News Round Up November 2026 Issue 11

Our 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 Round-Up of what our groups have been up to……

Transport group - 4th Monday of the month Venue: Park View room

The Transport Group went on a trip to the East Anglian Railway Museum on Sunday 23rd August. Sunday events are rare in the Transport Group, but the date was chosen because the museum would run a steam train.
However the summer of 2026 has broken many weather records and the risk of fire from steam locomotives was too great.

We were a small friendly group of five, including a new member who found it easy to meet the others.

The original plan was to travel by train from Chelmsford together, and then leave everybody free to follow their own interests in the museum but we went round together much of the time.



A compartment on a restored corridor coach. The window faces Chappel station on the Gainsborough line.

We spent time in a compartment in a corridor carriage. The seating was comfortable, and much softer than on modern trains. The carriage had been restored and it was interesting to note features from the past such as pull down blinds and a chain communications cord, and perhaps surprisingly nobody knew how the chain worked - did it lead all the way to the locomotive and what signal would it give the driver? However the compartment did not have air conditioning and it was not moving so there was no win, and it quickly became hot inside.



B&G members in an open wagon which took us on a short trip around the museum site.

We went on a short trip on the museum's railway in some sidings at Chappel. We were seated in what was almost a cattle truck, with a good outdoor view. Then we visited the signal box and were given an interesting introduction. The use of bells for communicating with the adjacent signal boxes was sophisticated, and we spotted some analogies with morse code.

There were a number of displays in the main museum, and perhaps the most interesting was an electric pantograph which collects the power on trains from overhead cables. We hardly notice pantographs these days, but it was interesting to see one close up and appreciate the hydraulics which raise the device and the number of electrical insulators required to insulate the device from a conducting metal train.

This was the final Transport Group trip in 2026. Potential trips in 2027 include Tower Bridge, the underground Post Office railway in London and the Transport Museum.

September/October
The summer season of transport trips has finished and the group has resumed its monthly meetings at the Millennium Centre (4th Mondays at 14.30). The first two meetings have had presentations transatlantic liners, stories that were quite different in detail.

The September presentation was about the RMS Olympic, a liner that should be famous but is not. She was the most successful troopship during the first world war, thanks to her large troop carrying capacity. Moreover she was the only troopship to ram and sink a German U boat. However her real claim to fame is that she was the Titanic's slightly older sister.

The Olympic's first captain was Edward Smith. He was the White Star Line's senior captain, and he took command of each new liner in turn. Sadly a few months later he was amongst those lost on the Titanic.

The Olympic was then given a major refit, including the installation of a significant number of additional lifeboats. She was arguably now the safest ship in the world!
After the first world war the ship faced a number of challenges through the depression and changing immigration rules in the USA, and nevertheless continued transatlantic service until she was scrapped in 1935. By then she had completed 257 round trips, carried 430,000 passengers and steamed 1.8M miles.

The October presentation was about the SS Rotterdam of 1959, owned by the Holland America Line and their fifth ship with the name. The talk started with a company history. The company did well during the first world war when Holland was neutral and there was great demand for their services. In contrast they lost several ships and facilities during the bombing of Rotterdam early in the second world war, and the rest of their fleet was operated by the allies.

The company is now owned by Carnival, and specialises in cruises to Alaska. They introduced the seventh ship called Rotterdam in 2021.

The decision to build the Rotterdam of 1959 came towards the end of a programme of postwar rebuilding, and a notable requirement was to be able to operate as a cruise liner in the winter. However jet aircraft became practical soon after the liner was introduced, and she because a full time cruise ship in 1969. In 1997 she was sold to the Premier Cruise Line and renamed Rembrandt.

Preservation of the ship commenced in 2003. Much of the ship was restored to her original Holland America Line condition, and she opened as a hotel permanently berthed in Rotterdam in 2010.

New members are welcome to the group, and I am pleased to say that we finally have a volunteer serving tea/coffee. Talks over then next few months include transport in Switzerland, a career in the merchant navy, the wankel engine and building a kit car. ***Alan***



One of several bars on the SS Rotterdam



The bridge of the SS Rotterdam. This picture generated an interesting discussion about where the ship's wheel is.

