

u3a learn, laugh and live
Ross-on-Wye & District
u3asites.org.uk/ross

Denis Azarenko - Pixabay



A Word from the Chairman



By the time you have received this Summer Newsletter we will all know who is going to govern us, or should I say at least attempt to, for the foreseeable future. I cannot make any political comment whatsoever, but I do hope that the needs of the bulk of you, our u3a members, will be given the attention you deserve. Let alone the fact that 2024 will go down in history as an election year, our attention has been drawn to the (far more) powerfully moving ceremonies commemorating the 80th anniversary of D-Day and the huge debt a lot of the

slightly younger u3a members amongst us owe to the generations that preceded us. We will remember them.

But the curse of ageism is one of the everyday enemies that the u3a movement was set up to confront and I sincerely believe that our (not so) little Ross & District u3a is a great example of how the huge potential that is often locked up in so many UK communities can be liberated not only for the benefit of “the recently retired” but for the community at large. As a relatively new Chairman (crikey, I’ve been in post for a year already!) I am amazed and inspired at the vibrant levels of activity I observe around me in the 70-plus activity groups and well over 500 members that make up our u3a family – and long may that continue.

Having made such complimentary comments might I nevertheless just once more point out that things don’t happen by magic and without the efforts of the dedicated team of people who freely and voluntarily give up their time and make much effort to keep things on the rails as we face constant difficulties in finding people willing to help us. I’m delighted to advise that Catherine Silver, who had volunteered to cover the position of Outings Secretary on a temporary basis, has now kindly agreed to take on the role permanently and I know members will be relieved to hear that this most popular activity will continue for the foreseeable future.

Have a wonderful summer.

William

Email: u3a.ross.chair@gmail.com

COMMITTEE NEWS

Committee

Chair and Cotswold Link - William Lyons
Vice-chair and Front of House - Mark Eardley
Secretary - Anne Pye
Treasurer - Simon Silver
Membership Secretary - Heather Whitehouse
Groups Secretary - Marilyn Reynolds
Publicist and Speakers Secretary - Catherine Silver
Outings Secretary - Catherine Silver

Co-opted onto Committee

Website - Jim Christie
Newsletter - Saleha Way
Deputy Groups Secretary - Judith Mackie

Vacancy filled

*We are happy to announce that **Catherine Silver** has kindly agreed to take over the role of Outings Secretary from **Jane Ryland**, who for the past three years, had dedicated herself to organising exciting trips for members. A big thank you to both of them.*

GIFT AID: EXTRA TAX RELIEF FOR US AT NO EXTRA COST TO YOU

For some time now all donations by individuals to charities have been tax free. The Government Gift Aid scheme allows charities like ours to claim back the tax that you have paid on your subscriptions and donations to Ross u3a.

With your agreement we can claim an extra 25p for every £1 that you give us, effectively increasing the value of your donation by 25% at no extra cost to you. It makes a very important addition to our income and means that we can keep our subscriptions as low as possible.

There are rules for Gift Aid of course. First, you must be a UK taxpayer and have paid income or capital gains tax during the year. Second, the amount of tax you pay must be at least equal to the value of all the Gift Aid that charities will claim on your donations during the year. Many of our members have already agreed to Gift Aid, which makes a significant contribution to our funds.

If you are eligible for Gift Aid, but have not made a Gift Aid declaration yet, please consider doing so now. Forms and further advice are available from our Membership Secretary Heather Whitehouse u3a.ross.membership@gmail.com

GROUP NEWS

Our many groups are flourishing, as we enter the wonderful summer season. Let's hope the English weather doesn't let us down!

A huge vote of thanks to all our group coordinators who do a sterling job using their own time as volunteers. Without them, there would be no u3a!

Please see our new website – ross.u3asite.uk – for all the latest information on any group that you may be interested in. Go to the groups page, click on the group and the information will come up. There is also a link on each group to put you in contact with the group coordinator.

New groups to note:

An **Astronomy group** is about to be launched. Do you have a telescope stashed away in your loft? Get together with like-minded people to look at the stars. Contact William Lyons – u3a.rosschair@gmail.com – if you're interested. Yes, our Chairman likes his astronomy!

A **second Genealogy group** has been launched – spaces are still available. If you fancy looking back at your family history, this is the group for you. Contact Judith Mackie judith@mackiehome.co.uk for more information.

Photography group 3 has been launched – spaces are still available. Dig your camera out, and enjoy visiting places to photograph – a mobile phone is just as good. Contact Jacqui Ehlen – jacehlen@hotmail.com – if you're interested. It's a perfect time of year to take photos!

Possible new groups if there is enough interest:

Would you be interested in joining a **cycling group**? We have a willing coordinator to organise a group of you to go for a cycle – exploring local routes, not too long, and perhaps enjoying a coffee somewhere on the way.

Is there anyone out there with sufficient **musical knowledge to run a Ross u3a Choir**? Most u3a's around the country have sufficient interest for a choir. With 550 members, there must be someone who would be willing to coordinate a small group of enthusiast singers. We all know that music makes us feel good, so let's put that into practice.

To volunteer for the above or for any queries about groups, please do not hesitate to contact

Marilyn Reynolds – incaamba@gmail.com

Judith Mackie – judith@mackiehome.co.uk

Ross Faces on Show

Over coffee at their monthly meeting members of Ross u3a Photographs Group 1 hatched a plan after someone suggested "What about doing an exhibition?"

