

November 2018

At our November meeting, we welcomed back the lively plantswoman, Jacqueline A Violet who asked us to guess the derivation of plant names. Her talk was entitled “Botanist or Not?” and we learned that many of the garden varieties mentioned by members were named after the Botanist who first discovered them. Few members knew that Fuchsias were named after Leon Hart Fuchs (1501 - 1566) a German herbalist, or that their berries are edible! Jacqueline explained that the systematic classification of plants was started by Carl Linnaeus, Sweden’s Uppsala University’s most famous Professor. He devised a system for classifying and naming nature which remains the foundation of the system that continues today.

Buddleia is named after the Reverend Adam Buddle, an English travelling Botanist, and Dahlias after Anders Dahl.

There are many plants whose names are not related to Botanists and these tend to describe a feature of the plant or its use. For example, Lavender is from the french “to wash”, and Salvia from the Latin “to heal”

Jacqueline ended her talk with an invitation for members to browse the large selection of plants she has propagated.

December 7th is the Christmas Big Quiz - entry by ticket only

October 2018

Our October meeting started with the AGM after which our speaker, former Theatrical Costumier Amanda Sutherland, took us on an exciting journey through her early career. After art school, a period of working in some famous workshops gave her enough skills for a nine-month bursary at the Royal Opera House as a buyer for ballet and opera costumes. This experience of “fabulous people, designers, fabrics, and bling ..” plus an impressive range of contacts, was sufficient for Amanda to enter the West End Theatre world. Her anecdotes about working on Les Miserables and Jesus Christ Superstar were hilarious and unforgettable. Later with Angel and Bermans, the worlds biggest costumier, she was part of projects such as Titanic, an experience which rounded off this stage of her life Over the last 15 years Amanda has set up her own workshop and showroom outside London, and described a frantic but very creative life of Wedding Fairs, Craft Courses and the worldwide promotion of her highly individual products. She ended her fascinating talk with a display of the accessories she designs from an eclectic range of materials.



September 2018

Our September speaker was Liz Huxley, an Essex based freelance wildlife photographer. Liz gave an illustrated talk on winter wildlife of the Essex marshes which she had studied for 30 years whilst working for Essex Wildlife Trust. The county is blessed with lots of coastline and tidal estuary shores which support a huge variety of wildlife. Being flat with a large tidal range, it also produces a variety of dynamic habitats from deep-sea through mud, salt marshes and grazing marshes. Winter wildlife is equally varied from seals porpoises and dolphins just offshore, to a wonderful range of birdlife and four-legged predators. Liz's photographs illustrated these beautifully from seasonal visitors in their tens of thousands, like Brent Geese and Mallards, to rarer occasional species like Black Brents, Merlins, Ibis and Spoonbills.

Studying Essex wildlife can be done from hides and huts as well as walks and boat trips, each of which produces a different perspective. Liz emphasised that before setting off one should always check the tides and weather to avoid being soaked, cut off or drowned! She was thanked for a fascinating talk.



August 2018

Our August speaker, Joanne Lerner gave the U3A audience an introduction to the process of tracing one's family history. Speaking from over 35 years experience, Joanne explained the various routes open to the novice genealogist.

Her own research traced her forebears back as the 1790s, turning up some fascinating characters including protestant Huguenots fleeing persecution in France, and more than one noble ancestor. She suggests a good place to start is with family members, listening to stories, looking at photos and collecting names and places. From here one can easily gain access to certificates of births, marriages and deaths.

Census records, old Newspaper reports, and military records are also sources of information.

The Internet has proved to be a boon for the study of Genealogy. In Joanne's case she found it took her only 90 minutes to trace a family member back to 1526 - as opposed to following the trail for 35 years.

DNA samples offer a further route to tracing ancestors and Joanne discovered she originated from the tribe of Oetzi, whose 5,300-year-old remains were discovered buried deep inside a glacier.

On a note of caution, Joanne stressed the importance of carefully checking dates and cross-referencing information wherever possible as simple clerical errors are common in early records.

June 2018

Our June meeting was graced with the presence of HRH King Henry VIII who, in full regalia, entertained his awestruck subjects with tales of his marriages.

