

# U3A Harwich Peninsula

**February 2024**



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

## **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 March 12<sup>th</sup>: Steve Scrutton and Ian Wyatt: My Life on Radio

*And presentation by History Group 3*

Tuesday April 9<sup>th</sup>: Sioban Pierce: From Clown to Corporation

Tuesday May 14<sup>th</sup>: AGM

Tuesday June 11<sup>th</sup>: Brian Carline: Gardening

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

August                      No meeting

Tuesday September 10<sup>th</sup> Steve Lester - Insights of a Provincial Auctioneer

Tuesday October 8<sup>th</sup> Frances Boardman - Tart to Empress

Tuesday November 12<sup>th</sup> Mark Lewis - Lighthouses

Tuesday December 10<sup>th</sup> Christmas entertainment (TBA) & refreshments

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

## **The Secret Life of the Wood by Roger Hance**

### **13th February at the Waterfront**

Roger Hance gave a very interesting talk on many aspects of woodland life, including birds, mammals, flowers, insects, butterflies and moths. His photographs are stunning, and were taken from a hide, so Roger was able to get many close-ups of birds by putting out treats to tempt them, for example suet and nuts. We were shown photos of many different species of birds, and Roger explained that female birds have fairly dull plumage so that they may be camouflaged on their nests. But when the baby birds got bigger they can become demanding, especially the young jays who were photographed pestering their mother for more and more food. Roger also explained that sparrowhawks, who are voracious predators, could easily tackle birds their own size for food.

We were shown photographs of beautiful woodland flowers, including wild garlic and bluebells. Roger explained that the UK is host to 3/4 of the world's bluebells, which attract many butterflies. Everyone was interested to learn about the story of 'cuckoo spit' on flowers, which is foam produced by frog-hoppers, and provides protection from birds.

Roger asked us if we knew what happened to dead birds, which are rarely found. Once a bird dies, for example a young bird falling from a nest, then Sexton beetles quickly move in, dig a pit round the bird's carcass, which collapses into a kind of burrow. The beetles then lay their eggs on the bird, which becomes a nutritious larder for the young beetles.

It was also encouraging to hear that the red squirrel has been introduced into Mersea Island.

Roger has another talk available so we can hope to hear from him again.

**Rita Rossini**

## The Frankenberg Partnership: talk on the Kindertransport

The Frankenberg Partnership is hosting a talk on the Kindertransport which may be of interest to members of your U3A. It's an opportunity to hear about the involvement of Harwich in the Kindertransport rescue.

The talk will be held at the Oak Room, Acorn Village, Mistley CO11 2NJ on Friday 15th March. Arrival from 6.30pm to enjoy a complimentary glass of wine or fruit juice. The talk will be given at 7.15pm by Helen Brown, a board member of the Harwich Kindertransport Memorial and Learning Trust. There will be time for questions.

Afterwards there will be cheese and wine for which donations are welcome.

Please book a place by text or phone to 07891 963005

**Patricia Chandler**

## Astronomy Group

"The FutureLearn course. 'Moons of the Solar System' is going to begin on March 4th, 2024. Several Astronomy members have found this (Massive Online Open Course) MOOC of interest.

THIS WILL BE THE LAST TIME. It's the best course in FutureLearn. But time to move on says FutureLearn. It's an exciting course. Learn why we have one Moon. Learn why some planets have many many moons. Learn about a moon that is bigger than the planet Mercury. Learn why some moons may contain life. Chat with other students around the world. I believe there is a free version, you just can't take exams or get a certificate" says Joe Stormer one of the coaches for the course.

<https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/moons>.

**Geoff**

## Wild bees



It takes a bit of time & effort to care for wild bees. I bought the nest box last year <https://nurturing-nature.co.uk/> from George who makes them up in his shed.



The "eggs", or more properly cocoons, have been in a plastic pot (with net covered air holes) over winter. The egg trays need cleaning so I took the perspex viewing panels off, got the wallpaper stripper out and steam cleaned them after brushing and scrubbing them. The steam kills the mites that might lurk in the wooden joints.



