

Bexley u3a Groups

Armchair Travellers (**Vacancies**); Choir (**Vacancies**); City Explorers; Crochet; Family History Advanced; French Conversation (Vacancies); French Intermediate; Gardening (**Vacancies**); German Conversation; Heritage Railway (**Vacancies**); Italian; Jazz Appreciation; Jigsaw Swap; Life Story (**Vacancies**); Listening to Music; Lights Theatre Bookings (**Vacancies**); Micropubs (**Vacancies**); More of London; Photoshop Workshop; Play Reading (**Vacancies**); Poetry Reading; Ramblers (**Vacancies**); Reading for Pleasure; Rummikub – 4 groups; Scrabble (**2 Vacancies**); Self-Help Art; Spanish Conversation (**Vacancies**); Spanish Intermediate (**Vacancy**); Stitchers; Strollers (**Vacancies**); Wartime Memories; Alternative Book Group (**2 Vacancies**).

If you are interested in any of the above groups, please contact me – Text, WhatsApp, leave a message on Voicemail, or E-mail - and I will get back to you with details of the group or groups that interest you.

Cynthia Allen (Group Liaison)

Book Reviews

From Carol - A Vision of Eden by Marianne North

This is the story of Marianne North, an unmarried middle-aged Victorian Lady of comfortable means. She was born in 1830 and lived in London. She set off in 1871 on her first expedition to make a pictorial record of the tropical and exotic plants of the world. While she travelled, she painted in oils everyday producing the paintings that are now in the Marianne North gallery in Kew Garden. An interesting read.

From Norma - The Hero's Welcome by Louisa Young

The Hero's welcome is the sequel to 'My dear I wanted to tell you'. Louisa Young writes of the return of soldiers from the First World War and how they adapted to civilian life. The book includes descriptions of the plastic surgery performed at Queen's Hospital Sidcup and of the surgeon Harold Gillies who led the way and went on to become a pioneer of gender reassignment surgery. The story focuses on two men, one of whom marries and eventually copes with the horrific results of his injuries and another who became depressed with the shocking result. Well written, excellent follow-up.

From Cynthia - The Friend by Charlie Gallagher

Danny and Sharon Evans' daughter has attempted suicide and is now lying in a hospital bed in an induced coma. They have no idea why she did this. Then a man, known to the family, tells Danny that he knows who was behind her attempt to kill herself and shows him the way to seek revenge. This begins a series of brutal murders. DI Norris has just returned from a period of leave to face two seemingly unconnected killings. The rest of the novel contains a series of sub plots of increasing complexity. The reader needs to keep awake and focus! But it is so worth it. I shall definitely be reading another of Gallagher's books.

From Irene - The Paris Library by Janet Skeslien Charles

Based on the true World War II, a story of the heroic librarians at the American Library in Paris, this is an unforgettable story of romance, friendship, family and the power of literature to bring us together.

The book is set during 1939-44 in Paris and 1983 in Montana. Odile is known as “the war bride” in the small Montana town and is now widowed. Lily is her teenage neighbour, and she is at an age where she is struggling to fit in. Her mother has recently died and her father remarries quickly. The pair become friends and Lily treasures the time spent learning French with Odile.

Odile’s story starts in 1939 as she begins work at the American Library in Paris. She has memorised the Dewey Decimal System and there are references throughout the novel, as well as quotes from the classics. Her father is a police supervisor and brings home prospective “husband” candidates for dinner. Once war is declared her twin brother Remy enlists. The librarians begin to send off packs of books for the soldiers to boost morale.

The German Occupation of Paris begins and the atmosphere of Paris and library changes. The Directress at the time was adamant about remaining open. Plans had been put in motion to protect some of the more treasured books, but restrictions are put in place by the Germans: the banning of certain books, and “certain types of people” can no longer use the library. To overcome this, the librarians set up their own resistance, delivering books to their Jewish subscribers.

The author worked in the American Library in Paris, some of the characters in the book are real, and the “crow” letters of denunciation were modelled on letters in the archives. Odile’s father was tasked with acting on these letters filled with hate and anger and vile accusations.

I enjoyed reading about this chapter of Second World War history, and how the courageous librarians defied the Nazis in order to help subscribers and to share a love of literature.

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“Remember When” contributions from Life Story Group 2

The Co-op in Lewisham

The Co-op in Lewisham was a large three-floor store with a basement. Each floor had specified items in individual departments. There was a lift and in the early days there was a lift attendant who would call out what was on each floor as you reached it – later this service was replaced with a recorded message. The store had a system for payments, which was a tube, which ran around the ceiling of each floor. The sales assistant would put the bill and the customer’s money in a small aluminum container, screwed the top and put it in the tube. A vacuum system sucked it through about ½ mile of tubing to the accounts office where the tube was emptied and the customer’s change was put back in the tube and it was returned through the system to the sales assistant on the shop floor. It was exciting to watch the tube disappear and listen to it going through the pipes and then waiting for the tube to come back.

(Wendy Scott)

Jones & Higgins

A magnificent old building built in 1900 on the corner of Peckham High Street. It was a large department store built on 5 floors and it was very grand. My Dad called it a poor man’s Selfridges, it stocked almost everything you needed. As a child, I loved the pet department, which sold all sorts of animals. There was a resident Mynah bird named Morris who used to sing and talk, he also learned how to swear too. The Christmas grotto in the toy department was amazing in the 50s &

60s before technology. The staff had created caves or a forest to walk through and a special train that really seemed to be travelling towards Father Christmas.

