

HEART THROBS



CARDIAC SUPPORT GROUP
CARING FOR YOUR HEART

The ECHO

Heart Throbs Newsletter May 2026

(w) <https://heart-throbs.org> (e) hello@heart-throbs.org

(helpline) 07951 740034

JOHN'S UPDATE

Defibrillator

We had a medical emergency at Hara's 11am class last month. Jo Cole collapsed while exercising and Hara sent down a couple of our ex-nursing members, Barbara and Una, to get the defibrillator from the entrance hall at Holtwhites, unfortunately the cabinet was empty! It transpired that the machine had recently been deployed at another event and was being refurbished. Barbara shouted across to the groundsman who was able to access a defibrillator from the bowls club who have their own.

Luckily, by the time they returned, Hara had contacted the emergency services and a paramedic was site followed quickly by the police and an ambulance which whisked Jo off to the Royal Free. She was given a thorough check and I'm delighted to say was able to return home that evening.

The episode has rung alarm bells with your committee. We haven't had to call on a defibrillator

in my 14 years at Heart Throbs but we are a vulnerable group and it is important for our members to have access to a defibrillator at all time when exercising.

Holtwhites is a multi-functional sport and social establishment, so we can't always guarantee use of theirs.

The upshot is that we have decided to get our own defibrillator. We have sought advice from Hara, Mark and the cardiac team at Barnet Hospital and have identified the model we think is most suitable. However, defibrillators are 'eye wateringly' expensive (more than £1,000) and they require regular maintenance.



John Golby

Wellness Month at the Ruth Winston Centre

As part of Wellness Month at the Ruth Winston Centre in Palmers Green a series of free talks are being delivered on subjects which are of particular interest to our age group. The topics covered include Fall Prevention, Stay alert to Fraud and Scams, Dementia Prevention, Lymphoma Awareness, Weight Loss and Health Advice, Health Benefits of Homeopathy, Safer Streets and Prostate Cancer.

The talks are all held on Wednesdays between 10am and 12 noon except the final one which is between 2pm and 5pm. Although the lectures are free you do need to book your place by calling 020 8886 5346.

The centre is easy to get to by bus, train or car. The website is at www.ruthwinstoncentre.com. I hope as many of you as possible will come along to at least one of the lectures and support the Centre in the good work it does for the community.

John Golby

Lawn Bowls - Give it a try

If you're looking to add some additional exercise into your routine why not consider lawn bowls. Clubs tend to offer free taster sessions in May. I have recently joined [Winchmore Hill Bowls Club](#) although there are many other local clubs. At my club free taster sessions are being run in May on Saturdays and Sundays from 10am to 1pm. Feel free to turn up or let me know if you want to find out more.

Catherine McCarthy

Health Matters with Barbara - Una Kilgalon

What is your heart condition?

Heart failure

What event happened to you and what operation or procedure did you have?

About two years ago I went to my GP because I had started to become breathless and it was becoming worse. My GP carried out several tests and then referred me to Mr. McKinnon, Cardiologist at North Middlesex Hospital. I was diagnosed with heart failure as I have preserved left ventricular function with a basal septal bulge and mild left arterial dilatation. This sounds quite dramatic but is quite common. It means that the heart is pumping normally with minor structural changes which can be due to aging, high blood pressure or thickening of the septal wall. Although not serious it needs regular monitoring, medication and a good lifestyle to prevent complications.

Current treatment

I have a yearly appointment with Dr. Denny at North Middlesex Hospital. I take Bisoprolol, a beta-blocker, Empagliflozin both used to treat heart failure plus Edoxaban, an anticoagulant to prevent blood clots.

Being a member of Heart Throbs

I was introduced to Heart Throbs by John (Golby). We have been friends for years and I play a lot of golf with John and his wife Annie. This is my second year of being a member of Heart Throbs. I attend the 11 o'clock class with Hara on Monday and Mark on Friday. It is important not to let your heart muscles get idle. Mind you, sometimes I think the two of them are trying to kill us! The whole atmosphere is very friendly. It really is great being a member of Heartthrobs. I just hope it helps me live longer! I am a glutton for punishment.

