

# u3a

## The Bulletin February 2023 Cam, Dursley & District

### 'First Footing' for the new Short Walks Group

Nine members joined Ann Lacy & Rachel Williams on 11th January for the first walk of 2023. They went from Slimbridge across the fields and along Ballards Lane to Rosie's Wood. After a short section along the River Cam, they returned along the lanes back to Slimbridge. The weather was mixed with some rain. However all agreed that it was good to be out walking and enjoying each other's company. The next walk will be on Wednesday 8th February.



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## Branch News

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**The Christmas Quiz**, on Thursday 15th December, was enjoyed by all the 18 teams that competed. The winners, in a close finish, were 'No Idea' (Andrew and Sally Pinch, Midie Macdonald and Margaret Whittle) by one point from 'Eddie's Eagles', who in turn were a point ahead of third place 'www (No Dot)',



Everyone enjoyed the mince pies and mulled wine. A big thank you to the kitchen team, who found a moment for this selfie.

### **Meeting report: The Great Western Air Ambulance Charity**



As the sun rose on Thursday 19th January, your editor heard the sound of a helicopter over his home. It transpired it was an aircraft of the Great Western Air Ambulance Charity (GWAAC), heading for Dursley "Rec" in response to an emergency call. Coincidentally, there was much more to learn about this charity later that morning from volunteer Richard Lewis, the speaker at our monthly meeting.

The route to the Rec started with a 999 call for an ambulance, dealt with these days by the regional call centre in Exeter. The call handler would have taken details, and assessed that urgent response was needed to a likely life threatening situation. The air ambulance, with Pilot, Doctor and Paramedic aboard, would have taken off from its Almondsbury base within four minutes and then landed in Dursley within 20 minutes of the call. With not just the health care professionals onboard but also what is described as a 'mobile ED', the patient would have received potentially life saving treatment, before transfer to the most appropriate hospital for their

condition. This could be Southmead for trauma, the Bristol Royal Infirmary for coronary, or if appropriate the Bristol Children's Hospital. Of course patient confidentiality meant that we could know nothing about the casualty that morning or the outcome, and our speaker confessed that he wasn't even aware of the incident. It served, however, as a splendid example of the achievements of GWAAC.

Founded in 2008 to serve Bristol, Gloucestershire and the surrounding area, with a population of 2.1 million, it's one of the busiest in the country responding to around five incidents daily. It's not just helicopters, there are also road ambulances and rapid response motorcycles. Typically, there's one cardiac arrest to attend every day. Other life threatening incidents covered may be road traffic accidents, particularly high speed motorcycle crashes, falling trauma and burns.

The charity is not funded directly by the NHS, although salaries of doctors and paramedics are partially covered. GWAAC needs to raise £4 million per annum to continue to operate. Each of the 2,000 callouts every year cost £2,000. The 90 members present gave generously at the end of an informative and at times heart wrenching talk.

This meeting also saw us sign up our 603rd member this year.

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### Group News

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The following new groups are now up and running.

[Whist](#) will meet on the 2nd and 4th Mondays in the month at 1-30 at Dursley Methodist Church. There are about 25 members interested already. The leaders are Sylvia Moreton-Cox and Ronnie Harding. Please contact Ronnie via the Bluebird on our website.

The four members involved in various [Doll's House](#) projects (leader Mike Kavanagh) will meet at each other's homes to share ideas and support. Their first meeting is a visit to the home of one of the members where she and her husband have an already completed collection of houses.

Six members have met to play [Canasta](#) and three more people are interested in playing. It is not yet an official u3a group as no-one has agreed to be the leader.

Being a Group Leader and using the Beacon online mailing system is not as daunting as might be thought. A training/refresher session for leaders on Beacon and how to modify a group webpage will held on Wed 8th February at 2.00 pm in Dursley Methodist Church. There are still spaces available, contact Pam Davis to book.

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## Group Reports

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### **Garden Visits Group: Coming Up in 2023**

The group is looking forward to visiting some amazing places this year. All members welcome, updates can be found on our website.

**Sunday 23rd February:** Algars Manor and Algars Mill Frampton End Rd, Iron Acton, Bristol, South Gloucestershire, BS37 9TD

Two gardens are opening under the National Garden Scheme. £7 for both visits. The site is accessible by wheelchair and dogs are welcome. Refreshments will be available at extra cost. We will be visiting using our own transport. Lift sharing is encouraged and can be facilitated

**Tuesday 6 June 2023:** Visit to David Austin Roses, Bowling Green Lane, Albrighton, Shropshire. Just one coach – ours – is being accepted each day!. Nestled in the Shropshire countryside David Austin award-winning rose gardens are home to the National Collection of English Roses. Visit five themed gardens filled with over 700 rose varieties. Timings and cost of coach and tour to be confirmed.

