

Brixworth and District Newsletter



Learn, laugh, live

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Issue 109

July/August 2026

AUGUST RIVER CRUISE – A GRAND DAY OUT!



It was perhaps inevitable, following weeks if not months of wall-to-wall sunshine and high temperatures, that when nearly 90 B&D u3a members and guests arrived at Brixworth Library to catch the coaches for our summer outing, that it should be cool and raining! But fortunately the clouds had dissipated by the time we arrived in Oxford and there was more blue than grey in the sky –by the afternoon it was getting very warm and sunny again – if a little breezy.

The river trip by Salter's Steamers on the "Wargrave" was a four-hour cruise up the Thames towards Abingdon – passing many of the colleges' boat yards, through two locks (Iffley and Sandford) and mooring for an hour (due to low water beyond the lock preventing us reaching Abingdon) by an adjacent pub to where many on board disembarked to stretch their legs. But before that there was a "take away" fish and chip lunch to enjoy on board – although eating fish and chips on one's lap, juggling vinegar, salt, pepper, packets of mayo and tomato ketchup with wooden knives and forks, did require the arms and hands of an octopus! (see right) With a busy bar on board to keep us well-watered, no-one was complaining.



The scenery was lovely, although we could see crops and grass were desperately in need of some rain. All in all, it was indeed, a "Grand Day Out"! And many thanks to Keith and Tim (and everyone else involved!) for organising it all, including Colin who arranged the coach hire. Photos from Chris, Clive and John – with many more at the end of the newsletter and on the website.

Photos (Left to Right) – fish & chip lunch , and the "Leg Stretchers"



returning from the pub!



INTEREST GROUPS – STATUS REPORT “THOSE WE HAVE LOVED AND LOST”?

While new interest groups start up with pleasing regularity, there are some that many of us have enjoyed in the past, learnt a lot from, but for one reason or another have foundered.

So, can we resurrect any (or all?) of the following (in alphabetical order)? Sorry about any puns!

Architecture group – looked at all styles of architecture over the years – and across the world.

Cycling – numbers fell (as did the group leader, ending up with a broken wrist!) but no-one was willing to take over.

Family History – many of us discovered ways to find our past (literally) using online searches.

Music Appreciation – covered all genres until the leaders moved from the area.

Painting and Drawing – this was thriving until early this year when the leader was taken ill – can someone get the artistic juices flowing again?

Photography – ran well for a while but got lost in a dark room – should we redevelop it?

Poetry Reading – what happened to it?

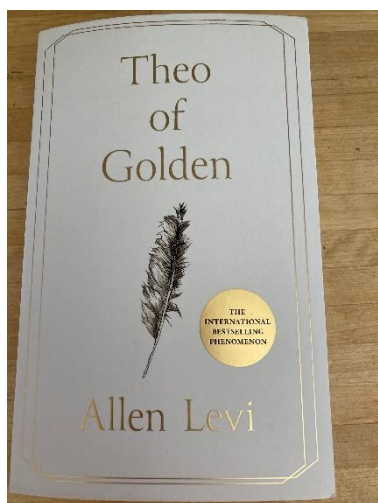
Science & Technology – closed last year on the leader’s retirement with no-one to take over.

If anyone would like to find out more about any of these groups, please let Jackie or I know and we will do all we can to get them up and running again. But in the meantime, if you have other suggestions for interesting groups, don’t be shy – let us know – quite probably there are other B&D u3a members who would be eager to join you and help set it up.

Jackie Bird & Chris Rowe

NEWS FROM OUR INTEREST GROUPS

BOOK GROUP: July discussion of “Theo of Golden” by Allen Levi



Everybody in the group enjoyed this fascinating, thought-provoking book. For anyone who is cynical or disillusioned by life in the 21st century this might be the title for you.

Set in small-town America, the deceptively simple plot starts with the arrival of a gentle elderly man. His subsequent actions enrich and enhance the lives of many of the residents, often in unexpected ways. At the same time the book suggests how many issues such as grief, trauma, marginalisation could be overcome starting with simple acts of kindness.

We found the book to be very compelling; and couldn’t wait for the stories of each of the characters to be revealed. At times their stories told of great sadness or hardship and yet the book was uplifting. But the biggest revelation was saved for the end when the story of the gentle elderly man was explained.

