



Chair Chat

I am writing this Chair Chat on a very dark and wet afternoon on the shortest day of the year. I am always glad when this day is past because now we have approximately 2 minutes more daylight every day. I remember the times when I would go to work in the dark and travel home in the dark. Light is very important for our wellbeing, natural light boosts vitamin D, wards off seasonal depression and improves sleep.

In Northern Norway, they have darkness for 3 months of the year and apparently, the stars are amazing. But in Svalbard, the men used to consume more alcohol than anywhere else in Norway! At other times, the sun does not set from approximately 19th April to 23rd August. When I was on holiday there, I found it really weird to have daylight for 24 hours.

Light is a common factor in many religions, Light of the World is a phrase Jesus uses to describe himself and his disciples. Diwali is a five-day festival of lights celebrated by Hindus and Sikhs across the world. It celebrates new beginnings and the triumph of light over darkness. Light features in Buddhism too.

We celebrate national events with the lighting of beacons and Lighthouses have saved many lives at sea.

So by the time you read this, we will have turned the corner and we will be having more daylight, thank goodness.

A Happy and Healthy (and Light) 2020.

Sandra Goulding

Monthly Meetings and Speakers:

The main meeting is held on the 2nd Thursday of every month at 2 p.m. (be there by 1.45 pm to get a seat!) at Roberts Hall behind Christ Church, Bexleyheath Broadway.

January 9th	Alan Ashby	The work of The RNLI
February 13th	Dr. Helen Fry	A Very Secret War. Bugging the Nazis in WWII
March 12th	Nick Dobson	A funny thing Happened on the way to the Potting Shed
April 9th	Pauline Martindale	Behind Closed doors. The Personal Experiences of a Prison Officer
May 14 th	Ian Keable	Charles Dickens – Conjuror
June 11th	TBA	TBA

From Terry: Tickets for the Barn Dance are now on sale. To remind you - Saturday 15th February, Roberts Hall, Bexleyheath. Start 19.30. Bring your own refreshments. Dancing to Skinners Rats. Tickets £8. Please See me at the meetings or give me a ring.

Local Lights

The Belvedere Band is performing at St Peter's Church, Pickford Lane on Saturday 21st March (eve) and tickets are £8.50 including a glass of wine or soft drink. If you were lucky enough to hear them at The Orchard in December then you won't want to miss this treat!

I am absent from the January meeting, so please email or text your ticket requirements to me. Please pay me by the following U3A meeting 13th February.

Carole Alleway

Dear New Members

Would you like to get to know other new members who have recently joined Bexley U3A? If the answer is "Yes" then I can arrange coffee mornings three or four times a year for you all to meet up. I am usually at the monthly meetings at the back of the hall, or contact me by email and let me have your name and membership number. Once there are enough members interested, then I shall go ahead and organise some meet ups.

Maureen Wright - Secretary

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### **STROLLERS**

A few weeks before Christmas is a busy and hectic time for us all. Wisely, our Group Leader Barbara organises our Christmas lunch in November and has not been different this year. As usual, on a Tuesday morning towards the end of November, we met at 10 am at Danson Park for our weekly walk.

About our walks - although we follow the same route, we find that each walk offers something different. Mother Nature has seen to it, as well as gardeners, wood surgeons and volunteers. They seem to be at work all the time transforming and creating changes from clearing some areas, forming new flower beds, planting in the Spring to clearing dead plants in the Autumn. At this time of the year the grounds resemble pretty carpets patterned with red, brown and dry leaves, which rustle and crackle under our feet. The foliage on the trees is exceptionally pleasing with pretty autumnal colours.

The water birds know who their friends are! A couple of our members bring small jars with special duck food. As granules fly out of the jars onto the smaller of the two lakes, the birds in military formation glide towards us and gobble the food. Occasionally a small rat joins in at the edge of the lake. Earlier in the year it was lovely to see small fledglings, the next generation of water birds; but by the end of the year they are all grown up. It is difficult to distinguish between parents and their offspring, especially among Egyptian geese.

We continue our walk across the bridge, above a brook which flows into the big lake. Sometimes the surface of the lake is calm; yet at other times there are a great number of variety of birds, from seagulls and coots to various ducks, Canada geese and swans. During the school holidays, youngsters with their instructors are seen in canoes learning how to use oars enjoying a day out on the lake. Sometimes a few sailing boats glide along. The birds in the air are usually more heard than seen, especially the parakeets with their screeching. Occasionally a heron, looking majestic on a tree, surveys the water below looking for breakfast.

