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## From the Chair

We are treated most months to some fascinating speakers who often have an extraordinary tale to tell. One of the most remarkable for me was in March last year when we learned about Medical Detection Dogs. I was reminded of this recently when I was listening to a very moving programme on Radio 4 in the series Life Changing. In this programme, we heard of the experience of Falklands veteran Geoff Stear, whose life has been changed, and indeed made possible, by the support offered by a 'medical detection dog'.

Life Changing is always worth listening to, and this episode especially so. This link will take you to it on BBC Sounds [Life Changing - A traumatised veteran's unlikely saviour - BBC Sounds](#). If you want to refresh your memory of the talk you can find a report on it by following this link [D&D u3a newsletter April 2024](#)

John

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## Monthly meeting report



I am pleased to say that there was a very positive response to my plea for volunteers to help us each month with providing and serving refreshments at our meetings. My threat that no-one would be allowed to leave until we had a group of people prepared to help out, proved unnecessary. Many thanks to those who have offered their services, it will be a great help to the committee.

If any other members would like to join the rota or would like to find out what it involves, please ask at our next meeting.

## Growing For Gold

The guest speaker at our October meeting was John Yeo who has had a long career working in the Torbay Parks Department. His love is for creating extraordinary

Living

Laughing

Learning

displays of planting which are more akin to engineering and sculpture rather than most people's ideas of 'gardening'. He is an experienced judge, including for South West in Bloom and Gardeners World show at the NEC.

Many of us have fond memories of elaborate planting displays in our municipal parks and public spaces, to delight holiday makers and local people during the summer season. Most of us have given little thought to how these are created and maintained, but marvel at the wit and ingenuity which goes into their design.



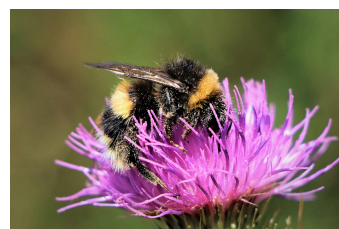
John showed us slides of exhibits that he and his colleagues have created, on a wonderful range of subjects: a Devon cottage, London guardsmen in their bearskins, the Pied Piper, Alice in Wonderland, Riding for the Disabled, Stephenson's Rocket, a Welsh Dragon and many more. There is immense attention to detail in the designs, but obviously great care over how the plants can be maintained and thriving throughout a long summer season.

Many of these designs involve a great deal of heavy metal structure which has to support a considerable weight of compost and plants. They can weigh up to one and a half tons, and be up to 16 feet tall. They have to be robust to stand the weather and a long time of display. Some have also been made with a view to being transported across the country to London shows, or to Wales for the Garden Festival in Merthyr Tydfil which some may remember from c1990. This logistical challenge has to be taken into account in the design, engineering and planting.

Sadly, the cost of work like this is considerable, and as we all know, the municipal parks departments which were in the forefront of these challenges have been severely reduced. They can cost up to £1.5 million pounds, much of which will be labour costs.

Locally, one of the most loved examples of this highly skilful work can be found on Riviera Way as you approach Torquay. As you pass by, you might like to give some thought to the skill and dedication of the gardeners who create these areas which give so much pleasure.

At our next monthly meeting, Clare Densley will talk to us about Beekeeping at Buckfast Abbey. If you would like to know something about this before coming to hear her talk, you might like to visit this website [Bees – Buckfast Abbey](#)



John Vick

## Interest Group news

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### Adventure Group

On Friday 10th November the adventure group boarded the **South Devon Railway** steam train at Buckfastleigh and set off at



speed (well, slow and sedate), perfect for enjoying our adventure and our perfectly produced pasties as we sat and pondered the list of characters; Tracey

Monroe, Cynthia Layne, Sean Regan, Reginald Carmichael, Prudence Carmichael, Bernice Leighton and Debbie Leighton. One of them a murderer and one yet to be the victim.

As we journeyed, the characters appeared and disappeared as they delivered their dialogue, dropped their clues and made their ways from carriage to carriage. The train reached its destination (Totnes) and set off

again on its return. Still no murder! But we were all pretty much convinced who the victim was to be – the odds were definitely stacking up against her. And everyone had a motive. Then the train stopped (not sure where –



it was dark outside). We were invited to disembark to view the bludgeoned dead body of Tracey Munroe lying prostrate on the platform. All aboard again, but who was the perpetrator? If you want to know, ask Roz Summerton, our sleuthing u3a adventurer, who not only guessed right, but also won a bottle of wine to boot! Yes, an enjoyable evening and experience.

