

General Meetings are held on the third Wednesday of the month at 2:00pm
at Great Baddow Millennium Community Centre, Baddow Road, Chelmsford, CM2 9RL

A note from the editor

Welcome to the fifth issue of our News Round Up. Apologies that it is online a little late. As always a BIG thank you to those who have sent in articles and photos!! Looking forward to seeing news from even more groups and members about what you or your group gets up to! *Jean*

HELP NEEDED WITH CHAIRS

We are still looking for more **regular** volunteers to help put out chairs at our General Meetings. If you are able to help and can get to the hall at 1:15pm please contact anyone on the committee

Round-Up of what our groups have been up to.....

Art Appreciation Leader - Debbie

There were four presentations at our session today, and they could not have been more different. They ranged from the edgy, through lovely, to amazing and finally controversial. And the discussion also ranged through many topics – religious, emotional, political as well as of course the usual of artistic technique, the meanings of paintings and our personal views about them.

The ‘edgy’ was a set of expressionist paintings, starting with ‘Harmony in Red’ by Matisse, which we learnt had started off life as ‘Harmony in Blue’, but Matisse took it back from the Russian art dealer who had commissioned it and repainted it in raspberry red. Discussion ensued about the lack of perspective and interpretation of the window/picture, but most of us liked it. We then looked at four more expressionist paintings which are very focussed on colour, again with varying degrees of enthusiasm. Cat pictures abound on YouTube, but nothing like the painting by Franz Marc, which also generated discussion about the posture and position of the creatures. However everyone loved the final one – Sunrise by Max Hermann Pechstein.

The person who did not take to the Matisse, showed us the 'lovely' paintings. Taking Claude Monet and the gardens at Giverny as a starter, we looked at pictures by Monet and then other artists inspired by gardens and by his paintings. Certainly not edgy, but beautiful to look at beautifully painted were those by Bi Wei Liang Tronolone, who as a commercial artist is selling her artworks to major hotel chains, to provide a beautiful background (to calm down guests who may not be happy with other aspects of their stay!)

'Amazing' was the set of artworks by Albrecht Durer. Living at the same time as Leonardo da Vinci, but in Nuremberg, we learnt that he was as much of a genius as Leonardo, moving from one technique to another, constantly experimenting and using the current scientific knowledge of his world to expand the themes of his work. He also managed to sneak in political and religious references into his pictures. We looked at a painting in oils – his self portrait, a woodcut – the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, a watercolour – The Hare, and a drypoint engraving – The Knight, Death and the Devil. Each of these were full of expression and detail and we could have spent hours on each one. And then we looked at a couple of book illustrations to show the breadth of his knowledge – one an illustration from one of his 4 books on Human Proportion and the other an astronomical chart illustrating the constellations, particularly those of the Zodiac. What a lot that man packed into his 56 years

Finally – 'Controversy'. June 13th was International Day of the Albino. Inspired by this we looked at some paintings from 18th century Spanish Mexico where casta paintings were all the rage, as the bloodlines of Spanish colonizers and of the colonized indigenous, black and mixed-race populations mingled and American-born Spaniards sought to define themselves apart amid increasingly blurry racial lines. Paintings of racial hierarchy, or casta paintings, put fictive family groupings, with father of one race, mother of another and children a third racial category, in hierarchical order. White Europeans (españoles) were at the top, with mixtures with indigenous (indios) and Africans (negros) in descending order. Controversial indeed, but we reflected that, sadly, some things never change

Debbie

Transport group  Leader - Alan

In the Transport group we occasionally question what forms of transport fit within the scope of group. The current answer is almost anything, from prams to aircraft, bridle ways to canals, and bus conductors to navvies. One may question whether HMS Belfast, a light cruiser, is transport rather than a fighting machine, but one of the primary purposes of cruisers was convoy protection which is clearly transport. Our April meeting was a presentation on the restoration of the narrow gauge railway from Barnstaple to Lynton in north Devon. One may expect the main effort to be the preservation of old rolling stock but the current effort is far more fundamental: purchasing land that has fallen into other hands over the 90 years since the railway was closed. This involves many challenges such as raising funds for future land purchases when they become available, clearing old bridges that have all but disappeared under rubble and nature, restoration of stations that have been converted to housing, and planning around houses that have been built literally

on the bed of the railway. Many segments of the original route have now been purchased, and track has been laid on a one mile stretch with trips available to the public.

