

A TALE OF THREE TALKS – OPEN MEETINGS

APRIL, MAY & JUNE 2026

Our open meeting speaker on Tuesday 14th April was Dr Gillian White who took us into the intriguing life and times of 'John Churchill, 1st Duke of Marlborough'. You know what you're in for with Dr Gillian; she is an expert in the history and visual arts of late medieval and sixteenth-century England and her well-chosen illustrations enrich her presentations. She began her career at the Warwickshire Museum, later served as Curator and Collections Manager at Hardwick Hall in Derbyshire, and currently teaches part-time at Leicester and Oxford Universities. Knowledge, clarity, scholarship, all spiced with tantalising snippets of domestic intrigue and sexual wickedness in the households of the powerful; no undergraduate would dare to doze off in one of Dr White's lectures! I initially encountered her during Lockdown; indeed, I recall her being one of our first speakers of that time who efficiently addressed us via the new-fangled Zoom thingy. Sharing her lecture from our dining room, observing fellow u3a members on screen via their screens in their sitting rooms, kitchens, garages, while my husband strove to run the meeting from our study, had a strangely comforting quality at such a very weird time. Here was a woman who knew her stuff, understood how to engage her audience and was ready for whatever developing technologies might throw at her. All continues to be well when Dr Gillian is in charge. Her commanding delivery makes it perfectly clear that even John Churchill, eventual Duke of Marlborough and master of Blenheim Palace, would have bowed before her - and he certainly wouldn't have tried the "Dog ate my homework" excuse if his essay wasn't submitted on time.

Born in 1650, John Churchill, one of eleven (!) children was, as GW put it, "A national hero but not a plaster saint", fitting well with our modern desire to explore flawed characters. With the restoration of the monarchy, and benefitting from his sister's position as the mistress of the Duke of York (the future James II), John rose through the Guards, along the way establishing a 21-year affair with Barbara Villiers, Duchess of Cleveland. Women figure significantly in Churchill's story - a sister, a lover, a wife and a queen – he was well-connected and supported, important at such a turbulent time. Saving Charles II's illegitimate son in battle did his reputation no harm, secretly marrying Sarah Jennings who

was a close childhood friend of the young Princess Anne certainly helped his ascent, and being a rather fine military tactician, all enabled his rise. Ironically, having rescued the young James Scott, Churchill jointly led the victorious government troops in the Battle of Sedgemoor (1685) and oversaw his beheading. Such nuggets always enrich Dr Gillian's talks. Churchill trod a careful route through the rapidly changing monarchies of the latter part of the 17th century, explaining to James II that his defection to William of Orange, with 400 troops, was "Actuated by a higher principle". Even so, King William distrusted Charles as a loyalist but was very confident in his military and diplomatic talents which saw him commanding the joint English, Dutch and Austrian forces against France in what came to be known as the War of the Spanish Succession. (Other listeners may also have had memories of A Level History stirred at this point.) Ennobled as Duke of Marlborough by the newly crowned Queen Anne, Churchill's audacious strategies in ignoring the dithering allies, by marching troops 250 miles at speed to Maastricht to secure the Danube crossing, brought about the overwhelming toppling of the French Grand Army at the Battle of Blenheim - their first defeat in over 40 years. Further royal rewards ensued (Blenheim Palace, anyone?) but despite achieving more significant military victories, after a smear campaign, accused by the Commons of misappropriation of public money, Churchill went into voluntary exile in Europe in 1712.

His wife's influence over Queen Anne and the support of fellow Tory colleagues had bolstered his power base but with the Whigs' political predominance, he took no further part in public life. Although restored to favour under George I, Churchill was already a sick man and lived in retirement until his death in 1722. Sadly, he didn't see his great royal reward, Blenheim Palace, completed but visitors continue to flock there – perhaps attracted also by its being the birthplace of his 6th great grandson, Sir Winston Churchill? John Churchill successfully navigated the torrid world of late Stuart politics, achieved huge success for his country on the battlefield and was then toppled as the political sands shifted.

Nevertheless, Dr Gillian White comprehensively presented a vivid portrait of an intriguing man of his time, a brilliant military tactician who was a person of conscience and honour, loyal to his faith, but also a gambler who risked charm, fortune, family - even his wife's support; his was a far more modern ending than mere battle honours.

At the appointed time, tea was served and we relaxed, secure that, yet

again, Dr Gillian had enabled our learning, thus fulfilling an important u3a guiding principle. We look forward to her next visit.

In contrast, our speaker on **12th May, Alan Rogers MBE**, now retired from a long career with the Warwickshire Police Service, chatted without any notes, promising to share anecdotes and insider gossip from his varied experiences on the beat, on the road, working with the Royals and his experiences in India with the BBC.

