

Brixworth and District Newsletter

u3a

Learn, laugh, live

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FRONT PAGE INTERVIEW – Diane and Clive Fenton, by Jackie Bird



Over a coffee and a beautiful warm homemade blueberry muffin I had a lovely chat with Diane and her husband, Clive. Both are members of the B&D U3A regularly attending Armchair Travel. Diane also attends Writing for Fun, she is a talented member of the group with many of her stories appearing on the B&D U3A website and in the 2024 book of short stories written by members of the group.

Both are from Northampton although Diane was born in London but moved to Northampton as a child attending Kingsthorpe High School, Clive went to Weston Favell. They met through work and married in 1981 celebrating their engagement in the Northampton Wimpy bar in the late 1970's. They have two children; a daughter Vikki and son Dominic, and two grandchildren. Diane and Clive lived in Brixworth when they first married and then moved to Northampton for about 10 years, moving back to Brixworth to their present, and forever home in 2001.

After leaving school, they both worked for the NHS, which is where they met, but her husband moved into sales, then retail management with Ikea where he was responsible for buying and pricing the home office furniture range. An interesting job which he loved and where he worked until he retired about 10 years ago. He travelled a lot working for Ikea visiting many countries including Sweden, the United States, Russia and Europe.

Diane left the NHS when she had the children and worked for a short time selling Tupperware but returned to the NHS working as a Dental Commissioner. She managed the contracts of dentists across Northants, Milton Keynes, Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire and commissioned 5 dental practices open from 8am-8pm 365 days a year in Northamptonshire, something she considers to be one of her most successful achievements. In the 1980's she successfully completed the Diploma in Management Studies at what was then Nene College, now the University of Northampton.

When they retired Diane and Clive made a conscious decision to travel more, having to date visited over 50 countries. They like to spend time during the cold months of January and February somewhere warm and sunny visiting the Caribbean or Canary Islands, however Portugal remains one of their favourite places having visited frequently over the years as they owned an apartment there until Covid hit when they decided to sell it.

.../Continued

During Covid Diane volunteered to be part of Professor Tim Spector's (OBE) Covid Symptom Study which discovered that the loss of smell and taste was a key predictive symptom for the virus. This led Diane to start looking into the effects of ultra processed food on the gut microbiome and as a result she now makes almost everything from scratch including bread, sourdough, kombucha, and sauerkraut, thereby turning her hobby into a way of life. Consequently, they also now grow some of their own vegetables and herbs in their garden to use in cooking.

Clive continues to enjoy sport, being a season ticket holder at the Cobblers and playing squash and badminton regularly.

Travel is still high on their list of hobbies and this year they have a UK cruise booked for May which includes Scotland and Ireland. They first went on a cruise around Alaska with friends and initially didn't think it was for them but by the end of the week they were loving it and have been on many cruises in Europe Asia, Australia and America since. This year they cruised from Mauritius to South Africa via Reunion Island, Madagascar, Durban and Cape Town. Highlights were seeing the lemurs in Madagascar, penguins in Boulder Bay, cheetahs, giraffes, elephants and white rhino on safaris and Robben Island where Nelson Mandella was imprisoned between 1964 and 1982.

They are both really enjoying their retirement fulfilling their decision to travel as much as possible.

NEWS FROM OUR INTEREST GROUPS

BOOK GROUP –January 2026: “Love Untold” by Ruth Jones

All agreed that this was an easy read, and although the characters were interesting some felt that the book lacked depth. Others really enjoyed the book and plan to read more books by the same author. The style of the book is warm and humorous, with many comic scenes and characters, particularly the divorce lawyer who gave great entertainment but wasn't very authentic.

The book relates the story of four women from different generations of the same family. The plot is well managed with slow reveals about them, both in the present and the past. It deals with the sometimes tragic and long-lasting effects of decisions and behaviours made by the previous generation. Despite this it also has a warm and cosy feel, if you enjoy it, you will both laugh and cry with the characters.

