

# **Bearsted & District u3a** **2023 Groups Annual Report**

## **Ancient History - Keith**

### Our 6th Year

This year we met the Romans for the first time, from the early days when the group of villages occupying a small area of about 60 square miles built on and around seven hills, close to the River Tiber was ruled by Kings. From 753BC, for just over 200 years these Kings, mainly Etruscans took control of Rome. Eventually, the people had enough of being ruled by Etruscans and decided that they had to go. The "Rape of Lucretia" (a subject immortalised by many artists), was the catalyst.

After this, the office of King was prohibited and the Roman Republic was established, where by its constitution, no one, absolutely no one was able to have permanent political power. Readers of this report will know of course that this principle did not last forever!

By the end of the year under review, we met Patricians and Plebians – the Plebs! We saw how powerful rich people climbed to greasy pole to power; we looked at the Roman army and navy. We encountered, as the Romans famously did, Hannibal and his elephants and the three Punic Wars against Carthage. By this time ancient Rome was over 500 years old and was expanding its empire. We finished the year by beginning to look at how the west was won and we shall be continuing with that for a few more months and on to the Empire and Emperors and Roman Britain.

This month – October 2023, a second group has started and is fully subscribed. We will begin, as did group 1, with a few months looking at Anthropology, Bi-pedalism, archaic hominins and on to anatomically modern humans spreading across the globe. I am really excited about starting again and looking forward to coordinating this group.

## **Armchair Travellers - Steve**

Our group has dwindled, and because not many are travelling far at the moment, we have suspended meetings until January. We have a couple of spaces, so if you have a special holiday you would like to share with us, by giving a presentation and showing photographs, please do come along. We have tea/coffee and biscuit break when general chit-chat ensues.

## **Art Appreciation (New for 2023) - Jean**

The Art Appreciation group has been very much appreciated by its members with lively What's App recommendations and with meetings where we each give a short presentation on a previously agreed theme.

So far we have considered portraits, women artists, architecture and sculpture. So to drop a few names : women artists Frida Kahlo, Berthe Morrisot, Marianne North, Laura Knight with architecture by Bernini and Zara Hamid. Sculpture was represented by Barbara Hepworth, Emily Carr, Antony Gormley and, as a master of woodcarving, Grinling Gibbons. Our next theme is illustration and both Blakes, Quentin and William, will be considered. This list may have missed out some presentations but all have been very much enjoyed.

We went to Margate to see Antony Gormley and the Turner Gallery but it was closed despite

the website clearly saying that it was open! We regaled ourselves with mugs of coffee in the old market buildings and sallied forth to find Tracy Erin's studios for young artists in the old bath house, fantastically white against the bright blue sky. We saw another exhibition by Benjamin Senior, enjoyed a Greek lunch and then said farewell to the lone Antony Gormley sculptured figure standing far out to sea.

We are a small but very enthusiastic group.

## **Bird Watching - James**

The September 22 meeting was held at Kent Wildlife Trust's Oare Marsh Reserve near Faversham. It was a good bright morning. The tide was low so the birds were distant. Curlew, dunlin, ringed plover, reed bunting, pied wagtails and black headed gulls were seen as we walked to the hide, but redshank were conspicuous by their absence from the mudflats. From the hide we saw the seals on a distant sandbank and several small groups of avocet. Closer to the hide a group of shelduck were roosting, and as we scanned for more avocets a pair of whimbrel were seen close by. The level of the water in the scrape was lower than usual but still held large numbers of lapwing and roosting redshank. A flock of black tailed godwit flew in as we watched and the usual coots and 3 golden plover were seen.

Our October 22 meeting visited Riverside Country Park. Although it was cloudy and very cold in the wind when we arrived, the weather brightened as we walked to Sharp's Bay and Copper House Lane on a rapidly rising tide. At our first stop a small flock of dunlin with redshank and grey plover were seen and the unmistakable call of a curlew heard as it flew by in the middle distance. As we walked, we saw more redshank, black headed gulls, herring gulls and a flock of turnstone. In the distance a flock of brent geese were feeding near our destination for the day. Although the estuary was our principal interest that morning it is always worthwhile checking the trees and bushes on the landward side of the path. One short stretch of the path yielded a mixed flock of long tailed tit and blue tit with a small group of goldfinches, female blackcap, and a small warbler (chiffchaff?). Above the adjacent field the resident kestrel was hovering. We then moved on to watch the flock of brent geese we had spotted earlier. They were feeding on green seaweed close to the shore, grunting and honking as they did so. We also saw a great crested grebe in winter plumage, a group of shelduck, countless roosting redshank on Copper House Island and another grey plover in the saltgrass. On our walk back to the car park we added lapwing, little egret and wigeon to our list.

