

Newsletter – Q3 – 2026

Editor's Welcome

Oh, the summer time is coming,
And the trees are sweetly blooming,
And the wild mountain thyme
Grows around the blooming heather.

Not round here it doesn't.

Hello and welcome to Summer! This quarter's edition features three articles :- Ann McNorvell continues her narrative of the Vikings, Chris Belton reports on the recent London Walk and I write about choirs.

Peter's report (below) is striking a chord for me as Karen and I are also hoping to downsize in the near future. In preparation, I have been carting many books to the charity chop in Burgess Hill. I've kept a sample couple of books from each author and said goodbye to the others. Heart-breaking. However, there's a lovely new library in Burgess Hill and there's a good library in Brighton so I'm sure I'll make do.

I also had about 600 old golf balls. Why so many? When you begin playing golf, your driving tends to be so wild that you don't even bother to look for your bad shots and you lose about five balls every round. As you get better, your drives finish a few yards off the fairway so its worth looking for them and you generally find about five other balls as well. Once your driving becomes more accurate and you hit the fairways, you tend not to lose or find many more (unless you deliberately tramp through the rough to look for them). So far, I've taken about 500 balls to various charity shops.

I'm also a frequent visitor at the local 'civic amenity site' or 'tip' as we used to call it. I think they know me pretty well by now.

Chairman's Report – Peter Smith

Although I have three months every time to prepare this report it always seems to creep up on me and then I have to have a bit of rush to get something written. Our current Editor Jonathan is always very early getting his work done so it comes as a bit more of a surprise when my contribution is requested.

Of course, the topic of the weather is always foremost in mind, it being the main topic of conversation in this country, probably because it changes every day. Unfortunately writing the article at any time means that by time it is published it's quite likely that the weather is completely the opposite.

This time is no different, just a couple of weeks ago it was sweltering hot as a heat wave swept across the country giving us all hope of a mild increase in the weather improving. This week it's gone completely the other way, cold winds blustery showers and a general dullness with colder temperatures all round, we even had to turn a heater on for a short while earlier this week. All very frustrating.

But not the only one in my life.

Having moved house, well house to a flat, inevitably there are things that need doing, electrics, a bit of plumbing, blinds for the windows etc. I have to say it's a real struggle to get things done, I don't haggle over prices, if it's too much I don't have it, I don't expect people to work for less than they think the job is worth. What amazes me is the number of trades people who don't return calls or turn up to price the job or even quote after they have visited.

Getting the blinds measured and fitted was a real challenge, four companies failed to visit and or quote, I even measured them myself and visited the factory, gave them my sizes and told them what I wanted, they promised to call me later in the day, nothing. I ended up ordering them online and I'm fitting them myself, yes, I have the experience and knowledge but it's taken weeks to resolve and I would prefer to pay someone a reasonable amount as I'm not getting any younger and I don't like ladders.

Thanks to everyone who have participated in the various Retiree Events over the past few weeks, myself I miss them but unfortunately my legs won't let me get around as much as I would like.

From Ann McNorvell (Editor of the e-newsletter)

Ann continues her tales of the Vikings

Sometime in the late 60s, my frail, but courageous, mum was in hospital once again. When she came home (children were not allowed to visit in those days), she was excited to tell us that she had been talking to a lady whose son had recently written a book!

The son in question was John Julius Norwich and the book was "The Normans in the South", the first of two volumes (the second is titled "The Kingdom in the Sun") which recounted what is sometimes called the second Norman Conquest, the establishment of the Kingdom of Sicily

A few years later, when I was studying A level History (Europe 800-1450ish), both volumes had pride of place in my teacher, Miss Kew's personal library. Though scholarly works, they are very readable, and are both still available in various formats.

Before we go further I should explain that the Normans (North men) were actually Vikings who settled in what is now France after a treaty between the Frankish king Charles III and the Viking leader Rollo, the great great great grandfather of William the Conqueror.

The Normans retained their Viking martial habits, their interest in trade, and their adventurous nature. The first Normans to reach the Mediterranean in c.999 were mercenaries who reported home on the rich pickings in the area. Unlike the conquest of England, the establishment of the Kingdom of Sicily was unplanned and piecemeal and took about 150 years, with numerous leaders, battles and ebbs and flows of fortune as they seized land from both the Byzantine Empire and the Saracens. The Kingdom established in 1130 included Sicily, most of the southern peninsula of Italy, Malta and parts of North Africa.

The key Norman figure of this period was Robert Guiscard (1015-1085), who was responsible for taking much of southern Italy and Sicily from the Byzantines. Arriving in the area seeking land and fortune, he was both politically astute (Guiscard means cunning) - ensuring he had Papal support and making useful marriages - and a good military leader.

Although the pure Norman dominance only lasted 1197, the kingdom itself under various European dynasties, endured until the early 19th century.

