

# the northern line

*the newsletter of north london university of the third age*

issue 70

april 2019



## Birds, blossoms and butterflies

You can find them all in north London as long as you know where to look.

And the Amateur Naturalists can take you to all the right places, as **Peter Cox** explained to **Judith Abbs**. Photos by **Andy Reid**

### **How do you find places to visit where you will always see some kind of wildlife?**

We go to Wildlife Trust sites that have guided walks. One of our members, Andy Reid, is a keen ornithologist and he always knows the best places for birdwatching. He is also an excellent photographer and takes magnificent photos, which help us to remember that visit and the species we saw on the walk.

### **North London feels like a very urban area. Are there wildlife sites within easy reach?**

We are prepared for a journey of up to an hour each way, travelling together in one or two cars. So we may go to places, such as Rainham Marshes and Ingrebourne Valley, that are about 20 miles away. Brent Reservoir (better known as the Welsh Harp), a Site of Special Scientific Interest, is on our doorstep. You can see an amazing array of wildlife there – with Wembley Stadium on the horizon.

### **Your group started in early 2018. How many visits have you made?**

We have made 14 visits to 12 different sites, including two each

to Rainham Marshes and Great Amwell, in Hertfordshire.

### **There aren't any butterflies to see in the winter and not that many wild flowers. What do you find on your winter walks?**

*continued on page 2*

## In this issue

Birds, blossoms and butterflies	1
Editorial	2
The good ol' summertime	3
As I see it	4
Group news	4
The three-plaque trick	6
A natural remedy	8
Away days	11
Summer term monthly meetings	12



# Our publications

The Northern Line (TNL) and Update are each published three times a year. TNL is edited by Leni Green, with assistance from

Judith Abbs, and designed by Barry Davies. Update is edited by Jane Marsh. Please send Jane submissions for the next Update by 17 May to [oriana.jane@btinternet.com](mailto:oriana.jane@btinternet.com)

• The editors may shorten or otherwise amend articles to fit spacing and style requirements.

## Editorial

As we get older, many of us can expect to have to deal with loss. I've just lost a beloved friend – a member of NLU3A as it happens – and it's hard. I want to ask her things, tell her stories, go places with her.

Thank goodness U3A is there. It offers me people who understand, keeps me busy, occupies my mind. That's not its purpose, of course, but it's a valued side-line.

U3As are run by their members for their members. Events and interest groups only happen if members are willing to organise them. And they only continue if other members are willing to take over in due course. In my nine years in NLU3A, I've seen a few valued

activities disappear because nobody wanted to facilitate them when the long-standing coordinator bowed out. For example, there won't be a spring tour this year – so no enticing photos for you to look at in September. What a loss!

But there *will* be a summer programme, as a new team has offered to replace the retiring one. This is what should happen, and long may it go on. Please see page 3 for details. It's a lot of work; let's all appreciate their efforts.

In this issue, we profile an intriguing new group, Amateur Naturalists, which engages in birdwatching and other wildlife activities while walking in nearby natural areas. Patricia Isaacs relates her experience of



NLU3A in her debut 'As I see it' column. And continuing our series on Blue Plaques in north London, John Seargeant introduces Harry Beck, who designed the first London underground map and is commemorated with a plaque in Finchley Central tube station.

Happy reading!

**Leni Green**  
Editor  
[editor@nlu3a.org.uk](mailto:editor@nlu3a.org.uk)

*Continued from page 1*



Winter walks are focussed on bird watching. For instance, Woodberry Wetlands in Hackney, which only opened in 2016, attracts wintering populations of pochard, shoveller, and tufted and gadwall ducks.

### **How do you identify what you find?**

That is the job of the guides at the wildlife sites. Andy Reid is our resident bird spotter and I can usually name the flowers. We can do our own homework by listening to birdsong on the Chirp! phone

app at [spinysoft.co.uk](http://spinysoft.co.uk)

### **Which walk was your own favourite?**

King's Meads Wetlands at Ware, Hertfordshire, run by the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust, where 265 different species of wildflower and 119 bird species have been recorded. The sheer variety of what we saw on the walk was exceptional, from dragonflies to butterflies.

