

EVENTS PROGRAMME FEB – MAY 2024

February 21 st	The Historic Front Garden – Dr Francis Burroughes From the castles built by the nobility in the Middle Ages to the 1930's semis, the front garden has always been an arena for display and eccentricity. The talk is a celebration of some of the most memorable and stunning examples of the English garden.
March 20 th	AGM followed by Dogs Saving Lives or Super Sniffers – Keith Hayman Imagine a world without disease brought about by a national medical service that identifies ailments at the point where a person has only just contracted the illness. Disease and illness eliminated before it develops into a life-threatening or life-changing state; detected and treated before we even know we have the condition.
April 17 th	From Bombs to Bournville – Helen Baggott An illustrated talk including the story of a family who helped build torpedoes and buildings, and a man from Cornwall whose invention transformed manufacturing on both sides of the Atlantic.
May 15 th	East Devon Hospice Care – Toni Hiscocks

*Meetings (unless indicated otherwise) take place at 2pm at the Beehive Centre, Dowell Street
Doors open at 1.30pm with a 3.30pm finish.*

The cafe will be open before the meeting for refreshments and light lunches, and will remain open after the meeting.

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Note from the editor

Contributions for the June newsletter should be sent to me by **26 May 2024**. It helps considerably if submissions are in an editable format, (e.g. Word or ODT format but **not** PDF), and if photos can be resized to less than 300KB (otherwise the newsletter becomes too large for the website).

Announcements

Annual General Meeting

We will be holding our AGM on Wednesday March 20th at The Beehive, and further details of the meeting will be sent out nearer the time.

In the meantime, have you ever thought about standing for election to the Committee? Several members of the existing Committee are coming to the end of their period of office in March. Please consider standing for election. We will be sending out details of the election process and the posts involved soon.

The continuing success and growth of our u3a depends, among other things, on having an active Committee. At present, we are particularly looking for members who might be interested in the following new roles:

- The Chair of a new Events Sub-Committee, which seeks to continue the outstanding work done by our fantastic Events Team. The Sub-Committee, made up of members of the Committee and other u3a members, will continue to plan and organise events such as our regular socials, organise our participation in events to promote Honiton u3a in the area (such as holding stalls in the High Street), as well as developing new ideas for member events.
- A Communications Manager, to monitor our email account, to send out emails to members, to print up the posters we use to advertise General Meetings (which are designed so beautifully by Stewart Raine, and are distributed by our Publicity Officer), as well as to print other documents as necessary (e.g. our membership cards).

The Communications Manager will also be responsible for printing and distributing documents such as this publication to the small number of members who do not have access to email. A printer and laptop owned by the Honiton u3a will be provided for the person undertaking this role, and they will be reimbursed for the cost of ink, paper/card etc.

News from the Events Team

Games afternoon

We recently hosted a second very successful games afternoon at the Mountbatten Football Club where 24 u3a members met to socialise, play Cribbage, Scrabble, Whist, Snakes and Ladders, Quirkle, Rummikub and enjoy themselves. Because they enjoyed themselves so much, the Cribbage players (experienced and new) are going to play again at the Beehive. Perhaps the Scrabblers will consider doing something similar as sometimes playing your favourite game only once in a month is just not enough!

The success of the afternoon, and of last November's games afternoon, has encouraged us to plan for further afternoons at the Club on February 23rd, March 22nd and April 26th when there will be a small charge to cover the cost of room hire and refreshments and a variety of games, in addition to those already mentioned.

If you would like to join in the fun at the next games afternoon on February 23rd please arrive by 1.45pm as this ensures we are set up and ready to get the games started by 2pm; the games will finish by 4pm. If you would like more information please email honitonu3a@gmail.com

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Honiton u3a Committee	
Post	Name
Chairman	Peter Halse
Vice-chair	Richard Spoerry
Treasurer	Peter Searl
Secretary	Kay Edge
Membership Sec.	Stuart Jones
Programme Secretary	Val Crawshaw-Gander
Publicity Officer	Martin Long
Groups Co-ord.	Peter Williams
Network Co-ord.	Richard Spoerry
Webmaster	Val Frood
Comm. member	Lauraine Etheridge
Comm. member	Jackie Moran

Interest Groups Survey

All members will have received an invitation to take part in this survey. Your participation will be greatly appreciated, as your comments and opinions will help the Committee to further develop the range and availability of group activities. Whether or not you belong to an active group, we want to hear the views of all members. Thank you to those members and group leaders who have already completed and returned their survey forms!

