

February programme

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
	1 Petanque	2 Monthly meeting	3 Music Appreciation	4	5 Birdwatching	6
7 Table Tennis	8 History talk	9 Theatre visit Patchwork & Quilting Art Group	10 Birdwatching Reading Ballroom Dancing	11 Golf Singing for Pleasure	12	13
14 Wine Group Garden visit Theatre visit	15 Petanque Woodturning	16 Woodturning Luncheon Club 1 Art Group	17 Family History	18 Social event Photography	19	20
21 Committee meeting Table Tennis Theatre visit	22 Art Appreciation	23 Art Group Theatre visit	24 Walking Group Craft Group Ballroom Dancing	25 Luncheon Club 2 Singing for Pleasure	26	27 Theatre visit
28 Gardening Group Maritime Group Astronomy						

Blackwater U3A newsletter February 2011

FEBRUARIE



U3A

www.blackwateru3a.co.uk

Reg. Charity No. 1113334

From the Chair

Wednesday monthly meeting

We are sorry that many people found the tea/coffee arrangements at the January meeting difficult and time consuming. The meeting was very well attended with 123 people there, so getting tea and coffee was a challenge! We have agreed we will give the new start time a trial so we are going to take measures to improve the flow. It would help if people could move away from the tea/coffee serving area after getting their drink. The signing-up table will be further away and processing that will be quicker as January always takes longer with renewal forms being handed in for those who had not done them. We did ask everyone to send in their renewal forms and cheques by 31st of December. However, several members decided to ignore this and thus created a problem and made a lot more work for some committee members chasing you up to see if you still wanted to be a member. At the time of writing we had 204 fully paid-up members. Should we be stricter next year as there are lots of people on the waiting list? Please discuss and in the autumn we will have plans for next year's renewals. After the speaker there is plenty of time to go around and sign up but, at the last meeting, most people started leaving as soon as the speaker had finished. So relax take your time, socialise with your cup of tea or coffee before the speaker.

AGM in March

The doors will be open at 1.30 to come in and not 2.00. Those setting out chairs and tables please come at 1.00. The meeting will not start till 2.30 so you will have a full hour for tea/coffee and sign up. So do come along and meet others as well as joining in the AGM. We will vote on new or old arrangements.

Dennis Eraut

March newsletter deadline

Deadline for the March newsletter is Friday 18th February Contributions to ian@ianlinton.demon.co.uk 51 Washington Road, Maldon, CM9 6BN

News update

Volunteer for Plume School reading support

Do you enjoy reading? Are you thankful that someone, long ago, gave you the time and support to learn to read? Would you like to bring the joy and skill of reading to a young person? I met with the Special Needs Coordinator of the Plume School to talk through her request for volunteers to hear pupils of years 7 and 8 (11/12/13 years) read. The 20 minute sessions take place at 8.30am which is registration time, to avoid withdrawing pupils from their lessons. The pupils are based at the Lower Plume in Mill Road. A volunteer would not have to commit to a long period, but a CRB check is necessary. CRB checks are free of charge for volunteers. If you can help or want to know more, please phone Dawn Mundy on 01621 854065 - email: dawnrosemary@fsmail.net

Citizens' Advice Bureau presentation

30th March at West Maldon Community Centre. You are all invited to attend a presentation by Irene Rose, Manager of the Maldon & District Citizens' Advice Bureau. We have been fortunate to be able to book the main hall from 2.00 - 3.30pm when Irene will inform us of the services offered by the CAB, of details of new Government legislation and will be happy to answer questions. Please sign up at the February or March monthly meeting, or telephone 01621 854065.

Dawn Mundy, Secretary.

Coordinators

Could you please give Ian your meeting dates for the year if known. It is a very helpful to coordinators when they are arranging their meeting dates to be able to check the website to see the possible spaces. *Thank you, Dorreen Linton, Interest Group Coordinator*

New groups

In next month's newsletter there will be a reply slip asking for your ideas for new groups so please in the next few weeks have a think and talk to friends so we can see if there is the interest for any new ones.

There will be a signing up sheet at the February meeting for a third luncheon group so if you are interested please sign up.