### **What has been the most**



### memorable highlight?

On a trip to Fishers Green Nature Reserve in Waltham Abbey in May last year, we heard or saw 50 species of bird. While we were there, we heard a nightingale sing during the daytime. Inspired by this, two of us have independently gone on Singing with Nightingales Walks. ([www.singingwithnightingales.com](http://www.singingwithnightingales.com))

### What are the practicalities?

I email the members every six weeks with the proposed visits and possible dates. The walks are every three weeks or so in winter and roughly every two weeks in summer. Days and times are flexible, but we have found that Monday mornings are often the



most convenient. We cancel if the weather forecast is appalling. The walk takes a maximum of two hours. Although we don't programme a refreshment break, we are often able to have a coffee together before we leave for home. There are rarely – if ever – toilet facilities on the route of the walk. People usually bring binoculars and cameras.

### Can new members join the group?

New members are very welcome. Although we usually fit everyone into two cars, we can always add more. You could join the early birds for 'Birdbrain' dawn chorus walks at Ally Pally in April and May; come with us to Panshanger Park, Welwyn Garden City, to enjoy a multitude of wildflowers, butterflies, dragonflies and birds; or join our visit to Belhus Woods Country Park in Thurrock to explore ancient woodland, grassland and lakes.



## The good ol' summertime

A new team is drawing up this year's summer programme, which will run for four weeks from 29 July to 25 August. **Mary Roche**, **Jane Cattell** and **Joan Coleman** have taken over from the previous organisers, Kathy Kyriakides and Christine Stammers, who have handed over after several years in post. 'It's a tough act to follow,' says Mary.

The team would love to hear from you

if you have an idea for an outing, walk, discussion group or any other activity which might be incorporated into the programme.

### Please contact:

- **Mary Roche**, 8802 2020, [maryrocheuk@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:maryrocheuk@yahoo.co.uk)
- **Jane Cattell**, 8446 2587, [j.cattell940@btinternet.com](mailto:j.cattell940@btinternet.com)
- **Joan Coleman**, [joanieafc1@gmail.com](mailto:joanieafc1@gmail.com)

# As I see it

Being a committee member is hard work but it's also lots of fun,  
as **Patricia Isaacs** explains



When Keith Richards, the founder of our North London U3A, asked me to take over this column from him, I answered with a firm 'no'. He just observed me over our coffee cups, and after first looking away I muttered, 'Well, I'll give it a go.' So here I am.

For those of you who don't know me, here's a brief introduction. I joined NLU3A

in 2009 and within months had been persuaded – we're good at persuasion – to join the committee as groups organiser. I had no idea what this involved, and nor did the two other wonderful women – Ann Elliott and the late Branwen Lucas – who joined my team. We had never met but within a short time had become firm friends; we made a plan, agreed on who should take on which tasks and got started. Somehow, over the next four years, it all worked; we learnt a great deal, enjoyed the work, met many members and had a lot of fun along the way.

During that time I became events organiser by default. With three events a year, including Open Day, and continuing as groups organiser, life seemed to consist largely of NLU3A: hard work, but seriously rewarding, meeting many terrific people among our members. In 2014 I made some amendments to our

constitution, approved by the committee and by the Charity Commission; one amendment clarified that committee members should stay in a given role for no more than three or four years. However, after four years as groups organiser I was still events organiser and also temporary chair. That task segued into my staying on as chair for a four-year period, plus an extra year as advisor to the committee: minister without portfolio.

I'm still involved in various ways, still enjoying it – and still keen to encourage our members to be an active part of our wonderful organisation.

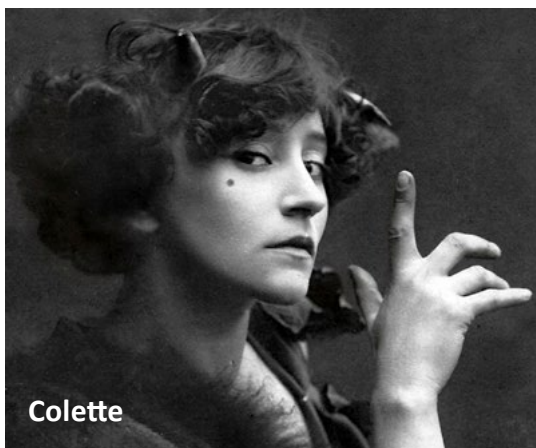
Next time, less about me and more about U3A.

*Patricia Isaacs*

PATRICIA CHAIRED THE  
NLU3A COMMITTEE  
FOR FOUR YEARS

## Group news

Groups seeking new members



### French Literature

We choose a book by general consensus, then read it in the group, about a page each. We look up words we don't know and discuss in French (if possible) the contents and ideas suggested by the text. We try to read modern and classic writers. This group is for intermediate level in French.

