

June 2026 Newsletter

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Secretary, Membership, Groups etc & any news from other u3as

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Last Month's Meeting: Rochester Castle; Bobbie Darbyshire

And Finally: "Deeds, not words"

Contributions to Alan:

<https://bearsted.u3asite.uk/contact/>

- By 22nd of month to ensure entry in next issue (or incl later issue)
- MS-Word Arial 12 preferred
- Max length 1 page please
- No surnames for privacy

NB Articles may be edited

Any **Photograph** submitted must have permission for its' use and publication from **all** those photographed.

u3a Contacts & Information

- B&D website
<https://bearsted.u3asite.uk/>
- B&D Committee Members
<https://bearsted.u3asite.uk/contact/>
- B&D Events
<https://bearsted.u3asite.uk/events/>
- B&D Groups
<https://bearsted.u3asite.uk/groups/>
- B&D FaceBook – to join:
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1381609732656710>
- National u3a website
<https://www.u3a.org.uk>
- National u3a YouTube Channel
<https://www.youtube.com/user/TheU3a/playlists>
- u3a National Newsletter
<https://www.u3a.org.uk/newsletter>

Welcome



This month we have a catch-up on Rick's monthly speaker reports, so we have April and May, together with more information on our Open Afternoon/Celebration in September. As it will be different to previous years, please take

time to read Maureen's update to coordinators, it does apply to all members.

Alan (Editor)

Dates for your Diary: details on the website at <https://bearsted.u3asite.uk/events/>

📣 Thursday 11 June 2.00pm Monthly Meeting
"Russia, Then & Now" Andrew Baker

👥 Thursday 25 June 09.30 Committee Meeting*

📣 Thursday 9 July 2.00pm Monthly Meeting
"The Malta Story" Paul Whittle

👥 Thursday 23 July 09.30 Committee Meeting*

📣 Thursday 13 August 2.00pm Monthly Meeting
"Tales of a Film Prop Man" Peter Benson

👥 Thursday 27 August 09.30 Committee Meeting*

Monthly & Committee meetings are held at Detling Village Hall. Non-members are welcome to come to two monthly meetings before joining.

*NB If you would like to attend a committee meeting, please contact our Chair, Graham <https://bearsted.u3asite.uk/contact/>

Committee

- **'From the Rockin' Chair'**



We have a packed newsletter for you this month to enjoy with your cooling drinks in the sun so I will be brief. Nationally the u3a is looking at wellbeing and safeguarding and the part that we, as a caring organisation as opposed to an organisation of carers, can play. Isolation and loneliness can be devastating in old age and membership of the u3a can provide the companionship and mental stimulation to ease these problems. Most new members come from word of mouth about interesting groups but we should also point out the friendly and social sides of our u3a where appropriate.

Learn, laugh, live

Graham Chair: <https://bearsted.u3asite.uk/contact/>

- **From the Committee**



Much was discussed at the committee meeting this month. We need to plan our Christmas lunch in good time and our Chair, Graham, is sending out an email to members to gauge interest. The majority of groups complete risk assessments, but they need to be current – so can you check your risk assessment(s) is up-to-date – if you have any questions, please email Richard, Vice Chair. The monthly meeting was also considered with regard to venue, 'streaming' the talk and the continuing development of 'welcome buddies' for new members and guests, plus the work of the 'refreshments team'. We have speakers arranged into 2027.

Your voice is important, the committee are members who have volunteered to help in the running of our u3a, so if you have anything you would like to raise, please contact Graham.

Peter Secretary: <https://bearsted.u3asite.uk/contact/>



Would any of our members like to learn and help update the Bearsted & District website pages using WordPress?

Nearly 42% of the worlds site are built using this system. Why? Because it's easy to get started and progress to a competent level quite quickly. Of course, I will train you every step of the way using a special training site which is exactly the same as our current one (and the one I learnt on), plus full u3a training and user manual. Treat this as another group opportunity!

Dan Website Admin: <https://bearsted.u3asite.uk/contact/>



In **June**, we welcome back Andrew Baker. Andrew, who has visited us twice before speaking about the seven years of political chaos in this country around the Johnson/Truss eras, and then on Donald Trump, is always very well informed and one of our best received speakers. This time the subject will be **Vladimir Putin**, examining his life and why he became the man he is.

Rick Speaker Secretary: <https://bearsted.u3asite.uk/contact/> For last month's click: [Monthly Meeting](#)

Groups Focus

Coordinators Update



Thanks to everyone who's volunteered to help at the Open Afternoon on Thursday 10 September. We have facilitators for all of the Category hubs as follows:

Membership & welcome hosts	Linda B & Rick G
Set up team	Tony B
Refreshments	Joyce G & Jan B
Active & Social	Richard & Patricia S
Creative	Linda S
History inc. Art App	Alan R & Keith P
Discussion	Jackie H
Languages	Marilyn S
Music & dance	Steve W
Science, Nature & tech	Robert W & Paul W assisted by Kevin W

(I'm unable to show full surnames because of u3a Data protection rules)

If they haven't already done so, the hub facilitators will be contacting you asking how your group will contribute towards the displays (which can be done in advance of the day, so not affected by holiday plans) as well as asking for volunteers to help on the day. As mentioned before, it doesn't always have to be the group coordinator who does everything, so please discuss within your groups. You never know what hidden talents may appear.