Our November 22 meeting was held at Riverside Country Park on the Medway Estuary near Rainham. We walked from the Reserve Centre to Bloors Wharf. The morning was still damp after heavy overnight rain but the weather gradually improved during our visit. The tide was very low which meant that the birds were often distant - so the telescope was essential. Heavy rain falling on the mud banks had washed off the soft surface mud to expose the more compacted material below it and similarly expose the molluscs and worms normally hidden below the soft surface. This had attracted large numbers of crows and jackdaws to the saltgrass to feed, as we watched them flocks of waders and ducks took to the air as a peregrine falcon flashed by overhead. Other birds seen and heard included wren, dunnock, robin and green woodpecker beside the footpath, and on the estuary teal, widgeon, shelduck in large numbers and sleeping shoveller duck. Waders included little egret, curlew, black tailed godwit, redshank, dunlin, sanderling, and ringed plover. The most exciting sight was a kingfisher that alighted on a steel pile about 15 feet from us. It then flew down to a perch in the saltgrass nearby and dived to catch a fish. Eventually it flew off but later returned and resumed its perch - at all times giving us a grandstand view of its activity in the by now bright sunshine that made its bright plumage glow brilliantly.

Our December 22 meeting at Oare Marsh near Faversham was abandoned shortly after arrival. Traffic delayed the writer by 25 minutes and a short walk confirmed that all the fresh water in the lake and drains was covered by an inch of ice. Not a bird was to be seen on the scrape. A snipe was seen sculling across the road and on the seaward side the tide was low and several curlew, a flock of dunlin plus redshank and oyster catcher were seen on the mudbanks exposed by the low tide. The sun was very bright with that special quality it has at the time of the winter equinox, and it proved perfect lighting for a female reed bunting that alighted some 8ft away on a reed seed head.

Our January 23 meeting was held at Riverside Country Park on the Medway Estuary. It was one of those startlingly bright mornings that follow a hard frost – ideal conditions, although still a bit cold. The tide was high when we arrived, so we intended to walk to Horrid Hill to witness the changes as it started to fall. As we left the car park, we talked to members of the Bird Wise group who had set up an information table at the exit to promote good practices when visiting N Kent's birdwatching sites. As we chatted a kingfisher flew right to left parallel to the path we were on. We moved on to the peninsula and the first flock of birds arrived – turnstones searching under the wrack growing on large stones at the top of the shore. Nor Marsh opposite our viewing point was the high tide refuge for many birds and we watched as they began departing to feed as the tide began to recede and murmurations of dunlin and flocks of redshank flew up. To our right a very large group of brent geese started to break up and skanes of 10 or 12 flew upstream to feed on the mud banks that would be the first to be exposed as the tide fell. The first mud to be exposed beside us was immediately occupied by a flock of dunlin, then to our right another flock of dunlin arrived closely followed over the next 20 minutes by numbers of redshank, golden plover, grey plover, oyster catcher, and curlew. Other birds seen included rock pipit, goldeneye, teal, widgeon and black headed gull. All in all an outstanding morning's birdwatching.

Our February 23 trip to Kent Wildlife Trust's Oare Marsh reserve took place on a somewhat gloomy morning with drizzle threatened in the weather forecast. The tide was low and still falling. A small flock of greylag geese in the field behind us caught our attention with their loud honking. As we walked along the sea wall one of the resident reed buntings perched on top of a small bush and on the seaward side redshank, grey plover, oyster catcher, curlew and several groups of avocet were seen. As we reached the first hide another 100+ avocets, teal, brent geese, cormorant, great crested grebes and harbour seals were added to the list. As we moved on to the second hide a marsh harrier glided towards us disturbing all the birds on the scrape. From the hide we saw numerous pintail and shoveller duck, gadwall and resident coot and mallard flushed from cover as the female marsh harrier made another pass. As we were about to leave, a rarity – a male hen harrier, appeared to our left and proceeded with its characteristic jindvinking flight (a pronounced zig zag flight pattern in 3 dimensions) to cross our view from left to right. It was close enough to see its yellow eye without the use of binoculars. By and large birdwatchers are a taciturn lot but once it had passed it would be true to say that everyone in the hide whooped with pleasure at the sight. It felt as if we had been visited by royalty.

Our March 23 meeting was held at the Kent Wildlife Trust's Sevenoaks Wildlife Reserve. The weather was clear and bright and warm in the spring sunshine. We watched a pair of great crested grebes on the first lake with mallard and tufted duck also present. On the next lake it was good to see the herons on their nests with 3 ugly nestlings visible. It is always good to meet members wishes on our trips. One of our new members expressed the hope of seeing a kingfisher. They are present at Sevenoaks but seldom seen. However today we saw one on the opposite side of the lake. Eventually it flew rapidly towards us along the edge of the lake before disappearing into the undergrowth. The next lake was occupied by graylag geese noisily pairing

off. Canada geese, a pair of Egyptian geese, shoveler duck, dabchick, more tufted duck, great crested grebe and mallard were also seen. From the third hide teal and lapwing were added to the list and blue tit, great tit, long tailed tit, chiffchaff, tree creeper and numerous robins were also seen as we walked through the reserve.

One of the consequences of our programme of visits is that we visit some sites on the same week of the same month each year. This gives us the chance to see the differences between each year. So, it was when we visited the Woodland Trust's Hucking Estate Reserve in April 23. Last year we arrived at the peak of the bluebell flowering with some already setting seed. This year the flowers had just started but were still a sight to see especially with the wood anemones nearby. The weather was bright but there was a strong east wind blowing. There was a lack of the usual spring migrants, the chiffchaff and blackcap we heard were probably resident. Other birds included jay, green woodpecker, great tit, blue tit, robin, treecreeper, and dunnock. Only one species of butterfly was active – we saw several specimens of peacock butterfly. On our return we saw a buzzard quartering the field we were crossing, but sadly no nightingales were singing this year.