During our walks we meet other walkers and begin to recognise them from our previous walks. Cheerfully and with smiles we greet each other. Some walkers have dogs which, if well disposed towards us, greet us by jumping on us, often with their wet and dirty paws. As we walk in twos or threes, there is an opportunity for us members to get to know each other better. Occasionally we extend our walk to a secluded corner of the park to see a couple of boards and stones, commemorating the past events during the WW2, the creation of the UN or the monument to the prisoners of war in Japan.

After completing a circle around the lake, about three miles, we stop at "The Stables" for refreshments. On a sunny day it is lovely to sit outside; on a rainy, windy and cold day we are glad to sit indoors. Their pleasant and friendly

staff are glad to see us "again", some of us regular hot chocolate drinkers. However, on this special occasion, we left the park and walked the short distance to The Toby Carvery. Upon entering the restaurant we discarded our walking jackets and hoods to reveal our more festive clothes, apart from our walking shoes, which are not seen under the table! A long table with colourful crackers and some Christmas cards, was set for the ten of us. Once seated we enjoyed our drinks and the festive meal. Our chatter and laughter joined the voices of other guests, adding to the general atmosphere of the place. Around 3 pm it was the time to leave and we wished each other a Happy Christmas. Thank you very much, Barbara, for organising the lunch and for your tireless enthusiasm in leading the group, come rain or shine, week after week for many years.

Tomira Carson

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## BOOK BUZZ

Bexley's third Literary Festival - 'Book Buzz' - will take place from Saturday 15 February to Saturday 29 February 2020 inclusive.

Authors coming to Bexley in 2020 include Mark Billingham, Louisa Young, Dorothy Koomson, Elly Griffiths, Ben Aaronovitch, Christy Lefteri and Alex Marwood. There will also be an author panel giving us all some great practical tips on how to be published.

The full programme will be available from Bexley Libraries in a few weeks along with details of how to book your tickets. In the meantime, follow Bexley Libraries on Facebook and Twitter to keep up to date with the latest Book Buzz news.

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*Sadly, Pam Chatfield who was host for the Family History Intermediate group, passed away in December. Her funeral is to be held at Falconwood Crematorium at 11 am on Wednesday, 15 January 2020. Our thoughts are with her family and friends.*

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## Group Vacancies

**Life Story 1** - 1 vacancy. Meets 3<sup>rd</sup> Friday in Bexleyheath. Contact Group Leader Jo Livingston; **Play Reading** No current vacancies. 1<sup>st</sup> Monday 2pm, Bexleyheath. To go on waiting list contact Carole Hunt; **Armchair Travellers** 3 vacancies 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday 2pm, Bexleyheath near bus garage. Contact Carole Hunt; **Greek** 5 vacancies. Alternate Thursdays 10-12, Sidcup. Contact Lynne Brown; **Backgammon** 5 vacancies. Monthly Thursday 10-12, Sidcup. Contact Lynne Brown.

### Open Groups

**Town & Around** - Group Leader Margaret Collins; **Decorative Arts Visits** - Group Leader Margaret Collins; **Amblers** - Group Leader Beryl Hutson; **Micropubbers** - Group Leader Derrick Allen, last Wednesday in month; **Strollers** - Group Leader Barbara Wheeler, Tuesday mornings Danson Park; **Jigsaw Swap** - Group Leader Maureen Wilkins, Monthly; **Evergreen Revellers Choir** - Group Leader Terry Moseley; **Local Lights** (local theatre trips) - Group Leader Carole Alleway.

If there are no contact details for the group leader, 'phone or e-mail me for further details:

Cynthia Allen, Group Liaison

### To All Group Leaders

If you have group vacancies, please let me know, including times of meetings, approximate venue, and whether you wish to be contacted directly by would-be members, or would prefer it if they contacted me first. Thank you.

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### RUMMIKUB GROUP

Unfortunately, Maggie Ellis is unable to continue running her Rummikub group. If anyone would like to start a new group, Maggie has very kindly offered to pass the games she has onto them. If you are interested, let me know - my email and phone number are on the back page. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank Maggie for running what was a very successful group. **Cynthia Allen**

**ARMCHAIR TRAVELLERS:** Our group has been meeting for the best part of ten years and we have enjoyed “visiting” many parts of the world. Over time, the original group of ten has decreased as members have moved on in one way or the other. We still meet regularly on the third Thursday of each month and enjoy our “travels”. We would welcome others of a like mind to join us and share their knowledge and experiences of the world. New blood is always good. We are not a holiday reminiscence group but rather one that enjoys searching out new places to visit and indeed members often feel inspired to actually visit locations in person after meeting. At present, we are visiting all the counties of England in turn. Of course, holiday recollections, experiences and advice are always welcome. Activities include research, sampling the local cuisine and beverages, discussion, visits. Some new ideas for activities would be welcome too. We plan an Open Afternoon for our February meeting and would like to invite anyone who is interested in extending their knowledge of the world in a fun way to come along. See what we do and partake of some refreshment. Please phone Carole Hunt for further information.

