictions on buildings were lifted in the 1950s.



Many of the City's new buildings have been given nicknames. The Gherkin, for example. Built after an IRA bombing, the original name of the Swiss Re Building hardly gets a mention. Then there's the Scalpel, the Cheese Grater, the Walkie Talkie, the Can of Ham and even Art Deco on Steroids.

The highlight of the visit was a trip up 22 Bishopsgate, a 'perfumed 62-storey building for City workers'. Completed in 2020, it is the size of a container ship on its side and second only to the Shard for height in London. Its viewing platform is actually higher than the one there, so we enjoyed great views to the Wembley Arch and beyond.



The fearless Tricia led us into brand new buildings such as One Leadenhall, which opened in January, where we sat on the bronze mosaic panels of its Opal benches, a bespoke sculptural installation. According to Tricia, these new buildings are only designed to last about 40 years. The Headlamp – Boris Johnson's former City Hall – on the South Bank is currently under scaffolding and being remodelled.

There are other problems. The Rill, a narrow stream of water running through Norman Foster's More London development, had to be covered up



because millennials walking while glued to their phone kept tripping up and spraining their ankles. The solar panels on one building began melting a Jaguar parked inside. They now use drones to wash the windows of buildings so tall. How do they clean the glass? The foolish man in our group who suggested a little man leaned out of the drone with a duster got suitably short shrift from Tricia.

Maurice Chittenden

Makers of History

THIS MONTH we heard the fascinating story of Billy Butlin, who popularised British holiday camps.

Born in 1899 in South Africa, he came to England with his mother to live after his parents separated. His early life was far from glamorous with little



education and a hand-to-mouth existence. On leaving school aged only 13, he took on a variety of jobs, including work as a fairground stallholder. This experience proved crucial, as it taught him what people enjoyed and how to entertain them. Billy had a natural flair for showmanship and a keen understanding of what working-class families wanted: fun, affordability and a sense of escape from the daily routine.

In the 1930s, he opened his first holiday camp in Skegness. His idea was simple but revolutionary: provide clean accommodation, plenty of entertainment and all-inclusive pricing so families could relax without worrying about unexpected costs. The success of Skegness led to the expansion of Butlin's camps across the UK, including sites in Clacton, Filey and Pwllheli. After World War Two, Butlin's camps flourished as more people took advantage of paid holidays. His introduction of the Redcoats – cheerful staff who entertained guests – became a defining feature of the experience.

Billy was knighted in 1964 for his contribution to British tourism. Despite his success, he remained a hands-on businessman, known for his relentless energy and attention to detail. However, the rise of cheap package holidays abroad in the 1960s and 70s began to challenge the popularity of British seaside resorts.

Sir Billy Butlin died in 1980, but his legacy endures. His camps brought joy to millions and helped popularise the idea of taking a holiday. More than just a businessman, he was a pioneer who understood the importance of leisure in people's lives – and made it accessible to everyone.

As an added bonus, one of our members was able to recount her experience and share some photos of her time working as a chambermaid at Butlin's during her summer holiday break from college in 1969.

Carole Lawrence

Golf

THE GROUP have been enjoying a couple of friendly rounds of golf at the Poulton Wood Course this month. The initial round of nine holes coincided with the start of the US Masters. Although our standard was not as competitive, it was no less enjoyable. After a few days to recover, we then took on the challenge of the 18-hole course and made it round successfully.



After both rounds we finished at the club bar for refreshments and a review of the days play.

Leigh Morris

Don't Get Me Started!

THE TOPIC chosen was on the US-Israel-Iran War of 2026. This is a wide topic to discuss with a continuing, moving of events on a daily basis.

On February 28th 2026 the US and Israel launched massive air strikes on Iran called 'Operation Epic Fury'. Targets included nuclear facilities, missile systems, military bases and top leadership. Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei was killed with several other leading politicians. This attack came after years of tension over Iran's nuclear program, a failed nuclear deal negotiation and over Iran's influence in the Middle East. Notwithstanding Iran's oil reserves.

Iran responded with hundreds of missiles and drones, with attacks on Israel and strikes on US bases across the Middle East in retaliation. Targets included countries like Saudi Arabia, UAE, Iraq and Qatar. Iran also threatened shipping in the Strait of Hormuz, a key global oil route. Iran also attacked oil infrastructure and regional targets.