A member has also mentioned to me that she thought there may be the interest for a religions group which would find out about the different religions and visit their venues. I will put a sheet out to see if there is any interest.

Dorreen Linton, Interest Group Coordinator

Committee Members 2010/11

Dennis Eraut	Chair	01621 829758
Alan Chapman	Vice-Chair	01621 816860
Adrian Stockton	Treasurer	01245 225081
Dawn Mundy	Secretary	01621 854065
Jennifer Fowler	Membership Secretary	01245 222834
Val Wilson	Minutes Secretary	01621 842455
Dorreen Linton	Interest Group Coordinator	01621 853428
Barbara Brand	Social Activities	01621 853218
Sheila Rowsell	Committee Member	01621 740820
John Wallace	Co-opted Member	01245 225093
Sheila Wallis	Co-opted Member	01621 856667

Local U3A contacts

Maldon—Joyce Cotterell 01621 858287
 South Woodham Ferrers—Heather Richardson 01245 320205
 Heybridge—Peter Thorpe 01621 850828

Coordinators

Interest Group Coordinator	Dorreen Linton	01621 853428
Art	Anita Sandison	01621 741351
Art Appreciation	Dorreen Linton	01621 853428
Birdwatching	Peter Leggett	01621 852377
Community Garden	Dorreen Linton	01621 853428
Crafts	Sheila Wallis	01621 856667
Family History	Ken Johnson	01621 828490
French beginners	Val Wilson	01621 842455
Gardening	Jennifer Fowler	01245 222834
Geology	Anita Sandison	01621 741351
Golf	Alan Chapman	01621 816860
History	Dorreen Linton	01621 853428
London Theatres	Gill Cato	01621 740153
Luncheon Club 1	Di Johnson	01621 828490
Luncheon Club 2	Kathy Leggett	01621 852377
Maritime Group	John Wallace	01245 225093
Music Appreciation	Mani Koenig-Roach	01621 854235
Patchwork & Quilting	Molly Middleton	01621 859914
	Gil Reeves	01621 855845
Petanque	George Wallis	01621 856667
Photographic Group	George Wallis	01621 856667
Reading Group	Pat Wade	01621 740253
Scrabble	Sylvia Harden	01621 858506
Social Group	Barbara Brand	01621 853218
Spanish	Sue Watson	01621 852941
Swimming	Anne Kellard	01621 853045
Table Tennis	John Mundy	01621 854065
Theatre & concerts	Sheila Rowsell	01621 740820
Walkers	Dorreen Linton	01621 853428
Wine Group	Stella Bradbrook	01621 854235
Woodturning	Charles Middleton	01621 859914

Joint groups with Maldon U3A

Astronomy	Alan Chapman	01621 816860
Ballroom Dancing	Jean Smith	01621 843054
Singing for Pleasure	Jacky Holmes	01621 854108
Snooker	Brian	01621 842619
Tenpin Bowling	David Arnold	01621 853866
Scottish Dancing	Shirley Grummett	01621 853288
Trouble-Shooters	Liz or Bryan Jones	01621 857031

Treasurer's Report for the Financial Year January - December 2010

The Financial Report summarises all payments and receipts recorded during the 2010 financial year. The master spreadsheet is backed-up by paper records, receipts, bank statements, together with cheque and paying-in book stubs. It's clearly not practical to provide an explanation for each line of the report, but the major sections are described below. The report is in a similar format to that used in previous years and has been independently examined and found to be in accordance with our books and records. The number of recorded transactions more than doubled over the previous financial year with their value also increasing significantly. This may be explained by our membership rising by 30% to 221 persons and to the increased activity by many of our interest groups.

