

Group Reports for 2024 AGM

CHURCH VISITING GROUP

During the year we visited twenty four different churches at a ratio of two per monthly visit. We also enjoyed twelve pub lunches. We visited churches in Warwickshire and neighbouring counties. Often we were met by friendly local people who were keen to tell us about the churches and their features. We now have nine members and we are now full for the time being.

CURRENT AFFAIRS GROUP 2

In past twelve months we've talked about taxation, patriotism, the right to demonstrate, higher education, the NHS, Stratford & tourism (including the RSC). In future meetings, we plan to discuss the oversight of elections, housing for people on low incomes, the environmental impact of world sporting events (e.g. the Olympics). We are a friendly, cheerful bunch and welcome new members.

FREE TIME

The Free Time Group has 10 members, it has met a few times and we have enjoyed a variety of activities. Outings have included the Bear Pit Theatre, the Gloucester and Warwickshire Steam Railway, Stratford Town Hall Heritage Open Day, Charlecote Watermill, Sudeley Castle Xmas Light Show, and a Xmas meal at the One Elm pub. More events are planned.

Helen Elliott - Group Contact.

FRENCH GROUPS We have a number of groups that encourage different levels of French:

FRIENDLY FRENCH - Friendly French is a new group formed in the autumn of 2023. We now have seven members who are happy to come to the group leader's home for a 90 minute "chat" on the first and third Monday of each month.

We pride ourselves on our team spirit; if anyone is struggling for a word or is not confident of a grammar point, we will work on it together. There is no teaching and homework is purely optional but always welcome as a basis for a group discussion. In addition to the usual reports of holidays and family activities, recent topics have included the ups and downs of a building project and a presentation on the city of Arles

It seems we have generated some interest in our casual approach and have recently received enquiries from some interested parties. Regrettably we are not able to take any new members ourselves but would be happy to encourage anyone wishing to keep their French alive to start their own group.

IMPROVE YOUR FRENCH (FORMERLY USEFUL FRENCH) - We were set up for keen but rusty francophiles. We meet fortnightly and enjoy support from Jocelyne, qui est française. We've encouraged defections to *Friendly French Conversation* and *French for the Terrified*, so could take a couple more. We use readings, questions and songs to build confidence. It's fun!

FRENCH FOR THE TERRIFIED - This new group meets fortnightly. It is designed for the very rusty who need lots of encouragement and help. A minimum level of knowledge is assumed, and we build on that with exercises, lots of questions and spoken practice. It's very easy going and unpressurised. There are six of us now, which is the ideal number.

REVIVE YOUR FRENCH

The group has 6 members who meet twice a month in each other's homes. Members generally prepare a written piece, in French, on anything of interest e.g., something that has happened in Stratford recently, or whatever that could be interesting, holidays etc., as long as it stimulates conversation. It is then read out loud in French to allow members to comment/correct or suggest any errors or ways of saying things better.

From time to time, we get French newspapers and magazines which are circulated. The best ones seem to be the free "giveaway" local editions which are particularly valuable for their use of regional expressions. Members' progress has been impressive, so much so that, unlike on previous occasions, when holidaying abroad the locals have not attempted to help them out!

GERMAN GROUPS

BRUSH UP YOUR GERMAN - We are a group of eight and continue to meet monthly, enjoying the splendid hospitality of Rosel, our native speaker. We each come prepared to speak on a topic of interest to ourselves and this can lead to general discussion among the group. It's a very happy, relaxed atmosphere. Eight is the most we can accommodate.

REFRESH YOUR SPOKEN GERMAN - Our group continues to meet twice a month for two hours on Thursday afternoons. As we all have a wide variety of interests, such as travel, theatre, cinema, family visits etc., we always have plenty to talk about in a relaxed, friendly atmosphere, although members are encouraged to prepare a topic in advance.

We are a group of seven and meet in each other's homes with tea and biscuits around a dining room table, which limits the number of members we can accept and unfortunately, there are no vacancies at the moment.

ITALIAN IMPROVERS

The group has now grown to about 6 members. Not everyone attends each session, but we now have enough people to ensure good interaction. We meet at least once a month, if possible, on Tuesday mornings. We converse, read various texts and translate them, and discuss points of difficulty. The meetings help us to revise and improve our language knowledge by mutual encouragement

KEEP FIT

This group meets on Monday mornings from 9:30 am to 10:30am at the Methodist Hall during the school term times. For one hour we enjoy a variety of exercises to improve our fitness and suppleness and this gives us a good healthy start to the week ahead. We have an excellent young teacher who puts us through routines which exercise every part of the body.

The class is fully subscribed at the moment but there is a waiting list for anybody who would like to join the class when a vacancy arises.

LATIN (ADVANCED)

We have been going for 17 years now and spend our monthly meetings reading Latin authors. Numbers have diminished over the years through natural causes, so we would welcome anyone who ever enjoyed Latin to join us. We are still learning and revising as we go, so don't be put off by the 'advanced' tag. Try us!

LATIN (INTERMEDIATE)

This continues as a very small group, meeting twice monthly at the group leader's home. Progress is relatively slow but thoroughly enjoyable.

PIANO

Eight of us meet monthly in SMC Room 1 to play for the others what we have been practising. Not everyone plays every time. Ability ranges from RAM trained to happy players with no grades. Some of us play duets, one plays only by ear and any style of music goes. It's a very happy mix. *Pianist* magazines to borrow too!

