

Bulletin

for Interest Groups

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Message from the Chairman

This dismal, DISMAL weather is probably making us all long for spring even more than we usually do at this time of year.

In order to help cheer everybody up, I am pleased to tell you that our Social and Events Organiser and his team have now started to put together a programme of events for the forthcoming year. Please take a look at page 3 for events and contact details.

There are still a (very) few tickets available for Hever Castle on 22 April and if you would like a ticket please contact the Events Organiser.



“Thank you everybody for your very generous donations to the Guide Dogs at the January General Meeting”



General Meetings 3.30-5.30pm

Crofton Halls, BR6 8PR

Doors open at 3.30pm for refreshments, until the main meeting starts at 4pm

Members who park at Crofton Halls when attending General Meetings will need to enter their car registration at reception to avoid a parking fine.

Click [HERE](#) for further details.

17 March - Blowing My Own Trumpet - Roy Bilham

Amusing and interesting accounts of Roy's 50 years as a professional musician, beginning with his time spent in a Yorkshire Brass Band followed by 22 years with the Royal Artillery Band.

He has also played with many leading London orchestras, including the BBC Concert Orchestra and most notably the Philharmonia Orchestra.



21 April - Clive Nutman

National History, Ecology, Wildlife and Travel



Clive is a Kent-based biologist who gives regular talks and presentations on his work in conservation; including ecology and natural history. He worked for the Tropical Biology Association at Cambridge University and organised scientific training courses in East Africa, Madagascar and South East Asia. Along the way he has collated a huge collection of photographs and videos that capture some of the wildlife, scenery, people and culture of those regions which he enjoys to share with his audiences.

At the January General Meeting Linda Regan, best known from Hi-de-Hi!, delivered an engaging and warmly received talk about her dual career as an actress and crime novelist.



Monthly u3a Coffee Morning

On the third Thursday of the month we have a Coffee Morning at 10.30am in the

BR6 Bakehouse Café

All members are welcome



Events!

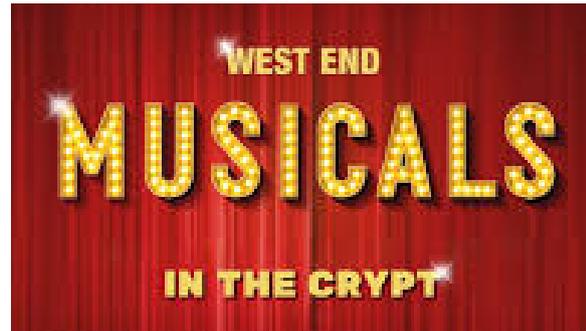
Musicals in the Crypt

RHS Gardens Wisley

The Events team is pleased to announce the next trip is to **"Musicals In The Crypt"**. Songs from the West End. Taking place on **Saturday 30th May**, at The Crypt in St. Martins-in-the-Fields Church. Opposite Charing Cross Station. There is a lift down to the Crypt. There is a full bar, and a limited menu.

Doors open at 7pm, music at 8pm, finishing about 9:45pm.

Tickets are £23 pp to go on sale at the March monthly meeting. Pay on the day to guarantee a seat. Card, Cash or Cheque.



The following Event will be **RHS Wisley on Monday 22nd June** - More details next month.

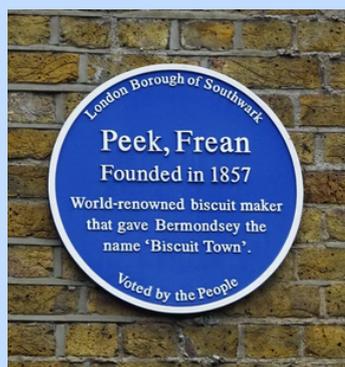
If you would like additional information about these trips or have any ideas for future outings, please contact the Events Organiser.

London Explorers

Peek Freans Biscuit Museum Thursday 9 April 2026

A visit has been arranged to the Peek Freans biscuit museum in Bermondsey.