The war spread, as fighting spread across the region, with US bases being attacked, and Israel came under missile fire. Groups like Hezbollah and others became involved. Air travel, shipping and trade were heavily disrupted. The human impact is thousands killed or injured, massive civilian casualties from air strikes and missile attacks.

The economic impact worldwide is that oil prices surged due to supply disruption. Global trade affected the energy markets. Flights and shipping routes affected. As it stands, the current situation in April 2026 is that a fragile ceasefire is in place, but unstable. Tensions remain high as the US seizes Iranian ships, with Iran threatening retaliation. Peace talks are being discussed, but are uncertain.

In short, the US and Israel attacked Iran first, with Iran retaliating across the region. Conflict escalated into a major Middle East war. Now the world finds itself in a tense, unstable pause with the risk of more fighting.

It was argued that strategists believe this war is unwarranted, with no clear exit plans. This is a heavy strain on Iran, as an already heavily sanctioned economy. But the war is also costly for the US and the world, affecting global oil markets. No decisive victory in the foreseeable future, no surrender and with no stable peace yet. Right now, the situation is best described as a stalemate with shifting advantages; not a win for anyone.

Angelene Rothwell

Full-Day Walking

EIGHT OF our members set out on Tuesday 14th April for a circular walk, meeting at 10am and parking at The Plough pub near Borough Green, with the kind permission of the landlord. It was a bright, sunny morning with a refreshing breeze and perfect walking weather.

We began by heading up the hill to join the Weald Way, crossing open fields where we were treated to the unexpected sight of four peacocks strutting



across the landscape. Our coffee stop came where our route met the Greensand Way, a peaceful spot to pause and enjoy the views.

There was a brief moment of drama when one member realised their jacket had slipped off

somewhere along the footpath, prompting an extra mile's walk to retrieve it successfully, thankfully.

We continued through well-managed fruit farms before reaching our picnic stop at Ightham Mote, where we enjoyed lunch at the outdoor tables and the chance for a relaxed chat. Afterwards, the route took us through some truly spectacular bluebell woods and more open farmland, and some newborn lambs, eventually descending back towards The Plough.

Five of us rounded off the day with a well-earned drink at the pub. Most of the group completed a total of 10.4 miles, walking at an average of 2.4 mph, with a total ascent of 574 feet. A lovely day out in great company.

Richard Bowles

Garden Visits

WE VENTURED to Boughton Monchelsea Place for our April outing. The location is used frequently for films and photo shoots.

The manor was constructed in 1214 for Robert de Hougham and has been owned by many families, and was sold in the 1500s to Sir Thomas Wyatt.



His son, Sir Thomas the younger, sold the estate to Robert Rudston in 1551. Following his involvement in Wyatt's rebellion against Mary I, he was fortunate to be reprieved from a death sentence, though his estate was confiscated by the Crown. It was restored to him when Elizabeth I came to the throne in 1558.

Many MPs have owned the property. The property was acquired by the present owners in 1998. The garden comprises a 150-acre estate, mainly park and woodland, with spectacular views over its own deer park and the Weald. Courtyard herb garden, intimate walled gardens, box hedges, herbaceous borders and orchard. Planting is romantic rather than manicured. Terrace with panoramic views, bluebell woods, wisteria tunnel, David Austin roses, traditional greenhouse and kitchen garden.



After seeing the garden, we were invited into an old barn, and the owner gave us a fascinating talk on the property whilst enjoying our tea, coffee and biscuits. Obviously, the history of the property was mentioned, but everyone was intrigued by a small window facing the barn, and one of our members gave a good explanation of the mystery window . . . "I think it is an owl nesting box, which would be opened up during the breeding season. Whilst the owl was there, it would round up and control rats and mice."

Pat Bell

Half-Day Walks

EIGHT OF us enjoyed a walk from Offham through the wooded paths to the village church of St Michael's, where we stopped to take in the Saxon/Norman history.

The views across the Kent countryside included fields of early salad crops as we walked through Betts Farm. Our route then took us across to Ryarsh and St Martin's 13th-century church, where again we were lucky enough to look inside and enjoy the Norman history and the current-day use.