Obituaries

Mr David Roger Rowley	Mrs Tojo Lorraine Melville	Mr Edward John Smith
Mr Ronald Kent	Mr Trevor Sydney Wright	Mr Henry Stern
Mr Terence John West	Mrs Audrey Kathleen Huggett	Mr Michael Byrne
Mrs Jean-Susan Medhurst	Mr Derek Robert George Bicknell	Mr Norman Peers
Mrs Dorothy Gladys Compton	Ms Cheryl Sims	Mrs Gillian Margaret Harrod-Edwards
Mrs Margaret Joan Jones	Mr Jeffrey Birch	Mrs Dorothy Haggart
Mrs J Morris	Miss Josephine Tye	Mr Terence Brian Rust
Ms Jean Anne Prowting		

From Chris Belton

Retiree Event – London Walk 20 May

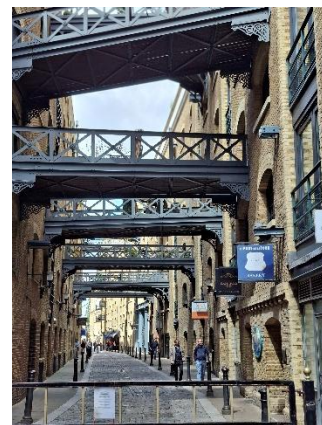
What I like about these walks is the fact that, in general, it takes you to places that you have never been to before. The group met at Bermondsey Underground station and we walked back to London Bridge station. None of the streets we walked along during our two hours had I set foot in before.

Our group was ten strong and we were joined by four others. We headed off from the busy Jamaica Road and into a tranquil housing development built with all the “mod cons” of an indoor toilet and bathroom and new to the times, gardens at the front. They replaced the slums that were once there. A huge improvement in the lives of residents. It wasn't far from here that we caught our first glimpse of the River Thames and the site of several key events. The headquarters of the River Police and the location for one of JMW Turner's most famous paintings – The Fighting Temeraire as featured on the Bank of England £20 note! Next up came a floating village of houseboats complete with shrubs, trees and a floating cycle storage park. We heard how the wharves were used in days gone by and how they have, mostly, been turned into living spaces. We heard about the hobby of Thames Mudlarking and as the tide was out, we got to see the mud!! We heard about pirates and hanging and about ship breakers that operated along the Thames, which was where the Temeraire was headed in the painting. Having observed quiet housing areas with wonderful gardens, fancy housing for “city gents” complete with everything they might need, we ended up at Guys Hospital– thankfully though none of us needed treatment!

It was just over two hours of information entertainingly delivered by our guide Aaron. I'm also glad to say that the weather was kind to us.

Two points became clear. The first was that of the huge variations in architectural styles that all seemed to complement each other. Secondly, despite being in the centre of a huge city – just how quiet it was along our route.

Keep an eye on the website's Events page for further events although we are taking a summer break for a few months.



Choirs

My wife, Karen, came in one evening a couple of years ago and told me that we had joined the Pyecombe Village Choir (PVC). This surprised me a little as she told me that many years ago, she had sung on a stage once (with her children in the audience) and somewhere found herself at the front of the choir. They then sang some pieces of which she knew neither the words nor the music. Rabbits and headlights come to mind. If you have ever seen a clip of Tory MP John Redwood singing the Welsh National Anthem, you will know what I mean.

Now neither Karen nor I have good voices. However, the nice thing about choral singing is that it doesn't matter too much – everyone blends in together.

As a child, I attended a Church school in Rottingdean and all the boys there were expected to join the Church choir from seven years old and stay until our voices broke. Choir practice was an hour and a half on Friday evening and we had to sing on Sundays at 11:00 and 18:30. I never learnt to read music so the practice was important. Of course, we resented all the TV we had to miss. However, our choirmaster recorded attendances and we got a welcome paypacket at the end Christmas time (probably a couple of pounds). I particularly enjoyed weddings during the summer when we were paid a half-crown for each (half-hour) service. There were sometimes three on the same day. Big money.

We became quite familiar with the traditional hymns and on those fairly rare occasions when I go to Church, I still enjoy singing them. Nowadays, however, things for me are a bit more tricky. Melodies are typically pitched at Sopranos so some are either too high for me or too low. That is the trouble with 'Unison' in which everyone sings the same tune. The alternative is 'Harmony' in which each part (Soprano, Alto, Tenor & Bass) sings their own tune. The composer/arranger can then ensure that each part is comfortably within its own range. Harder to learn, of course. Sometimes, the parts that aren't the melody are a little uninteresting (especially if you happen to be familiar with the melody). On the other hand, good harmony can be very effective. It's a team effort.

I sing the Bass parts usually in PVC though my range isn't good and I think technically I'm more of a Baritone (between Bass and Tenor). True basses are actually quite rare.