NB. Negative amounts in the Financial Report are shown in round brackets, so (12.34) means *minus* 12.34

No 1 Account – This is our main administrative account. I show the figures for 2010 and for comparison the similar items reported last year. An exact comparison between years is not always straightforward – it does depend on how each transaction has been categorised. Income has been boosted by the £905.62 of gift-aid reclaimed from HMRC. This figure was based upon only those well-documented subscription payments going back over five years. Future reclaims will not be so large – I estimate the next claim to deliver over £300, with each additional mandate returning about £4 to our funds – *Tax-payers, please sign a mandate form.*

With the gift-aid money and a contribution from the No 2 Account we have been able to move £1,000 to a new bank account opened with the Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) Bank. This now constitutes our reserve/equipment replacement account. The committee's target is to have about £1,500 in reserve – a sum less than the Charities Commission recommendation that reserves should be equivalent to 6 to 12 month's running costs. Our target figure should be sufficient to replace our current main equipment assets in due course. The receipt of gift-aid brings with it the obligation to ensure that subscription income is not used to fund purely social events. With this in mind, the hall hire and other costs for the Christmas Party were handled through the No 2 account. This has led to a reduced spend on the hall-hire budget for our main meetings. Our major costs have been the newsletter (31% of subscription income), capitation and U3A magazine (22%), hall hire (12%) and speakers (10%). For the 2011 financial year we have budgeted for increases to most of these headings. Hopefully our other costs will not rise too much.

No 2 Account – This bank account holds income for our groups' events and activities, and corresponding payments for speakers, guides, entrance fees, etc. Because the number of activities and the number of advanced bookings varies each year, it did not seem useful to show figures for comparison with 2009. Instead I show banked income and bank expenditure to indicate the amount of 'business' done and the resulting closing bank balance for each group. I also show the amount of cash reported as being held by coordinators. Our rules limit this sum to £50. This approach lets us see the total assets of each group. The final column shows how much of the income has been collected in advance for events in 2011. A few groups have accrued more profit than actually needed, so with the agreement of their coordinators, part of these profits were re-assigned to the 'Miscellaneous' heading and part of this fund was transferred via the No 1 account into our reserve account. The Miscellaneous heading is also used to fund certain small gifts and donations that the committee decides are an appropriate way to say 'thank-you'.

CAF Bank Account – This is our new reserve/equipment fund account. In future years it will have a previous year column as with the No1 Account. As described above, the opening sum of £1,000 came from the gift-aid income and the 'Miscellaneous' surplus from the No 2 Account.

The Summary of Accounts – With a column for each of the three bank accounts we can see lines showing the *Opening Balance* on 1st January 2010, *Opening un-cleared items* (ie. our cheques that had not been presented on that day, and the *Income* and *Expenditure* throughout the year. These figures add up to the *Closing Total*. We then see the Bank Balance as of 31st December 2010 and the *Closing Un-cleared items* which happily add up to the same total.

In Conclusion – 2009 was very much for me a *learning how to do it* year. This last year continued my education in the art of accounting with the number of visits to the bank ever increasing. Due to decisions made at the last AGM, 2010 will be the last year when subscription collection and the end of the financial year coincide. The Treasurer's next Christmas should be somewhat easier without the need to chase-up and check some 200 subscription payments. Finally, I would like to thank all those coordinators who have provided cheques and cash for banking with clear supporting paperwork. It makes my life so much easier when the money and the paper-work match. Also I must thank Dorreen Linton who, while already running a number of groups, still finds time to bank much of the groups' cash income on my behalf. She also was a great help in that busy December period in reminding members to renew their subscriptions. Most importantly, many thanks to the other Doreen in my life who has endured another year with me shut away in the (nearly) smallest room in the house with my computer and all my Blackwater files. Now, I will be happy to answer questions on this report at the March AGM, however if any detail is required, then advance warning really is needed. *Adrian Stockton, Honorary Treasurer, January 2011*

Rural Essex Group

Thursday 3rd February 7.45 pm - Council for the Protection of Rural Essex.
A talk at the United Reform Church Hall detailing the work of the council. If anyone would like to attend please let me know.

Wednesday 30th March 7 pm. - 'Time and Tide' Professor Worpole will be discussing the environmental and moral concerns highlighted by the county's extensive sea-coast, estuaries and river edges, are some of the most dramatic and shape-shifting landscapes in the world. The talk will be at The University of Essex. Car share arrangements can be organised and admission is by ticket only. Please let me know if you are interested.

Monday 11th April 2.00 - guided walk on Tiptree Heath. Meet at West Maldon Community Centre car park at 1.30 for car share.

