

Who's Who in Tavy District u3a

Chair	Andy Hutton
Vice Chair	
Secretary	Hannah Miatt
Treasurer	Gudrun Zeissler
Groups Coordinator	Linda Diggle
Newsletter Distribution	Caroline Lorenzi
Speaker Secretary	Isobel Davies
Two Moors Liaison	Andy Hutton
Equipment	Roger Plumb
Beacon Administrator	Susie Pitt

Events Committee

Norma Woodcock
Chris Webb
Janet Hunt
Shirley Smith
Sonja Armstrong

Theatre

Carole Thompson
Shona Dickenson

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

**Note the email
address for
Newsletter
contributions**

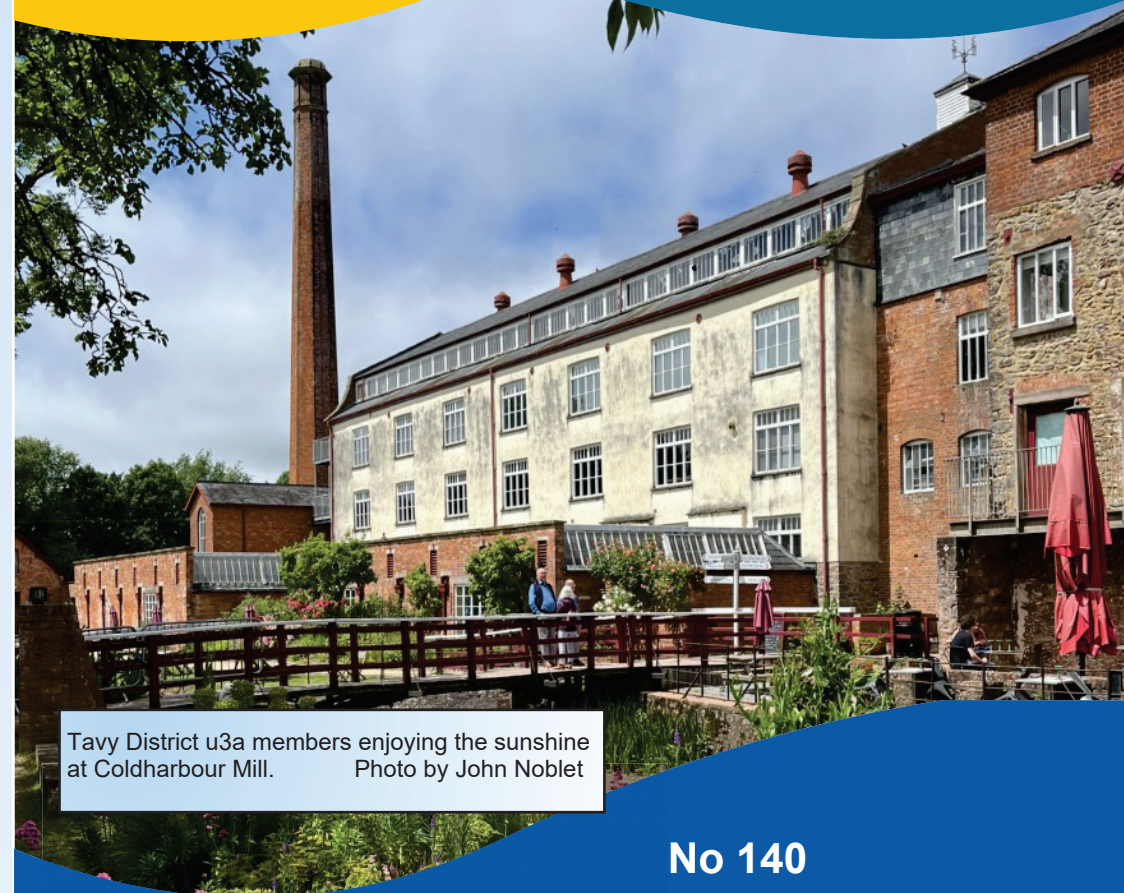
Newsletter Editor: John Noblet

The deadline for the next Newsletter is 20th August 2026

Send contributions to u3a@johnnoblet.co.uk

Tavy District u3a

THE NEWSLETTER



Tavy District u3a members enjoying the sunshine
at Coldharbour Mill. Photo by John Noblet

No 140

July 2026

u3a

FROM THE CHAIR

Can we make this a summer where everybody tries to be kinder to each other?

My daughter is a GP in Bristol and has just returned from maternity leave and she tells me it took precisely one day and two hours before a patient told her to “F*** off”. She tells me this is not uncommon. I gave up being a GP 10 years ago and in the proceeding 30 years I was only given the same advice by two people in my surgery. I was a police surgeon and met several people who gave me lots of advice when I saw them in the police cells! However, I’m talking about patients going into a GP surgery, hoping presumably to get some help with a problem and this is the way they treat the doctor. Why do people think that being abusive somehow will make people more helpful towards them?

I think generally in Tavistock most people treat most people very well. However, I am conscious on Facebook, for example, we do have some people who are very keen to be abusive and turn everything into this nastiness.

Nationally the news now is constantly full of events being turned into violence. Even recently with the tragedy of an 18-year-old being stabbed and then handcuffed by the police while he died, we ended up with hundreds of people on the streets trying to promote general nastiness. Whatever the rights and wrongs, surely in a civil society there are better ways of getting problems resolved.

I wonder if generally we have more and more people who feel they are not connected with the majority of the population. I’m conscious in Tavistock that recently due to the building of lots of extra housing estates there are definite groups of people who for whatever reason have not engaged with all the good things that Tavistock has to offer. Many of them have ended up working outside Tavistock even though they live in Tavistock. Do they really know what a delight it can be to live here?

