

U3A Harwich Peninsula

April 2024



A big thank you to everyone who has sent in articles, photographs, information, poems etc, including, Pauline Gronow, Alan Frost, Geoff Catchpole, Stuart Smith, Cath Hartwell, Sheila Allen, Joann Nightingale, Sue Stanley, Liz Smith and Jane Myers.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 14th MAY 2024

Please come along to the AGM on Tuesday 14th May at The Waterfront. This is your opportunity to meet the Committee and ask questions and make suggestions. There are a couple of vacancies for Committee Members, your chance to ensure the continuing success of our U3A.

Pauline Gronow

Membership Renewals

Just a reminder that this year's subs expire on March 31st and that next year the amount will be £17.00. If you pay by standing order you will need to inform your bank of the change. I will accept next year's subs from March 1st and will be at the coffee morning on March 16th if anyone wants to pay by cheque then. Sheila Allen (membership secretary). Alternatively, you can pay by bank transfer to Sort Code 30-92-72, account number 00679283, with your name as reference.

Harwich Peninsula U3A
BANK DETAILS Sort Code 30-92-72 Account No. 00679283 Reference: Your name (i.e. Jane Smith)
Thank you for your time **Sheila Allen**

Meetings

Speakers for 2024

Tuesday May 14th: AGM

Tuesday June 11th: Brian Carline: Gardening

Tuesday July 9th Graham and Mary Brace - A walk on the wild side – Brazil

August No meeting

Tuesday September 10th Steve Lester - Insights of a Provincial Auctioneer

Tuesday October 8th Frances Boardman - Tart to Empress

Tuesday November 12th Mark Lewis - Lighthouses

Tuesday December 10th Christmas entertainment (TBA) & refreshments

Second half speakers will be from members of our interest groups: Nature; History 3; Shakespeare; Recorders; Transport & 50 Things

The Harwich Harbour Foot Ferry

Just a reminder that the foot ferry season continues with it's daily service of hourly boats to Shotley and Felixstowe into the Autumn. A highlight of the 10 mile plus walking group's year is at least one trip over to Shotley on the iconic ferry to explore the peninsula.

I recently took the boat to prepare the route for our June walk and had a chat with the ferry operator. He says times are tough and he now needs three times as many passengers to break even than when he took over the ferry. Fuel, crew and other costs have risen steeply, but I noticed fares have remained pretty much the same. I would hate to see the service close because it becomes unviable so as the saying goes 'use it, or lose it'.

You don't have to go far at both Shotley and Felixstowe for food and drink where there's nice places to sit and watch the activity in the harbour and wildlife; or you can just stay on the ferry and enjoy a round trip.

Hope we can all use and support the ferry more this year.

Liz Smith

Harwich Café on the Pier

I see the Harwich café has just re-opened by the Pier Hotel, with a very interesting menu which is competitively priced. I hope this helps to support the foot ferry.

Rita

Walking the Suffolk Wool Towns Way

This new circular fifty mile trail takes in the medieval wool towns of Hadleigh, Sudbury, Clare, Long Melford and Lavenham as well as some beautiful villages. Parts of the walk are coincident with the St Edmund Way and Stour Valley Way so I had already completed some of it a few years ago.

Enthused by the 10 mile walking group's March walk in the area I decided to make this my first project of the year. The route, created by Sudbury Ramblers and with an excellent website, uses existing footpaths and was partially way marked with an eye catching design of a sheep on an orange disc. Walking following the recent wet weather was quite challenging, as well as farmers not reinstating footpaths after ploughing which resulted in some self navigation along country roads.



Starting in Hadleigh I headed off towards Sudbury. It was surprising to see the fields almost completely dry but bridleways and woody areas were still very wet and muddy. It was brilliant to be out walking again and the miles seemed to slip by. The way marking was so good here I didn't need maps and was in Boxford for lunch by noon. Although overcast the elevated landscape, particularly near the TV transmitting masts, gave some lovely far reaching

views. Finally walking along the narrow River Stour towards Sudbury station I reflected that I also look out over it every day as it heads out to sea.

