

Newsletter No.29 – Spring/Summer 2013

Spring at last! After what has seemed (has been?) the longest and coldest winter for decades...

Bees are also back, now hopefully less under threat from a certain pesticide. Carol Ann Duffy celebrates them here:

### VIRGIL'S BEES

Bless air's gift of sweetness, honey  
 from the bees, inspired by clover,  
 marigold, eucalyptus, thyme,  
 the hundred perfumes of the wind.  
 Bless the beekeeper

who chooses for her hives

a site near water, violet beds, no yew,  
 no echo. Let the light lilt, leak, green  
 or gold, pigment for queens,  
 and joy be inexplicable but *there*  
 in harmony of willowherb and stream,  
 of summer heat and breeze,

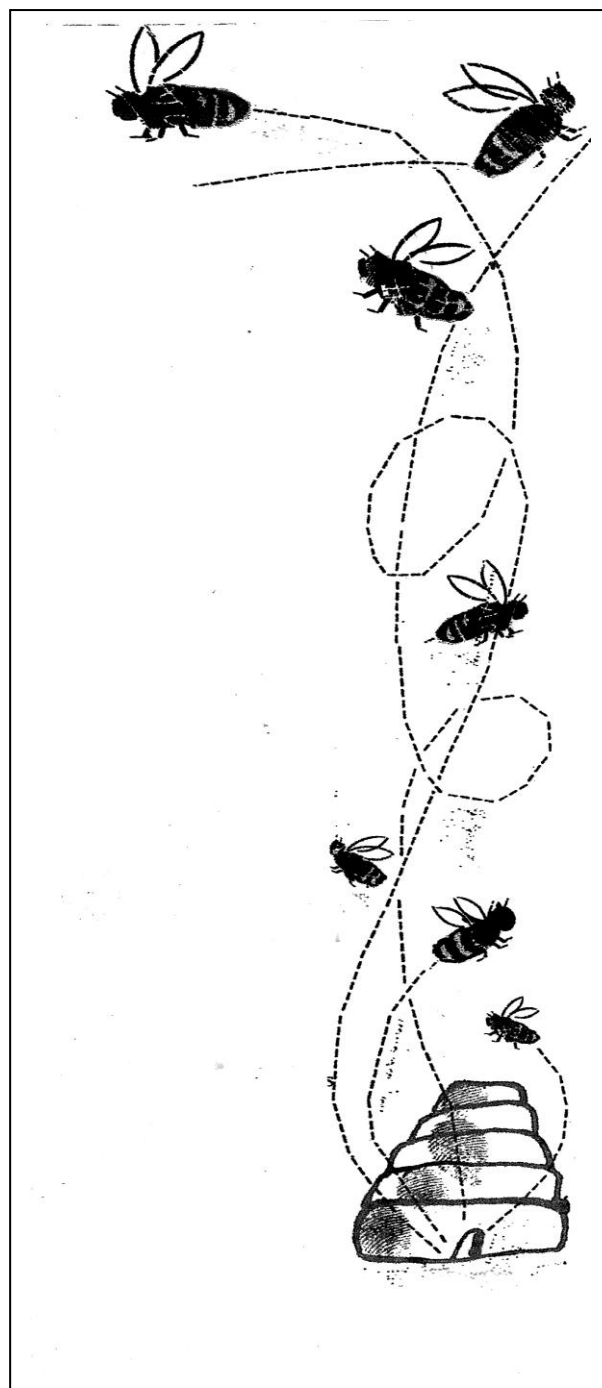
each bee's body

at its brilliant flower, lover-stunned,  
 strumming on fragrance, smitten,

For this,

let gardens grow, where beelines end,  
 sighing in roses, saffron blooms, buddleia;  
 where bees pray on their knees, sing, praise  
 in pear trees, plum trees; bees  
 are the batteries of orchards, gardens, guard them.

*Carol Ann Duffy*  
 (as published in the Guardian)



Here's an example of one of the things our members get up to (literally in this case!) outside the USA.