Having reassembled the blocks, yes I remembered to number them, I rubbed soil onto the face panel. Seemed a slightly odd thing to do after 90mins of vigorous cleaning but that's what makes it an acceptable spot for Red Mason bees to raise their numerous young, and its for their happiness I'm working. The larvae go in an emergence chamber at the base of the nest box and will exit in the next few weeks. I have lots of early flowers in the garden ready for them to feed.

Now the summer chamber for leaf cutter bees and other solitaires is in the shed until July when it all needs repainting and the process starts over again.



**Geoff**



## Hedgehogs

Join us, **20 March 2024 • 19:00 - 20:00**, for a free online talk all about hedgehogs, hosted by the Dedham Vale National Landscape, the Suffolk & Essex Coast & Heaths National Landscape, and Suffolk Wildlife Trust.

During this one-hour event we will cover the basics, everything you need to know about hedgehogs, plus tips and advice on how to support them and how to make your garden or green space more hedgehog-friendly.

It will then be followed by examples of best practice, projects that have been successful in Suffolk and Essex, plus advice on what community groups can do to make their village or town hedgehog-friendly.

The talk will then finish with a Q&A session where you will be able to ask any questions you have related to hedgehogs and what we can do to support them.

Presenters:

- Emma Black, Countryside Project Officer, Dedham Vale National Landscape
- Cathy Smith, Conservation Adviser, Suffolk Wildlife Trust

Join here:-

<https://events.teams.microsoft.com/event/55d4b897-d804-4b6d-b05d-027a2f915c62@109c6aec-5046-4a95-8f3c-84f63ba18af4/registration>

**Geoff**



## Walking Group

It is getting very difficult at present to find walking routes without deep mud or standing water. The 6's and 7's thought they had solved the problem last Friday by walking locally from Little Oakley and putting in more roads. However, as the pictures show, one very flooded field path proved rather tricky!!



**Sheila Allen**

## 50 Things...visit to The Longshed Woodbridge.

The National Trust Challenge 32 is to "Float in a boat" – a bit too much for some of us! However, Sue is an accomplished rower and is hoping she may have a chance to row in the reconstruction of the Sutton Hoo longship. So she kindly arranged a visit to the Longshed where we learnt more about the project.

Most of you will know about the remarkable discovery in 1939, when Edith Pretty asked the amateur archaeologist Basil Brown to excavate the mounds on her estate. The recent film "The Dig" and the TV programme "Raiders of the Lost Past" see *iPlayer* are well worth a watch.

Long ago, an Anglo-Saxon noble was buried in a mound at Sutton Hoo, just across the river from Woodbridge, in Suffolk. He was almost certainly King Raedwald, who died c 624. Not much remained of the original ship, just the impressive imprint of a ghost in the sand. The imprint was 27m long, outlined by iron rivets, and would



suggest a large clinker-built vessel. Dated back to the early 7<sup>th</sup> Century, it shed new light into this period as it was the most impressive medieval grave to be discovered in Europe:



The Ship's Company was formed in 2016 to create a permanent and authentic replica of the Anglo-Saxon ship in the newly opened Longshed. Our guide explained that they were using green oak, some sourced locally. Freshly-felled oak was almost certainly used for the original as this is more easily split into lengths and is more pliable. The first step was laying the keel – a piece of green oak 50 feet long, by about 12

x 8 inches (about 15 metres x 30cm x 20cm). However, a nine month delay to the £1 million project was caused when one of the first wooden pieces split.

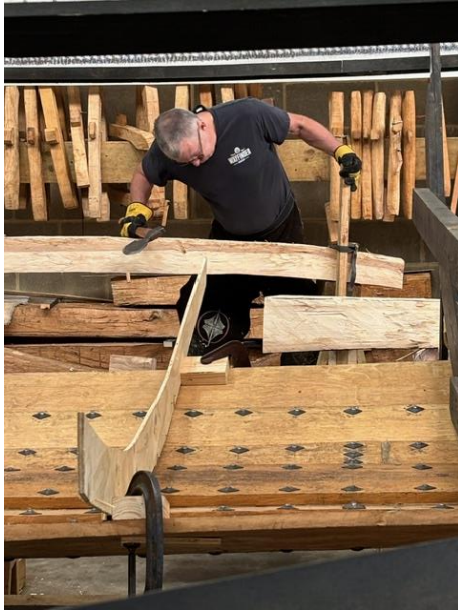


"The first piece that we secured, unfortunately it split, which is one of the hazards of using freshly sawn, unseasoned timber," said Tim Kirk, the project's master shipwright. We had to go and source another tree that was exactly the same shape as the one we had before". It took around six months to find a suitable tree, and then 450 hours to craft the new piece. This was followed by

shaping the stern.