Can I suggest this summer that everybody makes an effort to engage with people in the streets, when they go shopping or when they’re playing with grandchildren in the park and try and make sure everybody does know what good things go on in our town. Encourage people to learn about their history, the museums, Dickensian evening and the fun of the Fringe. Do they know about the u3a and what goes on?

Maybe this would help the whole community engage more with each other and help this town to become a kinder place and help maybe more of the people who live here to enjoy what goes on.

The recent mayor has just done a survey and discovered more than 130 volunteer groups in our area. There is a lot going on all ready but let’s spread the kindness and thinking of others more widely.

Have a good summer

Andy



Events

Sidmouth Folk Festival by coach

Sunday 2nd August £19

Leaving Tavistock 9am from the Bedford/Wharf car park.

Leave the Festival at 4pm to arrive back in Tavistock around 5pm.

Sidmouth coach trip leader: Sonja Armstrong

You can pay at the July meeting by credit or debit card.

*If you haven’t booked with the Event organiser, Sonja, at the u3a meeting, check there is still a space.

*Then pay by BACS to Events a/c

*Then email the organiser to confirm you have paid.

It is essential you pay into the Events Account below

Sort Code
Account No.
Reference

Exeter Birding Cruise in November

Bookings will be taken later this year.

And finally

Thanks to Margaret Garton



Choughs

On a recent stay in Cornwall I went to Pentire to watch the surfers on Fistral Beach. Within minutes I was joined by a pair of choughs and could hardly believe what I was seeing. They ignored me completely and obviously had found a food source hidden in the grass. My photographs don't do justice to these beautiful birds.

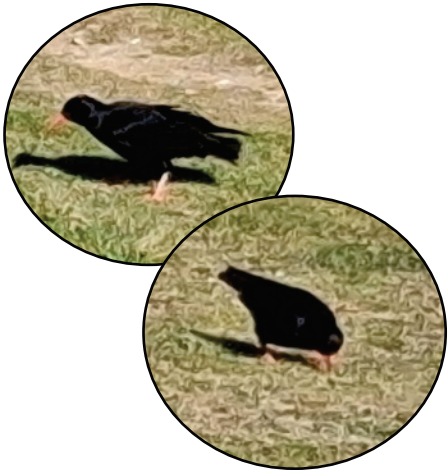
Choughs are quite rare in the UK and Google tells me there are only about 450 to 500 breeding pairs nationwide. They are found in only a few regions and have returned to the far west and north coasts of Cornwall.

Choughs are the rarest members of the crow family and are very distinctive black birds with long red beaks and legs. They forage on grassland and heath with short vegetation near to their cliffside crevice and cave nests.

Choughs were persecuted throughout medieval times, as folklore told they were fireraisers and got their red legs and bill from paddling in the blood of Thomas Becket after his murder.

The pair I saw at Pentire seemed very at home and looked in good condition so hopefully they will breed successfully and add to the population in Cornwall.

Pam Morris



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Mah Jong

The Mah Jong group meet in the Tavistock Football Community Centre once a fortnight on a Tuesday morning from 10.30 till 12.30.

Have a cup of coffee tea and biscuits at half time.



So if you play Mah Jong and would like to come and join us, you will be very welcome

We celebrated a 90th birthday 🎂 few weeks ago, and enjoyed cupcakes with our coffee ☕

If you would like to learn Mah Jong please get in touch with me.

Mary Piper

Trelissick and Falmouth

Our latest adventure organised by the Events team was a visit to the country estate of Trelissick which lies at the head of Carrick Roads on the River Fal.

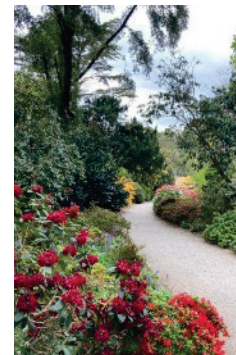
Built by the Lawrence family in 1750 it has been owned by at least 10 owners and the house has been occupied over the years by bankers, ceramic manufacturers, US army unit and mining adventurers to name a few. Ida Copeland gifted this to the National Trust in 1955 and the house and gardens have been constantly evolving over the years.

After our very comfortable coach journey, Mike, our driver, dropped us off very near the entrance.

We had been furnished with a small card listing the time to meet up again following free time at Trelissick and a detailed map of the house and gardens enhanced with extra information by the Events team.

Many headed to Crofters cafe for a welcome morning coffee before visiting the house and the extensive gardens.

The paths meander and gardeners are happy to help identifying various plants and fantastic huge trees with massive trunks. Although there are some little steps in places it allowed those less able to keep to the gentle ups and downs of the meandering paths in the pretty gardens. My personal favourite was the Dell and Hydrangea walk.



Meeting up again at the appointed time we followed Shirley down the zigzag path to the pontoon where we boarded our assigned boat the Moyana, where the friendly and helpful crew ensured we boarded safely.

A lovely relaxing cruise on the Fal river commenced. We were so lucky with dry sunny weather. Our captain gave a commentary that was very clear and informative with a bonus of seeing a couple of seals and many swans. Hot chocolate was delicious and warmed the hands from the chilly wind.

From the boat I was able to take a photo of Trelissick House on its prominent peninsula position.



Following the cruise we had free time in Falmouth. Taking note of the card listing time of meet up ready for our journey home, we explored at our leisure. A few of us visited a very nice independent cafe, sampling a very unusual apple, rhubarb and custard sweet pasty which was delicious. Upstairs was a very nice loo with a view! See photo.



The Events team work extremely hard to ensure the whole day runs smoothly. The day ran like clockwork for the 44 people who enjoyed a very interesting and varied day.