Secreted away in a surviving block of the old factory (which now homes offices, artists' studios and a gym) is the Peek Freans Museum, a treasure trove of biscuit heritage. Colourfully decorated tins glitter in cabinets. There are old advertisements, images of employees in flour-caked aprons, special Twiglet-cutting blades



— even antique biscuits still in their packaging, decades past their best-before date. Holding court in the centre of the room is a replica of a wedding cake gifted by Peek Freans to the then Princess Elizabeth, when she married in 1947. A towering Haversham-esque thing, it even features iced battleships — a nod to her husband's naval links.

We will have a guided visit to this small museum, which is only open by appointment. We will travel from Orpington to Waterloo East and take the Jubilee Line to Bermondsey; from there it's about a 10 minute walk. Entry is free!!

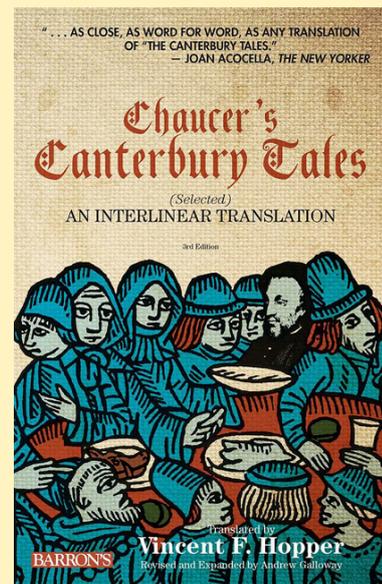
London Explorers

February Report - A small group met at London Bridge for a guided tour around Southwark Cathedral highlighting its evolution over the past 900 years. There has been a religious building on the site since at least 606 AD ranging from its early form as a Convent through being a priory and a parish church up to its status of becoming a Cathedral in 1905 in the newly formed Diocese of Southwark. The priory was dedicated to St. Mary Overie in the 12th century complete with a hospital which was the predecessor of St. Thomas's. Following the dissolution of the monasteries by Henry VIII, the site became the parish church of St. Saviours.

Much of the present Gothic structure represents the original style of the 13th century building; the latest part being the rebuilding of the nave in the 19th century after the church had fallen into disrepair, even at one time having no roof over the nave. The nave, together with the retrochoir, remain among the finest examples of early English architecture in London.

There are memorials to Geoffrey Chaucer - whose Canterbury Tales start just around the corner - and to William Shakespeare, reflecting the area's connections with theatres, including the Globe. Interestingly, however, it was Shakespeare's brother Edmond who was originally buried there. John Harvard was baptised in the church in 1607, his father being a church warden. Years later he emigrated to New England with his collection of books which, on his death, he bequeathed to the local college now the renowned Harvard College. The Harvard chapel in the cathedral was funded by Harvard alumni.

A more recent addition is a memorial to the Marchioness river boat tragedy on the Thames. There is much more to be seen there, and it is well worth a visit.





Walks



Walks are on the 3rd Wednesday of the month, starting at 10am unless stated otherwise.

All walkers join the walks at their own risk.

New walkers are welcome to join any of the walks - but please telephone us before coming on your first walk. Please ensure that you wear suitable footwear for the walks.

Note that the walk description is only a brief guide, not a complete breakdown of the walk.

Programme for the coming months



Wednesday 18 March

Pratts Bottom and Norstead Manor

Meet at the Bull's Head on Rushmore Hill for a 4-mile walk commencing with a short steep hill and then walking alongside fields, through wooded areas, over one low stile and across valleys.

The route offers views of London and concludes at the Bull's Head, where refreshments are available.

Park on the road or in the pub car park.

Wednesday 15 April

Shorne Woods Country Park

Meet outside the Café / Car Park, Brewers Road, Shorne, Kent DA12 3HX for a 3.7 mile circular walk around the country park. The terrain is undulating woods or meadowland. There are no stiles but 3 sets of steps in the woods, 1 short, 2 long. But the walk is organised to descend rather than ascend all the steps. Walking poles are advised if you have them. Please ensure you are fit enough to cope.