*Purse clasp*





There are many other parts to the build including nine planks each side, the frames (ribs), tholes for the oars to rest against, thwarts to sit on, a rudder to steer and all must be joined in the way that the original craft was built with thousands of iron rivets and many trenails, the wooden pegs used to secure things together.

We were able to watch the craftsmen at work – their skills with the axe as they shaped the planks were extremely impressive. Sue was very excited to being allowed to handle one of the very long oars!

### The King's River Tapestry

In the gallery above is displayed a project to create a tapestry detailing the life of the River Deben and the history of the local area. It already involves more than fifty people from Woodbridge and surrounding villages.

The tapestry will eventually be over 90 feet long and produced on 30 or more panels. It will tell the story of the shipbuild, its launch and sea trials. The beautiful designs and needlework are breathtaking.



Coffee on the quay rounded off a very successful visit – thank you, Sue, for organising the trip.





**Cath Hartwell**

## **Walking the St. James' Way**

### **Reading to Southampton 70 miles**

This is an official pilgrimage route, or Camino, which links to the famous walk to Santiago de Compostela in Spain. Many European countries have similar 'feeder' routes with the English one starting in Reading. Using mainly existing footpaths, it finishes seventy miles later in Southampton. The organisers are at pains to point out that this is a 'possible' route pilgrims could have taken and that there's no evidence of all or part of it being used.

Having the official Camino handbook and watching video clips I learnt that the route has recently been fully waymarked (but of course only in one direction). An official pilgrimage 'passport' is available at Reading Museum with pilgrim stamps available at a number of pubs, cafes and churches along the way. I didn't have one of these but did stamp my handbook occasionally. Starting in Reading (which I did whilst staying with family) the walk begins near Reading Abbey, which was once one of the largest monasteries in Europe, and goes alongside the Kennet and Avon Canal. Turning inland after about 6 miles it meanders through pretty villages, some with fairly good transport links, as well as the Roman Villa at Silchester.

### *Reconstruction of the Roman town*



Described as 'easy walking' I was able to complete the first part of my walking plan after 25 miles near Basingstoke. This took me three days as I was initially scuppered by the wet summer weather. Basing myself at Winchester some months later I completed the remainder of the route over 4 days. This trip coincided with the hot, sunny days of early October and the memorable late 'Indian summer'. Walking alongside the stunningly clear River Itchen, one of the most important chalk stream rivers in the world, it was

obvious why this area is renown for growing watercress.

Unfortunately the heat of day one resulted in thick fog the next but I didn't let that deter me. Picking up again near Basingstoke I tackled the longest section of the walk without transport links. Finally stopping for lunch at the church in Old Alresford I stamped my guide book and noticed that there was a box of provisions for hungry walkers and pilgrims as well as some scallop shells, which are the symbol of religious pilgrimage.

### *A pilgrim's scallop shell*



Once the fog lifted I was greeted by beautiful, rolling landscapes and views. This is definitely 'Jane Austen' country and fully expected to see a breeches clad Mr Darcy type character riding by. The route from New Arlesford into Winchester follows the St. Swithun's Way alongside the course of the River Itchen and partly through the historic commercial watercress beds.

The final day was the 7 mile walk from Eastleigh into Southampton. This followed the route of the 'Itchen Way' and was quite challenging walking as the footpath was partly eroded, leaf strewn and wet. As I've often found navigating in the city was quite difficult and ultimately tiring. I was devastated to find that the final stop, God's House, which is now an arts venue, wasn't open on the day I arrived but ringing the delivery door bell brought a kind chap to the door who gave me a final stamp in my handbook and a Camino scallop badge which I keep in my rucksack to remind me of a terrific walk. I would like to return to parts of this walk again. The signposting was generally good throughout, the handbook very detailed, the walking mostly relatively easy and the scenery compelling. The downside was some walking through busy and noisy towns, near the roaring traffic of major roads and even beside an airport.

