

# CHIT-CHAT

**u3a**  
East Renfrewshire

THE NEWSLETTER OF  
[EAST RENFREWSHIRE U3A](#)  
SCOTTISH CHARITY No. SCO44004

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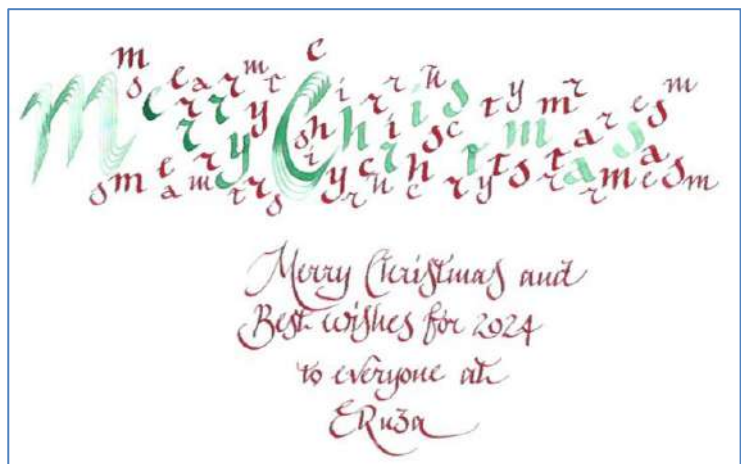
November 2023

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## HOLIDAYS ARE COMING

Avril McAllister used her calligraphic skills to design this festive greeting for us.



## CHAT LINE

*Chit-Chat* needs readers to keep sending in pictures, anecdotes, funny stuff etc. You can send it to me at [chit-chat@eru3a.org](mailto:chit-chat@eru3a.org), or post it on the [ERu3a](#) page in Facebook.

## MAKE CONTACT

Use the link incorporated in the *Chit-Chat* heading to access our website, and the various message birds to contact group facilitators. By using the message bird in the [Contacts](#) section of the website you can access any of the post-holders listed there. Safe links to other websites may also appear in *Chit-Chat*.

The interest groups featured in *Groups* are just a few of those now available. They are all listed alphabetically in the [Groups](#) Section of the website.

Facilitators can be contacted by clicking on the blue Message Bird incorporated in every group's heading.

If you don't have access to the Internet, phone 0743 712 3921 for information about groups etc.

Jim Hamilton

## THE BIZ

### CHRISTMAS PARTY

All members are invited to come along and enjoy a great afternoon at our Christmas Party in St Andrew's Church in Barrhead on 20th December.

Members of our very own Ukulele Group, led by John Rankin, will entertain us with a mix of wonderful music and the Hospitality team will provide tea/coffee and cake. There is no charge for these goodies but a donation to a charity of the Chair's choice would be greatly appreciated.

New and potential members will receive a very warm welcome to this wonderful afternoon of entertainment.

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### SUMMER SCHOOL

The u3a in Scotland Summer School will take place at Stirling Court Hotel, University of Stirling, Airthrey Rd, Stirling FK9 4LA from Tuesday 20th to Thursday 22nd August 2024.

There is free parking on site but cars must be registered in the reception area of the hotel. Accommodation is available at Stirling Court Hotel or Willow Court (University Guest Accommodation).

Subject to demand, six courses are planned. These are likely to include:

Creative Craft (Fabric Pictures); Drawing; Drug Discovery (Where our Medicines Come From); Play Writing (Creating Characters); Strolling to Admire Nature; Technology (Introduction to Programming).

Participants choose one topic to study, in a group, for the two half-days and one full day of the Summer School. There will also be alternative talks/activities for the last session on both afternoons.

Further information and an outline of the Programme is available on the u3a in Scotland website. Information on costs is included in the booking form and on the website: [u3a: Scotland: u3a in Scotland Summer School 2024](#)

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## THE BUZZ

### NOVEMBER MEETING

This month's guest speaker was Liz Allan. Her talk, entitled *John and Annie Glenn – Stars and Struggles* was about pioneering astronaut John Glen and his wife Annie. They were both born in the early 1920s and came from modest backgrounds. The high school sweethearts went on to get married in 1943 and had two children.



