

GENERAL MEETING 2024

January 2024: MEDICAL DETECTION DOGS

Ann Hilton was another one of those Speakers that probably appeared as very dry and technical on paper – but Wow (or maybe bow-wow).

Ann explained that this was a comparatively new charity – about 50 years of experts recognising that dogs could detect bladder cancer in humans at around 50% of the time and that dogs could do that without training.

The charity was set up in 2008 and the Queen is their patron. The first patient – the dog would refuse to get out of the car by constantly nudging her chest where the cancer was. The Centre at Milton Keynes began at an old damp draughty building (no viewing space to spread the word and display the dogs' work).

It is all about the dogs' noses. Humans have 5,000 receptors in our noses. Dogs have 3 million! Approximately 5000 breast cancers and 5700 prostate cancers have been identified. The dogs' pick up a cancer odour. They are trained to check samples and sit down when they pick up signals.

Some guide dogs, who don't make the grade at that are re-trained as Detection Dogs. They must have the temperament and like people. It takes £29,000 to train a dog, They are looking, beyond cancer, at other issues – Bacterial, virus, malaria, etc. In trials dogs could detect Covid. There are lots of possibilities with dog's noses and smart phones.

Well done to Ann who did her best to overcome our dodgy microphone. From my position at the back of the room – it was noticeable that only three people left the hall before the end. For a bunch of old people like us, that was significant.

Eric Rennie

February 2024: RUSSIA – ITS HISTORY AND ITS PEOPLE

Catherine McAteer is a serious researcher in all things Russian and gave us a quite in depth explanation of why it is as it is. Her talk opened in fluent Russian, which she explained was a language for most of Eastern Europe – not just the current Russia (the Baltic states and Ukraine, etc.).

Churchill had described Russia as “a riddle, wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma. Like a Russian Doll it has many layers, difficult to understand who the Russian people are. Their leaders forged the nation. Catherine repeatedly said the people liked “strong leaders” and gave us a whole list of leaders (whether strong or weak).

Tsar means Ceasar (He took out his rivals). The Tsars even took out their heirs. Ivan the terrible – well named. Peter the Great loved European / French style – he took many ideas back to Russia, but he was seen as weak. Even Lenin was not thought of as “strong” unlike Joseph Stalin (who we would say was a bit nasty?).

The Leaders have taken ideas from Europe but in their own way. Housing developments tended to be much smaller than those it copied (minimal gardens). *To do it Russian style - not like the Europeans* (but the people still crave blue jeans). The ordinary people put up with food shortages / black markets/ etc. but they are very hospitable. Catherine said they would blow their month's salary to feed their guest.

Lots of people still get ill, but still have a very stoic acceptance of their situation and reluctant to question authority. So much more could be written from this talk.

Eric Rennie

March 2024: The Masters of Mirth – The Sequel

Mike Storr had appeared here 6 years ago (2018). This was his follow up about his favourite Music Hall laughter-makers, beginning with the first panto dame in 1951 – Norman Evans at the Palladium.

Mike's talk moved quickly and jumped between times (not easy taking notes for this report) . The Music Halls had grown out of pubs / drinking places but had gone into decline after the war – in the 50s it was all changing. Script-writers became the kings and using the same jokes over and over, and catch-phrases evolved. “Can I do you now”, “Pin back you lugholes” from Cyril Fletcher.

Little stories and poems developed. Marriot Edgar as a script-writer began doing monologues. “Pickup tha musket, Sam” and “Our Mag's getting married” done by Al Reed. More recently Pam Ayres continued the style with “Clive the fearless birdman”. Stanley Holloway did the “Runcorn Ferry”.

It didn't last – TV was taking over and the star names were moving across to the “box” where they could not just repeat the same jokes going around the Halls. Mike did some good vocal impersonations of his heroes

Eric Rennie

May 2024: ONLINE SAFETY and the NHS APP

At May's meeting we were treated to two speakers. First was Trevor Parkinson from Nottinghamshire's Police talking about online safety. As he was speaking to an audience of mainly retired people, much advice and help were available. He included how to spot scams and to make it more difficult for the scammers. He explained how to take appropriate action when caught by a scammer. He advised updating devices and using strong passwords.

Trevor recommended not using the same passwords and changing them regularly as well as being observant and scam aware. He suggested “Taking 5”, and thinking carefully if something seems too good to be true, as it probably is. Also talk with family or friends if unsure and importantly, report scams, because so many people have unwittingly and quickly parted with life savings before checking first. Trevor took lots of questions and stayed on to take more and left leaflets with helpful information to take away.

James Hastings from Sherwood Forest Hospitals gave a short, concise and informative talk on using the NHS App. He outlined 6 areas for which the App could be used. These included ordering prescriptions, getting test results, booking appointments, and messaging GP's, although this is still a work in progress.

Marianne White



July 2024: ROGER BROWNE - JAZZ PIANO

Roger Browne is President of the Stockport Operatic Society and began singing and playing music at the age of 4. He spoke with great passion, humour and musicality about the development of jazz and musical theatre in the USA.

He talked about how slavery, poverty, racism and the migration of Jews into America changed western society and musical structure. The big Broadway musicals of the 50's and 60's grew from these beginnings. Roger was a class act with an awesome memory. He spoke, played the keyboard, recited and sang, all without notes. His piano rags were played at a fast tempo, note perfect.