**Liz Smith**

## Shakespeare Group

### The Earl of Essex

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*Robert Devereux, the second Earl of Essex, was a courtier and soldier, famous for his charm and ambition, and for his position as royal favourite in the court of Elizabeth I.*

Queen Elizabeth enjoyed the company of her male courtiers, and had a close relationship with her great friend Robert Dudley Earl of Leicester for much of her life; she seriously considered marrying Robert Dudley, but the mysterious death of his wife Amy Robsart, caused a scandal which may well have deterred the Queen. After all, it was difficult for a female monarch to give away some of her power to a male subject, who would then be made King. Queen Elizabeth's elder sister Mary had previously married Philip II of Spain, which was, not surprisingly, a most unpopular match with the British people, and the burning of over 200 protestant 'heretics' under her orders could not have been popular either, as the rising tide of Protestantism had begun during the reign of their father Henry VIII.

In 1575 Robert Devereaux was nine his father died, and Robert inherited the title of Earl of Essex. He then became a ward of the powerful Lord Burghley. Essex's mother, Lettice Knollys later married Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, to the great annoyance of the jealous Elizabeth I. The marriage of her favourite hurt the Queen deeply. 1583 she informed ambassadors that Lettice Dudley was "a she-wolf" and her husband a "traitor" and "a cuckold". Lady Leicester's social life was much curtailed. Robert Dudley thus became the Earl of Essex's step-father.

Essex first attained prominence by fighting against the Spanish in the Netherlands in 1586, and distinguished himself at Zutphen where his cousin, Sir Philip Sidney, was killed. Four years later the Earl married Sidney's widow, Frances Walsingham. By this time he had replaced his stepfather in the affections of the ageing queen, though he was 33 years younger than she. Essex was tall, handsome and hungry for martial success, as well as success at court, and he and Elizabeth had a tempestuous relationship with many quarrels, but his flirtatious nature and ambition ensured that she continued to grant him royal appointments, including a number of important military operations. The Queen also gave him the valuable monopoly on imported sweet wines, which became his main source of income.



By June 1587 he had replaced his step-father, the Earl of Leicester, as Master of the Horse.

Following the death of Robert Dudley in 1588, a number of the old guard were replaced by younger relatives, notably Dudley's stepson Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex, and Robert Cecil, William Cecil's son, who became a wise and shrewd counsellor of Queen Elizabeth.

Although Robert Dudley and William Cecil were often at loggerheads over military and religious policy, it was nothing compared to the rivalry and animosity that developed between their sons. The most serious division between the two camps was over foreign

policy. Essex's competition for influence with the Queen, combined with his insatiable ambition, would later lead to a fall from grace that was as dramatic and rapid as his rise to favour. Essex underestimated the queen, and his later behaviour towards her lacked due respect, and he showed much disdain for the influence of her intelligent Principal Secretary, Robert Cecil.



Essex had arrived at Elizabeth I's court when he was hardly into his twenties. Tall and handsome, he was every inch the gallant young aristocrat, appearing to be chivalrous, open-handed, cocksure and impulsive. The Queen, a much older woman, warmed to his charm and they often danced and played cards together through the night. He served with the maximum of dash and the minimum of judgement on various military expeditions.

In 1589, Essex disobeyed the queen and joined the English Armada - an unsuccessful attempt to drive home the advantage gained by the defeat of the Spanish Armada the previous year. In 1591, he commanded a force sent to assist the Protestant Henry of Navarre in France. In 1596, Essex became a national hero when he shared command of the expedition that captured Cadiz from the Spanish. The following year, he failed in an expedition to intercept the Spanish treasure fleet off the Azores.

Unfortunately, Essex was a peacock for vanity, fiercely jealous, easily offended and impatient of rule by a woman. One day in 1598 the Queen refused a request of his and he turned his back on her, an appalling breach of etiquette, and she boxed his ears; his hand went straight for his sword. Another courtier intervened, but Essex stalked off swearing that he would not have tolerated such an insult, even from her father, Henry VIII. Ladies of the court eventually persuaded the Queen to forgive him and in 1599 at his own request, Essex was appointed Lord Lieutenant of Ireland and sent to put down a rebellion by the earl of Tyrone.

