



Chester Times

December 2023



Musings from the Chair

Welcome to our new committee, which is getting to work with a swing. I hope that you begin to recognize some of the new faces on the block.

One question I have been asking myself concerns weekends. After fifteen years of retirement, I have almost lost the ability to distinguish days of the week. It matters little to me whether it's Wednesday or Sunday: the shops will be open, everyone can read my emails and Amazon will deliver whatever I need. So why do we programme our u3a activities into a five-day week? Personally I would welcome activities on the occasional Saturday and Sunday - they tend to be the slowest days of my week. I understand that some people use weekends to visit their families, but I don't think they pick up their grandchildren from school on Saturday. Please write back and let me and your committee know whether you agree with me or not. We could change our pattern of meetings (or not, of course) but you have to tell me which you would prefer.

The evenings are now quite dark and you may be reading more, so my topic this month is classic novelists. My definition of classic is 'dead but still in print'. I have laboured through Tolstoy (too long), Balzac (ditto), Dostoevsky (too depressing), Dickens (pretty good actually but again too long), Forster (too sensitive), various Brontes (too many), Hardy (too hard) and Camus (too



sad). And many, many more. Eventually the only two Brits who make my **Wow!** list are George Orwell - for so many reasons including imagination, commitment and brevity - and Jane Austen because she makes me laugh.

John Steinbeck is the American who has left the biggest impression on me, for his sympathetic approach to the human condition. For insights into America itself I nominate Sinclair Lewis (although more recently David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* earned a second read despite its length).

Going further back into history, Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* also made me laugh a lot (much more than *Don Quixote*, which is rather over-rated). Oops, that's three Brits. Finally my 'body of work' award goes to Emile Zola. Not only did he write a series of novels spanning an enormous gamut of French life, but he is rightly famous for his 'J'accuse' stand in the Dreyfus affair.

Oh dear, I haven't mentioned Lewis Carroll, Wilkie Collins, Conrad, George Eliot, Faulkner, Flaubert, Hawthorne, Hemingway, Hesse, Huxley, Kafka, James, Joyce (*nice juxtaposition there!*), Lawrence, Mann, Maupassant, Melville, Scott Fitzgerald, Stendhal, Thackeray, Waugh or Wells. The winter evenings are not going to be long enough but, however long they are, I won't be reading Virginia Woolf.

Finally, let me send you early good wishes for the Christmas season.

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Tuesday Monthly Meeting

Festival Church, Queen Street, Chester, 2pm for 2.30pm start

5th December: Katherine Wilson, Associate Professor of Later Medieval European History, University of Chester: **'Telling Stories from Medieval Objects: Mobility of Objects Across Boundaries'**

What stories do medieval objects tell? Why might it be important to study everyday objects from the past and how can they help us to understand our present?

In this lecture, Katherine Wilson will explore and use every-day medieval objects such as shoes, keys, tiles, ceramics, pottery, devotional and pilgrim badges which have been excavated in and around Chester, and are held in the Grosvenor Museum. We will uncover the stories these objects have to tell and think about how they can be used and made accessible in the present to members of the public, to educational practitioners, and to students of all ages.



Thursday Monthly Meetings

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

21st December: Festive Coffee Morning and Quiz

Take a break from wrapping presents and get into the festive spirit with music, mince pies and a quiz on all things Christmassy. A chance to show us what you know about trees, turkeys, twinkly lights and tinsel. Teams of up to six will battle for the honour of being crowned Chester u3a Champion Christmas Quizzers 2023. Don't worry if you don't have a team – just come along and we will find one for you to join. With musical entertainment supplied by Mal Waite, it should be a great start to the holiday season.

Festive treats will be available from 10am, with the quiz starting at 10.30 prompt.



Please note that there will NOT be a meeting at Festival Church on 2nd January.
 The first members' meeting of 2024 will be at St. Columba's Church on 18th January



Tuesday Walking Group, by Ian Cross: A Wander on the Wirral



The Dee estuary and Welsh hills

The third Tuesday in October – usual day of the month for the u3a Tuesday Walking Group outing – brought eleven of us to Burton on the Wirral, where we were able to combine woodland walks with spectacular views over the Dee estuary. Surprisingly, for this autumn, the weather stayed fine all day!

Starting from the north end of Station Road we headed back down the road towards Burton, taking in a visit to Hampstons Well (formerly called Patrick's Well) which apparently dates back to the Iron Age, and was used around AD 900 by the Anglo-Saxon settlement at Burton.

We then entered Burton village before turning left into Burton Woods, where, near St. Nicholas Church, we passed the Quaker Graves. In 1663 two Quakers, possibly husband and wife, were buried here, apparently to show their exclusion from the established Church. A stone records that the original inscriptions are almost obliterated, but one reads, enigmatically, 'The body of Ell... 1663'.

From there we walked back north up Neston Road, stopping for a welcome coffee break at Ness Gardens. Then after coffee we turned east towards Mill Hill, before making our way via Ness village back to the coastal path, where we were rewarded with beautiful views of the Welsh Hills across the Dee estuary.

The Tuesday Group always enjoys a post-walk lunch, in this case at Net's Café, conveniently situated almost at the end of the walk.



A well-deserved lunch!

Start point: Station Road Burton Map ref SJ 301747.