One of the most astonishing film sequences of the recent "Wild Isles" TV series showed a small member of the falcon family known as a Hobby catching a dragonfly in its talons removing the wings and eating it whilst in flight. During our May 23 visit to Stodmarsh we saw more than twenty of them doing precisely this in the sky above us. The weather was clear and bright – ideal conditions. As we left the car park a greater spotted woodpecker was seen and the first of many cetti's warblers was heard, its song bursting from nearby undergrowth. As we emerged from the woodland the first hobbies were seen above. We have heard bitterns booming at Stodmarsh in previous years but this time we caught a fleeting glimpse of one landing into a reed bed. The resident great crested grebes were seen on the lake with terns flying above them earning their alternative name of sea swallow by catching flying insects in their beaks as they flew. Reed warblers were also much in evidence and a cuckoo was heard in the distance. In all we saw three pairs of Marsh harriers over different sections of the reserve. On our return we heard nightingales and a wren in the woodland undergrowth and the cuckoo was now much closer. Other birds included greylag geese, tufted duck, mallard, robin, great tit, blue tit, chaffinch, blackcap, coots, and moorhen.

It has been many years since we visited Yalding Fen Local Nature Reserve, the site of our June 23 meeting. The sun was shining, and the day threatened to become very hot. As we opened the gate a great spotted woodpecker was seen in the branches above us. Mistlethrush, wren and chiffchaff were added to our list as we walked through the wooded area. Several members have a bird song recognition app on their mobile phones – very useful for those birds with high frequency songs we can no longer hear. The app told us that there were also goldfinches singing nearby. As we crossed the meadow a pair of herons flew over us. A profusion of banded and blue damselflies was found near the ponds and drainage channels. We came back to the old orchard across the boardwalk. Last time we came here a party of volunteers were clearing the invasive Himalayan balsam plants – it was good to see that their efforts had been successful. Spikes of yellow loosestrife were now growing in this area. In the orchard we saw pied wagtail, whitethroat and green woodpecker. By now it was too hot, and the sight of the pub was very welcome.

July is always a difficult month for bird watchers. Most birds have completed their breeding cycle and their young have fledged. They start their moult; cease singing and hide away in lush summer vegetation. With this in mind our visit was made to the KWT's Hothfield Heathlands Reserve where a complex habitat offers a wide variety of interest. On entering the wooded area of the reserve, a clump of ragwort had attracted newly emerged red admiral and peacock

butterflies and on closer inspection the plants were host to the bright orange and black cinnabar moth caterpillar. On the first of the heathland bogs a wren dived into the bushes as we approached. The footpath itself was pitted with countless tiny burrows of miner bees and tiny solitary wasps. The wasps are uncommon, but their nests are predated by another rare ruby tailed wasp. We have seen occasional single examples on previous visits – this time we saw 3 in the space of 2 square yards. A small copper and small heath butterfly were seen and common darter and migrant hawker dragonflies. A juvenile whinchat flew up from the heather to rest on a bracken frond. As we started our return the songs of 3 yellowhammers were heard. The closest bird came out of the cover to give us a good view. We had earlier heard a kestrel, and this was now also seen flying overhead.

August might well be thought of as the start of the bird watching year. Some summer visitors have already returned and the first passage migrants from the north have arrived. To witness this change we visited Sussex Wildlife Trust's Rye Harbour Reserve. The sun was bright and the tide high when we arrived. From the first hide we could see a large roost of oyster catchers and another of lesser black backed gulls. A small group of curlew and several little egrets were scattered across the saltmarsh. Flocks of starling, linnet, dunlin and knot (still in their rust coloured summer plumage) were also seen. On the fences we counted a total of 5 wheatears and black headed gulls and common terns flew above us. At the second hide we saw dozens of roosting cormorant, a pair of dabchicks and a common sandpiper at close quarters. The third hide was eerily quiet – the noisy tern colony it overlooks was empty, a reminder that 3 years of bird flu has had a deadly effect.

### **Book Group 1 – Carolyn**

Book Group 1 has continued to meet on a monthly basis. Our meetings have gone back to the Library at Bearsted and were initially a mixture of Zoom and face to face as sadly some of our members have become a little frail and found the steps difficult. We now generally meet on the second Tuesday of the month although this is somewhat flexible to try and accommodate holidays etc.

We have read a variety of books, mostly fiction, and generally (not always!) with enjoyment. The two books that we scored the highest are Act of Oblivion by Robert Harris and Still Life by Sarah Winman. Conversely, Slow Horses by Mick Herron was not received particularly well.

However, regardless of the book, I think everyone looks forward to the opportunity to get together.

### **Book Group 2 – Eve-Anne**

We meet each month on the first Friday morning. Books have varied widely, from Tolstoy to Richard Osman. The majority are modern novels with the odd classic from time to time. Discussion varies with some books generating far more than others or leading us to topics not obviously relevant. Sets of books are obtained from the library with members suggesting titles for a list from which the librarian can choose.