Car Parking is £3.30 for the whole day so you may want to consider car sharing. Toilets and refreshments are available after at the café.



Dark Matter

Dark matter isn't simply invisible 'space stuff'; it's a form of matter that doesn't emit, absorb, or reflect light, which is why our instruments can't detect it directly. So, what makes scientists think it exists? The speaker eloquently explained the theories and how its gravitational effects allow us to infer its presence.

Johannes Kepler's laws suggest the outer parts of a spiral galaxy should rotate more slowly than the centre, yet Fritz Zwicky found galaxies spinning so fast they must have far more mass to stay bound. Vera Rubin later showed that galaxy rotation speeds stay almost constant with distance, revealing that visible matter alone can't supply enough gravity and pointing to a large amount of unseen mass - **dark matter**.

The Bullet Cluster strengthens the case for dark matter. It consists of two galaxy clusters (each made of stars and large clouds of hot gas) that are in the process of colliding. During the collision, the gas clouds slow down due to friction, while the galaxies and the dark matter pass through each other. A phenomenon known as gravitational lensing reveals the centres of mass (shown in blue and interpreted as dark matter) clearly separated from the visible matter, which is mostly hot gas (pink).



Scientists think dark matter is made of invisible particles because galaxies behave as though there's far more mass than we can see. While some theories try to change gravity (Modified Newtonian Dynamics - MOND), others propose hidden objects (Massive Astrophysical Compact Halo Objects - MACHOs) or known particles like neutrinos. However, the leading candidates for dark matter are new particles such as axions and Weakly Interacting Massive Particles (WIMPs).

In 2026, NASA and ESA (European Space Agency) announced the discovery of "Cloud-9," the first confirmed starless, gas-rich dark-matter cloud, a rare relic from the early universe. Identified with the Hubble Space Telescope, Cloud-9 contains gas but no stars, offering new insights into early galaxy formation and the nature of dark matter.

[Something Far Darker Than a Black Hole Could Hide in The Heart of The Milky Way : ScienceAlert](#)

If you have an interest in science or technology and would like to give your brain cells some exercise please contact the Group Leader to be added to our emailing list.

FUTURE MEETINGS

10 March - Electron Microscopes

14 April - 50 Years of Weather Recording in South London

12 May - TBA

9 June - Forever Chemicals

ROYAL COLLEGE OF MUSIC LOVERS GROUP

Dear Friends,

The RCM music lovers group has gone from strength to strength with a selection of wonderful concerts to enjoy each month for as little as £5.

Our January concert at the RCM – “Opera Scenes” - featuring some of the RCM’s very talented singers, brought us some of the best loved songs from the operas. It was a delightfully entertaining evening bringing to life some of our best-loved operas.

Our concert on 19th February was also a wonderful evening, with:



Anna-Maria Helsing - conductor
Zala Kravos - piano
RCM Philharmonic
Ravel Piano Concerto in G major
Brahms Symphony no 3 in F major op 90



Acclaimed conductor Anna-Maria Helsing directed the RCM Philharmonic in a sumptuous programme of orchestral riches, featuring RCM Concerto Competition winner Zala Kravos in Ravel’s sparkling Piano Concerto. The programme culminated in Brahms’ Third Symphony, of which his friend Dvořák said:

“I say without exaggerating that this work surpasses his first two symphonies; if not, perhaps, in grandeur and powerful conception – then certainly in beauty.”

If you are interested in joining us, please contact the Group Leader



Philosophy

The recent presentation '**An Introduction to 'Deep Ecology'**' distinguished Deep Ecology from mainstream environmentalism.

It explained its core principles and philosophical foundations and inspired reflection on our relationship with the natural world and suggested practical implications and paths forward.

It also covered the definition, origins and ideas of its founders. Its underlying message was the shift from the egotistical self to the ecological self. It gave ideas on how this could be cultivated but acknowledged these could lead to implications on current events.