We meet in Finchley Central, weekly on Monday mornings from 10am to 12noon. Contact: **Elsa Ramsey**, 8346 1359, [elsaramsey@btinternet.com](mailto:elsaramsey@btinternet.com)





## Life, Art & Politics 1

**W**e discuss anything that interests us, choosing a topic together. Our arguments are always friendly and we buzz with ideas, thoughts and opinions. Members start to arrive at 10AM, and we chat over coffee before the meeting starts at 10.30. We very much enjoy each other's company.

Meetings take place every other Wednesday morning from 10.30AM to 12NOON at two venues in Finchley Central, which alternate fortnightly.

Contact: **Barbara Kushner**, 8346 5691, [barbarakushner@gmail.com](mailto:barbarakushner@gmail.com)

## Practical Shakespeare

**W**e are re-forming and would welcome additional members. The group will meet fortnightly on a Thursday afternoon from 2.30 to 4pm in N3 (Finchley), and will be coordinated by Janet Home and Maureen Blain.

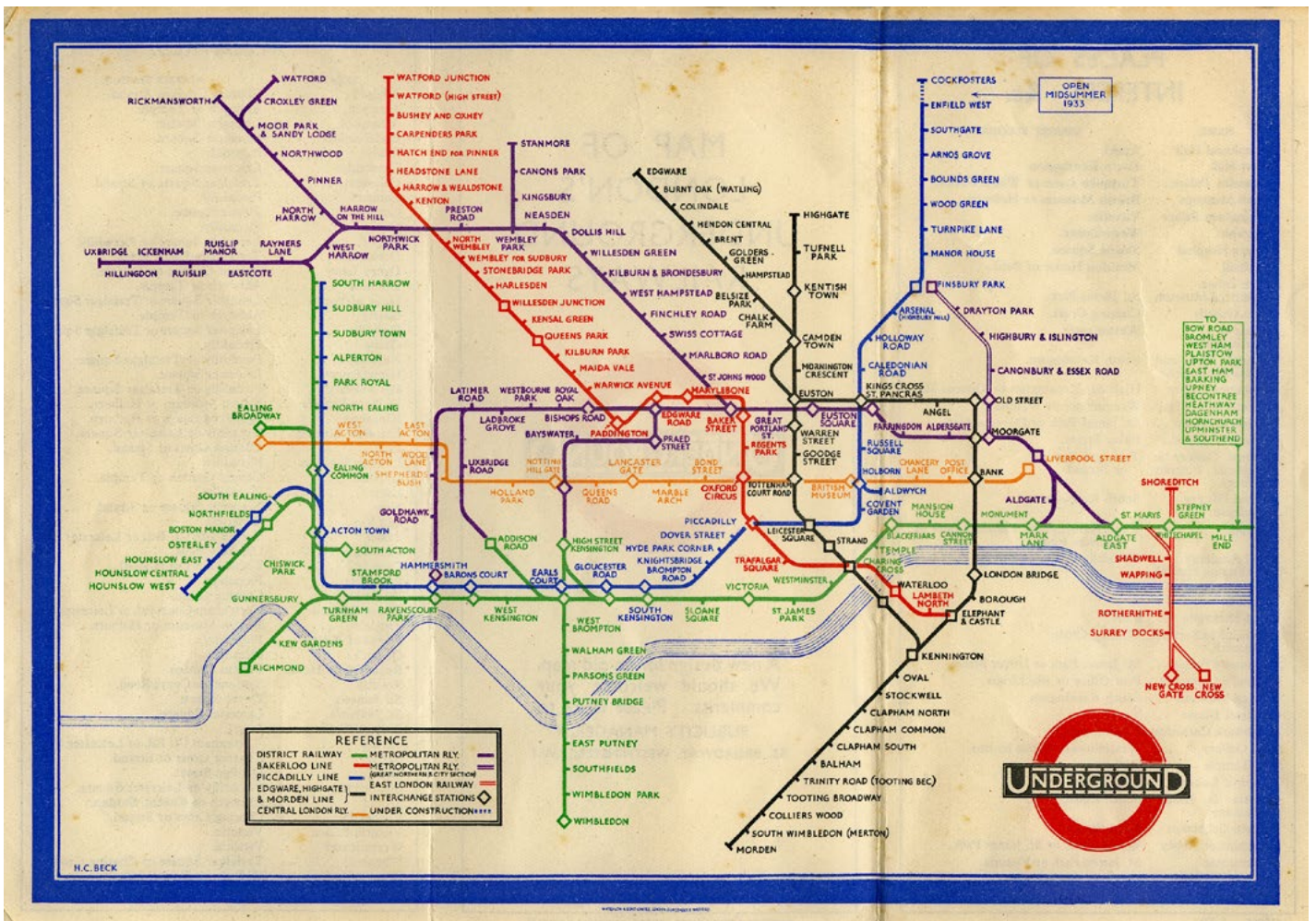
They say: 'We are lovely people and we have a very good time! We don't ask you to act, but just to join us in reading as many of Shakespeare's plays as we can manage. We try to mix up the genres – sometimes a tragedy, sometimes a comedy – with the historical plays being interspersed; we collectively select the next play to read.'

