



# Chester Times

February 2024

u3a learn,  
laugh,  
live  
Chester

## Musings from the Chair

Our Thursday talk last month was very special. We met in Storyhouse to hear the world premiere of a stunning monologue by Shaun Higgins, focusing on the life and words of Wilfred Owen. I do hope that we can meet again in Storyhouse: We filled the Garret Theatre with ourselves and then our lengthy applause.

One reader commented, having read my Wow list of classic novels, that I must do nothing but read novels. Not so, and for contrast this month my **Wow!** list is of musicals. For the purposes of this list I will not distinguish between stage and film versions although of course we will all have our favourites in each genre. My list is topped by *Cabaret*, closely followed by *Hamilton*, *Les Miserables* and *West Side Story*. You might notice a couple of things about this list. Firstly the subject matter in every case is very serious, whether the original inspiration was fact or fiction. I like my frivolity to have a serious sub-text. Secondly, none of these musicals is attributable to Andrew Lloyd Webber.

For a body of work I have to turn to film and to Gene Kelly. *On the Town*, *Singing in the Rain* and *American in Paris* are three of his best-known performances and in two of them he also co-directed. What a man!

My equation of the month is the Euler identity  $e^{i\pi} + 1 = 0$ , which has so much crammed into such a short equation. Euler was a Swiss mathematician who lived in the 18th Century and the number of concepts included in this short equation is nothing short of marvellous. I prefer its alternative formulation which would be spoken as: ee to the eye pie equals minus one. Every word of this was ground-breaking. e is the exponential function (and how often do you hear the phrase “exponential growth”?); “to the” means to the power of; i is the imaginary unit in a complex number; pi arises from the geometry of a circle; equals means a lot more than “is similar to” and minus one, well that is hard to define in popular language. Could we satisfactorily explain it as “one less than nothing”?

So the Euler identity relates six fundamental mathematical ideas using only seven symbols. I reckon that is pretty good.

$$e^{i\pi} + 1 = 0$$

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## Tuesday Monthly Meeting

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

### 6th February: Jim Holmes: English Breakfast and the Story of Ceylon Tea

The slopes of Sri Lanka's southern mountains are clothed in neat rows of low bushes that produce one of the country's greatest exports, tea. The famed 'English Breakfast' name is known the world over, but the story of tea in old Ceylon is far less refreshing. Jim Holmes toured tea estates and factories and met the immigrant villagers who still hand pick this everyday product to bring you the true story of English Breakfast tea. From its beginnings in 1824 through to today, little has changed in 200 years, but Sri Lanka itself has evolved into a proud independent nation, although with its political problems.



Jim Holmes is a fellow of the Royal Geographical Society and a professional documentary photographer specialising in worldwide humanitarian and environmental assignments from his base in Chester. Jim lived in Asia for over 30 years, and has travelled to over 50 countries around the world. Jim's talks are unique, entertaining and informative, bringing together the best of his photographic career and the experiences his assignments have brought, all from some of the world's most fascinating locations.

## Thursday Monthly Meetings

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

### 15th February: New Year, New You 3a!

**Organised by Chester u3a Groups and Membership Secretaries**



Looking to take up a new interest in 2024? Why not join us at our members' meeting on Thursday 15th February 2024 at St Columba's to find out more? We are gathering together as many of the group co-ordinators as we can, so they can share information about their groups and encourage everyone to take up a new activity in 2024. It promises to be an interesting event with refreshments, a quiz and entertainment from our own u3a ukulele group. Whether you've just joined the u3a or you are an old hand, you'll find something of interest. Make it a date in your diary and start something new!

## Social Events

### Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> February, 2.30pm: The Girl Behind the Drifters

This is the story of The Drifters and their difficult rise to fame. The show features many well-known songs like **Saturday Night at the Movies**, **There Goes My First Love**, **Hello Happiness** and, of course, **Stand By Me**.