Teresa Cooper

Sunshine, Sips, and Summer's Ultimate Drink: A Tour of Rosé

There are worse ways to spend an afternoon than sitting in the glorious sunshine with good company, clean glasses, and six bottles of chilled rosé waiting to be discovered. That was the enviable task of our u3a group last month as we gathered to explore the vast, often misunderstood world of pink wine.

Rosé has undergone a massive image transformation over the last decade. Gone are the days when it was dismissed as either cloyingly sweet or lacking in character. Today, it is one of the most dynamic styles of wine on the market. To put that to the test, our tasting took us on a true journey of quality and style, charting a course from a supermarket staple to an award-winning English great.

The Spectrum of Style: From Blush to Boutique

Our afternoon was a masterclass in how much "pink" can vary, not just in colour, but in structure, complexity, and price.

We kicked off our tasting with the **Jack Tone Pinot Grigio Blush**. For many, this is the quintessential definition of an easy-drinking summer wine. Light, crisp, and pale, it represents the entry-level "blush" style that relies heavily on the naturally coppery skins of the Pinot Grigio grape to give it that delicate, ballet-slipper hue. It's simple, unpretentious, and exactly the kind of wine built for a casual chat in a sunny garden.

From there, we worked our way up through four other carefully selected bottles—exploring different grape varieties, regions, and levels of dryness—before arriving at our grand finale.

To close the afternoon, we poured the **Chapel Down Rosé**, and the step up in quality was instantly undeniable. Hailing from the chalky soils of Kent, this English still rosé is an absolute triumph. Made predominantly from Pinot Noir, it bursts with aromas of strawberries and cream, balanced by a sophisticated, mouth-watering acidity and a hint of cranberry. It was structural, refined, and a brilliant testament to how world-class English winemaking has become.

How Does the Pink Get in the Glass?

While sipping, we discussed how winemakers actually achieve that beautiful spectrum of colour. There is a common myth that rosé is just white and red wine mixed together (a practice that is actually banned in most of Europe for quality still wines!). Instead, it usually happens in one of two ways:

- **Maceration (The Classic Way):** Red grapes are crushed, and the juice is allowed to sit with the dark skins for just a few hours. As soon as the winemaker gets the perfect pale pink shade, the skins are strained out and the juice is fermented.
- **The "Blush" Method:** Grapes with naturally pinkish or coppery skins (like Pinot Grigio) are pressed very gently, letting just a kiss of colour bleed into the juice.



Forgetter be Forgotten

My forgetter's getting better,
But my rememberer is broke
To you that may seem funny
But, to me, that is no joke.

For when I'm 'here' I'm wondering
If I really should be 'there'
And, when I try to think it through,
I haven't got a prayer!

Oft times I walk into a room,
Say 'what am I here for?'
I wrack my brain, but all in vain!
A zero, is my score.

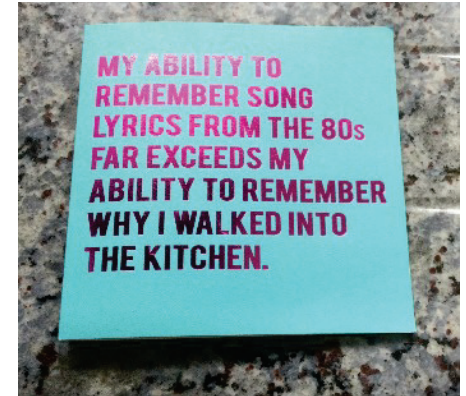
At times I put something away
Where it is safe, but, Gee!
The person it is safest from
Is, generally, me!

When shopping I may see someone,
Say 'Hi' and have a chat,
Then, when the person walks away
I ask myself, 'who the hell was that?'

Yes, my forgetter's getting better
While my rememberer is broke,
And it's driving me plumb crazy
And that isn't any joke.

A poem by the American,
James Casey.
Is this what lies ahead for you?
Or is it already becoming reality?

The poem shared by **Sheena Macleod**
of Plymouth u3a



Thanks to **Caroline Lorenzi** who agrees with this sentiment



And thanks to Margaret Garton for this.

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Newlyn Artists and Penzance

We left Tavistock in blustery rain bound for Newlyn, in Mounts Bay and a stone's throw from Penzance. Newlyn has the largest fishing fleet in the country and a rich artist heritage.

Our driver skilfully manoeuvred the coach through narrow roads to meet our guide Andrew, who took us through even narrower steep lanes lined with rows of granite cottages.

As we walked downwards towards the harbour he pointed out various properties where members of the Newlyn School resided and many of the studios that still exist.

A notable one being Stanhope Forbes (1857 – 1947), an Irish artist and founder member of the Newlyn School. A collection of late 19th and 20th century painters who settled in the Cornish fishing village, drawn by affordable living and stunning natural light. They championed 'plein air' painting to capture authentic rural realism, the farming and fishing community provided actual locals to model for their canvasses at 6d a day. The artists were often seen riding their bicycles with their canvas and easel on their backs.

The local residents took a while to get used to these strange artists, as the locals were strict Wesleyans and frowned upon them drinking and painting on Sundays! There were also many young ladies who wanted to learn to paint. To keep them safe they were boarded together in one house, but there are stories of parties, revelry, drunkenness and nudity in that same house!

Wandering through the pretty alleyways we were invited into the home of a very elderly gentleman called Bill to see his wonderful collection of original Newlyn School paintings, covering the walls of 2 rooms. He was not at all fazed to have 40 people wandering through his downstairs rooms, and admiring his fabulous art!

After the tour it was time for lunch, with many of the group tasting the delicious Delbert's

Ice Cream. Some of our group stopped off at the Penlee Gallery and Museum which has one of the finest collections of Newlyn School paintings, whilst others enjoyed exploring the town of Penzance.

We managed to dodge most of the showers during the day and arrived back in Tavistock having had a wonderful day out!