### **Book Group 3 – Irene**

Book Group 3 meets every third Thursday at 10.am. We currently have 7 members. We feel we cannot accommodate any more than that as we meet at each other's homes. Members take it in turns to recommend a book each month, and the Bearsted librarian orders 7 copies for us. This means that we may sometimes read books which we would not necessarily have chosen ourselves, but that is what is great about a book group – it encourages one to read a variety of books of different genres. We each give the book a

score, based largely on our enjoyment of the book. Sometimes our scores vary quite a bit e.g. "Lessons" by Ian McEwan, which elicited quite a lot of discussion. This year we all really disliked "Blood Meridian" by Cormac McCarthy, largely because of the constant, vivid descriptions of the pointless, grotesque violence. On the other hand, the book everyone enjoyed immensely was "The Nightingale" by Kirsten Hannah (about two sisters in France during the 2nd World war.)

Apart from the discussion of books, we enjoy the social aspect of our meetings - we enjoy each other's company.

### **Book Group 4 - Mary**

We are now a group of six avid readers and have enjoyed some and ploughed through other less well received novels. Our best read this year was The Woman in the White Kimono by Ana Johns. Our runner-up was the preceding book, the Dead Line by Holly Watt, a close run read with All The Light We Cannot See by Anthony Doerr. Poorest read, was The Name of the Rose by Umberto Eco. Most quirky was our latest novel, A Man called Ove by Frederick Backman. We seem to have chosen novels based in far-flung lands including India, Korea and Japan.

Our next two novels will be non-fiction. As always, Teresa, the Bearsted Library librarian, is a valuable resource. We give her a list of 12 - 14 titles and read them in the order they are received from County. So far we have been very fortunate in having the majority of our requests available.

We meet usually on a monthly basis on the third Monday afternoon, taking it in turns to host and provide refreshments. A warm welcome awaits any member who would like to join our group.

### **Bridge - Geoff**

This is a small group of 5 to a maximum of 7 members which for 2023 was effectively a refreshers group. This group met for the first time in February (with some breaks for holidays) and will finish at the end of November.

The format usually comprises a short teaching session followed by several pre-dealt hands which are played and the bidding and playing is discussed afterwards.

The group has in this year and previous years been successful in developing both bidding and playing techniques and has helped to set up spin off Bridge groups. It also tries to help members who are thinking about joining a Bridge club.

It is aimed very much at beginners and/or people who have played a little in the past. It does not attempt to teach bridge at a more advanced level. I am intending to start a new group in January/ February next year.

### **Crafts - Sue**

Craft Group originally met in members homes but the open afternoon in September 2022 produced a waiting list of members wanting to join us, so we had to look for a new venue. We have been made very welcome at the Bearsted and Thurnham Tennis Club. The 12 of us have enough space there to carry out our varying projects on the second Wednesday morning each month.

For the coronation this year we made fabric wreaths. We've also made air-dried clay decorations, decouped blackboards and boxes, glass painted jars, made papercraft stars

and iris folded Christmas Cards. We've sewn and knitted items including Ferrero Roche puddings and tried crochet squares We demonstrated between us how to make Christmas fabric crafts including a table basket, napkin, decorative cracker, fir cone decoration, placemat and coaster.

In the summer we went out to Rochester Cathedral to see the 12 large fabric panels that make up 'Threads Through Creation' which were magnificent.

## 12 Months of Craft - 2023

<p><b><u>January</u></b></p>  <p><b>Papercraft</b></p>	<p><b><u>February</u></b></p>  <p><b>Clay Craft</b></p>	<p><b><u>March</u></b></p>  <p><b>Fabric Wreaths for Coronation</b></p>
<p><b><u>April</u></b></p>  <p><b>Granny Squares - Crochet</b></p>	<p><b><u>May</u></b></p>  <p><b>Decoupage Blackboards and Boxes</b></p>	<p><b><u>June</u></b></p>  <p><b>Glass Painting</b></p>
<p><b><u>July</u></b></p>  <p><b>Crochet</b></p>	<p><b><u>August</u></b></p>  <p><b>Group Outing to Rochester Cathedral to see "Threads Through Creation"</b></p>	<p><b><u>September</u></b></p>  <p><b>"Iris Folding" Papercraft</b></p>
<p><b><u>October</u></b></p>  <p><b>Christmas Craft Demonstrations</b></p>	<p><b><u>November</u></b></p>	<p><b><u>December</u></b></p>

## **Cryptic Crosswords - Mike**

The "Cryptic Crosswords" Group for beginners continues to meet fortnightly on Tuesday mornings. Numbers have reduced slightly over the past year, so that there is now the opportunity for some new members to join the Group. Our sessions are an opportunity not only to learn about cryptic crosswords but also to have some fun at the same time!

## **Current Affairs 1 - Claire**

Current Affairs 1 has been resurrected post COVID. We meet on the first Monday morning of the month. The group has some of the pre lockdown members plus new members. Each person brings along several newspaper articles on national or international topics and we then discuss. The group encompasses a wide range of views. While we don't always agree, we manage to disagree in a friendly fashion. Sometimes we even rethink some of our deeply held views!! We always try and include something light hearted as there are so many dispiriting things happening in the world. Recent topics have included climate change, HS2, the up and coming US elections, Ukraine, the 20 mile speed limit in Wales, the spate of shoplifting, migration, multiculturalism in the UK, the current goings on in the UK political scene and not forgetting the case of Wally, the emotional support alligator whose owner was not allowed to take him into a baseball game in Philadelphia! So it is not all doom and gloom.