John left college in the late 1930s to join the US Marines and flew 59 missions in World War II. After the war he became a test pilot and, when NASA was established in response to the culture shock generated by the Soviet Union's launch of Sputnik in 1957, he volunteered for astronaut training and in 1962 became the first American to orbit the Earth in a tiny Mercury capsule. He resigned from NASA in 1964 and was elected as Senator for Ohio.



Annie had a very severe stammer, which made it difficult for her to respond to the media interest in astronauts' wives. She and the other six wives formed a support group informally known as The Astronauts' Wives Club. Aged 53, she attended a short intensive treatment course after which her speech greatly improved. She went on to promote inclusivity for the handicapped, particularly those with communication disorders.

John died, aged 95, in 2016 and Annie died, aged 100, in 2020.



## GROUPS

### AROUND THE WORLD DINING

This month our wandering diners enjoyed some Mexican fare at Topolabamba. The £12.95 express menu consisted of the typical street foods of the country; a choice of tacos, tostadas, taquitos and quesadillas with a variety of fillings was a popular choice, although



some chose from the main menu where albondigas, burritos and chimichangas were on offer. The food was hot and tasty and arrived as soon as prepared, so that some of the diners had their main course before their starters.



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## FASHION THROUGH THE AGES

At their November meeting The Fashion Through the Ages Group enjoyed *Sense and Nonsense About Fashion*, a highly entertaining presentation and film show given by one of the members, Aileen Harrison.

The usual venue at Clarkston Halls was unavailable so the meeting was held in the Community Room at Newton Mearns Library, which proved to be not only an excellent substitute, but one where complimentary tea and coffee was provided.

At the next meeting in January a representative from the Paisley Thread Museum will give a talk.

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## OUT AND ABOUT

This month our outandabouters had a most enjoyable audio tour of the House for an Art Lover in Bellahouston Park. The house was designed in 1901 by renowned Glasgow architect Charles Rennie Mackintosh and his new wife Margaret



Macdonald for a competition set by a German magazine to design a house fit for an art lover, with only genuinely original modern designs being considered. Unfortunately Mackintosh's entry was disqualified due to a technical breach of the rules – he was late in submitting certain interior views. The judges, however, were impressed by Mackintosh's entry, commending it for its distinctive colouring, impressive design and cohesiveness of inner and outer construction.

In 1989, Graham Roxburgh, the Consulting Engineer responsible for restoring Mackintosh interiors in nearby Craigie Hall, had the idea to finally build the House for an Art Lover. The drawings which Mackintosh produced, although very detailed for a competition entry, were not intended as technical plans from which an actual house would be built. The task of interpreting and turning them into reality was the challenge which faced Roxburgh's team of architects, led by



Professor Andy MacMillan, then Head of Architecture at Glasgow School of Art. The house was opened in 1990 and is used for special events.

The first of the three main rooms visited was a small, bright oval room which was intended for ladies to retire to after dinner – ovals being considered a feminine shape. The room's two prominent features were the window seats and the oval ceiling light.



The main hall, used as a dining room, was intentionally dark in order to show off the gentlemen's dinner suits and the bright colours of the ladies' gowns. Some of Margaret Macdonald's Gesso panels were recreated for this and displayed in the wood wall panels.



By contrast, the south facing Music Room was bright and airy. The piano was particularly admired by the group.

A soup and sandwich lunch was available for the group in a private room close to the main café and shop area.



## PHOTOGRAPHY

The Group took these mobile phone and camera shots – some on an evening visit to the Clyde Arc – for the theme of *Night Shots and Trails*. The members met recently to look at the results and discuss some of the challenges in taking good photos at night.