More of London Visiting Group - There are two places available on the Tour of the Royal Opera House visit in Covent Garden on Wednesday 15 January 2020. The tour starts at 12.15 pm and includes the renovations recently made to this magnificent building. Cost is £13.50 each. If you are interested in this visit please contact Maureen Wright.

Would anyone be interested in organising a group visit to the following?

**National Fruit Collection, Brogdale Farm, Kent**

The National Fruit Collection is the largest collection of temperate fruits in the world. Defra (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) owns the Collection on behalf of the Nation as a scientific resource for developing future food crops. Public access to the Collection is managed by the charity Brogdale Collections. Group guided Orchard tours are available daily from the beginning of April - end October and weekend festivals of cherries, cider and apples take place throughout the season.

Fruit days including soft fruit and plums add to the diversity of fruit available to the public.

All our events make perfect days out for groups – with so much to see and do, including tractor and walking tours of our fascinating orchards, wonderful informative talks and demonstrations, a wide range of local crafts, delicious food and drink and plenty more – there is something for everyone.

**Our 2020 calendar** – Easter at Brogdale – 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> of April; Hanami Festival – 18<sup>th</sup> & 19<sup>th</sup> April; Strawberry Fair – 21<sup>st</sup> June; Cherry Fair – 19<sup>th</sup> July; Cider Festival – 29<sup>th</sup> & 30<sup>th</sup> August; Apple Festival – 17<sup>th</sup> \* 18<sup>th</sup> October  
To book a group visit our website at [www.brogdalecollections.org/group-visits/](http://www.brogdalecollections.org/group-visits/) or call us on 01795536250. Included in the price is coach parking and a dedicated guide to meet and greet you at the event. Quote ‘Orchards’ on your booking form to receive a free place for the course organiser.

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## TOWN AND AROUND

ALL OUTINGS AT YOUR OWN RISK.

**Friday 24<sup>th</sup> January 2020. Foundling Museum, Brunswick Square.** Meet Charing Cross at 10.15ish then bus and short walk. Guided tour of this museum telling the story of why and the way it was founded, and its history. Collection of Hogarth originals housed here. £14.00

**Monday 24<sup>th</sup> February 2020. The Worshipful Society of Apothecaries. Blackfriars.** Meet Cannon Street Station at 10.15/10.30 then underground to Blackfriars North side and short walk. Guided tour of this historic Livery Hall destroyed by the Great Fire and rebuilt in 1672. £15.00

**Monday 30<sup>th</sup> March 2020. Trinity House.** Meet at Cannon Street Station 10.15/10.30 then District Line to Tower Hill. Guided tour of this historic building that has been dedicated to looking after Lighthouses, Lightships, Buoys and other navigational aids for seamen since 1514. £10.00

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|------------------------------------|--|--|
| <b>Organiser: Margaret Collins</b> |  |  |
| <b>Bookings: Maire Carr</b>        |  |  |
| <b>Money: Sabine Wayt</b>          |  |  |

## TOWN AND AROUND

Visit to Spencer House, St James

By Margaret Collins

On a grey drizzly day in November we visited the fabulously restored house that was the ancestral London pad of the Spencer family. We were split into two groups and invited to view the main rooms. The house was built in 1766 by the architect John Vardy for John, First Earl Spencer (died 1783) and Georgiana his childhood sweetheart who he married on his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday at Althorp in 1755. He had inherited a vast fortune as a minor from his grandfather and great grandmother and had no qualms about spending it on this splendid town house overlooking Green Park and at that time Buckingham House, with The Court of St James a few hundred yards away. It was built as a Temple to the Arts for fashionable entertainment, and as a setting for the Earl's impressive art collection, partly inherited and partly augmented by purchases he made during and after his Grand Tour. The ground floor rooms were completed in Italian style (with plenty of bling) but Vardy was replaced by the more fashionable architect James "Athenian" Stuart who had recently returned from Greece with lots of neo-classical ideas and who completed the first floor State rooms in Grecian style which suited the Society of Dilettanti who met in these rooms over some years.