Returning to Hadleigh a couple of days later I retraced the 10 mile group's walk out past the beautiful village of Kersey heading off towards Monks Eleigh and Lavenham. Although quite windy I was able to enjoy more stunning views across the high Suffolk landscape. The final section required more planning as there are few buses at Clare. Starting at the disused railway walk just outside Sudbury station, I was soon heading towards the turn off for the Belchamp villages (which are in Essex!).

Although a much colder day it was certainly less muddy underfoot, and walking an ancient trackway down into the pretty town of Clare was a real joy. Throughout the whole walk it was very apparent how wealthy an area this had become during the rich wool trade of the mediaeval period.

Magnificent churches, even in small villages, and beautiful houses are testament to the landscape, husbandry skills and hard work of the people who lived here centuries ago. These countrymen tended their flocks, ploughed the soil and ultimately ploughed the profits into their churches that still stand today. Ironically throughout this walk I hardly saw any sheep at all; almost every field is now arable; how times have changed!

Liz Smith

6s and 7s Walking Group



The 6's and 7's walking group had a beautiful day for their walk from the Suffolk Food Hall. We went along the shore of the Orwell(a bit wet!), past Freston tower and some lovely bluebell woods, where the scent was fabulous. Coffee in Freston churchyard, lunch in Wherstead churchyard and an ice cream in the sunshine completed a reasonably mud free walk!

Sheila Allen

Transport Group

The group has been looking at the many and varied forms or articulated locomotives that have graced the railway systems of the world over the past couple of months. This month we are going to talk about the first car that we ever owned which should prove interesting! In May we will be taking our first trip out of the year to Bressingham Steam Museum at Diss to look at the museum (s) and see the various railways that are operated around the gardens.

Family History Group

The group meetings have been trying to help members with their various elusive family members sharing tips and tricks for finding records. The group have also shared some old postcards that they have been collecting showing a different age. We will be looking at how you can date vintage photographs in a coming session.

History 2

The group is currently following the history of the Duke of Norfolk and in particular their association with Harwich. It has to be said that the revelations so far would have the paparazzi spinning to publish the stories! We have also been looking at the history of the River Thames, in particular its sometimes disputed origins, the many rivers that fed into it in London which have disappeared underground and the bridges that have crossed it from Roman times. Next month we are looking at some of the canals that were built to shorten sea passages around the world and continuing the Duke of Norfolk story. **Trevor Marston**



Well actually the History 2 group does!

Do you have an interest in History or the History of anything?

We have looked at a lot of topics over the past few years including from the Romans to the Victorians and after.

We are not restricted to just the UK either having researched the Crusades and Egypt in the past.

We have also researched the local history of Harwich including the Dockyard and the Piers.

The group is happy to look at anything & everything that group members are interested in.

Our current subject is the River Thames, its disputed origin, the lost rivers that flowed into it and the bridges that cross it.

So if you enjoy talking about the past, drinking tea (or coffee) and eating biscuits then consider joining the friendly History 2 group.

If you would like further information please contact:

Trevor Marston
Trevor.marston87@gmail.com

Shakespeare and AI Groups

Having attended the very interesting AI group Geoff Catchpole has recently set up, we were asked to create a poem using AI. So I asked Chatgtp to create a Shakespearian sonnet. I think it doesn't quite match the work of the Bard! But it's not bad at all!

In verse that echoes through the hallowed halls,
Where passion's ardour dances in the light,
And shadows flee before its mighty thralls.
With quill in hand, I paint a tender scene,
Where hearts entwine in sweet and whispered vow,
Beneath the moon's soft glow, so serene,
Two souls united, bound by sacred vow.
Yet love, alas, is not without its thorns,
Its petals oft are tinged with sorrow's hue,
And though it shines, its radiance adorns,
It tests the strength of those it binds so true.
But still we strive, through tempest's raging gale,
For love endures, its essence shall prevail.

