



NEWSLETTER

... from the horse's mouth

September 2025

Issue No.70

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Chair's message:

I do hope you have all enjoyed the summer. What a shock to start September cold and damp.

I celebrated a special Birthday at a Warners Hotel at Runnymede near Windsor which I recommend.

I met with members at the Theatre and enjoyed the show JUST ONE DAY which was excellent, getting home was another story with the underground on strike.

I am looking forward to joining the next village visits and meeting with Members.

Please book early for the Quiz on 29th October. It's always a good social afternoon.

I am grateful to all members who take part or plan extra activities for our Members to enjoy.

Regards

Carol Gupwell
MIU3A Chair

Wish List

- The world does not descend into anarchy
- Strictly has no more issues and is as good as it usually is
- Separations are amicable

TV

- Eastenders continues to be on the very dark side
- The news is almost unwatchable these days
- People with small budgets on A Place in the Sun have very large and unrealistic wants

Working together with the Community

Three of our members were asked to judge the Young Rotarians 'Writer of the Year' competition, as a favour to The Rotary Club. We were all a bit apprehensive but thoroughly enjoyed this activity once we got into it.

The criteria were very strict with the theme of 'Wonderful Water' and the age groups were broken up into three bands. They had a choice of prose or poetry, so we had an enjoyable afternoon of reading several entries over and over and over again to ensure we were being fair minded.

I did wonder how the judges of the national and international competitions ever manage to narrow it down to just a few finalists. Everyone got a certificate for participating and we judges each got a beautiful bouquet of flowers.

We all agree that we love the chance of encouraging young people to excel.

Patsy Wastell

Maidstone Invicta u3a
Quiz Afternoon

Wednesday 29th October
2025

Barming Village Hall
2-4pm

Teams of Six

£5 pp - payable on the day
includes a free raffle ticket
BYO nibbles and drinks

Please support your U3A for a fun
afternoon

To book your place or a table email
Anne Wicken

groups@maidstoneinvictau3a.org.uk

**Note – the quiz is at Barming Village Hall, NOT Beechwood Hall!*



The End is Nigh!

At least it is for Microsoft Windows 10! It's lasted 10+ years but from 14th October, Windows 10 will no longer be fully supported. It doesn't mean you can't continue using it but there will be no further security updates or improvements - a 1 year limited extension is possible but needs to be activated.

If you haven't yet converted to Windows 11 or if your PC or laptop won't run Windows 11 (likely if made pre late 2017), now is the time to think about the change.

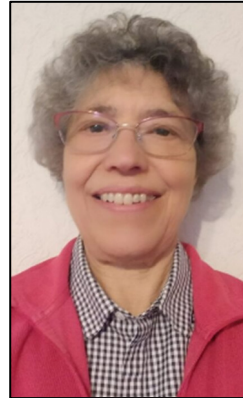
At the time of the change from XP (remember that?) to Windows 10, we ran a series of short workshops.

If members would like the same this time, please let me know and we can consider doing the same.

Martyn Roads

beacon@maidstoneinvictau3a.org.uk

Interest Groups Team



Sue and Anne

“We are your new Interest Groups Team Leaders and we are here to help you”

- If you have any concerns about the groups you co-ordinate
- Need help attracting more members to your group
- If your group is full with a waiting list, we can help with starting a second group
- If members are looking for a specific group that isn't currently on the Interest Groups list, please let us know and we'll do our best to help with starting a relevant group.
- Do you have a skill you'd like to share with others?
- New members, if you need help finding the right group

Please email us at groups@maidstoneinvictau3a.org.uk if you want to get in touch. Alternatively, we'll be available at the monthly meetings, so come and have a chat with us”.

Groups News

Longer Walks 6-7 miles

Third Thursday of the month

In June we walked the Aylesford Loop, starting in the village, stopping for lunch at Kits Coty.



July, we went to Upnor, walking part of the Saxon Shore Way, returning along the shore of the Medway.

August, due to holidays and colds we postponed our walk to Appledore and walked from Farleigh to Teston returning along the river.

It's amazing what you find on a walk, from ancient monuments, grapes, butterflies, orchids beautiful views and good company.