Heather Lyne



The group admiring one of the new studios



Newlyn harbour

PS from **Janet Hunt**:

Of course, I wrote to Andrew to thank him for his fascinating tour, and I am sure you will all be pleased to read his reply!

"It was a great pleasure to meet you all yesterday. You are certainly the best group I have taken on the tour. I very much enjoyed hearing the interesting questions and comments on the way. I know Bill was absolutely delighted to show you his collection and I will pass on your comments!.

Sunshine, Sips, and Summer's Ultimate Drink: A Tour of Rosé Continued

The Group Verdict

Wine Style	Best For	What We Noticed
The Everyday Blush (e.g., <i>Jack Tone</i>)	Casual garden sipping & crowd-pleasing	Very light, refreshing, simple citrus and soft berry notes.
The Premium English Still (e.g., <i>Chapel Down</i>)	Al fresco dining & special occasion	Vibrant English strawberries, crisp acidity, and a long, elegant finish.

As the afternoon drew to a close and the sun began to dip, the consensus was clear: whether you prefer a simple, crisp budget-pleaser or a complex, premium bottle to savour, rosé is the ultimate companion for a British summer.

A huge thank you to everyone who brought a bottle, shared a laugh, and helped make our tasting such a sunny success. Until the next glass!

PS I do hope you are all impressed by this wonderful resume of our sunny alcoholic afternoon from WAG one.

The main thing we actually learnt was that a good rosé definitely does taste of wild strawberries.

The others do not!

You should be even more impressed by Al's wonderful prose!! Feel free to share a laugh about that too.

Frances Howard



Beer Quarry Caves

On a bright, warm day the Rocks N Ruins group chose to enter the cool damp depths of Beer Quarry Caves for a conducted tour. We were told that limestone had been quarried there since Roman times, nearly all by hand - only in recent years has machinery been used to cut the stone.

The limestone there was created about 120 million years ago in particular circumstances that led to a very fine structure with very few large occlusions (fossils). It was therefore of great value to stonemasons, enabling them to create intricate carvings. It is very similar to the limestone found in Caen, which is probably why it was of interest to the Romans as they were already using stone from there.

Because the masons could create such detailed work, Beer limestone was favoured for ecclesiastical construction. More than half of the cathedrals in Britain feature it in their structure. It was used extensively in Exeter Cathedral, Winchester, St Paul's and Westminster Abbey and widely across the West Country in parish churches.

We heard of the dire conditions of the quarry workers, who toiled underground for up to 14 hours a day, six days a week, with only dim tallow candles for illumination. Quarrymen had to supply

their own candles, but stonemasons had theirs supplied by their employers. There was a lot of dust in the air, as there was little natural ventilation. The dusty conditions were not conducive to long life!

The quarrymen were considered the underclass, and the stonemasons the elite. They tended to live in different villages, and that divide is still noticeable today in the local family names. It is said that, even now, people from quarrymen families are (good humouredly) "looked down on" by stonemason descendants.

The methods used to extract the stone changed from time to time. There are distinct sections showing the Roman era, then Anglo Saxon followed by Norman and Victorian. The quarry was used for almost 2000 years until it became unprofitable in the 1920s.

After quarrying finished, the caves have been used for growing mushrooms and rhubarb. More recently they have been used for filming for cinema and TV, as well as hosting musical events.

It was a very interesting tour, with an excellent guide. We can thoroughly recommend a visit, but be warned, it is very cool (as we oldies say when reaching for the thermostat).

Peter Harden



Museum artefacts and fine carving from Colyton Church



Graffiti gets everywhere

Coldharbour Mill

Coldharbour Mill was originally a mill for corn or grist in the village of Uffculme in the valley of the River Culm.. There had been a mill on this site since medieval times and the name "Coldharbour" is said to be derived from Anglo Saxon, possibly meaning "Old Shelter".

Thomas Fox bought the land, complete with buildings and its own waterwheel, in 1797 for 1100 guineas. He then built a large wool-spinning mill on the site to serve his weaving factories in Somerset and opened it in 1799. In the 19th century, six of his sons continued their father's work and the company became known as Fox Brothers.

Originally the mill was powered by the waterwheel, with a new one installed in 1821. However the Fox Brothers were keen innovators and making use of new technology, they installed the steam engines in 1865 to power the factory's machines and keep up with production demands.

At this point the Fox Brothers changed their business from woollen to worsted spinning enabling a larger range of products with a higher quality finish more suited to being woven into their iconic textiles.

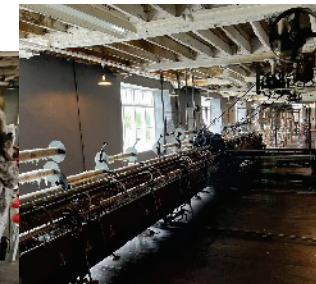
Coldharbour Mill played a key part in the Industrial Revolution in the South West, as Fox Brothers' developed a cottage industry into large scale factory production, distributing textile products throughout the world.

The changing fortunes of the textile industry, particularly increasing overseas manufacture, forced the closure of the mill in 1981. A group of local people, including the village vicar, were determined to preserve the mill's heritage and were able to purchase the property from the Fox family and it reopened as a museum the following year. It is now run as a charity by trustees and claims to be one of the oldest working woollen textile mills in the world.

The Rocks N Ruins group visited on a lovely sunny day in June and were treated to an excellent guided tour by Carol and Joy, enthusiastic and knowledgeable volunteers.

The visit was followed by a sociable lunch in their café.

John Noblet



If at first you don't succeed

On 13th May the Cycling group had a planned ride to Saltram House. On the day the forecast was for strong winds and showers; a couple of riders decided that it sounded too tough and thought it safer to stay at home.