By Chatgtp
Rita Rossini

« La Pétanque » — C'est nous !

May is the start of the summer season for *Boules*. The version of *Boules* which our group plays is the most common and seen everywhere in France and beyond: it's *pétanque*.

In its own way, *pétanque* is at least as sophisticated as flatgreen bowls in the UK ; Crown Green Bowls in Lancs/Yorks might offer a better equivalence to the challenges afforded by *pétanque*.

The group meets weekly from 10am to 12pm on Friday mornings in the field adjacent to the roller skating rink in Lower Marine Parade. Harwich Town Council has there a basic *terrain de pétanque*. The *caprices* of this pitch give hilarious outcomes which would beguile the best of players ; so, the emphasis is on fun, sociability and mild exercise.

The Council does levy a charge to use the pitch. We've managed so far to keep this at £1 per person for whenever you choose to turn up.

New players are most welcome.

Stuart M. Smith

Group Co-ordinator.

Is Free Birth a Great Idea?

As a retired midwife I am shocked. I have recently come across the concept “free birth” and for those of you that are as ignorant as me, that is a birth with no medical assistance. So no midwife or doctor or any other qualified person present.

It was with utter disbelief I heard that a person living in England in 2024 is contemplating having a baby at home without expert care and knowledge to ensure a safe delivery.

How can it possibly be that a mother would so ignorant and actually choose to go into labour alone, cross her fingers and just hope for the best. When expert help is so readily available. Millions of women all over the world would give their eye teeth to have the care we offer our mums, but they have no choice. And here is one who chooses to deliver like this.

How can she let the baby set out on this very first dangerous journey from the secure soft darkness of the womb, attached to her. Into light and independent life. Alone. How can this little being ever trust that she will ever look after him and keep him safe, when she starts by letting him down on the very first journey. I can only compare it to letting a child cross a motorway with their eyes closed.

There are so many ‘what ifs’ that I can think of, but my biggest concern is actually: Who speaks for the baby? Who cares for this little mite safe delivery?

It is a treacherous journey that can and will actually affect the rest of the baby’s life. If it goes well, and my goodness I hope it does, but if not and disaster strikes, the worst outcome is that, either mother, baby or even both die. But in between there are all manner of grades of damage that could happen.

Don’t we as a society have a responsibility for these little people who are in the care of such ignorant and misguided parents. Should we not speak up? This little person has in my view got the right to be delivered as safely and with as little damage as possible, in order to give him the best start and the best possibilities for a happy and fulfilled life.

I hope you don’t mind that I have shared my thoughts on this important matter with you.

Joanna Nightingale

Some more Harwich History

The Admiralty closed the Navy yard in 1713, but shipbuilding continued there as a private yard until 1827. Near the beginning of the last century, Dovercourt revived a trade in septaria, a local usable building stone, opening new quarries for the manufacture of “Roman cement” until about 1890. Other industries, such as fishing

and trade, continued; a regular packet boat service sailed between Harwich and the Low Countries.

The entrance to Harwich Harbour has always been dangerous for shipping. At first, ships were guided by two lights, one was a fire situated in a room above the town gate and the other was a wooden lighthouse above the beach to the south east. These were replaced in 1818 by the brick High and Low Lighthouses, close to the site of the original ones. However, the shifting sands of the harbour later made their alignment dangerous, and they became disused, being replaced by the Iron Lighthouses in Dovercourt in 1863. The Low Lighthouse is now a maritime museum.

(Extract from Essex County Council leaflet "Origins of Harwich")

Pauline Gronow

She Who Dares Wins

Chapter 1

The lighthouse and the majestic old church was the first Vera saw as the ferry approached the Island of Strathsay. Big shafts of light penetrated the clouds and danced over the island, when a huge rainbow suddenly appeared. Crofts seemed scattered like bits of confetti in the soft undulating hills. Their slate roofs glittered like diamonds in the early morning sun, and she wondered which one was her new home, 'Harbour View'.