All tickets have now been sold. I will be in touch by the end of January. I will meet you outside the Empire between 1.45pm and 2.15pm with your tickets, if you have not received them by other means. Again I will be wearing my blue lanyard. Any problems please ring me.

Liz Flanagan 01244 341097.

## Birdwatching 3: OK, let's talk about Hoopoes, by Nigel Platt

The species concerned is the Eurasian Hoopoe, *Upupa epops*, The Hoopoe, a bird so fabled and distinctive, figures in mythologies of Arabic, Greek, Persian, Egyptian, and other cultures.

It was known for its communication skills and compassion. It was also a companion of the prophet Sulayman. The Eurasian Hoopoe was chosen as the national bird of Israel in May 2008, and appears on the logo of the University of Johannesburg. It is the official mascot of the university's sports teams. The municipalities of Armstedt and Brechten, Germany, have a Hoopoe in their coats of arms, as does Märupe Municipality.

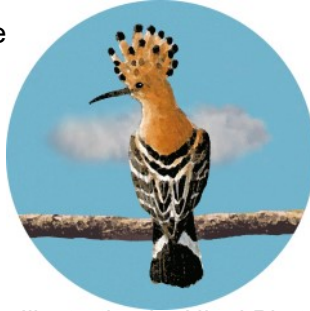


Illustration by Nigel Platt

But the humble Hoopoes haven't let fame go to their heads. They just get on with their lives, breeding in Europe and Asia, and getting some relaxing winter sun in Africa, where they sunbathe by spreading out their wings and tail low against the ground and tilting their head up. They are occasional visitors to the UK, but very few pairs have actually bred here.

Hoopoes are unmistakable birds and have two black and white chequered wings, two grey legs, one orangey body, one long curved black beak, and are proud owners of a truly magnificent orange, white and black tipped crested head. The crest is normally folded down, but when the bird gets excited, it becomes erect, and is an absolute wonder to behold!

Dinner is usually food that is available on the ground like seeds, insects, grubs, spiders and the occasional small frog. They also like the odd berry.

The female Hoopoe has an interesting way of keeping predators away. She produces a putrid-smelling liquid, which has a disgusting aroma of rotting meat, which she rubs into her plumage and that of her chicks. They are onomatopoeically said to be named after their call of 'hoop hoop' or 'hoop hoop hoop'..

I think I am correct in stating that every member of birdwatching 3 regards this bird as top of their wish list. This is why it has become our WhatsApp icon and mascot. I am tempted also to say that possibly one or two of our members (including myself) have become slightly obsessed by this superstar of the avian kingdom! I am the proud owner of a stylish Hoopoe Tee Shirt, and at least one other member has a Hoopoe mug. Searching the net revealed Hoopoes depicted on various items of apparel, crockery, bedlinen, wallpaper etc. I don't think many bird species, except robins, have such a multitude of merchandise items adorned with their image!



I am extremely lucky in being one of the few to observe one of these legendary creatures in the United Kingdom. It has been said that, if you go out specifically to see a Hoopoe, you never will, which is interesting, as once when on a walk in North Wales in the mid 1980s, I unexpectedly came across a single Hoopoe on the ground in the picnic area below the Aber Falls. I believe that others had seen it, as it was there for a couple of days or so, and it had I think been recorded by the Cambrian Ornithological Society at the time. This encounter helped spark my twitching instinct, and led me to many journeys, up and down the country with fellow, serious, rare bird seeking friends in search of poor, lost, tired and confused birds from far-away lands. I was rewarded with sightings of rare species like the Little Whimbrel, Broad-billed Sandpiper, Stilt Sandpiper, Upland Sandpiper, Forsters Tern, Laughing Gull and Pied-billed Grebe.

Out of all of those encounters, the most memorable, by far was the humble Hoopoe!

<https://youtu.be/9l6hsgcNH8A?i=cx4aArk4oR5Jld02>





## Thursday Strollers, by Pam Spencer

So it's the last walk of the year 2023.