Alan began by “Playing the policeman’s game” of checking the room for familiar faces. This was cue for some uneasy shifting in our seats which was even more pronounced when Alan told us that he had devised the Warwickshire Speed Awareness course. After checking how many of us had endured such a torment, he admitted his own two speeding offences and then humorously explained what goes through an officer’s mind when handling a detection gun. Maintaining a slender figure enables an officer to hide in trees, though capturing the Chair of the Parish Council who had specifically invited the force to carry out speed checks was an occasion for embarrassment on both sides. We gleaned that Warwickshire plays to the rules and positions its speed cameras just before notorious blackspots, thus slowing traffic, whereas Northamptonshire has cameras on virtually all its roads. After amusingly illustrating the use of an officer’s discretion, Alan lamented that young constables were rather losing the art of talking to the public.

Seemingly, Alan had been long destined for a Police career, guided by parents who were keen for him to have a reserved occupation, and hugely influenced by “Z Cars”. His experiences as a cadet, in subsequent training, and as a youngster in Glasgow’s Maryhill district provided plenty of rich material as did his encounter with Helen, the force tailor in Leamington Spa in a bawdy set-up with which Sergeant Bill, his mentor had undoubtedly tricked other rookies. He, and we, enjoyed this tale of gauche horror and this listener reflected that Alan was a man one might meet at dinner on a cruise ship, an affable person whose tales could cover 5 courses every night for a fortnight. Our meetings don’t last quite that long and it was clear at the end of an hour, that Alan had barely scratched the surface of his mine of tales.

He was granted another 10 minutes but listeners were clearly restive for their tea or needing to leave for other engagements. His reservoir of tales to be told is clearly considerable and his stories were entertaining; I

particularly enjoyed the one about searching through “Moriarty’s Police Law” to find an offence with which to charge a group of teenagers who were creating havoc as they delightedly, and continually, pressed the buttons of a “new-fangled Pelican Crossing”. “Abstraction of Electricity” fitted the bill perfectly and though this threatened a 5-year sentence, a Conditional Discharge was the eventual decision. Beaten by the clock, Alan slammed on the brakes with the hint of “more to come”. We hadn’t got far along his journey with the Warwickshire Constabulary, the advertised Royals never featured and neither did what could have been a particularly fascinating aspect of his career - road casualty prevention work with the Indian government and a subsequent television programme highlighting its significance. My subsequent internet trawl heightened my frustrations as a listener. THIS explained the MBE! We were left with rather too many gaps in his intriguing life, and our sense that speaking without notes can make listeners a little uneasy, especially where much of interest lies so close to the surface.

On **Tuesday, 9th June** we gathered in the Tithe Barn to hear our speaker, novelist **Colin Wade**. A neat arrangement of crisp new paperbacks displayed at the front of the stage immediately attracted audience attention as we were told that Colin would be exploring the fascinating life of Agatha Christie and how she inspired his own crime writing. This guaranteed us two for the price of one, a concise and well documented look at the great crime novelist’s life, and some peeps into Colin’s own challenges and rewards since he began his writing career.

His presentation on Dame Agatha was timely, as this year marks the 50th anniversary of her death, but her influence and world-wide reach remain undiminished. 66 detective novels, 14 short story collections, numerous plays, with her biggest seller *And Then There Were None* selling over 2 billion copies! No wonder, as Colin asserted, all crime writers, perhaps inadvertently, use her techniques; “Whodunnit?” being central; the locked room mystery; a remote or cut-off location; a good sweep of diverse characters; the clever outsider (often the detective); reusing characters - Hercule Poirot, Inspector Hastings, Miss Marple, Ariadne Oliver, Tommy and Tuppence, all reappear in her novels, some very much establishing their own sub genre. “Agatha tricks” were illuminated, for example her concluding expositions of the crime, naming the perpetrator and how they did it. These scenes are enriched by Christie’s wealth of characters, despite

writers often being urged to keep to a small palette of individuals. Colin was intrigued by the fact that neither the butler nor any of the lower-class characters ever commit the dastardly deed, and he delighted in Christie's "scattering of breadcrumbs"- both clues and misdirections - throughout her work, and reminded us that her love of the locked room challenge and the detective's final exposition is a feature of BBC1's popular *Death in Paradise*. We were taken deftly through Christie's fascinating life, beginning with her very comfortable middle-class Devon childhood, her passion for Conan Doyle. Her sister's challenge to write led to her creation at the age of 15 of *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (not published until 1920 when she was 30). Colin's narrative included Christie's passion for poison being soundly based in the grim reality of working as an assistant pharmacist in both World Wars; how, at the height of her first marriage's unhappiness, she staged her own dramatic disappearance; the manner in which her world travels with her second husband, archaeologist and academic Max Mallowan, fed into her novels - *Murder on the Orient Express*, *Death on the Nile*, *Murder in Mesopotamia* and how her holiday home in South Devon and the coastline around the River Dart provided the settings for *Evil Under the Sun* and *Then There Were None*. Despite her worldwide fame, Christie lived a relatively modest life in Wallingford for 42 years but Colin had no doubt that her accolade "The Queen of Crime" was utterly deserved.