If you'd like to join us, contact me via the website or find me at a monthly meeting.

Anne Wicken

Local History Group

Visit to Fort Amherst - July

In July, 10 members paid a visit to Fort Amherst in Chatham for a guided tour of the tunnels at this Napoleonic era fort. Chalk caves had long existed on this site but concern about the vulnerability of Chatham Dockyard to potential attacks from the land led to the caves being extended and strengthened in the late 18th century. They included a gunpowder store and many gun positions. Other defensive facilities were constructed which would enable the fort to survive a siege if necessary. The tunnels were equipped with a well, privies (toilets), gun positions, musket galleries and defendable gateways. Our guide showed us sections designed to ensure that any invaders that did manage to break into the fort complex would be trapped in a gated tunnel where they would be efficiently slaughtered. Members were fascinated by the privileged officers' privies which were the subject of some posed photos.

The fort and its tunnels were never tested and in the 1820s, the defensive designs were declared obsolete. Throughout the Victorian era, the tunnels were used for training purposes and, strangely, for entertainment, which is referred to in Dickens' book, Pickwick Papers.



In the 20th century, the fort came back into use with anti-aircraft guns installed, and in WW2, the tunnels were used as the ARP (Air Raid Precaution) Centre for the North Kent Region. In our visit, we were shown this section of the tunnels which had been reconstructed and equipped to demonstrate

how people lived and worked in the tunnels during this time. At the end of the tunnel tour, we emerged into the open to be met with aerial views over Chatham and some large guns.

We had a great guide, and all agreed that the tour was a fascinating and entertaining insight into a little-known local military structure.

Visit to Belmont House - August

In August there were 12 of us for the private guided tour of Belmont House, tucked away in the narrow lanes near Faversham.



The original house was built in 1769 by Edward Wilks, store-keeper at the nearby Faversham Powder Mill. It was designed by Samuel Wyatt and is a fine example of his architectural style. After enjoying coffee in the elegant orangery, we were given a detailed tour of the house and the treasures, which had been by collected

over five generations of the Harris family. The house is considered important for the well-preserved records of the family who played a role in the development of the overseas territories in the 18th and 19th Centuries.

It is particularly noted for its collection of 340 clocks, which were the passion of the fifth Lord Harris, many of which we were shown. Also on show were many 19th century paintings of the Trinidadian artist Cazabon, which were commissioned by the third Lord Harris when he was governor of Trinidad in the 1850s.

The house is now held by a Trust set up by the fifth and last of the family, the fifth Lord Harris.

The tour was much enjoyed by our group and a visit to Belmont House is highly recommended, especially if you have an interest in clocks.

Nick Willson

Don't forget, the latest Maidstone Invicta news
can always be found on our website at
www.miu3a.org.uk

Photography for Fun

Fourth Monday 2-4pm

We have a variety of cameras from phones to DSLRs and our skills are just as varied.

In July we took a trip to the RSBP Nature Reserve at Dungeness. Wildlife can be a challenge.



From there we drove to The Britannia Inn for a fish and chip lunch. We then ventured onto the beach for more photo opportunities.

The bank holiday fell on our August meeting but a few of us met to view some of our favourite photos, a very varied selection.

Our September meeting will be at Church Cross House, Barming, when we will view our Dungeness photos.

If anyone would like to join us, contact me via the website.

Anne Wicken

Invicta Art Club

Third Tuesday

Holidays and other summer activities have reduced our members able to take part during the summer months but with the onset of autumn I hope the numbers will increase again. We will resume 3rd Tuesday of the month meetings with a suggested subject.

I have unfortunately lost the email address for Jacqueline Newton so if she is reading this perhaps she could contact me.

If anyone is interested in joining us please contact me via the website.

Mo

Grumpy Old Men

Our Newsletter Editor has asked that for this edition we give some thought to the ways in which our group has interacted with the local community. For Grumpy Old Men this can be easily summarised in one word: badly. Although in our defence we do try to keep disruption to a minimum during our monthly meetings in the Muggleton.

Coincidentally, the Grumpy Old Men Management Team is in the process of making a determined effort to raise the profile of our group as we are under notice to expect a surprise visit by the newly convened *Interest Group Team*, AKA Anne Wicken and Sue Wicks.

