



# Chester Times

March 2024

u3a learn,  
laugh,  
live  
Chester

## Musings from the Chair

Welcome to March. It has been a great start to the year for our u3a. January's highlight was Shaun Higgins' production about Wilfred Owen and I hope you will read the report on February's meetings by our Speaker Secretary, Sue Houghton on page 3. We hope to feature more reports on our Tuesday and Thursday meetings in future issues of Chester Times.

My **Wow!** list this month is boxed sets, unashamed television watching. (I refuse to use the awful modern phrase "box set" - which consists of two nouns, neither describing the other.) Leaving such pedantry behind, my Wow series are: Lonesome Dove; The Wire; Breaking Bad; West Wing and Succession. Four of these are well known and feature on many "best of" lists but Lonesome Dove might need some explanation. List compilers tend to have short memories and questionable taste. Lonesome Dove is a Pulitzer Prize-winning 1985 novel by Larry McMurtry, who also wrote Last Picture Show on which the great film was based. It follows a pair of friends who drive a herd of cattle the length of America. As with books, most series are too long, losing their impact after a few sets of episodes - but not Lonesome Dove. (You will notice that I have not mentioned Mad Men, The Sopranos, Fleabag, Friends, Orange is

the New Black, Cheers, MASH, Monty Python or The Thick of It. I liked every one of these but they are just very compulsive sitcoms.)

My lifetime achievement award goes to Charlie Brooker for his Black Mirror series, every one of which - despite being very dark - is thought-provoking about the future.

$E=mc^2$  is probably the most famous equation in the world. It is not as beautiful as last month's Euler identity, but it is probably more useful. Einstein realised that energy and matter are equivalent and his equation describes how a very small amount of matter (mass  $m$ ) is equivalent to a vast amount of energy,  $E$ . A vast amount because  $c$ , the speed of light, is a huge number so  $m$  times  $c$  times  $c$  ( $mc^2$ ) is very big. Why might you care? Just because the conversion of a little bit of mass into a great deal of energy is what the sun does, and that keeps us from freezing! So, you might not use  $E=mc^2$  yourself (I don't either) but you should be grateful for it.



Photo by Cholin on Freeimages.com

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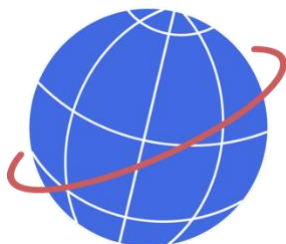
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## **Tuesday Monthly Meetings**

**Festival Church, Queen Street, Chester, 2.00pm for 2.30pm start**

### **5<sup>th</sup> March: Marianne Blaauboer: Nellie Bly – How to Travel the World in Less than 80 Days**

This is the story of an intrepid journalist, who was the first to follow in the footsteps of the fictional Phileas Fogg in 1889, as she travelled Around the World, meeting author Jules Verne along the way. 'No one but a man can do it' was the verdict, but she would prove everyone wrong!



*Nellie Bly - Public Domain*



## **Thursday Monthly Meetings**

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

### **21<sup>st</sup> March: David Murdoch – Wolves, Witches and Wagers**

David Murdoch qualified as a vet from the University of Glasgow and spent 48 years as a university lecturer at Glasgow and Liverpool as well as a practising vet prior to his retirement. His talk explores the origins of dogs and cats and how and why we domesticated them. 'Wolves' refers to the origins of dogs, 'Witches' links cats to witchcraft and 'Wagers' discusses the use and misuse of pets. With dogs, we start with domestication 12 000 years ago and bring it up to the present day and how we use and misuse our canine companions. As regards cats, we range through the contrast of being worshipped as gods to vilification as symbols of evil.



Honestly folks, this is not a boring talk



## February Meetings (Report):

### Breakfast Tea and Trying New Things, by Sue Houghton – Chester u3a Speaker Secretary

This month we were entertained at Festival Church by documentary photographer, Jim Holmes, who told us the story of English Breakfast Tea. The cultivation and selling of black tea has shaped the lives of generations of Sri Lankans for over 200 years. Jim's photographs conveyed the beauty of Sri Lanka but learning about the physical demands placed on the tea pickers and their low wages and basic living conditions gave us all pause for thought about the human effort behind our morning cuppa.

At St Columba's, we broke recent records with around 150 members coming along to learn how to get the most from their u3a membership. In presentations from a small selection of the many groups represented, we heard about the launch of Dog Walking and Strumming, the re-birth of Scrabble and the continued success of

established groups like History and Science. To conclude the morning, we were treated to a world premiere of our two Ukulele groups playing together for the first time. Thanks to all the group representatives who helped to make the morning such a success. Groups are at the heart of our u3a and I hope to involve them more in the meetings in the coming months.