The PVC repertoire is quite eclectic. Pyecombe doesn't have a town hall so we usually practise in the Church. We return the favour by leading the congregation at Easter/Harvest/Christmas services. However, we also sing popular songs, show tunes, spirituals, folk songs. "Wild Mountain Thyme" which I quoted in my Editor's Comments is an example. I hadn't come across it before but it's very catchy.

Our choirmistress sometimes accompanies on the piano and we have two flutes, two guitars and an accordionist to call on.

Right now, we are practising to sing in a local care home. The audience are usually very appreciative and are encouraged to join in if they know the songs.

Being in a choir is challenging but a good social activity and very rewarding. I can recommend it.

And finally, a few anecdotes

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

That Sherlock Holmes was anything but mythical to many was shown by the fact that I have had many letters addressed to him with requests that I forward them. Watson has also had a number of letters in which he has been asked for the address or for the autograph of his more brilliant confrère. A press-cutting agency wrote to Watson asking whether Holmes would not wish to subscribe. When Holmes retired several elderly ladies were ready to keep house for him, and one sought to ingratiate herself by assuring me that she knew all about bee-keeping and could 'segregate the queen'. I had considerable offers also for Holmes if he would examine and solve various family mysteries. Once the offer — from Poland — was that I should myself go, and my reward was practically left to my own judgement. I had judgement enough, however, to avoid it altogether.

Zsa Zsa Gabor

Asked how many husbands she had had, Miss Gabor looked puzzled "you mean apart from my own?" she inquired.

Alfred Lord Tennyson (1809 – 1892)

An enthusiastic admirer of his, who was staying at Aldworth, was, to her intense delight, invited to accompany him for a walk in his old English garden. They paced the terrace together in silence; he said nothing and she was afraid to speak for fear of losing some priceless utterance. The silence remained unbroken until they had returned to their

starting-point, when he remarked abruptly, 'Coals are very dear.' She received this without comment and he remained in abstraction for another tour of the terrace, when he spoke again. 'I get all my meat from London', he said, and again she did not see her way to following up the subject. Another long silence, and then he stopped beside a clump of carnations which were obviously drooping, and she waited hopefully for a comment that she could always treasure. But all Tennyson said was: 'It's those cursed rabbits!' which was the sum total of his conversation on that particular afternoon.

Victor Spinetti (1929 – 2012)

I heard this from Andy Mealing who had met Victor Spinetti (a long-time Brighton resident). Spinetti was a close friend of Princess Margaret and had told her a rather risqué joke. He got a phone call some time later from the Princess asking him to remind her of the joke so she could tell it to her sister.

Lord Attenborough (1923 – 2014) on brotherly love

(Response on being made a Distinguished Honorary Fellow of the University of Leicester in 2009. His brother David had already been made one in 2006 and was on the stage listening to the speech, which began as follows).

I have a grudge against my brother... The Vice Chancellor mentioned a film "In Which We Serve" which came to Leicester in (I think) 1942. And it was my first job. And when it came to Leicester, because I was a Leicester lad, the posters ignored John Mills and Noel Coward and Celia Johnson etc and STARRED this young man from Leicester with a part which I can assure you if you'd coughed at the wrong moment, you'd have missed me. However, I had a younger brother and the thought that a member of the family should be caught prancing about in public was really beyond any possible acceptance and so that at school I happen to know that when somebody said to Dave "Eh up Attie, is this Richard Attenborough a relation of yours?", Dave drew himself to his not inconsiderable height and replied "Only distant".

(The full speech is available to watch on Youtube. For content, delivery, pace and style, it is just about perfect).

Winston Churchill (on becoming Prime Minister in 1940)

Thus, then, on the night of the tenth of May, at the outset of this mighty battle, I acquired the chief power in the State, which henceforth I wielded in ever-growing measure for five years and three months of world war, at the end of which time, all our enemies having surrendered unconditionally or being about to do so, I was immediately dismissed by the British electorate from all further conduct of their affairs.

During these last crowded days of the political crisis my pulse had not quickened at any moment. I took it all as it came. But I cannot conceal from the reader of this truthful account that as I went to bed at about 3 a.m. I was conscious of a profound sense of relief. At last I had the authority to give directions over the whole scene. I felt as if I were walking with destiny, and that all my past life had been but a preparation for this hour and for this trial. Ten years in the political wilderness had freed me from ordinary party antagonisms. My warnings over the last six years had been so numerous, so detailed, and were now so terribly vindicated, that no one could gainsay me. I could not be reproached either for making the war or with want of preparation for it. I thought I knew a good deal about it all, and I was sure I should not fail. Therefore, although impatient for morning, I slept soundly and had no need of cheering dreams. Facts are better than dreams.

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