The walk then continued to West Malling, via the orchards and cricket pitch, to St Mary's church. After a brief look inside, we then returned to Offham for lunch at the King's Arms.

Leigh Morris

Pickleball

ANOTHER CONVINCING win for our group against Bexley.

Roy Simpson



Digital Photography 3

APRIL'S FIRST subject was 'Steps', not the 90's pop group, but the ones we struggle with the older we get. There was a wide range of steps and staircases, some going nowhere and others well known such as the Spanish Steps in Rome.

Interesting fact; did you know since 2019 you can no longer sit, eat or loiter on the Spanish Steps? They fine you between €250-350. Our photo was obviously taken before 2019.



We had steps going nowhere, spiral, ornate, wooden and ancient staircases, some inside buildings and some on the outside of buildings and some you wouldn't dream of climbing unless you were good with heights.

The second subject was 'Hobbies and Pastimes'. No one can say u3a members are just sitting around; we are out there following our passions from birdwatching, train spotting, classic cars and WW2 planes to card making, sewing, gardening, and, of course, photography.



The photographs are of The Spanish Steps (in Rome), Spanish steps in Mijas near Malaga, patchwork quilt cushions and an Avocet at Rye Harbour.

Sally Russell

AI

OUR GROUP met in the Spitfire pub for another lively and thought-provoking session, with plenty of ideas exchanged and questions raised.

We began by discussing the growing role of 'bot partners' – AI companions designed to assist, converse, and even provide emotional support. This led naturally into a wider conversation about the future of work, with some members expressing concern that advances in AI could reduce employment opportunities, particularly for middle-income roles.

While opinions differed, there was general agreement that society will need to adapt thoughtfully. We also explored the strengths and limitations of popular AI tools such as ChatGPT and Claude. Members noted their usefulness for drafting text, answering questions, and sparking ideas, while also recognising issues around accuracy, bias, and over-reliance. In a practical vein, we experimented with using AI to help write this very Newsletter



piece – and create the picture – with mixed results! Another member raised an interesting question about whether AI could assist with creating family trees, opening up possibilities for genealogy projects.

Finally, Barry shared a helpful resource: the u3a community page 'AI for Everyone', which offers guidance and discussion for those keen to learn more. A stimulating session, with much to explore before we meet again.

We meet at the Spitfire at 2 pm on the third Thursday of the month and all u3a members are welcome.

Barry Evans

Ten Pin Bowling

WE PLAY at Hollywood Bowl, Maidstone on the first and third Wednesdays every month (excluding school holidays).

Parking at Lockmeadow is £3.10 for 3 hours, sufficient time. I have booked Wednesday, 6th May for our next visit. Please arrive by 10.55am in time for an 11am start. 3 Games £10.80 or 2 Games £7.20



If this is of interest to you or you would like more information, I can be contacted by email roycsimpson@hotmail.com

Roy Simpson

Historic Transport

OUR FIRST visit in April was to the Heritage Transport Show at the Detling Showground. There were a great many vehicles of all types on show although, luckily, a lot were inside the show marquees as the weather wasn't brilliant.

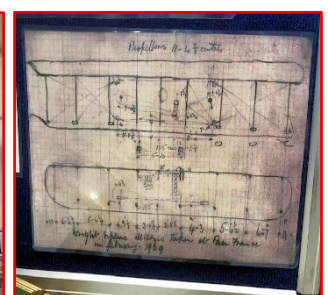
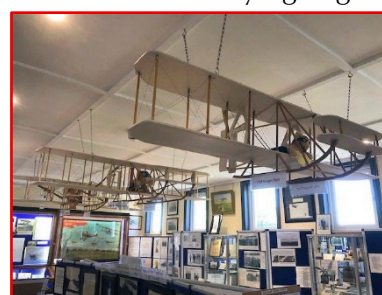


Some of the Group got along to the Sittingbourne & Kemsley Light Railway for a ride on the trains and a look round their workshops. They have several 2ft 6in gauge steam engines and a selection of carriages and goods wagons. The railway was originally a commercial one transporting raw materials to and from Sittingbourne and the Kemsley Paper Works on



the River Swale. Currently, they only have one engine actually in steam, but are hoping to get a second up and running again by the summer. The SKLR is now run by volunteers who do a great job in maintaining this little railway. It runs for two miles, most of it in open countryside, through Milton Creek Country Park and under the Swale Way road. It is a good outing for families, and the younger members, I'm sure, would love to go on the railway. They have a lot of themed days and special events during the year. They also have a café for drinks and snacks.