A small group of us gathered at the start point and had a chat about the wisdom of cycling to Saltram (easy, with a following wind) and the potential difficulties of getting back (a headwind of up to 40mph, not quite so easy). We decided on a shorter route and rode out to Hoo Meavy and back.

We made it back with no mishaps but the gusty wind was "interesting". The route to Saltram is a lovely ride so we decided we would have another go in finer weather.

A week or so later the weather forecast was suggesting that a spell of good weather was on its way – that had to be the time to have another go. 27th May was to be the day. But then the weather forecasters were telling us about the forthcoming scorcher and I had fears that we would have to abandon again – this time we might be roasted. Fortunately, the record breaking heatwave relented slightly on the 27th.

We left Tavistock in strong sunshine but early enough in the day for the heat to be not too oppressive. By the time we reached Clearbrook there were clouds appearing and very soon there was full cloud coverage which made the riding cool but very comfortable. Whenever there was a gap in the trees I was looking around for signs of rain but it held off, until...

We were due to stop at Saltram for refreshments. As we were parking our bikes there were a few spots of rain.



When we joined the queue in the cafe there was a bit more rain. After a few minutes there was a terrific downpour and we were happy to be inside. I heard later that the rainstorm made its way across Devon creating hail havoc on its way.

By the time we were ready to leave, the sun was back and we set off northwards hoping it wouldn't get too hot. Under the trees on Drake's Trail it was most enjoyable, with occasional views of the Plym valley countryside. However, that changed when we got to Clearbrook and were out in the sunshine. The climb up Clearbrook hill was very hot with the sun on our backs. It remained hot all the way back to Tavistock with the one relief being Grenofen Tunnel where the drips from the roof were much appreciated.

So, we made it to Saltram and back despite what the weather gods decided to throw at us. And foreigners wonder why we Brits are always talking about the weather!

If you're interested in joining our cycling group please see the info at the monthly meeting or contact **Peter Harden**

Beer Quarry Caves Continued



I counted them all in and I.....

Photo: Peter Harden

What a Difference a Day Makes!

In the last Newsletter the Walking Group said "What a difference a month makes!" Well, towards the end of May that could read "What a difference a day makes!" These photos of the stone row below Down Tor were taken on consecutive days, would you believe.

It's no wonder the weather is always a topic of conversation.

John Noblet



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Wine, Onions and Friends Wine Appreciation Group 2

Nigel and Susie Bateman's suggestion before last Christmas of a group visit to Roscoff was greeted with a vote of 'yes, let's do it' and so, many months later, ten of us boarded the Pont Aven as foot passengers for dinner and an overnight sail.

The food in the restaurant was very good, very French, and the wine went down well too! Everyone had a cabin waiting for them after dinner and because we were travelling on a group ticket the price was excellent value at about £105 each for travel and cabin/seat both ways.

We were staying in different hotels in Roscoff and a chilly early morning arrival greeted us but the walk or bus ride to our hotels was eased by breakfast and hot coffee before exploring the town at our own pace.



How many, I wonder, start their French holiday in Roscoff but hasten through the port to head south. Roscoff itself is a great place to visit, with many fine

restaurants and eateries. I love the narrow streets and shops and the beautiful traditional looking houses. There are lots of walking options for the more active: Clare and Paul took the boat across to the Isle de Batz and walked 12 miles around it; Linda and Nigel explored the beautiful Botanical gardens; others took Le Petit Train around Roscoff for a more leisurely viewing.

Myself and Bob enjoyed just being lazy - 'I love watching the tide as it ebbs and flows' he said, so we did just that, and enjoyed a lunch of Moules Frites with our group in a restaurant overlooking the sea!



That evening a number of us shared a tasting menu at the Michelin starred restaurant at the Brittany Hotel. 'That was one of the best meals I have ever had', said Nigel.

Course followed course of exquisitely deeply delicious dishes, with one which celebrated those famed Roscoff onions, which had a garnish of small onions!

A Little Bit About Us

I joined the original Craft Group in 2003. It soon became obvious that we needed another group as numbers grew so I offered to start another one in 2004.

At first we learnt all sorts of new skills such as card making, soft dough modelling, tissue and wire mobiles, nativity figures made from card, patchwork, Japanese quilting, mosaic tiles, decoupage, bead necklaces and gift box making to name but a few. Some things we tried are best not mentioned as we were not very successful.

Eventually we all knew what we really enjoyed doing most so we became a group for 'doing your own thing', but hopefully with help from each other if you needed it. Now it is very much a knitting group with some embroidery.

At the moment we are doing: Guess what? Yes, working on the decorations for our tree in the Christmas Tree Festival.

This year we are trying to use as many recycled or scrap materials as possible.

We have been involved with the tree festival ever since it started. We are also responsible for the u3a banner and tablecloth you see at the monthly meetings in the Town Hall.

At our monthly session, which is held in my house, we craft, drink tea, eat biscuits or possibly cake and chat a lot. Just before Christmas we have a shared lunch when very little craft is done.

So you can see it is a very sociable, friendly group finding pleasure in a shared hobby.

Mary Brock

**When life seems
just a dreary grind**

**And things seem
fated to annoy**

**Say something nice
to someone else**

**And watch the
world light up with
joy.**

Joy Smith



Pen your
contributions
for the
newsletter
today!

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the next Newsletter
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**Where do bad
rainbows go?**

**To prism. It's a light
sentence, but it gives
them time to reflect**

Margaret Garton

Saturday 25th April

As described in the last Newsletter, this year saw the celebration of Trevithick Day in Camborne on Saturday 25th April. Quite rightly a joyous event enjoyed by all Cornish folk (and those who are more Cornish than anything else). 25th April has, perhaps, a greater significance to those with a military ancestry. It is a day commemorated in many parts of the world as ANZAC or Gallipoli Day.