The closing date is 4th March. If you include your name on the form, you will have a chance to win a £15 Tesco voucher.

Returning surveys: full details for returning forms can be found on the introductory sheet that you have received. If, by the closing date of the 4th March, you have been unable to return your survey for any reason, please contact Richard Spoerry, who will arrange for it to be collected.

For any queries, please contact Richard Spoerry or Jackie Moran

Christmas Social

There was fun to be had at our 2023 Christmas Social held in the Mackarness Hall in December. It began with a glass of wine/soft drink for everyone on entry, which was followed by a welcome from our Chairman Peter Halse and then live entertainment from singing duo – 'Red Stitches'. Whilst members relaxed and enjoyed the music, they could puzzle over a two-part Quiz, which got everyone thinking.

After 30 minutes of musical delight our musicians took a break, and a delicious Buffet was served. After the buffet and a little more music, the answers to the Quiz were given and the winning team was announced: Anita Parsley, Val Crawshaw-Grander, Maggie Beasley, Sheena King and Brenda Head. Well Done!

The afternoon concluded with the Prize Draw.

A BIG thank you to the members of the Events team who organised the afternoon and to their many 'STARS' who helped with all the setting up and the final clearing away at the end of what was a very successful afternoon.



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Reviews from the Book Groups

Book Lovers

The Danger Within by Hilary Bonner

Hilary Bonner, past chairman of the Crime Writers Association, sets her novels featuring DCI Vogel in Devon, her home county. Thomas Quinn lies dead from multiple stab wounds, beside him is his silent, traumatised wife. But is Gillian Quinn the killer? Her son Greg is a suspect. Greg had a poor relationship with his father, partly because he recognised that his father was violent to his mother. Other suspects emerge. Switch of scene: Helen's House, a women's refuge, run by Helen Harris. We are then introduced to another abusive husband, Kurt. A lot of the book is about his relationship with his wife, Lillian. On the surface, DCI Vogel has a simple case to solve but it is much more complex than that. Who really murdered Thomas Quinn. What is the link between Gillian, Helen and Lillian?

At first the characters to us seemed wooden but their personalities do eventually emerge. This is a very topical novel centring as it does on domestic abuse, which at times is quite upsetting. But stepping back from the abuse, there are many clues and red herrings. These lead eventually to a clarification of the link between the three characters, and a satisfying ending. An intriguing plot, well constructed, and refreshing in that the detective is not the central character unlike many detective novels.

The Comforts of Home by Susan Hill

On the remote Scottish island of Taransay Superintendent Simon Serailier is asked by the local police to investigate the perplexing circumstances of Sandy's death.

Back home in Lafferton an arsonist is on the rampage. Marion Still is convinced that her daughter, Kimberley, was another victim of Lee Russon, a convicted murderer. Serailier is asked to do a cold-case review and finds gaps in the original investigation which lead him to new witnesses.

So there are two murders, one early on and one in the closing pages of the book. The link, of course, is Simon Serailier and his detection skills. Some of us felt that some of the sub-plots were padding but others enjoyed the complexity of the characters. We all agreed that this is a book more about the people than a 'whodunnit?'. Susan Hill raises several social issues: transgenderism, disability no longer being a barrier to job fulfilment, and corruption in prisons.

The Cupboard Full of Life by Alexander McCall Smith

This is the 12th novel in his No 1 Ladies Detective Agency series. When all else fails, visit Botswana's only female sleuthing outfit run by Mma Precious Ramotswe. Together with the assistance of Mma Makutsi, Precious solves any problem: a missing spouse, a wayward daughter, a philandering husband. Her case this time is to unravel the ulterior motives of the four men seeking wealthy Mma Holonga's hand. Central to every book is Mma Ramotswe's fiance, Mr Matekoni, proprietor of Tlokweng Road Speedy Motors. A kind, gentle, honest man, who is brave enough to frighten poisonous snakes away from the grounds of the orphanage. He is not, however, a man of decision. Will he ever tie the knot? He does not find it easy to say 'No' when the orphanage's matron asks him to do a fund raising parachute jump. So there are Mma Ramotswe's problems: eliminate the fortune hunters, find an honourable solution to her fiance's fear of jumping, and persuade him to take her to the altar.

