



The ECHO

Heart Throbs Newsletter September 2026

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John's Update

I hope you have all summered well and managed to continue your fitness and exercise programmes despite the heatwave. We must pay tribute to our wonderful team of trainers who have navigated us through the heat, keeping the rooms as cool as possible despite the dodgy air conditioning at Holtwhites. A special mention also to Lisa who brought along her lap-top to allow the Wednesday evening class keep in touch with the England v DR Congo World Cup match while they were exercising. The number of members remains steady at around 100; we have a good stream of new faces (mainly from the 'phase three' exercise programmes at Barnet and North Middlesex Hospitals) but we always lose members as well for a variety of reasons.

Website Re-designed

Catherine and our web designer, Lucy, spent the summer redesigning our website. If you haven't seen it yet, I recommend taking a look immediately (www.heart-throbs.org). The site now has greater impact, with a new font and more modern colours. Our logo has also been digitally redrawn; no one remembers who designed the original logo (it was

probably hand-drawn) and for many years we have relied on inherited scans of copies. It is now crisp and clean whilst retaining its original feel and impact.



There are a few things left to do to the website which we would like the members to help with:

There is a glaring lack of photos, particularly action photos. I know we have some great photographers with some expensive photography equipment within the membership so I am challenging you to take some action shots for us. All the photos we use will win you a Heart Throbs t-shirt.

We have some great testimonials on the site but these are at least 10-years old and many of the providers are no longer with us. Our web designer, Lucy, has told us that the most impact is now from video testimonials so, again, there is a t-shirt for everyone who provides us with a video testimonial (hopefully saying nice things).

John Golby

New Defibrillator

The new defibrillator has now been purchased and is now located in the equipment cupboard at Holtwhites Sports and Social Club. The final cost was £1,054.72 and we were helped by three anonymous donations of £500 and two of £100 with the balance being met from club funds. A big thank you to the anonymous donors; it is comforting that we now have this available for emergencies but hopefully we will never need to use it.



New members

A warm welcome to all our new members; Chris Atherley, Jacqueline Barrell, Samantha Hatton, Carol Huntley, Eileen Johnston, Janette McCulloch and Karen Straw.

Health Matters with Barbara - Bill Bilimoria

1) What is your heart condition and how did it present itself?

In October 2019 my wife, Eileen, and I were on holiday in Northern Italy, enjoying a tour of the Lakes. On the last day of our holiday, near Lake Como, unfortunately I had a heart attack. Eileen and our tour director called an ambulance and I was taken to hospital.

Dr Andrea Audo at the Alessandria hospital diagnosed me with angina symptoms with severely depressed left ventricular function (20-25%). On 8th October 2019, in Italy, I had a successful double heart bypass operation. Without the help of the Italian doctors and nurses and my wife I would not have survived.



2) What is your current treatment?

When I returned to the UK in early November 2019, our excellent NHS put me on two daily tablets, Bisoprolol and Clopidogrel (antiplatelet). I also went through an 8 week cardiovascular exercise programme (CVE) at North Middlesex University Hospital (NMUH) and when this was completed, it was recommended that I should continue my CVE with Heart Throbs. I had my last Echocardiogram (ECG) in May 2026 at NHUH. This demonstrated mild mitral and aortic stenosis. Dr Maradia, a Consultant Cardiologist at NMUH, recommended that I should have my next ECG in May 2029.

3) How long have you been a member of Heart Throbs and how has it helped you?

I joined Heart Throbs in 2022. I do believe the exercises that Hara and Mark provide are making a significant difference to the quality of my health life. I attend these sessions once a week on Mondays. I also do chair yoga on Wednesdays at Southbury Leisure Centre.

4) A little bit about yourself, family, interests and Awards

I am now 79. I retired as a Finance Director in July 2008. I have had a rewarding career as a qualified accountant. I also have a Master's degree in Finance. My wife is a retired teacher with a Master's Degree in IT. We have two sons and five grandchildren. Both our sons are graduates in Finance and Business. They did not want to be accountants or Teachers! Both have successful careers in the City of London. Our sons and our grandchildren are very sporty. They play hockey and cricket, as I did for 60 years. I did a lot of Volunteering work over the years with Eileen's support. This work included being Treasurer and Club Captain of Enfield Hockey

Club for several years, during which time I helped to establish mini hockey for boys and girls in 1986. This is still run by current members of Enfield Hockey Club. I managed to have non-executive roles as Treasurer for various charities including The London Playing Field Foundation and the Law Society Charity.

