

Tavy District u3a

# THE NEWSLETTER



Haldon Grange

*Photo: Janet Hunt*

No 116

July 2022

u3a

# Who's Who in Tavy District u3a

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|                         |                  |
|-------------------------|------------------|
| Chair                   | Paul Ward        |
| Secretary               | Randall Williams |
| Treasurer               | Angela Pitt      |
| Membership              | Tony Rose        |
| Groups Liaison          | Sonja Armstrong  |
| Newsletter Distribution | Caroline Lorenzi |
| Speaker Secretary       | Jane Ward        |
| Two Moors Liaison       | Randall Williams |
| Catering                | Isobel Davies    |
| Equipment               | Graham Foster    |

Events Committee  
Norma Woodcock  
Chris Webb  
Janet Hunt  
Shirley Smith

## **Remember:**

Contact details of all  
Group Leaders and  
Committee members  
can be found in the  
password protected  
area of the website

Webmaster: Jan Draper  
[web@tavydistrictu3a.org.uk](mailto:web@tavydistrictu3a.org.uk)

**Newsletter Editor: John Noblet**

**The deadline for the next Newsletter is 20<sup>th</sup> August 2022**

**Send contributions to [johnnoblet@tavydistrictu3a.org.uk](mailto:johnnoblet@tavydistrictu3a.org.uk)**

# FROM THE CHAIR

Wearing a different hat, both physically and metaphorically, I had the privilege of lighting Tavistock's beacon on Whitchurch Down on the 2<sup>nd</sup> June to celebrate the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II's accession to the throne. I confess to having felt somewhat apprehensive as I donned a full body harness, climbed into the "bucket" of the town council's cherry picker, was attached to a safety line, and was hoisted into the air to access the brazier that was packed with wood and four packs of firelighters.



I need not have feared. The cherry picker proved to be very stable, and it was driven very competently by a member of the council's works team. Thank you, Ian. From my elevated position I had a superb view of Whitchurch Down, numerous Dartmoor tors, the church of St Michael de Rupe on Brent Tor and over the whole of Tavistock and beyond to Cornwall.

However, the most impressive sight was that of crowds of people streaming on to the down from every direction and taking up station to watch the lighting of the beacon. We estimated that about a thousand people attended. A piper played a piece of music written for the occasion, free refreshments were provided, including Pimms, and there was a wonderful relaxed and enjoyable atmosphere. I lit the beacon at 9:45 pm precisely, the time at which it was proposed that more than 2000 beacons all over the United Kingdom were to be lit, and happily it lit first time and burst in to flame. It was an impressive sight, bringing light into what was by now a dark sky. It was a heart-warming event and a reminder of how lucky we are to live here.



Of course, the platinum jubilee is not the only event to be celebrated this year.

40 years ago, the u3a movement was established in the UK, and 20 years ago Tavy District u3a came into existence. Many u3as have already held an event to mark the movement's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary. It will be our turn in August, when we will have our own "Picnic in the Park" event in the Meadows. This will take place on Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> August from 2:00pm until 4:00pm. Part of the Meadows will be marked out for the occasion with our new u3a bunting.

Sandwiches, teas, and coffee will be provided by Julie Credicott of Blue Skies Catering, and you are invited to bake and bring a cake for sharing. We held a similar event in 2021, but last year it was a way to meet up out of doors to avoid Covid. It proved to be a very enjoyable occasion, and I am sure it will be again this year. Fingers crossed for good weather. Our Speaker Secretary, otherwise known as she who must be obeyed, has asked me to remind you that there will not be a meeting in the Town Hall in August.

## From the Chair *Continued*

Plans are afoot for other celebratory events later in the year, and we will keep you informed as the details are confirmed.

Covid was certainly a disruptive, and, for some, a devastating experience, but I am pleased to report that Tavy District u3a not only survived but is now rising like the phoenix from the ashes. Perhaps that's a bit too melodramatic, but we are seeing a significant increase in interest with the number of paid-up members increasing to around 375.

We are also witnessing the birth of new groups and activities including a gardening group, canasta, weekenders, and garden visits. I recently attended a meeting of nine members, plus two apologies, to explore setting up a science group, something we haven't had for a long time. We will be holding a trial meeting on the 25<sup>th</sup> July following which we hope to "go live". Watch this space.