February 2026: “A Pale View of Hills” by Kazuo Ishiguro

Set In Nagasaki in the early 1950's the author establishes a very unsettling or disturbing atmosphere, that some felt was almost reminiscent of a ghost story. There were certainly undercurrents hidden between the interminable politeness of Japanese societal interactions. The book was a short seemingly easy read, but the group did not find it satisfying. Some found the historical detail interesting, but we all felt we were waiting for more detail in the plot and in the development of the characters.

The title of the book, gives a clue to one of the author's themes; the unreliability of human memory particularly when relating to difficult or traumatic events. The sparse plot has a subtle reveal at the end, leaving the reader to draw their own conclusions. The book generated a very interesting discussion, but this was mostly critical. No one wanted to reread the book to look for further signs of the outcome.

Chris Laukaitis

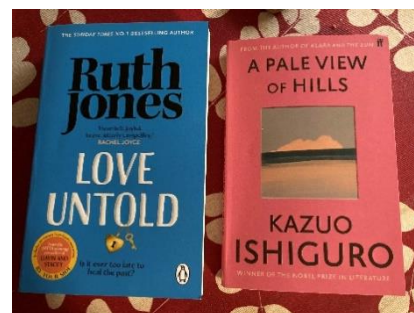
Forthcoming titles:

3rd March: The Island of Sea Women by Lisa See

7th April: V for Victory Lissa Evans

5th May: Question 7 by Richard Flannagan

2nd June: The Good Samaritan by John Marrs



SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY – Fusion Reactors – report by Colin Rowe

On Thursday February 5th 15 members of the Science & Technology group met at Loder Hall to learn from Tim Simmons, group member, about Nuclear Fusion a process, if perfected in the future, would be far safer and greener than the fission process which Tim presented to us back in November, and has been widely used for over 60 years. There was emphasis throughout the talk that fusion, where light atoms such as Deuterium and Tritium (heavy isotopes of hydrogen), are heated to 100 million degrees forming the fourth state of matter (after solid, liquid and gas) known as plasma, fusing together the atoms to release energy is very much in the future still. Scientists have been working on the process for over 60 years since the Russians came up with the theory. The problem is the process of fusing atoms to release energy requires a lot of energy and at the moment more energy is required than can be produced which Tim referred to as “Q” being less than one. To make the process viable Q will need to be at least +10, which could take another 10 years to achieve for energy production on a commercial scale.

Much of the work being carried out is being done in the South of France. Work at the Culham laboratory near Oxford, known as JET (Joint European Torus) has now been disbanded where the process was made to work on a laboratory scale achieving an output of 16.1 MW in 1997. In this process a reactor known as a Tokamak consisting of a circular steel reaction vessel is surrounded by magnets to keep the plasma from contacting the edge of the vessel preventing heat loss. The high temperature to produce the plasma is achieved by passing a high current derived from the secondary winding of a large transformer. The next phase in Britain is to build a reactor on the site of the West Burton coal fired power station in Nottinghamshire which won't be ready until 2040 when it will produce 100MW



One argument against investing large sums of money to achieve Q10 thermonuclear fusion is the money could be better spent in developing solar power and storage batteries which is already available from the largest thermonuclear reactor in the universe, ie the sun!

WEEKEND GROUP – report from Sue Dodds-Smith

On the 1st February, on a damp and grey day, 11 of our members enjoyed Sunday Lunch at The George pub in Brixworth. We had a small room at the back of the pub all to ourselves and as the other areas were very busy our small room made it a very cosy and enjoyable time together.

KNIT AND NATTER – news and photo from Sarah Nelson

This month's meeting began with welcoming two new members, Ruth and Karen.

We are currently working on a new project for the Remembrance poppy display on The Pound.

We have now completed the blue blanket and are just adding the final touches before presenting it to our chosen charity.

The group members continue to make this a very pleasant morning spent with like-minded people enjoying their tea, biscuits and knitting whilst nattering!



LONDON STUDIES



The group met on Friday 6th February and the Topic was “Off the Pitch” looking at football in the 1960s to 1990s. Firstly, we listened to some clips of football songs from the era, sung by teams celebrating reaching the FA Cup or successful seasons. Paula, who has spent the last few months researching the origins of London football clubs, shared what she had discovered in what was a really very interesting and informative talk. Who knew that Arsenal Football Club was originally founded as a works team for the Woolwich Arsenal factory?