The initial response was a mixture of enthusiasm and hesitant trepidation! For over five years they have enjoyed using their cameras in many different places within a 20-mile or so range of Ross-on-Wye, from churches and cathedrals to woodland walks and local places of interest.



The U3a Photography Group 1

Accepting the challenge, "Faces of Ross" was the title decided on for the exhibition, which will run in St. Mary's Church from July 6-14. (9.00am-5.00pm). More than 30 portraits of people from the local community will be displayed. Come and see how many you recognise – admission is free.

On Tuesday July 16, the Local History 1 group has a talk and tour arranged at St. John Medieval Museum and Coningsby Hospital in Hereford. If anyone is interested in joining this visit please contact Belinda Legge belinda@richardnet.co.uk. The hospital makes no charge for the visit but would welcome a donation. There is no transport organised as the group usually travels by bus on visits to Hereford but the Ross Hereford bus passes the hospital, and if anyone prefers to use their car there is parking not far away.

D-DAY AT 80

Sarah Angus



Ceremony to remember and honour our WWII heroes

St Mary's Church was packed to the gunnels on the evening of June 6 for 'The D-Day Story', a ceremony celebrating the 80th anniversary of the largest naval, air and land operation in the history of warfare. It was the start of the campaign to liberate Europe and defeat Germany with an assault on Nazi-occupied France.

In the presence of His Majesty's Lord Lieutenant for Herefordshire, Mr Edward Harley CBE, and graced with the presence of D-Day veterans Mr Stanley Wilson and Mr Peter Harness, a vivid account of the events leading up to D-Day was related in narrative, photographs, poetry and prayer.

This included a recording of President Roosevelt's speech on the eve of battle, exhorting the 160,000 soldiers of the greatest-ever invasion fleet who were about to face the enemy on the Normandy beaches.

As General Eisenhower said: "You are about to embark upon the Great Crusade, toward

which we have striven these many months. The eyes of the world are upon you."

Stanley Wilson was a Lancaster airman. He and his crew were selected for specialist duties, which involved flying at low level on June 5, marking targets (such as troop concentrations and ammunition dumps) with flares in support of D-Day. He flew over 30 missions over enemy territory and was awarded the '*Legion d'Honneur*' in 2014.

Peter Harness volunteered for the Royal Navy but was underage. He subsequently joined the Merchant Navy and, on the SS Empire Celia transported American, Canadian and British troops to France, completing 14 trips over many days. He, too, was awarded the '*Legion d'Honneur*' in 2016.

Many of those in the audience commented on how touching the ceremony had been.



Lord Lieutenant for Herefordshire, Mr Edward Harley, and D-Day veterans Stanley Wilson (left) and Peter Harness at the ceremony

Testament to this was the silence during the wreath-laying as everyone quietly reflected on the events of that momentous day in 1944.

Following the laying of the wreath at the chancery by the Lord Lieutenant and the two veterans, and silence for the 'Last Hymn and Sunset', everyone made their way to the Prospect for the lighting of a beacon, one of over 700 fired that night throughout the United Kingdom in solemn remembrance of those remarkable events 80 years ago.



PHILIP ANGUS



Lord Lieutenant for Herefordshire, Mr Edward Harley, lighting the beacon at the Prospect



Unless otherwise credited, all photos by Paul Clarke, Waterpump Shutterbugs

SOME D-DAY FACTS

D-Day - June 6 1944 - was the largest amphibious invasion in the history of warfare. The statistics of D-Day, codenamed Operation Overlord, are staggering. The Allies used over 5,000 ships and landing craft to land more than 150,000 troops on five beaches in Normandy. The landings marked the start of a long and costly campaign in north-west Europe, which ultimately convinced the German high command that defeat was inevitable.

- 1. The term D-Day is used by the Armed Forces to refer to the beginning of an operation. The 'D' stands for 'Day', meaning it's actually short for 'Day-Day' (which is nowhere near as catchy). Before the allied attack in June 1944 there would have been many D-Days, however it was so iconic that it came to be used solely when referring to the beginning of Operation Overlord.***
- 2. Over 2 million troops from over 12 countries were in Britain in preparation for the invasion. On D-Day, Allied forces consisted primarily of American, British and Canadian troops but also included Australian, Belgian, Czech, Dutch, French, Greek, New Zealand, Norwegian, Rhodesian and Polish naval, air or ground support.***
- 3. The D-Day invasion was actually planned for June 5. However, in true British fashion, the weather was too bad for the ships to set sail. It was therefore postponed until the day after.***
- 4. As the invasion was the first of its kind, there was no existing equipment with which to carry it out. Not only were the Mulberry Harbours invented, so were the iconic landing crafts. These had a ramp that dropped down into the sea, meaning troops didn't have to scramble over the side to get out.***
- 5. Fake news played a big role. It was impossible to hide the coming attack from the German intelligence. The allies therefore ran operations to confuse them on when, and where, it would take place. The French Resistance then cut telephone lines to stop news of the invasion reaching the German High Command. German intelligence wasn't sure whether the attack was real even as it was taking place! They leaked fake plans, set up fake camps and sent fake coded radio messages. On the morning of June 6, the Allied forces bombed Calais to give the illusion they were readying for an attack.***

SOURCES: IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM, ROYAL BRITISH LEGION

Here comes the sun – and all the fun and funny fests

From the famous ritual of welcoming the sunrise on the longest day of the year at Stonehenge to fiery bonfires in the Tyrolean region of Austria to the 24 hours of daylight at the Midnight Sun Festival at Fairbanks in Alaska, the summer solstice gets a very warm welcome around the world.