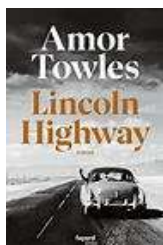
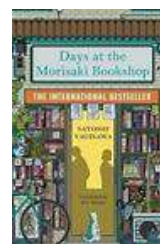






## READING

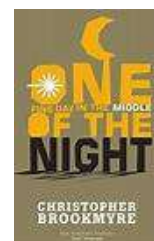
Group 3 read *Days at the Morisaki Bookshop* by Satoshi Yagisawa. The story set in Japan is about a young girl whose life is transformed when she discovers a love of books. It is short and simple but heart-warming, and at times humorous. The group as a whole enjoyed it.



Group 4 read *The Lincoln Highway* by Amor Towles. This book is an intricate and moving exploration of journeys and the infinite unexpected turns they can take. It traces the journey of four very different boys over 10 days, with chapters beginning at number 10 and going down to 1 at the end.

It was very well liked by almost everyone although some felt that it was slightly too long and could have done with being edited. Especially appreciated was the interweaving of the different stories throughout and the ease with which the reader could keep abreast of the interactions of the characters. It was slightly confusing that the Duchess character was written in the first person while all the others were in third person. Because of the Billy character's obsession with his big red book of heroes there are many references to Greek mythology and the classics. There was much discussion about the mental health issues and autism prevalent throughout the book. Most members were satisfied with the ending although some would have liked to know more of the outcomes and the futures of Emmett and Billy.

The Audio Reading Group read *One Fine Day in the Middle of the Night* by Christopher Brookmyre, which is on the list of 100 best books by Scottish authors. The title from a Victorian nonsense poem sets the tone of the novel. The plot concerns wealthy businessman Gavin Hutchison who has converted an oilrig into a luxury floating holiday resort moored in the Cromarty Firth. Gavin, a nonentity at school, decides to show off his success and wealth to his old classmates by hosting a 15-year school reunion at his own expense on the not quite completed rig. It is too good an offer to refuse, so the classmates board a coach from Glasgow to take them there. Gavin's wife, who intends to embarrass her philandering husband, invites the two classmates that had been omitted from his list – one a successful comedian and the other the class bully, now a reformed character. Unbeknown to everyone, including Gavin, a troop of would-be mercenaries have been contracted to hit the rig for some blackmail action. Chaos ensues! The group really enjoyed the book's laugh out loud moments interspersed with thrilling page-turners. It was well narrated and gave plenty of scope for discussion. However it is not a book for sensitive to swearing.





## STAGECRAFT

Our Stagecraft helped GTP members paint, erect and dress this set for the production of *The Odd Couple* performed in Eastwood Park Theatre at the beginning of the month – and yes, that picture is intentionally squint, as those who attended the show will know. The group found it so rewarding to see



their efforts come to fruition and be applauded by the theatre-going public.

Work has now started on the set for the February production of *Cuttin' A Rug* – John Byrne's sequel to *The Slab Boys*.

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## SATURDAYS TOGETHER

This month the Group enjoyed a sunny stroll in Linn Park surrounded by the beautiful autumn colours. The waterfall (the Linn) looked lovely in the sunshine. After the stroll the group headed to the Derby Café for a light lunch.







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## STROLLERS

This month our Strollers enjoyed their walk at Rouken Glen, despite the weather.





## TASTE THE WORLD

This month 12 of our globetrotting diners enjoyed a lovely selection of Indian street food – the sub continent's version of Tapas – at Mowgli in St Vincent Street. If you are looking for something a little different, this place will definitely fit the bill.





## THEATRE

This month our theatregoers attended the matinee performance of the *Beauty and the Beast* Pantomime at Eastwood Park Theatre.