This is a light, easy read. The central characters are very likeable. There are no gruesome murders, in fact there is little detective work so some of us found we were waiting for something to happen. It is well written but we wondered how much it represents what life is like in Botswana which, from his style of writing, is rather formal. For example, no one is ever mentioned by their

first name, and there is great respect for the older members of society. Like the rest of the world the novel depicts changes in moral values. We wondered if McCall Smith was hanging on to the Africa he knew as a child and the Botswana of 1981 when he set up the Faculty of Law at the newly established University of Botswana. In parts it amused us, especially the women's cunning manipulation of their men's frailties.

Lucky Jim by Kingsley Amis

We thought that there were autobiographical elements in *Lucky Jim*. Like his eponymous hero, James Dixon, Kingsley drank rather a lot. This was a habit which led both of them into misfortune. Apparently, Amis wrote 500 words before lunch then went to the pub, Clive James said that his drinking 'ceased to be social and became a way of dulling his remorse and regret at the way he behaved towards Hilary, his first wife.' In the novel Jim also drank to escape. The first episode is at a musical weekend being held at the home of Professor Welch, Head of the History Faculty at a new provincial university where Jim is a junior lecturer. Unable to sing, play an instrument or read music, Jim accepts the invitation to curry favour with his boss in order to increase his chances of his contract being renewed. Unwisely he sneaks off to the pub, drinks too much beer, then drops a cigarette on the bed burning a hole in the sheets. Amis admitted to being serially unfaithful, similarly Jim has two lady friends and he dithers between them. The novel reaches its climax when Jim is giving a public lecture on Merrie England. Far from sober he mockingly imitates other members of the faculty then denounces the arty pretensions of the modern university.

Lucky Jim was highly acclaimed in its time, winning the Somerset Maugham Prize for Literature. Nearly 70 years after publication did it, in our view, pass the test of time? Sadly not. Surprisingly none of us had read any of his other books, and we all agreed we wouldn't be reading any more. The title is apposite in that in the end he gets a new, good job, and he gets the girl. However, we disliked his social inadequacies and obfuscations, and only one of us found his antics amusing. Jim is a sad disillusioned chap, always pretending to be something he isn't. The History Department was only a microcosm of the university but we were irritated by the professor's incompetence and lack of academic rigour.

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Reading for Pleasure

The Shipping News by Annie Proulx

This novel, set in Newfoundland, won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1994. The main character, Quoye, returns with his aunt and his children to the land of his forebears following the breakdown of his marriage. He is described as an unattractive loser who has been damaged by his past. In the town of Killick-Claw he finds work writing the shipping news at the local newspaper. Gradually we see Quoye overcome his harrowing past, accept himself, and become a better husband and neighbour. Proulx's prose is dense and at times almost poetic. Her terse sentence structure reflects the bleak landscape of Newfoundland that is central to the story. *The Shipping News* is a deep and engrossing novel with many layers, not a quick read nor one to skim through. We had quite a discussion about it. Some of us had read it before and loved it. Others found it hard to get into at the beginning, but thought it worth the effort. A few didn't finish it, but overall we would recommend this book.

Alison Harrison

The Lady in the Van by Alan Bennett

Bennett published this short book in 1990, shortly after the death in 1989 of the eponymous homeless woman. Bennett knew her as Miss Shepherd and she lived in a van on the drive of his north London house. As a premise for a novel it would seem far-fetched yet these were true events, retold from Bennett's diaries. It is, at heart, a sad tale of homelessness, mental ill-health and instability, albeit laced with Bennett's familiar humour.

The successful feature film was made in 2015, a long time after the book was first published. Many of us had seen the film and couldn't help but picture Maggie Smith as Miss Shepherd.

We had a long discussion about homelessness, mental health, London in the seventies, Bennett's other work, the style and length of this book, sanitation issues arising from living in the back of a vehicle, and the early life of Miss Shepherd (she had been a concert pianist and a novice nun).

We were divided in our opinions of the book. A slim majority liked it and would recommend it. The remainder found it too short; it could have been much more.