Please contact either **Janet by phone**, 7272 3414, or **Maureen by email**, [moblain162@gmail.com](mailto:moblain162@gmail.com)



## Who's who in the groups organiser team

Henrietta Cohen	Groups organiser	07976 903767	<a href="mailto:henanded@gmail.com">henanded@gmail.com</a>
Candiss Waldram	New groups	8883 1395	<a href="mailto:scwaldram@yahoo.com">scwaldram@yahoo.com</a>
Ruth Newman	Venues organiser	8340 3516	<a href="mailto:ruth.newman@blueyonder.co.uk">ruth.newman@blueyonder.co.uk</a>



© TfL from the London Transport Museum collection

# The three-plaque trick

A blue plaque on a building honours a person famed for their achievements. You would expect someone with three plaques in their memory to be a household name. But have you heard of Harry Beck? **John Seargeant** introduces him

Harry Beck has been honoured by two blue plaques: one is at 14 Wesley Road, Leyton, where he was born in 1902; the other is at 60 Court House Gardens, West Finchley, where he lived from 1936 to 1960. However, the most interesting memorial plaque – which is not blue – is on the southbound platform of Finchley Central underground station.

This is very appropriate as Harry is remembered for designing the unique diagrammatic underground map.

Finchley Central is the station that he used most regularly.

He first devised the map in 1931 when he was a temporary draughtsman working for the Underground. He was inspired by an electric circuit diagram. The dense central area was enlarged in relation to the outlying areas, allowing both to be shown more

clearly. Because everything was underground, he dispensed with conventional geographical accuracy and used only horizontals, verticals and 45-degree angles. The various lines were represented by different colours.

Initially the Underground authorities rejected Beck's map

**Because everything was underground, he dispensed with conventional geographical accuracy and used only horizontals, verticals and 45-degree angles**



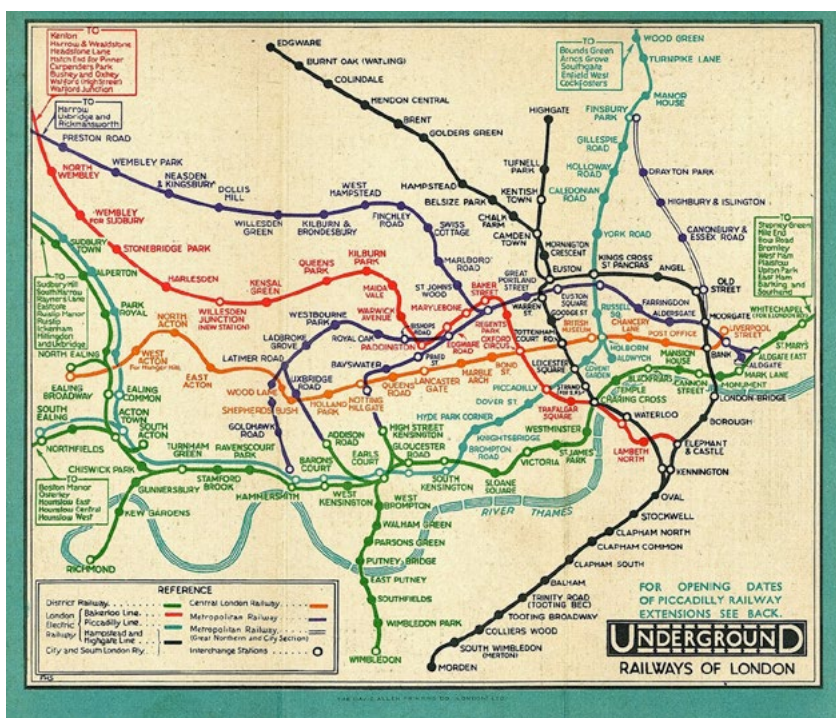
but by 1933 it was being mass produced in pocket form. It became internationally recognised as of graphic and information-design excellence and his concept was copied by other transport systems, including those in New York, Leningrad and Sydney.