Forthcoming titles:

1st September: Clear by Carys Davies

6th October: The Paris Bookseller by Kerri Maher

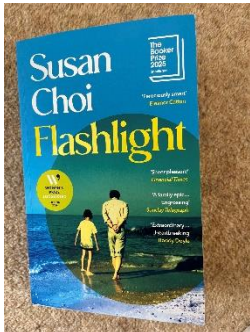
3rd November: The Island of Missing Trees by Elif Shafak

WRITING FOR FUN – by Jackie Bird

The Writing for Fun group members have been busy writing stories in July about an incredible journey for the national magazine story competition U3A Matters (formerly Third Age Matters or TAM). The stories had to be a real non- autobiographical, well researched journey and no more than 1000 words long. Of the ten of us seven entered our stories which were not allowed to have been published so the website story is from one of the members who decided not to enter. The stories were fascinating and really well researched and covered a real range of ideas and facts including the journey of salmon, Eleanor of Castille and Thomas Stevens (the first man to ride a bicycle across the world and it was a Penny Farthing!). Sarah Nelson found her namesake who made ginger biscuits and became a household name and yes we did all try them with our coffee. Lovely. There was also a story that took us through the earth's history from slime to AI and that was followed by the life and times of "Sisi" (Empress of Austria). "Dare to March" brought us up to date with the political changes demonstrating the strength of the voice of the people. "Women's struggles through the church" was one of the two not entered and is on the website and the other was "Prince or common toad hidden in a shoe" which was based on a true story of a toad hiding in a shoe after a picnic. Winners will be notified by TAM in early September and we will let you know if any of our stories are shortlisted or winners.

Back in June we wrote about a secret witness which included a village hall fete with of course the cheating cake maker, a murder mystery, a doggy witness and the wedding duel, which was on the website. Next month we are all writing about The Family Treasure, will the treasure be a person, lost jewels or a favourite pet? One of them will be there for you to read and enjoy as always.

BOOK GROUP: 1 August 2026: Flashlight by Susan Choi



The group found the historical background of this family saga informative and towards the end as more facts and their impact on the characters were revealed, the book became more compelling.

Flashlight contains many strong characters, and although they were living very challenging lives, they were not pleasant people. At times their behaviour shocked and saddened us but it was difficult to empathise as they were so mean; after a while some of the scenes became tedious.

The theme of a Flashlight or torch occurs several times in the book, sometimes as an actual object and also when the characters were looking for truths and hidden secrets. Many of these references were fleeting or obscure and failed to give readers any clarity. To conclude none of us found this book to be a satisfying read.



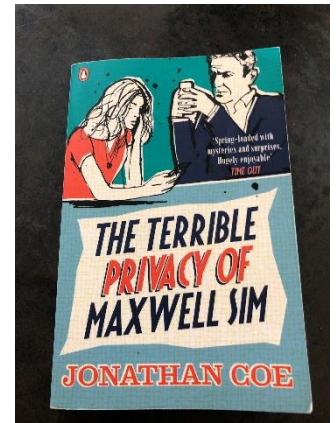
EVENING DINING GROUP – update from Sue Dodds-Smith

The Evening Dining Group hasn't met for some time and I thought it would be good to try and organise another meal at The George, Great Oxendon on the 14th September. The George will provide a three course set menu with a price for two or three courses, as they have done in the past.

It would be a great help if you could please let me know if you are interested so that I have some idea if people are interested.

BOOK WORMS – The Terrible Privacy of Maxwell Sim” by Jonathan Coe

At our July meeting, we enjoyed a beautiful summer's evening and a lively discussion about 'The Terrible Privacy of Maxwell Sim' by Jonathan Coe which was published in 2010. Most of the story is told in the first person and we first meet Max in Australia where he has been trying to form a relationship with his estranged father. He then flies home and we learn of his clinical depression and feelings of isolation and loneliness. He has been on sick leave for six months following the break-up of his marriage but gets a new job for a toothpaste manufacturer. This involves a journey to a remote chemist in the Shetland Islands during which he visits various people from his past. He continually tries to work out why he feels so alienated from the world and all the people in it. He suffers a nervous breakdown on this journey but this is not the end of his story!



We all enjoyed the book and some of us mentioned the exploration of serious themes such as depression, alienation and marriage breakdown. Others noted that technological devices such as social media and mobile phones which should facilitate social connection somehow fail to do so in Max's case. Arguably, the most significant relationship Max develops is with Emma his Sat Nav! He feels at one with her, free to be himself and able to accept her calm reassurances that he is on the right path.