Short walk, then a Christmas lunch to follow at The Shrewsbury Arms at Mickle Trafford. Weather forecast set fair so lots to look forward to.



Then the rain came (that wasn't in our forecast!). I'm a fair weather walker and don't especially enjoy a walk in the rain. 'It will be fine', said Jan. 'Look over there, the clouds are parting and the sky is blue. It won't rain for long. The sun will shine in a while.' Alan promised me there wouldn't be too much mud.

So off we set on our last walk of the year. Through the woods (lots of mud!) then out into the open where the view was water, water everywhere.

We only walked for an hour today as our Christmas lunch would be ready and waiting at 12.30 .

Do you know, I really enjoyed our walk? Good company, great conversation and some bird spotting on the way. The sun did shine and my boots will clean. Lunch was very enjoyable. I'm so glad I went.

Looking forward to all the walks we will have in 2024.



## Industrial Heritage 1: Our visit to Tata Steel, Shotton, by Jane and John Chilton



Actual steelmaking ended in the 1980s at Shotton, but today it is the largest pre-finished steel products site in Western Europe. Eighteen members of our group arrived at the North Security Gate off the Deeside Industrial Park, Zone 4 at 9am on Thursday 9 November 2023. Welcoming staff registered us with our passes, and gave a short site induction. Our on-site guide, Julie Baddock (Continuous Improvement Coach), was there to greet us before leading a convoy of our cars deeper into the site to the Innovation Centre, where we had a much welcomed cup of coffee and biscuits! Imagine our delight when our introductory talk was presented by Bill Duckworth, the Works Manager himself! We were given an excellent overview of the plant and we greatly appreciated his experience, enthusiasm and patience in answering our many questions.

Next it was time to don hard hats, high vis jackets, protective footwear and headset/ear protectors before we drove deeper still into the site towards the Galvanising line where Julie handed us over to Steve Cooke and Dave Crossley (HDG Training). We followed the line from where huge rolls of flattened steel, arriving from Port Talbot by train, are unloaded, unrolled and welded together into a continuous strip. This then passes over alternate sets of rollers, top and bottom of a huge shaft called the “accumulator” – rather like queuing up “snake-like” at an airport – but vertically rather than horizontally - simply to accommodate its length before it is galvanised. Through our headsets Steve explained the process as we walked along the line, with the continuous sheet of steel racing up and down in the accumulator, towering above us, before entering the continuous galvanisation process. A very small percentage of aluminium is added to the molten zinc - aluminium rapidly adheres to the steel forming a very thin layer of an aluminium-iron

compound that then better binds with the molten zinc. It is this very thin layer that enables a steel sheet to be bent or formed into many useful shapes without the alloy layer cracking and losing coating adhesion.

After the steel coils are galvanised many customers require their steel to be painted. In 2019 it was the Shotton works that developed a revolutionary three-layer Colorcoat Prisma® pre-finished painted strip product, consisting of a primer layer, a coloured layer and finally a protective layer. So, our next stop was a brief visit to one of their Colorcoat lines where Julie showed us the newest coating head, which applies one of the three layers of paint onto the galvanised steel in one pass through the line, before being coiled up, ready to be shaped into panels for large buildings.

Finally Chris Russell (Section Manager Panels and Profiles) took us to one of their Composite Panel lines where the Colorcoated steel for the outside of a building and the white liner sheet for the inside of a building are brought together along with liquid foam which, upon heating in an oven, makes a panel ready for installation.

After our very informative site tour it was time to return to the Innovation Centre, take off our protective clothing and leave our security badges as we passed back into the “outside” world, taking with us a much greater understanding of steel and the protective processes it undergoes – and, as most of the Tata Shotton works products are used in the UK, we all agreed that steel paneled buildings will never look quite the same again!

Many thanks to Julie and the team for organising such a comprehensive and enjoyable visit.





