Chester Times
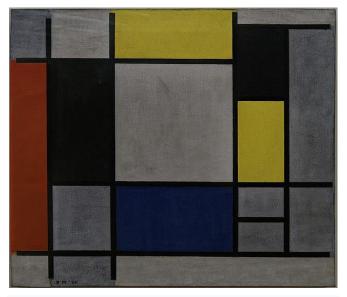
April 2024

u3a learn, laugh, live — Chester

Musings from the Chair

Happy Easter! I hope you are not overdosing on chocolate or grandchildren.

My **Wow!** topic for this month is painters. I chose painters rather than paintings because in my list are Piet Mondrian and Bridget Riley. I don't have a favourite work by either artist, and if I named one, I could not call it to mind (and nor, probably, could you). That is the problem with abstract paintings.   My list is completed by Klimt (for example *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer*) and Magritte: I have a soft spot for *ceci n'est pas une pipe*. I even have a tie with the inscription *ceci n'est pas un cravate*, but nobody wears ties anymore, so it gets very little exposure.

Amsterdam - Stedelijk Museum - Piet Mondrian (1872-1944) - Composition with Yellow, Red, Black, Blue, and Gray (A 9864) 1920.jpg   CC BY-SA

For his body of work, I nominate Picasso, whose variety of output is incredible. But if his only painting was *Guernica*, he would still get my vote, such is the impact of this astonishing - and shaming - work.

My equation of the month is Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle. Formulated by the German physicist and Nobel laureate, Werner Heisenberg, in 1927, the uncertainty principle states that we cannot know both the position and speed of a particle, such as a photon or electron, with perfect accuracy; the more we nail down the particle's position, the less we know about its speed. Mathematically this can be expressed like this:

$$\Delta x \Delta p \geq \frac{h}{4\pi}$$

Just as with the Euler identity (January's equation) this is beautiful in its economy. Just eight symbols to say a huge amount. By the way, h is Planck's constant, named after another Nobel prize winner in 1918, Max Planck. Beyond the narrow confines of physics, you might like to speculate whether there is an uncertainty relationship between truth and simplicity: the more simply we express something, the less likely we are to bring out the full complex truth.
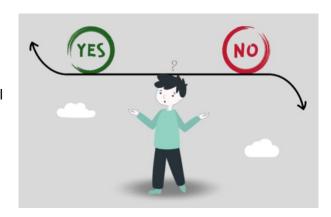
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Tuesday Monthly Meetings
Festival Church, Queen Street, Chester, 2.00pm for 2.30pm start

2nd April: Lisa Oakley: Dilemmas and Decisions - How do we make moral decisions?

Life is full of moral decisions but how do we make them? Does it change depending on our age, culture and the media? How do psychologists work out how people make moral decisions and do moral dilemma problems really tell us much about how we make moral decisions in real life?

This talk will explore all these questions and include moral dilemmas for those attending to solve.

Thursday Monthly Meetings
St Columba's Church Hall, 10.00am for 10.30am start

18th April: Mervyn Saunders: Gosh - Is Auntie really over 100!

Mervyn has enjoyed a life-long interest in entertainment in its many forms, with over 40 years spent as a 'hobby' compère and MC of carnivals and charity dinners.

This talk is about the evolution of the BBC, its ups and downs and why the organisation had to dramatically change its ways in the 1960s. Mervyn always tries to involve his audience and his talks are full of interesting facts and nostalgia.

March Meetings

Report from the Speaker Secretary, Sue Houghton

At Festival Church in March, Marianne Blaauboer took us on a globe-trotting adventure from the comfort of our chairs with her fascinating account of Nellie Bly, an American journalist whose race against a fictional record brought her international renown. The intrepid journalist was no stranger to difficult assignments, having already gone undercover in an insane asylum and worked as a foreign correspondent in Mexico, but this was her biggest challenge to date. People claimed a woman couldn't possibly follow in the footsteps of Phileas Fogg to go around the world in 80 days but in 1889 she proved everybody wrong by completing the journey in 72 days 6 hours and 10