Alison Harrison

Disgrace by J M Coetzee

Disgrace won the Booker Prize winner in 1999, written by a well-regarded and Nobel Prize winning author. The book is well written and, objectively, is a good book. At only 220 pages it's also a short book! Many of the group, however, found it a bleak and challenging read. It is set in post-apartheid South Africa and the main character is a lecherous middle-aged white academic. He assaults one of his students and subsequently loses his job and status. We see him move out of the city to live on his daughter's farm where a vicious attack occurs.

It is a harrowing and violent novel with themes of racial tension, misogyny, and animal cruelty. Some of the group hated it but the majority would recommend it, with reservations. As one of the group quoted from an online review, "I respect the writing but I don't like the book."

Alison Harrison

Dear Mrs. Bird by Alan Bennett

We discussed *Dear Mrs Bird* at our December meeting via Zoom. This is the author's first novel and is set in 1941 in London. Emmeline Lake is a plucky young woman who dreams of being a war correspondent. She finds work as a typist for Mrs Bird, the formidable agony aunt at a failing

woman's magazine. Emmeline secretly starts replying to the letters that Mrs Bird won't even read because they contain "unpleasantness". Emmy is also a volunteer for the Auxiliary Fire Service and experiences the bombing of London at close quarters. Her friends and colleagues feature in the story, as well as the voices of the women who write to the magazine for advice. These letters are apparently drawn from true examples of the time.

It's a quick read, funny and light at times, but sad as we see the destruction and loss caused by the second World War.

Most, but not all, of us liked this novel and would recommend it.

Alison Harrison

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Poem Sharing: A Brief History in Verse

Kay Edge

During lockdown a guy hatched a scheme
Poem Sharing has turned out a dream
We meet up on Zoom
It's a virtual room
And each time there's a different theme.

A gentle maths teacher (Retired)
Makes verse choices that are inspired
Likes Fanthorpe and Duffy
But nothing too stuffy
Pete 'leads' us but just as required.

Kay didn't know much at the start
She preferred reading novels, and art
Now she's the group's scribe
And has learned to imbibe
Adding verse to her Amazon cart.

There's a chap who will give us a score
When most of us turn up with four
Keen on Shelley and Blake
Only make no mistake
Out of Peter the ideas just pour.

Howard Lyne was around for a while
Steam trains, fish, birds and trees were his
style
He liked Belloc and Clare
Shakespeare b'yond compare
Now his Newsletter makes us all smile.

Val Frood really loves to join groups
With Nature she rallies her troops
Verse on travel or pet?
She's a whizz on the Net -
Runs our Web and reveals all the scoops!

Terry Palmer has moved far away
But on Zoom he can still have his say
Full of fanciful tales
He's a spokesman for Wales –
But for him Seamus Heaney holds sway

Philip Larkin is often John's choice
And he sometimes gives Ted Hughes a voice
Seems a serious soul
Then revealed a new role
Doc Martens and the Blockheads – Rolls-Royce!

Ali's work was with books in the day
Now she's free she can come out to play
Goes for witty and quick
And her reading is slick
'Riding Hood' was a perfect display.

TrevString is our newest recruit
A fresh voice, and his picks make us hoot
The Drury was great
He seems like a good mate
And he's keen on the Wine group to boot!

It seems we've now gelled as a team
And hope we have fulfilled Pete's scheme
We laugh and we chat
And there's nowt wrong with that
Poem Sharing makes all of us beam!

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From the Writing Groups

Writing for Fun

Acrostic Poems for Christmas

Members of the Writing for Fun group

Christmas carols will be sung tonight
Holy infant and a star so bright
Oh come all ye faithful
Come and rejoice in the sight
On Christmas eve and into the night
Light up those candles
And ring out those bells
Together merry with family and friends
Enjoy your Christmas and Happy New Year!

Cheerful greetings!
Ho Ho Ho ...or Humbug?
Roasted dinner... sorted
Illuminated tree ...up
Santa's coming
Traditions kept
Mulled wine drunk
Aglow and relaxed
Silent Night...eventually.

Setting off across the icy field
Now that the sun has warmed the air
Oliver and I; dressed for the cold
Walk quickly but carefully across the frozen furrows
Merry church bells ring across the valley
Announcing the season of good will
Now we reach the village and head for the church

Your family visit
Up from Little Trivet
Love your decorations and the sparkly tree
Every year they are full of fun and glee.