He ended his talk with a moving rendition of Cole Porter's Miss Otis Regrets. Roger could have talked all day but fortunately we will have the pleasure of seeing him again soon, I hope.

Marianne White



August 2024: LIP READING

Helen Barrow is a hearing loss management consultant and the only qualified tutor for Lip Reading in Nottinghamshire. She has had lifelong hearing loss and her talk on the role of lip reading was informative and entertaining. It was particularly relevant to an audience of retired people given that 50% of over 55s have some hearing loss and 80% of over 70s.

Helen used a screen presentation on statistics and facts on hearing loss, the structure and functioning of the ear and how sounds reach the brain from the Cochlea. We had leaflets on how to be a Hearing Aid to someone with hearing loss and ways to help ourselves too.

There was some audience participation to try out various sounds with the people sitting near us. Most of us were completely unfamiliar with lip reading and it is proved very tricky and pretty complex to learn but this was a good introduction and plenty of information to take away.

Marianne White

September 2024: DON'T YOU KNOW WHO I AM?

The Speaker was Peter Slater who was a sports reporter on BBC Radio in Ipswich and Newcastle upon Tyne as well as BBC East Midlands and retired in 2012. His book *Don't you know who I am?* relates his experiences throughout his career. He had a range of anecdotes as well as several regional accents as he described his encounters with many famous sports personalities, literally ranging from A to Z in alphabetical order from Muhammad Ali to the only female on the list, inexplicably, Catherine Zeta Jones.

In between were the likes of Brian Clough, Bobby Robson, Gary Lineker and many others. His most memorable interviews were with Eric Cantona, Jackie Stewart and Kevin Keegan.

Peter took questions and invited audience members to purchase his book.

Marianne White

October 2024: TALES OF A COUNTRY VICAR

The speaker was Reverend Alan Haydock. At first glance you may imagine our speaker had just stepped off stage from an Agatha Christie novel, or the Cluedo character "Rev Haydock in the billiard room with the spanner"!

The reverend Alan Haydock, aka Rural Dean, Rector, Canon, Vicar and other titles, delivered joke after joke in his droll, self-effacing and hilarious manner, seemingly with no notes. Many of his anecdotes unsurprisingly took a swipe at the hierarchy of the Church of England, as well the Roman Catholic and who can forget the one about the WC!

He himself was the butt of many of his one-liners, sometimes using phrases that could be twisted in meaning, but as he kept reminding us he was always so misunderstood! He had his audience laughing out loud.

Reverend Haydock has raised £125,000 for good causes. He has donated our fee to *Crisis at Christmas*. For a lad who kept repeating to his dad he was going to do "Nowt" he ended up quite a lot.

Marianne White

November 2024: A VERY VICTORIAN MURDER

Dave Brookes is a Derbyshire man, an ex-copper and one half of The Woolly Tellers, who with his colleague Mick Whysall perform story telling around the East Midlands.

Our talk was a potted version of a true story known as the Saville Murders which took place in Nottingham in 1844 and for which William Saville was hanged. William Saville was well known to the police as a violent drunkard and when his wife and three children were found with their throats cut, William was quickly arrested and charged with their murders.

The jury took little time to find him guilty and he was condemned to be hanged soon after. Doubt still exists over the verdict and there is still a view that maybe the wrong man was convicted.



Public executions were a source of entertainment for the whole family and on this occasion a massive crowd of more than 10,000 people gathered at what is now the Museum of the Courts of Justice. The crowd became unruly and with little space and blocked exits many people were crushed to death or suffered devastating injuries.

This event, bad though it was led to changes in crowd control and policing methods . This was an interesting insight into the changes in attitudes and social behaviour as well as new methods for dealing with crime and crowd control.

December 2024: CHRISTMAS SOCIAL

We finalised 2024 with our Christmas Social event on Thursday December 19th, it was a fun morning with a good attendance. Thanks must be extended to all those that played a part in making the event successful.

Deidre Williamson began by reading two short Christmas poems that beautifully set the scene for our celebrations. Following Deidre our brave committee men took to the stage entertaining us with a ballet interpretation to Cygnet from Swan Lake (a short drink break provided John White with the opportunity to tease our gents with a rendition of the Dying Swan from the same ballet).

After some fluid sustenance – lager – Paul, John, Eric and Mark performed the number again; I fear the alcohol did nothing to improve their group work! The crowd however, were thoroughly entertained by their strenuous efforts providing gold stars and cheers.

Janet Whitchurch presented Jenny Josephs poem “When I am old I shall wear purple”, a funny and engaging reading and acting of the piece that offered the audience opportunity to consider their own sauciness that might be forgiven in later life.

During the break some lovely cakes and nibbles were available, with feedback thanking the bakers among us for all their effort. It appears the selection was well enjoyed as only small amounts were left at the end.

After the break our Ukulele band took to the stage to play and sing a number of classics for us; all the players, some with little experience performing, sounded great providing the audience chance to sing along or relax and listen.

Several members made a great effort with their festive hats, sadly we only had three prizes to give away as all deserved acknowledgment, a huge well done to those that won. We had an extra-large raffle offering of some fabulous Christmas inspired prizes, members were extremely generous in buying raffle tickets, which really helps the function of our u3a, thank you.

The morning was completed with singing and dancing to a compilation by John White who provided all the music for the event. Thanks John, you really did put the icing on the cake with all your hard work. We are really grateful to everyone who could support the event and hope in 2025 we can maintain that feel-good emotion within our u3a.

Gayle Harris