To give it an historical context, it took place in an area smaller than Southampton amid appalling conditions – heat, flies, lack of water, supplies and sanitation. Late in the campaign, which lasted from 25th April 1915 to 9th January 1916, rain and a freak spell of sub-zero temperatures had to be endured. Some 559,000 Allied personnel were committed of whom 420,000 were British and Empire troops, including 50,000 Australians and 9,000 New Zealanders, and 80,000 French. The cost in human terms was terrible. The allies had 250,000 casualties of whom 58,000 were killed. Only 11,000 have known graves. Ottoman forces, with some Germans, numbered between 300,000 and 400,000 and some 87,000 were killed.

In line with common perception, Commemoration Services take place throughout Australia and New Zealand



The National Memorial Arboretum

but perhaps less well known are the Services elsewhere, in particular the UK. Dawn Services take place at Anzac Cove in Gallipoli, at the Australian and New Zealand War Memorials (alternate years) at Hyde Park Corner, Glasgow and Edinburgh. Later in the day Services are held at The Gallipoli Memorial in the Crypt at St Paul's Cathedral, at The Cenotaph this year in the presence of HRH The Princess of Wales following a March Past, and at Westminster Abbey, The National Memorial Arboretum, Edinburgh Castle, Antrim, Sutton Veny (the resting place of 144 Australian personnel) and Eltham-Gallipoli Chapel. Overseas ceremonies include East Mudros Cemetery and West Mudros Cemetery in Lemnos, Greece.

Needless to say, ancestry searches are revealing family connections all the time and there is now a huge amount of information available about the campaign.

The Gallipoli Association has recently commissioned 6 YouTube films showing different aspects of the campaign from landings to evacuations and these have been viewed over 1 million times. Here the author of this note confesses a conflict of interest as a Trustee of The Gallipoli Association and will be pleased to help any member of u3a who wants to learn more.

Peter Luff



The piper at Anzac

Wine, Onions and Friends Continued

The highlight of our trip was a wine tasting lead by our French expert, Benoit, in the restaurant L'Ecume du Jours. We had a beautiful room with large table and a view of the harbour where we sampled 5 bottles of wine with an accompaniment of nibbles carefully matched to them by our host. He told us that he travelled around France tasting wines and leading wine tasting sessions but of course, when we asked him where he had bought our wines the answer was 'The Red Bus'! Anyone who has been to Roscoff will know where that is!



Our wine expert for the tasting had no English but luckily for us we didn't have to rely on our various levels of schoolboy/girl French as we had a linguist in our midst. Jonathan Banyard made it seem easy as he translated alongside Benoit. The selected wines, so classically French, were beautiful, it was a perfect afternoon of wine tasting, and Benoit, so nervous on his arrival admitted that he enjoyed it too. It turned out we were his first British group - 'Merci beaucoup' we all called as we left.

That night we shared a three course meal at the same restaurant before returning to our hotels. And after a leisurely morning we made our way to the ferry port for our return sail home. It was beautiful to watch the coastline of Devon appear as we sailed into Plymouth.

Our appreciation to Nigel for his detailed planning and on the spot care of us all, thank you Nigel 'Where to next time?'.

Sheila Naybour

The Ship That Fell Over



This unfortunate man slept for 400 years under his cannon until disturbed by lifting the Vasa from 32 metres in Stockholm, Sweden.

In the early 17 C Sweden was on its uppers (broke that is) so King Gustav II and his father, Charles IX went off to plunder the locals. Lots of water round there so rather than walk round they decided to build ships to blast the opposition into submission. It worked!

By 1620 Sweden was rich and had stolen lots more territory. Gustav led his troops and wanted to show his mighty power with a demonstration of the best and biggest military in the local world. (sound familiar?). He came from the family name of Vasa so ego demanded that the new ship be called the same.

Vasa was born in 1625. The design principles were uncertain since warships were mostly converted caravels, (small cargo carriers), and later carracks, (larger cargo/warships). Buoyancy and hull shape were not understood. The ship was built how the shipwright's dad did it and the curve of his thumb was used to shape the hull. I don't fancy a shipbuilder's thumb holding me up in a gale!

Gustav insisted that it carried 72 large cannons on three decks together with the hull decorated in fine heavy carvings with gold and paint. Now, a 24 lb cannon is misleading as that is only the weight of the balls and other nasty stuff exploded at the unfortunates that are due to be annihilated. They actually weigh 2.5 tonnes. If installed this would be 15% of the total weight of the ship, (normally 6%). Disagree with the King and it's a short life.

There was no room, the ship was not expected to carry this weight, the gun ports were too small, and the shape would not hold them or the volume of men to use them. No matter, 48 were installed plus a few smaller cannons, still 10% of the overall weight.



The decorations were fab

The Navy happily adopted the ship in 1628. The sailors were not so happy. They tried to protest and showed 30 sailors running from side to side made the ship heel over in calm water. As is the way of things no one listened. The king insisted that a big parade with a noisy broadside would be held on the maiden voyage. Power was everything!

"Fine" says the Navy. "Oh dear" says our man, (or maybe stronger words to that effect). 450 people on board, sails set and off she went. All gun ports open ready for the big bang to wow the crowd at the party ashore. Our unfortunate man noticed that the gun port was only 1 metre from the

Why?

In 1666 Newton saw an apple fall, and wondered why. In 1912 Alfred Wegener noticed that the eastern coast of South America was the right shape to fit into the western edge of Africa, and wondered why. The first resulted in the Theory of Gravitation, the second the discovery of Continental Drift.