Cards arriving daily at the door,
All bringing cheerful messages galore.
Round the tree lots of presents gathering
On the branches fairy lights scattering
Little flashes of bright colours showing
Smiling children's faces glowing.

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Ritual

Russ Connors

Malek gave a final look to the night sky. The moon had reached the correct stage of its cycle, as laid down in the holy books. The stars were in alignment. The ritual could begin. He heaped more coals on the hearth and began pumping the bellows. Soon, the dull glow would be replaced by an angry red inferno, fiercer than a sun. Then the ingot would be placed in the flames.

It had been smelted from ores, found in the holy mountains, many weeks distant. On arrival, it had been blessed by the priests, and the purification commenced.

To many, metal was inanimate, inert, but they lacked the intimate knowledge of a metalsmith. Molten metal, urgently flowing to fill a mould. Red-hot metal, under the hammer's strike, showering the forge with a rain of angry sparks. Malek knew that metal lived.

With a knowledge distilled from generations of metalsmiths, Malek judged the moment to remove the ingot and begin its shaping, first, with heavy hammer blows, latterly with light taps, almost a caress. Finally, satisfied with his labours, the finished object was quenched in water to cool.

Once dried and polished, it would nestle on a bed of blue velvet, in the custom built sandalwood box, blessed by the priests. At the new moon, it would be handed to a trusted merchant, to be taken by caravan on the long, long journey westwards.

One last task – the roll of parchment that would accompany the box on its journey. Malek took up his quill and wrote -

“To The Manager,

Tesco's Honiton.

Replacement widget for repairing air conditioning plant.

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Armchair Adventurers – the Isle of Man

Without leaving the comfort of our own homes, our next 'exploration' was to the Isle of Man, and we found it quite rewarding as it has so many features which make it unique. Although it is part of the UK, being a Crown Dependency with King Charles holding the title Lord of Man, it has an independent legislature which it is the oldest in the world. Its parliament, Tynwald, is responsible for domestic matters, and it showed its independence by being the first nation to enfranchise women. In July the Tynwald meets in the open air on a hilltop when all the laws passed in the preceding year are promulgated using the Manx language. Like our other Celtic languages Manx is undergoing a revival.

The island has many archaeological features from pre-historic times and we looked at some of them: Neolithic tombs, passage graves, chambered cairns, and in the Stone Age it developed a culture, the Ronaldsway Culture, which is unique to the island. It appears that the Romans passed it by but in the 5th century the Irish arrived and introduced Ogham inscriptions. And then came the Vikings.

Tax rates are very low. The super wealthy use it as a tax haven, sheltering under the cover of anonymous companies. In 2007 it launched an Aircraft Register and now has the second largest register of private jets in Europe. Its large and sophisticated financial sector make it attractive for money laundering, illicit funds largely originating from fraud schemes and narcotics trafficking.



The Manx cat is tailless but we didn't find a convincing explanation of why. The three legs of Man has been a symbol of the island since 13th century. Industrial archaeology featured with the Great Laxey Wheel, the islands railways and the horse-drawn tram. The Isle of Man TT brought us right up to date.

Armchair Adventurers was the inspiration of Susan Unsworth who very reluctantly, last autumn, relinquished her role as leader. She is greatly missed and we all thank her for running the group so successfully.

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Devon's Historic Churches

St James the Great Church at Talaton

The most recent visit of our group has been to St James the Great Church at Talaton. A fuller report of the visit will be available from the Honiton u3a website, together with reports from earlier visits to *Devon's Historic Churches*. <https://u3asites.org.uk/honiton/page/118134>



Our first look at the Church from outside revealed a tower with a variety of sculptures including more examples of our favourite hunkypunks (often ugly stone carvings which have no practical use and are purely ornamental). The Norman porch was topped by a statue of the Virgin Mary holding a sundial, and underneath her an example of a green man.