Other plans are visits to local woods, heaths, and farms. *Dorreen Linton*

Luncheon Club 2

All aboard the Tiptree 'Ship',
For Luncheon Club 2's fun and frolic.
The usual treats and company,
Just the right Yuletide tonic!

A few new members were welcomed,
To our merry throng.
The plates piled high and cracker jokes,
Helping us along.

Then with our gigantic just desserts,
We had all had plenty to eat.
So thank you Kathy for all your work,
And here's to the next meet.

We live to dine another day,
Having Gastronomical fun at the U3A!
Angie Payne-Newman

Art Appreciation

The January meeting led by Dennis Eraut was an occasion for members to bring along an object for discussion. One-by-one, objects of art were discussed and more information was given by members recognising something they knew about. The objects ranged from fire pokers, toasting forks, 7 Dengie Hundred men in a waistcoat, a 1903 watercolour painting, a graphite gouache painting, 1820 Chinese Emperor's garment rank badge, clay sculpture, hammered copper sheeting sculpture and Girl's Own paper dated 1889, a family bible dating back to 1719 and finally a recipe book from the 1700s. Everyone agreed that this had been a really interesting session and it will be repeated in another session later in the year.

Our next meeting will be on Tuesday 22nd February at 2 pm at West Maldon Community Centre when Alan Chapman will give a talk about Vincent Van Gough.

The Ipswich School of Art

A visit has been arranged to view the exhibition and for a guided tour of the School on Tuesday 22nd March. We will be leaving West Maldon Community Centre for a car share to Ipswich. Time to be given later.

Dorreen Linton

Astronomy Group

This group has now reformed and meets at West Maldon Community Centre at 7.30pm on the 4th Monday of the month. The group, as the name implies is made up mainly from members of both Blackwater U3A and Maldon U3A. At the meetings we show films relating to all astronomy topics, arrange for guest lectures to attend and also make visits to the famous Castle Point Astronomy Club, on the sky viewing nights, using their very powerful telescopes. If any member of our U3A wishes to join the group then please contact Alan Chapman on 01621 816860, or just turn up on the meeting night.

Swimming Group

There will be no swimming until 2nd March. *Call Anne 01621 853045*

Theatre Group

As I write this, our planning meeting has not yet taken place, so the results of our morning researching every show, play, musical, ballet etc. in our local theatres will be shown in full in next month's newsletter. You will also find the full list on the website.

Moscow State Circus

On January 17th, 25 of us drove or were driven to the Cliffs Pavilion to watch this event. Several pairs or teams of acrobats, gymnasts, clowns etc. entertained. Where did that girl from the floating bed disappear to? The evening ended on a very happy note as we all walked down to the 'Flying Pasta' and enjoyed a superb meal, with of course - great company.

Forthcoming events

Monday February 14th - Murdered to Death. Civic Theatre, £14. Full

Monday February 21st - Westside Story, Witham Public Hall, £5.

Wednesday February 23rd - The Hauntings, Palace Theatre, £23.50. Fully booked

Sunday February 27th - Swan Lake, Moscow State Ballet. Cliffs Pavilion. Fully booked

Tuesday March 8th - The Rivals, Mercury Theatre, £7.70.

Tuesday March 15th - Private Lives, £15.25

People do drop out of visits due to illness or commitments, so if you wish to see something that is showing full it is worth putting your name down on my waiting lists. *Sheila Rowsell, 01621 740820*

London Theatre Group

On Wednesday 9th February we are going to see "Love Never Dies" at the Adelphi in the Strand, London. There is room on the coach if anybody would like to come just for the ride to London – the price is £9. We leave West Maldon Community Centre at 9.00 am and start our return journey around 5.25 pm. Any questions please contact me at cato662@btinternet.com or 01621740153. *Gill Cato*