“King Henry the Eighth to six wives was wedded One died, one survived Two divorced , two beheaded”

For the monarch, it was imperative marriage produced a healthy male child, and preferably a second son - an heir and a spare. His first wife Catherine of Aragon in the course of their 24-year marriage, produced Henry, but he died at 60 days. After many unsuccessful pregnancies Catherine had her daughter Mary, and Henry had her 'demoted' citing her previous marriage to his brother Arthur. His second wife Anne Boleyn made the King wait six years, but at their splendid coronation she was pregnant by Henry and promised him a son. The astrologers confirmed this and Elizabeth was born! This would not do either so, after a trial, she pleaded guilty to 27 counts of treason and was beheaded by the sword. Eleven days later a grieving Henry married Jane Seymour who at last provided him with a bright, healthy red-haired boy, Edward. Sadly, Jane died 12 days later from birth complications. Henry grieved for nearly four years until Thomas Cromwell persuaded him to marry again. Anne of Cleves ticked all the right boxes but he did not like her at all and the marriage was annulled.

Catherine Howard was next. At 17 years of age to his 50+ years she made him feel youthful again, but her infidelity was exposed and she and two lovers were executed. Henry's last marriage to Catherine Parr worked. A beautiful, clever, experienced woman, she both loved and nursed him in equal measure until his death. Henry's efforts were ultimately successful in that all three children became monarchs but it had been a long hard road.

Tony Harris who played Henry, gave a full-bodied performance and was thanked for a witty, dramatic, and very well informed presentation.

May 2018

After a journey interrupted by a bomb scare on the Jubilee Line, our May guest speaker, Nick R Thomas, made his way to Burnham on Crouch to talk about The One and Only Groucho Marx.

The Marx family were European Jewish immigrants who settled in New York where they raised their five sons, Julius, Adolph, Leonard, Herbert and Milton - later to be known by stage names: Groucho, Harpo, Chico, Zeppo and Gummo.

Nick talked about the early years with their Father, an unsuccessful tailor, and their Mother Minnie who was to be their agent up until her death in 1929. She was determined her sons were going to succeed, and indeed they honed their craft working on the vaudeville circuit, their humour becoming increasingly zany and unpredictable. Groucho was to try different personas before settling on his trademark bushy moustache, glasses, big cigar and distinctive walk. He was the crazy scheming fixer, king of the smart remark and witty aside.

In the 20s the Marx brothers' careers took off, earning them large sums of money from Broadway successes and a series of popular comedy films. Groucho lost a fortune during the Wall Street Crash, and Chico was a compulsive gambler, but the films brought them wealth and fame and they remain amongst America's most popular entertainers of all time.

Nick pointed out that Groucho had to combat antisemitism, and one of his most famous cracks "I refuse to join any Club that would have me as a member" was made in a letter resigning from a Club where he had experienced prejudice.

Groucho's death in 1977 went practically unreported, overshadowed, by the death at the same time, of Elvis Presley.

April 2018

Our guest speaker at the April meeting was Margaret Mills who gave a fascinating talk on Wilkie Collins and Mary Elizabeth Braddon- two late Victorian popular writers. Both lived unconventional lives hence the title of Margaret's talk. Both lived at a time when there was a 'literacy explosion' and although Universal education was far in the future, people sought novels, magazines and periodicals to develop their literacy skills.

Mary Braddon was born into a seemingly conventional middle-class family but her father fled the country to avoid debtors prison and never returned. To help the family income Mary became a child actress but later turned to writing short stories and travelogues for the growing magazine and periodicals market. Her income quickly exceeded that of an actress and enabled her to produce and edit two magazines, the "Belgravia" and "Temple Bar". With her growing reputation and financial independence, Mary turned to writing novels and produced some 70 in her lifetime. Some remain in print, and her most well-known work *Lady Audley's Secret* has been filmed.

The skeleton Margaret refers to is that Mary lived with a married man and produced six children whilst classed as a housekeeper, and the death of her lover's wife eventually freed them to regularise the arrangement!

Wilkie Collins was part of a somewhat bohemian family. His father was an artist and the family spent time in Italy and France where Wilkie became fluent in both languages. He tried accountancy and the law then started writing short stories and articles. His friendship with Charles Dickens cemented his place in the literary world and he is credited as writing the first crime novel *The Moonstone*, which remains in print to this day.

His other most well-known work is *The Woman in White* which is currently being serialised on BBC One.

Collins didn't marry, he lived with two consecutive lovers and fathered three children, and his addiction to Laudanum led to a decline in his health and his work.

February 2017

Our guest speaker in February was Veronica Smith who came to talk about Building Design and Conservation in Essex.

Veronica is a member of the Maldon and District Design Awards panel and explained that each year applicants compete for awards in building design, building conservation, sustainability, and conservation. Her talk was illustrated with pictures of the successful winners from 2016, and members were fascinated to look at the process of developing the Water Tower at Latchingdon, Wibblers Brewery at Southminster, and a renovated Georgian House in Maldon.

Veronica followed her interesting talk with a picture quiz where members were invited to identify 20 historic buildings and a prize went to the winner and runner up.