All being well, we will have the groups table set up at the July meeting in the Town Hall and you will once again be able to see the impressive range of activities on offer and sign up for those that are of interest to you. We would like to see even more groups established. If you have an interest that you would like to explore with like-minded members, or you have special knowledge or experience that you could share with others, please do consider offering your services. We would love to hear from you. Remember you do not have to be an expert or have any specific qualifications to be a group leader, or convener, because we learn from and with each other. If you are interested, please contact our group co-ordinator, Sonja Armstrong, who will help you to get started.

You are probably fed up with me banging on about this but remember the u3a's "mutual aid" principle. We are all here to help one another and we all have something to offer.

I wish you all an enjoyable summer and look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at our forthcoming events.

**Paul**

making new friends new things holidays theatre trips Joined like-minded people Social  
events Social contact going monthly talks development part subjects  
monthly meetings Bridge activities sharing interest meeting  
talks interest others groups things Friendship  
Walking learning visits Meeting people joining groups  
Meeting new people making opportunity many trips Attend  
interesting talks See friends Chance enjoy made friends Belonging History group  
people

# Member Survey Report

A total of 169 responses were received, which amounts to 47% of the membership. Thank you to all those members who took the trouble to respond.

Responses were broadly speaking very encouraging. There is a great deal of positive feeling towards the u3a. Members clearly get a lot out of their membership and appreciate the opportunities available through the u3a. At the same time, they were helpful in making numerous suggestions for improvement and did so very constructively.

One question gave quantitative results. Members were asked how important to them were various aspects of the u3a's provision. Eight of these could be described as "inputs" and two as "outcomes". They were scored on a rating scale of 1 to 4. So an average rating of 4 would mean that every single respondent considered the aspect to be very important and an average rating of 1 would mean that every single respondent considered the aspect to be not important. Average ratings were:

## Inputs

|                                     |      |
|-------------------------------------|------|
| Interest groups                     | 3.69 |
| The newsletter                      | 3.40 |
| Monthly meetings                    | 2.97 |
| Our website                         | 2.91 |
| Other u3a events e.g. garden visits | 2.85 |
| Third Age Matters magazine          | 2.35 |
| Theatre visits                      | 2.34 |
| u3a holidays                        | 1.97 |

## Outcomes

|                               |      |
|-------------------------------|------|
| Friendship/social contact     | 3.68 |
| Learning new skills/knowledge | 3.26 |

Predictably, interest groups came out as the most important aspect of provision. The newsletter was also very highly regarded. Theatre visits and u3a holidays score less highly not because they are less valued by those who take part but because only a proportion of members participate. However, the relative lack of importance ascribed to Third Age Matters was interesting, in that all members have received this to date. That finding led to the committee offering members the opportunity to opt out of a postal copy, an option which has been taken up by 97 members.

It is interesting that, in terms of outcomes, friendship and social contact is seen as more important than learning new skills and knowledge.

All the other questions were deliberately designed to produce freely expressed qualitative answers on the basis that this would give members maximum opportunity to express their views. Replies to these closely reflected the quantitative findings in terms of the main things that members get out of their membership. The most commonly mentioned, together with numbers mentioning each, were as follows.

|                              |    |
|------------------------------|----|
| Interests/interest groups    | 70 |
| Friendship                   | 43 |
| Speakers at monthly meetings | 30 |
| Meeting new people           | 27 |

# Member Survey Report *Continued*

In response to the question about what Tavy District u3a does well, the most commonly mentioned aspects were as follows.

|                                        |    |
|----------------------------------------|----|
| Variety and quality of interest groups | 45 |
| Communication                          | 30 |
| Quality of organisation                | 17 |
| Variety and quality of speakers        | 17 |
| Newsletter                             | 14 |

Feedback on the positive aspects of the u3a may be helpful in developing our public relations activity but the main reason for the survey was to get members' views on how we might improve what we do. A surprisingly large number of members were happy with what is on offer but the following two areas of concern were widely shared.

- The need for more interest groups that are open to new members and the need to increase the responsiveness to situations where members are unable to join groups.
- The need to make monthly meetings more welcoming to new members.

There were a large number of additional helpful suggestions for improvement, including ideas for making it easier for members to volunteer, either as group leaders or in other roles that allow the u3a to function. Action has already been taken on a number of these, including the following.