Very recently, some members present had attended the *Cotswold Link Special Interest Day* when Colin Wade had been one of the speakers, "Oh, we enjoyed him", I was told by my neighbour in the Tithe Barn, and this proved true as Colin interwove his own writing journey into his account of Dame Agatha's life. Since retiring from working as a civilian with Thames Valley Police (very useful background for a crime writer), he has self-published 7 murder mystery novels, each volume a "stand alone", incorporating touches of numerous crime genres - dark, cosy, psychological, corruption/conspiracy thrillers, crime capers, as he strives to create a "classic" whodunnit. Like Christie, who admitted that meeting Belgian refugees in World War II had influenced the character and mannerisms of Hercule Poirot, Colin said that it was inevitable that personal traits of people you know enter your novels (for him, it's police officers). He spoke of the graft which underpinned the craft as he shaped fast-paced, gripping stories; of how he tried to be disciplined to write during the day, not at night; of the courage it took to "put yourself out there" and be subject to others' criticisms. His axiom, "Just get on with the story and make it interesting"

seems effective as it was clear that Colin thoroughly enjoys his work, loving the rewards of research and writing, especially the feedback from readers. His “alpha readers” are his daughter, son in law, sister and mother and a professional critical editor. Curiously, his wife hasn’t read any of his work! The business of self-publishing is demanding, especially as big chains aren’t interested in stocking independent authors; sales are mostly made on-line and in independent bookshops (like *The Cleeve Bookshop*) which will stock independent authors but 75% of his sales were made through face-to-face contacts - book fairs and talks being vital. Of particular interest were Colin’s views on the best length for a novel; the modern advice is 70-90,000 words but many of the volumes published in the 1930’s (the *Golden Age of Crime*) hovered around 60,000 words. Appropriately, his soon to be published *Murder at the Book Club* will be just that - “60,00 is a good length for a book club read!” he declared. Given the subsequent queue at Colin’s front of the hall bookstall, I wouldn’t be surprised if more than one of our numerous u3a book groups will be interested in this forthcoming publication - we certainly did our best to reduce the weight of current volumes that he took away. Unlike Dame Agatha, Colin Wade is not crime writing royalty, but he certainly relishes his craft and provided us with an intriguing peek into two writer’s worlds and works.

Maureen Hazell

Congratulations to Sue Weir-Cracknell who won the Volunteer Award 2026 in the Gloucestershire Lifestyle and Community Awards!

Sue Weir-Cracknell has been a valued volunteer at Sue Ryder, Leckhampton Court Hospice for ten years. Sue supports patients in the community hub, helps with fundraising events throughout the year, hosts coffee mornings and has looked after reception on Christmas Day for eight years in a row.

At the Street Fair

Would the man who asked me about a German group please contact either the group leader or myself, if you have not already done so. Unfortunately I did not take his name but I know he has been a member for two years. Val Hayward 07850375641

Cotswold Link Special Interest Day

On the 2nd June, several members of Bishops Cleeve u3a attended the special Interest day in Cheltenham organised by Cotswold Link. The theme of our talks was *"From pen to reader"*

The day started with tea or coffee for all before we were asked to take our seats to hear the first speaker, Sue Ablett, tell us what it was like to run a Literary Festival. Entitled "Bums on Seats" the talk led us through the trials and tribulations suffered, while unfortunately, the audience suffered from feedback from the sound system. Thank goodness this seemed to have been put right when the second speaker, Jacqui Rogers gave us some insight into researching Roman Britain for her series of historical thrillers. Many of you will have noticed the many pages at the rear of a book giving thanks to their research sources.

Lunch was then served which gave everyone the chance to compare notes and to mix with other u3a members.

In the afternoon we were treated to a talk from Colin Wade on the joys and perils of being an author. It seems it is not easy to get published once the book is written but Colin had found ways and means of promoting his books. Colin was booked to speak at our next Open meeting which was one of the ways he had found to get round this problem. It seems you have to get out there if you hope to sell your books to the public. Our final speaker was an actual publisher, Gareth Swain, who runs a publishing company specialising in historical books. He very generously gave each of us one of their books to take home with us. We did also have a bonus section when members of Churchdown u3a told us how they had managed to get several of their books published using Amazon. They are to be commended for their determination.

I came away thinking it was easier to get a factual book published rather than a fictional one... unless you are famous of course.

Val Hayward



Holiday to Ayrshire

We have a few vacancies for this u3a holiday if you are interested. The dates are 27th September to 1st October and the cost is £660 with a £60 single supplement. All rooms are doubles, half board and there are three days of trips out. The full details are on our website or you can contact me, Val Hayward 07850375641 for a brochure.