## Friday Writers: Colour and Speed, by Fran Waldie

The woman turned into the park and paused to gaze at one of her favourite places in all the world. She came every day to this beautiful space and always thought of it as Nature's amphitheatre. Tall trees formed the top tier of this coliseum and below were mature shrubs with dark green, light green and silver foliage. Below these a broad path circled a lake that she thought of as the arena. Spectators sat on benches positioned at intervals on the edge of the path, poised to watch whatever spectacle appeared.

Sadie Shawcross herself was a vision in purple velvet with yellow earrings and a mass of wild, pink, curly hair on which was crammed a red felt hat adorned with a huge peacock feather. She took a deep breath and propelled herself forward on her electric mobile shopper. A smile lit up her face as she began her first circuit of the arena.



*A cartoon of a lady on a Mobility Scooter,  
Openclipart*

Meanwhile, her grandson, Jonathan, was sitting on a park bench with his mother, enjoying an ice cream while they waited for his gran who was coming home with them for tea. He almost dropped his cone in amazement as the unexpected splash of colour and speed whizzed past them.

You are old, Grandma Sadie, the young boy said  
And you've painted your hair bright pink!  
And if you drive at that speed, you'll soon be dead,  
So, it's time to slow down don't you think?

Without slowing down, Sadie waved and shouted back:

Don't worry young Jono, try cracking a smile.  
Cos I'm having fun on my shopping mobile.

She sped along the path at break neck speed, almost chopping off the feet of three grumpy old geezers on the next park bench.

You're old Sadie Shawcross, one bearded bloke spake  
And you're careering around hell for leather.  
It's time to slow down or you'll fall in the lake  
And drown along with your peacock feather.

Sadie grinned and held two fingers in the air.

You guys have been glued to that bench for a while.  
Me, I'm a girl racer, just loving my shopping mobile.

Her chariot gathered speed, then she recognised some ladies from her street, walking sedately round the lake. They turned in unison as they heard the wheels behind them and Sadie's voice shouting "hello" and realised the mobile shopper was almost upon them. The startled strollers hurled themselves on to the nearest bench to avoid imminent collision.



Good lord, Sadie Shawcross, you're too old for such frisking  
They chorused like twittering birds  
It's time to slow down and think what you're risking.  
Well really! We're quite lost for words.

Don't worry about me. It just makes me smile  
To ride around on my electric mobile.

Sadie left the park and crossed the main road on her way home. This highway was like an invisible barrier between two worlds which when penetrated, changed everything. Gone was the devil may care Sadie, the free spirit that raced around an amphitheatre on a bright red electric chariot, refusing all advice to slow down, to be careful, and avoid all risk because now she was too old.

Once inside the house, the mobility shopper seemed to move at a snail's pace down the hallway to Sadie's apartment on the ground floor. She stopped and looked into the lounge where a television flickered with the sound on mute, while in the semi-circle around it heads drooped on chests, gnarled hands clutched walking sticks that rarely walked anywhere, and where occasionally a weak, reedy voice would call for help.

Sadie propelled herself forward and went into her flat. She took off the red hat with the peacock feather and the yellow plastic earrings, while muttering furiously under her breath. She sat at her dressing table and gazed into the mirror for a few minutes. Then she opened a drawer and took out an acid green beret which she put on and affixed with a sparkling hat pin in the shape of Pegasus the horse; she completed the look with large multi-coloured hoop earrings. 'There, that's more like it,' she said to the mirror.

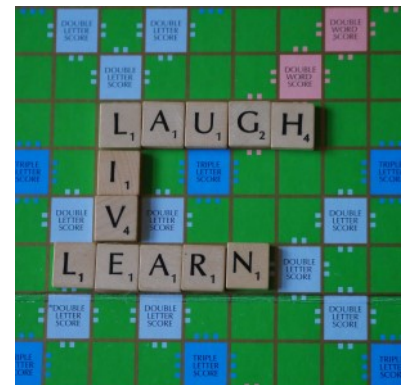
The mobility shopper had morphed into a fiery chariot once more, and turning the key she made her escape from the nursing home and headed for the coliseum.