In 1926 the Spencer family moved out and the house was let to the Ladies' Army and Navy Club who were there until 1943 and then a succession of lets until the 1980s. By 1941 fearing bomb damage during WW11 most of the original architectural features, including chimneypieces, doors, architraves, skirtings, paintings, furniture etc. was moved to Althorp and eventually became part of the furnishings of Althorp. The family still own the property but Lord Rothschild has a 125-year lease on behalf of RIT Capital Partners plc who use the upstairs rooms as offices.

The restoration was complete in 1989 and taken back to when it was fairly new. Princess Diana formally opened the house in 1990. No expense spared, carpets commissioned, gilding on absolutely everything, fabulous furniture, chandeliers, art works, sculptures, lamps, mirrors and so much more. Teams of historians looked for some of the original furniture and purchased back, or negotiated long-term loans from private collections and museums all over the world to bring back to the house. The Althorp estate had an attic sale a few years back and they were able to purchase some of the unwanted original items to refurbish the house. Only one room has original furniture.

As so little of the original fittings, fireplaces, mirrors or doors were available Lord Rothschild employed Dick Reid and a team to reproduce the originals, which are in situ at Althorp, and in museums elsewhere in the world, and these, have been faithfully reproduced throughout the house.

We were taken into the Morning Room first with its lovely calm atmosphere, then into the Ante Room with his highly decorated and gilded apse leading on to the Hall and staircase complete with enormous Centaur. We entered the Library through great mahogany doors that housed some of the book collection of the Second Earl Spencer. The Dining Room was lovely, with large windows overlooking Green Park, four scagliola columns lead your eye to the fabulous ceiling in green, white and gold and the wonderful chandelier. The Palm Room took our breath away, columns in gold made to look like palm trees dominate, but a beautiful fireplace and green silk furniture soften the bling.

We then went upstairs and marvelled at the huge lantern light hanging from the very ornate plaster ceiling and into the Music Room. No sign of music now, but a very comfortable room with gingham covered dining chairs around a beautiful Irish wake table now used as a small dining table. Lady Spencer's Room with walls of red silk damask specially woven for the refurbishment was a very pretty room. The Great Room was used for balls and parties, and is

still used today for weddings and functions. Apparently Prince Charles came here for his 70<sup>th</sup> Birthday. The three huge chandeliers, fabulous furniture, wonderful paintings and enormous carpet give this room a very luxurious feel. The Painted Room was the last stop on this tour. The white, gold and green ceiling led to a column supported apse with painted panels expressing the Triumph of Love. The walls are covered in painted scenes, cherubs, all festive and carefree, and painted panels showing flowers reminded me of those at Danson House. This room suffered damage to the ceiling during the war, but fortunately the walls had been protected so no damage to the painted walls, fireplace or columns. The furniture in this room is original and in the same place as it was made for.

What a wonderful house, and thank goodness for the likes of Lord Rothschild who has the money and impetus to take on such a huge task of restoring this property for us to enjoy.

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### **Executive Committee 2019- 2020**

|                            |                   |  |                                                                                                                                  |
|----------------------------|-------------------|--|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Chair                      | Sandra Goulding   |  |                                                                                                                                  |
| Vice Chair                 | <b>VACANCY</b>    |  |                                                                                                                                  |
| Secretary                  | Maureen Wright    |  |                                                                                                                                  |
| Treasurer                  | Ron Clayton       |  |                                                                                                                                  |
| Membership                 | Douglas West      |  |                                                                                                                                  |
| Speakers                   | Terry Mosley      |  |                                                                                                                                  |
| Group Liaison              | Cynthia Allen     |  |                                                                                                                                  |
| E-mail & IT                | Nino Parascandolo |  |                                                                                                                                  |
| Social Secretary           | Thelma Wilkes     |  |                                                                                                                                  |
| Catering                   | Vi King           |  |                                                                                                                                  |
| Hall Manager<br>/Database  | Nino Parascandolo |  |                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>NON-COMMITTEE ROLES</b> |                   |  |                                                                                                                                  |
| Meet & Greet               | Edna Sutton       |  | Please let Edna know of personal events e.g. significant birthdays, anniversaries, condolences, etc. so that she can send cards. |
| Newsletter Editor          | Mary Jupp         |  |                                                                                                                                  |

*All contributions for February newsletter to be submitted by **Midday Monday 27<sup>th</sup> January***

*Please ensure you contribute before the cut-off and have an email acknowledgment from me that I have received your contribution! Thank You*