The Adventures of Clovis and Vi ...Clovis succumbs to temptation... by GLF



Open Meetings

We meet at 2:30 pm on the 2nd Tuesday of each month at the Tithe Barn, Bishop's Cleeve. Free refreshments follow the talk. Prospective u3a members may attend one meeting before joining.

Upcoming talks:

14th July: "Russia - Ukraine: Two sides to a story - a historical approach"
George Ellis

11th August: CREAM TEA

8th September: "Cheltenham's Remarkable Buildings"
David Elder

We collect birthday, anniversary, new home, get well, and sympathy cards (no Christmas cards) for Cobalt to recycle. These efforts help fund diagnostic equipment, research, and specialist nurses.

Learn more at www.cobalthhealth.co.uk

A very big '**THANK YOU**' to everyone attending any of our Open Meetings and continuing to bring your various cards (but not Christmas cards) for the Cobalt Unit here in Cheltenham, and of course our special thanks to our member Janet Cayzer who then takes them to the charity on our behalf.

Due to the cost of postage these days, sadly none of us probably receive as much Royal Mail as in the past. However, did you know that even those few postage stamps that come our way can help one of our local children's charities, The James Hopkins Trust? So, please don't throw away those envelopes - bring them along with you to an Open Meeting - remember, every little helps! However, if for any reason you can't or aren't able to attend Open Meetings on a regular basis, please contact Joan Hall (01242 68057) or Viv Paxford (07517 680909) - leaving a message if there's no reply.

We would like to welcome the following new members:

Rhuna Winstanley
Jennnifer Wood
Patricia Tuckfield
Sue Hazeldine

Richard Pashley
Jean Dorroh
Brian Tuckfield
Neil Pyrce-Jones

Bridget
Membership Secretary

AbilityNet

AbilityNet offer free technical support to anyone over 55 and are happy to support the u3a movement. They provide seminars and courses but will also visit people in their homes.

AbilityNet's friendly technology volunteers provide free IT (information technology) support to older people and disabled people of any age, anywhere in the UK.

Every volunteer is disclosure-checked and can help with all sorts of IT challenges, from setting up new equipment, fixing technical issues, showing you how to stay connected to family, using online services and much more.

Contact details

Website : AbilityNet.org.uk

IT Helpline for over 55s: **0300 180 0028**, 9-5pm, Monday to Friday – solves technical issues and IT queries.

Please note: Calls to this helpline number cost no more than a national rate call to a 01 or 02 number and count towards any inclusive minutes in the same way as 01 and 02 calls, and AbilityNet does not receive any money from these calls.

Photographs are taken at Bishop's Cleeve u3a activities for use on our website and other publicity.

At general u3a events such as Open Days, Open Meetings, visits, celebrations etc, you should tell the photographer or organiser if you do not wish to be included and move away whilst photographs are being taken.

Tell the Beacon Administrator and Group Leader if you do not wish to be included in your group's photographs.

Badges at Open Meetings

The 'New Member' badges available when you enter our Open Meetings are not only for those attending for the first time, but also for anyone fairly new who doesn't yet know many people or much about us and would be happy for people to talk to them.

Groups News

Groups Co-ordinator **Richard Gaul 0300 102 4559 Option 4**

Please note that a group having a waiting list does not necessarily mean that there are other people on the waiting list, please contact the group leader or group co-ordinator for more details.

[Art Appreciation](#) Waiting list

Paul Workman 07816470267

The scope of Art Appreciation is exceptionally wide, so that each month our talks can veer from one end of the spectrum to the other. In April, Suzanne Greenhill delivered an enlightening discourse about the 17th Century Italian painter Artemisia Gentileschi. Considered among the most accomplished artists of the era, she was one of the very first female artists to attain fame and recognition in her lifetime. Some of her paintings can be quite challenging in subject matter, partly reflecting a sometimes brutal early life but some can also be quite beautiful.

In May, skipping across time, we arrived in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries for Stella Carney's talk on the Post Impressionist painter Pierre Bonnard, known for his boldly coloured paintings and complex compositions. He had a fondness for depicting intimate domestic scenes, many featuring his wife, either nude or engaged in everyday activities. An obsession of his was the attempt to capture light. Unfortunately our session met with a few technical difficulties after the tea break but Sally Ferrers came to the rescue with an impromptu solution.

June's talk was given by Paul Workman on the subject of Medieval Tapestry and in particular the series of six hangings depicting the Lady and the Unicorn. The image of the Lady and the Unicorn tapestry, often found in reproduction, has become a bit of a visual cliché but as Paul explained, the series has thrown up a number of questions regarding possible meanings. Entrepreneurship is nothing new as we found out - in the 15th Century the Duke of Burgundy, who controlled many of the tapestry workshops, gifted tapestries to eminent people across Europe in the hope that they would in turn purchase more from his looms!