- A high visibility meet and greet service has been set up for monthly meetings, where nine volunteers will take it in turns to fulfil that service.
- A very well attended new members' coffee morning has taken place and volunteers are being sought to organise regular coffee mornings open to all members.
- Numerous actions on interest groups, reported more fully below.

The committee are actively considering how other suggestions for improvement might be taken on board.

A final set of questions was about interest group membership and the potential for new groups. A total of 68 members made suggestions for new interest groups in 48 different subject areas. For the three most popular, meetings have been arranged to consider the way forward. Where a smaller number of members expressed interest in the same activity, they were linked up with each other. There has been a very encouraging response and the following developments have taken place since the start of the survey.

- A well attended gardening group has begun meeting.
- The weekenders group has been reformed with thirty members.

# Member Survey Report *Continued*

- A garden visits group has been re-established.
- A canasta group has been formed.
- A Scrabble group has been formed.
- A local history group "Rocks N Ruins" has been formed.
- A second pilot meeting of a science group is planned.
- There have been meetings to discuss the establishment of a geology group.
- There is interest in a second art appreciation group.
- A second play reading group is likely to restart in the autumn.
- A meeting to discuss how to progress one of more Spanish groups will have taken place by the time of publication.
- Moor's Edge u3a has kindly opened up their Tai Chi group to our members.

Once the groups have been formalised, they will be publicised on the website and at monthly meetings.

A detailed report on the survey, which includes all the suggestions for improvement made, is available on our website. Thank you again to those who completed the survey.

**Randall Williams**

## Rocks N Ruins Group

The new Rocks N Ruins group got off to a warm and sunny start in the middle of June with a walk around Lydford. The group looked at the historical aspects of the village from Saxon times to the coming of the railways.

The next outing will be on Friday 15<sup>th</sup> July when they will visit Okehampton for a walk around the town and go to the castle.

All are welcome. Sign up at the monthly meeting or contact the leader.

**John Noblet**



# Weekenders Has Started Again!

**W**eekenders is for people who find themselves with not a lot to do socially over the weekend.

We meet in the bar area at The Wharf – picking up a coffee on the way in – on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday of the month at 10.30.

We will look at social activities over the next month and each member has the opportunity to invite others to join an activity they themselves would like to do. Normally we have some sort of social gathering in between our monthly meetings, often this is a lunch out on 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday.

At the moment we have planned a lunch out at Yelverton Golf Club on Sunday 17th July. £16 for 2 courses and a coffee. And 31st July at 2.30 an outdoor theatre experience at Clearbrook – THREE MUSKETEERS.

There are also suggestions for going to Drake's Island at the beginning of August, and maybe an overnight stay in Bristol.

*To join us*

Contact Janet or Margaret

## Just Like a Nature Ramble!

**I**t was a lovely day (it always helps!) as we set out from Horndon to take this tranquil walk through the middle Tavy valley, along the Hill Bridge leat along to Hill Bridge and beyond.

The stiles are easily negotiable and following the leat through the Creason woodland and areas of the old industrial past we had a feast of spring flowers to admire. Our first discovery was an early purple orchid, followed by bluebells, pink campion, bugloss/ajula, vetch, stitchwort and yellow marsh marigold. We heard our first cuckoo of the year!

We lunched at Wheal Jewell overlooking the reservoir. Wheal Jewell gets its name from the old tin and arsenic mine that last worked in World War 1. Water from Tavy Cleave flows along an old leat which served the mines in the area in 19<sup>th</sup>C, and now feeds the Mary Tavy hydro-water power station.

It was a wonderful sheltered walk, and a joy for all!  
Thank you Caroline.

**Janet Hunt**



# Gardening Group

Our first meeting of the Gardening group took place in May at the house of the leaders, Bob and Sheila Naybour, and was attended by eleven people. It was a beautiful afternoon and we were able to sit in their garden room with the bifold doors fully open. Several people knew each other, and all seemed to relax into the occasion.

Sheila had prepared an agenda to decide on various aspects of future meetings. We all agreed that we would try and meet at a different members garden during the summer while we could on the first Monday of each month. Thereafter we would meet indoors at Bob and Sheila's house or anyone else who is willing and has room to accommodate the group. Through the winter months we could visit some garden centres together.

