

# Borderlines

Autumn 2022



## **Introduction from the Editors**

Hello and welcome to our Autumn issue of Borderlines.

We would like to thank everyone for their positive feedback on our last issue of Borderlines, it is very encouraging to us.

Also we would like to thank everyone for the reports and contributions as without your efforts we would not be able to produce an issue of Borderlines.

If you would like to join any of the interest groups all details and contacts are on the u3a website.

If anyone has anything they would like included in the next issue please contact us at email address [borderlines@u3a-llandrindod.org.uk](mailto:borderlines@u3a-llandrindod.org.uk)

With thanks, Margaret and Bob.

## **Remembrance to Queen Elizabeth II**

We held 2 minutes silence in remembrance of the death of HRH Queen Elizabeth II on Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> September 2022 at our September meeting.

## **Welcome**

We would like to welcome the following new members who joined us between June and September 2022

**June:** Lesley Fowler, Janet Few, Jan Moulding, Patricia Samuel, Ernie and Pheone Husson and Pamela Morello.

**July:** Alison Owen, John Moorhouse and Jackie Smith

**September:** Janet Goodwin, Robert Loveridge, Hilary Lewis, Maria Francis, Leonard Elliott and Audrey Price.

We hope you enjoy your time with u3a.

## **Report from Gina Maddison on her talk to the u3a at the August 2022 meeting on her experiences in the Birmingham Back to Backs.**

I was thrilled to be asked to attend the Llandrindod Wells u3a meeting in August, at the request of my dear former school friend Janice Brandreth (Horne), to talk about my book *The Girl from Guildford St*, published by Brewin Books under the name Grace Caroline Holte (the reason why is on the book!)

My book is an account of growing up in a working class area of Birmingham as part of a close family and community in the 1960s, in the Back to Back Houses of Aston and Lozells.

I was born in Birmingham in 1957, to two factory workers who each spent 50 years working in industry. A sister followed in 1958; we were part of a close, extended working class family. By 1958, the family was living in a Back to Back house in Guildford St, Lozells, and I was one of the last generation of children to grow up in the Birmingham Back to Backs; two up, one down, no bathroom, inside toilet, or hot running water, and heated by coal fires; courts centred around a backyard with a brewhouse, outside toilets and sheds often containing racing pigeons.

Our family left for a new housing estate in 1968, when the Back to Backs were demolished; The only surviving ones are the National Trust properties in Hurst St. I grew up in the 1960s, a time when Birmingham was known as The Workshop of the World, and the City of a Thousand and One Trades.

In many ways, the Sixties were a Golden Age: the fashions, the politics, the music, the hairstyles, the World Cup.

But there was tragedy too: thalidomide, accidents in factories, poverty, the Moors and Cannock Chase Murders, incurable illnesses, a heavily polluted city.

I passed the Eleven Plus in 1968, and went to a King Edward's Grammar School.

From there, I went to University thanks to the grants system, the first of my family to do so, and became a teacher and librarian for Birmingham and Sandwell.

When I retired, I looked around for books to read on growing up in a working class community in Birmingham in the 1960s, and could find very little - and so I decided to write my own. We all have a story to tell.

*The Girl from Guildford St*, a memoir, was published by Brewin Books in 2018, and *Tales of Guildford St*, a family saga, was published under the pen name Emila Williams in 2020. I call them "love letters to Birmingham and her people, a tribute to a time that is gone." The books can be borrowed from public libraries or purchased from Brewin Books, and the proceeds go to charity.

The third book in my Birmingham Trilogy come out in 2023. *A Grammar School Girl* covers the years 1968 - 1975, and is an account of my years at King Edward's Grammar School, Handsworth, and also of my teen years on one of Birmingham's brand new council estates, then seen as an answer to Birmingham's housing problems. It also looks at events in the dark decade of the 1970s such as the power strikes, the 3 day week, change and conflict and the Birmingham Bombings.

I do talks on all three books, and can be contacted on [ginamaddison@mail.com](mailto:ginamaddison@mail.com).