[Art Appreciation 2](#) Waiting list

Heather Ridgway 07407 787615

We are a small enthusiastic group enjoying presentations, videos, and shared pieces of art. The artists we have focussed on have been David Hockney, John Russell and Lorenzo di Bicci. St Nicholas Banishing the Storm by di Bicci was very new to us and we enjoyed speculating and interpreting before finding out the real meaning. We loved the piece of art that Debbie had created in response to the painting, don't think we will forget the snake with Putin's head!

Our discussions are wide and ranging. At our next meeting we are each selecting a female artist to introduce to the group. I think we are doing amazingly well since we began a few months ago and thinking that our knowledge was poor.

[Arts and Crafts 1](#) Waiting list

Pamela Levermore 01242 678276

We have a full group with no one on the waiting list.

In April and May Vanessa introduced us to Diamond Art. This involved using a special tool to pick up small beads and transferring them to their numbered places on the diagram, in our case we made coasters. The technique required a degree of concentration and I had never heard the



group so quiet! In June we began to decorate a glass plate using rice paper and a reverse decoupage technique (Front cover photo). After watching a You tube video we stuck the paper to the reverse of the plate. In July we will paint the reverse of the dish and decorate the edges with gold wax.

[Book Circle 1](#) Waiting list

Sue Silverthorne 07740 289795

Again, two very contrasting books. The choice for May was The Examiner by Janice Hallett. Well, this was a 'marmite' of a book. Opinions were sharply divided because of the writing format - conventual text versus digital. It depends how comfortable one is with reading modern methods of communicating or more traditional. There was however plenty to talk about in this murder mystery with its red herrings, twists & turns. Could we have solved it?

June's book was on more comfortable territory with Precipice by Robert

Harris. This is a historical novel based on the love affair between H H Asquith, Prime Minister at the start of WW1, and Venetia Stanley. He was obsessed, writing to her daily, sharing state secrets, asking for her opinion, and striving to see her as often as possible. It's a book weaving together fact and fiction. His notes and letters to her had survived and Robert Harris quotes them. Hers to him were destroyed and Robert Harris used his imagination to recreate them. To us, it seemed almost unbelievable that such behaviour by a Prime Minister could be known about and condoned – but we could also see a relevance to behaviour by 'the great and the good' now

[Book Circle 2](#) Waiting list

Stella Caney 01242 676143

In April we read *The House of Fortune* by Jessie Burton. This was a sequel to *The Miniaturist* which we had read a few years back, and examined the fortunes of the family a generation later. The book brought out the life of Amsterdam society and how important it was for girls to marry a wealthy man! We generally enjoyed the book, although one or two loose ends remained untied.

May's book was *The Echo of Old Books* by Barbara Davis. This was about a dealer in rare books, who could detect "echoes" from the volumes as she read them. She comes across a pair of books which seem to complement each other, but written by two different people and with no other details. She was keen to find out more, and followed up all possible leads. Persistence paid off, and the characters/authors were tracked down to produce a satisfactory ending!

In June we read *Her Sweet Revenge* by Sarah Bonner. This was a fast-moving thriller with many twists and turns, and could be (intentionally) confusing at times. There were mixed views about the book, but it was certainly a clever plot.

[Cinema](#) Spaces

Ann King 01242 698497 **Mary Moore** 07980 685655

It is a great privilege to have access to world class ballet, opera and theatre via live streaming services at local cinemas and several members of the Cinema Group have recently taken advantage of this opportunity. "Frida Kahlo on Screen" was a fascinating portrayal of this iconic artist and her extraordinary work. Having enjoyed every minute a couple of us now plan a

visit to her forthcoming exhibition at Tate Modern.

On the other hand, The National Theatre Live production of the classic play “The Playboy of the Western World” was disappointing, mainly because we found the old Irish dialogue almost impossible to understand and the touches of magical realism confusing. Consequently we felt that, despite excellent acting, the important themes of guilt, forgiveness and the role of women living in rural poverty were jettisoned.

On the more conventional film circuit there were divided views about “Midwinter Break” with comments ranging from “a sensitive portrayal of a long marriage with all its complexities” to “boring” and “long winded”. However we all agreed that the atmosphere and beauty of Amsterdam where the film, was shot were well captured.

The hot weather meant that a couple of trips to the Cinema were cancelled but “Rebuilding” a slow moving beautifully crafted film was well worth venturing out for. The thought provoking story of a rancher (brilliantly played by Josh O’Connor) trying to rebuild his life after a wildfire that destroyed everything raised questions about how people recover from the devastation of fire, flood, war and even extreme heat.

As always, we welcome new members.

[French Conversation 2](#) Waiting list

Eileen Hardwood 07479356209

We are a small group of people who meet in each others houses twice a month to improve our French. We have a different topic each time and ask questions in French to increase our understanding of the French language and culture. We sometimes watch films in French.

