

“Running Fawltly Towers”

Talk by Susan Howe, 24 March 2026. Review by Marlene

After our AGM in March 2026, we welcomed Susan Howe, our speaker for the day, who shared fascinating snippets from various stages in her life. As background, she told us that she is a London Blue Badge guide, which enables her to carry out this role throughout the breadth of the UK.

The core part of her talk covered three of her career stages – her experiences as a cook on a luxury yacht, her time at Westminster Abbey and the third stage, running a hotel.

It started in the 1960s when she answered an advertisement for a job on a luxury yacht as a cook (despite having no previous experience). In the interview, she was given to understand that the captain’s girlfriend would provide any necessary help. Sadly, she found this was not the case and that she was not only there for the VIP guests, but also for the 17 crew (who did not think that quiche was appropriate fare for seamen).

Anecdotes for this stage included the following: the time when the yacht’s freezers broke down and Susan was rowed into Dubrovnik at night to get fresh supplies, and the fact that Guenther Sachs (ex-husband of Brigitte Bardot) suffered from seasickness and used his private jet to fly to Malta etc., leaving the yacht to follow without him. He offered her a job in St. Moritz for the winter, which she was happy to accept because she thought there would be a lot of skiing opportunities.

Unfortunately, there was an extensive staff, including an English butler, who expected lunch at midday. By adjusting the clocks, she was able to serve lunch at 10.30; earlier than they realised, and go off to ski afterwards.

As a contrast, the next stage was Westminster Abbey, where she met her husband, who was the catering manager there. One highlight she mentioned was when the Royal Family and the Mountbattens came for a memorial service to lay a stone for Lord and Lady Mountbatten. Tea was served, but Princess Diana wanted brandy. Susan’s

husband went to get some, leaving Susan to serve the royal guests.

The third stage mentioned was taking on a run-down hotel with a dovecote in the winter of 1986. The dovecote triggered another little story – that doves from this very dovecote were sent to the Dame of Sark in the aftermath of the occupation of the Channel Islands, because the Germans had eaten all the local doves there.

This hotel is what led Susan to call her talk “Running Fawltly Towers” as so many experiences were comparably zany. Reminiscences included the tale of the escaped convict (who had stolen a suit and a car from a golf club in Cirencester) ordering drinks for everybody around and then absconding owing a lot of money. Another story featured a guest requesting an engagement ring be wrapped in foil and put into the pudding of his intended (who incidentally had been asked six times previously without success!). The other diners were a military contingent, possibly why the lady said “yes”. They subsequently spent their wedding night in this hotel, eventful because a deluge of water from the shower in the room above came through the light fittings. They tried to catch the water in a teapot which was the only receptacle they could find in the room. After all that, they asked if they could return to the hotel for their first wedding anniversary!



In the course of her various roles, she met several well-known people. She mentioned among others: David Suchet (who stayed in his room for three weeks, never stepping out of his Poirot character) and Paddy Ashdown (who came to the hotel after his scandal) and in Switzerland, Guenther Sach’s many guests included Roman Polanski and Jackie Stewart.

The Horsham u3a audience thoroughly enjoyed Susan Howe’s talk and we thank her for coming along to share her memories with us.