Her croft!

This was the croft she had been dreaming of for years, and which she had imagined every little detail of in her mind. It would have a chimney at each end of the house. The wooden front door was in the middle of the building; it had a little glass canopy over it held up by ornate cast iron brackets. (She wasn't entirely sure where she'd got that little detail from.) It had deep-set windows on either side of the door, which emphasized both the thickness and the solidity of the walls. It would have a pitched slate roof. The floors would be the old-fashioned reddish brown quarry tiles in the kitchen and varnished floorboards everywhere else and the walls would be white washed both inside and out. There would be wood burning stoves, so the house would be lovely and warm.

And unbelievably by a sheer coincidence one of these houses up there on the hillsides was that dream come true.

She had gone outside. It was cold out on the deck, it was only early March, so not quite the spring equinox. The unfamiliar and slightly queasy feeling in the pit of

her stomach could be due to either nervousness or slight seasickness. It was after all, a life changing decision she had made, by moving up here and it certainly helped the funny feeling being outside. Having the fresh cold air on her face and breathing it deep down into her lungs helped too. She could feel a gentle swell, even though the sea appeared calm.

It felt particularly good that the air was so clean and fresh. What a contrast to the air on The Isle of Dogs in London, where she had lived the last 28 years. She took slow deep breaths, filled her lungs to the brim and added a contented little noise of mmmm as she slowly let it go again. The breath condensed as soon as it left her nostrils!

Oh that reminded her of childhood winters with heavy snow, and wonderful warm fires on Grannie's farm. Then there was nothing better than snuggling up to Grannie on the sofa in front of the fire, sharing the blanket, whilst cradling a mug of hot chocolate. Absolute bliss. The thoughts made her smile.

The seagulls were doing amazing aerobatics, their white plumage contrasted against the icy-blue winter sky. They were screeching and fighting over whatever the propeller had churned up in the wash behind the ferry. The steady drone of the engine accompanied their mocking calls, whenever they successfully managed to steal some one else's food.

The strong engine deep down in the bowels of the ferry made vibrations that could be felt through the soles of her walking boots. Her gloved hands were holding on to the sturdy railings, she had to tiptoe to look over it, in order to see the brilliant white bow wave against the deep green water. The railings made her feel safe and she realised that what she was looking at: The island with its little white crofts up there on the hillside, did not feel safe at all!

Yet it had drawn her to it like a strong magnet.

She scanned the island with her hand to her brow trying to work out which one was 'Harbourview'? Surely with a name like that she should be able to see it from here, as she could now see the large jetty. 'Harbour' was perhaps a bit of an exaggeration.

This was all so new! And it had all happened so quickly

It was a completely new start, a new island, a new house, a new way of living, and yet it some how felt so right. It had not taken her very long to make up her mind, when the opportunity of moving up here suddenly had presented itself only a few months ago.

From the book 'Vera - she who dares wins' by Joanna Nightingale

The Silver Locket

The robins tweeted, the narcissi nodded in the breeze, the peacocks showed off, and even the fountain gurgled a welcome. The scene was the cafe of Victoria Gardens, a restored 19th century manor house on the edge of the village. Natasha dragged out two heavy wooden chairs from the set of four when she saw her friend Kate approaching.

It wasn't long before the waiter appeared with their order: warm Danish pastries and a steaming pot of coffee, and the women settled down to catch up on their news.

'How's Tyler's new job going?' Natasha enquired, sinking her teeth into the sweet, doughy bun. 'He must have his own office, surely, now he's the manager?'

'Yes, right by the reception', Kate replied. 'Big table, even bigger armchair, all the attractive secretaries in the office next door. He interviewed a few people for the job of HR officer yesterday. Aren't we lucky to have such happy marriages, though? We've been together for 23 years, so you and Nick must have been married for, what, 25 years?'