In June 2016, I was awarded the Queen's British Empire Medal (BEM) for services to Community Sport and Charity work. The BEM award gave my wife and I an invitation to the Queen's Garden Party the following year, which we attended. The BEM also entitled us to get married at St Paul's Cathedral (a few years too late!) and to have our children and grandchildren christened there. We were able to get three of our grandchildren christened there in early 2020.



Barbara Miller

Meet the Committee - Anne Cullen/Deputy Social Events Manager

1) How long have you been a member of Heart Throbs?

I investigated Heart Throbs in 2014 after my first aortic valve replacement. As I was still lecturing full time then, I could not do a daytime exercise class. Sadly, that biological valve failed after seven years, so in December 2020 my second open-heart operation gave me a mechanical valve, during the pandemic. By then I had retired and soon felt stronger. Again, I visited Heart Throbs and finally signed up in Spring 2023. I soon increased to two or three classes a week which has made a fantastic difference to my health.

2) What role do you have on the committee?

I am Deputy Social Events Manager. Jim Yates stepped down as Events Manager, and I am still looking for a job-share partner if anyone's interested!!

3) When did you take on that role?

I attended my first committee meeting in June 2024.

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

I am often the one that asks you to buy raffle tickets and amazingly you often do! I enjoy our short little chats. We are very grateful to you as all the money raised goes to boost Heart Throbs funds. The social atmosphere at Heart Throbs classes was a real surprise to me and I am convinced it helps keep us happier and more likely to stick with the vital regular exercise. The socials give me, and all members, the chance to meet members from other Heart Throb classes and to have different types of conversations with our own 'classmates.' The social side of Heart Throbs can be a bonus to us all, so I am happy to contribute in a variety of ways.

5) What football team do you support?

I don't unless England is in a World Cup match. But I am a Londoner, so I politely ask my brother about his team, Arsenal. And I am very sympathetic with my son-in-law who supports Spurs. I am more of a tennis, horse-racing and water sports fan, now as an observer.

6) What's your favourite food?

Cheese and Marmite, each on their own slice of hot buttered toast. These are essential. Luckily, I don't have a cholesterol issue, and I need plenty of calcium for the osteoporosis of my bones, so dairy products are great. (I do like all the 'healthy' stuff too).

7) What's your favourite drink?

I do not have one favourite. I love various teas without milk. Favourites are at least one tasty coffee per day and plenty of water.

8) What's your favourite holiday destination?

Two are joint favourites – Milan as one grandson and his parents live there, and the other grandson and family have their home in Boston. In the UK I would choose Cornwall, near Padstow. My dad was stationed down there for a year in WW2, so mum went with him and it later became our regular holiday haunt. I also had one amazing trip to Botswana.

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

Sadly the world's greatest cat, my Toby, died in April at the age of 16. He was a moggy but a beautiful tabby and white, with a great personality, fond of humans and sociable. He will always be remembered fondly.



Catherine McCarthy

Heart Throbs Social Events

Our Spring 2026 programme included:

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

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

2 July - Stefano's BBQ

Our Autumn 2026 programme:

1 October - Bill Hamilton, BBC News reporter

November, date tbc, Dr Simon Kennon, cardiologist, our patron

5 November - Hara Markos, Falls prevention talk followed by AGM at 8:15pm

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 to deliver a talk on please contact any member of the committee.

Catherine McCarthy

How heatwaves affect your blood pressure

While warmer days are normal during British summers, extreme heat can make things far more challenging. For many of us, sunscreen, fluids and shade are enough to stay safe, but if you have a health condition such as high blood pressure, there are other things to think about.

The British Heart Foundation (BHF) says that around 3 in 10 people in the UK have high blood pressure (hypertension). It happens when the pressure on the walls of your blood vessels - caused by the blood within them - is higher than normal. Because they're under more strain, your heart has to work harder, increasing the chance of heart disease, stroke, and other serious conditions.

While your body's usually good at lowering blood pressure as a way to keep it safe when you overheat, there can be issues if it goes too far. Again, the additional strain on your heart as it beats faster to maintain blood flow into your organs means blood pressure can spike temporarily. This happens when blood vessels widen, you sweat, your body releases stress hormones - if you get too hot, parts of your nervous system release adrenaline, which shrinks your blood vessels and increases your heart rate, there's an electrolyte imbalance and the side effects of medications.

Warning signs that your blood pressure may be affected include:

Being light-headed or dizzy. fainting or feeling faint, rapid heartbeat, nausea or headache, muscle cramps, excessive sweating or not sweating at all.