David Pickton

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### Art Appreciation

In the October meeting, John gave a presentation on the sculptor, engraver and calligrapher Eric Gill (1882-1940). In his lifetime, Gill gained a considerable reputation not only for his art but also for his philosophy and approach to life. Indeed, in some people's eyes, he attained the status of a 20<sup>th</sup> century saint. However, his life – and to some extent, his art – has been cast in a very different light following the biography by Fiona McCarthy, published in 1989. What is now clear is that he was guilty of sexual abuse of his daughters while they were still teenagers, and also of sexual relationships with at least one, and most probably two, of his sisters. He also conducted numerous affairs throughout his life while remaining married to his wife, and also maintaining a strong adherence to his Catholic faith. At the very least, it is clear that he was a complex character but one who is still regarded as one of the finest artists of his era.

Gill established an early reputation for his engravings and lettering work for public buildings and memorials, and then moved towards sculpture. He was strongly influenced by the Arts and Crafts movement, by medieval sculptures in his home city of Chichester, as well as temple sculptures in



India. His first major commission was to produce the Stations of the Cross for the new Roman Catholic Westminster Cathedral. After the First World War, he produced a great many war memorials, while also producing some beautiful engravings and calligraphy for high quality, hand printed publications of works such as *Troilus and Criseyde*, *The Canterbury Tales* and *The Four Gospels*. Much of his work had religious themes, especially focussing on images of mother and child.

Throughout his life, Gill created a series of communities which included his own extended family as well as his apprentices and some fellow artists and craftsmen.

These communities had a strong religious identity, and Gill himself was a member of an order of Dominicans. He was reacting strongly against modern industrial society, and what he saw as the evils of mass production and the loss of craft skills. In common with other artists of his generation, Gill believed that there should be no distinction between 'artists' and 'craftsmen', and scorned the world of galleries and patrons. He promoted socialist views, although not those of the mainstream left wing parties. He also believed that there should be no distinction between the 'spiritual' and 'earthly' domains, and this certainly determined his attitude to sexual matters.

His views were a considerable challenge to orthodox views, including those of the Catholic church. He regarded sexual activity as blessed by god, and much of his art

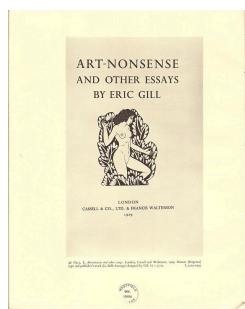
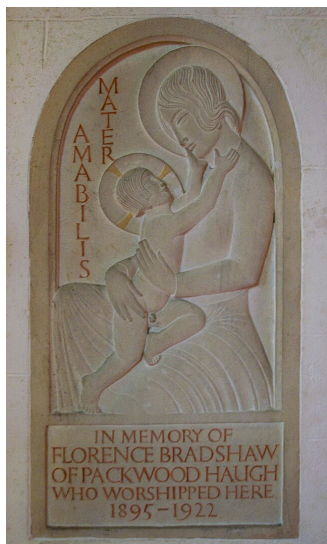
reflects his belief that sex should be celebrated rather than in some sense 'hidden away'. He produced numerous beautiful life studies, often using his daughters and sisters as models, as well as other female members of his communities. What we now know from McCarthy's biography is that at the time he was producing these images of his daughters, Gill was also having sex with them.

Gill's reputation was growing, and he was securing high profile commissions for sculptures in prominent locations such as the BBC's Broadcasting House, underground stations in London, and the League of Nations building in Geneva. He was also gaining a reputation as a designer of typefaces, many of which continue to be used today. Gill Sans is one of the most universal typefaces, appearing on the covers of Penguin Books, the BBC, and even the Flying Scotsman.

Not surprisingly, the group discussed the controversial aspects of Gill's life and work. There was strong appreciation for his art, and there was little support for those who have argued that his work should be removed from public view. There was recognition that when we view his work, we cannot be unaffected by what we now know

about his behaviour, but that should not amount to his work being 'cancelled'. We can recognise his talent and achievements but we do not need to erect a statue to celebrate his life.