Our last visit this month was on to the Eastchurch Aviation Museum on the Isle of Sheppey. It is a small museum, opened in 2015 (next door to no less than three HMP prisons!) and showcases the history of flying in the Sheppey area. We were taken round by Simon, one of the volunteers, who gave us a very detailed and interesting description of most of the exhibits and the history of Eastchurch where UK heavier-than-air flying began.



Short Brothers (who later went on to have a big aeroplane manufactory in Rochester) had visited the Wright Brothers (first to fly a controlled, heavier-than-air plane in 1903 at Kittyhawk in the USA) at their 1909 flying ground at Pau in France. The result of this visit was the purchase of land at Shellness Point on Sheppey and the creation of workshops building Wright Brothers' aeroplanes there. As there were no drawings of the planes, a sketch of the plane at Pau was done by one of the Short Brothers. However, during the test flying at Shellness in



1909/10, the land was thought too low lying and so a large area was purchased at Eastchurch, to the south of Stanford Hill, to continue the operation.

The first plane to land at Eastchurch was a Wright Flyer, built by Shorts at Shellness, and piloted by the Hon. C.S. Rolls (known as half of Rolls-Royce). In March 1909, Mr Moore-Babazon flew over 18 miles around Eastchurch in one of the planes. This was only six years since the Wright Brothers had been the first to fly. C.S. Rolls, on 2nd July 1910, was the first to fly non-stop across the Channel and back. Unfortunately, only 10 days later, he became the first person to die in a plane crash when the tailplane



of his Wright Flyer broke off during a flying display in Bournemouth.

In 1911, there was a flying race at Eastchurch, organised by Gordon Bennett. He was a Victorian Playboy who got up to all sorts of antics and was the inspiration for the exclamation, "Gordon Bennett"! About 12 aeroplanes from the UK and France took part in the race.

During the Great War (1914/18), Eastchurch became a training station for the Royal Naval Air Service. In the War, only 11 years after the first

flight, there were already over 30 different aircraft flying from several different countries. In 1917, the Short Brothers sold their Eastchurch Works to the Government to enable the aerodrome to be extended, and Shorts then moved to Rochester. In the 1939/45 War, Eastchurch was a training centre for the RAF. The airfield was finally closed in 1946.

Hilary Kilborn

Pies, Pubs and Pints

WE WELCOMED old and new to the 16th century Swan on the Green at West Peckham for the first of a series of requests to revisit some of our favourite pubs.

We started drinking in the sunshine on the village green before venturing inside for Swan pie of the week. If anyone was expecting to feast on the royal bird they were disappointed but the



shoulder of lamb pie was decidedly delicious.

Maurice Chittenden

Contract Whist

SOME REALLY high calling at this month's meeting, with, I think, a record 9 being achieved by Ivor, and Kathy close behind at 8 called and achieved.

Three tables had drawn 1sts – Martin and John P, Les and John Ph, and Helen and Mary. Another fun morning, with lots of lively chatter amongst periods of intense concentration!

Lin Martin

Art Appreciation

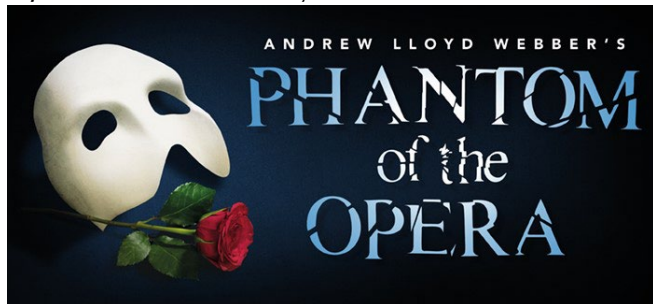
THIS MONTH we were studying 'The Odyssey' by Homer, and how it has been portrayed in art over the years. Mary gave an exceptional presentation on this topic. She taught us much about the voyages of Odysseus and had found a wide variety of paintings to accompany the story of his journey. She did it all with wit and humour.