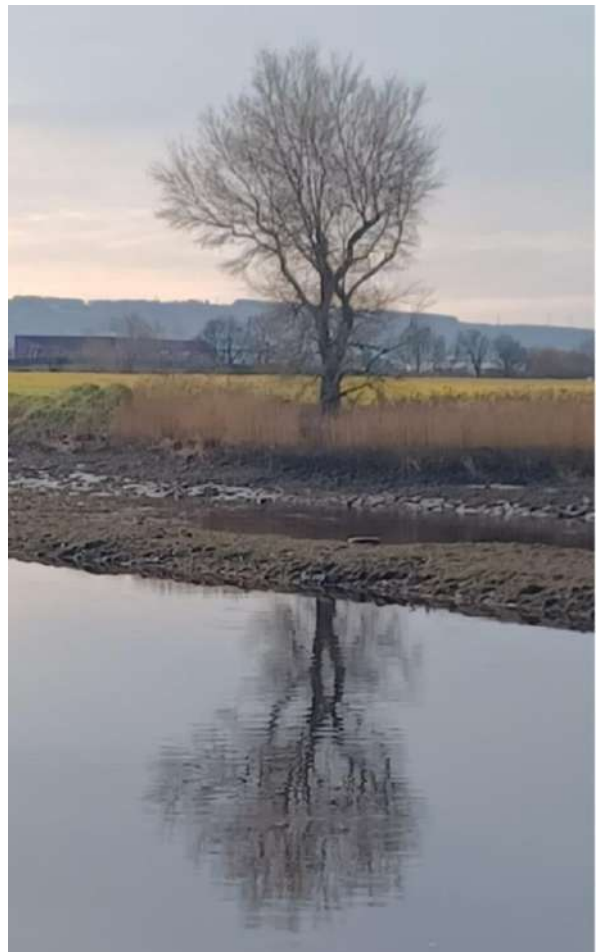
Everyone had a great time and joined in the singing and dancing, even though several members got very wet when the cast ran into the audience firing water pistols and super soakers.

Oh yes they did!



## WALKIE TALKIES

On a lovely November morning 20 members of our chatty walkers enjoyed a four-mile circular walk along the Rivers Clyde and Cart in Renfrew, followed by a convivial lunch enjoyed by all.





## WALKING

Members went on a shorter but no less enjoyable 4½ mile walk around the Cathkin Braes Country Park for their two outings this month.

This walk took them along the escarpment of the Braes, giving magnificent views over Glasgow and towards the Campsies and Ben Lomond beyond. The route then continues through woodland and a grassy meadow down to the village of Carmunnock before returning to the starting point via Coulter's Wood.

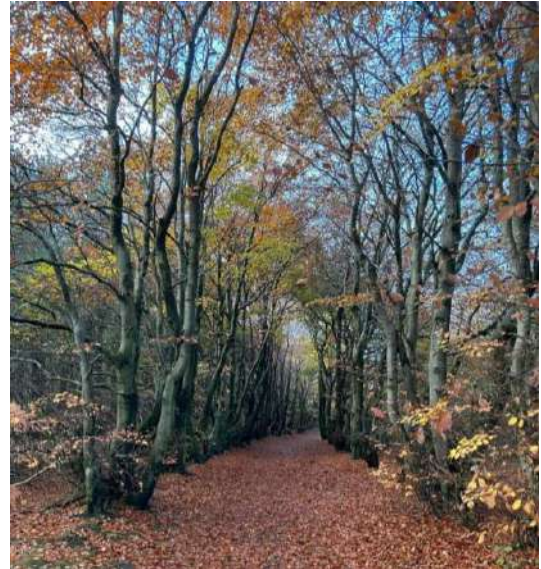
Weather conditions on each walk turned out better than forecast, the first week being bright and sunny all morning, with the trees showing their autumnal colours to best effect. Despite being very windy and overcast on the second week, the rain which had been predicted for that day held off and everyone returned dry. However, following previous spells of heavy rainfall, some paths along the route were waterlogged and very muddy in places on both weeks, but our members had been well warned and were prepared for all eventualities.



The walk finished promptly and, since there were no facilities for refreshment at the Park, everyone returned home for lunch.