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## Scrabble Group

The scrabble group has been resurrected and will now meet once a month on the 2nd Thursday at 2pm at Pam Taylor's house in Hoole Road. £1 contribution for tea/coffee. We can have up to three tables so all are welcome to come and join us. Contact [scrabble@chesteru3a.org.uk](mailto:scrabble@chesteru3a.org.uk) if you are interested.

Nicola Runnels-Moss



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## Notice of an event for recorder players

Formby u3a have organised a playing day on 24th February in central Liverpool for recorder players, tutored by Andrew Collis. Places are available. For more information please contact [helenlew1962@outlook.com](mailto:helenlew1962@outlook.com).

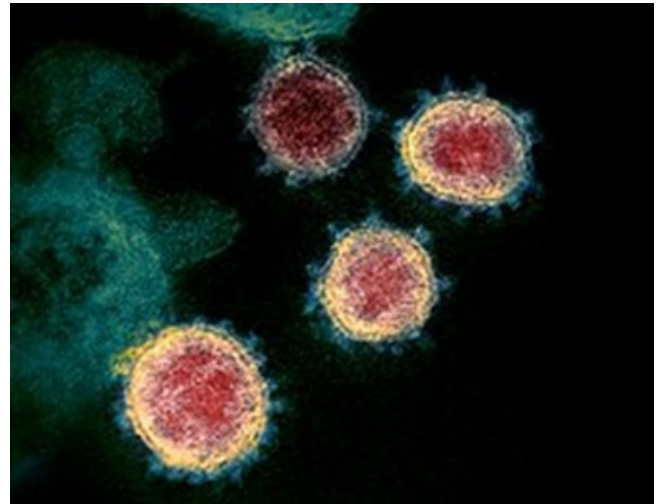
## Popular Science

Did you know that Chester u3a used to run popular science talks? The numbers attending some of these talks rivalled that of the monthly meetings. However, like many other things in the last few years, they stopped running after Covid-19.

We would like to revive these talks, just two per year, and use St Mary's (Handbridge) as a venue. These talks are for an audience with little or no background in science (but everybody is welcome) and aim to bring a scientific subject, or a subject in which science is heavily involved, to a general audience.



*The Crab Nebula, Wiki Commons image*



*The coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) . Wiki Commons image*

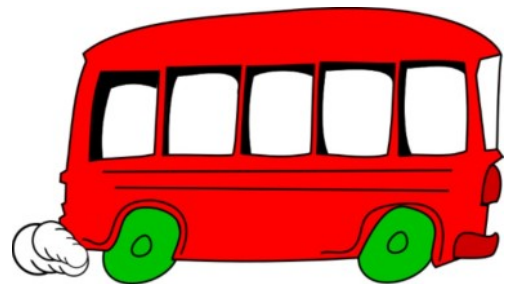
We intend the meetings to consist of two talks, each followed by questions, split at half time by a break for tea or coffee. Although we are still at the very early stages of planning these meetings, we do have several suggestions for speakers and/or topics but would welcome your ideas. We are currently considering holding the meetings in May and October of each year, but if people feel other months would be more appropriate, then let us know.

To run these meetings successfully we will need several volunteers on the day of each meeting. The volunteers will be involved in greeting people, serving refreshments, and generally helping. So, if you wish to volunteer, or give suggestions, or indeed have anything to say about popular science talks then let us know.

Jeff Howard & Sue Foy: [science@chesteru3a.org.uk](mailto:science@chesteru3a.org.uk)

## Bus Buddies

We are hoping to set up a new u3a group called 'Bus Buddies'. This would meet monthly, using our bus passes. Did you know that you can travel free from Chester to Corwen - a beautiful ride through the countryside? Going north, you can go to Liverpool; east to Warrington; south to Nantwich, and many other places. Two of us have been trialling the routes and we have been to several towns - enjoying the ride and then the destination. There is always time for lunch and a trip to a museum or ancient church. We usually leave the bus interchange at 10ish and arrive back around 3.30, though we need not all travel back together.