Emma is one of the comedic set pieces in the novel and we found her laugh out loud funny. We all mentioned other episodes which we found hilarious. There was one sequence, for example, where everyone was speaking at cross purposes and Max was trying to keep up. Near the beginning of the book Max is telling the man sitting next to him on an aeroplane the story of his life. He really feels he is making a connection only to realise at some point during the conversation the man has actually died of a heart attack.

A long discussion took place about the ending of the book. Some of us felt the ending undercut the whole novel and we felt cheated. We tried to work out what Coe was trying to do with such a bizarre ending. Others of us weren't that bothered by it and just ignored it as it was such a good story.

CRAFT GROUP – AND SCRABBLE from Rosemary Jenkins



This is a photo of our painting on canvas which took two months. It follows numbers on the canvas and we used acrylic paints.

Scrabble started last month and we are 6 members in total. It is held the 3rd Thursday of the month. We had a fun afternoon and got to meet new members. We will keep on going every 3rd Thursday from 2pm to 4pm.



DUPLICATE BRIDGE RESULTS FOR JULY – from Brian Collett

FINAL RESULTS - THURSDAY 9th JULY 2026					
	IMPS	%	Players	Tops	Joint Tops
1 st	37	61.7	Gila Gwinn & Del Smith	6	2
2 nd	36	60.0	Katie Lindenbaum & Tony Nixon	7	2
3 rd	32	53.3	Lynda Stevenson & Chris Hill	5	1
4 th	26	43.3	Ruby Cole & Chris Williams	3	2
4 th	26	43.3	Roger Atterwill & Brian Collett	2	2
6 th	23	38.3	Mavis Sturgess & Richard Hartley	2	1

FINAL RESULTS - FRIDAY 17th JULY 2026					
	IMPS	%	Players	Tops	Joint Tops
1 st	55	57.3	Paul Jarvis & Brian Collett	5	2
2 nd	54	56.3	Ruby Cole & Chris Williams	5	2
3 rd	50	52.1	Tony Nixon & Katie Lindenbaum	4	1
3 rd	50	52.1	Jules Judkin & Fiona Cox	3	1
3 rd	50	52.1	Jane Davis & Del Smith	2	3
6 th	47	49.0	Gila Gwinn & Madeleine Jones	2	2
7 th	44	45.8	Sheila Jones & Tim Smith	2	3
8 th	43	44.8	Paula Jones & Lynda Stevenson	1	3
9 th	39	40.6	Mavis Sturgess & Fay Duckmanton	1	2

The Friday result was the closest that we have seen for a while, with just 5 IMPS covering the top five pairs, with three of them finishing on the same score.

RAMBLING & STROLLING GROUPS –



On the 14th July the Ramblers met at West Haddon, enjoyed lunch and a most enjoyable walk in fabulous weather. Photos by Keith Featley.



The Rambling Group have arranged the next walk on September 8th to start at the Walnut Tree Inn, Station Rd, Blisworth (NN7 3DS) at 10.30am, for a canal side , countryside and village walk. Strollers meet at 10.30am as usual

If you would like to join us for this walk please contact timsmith1707@aol.com and advise whether you will be staying on for lunch

LOCAL HISTORY GROUP – VISIT TO DESBOROUGH HERITAGE CENTRE

report and photos by Wendy Schmitt

On Thursday 23rd July, 23 members of the group travelled to the Desborough Heritage Centre. They were met by volunteers of the centre and Wendy Schmitt, who apart from being a member of Brixworth U3A is a committee member of Desborough Civic Society. The Chairman of the Civic Society, Belinda Humphry, gave a potted history of Desborough. Like so many places the first written record is in the Domesday Book where it is referred to as Dereburg, Desburg and Deisburg only becoming Desborough at the beginning of the 18th century.



However, the discovery of a small cinerary urn, now in Northampton Museum, and other finds indicate a Bronze Age settlement, various other finds indicate Roman occupation. The most interesting finds are The Desborough Mirror (left). It is bronze and belongs to the Celtic period, 300 to 200 B.C. and is said to be the most perfect example of one. The other being the Desborough Necklace (right) which was found amongst approx. 60 graves. It is gold and garnet and due to having a cross as part of the design is thought to have belong to a high status



Anglo Saxon woman who was a Christian, again this is considered to be one of the finest examples. Both are now in the British Museum but the necklace was brought back to Northants last year as part of the excellent exhibition of “A History of Northamptonshire in 100 objects”, held at the Northampton Museum. Both of these items were found due to the extensive Iron Stone quarrying that took place all around the town, although other smaller items were found with them no doubt much has been lost due to the quarrying.