We currently have no vacancies for our group.

[Gardening](#) Waiting list

Janet Davis 01242 674068

Hello all

A very mixed month weather wise- but the gardens are all flourishing and are flowering well - particularly the roses which have been splendid. Plenty of activity for us with cutting back lots of overgrowth and the inevitable weeds.

We have been treated to an excellent illustrated talk given by Sally Ferrers. It was entitled “A History of the Garden as Paradise“. Dating well BC to 19th century, if you spot it being repeated treat yourself!

Hopefully we shall enjoy some steady summer weather soon though not too hot.

Enjoy!

Happy gardening. Janet

German Chat Spaces

Chris O'Connor 07547 924216

This group is open to new members. Maximum is 6. We currently have 3, plus the leader. A possible new member is having a taster session in June so there is room for 2 more.

It is not a beginners' group. I would recommend O or A level or equivalent, maybe evening classes? We aren't sticklers for accuracy, but you do need some background in the language. Relaxed atmosphere. The Quiet Room in St Michael's Centre is an ideal location with no noisy distractions.

German Conversation Spaces

Carol Harris 01242 602872

There has been a small group for people who want to keep up their German for many years – and now two exist. The original group now meets on 1st and 3rd Mondays in the Royal Oak in Bishops Cleeve, 10-12. You do need some German – although we learn at least more vocabulary and grammar – a couple have lived in Germany. We try both conversation and reading texts. I have a few film DVDs and books. We don't want to be too big but we can welcome new members.

Contact Carol Harris 07971886062 – or just come.

Local History Spaces

Barbara Day 07484 878976 **Brian Paterson** 01242 673917

July 6 Visit to The Soldiers of Gloucester Museum, Gloucester Quays

August 3 Visit to Llanthony Secunda Priory Gloucester

Sept 7 Visit to Masonic Hall Cheltenham

Our May Meeting

The John Moore Museum is nestled in a row of historic timber-framed buildings close to the Abbey in Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire. The museum was established in 1980 in memory of the writer and naturalist, John Moore. There is a display of photographs and many of John Moore's books.

It is also home to an extensive Natural History collection featuring specimens of the mammals and bird's native to our woodlands, wetlands, gardens and farms.

A few doors away is The Merchant's House, a two-storey building which has been beautifully restored and furnished to show the construction of a 16th century shop and dwelling. The building was originally built in 1410 by the monks of Tewkesbury Abbey to generate income for the Abbey. It is one of a row of 28. There is a shop facing onto the pavement which was being used during the visit by some reenactors to display medieval clothing.



The museum has recently renovated the Old Baptist Chapel which is opposite the merchant's house down an alley. It was originally a late medieval hall house which was later converted in 1623 for use as a Nonconformist meeting house. Initially the Baptist chapel was secret to avoid persecution, but during Civil War and the Commonwealth the growth of the Baptist churches was enabled by the breakdown of the Church of England during this period. With the restoration in 1660 Baptists were persecuted and fined again.

After the passing of the Act of Toleration in 1689 Baptists could worship openly. The chapel was replaced by a new larger chapel on Barton Street in 1804 and the building was converted into 2 cottages with a smaller chapel in the centre of the old chapel. In 1978, Tewkesbury Borough Council acquired the Court and chapel and restored the building to show how it probably looked in about 1720.

Our June Meeting

Northleach

The origins of Northleach are thought to stretch back over 1,200 years. The Domesday Survey of 1086 mentions two mills at 'Leece', by which time the lands were held by the Abbey of St Peter in Gloucester.

As the wool trade began to develop in the Cotswolds, so the importance of the settlement began to grow. The town of Northleach came into existence in 1227 when Henry III granted the right of a weekly market every

Wednesday, together with the right to hold a fair on the Feast of St Peter and the two days either side.

The layout of the town dates from this period, with regularly sized 'burgage plots' facing onto the east-west road, and a triangular market place on the other side.

There must have been a church in Northleach from the time when the Market Charter was first granted and the building as we know it today is the product of various stages of expansion and development. The church was rebuilt over approx. 100 years starting in about 1390 using the wealth of the woolmen of Northleach who included Thomas and John Fortey, John Taylour, William Midwinter, Robert Serche and Thomas Busshe; their memorial brasses are all to be found in St Peter & St Paul, and together make up one of the finest collections of brasses in the country. Their generosity funded the building of the tower, the addition of aisles and chapels, and the building of the porch. John Fortey left £300 in his will to pay for raising the roof of the nave and installing the clerestory windows. The church is now grade 1 listed. There is a modern stained-glass window above the altar. The altar is large slab of stone that was buried in the floor of the church probably during the reformation and found in 1902 and restored to its proper place. A walk from the church to the mill leate went past a house converted from the last mill, past Allens Alms-houses which date from 1780. An old jetted timber building is possibly the oldest surviving house in the town and is believed to have been owned by John Fortey circa 1450. It later became an inn (the Pike then the Crown) and is now a butchers. Dutton's Alms-houses which date from 1615 were originally for women only, but men were admitted from 1820. The walk continued to the Northleach workhouse which was built in 1836 and then returned to the triangular market place.