Duration: 2 hours 45 minutes (including coffee break). Distance: 5.25 miles. Total ascent: about 300 feet

NB: if you wish to repeat the walk please note that the above is not intended to be a step-by-step guide. You should go appropriately equipped, eg with a map or walking app and keep to public footpaths,

Craft Group, by Sue Houghton and Louise Hammond

We are a friendly group of crafters who started meeting last year. Between us we have skills that include knitting, crochet, embroidery, cross stitch, patchwork, felting and macramé (to name but a few), but there is no pressure to be an 'expert' at anything – it's just a chance to relax, connect with others and share interests and ideas in a friendly and informal setting.

At our meetings, members can take the opportunity to try out a new craft under the guidance of a group member or bring along a project of their choice to work on whilst watching and encouraging the novice crafters. So far we have tried crochet, pebble art pictures, and making fabric bookmarks.



At our October session, we attempted macramé bracelets. It was much trickier than it appeared to get consistency in the knotting, but at the same time it was a very relaxing craft to do with pleasing results once mastered. A few grandchildren will be getting pretty bracelets for Christmas.



Sashiko example

Planned crafts to try out in the New Year include Sashiko (Japanese 'decorative darning'), lavender bags, Fair Isle knitting (for those of us who can actually knit – probably not me!), patchwork and card-making.

As a small group we have been meeting in members' houses but have now outgrown our kitchen tables and from January 2024 we shall be meeting in Hoole Community Centre 10am to 12 noon on the second and fourth Fridays of the month. There is plenty of room for new members and we welcome anyone with an interest in crafts, whatever your skill level. Members contribute a small cost towards the hire of the hall. The community centre has a large car park and a lovely café on site too. Please contact the group leader for more information or to join the group.

Crafting in the comfort of your home is rewarding but you'll find that crafting with others is even better!

Industrial Heritage Group 1, by Jane and John Chilton : Visit to Wrexham

On 19th October we had a fascinating visit to Wrexham to look at some of its extensive industrial heritage. Our tour leader was Stewart Shuttleworth, author of *Wrexham at Work- People and Industries through the Years*, published this year.

Our tour started at the Gresford Memorial (see photograph). The worst disaster of the North Wales coalfield occurred at Gresford Colliery in 1934. An explosion took place and, with the exception of one deputy and five men, everyone working in that section was killed. The explosion was followed by a fire which spread to the rest of the mine. For over twenty-four hours, rescue teams fought the fire but to no avail. As the rescue operations had already claimed the lives of three members of the rescue brigade, it was decided to seal off the top of the two shafts. Only eleven bodies were recovered of the 266 miners who were killed. The mine was re-entered in 1935 and coal production was gradually resumed from January 1936 until its closure in 1974.

Our next stop, appropriately, was the Wrexham Mines Rescue Station near the city centre. The guide there told us that the building was partially demolished a few years ago, illegally by the site owner, until Cadw stepped in and gave it immediate Listed Building status.

The centre is run by volunteers and visitors are always welcome. For a weekday group visit it is advisable to check availability first as space is limited. The centre also runs arts and crafts classes and has a small café.



Photo by Ian Lawrence

We learned about the life of coal miners, children and adults, in the area, the hazards they faced, the disaster that befell them in 1934 and the work of the fire and rescue services. On one of the walls, 266 tiles commemorate all those who lost their lives in the disaster.

Stewart then took us on a tour along the Town Trail and other historic parts of the city centre, taking in the Lager Brewery Office, the City Museum, the Butchers' Market, St Giles Cathedral, the Overton and Central Arcades and the Soames Brewery chimney amongst other sites.

Although Wrexham has faced hard times, as with most heavily industrial areas, it was encouraging to note that various projects have been completed or are underway to restore some of its rich industrial and architectural heritage. In spite of a few showers, we all had a very enjoyable day.

Possible New Groups

- Italian for Beginners or Improvers
- Music Group (popular music: singing and instruments)
- Writers Group

If you're interested, please contact Groups Coordinator Sheila Morris groups@chesteru3a.org.uk



Social News

Friday 1st December: Macclesfield trip. Pick-up times are Hough Green 9.00am, Delamere Street 9.10 and Sainsbury's bus stop at 9.20.

Saturday 16th December: Stocking Fillers, Royal Court Liverpool. 1.30pm start.

If you wish to travel with me, I will be at Chester Station at 11.30am near the entrance gate, having bought my train ticket (cheap day return) before this time. If you could do the same that would enable us to cross the line together for the 11.40 train. Packed lunch to eat on train would be good or get a quick snack at the venue. Let me know if you wish to come with me.

For those making there own way I will be in the foyer at the theatre from 12 50 pm

Please ring me if you are uncertain of anything. Liz 01244 341097

Chester u3a Committee 2023-2024

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Articles for Chester Times in 2024

The editors will be pleased to hear from any groups or individuals who would like to contribute to Chester Times next year. We have sent out invitations to specific groups who have sent us articles in the past, but we really don't want anyone to feel they have been ignored.

If you have something you would like us to publish, such as a planned activity for your group or a report on something you have recently done, please let us know. It may be useful if you want to recruit new members, but even if you don't, it's good to let u3a members see the full picture of the sort of activities that we are able to offer.

If you want your group to be included, please email chestertimes@chesteru3a.org.uk

Schedule of 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 situation, please email committee@chesteru3a.org.uk so that all members of the committee are aware of the need to provide additional cover.

Festival Church		St Columba's
December	Tuesday Literary Appreciation 1 Local History	Thursday Mahjong, Maths for Fun, Metaphysics for Dummies
January	Tuesday (No meeting)	Thursday Mindfulness Meditation Music 2 Music 3

The cut-off date for the next Chester Times is Wednesday 20 December 2023.

Please send contributions to: chestertimes@chesteru3a.org.uk or: PO Box 167 Chester CH1 9FB.

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