minutes. And she achieved this with just two days of preparation, a single bag measuring 16 inches by 7 inches and one gown (and no corset!). We heard how Nellie spent a five-day delay in Colombo having a curry at the Grand Oriental hotel (and discovering that bombay duck is, in fact, fish), watching snake charming and buying a monkey for three dollars that she christened "McGinty". At her final destination in Jersey City, the men were interested in her sun-burned nose, whilst the women wanted to examine her one dress … and, of course, the monkey. The Mayor of Jersey City declared that, in future, the American Girl would be recognised as 'pushing, determined, independent, able to take care of herself alone and single-handed wherever she may go' making this a very appropriate talk just a few days before International Women's Day.

Nellie Bly - Public Domain

At St Columba's, David Murdoch took us on a different journey, beginning 15000 years ago when man started to domesticate the Eurasian wolf for hunting and protection, and taking us up to the present day with Man's use of dogs in a variety of contexts, such as Guide Dogs and Hearing Dogs, and dogs used for pet therapy, medical detection and to assist the police. We learnt the moving stories of dogs working in war zones and heard about the heroes of 9-11, who escorted their owners to safety or helped in the search and rescue effort. David also traced the history of cats, originally domesticated as 'Feline Rodent Operatives'. We discovered that the Egyptians worshipped cats as gods, and that mummified cats were popular ornaments in Victorian times. However, cats also got a bad press at times, such as in the 13th century when they were vilified as symbols of evil with the eyes of the Devil, and in the 1600s when they were associated with witchcraft. David's talk was a brilliant mixture of history, story-telling and humour, and gave us a great insight into the origins of our canine and feline companions.

Thank you if you have already completed the 2024 Members Survey. The survey asks what you think about our meeting venues and the talks offered. It also gives you the opportunity to comment on any other aspect of your u3a membership, so I encourage you to complete it even if you do not attend the monthly meetings. The online version will remain open until April 19th and paper copies will be available at both April meetings.

Finally, I am hoping to set up a small team of members to work with me on the monthly meetings. If you are interested in helping to plan the programme of talks and/or would like to get involved on the day (e.g. organizing refreshments, meeting and greeting on the door), please email me at Speakersec@chesteru3a.org.uk.

Open Meeting

Popular Science

Monday 29ᵗʰ April 2024 at St Mary's Church Centre, Handbridge, CH4 7HL. Doors will open at 9:30am and talks begin at 10:00am. Refreshments will be available before the meeting and in the interval.

All are welcome!

My Adventures in DNA testing – and what I found out!

Ever thought of getting your DNA tested (or maybe your pet's)? How do you go about it? What can you learn? What do you need to consider before going ahead with it? And what might the consequences be?

By Sue Foy

How your home affects your health

Including simple changes you can make to make it much healthier than you might think it needs to be.

By Mark Thompson

Suggested donation of £2 towards room hire and refreshment costs

Social Events

Wednesday 17th April: Trip to Potteries Museum and Art Gallery, Stoke on Trent and Trentham

We will begin by visiting the **Potteries Museum and Art Gallery** in Hanley, Stoke on Trent. There are many diverse galleries to see, including a Spitfire which has been donated by the RAF and has been fully restored. There are also artefacts from the Staffordshire Hoard, purchased by the museum.

Other galleries include natural science, fine art and the world's greatest collection of Staffordshire Ceramics.

We will return via **Trentham** with one of the largest garden centres in the country. There are also 80 quirky shops housed in wooden lodges with several cafes and restaurants on site. **Cost will be £15.**

Pick up points as usual: Hough Green 9.00 am, Delamere Street 9.10 am and Sainsbury's 9.20 am.

Please contact either Liz Flanagan 01244 341097 or Sandra Moffat 07818 401 526 if you are interested in this trip.

cc-by-sa 2.0 - Trentham Gardens by Kevin Rushton - geograph.org.uk/p/644779

Friday 10th May: Tissington Village Well Dressing

We still have 4 seats available for this trip to Derbyshire where the whole village of Tissington gets together to celebrate the fact that none of the inhabitants died from the Black Death or the Plague.