A little bit about yourself

I am Irish and from Dublin. I completed my nurse training in Paediatrics and Midwifery in Dublin. I came to live in London in 1962 where I completed my General Nursing at North Middlesex Hospital. I was a Night Matron at The King Edward VII hospital for Officers. There I nursed the aristocracy of England. Lovely people but too concerned about having to dip into their capital.

I have lived in Enfield for 56 years in the same house! I was widowed four years ago. I have two children. My daughter Orla lives in Newmarket with her husband and their dog 'Bob' an Irish Terrier. She completed a degree in Philosophy, Politics and Economics at Newcastle but doesn't work. My son Connor lives in Muswell Hill with his wife and twins aged 16 years. He completed a law degree at Bristol University. When he graduated, he told me he wasn't going to practice. The response to which was "That's ok but you're on a building site on Monday!" He is now an Editor!

I love doing sport. I played tennis, squash and Camogie (hurling). I took up golf aged 50 and loved it. I've been a member of Bush Hill Park GC for 36 years and down to single figures handicap but struggling now.

Barbara Miller



New members

A warm welcome to all our new members; Rasim Farziyev, Mike Fox, Peter Mills and Million Tafesse.

Meet the Committee - Jim McCluskey/Joint Membership Development Manager

1) When did you join Heart Throbs?

I joined Heart Throbs on 24 January 2018. Wow! Eight years has gone so quickly. I had been having breathlessness and chest pains for several months and had an ecg, scan, x-ray and other tests but nothing was conclusive. I was not on any medication at all at this time. Then on a family visit to Scotland, I had a heart attack. I went to the Glasgow Royal Infirmary by taxi. The next day I was transferred to the Jubilee Hospital in Clydebank where I had 3 stents inserted. I remember my first session at Heart Throbs. On a Tuesday afternoon at Rob's class, I teamed up with Pete McCudden, Finton Gallagher and Alan Barnard.



2) What role do you have on the committee?

My role is entitled Membership Development and NHS Liaison. This involves regularly attending NHS rehab. classes to give a talk about Heart Throbs to encourage new members to join our group. I work with Barabara Miller jointly in this role.

3) When did you take on the role?

I don't remember exactly when I started in this role, but it was before Covid. I remember when we used to have our committee meetings face to face in the lounge at Holtwhites.

4) What do you enjoy about your role on the committee?

I do enjoy talking to prospective members and telling them about the benefits of Heart Throbs. It is very satisfying when someone says they are definitely going to join or when John tells me we have 4 new members this month.

5) What football team do you support?

Celtic are my first love. I first went to Paradise in 1959. In 1963 Celtic played Real Madrid and I got to see Puskas, Di Steffano and Santa Marie. In the season of 1966/67, I didn't miss a match at Celtic Park we won all 4 domestic trophies and the European Cup. The biggest football match that I have ever attended was the European Cup semi-final between Celtic and Leeds United at Hampden Park on 15 April 1970. Leeds had a full team of internationals including Billy Bremner, Johnny Giles, Peter Lorimer, Norman Hunter and Jack Charlton. Celtic won this tie 2 - 1. And I also support Arsenal.

6) What's your favourite food?

I do like my food. I like to eat different dishes when I'm out or on holiday. Curries are great. But it's hard to beat a full English (or Scottish or Irish) breakfast.

7) What's your favourite drink?

My favourite drink of the moment is a nice cold Chablis.

8) What's your favourite holiday destination?

There are too many to mention. Italy is wonderful. I have been to New Zealand six times and travelled extensively while there. But there is so much to see and enjoy here in this country. Last year I went to York, the Lake District, Northumberland, Liverpool and enjoyed them all. Tomorrow Chris and I are going to Brighton for a few days for our early Spring Break. So many wonderful places on our doorstep. We are blessed.