If you want to learn more, come and talk to Pat and Margaret in the Health and Leisure area at St Columba's on 15th February or email [groups@chesteru3a.org.uk](mailto:groups@chesteru3a.org.uk).





## Photography Group

These are some of the entries for the Photography group's annual competition.



Anchorage Quay, by Ian Nixon



Gaia Exhibition, by Jeff Lee



Lilac-breasted Roller, by Dave Clappertpn



Albert Dock, by Jo Poppy

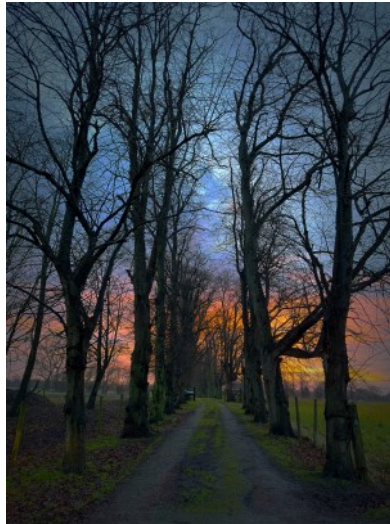




## Photography Group competition (contd.)



Damsel Fly at Bodnant,  
by Carol Raynor



Winter Trees and Sunrise at  
Puddington, by Simon Davies



Alan Gray

## Racketball Group Taster Sessions

Chester u3a Racketball Group has been running for about seven years. We have up to a dozen members every Tuesday, at the Parry Courts, University of Chester, Parkgate Road. It's a lovely facility. Then tea or coffee afterwards.

We have room for lots more members who would like some comfortable weekly exercise, and would like you to come to a free taster session, on Sunday mornings at 11:15 am on 4th February and 11th February

If you want to stay/get active then Racketball is:

- (1) an easy game to pick up - played on an indoor court with bouncy ball and big rackets
- (2) a good way to improve fitness and get a cardio workout
- (3) guaranteed to provide fun and social contact

Racketball is a game for all abilities. Chester u3a has group sessions for beginners/improvers as well as sessions for former squash or tennis players looking for a less physically demanding game.

You'll be welcome whether you come by yourself or with friends. All you'll each need is a clean pair of indoor court shoes, a water bottle and loose clothing. Dress as you would for badminton. Rackets and balls can be provided.

If you need directions please send a note via the u3a website, or email [racketball@chesteru3a.org.uk](mailto:racketball@chesteru3a.org.uk)

Did we mention the coffee ?



*Please click on the picture above to see a short video of our group in action*



## Follow-up to 'Strange Meetings - The Words of Wilfred Owen on Jan 18th

As he explained at the meeting, Shaun Higgins is planning to take his one-man show to the Edinburgh Fringe this year and would be very happy to get feedback from members who saw it. Please email [smhigginswriter@outlook.com](mailto:smhigginswriter@outlook.com).

He has also sent me an electronic copy of his handout for members who didn't manage to get one at this exceptionally well-attended event. Please email [speakersec@chesteru3a.org.uk](mailto:speakersec@chesteru3a.org.uk) if you would like one.

I would also be interested in any comments about the suitability of Storyhouse as a potential venue for future u3a events.

Sue Houghton Speaker Secretary

## 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](mailto: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
<b>February</b>	<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Thursday</b>
	Music Performing Opera Appreciation	Painting 2 Philosophy Poetry Appreciation
<b>March</b>	<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Thursday</b>
	Photography	Pickleball Northgate Arena Group

**The cut-off date for the next Chester Times is Tuesday 20th February 2024.**

Please send contributions to: [chestertimes@chesteru3a.org.uk](mailto:chestertimes@chesteru3a.org.uk) or: PO Box 167 Chester CH1 9FB.

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