Desborough was also noted for its silk weaving and worsted trades; much hardship took place when these trades dried up but then the Boot and Shoe Industry took over from 1868. There have been 29 of these factories in the town but now only one remains, Cheaney’s which makes high quality men’s shoes. The corset trade also took off with Symington’s and then the C.W.S. Corset Factory, which made a pleasant change for lady machinists. The company is now owned by Wacoal.



I then gave a short resume of two talks held at Scaldwell for the LH group, the first being about Desborough Co-operative Society, which happened to be my first meeting of Brixworth U3A. It was founded in 1863 and I am very proud that my 3rd Great Grandfather was the first Member and my 3rd Great Uncle the first President and late Grandfather was President for 20 years. The other topic was the talk given to the group by Wendy Raybould about the Worsted Industry. She mentioned that Bishop Blaize was the Patron Saint of the trade and had said that one of the three mentions of him had taken place at Rothwell and Desborough. She kindly sent me a copy of the 1788 newspaper article which was about the inquest of the death of William Crick who when walking home from the celebrations in Rothwell was found dead. The jury brought their verdict that he had died through intoxication of liquor and the severity of the weather. Obviously a very jolly celebration!!

/Continued ..

Then Stuart Irons gave a shortened version of his film show of Victorian Desborough, there are many photos of old Desborough taken before most of the old buildings were demolished to build what is referred to as the bypass which runs through the middle of the town. He also gave demonstrations of how AI can colourise old photos but that one had to be vigilant as for example it sometimes it changed elderly people into young ones and vice versa!



At the interval tea/coffee and cakes were enjoyed, so much so that it was noticed that the recipe for the Sticky Toffee cake was sought by several members and Gillian Brunton took the time to email Chris and say the Lemon Drizzle cake was the best she 'd had and that she had tasted quite a few. Members then looked around the large number of exhibits, some staying until 1pm and others saying that they would return and some would bring grandchildren.

Unfortunately there was not time to look at the beautiful church but a guided tour has already been planned for next year due to requests from members (26th August 2027, Chris).

Wendy Schmitt

"The film show we had lasted for an hour with a break for coffee and cake. The best slice of Lemon Drizzle cake I have ever tasted, and, I have tasted a few!"

Plenty of time afterwards to peruse the various rooms in the museum. It was gone 1pm when we left. Ray was still there!"

Emailed by Gillian Brunton

KNIT AND NATTER – July report from Sarah Nelson



We had a very productive group meeting with some beautifully completed projects for our chosen charities (now delivered). One being the desperate need for knitted cardigans and jumpers for new born baby boys at a place called Baby Basics in Moulton Park where vulnerable

women go for some TLC. The group members have produced some amazing work, their talent is brilliant. We have also completed a cute little blanket for the doggy charity and will be delivering that to help dogs in need!!

Our nattering this month covered various subjects covering current affairs and as always put the world to rights over our tea, coffee and biscuits. Looking forward to next month's get together.

DUPLICATE BRIDGE RESULTS FOR THE MONTH OF AUGUST 2026

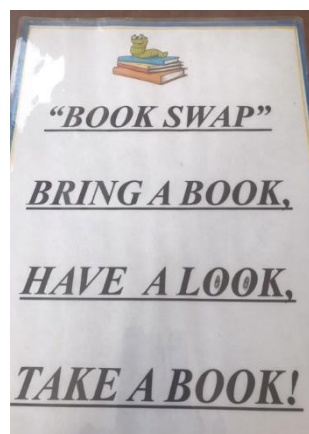
Report by Brian Collett

After a fine win by Tony & Roger on the second Thursday of August, Jane & Del, closely followed by new pairing Sharon & Maggie, snapped up the two top places on a much cooler Friday afternoon to restore the balance. This year's Bridge for Beginners Course has now been completed, with the new players now honing their bridge skills upstairs at the Heritage Centre on Thursday evenings, with our regular members continuing to play downstairs. So in the longer-term, we may see some new names appearing in future duplicate bridge results tables

THURSDAY 13 th AUGUST 2026 - FINAL RESULTS TABLE					
	IMPS	%	Players	Tops	Joint Top
1 st	62	73.8	Tony Nixon & Roger Atterwill	3	4
2 nd	55	65.5	Brian Collett & Paul Jarvis	4	4
3 rd	45	53.6	Lynda Stevenson & Rosemary Heaver	4	1
4 th	42	50.0	Chris Hill & Belinda Collett	3	3
5 th	38	45.2	Pam Wilson & Kim Mabbutt	2	0
6 th	35	41.7	Gareth Cox & Steve Sercombe	2	1
7 th	34	40.5	Bea Bennett & Madeleine Jones	1	2
8 th	25	29.8	Del Smith & Gila Gwinn	1	2