Art Appreciation 2nd Friday of the month Venue: Meadgate Church Orchard Centre

September
Last month we looked at the life and works of David Hockney who had died recently and whose works were familiar to most of us. This month it was the turn of Yayoi Kusama who had died the previous week aged 97.

She was born in Japan and moved to New York in the sixties, meeting up with other young artists who were experimenting with new ways of expressing themselves through abstract art, installations and performance art. From an early age she had hallucinations about repeating patterns and the infiniteness of the universe. This was reflected in her obsession with polka dots, while her use of stuffed cloth phalluses may have been associated with her philandering father and overbearing mother. Who knows where her love of pumpkins came from? Her obsession with infinity led to her creating 'infinity rooms' which are surrounded by mirrors so when you enter any artworks are reflected and appear to be all around you and disappear into the distance in all directions. And the artworks are her trademark polka dots, sinuous shapes, bright colours, and as the viewer, you are part of them. On her return to Japan, Kusama booked herself into a psychiatric institution where she remained for the rest of her life, but she continued to work in a studio nearby. Her fascinating life and work was new to many of us. In contrast John Constable's artworks were very familiar and his life relatively dull. A recent visit by one of the group to an exhibition in Ipswich was the inspiration for this presentation. He had been brought up on a farm in Suffolk and tramped through the countryside from an early age so knew it intimately and loved it. As well as looking at his famous paintings such as the Haywain, we also saw some watercolours and chalks. We decided that although you may not love his pictures, you have to admire the technical skill with which he brings his world to life. Among the many things we thought about was his ability to convey depth in his pictures, how just using paints you can depict a tree that you can almost feel the leaves of, and water that you can see lapping against the bank. And his famous clouds which loom over the scenes below with gaps where the sunlight pierces through and highlights the countryside beneath.

Feeling that women have been neglected in some of our presentations, we looked at three female impressionist artists – Berthe Morisot, Helen McNicoll and Mary Cassatt. Each of them had painted women in different context - a woman at a table with a beautiful garden in the background gazing past the viewer, three women harvesting beans, and a woman bathing a child's feet. We looked at the technical aspects of each of these paintings, particularly the use of new styles of pigment and paint, but were just as interested in why the painters had chosen these particular subjects and the position in society and feelings of women at the time that they were painted.

Finally, in need of refreshment, we looked at a variety of paintings ranging from 1742 to 1962 around the theme of coffee. As much a history of coffee as of painting, we could see how in the early paintings a family group drinking coffee against an ornate room showed how sophisticated and affluent they were. Later on, depictions in coffee houses would demonstrate that coffee was the domain of the bohemian or the intellectuals. Or, maybe for the lonely and introverted(Edward Hopper). And in more modern times, it could be used as a comment on modern life (Andy Warhol)

Throughout the session we returned to the theme, as always, of is art for the artist or the viewer, do painters paint for themselves or the public, how much of their own selves do they put in their artworks and how much do our perceptions affect how we see them. And, as always, we each had our own opinions and there was no consensus.

October
One of the joys of the Art Appreciation group is that you have a captive, curious and responsive group of people with whom to share your enthusiasms. This was exactly the case of our first presentation of artworks by Yvonne Jean Haffen, an artist unknown to all of us, apart from one member who had discovered her on holiday and was keen to share this discovery.
Yvonne Jean Haffen was a French artist whose life spanned most of the 20th century. She rejected the modern movements of energy, bold colours and images of urbanisation and strife,

preferring to paint gentle pastoral scenes of her beloved scenery of Brittany. Aside from her landscapes, we also looked at some self portraits and some delicate paintings of animals. She did not just confine herself to Brittany. She had travelled and we looked at some of her paintings from Greece. All these painting showed a definite impressionist influence in the way the light fell and in the subject matter, but she also was interested in art deco and some textiles and ceramics demonstrated how she had used this art form to shape her own works. Her work was very varied and gentle and well worth looking at.

