

April Newsletter

Spring has finally arrived and doesn't the world look lovely!

What a variety of talks we had during March, starting with John telling us about the history of the Poet Laureate and sharing with us some of his favourites including Carol Ann Duffy. Jill then hosted our tea, coffee, cake and bring a friend morning. We listened to the history of the aforementioned before indulging! This was followed by A Policeman's Lot by outside speaker, Alan Rogers. He kept us entertained with stories of his life both training to be in the police force and his time as a policeman. We culminated the Spring term with an Easter quiz hosted by Alistair. Seven teams took part. After a nail-biting tie-break question (building up the suspense), table 7 were announced winners. The bounty was £25 to a charity of their choice. The Bethany food bank in Aston were the chosen recipients. This is taken from their website:

'We are now feeding over 1000 people per month many struggling to buy food. This in turn stops many from shop lifting and helps those who desperately need help. We operate on a referral basis from various agencies including the Council, Police, Homestart, Housing Associations, Job Centre, local churches and local Community Groups. Our clients are usually homeless, jobless, elderly, infirm, low-income workers and those in temporary financial difficulties'.

A worthy cause I'm sure you will agree.

At the book club meeting in March, I saw some fantastic artwork on display and the artist was our very own Anthony Payne. I asked him to share some of his works and explain his inspiration for each piece. With the commentary running alongside, we get a real glimpse of the artist and what motivated him. Wonderful work, thank you, Anthony

Ancient Stones to a Chinese Tea Garden

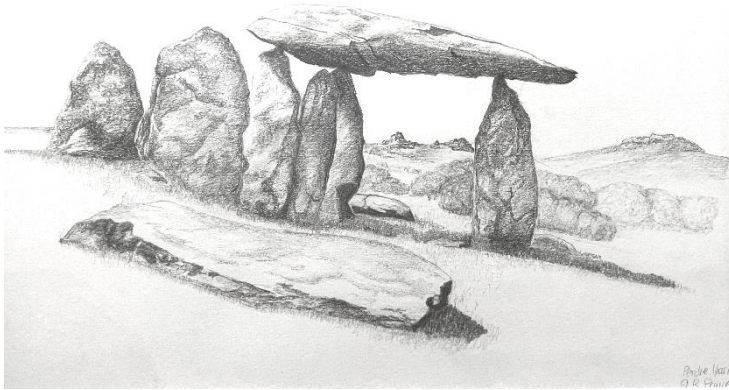
Ammonite

Sketching has always been an important part of my life since my late father taught me to draw at about 10, teaching me how to cut a pencil chisel point and the art of perspective. Since then, I am never far from a sketch book and often draw up my sketches into full pictures. I am also a keen amateur geologist, combining my drawing with capturing the form and textures of different types of rock and fossils; this ammonite makes a wonderful subject for a full-blown picture. Using graphite pencils with a touch of colour highlights its 3-dimensional image and texture.



Ammonite

Graphite and Colour Pencils on
cartridge paper



Pentre Ifan

Graphite and Colour pencil on mixed media paper

Pentre Ifan

Prehistoric peoples and especially the Neolithic or New Stone Age are another real interest, and their standing stones and stone circles make another wonderful subject for sketching and drawing. The enigmatic Pentre Ifan in Pembrokeshire with its 16-tonne capstone supported on the points of three upright stones of spotted dolerite from the Preseli Hills produce a great image framing Carnedd Meibion in the background. The contrast of the shadows and underside of the capstone give it a real 3-dimensional feeling

Slater's Bridge

A lot of my early painting was in watercolour, often combined with fine Roting pen ink, as in this painting of Slater's bridge, Little Langdale in the Lake District. Based on a watercolour sketch, the transparency of watercolour, recreates that clear spring light with first hint of the fresh green grass. Under the flanks of Wetherlam Fell on the left, the Slater's bridge is typical of the Lake District packhorse bridges, used to transport slate from the Tilberthwaite Westmorland Green Slate Quarries and ore from the Greenburn Copper Mine, over Little Langdale Beck.

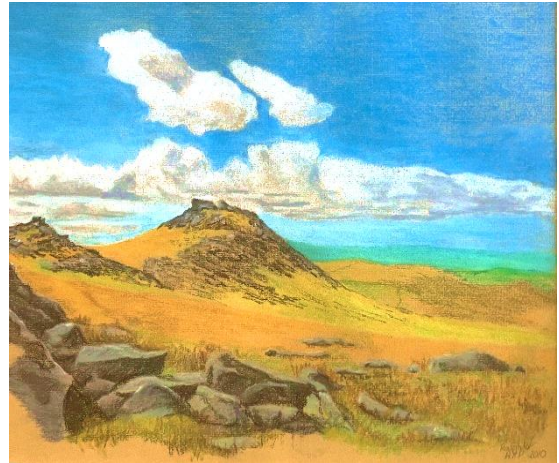


Slater's Bridge

Water Colour with Pen and Ink on Watercolour Paper

Roughtor Bodmin Moor

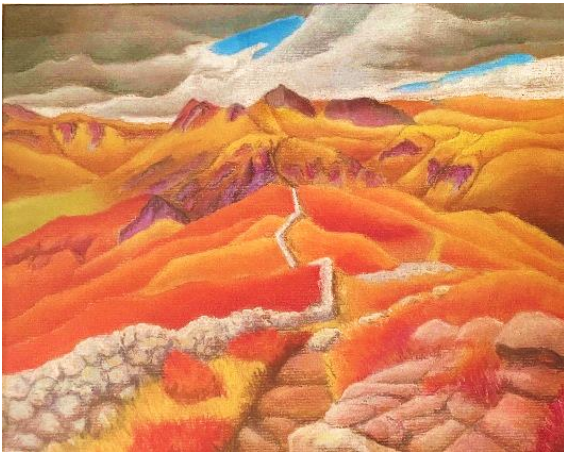
I just love the bright colours of the Conte hard Pastels and the way they blend on the pastel paper. Combining these with the blocky granite rock of Roughtor and grass heath of Bodmin Moor they produce that sense of space and distance. These mysterious tors were revered by the Stone and Bronze age people, building massive cairns on accompanying Showery Tor and Little Roughtor and a ritual platform on the very top of Roughtor. Daphne Du Maurier used their bleak and rugged aspect to great effect in her novel 'Jamaica Inn'.