However, there are many other traditions that are also celebrated in the summer months. Here are some of them.

La Tomatina is a Spanish festival in Buñol, Valencia, where participants throw tomatoes at each other on the last Wednesday in August. What began as a food fight between friends in 1945, it has now become a tourist attraction.

Come Wednesday morning, the 'Palo Jabón' takes place, where a piece of ham is placed on top of a pole and people are encouraged to climb on each other to knock the ham off. Once this falls, the food fight, said to be the biggest in the world, began. The city centre becomes a mass of people and passata, as 20,000 participants chuck roughly 145,000 kg of tomatoes at each other.

Tanabata, also known as the Star Festival, is a beloved summer tradition in Japan, typically celebrated on the seventh day of the seventh month. It tells the story of two celestial beings, Orihime and Hikoboshi, who are deeply in love but separated by the Milky Way and only allowed to meet once a year, on the night of Tanabata.

On this day people write their wishes on small, colourful strips of paper called "tanzaku" and then hang them, along with origami and paper lanterns, on bamboo branches, which are then set afloat on a river or burned to send off the wishes.

Patrick Vierthaler



Tanzaku hanging from bamboo

Plashing Vole



Coronation of King Puck



Celebrating summer solstice at Stonehenge

English Heritage

gibffe



La Tomatina in Buñol, Valencia

Then there is the **Hungry Ghost** festival observed by Chinese communities which traditionally falls on the 15th of the seventh lunar month (in July or August on the Western calendar) and is observed for the whole lunar month.

On this day the gates of the underworld open, allowing the spirits of the deceased to re-enter the living realm. To keep these hungry ghosts happy and stop them from wreaking havoc, families offer food, (fake) money and entertainment.

Another one of the quirkiest summer festivals is the **Puck Fair** in Killorglin in County Kerry. It is Ireland's oldest gathering, which is held annually from August 10-12.

The central event is the crowning of a wild mountain goat as King Puck by the "Queen of Puck", traditionally a young school girl from one of the local primary schools.

There are diverse explanations for the he-goat coronation. One is linked to the pre-Christian celebrations of a fruitful harvest and that the male goat or "Puck" was a pagan symbol of fertility, like the pagan god Pan. Another has it that the event honours a wild goat that acted heroically during the Cromwellian conquest of Ireland in the 1600s.

The three-day celebration includes a traditional horse fair and street entertainment, culminating with the dethroned King Puck being led back to his mountain home.

Putting the spotlight on our River Wye

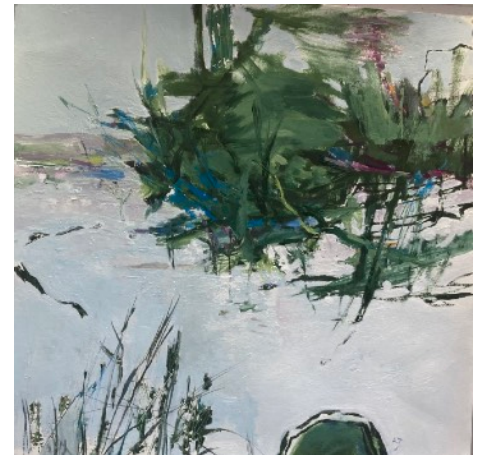
U3a member and artist Ann Johnson has just published a book of paintings – *Wild Margins 2, After the Storm* – to help raise awareness of threats to the River Wye.

With the pollution in the Wye a current and emotive subject among residents and especially environmental groups and wildlife trusts, the publication of the book could not have been more timely.

Ann says: “We moved to Ross on Wye from the south coast five years ago and I began painting the river Wye and surrounding areas. I quickly became aware of local

concerns around pollution to the Wye and was appalled at the way it was being treated by human/business intervention.

“The last straw was when, in May 2023, Natural England downgraded the Wye’s official status to ‘unfavourable declining’.



“There are a lot of passionate and committed local organisations working hard to save the Wye and I wondered what I could do to help.

“Often one feels so powerless when it comes to challenging big business and the government. I worked as a journalist until retirement and have contributed to several books and I also self-published a book of my drawings in 2016. I wanted to publish another book of paintings and, suddenly, it became obvious to highlight the plight of the Wye. In addition to celebrating its beauty and history, at the same time I could write about the challenges to our river.”

Wild Margins 2 comprises 52 pages of colour and black and white images, together with text. As well as river paintings there are sections on inspiration from buildings, gardens and flowers that line the river margins and surrounding areas. It comes in a limited edition of 200 copies (signed) and costs £20.



Ann is a professional painter who has exhibited her work locally and nationally and has had several paintings accepted and hung at Royal Academy Summer Exhibitions. She is on the Advisory Committee of the h.Art festival (September 7-15) <https://h-art.org.uk/>

Ann’s first art book, ***Wild Margins, Drawings and Inspirations*** was published in black and white by Amazon in 2016 and continues to sell. ***Wild Margins 2*** is available to buy from Ann’s Ross studio.