We then had a lively and animated discussion about the behaviour of team’s supporters, ticket prices now and then and shared our experiences of the first football match we attended as well as several other topics. The discussion points were led by our question master Karen; and we were kept in order by our referee June; who needed to blow her whistle and show several yellow cards (luckily no red cards!).

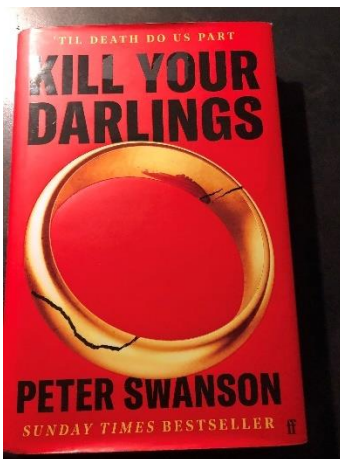
About half of the members who attended the meeting were football supporters, with 10 members supporting London Clubs. They included one Arsenal, two Chelsea, two Fulham, two Millwall, one Tottenham Hotspur and two West Ham United fans.

Football and their fans are another part of London’s rich social history. It was a very enjoyable meeting.

In March Irene will be talking about London Villages.

Jan Nicholson

BOOK WORMS – December report and photos from Celia Moss



At our December meeting we discussed ‘Kill your Darlings’ by Peter Swanson. This was a thought provoking book.

The plot begins in the present and is then told in reverse order, a sort of back to front narrative. In the present, a woman murders her husband and we read on to find out why. We discover her reasons quite quickly but as the story moves on more and more horrific details become apparent. The couple are Thom and Wendy who have one son called Jason. Thom is a university lecturer and Wendy a published poet. They are very wealthy and seem to have a successful lifestyle so why do these once childhood sweethearts have such a toxic relationship and why have they killed 4 people between them?

Most of us enjoyed the book. Some of us found the back to front narrative quite confusing but others considered this a strength. A few of us found it repetitive. Others found this story of two damaged people very interesting. It is really only about these 2 people and their marriage and all other characters are peripheral.

We had mixed responses and so the discussion was lively. Another very enjoyable evening!

ART APPRECIATION GROUP – report and photos by Janet Womack



Members of the Art Appreciation Group had a lovely afternoon on February 11th when we visited the University of Northampton archives, kindly arranged by Angela Carter, one of our members who used to teach at the University. We met at the Development Hub where the Archivist, Mandy Morgan, spent a couple of hours sharing with us her knowledge and the archive material of three Northampton artists, George Holland, Jean O' Neill and Angela Reeves.

George Holland 1901-1987

The son of a grocer, George was educated at the Northampton Grammar School and then studied at Leicester School of Art. He made his living painting portraits of Northampton dignitaries. His work can be seen in the National Portrait Gallery, National Library of Wales, and closer to home in Northampton Museum and Art Gallery and Lamport Hall.

Jean O' Neill

Jean studied at the Northampton School of Art in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Her collection in the archives includes pencil and charcoal sketches as well as watercolour travel sketches and oil portraits of family and friends.

Angela Reeves 1942- 2008

A talented and successful artist working in the latter half of the 20th century in corporate graphic design. Her clients included the BBC, Royal Mail, BEA, PanAm, Chase Bank and New York University. The collection of her work in the archives contains early drawings and sketches dating back to college days in Northampton, some of which indicate they were submitted as part of a portfolio for entrance to the London School of Printing and Graphic Arts.

We felt very privileged to see examples of their work, especially the pencil and charcoal sketches from life classes during their early training, and to have Mandy explain the finer details to us.



WRITING FOR FUN

Celebrating the new year the writing group read their stories about new year's resolutions and talked of our individual and group plans for 2026. The group are thinking about another book of short stories to publish in time for Christmas and all that goes with it including planning, printing and costs which must be covered by the purchase price. We will keep you up to date with its progress throughout the next few newsletters and you may see book number 3 for sale at various meetings leading up to Christmas.