### **Mittwoch aus Licht** (Wednesday out of the Light) **and Me!**

The invitation from the Birmingham Opera Company (BOC) to be part of the acting chorus in Karlheinz Stockhausen's mammoth composition came by email last July and my immediate reaction was Karlheinz WHO? I had heard of Schoenberg and other "modern" composers, but my knowledge of Stockhausen was virtually zilch: so I turned to Wikipedia... "German composer widely acknowledged as one of the most important, but also controversial, composers of the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. He is known primarily for his ground-breaking electronic sensual sound, aleatory (controlled chance) in serial composition and musical spatialisation." Hmmm?

At the first rehearsal Graham Vick delved into the mysteries of multiphonic electronics, the "white noise" of the universe, the pneumatic flap of a bird's wings, the thrum of a helicopter and the screech of a parrot, all bathed in octophonic sound. We were told to close our eyes, open up our senses and feel the emotion, and to my astonishment I did. Weird or what?

The plot revolves around the conflict between Good (Archangel Michael) the Bad (Archangel Lucifer) and the Naughty (Eve, who from prehistory has been deemed by man to be the cause of all bother, and still is by some). Overriding all this is the search for a leader to take mankind to the promised land of Utopia. It is important to note that the opera is performed in two vast interconnecting auditoria, is split into six sections and lasts for six hours!

The six scenes contain many complex and technically demanding sets, which understandably drew the attention of the press. Widely reported were musicians strapped in special chairs which were hoisted aloft, and most notably the four virtuosi flying around outside in separate helicopters performing a string quartet.

#### **The And Me bit:**

As an insignificant actor among so much talent my part was to help in the background. Actors are asked to interpret many scenarios, some demanding, some strange. Amongst other activities I protected the audience from an imaginary swarm of bees, then as the mood of the music changes I morph into a child of six and make paper aeroplanes while sucking my thumb. Finally, as the mood changes again I morph into a goat, chew on the paper planes and generally molest the people around me as I leave the auditorium on my knees and knuckles, snacking on a pair of bootlaces as I go. Looking up I find they belong to Graham Vick! Acting is a challenge with the BOC and I love it. Finally, it is all too easy to consider Stockhausen as

way-out, and yes the opera is difficult to understand and it's not clear why he produced a work of this magnitude. But hundreds of fans travelled from all over the world and critics of high reputation proclaim it a monumental success. Perhaps we should try harder.

It took Graham Vick and the BOC a considerable amount of time to produce this prodigious work. No one else in the world had the imagination, tenacity and drive to do it, having to overcome so many complex financial, musical and technical problems. Surely this demands recognition of the highest order.

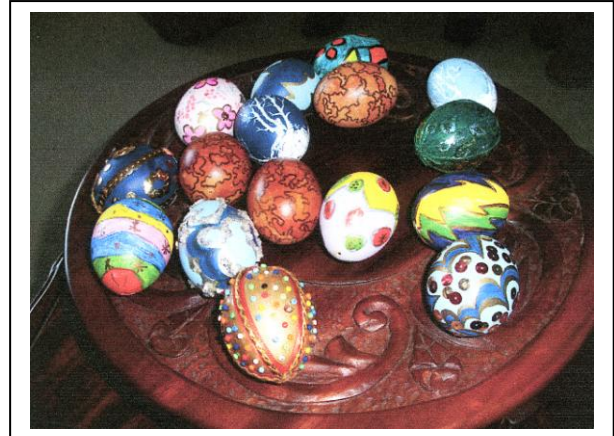
David Starmer

(Watch and listen on youtube, eg at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ReEnAeyS3rc> )

### **Round the Groups**

#### **Food Group**

The March meeting was held at Mollie Painter's home on the topic of 'Easter Eggs – chocolate or otherwise'.



A summary of Easter traditions, such as Easter egg hunts (and less well-known activities such as rolling eggs down a hill and 'egg-jarping' when each player with a hard-boiled egg attempts to smash those of his opponents) set the scene.