## **Current Affairs 2 - Mary**

It seems a long time since I've written one of these reports. We have lost some members but gained new blood to get a fresh outlook on events, either locally, nationally or on an international level. We review the major headlines of the previous month before going onto our individual items for discussion. War, the cost of living crisis, changing climate, and the poor state of our country's politics are often discussed. We have discussed advances in A.I. used in healthcare, surveillance, industry and technology. As always some see it as the way forward, but others as more of a Big Brother issue. Local issues have included the state of our roads, medical appointments and how national issues have affected us locally.

We mostly meet at the coordinators house, unless they are away, on the second Wednesday at 10:15 am. We have tried to fit members in if they've expressed an interest in joining the group. All are welcome as long as they respect other members points of view.

## **Enjoying Opera - Mike**

Meetings are based around two factors, time and availability, Time, as I pick operas that fit, more or less, to a two hour session; availability, as to whether I own a copy of the opera. The group's taste is catholic, so we have stretched from C18th to late C20th works. The last year has included viewings of works by Donizetti, Bizet, Weill, Mozart, Verdi and Rossini. We tend to avoid the more often-seen operas and catch up with rarely-performed gems.

The current season promises works from Paisiello, Bellini, Lalo, Verdi, Bernstein and Torroba. Performers will include Placido Domingo, Jose Cura and Patti LuPone, while productions are sourced from opera houses in the U.S., Germany, Spain, France and Italy.

We meet every third Tuesday afternoon. We're currently full, though do contact me if you are interested in joining us.



## Exploring World Faiths - Claire

Exploring World Faiths has been going for a year and takes place on the second Monday afternoon of the month. In the past year we have covered a huge range of areas including looking at the basic tenets of all the world's main faiths including Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Sikhism, Hinduism and the Orthodox churches among others.

We have also looked at some religious sects including some wacky ones! We are currently doing a comparison of religious areas including marriage, divorce, same sex partnerships. We will look at pilgrimages, attitudes to money amongst other topics. There is so much to explore! The group aims to provide a forum for thought and discussion. We visited the Sikh temple in September that was a lovely afternoon and hope to do some more visits next year to other places of worship. We welcome new members. None of us are experts. We are just exploring and learning together.

## Face the Music - Myra

Our first meeting was in April 2020 so we have been going for 3 years. The idea of the group is every month we have a theme and the members suggest music that they like or has a special memory. The themes are chosen by each member, one a month in advance, and they send me the song they have chosen. I put it together and at the meeting it is played on You Tube with the member having explained a little about the song, why they like it or what it means to them.

Some of the choices we have had this year:-

If you had a theme tune that played every time you walked into a room, what would it be?

*Simply the best, Man of Action, Always look on the bright side of life*

Drink and Drinking songs:

*Sherry by the Four Seasons, I'm a cider drinker by the Wurzels*

Songs with the names of people in the title:

*Michelle My Belle, Peggy Su*

Favourite song from a musical:

*Whistle while you Work from Snow White, When I marry Mr Snow from Carousel*

Song with the theme of Winter:

*A foggy day in London Town, Baby it's Cold outside*

A song of somewhere you have visited that was memorable:

*New York New York, 9 million bicycles in Beijing, A windmill in Old Amsterdam*

## Family History 1 - Carole

We meet once a month in the library at Bearsted Station where we are well looked after by Theresa, the librarian. After the uncertainties caused by the Covid pandemic, we now have a regular group of members able to attend.

Exploring family history involves individual research so our monthly meetings are used to exchange ideas about areas of research. We can use personal experiences and collective expertise to make progress. It is also fascinating to find out what others have managed to unearth from their own research.

We use the library's two computers to access the subscription websites such as Ancestry and Find my Past. This has also proved useful for looking at the 1921 census.

## **Family History 2 (New for 2023) - Marilyn**

The second Family History group consisting of 5 members has been going for 6 months and consists of newcomers to genealogy and more experienced researchers. We meet once a month on a Tuesday afternoon. Between us we have a number of different websites that we subscribe to. This enables us to compare and assist with data gaps. One of the group has subscribed to the latest 1921 census which has proved invaluable to others.

Within the group we have gained "top tips!" from others and some excellent shortcuts. We have some interesting discussions especially in relation to the social history aspect and more recently the topical issue DNA testing and the widespread implications that it throws up.

We all agree it is a good way to spend an afternoon and our family trees are growing.

## **French Intermediate - John**

French Intermediate has continued to meet at each other's houses for two hours at 2 pm on the first Tuesday of the month. We all seem to be at a similar level and find that we enjoy a range of speaking and translation activities. We use a book of short stories in French which we read and translate, we have colloquial phrases in English and French that we translate both ways and we write, and read out, short pieces ourselves in French about our own experiences on any subject. We find topical news items in the French press and translate them. There are suitable podcasts that we have used extensively in the past and which we may go back to in future and we are open to new ideas all the time. We all appreciate that time speaking French is what we need most and for that reason we limit our membership to 8. We realise this makes it difficult for new members to join us but hope prospective members will understand.

## **Gardening - Barbara**

The group currently has ten members, and we have held monthly meetings circulating around our respective homes through the year, weather permitting we meet outside. From the plantsman's perspective 2023 has been a better growing year than 2022; always warm, hot only on occasions and at times certainly wet, so flowers and vegetables have been capable of their best.