There are about 7 wells which are decorated with beautiful flowers.

Cost is £13.50. There is a cafe in the village.

Pick up points as usual: Hough Green 9.00 am, Delamere Street 9.10 am and Sainsbury's 9.20 am.

Please contact either Liz Flanagan 01244 341097 or Sandra Moffat 07818 401 526 if you are interested in this trip.

One of the Decorated Wells at Tissington

Group News

History Group, by Ian Cross and Joyce Carrington

The history group is flourishing. We have now reached the magic figure of 50 members, after several people joined at the recent groups meeting at St Columba's.

The main topic that we are looking at in the first half of this year is the history of slavery.

When you think of slavery, your mind will probably immediately go to the transatlantic slave trade and the slaves who worked on the sugar plantations. However, in order to put this into a wider context, we started our research much further back in history. We have looked at what was happening in Greek and Roman times and also in the Middle East and Africa in ancient and medieval times. We have also looked at what is meant by 'slave societies' and how these differed from 'societies with slaves' – the former are ones where the main source of labour is provided by slaves. The main examples would be the cities of ancient Greece, Roman Italy and Sicily, and in more modern times the Caribbean, the USA and Brazil.

We think of Athens as the 'cradle of democracy', but is it possible that, ironically, slavery played an important part in this? By the fifth century BC it was usual for even ordinary Athenian citizens to own a few slaves. Soldiers would often go on a campaign with a slave attendant as his batman, and it is likely that he would also have at least a few slaves to work on his small farm. This freed up Athenian citizens to perform the duties associated with citizenship, such as attending the assembly to participate in debates, and to this extent slavery in Athens was just the other side of the coin of citizen freedom.

As in Athens, Roman citizens were freed up to participate in the politics of the Roman Republic and to fight in its wars. The main difference between Athens and Rome was one of scale. Rome's huge estates in Italy and Sicily were farmed by using slaves on a massive scale. By the late first century BC there were about I to 1.5 million slaves in Italy out of a population of 5 to 6 million – over 20% of the population.

The Greeks and Romans got their slaves in two main ways – either by seizing them in wars, or by encouraging the breeding of slaves from those already captured. Slave traders generally followed each Roman campaign in order to transport slaves to markets back in Rome. Whichever method was used, one thing is clear – slaves were mainly foreigners, or as the Greeks and Romans would say, barbarians.

Roman Captive Figurine from Holt .CC By SA. National Museums of Liverpool

Slavery persisted in medieval Europe. The Viking era (8th-11th centuries) in particular saw an explosion in slavery, with many captured from the Franks, Anglo-Saxons and Celts, some by their raids on monasteries such as Lindisfarne. The Vikings used slaves in their colonisation of Iceland.

The Catholic Church, which might have been expected to condemn the practice, largely accepted it as a *fait accompli*. They sought to stop the enslavement of fellow Christians but, with a few notable exceptions, they took little action. In England, chattel slavery was theoretically abolished in 1066, but the Domesday Book of 1086 described 10% of the population as slaves. One of the last records of slaves in England was on the land of Peterborough Abbey in the 1120s. Wales, Scotland and Ireland were among the last parts of Western Europe to end slavery.

One interesting strand that we have looked at was the example of slavery in the Canary Islands and Madeira, which was an important forerunner of transatlantic slavery. From 1341 Castilians began

to colonise the Canary Islands. They enslaved large numbers of the local population, the Guanches, supposedly justifying this by considering them to be inferior or even sub-human. Madeira was colonised by the Portuguese from 1424. Early stages of colonisation saw indentured Berber labourers brought to Madeira from Morocco to clear the land. Then the rapid expansion of sugar plantations made it more efficient to bring slaves from Senegambia in West Africa (perhaps the first European colonial slaves from sub-Saharan Africa). This model was later transferred to Portuguese colonies in the Caribbean and Brazil.