Garden News

No one has much enthusiasm for gardening at this time of the year, it is too wet and too cold, the days are short and the light poor, so we were delighted to have a combined meeting, our first of 2011, with South Woodham Ferrers U3A - a talk with slides. Our speaker was Georgina Green, who was, until three years ago when she retired, a Local Government Officer. Since then, she has become very involved in researching local history, mainly on the outskirts of London. Her talk was entitled 'The Country Gentleman and his Estates' covering the period 1750-1850. The owners of estates all over the country were not necessarily members of the aristocracy but wealthy businessmen or merchants who wished to impress people. Often they had a town house as well. We were shown plans of several gardens in 1750s which were very formal and structured. Capability Brown and William Kent changed this style and concentrated on the landscape and produced a more natural scene. Another interesting aspect of the country estate was the development of the glasshouse. To end her talk, Georgina told us about the hobbies of the young sons of these gentlemen, namely hunting, fishing and shooting. Her slides were excellent and the talk very interesting. We hope she will visit us again in the future

Forthcoming visits

Monday February 14th - Visit to Anglesey Abbey. Meet at West Maldon Community Centre at 8am. The coach is full but I have a waiting list, and will contact those on it if anyone is unable to go.

Monday February 28th - Talk at Stow Maries Hall 2pm. Linda Holden on National Gardens Scheme, cost £4 including tea. Please make your own way there if possible.

Monday March 28th - Visit to Hyde Hall 11am. Meet at West Maldon Community Centre at 10.45

Thursday April 14th - Visit to Barnards Farm, West Horndon. Private Garden 11.30am, cost £6, £3 to Driver. Lunch is available at a reasonable price or you can picnic. Meet at West Maldon Community Centre at 10.30

Monday May 9th - Plant Swop. Venue TBA.

If you would like to come to any of these visits please sign the lists at the meeting or phone me *Jennifer Fowler, 01245 222834.*

Social Group

Murder Mystery Evening - Friday 18th February at West Maldon Community Centre at 7.30. This event is almost full.

BBC Television Centre behind the scenes tour, Thursday 30th June. The cost including coach will be £25.00. Please contact Barbara if you would like to come along. *Barbara Brand —01621 853218*

Art Group

The Art Group now meet at the Village Hall in Mundon from 10.30 - 12.30pm. New members are welcome. Initially we will work for a couple of hours on our individual projects. *Anita Sandison 01621 741351*

Golfing Group

Our golfing session for January was a return to Woodham Mortimer Driving Range where our golfing instructor Ken taught us new golf driving techniques and also tips on putting. We have booked Ken again for our February visit to Woodham Mortimer Driving range on Friday 11th at 11.00am, where he will be teaching us further techniques on how to hit these very small balls straight and a long distance.

Our golfing thought for the month is:

The friends you make on the golf course are the friends you make for life. Jessica Valentine (Scottish golfer)

Alan Chapman 01621 816860

Wine Group

The next meeting of the Wine Group is at 7.30 on Monday February 14th. To find out the venue, please ring Stella on 01621 854235.

Photographic Group

The February meeting of the Photographic Group will be held at my house at 10am on Friday, 18th February. The subject will be 'Your Winter Photographs'. *George Wallis 01621 856667*

Table Tennis Group

Table Tennis sessions take place from 11.45 am to 1.30 pm at West Maldon Community Centre. Please do not arrive before 11.40. Sessions take place 1st, 3rd and 5th (when applicable) Mondays, fee £3.00 per session. It is a very friendly group and new members are welcome. Bat and balls are provided. The coordinator provides coaching.

League report

The Burnham & District Table Tennis League has a number of both Blackwater and Maldon U3A members competing in the league. In Division 2 Maldon U3A after 12 matches are in 6th position; they have won 5 matches and scored 57 points. Maldon U3A member Norman Hayes continues to play well with 24 wins – a 69 % win ratio. Ray Cheung, a Blackwater member, has won 12 matches – a 57% win ratio. Maldon D, newly promoted to Division 2, are finding the going quite tough. While still second from bottom, an improvement in form has brought them very close to the teams above them. After 13 matches they have now won 2 matches, drawn two and scored 46 points. Rob Sach has been the pick of the U3A members with 5 wins. In Division 3 Maldon U3A are in 5th position and have played 11, won 6 and drawn 2, with 23 points. Tony Murray continues to be the star with 27 wins and a win ratio of 87%. In Division 3 Maldon G are still 2nd from bottom but now have recorded a win over St. Lawrence B. Julie Doidge has now won 5 matches with a 17 % win ratio. *John Mundy 01621 854065*