February saw a much depleted group with people chasing the sun for short warm breaks and the inevitable winter ailments. We read our range of stories on looking through the window which included a story about writer's block to one based on fact that was a train crash plus a story for children. It's unusual for the group to write children's stories so you can read it on the website this month along with a fairytale dream a poem written by one of our members. We did two exercises the first was the good old words from a dictionary and the second was what we might say to a school friend we met after many years which led to an interesting discussion about ageing and a general dislike of Botox and all things artificial to our bodies.

Jackie Bird

BRIDGE REPORTS – from Brian Collett

DUPLICATE BRIDGE RESULTS FOR JANUARY 2026

Because of the threat from Storm Goretti, the duplicate evening for 8th February had to be postponed until the following week, which meant our monthly events were on consecutive days. For the first of them, it was the 'usual suspects' topping the table, but the following day there was a marvellous result for Kathy & Roger Morgan, beating the chasing pack by a big margin. There was also a great result for 'newbies' Sharon Hammond and Roger Atterwill, snatching a creditable fourth place ahead of some of our more established players. Likewise, on the previous evening, another result worthy of mention is the third place achieved by Rosemary Heaver and Jill Snedker.

These two events attracted two of our highest attendance numbers, with 5 Tables on Thursday, and 6 Tables on Friday – which could have been 6½ but for absence due to an unforeseen occurrence.

During February, March, and April, we will be running a Bridge Refresher Course, primarily requested by those members who took part in last year's Beginners Course. This has been arranged at the Heritage Centre from 7.00 until 9.00 pm of Wednesday each week (excluding the first Wednesday of the month), thanks to the help of Tony Brunton who has juggled the dates after consulting with other evening users of the centre.

FINAL RESULTS TABLE – THURSDAY 15 th JAN					
	IMPS	%	Players	Tops	Jt Top
1 st	88	68.8	Paul Jarvis & Brian Collett	6	2
2 nd	80	62.5	Simon & Sally Bevan	3	4
3 rd	75	58.6	Rosemary Heaver & Jill Snedker	1	3
4 th	73	57.0	Del Smith & Gila Gwinn	3	3
5 th	72	56.3	Lynda Stevenson & Denise Cowling	2	3
6 th	67	52.3	Bea Hartley & Roger Atterwill	3	2
6 th	67	52.3	Ruby Cole & Chris Williams	2	3
8 th	44	34.4	Gareth Cox & Steve Sercombe	1	2
9 th	42	32.8	Mavis Sturgess & Jim Wardle	1	1
10 th	32	25.0	Belinda Collett & Chris Hill	0	1

FINAL RESULTS TABLE – FRIDAY 16 th JAN					
	IMPS	%	Players	Tops	Jt Top
1 st	110	68.8	Roger & Kathy Morgan	4	4
2 nd	93	58.1	Tony Nixon & Katie Lindenbaum	3	2
3 rd	89	55.6	Paul Jarvis & Brian Collett	3	2
4 th	86	53.8	Sharon Hammond & Roger Atterwill	3	1
5 th	83	51.9	Hazel Barr & Gila Gwinn	3	1
6 th	82	51.3	Ruby Cole & Chris Williams	2	1
7 th	78	48.8	Helen Coghill & Mary Parker	2	2
8 th	73	45.6	Jane Davis & Del Smith	1	1
9 th	69	43.1	Jim Wardle & Mavis Sturgess	1	3
10 th	67	41.9	Paula Jones & Lynda Stevenson	0	4
11 th	66	41.3	Judy Peck & Ann Maynard	0	0
12 th	64	40.0	Tim Smith & Sheila Jones	1	1

FEBRUARY NEWS FROM THE BRIDGE GROUPS

It has been a very busy February, in which we enjoyed our two monthly sessions of the competitive Duplicate Format, both events well attended with 4½ Tables, with great results for Ruby & Chris on the Thursday, and a fabulous result for Sheila & Roger on the Friday – full results below.