Perhaps surprisingly, given attitudes towards other high profile figures whose unacceptable and illegal personal conduct has been exposed, his reputation amongst art historians remains as high as it has ever been.





At our next meeting on **Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> November** members are invited to select and talk briefly about a work of art on the theme of 'Other Cultures' or 'Cultural Connections'.

Lynne Vick, Convener

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### Discussion Group

Our October meeting focused on Freedom of speech. We found it was a topical subject and attacked it with enthusiasm. Like any freedom, it is limited by the extent to which it cannot harm others.

Before the social media era, it was easy to choose an audience and target messages to it, but now, with universal access, it is much easier to offend one group or another. The risk may be cancellation and removal, yet we observed that the cancel culture is less pervasive in recent times.

We also noted that in dictatorships and under aspiring dictators freedom is denied to anyone not toeing the official line. Offensive and harmful messages are encouraged if they come from the regime representatives, but can cost people their freedom and even life if they are opposing the official views.

We expressed concerns about the "snowflake" attitudes among the young and discussed at length the situation of islamophobia and antisemitism as concrete examples.

Our next meeting is scheduled for **19th November**, when we'll exchange views on retirement. Good or Bad?

We are still looking for interested parties to join our group!

Dana Dima, Convener

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### Dog Walking

We meet on Tuesdays and continue to increase in numbers, but we are never too large a group as not everyone can make it. We have also had walks on the occasional Friday.



The Ferry over to Shaldon is a favourite and a good stand by is Teignmouth Beach meeting by Teign Bean, walking along the beach and up through Mules Park. It is easy via bus or train for those who do not have access to a car. We are happy as long as there's good coffee, and the walks are great for socialising dogs, especially puppies and rescues.

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### French Conversation

We met twice in October .

We read and discussed an article "Sommes-nous vraiment devenues plus impolis?"

We generally felt that people were less respectful nowadays, quoting things like you didn't call people by their first names as everyone including trades people now do.

It's also common these days to have a sign in shops, surgeries, etc asking us to be respectful as the staff are often subject to verbal, or even physical abuse.

We felt that we used to respect our elders and those in authority (maybe too much!)

Youngsters seem to have more of a sense of entitlement and often don't use their ps and qs, eg "I want" and not "Please can I have?"

The use of mobile phones has proliferated and you see people constantly looking at them or talking to the extent of sometimes ignoring their children. AND they can have a huge presence at meal times.



The older generation worry about the overuse of tablets, game consoles, etc when children should be out in the fresh air playing with friends.

The article comments that each generation thinks the latter is more polite!

At our second meeting we talked about what profession we might have chosen if we'd followed our childhood dreams.

We had interesting contributions, for example a couple of people would have been dancers, either ballerinas or tap dancers, some wanted to be a film star, a shop assistant, a teacher or a doctor. One used to line her dolls up and become their teacher though, as she grew older she considered interior design and catering. As an adult, she became a teacher!

Finally we shared experiences and recommendations of eateries. We also heard of John's birthday celebrations and were

very impressed with the cake Lynne had baked. She paid homage to his success growing vegetables.

Bridie, Convenor

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### In Our Own Write

Five of us met to read our stories which on this occasion had to include a reference to an island.

As per usual we had greatly differing versions even a kitchen island making an appearance in a story about a party loving lottery winner.

The others were about:-

A family taking a holiday by the seaside spotting mermaids on a nearby island.

An obnoxious cruise passenger who failed to make her return on time from a trip on an island (much to the delight of the other passengers).

A very descriptive piece about a decaying building on an island.

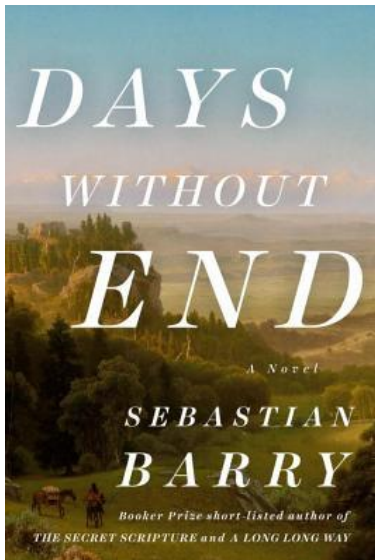
A man who following the death of his wife retired to the island that he had purchased for her becoming reclusive with little contact with his children until an accident made him review his decision.