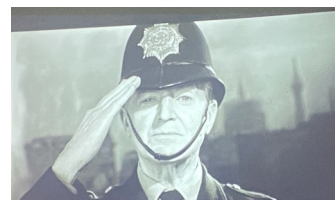
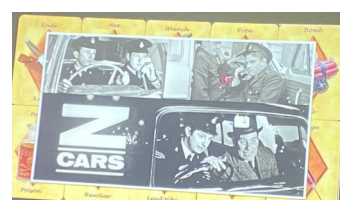
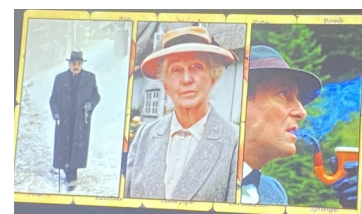
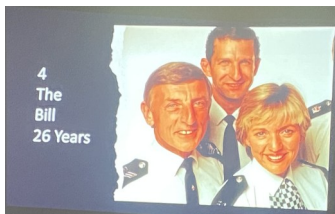
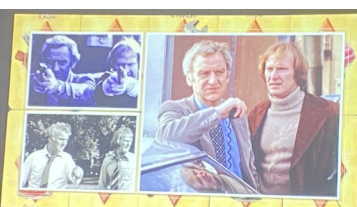
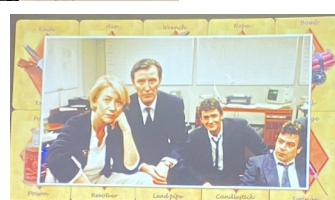
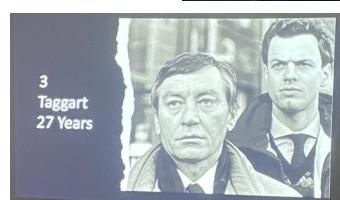
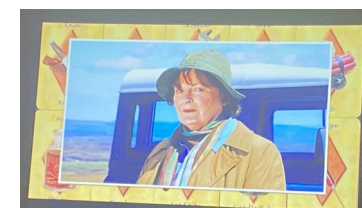
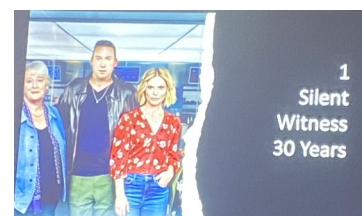
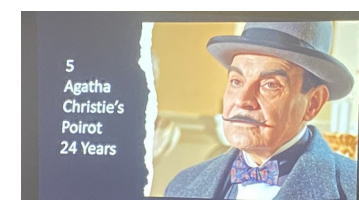
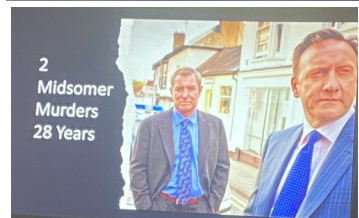
If you have any of these symptoms, act straight away to cool down and stay hydrated by getting out of direct sunlight and into somewhere cooler, cooling yourself down with cold - but not icy - water, and drinking plenty of non-alcoholic fluids. If symptoms don't go away, get help from a medical professional. Call an ambulance immediately if you or someone else becomes confused, stops sweating, loses consciousness, or collapses.

Source: <https://patient.info>, 2026



Watching the Detectives

On 7th May we had a fascinating talk from Pete Allen called Watching the Detectives about programmes on television about British crime fighters. He explained that as a country we have an obsession with murder. He covered 49 programmes in total starting with black and white programmes until the current year where 24 series had already been running in 2026. He shared that at the end of the 2nd World War there was a demand to increase entertainment on television. One idea was to get ideas about crime stories from Scotland Yard's real case files. Early programmes included Dixon of Dock Green and Softly Softly. The longest running show was Silent Witness which was on for 30 years followed by Midsomer Murders (28 years), Taggart (27 years), The Bill (26 years) and Agatha Christie's Poirot (24 years). It was interesting to hear about famous actors playing cameo roles in these programmes. We finished with the grand raffle. A big thank you to Pete for a very enjoyable evening.