There will be no walks in December due to other commitments. In January, it is planned to cover a section of The Commonwealth Walkway from Kelvingrove to Pollok Park, and further details will be announced to members by email in the New Year.



## **DID YOU KNOW ...?**

### **HEAD STUFF**

The 21st October issue of *New Scientist* included a piece by Anthea Rowan about how we can protect our thinking abilities as we age. Nearly 30 years ago Yaakov Stern, a neuropsychologist at Columbia University in New York found that highly educated people or those in a more intellectually challenging occupation developed a cognitive reserve that made them less likely to develop Alzheimer's disease. A few years earlier Robert Katzman at the University of California, San Diego, found from post-mortem studies of the brains of elderly care home residents that a high degree of plaques associated Alzheimer's was evident among those in the top 20 per cent, who functioned at least as well as those without any brain pathology. He concluded that this was due to them having bigger heavier brains with more neurons, providing a 'brain reserve' to withstand damage caused by plaques. Stern regards brain reserve as the brain's hardware, with cognitive reserve providing the software.

Another aspect of cognitive resilience is brain maintenance – lifestyle or environmental factors which keep the brain in good condition. The combination of cognitive reserve, brain reserve and brain maintenance enables some people to preserve their thinking abilities more successfully than others. A 2020 study following 12,000 people aged 50 or over found that education, type of occupation and lifestyle choices such as leisure and social engagements contributed to a higher level of cognitive reserve, thereby reducing the risk of dementia.

Cognitive reserve is typically measured using proxies such as attainment in cognitive tests. A higher IQ is associated with higher cognitive reserve, but higher levels of social engagement in later life are also strongly linked to cognitive performance. Andrew Sommerlad at University College London describes socialising as a mental challenge that involves remembering faces, names and context, while navigating a conversation.

Inflammation produced by stress, obesity and poor diet can disrupt many of the brain's functions, according to Craig Ritchie, chief executive and founder of Scottish Brain Sciences.

A good night's sleep has a positive effect. A 2023 study found that the non-rapid eye movement (NREM) phase of our sleep cycle seems to be especially important, possibly because it is crucial for consolidation of memories and clearing toxins that interfere with healthy brain functioning.

Physical activity is another factor. A 2020 study of 130,000 US adults found cognitive decline was almost twice as common among the physically inactive. Exercise supports cardiovascular health and cerebral blood flow while helping to reduce inflammation and elevate levels of brain-derived neurotrophic factor, which increases the size of the hippocampus memory centre. It also improves memory by promoting deep sleep.



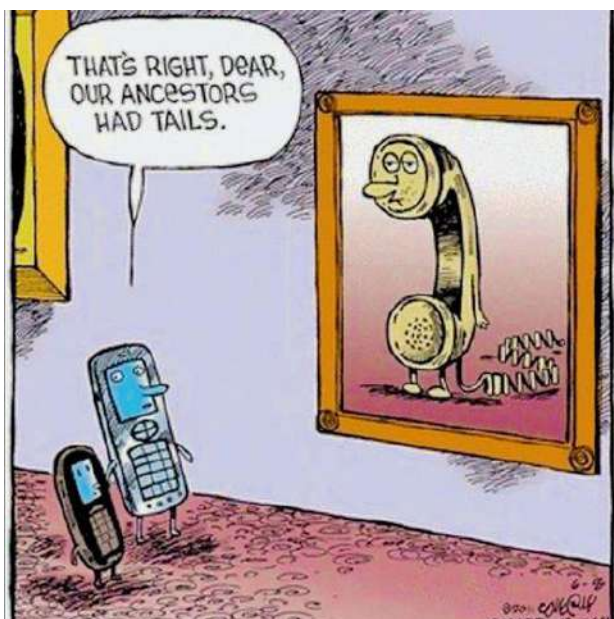
Various studies have shown that ability to speak more than one language acts as a powerful cognitive stimulant. 'bilinguals tend to stave off (Alzheimer's) symptoms for longer' says John Grundy of Iowa State University. Any strong mental engagement and focus on challenging activities is beneficial, as demonstrated by a 2015 US study that found the neural networks in the brains of participants who spent 14 weeks focussing on quilting or digital photography operated more efficiently, adopting more youthful patterns.

