

Dear Members

We are well into our winter now so staying warm seems to be our priority. However, I hope you are still getting together with friends and family and also enjoying our u3a Speakers and Interest Groups.

My autumn holiday plans to meet up with friends and to go somewhere solo again, did not come to fruition so I made use of the time getting a bit fitter and reading many books by authors unknown to me. A good mental exercise to take me out of my reading "comfort zone" of following just the genres I usually choose!

I missed out on booking a place on one of the theatre trips but I know many of you will have enjoyed both the garden visits and theatre. Membership is steadily increasing and we have a few more groups getting established; I have joined Dining Group 3 and welcome the recently established Improvisation and Writing for Fun groups. But more is better, so all offers and suggestions for new groups are welcome.

Our AGM is fast approaching and, as you will have read from our notifications, we are in need of committee members to help run **your u3a** - specifically the Secretary and Treasurer posts. I would appreciate a Vice Chair to share the load ( the post being vacant this last year). We are also in need of a Lecture Organiser and we would love to have an Educational Visits Organiser to swell the opportunities for more trips out and about.

Please consider putting yourself forward - any post can be a shared and support will be offered.

I will be glad to welcome in the Spring and my favourite flowers. Good health everyone!

Liz (Chair)

## Classic Femme

For the last open meeting of the year the audience of 152 members were entertained by Gill, Jo, Katie and Polly, collectively known as Classic Femme.

This cappella quartet provided an hour of well known songs to their own arrangements, covering film, musicals and the charts from the thirties to the present day.

After everyone had been encouraged to join in with the last song - *I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas* - there was time to socialise over mince pies, sausage rolls and a warm drink provided by the committee



## Monthly Lectures

10.00am at New Green Centre  
Refreshments served until 9.45

### Monday 3 March

AGM followed by:

The History of Bury St Edmunds Abbey

Dr Francis Young

### Monday 7 April

Medical Detection Dogs

Norma Howell

### Tuesday 6 May

Photographing Big Cats around the  
Globe

Barbara Meyer

### Monday 2 June

Peregrine Falcons in Suffolk

Peter Merchant

### Monday 7 July

Terry Wogan's Hair Weave

Graham Keal

## A Tour Manager's Tale

For October's talk Graham Dossett regaled the 135 members who attended with tales of his life as a Tour Guide. On his retirement Graham took up the part time job of a tour guide, travelling all over the World, accompanying groups of tourists on their chosen holiday, ensuing everything ran smoothly and they had an enjoyable holiday. With the emphasis of the talk being the trials, tribulations, fun and enjoyment of one tour manager and his talk could be summarised by the statement 'what could possibly go wrong?'

Graham then continued to enlighten us with the many things that could go wrong, including passengers that left phones in the previous hotel's room safe, a guest inadvertently packing the bed overlay from the previous hotel into their suitcase, a passenger tipping scolding hot coffee over their arm, guests getting stuck in a department store's toilet.

He then proceeded to tell us about the trip he entitled 'the tour from hell', which should have been a straight forward tour as far as he was concerned.

This involved him guiding a group from the UK via the French railway system to Lyon, where they would board a river cruise, at which point the staff of the river boat would then be responsible. Some of his issues, included a passenger nearly missing the Eurostar train, seriously ill passengers on the way there and on the way back, a pile up of his guests at the bottom of an escalator in Lyon station. Things did not get any better after boarding the boat in Lyon where, due to the high water level, plans had to be changed, resulting with them getting stuck in Avignon for most of the week and then requiring them to undertake a long coach journey back to Lyon where they were due to catch the train back to Paris, which they subsequently missed. Anything that could go wrong seemed to have gone wrong.

Graham told many more tales and could have carried on for much longer keeping his audience entertained.

*Paul Taylor*

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## The Changing Face of Retail in Bury St Edmunds



At the November meeting 135 members plus three guests were treated to a thoroughly entertaining talk by Stephen Murray, one of the Bury Town Guides. We were entertained by a history of shopping in Bury St Edmunds and were reminded of the names of long gone local and national name stores.

Many of us remembered the Christmas present of tea and sugar given every year to the local pensioners by Glasswells Furniture Store from their St Andrews Street premises. I hasten to add that nobody was prepared to admit that they had received that present!

We were reminded of the cattle market but not many realised that cattle arrived by train and were driven up St John's Street and on one occasion a cow

escaped and galloped into the town centre sending people into the Woolworth shop in a state of panic. The now closed Woolworths Store was in the top twenty of the company's stores.

In the Marks & Spencer store market day was referred to as "Big Knickers Day" when all of the small sizes in ladies underwear were removed from display and replaced by larger sizes to meet the needs of the day's clients. I make no comment!

Stephen explained that the large number of shoe shops in the town were all trading with different names although they were, in fact, members of one national chain.

Bury St Edmunds is a popular town for businesses to open branches with only 6% of business premises currently unoccupied compared with 9.6% in East Anglia and 13.9% nationally. Companies are prepared to wait for specific locations to become available.

As I left the meeting I had a feeling of pride that I live close to this lovely town and I am sure that many others felt the same. Bury St Edmunds is a popular town with many attractions and a long history of shopping facilities that have continued to develop to meet the needs of the population. Stephen Murray gave an excellent talk which left me feeling confident that the town will continue to thrive.

*Laurie Marshall*

## The Great Train Robbery – Heroes or Villains

For the January lecture, John Saunders, a retired detective, gave his account of The Great Train Robbery, the most audacious crime of the swinging sixties. The criminals involved have almost achieved the legendary status of Robin Hood.