FRIDAY 21 st AUGUST 2026 - FINAL RESULTS TABLE					
	IMPS	%	Players	Tops	Joint Top
1 st	52	61.9	Jane Davis & Del Smith	3	4
2 nd	51	60.7	Sharon Hammond & Maggie Lewis	4	3
3 rd	43	51.2	Tony Nixon & Katie Lindenbaum	3	2
4 th	42	50.0	Sheila Jones & Roger Atterwill	2	2
5 th	40	47.6	Brian Collett & Lynda Stevenson	4	1
6 th	39	46.4	Judy Peck & Gila Gwinn	0	5
7 th	37	44.0	Fay Duckmanton & Chris Williams	3	2
8 th	32	38.1	Kathy & Roger Morgan	1	0

BOOK SWAP TABLE



The monthly Book Table continues to be a big success!!



But not just books, jigsaws too are very popular



So I'd like to say a big "Thankyou" for your continued support



Paula Smith

LOCAL HISTORY GROUP WALK & TALK AROUND ABINGTON PARK – 27th August

You know that song “Raindrops Keep Falling on My Head”? Well, that was most definitely the case this morning when 15 intrepid members of the LH group met with Terry Wenham



who guided us around various interesting parts of Abington Park – especially mentioning the memorial to Edgar Mobbs and the Mobbs Own regiment as well



as the stories of two Victoria Cross recipients. We were able to shelter in the Bandstand at one point where Terry told us about the homecoming celebrations for many of the WW1 and WW2 heroes,

when thousands of people would gather for official gatherings around the bandstand. We did, of course, also visit “Tanky Hill” and hear the stories about the tank and guns that were on display for many years before being cut up for scrap in Sheffield! So our cutlery may be made from tank steel – who knows? We ended up in the churchyard to hear some more stories of war heroes, including two of the Crockett & Jones shoe manufacturer’s Crockett family members. There are several CWG commission grave markers in the churchyard which are equally interesting.

Thank goodness for the bandstand – and all the trees in the park where we could shelter!

USED STAMPS FOR CHARITY



I hope that you can let the Brixworth and District U3a community know that I shall be sending out 4 x1/2 kilo envelopes to charities this week, the charities are Kidney Care Uk, Bone Cancer Research Trust, Dogs for Good and Kicks Count.



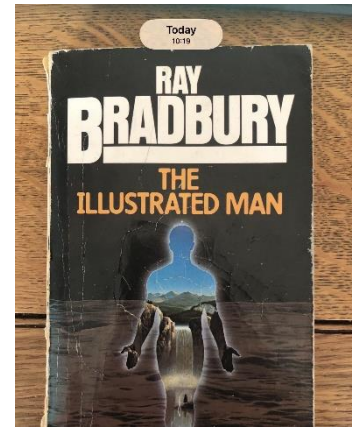
We have also received thanks from Against Breast Cancer, Multiple Sclerosis Stamps, Stamp Out Motor Neuron Disease and British Hedgehog Preservation Society within the last month

I have also received huge thanks from Parkinsons UK who have been able to raise over £172,000 through their recycling scheme. Any and all stamps very gratefully received, old, new, foreign and domestic, Commemorative and everyday...all welcome. Thanks again for your support.

Keith Featley

BOOKWORMS – August report from Celia Moss

At our August meeting we discussed 'The Illustrated Man' by Ray Bradbury. This collection of 18 short stories was published in 1951 and has never been out of print. The stories are linked together by an unnamed narrator who meets a man who is covered with living tattoos. Each tattoo shows a vision of the future. As each story is told, the corresponding tattoo disappears. At the end of the book there is only one empty space on the Illustrated Man's back which begins to come to life and shows the unnamed narrator being strangled. Not willing to lose his life the unnamed narrator runs away. We liked this useful framing technique.



We felt the book was very much concerned with the issues of its time; it dealt with Cold War anxiety and fears of nuclear destruction as well as issues around racial segregation. Another major theme was the post war boom in technology. Bradbury warns us of the dangers of embracing advances in technology too freely. He feared that without care they could erode human connections.