Wildlife of Africa

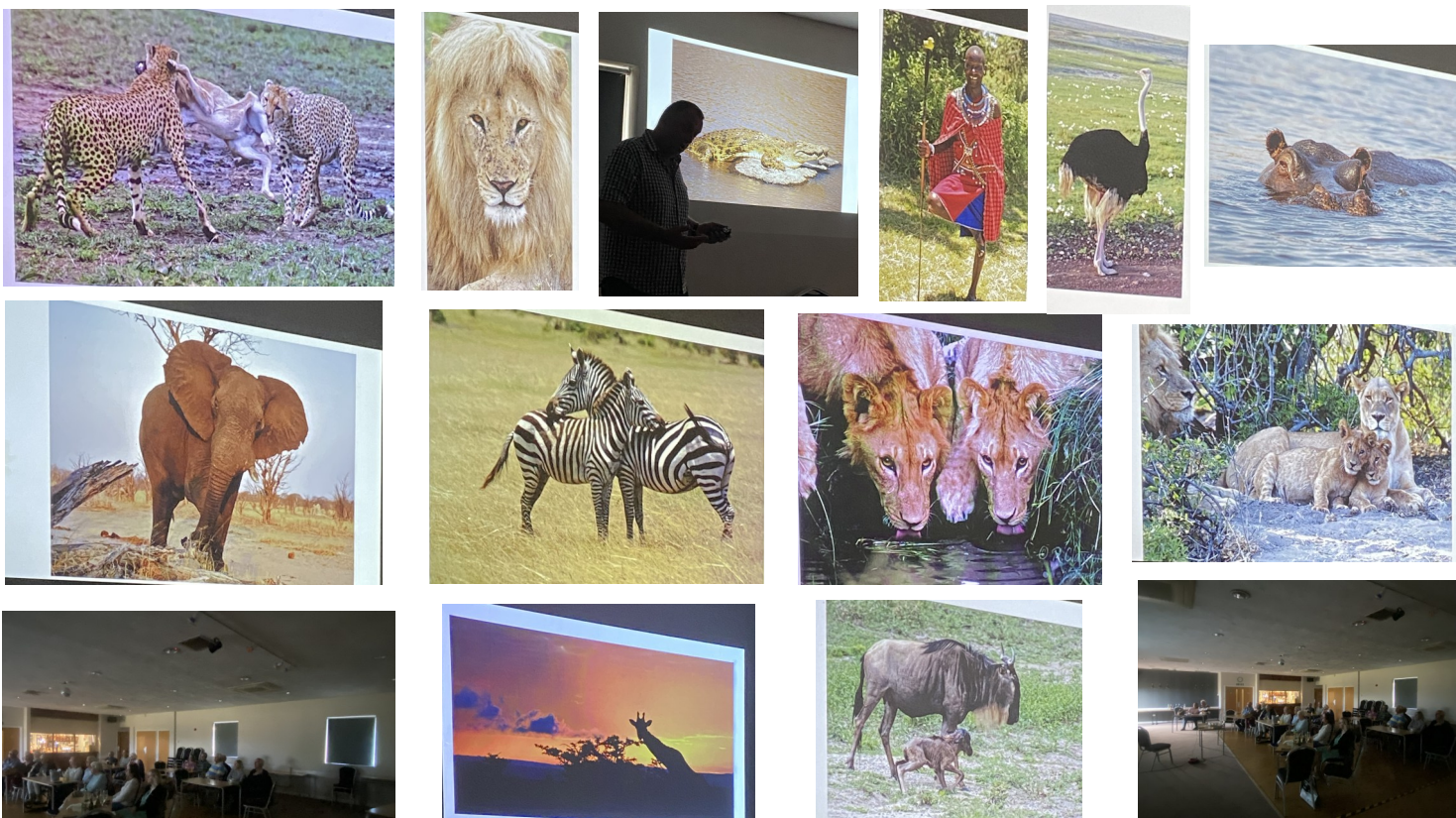
On 4th June we welcomed Robin Claydon, the wildlife photographer, back for another one of his captivating talks. This time we heard about African wildlife from his trips to Uganda, Kenya, Botswana and Zimbabwe. He explained that the big 5 animals in Africa are the lion, leopard, elephant, Buffalo and rhino.

We learnt about Africa's most dangerous animals. The mosquito is the most dangerous due to malaria and dengue fever with hundreds of thousands of deaths annually, the adder has 32,000 deaths annually, the hippo 3000, the crocodile 3000, the Buffalo 200 and the lion 100.

The white rhino is more common than the black rhino with approximately 15,750 left in the wild and is considered 'near threatened' but the northern white with only two females left in Kenya, under 24 hour guard, is considered extinct. The black rhino is about half the size of the white but much more aggressive with approximately 6750 left in the wild and is considered 'near extinct' compared with the Sumatran rhino only 45 left in the wild.

