

December 2009

Issue 25

Season's greeting to all members! For practical reasons, the winter issue of the Newsletter appears a month earlier than usual. As ever, my thanks to all regular contributors for the words and pictures below.

LT (Ed)

Autumn Lunch & AGM, Wednesday 23 September, Sports Pavilion

Sixty-four members attended the autumn buffet lunch and talk which preceded the AGM. Professor Andrew Oswald (Department of Economics) spoke on 'Happiness and Economics' in an entertaining presentation in which he suggested that society's goal in the 21st century should perhaps be happiness rather than economic growth (GNH rather than GDP!). This raised the question of whether it is possible to study happiness and mental well-being in a systematic way. He illustrated his talk with examples showing the deep connections between happiness, money and health, such as the effects of high blood pressure, diet, relationships, stress, unemployment, and income on individuals at various periods in the life cycle. Research had shown that, paradoxically, growth in income is not now correlated with growth in happiness. Perhaps most interesting to this particular audience was his observation that 'happiness is U-shaped over the life cycle', with a chart showing the pattern of reported happiness at various stages in life. The high point comes in the 61-70 decade, so we found ourselves in the position of being able to consider our own experiences in the light of this finding.

Professor Oswald's talk was followed by the formalities of the AGM. A list of WRSA Committee Members for 2009-2010 is printed at the end of this Newsletter.

LT(Ed)

BURSARY NEWS

2009/2010 Bursary Awards

The WRSA bursary awards are continuing to be popular and this year we had seventeen applications covering a wide range of topics. The Committee agreed to give awards of up to an overall total value of £1000 pounds and also formed a Subcommittee to select the bursary winners. Members of this were Steve Van Toller, Colin Brummitt, Liz Thompson and Joan Cole. Requests for financial support ranged from international meetings, these being well outside our level of awards and, therefore, easy to deal with, and other more moderate proposals within our price range, all of which required careful consideration. The final selection, agreement about which was remarkably consistent, was arrived at independently by the Subcommittee members. It broke new ground in that one of the recipients, Adam Perrin, is an undergraduate engineer representing a Students Union (S.U) Engineers without Borders. His proposal, which was awarded £500, is for the erection of a hydraulic ram pump to irrigate the Tocil woods allotment, which is run by the S.U Green Food Co-op Society. The plan is to sell produce from the allotment. WRSA members will be able to go and see both the allotment and the water pump, when installed, and perhaps even buy some of the garden produce. The second

bursary awarded this year, also for £500, is to enable Emma Coffey and the S.U Music Society to run a course for local school children, teaching them the skills required in the musical theatre. The award will enable them, this year, to hire costumes and to book a venue for the children to put on a performance at the end of the course. This show will be held sometime during the first term of the 2010 academic year. Hopefully, we will be able to let our members know when and where this will be.

Steve Van Toller

Warwick Medical School Big Band and Singers

'A Musical Extravaganza for an Autumn Afternoon' – Sunday 25 October 2009

Having been invited to attend a musical event at the WMS, by Dan Border, a 2007 WRSA Bursary recipient to form a 'charity big band to benefit medical students', Steve and I were pleasantly surprised to discover that WMS had earlier this year formed a choir alongside its Big Band, following the carol singing success of a small group of WMS singers in 2008. The choir, which had received financial support from Professor Yvonne Carter, Dean of the Medical School, had already performed in April 2009 at the Nuneaton Festival of Arts and won the Len Rose Bowl for Choral Singing, achieving a distinction for its performance. We were, therefore, offered a first half of choral music, followed by the Big Band sound after an interval, during which cheese and wine was provided (included in the ticket price).