So In April 1599 Essex was sent to Ireland as Lord Lieutenant and Governor General of Ireland, with an army of 17,000 men and explicit instructions to crush the Earl of Tyrone's rebellion and bring Ireland under control. Following a number of unsuccessful skirmishes, Essex had a secret meeting with Tyrone, made an unauthorised truce in Elizabeth's name, and abandoned his post to return to London and explain his decision to the Queen. She told Essex that if she had wished to abandon Ireland it would scarcely have been necessary to send him there.

The queen had expressly forbidden his return and was incensed when he made an unauthorised entrance into her bedchamber one morning at Nonsuch Palace, before she was properly wigged or gowned. On that day, the Privy Council met three times, and it seemed his disobedience might go unpunished, but the queen did confine him to his rooms with the comment that "an unruly beast must be stopped of his provender."

So Elizabeth deprived him of his offices, placed him under house arrest and suspended him from his official posts. In August 1600 Essex was released, and was determined to regain his position as favourite and councillor. He wrote Elizabeth many pleading letters, but in September 1600 the Queen refused to renew the lease and patent on Essex's concession for sweet wines. Politically and financially ruined, Essex was frustrated and furious, and decided to make a bid for power. He and his supporters, mostly disaffected nobles and soldiers, planned to capture the Queen, rid the Council of their rivals, and proclaim James VI her successor.

On the 8th February 1601 they marched into the City, thinking they would be joined by vast numbers of delighted Londoners. This support did not materialise, and the rebellion collapsed within the day. Essex and some of his co-conspirators were executed.

**Rita Rossini**

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## **BREAD AND BUTTER PUDDING**



**275ml milk**

**275 ml cream**

**1 vanilla**

**6 slices of bread**

**40g butter**

**3 large eggs**

**60g sugar**

**Apricot jam**

**60g sultanas soaked in water**

**Boil milk and cream slowly with vanilla. Leave 10 minutes. Butter slices of bread, put sultanas between layers. Whisk eggs and add to milk and cream. Pour over bread and leave for 20 mm. Oven 160C for 45mm. Cool a little and add jam and icing sugar.**

**Christine Bennett**

## **PARKESTON QUAY**

### **A bit more Harwich History**

#### **Extract from 100 years of Parkeston Quay and its Ships by Philip J. Cone**

On Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> February 1883, the Chairman of the Great Eastern Railway Company officially opened his company's newly-completed Quay on Ray Island. Named after himself, Parkeston Quay was a fine commodious dock. It cost half a

million pounds and took 4 years to build. At 1850 feet in length, it could accommodate six vessels at any one time and a further seven moored on screw piles in the river bed. On the Quay was built two large warehouses and a hotel, which was in addition to the company's hotel on Harwich Quay, and a railway station for direct access for passengers travelling on G.E.R.'s nightly service to Rotterdam, Antwerp and United Steamship Co's weekly service to Esbjerg. Parkeston Quay was well illuminated, it had installed 16 Brush electric arc lamps of 2,000 candle power each, current being supplied by the company's own Brush dynamo.

**Pauline Gronow**

## A Walk to the Highest Point in the Netherlands

The highest point is Drielandenpunt, Vaalserburg, altitude 322.4 metres. Drieslandenpunt, or three land point. It is the point where the boundaries of the three countries of the Netherlands, Germany and Belgium meet. The boundaries are delineated on the ground and a tall tower nearby can be ascended to view the areas of the three countries.



Vaalserburg is part of Vaals, a town in the most south eastern tip of the Netherlands in the Dutch province of Limburg. It is on the road to the German city of Aachen with its Charlemagne cathedral. A bus journey between these two places takes about 15 minutes.

In a previous year we had gathered in Delft, in the province of South Holland, walking the flat lands divided by dykes and never far from densely placed industry, most of which is associated with the shipping activity centered on the Maas. Our

walk to Drielandenpunt was a complete contrast with its rolling hills providing a pleasant contrast to the low lands of the other 11 Provinces that form the regional administrative areas of the Netherlands.



We were pleasantly surprised to discover the southern part of the province Limburg has



timber framed houses set in countryside of narrow meandering roads and tracks between arable farmed fields, meadows and through woodlands. Epen is one of the small towns in the area we walked, a popular base for tourists to enjoy the southernmost part of Limburg, and important for us, a cafe to take in the scene with other local people enjoying the fair weather.