Our next meeting will be on the **10th November** when the topic will be "It all started when..."

Travina White, Convenor

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## Literature



Days Without End by Sebastian Barry

This novel is in the form of a first person narrative by Thomas McNulty, an Irish emigre to America alone at the age of fourteen.

It encompasses three tragic events, the Irish potato famine, the Indian

wars, and the American civil war.

Thomas teams up with another destitute boy, John Cole, and their friendship grows into a lifelong loving relationship.

They find employment working in a dance hall dressed as girls to partner the miners in a small community with no women. The men love their dance evenings and, though fully aware that Thomas and John are boys, treat them with gallantry. Some of the group found this hard to believe although it was true that men at the time did dance together.

When the adolescent boys become young men they regretfully have to part company with their kindly employer and join the army but they keep in touch with him. Later on in the story they join his newly formed minstrel show and perform in a romantic drama with Thomas as the female heroine.

Sebastian Barry always tackles challenging subject matter in his work with great compassion and humanity. The battles and resulting death and injuries accompanied by disease and the hardships endured by the

soldiers up against bitter winters, searing hot summers and driving rain are described in such excellent prose as to have a certain poetry. The descriptions of nature and landscapes are also beautifully drawn but the story is harrowing, particularly the massacres of Native American tribes and some of the group found the book too violent and grim.

Others thought that the love between Thomas and John, the quality of the writing, the humour and comic relief mitigated against the horror.

A young Indian girl, Winona, is adopted by the two men and though well-loved and cared for, it was said that she was not given a say and we wanted to learn about how she felt about her losses and the

trauma that she had suffered.

Some of us appreciated the narrative and considered it authentic but others missed dialogue. We also disagreed over whether or not Thomas had maintained his Irish lyrical voice. It was a tough read but it is the job of writers, poets and artists to bear witness to the harsh realities of war.

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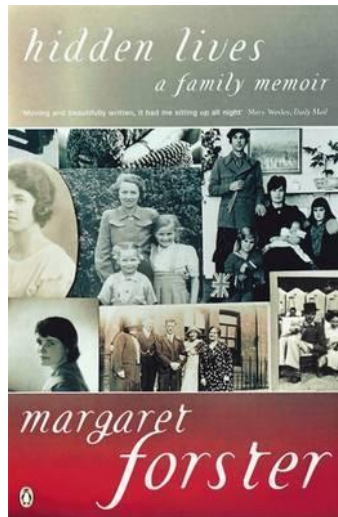
### Page Turners

In October the Page Turners read 'Hidden Lives' by Margaret Forster. Margaret Forster wrote over twenty novels and about fourteen biographies and memoirs. This memoir was published in 1995.

It tells of the lives of her grandmother - a former servant with a secret illegitimate daughter, her mother and herself. Margaret's mother and grandmother are portrayed as locked into lives of duty, marrying because



to be a wife and mother was the only expectation they and others had of them and putting their family first at the expense of their own satisfaction. Margaret, on the other hand, was determined from a young age to live a fulfilling life as a writer and not to be hampered by husband and babies. She was fortunate enough to have been born at a time when women were able to aspire to 'have it all' and when she chose to have the husband and babies, it did not prevent her from also having a very successful career. The book examines the choices available to the three generations of women and celebrates the changes.



Of course, many in our group are women and we all have mothers and grandmothers whose lives overlap the timeframe of this book so we were all able to relate to the themes in so many ways and compare the events of the book with those in our own families. For this reason we all enjoyed the book, although some of us wondered how the author's mother and grandmother would have felt about their secrets being shared so openly.

We found the book easy to read and engaging. The descriptive writing enabled us to easily picture the locations and people. During our discussion we focussed on the way in which women's lives have changed over the past century, considering the events in the book, our own lives and the current generation. I think we concluded that we were born at the best time - we definitely had more choices than our mothers and grandmothers and did not have

to contend with the unemployment and financial pressures that affect young people today.

If you are interested in reading this book for yourself, please get in touch and swap our page turner for one of your own. (I am delighted to say that someone actually did this last month and I have an interesting looking book on my reading pile as a result!)

Deborah Wallis - convenor

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## Quiz Group

After a three week break the quizzers were ready to tackle the sixty questions that were set. The themes ranged from General Knowledge to the Solar System, from Hit or Miss to Trousers, from In the Pink to Posts. A mixed bag!