June

The group held its final pre-summer meeting at the Millennium Centre on the 23rd June. This meeting followed a week of hot weather but it was a bit cooler on the 23rd, so much so that we suffered from a powerful air conditioning unit that we were unable to control. However the meeting was well attended, and everybody was in good cheer and remained a healthy colour.

Ron gave us a presentation on the Empire Troopships, with Norma patiently keeping the presentation on track whilst sitting directly beneath the air conditioning outlet without complaining. I thought that the empire ships were prizes captured from Germany after the war but Ron explained that there were also other categories including British ships run for the government.

Ron opened by saying that he had been on two cruises on empire ships, courtesy of the government and hence free on both occasions. However they were not luxury cruises. Many of the ships were old and slow, accommodation was in three or four tier bunks and "passengers" had duties such as cleaning the ship.

The two ships were the Empire Ken and Empire Clyde, and it turned out that member Hugh had also been on the latter. The Ken was a German prize, built as passenger ship *Ukena* and involved in a major evacuation of civilians from the East German coast under fire from the Russians as they advanced. The ship was seized by the British shortly afterwards and converted to a troopship. Ron's cruise came in 1954 and the ship was scrapped in 1957.

The Empire Clyde was built as the passenger ship *SS Cameronia* for the Anchor line. At the start of the war she was still in passenger service. She rescued survivors from the *SS Athenia* and became the first British ship to arrive at New York after war had been declared. She spent much of the war as a troopship and was then converted back to a passenger ship before being sold to the Ministry of Transport and renamed *Empire Clyde* in 1953. She spent just four years in her final life as a troopship before being scrapped in 1957.

Ron also told us that the *Cameronia* was mentioned in the fourth season of *Downton Abbey* when the Earl of Grantham sailed to New York to help his brother-in-law, Harold Levinson, who was caught up in the Teapot Dome Scandal.

July Trip 1

The Transport group went to Walton-on-the-Naze to see some concrete barges on Friday 11th July. This was our second attempt to visit Walton because our first attempt in June was postponed due to heavy rain. In contrast our July visit was during a heatwave, and the weather was glorious being a few degrees colder in Walton than in Chelmsford.

The visit was hosted by Maurice and Stella who will be known by many readers. They have a caravan at Walton and are proud of the area with its beaches, receding cliffs, backwaters, marinas and concrete barges. Our visit got off to a good start in the caravan with tea, coffee and cakes baked by Stella.

Stella has spent time researching concrete barges so, although we think of them as a second world war invention, she told us that the oldest known concrete vessel was a dinghy built in France in 1848. However we think that the barges we saw at Walton were from the second world war and the full histories are not known.



Walking on the concrete deck of a barge, and the list was much steeper than appears in this photo

The first barge we saw had been acquired by auction at Ipswich in 1995 and is now a luxury boatel with accommodation for 14. At first sight one sees a relatively modern superstructure and it is only when one looks carefully at the hull that it becomes a concrete barge.

The second barge we saw had no superstructure; it is stranded a little above the high tide level and listing but we were nevertheless able to walk carefully on the deck which was, naturally, made of concrete. We could look down a hatch into the dark interior which appeared larger than expected. This barge is for sale at £16,000 but it would probably cost more than that just to move it, even if it still floats.

Our final barge was on dry land, or rather partially buried in dry land beside Titchmarsh Marina. It was originally a dry lighter, and a four bedroom bungalow has now been built on beams across the open hull and it serves as accommodation for staff at the nearby Harbour Lights restaurant. The space within the hull remains available in the event that more accommodation is required.

Every trip by the Transport Group has been distinct and enjoyable, but this trip was particularly enjoyable thanks to a combination of the weather, a small friendly group, a somewhat different subject and our Chelmsford/Walton hosts



Our group sitting on the side of a concrete barge that has been built up with brick and wood. Spot the many former B&G committee members.

July Trip 2

The Transport group went on a day trip to Southend on Monday 28th July. Correction ... we went for a ride on the new train on Southend Pier, and we had a good day although we failed in the overall mission.

Eight of us met at Chelmsford bus station for the journey to Southend on the X30. The good news is that it is free for those with bus passes. The not so good news is that it literally goes round the houses en route, and also skirted the airport. The driver certainly demonstrated his skills steering along the narrow roads. Fortunately the double deck bus had relatively good seats and legroom compared with the rattling single deck bus used when I went for an earlier recce.

We arrived in the town centre and had drinks at Tomassi's, followed by a short walk to the pier via a lift down to the sea front. The weather was pleasant, neither too hot nor too windy.