Our rail journey from Hoek van Holland had brought us to the Maastricht, the provincial capital of Limburg, from where a service bus conveyed us to the small village of Mechelen on the small river Geul. We found the hostel that was to be our base for three nights and we were greeted by our Dutch hosts Sue and Bert. Most of the other guests had already arrived. Dutch, Scottish and English. Our link was having taken part in the TGO Challenge, an annual self supported event walking across the Highlands of Scotland, from the west to the east coast. The annual Spring weekend gatherings in the Netherlands, and in the Peak District of Derbyshire, provide the opportunity to maintain friendships before the Challenge in Scotland starts each May.

**Alan Frost**

## Conversations Heard on the Beach

'Starkers I was! Bloody starkers!'

I traced the irate voice to a short-bearded, sun-bronzed man in his early 30s, wearing frayed cut-off denim shorts, with a glinting gold chain around his neck and a YAMAHA tattoo visible on one hairy forearm.

'It was just so embarrassing', Tattooed Forearm continued, his remarks addressed to his companion, a woman I took to be his wife. She was a red-head with long shapely legs who was engrossed in erecting two unruly sunchairs a few metres from my bench. I had been trying to work out who the murderer was in my exciting new Ruth Ware book, *The Turn of the Key*, but now it was hard to concentrate.

'Ricky, you're not still going on about that, are you? It's not my fault you ....'

Her words were drowned out by the wind and squeals of a small group of young children racing each other along the beach in our direction and followed by an excited, yappy terrier who wanted to join in the fun. A harassed woman hurried far behind, warning them not to go into the sea, but her distant words were too faint to be heard.

'Ugh! Jellyfish!' said the youngest child.

'Don't touch it Emma!' warned an older girl, who'd managed to catch them up.

'It's dead! I'm not afraid of any fish, creepy-crawlies or tig...' said Emma, to the group in general, her words floating off into the breeze.

'Your mother's afraid of the dark though!' came the rebuff.

'No, she isn't!'

'Yes, she is! My mother says that's why the man across the way has got to come and sleep in your house when your father's on night work, because she's afraid of the dark'.

I was unable to hear how the younger girl managed to defend her mother because they progressed a little further along the shore, the terrier enthusiastically charging ahead and then back to the group. I returned to my book to find Rowan was being shown around the spooky, isolated Victorian house where she was soon to be living and working. The murder scene was set.

'Lucy, Lucy!' My attention was diverted again, this time by a young teenage girl and her Springer Spaniel. While Emma had been bullying her neighbour about her mother's secret liaisons, I had been vaguely aware of a girl who had been throwing a largish red ball out to sea for her dog. Lucy had been unable to grasp the too big ball in her mouth, and was eagerly nosing it back to her mistress so the process could be repeated. It was quite an entertaining scene to watch.

I tried to concentrate once more on my book. Was Rowan really guilty of murder, and would Mr Wrexham be able to help secure her release from prison? She had been a nanny like me. I had thought my living conditions were bad, but it seemed they were paradise compared to hers.

My quiet read was rudely interrupted again by the raised voices of Ricky and his long-legged companion.

'Well, after what you put me through this morning, I'd have thought the least you could do was let me decide what we do today'.

I gleaned that Ricky wanted to go on the boat trip to watch the seals at Hamford Nature Reserve and his wife wanted to swim and work on her tan. That didn't seem to be the only reason for their argument, though.

'If only you hadn't had your silly earphones in, you'd have heard me banging on the door!'

Their day obviously hadn't started well and Ricky didn't appear to be able to let the matter drop.

'Well next time we'll make sure we get an en suite room, whatever the cost!' Ricky harped on. I wondered how much fun their holiday was going to be if they didn't settle their differences soon.

'What the hell was I supposed to do?' he continued.

I couldn't make out all his words, but I gathered that Ricky had thought that no guests would be awake at that very early hour and had chanced striding naked the two steps across the hotel corridor to the communal toilet. Not wanting to disturb his wife, and unable to find anything near at hand to protect his dignity, he made a dash for it, in the process allowing the door to shut behind him. His urgent need taken care of, he returned to find he was unable to get back in, and in his haste, hadn't picked up his key-card.