**Llandrindod u3a organised a visit to the Edinburgh Tattoo. Below are some reviews of their visit.**

### **My Edinburgh trip – Margaret Wood**

I was lucky enough to be able to join the group going to the Edinburgh Tattoo. We met up on a Sunday morning to travel by train from Caersws to Edinburgh with a stop and train change at Wolverhampton. On arrival at Edinburgh we had a short walk to our hotel and checked in for our stay. Sunday evening we met up for a lovely meal at an Italian restaurant which we all enjoyed. Monday was a free day so I joined up with David and Janice for a short walk (as David called it?) to the Royal Yacht Britannia. We spent about 90 minutes having a good look round and I thoroughly enjoyed the experience. We then met up to go to the tattoo. The atmosphere walking to Edinburgh Castle was fantastic which carried on into the Tattoo itself. The experience of all the colours, noise, lights, music, dancing and displays is something that I will never forget. Following the Tattoo we decided to have a nightcap at a Wetherspoons opposite the Hotel to end a fantastic day.

The following day (Tuesday) was free time in the morning, therefore David Janice and myself went to Holyrood Palace and then walked down the Royal Mile and looked in the local shops. We back to the Hotel and collected our luggage for the walk back to the station to catch the train home.





## Reflections from Edinburgh. – David Horne

Janice and myself have long since planned to attend the Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo but never got around to it. It is truly a bucket list item.

I was born into a military family and the pomp and pageantry of such events stirs the blood and quickens the heart rate. Trooping the Colour, Changing the Guard, The Royal Tournament. Seen them all except Edinburgh. Seen it on tv.

So when this opportunity arose we snatched it with both hands. The reality is much better than the tv. The arena looks quite big on tv but in reality is quite small.

We spent the evening on arrival in an Italiano ristorante, yummy.

On the Monday of the tattoo we visited The Royal Yacht Britannia. What a superb visit that was.

We met up with everyone else prior to the tattoo and arrived at the castle in good time. It was exciting walking round before it went dark. From the opening entertainment to the big event it was thrilling. The colourful displays, the skirl of the pipes, the drum beats, massed bands, a children's choir and international performers from Mexico, The USA and New Zealand.

These are imprinted in my memory forever.

On the Tuesday we walked from Holyrood Palace all the way up the Royal Mile to the castle (by the way a Scottish mile is an old measurement and longer than the mile we currently use), not knowing that our beloved late Queen Elizabeth ii would soon be passing the same route for her final journey. May she rest in peace.







## **Edinburgh Military Tattoo Trip, an organisers dream – Karen Latham**

Only sixteen people signed up to go on the trip up to Edinburgh to see the Military Tattoo, disappointing after the usual coach loads for days out. But this was to be a longer expedition, a city break to Edinburgh. Yes, I could not deny, for the cost you could have had two weeks camping in France. But this was to be a “bucket list” event and what memories can be packed into a short period of time.

As it turned out sixteen was a perfect number to get to know each other and most importantly, sit around tables, be it the fabulous and very reasonable Italian restaurant literally next door to the Hotel. The late night Wetherspoons just across the road (it was twenty to one in the morning before we left the night of the Tattoo) or sitting in the hotel lounge to share our experiences and recommendations.

Two of the group travelled by car, stopping overnight on the way up and back making a longer holiday. Two of the group went on to family while Meg the intrepid stayed on to explore further after the main group returned.

The trains were on time and fast, a relief after the train strikes and fears of works to the line or train break downs. We found the city hotel easily (thanks to our team navigators). The rooms were large enough, clean and amazingly quiet, except for breakfast which was admittedly a bit of a scrum.

Edinburgh is an amazingly beautiful city marred on this occasion by the bin men strike, the remnants of the Edinburgh Festival and new tramlines being laid, it seemed over about a quarter of the city roads. Like a dirty face the beauty beneath could not be concealed, raising the eyes was a joy at every turn.

Some visited the Zoo to see the Pandas and the Botanic gardens, others the Royal Yacht Britannia, the Castle and the Royal mint. We took open topped bus tours, walked the Royal mile and Princes Street found back street cafes, quested for affordable mementos and presents not made in China. (I did collect the free Tattoo mug which turned out to have a rather bizarre design). I regretted there was not more time as there was so much I wanted to do from the Portrait Gallery to Holyrood Palace, the Medical Museum.... Meg had the right idea, now we have to return to revisit this wonderfully compact and fascinating city.

Never in all the trips I have organised over the years has one gone so smoothly, successfully and with such obvious enjoyment. To all those involved you really were a pleasure.

### The Tattoo Experience

The first thing to say is it is nothing like watching the Tattoo on TV.

The atmosphere built as we walked up together as a group and joined the thousands of others that night walking up and later down the Royal Mile past the Cathedral in which the Queen was later to be laid in state.

The first surprise was how small the parade ground actually is, it looks so much bigger on TV. In reality it is quite intimate.