Our group has now grown to 18 members, and we cannot accommodate any more for a while, as we are running out of room in the Briefing Room, which is kindly made available to us by the Spitfire, who are always helpful and welcoming.

Jill Rutland

London Shows

THIRTY ONE of our Group's members put their names down for the spectacular Andrew Lloyd Weber's masterpiece *Phantom of the Opera* for a visit in early June.



Should anyone wish to join the Group to get the chance of much reduced price tickets please let me know.

Laurie Frowde

MOTO

Bluebell Walk in Kings Hill

A small group of Moto members took part in our annual Bluebell Walk from Kings Hill to The North Pole public house. This year we had perfect



weather, and the Bluebells were beautiful.

Our lunch at the North Pole was very filling, and no one could manage a dessert, which was disappointing as there was a very tempting choice.

Afternoon Tea

No one could remember who had recommended the cafe at Knights Garden Centres, Nags Hall, Oxted, but it was a lovely afternoon tea; very economical with just the right amount of food.



We were also lucky with the weather, so we all had a good look round the garden centre, and although it was a little breezy, we all had a lovely time.

Visit to Hampton Court

It was a perfect day for our trip to Hampton Court; the M25 behaved itself both ways. It was the final day of the Tulip Festival, which meant that a lot of the flowers had finished. However, there was a lot of colour still to see.

We joined an historic garden tour, which was amazing; full of interesting facts about the gardens describing Queen Mary's talents for the designs and features in the gardens, being almost an instructor in biology.

The Palace was very impressive, particularly the Georgian suite with a dining room containing a table with incredible serviette creations. Among them a lifelike horse as well as lobster, duck, turkey and vegetables.

It was a most enjoyable day with Brookline coaches.



Sunday Lunch

Nine members of our group headed out into the Kent countryside on a bright sunny day for lunch at the Kentish Rifleman, Dunk's Green, near Plaxtol. The food was good, but the service was rather slow!



MOTO Monthly Meeting

The next MOTO monthly meeting will be on Wednesday May 27th in the Lancaster Room, The Spitfire, Kings Hill. I look forward to seeing new and regular MOTO members at the meeting

Sarah Barker

Garden Group 1

WE MET at Elaine's house this month, where we looked around her garden full of traditional plants, including Iris, Aquilegia and Lupins, along with more unusual



varieties, many originating from Mexico. The photo shows an Agave, which has very spiky leaves and a tall central spike which will flower this year, and then the plant will probably die. The photo showing



the mass of white is an unusual type of *Cornus*, and has bracts with a tiny flower in the middle.

After our tour, one of our members gave a talk on a favourite flower known to us all, the Chrysanthemum. We found out it originated from China and is used as a herb there. As usual, we had plenty to say regarding our own gardens and are all hoping for a few rainy nights!

Christine Hutchins

London Walks 1

ON A LOVELY Spring day, Eve started our walk around Chelsea with coffee at Sloane Square in the John Lewis store, Peter Jones. We successfully exited the shop without tempting deviations!

Our Group had been around Chelsea several times before but there were new sights to discover. As we entered the Duke of York development (opposite Peter Jones), we saw two bronze statues depicting a boy and a girl, pupils of the Royal Military Asylum school, which had stood at this point from 1803 until it relocated to Dover some 100 years later. These statues were provided by The Cadogan Estate to mark the bicentenary of the school. After a brief look at the impressive Saatchi and Saatchi gallery housed in the Duke of York headquarters building, and the Chelsea Grocer Store (which rivals the Harrods food hall), we walked down to the Royal Chelsea Hospital and caught glimpses of the red-coated pensioners strolling around the grounds. After passing the more modern National Army Museum and the Chelsea Physic Gardens, we came to the





Thames. On the opposite bank, we saw the Peace Pagoda in Battersea Park. This pagoda was constructed in 1985 by Japanese Buddhist monks to commemorate the Peace year.

We then strolled along the river until we came to the statue of *Boy with a Dolphin* by Sir David Wynne on the corner of Cheyne Walk. As we went along this exclusive road, we were met by the strong scent of the magnificent Wisteria that was in full bloom outside several of the houses. It was



particularly beautiful outside number 48, the former home of Mick Jagger. Two local artists thought the same as they were busy creating new paintings of the house and its flowers.