It was also on Wednesday 18th February that we launched our Refresher Bridge Course specifically tailored for those players recently introduced to the great game, who wish to hone up on the bidding and playing skills, hopefully to improve their results. I initially thought I might get half-dozen or so interested, and could hold it in the dining room at home. However, the actual number of people who eventually signed-up for it, well exceeded my expectations, ending up at 31. Thanks to Tony Brunton, who pulled a few strings for us, we are squeezed into the Heritage Centre, but for the eight meetings of the group (over Feb-April) there will be some members missing due to holidays etc, as happened on 18th Feb, when we had 20 players attend, so 5 Tables. It may be soon that I have to ask Tony if I can put a bed in the HC, as some weeks I am there for u3a Canasta Monday am, the Heritage Bridge Club Monday evening, Wednesday evening for the Bridge Refresher, Thursday evening for u3a Bridge Group 1, and Friday afternoon for u3a Bridge Group 2. It is a good thing that the u3a Table Tennis Group, of which I am member, meets in Pitsford Village Hall on Thursday afternoons, just for a change of scenery.

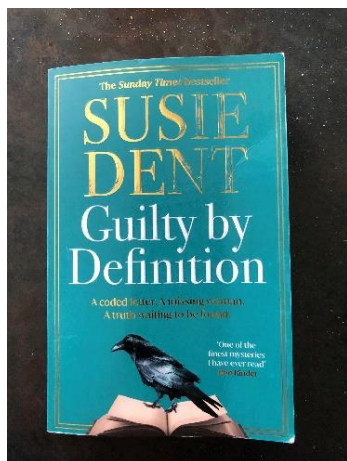
FINAL RESULTS TABLE – THURSDAY 12th FEBRUARY 2026

	IMPS	%	Players	Tops	Joint Tops
1 st	72	75.0	Ruby Cole & Chris Williams	7	3
2 nd	51	53.1	Paul Jarvis & Tony Nixon	4	1
2 nd	51	53.1	Rosemary Heaver & Jill Snedker	1	4
4 th	50	52.1	Brian Collett & Karen Brown	4	2
5 th	47	49.0	Gareth Cox & Steve Sercombe	3	0
6 th	46	47.9	Simon & Sally Bevan	1	3
7 th	44	45.8	Bea Bennett & Richard Hartley	3	0
8 th	41	42.7	Belinda Collett & Chris Hill	2	1
9 th	30	31.3	Jim Wardell & John Palmer	0	1

FINAL RESULTS TABLE – FRIDAY 20th FEBRUARY 2026

	IMPS	%	Players	Tops	Joint Tops
1 st	74	77.1	Sheila Jones & Roger Atterwill	7	2
2 nd	56	58.3	Brian Collett & Paul Jarvis	5	2
3 rd	55	57.3	Hazel Barr & Gila Gwin	3	3
4 th	49	51.0	Tony Nixon & Katie Lindenbaum	3	0
5 th	45	46.9	Ruby Cole & Chris Williams	1	3
6 th	41	42.7	Kathy & Roger Morgan	2	0
7 th	38	39.6	Paula Jones & Judy Peck	1	4
7 th	38	39.6	Jane Davis & Del Smith	1	2
9 th	36	37.5	Chris Russell & Anne Weddle	0	2

BOOK WORMS – “Guilty by Definition” by Susie Dent



'Guilty by Definition', published in 2024, is written by Susie Dent who is famous for her appearances in Countdown. She is a renowned lexicographer and wordsmith who has written many non-fiction books about words and language. This is her first work of fiction.

Martha has returned home from Germany to work at the Clarendon English Dictionary in Oxford. It has been ten years since her brilliant, older sister, Charlie, went missing. Martha and her widowed father have never recovered from the loss. Cryptic, anonymous letters begin to arrive at the Dictionary office, hinting at secrets and lies surrounding Charlie's disappearance. Martha and her colleagues start examining the clues in the letters and try to solve the mystery.

There was an effective storyline which kept moving forward, albeit rather slowly at times for some of us. It was a leisurely read certainly but kept our attention. We wanted to know 'whodunnit' so kept turning the pages! The characters were well developed particularly Alex, Safi, Charlie and Oliver and all had a part to play in discovering the truth. There were effective descriptions of Oxford itself with its river, birds and pubs too and the city came alive.