Email: ann.john377@btinternet.com Tel: 07597 114 616

SPEAKERS' CORNER



The engines pumping clean water into Ross

The Ross u3a talk in April was given by Bob Higgle, who was cheerfully upfront about repeatedly plugging the Waterworks Museum – Hereford where he is a volunteer. I hope that many in the audience do choose to visit the museum as some of the star engine exhibits were at one time working away to keep Ross supplied with water.

Given the town's proximity to the River Wye one might have thought that that would have been the natural source of water. But centuries before the current concerns about the River Wye's high phosphate levels, people were complaining about the poor water quality and how it was affected by sludge, sewage and variable flow. So the 17th century solution of using a waterwheel powered by the Rudhall Brook to pump water up to the Prospect (where the Royal Hotel is now) did not last.

Several attempts were made in the 19th century to provide a more comprehensive service but it was not until 1888 after a local investor purchased Alton Court and surrounding land and sank four wells, built a reservoir, pumping station and commissioned pipework to supply the town that clean, safe water became available for all. Interestingly the over five miles of pipework took less than three months to lay! The water from these sources was exceptionally pure because of its having been filtered through the local red sandstone on which Ross is built.

In 1880, 350 of the 800 or so houses had no water supply. By 1888 no dwellings were in that position. Until the late 1970s the water supply was still from these wells but today Welsh Water extract water from the Wye at Lydbrook and pump it to its treatment works at Mitcheldean and thence to Ross.

We were shown a video of one of the gas-fired pumping engines that is now in the Waterworks Museum with a live commentary from a member of the audience who had worked with the engine. His father and the original owner had worked with the very same engine since its installation in 1910.



I came away from the talk with a greater respect and understanding of our infrastructure and its engineering and that it does not come cheap.

SIMON SILVER

Photos: Waterworks Museum - Hereford



Monthly talks at the Larruperz Centre, 2.30pm

July 15: Fiona Morrison

The Roses of No-Man's Land — Nurses in World War One

August 19: Summer break

September 16: John Butterworth

How the Stagecoach Transformed the Area

Open gardens: feast for the eyes and help for those in need



Our May talk was given by Angela and Graham O'Connell who are, and have been for many years, Assistant County Organisers of the National Garden Scheme, an organisation formed in 1927.

The National Garden Scheme idea all came about because of a sick lady and her nurse.

The history of the scheme started in 1859 when a Liverpool merchant and philanthropist, William Rathbone, employed Mary Robinson to nurse his wife during the final days of her illness. Rathbone continued to employ Mary as he wanted to help those people in Liverpool who could not afford to have nursing care in their homes. Rathbone joined forces with nurse Florence Nightingale to develop this nursing at home service and thereby started the organised service of 'district nursing'. Queen Victoria became patron of the nursing scheme.

After several years of this organised, though informal, scheme The Queen's Nursing Institute (QNI) was founded in 1887. This enabled the co-ordination of national standards for the district nurses and the Institute provided training, support, maintenance and supply of nurses for the sick poor.

Elsie Wagg was a member of the QNI and it was she who had the idea of raising funds for the district nurses. At the time there was an obsession with gardening so people were asked to open their gardens for a 'shilling a head'. It was then, in 1927, that the National Garden Scheme (NGS) was founded. In that first year 609 gardens opened, and the grand sum of £8,191 was raised. Sandringham House was the first to open, then other royal houses and estates followed. By comparison, in 2024, a total of 3,372 gardens will be open to the public.

Fiona Leathart



Laskett Gardens in Much Birch



Grendon Court in Upton Bishop

Sandringham House was the first to open, then other royal houses and estates followed. By comparison, in 2024, a total of 3,372 gardens will be open to the public.

In 1932 the first NGS guide was published, in green. It became yellow in 1949 because the AA supported the scheme, so it matched the organisation's colour.

The most well-known beneficiaries are Marie Curie, Macmillan Cancer Support, Hospice UK, Carers Trust, The Queen's Nursing Institute and Parkinson's UK. In 2023 the NGS donated £3.4 million to all its beneficiaries.

In 2002 Prince Charles became the NGS's Patron and the NGS were delighted that in May this year he has confirmed the continuation his patronage as King Charles III. In 2016 Mary Berry became President of the NGS.

National Garden Scheme



Old Grove, Llangrove

Despite the Coronavirus lockdowns in 2020 the NGS was still able to donate £2.88 million to the beneficiaries.

NGS gardens close to Ross in the HR9 postcode area are Grendon Court, Upton Bishop; Old Grove, Llangrove; Wainfield, Peterstow and Weston Hall, Weston-under-Penyard.

For all garden opening details go to www.ngs.org.uk. Also catch up with current news on the Facebook page 'ngs herefordshire'.

FIONA LEATHART



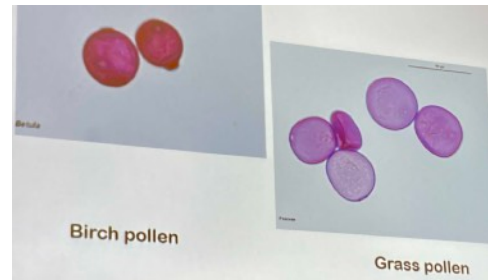
How pollens can help solve serious crimes

Our June speaker, Dr. Jean Emberlin, is a well known allergy specialist in the field of pollen dispersal and hay fever. Her expertise and knowledge of pollen, and vegetation distributions led her to helping the police to solve serious crimes such as murders, rapes and high-level fraud, using forensic palynology.

