

u3a

The Bulletin Spring 2023
Cam, Dursley & District



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Branch News

Group Coordinator

We are pleased to report that Elinor Padfield has kindly come forward as a Group Coordinator, to take over from Pam Davis. She'll be working with Pam until the AGM in June, and in the meantime has been coopted onto the committee to learn the ropes.

PAT Testing

Some of the portable electrical appliances used by the Branch and groups will need to have regular tests to make sure they meet safety requirements. Tests in most cases won't need a qualified electrician, just a visual inspection for loose connections and any obvious damage. Your committee would like to hear from any members who are willing to take on this important task. Contact our secretary Karen if you can help.

Accidents

Accidents, although rare, can and do happen, even in the best run organisations. There were two in one day in February, both in the same venue, the Chantry Dursley, and both requiring ambulance and hospital assistance. Happily, those involved are recovering. Fortunately, the fantastic Chantry staff were on hand to help and the group leaders had with them the necessary group lists and emergency contact numbers. Leaders are reminded to keep group lists on Beacon up to date, with new members added as soon as they join. They should take a list of members and their emergency contact number to every meeting. Each activity and visit should have its own risk assessment. They should always carry an accident report form and a mobile phone.

There's also an important duty for all members to be aware of their own personal safety and to make sure that your emergency contact details are up to date. The simplest way to do this is to advise the Membership Secretary, who can update the records on Beacon.

Meeting report: *The Vale of Berkeley Railway*

At the February meeting Peter Bennett, a volunteer at the Vale of Berkeley Railway, updated us on progress for the eventual reopening of the old line from Berkeley Road to Sharpness. Historically the line crossed the River Severn to Lydney, but the bridge was destroyed in 1960 following a collision with two barges. Passenger traffic to Sharpness ended in 1964, although the line remained in use for the transport of used nuclear fuel from the local power stations to the reprocessing plant in Cumbria. The

line is still required for transport of radioactive waste arising from decommissioning work, with a contract in place for the next 25 years. The charity estimates that it will take them this long before they can actually run heritage locomotives from Sharpness to join the main line at Berkeley Road. In the meantime volunteers are refurbishing and repairing the stock of old engines in a workshop at the Oldminster sidings. These include one from the National Railway Museum, a small diesel locomotive, and to the delight of one of our members who remembered it in use, a 'fire less' loco once used at Gloucester's old coal fired power station and on the docks. Other teams have worked on fencing and clearing parts of the line and excavating the ruins of Berkeley railway station.

The 25 year phased project to fully restore the line includes much bureaucracy before the rebuilding of the railway stations. The current team of 60 active volunteers always need newcomers. One fundraising scheme potentially useful to u3a members is a service to remove scrap white goods free. These are then sold on to raise cash for the charity. Contact them via their website to arrange collection.

Group News

Our new Whist Group is now full. You can join the waiting list by contacting Ronnie via the Bluebird link on the website. She will let you know when a space becomes available. There's a maximum of 24 members at the moment because of room size.

We still need leaders for some requested new groups.

Archaeology needs someone with a bit of knowledge and enthusiasm to organise visits, speakers, discussions etc. We do have one volunteer but she would like someone to share the job with her.

There's been no response to date to an appeal for a musical member to lead a Singing group. We may have to abandon this suggestion for now if no one comes forward.

There are a few members who are keen to learn Spanish. We need a Spanish speaker who could share their expertise with this group.

Our French conversation group is struggling to keep going at the moment for various reasons. It needs more members and a new leader. If unable to continue its present form maybe it could become a beginners group with a new leader.

Group Reports

Garden Visits Group:



What a wonderful start to our garden visits for the year. Algars Manor and Mill at Iron Acton were beautiful and the sun shone. The manor and mill are 13th century, but the woodland garden, arboretum and riverside walks date from the 1950s. There are over 100 camellias and magnolias. Especially impressive was a bank of Newent daffodils.

Science and Engineering – Helicopter Museum Weston–super– Mare

Science and Engineering visited the helicopter museum on 2 March. It was a bright but bitterly cold day, and viewing the collection, housed in a large unheated old hanger, required warm clothing and some tenacity. Our volunteer guides came from a range of backgrounds, including Martin Barnes, a retired technician from the Westland helicopter factory, Yeovil. Martin, dressed for the occasion in flying suit, opened up one of the cockpits for anyone intrepid and fit enough to clamber inside. Donald Gibson was one member who couldn't resist.