The seasonal glut of ovoid chocolate confectionery in the shops contrasted with the nutritional advantages of eating real eggs was discussed and several types of free-range hard-boiled eggs, with deeply satisfying yolks, were passed around for our inspection. Hen-house horror stories were swapped, and in spite of this the joys of keeping poultry were advocated.



Easter celebrations in other countries were related and a Greek tsoureki, an impressive plaited loaf decorated with scarlet eggs, was proudly produced from a basket, like a rabbit from a hat!

Other chocolate cakes, liberally decorated with fluffy chickens and mini chocolate eggs were produced, and a selection of decorated blown eggs along with a Ukrainian book of instructions on how to do it professionally were passed around for inspection. The trophies were all duly admired before we set about consuming the edible ones together with delicious chocolate cake and gingerbread made by Mollie.

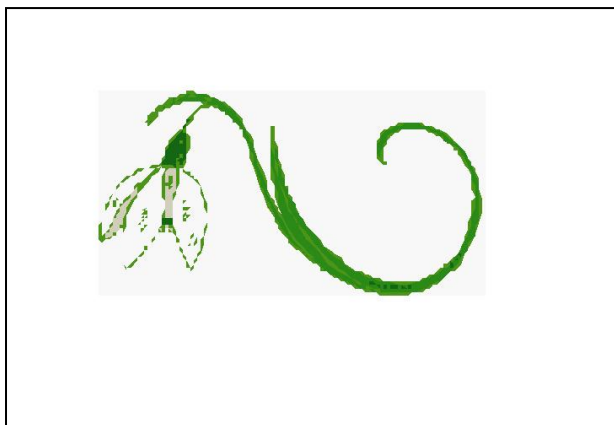
Louise Henly

### **Gardening Group**

We had a wonderful meeting in February, at the home of Eileen Bayliss in Penn. As you may know, Eileen is a galanthophile and has an amazing collection of snowdrops, which we were able to enjoy not only in her garden but in a presentation that she gave us into the background of many varieties of this delightful plant. She has an encyclopaedic knowledge, and went into enormous trouble to enthuse us with her passion, having been introduced to other galanthophiles in 1998. These are some of the observations she made about snowdrops:

“I am a Winter child from a farming background in Shropshire and enjoyed cottage gardens full of clumped clusters of snowdrops straying into every uncultivated corner. Entering churchyards, becoming enthralled, awe-inspired and spiritually uplifted by the spectacle of multitudes of this most loved winter flower. Wandering through woods and dells, whose leafy floors were carpeted in wondrous pristine white.”

Her enthusiasm is infectious; she gave each of us some snowdrops to plant in our own gardens, and maybe inspired a few more people to become galanthophiles.



She then provided a ‘light lunch’ with her usual flair and generosity. By this time the sun was showing itself and we were off to visit Eileen’s friends Jean and Bill Snelson in Bobbington. They are retired farmers, and Jean has designed the most wonderful winter

garden, which she showed us around, providing many gardening tips. Jean and Bill are a delightful couple who very kindly provided refreshments despite being in the midst of a flooding crisis – the water was being pumped out of their house when we arrived! Many thanks to Eileen for a memorable day.  
Jeanette Black

### **Black Country Time Machine’**

On Thursday 14th March the **Science and Technology Group** organised an excellent talk given by Christopher Broughton (aka Dr Fossil) at the Wolverhampton Art Gallery.

Those who attended were whisked back in time to the ‘big bang’ and creation of the universe at the start of an amazing Black Country journey through the Silurian, Carboniferous and Jurassic periods, the ages of tropical seas, crinoids, horsetails, giant dragonflies and dinosaurs. We stopped along the way to visit deserts, mammoths, early hominids, and homo sapiens of the stone and ice ages before finally arriving back at present day Dudley. Here at Wren’s Nest fossils are still being found, the oldest 430 million years old. To supplement his first-rate talk, slides and film footage, Chris had put out an amazing display of fossils from a collection of over 10,000 donated to the people of Wolverhampton in 1911 by Dr Fraser and now in the archives of the Art Gallery. These can be viewed by special arrangement.