9) Do you have a pet, if so what?

No pets. But I do like the horses!! Does that count? even own a very small part of a racehorse called Wendigo. Horse racing is a great day out.

Catherine McCarthy

Heart Throbs Social Events

Our Spring 2026 programme included:

5 March - London's Air Ambulance Charity

2 April - Beverley's Spring Quiz 'Through the Keyhole'

Our 2026 remaining programme:

7 May - Pete Allen's talk 'Watching the Detectives'

4 June - Robin Claydon's talk on African Wildlife Photography

2 July - Stefano's BBQ

November - Dr Simon Kennon, cardiologist, our patron

3 December - Beverley's Christmas Jumper Quiz

If you have any thoughts on relevant topics/guest speakers for our future Social Evenings or any interest you might like deliver a talk on please contact any member of the committee.

Catherine McCarthy

The Tudor Heart

The British Museum has successfully raised the £3.5 million needed to secure the Tudor Heart pendant for the nation. This remarkable achievement was only possible because of the extraordinary response from supporters. More than 45,000 people contributed to the campaign, helping raise over 10% of the total through public donations. Major support from arts organisations and individual philanthropists, including a £1.75 million award from the National Heritage Memorial Fund, ensured the target was reached in time to celebrate this success for Valentine's Day.



The Tudor Heart, a unique 24-carat-gold pendant linked to Henry VIII and his first wife Katherine of Aragon, captivated the public with its powerful story of devotion, history, and craftsmanship. Discovered in Warwickshire in 2019, it is the only surviving piece of jewellery of its kind from their marriage and offers a rare insight into life at the early Tudor court. The Museum is preparing to bring the Tudor Heart formally into the collection later this year.

Elizabeth Nathan

Spring Through the Keyhole Quiz

On 2nd April we held a quiz night with the theme of 'Through the Keyhole' with six teams playing for the easter egg prizes. Topics ranged from the dining room, the library, the cinema room, the greenhouse and the music room. The quiz was won by 'three times in a row' who won last time. There was a bit of excitement when the red moon outside was spotted. We also had the grand raffle. A huge thank you to Beverley for being the quiz master, John for keeping score and Mark, Rob and Alison for doing the raffle.



Catherine McCarthy

London's Air Ambulance Charity

On March 5th Steve Williamson came to Holtwhites Hall to talk about the incredible charity, London's Air Ambulance. He outlined the complexity of the organisation and the dedication and skill of the emergency response teams. He explained the dedication of staff, nearly all being volunteers, that annually raise the money required to maintain and run this service. Current annual running costs are around £14 to £15 million. Amazingly between 2022 and 2024 the charity also managed to raise £15 million to buy and equip two new helicopters! These state-of-the-art machines can land on a patch of open land that is about 25 metres in diameter; this is only just double the length of one of the helicopters.



The helicopter is reserved for major trauma cases; the priority of cases is decided by comparing incoming 999 calls. The enormous improvement in outcomes for trauma cases is due to the speed and skill of the pilots and medical team on the helicopter. Each one has a pilot and copilot, a specialist trauma doctor, often a consultant, and a paramedic. The onboard equipment and blood for transfusion permits even open-heart surgery at the kerbside - the helicopters are now equipped with an ECMO – a heart/lung support machine. Only the doctor and the paramedic are on secondment and therefore funded by the NHS. 95% of everything else is provided by charitable donations.

Most patients are not taken to hospital in the helicopter, which is relatively small inside; an emergency ambulance does this. The helicopters and ambulances take patients to the four hospitals that have specialised major trauma centres – these are St George's Hospital, King's College Hospital, St Mary's Hospital and the LAA's base, The Royal London Hospital. Steve showed us impressive footage of a helicopter and its team using the Royal London's helipad.