No amount of knocking on the door aroused his wife, and he was at a loss what to do. Getting a replacement key-card from the receptionist seemed the only viable option. As far as I could make out, he thought he would have less chance of meeting someone if he took the lift rather than the stairs, which anyway were quite a bit further away, and pressed the button. I gathered that the lift door slowly slid open - to

reveal a well-dressed woman in pearls, who looked as though she was on her way to work.

'... like a footballer defending a penalty kick, and that d...slow lift... to the ground floor. Thank God, the woman made a direct beeline for the carpark. But so embarrassing'!

I tried to engage myself in my Ruth Ware thriller again, hoping for a few minutes of peace. This wasn't the kind of novel that you wanted to be disturbed reading. By now, one or two families had grouped outside the colourful beach huts nearby, some already drying off after a swim. Soon the sandy beach would probably be filled with more locals or tourists. I imagined that a new batch of Dutch cyclists would stop to ask directions to the nearest hotel or enquire whether the tall lighthouse was open to the public. I breathed in the salty smell of seaweed and listened to the distant screeching of circling seagulls and the more gentle background of waves breaking onto the shore. It seemed that Ricky's wife had won the argument, at least for now, and they had obviously chosen to do a bit of sunbathing before the sun got too hot. I couldn't really relax into my book, though, because the hotel couple were sitting too close to me not to be unintentionally overheard.

'The receptionist quickly... big towel...and... rang you to...' Some of his words were obscured, but I got the drift. Thank goodness for that! Ricky's dignity was saved!

I managed to have about half an hour's peaceful read, but was brought back to reality by the sound of shouting from the shore. The Springer had got into a bit of trouble with its large ball. Instead of turning around to nose it back, and unable to open its mouth wide enough to secure it, it had been swimming further and further out to sea. It seemed intent on completing the task and fetching the ball one way or another. As a dog lover, I was torn between dangerously swimming out there myself and helping it out, and trusting that the clever dog would eventually succeed in its mission. It was becoming even more absorbing than my suspenseful book.

Thank goodness, though, a passing rower managed to lean over the edge of his boat and with his strong rower's muscles throw the ball far towards the shore. The little dog then eagerly paddled after it, towards his worried owner who was peering out to sea.

Hopefully, I could resume reading without further distractions. On page 62, handsome Jack Grant was walking across from a huddle of outbuildings tucked just around the corner of the house. His hair was wet, as if he had just showered, and he was holding a bag of tools in his hand....

'Do you mind if we share your bench while we eat our ice-creams, dear?' asked an elderly, white-haired lady in a low-cut, bright orange, sleeveless top. Not very flattering for an overweight older woman, I thought. Too many aged wrinkles, thick blue veins and ugly moles on display. Her companion settled herself down and continued telling the white-haired lady her shocking news.

'Yes, heart attack it was. Just like that! One minute in bed beside me and next minute gone! Wearing his new pyjamas, he was. Only bought those for him last Saturday. Cost me £30 they did! Won't get a refund now - he cut the label off, the idiot'!



' My brother-in-law, Pete, passed away last month, too. I didn't go to his funeral. I saw enough of him when he was alive! Always grop...the gir...and borrowing m...' came the disjointed reply.

The women were now sharing a large packet of crisps and offered me a handful. I politely declined, debating whether to move to another bench, but decided to first get to the end of my chapter.

'I don't know about you, but I'm starving!' said the larger of the two women. It's always the same when I start at Slimming World. It just makes me think about bacon butties.'

' Oh, go on then!' said her friend. 'I didn't have any breakfast. Just cornflakes, buttered crumpets and a bit of chocolate cake that needed eating up. Nothing really. Come on! Shall we go to that place on the pier and get ourselves a proper breakfast? We are on holiday, after all!'

The women heaved themselves up from the bench, one carelessly allowing the crisp packet to fall from her lap onto the ground.

The wind began getting up and I headed home, where I enjoyed reading to the very last page of my book in total peace. So now I knew the identity of the murderer, but actually had correctly guessed it before it was revealed.

I mused on the fact that my experiences of the day confirmed the cliché that truth, in this case everyday life, is indeed stranger than fiction.

**Jane Myers**