Our cover girls, Sally Beynon, Grace Pink and Jacky Ling also took the opportunity for a closer look.

Some of the details, particularly about the engines, were quite complex, and it was useful to have retained your anorak. Good job I had mine, as a radiation warning sign on one vintage exhibit led to a discussion on the dangers of radium based luminous paint.



The museum has over 100 helicopters on display. One of the most iconic was a Bell "Iroquois", the 'Huey' used by USAAF in the Vietnam War.



There were even a Russian Hind Gun Ship. Another Russian helicopter had been hired out to Pinewood Studios for a Marvel blockbuster movie. You can see it in action (thanks to wires and green screen technology) in the film 'Black Widow'. From the UK, world speed record holder the Westland Lynx was built in Yeovil in 1979. An Augusta was used by the Italian customs. To cap off the collection, and looking pristine and bright was a helicopter formerly of the Royal Flight.

We were thankful for the cafeteria and the hot Shepherd's Pie. Incidentally, the trip coincided with the recent jammed tipper truck and the consequent closure of the M5. We were treated by our competent coach driver to a tour of Avonmouth going and a return journey through Sea Mills and Shirehampton, diversions that kept us reasonably to time and avoided the frustration of long traffic queues.

Natural History: *by Alan Keith.*



On a very wet and disappointing 9th, March, ten of us met at Slimbridge Wildfowl and Wetland centre for an organised tour. Magnus Carter, former BBC journalist and one of the volunteer guides, began by regaling us with the history of the Scott family and the WWT. We then moved on round the main hides. At Rushy Pen we saw the Bewick's Swans, their departure for Siberia having been delayed, possibly by bad weather.

Then on to the Tower hide where en route two water rails were showing well. From this hide we could see the common cranes, now well established and beginning to breed successfully. Their main enemies are the local foxes. Finally we returned to the Rushy pen hide to watch what may well have been the final swan feed of the year, before slipping out of the side gate into the gathering gloom.

Country Walking Group

On 2nd March seven members walked from the George at Cambridge along the River Cam and through the woods to Frampton, crossing the Sharpness to Gloucester canal at Splatt Bridge. We then walked along the canal to Cambridge Arms bridge before crossing back over and walking back through the fields to Cambridge, pausing only at a private nature reserve. The landlord of the George had been kind enough to give us permission to park and four of us had a splendid lunch. Our next walk, led by Jane Jennings, will be at Ozleworth at 10.30 on Thursday, 6th April.



The Short Walks Group *strode out on a couple of occasions. As usual, their reports are in rhyme.*



Snowdrops and catkins – the first hint of Spring
 Glorious sunshine– fit for a king
 Walking together – boots are a must
 In Rachel and Ann – we put our trust
 The next walk is March – where will it be?
 As for the weather – there's no guarantee

And they were right to worry about March. A good walk despite the weather, report Rachel Williams and Ann Lacy.

T'was a chilly walk it has to be said
 But with gloves on hands and hats on heads
 This bold bunch strode out with a smile
 O're muddy fields and sturdy styles
 The wind in our faces and a flurry of snow
 Were we downhearted? A resounding NO.



Historic Places: *from Sally Beynon*

In February 2023, members visited Royal Wootton Bassett and the REME museum at Lynham. The Town Crier and Sword Bearer, dressed in traditional costume with an ostrich tail feather in his cap, showed us around the town. The feather doubled up as a quill for writing in the past. He greeted us with a proclamation on behalf of the Mayor, councillors and people of the town. In the proclamation, he explained the history, the four market charters given to the town and the Letters Patten bestowed by Queen Elizabeth II to give the town Royal status.



The late Queen added Royal to the name Wootton Bassett in 2011 in recognition of its role in the early-21st-century military funeral repatriations, which passed through the town from the military base at Lynham.

The Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (REME) museum displayed the equipment used, the wars fought, the jobs undertaken, the habitats fought in and the soldiers lives when not on duty. The displays included action in the 2nd World War, Korea, the Falkland Islands, Northern Ireland, Iraq and Afghanistan. Radios for communication and the 'Wheelbarrow' to locate and destroy improvised explosive devices (IEDs) using remote control and cameras were among the essential equipment needed for the soldiers' safety. There were also displays showing the official regimental life, family life and charity work undertaken by the soldiers. Ronnie and Pat couldn't resist the opportunity to dress up for a mess formal dinner.