Using a slideshow, Dr Emberlin first explained what these magnified microscopic pollen grains look like and the plants they come from. Her interest in pollens was sparked by her interest in climate change in the post-glacial period from the last 10,000-12,000 years. Pollens are very useful as a tool to find out about climate change and vegetation change because they get buried and preserved in peat bogs. The resistance of pollen structure — hard shell around the grain itself — means it can be preserved for a thousands of years.

“Pollen is very useful in forensic because it’s like a natural tracer particle,” said Dr Emberlin. The pollen grains could help identify down to the type of plant and even the time of year an incident took place.

Forensic samples can come from anywhere — soil, body, guts, drugs, explosives, firearms, paints, and the list goes on. Dr Emberlin emphasised the importance of avoiding contamination at all cost. Everybody has to be fully kitted up from top to toe. Protocols have to be followed for security and continuity. Every detail has to be recorded. In murder cases evidence is kept in forensic storage for 50 years in case new techniques develop.



Dr Emberlin relates the case of a girl’s body found in the cellar of a house when the new residents decided to do renovations. In the nose and body they found oak and birch pollens, which gave a late spring-early summer profile, showing that the girl had been buried in May or, June. Other evidence corroborated the time of year a certain suspect had inherited the house.

Pollen deposits in the nose — which is a good filter for particles — can not only indicate season of death, they can also tell if the person was alive or dead when they were buried, or if death was at the location or if the body had been reburied.

In the infamous historic case of the Srebrenica genocide, through pollen and soil samples taken from each of the 20 small mass graves the UN Tribunal examined over a four-year period from 1997, forensic analysts found that all the bodies had cereal wheat pollen in the nasal cavities not found in the secondary site — so the bodies had been linked to having been buried initially in or near a wheat field. The Serb perpetrators had dug up the bodies and reburied them in different places in smaller groups to make it look like minor skirmishes rather than mass persecutions. The evidence was crucial in the conviction of Radislav Krstic, commander of the Bosnia Serb corps responsible for the Srebrenica area at that time.

Pollen in substances are also important in identifying fake designer products i.e. “Indian or Chinese instead of Italian”, bank notes, honey and drug trafficking. Every time drugs — in most cases heroine and cocaine but also sometimes cannabis — are split, they collect pollens. Through samples of pollens taken at the end route, you could tell where the drug has come from and through which ports of call.

On a lighter note Dr Emberlin was commissioned to determine the authenticity of the Gauguin painting *Tahitian Eve*. The tiny sample of paint she delicately scraped found pollens from Brittany. There was no evidence of Tahiti but her client said Gauguin used paints from France and was quite happy with the outcome.

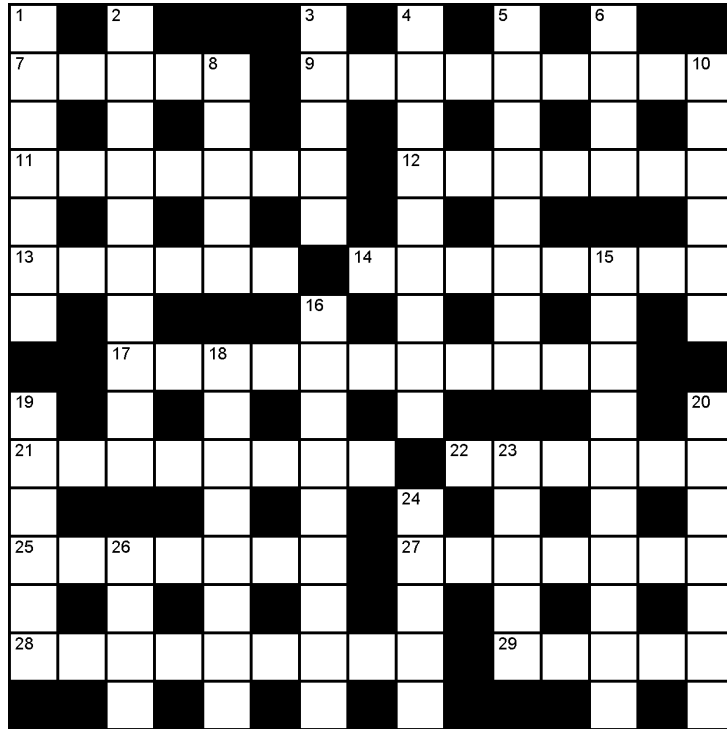
Jane Thomson



In conclusion, Dr Emberlin said forensic palynology has a wide range of potential applications. About 10 per cent of the job is exciting; the rest involves hard work and sometimes boring routine of statistical analysis. However, as we have heard, the use of pollen and spore identification, together with other corroborating evidence, plays a important role in catching criminals.