Each hub has been allocated one set of display boards and a large table. If more "props" are needed, we must allow time to acquire extra. If anyone is unclear about any of this, you know how to get hold of me.

B&D u3a is entirely volunteer run and would not be able to function without the group coordinators, committee, RUGS and the people who help with refreshments. As a thank you we are organizing an afternoon tea party for them Tuesday 29 September. There will be more on this over the next few months.

Maureen: Groups Coordinator: <https://bearsted.u3asite.uk/contact/>

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Groups Update:

This month we have articles from two of our more "outdoor" groups. This has prompted me to remind you that a lot of our groups are planning visits over the summer and autumn. Some jointly with other similar groups. For example, Local History 2, 3 and General History have several in the pipeline. So, it's a good time to join. They have spaces and their web pages are up to date.

I'd like to draw your attention to the important message contained in Gardening 1's article about supplementary feeding affecting the health of some of our much-loved garden birds. A better (and cheaper) option is to grow bird friendly plants. If you would like advice on what to plant, just ask anyone in either of our

gardening groups or the bird watching group. Incidentally all 3 of these groups have space to welcome new members.

The **Chess Group** is taking a summer break, with a view to restarting in the autumn. Spaces are available & we are looking for volunteers to help run this group. If you're interested, please contact me.

Maureen: Groups Coordinator: <https://bearsted.u3asite.uk/contact/>

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Groups News

Gardening 1

I'm sure many of us enjoy seeing and feeding birds in our gardens, parks and other public spaces. Even the infamous feral pigeons in our city centres have a certain visual appeal. But it has become apparent that our feeding of birds, for decades an established practise nationwide, and an effective means introducing children to Britain's wildlife, has been actively harmful to Britain's birds.

The RSPB announced in April that it strongly recommended not feeding wild birds from 1st May to 31st October with seeds or peanuts, though feeding with mealworms and fat balls could be continued. And importantly it strongly recommended never using flat feeding tables, and weekly cleaning of all bird feeders through the year. The RSPB has identified harmful pathogens, such as trichomonosis, accumulating on bird feeders, and as the birds move from feeder to feeder, they take these pathogens to new areas, spreading infection through the bird food and avian population.

My rural garden once had many greenfinches, and this bird, and others, has seen a precipitate decline in recent years, its population is now at serious risk from infections passed through our bird feeding. The RSPB noted that regular feeding of wild birds was also actively benefitting some bird species over others, for instance great tits are overly successful, at the expense of blue tits, and distorting the species' natural balance. I urge you to pay attention to the RSPB guidance, readily accessible on their website.

On the upside, many of us with gardens are now much more aware of actions that we can take to boost the natural world in our gardens by careful selection of plants, and below are a couple of striking pictures from my own garden. One is of our regular feeding was benefitting some species over others, for instance great tits are overly successful, at the expense of blue tits.



I've included two pictures from our own garden. Yes, they were lucky shots, one is of three fishermen waiting patiently at our pond, the other is of a golden rod crab spider with its lunch, in a late daffodil.

Kevin

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Village Visits



A very enjoyable village visit led us Westerham, alright more a town than a village, but it started off as one, or so our guide, local historian Bill Curtis led us to believe.

Picturesquely sited atop a hill with a valley encircling it, through which the river Darent flows, and then encircled by more hills.

Famous personages include General James Wolfe (who was born in the "Old Vicarage" and lived in Quebec House), Sir Winston Churchill (who lived nearby at Chartwell and visited often), Alice Liddell, the subject muse of Lewis Carroll (and thought to be the model for the 'Alice in Wonderland' books), William Pitt the Younger (during renovation works on his house in Keaton) and the Streatfeild family, including Noel Streatfeild, author of children's book "Ballet Shoes". We learnt about the green, where the statues of General James Wolf and Winston Churchill are displayed, and the original Buttery, where the storage and sale of perishable goods took place until it was demolished in 1853.



We visited the parish church of St Mary the Virgin, with 12th and 13th century beginnings. The 14th century font was used to baptise the parishioners, who included John Fryth (bible translator, friend of William Tyndale and martyr), General James Wolfe and Jeremy Bernard Soames, grandson of Sir Winston Churchill. The church is unique in that it is only 1 of 2 in England having a late 14th century wooden bell tower spiral staircase which twists to the left and for having the oldest known example of Edward VI's Royal Coat of Arms.



We were told about the 2 breweries that worked at the east and west ends of the town, several clear examples of Wealden hall type houses, former almshouses established in 1575, the site of Elm View Mill, once the largest corn mill in town, later converted into the Pump house which pumped pure water into a reservoir from a well drilled down into an aquifer which supplied water to the town's residents. We saw examples of different types of architecture ranging from the early 15th century, weatherboard from 16th century, to Flemish style gables and then Georgian, Victorian and modern buildings. We finished the day at a local Italian hostelry. Joyce

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The April & May Meetings

At our **April** meeting, we welcomed Simon Waterfield with his talk on three events that affected Rochester Castle in the 13th and 14th Centuries.