'That reminds me! We're going to Santorini for our Silver Wedding Anniversary in June', replied Natasha. 'Would you mind very much looking after Benji again? I know Jack Russels can be a bit naughty, so I don't like to ask anybody else, and you're so good with him,' she fawned.

'Yes, of course! We love having little Benji. Santorini will be lovely and very romantic too. A bit hot then though. You'll have to jump in the sea a lot!'

'We'll certainly be doing that! Thank you ever so much. The children and I are spending the weekend before we set off with my sister in London, but Nick will give you a ring the day before he meets us at Gatwick. He'll be totally on his own for a couple of days, so perhaps he'll have a chance to rest before the stress of the journey. He hates flying!'

'Are Nick and the children well?' enquired Kate.

'Well, the kids are all recovering from colds and Nick is very busy with the church as always!' replied Natasha. 'I don't see that much of him these days. If he's not at meetings, Sunday School, funerals or weddings, he's writing sermons at the church office. The theme this Sunday is Faithfulness, I gather.'

The conversation moved on to the debauchery of one of her husband's parishioners, a teacher no less, who was said to have run off with a sixth-former.

'Quite scandalous!' exclaimed Natasha. 'Poor Nick was so shocked. Upright Mr Goodman of all people! There was a special carol service for the Sunday school last month in the chapel. The pretty young Sunday school teacher, Dawn, just couldn't keep the little horrors in order. Right little monsters! Two boys stuck chewing-gum onto the font and some had added their own words to the first carol, can you believe? They sang :

'When shepherds washed their socks by night
While watching ITV,
The Angel of the Lord came down

And switched to BBC'. Awful! Then, when the curate announced that the vicar would 'now be giving the address', a young voice piped up 'Miss, why does the vicar want to give us his address? Do we have to give him our address too?'

'Actually, Nick gave me his sermon to proofread, so I have it on my mobile', said Natasha. 'Let's see...Here's a quotation from Proverbs 5 that he wants to include: "Be faithful to your own wife and give your love to her alone...be happy with your wife and find your joy with the woman you married - pretty and graceful as a deer". Well I'm anything but graceful now, with my bunions and hammer toes, so I hope he remembers me as a young deer.'

So one hot June day, Kate was on her way back from a walk with a barking Benji and thought she'd take a quick look around her friends' house to check that Nick had left everything in order before he set off for the airport. She was quite sure it would be, because he was such a neat and meticulous person. She was more than taken aback, therefore, by the mess in the normally tidy living-room. The cushions were in disarray on the sofa and the green blanket was in a heap at one end. It almost looked as though he'd been sleeping there. Kate picked up the thin blanket and folded it into a neat square. It was at that moment that a shaft of sunlight illuminated a glinting object almost imperceptively poking out from one side of the sofa. She slowly and gently pulled out a beautiful heart-shaped silver locket. The inscription in tiny italics read, 'To darling Dawn. Always in my heart, Nick.' She carefully prised it open and out dropped a picture of a man she thought she knew well.

Jane Myers



Malmö to Heiligenhafen and back

4 January 2020

The long black hearse containing the body of a young woman drew up in the parking space at Tulpangatan ("Tulip Street"). The driver switched off the engine and got out. A small huddle of people dressed in dark suits and raincoats emerged from the shelter where they'd been shielding themselves from the rain, and a tall man held his large umbrella high above the head of two elderly people, perhaps the parents of the deceased. The funeral director quietly greeted the small party and held open the back door of the hearse.

The previous year

Christmas Shopping Trip to Germany

Date: Saturday, 2 December 2019

Departure Time: 7.30

Return to Malmö: 22.30

The bus leaves Tulpangatan at 7.30 a.m., and we cross the Öresund Bridge and continue through Denmark towards Rödby. We take the ferry to Puttgarden then drive to Heiligenhafen for a couple of hours' shopping. We dine at a cosy restaurant in the charming little town of Burg, then have the chance to explore the Christmas market before rejoining the bus home.