Southend pier is the longest in the world, at 1.3 miles. A wooden pier was opened in 1829, followed by an iron pier in 1889. The first railway was built soon afterwards. The pier was closed to the public during the Second World War, becoming HMS Leigh, the naval control centre for the Thames Estuary. It organised over 3,000 convoys, and 800 ships/boats set sail for Normandy which leaves me wondering whether this was a convenient departure point or part of the deception operation, or perhaps both.

The pier fell into disrepair and was restored, with a new railway opened by Princess Anne in 1986. Over the years there have been fires and collisions with ships. Sir John Betjeman said "The Pier is Southend, Southend is the Pier".



Members of the Transport group in the Southend Pier train on their return journey

Our original plan was for the group to take the train along the pier both ways, with a couple of us walking on the outward journey. However in the end five did the walk, perhaps this was due to something in the coffee! The pier has a sign at 1 mile from the shore, and it seemed to take a long time getting there but the final segment went quickly.



Southend Pier trains in the station. The new train (shown on the left) is wrapped, maybe the mayor will be invited to the unwrapping ceremony!

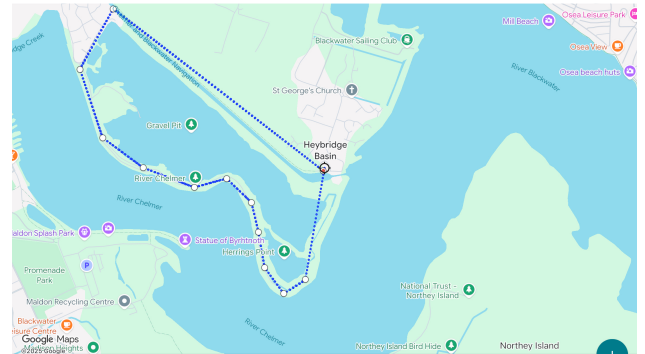
The group reassembled at the end of the pier and had lunch, and then a view of the lifeboat station before we all returned by train and then another X30 bus.

When I went on the recce for this visit I discovered that the new trains had broken down and one of the older (1986?) trains was in use, but I was unsure how quickly the trains would be repaired. On the 28th the older train was still operating, but we saw the new trains wrapped in cellophane. Well it was a narrow gauge railway, and I cannot imagine a mainline train being wrapped in the same way - the clingfilm cost would be considerable!

New members are welcome to join this group, please contact Alan

Strollers group 🚶 Leader - Jo

The Strollers group have been making good use of the sunny weather. July's stroll was to Heybridge Basin, Maldon - well, I say it was a stroll but it ended up being a rather long walk! Lunch (and no doubt a well-deserved pint) was enjoyed at The Jolly Sailor



The dotted line shows the route

Here's the hot-but-happy strollers having a well-earned rest about three-quarters of the way!



Strollers in the herbaceous border garden

The August stroll was a less strenuous one at RHS Hyde Hall, with non-members taking advantage of pairing up with RHS members to gain admission.

It's always a pleasure to walk amongst the beautifully planted gardens, and this Summer they were spectacularly colourful.

Have you heard about a new sport called Quiet Tennis?

It's like regular tennis but without the racket

I've been trying to break up with an Optician recently....it's really hard!

Every time I tell her I can't see her anymore she moves an inch closer and says: "How about now?"

I have, as usual, been deluged with articles from my fellow members of the Photo Group. However, I've decided that they can all be held over until later editions of the News Roundup, since I've been asked by many of our wider u3a membership to explain what an F-stop is and why it matters. (If you're not one of those inquisitive types, just skip over the two paragraphs in italics to get to all our really exciting news.)

*Have you ever looked at the markings on a camera lens and wondered what all the strange hieroglyphics actually mean?-I certainly used to, so decided that I'd try to unravel the mystery. One part of the markings will be similar to **18 – 50 mm 1:2.8** and the translation is that the lens has a focal length which can be zoomed from 18mm millimetres up to 50 mm, with a maximum aperture (this hole in the lens is known as the **aperture**) of f/2.8. Now the first part of this might make some sense, but the bit about **f/2.8** is still a bit baffling., especially since “f” isn't a number. Well, if you look at the series f/1.4, f /2, f/2.8, f/4, f/5.6 and you are told that these are the aperture decreasing in size rather than increasing, you may cast your mind back to primary school and those dreaded **fractions** that put many people off maths for life. The use of the “/” in a series like ½, ¼, 1/8, 1/16 indicated that 2,4, 8 and 16 were the denominators or divisors and that these fractions got progressively smaller. (Should I give up now or persevere?)*