He shared interesting anecdotes from his travels in Africa. Always padlock your tent or the baboons will get in and take everything. The young Maasai warriors are getting mobile phones and are more connected with the outside world so Robin thinks in 20 years there won't be any new warriors. Giraffes are the most threatened animals due to tourists wanting to shoot them. Young wildebeest have to run within 5 minutes of being born due to circling lions. Lions sleep for 20 hours a day and hunt for four, they are also very good at hiding. Never wear a dark blue shirt on safari as flies are attracted to it, the best colour to wear is khaki. Giraffes only sleep for 20 minutes a day.

Finally, Robin's photo of lions has been used by London Zoo in one of their lodges. We had the grand raffle as usual and would like to thank Robin for another engaging talk and look forward to him coming back.

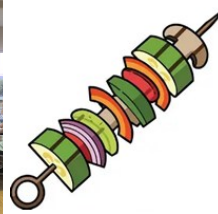
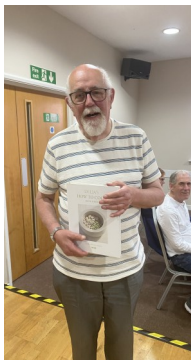
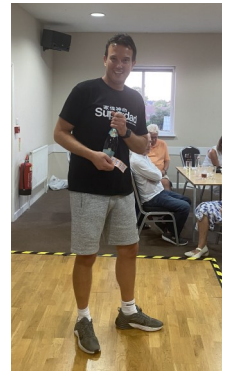


Catherine McCarthy

Stefano's Summer BBQ

We all had a wonderful time at Stefano's BBQ on 2nd July. We enjoyed chicken fillets with melted mozzarella basil and fresh tomato, beef burgers with melted mozzarella fresh tomato basil oil and fresh lettuce, Italian fennel sausages with fresh tomato and basil oil, vegetable kebabs of peppers mushrooms and onions, garlic mushrooms, coleslaw, mixed salad and freshly baked brioche buns followed by fresh watermelon.

The evening was a great success. We enjoyed good company, had the grand raffle and in total over £800 was raised. A huge thank you to Stefano, Enrica and Paul for all their hard work.



Catherine McCarthy

A one-off treatment could lead to a cure for high cholesterol

Results of early stage Clinical Trial

A one-off treatment could lead to a cure for high cholesterol, according to medical researchers in London. In an early-stage clinical trial, a single dose of a new experimental therapy cut levels of LDL 'bad' cholesterol by up to 62 per cent and kept them low for up to a year, raising hopes that patients could one day avoid taking daily medication for the rest of their lives.



The treatment, called VERVE-102, is delivered through an IV drip and works by permanently altering a gene involved in cholesterol regulation. Researchers reported no serious safety concerns in the trial, the results of which were published in *The New England Journal of Medicine*. Lowering LDL cholesterol reduces the build-up of fatty plaques in the arteries, helping to cut the risk of heart attacks and strokes.

While statins can achieve similar reductions to gene therapy, they generally need to be taken every day. If larger studies confirm that VERVE-102 is safe and effective, a single treatment could provide long-lasting protection against cardiovascular disease. It is a gene therapy which works by permanently altering a gene involved in cholesterol regulation. "It is still early days, but this is an extremely exciting milestone," said Prof Riyaz Patel, a clinical academic at University College London (UCL) and consultant cardiologist at Barts Health and UCL Hospitals (UCLH), and one of the local leads for the trial.

Why it matters

Raised LDL cholesterol is one of the biggest risk factors for heart attacks and strokes, contributing to hundreds of thousands of deaths each year in the UK and US. Doctors can lower that risk with statins, and the drugs are now taken by more than 7 million people in the UK and upwards of 40 million in the US. But they only work if people keep taking them.



Research suggests around half of patients stop their cholesterol medication within a year of starting, either because they find a daily pill difficult to maintain or because of side effects. Muscle aches are the most commonly reported problem, while a small number of patients experience more serious complications.

That is why researchers are so excited by treatments such as VERVE-102. If a single dose can provide lasting cholesterol reductions, it could remove the need for lifelong medication altogether. Over time, cholesterol-rich plaques accumulate in the artery lining, narrowing the vessel and making dangerous blockages more likely.

Prof Bryan Williams, chief scientific and medical officer at the British Heart Foundation, said: "These results are very exciting and highlight the pace of change in genetic technologies and their application in healthcare. "Cholesterol levels were lowered by impressive amounts, up to 62 per cent at the highest dose, and reductions appear to have been stable over several months. "While longer studies involving more patients will be needed to confirm this, it is possible that a single dose could reduce a person's risk of cardiovascular disease for years.