The main aims are to share our pooled knowledge and visit each other's gardens and also discuss all things gardening. The great thing about gardening is that there is always something new to learn and discover. We had a tour of the hosts garden and looked at photographs of how the garden has changed since they had moved there a few years ago. Tea was taken on their patio enjoying the birds and beautiful surrounding flowers.



Jill Turner volunteered to host our second meeting at her home in Bere Alston in early June. We couldn't have hoped for a better day, with blue skies and puffy white clouds as we sat outside accompanied by bird song. Jill was keen to share her new found knowledge of Azalea gall and Viburnum beetle! Both of which were unwelcome visitors, but now we all know to look out for them in our own gardens. She provided a list of plants in the garden for us to refer to (and remind herself in case of memory lapse!). She clearly has an interest in unusual plants and wildlife which flourish in her garden.

We had a tour of the front and back gardens, complete with wildlife pond, veg patch, bee hotels and compost heaps. We were certainly ready for a restorative pot or two of Earl Grey tea. We are looking forward to our next meeting in July which will be hosted by Ginnie Parker in Whitchurch.

**Jill Turner**

# Garden Visits Group

**W**elcome back to the **Garden Visits Group**

We have a very exciting programme for the next few months and into 2023, see the web site for more details of the later dates.

## **Wildside      Friday 29th July**

Wildside never fails to thrill! This 3-acre garden created since 2004 by Keith Wiley is one of the most attractive and innovative gardens in the country, and is expected to be in full bloom with Agapanthus, Campanulas and Lilies at this time of year.

### Details of the visit

Cost entrance fee £10 petrol £5 @ 20p per mile PLEASE BRING CASH

Leave Pixon Lane at 10.30

*Refreshments are NOT available, so bring a picnic*

## **Cadhay, Ottery St Mary      Friday 19th August**

Cadhay is listed as one of the top manor houses in the country. It is a Tudor Manor with mediaeval fish ponds surrounded by rhododendrons, gunnera, hosta and flag iris. It also boasts of its 120' herbaceous border walk with roses, clematis and lilies, and has magnificent dahlias throughout the garden.

### Details of the Visit

Cost entrance fee £15, including a tour of the house, petrol £20. PLEASE BRING CASH

Leave Pixon Lane 9.15 and go via Darts Farm (1 hour) for coffee and take a picnic to enjoy in the Cadhay gardens.

*Timings* 1.45 tour of the house (1 hour) and then time to see the garden and have tea and maybe a cake. Leave there about 4- 4.30

To sign up for these visits

Contact Jennie or Janet

## Craft Group 2

Here are just a few examples of the work of Craft Group 2



### Threads Through Creation

'Threads through Creation' is on show at Exeter Cathedral from 8th June to 24th July. This exhibition consists of twelve huge, spectacular and beautiful silk panels retelling the story of creation from the bible.

It took textile artist Jacqui Parkinson three years - and eight million stitches! Jacqui lives in Devon, and has a national reputation. The exhibition is touring twenty cathedrals into 2024.

It's breathtaking, intriguing and enjoyable. Anyone interested in the visual arts or in stitching will find it most absorbing. Most people love it.

For more information go to the website

Andrew Parkinson has offered that if an informal or organised group is going, or any individuals, they can contact him for some special notes about the exhibition, giving extra specialist details not mentioned in the regular guide. Contact him on 01626 854572

# Cruising Down the Canal on a Tuesday Afternoon

Gathering on a coach opposite the Bedford Hotel was a reminder of times BC (before Covid).

It was such a pleasure to see old familiar faces not seen for the better part of three years. It was equally as good to note the number of unfamiliar faces, proof of the continuing vitality of our u3a and a credit to the 'Covid Committee' who have kept us all together.

Our purpose was two-fold, a morning to enjoy Exeter and the afternoon to be spent aboard a Stuart Line vessel cruising the Exeter Ship Canal and the lower Exe estuary to Exmouth.

My morning involved coffee in the sun, a little light shopping, a look in RAMM and a light lunch. Others told tales of town walks, a guided tour of the cathedral, more exciting and imaginative quests than mine!

The original intention of the cruise was that it should begin at the Exeter Quays but technical problems at the Countess Wear swing bridge meant starting below there.