The book was full of insights into language, the roots and development of words and the English of Shakespeare's times. We learned many new words; for example, the book was full of 'witterhed' (chapter 45)-knowledge and wisdom. In many ways this was a cozy mystery with credible characters, a good story and a potential love interest but it also dealt with serious themes such as grief, loss and the dangers of ambition.

Celia Moss

ARMCHAIR TRAVEL - Visit to Mongolia



Armchair Travel takes a break in January each year, since the meeting day is too close to the New Year festivities. Therefore the 2026 programme began in February with a nostalgic talk from Helen King about her visit some 10 years ago to Mongolia. Helen had some really interesting photos of that visit which she shared with us. We were left wondering whether the nomadic way of life that she encountered was still the same now, some 10 years on.

Certainly, recent U-tube short films show the capital Ulan Bator to be built up with many high rise blocks, far different from ten years ago when Helen visited. Thank you Helen for sharing your visit with us.

Photos by Helen: Left – a local musician playing on a “horses-head” fiddle, Below: Bactrian Camel Breeders in the Gobi Desert, Right: a huge monument of Genghis Khan's Empire



If you have been somewhere interesting and would like to share your visit with the Group, please let us know. You will be made very welcome. We are certainly gaining an insight into various known and unknown parts of the world, with first hand accounts such as this one about Mongolia with Helen. We meet in Scaldwell Village Halland all for the cost of £2.00 to include refreshments on the first Tuesday of each month.



GARDEN GROUP – report by Annie Curtis

In January Dave Askew from Northamptonshire Walks gave us a very interesting talk about how he set up the Northamptonshire Walks' website and Facebook Group. There are over 200 walks in Northamptonshire together with many from other parts of the country. Each walk is illustrated and led by photographs so that even younger members of a family can take a guiding role in taking their family on a selected walk. In addition, Dave and his helpers lead guided walks on a regular basis together with asking walkers to post photos of their varied walks on the Facebook page. This is a wonderful way for people to discover Northamptonshire via these photos. Dave was asked to describe walks in Northamptonshire on his Northamptonshire Walks website where members could see snowdrops and bluebells out in the countryside. He named Badby Woods as one of the best places to see bluebells but listed others too. Check them out on his website at Northamptonshire Walks.

In February Geoff Hodge - one of our regular speakers - went through the year, describing and giving us ideas for scented plants for our gardens in each month. He suggested that we might like to plant some by our front door, to smell their scent as we enter the house. Afterwards he very kindly emailed a list of all the plants that he had mentioned during his talk. So now we have a good list for reference when we visit a garden centre. Geoff has been booked again for next year's winter programme.

March will see the return of another of our regular and popular speakers. Chris Rowe will be telling us about 'The gardens of the Loire,' which are in a beautiful part of France. This sounds extremely interesting and informative.

GARDEN GROUP PROGRAMME FOR 2026/27

15th Apr 2026	Visit to Ascott House and Garden
20th May 2026	Visit to Leicester Botanic Gardens & Attenborough Aboretum
17th Jun 2026	Visit to Woolscott Barn Gardens, Woolscott
15th Jul 2026	Visit to Foxtail Lily Garden, Oundle
19th Aug 2026	Visit to Wicket Farm, Lutterworth
16th Sept 2026	Visit to Boughton House
20th Oct 2026	Talk given by Bridget Blair. Former BBC journalist and member of the Garden Media Guild
18th Nov 2026	Talk given by Andrew Mikolajski "How to Manage Wall Shrubs and Climbers"
16th Dec 2026	No Meeting
20th Jan 2027	Talk given by Chris Rowe "Blossom"
17th Feb 2027	Talk given by Geoff Hodge "Easy Gardening"
17th Mar 2027	Talk given by Howard Drury "Forty years of Gardening Tips"



RAMBLING & STROLLERS GROUPS

The next ramble will be taking place on Tuesday 10th March starting from The Stags Head, Maidwell (NN6 9JA) at 10.30am.