The impressionist influence continued in the next presentation where we looked at how Edward Hopper had been influenced by Degas and Monet in particular. Edward Hopper is widely acknowledged as the most important realist painter of twentieth-century America. His artwork reflects his own temperament in the empty cityscapes, landscapes, and isolated figures he chose to paint. At first glance it seems very far-fetched to imagine that impressionism influenced his work, but when shown one of his paintings, 'The Automat' and comparing it with 'Bar At The Folies-Bergere' by Monet, the structure and themes jumped out at us. Two others of his paintings were compared with Degas pictures and the influences, once pointed out, were very evident. This whole set of paintings generated a great deal of discussion about how he was so well able to convey loneliness and alienation. However, the painting that caused most controversy 'Soir Bleu' had 7 characters, on their own or interacting in various ways.

The central figure was dressed in a white Pierrot-style costume and makeup with a cigarette. This has been interpreted as a self-portrait of Hopper reflecting his own career insecurities and feelings of isolation, although we did not see that at all. The figure on the left with a cigarette hanging out of his mouth has been seen as a pimp (again, that did not crop up in our discussion) and the enigmatic heavily made-up standing woman, who we thought might be a waitress, a member of the group of card players or a friend of the bourgeois couple on the right could have been a sex worker according to the internet site I looked at.

The final set of paintings looked at a few paintings of babies. We learnt that how artists painted babies reflected the social and religious background of the time. In medieval times, most paintings were religious and most babies were the baby Jesus. As Jesus was perfectly formed and unchanged, the babies had to be a baby miniature of a grown man. And that just became the way to paint babies. Scary and grotesque was our view. With the renaissance came more naturalistic painting and the emphasis on the innocence of children so the paintings became more realistic. Later still, a van Gogh image of what we thought was an extremely ugly baby was obviously adored by its mother, and perhaps the fashion of the time was to have fat, hideous children! We looked at three images of the abduction of the shepherd Ganymede by Zeus disguised as an angel. Two showed the sort of youth that you could imagine a god might fall in love with, but the Rembrandt interpretation showed a bawling toddler in the grip of the fearsome eagle. Again, a very disturbing image of a child, but if you were being carried off by an eagle, you would probably also not be at your best. Finally, a beautiful African picture by Angu Walters of a mother and child, painted in an almost abstract but geometrical style. ***Debbie***

London Walks group 2nd Weds of the month (April - Sept only) Various London locations

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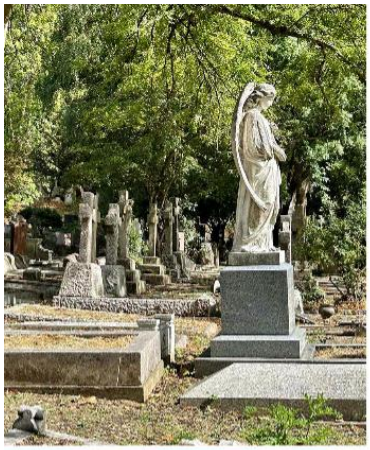
High up in Highgate walk

At 136m above sea level, Highgate is one of the highest points in London. Its underground station however, is third deepest in London, so there were invariably steps and slopes on our walk! Highgate village gets its name from the medieval tollgate into the Bishop of London's vast deer park, now replaced by The Gatehouse, a mock-Tudor pub and theatre venue.

Variety was the theme of the day. At The Grove we admired the homes of JB Priestley, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and more recently of Sting, Jude Law, Kate Moss, Annie Lennox and George Michael, plus the Flask pub opposite where they drank. Highgate has the second largest residential mansion in London, beaten only by Buckingham Palace. Hidden behind a long, forbidding brick wall is Witanhurst, with its 65 rooms, 25 bedrooms, a large 70ft ballroom, a huge subterranean multi-level complex and tennis courts. Bought in 2008 for £50m and now worth £300m it's owned by Andrey Guryev, Russia's twenty-eighth richest man.