We started the year with practical lessons on pruning (a willing volunteer offered a big overgrown rose bush) and thoughts on pest control, ideally excluding chemicals. In April we visited Sissinghurst, one aspect of that was a chance for us to see the much-vaunted Greek garden recently established there, but realistically we found it a bit underwhelming, it needs a few more years to develop perhaps. In June we went to Chartwell and our August meeting was a summer safari around members' gardens in Detling.

We ran a competition to grow Hungarian "hot wax" chillis. The little seeds were easy to germinate, and some of us produced reasonable crops to add to salads and other dishes, though the chillies were more like slightly spicy red peppers. Throughout the year we have shared advice and ideas, and enjoyed successes and commiserated on failures, and Autumn brings the opportunity for us to share seeds that we've garnered in recent weeks. And now we're looking forward to 2024.

## Geology - Richard

The past year has been a very good one for the Geology Group with membership rising to capacity and a full programme of talks and field trips with contributions from many of the groups members. The year started with a talk on diamonds from source to grading as gem stones with further talks on;

iron in the Weald, fossils, the Cheshire Salt Field and Geology's influence on landscape, soil and plants. Field trips included; building stones and geology of Chatham Dockyard, geological walks around Bearsted and Samphire Hoe, Dover.

## Hidden London Walks (New for 2023) - Patricia & Richard



April 2023 - 14 walkers

Richard (husband) and I are members of the West Malling U3A London Walkers group, and having been members of the Bearsted & District since just before Covid struck, we decided to try our hand at co-ordinating a similar group for our Bearsted & District Group.

Naming the group 'HIDDEN LONDON WALKS' we sent out invitations to those whose replies we had received, as a result of having a table at the open day, in 2022. We met for our initial chat at Mote Park, on a bright sunny, cold January morning, and had a lovely stroll around the park.

The guidance for the walks was simple: each month, a host team of 2 as a minimum, would lead a London walk. The whole of London was at their disposal, so long as the walk was about 3 hrs long - 3-5 miles, with lots of interesting nooks and crannies, and was nowhere near the usual tourist routes. We would aim to take the first train out of Bearsted that fell within the 'cheap day return' times, factor in toilet stops, and actually leave for the walk from the rendezvous at 11am sharp. Obviously this entailed detailed research on behalf of the host team.

We explained that a recce was needed by each team of their chosen area, in the month preceding their chosen month. Detailed directions of the route should be noted, plus copious notes of all the interesting buildings, statues, murals, parks, churches, etc etc. A risk assessment was also needed, as there were bollards aplenty, wobbly paving slabs, and cyclists galore. Not to mention the taxis. All this information Richard and I needed, to be able to

circulate to the members, in good time for them to reply to us, yes/no they were joining in. We would then have a definite list of those walking, and so could tick them off at the rendezvous site before leaving.

As start-up walks, Richard and I led the walks for February and March. Our first walk was Hidden Wren Amongst Others. The second was Herne Hill and Brixton Village. A good mix of culture and architecture which we hoped would give the group lots of ideas for themselves. These two walks also showed that walking in the park was as interesting as walking amongst the likes of Wren.

April was the first walk lead by a team completely new to the experience - Paddington to Kings Cross.

May - Legal London: The Temple & Inns of Court. July - Mayfair, September - Greek Revival Architecture in Bloomsbury and St Pancras, October - Kensington - Holland Park and area. November we are exploring Pimlico.

June proved too hot for many members, and August was deemed 'holiday' time.

As convenors of the group, to say we are delighted with the enthusiasm would be an understatement. Setting up a new group is not easy, but all our walks have been fun, well attended and very well received by all.

### **History - Tony**

Our group has ten active members and we continue to meet at a member's home each month. Our remit is wide and we cover all aspects of general history. Subjects covered by our members recently have included:

The Great Exhibition. Berlin. The Treaty of Tordesillas. The Treaty of Saragossa. Cecilia Payne Astronomer. Charles 2nd and his mistresses. The world of spices. Disraeli. The origins of English Language. Genghis Khan. Sir Humphrey Davy. Will Adams and Japan. German Immigrants to London. The Hapsburg Empire.

### **Italian Improvers - Adrian**

Buon giorno

Our group is now up to seven members. We meet twice per month in members' homes and have a sort of read and learn style. We have read some books aimed at schools most of which have been a mystery where our hero or heroine solves the crime and exposes the criminals. Our last book was "La Collana Logobarda" about the theft of a necklace and we are nearly finishing "La Casa Sulla Scogliera" about strange noises from the house on the cliff and about to start another on the culture in Italy such as their love for coffee and the custom of "La Passagiata". Reading these books adds to our vocabulary and gives an opportunity to discuss grammar and how Italians speak.

A presto.

### **Italian Intermediate - Karen**

Our group continues to meet on the third Wednesday of the month and we take turns to host and to supply coffee and cakes which are of course very important to aid the flow of language! We are enjoying a text based on the true story of the flooding of the village of Curon at the time of the Second World War, where you can still see the top of the partially submerged tower. We like to chat about current affairs, general news and our own lives all of which encourages our use of the modern language as well as the written form. Our group has grown in size recently and there is always a lively discussion!

