

OCTOBER 2015 MONTHLY MEETING REPORT

The Chair welcomed 133 members and 20 guests back to the Public Hall, following its closure in August and September for structural improvements. The Directors and volunteer supporters of the Public Hall were congratulated for the successful completion of the new foyer and balcony.

A cake, made by Amanda Smith, was cut and shared in celebration of this meeting being our 1st. Anniversary. The chair reminded members that one year ago at the Inaugural Meeting of Beccles U3A 185 people attended with 133 people signing up as members on the day. One year later we have 390 members with 39 interest groups. We have had 11 monthly speaker meetings attracting an average of 137 people per month. Over 300 members will have enjoyed attending visits and trips by the end of this calendar year. Events include a trip to the Houses of Parliament early in the year and will conclude with a trip to Thursford for a Christmas Extravaganza in December.

The Chair invited members to consider joining existing interest groups or to suggest and help set up new groups. The Interest Groups are the life blood of Beccles U3A and members should join in, get involved and have fun. The Beccles U3A is established and is flourishing.

The Executive Committee, Web Master, Accessibility Officer, Minutes Secretary and the team of people who organise the refreshments were all thanked by the Chair for their help and support in making Beccles U3A such a success. Amanda Smith was also thanked for providing a Beccles U3A Anniversary Cake.

Members were advised that any Nationally U3A events are posted on the General Notice Board. Most of these events are London based but are for the exclusive use of U3A members. Additional details can be found are on the Main U3A website.

Sandy Perrin (Groups Co-ordinator) gave an update on Groups:-

Starting today was Digital Photography, Singing for Fun, Lunch Club and Dog Walking. A convenor has now come forward for the Madrigal Singing, details to follow. Sandy introduced Rod Parker to present his new group Science in the News. This latest group attracted 14 members by the end of the meeting.

Members were then updated on Events; two places remain for the trip to Thursford. other events for this year are Waveney Stardust- All Day Cruise on 20th November and Bury St Edmunds Christmas Market on 27th November. For more details contact Irene Squirrell (Events Secretary). A new 2016 events programme will be published in the near future for all members to consider. This may include a possible 12 day cruise.

Peter Westmacott (Vice Chair) gave a vote of thanks and a presentation to Peter and Susan Shannon for the idea and setting up of a U3A for Beccles.

Mu Gurbutt (Monthly Programme Secretary) introduced Ian McLachlan.

Report by Vicki John

Ian McLachlan gave a fascinating talk at the October meeting. Ian is an aviation archaeologist, historian and author of a number of books about the USAAF in the Second World War.

By Christmas 1942 some 30,000 Americans were here, and starting to construct a total of 41 heavy bomber airfields. Personnel were given an instruction booklet titled 'A short guide to Britain'. This had advice on how to deal with the differences in USA and UK life; e.g. currency and rates of pay, customary conduct, sayings and phrases, laws and religions, living standards and dress. The latter was easily noticed as American pay

was nearly four times that of the UK, and their uniforms were smarter and better made. UK servicemen were very conscious of the differential, so too were their wives and girlfriends, causing early resentment of the incomers though this eased in time.

Having already endured three years of war, rationing and hardship, UK residents were used to going without many luxuries, particularly foodstuffs. The Americans brought some comfort as they soon became aware that simple gifts of food and tobacco were greatly appreciated, particularly by children, many of whom had never seen sweets or bananas. Coca Cola was popular with the British and ladies liked the imported nylons; the Yanks liked our fish and chips, but not our warm beer, or our meat pies (not enough meat). Schools were invited to visit the USAAF bases and ferried to and from the latter by the airmen. In return, the Windmill Girls came from London to East Anglia to entertain the Americans!

Wartime did bring some problems. Race was sometimes troublesome as black Americans were not integrated, and fights could develop. On the whole, the bad balanced the good and many very successful events were held, such as musical concerts. The great Swing Bands of Glenn Miller, Count Basie and Benny Goodman were top of the wartime charts and visited the UK (the waltz and foxtrot soon being dropped in favour of the jive, lindy-hop and trucking). Many village halls, in addition to town theatres, hosted dances in return for those held at the airbases. The American Red Cross set up about 400 Anglo-American Clubs in Britain and also arranged 'Flak farms' where US aircrew suffering fatigue and stress could recuperate. This mixing of people inevitably inspired wartime romances and many British girls became GI brides, eventually travelling to pursue new lives in the USA.

From 1943, the joint Anglo-American air operation developed in strength and instigated ever-heavier raids until Germany had to surrender. The USAAF then rapidly closed their activities in the UK and shifted all planes and crews to concentrate on the war in the Pacific, against Japan. One fact not widely known is that since coming to Europe a total of almost 4,000 USAAF airmen remain in Maddingley memorial cemetery near Cambridge, and 5,000 more remain listed 'missing in combat'. Out of 115 in total, only 2 USAAF bases remain in East Anglia – Mildenhall and Lakenheath.