Finally, a heads-up that I will shortly be launching a survey to find out more about what members want from the Speaker Programme. You will have the opportunity to comment on the venues we are using and the types of talk offered, and to make suggestions for future topics and speakers. You will be able to pick up a hard copy of the survey at the March meetings and it will also be available to complete on-line.



*Two Chester u3a ukulele groups performing together.*

## Social and Open Events

### Visit to Tissington, Derbyshire, by Liz Flanagan

I am planning an outing to Tissington village in the Peak District, Derbyshire on Friday, 10th May.

Each year the villagers get together to dress the wells which are scattered about the roads and paths around the village.

There are many theories why this celebration is carried out, but one of the most popular is that in the 14th century many people died from the Black Death. Tissington was probably saved by the purity of its many wells. Nowadays the wells are decorated with beautiful flowers and it is well worth a visit.

At present we are just taking names, but the price will not be more than £15.00.

Please ring Liz Flanagan on 01244 341097, who will give you more information.



*"186a Tissington Well Dressing, May 82"  
by wilfordpeloquin CC BY 2.0.*

### Popular Science, by Jeff Howard

Our first meeting of the revived Popular Science group will be on **Monday 29<sup>th</sup> April 2024 at St Mary's Church Centre, Handbridge, CH4 7HL.**

Doors will open at 9:30 am and the meeting will start at 10:00 am. Refreshments will be available before the meeting and in the interval. There will be two talks.

#### DNA - Testing

Speaker - **Sue Foy**

What can a DNA test do for you (and everyone else)?



#### How your Home affects your Health

Speaker - **Mark Chapman**

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

A small donation of £2.00 to cover costs would be welcome.







## Group News

### Pickleball – A Runaway Success, by Nicola Quartermaine



It's the game that is taking the UK by storm: a cross between badminton, tennis and table tennis. Or it could be called tennis for oldies as it does not require the fitness of tennis or badminton. Having said that, it also appeals to younger people too as you can pick it up fast and be playing an actual game within minutes. You play on a badminton-like court with paddles (table tennis bats on steroids) and a plastic ball with holes in. It is easy to start playing. The rules, however, are another matter (when you can score, where you can volley and when) and it can take a few sessions to master them.



It was invented in America by a group of neighbours and its huge success there has brought it across the pond. The name was coined apparently by one of the original inventors, a rower, who said the game reminded her of a 'pickle boat' (i.e. the boat that came last in a race), although that does not sound a wonderful connection. I prefer the story that it was named

after a Cockapoo called Pickles, who used to grab the ball and run off with it. However, apparently the dog Pickles appeared a couple of years after the game so we will have to run with 'pickle boat'.

It started in Chester u3a before the pandemic with Dave Smith as the co-ordinator and was already becoming popular when lockdown stopped all play. Dave must take the credit for its initial success. At that time, he reckoned that most new u3a members joined because of Pickleball. I joined u3a in January 2020 and started playing soon after, as it was easier on the joints than tennis or badminton although, of course, it all stopped in March. However, by the summer we were back on court playing outside at Westminster Park and continued outside throughout the winter of 2021 until eventually inside play was allowed again.



We do still play at Westminster Park in the summer when the weather is favourable. Dave managed to get 3 courts marked out there and we have the proper nets, so he achieved a lot. He handed the co-ordinator's job over to me at the end of 2021 and since then it has gone from strength to strength. We now have 79 in the group and the 2 pm Tuesday sessions at Northgate Arena regularly attract over 30 players. Maureen Carter has now joined me as joint co-ordinator as it is quite a large unwieldy group to manage and having 2 of us makes a big difference. New players join most weeks. so we now have a 1pm



session for the newbies and for those who prefer a smaller group.

Most players just enjoy a friendly game, but more and more attend local Pickleball festivals and competitions. Some play 2 or 3 times a week at other venues. Other u3a groups have now picked up the paddle both in Flintshire and Frodsham after having played at Chester first.

Here are a few quotes from a couple of new players:

*'It's a great way to get some exercise with a friendly bunch of people.'*

*'It's fun and entertaining.'*

*'Once you know the rules, it's great. (a first timer!)*

And from some more experienced players:

*'It's addictive for any age at any level. It's a sport that older people can play with younger people. Age is no barrier.'*

*'One game and you are hooked!'*

*'It's easy to pick up, friendly and sociable. But it would be good to get some proper nets at Northgate Arena.'*

## Amblers, by Sandra J Boyne

Our group has 16 regular members and one dog, Bruno. We walk on the 4th Friday of each month, meeting at 10.30, with an optional lunch at the end of the walk.