The Countess's Weir, built for the use of her woollen mill, was a problem too in Tudor times, as was a later one across the Exe near Topsham designed to interrupt the passage to Exeter, collect

the harbour dues and charge for the onward transport by cart of the goods.

The original Tudor canal was built to get round these obstructions to give access to the then thriving port of Exeter. It was the first of its kind, as were the later installations of the double locks. The canal was increased in all its dimensions over time to accommodate ever growing sizes of vessels and was still active in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, though then only for the sewage carrier to get to the sea to dump its load. When that practice of disposal ceased the canal became redundant .

Now it hosts kayaks, yachts and swans and provides an attractive cycle and walking route beside it. Cruises such as ours are an infrequent event. My impression was that all enjoyed the abbreviated voyage and its river extension to the open sea at Exmouth where we disembarked. The sun shone, the showers stayed away and ice creams and cream teas were appreciated.

So were their crumby remains by the wagtail that arrived on board as soon as we moored!

Should you be interested enough for more of the history of the Exeter Canal there is a very good 15 minute video on You Tube presented by Dr. Sam Willis and Dr. Todd Gray.

**Val Turner**



# Speaker Programme 2022 Part 4

Before turning to the detail of the meetings, I thought I would share with you the comments which our June speaker, Brenda Ainsley, sent to me in response to my e-mail to her following her very interesting talk on climate change.

*"[Brenda's husband] John and I were saying afterwards, what a well-informed and interesting group of people you are down in Tavy. We thought it was really encouraging that many of your members were either already engaged in doing something positive, or wanted to know how to. It is notable how in the couple of years I have been making this presentation up and down the land, people are increasingly well clued-up and definitely more interested in the whole Climate Change issue and what some of the solutions are. It is very rare that I get a 'doubter'."*

Special congratulations must go to Margaret Garton who actually produced copies of the two books mentioned by Brenda during the talk whilst it was still in progress. Very impressive!

I hope fairly shortly to make a start on the 2023 speaker programme. I have taken on board a number of comments from the recent member survey in particular the suggestion that we should have a wider variety of topics. I do have quite a list of potential speakers, many thanks to input from members. However, further suggestions are always welcome. Please feel free to e-mail me – [jane.paul.ward@gmail.com](mailto:jane.paul.ward@gmail.com)

**Jane Ward**

## 2022 PROGRAMME PART 4

**Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> July 2022 – 2pm – at Tavistock Town Hall and via Zoom**  
**"Poisons in the Garden"**

**Speaker: Dr Frances Howard**

Dr Frances Howard, Tavy District u3a member and Fellow of the Linnean Society will be well known to many of you from previous plant related presentations. To quote Frances:  
*"Do you need to worry when your grandchild...or the dog, eats holly or mistletoe berries? Do you know which plant acts like Novichok? Which is the most poisonous plant in your garden?"*

*Come and listen to Dr Frances Howard, FLS.....and find out!"*

**Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2022 – NO MEETING.**

**PLEASE KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR INFORMATION ABOUT OUR PICNIC IN THE PARK ON WEDNESDAY 17<sup>TH</sup> AUGUST!**

**Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> September 2022 - 2pm – Tavistock Town Hall and via Zoom**

**"Buckfastleigh Hill and its Caves"**

**Speaker: Sheila Phillips, The William Pengelly Cave Studies Trust**

Further information will follow in the next newsletter.

# French Novel Group

Our long-established book group reads novels in the original French at home. We meet monthly to discuss in English the topics involved, the plot and characters. But to practise our fluency, we read aloud certain excerpts to explain extra points. The books are chosen by the members and these have been an excellent variety in recent months.

One of the last novels is appropriate to the current situation in the Pacific. In 1967 the UK leased an island in the Archipelago of Chagos to the USA for a 50 year period to construct a military air base on Diego Garcia. A few months later Mauritius gained independence and its government severed connection with any colonial authority. The publication of this novel reflects the current dilemma 50 years on.

Our novel "Rivage de la colère" by Caroline Laurent describes the upheaval of a fictional family, forcibly relocated from the small tropical island. These inhabitants worked on a coconut plantation which imported foodstuff to supplement the excellent local diet consisting of freshly caught fish, fruit growing in the area and milk from goats kept by the villagers. There was a barter system for day-to-day living, therefore no monetary system in operation.