The hit or miss round was definitely a hit, with scores of 8,9 and one 10. That said the posts were knocked down as that was the lowest scoring theme.

I always like to see how you would have fared and so here goes; a question from each round.

Which spirit replaces vodka to turn a Bloody Mary into a Bloody Maria?

What celestial object is expected to return to our skies in 2061?

Jefferson City is the capital of which US state?

What is the term for trousers with an adjustable strap or elastic at the ankle?

Who is the artist behind the iconic Rose period?

At what time in the evening is the last post played at the Menin gate?

Our second quiz zoomed in on the subjects of Place names in films, General knowledge, Locations, Shakespeare characters, Two answers and Witches and wizards.



Would you have known that...? 'Film stars don't die in Liverpool' was an allegedly true story of an aging Hollywood actress and her much younger lover.

Margaret Thatcher died in 2013

The Rusty spotted cat is native to Asia

Cinna and Calpurnia are characters in the play 'Julius Caesar'

The country of Panama has borders with Colombia and Costa Rica

Thomas Edison was the wizard of Menlo Park

So did you know ? If so, well done.

As for the quizzers they excelled on the Two answers Round. However it was different when it came to Shakespeare characters. Poor old Will! It's all good fun and fellowship...

Now it is on to November with our next two quizzes scheduled for **Mondays 10th and the 24th November.**

Graham Carey

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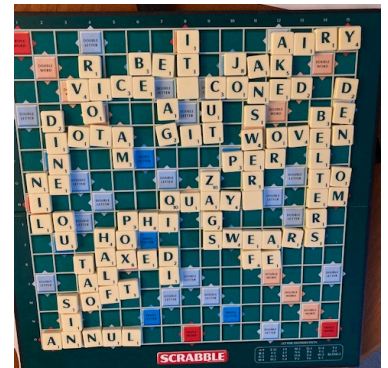
## Scrabble

We had a bumper attendance of eight players at our last meeting on Monday. It took some time to sort ourselves into groups of players and hence had a slightly delayed start.

For the first game I was matched against one of our more experienced players and was suitably thrashed.

For the second game we had two players itching to play against each other, so we let them get on with it to produce this result.

Judging from their conversation they had an enjoyable competitive game producing one seven letter word which I believe led to victory.



In the game that I was part of a close neck and neck developed, of which I hasten to say I was not part of.

An enjoyable afternoon and we meet again to compete on **Monday 24 November.**

George Mansfield

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## Strollers Social Walking Group

Again, several apologies, and just four of us on our Dawlish & District u3a Strollers September walk where we explored the lovely Bradley Woods then had our refreshments at the Bakers Park café in Newton Abbot.

Our next Strollers walk (suggested by one of our walkers) is on **Thursday Nov 13th** when we're catching the train to Exmouth, walking back along the level Exe Trail to Lympstone then catching our train home. It's best to buy a return train ticket to Exmouth!

The outward train leaves Teignmouth at 12.44pm and Dawlish at 12.50pm; return trains from Lympstone leave at 15.27pm, 15.59pm and 16.27pm.

New u3a walkers are always welcome to join our monthly Strollers walks.

Jean Gitsham, Convenor

## Tea and Chat

We meet the first Thursday of each month in the Riverside Building 2 – 4pm.

We have tables set aside for games and Theatre Group who want to discuss productions and book tickets together so that we can sit together. We also have a table for members who just want to have a cuppa and enjoy some company.



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## Dawlish Notice Board

Do you have an interest in Chess?

Every Thursday from 10am to 12 o'clock there is an open chess group at the Methodist church Brunswick place.

All levels of experience are welcome. Just call in, say hi and have a game.

Tea, coffee and cake available at just £1 each.

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## Contact us:

You are invited to send us all your group news and updates.

**Newsletter Editor:** Please contact Roz Summerton via [newsletter@u3a.dawlish.info](mailto:newsletter@u3a.dawlish.info).

**Webmasters:** Please contact Dave and Miggy Pickton via [webmaster@u3a.dawlish.info](mailto:webmaster@u3a.dawlish.info)

Want to know more about Dawlish & District u3a? Check out our website: [u3a.dawlish.info](http://u3a.dawlish.info).