The map had to be revised constantly as the Underground lines were extended and new ones built. (As a personal aside, my mother told me that she took me on the new line from East Finchley to Barnet on the day it was first opened, although I was too young to remember it.)

Only recently, the Overground was added to the Underground map. So now the map has become very complicated. But such is the design that I think that Harry Beck would still recognise his handiwork.



The not-blue plaque at Finchley Central station, southbound platform



London before Beck



Harry Beck

Do you know of a blue plaque commemorating someone in north London? We would love to read about them, so please send a brief summary of why they've been honoured to [editor@nlu3a.org.uk](mailto:editor@nlu3a.org.uk)





# A natural remedy

Fancy a day out that takes you from dry deserts through air plants and alpines to tropical treasures? Grab your Freedom Pass and go to Kew Gardens, where you will be overwhelmed with natural beauty. Words and photos by **Barry Davies**

**B**y overground or underground your Freedom Pass will take you to Kew Gardens Station. It's a short walk to the Victoria gate of the Royal Botanic Gardens. Go through, escape from the traffic into one of my favourite places anywhere. In London's largest World Heritage site, art

**In London's largest World Heritage site, art and nature come together in a glorious theatre**

and nature come together in a glorious theatre. I have been going regularly since I moved south when the entrance fee was 1d (less than 1p in today's money). It's now £15.95 for concessions but how can you complain when you consider the work that goes into its

maintenance, the unique pleasure it offers anyone with any interest in plants, the opportunity of pleasant walks along its avenues and among its 14,000 trees and the scientific contribution it makes to global preservation – it aims to conserve seeds from 25 per cent of the world's bankable plant species by 2020.

Whenever I go in the year it is different. My favourite time is after the winter, perhaps on a day when the sky is blue so that the bright spring light intensifies the beauty and colours of the early flowers, of the trees with new leaves in shades of almost transparent limes and greens and copper beech. Turn left at the Victoria Gate for the many varieties of camellia. In the Sakura season near the Palm House enjoy the cherry blossom walk (in Japanese culture the cherry blossom is representative of the quality of impermanence



Giant water lilies



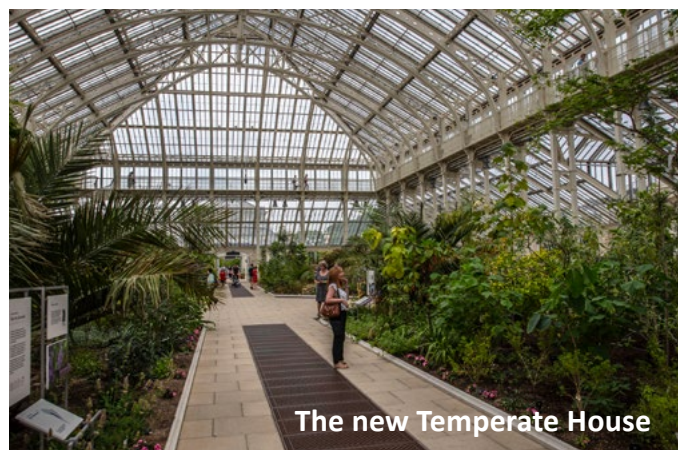


Visitors of all kinds

– and a reminder to celebrate the vigorous beauty of life while it is, knowing full well that it will not endure). Admire the bluebell wood around Queen Charlotte's

full leaf. Last year the green carpet turned the colour of straw, but the green was back in time to contrast with the autumn leaves.

Dotted about the gardens are historic buildings. Two of them are the recently restored 50-metre-high octagonal pagoda, designed in 1762, with a view



The new Temperate House

modern structures have appeared in recent years. I love the Treetop Walkway, 200m long and 18m in the air (there are lifts) enabling 'an insight into the complex ecosystem of the forest canopy'. It's a wonderful place from which to study bird and insect life.