Source: *The New England Journal of Medicine*, 2026

Stefano Francioso

Importance of Strong Chest and Back for Heart Health

Analysis using Artificial Intelligence

People with a strong chest and back are less likely to have a heart attack, analysis suggests. Researchers, using artificial intelligence, think people with greater muscle density in the torso area are also less likely to die prematurely or have a heart attack.

Researchers led by the University of Edinburgh used AI to examine hospital scans of 1,722 patients, aged mostly in their 50s, who had chest pain. Those with greater muscle density in their chests and backs were less likely to have a heart attack or die in the decade after the scan, the study found.

Researchers suspect people with this type of “good-quality skeletal” muscle are those who exercise more and have greater strength in their torsos. The findings, published in the journal *Radiology*, suggest this could help reduce the risk of having a heart attack or dying early.

Prof Michelle Williams, the senior author of the study, found the study’s findings so compelling that she has started going to the gym twice a week and aims to walk for an hour a day. “It is fascinating that people’s skeletal muscle could be linked to their risk of having a heart attack. The muscles which show up in the scans we used – coronary computed tomography angiogram scans – are principally the back muscles, part of the pectoral muscles – or ‘pecs’ – and the intercostal muscles between the ribs.

“So I am now personally interested in exercises like cycling, planks and pilates, which I enjoy and may have an effect on these muscles. However, we need far more research to better understand how exercise may affect muscle density, and how this may relate to heart health.”

How was research undertaken?

Researchers used AI to examine people’s muscle, organs, bones and fat in their upper bodies. This included looking at skeletal muscle attenuation – the brightness or darkness of the muscle in a scan. Denser muscle appears lighter in a scan image because more X-ray beams bounce off it. A brighter image indicates that someone has better quality, more dense muscle, which may contain a lower proportion of fat.

For every 10-point increase in scan brightness, suggesting better quality muscle with less fat in it, a person was calculated to be 31% less likely to have a heart attack. They were also 39% less likely to die in the 10 years after the scan, researchers said. The size of people’s muscles was not linked to their risk of a heart attack or early death, suggesting it is the composition of the muscle that matters, the researchers said.

In future, routine heart scans could be used to identify people with less good-quality muscle who may be at greater risk of heart attacks. These people could then be helped to exercise more, be monitored more closely, or be prioritised for drugs that reduce the risk of a heart attack.

Prof Bryan Williams, the chief scientific and medical officer at the British Heart Foundation, which part-funded the study, said: “It is likely that people in this study with more dense muscle mass were more physically active and as a result may have better heart health. That is yet more evidence supporting the power of exercise.”

Source: The Journal of Radiology, 2026

Jim McCluskey



Tribute - Mages Sivagnanam

Mages Sivagnanam sadly died on July 6th aged 89 and had been a member of Heart Throbs for many years since 2005. She was born in Ipoh, Malaya, to parents who were originally from the Jaffna area of Ceylon as it was then known. Mages did teacher training in Kirkby College near Liverpool, which was one of two colleges in England that had programmes to train Malayan teachers.

She then taught in Malaysia for several years before marrying and moving to the UK. She taught in several Enfield schools and then for the English Language Service. Mages was renowned for her garden and her wonderful cooking. Bridge was also an important hobby until dementia took its toll. Mages' daughter, Maya, is about to take up the post of His Majesty's Ambassador to North Macedonia. (Tribute by Elizabeth Nathan).



The Committee

The committee meets each month except August and January. The Annual General Meeting usually takes place during the autumn.

The committee members are:

John Golby (Chair/Treasurer), Fintan Gallagher (Deputy Treasurer), Stefano Francioso (General Secretary), Jim Yates, 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), Catherine McCarthy (Newsletter/Website Editor) and Maurice King (Equipment Manager).

Maurice King - Equipment Manager

Maurice has joined the committee and taken on the role of Equipment Manager, particularly helping set up and put away on the Monday evening class at St Stephen's. If you have any suggestions for new equipment please let Maurice know and he can raise it with the committee so we can agree what to buy next.



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

On 5 November at 8:15pm we will be holding our Annual General Meeting after Hara's talk about Falls prevention at Holtwhite's Sports and Social Club. If you're interested in hearing about the running of Heart Throbs, the accounts and future plans or have any questions to ask the committee we'll see you there.



Catherine McCarthy