Music Appreciation

The Music Appreciation Group is back in service, starting on the 3rd February from 2 to 4 pm using various home premises. Our first venue will be Pat Willis's home and the programme will consist of music and composers starting with the letter A. Please phone Pat to confirm you will be coming - 01621 852784

Mani Koenig-Roach, Coordinator 01621 854235

Speakers' Corner

Our monthly general meetings feature a wide variety of guest speakers. The meetings are held at West Maldon Community Centre on the first Wednesday of the month. Remember doors now open at 2.00.

Our speaker for January was Peter Maggs who used press reports and material in the public archives to tell us an intriguing and sad story about the extraordinary life and history of Henry John Hatch, the first chaplain of Wandsworth Prison and also Rector of Little Stambridge Essex. Our speaker for February is Graham Smith on 'Essex raise for the sky' a talk on the development of aviation in the Essex area between 1900 to 1939.

Alan Chapman, Speaker Coordinator

Refreshments & Meet & Greet rota

March	Art Appreciation Group
April	Beginner's French Group
May	Geology Group

Scrabble Group

The group is now meeting and Sylvia Harden would be pleased to hear from anyone else who is interested in playing Scrabble - 01621 858506

Ballroom Dancing

Come and enjoy a sociable afternoon and learn a few new steps. We meet on the 2nd and 4th Thursdays at 2:45pm – 4:15pm at West Maldon Community Centre. For further details contact *Jean Smith 01621 843054*

Community Garden Group

Three members have given the area a winter tidy-up. Could anyone who sees vans parked on the grass area please let me know. Thanks, Dorreen.

Maritime Group

January meeting

Two of our members, John and Di Rogers, gave an excellent illustrated account of their recent experiences of chartering yachts on sailing holidays, both in the British Virgin Islands, and slightly closer to home around various Greek islands. On a rather gloomy January day it was delightful to be transported to these idyllic places and hear of the type of holiday experience which most of us only dream about! John set out the benefits and problems associated with bareboat charter in the BVI and flotilla sailing in Greece. Both seemed to produce great holidays, though we realised that both our colleagues are very experienced sailors – John's previous talk having been a description of a trans-Atlantic crossing! However we were assured that such holidays do cater for those with rather less exalted skills.

Future meetings in West Maldon Community Centre Linton Room

Monday 28th February 2.00pm - Our next meeting will focus on some BBC DVDs of some of the famous boats which contributed to the making of Britain.

Monday 28th March 2.00 pm - Ken Johnson will give a talk entitled 'From Sail to Steam', tracking the evolution of ships in the nineteenth century.

For more information, please contact *John Wallace Coordinator 01245 225093*

Family History Group

All meetings are held on the third Thursday in the month at 1.30 pm in the Linton Room at West Maldon Community Centre. Beginners and new members welcome. *Coordinator Ken Johnson 01621 828490*

13:30 - 14:00 Memories 14:15 - 14:30 Website of the month
14:30 - 15:00 Main topic 15:00 - 15:20 Tea & biscuits
15:20 - 16:00 Questions & answer session or main topic continuation.

MONTH	MEMORIES SUBJECT	MAIN TOPIC	SPEAKER
February	Hobbies	Sail to steam	Ken
March	Memories extracts	Monumental inscriptions	Angela

For full 2011 programme, see Family History page on the website. With all question and answer sessions it would be very helpful if you can let me know your questions in advance. This then gives an opportunity to find the right person to answer and or do the necessary research to get a meaningful answer rather than just give a best guess at the meeting
Roger Smith

Birdwatching Group

What a fantastic movement is the University of the Third Age. This was so apparent when fifteen of us were guests of the Braintree and Witham U3A at Rivenhall End on 13th January. Yes it was the universal love of wild birds which drew us together, but it was also the eagerness to meet others, to exchange experiences and for friendship. Furthermore, there was no better catalyst for all of this than Mike Logan Wood, Chairman of the Mid-Essex RSPB giving a very interesting talk on 'The Secret Lives of Garden Birds'.