My wonderings why are much simpler. Why, for instance, are thousands of houses still being built without solar panels? And why do we measure temperatures in degrees Celsius? The scale that Anders Celsius invented in 1742 has zero as the boiling point of water and 100 was freezing. Why do we honour him for being so illogical? The scale was inverted later by Carl Linnaeus but why didn't we stay with Centigrade, which has the simple meaning of one hundred units?

Why does so much TV drama have loud background music and muttered and incomprehensible asides when there's no way we can say 'Sorry, what was that?' Plus mobile phone messages flashed on and off that are vital for the plot but unreadable on any set smaller than a 98-inch?

Still on about TV: why do factual programmes (especially the scientific sort) have presenters flitting around the world, landing by helicopter on the top of volcanoes, and mostly 'full of sound and fury, signifying nothing'. Why is anything with even a hint of seriousness dumbed down into mere entertainment with pretty pictures?

Why are nearly all men's shirt collars still made to have a tie? Mind, a lot of men who should know better think that going tieless somehow conveys the impression of relaxed confidence. Where are shirt designers working these days? Haven't they noticed? There's nothing quite so slovenly-looking as an old-design open-

necked crumpled collar with a suit. (Yes I'm showing my age but someone has to maintain standards).

Why is it that in these days of 300-odd earth observing satellites, 8,000 ground reporting stations, 1300 automatic temperature-reporting buoys floating across our oceans, plus AI and forests of huge super-computers, you can still find half a dozen different weather forecasts for tomorrow?

Why are we told that temperatures are the highest ever and storms are the worst ever? What was our weather like under George III in July 1796? Or Henry III in November 1241? We've been recording actual weather details only for the last 150-odd years.

Why are we treated as idiots? Watch out it's going to be hot/cold/stormy, better stay in/use Factor60/check drains and the elderly. I remember when we just had weather and we were left to deal with it ourselves. We managed.

We can't all be clever like Newton and Wegener but we can at least keep asking 'Why?'. I've given you a few examples; now it's your turn.

Ivor Williams



.....and why can't some people read?

Photo: John Noblet

Mining in Mexico

The recent interesting talk by Stephen Lay on mining brought back memories of the research I did on Silver Mining in Mexico.

I have travelled extensively in Mexico and noticed the many chimneys in the countryside which indicated their mining history. This prompted me to go to Pachuca and the Museum there to explore this further.

My particular interest was the story of the miners who mostly came from the West Country in 1820's. It turned out to be a fascinating one and I gathered details on how they travelled here, their life when they settled and found the cemetery where they and their families were buried.

Imagine my surprise to find a John Taylor had played a big part in their story and that this John Taylor was the very same man who had been a prominent person in Tavistock's history.

John was born in Norwich in 1779 and he had trained as a Land Surveyor and Civil Engineer. He came to Tavistock and was the Mine Manager of Wheal Friendship Mine, Mary Tavy when aged 19.

In the early 1800s Mexico was undergoing civil wars, uprisings and their own independence war from Spain 1810-1821. The mines in Pachuca had been left abandoned for 20 years.

The Mexican Government decided to try to sell off the mines. The London Stock Exchange advertised them and a bonanza in buying shares followed. John Taylor formed a company called "The Gentlemen and Adventurers in the Mines of Real Del Monte."

Taylor was reckoned to be the greatest mine manager of his day. He had the particular ability of employing the finest men in their field and for Mexico he

designated Captain James Vetch as his Commissioner in charge of logistics. Captain Vetch was a Scot and had fought with the Duke of Wellington in the Peninsular War. He had vast experience of handling both men and logistics with the added advantage of speaking Spanish. John Taylor hired the help of John Rule, a Cornishman to clean out and re-open the deserted mines.

An advance party of 27 men were sent out by Taylor on the packet ship "Corinthian" from Liverpool to New York on 24 March 1824.

What awaited them once they attempted to land in Mexico is a story in its own right.

For 20 years John Taylor's company lost money in the mines. The cost of sending out more and more equipment to cope with the constant flooding, the taxes that had to be paid to the Mexican Government and the logistics of shipping heavy machinery to Mexico all took their toll. In one year alone, an order of seventeen tons of stores were carried by sea. Communications between England and Mexico could take up to 3 months.

Finally, the shareholders had had enough and the company was sold in 1849 for one and a half million pounds.

Two Mexican capitalists bought the mines. John Buchan, a Scot, was retained. He changed Taylor's methods and explored old workings; he managed to locate the point where two silver-streamed veins intersected which brought forth a bonanza of silver for many years.

It is possible that if John Taylor had ever visited Mexico things may have been very different.

Linda Elliott

The Ship That Fell Over *Continued*

calm sea. Ready with his linstock in a shaky hand, (posh name for a slow fuse), his foot slipped as the ship heeled with a small gust of wind. The sea gushed in covering the cannon and our man. The ship went over; 29 of his friends perished with him.

Fast forward to 1961/67 and like the Mary Rose the Vasa was raised.

Luck was in. The acidic waters round Stockholm kept ship worms away and the hull even floated when towed to the dock. Our man slept under meters of mud; now looking a bit liverish, and who wouldn't after all that? Over 30,000 items preserved showing the way of sailors' life in that period. Food, games, sails, rope, clothes, loose change, all revealed.

But this tale of disaster becomes success. Sitting in its own building the Vasa draws nearly one million visitors a year to marvel at the complete ship. Not quite what Gustav had in mind. And our man? He has gained more state recognition and fame than he could have expected, (or probably wanted).

Our History group, most ably led by Kevin Dickens, were further indulged by why the ship capsized and the consequent development of ships of the line until steam changed them forever. But this represented only a small part of our monthly meeting in Kings.....