FUTURE GROUP MEETINGS IN 2026

Friday, 6th March - Eugenics

Friday, 10th April - The Meaning of Life

Friday, 1st May - Life, Death and Self Realisation

Friday, 5th June - Phenomenology/Existentialism

Friday, 3rd July - Subjective Idealism

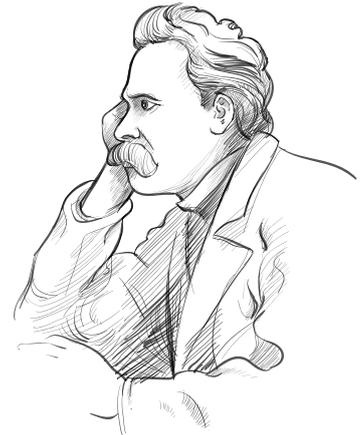
Friday, 7th August - Loss of Faith

Friday, 4th September - Reality

Friday, 2nd October - Faith and Reason. The Necessity of Both

Friday, 6th November - AI Bubble and Robots

Friday, 4th December - Summary and Way Ahead, and shared lunch



If you would like to find out more about joining this group please contact: the Group Leader

'CHEERS' - Wine Tasting Group



The Cheers group meets on the second Tuesday of each month at a member's house. One of the group presents six wines chosen from a particular area or on a particular theme. The wines are tasted and discussed. Costs are divided up between those present at the meeting.

If you are curious and would like to try us out, why not come to one of the meetings to see what you think. Contact: the Group Leader

u3a friends

u3a Friends is an exciting new initiative to bring together stories and interests from across the u3a movement. The scheme includes regular and special issues of the online national u3a Friends Newsletter, filled with news from u3as across the country, plus fantastic offers and services.

If you would like to find out more please follow this link:

<https://www.u3a.org.uk/about/u3a-friends>

INTEREST GROUPS UPDATE



SOLO - Sunday Lunch (New Group)



Are you on your own? Do you find that Sunday can be a very long day?

Would you like to join others in a similar situation for a monthly lunch on Sundays?

If so, I am setting up a new group to do just that. Please contact the Group Coordinator and when we have several people interested, I'll set up a first meeting.



Last year, a U3A Craft group was proposed. It was a popular idea; however, initially, no one came forward to lead the group, so (as an avid crafter), I volunteered.

At our first meeting in December, eight ladies joined me to create origami paper stars and beautiful 3D snowflakes using paper, scissors and glue. Since then (as there was so much interest!), I've split the group into two, and we've had two more sessions with a floral theme using paper napkins, cupcake cases, and origami (the photo shows the lovely results!). No special skills or equipment are needed (and I provide you with handouts and video links for more complicated crafts).



If you'd like to join us in making paper crafts/origami, mosaics, macramé, Hama beads (and more), the groups run on the last Thursday of each month at my home. Crafts 1 runs from 10.00 am-12.00 pm, and Crafts 2 from 1.30 pm-3.30 pm. Information about what we will be doing (and what I'd like you to bring with you) is sent out two weeks before meeting up.

Numbers are limited to eight in each session, so pre-booking is essential, and there's a very small (optional) charge to cover any handouts and materials I provide. Lots of help is given throughout each session, so complete beginners and more experienced crafters are very welcome! Come and get crafting with me!

For more information, please contact the Group Leader

RECORDER GROUP FOR BEGINNERS

Suggested New Group

I have recently started playing the descant recorder and would like to set up a group of fellow enthusiasts. The group would meet twice a month, second and fourth Friday mornings, 10:00-11:30. Initially the group would meet at my house in Orpington, with a view to possibly meeting in each other's homes in due course. Ability to read music would be helpful, but not essential. Contact: the Group Coordinator.



Local History Research Group

**Are you interested in researching local history?
Have you ever wondered about the road you live in?**

When was it built and who used to live there? OR..... how DID Orpington get developed? When and by whom? AND.... what role did the railway have in expanding the town? OR ... why is the Parish Church up a hill...?

SO many questions and we hope we can use old maps, census information and other documents to find out some answers.

If you are interested in joining this group, and so that we can arrange an introductory meeting to discuss the way forward, please contact the Group Coordinator.