Revised programme of events until July 2011

In view of the desirability to plan events close to Maldon during the current severe winter, I have programmed Hanningfield for March in place of Rainham Marshes, which is now on 1st April. Furthermore, I have taken out the proposed trip to Lakenheath on the Suffolk/Norfolk border for 3rd June. It would have been too close to our return date from Scotland in the last week of May. Now the over-excessive travelling is reduced. The Scottish expedition was suggested after the 2010/2011 programme had been agreed so an alteration was bound to be needed. Instead of Lakenheath, the replacement venue is just up the road from Maldon in Tolleshunt Knights.

Saturday 5th February - Heybridge Basin, guide John Buchanon. Meet at 9.45am Sea Wall end of Daisy Meadow Car Park, Heybridge Basin. FULLY BOOKED

Thursday 10th February - Indoor meeting with Witham & Braintree U3A. 'Year in the Wildlife of Bocking' - £3 each. Talk by Alex Bass, 10am to 12 noon. Meet at West Maldon Community Centre car park 9am.

Friday 4th March - Hanningfield Reservoir, guide David Petts. Meet at 8.45am in West Maldon Community Centre car park. Lunch venue to be arranged.

Friday 1st April - Rainham Marshes. Free entrance to RSPB Members, others £2.50 payable on entry. Guide Ruth Barnes for whom there is an additional charge. Meet 8am at West Maldon Community Centre car park. Full day with lunch at Reserve Café.

Tuesday 3rd May - Dawn Chorus, Chigborough Lakes EWT Reserve, guide Russell Neave. Meet at 4.15am in Reserve car park

Monday 16th May - Grantown-On-Spey, Scotland. Start of 5 nights for guided birding tours. FULLY BOOKED

Friday 3rd June - Oxley Meadows, Tolleshunt Knights. Species-rich traditional hay meadows, guide Carole Mander. Meet at 9am in West Maldon Community Centre car park.

Friday 1st July - Pandemonium, Wimbish near Thaxted. Nesting buzzards, orchids, walking a broad leaf woodland with guide Barry Kaufmann-Wright, £5 per head fixed charge. Full day, bring own picnic lunch, tables in beautiful gardens. Meet at 8.15am West Maldon Community Centre car park.

Friday 15th July - Birdwatching planning meeting for 2011/2012 at my house 11am.

Finally, I am pleased to announce that, due to their faithful attendance at most of our events, I have decided to promote two ordinary birdwatchers to the rank of deputy birdwatching coordinator. They are Roger Wilson and Dawn Mundy - unpaid! *Peter Leggett Coordinator- telephone 01621 852377. Mobile number on day of every excursion is 07881 680260*

Reading Group

This month's book, 'Ross Poldark' by Winston Graham, was enjoyed by most of us, although some wondered initially how it would compare with the television production shown in the seventies. It was light and easy reading and a thoroughly good yarn set in the 19th century. Ross Poldark, returning from the American War of Independence to his home in Cornwall, discovers that his fiancée Elizabeth is now betrothed to his cousin Francis and his home neglected and in a terrible state of disrepair. His servants, Judd and Prudie have played no small part in this neglect and disconcertingly, Ross finds them in a drunken stupor on his return after Judd had forgotten to meet him. From this rather inauspicious beginning, we see Ross gradually coming to terms with his situation, while at the same time experiencing numerous challenges and setbacks.

There are several themes, including good triumphing over evil, the disparity between the gentry and the working classes and unrequited love. We learned some interesting aspects of this part of Cornwall at that time, and the well-defined characters provided us with an interesting insight into the nature of different kinds of relationships, such as that of Ross and Verity, Ross and Demelza, Judd and Prudie, Prudie and Demelza and so on. The members of our group pondered over issues such as why Ross continued to employ his two rather questionable servants; why his Uncle Charles had not helped him more and we all wondered what might have happened to Verity. It was agreed that some of these questions might be answered in other books in the series. *Val Fry*

New members are very welcome. *If you would like to join us, please contact Pat Wade on 01621 740253*