## **Latin - (New for 2023) - Myra**

We had our first meeting in January with 3 of us, we now have 6 members. Unfortunately we have been unable to meet every month but have managed to have 6 meetings.

We have been looking at various topics, Roman Numerals, memorial plaques, a bit about plant names and anything else that has caught our eye. We have a mixture of experience, a couple did Latin at school but nothing since, while a couple of the group have done a bit more. We have decided now to work through a book we have all managed to get – so Watch this Space for next year's report!

## **Local History 1 - Diana**

The LHI group has been very busy this year, now having clocked up 100 meetings since the group began! Despite the fact that we've been running since 2014, we haven't yet run out of topics to pursue. We still have 4 members from the original group.

We've enjoyed visits; St Mary's Church, Burham; Maidstone Town Hall; Charles Darwin's Down House; Boxley Church and village; Richborough Roman Fort, Sandwich.

We've also met in Bearsted Library upper room to learn more about: the Kentish Royal Dynasty; Dickens in Kent; Upnor Castle and the battle of the Medway; Medieval Goudhurst; Dan's Pot Pourri talk; Romney Marsh.

The members of the group take turns in presenting a talk and discussion or fixing a trip. We have diverse interests as you can see from our topics/visits. I've run out of Megaliths now so will have to broaden my field. Do visit Coldrum Stones, near Birling/Ryarsh if you've never been – older than Stonehenge AND the Giza Pyramids; free to visit and free to park.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coldrum\\_Long\\_Barrow](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coldrum_Long_Barrow)

<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/kent/coldrum-long-barrow>

## **Making Music Together - Joy**

We continue to meet at the Holy Cross Church Hall in Bearsted on the first and third Tuesday of each month. At the moment we are working on some music for our visit to Harrietsham Primary School in November when we are going to play to the children and talk about our various instruments.

Our aim is to create a supportive environment where we all learn from each other."

## **Music Appreciation - Paul & Mike**

The group has continued its successful format with members taking it in turns to present a programme of their choice on the second Monday of every month. There are a couple of vacancies in the group.

We have continued our innovative range of subjects which have included Oceania Bound [including some characteristic ethnic music], music from Poland, Summer/Heat, From Dawn to Dusk, Aspects of Love. At Christmas we have a pot-pourri when everyone contributes 15 minutes of music to the meeting.

## **Read It Aloud - Val**

The Read It Aloud group has now been operating for ten years and some of the members of the group have been there since the beginning. Very sadly some former members have passed away and others have moved away but their replacements have slotted in seamlessly!

The whole ethos of the group is to enjoy each other's company, to have a laugh, to learn and to provide support and a listening ear when needed.

Each month the members of the group agree on a theme for the following meeting and bring with them pieces of prose or poems on that topic to share. We also try to find out some information about the writer or poet. Over the year, we have covered such topics as Buildings, Summer, Joy, colours and Families, and the variety of pieces which members have found has been so diverse and interesting. An integral part of our meetings continues to be the superb discussion which ensues both during the meeting and afterwards over refreshments.

The group is full at the moment but we would be very happy to help anyone else who would like to set up a second group.

## **Recorder - Jean**

Our recorder ensemble have been playing since the Spring of 2016. There are 6 of us that regular play twice a month and thoroughly enjoy our time mastering the pieces that we play.

We have been practicing many of the Playford dances which are 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century pieces along with tunes such as Rondo (Mozart), Beckett Blues (Pitts) and tunes such as An Eriskay Love Lilt which is a Hebridean Folk Song, American Patrol and Yellow Bird (Calypso). As you can see quite a varied repertoire!

Five of our members have been playing since the beginning and between us we play descant, Treble and Tenor recorders. If you would like to come along and hear us play or join you would be more than welcome.

## **Singing for Fun - Steve**

Although our group is currently down to 8 members, we have still been meeting and enjoying our singing. We use karaoke backing and sing a wide variety of songs, from across the years, including some well-known show songs.

We take a half time tea/coffee and biscuit break when general chitchat ensues. All you need is enthusiasm and a good pair of lungs, a tuneful voice is a bonus. We have several spaces if you would like to give us a try.

## **Spanish - Marilyn**

Our group meets regularly twice a month. We have a group number of 7.

There is a good range of activities including listening, reading, speaking and writing

The group is reading a Spanish short story together for oral and translation practice and also using an online Spanish course to reinforce grammar points. Level of language designed to extend and motivate. Weekly tests arranged by group members. The sessions are thoroughly enjoyable.

Although I found the idea of taking over the group rather daunting at first because I had only started to pick up the language during Covid, I thoroughly enjoy planning our sessions and see the members progress in both knowledge and confidence. Marilyn



## **Spanish Hola Español - Linda**

This group has been running now for three years and the 6 members seem as enthusiastic as ever. We meet fortnightly and do a variety of activities including reading and translating short stories. We also do grammar topics with plenty of practice putting sentences together. We also have vocabulary to learn. Retaining the knowledge seems a lot harder than when we were at school but it's a good workout for the brain! It's a relaxed, friendly group of people and anyone interested in joining us would be very welcome.

## **Table Tennis 1&2 - Jenny**

We started our Monday morning Table Tennis in March 2017 and as it proved so popular, we set up another group on a Wednesday morning just under a year later.