As teenager in the 60s, my friends and I frequented the "Record Store" where you could listen to your chosen record in a little booth. Two or three of us used to cram in together to listen and swoon over the Beatles. Occasionally they had Pop Stars who turned up to plug their latest record and autograph it if someone bought one. I never bought one as I never even had a record player! I loved that department store and often went back when I grew up. But, other newer shops opened and peoples shopping habits changed, large stores weren't so popular, so in 1989 they closed their doors for the last time. (Lesley Beasley)

Seeing Red

In the Sixties and early Seventies, the London Electricity Board and the Gas Board both had showrooms in some of the high street of towns. An Aunty of mine was being let down by the gas company as twice she had spent half a day waiting in for them and nobody turning up. She got so mad about this on the second occasion that she decided to take her complaint to the showroom of the Gas Board to let them know what she thought about their service. She was very angry and she raced down to the high street and charged into the shop loudly complaining about this to the assistant. The lady behind the counter stayed very cool. She then said 'I would love to help you madam but you are in the LEB. The Gas Showroom is next door'. (Vicky Wheatley)

Gravesend

When we moved to Gravesend in 1984, the town had a good selection of shops catering for most needs. Notably we had 2 decent department stores. An Army & Navy and a Debenhams, which had a good array of quality goods. Just opposite the Army & Navy was a Woolworth stocking affordable items including household items, toys, records, pick & mix sweets and loose biscuits. Sadly, the store closed along with all the others in the country. Our branch has been boarded-up since then and it is finally being refurbished into, what is rumoured to be, assorted units. Our Debenhams closed last year and is still empty. Opposite Debenhams was a British Home Stores and the site now houses a large Job Centre. Next door was a Marks and Spencer which was very handy, as the nearest now is in Bluewater, it is now a B & M Store.

As we progress up the road, what was New Look is now empty along with Thomas Cook and Tui travel shops. Their demise is probably down to the restrictions on travel due to Covid-19. We still have a Card Factory to the detriment of Clintons. In the last couple of weeks 'Closing Down' notices have gone up in W H Smiths and again the nearest will be in Bluewater. Also, just before Christmas 2021, our lovely curtain shop closed.

Unfortunately, the loss of our high street shops, as we knew them, is probably down to 'Online Shopping', large out of town Malls, like Bluewater, and Supermarkets with a larger range of goods plus the higher rents that are now being asked for these sites. (Chris Friday)

Living in a small Scottish town

Living in a small Scottish town there were no Department Stores or any of the well-known shops such as Dolcis, Timpson etc. We did have a small Woolworths but the rest of the shops were independent apart from the Co-op or "Soshi" as it was known, which reigned supreme.

Everyone had their own "divvie number" and this had to be given when you bought something, a bit like reward cards today. Twice a year a letter was sent advising how much dividend you were due, and everyone duly trooped to the Co-op Office to collect their money, in a little brown pay packet.

Before self-service we would go into the local store with our shopping list, the cheese was cut for you and the ham and bacon sliced by the machine. Everything was taken from the shelves and put into a box, to be delivered later by the “message boy”. A good way to earn money as a teenager.

We had Co-op, butchers, bakers, chemists, grocers, menswear, ladies wear and home furnishings shops.

Twice a week the butcher’s van would come around to all the streets so fresh meat could be purchased.

The baker’s van came round on Friday (payday at all the local engineering plants) if there was spare money, you could be treated to, what was known as “tea bread” mainly scones, plain buns and teacakes. Cakes only on special occasions.

I used to love going into the ladies’ wear shop with all the draperies in drawers and when you paid the cash was put into a canister and went into a tube to the Office and the change and receipt came back down the pipes.

In our town the Co-op also delivered milk, I used to do this whilst at school, the milk was all packed up on the Furniture Van and we would cover our round from 6.00 to 8.00 every morning, then the van would be used to deliver the furniture during the day.

There are still Co-op supermarkets in the town but now joined by the usual shops, Tesco, Morrisons, Argos, Iceland et al. (Irene Mitchell)

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We have many free events in the borough. Check out Eventbrite website <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk> for upcoming talks at our libraries. Some familiar faces appearing at a library near you!

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HALL PLACE – FARMERS MARKET

10am – 2pm

Free, drop in

On the first Sunday and third Saturday of every month.

Come and buy the best local produce at Hall Place. Meet the farmers and producers, try food samples and buy everything from home-grown fruit and vegetables, through to delicious cakes, breads and cheeses.

Location: Located outside on the courtyard by the Visitors Centre

Who would like this: Anyone who likes to buy from local producers

What to bring: Please dress for the weather. You might want to bring your own bags with you

Accessibility & Facilities: This event is held on flat concrete in winter and grass in the summer. All the traders are following government guidelines on covid safety. There is the café and toilets nearby including disabled toilet and baby change (open 10am-5pm). Please follow this link for information on mobility access <https://www.hallplace.org.uk/accessibility/>

## Executive Committee 2021- 2022

|                            |                |  |                                                                                                                                  |
|----------------------------|----------------|--|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Chair                      | Wendy Scott    |  |                                                                                                                                  |
| Vice Chair                 | <b>VACANCY</b> |  |                                                                                                                                  |
| Secretary                  | Maureen Wright |  |                                                                                                                                  |
| Treasurer                  | Keith Scott    |  |                                                                                                                                  |
| Membership                 | Douglas West   |  |                                                                                                                                  |
| Speakers                   | Paul Morris    |  |                                                                                                                                  |
| Group Liaison              | Cynthia Allen  |  |                                                                                                                                  |
| E-mail & IT                | Keith Scott    |  |                                                                                                                                  |
| Social Secretary           | <b>VACANCY</b> |  |                                                                                                                                  |
| Catering                   | Vi King        |  |                                                                                                                                  |
| Database                   | Keith Scott    |  |                                                                                                                                  |
| <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 **April newsletter** to be submitted by  
Midday **Monday 4<sup>th</sup> April**

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