Strollers - if you wish to join the ramblers on the first part of this walk which will be the Peter Martin Memorial walk to Blueberry Lodge please also be at the Stags Head for 10.30am

LOCAL HISTORY GROUP – January and February round-up

In January I started the year off with a look at some “More Spires & Squires of Northamptonshire” – a follow-on from the very first meeting of the group in January 2019. Was that really 7 years ago?? This time I looked at a variety of churches (with or without spires) and local worthies, some of which we had visited as a group over the past 3 years or so. I started with Spratton – which we had visited in 2023, and finished with Weekley – which we are visiting in April 2026.

When talking about Spratton, I told the group how the suffragette, Emily Davison, was a governess at Spratton Grange. It was she who ran out in front of the King’s horse with fatal consequences at the 1913 Epsom Derby. At Spratton Hall, General Sir George Whichcote fought at the Battle of Waterloo.



One village we, as a group, have not yet visited is Geddington – with its lovely Eleanor Cross. I think there would certainly be enough of interest historically in the village to make a trip worthwhile. Although the Royal Hunting Lodge is no longer there, the church, cross and old pack-horse bridge are interesting sights. And a pub, of course.

In February, Jackie Bird, gave us a fascinating talk entitled “Raising the Curtain” about some of the theatres in Northampton. At one time there seemed to have been dozens offering plays, vaudeville, music as well as early silent films.

Her talk prompted much discussion from the group who remembered many of those old theatres – from seeing the Beatles and Rolling Stones perform in the town, to watching the latest play on tour from the West End. Laurel & Hardy and Cyril Fletcher as well as Errol Flynn performed here – no doubt he got up to a few naughty activities while



he was in the town! The New Theatre opened in 1912 as the Hippodrome – a music hall venue. But by the middle of the century, I suppose with television providing more family entertainment, the New Theatre became known as the “Newd Theatre” thanks to its regular striptease acts!

The New Theatre in Abington Street is sadly no longer there – it was totally demolished in 1960 and by 2008 the site was a Primark store. What a loss to the town.

Fortunately, Jackie had a lovely picture of the theatre lent to her by a cousin, which she brought along and has kindly photographed for us.

CRAFT GROUP – February report by Rosemary Jenkins



The Craft Group meeting in February was a little different in that Chris Rowe came to explain to us how to do picture batiks. Thank you Chris for the very interesting and informative talk on Batik. My group is going to have a go with yourself in August. We are all looking forward to it but it’s a small project and we are sure it won’t be as good as yours.

Photos of two of Chris’s batiks of Peruvian gods.



MONTHLY MEETINGS

January – “History of Ladybird Books” by Mark Temple



On January 7th, Mark Temple presented his talk on the “History of Ladybird Books” to a full house (quite surprising since the weather had been cold and snowy for the previous couple of days!) of members. Mark lives quite close to Loughborough – the birthplace of the printing presses which eventually published Ladybird books. He described the various Issues from the early 20th Century up until the company was taken over in the 1970s. Mark told us that he has quite a collection of vintage editions, but is always looking out for rare ones in second-hand bookshops – some editions are worth a lot of money – if you can find them!
(Photo of books on sale at Brackley Antiques Centre)

It was following WW2 that many of the titles that we probably knew and loved hit the shelves, usually in the same 4” x 7” format with colourful pictures painted by a plethora of artists. But in 1972, the company was taken over and by the 1990s became part of the Penguin Books publishing group. Nowadays Ladybird books for adults have introduced us to parodies of our childhood reading, with such exhilarating titles as “The Hangover”, “Mindfulness” and “The Grandparent”. Mark’s talk was most amusing and brought back many happy memories for many of us.

February – “A Downstairs Maid” with Jo Golby

On February 4th we welcomed back Jo Golby who has previously entertained us with her stories of ghosts at both Warwick Castle and Calke Abbey, where Jo has worked for many years as a costumed tour guide. And it was in her costume of a Victorian “Lady’s Maid” that Jo told us about Violet, Lady’s Maid to Lady Mary Curzon, of Kedleston Hall. Mary was an American heiress who came to Britain to nab herself an aristocratic husband in 1890. Her inheritance of approx. \$12 million would no doubt bring her to the attention of a suitable aristocrat with plenty of breeding and a stately home but with insufficient funds to repair the leaky roof! That aristocrat was George Curzon.