Roughtor Bodmin Moor
Conte hard pastels on Pastel Paper

Langdale Pikes from Lingmoor Fell

For this view of the Langdale Pikes I was influenced by the late Lake District artist, Libby Edmundson, with her signature red and yellow palette. Although not the highest fells, the Langdale Pikes epitomise the Lake District, with their rocky summits, craggy slopes with ravines and iconic shape. However, we were not the first to exploit their wonder, as stone age miners extracted the green fine-grained tuff or volcanic ash from just below their summits, to produce the Langdale polished stone axes, which were so highly prized they have been found throughout the British Isles and beyond.



Langdale Pikes from Lingmoor Fell Conte
Hard Pastels on Pastel Paper

Chinese Tea Garden – Morton Hall

Closer to Solihull, Morton Hall, near Alcester, opens its gardens throughout the year, as well as for their annual Tulip Festival, in early May. However, away from the formal Tulip Gardens, is a Chinese Teahouse located above a delightful lake, surrounded by moss covered rocks and beautiful white barked silver birches. I found these Autumn colours mesmerising; backed by the deep greens of the shrubs, contrasting with the white bark and yellow leaves of the silver birches and bright reds around the lake. Where better to have a cup of tea.



Morton Hall Tea Garden
Conte Hard Pastels on Pastel Paper

Paphos, Cyprus, 2026

In March, members of our U3A holidayed in Cyprus. Here's what John had to say:

Following on from Derek's highly successful trip of 2025, a group of 6 (3 from Solihull u3a, 3 non-members) signed up for this year's visit. Derek and Penny had originally intended to go, but, sadly, Derek's awful diagnosis meant that they had to cancel, leaving me the only male on board. Two of the non-members went their own way, leaving me to deal with a group of ladies I categorised as "The trio of tough old biddies". They missed no opportunity to remind me of my status as the sole male representative of that great old "Brits on Holiday" tradition – blokes waiting outside the ladies' toilet. Gill, in particular, took great pleasure in recording the event for posterity.



It was, in fact, a great holiday. Contrary to earlier concerns, the war in Iran did not impinge, significantly – we were overflown a few times by an F35 fighter flying low and loud, possibly Greek – but, good weather, excellent hotel, interesting location, wonderful company all contributed to a really good time.

Thanks John.

Something special in April

April in History

On 4th April 1964 the Beatles filled the top five places of the US singles chart with *Please, Please Me*, *I Want to Hold Your Hand*, *She Loves You*, *Twist and Shout*, and *Can't Buy Me*



Love. And that wasn't all. In addition to the five chart-toppers, the Beatles were represented by another seven titles on the chart that week: "I Saw Her Standing There" (#31), "From Me to You" (#41), "Do You Want to Know a Secret" (#46), "All My Loving" (#58), "You Can't Do That" (#65), "Roll Over Beethoven" (#68) and "Thank You Girl" (#79).

And several of those were B-sides—such was the extent of Beatlemania in US 1964 following their *Ed Sullivan Show* appearances.



Celebrations in April

Songkran is the Thai New Year festival, celebrated from April 13th–15th, known for massive, nationwide water fights that symbolise cleansing and purification bringing a sense of



renewal. It is a time for family, visiting temples, and pouring water over Buddha statues. While the water fights are famous with people of all ages taking to the streets armed with water guns and buckets, the act of splashing water is meant to wash away bad luck, sins, and misfortunes from the previous year. The

celebration is officially three days, though festivities in some areas may last longer. However, it's most well-known among travellers as a raucous country-wide splash fest.

What's happening locally in April

A Titanic exhibition at the NEC running from 19th April – 26th May 2026. The exhibition follows Titanic's journey from the Harland and Wolff shipyard in Belfast, through its fateful voyage and sinking, to its rediscovery at the bottom of the Atlantic. This is how they describe this exhibition:

White Star Heritage - Titanic Exhibition: Birmingham

Experience the extraordinary story of Titanic at Birmingham's NEC. Follow the ship's journey from the Harland & Wolff shipyard in Belfast, through its legendary maiden voyage and tragic sinking, to its rediscovery more than two and a half miles beneath the Atlantic. Stand face-to-face with genuine artefacts from the ship, including an original deckchair, a fragment of the Grand Staircase, a fireman's pocket watch, and a letter written



on board. Around you, the world of Titanic comes alive through towering LED walls, immersive recreations, and powerful video storytelling that reveal the human stories behind each remarkable object.

May be worth a visit

Local trivia

Who knows anything about this hospital?



If anyone would like to write a piece about the hospital, let me know. Otherwise, more information on this next time.

If you have anything you would like to add to our newsletters, I'd love to hear from you.

Thanks for reading. See you all April 13th when Alistair presents his talk – Tarzan's Garden

Happy Easter,

Chris