Firstly, the siege of the castle in 1215 by King John, who had been excommunicated by the Pope. The King had recruited an army in France to defeat the Barons who were rebelling against tax increases and the fact that he had refuted the Magna Carta on the basis that it was illegal, depriving the Barons of their rights. The siege was successful, starving the rebels into submission. Tactics included blocking the drainage to the castle, using trebuchets and mangonels to damage the walls and send rotting animal and human carcasses into the castle causing health issues, and even agreeing to take sick people from the castle and then cutting off their hands and feet on the steps of Rochester Cathedral (visible to the rebels). With the Barons winning initial skirmishes, King John increased his forces and the outcome was inevitable.

Secondly, the plague in 1349. Originating in London, the disease was highly contagious, with death likely after only three days of symptoms (including large blisters) appeared. Never having been seen before, nobody understood the causes. Many remedies were tried, from poultices to draining blood, rubbing skinned snakes onto the blisters and placing the bare backsides of chickens on the afflicted areas. Pedlars would sell fake relics such as a triptych painted by the feathers of an angel, powders sold as crushed emeralds or the crushed horn of the minotaur. In 1350, the situation eased (herd immunity?) with, it is believed, as many as 50% of the population dying. With livestock also affected, a period of starvation followed. It is believed that the disease emanated from rats.

Thirdly, the Peasants Revolt in 1381. Following the plague, the Country was financially ruined. Taxes that were taken by force included the introduction of a poll tax payable by everyone over 15 in order to finance the 100 years' war. The revolt, that included lawyers and teachers, originated in Essex. Jails were burned down and prisoners were released. Then, led by Wat Tyler, Rochester soon followed. Three thousand men descended on Rochester Castle demanding prisoners be released. After four days, the castle was breached as repairs following the siege had not been carried out. The prisoners were released and hostages taken to London. At Blackheath, 40,000 rebels met 14-year-old King Richard II, who agreed to their demands, only later to change his mind, revoking the agreement. The Peasants Revolt was over, with 1,500 rebels found guilty and hanged.

And seamlessly onto our **May meeting!**



It is often said that everyone has a book inside them. Maybe you have. At our May meeting, we learnt from our speaker Billie Darbyshire, a successful author who has won the fiction prize at

the National Academy of Writing, some basic elements of how to go about it. Persistence helps! It took Bobbie 12 years before a publisher took her first book that then became a success. Billie has now attended Waterstones on no less than 46 occasions promoting her books.

To start with, understand it is a gradual process, ensuring there is suspense and surprise throughout, developing the characters allowing them to grow as the story unfolds. Make stuff up working towards what you want the reader to know and don't try to make it too autobiographical. Then remember that one sentence leads to another and to quote Iris Murdoch, "every novel is the wreckage of a perfect idea". Question anything written that requires an answer. Bobbie described it as jumping off the edge of a cliff wearing angels wings!

Planning and research of characters and locations is essential, then start writing until a first draft is achieved. Work on it ensuring the plot does not get lost, particularly in the middle sections. Stimulation by invention is a good motto. Does something work or maybe it doesn't, don't let the characters take over the story and whether you feel exhilarated or uncomfortable with an idea, carry on.

If you reach `writers block`, be patient, take a break (maybe a day, maybe six months) and all will become clear.

Engage your journalistic side with random ideas and remember, writing a book is a marathon, not a sprint. It's as simple as that.....

An excellent talk that was well composed (as you would expect from an author) and expertly delivered.

Rick: Speaker Secretary: <https://bearsted.u3asite.uk/contact/>

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And Finally

There are anniversaries in June I'm sure you're well aware of, but perhaps not so much with 4th June. The date on this occasion refers to the year 1913 and the Derby at Epsom. Perhaps bells are ringing, but the acronym WSPU may help, or rather Women's Social & Political Union – their motto "Deeds, not words" – wanted the vote, or suffrage.

Suffragists, labelled suffragettes – little suffragists – by the Daily Mail to belittle the idea did indeed use deeds to progress their cause, smashing windows, burning the unoccupied homes of politicians and hunger strikes when imprisoned.

Emily Davison set fire to post boxes, hid in the Houses of Parliament, attacked David Lloyd George – actually it was a Baptist minister, a case of mistaken identity! – and was force-fed 49 times. Sylvia Pankhurst described her as "one of the most daring and reckless of the militants". Emily Davison herself wrote, with regard to force feeding, "by nothing but the sacrifice of human life would the nation be brought to realize the horrible torture our women face". Emily purchased a return ticket to Epsom and had two suffragette flags of purple, white and green. The rest is, as they say, history, and actually filmed. She ran towards King George V's horse Anmer and clutching her flags appears to reach for the reins. When half ton of horse travelling at 35mph crashed into her she fell, fracturing her skull and, unconscious, died 2 days later. The coroner's verdict was 'accident'. Her flag now hangs in Parliament.

Bibliography: "Revolting" by Terry Deary – an entertaining read Ed.

Alan: Editor: <https://bearsted.u3asite.uk/contact/>

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