The choir sang a variety of music including pieces by Rutter, Bruckner, Byrd, Tallis and Taverner, the latter's, 'Song for Athene', perhaps, its most ambitious rendition. Choristers sang with clarity of diction and purity of tone. Many pieces were unaccompanied and the choir sustained pitch impeccably; clearly this was not a problem for these young vibrant singers. A particular treat was the choir's delivery of Matyas Seiber's (1905-60) 'Three Hungarian Folk-Songs', composed for unaccompanied mixed voice chorus, a perfect choice for this relatively small group of choristers. Although somewhat depleted in the male voice sections, the quality of the men's performance compensated for this. In fact the balance of the choir was surprisingly good, given the predominance of female voices. Whilst I have no knowledge of the former experience of the choir's conductor, Fiona Windsor, who also sang in a semi-chorus performance of music by Tallis, it was clear that Ms Windsor was well in control of enthusiastic singers who responded to her clear yet sensitive direction, with few (if any for the most part) heads buried in music copies, and the overall result was extremely pleasing. This choral performance was tinged with sadness as it was dedicated to the memory of Professor Yvonne Carter.

The Big Band second half was superb, with Rachel Brooke, a soprano in the choir, offering vocal contribution to several of the numbers, singing with style and ease. The Band's conductor, Dan Border, doubled on both trumpet and keyboard, having already sung bass in the choir. Two other instrumentalists had also performed in the choir and in the semi-chorus, all concerned demonstrating that this is, indeed, a multi-talented group of musicians. Although still quite a small 'big' band (there were only eleven individual musicians), it is to be hoped that the band will expand in size in line with its wide and varied repertoire. After we had enjoyed Gershwin, Hefti, Basie and Garner jazz classics, to name but a few, we were treated to a grand finale of orchestra and choir performing a special arrangement of Duke Ellington's, 'It don't mean a thing', which was very well received by the audience and a fitting ending to this showcase of the music at WMS.

The concert was well attended (extra seating had to be brought in) and definitely worth taking time on a Sunday afternoon in October to attend. We did not notice any other

WRSA members present, their absence possibly due to the very short notice the WRSA was given about the event, which was a shame because they missed a truly enjoyable concert. We felt that the WRSA Bursary awarded to this big band enterprise had proved to be money very well spent, evidently put to extremely good use. May this music venture go from strength to strength; it is a musical experience to look out for in the future.

Sam Van Toller

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BUTTERFLIES GALORE: Withybrook and Shilton walk, 6 August 2009

As this was the first walk held in August, it was encouraging that seventeen members arrived at the Pheasant at Withybrook on a warm day with blue skies – just a memory as we read this in winter. Following a field with some over-inquisitive bullocks, a few fields of waist high cereal crops were crossed until a wilder area was reached, where the rains of the previous days created a slippery area not enjoyed (!) by one or two members. Passing Hopsford Hall and going under the west coast main line and a canal, an area of wild flowers was reached, where the butterflies were in abundance.

Some disapproving stares were in evidence as we passed the club house of the golf course near Shilton on the public right of way, following the diversion to avoid the fairways. More butterflies were seen on the edge of the golf course until the village of Shilton was reached. There the group divided into a few who took the road back to the Pheasant, and the main group who took the higher ground over more fields of arable crops and meadows. A well earned lunch followed at the Pheasant, unfortunately inside as the forecast rain appeared to be imminent.

Malcolm Wilding

Newbold-on-Avon walk: 6 October 2009

Although 17 members and friends had indicated that they would attend, last-minute cancellations resulted in only 11 being present on the day. The walk coincided with the first day of rain in the area after more than a month of dry weather, and it was drizzling as the party converged on the Barley Mow pub in Newbold-on-Avon. It is said that there is never bad weather, only unsuitable clothing, and the party was soon arrayed in waterproof hats, jackets and trousers. However, by the time we set off it was dry and the weather improved as the morning wore on. Part-way round we paused to allow the removal of excess clothing, and we ended the walk in sunshine. From the pub we set off east along the canal towpath, then north-east on the Brownsover road for a few hundred yards before turning almost due north up a field edge. We maintained this general direction for something over a mile, at one stage crossing a field of newly sprouted wheat where, it seemed, no walkers had been before us and we had to define a new track. In this region there were extensive views in all directions, mostly attractive countryside, and even the Rugby Cement plant was not too intrusive at a distance of several miles. At a crossroads of paths we turned east, first along the edge of pasture, and then on an old green road – rather overgrown – that brought us to the B4112 into Harborough Magna. Continuing in the



same direction, and then swinging south to cross the Brinklow Road we passed some very noisy dogs, shortly afterwards stopping to talk to some small black and white horses who were pleased to see us. Finally we picked up the Oxford Canal again and followed it along the towpath and through the Newbold tunnel to our starting point. The pub was not over-busy, and our pre-ordered lunches were served promptly and were as tasty as usual. Those who came prepared to brave the rain had a fine time.