Our walks are arranged by members on a rota basis and are 3-4 miles long. It's easy walking.

Recently, we have walked at Parkgate, Wepre Park and enjoyed a festive lunch in December.

Our January walk was very enjoyable at Dibbinsdale Nature Reserve, Bromborough. We had a bright sunny day and it was great to see everyone after Christmas and catch up with news.



Amblers at Dibbinsdale Nature Reserve



Dibbinsdale Nature Reserve



Amblers Christmas Lunch





## Industrial Heritage 1, by Ian Lawrence

The visit to the excellent Avro Museum on 15<sup>th</sup> February was organised by Jim Fowler from our group. The museum was opened in November 2015 on the old BAE Systems site. We were taken around by a group of very enthusiastic and knowledgeable volunteers, most of whom had a background in the aviation industry, including retired pilots, engineers and designers. The displays are very well laid-out with aircraft replicas going back to a 1909 Triplane. The centrepiece is a full-scale replica of the cockpit and front end of a Lancaster Bomber (R5868), so famous in World War 2. We had the opportunity of going inside some of the cockpits with our guides to get a first-

hand experience, including sound effects of the engines in the Lancaster!

The museum also organises special events throughout the year. Their website is [www.avroheritagemuseum.co.uk](http://www.avroheritagemuseum.co.uk) They also have a Facebook page.

We would highly recommend this museum to all u3a members and their families.

The aircraft in the background is one of the famous Avro Vulcan bombers as used by the UK in the Falklands War



*The aircraft in the background is one of the famous Avro Vulcan bombers as used by the UK in the Falklands War.*

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## SOS – Wordpress Expertise Needed!

Our web site is in serious need of an upgrade, and we have at last risen to the top of the list for help in this major task from the national u3a team. A new site would be based on Wordpress. I wonder if there is anyone among our 950 members who has some experience developing or maintaining a Wordpress web site. If this might be you, please contact me (Peter Goodhew) for a chat. [chair@chesteru3a.org.uk](mailto:chair@chesteru3a.org.uk)

## Art Appreciation 2, by Terry McHugh

Our previous review of Art Appreciation 2 activities last September mentioned that in October we would discuss Kandinsky and Der Blaue Reiter. This we did with some excellent presentations and contributions on the work of this admired and influential artist.

We then considered artwork under the heading Food. The presentations included the Sulawesi Pig, a cave painting in Indonesia possibly 45 thousand years old. If its dating is correct, it would be one of the oldest examples of figurative art yet discovered. Other works considered included Cheeses, Almonds and Pretzels by Clara Peeters, a Flemish artist around 1600 and, in contrast, Warhol's Campbell's Soup Cans circa 1961.

As usual, December was our social coffee get together in the Cathedral and in Storyhouse,

Our January meeting was a virtual walk through the Louvre and took in works by Caravaggio, Degas and Vermeer. We also looked at the

impressive architecture of the entrance to the museum.

In February we have a new discussion subject of posters and postcards which could be interesting.

We have been concerned for some time that meeting via Zoom restricts social interaction which group members think is essential. We expect to meet up at Lady Lever Gallery in March or April.



*Still Life with Cheeses, Almonds and Pretzels by Clara Peeters - Public Domain*

## New Groups, by Sheila Morris

Can you help to set up a new **Tai Chi** group? We need someone with experience to lead a group of beginners. Please contact [groups@chesteru3a.org.uk](mailto:groups@chesteru3a.org.uk) if you think you could help.

And.....

The **Multimedia Art** group is looking for a few new members. Please email [groups@chesteru3a.org.uk](mailto:groups@chesteru3a.org.uk) if you are interested.



*"Tai Chi Demonstration" by Doug Hay CC BY 2.0.*

## Creative Writing, by Su Sisung

The existing creative writing group (Friday Writers) is full, but as there has been interest recently from people wanting to join, it could well be time for a second creative writing group to be formed.

If you are interested in being part of this, please contact me through the Chester U3A website. Once there is a goodly number, I will arrange an initial meeting to take this forward.





## Wine Appreciation Group (WAG), by Hazel Lloyd

The WAG has existed since 2020 and its organiser is Nicola Runnells-Moss. It meets once a month, at a member's house, in a hired room, at a wine venue in Chester or, occasionally, in a vineyard. During the warmer months, we meet in the gardens of respective members, which is a lovely way to spend an evening. The group managed to exist throughout Covid, although sitting in front of a zoom screen swigging a couple of wines on your own was a poor substitute for face-to-face meetups.