These islanders were the descendants of freed slaves who had decided to stay on the land their forefathers had worked under duress. The pattern of life for the Chagossians in the 1960s meant there was no unemployment, every family lived in a house built from local materials, there was basic education for the children and a priest would visit using the regular supply ship from Mauritius.

The British were responsible for handing over the island to the USA. Diego Garcia air base involved the demolition of the coconut plantation buildings, the clearing of the tropical trees and the construction

of many buildings and a port for necessary supplies. The brutal relocation of the Chagossians to a completely different lifestyle in Mauritius makes for salutary reading. Even the horrendous 5 day sea passage to Mauritius was reminiscent of the journey their ancestors would have endured.

International Courts are still deliberating injustice, lack of adequate compensation and the right for recognition of the islanders' rights.

L'Attentat by Yasmina Khadra

This is another relevant novel dealing with modern ideas, set in the Israeli Palestine area of conflict and unrest. A woman suicide bomber causes great distress for all present at a children's party in a restaurant. Her identity is immediately established.

The principal character of the book is her husband Amine. An Arab of Bedouin descent, he is a highly valued and brilliant surgeon in a major hospital in Israel. The evidence that his own wife was the bomber leads him to a quest for the truth which takes him into the conflict between opposing beliefs and attitudes.

The power of the dispossessed who have become landowners with rights is contrasted with the frailty of others whose land is forcibly taken by those same former refugees. The atmosphere of unrest, instability and the fragility of the present situation there is vividly portrayed.

A similar setting was described in "Étoile errante" by J.M.G. LeClezio where the problems of the Eastern Mediterranean countries prove worthy of much discussion but where the situation appears to be at an "impasse".

As in Chagos, decisions made in the postwar period have had a profound bearing on 21st century politics.

# French Novel Group *Continued*

Modern French novelists have been taking these situations as a subject for fiction. Researching the historical facts in detail but creating plausible fictional characters with complex human emotions, these authors engage the reader in serious topics. In this way we have been made more aware of some international political decisions taken in the last century.

Last Autumn we enjoyed the final volume of the trilogy of a family in the 20th century." Miroir de nos peines". Pierre Lemaître won the Prix Goncourt for the first volume and this novel was also excellent.

It is 1940 and Paris awaits the outcome of the aggressive engagements in Norway of the German forces. We see officers and privates of the French military in the underground complex of Mayenberg near the Maginot Line. We travel across France with columns of refugees and deserting soldiers.

This author, who has written many thrillers, is skilled at creating tense moments with a dramatic incident at the end of a chapter. It is many pages later developing another sub plot, before he reveals the outcome of the hazardous situation. This keeps one's interest " on full alert". There are also many humorous episodes to enjoy.

As usual, the opening few lines engage the reader's attention. Why is a young naked woman running in terror down a Parisian Boulevard? What is the history of the elderly gentleman found dead in a small hotel?

Characters from the previous 2 volumes have influenced the actions and behaviour of these fictional men and women enduring the conditions imposed by war.

There is continuity for readers who know volumes 1 and 2 but " Miroir de nos peines" is complete in itself.

The appearance of a brilliant confidence trickster, a man of many parts, adds greatly to the reader's enjoyment of the bizarre events. At one point he acts as a most effective Minister of Information (disseminating blatant lies as Propaganda chief of the French radio). Later however, to the reader's surprise, he becomes a public spirited young priest helping refugees in crisis. As is customary for him, he eventually disappears with a stolen bag of "loot".

Another schemer, a quick witted character, later becomes the valuable protector of the principal "hero". Despite his attitude of survival of the fittest and seemingly ignorant of the difference between right and wrong, this schemer is the person to resolve difficult wartime situations. Part of the humour lies in his unexpected actions to surmount problems.

There are mysteries to be solved and connections to be made, leading to an excellent conclusion to this trilogy.

Our group often accepts the challenge of a long novel but we can take our time as we read and discuss at length for our own pleasure.

We look forward to scones and jam at a member's home one day but have discovered a way of zooming that suits everyone.

With my thanks to all the members who continue to support this book group.