We followed along the River, passing well-known statues of Thomas Carlyle and Thomas Moore near Chelsea Old Church, until we reached the newly restored Crosby Moran Hall. The original building



was constructed by wealthy wool merchant Sir John Crosby in 1466 on Bishopsgate. It has a long history of former owners, including Richard III and Thomas More. In 1910, it was moved to the new site here on Cheyne Walk by the Chartered Bank of India, Australia and China. This banking company had

purchased the building with the intention of demolishing it. In WW1, it was home to Belgian refugees. After the War, it was home for many years to the British Federation of University Women. When the GLC was abolished, the building was sold to Christopher Moran and then restored and converted into the current luxury mansion we see today. And in 2021, it was renamed Crosby Moran Hall.

At this point, we left the river and returned to walk past the Old Dairy and the Pigs Ear Pub to the King's Road, coming to St Luke's Church on Sydney Street before getting back to Sloane Square for a well-deserved lunch.

Roma Elson

Wine Appreciation 2

THIS MONTH we tried our hand at scoring wines as the wine professional do. Back in the late 1970's an American wine professional called Robert Parker developed a new industry-standard '100-point scale' which more easily identified for everyday wine drinkers the likely quality of a wine. The new system was also commercially very attractive to wine producers enabling them to improve promotion of their wines by the simple expedient of showing an impressive wine score on the neck of their wine bottle. Go to any supermarket today and you will invariably see one or more wines on the shelf proudly displaying a wine with a number in the 90's!

Our first scoring attempt using the Robert Parker scoring system ended up with our score averaging 76 points, whereas the average wine critics' score was 90 points; not a great start. We just couldn't see that this particular wine warranted such a high score. With each successive wine tasting, our average wine scores increased, culminating in the final wine of the evening, the Trivento Golden Reserve Malbec, scoring an average of 90 points by our group compared to the wine critics score of 93 points.

Great fun was had by all, and I would add, the evening wasn't taken too seriously!!!

John Warren

KHaD u3a Information

KHaD u3a Committee

Officers



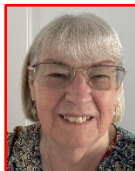
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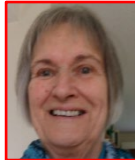
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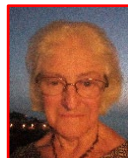
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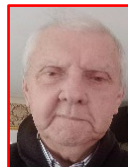
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SIG reports and photos deadline
Friday before each General
Meeting.

Editor: Laurie Frowde
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To see us on Facebook @u3aKingshill

Let us hear from you . . .

THE NEWSLETTER would be keen to hear from members about anything connected with the u3a. Any observations or comments on the Newsletter – especially new ideas – would be welcomed.

All correspondence will be acknowledged and some even published.

Email: newsletter@kingshillu3a.org.uk

Monthly General Meetings

These are held on the 1st Thursday of each month in **The Kings Hill Community Centre**, off Gibson Drive, Kings Hill, West Malling (near ASDA) at 2pm. We usually have a speaker following refreshments and a social get-together. Our meetings are normally very well attended, and it is recommended that members plan to arrive early (soon after 1.30pm) in order to secure parking and reduce queuing for registration and refreshments.

Entry to the monthly meetings (including refreshments) is included in an annual £20 fee (currently reduced to £15), which also includes membership in the Special Interest Groups. Guests may attend monthly meetings for a maximum of three visits, at no charge, prior to becoming full members.

Special Interest Groups (SIGs)

The Special Interest Groups meet at various places, and often these are in a member's house to avoid fees for hiring a venue. Contact the Groups Coordinator and convener before you attend.

See the website for a full list of SIGs and contacts, and watch the Newsletter for their latest activities.

Cancelled Meeting

If the General Meeting must be cancelled for any reason we will try to get a note on the website by 11am on the morning of the meeting; so please check there if you are uncertain.

Parking

There is a small tarmac-surfaced car park at the Community Centre, but this fills quickly. There is an additional parking area to the east of the Community Centre. Otherwise, there is a large public car park behind **ASDA** (3-hour parking limit) and another on **Crispin Way** to the south. All of these parking options are shown on the map below . . .