Of course, they will be most welcome and may hopefully learn a thing or two about how one of miu3a's leading groups is so successfully run. They will also be our first female guests as previous invitees, including Stormy Daniels and Queen Camilla, all failed to turn up.

Anyone who has information as to when this surprise visit may take place is asked to contact, in strictest confidence, the Grumpy Old Men Group Leader.

KBO, David Holmes

French Conversation Group

The French Conversation Group has continued to meet on a fortnightly basis in each other's homes. We have had a variety of interesting conversations on different topics including a meal at Frederic's in town in July. We finished for the Summer with a garden bring and share lunch which was enjoyed by all as the weather was so good.

We are delighted that we have managed to recruit 2 new members in September. I am sure they will be a great asset to the group.

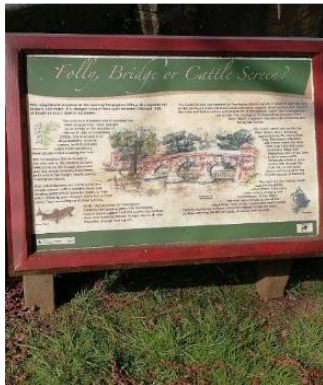
Glynis Carpenter

Village Visits

April

April saw us visiting Farningham which Judy had obligingly organised, and what an enjoyable visit it was too! Farningham is somewhat of an overlooked backwater, being passed by traffic on the main A20.

A time traveller from a hundred years ago or more would still very much recognise the historic heart of the village today. This is in no small part due to the establishment of the Farningham Conservation Area, which now covers 15 hectares and contains forty-six listed buildings and structures. It includes almost the full length of the High Street together with the Cricket Ground, Market



Meadow adjacent to the Village Hall and the land surrounding the Lion Hotel by the Cattle Screen. Where shops and businesses have disappeared from the High Street, their frontages have been retained, and it is easy to pick them out.

Among notable past residents and frequent visitors are Captain Bligh of the 'Mutiny of the Bounty' and Marianne Farningham - Victorian writer of poetry, biographies, prose and hymns, Charles Dickens, Major W. G. Wilson - one of the inventors of the first tanks, Graham Sutherland - artist and painter of the controversial portrait of Winston Churchill and Patience Strong the well-known poet. The butchers shop served the Village for nearly 200 years before closing its doors for the last time at the end of 2022.



After our tour of the village, we lunched at The Pied Bull where the lunch was very good, however the service rather let it down.

May

Our visit this month was to Offham being well organised by Di, where we were given a guided tour by Michael Rowe who has lived in Offham all his life and knows it extremely well and has seen many changes.

The name Offa was the name of a Saxon landowner and Ham is a village or homestead. It goes right back to 823 when Aethelwulf was King of Kent and this would have been an ancient Anglo-Saxon settlement.

Michael told us the history of the village and about the various buildings and their prior uses; for instance, the blacksmiths and the abattoir. The original



manor house called Offham Manor, Pepingstraw and Snodbeane have long since gone but the old names linger on. Jack Straw was born at Pepinstraw and Sir Richard Culpeper's granddaughter Jane was born at Offham Manor, and they were well known.

Sir Richard Culpeper, of this well-known Kentish family name, and his wife had three daughters who inherited the great manor and estate. There remains a Pound, a Grade II listed building, where stray animals were kept and released on payment of a fine; the wall surrounding the Pound bears a

green plaque with more information.

Offham is probably most well known for the Quintain on the village green. This is a wooden post six foot high and has a freely revolving arm on the top. One



end of the arm is flat and from the other hangs a heavy object. In the age of chivalry, the horseman rode full tilt at the quintain with his lance extended and the object was to strike the flat end (or eye) and gallop on before the heavy arm swung round, hit the competitor on the head and knocked him to the ground.

It was very popular in England and on the continent during the 17th century. Tilting the ring, as it was called was a tournament sport. And that's where the expression "full tilt" came from.

The Kings Arms, where we had a very good lunch, was originally erected as two cottages in the time of Elizabeth I. It fell into the hands of a saddlery and harness maker who ran his business there until 1680 when it was granted a licence, so it's been dispensing liquor for 325 years!