By the end of the 15th century the basis had been laid for expansion to new colonies across the Atlantic. We'll be exploring these developments in future meetings.

If you are interested in joining the history group, please email history@chesteru3a.org.uk.

Sugar Plantation. Unknown Artist. Public Domain

The Cycle Group, by Terry Garner

The Cycle Group encourages a community where members can enjoy exercise within a sociable environment. Our routes deliberately avoid congested roads, opting instead for scenic towpaths, cycle paths and quiet country lanes in Cheshire, Wirral and Flintshire. We accommodate all types of bikes, whether manual or electric, and embark on both longer and shorter rides.

Our weekly rendezvous point is at Limewood Fields, Kingsway, Newton and we make sure that in each ride, whether long or short, we include a refreshing break at a cafe where matters of shared interest are discussed further enhancing the social aspects of the group.

Looking back at the past year, we are thrilled that it was our most successful yet in our 12-year history. With a robust membership of 28 individuals, we collectively completed a record-breaking 51 rides. Among these, 22 were longer journeys while 33 were shorter ones offering something for everyone. In addition to the scheduled rides, 6 extra rides were organised by members which further enriched our cycling experiences.

Together we covered a total distance of 1108 miles, a record-breaking achievement for our group. To celebrate our achievements, we had a meal at the Boathouse Inn in Chester, enjoying each other's company and reflecting on memories made throughout the year.

As we look to the future, The Cycle Group is committed to fostering a welcoming environment supporting both friendship and fitness. So come along and join us on our future rides.

Wirral Ramblers Sunday Coach

This is not a u3a group, but members who want to walk further afield without having to drive there, may find this useful.

Wirral Ramblers organise a coach every Sunday from the Toby Carvery, Arrowe Park to take ramblers to places further afield such as North Wales, Lake District, Peak District, Yorkshire Dales and Lancashire. There are 4 or 5 levels of walk every week, organised by experienced leaders. The sociable atmosphere on the coach and refreshments breaks at pubs or cafes gives ramblers the opportunity to get to know others who share their interests. For more information go to www.wirralramblers.org.uk or find them on Facebook.

Feedback to the Chair, from David Savage

The Chair's recent items featuring his favourite equations have led me to think about what might be my favourite one. I've come up with the formula for **Reynold's Number.**

$Re = \rho\, l\, v / \mu$

Reynold's Number is a measure of the turbulence of flow of a liquid, defined in 1883 by Osborne Reynolds (1842-1912), an Irish born British innovator. It's short and sweet and trips nicely off the tongue as: Row Ell Vee over Mew.

But what's it all about?

ρ is the liquid density

l is the length of some relevant feature, perhaps the diameter of a pipe

v is the liquid's velocity

and μ is its viscosity.

As a result, Reynold's Number is dimensionless, a pure number, as all the dimensions of its components magically drop out. Up to about 2,000 flow is laminar and above is turbulent.

So what? Well, apart from the fact that I like the idea of a dimensionless quantity, it's also very useful, not only to Hydraulics Engineers but also in a domestic setting where it can be used to explain why one teapot spout tends to dribble where another doesn't.

Think about it.

Schedule for Groups to Help at Monthly Meetings

We would hope that groups will cooperate in providing help to the volunteers who are already working hard to facilitate our two monthly meetings. However, in an emergency, please email committee@chesteru3a.org.uk so that all members of the committee are aware of the need to provide additional cover.

You are very welcome to use these sessions as an opportunity to seek new members or promote your activities by bringing along flyers or photographs, setting up a stand or even asking if you can take a few minutes to talk to the whole group.

	Festival Church at 2.00pm	**St Columba's at 10.00am**
April	**Tuesday 2nd** Racketball	**Thursday 18th** Pickleball Westminster Park
May	**Tuesday 7th** Racketball Reading 1 Reading2	**Thursday 16th** Science

The cut-off date for the next Chester Times is Wednesday 20th April 2024.
Please send contributions to: chestertimes@chesteru3a.org.uk or: PO Box 167 Chester CH1 9FB.
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