**Frances Stephens**

# Favourable Optimism

There was news the other day that yet another satellite would improve weather forecasting. This follows a long series of similar claims about imminent benefits to pilots filing flight plans to San Francisco or retired folks hoping for an afternoon on the beach.

The first weather satellite was launched on 1<sup>st</sup> April 1960; it sent back astounding pictures of clouds from above that led to a feeling that it was only a matter of a year or so before short-term weather forecasting could be left to an array of expensive machines with their associated geeks and nerds. Serious meteorologists could retire to weather-heaven (California?), occasionally living it up at the frequent climate change conferences in the more sunny of the world's capitals.

Computers added to that same feeling; the problems of forecasting were surely well on the way to solution. In 1971, for instance, the Met Office installed a new IBM 361-95 to give us, they said, accurate forecasts for a week ahead. They should have learned from economists that telling people things are getting better is risky, because later that same year the then head man (John Houghton) was quoted as saying "he was going for 100% accuracy but there was clearly room for improvement".

A month or two later the previous Director-General (Sir John Mason) made a much more thoughtful and farsighted comment: 'computer-based mathematical models ... may come to dominate the judgements of governments ... despite their limitations and uncertainties of their predictions.' That statement remains as worryingly true today as it was 39 years ago.

A plethora of satellites in 1985 generated another dubious claim: 'reliable forecasts for six to seven days ahead will become available in the near future,' said the World Meteorological Organisation.

The bravado showed scientists getting over-confident (again) that their job would soon become redundant now they could see the whole surface of the earth. They forgot that the satellites' pretty pictures only told the story of now, and even from their angelic heights could see no further into next week than earthbound mortals.

2003 was an off year for meteorology. 'The weather reports are scientifically grounded and we get it right more often than not,' a defensive Met Office spokesman said in May of that year. He was not too careful with his choice of words as he forgot that you can do your own forecasting by assuming that tomorrow's weather will be about the same as today's. You will be right around 50% of the time. That same year we heard the hammering of a determined nail in the coffin of overconfident meteorologists in the form of an AS level exam question: 'Why is weather forecasting so unreliable?'

The current brace of three Cray XC40 supercomputing systems, says the Met Office, 'are capable of over 14,000 trillion arithmetic operations per second - that's more than 2 million calculations per second for every man, woman and child on the planet.'

But that's not enough these days. Bigger, faster, latest model, that's the key to modern life. So the Met Office 'have signed a multimillion-pound agreement with Microsoft for the provision of a world-leading supercomputing capability that will take weather and climate forecasting to the next level and help the UK stay safe and thrive.' I look forward to being helped to stay safe and thrive when it starts work later this year.

Most of the quotes are from scientists who got carried away, alas. They would still argue that UK forecasts for 3-4 days ahead are pretty accurate.

## Favourable Optimism *Continued*

But you readers might want to raise a quibble or two about that when no two of the dozen or so forecasting organisations ever seem to agree about Tavistock's weather. There have been some rather extravagant claims. In no other field of human enterprise have so many developments produced so much optimism, so the appropriate collective noun must be a 'delusion' of meteorologists.

If the birds be silent, they used to say in medieval times, expect thunder. And when sheep turn their backs to the wind, it is a sign of rain. Maybe we've moved on a little from that.

But maybe not quite as far as the experts tell us.

**Ivor Williams**

### Haldon Grange

**T**his was the most amazing, tranquil and beautiful garden that we had ever visited.

Run by the Phythian family, we were stunned by the 12-acre gardens with its lake and cascading ponds, the unusual but glorious lilac circle, and the Haldon Oak.

The homemade cakes were totally delicious – it is a highly recommended NGS Garden!

**Janet Hunt**

*See also the photo on the cover of this Newsletter*



**The deadline for the next Newsletter is 20<sup>th</sup> August  
Please send to [johnnoble@tavydistrictu3a.org.uk](mailto:johnnoble@tavydistrictu3a.org.uk)**

# A Midsummer Day Out

That's what the programme said: A Midsummer Day Out. We met at Pixon Lane and shared cars to Milehouse Park and Ride. John lead us to the bus stop where we caught the scenic bus to Cawsand.

We all managed to get a seat upstairs and had wonderful views as we crossed the river on the ferry at Torpoint and along the coast at Whitsand Bay to Polhawn.