Photography is all about capturing the right amount of light. If you want more light in your photo, simply make the hole in the lens bigger; Since we now know that f/2 is bigger than f/4, then using f/2. However, just when you think you've mastered it, then some bright spark asks why you wouldn't then want to use f/2 all the time. The answer being that those f-numbers also alter the depth of field – and I'm certainly not going into this here or I'll be writing a chapter rather than a paragraph. Maybe I'll tackle that in the next article and postpone all those other contributions yet again.

Since my last article, the group have visited Feeringbury Manor at the end of July (if you don't know where it is, perhaps you'd fit in well with our group). For those who couldn't attend, our option was taking pictures of an alternative house/garden, so at a later date we ventured to Priory Park in Southend and I include one of my photos below to give you a visual break from all these words. At our September meeting we had an interesting talk from James Crisp, who is based in Maldon. James works as a graphic designer in his “real job”, but broadened out into photography in 2021. He talked us through his journey starting from taking photos on his phone, to buying his first DSLR camera and on to the professional set-up that he now uses. It was also a surprise to many of us to learn during his talk that there are actually two 5 o'clocks in the day. James has had a number of photos published and chosen in national competitions and he also creates a photographic calendar each year which he sells locally. These sales have raised more than £6000 for the Helen Rollason Cancer Charity in 3 years.

Our next outing in September is to Hatfield House and Gardens. There is also an ongoing “photo scavenger hunt” in Chelmsford, with 30 challenges set by Allen B for us to photograph during the summer. Allen will be judging the submitted images and they will be shown at our October meeting. This will be followed in November by peer review of our competition entries, which this time are themed on Macro and Black & White. No

prizes, but if you wish to see the winning entries then I'll include them in our next News Roundup contribution (alongside all the articles that I've spared you from in this issues!).

And finally...



Maurice

In case you missed it ... or even if you didn't

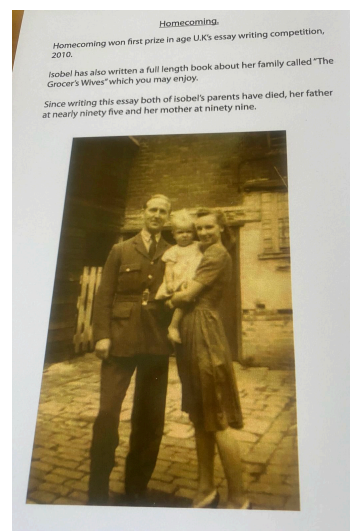
Fitness teacher Karen Lawrie joined us again at our July General Meeting for a lively spot of seated gentle exercise. This time, we ditched the chairs at the end for a dance session which was really enjoyable. She is booked to return next year - can't wait to see what she has planned for us!

If anyone would like to set up a **Creative Writing group**, there is help available from u3a National Advisors, who have produced an excellent handbook of ideas. There's also a newsletter giving practical help, useful books, and everything you would need to begin.

Writing in retirement

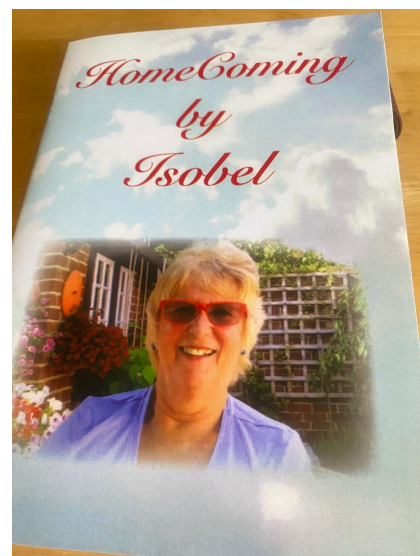
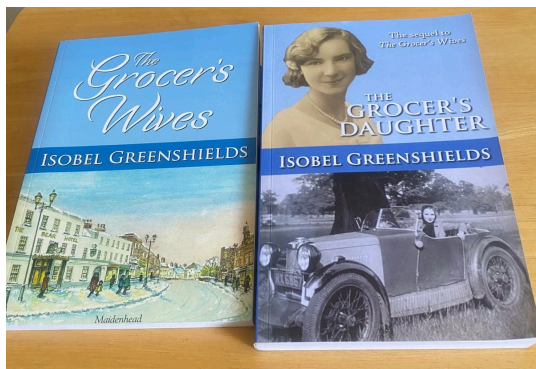
I enjoyed Mark Butterworth's talk in June, he wrote about his father, a pilot, just as my father was. I wrote about my father, and the effect his homecoming had in the Age Concern story writing competition in 2010, which I was fortunate to win.