PLAYREADING

This group has continued to meet regularly with a high attendance level. A wide variety of plays have been read and enjoyed. This year we ventured into Shakespeare with an impressive reading of Twelfth Night.

At our January meeting we finished reading Mike Harding's Comfort and Joy, a play that was suitably festive in December and seemed, if anything, funnier still after the festivities had ended. In February we moved on Alan Ayckbourn's play, How the Other Half Loves, an amusing examination of the nature of marital fidelity.

In March we're moving to a new venue, Trinity Manor Care Home. This will give us more space than we have now when we meet in a member's home which means that we can take a few new members.

PORTUGUESE

The members of this group, having met for two years, have now been "promoted" to intermediate standard. The emphasis is on spoken Portuguese around the subjects of current affairs, Portuguese life, and culture. The group is assisted by a native Portuguese speaker.

RUMMIKUB

The Rummikub group has been running for three months now and we are building a very enthusiastic group of skilled players, some of whom were complete beginners when they started. We meet upstairs at Huffkins restaurant in Bridge Street, Stratford, every 3rd Friday of the month at 2pm. The session normally lasts about two hours – or whenever Huffkins chuck us out! Indeed, Huffkins make us very welcome indeed for no charge, except for the possibility that we might like refreshments. I think that has turned out to be a good business decision for them!

The room is beautifully beamed, with a tall ceiling, so that it is airy and light, and we usually manage at least three or four tables of three or four players. Of course, we have space for more so please do come along at least to try us out. If you happen to have a Rummikub set, please do bring it with you, just in case, although we have managed so far. Beginners are very welcome indeed and I usually spend the first session with them, teaching them the rudiments of the game, which is quickly and easily understood by most people. That's the lovely thing about Rummikub; you can have real fun, even from day one, but even a little practice can give you some very enjoyable and friendly but competitive skills.

SPANISH INTERMEDIATE

The Spanish group has had a successful year. We now have a native Spanish speaker in our group who supports the group members with their conversational Spanish. Many of our members spend time in Spain throughout the year and it is interesting to hear of their experiences in different parts of the country. We still meet on the first Thursday of each month at 2.30 p.m.

STEEL PANS

The six group members play steel pans together working on calypso, folk and pop tunes. Recent tunes we've played include Banks of the Ohio, Honey, Honey, Paint It Black, the largo from the New World Symphony and Unchained Melody.

We would welcome a few new members to complete our band. We meet on Tuesday mornings at 10.00 a.m. at the primary school in Lower Tysoe during term time. Sessions are one hour. You do not need to have played an instrument before or read music.

Previously we have played at occasional charity events, fetes and Caribbean evenings, which have been great fun and helped to raise funds for good causes.

STRATFORD HISTORY

From modest beginnings our numbers have exploded to 28 and we can't take any more. We meet monthly for talks/presentations in SMC's New Room or visits to sites of interest in Stratford. Our members research areas of interest to them and share their findings. It works very well and we're learning all the time.

SUNDAY MORNING WALKS

The walks start at 10.00 a.m. on alternate Sundays and are circular walks in the Welcombe Hills nature reserve, Clifford Chambers, Alscot Park, Preston on Stour, Atherstone on Stour, Bidford upon Avon and other local places. The walks are between 1 and 2 hours at a reasonable/normal walking pace.

To be part of the group and stay in touch: you will need to join a dedicated WhatsApp group for sharing walk details, dates and any updates.

TAI CHI/YOGA FUSION

Sixteen members are currently enjoying this new group that started in January 2024. The teacher, qualified fitness professional, Hazel Oliver, takes the group through a series of movements designed to improve flexibility, coordination, and balance. The group is self-funding and meets in the Methodist Church rooms.

UKULELE GROUP

This year has seen the Ukulele band playing at various venues, including Briar Croft and joining with the UPBEAT Band of Bidford to play at the Guild Street cottages, formerly The Alms Houses at their Garden Party in Stratford.

We also lost two key members, our bass player Richard who has moved abroad , and our treasurer Jeff who had to retire due to ill health.

We struggled financially as the year progressed with room charges and a small number of attendees. However, we were lucky to have a good core group.

We finished the year at Briar Croft where we were joined by a talented resident on the piano and at the U3A Christmas meeting where we started the festivities!

This year started well with a new venue at the Trinity Manor care home, where we have been offered a room . Our first meeting was successful with 14 players and we were joined by 3 new members. including a new bass player. We look forward to a musical year!

WINE APPRECIATION

The group meet once a month with members taking in turns to host.

We always have a diversity of choice by e.g., having three different reds from different countries, or three of the same grapes from different countries. Last year we tasted at least 20 different grape varieties from various countries. White wines are usually tasted in the summer months. We do make a session a special event when a member has a significant birthday.

We compare the description given on the wine bottles to see if it meets with our individual taste and then score them from 1 to 3 and see if there is an overall winner. It is only on rare occasions that this happens. Comparing which supermarket and prices are the best is an important part of the exercise. It is quite common for the cheapest wine to be considered the best. Most times it has been wine from TESCO that has been the best in terms of value for money. But one thing is certain – we are never short of choice.

The group is always well attended and we do have an enjoyable time.