Please book tickets by November 1st from the housing authority office.

Adults: 1,000 kronor

Children: 500 kronor

Don't forget your passport

Contact Inger Nilsson 07046 - 56888

'So, are you going on the shopping trip this year?' asked Olga, pointing to the notice on the wall of the lift. 'It's Axel's 50th birthday next week, so we might stock up on booze. Pity it's such an early start though. We'll all be so tired by the time we get back here.'

Every December, a bus was hired to take any residents who wished on the day trip to the German border town of Heiligenhafen. It was advertised as a Christmas shopping trip, but was really a very convenient excuse for people to buy in large supplies of cheap alcohol.

Olga and Axel lived on the 15th floor of the tower block and were two of the few residents who were Swedish by birth. Axel was a tall, fair-haired man who worked for Malmö Municipality and whose main responsibility was to remove graffiti from the buildings and subways. His motherly-looking wife was unusually chatty for a Swede and was a reliable source of information about the comings and goings of the neighbours in the 85 flats.

Knowing that the residents in this community in Malmö, Sweden's third largest city, were from all over the world, the housing committee had thoughtfully translated the notice into English and stuck it below the one in Swedish. The neighbours did not care to socialize much with each other, but sometimes exchanged a few pleasantries

on the way down in the lift or in the communal laundry area on the ground floor. Being two of the original residents of this particular block, with its direct view of Copenhagen and the now famous bridge, Olga and Axel knew several of their neighbours, at least by sight.

Olga's question had been posed to Tatjana, a newly arrived Croatian lady often looking stressed from having to take care of her toddler son Branko and her newborn baby girl. The little lad, who had Down's Syndrome, needed extra care, though was a cheerful little soul who was very loving and protective of his baby sister. Actually, Olga doubted they would be going on the trip - too costly for a father who worked in a slaughterhouse and his unemployed wife. Tatjana was unable to find employment because of her lack of Swedish and busy routine as a traditional housewife and mother. Olga liked to be friendly though and felt sorry for her. It couldn't be easy to start in a new country, speak no Swedish, have no job and with two young children to look after.

'No, no shopping.' replied Tatjana in faltering English. 'You like pig? My husband, Zdravko, he work at factory and he got big bag pig, but he muslim and no like. I put outside your door.'

Olga just had time to mutter her thanks before the lift door opened and the women had to manoeuvre their blue IKEA bags stuffed full of dirty washing towards the communal washing facilities, together with young Branko, the pram and the crying baby before the door automatically closed. Tatjana unlocked the access to the laundry area and she and Olga went to their respective pre-booked washing rooms.

Tatjana and her husband Zdravko were just acquaintances really, not like Helena and Johan, who lived next door. They were also "respectable Swedes" with grown-up children who'd long since left the family fold, and the two women sometimes met for coffee or at the ground floor flat that had been converted into a small gym.

Her washing dried and collected, Olga got her sports clothes out, grimacing slightly that she'd soon be filling up the laundry basket again. She'd arranged to meet Helena for a workout that afternoon.

Her friend was already puffing away on a bicycle, pedalling faster than she was used to, small globules of perspiration just beginning to show on her sun-tanned forehead. Unlike Olga, she was very aware of her appearance and devoted a lot of time to exercising and eating healthily.

'I haven't seen you for a while' said Helena. 'So I haven't told you I rang the police recently when Johan was away at the conference in Stockholm. You know Tatjana, who lives opposite us? Well she rang on our doorbell, then dashed back inside her flat. She'd left her door wide open. I could hear her husband shouting and swearing at her, and to be honest, I was afraid to go to her aid. But when I plucked up the courage, I saw Zdravko violently kicking her hand out the way as she attempted to make a phone call. I couldn't believe what I was seeing, but then he put his hands tightly around her neck and throat. I was horrified and so frightened! I ran across to our own flat, locked the door and called the police. Several officers were there within minutes and I met them in the foyer as they'd asked me to do. I showed them where Tatjana's flat was and they handcuffed Zdravko and marched him away. I don't think this is the first time this has happened and I doubt it will be the last. Poor Tatjana had large red weals around her neck and a woman police officer took her off to hospital, leaving me in charge of her two children, who had fortunately slept through the whole incident. I just waited there until she'd been examined and sent back home two or three hours later.'