The story 'The Veld' illustrates some of these concerns. It describes a suburban house in the future with George and Linda and their children. The house cooks their meals, cleans itself and washes their clothes. It also provides a high-tech virtual reality nursery that projects environments directly from the children's minds. Lydia feels uneasy about the nursery and they enter it to find a South African Veld. This is well described; the 'hot yellow sun' makes George sweat as it feels so real. They can smell the 'great rusty smell of animals' and hear the thump of antelope feet and the 'papery rustling of vultures' circling overhead. When the lions arrive with 'the smell of meat dripping from their panting, drippy mouths', the couple are chased out of the room. The couple realise that the automated house has become the children's mother. They both feel they have lost their roles as parents. The children deny they have created this scene but George finds an old wallet of his in a corner of the room where the lions have been and it is covered in blood and saliva. They decide to turn off the nursery and leave the house but the children beg for just one more minute..... The children call their parents into the Veld. They then shut them in the room and the lions attack and kill them. When a friend of George's goes into the nursery he finds the children calmly eating a picnic lunch. The lions have finished feeding and the vultures are dropping down from the blazing sky.

We considered the impact today of 'iPad parenting', the growth of AI companions and virtual babysitters and reflected that although some of his themes are dated, many have stood up and are still relevant today. The nursery has provided a wonderful learning experience for the children but it was not able to teach warmth, kindness, empathy and human connection.

We thought Ray Bradbury was a marvellous storyteller. The stories are short and accessible. His other great strength is in the power of his descriptive writing. This was seen in 'The Veld' and also in the 'The Long Rain'. In this story a small squad of US astronauts crash on Venus which is described as a sweltering jungle where the rain never stops. They struggle to find safety in a Sun dome but most die or become insane. The Captain reaches safety at last or is he only hallucinating? The story is gripping but what really stands out are the descriptions of the relentless rain. He makes us feel the rain as heavy and suffocating. Similarly, in 'The Kaleidoscope' a rocket ship explodes in deep space. The crew members in their space suits are scattered in different directions. The men talk through their suit radios and largely reach acceptance about their lives and deaths. The story comes alive with the power of the descriptive writing; for example, as the crew members drift apart their coloured spacesuits scatter across the void like tumbling beads inside a kaleidoscope.

Most of us thoroughly enjoyed these stories although some of us found them rather too bleak. We all had our favourites and it hasn't been possible to write about all of them here. Some of them have dated more than others but in general they have stood the test of time. We recommend this classic Sci Fi, fantasy and horror collection.

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 main monthly meeting or at one of our interest groups.

Jill Meredith

Anthony Lunnon

Caroline Wood

Judy Ross

Andrew Ross

Vanessa Bacon

MONTHLY MEETINGS

1st July – “Stamford and the Cecil Family” by Mike Burton

On his return visit to B&D u3a (he came in October 2025 to tell us about Rockingham Castle) Mike gave us a very interesting history of the town of Stamford and the Cecil family who were major benefactors to the town.

Stamford, or “the Stony Ford” as it was called in early times, was conveniently situated on fords crossing the River Welland which flows eastwards into the Wash. It was therefore an ideal place to become a major commercial centre from Anglo Saxon times up until the 19th century when the river began to silt up. The Vikings used the river to trade (and cause havoc) with the early settlers but by medieval times the town was fully established with a castle, many priories and markets trading in wool as well as other commodities coming from afar.



Royalty came to Stamford with the overnight stay of the funeral cortege of Queen Eleanor of Castile, the much-loved consort of King Edward I, who to mark the occasion caused one of the elegant Eleanor Crosses to be built in the town. The original was probably destroyed by Oliver Cromwell's Parliamentary army, along with the castle. A modern replica of the cross stands in the centre of town (*photo by Chris Rowe*).

The Cecil family were supporters of the Tudor monarchy – William Cecil becoming Queen Elizabeth's “right-hand man” and his son, Robert being equally important to King James I. With such royal support it was inevitable that they became wealthy enough to build their “prodigy house” of Burleigh.



Mike will be back to visit our u3a next year, when he will be telling us more about the Civil War and how Rockingham Castle was involved. (*photo of Mike answering questions after the talk*).

Future monthly meetings:

2nd September

AGM and “A-Z Northamptonshire” with Jon-Paul Carr

7th October

“Tales from a TV Reporter – from an Indian Family” by Bharat Patel

4th November

“Winston Churchill's Early Life” by Michael Kushner

MORE PHOTOS FROM THE AUGUST BOAT TRIP



Cheers everyone! What a grand day out.
Chris