For me the special attractions are the icons of Kew – the greenhouses where you can experience the climates of other parts of the world. Escape the chill of a cold dry day and walk into the hot, humid rain forest of the 1848 Palm House. Wait for the mist on your glasses to clear to admire the collection of exotic plants: bananas, coffee, cocoa, tall palms, some species threatened in their native habitats. The Temperate House has now reopened after years of restoration. The Princess of Wales House is a source of wonder, because of the different climatic conditions created within. At the



The arid zone in the Princess of Wales House

cottage and be surprised by the different varieties and colours of lilac. I enjoy summer too. It has a different feel with bedding and border plants and exotic trees in

from the top to rival that from the London Eye, and the 1631 brick-red Kew Palace by the Thames with its own formal garden and royal kitchens. A few



Some of the orchids in the Princess of Wales House

*Continued on page 10*





### The restored pagoda

entrance there is an arid area suited to cacti and succulents; walk into the carnivorous plant enclosure, and then out to where at certain times pools are covered with giant water lilies whose leaves you could almost use as rafts. On to the orchid area to admire the science and the art which has created such a show of eye-wateringly beautiful rare plants. The Davies Alpine House is designed to create the cool, dry and windy conditions that alpine plants favour, without using air conditioning or wind

pumps.

What about a place to relax?

There are picnic possibilities

and cafes everywhere, but the Pavilion Restaurant, re-opening in April after refurbishment, is my preference. It's extremely pleasant on a sunny day in spring to sit at tables outside amid Kew's greenery and to feel the warmth of the sun. Admittedly the sounds of nature can be overwhelmed by the raucous engines of aircraft low overhead coming in to land. However, I spent a good part of my life in engineering, so I can put my annoyance aside and appreciate another wonderful example of the ingenuity of



### The Davies Alpine House

human beings.



### Kew Palace

**D**o you have a favourite place in London, accessible with a Freedom Pass? Send a brief description to [editor@nlu3a.org.uk](mailto:editor@nlu3a.org.uk) telling us why it's special. Don't forget to include a photo!



# Conducted walk through Bloomsbury

**Friday 21 June**

For many, Bloomsbury means Virginia Woolf and the rest of the Bloomsbury set, living in squares and loving in triangles. But the area also contains a rich cast of other characters, including an 18th century social reformer, a star of radio comedy with a sad personal life, the architect of the Russian Revolution, and a leader of the post-colonial independence movement. For all this and more, we have engaged professionally qualified tour guide and Historical Research Masters student Colin Davey, and will stroll with him around this fascinating area of London.



## Travel and times

We meet at 10.50am outside Russell Square tube station (Piccadilly line) for an 11AM start and will finish at about 12.45PM.

## Cost

£6 each, payable in advance.

## Booking is essential.

Please use the booking form below or send us a note with the requested details and your cheque.

## Away days booking form

Name(s)\_\_\_\_\_Membership number(s)\_\_\_\_\_

BLOCK LETTERS please. No more than two names per application form.

Phone number(s)\_\_\_\_\_

Date	Name of visit

- Cheques payable to NLU3A
- Send booking form and cheque to Sue Teller, 27 Midholm, London NW11 6LL. Please send a separate booking form and cheque for each visit.
- You will be notified **by phone if you have a place (or not)**. Your cheque will be banked or destroyed accordingly.
- If you are unable to attend the visit, please phone Sue Teller on 8381 4480 so that your place can be offered to another member or 07748 478 428 for last-minute cancellations.

# Summer term monthly meetings

All take place at 10.45AM at St Paul's Church, 50 Long Lane, Finchley N3 2PU. Refreshments are served from 10.15AM. Please note that, out of courtesy to the speaker and to abide by the fire regulations, you might find yourself locked out of the meeting if you do not arrive by 10.40AM.

**13 May**

## 'Il Divino': Michelangelo in Florence and Rome



A sculptor, artist, architect, poet and thinker, Michelangelo was so respected and admired by the wealthy and powerful of the day that even during his lifetime he was referred to as 'Il Divino' – The Divine One. Yet he was also very much at the mercy and subject to the demands of that same powerful and ambitious nobility – the Medicis of Florence and the Popes of Rome – and his life was frequently troubled as a result. Janet Diamond will explore highlights of his life and works, and hopefully, leave everyone agreeing with the words of fellow artist and historian Giorgio Vasari that 'anyone who has seen Michelangelo's David has no need to see anything else by any other sculptor, living or dead'.

**10 June**

## Regent's Canal – the dark side

This is a talk about two centuries of crime, espionage, embezzlement, fraud, hoaxes and much more – fictional and real, all played out in and around the murky waters of the Regent's Canal. The talk will include references to infringements of the Town & Country Planning Control of Advertisement Regulations (1969). Lester Hillman, an international award-winning planner and former visiting professor in transport at London Metropolitan University, promises to plunge into the inky black waters and reveal all.



**8 July**

## Annual general meeting

Further details in Update and the monthly email newsletter

## Term dates



Term	Start date	Finish date
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Summer	23 April	19 July (half term 27–31 May)
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