Going inside the Church the first thing that struck us was the amazingly ornate rood screen with its gold leaf decoration. Other things which awoke our interest were the stained glass window depicting and including six hidden butterflies, and the font with a relatively modern lid carved with a memorable spelling mistake,



The Rood screen separating the Chancel and the Nave



The Butterfly window



The mis-spelling on the cover of the Font

Probably the most unusual find was in the churchyard where we discovered two quite elaborate graves commemorating the coachman and his wife and children, servants of Sir John Kennaway of Escot. When we looked more closely we found that the coachman, Aaron Webb, had been killed in 1848 by falling from a horse in the grounds of Escot and hitting his head on an oak tree. His wife and her friend, buried in the adjacent grave, died in 1838 from 'lingering consumption'.



A brief mention at the foot of this gravestone mentions two young children. Further investigation revealed that they were twins. One has both birth and death records in the third quarter of 1837 and the second died in the second quarter of 1838.

The final highlight of our visit was being offered a cup of coffee and a biscuit by our guide! Next stop – lunch at the Talaton Arms.



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News from the groups

Armchair Adventurers – to be determined

Our latest adventure and report can be found on page 13

Book Groups:

Book Lovers – GillThomas

Our latest review of books is on page 6.

Reading for Pleasure – Peter Searl & Hilary Lyne

Our latest review of books is on page 8.

Devon's Historic Churches – Marilyn Medforth

A summary report on our recent visit to St. James the Great Church in Talaton can be found on page 14 of this newsletter.

German Conversation – Brian Houlihan

This group is for those who would like to learn a little basic spoken German, or to practice or refresh their existing German with fellow u3a members. The emphasis of this group is not about learning grammar, spelling, or writing German. It's about speaking basic words and phrases especially for conversation or holiday/travel use.

Note: Our meetings may be ad hoc and not necessarily all year round. We went into hibernation at the end of August 2023 and shall resume Tuesdays fortnightly 13 Feb until 24 Sep 2024 14:00-15:30.

History Group – Stewart Raine

We're now well established at Awliscombe Village Hall and have just started on our programme for 2024 which, like previous years, has been put together from suggestions by members of the group, thinking about their interests and some of the 'anniversaries' which fall during the year. The full programme is on the Honiton u3a website.

We started the year with recognising that January 2024 is the centenary of the first Labour Government in the UK which took office under Ramsay MacDonald on 22nd January 1924. We studied the growth of an independent Labour party from the mid-19th century to the point where in 1924 they were in a position to form a minority government.

Our topics this year include the Venetian Republic, the decline of the Ottoman Empire, the emergence of an independent South America, the Renaissance of the 12th century and the growth of modern London. A wide range which I hope will appeal to members.

We meet on the 4th Thursday of each month (January to November) and the cost to members to cover the hire of the hall for the year is £5. The hall is large enough to accommodate all those members who would like to attend, so if you are interested in joining us, do get in touch.

Knitting (Knitwise) – Hilary Lyne

The Knitwise group has continued to meet twice monthly. At one session we look at a new technique and hopefully master it. Recently we have worked on three needle cast off, hat patterns, i-cords and mock cables without a cable needle. Our second session each month is in a local cafe, where we knit, chat, and exchange patterns and equipment. In the dreary winter months we have had several extra social sessions, recognising the value of company and getting out of the house. Knitting is known to be very therapeutic, with physical and mental health benefits. It is a bi-lateral brain activity using both hands, and is both stimulating and relaxing. And we can talk at the same time!

Music Appreciation – Howard Lyne

October's meeting provided an opportunity to learn more about the work of Amy Beach, a prominent American composer and pianist of the late 19th and early 20th century. This included her Romance for Violin and Piano and Piano Concerto, with the former the subject of an Interpretation Class by Benjamin Zander of the Boston Philharmonic.

The Promenade Concerts of 2023 were featured in the November meeting. These included contributions by two members of the talented Kanneh-Mason family: Isata Kanneh-Mason (piano) playing Prokofiev's Piano Concerto No. 3 in E minor at the 22nd Promenade Concert, and Sheku Kanneh-Mason (cello) playing Kol Nidrei Op.47 by Max Bruch in the final Prom 71 of 2023. Also featured was Benjamin Britten's Young Persons Guide to the Orchestra from the 1st Prom, with the BBC Symphony Orchestra conducted by the inspiring Dalia Stasevska. The afternoon concluded with selections from the Late Night Prom 34 entitled 'The Mindful Mix'. This featured the singing group VOCES8 (celebrating their 20th anniversary), the Norwegian composer and pianist Ole Gjeilo, and the Carducci Quartet who concluded the concert with a moving performance of Samuel Barber's 'Agnus Dei', arranged by the composer for string quartet.