**Friday 23rd June:** Visit to Blenheim Palace Flower Show by coach. Entry to the gardens and park included. Exact cost to be confirmed

To book please contact Danielle Ellis.

### **Science and Engineering – *Engineering Challenges on the Cotswold Canals***

Last November, the Science and Engineering group welcomed local expert Ken Burgin for a talk on the challenges facing the team working on the attempt to re-establish the canal route between the rivers Severn and Thames. Ken has been involved with the project since 1976, was Chief Executive of the Cotswold Canal Trust from 2008 to 2020, and remains a Director of the Company of Proprietors of the Stroudwater Navigation and the Stroud Valleys Canal Company.

The Stroudwater Navigation, one of the country's early canals, was built in the 1770s. In 1789 it became part of a through route to London after linking up with the Thames & Severn Canal. The last use of the full length was in 1911 but parts of the Stroudwater Navigation lingered on until 1954. The Cotswold Canals Trust has been working to restore these canals since the early 1970s when the M5 motorway construction severed the link between Saul Junction and Stroud. Five miles of canal through Stroud has recently been fully returned to navigation. A second Heritage Fund grant will see the remaining four mile section of the Stroudwater Navigation restored by

2024 to reconnect with the Gloucester & Sharpness Canal and the rest of the national inland waterway network. Part of this work, the channel through the A38 roundabout at Whitminster, was finished last year. Next up will be to replace the missing mile, cutting a new section to share the existing channel where the River Frome is bridged by the M5, then linking up with the rest of the Navigation at Eastington. .

But the biggest challenges lies ahead. These include refurbishing the over two miles long and over 200 feet deep Sapperton Tunnel, opened in 1789 to connect the two canals. Channeled through limestone and Fuller's Earth clay, and only wide enough for narrowboats, which had to be "legged" through. Prone to water leakage in the Fuller's Earth section, the last commercial traffic passed through in 1911 and in 1916 further roof falls occurred. The whole canal was abandoned by 1933. Around 20 miles of the route from the tunnel to the Thames at Lechlade are currently impassable.

The Canal Trust's funding bid rests on the argument that reopening the whole original route from Severn to Thames gives the best value for money solution to a very modern problem: how to meet the increasing demand for water in the South East. Plentiful Welsh water can be transferred via the Severn, the canals and the Thames. Political support will be vital as central Government money will be required, spread over several ministries.

Ken ended his presentation with an interesting hypothesis. Drive between Tetbury and Cirencester and there's a sign directing you to the source of the Thames. It's near the eastern end of the Sapperton Tunnel, close to the route of the canal and, inevitably the Thames Head pub. That part of the canal was notoriously leaky. Does the Thames really rise there, or was there some clever marketing?

The Science and Engineering Group also recently enjoyed a guided tour of the Great Western Steam Museum in Swindon , [writes Donald Gibson](#). The Swindon Works was built by the junction of the Golden Valley Line and the new GWR line from London to Bristol. Work started on the line in 1841. As the gradient for the line was rather flat from London to Bristol, the early Brunel designed engines such as the 'North Star' used the Broad Gauge rail width of 7 feet and 1/4 inches, enabling the journey from London to Bristol to be completed in a faster time than previous engine designs. Our guide explained the differing boiler systems and how the cylinder layout went from vertical to horizontal to give a better balance and smoother ride.

These engines did not have brakes and braking was achieved by the use of a Brake Van at the rear of the train, at times a dangerous procedure.

We were told about the Castle Series of engines which held the speed record of 100 miles per hour in the 1920's. This was achieved by higher boiler pressure and improved overall design. The engine designer Cressley copied Brunel's design for his 'A' Series engines. By now the engines had developed brakes and would run on the new Standard Gauge width as it was found to be cheaper to lay and used less land.



Once the official tour was completed the group wandered around the museum at leisure. It was fascinating to see how rail travel used to be in times gone by. On display was an original station with weight scales, ticket machines and tea trolley all situated on the platform, which brought back many childhood memories. It was great fun to try our hands at operating a signal

box and Engine Simulator. In years gone by horses were used to transport goods around the Swindon Yards before the advent of mechanisation. Displays of carts and packing cases, an early fire engine were along side an original Buffet Car and Queen Victoria's Royal Carriage, whose interior was not lavish. Several engines including the last ever GWR Engine to be made in 1947, could be seen. One brought back memories for a member of our party, whose Grandfather was a driver on a similar engine back in the 1890's.