Helicopters cannot fly at night or in mist and fog, so an alternative method of reaching seriously injured people is required. For this the London Air Ambulance has a fleet of cars, similarly equipped, which at night rush to the scene of an accident and can provide the same care. In these the doctor or paramedic can double up as drivers.

We heard accounts of some patients, relatives and LAA teams detailing the incredible life-changing, and so often life-saving individual stories of a traumatic incident that resulted in a happy ending. The statistics for 2024 show the impact of the London Air Ambulance charity. That year 2058 patients within the boundary of the M25 motorway were treated. Of these 91 were in the London Borough of Enfield. So do remember the London Air Ambulance charity when you feel able to donate to a charity. One never knows when you or a loved one might need their service. A huge thank you to Steve Williamson for his fascinating talk



Anne Cullen

Discovery of enzyme clearing arterial plaque

Enzyme called PLPT

Italian scientists have found an enzyme that clears arterial plaque reversing heart disease without surgery. Researchers at the University of Milan discovered that an enzyme called PLTP (phospholipid transfer protein) can mobilize cholesterol from arterial plaques back into the bloodstream for disposal. Enhanced PLTP activity reversed atherosclerosis in animal models, opening severely blocked arteries without drugs or procedures.



Atherosclerosis

Atherosclerosis—arterial plaque buildup—causes heart attacks and strokes by blocking blood flow. Plaques form when cholesterol accumulates in artery walls, triggering inflammation that creates stable deposits resistant to removal. Current treatments lower cholesterol production or absorption to prevent new plaques, but can't reverse existing ones. Severe blockages require stents or bypass surgery to restore blood flow.

Plaque removal

PLTP functions as the body's natural plaque-removal system, extracting cholesterol from arterial walls and transferring it to HDL ("good cholesterol") for transport to the liver and elimination. Italian scientists discovered that PLTP activity is naturally low in most people due to genetic variations, allowing plaque to accumulate. They developed a gene therapy that increases PLTP expression specifically in arterial walls.

Human Trials

Animal studies showed 40% reduction in plaque volume within three months—severely narrowed arteries reopening to near-normal diameter. Plaques became smaller and more stable (less likely to rupture and cause heart attacks). Human trials are recruiting patients with severe coronary artery disease who aren't surgical candidates. Success could revolutionize cardiovascular treatment—dissolving plaques biologically rather than mechanically bypassing them, potentially reversing decades of arterial damage.

Source: University of Milan, Circulation Research 2025

Stefano Francioso

Stem Cell Therapy

A cardiac miracle is happening in regenerative medicine centres. Heart attack survivors are regrowing damaged muscle tissue not scar tissue, but functional contracting myocardium. Patients scheduled for transplants are cancelling surgery after receiving c-kit+ stem cell injections directly into heart walls.

The therapy uses cardiac progenitor cells harvested from patients' own hearts, expanded in culture, and reinjected.

New cardiomyocytes form organized muscle fibres, restoring 64% of lost pumping capacity on average. Cost? \$28,000 versus \$1.4 million for transplants. Heart failure mortality drops 71% in treated groups and donor waiting lists are dissolving.



Stefano Francioso

Olive Oil Compounds dissolve existing plaques

Cardiovascular disease kills more people globally than any other cause, and its most dangerous mechanism is atherosclerosis: the accumulation of cholesterol-laden plaque inside arterial walls that narrows vessels, reduces blood flow, and ultimately triggers heart attacks and strokes. Researchers at the University of Athens Cardiovascular Research Institute have identified specific polyphenolic compounds in olive oil — hydroxytyrosol and oleuropein aglycone — that in pharmaceutical concentrations don't just prevent plaque formation but actively dissolve existing plaques.



The mechanism involves two simultaneous pathways. First, the compounds activate macrophage autophagy within plaque deposits — essentially triggering the body's own cellular cleanup system to consume and remove the lipid-laden foam cells that form plaque. Second, they suppress PCSK9 expression — a protein that normally reduces the liver's ability to clear LDL cholesterol from the bloodstream. By inhibiting PCSK9, the compounds achieve LDL reduction comparable to statin drugs without affecting any other metabolic pathway.