June

In June we visited Hawkhurst Moor which has a large village green surrounded by interesting and elegant houses lying south of the town of Hawkhurst. This visit was jointly organised by Molly and Tracey, The Moor was originally an area of common land, used for holding annual Fairs as far back as the 14th Century and is still used for community events today.

We were shown around the village by Joanna Davis, a member of Hawkhurst Historical Society who has lived in Hawkhurst all her life and is a local author who has written books about the area.



We first visited St. Lawrence Church the oldest part of which is the chancel and north chapel. The great east window was built about 1350. Most of the rest of the church dates from about 1450. We heard how, on 13th August 1944, a German flying bomb fell in the churchyard causing considerable damage. Part of it can be seen at the back of the church on the south side.

Inside the church we looked at the magnificent memorials of Sir John and Lady Herschel who lived in the parish for many years. In the north porch is a memorial stone to Thomas Glover, a previous incumbent, the nephew of Bishop Spratt, of "Jack Spratt could eat no fat" fame.

Our visit to the church was followed by a short tour around the village pond and green, learning about the buildings and their history, including a former brewery, the post office and stores, the Bakehouse and the lovely Victorian village school which closed in 2003. Joanna illustrated her descriptions with postcards from back in the day, showing how the street and buildings would have looked then.



The weather wasn't kind to us for our Visit and when the rain finally arrived at the end of our visit, we had a welcome lunch at the Waterside Cafe at Hawkhurst Fish Farm.

Molly Watch

July

On a very hot, in fact a blisteringly hot, day in July, nine intrepid Village Visit members made their way to the quintessentially English village of Smarden, there to be guided by myself, Anne.

The village is punctuated with beautiful homes from a by-gone era, from Dragons House to the Brothers House to The Cloth Hall. And on the air, can be heard the regular toll of church bells on the quarter hour, like a heartbeat. Gardens festooned with hollyhocks and roses and the sweet smell of lavender pervading the heat. An array of Best Village of the Year awards was found tucked under the lych gate close to where the village stocks used to be.



Everything on the surface was picture perfect, no wonder Smarden was chosen as the location for Agatha Christie's *The Mirror Crack'd*. The village and the Church were used to double as St Mary Mead. The Thatched House in Smarden was used as Miss Marple's cottage. The film was shot on a ten week schedule from 12 May to 18 July 1980 and starred Angela Lansbury, Tony Curtis, Edward Fox, Rock Hudson and Elizabeth Taylor. But, as with all whodunnit's, there is an underbelly of intrigue, murders, scandals and celebrity. Miss Maple would feel very "at home" living in

Smarden.

We discovered two murders, one recent and one nearly 200 years ago, both grisly and blood curdling affairs. There are ghosts of course and hauntings. And a secret tunnel connects the pub to the Church, but its whereabouts are lost in time. We discovered a racecourse from times past and heard tales of hunt saboteurs.

One very poignant discovery was about the life of John Sella Martin, born into slavery, and his connection with the Zion Chapel. We also learnt about an illiterate builder who was so convinced of the value of literacy that in his will of 1716, he left his house together with some agricultural land in Smarden and Bethersden, to found a free school.

During WW2, another property was used by Catford Girls School, who were evacuated to this part of Kent for safety. Smarden's prosperity grew in the Middle Ages thanks to the local weaving industry and in 1333 it was granted a Royal Charter by Edward III permitting weekly markets and an annual fair. In 1576 Queen Elizabeth I travelled through the village on her way back from Sissinghurst Castle and later honoured Smarden by confirming the earlier charter.

In 2020 Paul Hollywood hosted a baking contest to raise money for the parish council. He lives in the village and owns the Chequers Inn with his wife (allegedly Johnny Depp had also wanted to buy the pub). The interest in this event was so intense that one local, peering through the pub windows, was heard to say "It was absolutely rammed, I could hardly see Paul at all." Our group was also drawn into two other stories, namely the contaminated land scandal and the genealogy of Bertram Mills, he of circus fame.

Our visit concluded with lunch at The Flying Horse and we were made most welcome by Landlord Paul. Smarden has it all, it really does – and one visit is definitely not enough.