The release of the film *Maestro* near the end of 2023 inspired the January meeting to be devoted to the works and performances of the conductor and composer Leonard Bernstein, drawing, as much as possible, on original performances by Bernstein himself. Although he will forever be remembered for *West Side Story*, we concentrated on his other works, opening with the *Overture to Candide* and including 'The Masque' from his 2nd Symphony '*The Age of Anxiety*'. The latter was played by Krystian Zimmern in a concert conducted by Bernstein and again 32 years later with the Berlin Philharmoniker under Sir Simon Rattle. Perhaps the most moving performance was of his *Chichester Psalms* by the Boys and Men's Choir of the Poznan Philharmonic 'The Poznan Nightingales', conducted by Bernstein and dating from around 1989.

Nature Appreciation – Val Flood

2023 was a very successful year for the group when outings included two bird watching days, visits to two nature reserves, invitations from two u3a members to view their gardens, the River Otter Restoration Project, a local woodland, and a country park.

This year we are looking forward to a wildlife photography exhibition, bird watching at Topsham, visiting a member's private wood, a guided tour of wildflower meadows, a guided talk at Seaton Wetlands, a summer coffee morning in a member's garden and hopefully a fungi foray in the autumn.



We now have 22 members in the group but there are still a few spaces if anyone is interested in joining us. Please contact the group leader.

Poem Sharing – Peter Searl

A brief history of the group in verse can be found on page 10

Walking Groups:

Strollers – Jackie Moran



We have begun to plan our calendar of strolls for 2024 and hope that the weather does not force too many changes to our plans in the coming months. However, we try not to give in to the weather too easily, as is shown in the photo taken a few days after the storm that virtually re-landscaped the seafront at Seaton last November. So, we modified our planned route a little, in the interests of safety, and were able to enjoy a bracing stroll along to Axemouth Harbour followed by lunch at the Ship Inn; a very pleasant way to finish off our strolling in 2023.

Our group is currently full but our waiting list is empty so if you would like to join Strollers please contact me, Jackie Moran, via the Honiton u3a website where there is a form for requesting to join groups.

Walking Group – Caroline Steggles and Helen Wale

The Walking Group continues to attract members and over the last 6 months some of our newer recruits have successfully organised walks for us as well as finding some new venues for lunches that have also been enjoyable. Unfortunately there have been times when the weather has proved challenging but after being so lucky for so long we must expect this and although there was rain and wind we still enjoyed our experiences.

We have been to some different areas too starting with the Canal Basin at Tiverton where it was comfortable underfoot and flat with much to see and a number of bridges where we could shelter from the showers.

Newton Poppleford was our starting point twice giving us the opportunity to experience two very

different walks and sights of interest.

Unusually our walk around West Hill was led by a member who lives there and that gave us the opportunity to see things that others might miss and it included a lovely walk through a local wood.

Woodbury Common is always a delight and our walk there was no exception.

Our visit to the Aylesbere area where we had not been before was varied and proved be very popular so we intend to go back again.

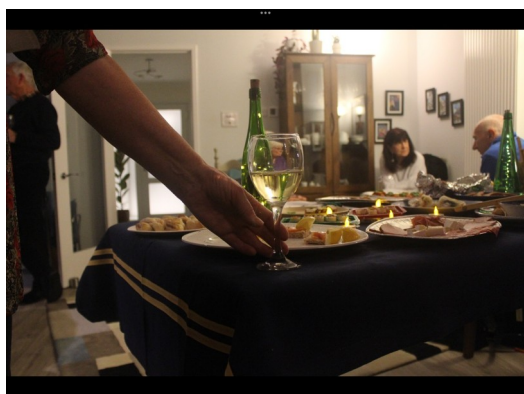
We hadn't been to Escot for a very long time and that was still most enjoyable.

Our last visit took us to Budleigh Salterton's new nature reserve which was so good to see as the last time we went it was under construction and we had hoped to go back. For anyone interested it comes highly recommended.