Having been advised the stands can get very cold on the top of the hill if the wind blows. And it's OK to wear a big coat but if it rained hard, shoes could fill and rain can go through coats. So bin bags over shoes and legs and plastic ponchos over coats – we were prepared. In the event it drizzled lightly at the beginning of the evening then stopped completely and the wind dropped to nothing- but by then I was so engrossed that I and several others of our party stayed plastic wrapped until the end of the Tattoo.

I guess we were not the brightest crowd that night as it took the warm up person four attempts to get a half way decent Mexican wave and when the Divas sang and the lights went out it took a few minutes for people to realise and light up their telephones to become part of the visual effect.

The second big surprise was there is no commentary, so silence between each performance adds to the anticipation and what an atmosphere from first entrance of the children's choir to the last firework.

All the senses are engaged. The TV selects what you look at, which face, which detail, when you are there, there is so much to see the eyes never stop moving and still it is hard to take everything in.

The music and sound levels are not controlled by a technician and the sound enters your body and beats in the chest. When the flares went off you felt the heat and could smell the fireworks. It was a night I will never forget.

### Royal Yacht Britannia

Having been told that the Royal Yacht Britannia was a must see, we went with Ruth and Jill getting there by jumping on a tour bus. We were not disappointed. I guess I was expecting it to be much more like a Russian Oligarchs play thing than the beautiful and understated vessel it turned out to be, the queens bed was a standard 3 feet, the cabin little more than those on to-days cruise liners. It was fascinating to see the social strata demonstrated physically on the different levels and parts of the ship.

As we later watched Antiques Road Show being filmed and presented from the Britannia we could recognise so much of the back drop.

We had our photos taken under the ships bell on the Queens deck, first with Ruth and Jill, then just Alan and I. A beautiful Chinese girl walked over and said to me "My husband says you are just like me" As I started to preen, she really was lovely; she delivered the killer blow in two words "Very bossy".

When I looked round Alan and her husband were grinning at each other.

The whole trip was full of such special moments.

### **u3a Singing Group**

The Commodore hotel in Llandrindod has built a memorial garden for the fallen soldiers in Ukraine. Some refugees have been staying in the hotel, it is to give them somewhere quiet to reflect and honour their dead relatives and show Welsh solidarity with Ukraine...

The u3a Singers decided to bless the garden by singing "Sing me a song of the man that is gone" by Robert Louis Stephenson and "A song of peace, for their land and for mine" by Sibelius. Mary Davies read the inscription by the urn water feature.

I also remembered 2 British volunteers from the charity Food For All who had been tragically killed by a missile in Ukraine, whilst serving free hot food to the people. We paused for thought and realised how lucky we are compared to the Ukrainians, we so wish for peace in Ukraine



The u3a Singing For Fun group (plus a few friends to make up numbers) sang as part of the entertainment for the Llandrindod Wells Victorian festival. We sang twice, each session about 40 minutes. Our song choice quite diverse, including Dancing Queen, Those Were The Days, When You're Smiling and Land Of Hope And Glory. The enthusiastic crowd watched, clapped and a few sang along, Queen Victoria gave us a wave and the sun shone. A fun time was had by all.





## **A story from Ann Weir on her experiences during a bike rally to Switzerland**

As the past two years rallies were cancelled because of 'you know what', I was more determined than ever to attend this years in Switzerland. We were all 3 weeks away from Holland last year before their government, in their wisdom shut the borders. There were no end of stumbling blocks in my way before the due set off date of June 30th. For start mice had got into the bike shed causing havoc with wiring and fuel lines over the Winter period, then battery problems, then to be booted with a new rear tyre to be 'scrubbed in' before I went.

I have always felt that I am at the end of a cul-de-sac here in mid Wales having no other members within striking distance so I would be very much on my own-ee-o until I reached Besancon near to the Swiss border. Here I was to meet up with our International president who is British but lives in France, and a French girl at a hotel in the town. I found it with a little bother as it was hidden amongst a huge industrial site. Why do they do that? heaved a sigh of relief to change out of my leather pants in the 30+ degree heat and sat out in the shade with a beer to await the arrival of the others.

Fabienne, the French girl sets her sat nav the next morning so off we set using all B roads and passes to get us to the rally site, a ski centre south of Luzern. I felt like a mountain goat before we'd even started on the serious stuff.