Anne Chapman

August

Loose Village was the focus of our visit for August, nicely organised by Pauline one of our newest members, and guided by Mick Abbott.

Mick talked about the history of Loose and mentioned the various notable buildings explaining their former uses. Loose is a pretty village and is a pleasure to walk around taking in the variety of house styles making up the village.

September

Our visit to Wye was led by our newest recruit, David Walters who had put together a very interesting and informative tour of the village. In the 13th century Wye was a Royal manor whose liberty extended as far as Hawkhurst. The parish of Wye and Hinxhill covers 2410 hectares much of which is the North Downs AONB, about 2560 people lived in 1150 homes here in 2022.



We visited the first Latin School in Wye which trained Vicars. It is now a Heritage Centre, conceived in 2009. The Historical Society founded in January 1948 have a website and also a Facebook page.

The old College was founded in 1447 by Cardinal John Kempe, Bishop of Rochester, Chichester and London, then York and Canterbury. In later life he set about rebuilding Wye Church. The former College is currently being converted into around 156 residential units, after it was abandoned in 2009 when the last students left. We heard about the notable people of Wye, namely the Sawbridge family who have a large Memorial stone in the churchyard.



After our tour of the village, we took refuge from the rain in the Church of St Gregory and St Martin Wye which is a Grade 1 listed building. The present building originated in the mid to late 13th century. In 1572 lightning struck the steeple, which took a decade to repair. In 1686 the crossing tower fell destroying the chancel and transepts and all but one of the medieval memorials.

Between 1706 and 1711 a massive bell tower was erected on the site of the medieval south transept reusing much of the medieval stonework.

Of the eight bells dating from 1774, two treble bells were given in memory of three parishioners and to commemorate the millennium, the full set of ten bells were first rung on 31 December 1999.

This is but a brief snapshot of what we learned.

Linda Taylor

Walking Group

Second Friday of the Month

August's walk took the group around Sutton Valence with the traditional finish for lunch at the pub!

The walk provided an opportunity to take group photos overlooking the beautiful weald and facing the camera!



Martyn Roads

Research Bakers Group Bake Off

Carol Gupwell wonders if a group (or groups) of members might be interested in taking part in this “Bake Off” organised by the Medical Research Foundation. If you are, contact Carol in the first instance – chair@maidstoneinvictau3a.org.uk

Organise a bake off with your community group, bringing them together for a great cause, and win a visit from Great British Bake Off finalist, Josh Smalley.

Join groups across the UK in supporting vital medical research with an exciting bake-off competition!

1. What are Research Bakers?

Bake a cake with a scientific twist, email a photo, and your group could win a special visit from Josh Smalley, finalist of The Great British Bake Off!

Support medical research

Millions of people in the UK and around the world still grapple with debilitating health conditions. Medical research has gone a long way to solving challenges in human health, but there is so much more to do. You can play a part in this and ensure your organisation continues to have a positive social impact.

A fun and simple competition to join in with

Taking part is straightforward. All you need to do is bake a cake – large or small – with a scientific twist and send a photo to the Foundation. Then invite friends, family and work colleagues to make a donation in return for a slice of your culinary masterpiece.

2. How does it work?

Getting started as a Research Baker is easy! In simple steps:

- Organise a time and date with your group to bake and bring your creations together.*
- Bring your bakes, share them with the group and vote for your favourite edible masterpieces.*
- Take a photo of your favourite bakes (no more than three different designs please).*
- Send us the photos of your group's favourite bakes by e-mail.*

- *Get eating! This is the satisfying bit – invite your group members, friends and family to taste your baked creation. Better still – get them to buy a slice and donate the proceeds to the Medical Research Foundation.*

1. Deadline

Submit your photos to us before 5pm on 24 December 2025. Entries by email only. Please see Terms and Conditions below for further details.

2. Does entry into the competition cost anything?

Entry is free but if you wish to make a donation to the charity, or donate any proceeds from selling your bakes, we would be so grateful for your support for our work. Thank you!

3. Where do I need to email my entries?

Please email your entries to fundraising@medicalresearchfoundation.org.uk