[Luncheons](#) Spaces

Mary Moore 07970 685655 **Monica Wragg** 0777 7612613

Thursday 30th July, Thai Legend Restaurant, 62 High Street, Pershore, Worcestershire, WR10 1DU, 01386 554604.

Meditation

Joan Hall 01242 680575

No Spaces - Waiting List

Music Appreciation Possible space

Stella Caney 01242 676143

The May meeting was focused on the trumpet. There were a number of often well-known pieces of music where the trumpet made a sizeable contribution or focus. This also gave rise to the history of the trumpet, which dates back to 2000 BC.

For the June meeting, we listened to Modest Mussorgsky – in particular his Russian Extravaganza. We enjoyed the music, but it might not have been appropriate for anyone with a slight headache!

Petanque 1 and 2 Spaces

Doreen Chapman 07503 165947 **Val Hayward** 07850 375641

There are still places available in both these groups. We meet on alternate Friday mornings at the piste by Woodmancote village hall so if you would like to play a very simple game with like minded people out in the fresh air, please give us a call. 07850375641 or the details are on our web site.

Play Reading Waiting List

Vivien Paxford 07517 680909

In April we read 'Boeing Boeing' by Marc Camoletti.

This is a farce written by a Frenchman and translated into English by Beverley Cross. It was first produced in the West End at the Apollo Theatre in 1965 and ran for seven years.

The central character is Bernard, a bachelor who lives near the Eiffel Tower and is

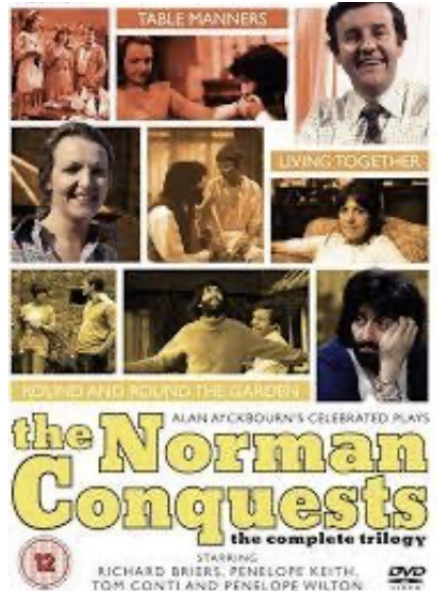
engaged to three stewardesses, none of them having any knowledge of the others. Bernard's complicated lifestyle falls apart when his friend Robert comes to stay and the bad weather, plus a faster Boeing jet disrupts his careful planning and romancing. Very quickly his three fiancées are all in Paris at the same time and catastrophe looms.

For our May meeting I selected 'The Norman Conquests' by Alan Ayckbourn.



This is a masterpiece - typical Ayckbourn comedy wrapped up in a believable plot with laughs easy to come by. You feel that you are acquainted with his characters, with all their foibles and habits! This is a trilogy of plays written in 1973. Each of the plays depicts the same six characters over the same weekend in a different part of the house where they are staying. We read 'Table Manners' in May and will read the remaining two plays at our June meeting.

Currently we have no vacancies, but please contact me if you wish to be included on the waiting list.



Play Reading 3 Spaces

Richard Robey 07305 154410

Our group came into being at the beginning of this year formed from the waiting list from the other two play reading groups. Our thanks go to Richard Robey for taking on the leadership. So far we have read three plays. In March we read *The House by the Lake* by Hugh Mills, a fairly light-hearted mystery crime play which kept us all guessing up until the end as to 'who dunnit'?

In May we read *The Birthday Party* by Harold Pinter, a well-known but rather strange play, with interesting characters!

At our latest meeting in June we read *An Inspector Called* by J.B Priestley. Again, a well-known play which is still staged regularly and can be seen at The Everyman Theatre in Cheltenham and other theatres from time to time. Even though it was first performed in 1946, the moral it contains could still be relevant today. A thought-provoking play. We will have to wait and see which will be the next one we tackle! We meet every second Monday at 13.30 in St Michaels Church Centre in Bishops Cleeve and there are a few spaces if anyone is thinking of joining a play reading group.

Ruth Whiting

Poetry 1 Waiting List

Kay Duck 01242 672474

In May, we delved into the 18th and 19th century, to look at the literary works of William Cowper and John Clare. William Cowper, 1731-1800, was an English poet and Anglican hymn writer. Despite being depressed and dogged by tragedy, he was one of the most popular poets of his time, and changed the direction of 18th century poetry of everyday life. John Clare, 1783-1864, was a major 19th century

poetry. From a poor and deprived agricultural background, his poetry looked at the natural world and social injustice. He too was depressed and suffered from serious mental problems but managed to write so eloquently.