As spring and summer are on the way we look forward to many more adventures

Wine Tasting for Fun – Richard Spoerry

Our group has developed over the past four years from eight to nineteen members. The group chose to limit meeting numbers to a sociable maximum of eleven. So the original eleven has become Group 1 and the more recent recruits Group 2. Group 1 continues to meet monthly and if a member is unable to attend members of Group 2 are invited on a rota basis. For the coming year we have also planned extra meetings every couple of months for Group 2.



Alongside this pattern there are plans for summer and year-end social meetings for everyone to attend. Last year these were an Italian themed summer evening and a Christmas social.

We continue to have a theme for each meeting and are trying to challenge ourselves by tasting wines from less common grapes, or countries we have never tried before. Our likes and dislikes often surprise us!

Our main aim – aside from enjoying our subject – is to widen the scope of our knowledge and enjoyment of wine.

Writing Groups:

Writing for Fun – Sue Horswood

The group continues to write 500 – 600 words each month on a different theme. Part of the enjoyment of writing is to think of a story to fit the given task. The harder bit is to keep within the 500 – 600 words. This is more difficult than you might think but somehow the members of the group do manage this. Hopefully this exercises our brains!

Earlier in the year we tried writing acrostic poems. These are poems where the initial letter of each line spell out a word. The poems do not have to rhyme or even scan so the tricky part is finding a suitable first word that starts with the letter needed for the chosen word. We had a second try at writing this type of poem at Christmas. Everyone chose their own word and our attempts can be seen on page 11 of this newsletter.

There are now a few spaces in the group so if you think you might like to try writing for fun then please get in touch and come along to see if the group would suit you.

Writing Group – Pam Faulkner

Please see page 12 for an example of the group's writing.

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Groups and contact details

Could group leaders review the following details and inform the group coordinator and editor of any changes?

NB: the format of the table has been altered slightly to reflect the common interests of the various groups. Please let the editor know if you prefer the earlier version or of any other comments.

Group	Day	Time	Leader
Armchair Adventurers	4 th Wednesday	2.00pm	To be determined
Book Groups:			
Book Lovers	1 st Monday	2.00pm	Gill Thomas
Reading for Pleasure	4 th Monday	2.00pm	Peter Searl & Hilary Lyne
Book Group 2	3 rd Monday	2.00pm	Pam Faulkner
Bridge (Rubber)	Wednesday	2.00pm	Derek Ballard
Craft Groups:			
Crochet Group	1 st Monday	2.30pm	Anne Halse
Knitting	1 st Wednesday 3 rd Wednesday	1.30pm 10.00am	Hilary Lyne
Devon's Historic Churches	2 nd Thursday	10.30am	Marilyn Medforth
Discussion Group	1 st Wednesday	10.00 for 10.30am	Peter Searl
History Group	4 th Thursday	10.00am	Stewart Raine
Language Groups:			
German conversation	Fortnightly	2.00pm	Brian Houlihan
Italian conversation	1 st & 3 rd Monday	2.30pm	Greg Arnold
Lunch Club	1 st Wednesday	Lunchtime	Marilyn Adhamy
Meteorology	2 nd Friday	10.30am	Howard Lyne
Music Groups:			
Handbell Ringing	4 th Tuesday	2.00pm	Rhona Hitchcock
Music Appreciation	4 th Wednesday	2.00pm	Howard Lyne
Opera Appreciation	1 st Thursday	7.00pm	Derek Ballard
Recorder Group	3 rd Monday	10.00am	Tricia Lewis
Singing for Fun (SfF!)	1 st Tuesday 3 rd Tuesday	2.00pm 2.00pm	Janet Young
Nature Appreciation	3 rd Monday	10.30am	Val Frood
Play Reading	2 nd Tuesday	10.00am	Joan Roberts
Philosophy	3 rd Thursday	2.00pm	John Sadler
Poem Sharing	3 rd Tuesday	10.30am	Peter Searl
Quiz Group	As required		
Walking Groups:			
Strollers	2 nd Wednesday	11.00am	Jackie Moran
Walking	2 nd Wednesday	10.00am	Caroline Steggles & Helen Wale
Walking 2 (all-day)	1 st Thursday	9.30am	Brian Houlihan
Wine Tasting for Fun	2 nd Monday	7.00pm	Richard Sperry
Writing Groups:			
Writing For Fun	4 th Monday	2.00pm	Sue Horswood
Writing Group	Alternate Fridays	10.00am	Pam Faulkner

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