One thing had bothered me across France--the oil light had come on and after a service? Gulp--don't tell me! with Zara's help (big girl) we got the T-Max on its main stand so I could inspect the oil window. OK, oil in it but I didn't like the colour. Plod on regardless. We made the rally site by transversing the Glaugenberg pass, the last of many I'd hoped that day as by now after 4 days riding I was feeling a little tired. 880 miles up to now.

A huge welcome greeted us, most of the rallyists already there but bike parking space was at a premium as there were a lot of Dutch motorhomes taking up precious space----all WIMA's i can assure you but not everyone arrives on a bike. The International Women's motorcycle rally follows a usual format that of \*a welcoming dinner; \*a trip out via bus with special tours. \*a rally of 4 members following a route into the local countryside to do silly things at the controls; \*a parade -flying your country's flag to some special centre. In recent years has been to meet the local mayor with speeches and a show. \*free day followed by a farewell supper. This year was not much different. We won't mention the supper on the Sunday night when most of us 250 participants from all over Europe plus Iceland and Australia had gathered for the spag bol supper which turned out to be a Swiss delicacy of summat with a dollop of apple sauce in the middle!

We all took over the ski centre in the various huts plus the camping area (for the super hardy amongst us.) all in a good mood for the meet up of all the nations at the welcoming supper.

3 of us set off that day; should be in a team of 4 but who cares? The first game to be conducted 'on site' I suppose to give some crowd back up to cheers us as we threw oblong choccy bars into obscure receptacles for various points. That done, on our bikes and off we go into the 'unknown', Caz in front with the route, I behind with the pictures of control sites in my map case, and Lorraine at the rear. We soaked up the miles of the lovely countryside breathing in the fresh alpine air with its pine forests.

Control no; 2 was a car park near a church where we had to guess how many peas in the 4 jars.

Off we go again---oh no! not another pass---concentrate! We were zooming down yet another when I noticed a painted arrow in the ground pointing to the left---looked up to see the cable car centre we wanted so blasted Caz with my horn but she had already disappeared round the corner. Lorraine and I turned in to wait for Caz who we hoped would realize we weren't following. We evidently caught the marshals out as they weren't quite ready being the first to arrive which sent one of them scuttling to the entrance to stand on ceremony in case anyone else missed the turn. object of the test here? feely bags. I never did get to find out what was in them but it was fun guessing.

Now off to the last check which took us over the Glaubenberg, again--aaarrghh. By now I knew what I was looking for as we had passed it on the Sunday going and I had thought then as it was a famous biker stop "ah-ha--bet they use it on the tour"--and they did. Yippee, a restaurant too and here we find half the German contingent. The silly game involved carrying 2 plates in one hand with ping pong balls on board over an uphill distance. Step forward Lorraine being the youngster among us. luckily she put in a great time. Great--we can now go eat huh? All we had to do then was to drive back to base.

Next day was the day of the parade where we have the opportunity of flying our national flags round on an escorted tour to a place of interest--in the past has been the local town square to be met by the mayor/bugermaster/whatever for a little ceremony but not today; we were taken to a lake for a swim! OK if you remembered your cossie but not for some so we sufficed by taking off our boots and socks, rolling up our trousers and settling for a paddle. As there was no food in sight, myself and Liz from Cornwall went back to the bikes to go find a cafe somewhere, finding a lovely village square where we were joined by two Germans, Cristina with a sidecar outfit and Jackie on a solo.

Back to the rally site for more silly team games in the tennis courts at 4pm

Friday of the rally is always a free day before the final farewell supper. By now a few participants had walked the extra 1/2 mile up to the cable car station for a ride further up into the alps but had paid the going extortionate rate of 30 + Swiss francs, until that is some-one negotiated on our behalf for a reduced rate. 6 of us set off early to make a day of it with lots of nice walks around the mountain lake, take in a swim--bbrrr, it would be freezing up there as two of our members found out. We found a nice little shed too which served apple cake and cream.

This ski centre had utilized every inch of land and paths to suit the summer traveller too and one could travel back using their stand on scooters. The 3 Australian members opted for this but as we walked back to the centre we heard the siren of an ambulance---yep, one of them had done an A over T on the trip down. Ironic when you think--they can drive hired machines on the wrong side of the road in a strange country then land in hospital on a platform with wheels!

Even the Ukrainian WIMA president had turned up for the supper and had placed on everyone's place mat a jig saw piece which read "hugs from Ukraine"

After a few speeches the 250 of us tucked into our last supper, followed by a bit of prize giving from the tour and silly games and whadya know? I got one too for being the oldest participant who had ridden there. wahoo--fame at last eh?