Chris Hall

Grandborough walk: 4 November 2009

Fifteen of us assembled at the Shoulder of Mutton pub in Grandborough on Wednesday November 4th. We should have been more in number but several would-be walkers had to drop out at the last minute with illness or other problems. We set off on a walk led by Caroline and Godfrey Carr in glorious sunshine and after leaving the village had to cross a very large field over which the right of way had not yet been re-marked after ploughing and seeding. Just as we were successfully completing this we luckily saw two figures hastening along in the distance behind us. They had arrived late after having had navigational problems in finding Grandborough, but had been sent on the right route by helpful locals.



We re-grouped and then moved on to firm farm tracks which make this a good winter walk. These take you through a very open area with attractive views in all directions. En route we met a tall figure equipped with impressive walking gear and binoculars, who turned out to be conducting a survey of this particular area, which was both a farm, and a commercial fishing facility. It was clear that considerable work was also being done to encourage wildlife. Our warden's job was to monitor the area to see to how far a commercial farm with appropriate grants could sustain wildlife in comparison with a nature reserve. He told us that six pairs of short-eared owls and a hen harrier had been seen in the area last year.

After covering some 5 miles we arrived on schedule at 1.15pm. for lunch at the Shoulder of Mutton which was produced promptly by the very helpful landlord and it was much enjoyed after so much fresh air and sunshine.

Godfrey and Caroline Carr

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Visit to Greenwich Village: 17 November 2009

Over 30 members went by coach to Greenwich Village. Passing through the outskirts of London we saw the progress of the stadia at the village for the 2012 Olympics.

Opposite the drop off point in Greenwich was a Cafe Rouge and the majority of members went in for a welcome coffee. With a diversity of interesting things to do, members soon formed their own groups and visited places in their own time.

The most popular places of interest included the National Maritime Museum that featured Britain's seafaring past and the Royal Observatory, built by Sir Christopher Wren, the home of our Greenwich Mean Time and the famous Prime Meridian of the

world - longitude 00'0". From the Observatory we were able to enjoy panoramic views of London in autumnal sunshine. The Queen's House was completed around 1638 and introduced England to the beauties of Palladian architecture with its sweeping staircase. The Great Hall is a spectacular setting with an elaborate tiled marble floor and grand gallery above. The time soon passed before we reassembled, having lost no one, for our homeward journey.

Everyone agreed that it had been a worthwhile visit enhanced by glorious November weather.

Alan Foster

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Notes and Dates for Your Diary

Membership

A Subscription Renewal form is included with Newsletter mailing. Please return this as soon as possible, and be sure to fill in your current contact details. It is especially important that I have **up-to-date email addresses**, please, and that you notify me of any changes if these occur during the year. Thank you.

Bill Prichard (Membership Secretary)

Spring Lunch

The date for the Spring Lunch is **Thursday 22 April 2010**, in the Sports Pavilion. Further details to be announced later.

A gentle reminder to all (including the Committee!) of the importance of returning your attendance slip for our seasonal lunches – numbers are important when placing the catering order.

Newsletter contributions

If any member would like to submit a short piece of general interest for possible publication in the Newsletter, please do send your contribution to the Editor. Issue 26 will appear in July 2010.

Visit to Van Gogh Exhibition: Thursday 11 March 2010

Mel Lloyd-Smith, Chairman of the Friends of the Mead Gallery extends an invitation to WRSA members to join in this exhibition visit. See separate sheet for further details.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS 2009-2010

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