Lady Mary’s attempts to make friends in England brought her into the realm of the Black Country seamstress, Violet, who started making Lady Mary’s dresses. Violet soon became more of a companion to Lady Mary, even travelling to India with the couple when Lord George Curzon, Lady Mary’s husband, became Viceroy of India.

Jo very humorously described Violet’s duties and those of the ladies such maids worked for. Her descriptions of how to “talk” with the ubiquitous fan that all ladies carried, the Victorian ideals of decorum, dress and, especially, the ladies’ place in society, had us all laughing. “Stays”, bloomers and other undergarments made most of us very glad that we were born in the 20th, not 19th Century. I hope Jo comes back to entertain us some more.

Future monthly meetings:

- | | |
|-----------------------|--|
| 4 th March | “My Year as a Lighthouse Keeper”, with Norman Wilson |
| 1 st April | “Unknown Icarus”, with Roy Smart |
| 6 th May | “Behind the Scenes of Who do you think you are?” with Nick Barrett |

NEW MEMBERS

We welcome the following new (or returning) members to B&D u3a. We look forward to getting to know you and meeting you at the monthly or interest group meetings.

Gillian Felton	Amanda Oakes	John Palmer	Christine Homer	Jane Price
Julie Rudkin	Heather Pool	Robin Pool	Neil Bennett	Clodagh Elliott
Margaret Lewis	Peter Drabble	Sue Drabble	Madeleine Jones	

B&D U3A NEWS:

Stamps for Charity – news from Keith Featley



Please pass on my thanks to everyone in Brixworth and District U3A for donating stamps for Charity. I am sending out 3 envelopes of used stamps this week, each weighing approximately 1/2 kilo.

I can also confirm that a total of 76 envelopes were sent out in 2025 to an astonishing 17 charities ranging from Cancer Research, Motor Neurone Disease, Multiple Sclerosis, Hedgehog Appreciation Society to Dogs for Good. These have been received with many thanks.

Any and all stamps are very much appreciated and I look forward to any sending out more stamps to these charities

Keith has also passed to us a very nice thank you from Macmillan Cancer Support in response to the bags of used stamps collected at B&D u3a meetings.

Keith informed me that about 1.5 kilos of stamps have been collected from B&D u3a members – out of 5 kilos sent to Macmillan from Northamptonshire.

The Charities this month are Dogs for Good, Multiple Sclerosis Stamps, Bone Cancer Research Trust and British Hedgehog Preservation Society, each charity is being sent 1/2 kilo of stamps to raise funds for their vital work.



INTEREST GROUP UPDATES

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY – NOTICE FROM COLIN ROWE

Thank you for your support in making the group a success over the months and years - 10 years in fact since we started out - just 4 of us in the old school room at Holcot. I am writing to you today (23 February) as I have decided, effective immediately, to step down as group leader to make way for a new leader hoping that someone within the group will take over from me. I will remain available to assist with the handover should it be required and be prepared to offer odd talks if requested. Special thanks to Ray Bradfield, Tim Simmons and Chris Rowe for their help over the years in preparing talks on a variety of subjects which have aroused our interests on diverse topics such as "tomatoes" the imperial inch and nuclear power. Thank you all for your support and contributions.

ART GROUP NEWS

We have received news from Kevin Daykin (Norah's husband) that unfortunately, due to Norah's ongoing illness, the Art Group has been cancelled for the foreseeable future. We wish Norah all the very best for a full recovery.

SECOND BADMINTON GROUP

As the existing Badminton Group is full and unable to accept new members, John Cahill has been able to secure the Old Village Hall on the 2nd and 4th Monday of the month 2-3.30pm for a second Badminton Group. Start date to be advised – please check the website for details and to contact John to put your name down for the new group.