



June 2021 Bulletin

MONTHLY MEETING

Tuesday June 8th 2021

A world of Music with a Light Touch with Martyn Harrison

Martyn worked for 40 years as a professional opera singer. As a tenor he worked with major opera companies including ROH, Glyndebourne and other festival and regional groups. After retiring from London in 2012 his career diversified with time into several associated areas of the performing arts such as stage director, vocal coach and production reviewer.

Topic: Meopham U3A Monthly Talk

Time: 8 Jun 2021, 2.00 PM

Login details with original email post from Carole .

Gravesham Fringe Festival

The Gravesend Fringe festival runs from Fri 4th to Sat 12th June and comprises both online and live events. This is part of the larger Estuary Festival 2021 which is taking place on both sides of the Thames and includes information about the history and plant life of the area as well as walks, music and arts.

If you are interested, the link for more information is <https://graveshamfringe.org/>

NEWS FROM OUR GROUPS

Yoga

We have a dedicated but rather small group of people who make up our yoga group and it would be good to have a few more. May be you have tried on line yoga during the last year and would like to try it in person or maybe you feel now is the time to improve your balance and flexibility.

This is a group aimed at beginners and it's an excellent way to keep flexible and physically balanced as we get older and is recognised as being good for your mental wellbeing too. The Meopham Leisure Centre is looking for a new trainer and as soon as one is found we can begin the class again.

Please register your interest by dropping an email to mepgroups1@gmail.com



PIC•COLLAGE

The **Needlecraft** group finally met in person last week in a garden and it was wonderful to have a good catch up. We have been communicating via a WhatsApp group, sending photos of finished projects. Everyone has been busy working on a variety of projects ranging from dressmaking, cushion making, crocheting blankets, ribbon work, bag making and a range of Christmas gifts and decorations. We are hoping to meet again outside and are choosing a new project to work on.

THE MEN'S SINGING GROUP is looking for new members.

We are a small group, currently 5 singing members plus an accompanist. At the moment we are meeting every 3 or 4 weeks just to relax and enjoy ourselves by singing for around 45 minutes and enjoying chatting about future plans.

Prior to the pandemic we regularly sang at care homes and dementia centres. We also took part in a couple of monthly meetings in St John's Church.

Care homes apparently enjoyed our visits and we have several open invitations to go back and sing to them again as soon as regulations allow.

We sing a wide range of well-known songs, including music hall numbers, war time favourites and classics by groups including the Beatles, Abba, Simon and Garfunkel, the Carpenters and the Seekers. Songs from the shows and light opera choruses are also included in our repertoire and around Christmas we sing traditional seasonal music.

We are always looking to extend our repertoire.

There is no doubt at all that singing is very beneficial, physically, mentally and emotionally. That is well-documented extensively in research.

So all you men, please consider coming and joining us. Give it a try and then you can decide if it is for you.

If you'd like to talk to me to find out more about the group, please call me on 07535 266539 or email me on davidb35ga@gmail.com.

NATIONAL TRUST

The National Trust group are planning a trial trip to Ightham Mote after June 21st.

Although it will be a little different as everyone will have to book themselves in via the NT website it seems a good idea to give it a go. Ightham is very familiar to many members but it has the advantage of being close, a decent café and a picnic area, interesting grounds and a house for those who want to venture inside.

Members are welcome to just join us for lunch and a chat in the fresh air even if they have no wish to visit the property on this occasion.

Firmer details will be circulated after June 21st.

Provided this works for us then we can plan a few trips for the late summer and early autumn that are a bit further afield.

If you would like to join this group please send a message to crdcu3a@gmail.com to register your interest and be added to the email list.

Sea Shanties

Long before the recent TikTok exploits of Scottish postman Nathan Evans and his singing of the whaling song 'Wellerman' raised the profile of sea shanties many readers will no doubt remember, as I do, the BBC Schools Radio series 'Singing Together'. This got into most school classrooms at 11 o'clock each Monday in term time. That series, recorded live, started in September 1939 and continued into the 1980's and featured folk songs of the British Isles including sea shanties and songs of the sea.

Sea shanties are not unique to the British Isles and many other countries have their own traditions as can be witnessed at the many shanty and maritime festivals across Europe, the Americas and Oceania among others. They were initially chants to co-ordinate the timing of team work and shared many of the characteristics of songs sung in plantation fields, railroad building and prison chain gangs. They would last as long as the task in hand and vary by tempo depending on the nature of each task.

On a tall ship used for carrying commercial cargo the size of crew was generally kept to a minimum so maximising the effort from a limited number of men required synchronisation and precision. Many of the tasks were repetitive and boring, rhythmic chanting and later on singing made the time pass more quickly.

Of course we are talking of a time when there were no engines or powered machinery so 'mandraulics' was the only power available to raise the yards, sails, anchor, turn the capstans or winches and to operate the pumps that kept seawater at bay. Shanties were developed for each of these onboard tasks but the superstitious sailors would not sing them ashore so they were confined to life onboard. Songs of relaxation were part of life at sea but sung in off duty hours in the foc's'le and are termed forebitters. Importantly sea shanties were not sung on the ships of the Royal Navy where fiddle and drum were used to keep sailors in time while working the ship.

The musical structure of shanties owes much to the call and response found in the songs and music of African traditions and as their importance grew and was recognised there evolved the role of the Shanty Man who led the shanty by calling with the working crew responding. Given the noise of the wind, waves and sails at sea volume, clarity and brevity of lyrics became a characteristic of sea shanties in addition to the strong rhythms. Harmonies were very much the exception rather than the rule.

The etymological origin of the term sea shanty is not entirely certain. It may have derived from the field holler huts on the plantations of the Caribbean (as used today to describe shanty towns) or as likely from the French verb to sing 'Chanter'. Spellings are not standardised either and include Chantey, Shantie, Shantey.

The UK has had a thriving shanty scene for at least the past 20 years with major festivals at Falmouth, Whitby, Harwich attracting thousands and bringing performers in from France, Holland, Poland, Norway, Spain and North America.

As well as Fisherman's Friends look out for Kimber's Men, The Longest Johns, Sheringham Shanty Men, Yesterday's Men, The Old Gaffers, Exmouth Shanty Men, The Naze Shanty Crew, Rhum and Shrub and my own crew Swinging the Lead. Ladies are represented too by crews such as She Shanties, The Norfolk Broads and Cornwall's Femmes de la Mere so no excuses for anyone not to be singing sea shanties !!!

Joe Whittaker

If anyone would like a pdf fact sheet or further information on sea shanties, festivals etc. do email Joe on joe2you2joe@hotmail.com