There are twelve members, as this enables the host to split a bottle of wine very nicely for tasting purposes, and usually six or seven bottles are tasted per meeting. Unlike the professionals, we don't usually spit it out... Each meeting has a different theme, concentrating on one country or region, or a grape variety, or all white or red, supermarket specials, 'holiday wines', and several other topics. The meetings are relaxed and relatively informal, with a wide range in depth of knowledge. Each member also provides some food, which often turns out to be quite a feast. When we attend a wine venue, we usually let the manager select some of their favourite wines, and also provide nibbles. For example, a recent

tasting at Chester Beer and Wine, Handbridge was titled 'Big brother, little brother', where pairs of wines were from the same region or vineyard, but one was a fairly expensive wine (£20 - £30) and the other was < £12 per bottle. This was a very interesting exercise.

The wine venues we have visited are :

- Chester Beer and Wine
- Majestic
- Tanners
- Vin Santo
- Wroxeter Vineyard (see previous Chester Times article)
- Conwy Vineyard



We estimate that we have held over 40 meetings so far and tasted over 200 wines.

We have had several people interested in joining the group, but there are constraints on numbers (size of the average lounge, difficulty in stretching a bottle to more than 12), so it was decided to set up another group (WAG 2) last November, which came into existence this year, with an initial meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> January. This was mentioned in the recent Chester Times, and we are hoping to attract more members after the New Members meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> February.

Cheers!



## Friday Walking Group, by Jeff Howard

The Friday walking group is for those who enjoy slightly more demanding walking, including the scenic upland areas of North Wales, the Peak District, and the Shropshire hills. Members take turns to organise and lead walks on the first Friday of the month. Winter walks are usually 6 to 8 miles, with longer, more ambitious all-day walks of up to 10 or 12 miles, depending on terrain, in the summer. Some hills and occasional rocky or boggy stretches must be expected, so boots, waterproofs and a reasonable level of fitness are essential. Walk descriptions are circulated by email.

On 2<sup>nd</sup> February, Mike Clark led our last walk near to Oswestry racecourse. It was a bright, sunny

day and the temperature was much higher than we could have expected for the start of February. During the walk we came across numerous patches of snowdrops. We finished our walk with a stop for tea (and cake for some) in a café in Oswestry.

Please let me know, through the email below, if you wish to join us for the next or subsequent walks. We meet at Halford's car park (Caldy Valley) to share lifts although, depending on where the walk is, some people make their own way to the start of the walk. The meeting time and the start time of the walk depend on the length of the walk.

Jeff Howard [fridaywalking@chesteru3a.org.uk](mailto:fridaywalking@chesteru3a.org.uk)



*Snow drops and walkers - Photo courtesy of Mike Clark*

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## Third Age Matters Magazine

The Third Age Matters magazine is delivered to members who have requested it as part of their membership. If for environmental or other reasons, **you have decided that you no longer want to receive this magazine**, please email the membership secretary at [members@chesteru3a.org.uk](mailto:members@chesteru3a.org.uk), so that we can update your record.





**Schoolreaders**  
improving literacy • increasing life chances

Volunteers  
Needed!



One in four children leave primary school unable to read to the expected standard.

**This will have a negative impact on their secondary education and future life chances.**

Children's literacy charity Schoolreaders recruits volunteers to listen to children read in primary schools, focusing on schools where children require the most support. Volunteers are asked to listen to children read once a week in term time and to commit to an academic year.

95% of children supported by a Schoolreaders volunteer improve their reading age. Partner schools also reported that volunteers had a positive impact on pupils with 95% improving their reading confidence and 87% their reading enjoyment.

Jane Whitbread, founder of Schoolreaders, comments "Children who leave primary school unable to read well can't access their secondary schooling fully which will compromise their life opportunities. One in seven adults in England (7.1 million) are functionally illiterate and cannot read instructions on a medicine label, sit a driving theory test or fill in a job application form. Working together we can change this."

If you can spare just an hour a week to listen to children read, you can help to change their life-story.

**To find out more about Schoolreaders visit [www.schoolreaders.org](http://www.schoolreaders.org)**

Schoolreaders CIO Registered Charity Number: 1159157. Registered in England and Wales





## 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](mailto: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	
March	Tuesday 5th	Thursday 21st	
	Photography	Pickleball Northgate Arena	
April	Tuesday 2nd	Thursday 18th	
	Racketball	Pickleball Westminster Park	

**The cut-off date for the next Chester Times is Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> March 2024.**

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

This month's editor: Gwen Goodhew

Next month's editor: Gwen Goodhew

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