SALEHA WAY

CRYPTIC CROSSWORD



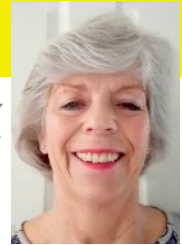
Across

1. Sounds like Muslim state in western USA (5)
9. Cared most about elected representatives (9)
11. Empty space in chambers (7)
12. Titanic obstacle! (7)
13. Revels in misfortune of learner in ungulates (6)
14. Nut sighs discomfited when campaigning (8)
17. He captures and understands! (11)
21. Can yea be upset for suspension (8)
22. *Et Vivo!* Reworked and offered for gratitude (6)
25. Sounds like hold-up for teleprompter (7)
27. Stogies smoked for selfish people (7)
28. Sexpot ill but cured for voters' feedback (4,5)
29. Salty SE constituency (5)

Down

1. CSA gave means for duty (7)
2. Choose and talk for those entitled to vote (10)
3. Amend for advertisers (2,3)
4. Bum noises regurgitated for legal packages (9)
5. Elected for party and recognised (8)
6. Spicy bludgeon in front of speaker! (4)
8. Buoyancy for party election vehicle? (5)
10. My go is torturous for spiritual activity (6)
15. Personality flaw from sins and racism (10)
16. Teacher's characteristic! (9)
18. Legal document sounds steep (8)
19. Fag Ear reformed for party leader (6)
20. Sets jam and thrown overboard (7)
23. Gas emitted from exozones (5)
24. Does MP sound an oversensitive type (5)
26. Notwithstanding, contains numpty (4)

LIFE STORY



BY
MARILYN REYNOLDS

Around the world in 101 days

The centenary anniversary of the Jules Verne book “Around the World in 80 Days” sparked my interest. *Wouldn't it be great to retrace his steps?* I thought.

Imagine my delight, when a “Round the World” cruise brochure found its way into my hands! Peter and I had never cruised before (never fancied it) but the itinerary blew our minds . . . *Let's celebrate our Golden Wedding by circumnavigating the world* we thought . . . and off we went!

We sailed west from Southampton – the Atlantic Ocean in January proved to be good practice for getting our ‘sea legs’. The whole ship was elated at the sight of land as we approached Bermuda. Several stops down the east coast of America included a visit to Port Canaveral, where we were lucky enough to see a NASA rocket launch to the Space Station. What a spectacle! And how the ship shook as the booster returned to earth emitting a sonic boom!



Passing through the Panama Canal was a real highlight. It took all day to travel the 44 miles from the Atlantic to the Pacific. This immense complex of locks, dams, artificial lakes and channels was built to shorten shipping journeys by thousands of miles. Sadly, the current water levels are much lower than normal and shipping numbers that are permitted to pass through have been drastically reduced. No doubt the cruise line companies are paying enormous fees to be granted passage.

Cruising north from the Canal, we enjoyed brief stops in Costa Rica and Mexico before heading west across the Pacific – another bumpy ride! – to the Hawaiian Islands. Honolulu lived up to expectations – beautifully kept houses, gardens and public areas with fantastic mountains as a backdrop – and a pinch yourself moment lying on the famous Waikiki Beach with its white sands, turquoise waters.



We had two stops in French Polynesia: Tahiti and Bora Bora.

Passing through the Panama Canal. Above: NASA rocket launch

Tahiti delighted us with its beautiful white tiare flowers (their national flower) that all the ladies wear behind their ear, and also the Tahitian black pearls harvested from the surrounding seas.

Bora Bora, unfortunately, had been hit by a devastating storm the night before we arrived, which closed most of the roads. Luckily there was an idyllic beach to lie on!

New Zealand was a definite high point of the trip with its majestic mountains, rushing waterfalls and friendly people. We enjoyed a day's kayaking on a quiet lake, away from the crowds. Bad weather (and more rough seas) then altered a planned cruising day through the southern fiords. But much to our joy, at the very last minute, the winds changed and the sun came out and we were able to visit Milford Sound, just as the clouds were lifting.



Three stops in Australia – of which the very best was Cairns

Waikiki Beach in Honolulu

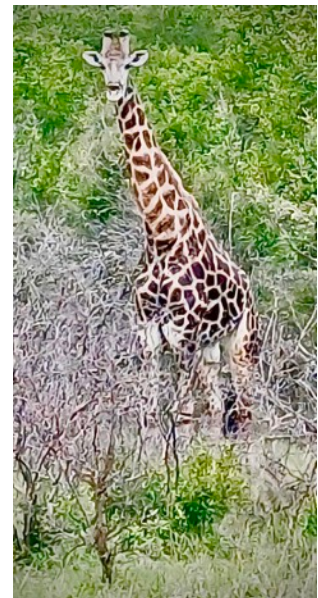


Above: Milford Sound, South Island, New Zealand;
Left: snorkelling in Australia' Great Barrier Reef

where we were lucky enough to take a helicopter ride out to the furthest reaches of the Great Barrier Reef and spend the day snorkelling amongst the beautiful coral. The variety of fish was phenomenal, and the many colours and shapes of the coral left us spellbound.

Papua New Guinea and Indonesia left us feeling very humble – the poverty is beyond anything we'd experienced before. Komodo Island most certainly educated us in the ways of nature, as we delighted in watching the Komodo dragons – great ugly creatures who only live in this part of the world.

Singapore and Thailand were the final two ports on our original itinerary, before we had to turn south – thanks to the antics of the Houthis in the Red Sea. Six days of bouncing around in the Indian Ocean led us to Mauritius and then on to Durban. Determined to make the most of every minute, we enjoyed a three-day visit to a private game reserve north-west of Durban. A very small group of us relished delightful safaris with very knowledgeable guides, as we searched the savanna for wild animals. Breath-taking, astonishing, magnificent are all words which come to mind when describing seeing these creatures in their native habitat.