The crime was carried out by 15 known criminals from South West London and the South Coast. It was well planned and was believed to have involved an insider from the banks or post office who had information about the transfer of large quantities of cash by train down the west coast line. This person is referred to as the “Ulsterman” but has never been identified. A solicitor’s clerk acted as the go-between and facilitated the planning meetings, each member receiving an equal share of the proceeds.

The original plan was for the Monday morning but because of the Bank Holiday more money would be carried the next day so the raid was



postponed to the Tuesday. The information was that the amount of money carried was in the region of £300,000, still a considerable sum at that time and about £7 million in today’s money.

Having stopped the train and using force to make the driver move it up to the bridge they quickly loaded their vehicles with about £2.6 million pounds and transferred to their hideout at Leatherslade Farm, where the money was divided up, intending to stay there until the hunt died down. There was suspicion that the hideout

would be discovered so they left early without fully removing all the evidence, but thought they had arranged for the house to be torched. This was not done and because of local suspicion the police found it fairly easily, including the board that they had used to play monopoly using real money. With the fingerprints found, the members of the gang were soon identified, arrested and charged.

Of the £2.6 million only about £400,000 was recovered but the criminals spent a lot of the money either avoiding capture, on their defence lawyers or funding their lifestyle after their escapes from prison.

Anyone wishing to find out full details of the perpetrators and their history can find a plethora of information on line or in various books.

Mary Dunbavin

## A walk in Wyverstone and Westhorpe with some history thrown in



On a sunny October day members of the Friday Longer Walks group set out to explore parts of Wyverstone and Westhorpe with a small incursion into Finningham.

Wyverstone is a small Suffolk parish, about 7 miles north of Stowmarket and is approximately 1,558 acres in size with a population of 380. Its name is said to derive from Wigfrith’s Homestead.

The group left Wyverstone village hall car park passing the 14th. century church dedicated to St George then headed north to go through Park Farm, once thought to be a deer park and where Neolithic flints were found indicating occupation from 4300bc to 2000bc.

After crossing a stream the walkers entered Westhorpe. This parish is around 1300 acres with about 220 persons living there. The name Westhorpe is derived from “Outlying Farm” which belies its importance as the home of a Queen of France and sister of Henry VIII, Mary, who moved to Westhorpe after marrying her childhood friend Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk in 1515. The King was not happy about the marriage as he had other plans for Mary and fined the Duke a substantial sum for his treasonous act. The Duke had enough money left to purchase the Westhorpe estate and built a moated house called Westhorpe Hall. The group visited St Margaret’s Church where Mary worshipped until her death in 1533. The 14th. century church has many interesting features and is very much worth a visit.

The walkers left the church to traverse the footpaths on the north side of the parish going by Westhorpe Lodge Farm and briefly in to Finningham parish before turning south back to Westhorpe. The group passed the site of Westhorpe Hall, Mary and the Dukes original house, which was demolished in the 1760’s and replaced by a Georgian building although the Tudor bridge over the moat remains. After crossing the Street the group returned to Wyverstone.

In all a delightful 2½ hour walk in some lovely Suffolk countryside where little snippets of history were shared, some great conversations and good companionship were had on the way.

Bill Blackaby

## Thursday Walks With an Interest

2024 was a good year for our monthly walks. In contrast to 2023, not one walk had to be cancelled due to weather conditions.



Thursday walkers by the lake at Wyken Hall

Our routes were mainly through open countryside in local areas such as Wyverstone, Elmswell and Norton but with a few further afield. Our November walk was from Hartest, passing Boxted Church and Giffords Hall Vineyard along the way. It was hilly and our most strenuous of the year but the views were lovely.

A more urban walk was at Mildenhall in August. Starting in the town centre we headed out to Barton Mills on a quiet road and took a footpath along the Lark followed by a stretch by the busy A11 to the Fiveways roundabout which fortunately proved much easier to negotiate on the footpath than in a car.

Once back in town, we visited St Marys Church which is Grade 1 listed, has a lovely angel roof and is over 800 years old. We finished by visiting the Community Hub, an impressive modern building which houses leisure facilities, community services, a health centre, a library, a café and a school, all in one location. Several walkers later went on to visit the Mildenhall museum in the afternoon.

Lynda Heywood.

### Book Group

This group currently has vacancies so if you are interested, please contact Lorrie Finley, on 07778790285 or [lorrief2@icloud.com](mailto:lorrief2@icloud.com).



Autumn colour by the Flower Arranging Group

## Moulin Rouge - The Musical



Despite a delay on the way down there was still time for a bite of lunch before taking our seats in the Piccadilly Theatre to enjoy the stage adaptation of the film.

And what a brilliant show it is, cleverly put together, with a mix of original and more recent songs. The set is fantastic with no expense spared and every member of the cast oozes talent! The audience was soon captivated by its high energy so that by the end of the show, the whole theatre was buzzing.

## Art and Mixed Media Group



Members of the group held their annual exhibition in Pakenham village hall at the end of October.

There was a wide variety of subjects and styles on display and visitors were able to chat to members whilst enjoying delicious refreshments.

The group welcomes members of all standards and meets at Pakenham village hall on alternate Tuesday afternoons.

Feel free to come along or contact Barbara Westgate on [bhwestgate50@gmail.com](mailto:bhwestgate50@gmail.com)



**RHS Garden Bridgewater,  
The Heritage of Cheshire and  
The Welsh Borders,**

There are places available for members on this five day trip on July 3.

Further information is available from Gill Burgess, 07759 603119 or email [gillyeb121@outlook.com](mailto:gillyeb121@outlook.com)

Items for the Newsletter, no matter how short, are always welcome and provide a record of our U3A activities.

Copy for the next should be sent to [bryann@brysuward.plus.com](mailto:bryann@brysuward.plus.com)  
by 18 April 2025