On the 3rd March, we visited Harvington Hall, a moated Elizabethan Manor House in Worcestershire. Today Harvington is only half its original size, as two wings were demolished about 1700. The house was sold to the Catholic Church in the 20th century and renovated using some panelling and stain glass from other properties of the same period.

It's a three storey house: the kitchens on the lowest; the middle, the family living accommodation; the top, the servant's quarters and nurseries. It is obvious that it was a Catholic household, as there are seven surviving priest hides, even off the main staircase and the kitchen. The one in the kitchen was above the bread oven.. There was yet another priest hide in the withdrawing room. When Catholic worship was eventually re-permitted, a small room in the house was converted to a chapel, followed later by a Georgian chapel in the garden.



After lunch we visited the Kidderminster Museum of Carpets. The museum trust leased the 1856 built Stour Vale Mill ten years ago. There had been weaving in the Kidderminster area since the 14th century. The products woven in Kidderminster were referred to as 'stuff' and consisted of curtain material, matting and coarse upholstery. Carpet making started in 1735 and exhibitors from Kidderminster were awarded prizes at the Great Exhibition of 1851. With the advent of steam power, manufacture moved from the weavers' houses into thirty factories. Carpets became cheaper but by the 1970's with alternative floor coverings becoming more popular, the factories started to close. By the 1980's, many mills were demolished.



We were shown the differences between Wilton, Axminster, knotted and tufted carpets. There was also jacquard card stamping and lacing, a shearing machine, bobbin winding and spool setting. We were given a demonstration of hand spinning, starting with carding wool from Jacobs sheep, followed by gradually pulling and twisting to make a skein of wool ready for spinning or weaving. This was followed by a demonstration of a power weave loom by someone who had trained and worked in a carpet factory from the age of fifteen.

Dursley Wine Group

MOTO (Members on their own)



Louisa Rubin (Group Leader) sent on this souvenir of the first meeting of the new Dursley Wine Group. It was, she reports, a most enjoyable evening.



Elaine Harrison's photo from their 15th March meeting

BOOKWORMS BOOK GROUP from Sue Dunn

"Olive Kitteridge" by Elizabeth Stroud is a 2008 Pulitzer winning prize book, and really a collection of short stories. The title character lives in Crosby, Maine, a small coastal town on the east coast of USA. She's in every story to a greater or lesser extent, and some local inhabitants also link up occasionally. Olive is married to the friendly, helpful, and socially easy, Henry, the local pharmacist who keeps a very low profile. She's a retired maths teacher, and a very difficult character. She is described a big

person, with changeable moods. As an intelligent woman, she knew how to behave but can be hurtful towards others. Her relationship with her son was awful. She kept saying how much she loved him, but his memories are different, and he moved far away to escape her.

Bookworms didn't enjoy the book much...always waiting for the unperceptive Olive to be outrageous. However, the descriptions in the prose were beautiful, like a picture being painted, and a light relief from Olive. Some members have read other books by Elizabeth Stroud, and have enjoyed them more. So maybe try one of those, rather than this one.

Coming Up

Date	Group	Event
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
Fri 5 May all day	Historic Places	Witley Court and Gardens Details from Carol Tipper
Thurs 18 May 10.30	Branch Meeting	Dursley Methodist Church Talk 'The Novels of Jane Austin' by Keith Hooper
Fri 2 June all day	Historic Places	Avoncroft Village, Bromsgrove Details from Carol Tipper
Tues 6 June all day	Garden Visits	David Austen Roses Details from Danielle Ellis
Thurs 16 June 10.00	Branch Meeting	Dursley Methodist Church Annual General Meeting followed by talk 'Blasts from the Past' by Bob Sinfield
Fri 23 June all day	Garden Visits	Blenheim Palace Flower Show Details from Danielle Ellis

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

where you will also find links to read or download previous editions of the Bulletin

NEXT EDITION - MAY 2023 - COPY DEADLINE FRIDAY 22nd APRIL

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ALL CONTRIBUTIONS MAY BE EDITED FOR PUBLICATION.