A giraffe spotted at the game reserve in Durban

From Capetown we continued up the west coast of Africa. A stop at Walvis Bay facilitated a visit to the Namib Desert – possibly the oldest and largest stretch of desert on the world. We revelled in an exciting drive across the dunes in a 4x4 Land Cruiser and looked on in awe as our guide dug into the sand to reveal various tiny living creatures.

A long seven days at sea took us around the bulge of Africa. A brief stop at the Cape Verde islands, followed by an even shorter stop in the Canary Islands brought us back into the Bay of Biscay and homeward to Southampton Docks. We'd circuited the globe (albeit not on the original itinerary), we'd visited places that we had never dreamt we would set foot in, and we'd made several friends. We'd also missed one of longest and wettest winters ever recorded in UK! What's not to like?

PHOTOS: MARILYN REYNOLDS

CRYPTIC CROSSWORD ANSWERS

Across

7. Calif, 9. Democrats, 11. Vacuole, 12. Iceberg, 13. Gloats, 14. Hustings, 17. Apprehender, 21. Abeyance, 22. Votive, 25. Autocue, 27. Egoists, 28. Exit Polls, 29. Epsom

Down

1. Scavage, 2. Electorate, 3. Ad Men, 4. Omnibuses, 5. Accepted, 6. Mace, 8. Float, 10. Sagist, 15. Narcissism, 16. Teacherly, 18. Praecepte, 19. Farage, 20. Jetsams, 23. Ozone, 24. Jesse, 26. Twit