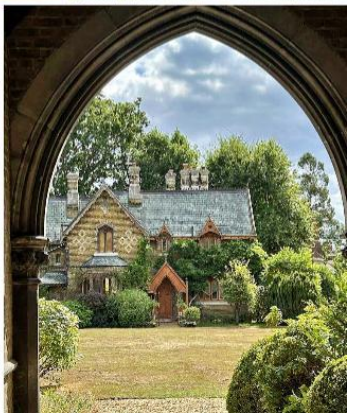
We visited Pond Square (said to be haunted by a frozen chicken that caused philosopher Francis Bacon's death) before descending down Swains Lane (pig herders once used it to drive swine down to Smithfield) and into Waterlow Park.

Bequeathed by printing magnate Sir Sydney Waterlow, this park was intended as a 'garden for the gardenless' - the poor of the area. The 'garden' offered us beautiful varicoloured trees and fantastic views of the City and the full London skyline. Most of the group commented it was the most surprising thing of the day. Cameras were in full-click.







Further down the hill, we passed the twin Highgate Cemeteries, dubbed 'the most fashionable necropolis in Victorian London'. The West Cemetery is the final resting place of George Michael, Michael Faraday (19C scientist) and Alexander Litvinenko, the Russian spy poisoned in London by a radioactive isotope, who subsequently required a much deeper grave with a lead-lined coffin. In the East Cemetery lies Karl Marx, George Eliot (author), Douglas Adams (Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy), Malcolm McLaren (Sex Pistols manager), Max Wall (the saddest clown), Sir Ralph Richardson (actor), Jeremy Beadle (trickster of British TV) and Bob Hoskins (actor)

We walked through Stoneleigh Terrace, social housing units designed for Camden Council in the 1970s that have an average value today of £800k. The 1-6 bedroom flats have walls that are divided into panels, and spaces can be opened up and changed via sliding partitions. Each has a terrace overlooking the pedestrianised walkway. Lots of concrete and used in TV adverts and BBC dramas such as 'The Bodyguard'.

Around the corner, the Whittington Hospital was once the site of the 19th century Smallpox hospital relocated from King's Cross when the railway station was built.

At the last stop we discovered how the hospital got its name. The Whittington Stone statue with a scruffy black cat, marks the site where Dick Whittington reputedly heard the sound of Bow Bells urging him to turn again. Eventually the story has become a popular pantomime.
Oh yes, he was…..oh no he wasn't…..

Secrets of Southwark walk
Our last walk of 2026 took us 'sauf of the river' to Southwark, formerly an unruly area with its own jurisdiction for over 750 years. Its close proximity to London Bridge, which until 1729 was the only bridge across into the City over the Thames made it a place for travellers.

We started by the most famous landmark - The Shard, which due to its height could be seen from almost everywhere on the walk. Next door is Guys Hospital founded by bookseller Thomas Guy in 1721. He made his fortune in the South Sea Bubble and decided to spend his fortune on 'curing the incurables'. In fair exchange, he is interred in the hospital chapel. Nearby is the Old Operating Theatre, the only remains of St Thomas's Hospital before it was relocated to Lambeth.

Along Borough High Street are courtyards once serving the inns used by travellers. The most famous being The Tabard where Chaucer began his Canterbury Tales. Most of the George Inn still survives as the last galleried coaching inn in London - used for travellers to rest and also to watch plays performed in its courtyard.

The most eye-catching building is the Hop Exchange, as the area was famous for brewing when hops became an integral part of English beer in 17C. Hops were picked and dried in Kent and brought up to Southwark to be stored and sold. The Hop Exchange was the marketplace. It has a glass roof to enable the quality of hops to be examined.

Borough Market claims to have existed since 1014 and was one of London's most important food markets, being near the riverside wharfs of the Pool of London. Nearby are narrow alleys aptly named Dead Mans Place, Dirty Lane, and Naked Boy Yard. We walked down Dead Mans Place, it still survives but has been renamed Park Street. What's in a name?