When we were clearing my late mother's house we found numerous "keep this" and "read this" messages around the house. I realised that when I depart no one will know many family stories, and well kept secrets; so I wrote *The Grocer's Wives* about my grandparents with whom I lived until my father returned in 1948. They were the most important people in my life.



I later wrote *The Grocer's Daughter* about my mother who met interesting people when she worked at a court photographer's in Bond Street, visiting Kensington Palace and being one of the first women in Maidenhead to own a car.

I have just finished my last book, *The Grocers Little Mate*.
No prizes for guessing who that was!
Isobel



u3a Essex Network Lecture 4 July - 'Artificial Intelligence for Everyone'

On a very hot, sultry and sunny day four of our Baddow and Galleywood u3a members attended a very promising event at Stanway Village Hall near Colchester. I was one of the seventy members present.

It was the second lecture on AI I had attended this year. The February lecture was provided by The City of London School and focused on using AI to deal with the global problem of feeding the world. Tony's favourite magazine 'New Scientist' has weekly references to the subject. Yes, it is an 'in' topic for learning and debate, a subject area which is moving at such a speed that it frequently seems as if new information is out of date, displaced by the latest invention.

Clearly there are many high tech geniuses around the world competing in all areas of life. A few are promising and positive Health, housing, Food production, household appliances, transport, education and more controversial the military.

Friend or foe, do we fear it or accept and adopt it? Like all leaps since man first stood up to walk, make tools, fire, settlements, farming, the agricultural revolution, the Industrial revolution and technological revolution AI has risen and is the development. Man's thirst for learning and curiosity is insatiable and inevitable. The big question is where are we going AI ? Which path will we take, a force for good or evil? Quite clearly it is happening now, accept, there is no choice.

On arrival Lesley, Essex U3a Network Organiser, Chair of Chelmsford and her team generously welcomed us all with refreshments.

Lesley has written a concise and interesting account of the afternoon lectures and has very kindly allowed me to share it with you our members.

Lesley begins with the first speaker '

Ian Hawker who delivered a compelling presentation titled 'AI Everywhere' - covering the fast growing of artificial intelligence across everyday applications. From chatbots that

enhance online engagement to advances in healthcare, climate change solutions and educational tools. Ian's examples brought clarity to this evolving landscape.

Don Mobley then guided us through 'AI in Aviation', revealing how intelligent systems are shaping safety, navigation, and decision-making within the aerospace industry.

His insights added a fascinating technical layer to the discussion and showcased how innovation reaches into unexpected areas.

I warmly encourage you to explore the excellent resources on the u3a Communities "AI for Everyone" page. You will find recordings, workshop ideas, contact information for AI subject advisers and regular updates via the 'AI News' Zoom events. It is a rich and accessible starting point to help members engage with AI confidently, whether dabblers or enthusiastic explorers.

Let us continue the conversation and encourage participation across our region.'

Warm Regards

Lesley, Chair, Chelmsford u3a.'

Personally, I found that despite Don Mobley's American Airforce background, a charismatic USA pilot sent to one of the Suffolk bases, he found love and made Suffolk his permanent home. He presented a lively questioning, thought provoking and at times a well considered cynical point of view. His version of pros and cons really connected and fired my mind to continue exploring this subject, after all it is quite possible that I will be offered the non human form of a robot to care for me in my dotage!

I welcome comments on this article, perhaps we can get a letters from members page going?

Sue, Vice Chair and Interest Group Organiser

Q. What are the moving lights in the garden in the middle of the night?

A. It used to be glow worms, now it is a robotic lawn mower with headlights?

This is a true story! Sue

Coming up at the General Meeting

Weds 15 October - **My Creative Journey** - tales of a career working in the TV and Film Industry with Amanda Sutherland

Weds 19 November - **Finding Wildlife in Epping Forest** with Peter Warne - a pictorial journey through the eyes of a biologist

Newsletter contributions - If you have any items please send them before mid-October for inclusion in the next issue.

Please note: in the interests of security, all personal details of individual members (surname, address, email or phone number) have been removed