ROSS u3a GROUPS

Highlighted groups have space

| GROUP | CO-ORDINATOR | TELEPHONE | MEETING TIMES | EMAIL ADDRESS |
|------------------------------|-------------------|--------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Ancient & Med History | Frank Bowden | 01989 567125 | 3rd Thurs 2pm | frankbowden25@gmail.com |
| Armchair Opera | Alan Stringer | 01989 562792 | 2nd & 4th Tues 12pm | alan.stringer26@outlook.com |
| Art | Margaret Hay | 01989 763564 | 1st & 3rd Fri 2-4pm | m.hay008@btinternet.com |
| Art 2 | Lynda Mower | 07771 760052 | 2nd and 4th Thurs 10am | lynda.mower@btinternet.com |
| Astronomy | William Lyons | 07743 123903 | | u3a.ross.chair@gmail.com |
| Books | Ginny James | 01531 821904 | 3rd Wed 11am | vjames1909@gmail.com |
| Books 2 | Judith Mackie | 07766 134956 | 4th Thurs 10am | judith@mackiehome.co.uk |
| Bridge | Rochelle Nash | 01989 563195 | 4th Tues 2:30pm | nash_rochelle@yahoo.co.uk |
| Canasta | Pat Milnes | 01989 762028 | 2nd & 4th Wed 2pm | patmilnes49@gmail.com |
| Chess | Dave Tomlin | 01989 720455 | 1st & 3rd Thurs 10.30am | gorsleydave@outlook.com |
| Crafts | Joyce Meyer | 01989 568607 | Alternate Thurs 10am | sandiecotterell@gmail.com |
| Creating Your Life Story 1 | Jane Travers | 01989 562308 | 2nd Thurs 10am | bjaneww@aol.com |
| Creating Your Life Story 2 | Jane Travers | 01989 562308 | 2nd Tues 10am | bjaneww@aol.com |
| Creating Your Life Story 3 | Jane Travers | 01989 562308 | 3rd Thurs 10am | bjaneww@aol.com |
| Creating Your Life Story Men | Jane Travers | 01989 562308 | 3rd Wed 10am | bjaneww@aol.com |
| Creating your Life Story 5 | Jane Travers | 01989 562308 | 4th Tues 10am | bjaneww@aol.com |
| Crewel Embroidery | Caroline Miller | 07947 065247 | 2nd & 4th Mon 2-3.30pm | up7ailsa11@gmail.com |
| Cribbage | Suzie Kemp | 07721 988125 | 1st & 3rd Thurs 2-4pm | witchiepoo_007@yahoo.com |
| Crime Books | Sally Beswick | 07808 183911 | 3rd Thursday 10.30am | sally.beswick@hotmail.co.uk |
| Cryptic Crosswords | Phil Angus | 01989 562455 | 1st Thurs 10am-12pm | pandsangus@gmail.com |
| Current Affairs 1 | David Mason | 01989 762022 | 1st Fri 11am | djmasonross@gmail.com |
| Current Affairs 2 | Michael Wood | 01989 769836 | 2nd Fri 10am | enawood1@gmail.com |
| Current Affairs 3 | Mary Alam | 01989 567009 | 4th Mon 2.30pm | marycalam@gmail.com |
| French Revisited | Elizabeth Holleis | 01989 565352 | Mon 10am-12pm | keholleis@gmail.com |
| French Conversation | Jon Stern | 01989 577020 | 1st & 3rd Tues 2-4pm | jon.stern.kimpton@gmail.com |
| Gardening | Maggie/Ken Jones | 01989 568780 | 2nd Tues 2pm | collcost@yahoo.co.uk |
| Genealogy | Di Taylor | 07425 154730 | 3rd Fri 11am-1pm | zpundit@yahoo.com |
| Genealogy 2 | Judith Mackie | 07766 134956 | 3rd Tuesday, 10.30am | judith@mackiehome.co.uk |
| Geology & Landscape | Tim Barrett | 01989 567906 | 1st Fri 10am | trbarrett@btinternet.com |
| History of Science | Brian King | 01989 769736 | 3rd Fri 10am | margaretfrances@hotmail.co.uk |
| Jewellery-making | Nola Bates | 01989 610150 | 1st & 3rd Thurs 10.30am/2pm | nolabates1@gmail.com |
| Keep Fit | Rae Duffield | 07971 968469 | Wed 11.30am | glasym@hotmail.com |
| Line dancing | Hilary Smart | 01989 762383 | 1st & 3rd Wed 2pm | hilarysmart@ymail.com |
| Local History 1 | Belinda Legge | 07964 821930 | 1st Tues 10.30am | belinda@richardnet.co.uk |
| Local History 2 | Diane English | 07845 088497 | 3rd Thurs 2pm | di.english13@gmail.com |
| Mah Jong | Jane Collins | 07887 768485 | Every but 2nd Fri 10.15am | janelouisecollins@gmail.com |
| Mini Bridge | Roy Milnes | 01989 762028 | 1st & 3rd Thurs 10am-12pm | roy5.milnes@gmail.com |
| Modern World History | Brian King | 01989 769736 | 4th Wed 2pm | margaretfrances@hotmail.co.uk |
| Nature | Catriona Pearson | 01989 769425 | 1st Mon 10.30am | catriona64@gmail.com |
| Philosophy | Brian King | 01989 769736 | 1st Tues 2pm | margaretfrances@hotmail.co.uk |
| Photography | John Ryland | 07752 661390 | 2nd Tues 10am | jryland42@gmail.com |
| Photography 2 | Andrew Mackie | 01989 750860 | 2nd Wed 10.30am | andrew@mackiehome.co.uk |
| Photography 3 | Jac Ehlen | 07968 351629 | 3rd Wed 10.30am | jacehlen@hotmail.com |
| Pickleball | Lesley Lyons | 01989 769931 | 1st & 3rd Fri 2pm | gilmourlesley@yahoo.co.uk |
| Playreading | Anne Summers | 01989 218432 | 1st & 3rd Tues 2pm | annemesummers@gmail.com |
| Pub Walks | Dixie Collins | 07789 474091 | 2nd Fri 10am | dixie4028@gmail.com |
| Pub Walks 2 | Carol Carney | 01989 780787 | 1st Fri 10.30am | carolcarney001@gmail.com |
| Quiz | Mike Travers | 01989 562308 | 4th Mon 10am-12pm | miketravrs1@hotmail.com |
| Rock Music | Mike Goff | 01594 862640 | 2nd Tues evening | mikejgoff@outlook.com |
| Rummikub 1 | Sandie Cotterell | 01989 763546 | 1st & 3rd Tues 10am | sandiecotterell@gmail.com |
| Rummikub 2 | Sandie Cotterell | 01989 763546 | 2nd & 4th Wed 2pm | sandiecotterell@gmail.com |
| Science & Technology | David Colenso | 07857 940143 | 2nd Mon 2-4pm | davecolenso@yahoo.com |
| Scrabble | Nola Bates | 01989 610150 | 2nd & 4th Wed 2pm | nolabates1@gmail.com |
| SOLO | Caroline Miller | 01989 569903 | Wed 10.30am | up7ailsa11@gmail.com |
| Spanish Intermediate | Diana Wood | 01989 562355 | Mon 10.30-11.30am | diwood407@gmail.com |
| Spanish Beginners | Marilyn Reynolds | 01989 564830 | 2nd & 4th Tues 10.30am-12.30pm | incaamba@gmail.com |
| Spanish Beginners 2 | Marilyn Reynolds | 01989 564830 | 1st & 3rd Tues 10.30am-12.30pm | incaamba@gmail.com |
| Table Tennis | Keith Westwood | 01989 562697 | 2nd & 4th Mon 2-3.30pm | kw@keithwestwood.plus.com |
| Table Tennis 2 | Catriona Pearson | 01989 569425 | 1st & 3rd Thurs 2-3.30pm | catriona64@gmail.com |
| Tai Chi | Jane Travers | 01989 562308 | Thurs 2pm | bjaneww@aol.com |
| Theatre | Fiona Leathart | 01989 565271 | 1st Thurs 2pm | leathart.holly@gmail.com |
| Walking | Vivienne Nutt | 07812 826155 | 2nd Mon 9.30am | vivnutt@hotmail.co.uk |
| Whist | Rochelle Nash | 01989 563195 | 1st Thurs 2:30pm | nash_rochelle@yahoo.co.uk |
| Writing for Pleasure | Marianne Wright | 01989 762949 | 2nd Thurs 2.30pm | wrightmarianne9@gmail.com |
| Writing for Pleasure 2 | Lynda Roger | 01989 561045 | 2nd Thurs 2.30pm | lynda.rodger@hotmail.co.uk |
| Yoga | Marilyn Reynolds | 01989 564830 | Wed 11am | incaamba@gmail.com |