Di Tordoff

The aims of the Group are to introduce topics to all interested members (i.e. not just scientists, engineers etc). We critically discuss all presented topics and allow their examination in more depth. Examples so far have been: Newton to Hawking; Genetic Modification; Ancient Greek Science; Science in Art; and for the future: Climate Change.  
John Rose

The **Meditation Group** has had a successful start. We have been meeting three times a month for six months; the average attendance is five. Each week we have theory, discussion and 30 minutes of meditation, and members seem to have gained a lot from their practice. New members are always welcome.  
Michael Clement

The **Part-singing Group** is flourishing with a varied repertoire of madrigals, folksongs, American spirituals and other sacred music. We have five members and will welcome some extra voices, especially soprano, tenor and bass – but if you are a contralto you are still welcome to come and join us!

Pat Coates

The **Philosophy Group** started in September and meets on the second Monday in the month. We have had seven meetings; one was cancelled because of snow. There are eight members and we have averaged between five and six at each meeting. We've discussed Free Will, Ethics, Identity, Persons and Political Theory from Hobbs to Marx. A second group was started in April with five members and we hope to meet on the first Wednesday of the month, to discuss Citizenship and Multiculturalism.

Tim McNamara

The newly reformed **Luncheon Club** has made a very good start with many members enjoying good food and company. The next venue is the Academy Restaurant, at the Metro College campus in Wolverhampton, on 7th June at 12:15. If you are not on the mailing list and do not make it to monthly meetings and are interested in knowing more, please contact Linda Briscoe on 01902 700151, mobile 07747 126008, or email [kbriscoe@btinternet.com](mailto:kbriscoe@btinternet.com). I will rebook some of the more popular venues to enable as many people to come along who were unable to join us the first time around. I look forward to hearing from you if you need any more information. Linda Briscoe

### ***In numbers:***

Wolverhampton U3A was set up **17** years ago - in March 1996.

We have **213** members – and counting...

There are **25** interest groups, four of which have two sections – again more in the pipeline...

The Reading Group has read and discussed **65** books in six years

.The Opera Group has heard and studied **33** operas over the past 7 years.

***...more statistics welcomed!***

### ***A reminder...***

...that we are Friends of Kingswood Nursery Infant Centre ( [www.discover-kingswood.org.uk](http://www.discover-kingswood.org.uk) ) and are welcome to attend their full committee meetings, the next one being on Wednesday 5th June, from 4:30-6pm. Friends are always welcome to come to events, offer ideas and support, to attend volunteer days to help with resources and activities, and to communicate to others the Centre's ongoing work and developments.

### **Summer Outing Advance Notice**

Date: Tuesday, 27<sup>th</sup> August

Venues: Little Moreton Hall (NT) and Biddulph Grange Garden (NT)

Free entrance for NT members. Joint ticket £13 for non-members.

Coach travel from Bantock Park main entrance at 9.15 a.m. Cost £15 per head. Return journey leaving gardens at around 5 p.m.

Little Moreton Hall is a moated half-timbered manor house, the earliest parts being built about 1504 to 1508 and the remainder in stages by successive generations of the Moreton family until about 1610.

Biddulph Grange Gardens A delightful Victorian garden and an extraordinary survival from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, created by James Bateman for his collection of plants from around the world. A visit takes you on a global journey from Italy to the pyramids of Egypt. A Victorian vision of China and a re-creation of a Himalayan Glen In the Geological Gallery, see how Bateman reconciled geology and theology.

Contact Ann Eales Tel: 01902 563281

e-mail: [ann.eales@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:ann.eales@blueyonder.co.uk)

### ***FOR YOUR DIARY***

Our AGM is on Tuesday 24 September (see accompanying information sheet)

### ***CAN YOU HELP?***

Do you do copperplate writing? If yes and would be willing to fill in some certificates for me, can you contact Linda Briscoe on 01902700151?

*Margaret Taylor 01902 341528*

*[mag@copthorneroad.plus.com](mailto:mag@copthorneroad.plus.com)*

*(with a lot of help from Christine and Peter!)*