History Group

Abbots Hall farm

The talk in January given by Alan Shearing took us through the history and development of the 700 acre coastal farm on the Blackwater Estuary. The buildings are Grade II listed, and the oldest part of the house foundations date back to the Domesday survey of 1085 - "and then Abbes Hall in Wicgheberga was held by Barking Abbey until the dissolution of the monasteries in 1530". Sir Leonard Crossland, former Chairman of Ford, overhauled the buildings in 1970 and after his death they were purchased by the Essex Wildlife Trust in 2000. The buildings are now used as the main offices of the Trust, as well as storage of crops, machinery and workshops. There is a Farm Manager and Farm Warden and changes have been made to benefit the wildlife on this working farm. The Abbots Hall coastal realignment or Managed Retreat is internationally recognised as an important example of how, with careful planning, there can be a more sustainable approach to coastal defence. In order to keep the farm profitable a variety of crops are grown. Among the many items for sale are the EWT birdseed and Jordan's health bars (conservation grade) at our local supermarket.

Maldon's historic buildings

I would like to arrange a meeting for anyone who is interested in finding out more about our local historic buildings starting with the High Street. Could anyone interested please let me know. Thanks, Dorreen

Forthcoming events

Tuesday 8th February – Robin Carpenter will be giving a talk on The Utopian Modern Movement Housing in Essex. West Maldon Community Centre at 2 pm. £5, refreshments are included.

Monday 7th February – Talk about the building of the Maldon Bypass. West Maldon Community Centre 2 pm.

Tuesday 8th March – Visit to Essex Records Office, leaving West Maldon Community Centre for car share at 9.30 am. This is now full.

Tuesday 12th April – Guided Tour of Bury Cathedral, £20 leaving West Maldon Community Centre at 8 am. 29 seater coach booked, some seats available.

Thursday 21st April – Olympic Tour. Meet West Maldon Community Centre at 9 am. Fully booked although a reserve list is in operation.

Tuesday 10th May – Guided Tour of Bulmer Brickworks and afternoon visit to Sudbury. Meet West Maldon Community Centre at 9 am for car share.

Friday 17th June – Canterbury visit with guided tour of the Cathedral £26 – 29 seater coach, leaving time to be confirmed.

Tuesday 12th July – Guided walk and visit to Mersea Museum – time and cost to be confirmed

Thursday 21st July – Guided tour of Copped Hall house and gardens – time and cost to be confirmed

Tuesday 13th September – Guided tour of Eltham Palace and Gardens, leaving West Maldon Community Centre at 8 am. £21 (29 seater coach)

Tuesday 11th October – Guided tour of Glemhall House and Gardens and morning visit to Sutton Hoo or Woodbridge - £12 + car share.

Tuesday 8th November – Talk at West Maldon Community Centre at 2 pm.

Tuesday 13th December – Talk at West Maldon Community Centre at 2 pm.

Dorreen Linton 01621 853428

Walking Group

The Walking Group has now arranged a varied programme for the year with different members volunteering to lead each month. The area to be walked may change according to the weather conditions which will effect the surface underfoot. Our walks are usually between 5-6 miles and may be approximately 20 minutes drive (car shares will be available) to the venue. We meet on the 4th Thursday in the month either at Tescos or West Maldon Community Centre car park depending on the venue. Please check with the coordinator for starting venue. Besides our walks, there are Fitsteps walks which are held on the first Monday in the month at various venues in the Maldon Area. Please see noticeboard for more information or contact *Dorreen Linton 01621 853428*

Petanque Group

Just a reminder that the group meets on the terrain overlooking the Promenade Lake (adjoining Rossi's) on the 1st and 3rd Tuesday of every month throughout the year. Inclement weather may deter us, but warm clothing overcomes any chills. Ten members enjoyed the fun and competition on 4th January and four very competitive souls on the 18th when the girls won, both games! All are welcome to 'come and have a go'. Dawn Mundy.

George Wallis is our expert coordinator - 01621 856667.

Beginners's French Group

The Beginner's French Group is starting to grow in confidence and spends more of each meeting conversing in French only. It's a bit of an uphill struggle, but we laugh a lot and have bonded as a group. If you are interested in joining the group, *please contact Val Wilson.*