Other studies show that learning and engagement help to preserve brain volume and prevent shrinking of memory centres. A 2023 Swiss study found that a group of people in their 60s and 70s who spent six months either playing or listening to music had improved memory with increased neuroplasticity and volume of grey matter. Cognitively demanding tasks strengthen neural pathways and create alternative pathways that mitigate loss of function. According to Sommerled cognitive reserve is the end point of exercising your brain throughout your life through education, healthy lifestyle, physical activity, socialising and mentally taxing activities.

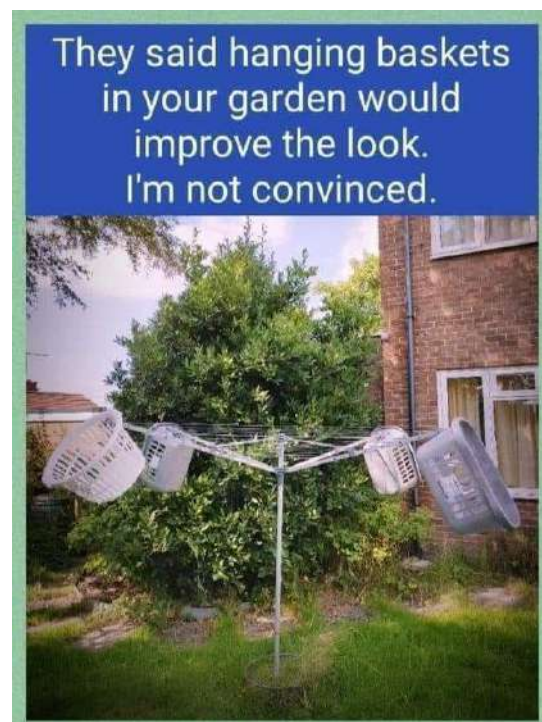
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## WHIMSY

Marbe McNeill posted this.



And this one's from Annie Wills.





## PICTURE GALLERY

### CASTLE OF LIGHT

Willie Dyer posted this dazzling picture of Christmas lights in Puglia, Italy.



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### REMEMBERING

Brenda Mason posted this shot of the wonderful annual remembrance display at St Andrew's Church in Barrhead.



## EVENTS

DAY	DATE	EVENT
Wednesday	20th December	Christmas Party in Barrhead
Wednesday	17th January	Monthly Meeting in Broom Church, Newton Mearns Tom Marchant - Dear Green Places - The Story of Glasgow's Parks
Wednesday	21st February	Monthly Meeting in Barrhead Brian Young - The Roman Camps in Scotland
Wednesday	20th March	Monthly Meeting in Broom Church - Allan Mauchline - Scottish Emergency Rides Voluntary Service

## CONTACTS

Mobile enquires call/text 0743 712 3921 [www.u3asites.org.uk/eastrenfrewshire](http://www.u3asites.org.uk/eastrenfrewshire)

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Vice Chair: Liliias Dunlop [speakers@eru3a.org](mailto:speakers@eru3a.org)

Secretary: Mary Fyfe [secretary@eru3a.org](mailto:secretary@eru3a.org)

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Membership Secretary: Roy Bryce [membership@eru3a.org](mailto:membership@eru3a.org)

Groups Co-ordinator: Allison Kershaw [groups@eru3a.org](mailto:groups@eru3a.org)

Webmaster: Roy Bryce [website@eru3a.org](mailto:website@eru3a.org)

## SUPPORTING u3a



The [Riviera Travel Affinity](#) scheme donates 10% of the cost of holidays booked by members.

East Renfrewshire u3a doesn't endorse any commercial organisations.