To date we have 37 members in total have been regularly meeting every Monday and Wednesday morning each week except for Bank Holidays.

We all have a lot of fun and certainly laugh a lot. I often say what more can you ask for then to start your morning with a good laugh chasing after a little white ball!

The exercise it gives us has been amazing and is shown by how everyone has improved their game enormously which has ensured even better mobility and movement.

In July the Monday Table Tennis group were visited by the u3a National Chair Liz Thackeray. (in the middle with the bright cardigan)



Some of the members of the Wednesday Group



## **Ten Pin Bowling - Barbara**

Our group has been up and running for about 4 years with a covid break just a few weeks after we began. I wondered if members would return after the covid break but we only lost a few and we now have 15 members and most of them turn up to our monthly get togethers on 3rd Tuesday of each month.

We use the bowling alleys at Hollywood Bowl at Lockmeadow in Maidstone. The staff there are very pleasant and helpful.

We were mostly all newcomers to the activity when we started although some have played before in their youth but we are all improving and mostly learning from each other. 100 and above is quite regularly scored nowadays.

Sometimes the men/women form a team and sometimes we have mixed teams - whatever we do it is good fun and we have a laugh challenging each other. We fill the alleys cheering when a Strike is achieved.

We are a happy bunch who exercise, have fun and we are friends now - what more can you ask?

## **Transport & Machines - Mike**

This group evolved from the "Aviation" Group, via the "Men and Machines" group title, which was then considered non-PC! (We still don't have any ladies in the group). The group meets on the third Wednesday afternoon of each month. The nominal size of the group is twelve, but a couple of members have recently dropped out, so there are a couple of vacancies at present. During the winter months (not December, too close to Christmas) we try to have our meetings in a member's house, when the member (or another) will give a presentation of their choice, sometimes work-related, or a topic which they are familiar with, such as a hobby. Also, some museums are closed in winter.

In summer (not August, holidays) we try to visit museums of interest to the group.

This summer we have visited the following:

Eastchurch Aviation Museum on the Isle of Sheppey which was the birthplace of British aviation,

The Kent & East Sussex Railway workshops at Rolvenden, while they had a "Battle of Britain" class locomotive undergoing maintenance. This was the largest locomotive ever to visit this heritage railway,

Ifield Watermill Museum, near Crawley.

Plans for future visits include the Medway Queen paddle steamer at Gillingham, the Medway Aircraft Preservation Society at Rochester Airport, and Brooklands, where there are many aircraft including a Concorde, many cars and related paraphernalia, and the Bus Museum. Next door to Brooklands is the Mercedes-Benz World, so a visit to both on the same day would be sensible, but this would be an all-day trip.

## **Village Visits (New for 2023) - Liz**

The new Village Visits group had its first outing on 21<sup>st</sup> July. This was a guided tour of Rochester Cathedral after coffee in the nice café in the crypt. For various reasons the attendance was smaller than anticipated but this had the benefit of the chance to see what is said to be the oldest door in England. Because the area can only be accessed by two people at a time this is not included on tours for larger groups.

The tour, lasting just over an hour, was both very informative and entertaining. It highlighted the development over the centuries of this very ancient cathedral. It also covered the different construction styles and the improvements made possible by lottery funding. The connections with Charles Dickens and General Gordon were also covered. The links with the Royal Engineers



Regiment, based locally, are strong with memorials dating back to campaigns including Waterloo, the Boer War and Khartoum.

This is a new Group and meets on the third Friday of the month. There will be a programme of visits to local villages and small towns with the option of lunch afterwards. There is space for further members to join so if it appeals to you please contact the Groups Co-ordinator through the website.

A visit to Lenham was made on the 20<sup>th</sup> October, 8 members attended, we met at St Mary's Church, greeted by a Church warden, refreshments were provided for which we gave a donation. The Church historian gave an excellent tour and description of the Church. We were then most blessed to encounter only a light drizzle – the forecast had been for torrential rain, all day, Jean gave us a most interesting talk of the history of Lenham, as we walked around the village, hidden alleys, the Tythe Barn and the property in the square being a Hall House, where she had lived for a number of years. Various other notes of interest around the square and up the hill to places of interest. The visit was rounded off by an excellent lunch at The Red Lion. Members later wrote to say how much they had enjoyed the visit and looking forward to the next one in November to Tenterden.

### **Walking - Geoff**

The group walks on the first Thursday and following Wednesday each month, except in December when there is no walk. The change from the Tuesday to Wednesday for the second walk has been a success with a higher attendance than was previously the case.

We welcomed Paul as a new walk leader, especially as this has relieved some of the pressure on the other leaders. The walks themselves have been very enjoyable and varied. Early in the year, when it was particularly muddy underfoot, we walked predominantly on lanes. This did not make the walks any less pleasurable as they took in the pretty villages of Loose and Wye. We spread our wings later on and have walked on the North Kent marshes at Oare, the Greensand Way at Sutton Valence and again at Linton, and on top of the Downs above the River Medway amongst other locations.

Most walks ended with lunch at a local inn, though the second walk at Great Chart near Ashford left us hungry because of a problem in the kitchen!

Following our November walk we will rest in December and recommence operations in January. The leaders would like to thank group members for their appreciation of the efforts of our walk leaders.