Roger Plumb

Photos © Vasamuseet. (Vasa Museum. See their excellent website)



The actual ship in the Vasa museum

Recorder Group

Our recorder group will be performing at Tavi Fringe on Saturday 11 July. They are the first act of the day in Butchers' Hall, from 10 am to 10.30 am.

As usual, the programme will be a mixture of old and new, making the most of the wonderful acoustics of Butchers' Hall.

History Group

Over the past few months our history group has ranged far and wide, island hopping for a start, across our own virtual archipelago; from Drake's island to the Scillies, to Walcheren, to Malta, St. Helena, Okinawa, with much rich and varied history encountered on the way. We survived this epic trip only to roll over and sink in the Baltic, with the positive result, unappreciated by the unhappy crew, of providing present day Stockholm with a marvellously preserved 17th century warship, the "Vasa".

Islands often sport cliffs of course and that's another theme we are pursuing, although so far our cliffs have been well inland. We have shoved unfortunate Romans over the Tarpeian cliff and trekked out to South Dakota, to Mount Rushmore, to gawp at the enormous sculptures of past American presidents there, shuddering at the prospect of a more recent president modestly thinking of adding his own orange physog to the grey granite wall. (Now who could that possibly be?)

We lingered in the States to meet Ned Buntline, a rumbustious character and one of the few survivors of being hanged. (Shooting didn't finish him off either). Whilst over there, we came across a bizarre native crop known as the tobacco plant, which turned out to have an interesting history in its own right, though human rights of course, didn't play a large part in it. Obligations, slavery, duty, even conscription, at least in its imperial form, all came to be considered by us in the story of human rights, or the lack of them, over the centuries.

Local matters frequently came up as well, often with far flung ramifications. We found ourselves on the wartime Harrowbeer air base, with money for war planes pouring in from, of all places, Brazil and Argentina. Another local story

centred round the building that now houses the Abbey Surgery and its many practitioners over the years. That led on the Tavistock Hospital and one unsuccessful candidate for a job there, whose failure led eventually to one of the most imposing (posthumous) monuments in modern London. We then found numerous others whose initial rejections led on to interesting careers, Albert Einstein and Joe Stalin being but two of them.

The failed candidate for the post of matron at Tavistock Hospital was the heroic Edith Cavell, shot by the Germans in Brussels in 1915. She was just one of many extraordinary women we encountered over the past year. Among them were the double Nobel Laureate Marie Curie, the giant of computer prehistory, Ada Lovelace, Mary Wollstonecraft of Frankenstein fame, the marvellous Daisy Greville, Countess of Warwick and a rule breaker in so many ways.

Women also seem to attract particular forms of denigration. "Camp follower" is still a popular term of abuse, and we learned the sobering story of what happened to camp followers during the Civil War on the charming little bridge at Lostwithiel. "Blue stocking" belittles in women what we are called on to admire in the other lot, a sneer all the more interesting when we were told that the first wearer of blue stockings was a man.

There is, thank goodness, much more to the story of English than its capacity for insults, and we were introduced to this rich history, learning too of the debt our language owes to many others across the globe.

Plenty of themes for the future; we will meet more women against the grain. We have more cliffs to climb and we are also now into tunnels, having dug our way under the Thames for the first time, with only a few fatalities.

History Group *Continued*

"Restoration" is a theme which will have more mileage for us. It has already led us into a British Museum nightmare and taken us from a hitherto neglected painting in the quiet little town of Arbroath to King Philip II's Prado. More restorations will be on the way, some impressive, not all of them good.

Reviewing this piece, I'm not altogether sure we looked at things in the order

described above. Never mind; what keeps us going is the knowledge that there will continue to be lively and fascinating contributions by our members. A special thanks too is due to the kitchen team dedicated to ensuring that everyone is provided with coffee and biscuits at the half way point – and who set to determinedly on the washing up afterwards.

Kevin Dickens

Classical Music Appreciation

Our music group has been going for over ten years now and some of the members have been there right from the start. So why do they keep coming? We asked them and it seems it's not just the biscuits.

There was a range of reasons, for example listening to pieces they've not heard before or discovering something new about a particular composer. There is always lots of discussion especially as we mostly watch the music on YouTube and can talk about the composer or a particular section of the orchestra. But above all it's rare that many of us these days allow ourselves the time to just sit and listen to music and the members all felt that these afternoons offer the opportunity to do that just that.

Summer 2025 saw us enjoying the music of Bizet in June, especially pieces from The Pearl Fishers and l'Arlésienne and in July a range of music chosen by members of the group including a piece by Johann Hummel whom few of us knew. As a result, we decided to make him one of our monthly composers which we did in October (so thank you Edna!) In the autumn we chose César Franck, Hummel and the more unusual music of Darius Milhaud which includes such pieces as Le Boeuf sur le Toit (The Cow on the Roof).

In December everyone came along armed with a carol for us to find. There was huge variety, ranging from Alison Krauss singing the Wexford carol to the more traditional (and regularly heard on Christmas Eve from Cambridge) The Angel Gabriel. We enjoyed the traditional Sussex carol and after various other choices rounded off the afternoon with The Sultans of String in Prague (highly recommended).

In the new year we introduced many members to Ibert and in March enjoyed a complete contrast enjoying the music of Fanny Mendelssohn. Her position in society as a respectable married woman meant she had little or no support from either her brother or especially her father, even though the siblings' piano tutor recognised her as a far more superior musician as a child than her brother. Fortunately her husband was totally supportive so we do have some of her compositions (though six of her songs were published under her brother's name).

The world has changed! Our music group has listened to many female composers and in 2014 Alison Weir was appointed Master of the Queen's Music. The current master is also a woman, Errollyn Wallen. We look forward to enjoying the music of more composers, some familiar, some less so (and some female!)

Liz Johnson