In June, by contrast, Irish poetry was our theme. How wonderful are the Irish poets, and how plentiful their work over the centuries !

On this occasion, for our Summer delight, the chosen poets were Patrick Kavanagh, W.B. Yeats and the late great Seamus Heaney.

We are going to look at poet laureates next time.

KD



Ramblers Waiting List

Liz Neeves 07759 477750 **Nick Barker** 07894 117656

We have temporarily closed the Ramblers Group to new members.

In May, Alan and Maureen lead the group on an interesting walk around Naunton (a long-isolated village), Naunton Downs, a golf course, racing stables, a lost medieval village, a path beside the River Windrush, and a dove cote. It was completed with an enjoyable lunch at The Black Horse.

In June, we met up at Hayles Fruit Farm, and Sue Weir lead us up the Cotswold Way and on to the Winchcombe Way to Little Farmcote, returning

via Hayles Abbey to the Fruit Farm for lunch in the Orchard Kitchen. Thank you to all our walk leaders who make our varied and enjoyable walks possible.

Hayles Fruit Farm to Little Farmcote walk June 2026



[Science and Technology](#) Spaces

Alan Green 07714 329861

We normally meet on the first Thursday of each month in the large hall at the Stoke Orchard Community Centre. We range across the full spectrum of science, technology, and engineering, including the economic and social impact. As well as talks and discussions we have occasional visits, and also take time to have a chat and refreshments.

In June we watched a video of a recent talk at the Royal Institution on 'The Story of Electricity' by Dr Marty Jopson, a very lively science communicator. He started (as ever) with the ancient Greeks (who discovered static electricity: the word 'electricity' comes from the Greek for amber, we learned) and progressed through the Enlightenment and the pioneering work on electromagnetism done by Michael Faraday in that very building, with public talks and demonstrations in the very lecture theatre, at the very desk where he demonstrated what it is all about. It was good! In July we return to Civil Engineering with a talk by John Hainsworth (of

Ledbury u3a) on the story of the combined rail and road bridge over the Menai Straits to Anglesey, from the original railway bridge built by Robert Stephenson in 1850, it's disaster and rebuild in the 1970s (when John was part of the team), to its prospects for the 21st Century. It will be interesting to compare it with what we saw of modern practice on our visit to the A417 Missing Link project in April.

In August we have something completely different: Emma Hutchins, Director of Nature Recovery at the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, will tell us about the challenges and successes of doing ecological research and effective interventions in the countryside around us in Gloucestershire.

Although we are quite a large group we still welcome new members, whether bubbling with ideas or just full of curiosity about all this Science & Technology stuff.

Table Tennis Waiting List

June Hall 01242 675711 **Philip Watson** 01242 673267

On 22 May 12 members of the table tennis group decided to try a new sport so we went to The Royal Oak in Prestbury to play skittles.

We split into two teams with a difference of one point separating winners from losers over a three hour period.

Never mind our varying abilities at skittles, the highlight was a buffet of sandwiches with various fillings, chips, gala pie and sausage rolls. Scones and cake plus tea and coffee completed the buffet and of course the bar was open.

We might do it again next year especially if someone wants to start a u3a skittles group and teach us how to play!

Meanwhile our group remains full with a waiting list

June

Co Leader TT Group

Yoga - Chair **Audrey Cooper** 07949 941608

Yoga - Floor **Audrey Cooper** 07949 941608

Both yoga groups are full, with waiting lists. Both are in high demand and continue to be very popular.

Please email your news and photos **by 12th August** for the next Clarion:
clarion@cleeve-u3a.org.uk, or use the website:
bishops-cleeve.u3asite.uk/contact/

Committee 2025/2026

Chair	Mike Pritchard	0300 102 4559 Option 2
Vice-Chair	Gillian Thompson	01242 690186
Business Secretary	Lynne Craig	0300 102 4559 Option 7
Treasurer	Simon Waller	0300 102 4559 Option 3
Groups Co-ordinator	Richard Gaul	0300 102 4559 Option 4
Membership Secretary	Bridget Stuckey	0300 102 4559 Option 1
RUMS Group Leader	Chris Larkin	07736 807511
Beacon Administrator	Philip Watson	0300 102 4559 Option 6
Speaker Secretary	Joan Hall	07740 902231
Committee Member	Valerie Hayward	07850 375641

Other contacts

Webmaster	Jenny Waller	
Welcomer	Monica Wragg	07777 612613
Refreshments Organiser	Kath Mason	07867 532552
Minutes Secretary	Stella Caney	01242 676143
Clarion Editor	Rachel Chetwood	

©Copyright – No items printed in this newsletter to be copied or printed in any other publication without reference to the Editor and/or originator.