Just as we started our walk, admiring the views, a kindly cyclist offered to take a group photo for us. (See the next page). From there we walked past Rame church and along the coastal path to Cawsand. Here we found seats overlooking the beach and had our picnics. We watched the Navy and various sailing boats pass by.

Pam elected for a boat ride and caught the ferry back to Plymouth whilst the rest of us set off following John up the cliff path towards Mount Edgcumbe and the Cremyll ferry. As we went through the woods the path was quite steep and covered in dried leaves when suddenly I felt my head hit the path and I started to slip down the hill. Tony made a rugby style dive and prevented me slipping further down the slope. Hannah reassured me and she and Tony mopped up the blood. Everyone in the group emptied out their first aid kits and offered advice.

They patched me up and I was gently helped to my feet and we plodded on to Mount Edgcumbe. Having missed the ferry because of my accident we decided ice creams would be good. While we sat down in the splendid conservatory Jennie said "You need to go to A&E." "Oh I don't want any fussing. I don't need that" The group all replied that I did need to go, protesting that I had not seen my face.

We got on the Cremyll ferry and then Jennie and Pauline and I got a bus to the Cumberland Centre A&E whilst John went to fetch a car. I was examined and checked over but they sent me off to Derriford. John arrived plus car and Jennie and I were soon at Derriford A&E armed with M&S sandwiches and ready for a long wait. A few hours later I was stitched together and given various instructions and we were sent on our way.

The next day I developed a couple of black eyes and a neatly stitched scar.

## WELL THAT WAS SOME MIDSUMMER DAY OUT!

How grateful I am that I had such a wonderful group of people with me. They knew what to do, they had the equipment, they were kind and reassuring and never complained that I had been a nuisance.

The next morning the group all checked up on my progress.

I really have to thank Jennie for her care and patience.

I am so glad I am a Tavy District u3a member and have such a special group of people to walk with. Thank you all so much.

**Caroline Lorenzi**

# Walking Groups



Walkers at Whitsand Bay in June. See Caroline's article on a previous page

Forthcoming walks are as below. **All are welcome but remember that you MUST book in advance with the leader beforehand by text or phone.** Bring a drink and a snack.

## **Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> July**

Meet at Pixon Lane at 09.40 to car share to Jennycliff Bay, car park on coast road. SX493523.

Walk coastal path to Bovisand Fort and then inland to join the Erme Plym Trail through Turnchapel. Approx 5 mls.

**Tony**

## **Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> July**

Meet at Pixon Lane at 09.40 to car share to Postbridge Visitor Centre Car Park.

Circular walk on forest tracks to Bellever Tor and back along good tracks. Approx 5 mls.

**Chris Webb or Jennie Youngs**

## **Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> August**

Meet at Pixon Lane at 09.40. Catch 10.00 bus to Horrabridge. SX511696

Walk back by way of Plaster Down and Pew Tor. Approx 6.5 mls

**John**

## **Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> August**

Meet at Pixon Lane at 09.40 to car share to the Scout Hut, Nattor SX671584

Circular walk in the area of Edward's Path, impressive stone rows and historic settlements. Approx 5 mls.

**Chris and Jennie**

# The Events Committee

There are a number of exciting visits planned for the summer months and as usual you can sign up and pay at the u3a meetings in the Town Hall, or contact the committee member identified for each visit and they will help you place your name on the list and sort payment. Sadly, at the moment we are unable to take bank transfers for our events.

## **Coach trip to Bodmin Jail and Lanhydrock Thursday 7th July £25.**

This will be a 2-hour guided tour around the jail – “an exciting interactive experience”, and then we will coach to Lanhydrock NT for lunch.

There will be enough time to visit Lanhydrock House and have a look around the gardens. The coach will leave opposite The Bedford Hotel, Tavistock at 9am and will be back around 6pm.

**DON'T FORGET YOUR NT CARDS! LAST CALL**

Contact Janet

## **Plymouth Guided Walk** date and meeting place tbc

Contact Chris

## **A day trip by coach to Totnes Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> September**

We then take a boat down the **River Dart to Dartmouth** where the coach will pick us up later in the afternoon for the journey home. Cost £32.50.

Contact Norma

## And Finally ....



Animals with a difference seen by Janet Hunt at Delamore Sculpture Garden