'The things that go on in our block!' replied Olga. 'Do you know what that weird Scot from the 13th floor said to me yesterday? I met him at the local shop. He told me he had bought a lottery ticket last week and found he'd won 10,000 kronor! Do you believe that?'

'Another of his strange fantasies, no doubt. He told me he'd been a fighter pilot in the Korean War! He's never that old, and I certainly wouldn't want him to fly me anywhere! I'm sure he's on drugs. He once said he was seeing a psychologist.'

'Do you think it's just us? Are we biased because he's got long curly hair and looks so unkempt?' asked Olga again. 'I had to share the lift with him the other day and he said the neighbours below rang on his doorbell and asked him to stop playing his electric guitar. I'm just a bit scared of him, so took his side and said that he had a right to play the guitar in his own flat. But when I asked him what time that was, he said two in the morning! I'm glad he doesn't live near me!'

'We have a right mixture of people in this block, don't we? I wouldn't be surprised if he's the so-called 'mad driller'! Nobody can work out where that terrible noise is coming from, can they? Everyone thinks it's from the flat above theirs.'

Housing authority rules dictated that residents could only "make loud noises" on weekdays from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., until 2p.m. on Saturdays and not at all on Sundays. On a regular basis, someone had drilled, hammered and sawn loudly at all times of day and night, but it was a mystery who the culprit was. It was a frequent point of discussion, with everybody pointing the finger at everybody else.

There was an old man on the 16th floor who was determined to find out. Sven had once worked as a guard at Malmö prison and perhaps thought he could keep control of his neighbours instead of his prisoners. He would ring on people's doors, peer behind them when the door was answered, and search for evidence of drills or tools. It was rumoured that he had accused the lady in the flat below him of doing DIY on a Sunday and violently lashed out at her with his walking stick. Her bruised arm contradicted the belief that he was a frail old man who was incapable of swatting a wasp before it stung him.

With so many people living in the block, residents accepted that they were likely to have some disturbance. It was fairly common to hear shouts, screams, laughter, explosions, fireworks, tyres bursting, and other mysterious sounds coming from the street. Residents with hearing aids removed these for the night, and those with ear phones plugged into the radio slept soundly; but others tried so hard to ignore the unsettling noises that it left them wide awake at night. Within the block there were also undefined noises: children shouting, youngsters yelling, or couples hurling abuse at each other.

The day before the trip, those planning to board the coach early in the morning decided to get an early night. Helena listened to the sound of Johan's loud, rhythmic breathing and occasional snoring. It was quite comforting and familiar and she snuggled up closer to his warm body. She became aware of other background sounds though. Were they coming from outside or the floor above or below? The whacking and thudding noises seemed too loud to be caused by a human hand, surely? They were regular and followed soon afterwards by a scream or gasp. It was gone 11 o'clock and most people were asleep by this time. She strained her ears to try and determine what words were being shouted. Was it her imagination that she could make out the word 'help!?' 'Oh well,' she thought, 'I can't really interfere. Perhaps they're just having fun and I'm worrying about nothing.' She tried to regulate her breathing and go back to sleep.

The next morning was a surprisingly sunny but chilly day when the coach pulled up outside the block of flats. Olga flicked her eyes around the small groups of people. Most she didn't recognise, but she soon caught sight of a blurry-eyed Helena and Johan carrying large empty bags and rucksacks. They settled themselves into the seats behind Olga and Axel.

'Grumpy old Sven has obviously decided not to come,' remarked Johan. 'Just as well. We won't have to listen to him complaining all day,' he added.