When packing up the next day, other 'oldies' were coming up to ask my age. Not telling you either so Ner!

Right! now for the journey back which looked like I'd be on my own-ee-o once more as no-one seemed to be going my way. As long as I could get back to Besancon using normal roads instead of small passes I could then follow my route backwards but first I had to go up that blasted pass one more time. Ah well, should know every hairpin by now. Deep breath---here we go-----.

I had to keep telling myself--"follow the blue routes!" cos here the green ones are their motorways and I hadn't pre bought a carnet. Now I am no 'techno geek' so I had made route cards, sticking them to the inside of the screen with blu tack. It worked, in parts but I made so many U turns when I'd missed a vital road, I was beginning to feel dizzy.

Phew---Besancon at last but I can get further surely then was plaiting sawdust again when I was disparate to stop to find a hotel. A small place loomed up at the road side near to Dijon---yes they had a room, the monsieur not understanding much English but I can usually get by with my schoolgirl French.

I grabbed a beer to sit out on the small terrace to talk to 4 of the locals. they had already established that the restaurant was shut (Saturday night??), then when I tried the bar door that was shut also?? Whaaat? 9 p.m. Saturday. The chappie who knew more English did no more than give his African friend some money to bring me back another beer so at least that was my lunch and supper that day--2 pints of beer. No tea or coffee in the room so I asked another monsieur inside "Avez vous cafe s'il vous plait"--to which he disappeared to bring me a flask, cup and milk---yippee, coffee at last, so with that plus a biscuit salvaged from my pocket I went to bed happy.

Last leg of the journey---hopefully to Soissons today using a few legs of le payages (motorways to you) where you took a ticket at the barrier to safely stow it till you came off then offered your ticket to the machine quickly followed by your credit card in the hope that the machine wouldn't swallow it, put in your pin no; then hopefully retrieve your card. The first time I did that then looked helplessly at the driver behind till he came to my help.

I dived down a side street in Soissons to hopefully find a hotel and thankfully came across a great western or whatever--i didn't care, I was hot, sweaty and very dehydrated, past a group of M/cycle Brits on the verandah supping beer to exclaim that I'd be joining them soon. Madam explained that it would be 100 plus whatever Euros per night. I didn't care--my btm wouldn't do any more miles that day.

I quickly changed to join the group who would be dining elsewhere that night. Ah well, can't win 'em all so I settled for a smoked salmon platter, more beer and pavlova that night.

Getting out of Soissons the next morning was a job and a half as there was a deviation from the Autres routes. Right--now I am lost and in the doo doo's so I flagged down what I took to be a council type van---well it had something soissons written on the side. The nice young men got out their gizzmo phones, asked in French then it translated into English---I needed the road out to Beauvais but first I didn't know that had to go through Compeigne first.



The message read was "follow me to rest" Boy, was I relieved as the sun was up, was getting hot and thirsty by the minute. I quickly followed down all the back streets. The 'rest' was a boulangerie where they stopped. Ok what happens now? It was obvious that I was on a main road so said "merci beaucoup" and carried on. Another 'plaiting sawdust' moment arrived when low on fuel as it does often when transversing France as garages are few and far between. I diverted into a village; big mistake, as no-one could help till I accosted a farmer on a quad who explained to go back to road and at next circle there was a garage. Phew!

Even most of the garages across France are automated so expect your card to be swallowed before you can get fuel.

On the last leg towards Dieppe and I needed a rest/and or meal. I spotted a bar/restaurant at the roadside. No, no luck they stop serving at 2pm!! not even a salad or sandwich. What is it with these people?? I therefore settled with a large pelagrino (water\ ) and didn't care how long I sat there---I needed the rest.

The ferry was made in good time---only problem there the drinks machine only took cash and i was left with a 10 euro note and NO, the desk didn't give change, What a bummer!

I literally fell into my friends place in Southwick this side of Brighton that same night to borrow her sofa, finding her place in the dark as I'd never been there before. last leg of the journey to get home the next day which I did by 4pm after stopping for much needed cuppa and cake at the Honey Pot cafe.

First thing I did when I got home? put the kettle on.

The oil light? Oh it turned out to be a faulty sensor.----and I didn't drop it once!

I might have been the butt of jokes but my map and route cards got me there and back safely without any fancy gizzmos, so there--Ner!--plus a tongue in my head.