One final point; Dursley had its part to play in the GWR story. Just inside the main entrance to the museum there is a diesel-powered vehicle made by Listers which was used to ferry workers around the yard/works. A little piece of local history. A trip to the GWR Museum is definitely worthwhile and will be a big hit with the grandchildren.

And to end this section, here's something that links to the report in our last edition about the the boutique vineyard at Woodchester. which has recently taken a top accolade for its ground breaking Sauvignon Blanc 2021. Winning a Master medal at the Global Sauvignon Blanc Masters 2022, it was given the highest possible award in the competition by a panel of expert judges, including Masters of Wine and Master Sommeliers, beating contenders from around the world. It was the only Master medal awarded in the 'unoaked' category. The bad news, if you want to try some, is that the category was for wines retailing between £20 & £30.

**Natural History:** *by Alan Keith.*

The group met on Thursday, January 12th for a lecture by Jackie Harris, a volunteer conservation officer from the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, Slimbridge. The talk covered the whole range of the trusts's conservation activities, worldwide. These projects are to save and protect a number of species of wild fowl and wading birds, including Bewick's Swan, Curlews, Baer's Pochard, the Madagascar Pochard and of course their most recent successes with the Spoon-billed Sandpiper.

Next meeting: "The Evolution of Plants" by one of our own members, Graham Baker, a volunteer dendrologist from Westonbirt, on Thursday 9th February at 2.00pm at the usual venue at the Dursley Methodist Church

**Country Walking Group:** A walk led by Greta Barker on 5th January started from the Stinchcombe Hill car park in fine drizzle on a very unpromising day. A small number of stalwarts did manage to complete the 3 mile circuit of the summit and were rewarded when the mist cleared with excellent views from Drakestone Point towards the estuary of the Severn.

Next meeting: 10.30 Thursday 2nd February for a circuit of the Frampton Lakes, starting from the Bird Watcher's car park on Watery Lane, Frampton.

**Cycling group:**

The cycling group is back in business after a break. Despite the weather, a few brave souls ventured out in January in groups of three to five to explore some of the lanes and roads between Cam/Dursley and Thornbury to the South-West and between here and Nailsworth in the East, with ever important coffee stops at Leyhill Prison (where else?!) and Horsley. As well as these rides of 20 and 35 miles, we have had one short one described unofficially as being for "softies" around the Wotton area.

With days getting longer and Spring just around the corner, now is an ideal time to build up some fitness. We aim to meet on Thursday mornings at 10:00 or thereabouts at various locations. We use WhatsApp and Email to arrange leaders, dates/times, starting points and routes.

If you are interested in trying out your bike in a small group, please contact the leader, Paul Lewington, using the Bluebird on Groups page of the website.

**Play Reading:** We meet in the Garden Room of the Chantry, Dursley, on the second Thursday of the month at 10.00 am. On 14th February, enjoy Alan Ayckbourn's 'Table Manners', and on 14th March, Terence Rattigan's 'Separate Tables'. The tables are entirely coincidental. Contact Lisa Randell via the Bluebird. Lift shares available from Wotton.

### Coming Up

Date	Group	Event
Thurs 15 Feb 10.30	Branch Meeting	Dursley Methodist Church Talk "The Vale Berkeley Heritage Railway; an Update"
Sun 26 Feb 13.00 -16.00	Garden Visits	Algars Manor and Algars Mill, Iron Acton Open Gardens -book and pay by 14 Feb with Danielle Ellis
Thurs 2 March all day	Science and Engineering	Helicopter Museum Weston super Mare Contact Bob Atack to book place oil coach
Fri 3 March All Day	Historic Places	Harvington Hall, Kidderminster and the Carpet Museum Book with Carol Tipper
Thurs 16 March 10.30	Branch Meeting	Dursley Methodist Church Talk "A trip down the Severn by Narrow Boat"
Fri 31 March all day	Historic Places	Black Country Museum Details from Carol Tipper
Thurs 20 April 10.30	Branch Meeting	Dursley Methodist Church Talk "The Fighting 40s" by David and Virginia Adsetts

**Full details of these events, and many more to come, as well as email links to group leaders or committee members, are available on our website**

**[u3asites.org.uk/cam-dursley/home](http://u3asites.org.uk/cam-dursley/home)**

**where you will also find links to read or download this Bulletin**

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