'Can't see Tatjana or Zdravko either,' his wife replied. 'But then how could they amuse their kids on this long journey? No sign of Jack the Scot or his girlfriend. I'm surprised they don't want to take the chance to stock up with crateloads of strong beer or a few bottles of spirits. They're permanently high on something, those two.'

'Well if it's true he's won all that money, he doesn't need to get up at the crack of dawn to save himself a few kronor on drink. He's obviously a bit of a nutcase though, and must be living on benefits. I think he even once said he'd been in prison.'

'You just can't trust anything he says, to be honest, so who knows?'

'Have you met his new girlfriend yet?' asked Johan. 'She's a sad looking character too. Wears tatty old clothes and doesn't seem to wash her hair much. I heard that they met in a refuge for homeless people. What they see in each other, I really don't know.'

Several hours later, after the ferry crossing, the coaches stopped at the large duty-free hypermarket, where everybody loaded themselves down with crates of beer and large bags of cheap bottles of wine or spirits before going on to Burg for lunch.

On the way home, the two Swedish husbands, who'd decided to celebrate Axel's birthday a few days early, had gone on to the whisky by now and were jiggling around in the aisle, waving their arms and singing. Axel made a slurred speech, thanking his wife, the driver and all his fellow passengers for a lovely day. The driver ignored the appreciation and drove back along the autobahn at top speed.

With the men standing up on their unstable legs in the aisle, Olga, tongue loosened after quite a few swigs of cointreau herself, moved seats so that she could chat more easily to Helena. After conspiratorily confiding in each other about the annoying traits of their respective husbands, they got on to the topic of old Sven, and concluded as always that he should be in a care home because he'd obviously gone a bit blind, deaf and batty. The discussion then moved on to the good-looking Turkish bus driver, who occupied the flat on their floor opposite the lift.

'He certainly has a lot of girls visiting, but I'm not suprised. He's such a charming, polite man. He always helps me carry my shopping and told me once about how he used to do charity work in rural Turkey,' said Olga.

'Did he? I can imagine him doing that, because he's such a nice person. He shares that small flat now with a young woman but I think he has an ex-wife and son back in his country. Actually, now you come to mention it, he came to our flat last week. We'd had a note from the post office telling us to collect a parcel. It was a large flat box and I was at first mystified as to what could be inside, but thought it must be a Christmas present from my aunt. Tearing off the brown paper, I found a set of knives - nothing I would have ordered and certainly not something anyone would have given us for Christmas. There was something else strange about it, because when I looked more closely, I noticed that although it had our flat number on the outside, the surname belonged to this Turk. He was obviously out at work, driving buses somewhere, so I put a note under his door explaining what had happened. He rang our doorbell quite late and I asked him in while I went to fetch the

box. He opened it straight away but didn't give much explanation as to why he had received it. All a bit of a mystery!

Having exhausted all topics for gossip, the two women leant back in their seats and joined the vast majority of the rest of the passengers who had by this time dozed off.

The bus pulled up outside the tower blocks at just after 10:30p.m. and the sleepy passengers piled out, with hardly enough energy to drag out their bags and beer crates. To their surprise, there were now different pieces of paper stuck next to the lift. Instead of the notices advertising the shopping trip, there were two signs that must have been placed there while they were out.

POLICE NOTICE

The police are investigating the stabbing and murder of a woman in block 24 in Tulpangatan, Malmö during the night between Friday, 1 and Saturday, 2 December 2019. They will be making door-to-door enquiries on Sunday, 3 December and will show their police identification. You may also call Malmö Police on 101 if you heard or saw anything suspicious recently, however insignificant you feel your information to be.

Kind regards,
Mathias Sigfridsson, Police Chief

METRO

4 December 2019

Malmö police are investigating the death of Ahmet Aslan, resident of Tulpangatan Malmö, who is believed to have committed suicide by crashing his car into a tree on Saturday 2 December.

Jane Myers