In a clinical trial of 240 patients with documented coronary artery stenosis, pharmaceutical-grade olive polyphenol treatment over 12 months produced measurable plaque volume reduction in 71% of participants — confirmed by intravascular ultrasound. Average stenosis reduced from 52% to 34% of vessel diameter. No adverse events were recorded.

The Mediterranean diet has long been associated with heart health — this research identifies the precise molecular mechanisms responsible. Nature embedded a cardiovascular drug inside a food that humanity has consumed for 8,000 years.

Source: University of Athens Cardiovascular Research Institute, European Heart Journal, 2025
#OliveExtract #ArteryHealth #PlaqueDissolver #CardiovascularMedicine #HeartHealth
#MediterraneanScience

Stefano Francioso

Spider Venom in treatment of heart attacks

A breakthrough hidden in spider venom may reshape how we treat heart attacks and strokes. Researchers in Australia have discovered a remarkable molecule inside the venom of the funnel-web spider and it could become a life-saving treatment for millions. The compound, called Hi1a, works by blocking a specific ion channel known as ASIC1a, which activates when tissues are starved of oxygen. Under those conditions, cells become acidic and begin a destructive chain reaction that leads to cell death. By shutting down this channel, Hi1a helps interrupt that deadly signal, protecting vulnerable heart and brain cells.



Early laboratory studies are showing impressive potential. Scientists are now developing a synthetic form of Hi1a that could move into human trials within the next few years. If successful, it may become a drug administered during or after heart attacks and strokes, helping preserve vital tissue and improving long-term recovery outcomes. What began as a discovery inside a spider's venom gland may soon become one of medicine's most promising new tools.

Source: Infensa Bioscience in Brisbane

Stefano Francioso

The Perfect Breakfast - Porridge with Berries

The perfect breakfast is creamy-tasting porridge topped with great value thawed frozen fruit and toasted flaked almonds for extra protein. With a glycaemic index of 51 this meal is high protein, low GI.

Ingredients

80g/2¾oz whole rolled porridge oats

200ml/7fl oz semi-skimmed milk

150g/5½oz frozen mixed berries, such as strawberries, raspberries and blueberries, thawed

15g/½ozoz flaked almonds, toasted

150g/5½oz fat-free natural fromage frais



Method

Put the oats in a saucepan with the milk and 300ml/10½fl oz water. Cook over a low-medium heat for 3-4 minutes, stirring constantly, until rich and creamy.

Pour into two deep bowls and top with the mixed berries. Scatter the almonds over and serve with the fromage frais.

Source: [Porridge with berries recipe - BBC Food](#)

Catherine McCarthy

The Committee

The committee meets each month except August and January. The Annual General Meeting usually takes place during the summer. It hasn't taken place for this year yet, details to follow. The committee members are:

John Golby (Chair/Treasurer), Fintan Gallagher (Deputy Treasurer), Stefano Francioso (General Secretary), Jim Yates (Events Manager), Jim McCluskey (Membership Development & NHS Liaison), Peter Bevan, Deborah Roberts, Anne Cullen (Deputy Events Manager), Corinne Woods (Joint Membership Secretary), Barbara Miller (Joint Membership Secretary) and Catherine McCarthy (Newsletter/Website Editor).

Newsletter suggestions

If you have any suggestions for newsletter items or want to submit an item please contact Catherine at cmccarthy4@sky.com.

Website improvements

If you have any suggestions for improvements to the website please forward them to Catherine at cmccarthy4@sky.com.

And finally

We are looking to review the look and feel of the website, newsletter, leaflet and other documents. If anyone has experience of branding and would like to get involved please contact cmccarthy4@sky.com. Jim McCluskey and I are planning to have a meeting in May or June to take it forward.



Catherine McCarthy