Southwark Cathedral, formerly an Augustinian priory sits alongside the Market, and it's where the Bishops of Winchester established their seat. Inside is the Shakespeare Memorial, a memorial to the Marchioness disaster (51 people who died when the pleasure boat sank in 1989), a model of the church and the Harvard Chapel, named after John Harvard the benefactor of Harvard University US who was born in Southwark.

Along the narrow Pickford's Wharf is the remains of the Bishop's Winchester Palace in the Liberty of the Clink, an area free from the jurisdiction of the City of London. Outrageous activities flourished - gaming houses, bowling alleys, bear-baiting, theatres and brothels (called "stews") licensed by the Bishop himself! A short distance further on we passed the site of the infamous Clink Prison, where inmates would be said to be 'in clink', a phrase sometimes used today!

Three original theatres were sited near here: the Old Globe, the Rose and the Hope. The buildings are long gone, closed down when theatres were outlawed by the Puritans in 1642 along with the bear-baiting and other nefarious pastimes.

Thankfully, actor and director Sam Wanamaker masterminded a realistic reconstruction of Shakespeare's Globe in 1997, opening with a production of Shakespeare's Henry V, just as the Old Globe had opened with in 1599. ***Jean***

Photo collages courtesy of Marjorie

Photography Group - 2nd Monday of the month Venue: Galleywood Heritage Centre

I thought you all deserved a break from my ramblings in the last News Roundup, but there has been such a public outcry that I decided I'd better write one for this issue. So here goes.

In August the group takes a holiday, but in September John set us a series of 15 challenges for a photo scavenger hunt in the Hythe Quay area of Maldon. With a time limit of 2 hours, the challenges were designed to encourage members to observe their surroundings more closely and gently encourage some to switch from their normal camera settings (usually automatic) to those more appropriate to the target. A total of 12 members submitted 3 or 4 of their chosen images for discussion at our October monthly meeting. These should be available on our website at the time of reading, but are changed monthly. Participants had their arms twisted to meet up afterwards for lunch and a drink in the nearby Queen's Head.

Here are a couple of my own photos based on the challenges :-





By the time you read this, the group will have visited Mark's Hall to capture Autumn Colour in all its glory. As usual some folk won't be able to attend on the day, so they will either make their own way there or take a picture of a colourful tree or shrub in their own garden or local park – it's all about being flexible and capturing your own vision of the theme.

Just a reminder to you all that Mike, our group co-ordinator, is retiring from the post in November having given us a wonderful and greatly appreciated 14 plus years of leadership. Throughout this period Mike's wife Linda has also been providing us with much-appreciated half-time refreshments at our monthly meetings. Grateful thanks to both Mike and Linda for everything that they've done for the group. If there are any members out there who would like to take on the role, just contact Mike for a job description. (There is a committee in place to try to ensure that the group can continue to function, but it does need someone willing and able to tie it all together.)

and finally...

Our Photo Group are very interested in finding out whether anyone actually take time to read each News Roundup (apart from the small, loyal band of contributors). If they do read it, do they only read about groups that they participate in? Does anyone ever join a new group because of something they've read about? To try to help us we've designed a simple quiz question for you to answer – if no-one responds, then we'll have a good indication. There is a generous prize, consisting of a free taster session with our group in the new year, for the first correct answer received by Mike (contact details in the Groups page on our website) from a u3a member not already in our group. And the question... find a two-word anagram of ”exit groups leaner” which is the foundation of getting the correct image brightness when taking a photo (clue : it's not in Bermuda!).

Maurice

Ps: all of the photos can be seen in the Photography group page on our website

Coming up at the General Meeting
Weds 18 November - **‘Make Do and Mend'** by Amanda Sutherland
Weds 16 December - festive meeting with 'Rumatica'
2027
Weds 19 January - 'The Importance of Lasting Power of Attorney' with LPA Made Simple

Newsletter contributions - for inclusion in the next issue.
If you have any items please send them before mid-January
Please note: in the interests of security, all personal details of individual members (surname, address, email or phone number) have been removed