



BY THE  
CREATIVE WRITING  
GROUP

**NOT THE**

# U3A NEWSLETTER

June 2015 / July 2015

Website address: [www.nottheu3asites.org.uk/gravesend](http://www.nottheu3asites.org.uk/gravesend)

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## Today's Speaker...

..... is Billy, "the artist" Malone who you may recall came to talk to us a year ago on the very interesting and topical subject "Life behind bars". Today Billy is back with us and his subject is "I promise to pay the bearer" in which he will regale us with his career as a forger of bank notes.

# MESSAGES

## From your Chairman!

Since becoming your Chairman it has been my policy to introduce bold and innovative initiatives to radicalise the way we do things and to distinguish us from other U3A branches around the country.

Like many of you I have been long concerned about the standards of education in this country. We seem as a nation to be sending out into the world teenagers who are largely illiterate and innumerate, apart from their ability to send texts. I am afraid this phenomenon has not just afflicted young people for I have read recently of older folk who are deficient in the basic literacy and numeracy skills essential to functioning in the modern world.

I am not suggesting for one moment that our U3A membership possesses these problems. On the contrary, I know from feedback from group leaders that we possess members with excellent literacy and numeracy skills. Nevertheless we have to take steps to preserve standards and ensure that such standards do not slip.

Your committee has thought long and hard about this matter and after much deliberation has approved my proposal to introduce entry examinations for new members. With effect from 1st January next year if someone wants to become a member of our U3A they will be required to sit an entry examination which will comprise tests in Maths, English Language and Basic Intelligence. A pass mark of 50% will allow immediate entry into the U3A. There will be no appeal against the Committee's final mark.

Some of you may be worried, I know, about whether we are being overly stringent in

introducing this new requirement. But you must appreciate we are faced as a country with a population with deteriorating levels of intelligence and someone must have the courage to tackle the problem before it is too late.

There are no plans at the moment to extend testing to existing members but your committee will keep the position under close review.

## And Another Thing... or Two!

You will notice that we have replaced the chairs with hard wooden ones and we are leaving the windows wide open from now on. Last month the Minutes Secretary estimated that at least 20% of our U3A had fallen asleep during the talk. It was very embarrassing when we heard loud snores from the third row just as the speaker was commenting on the beauty of Chopin's music.

I would like to make you aware that subscriptions are now due. There is an increase of £2 owing to the fact that the vicar had to leave the parish rather hurriedly and the church hall prices have now risen. In addition Mrs. Brown [a keen U3A member] and manager of our local corner shop has also left town suddenly and we now no longer get discounted tea and biscuits.

I would like to point out that 'The Grumpy Old Man's Group' that started last month is oversubscribed and has a waiting list. The landlord of 'The Red Lion' said ten is the maximum as some of the locals were complaining about the noise. We don't want to give our U3A a bad name but our membership has increased by 8 with some more showing interest.

**Members of the Creative Writing Groups contributing to this "Newsletter" are:**

<b>Anne Stott</b>	<b>Mike Swift</b>
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**The issue was compiled and edited by Colin Nice**

## EVENTS AND GROUP MEETING ANNOUNCEMENTS

If you would like to attend any of the events mentioned below, please add your name to the appropriate sign-up sheet or telephone/e-mail the group leader.

<b>Art Appreciation Group</b>	We are organising a trip to a local art school so that we can see pictures in the making. A group of young ladies and men will pose nude while the artists paint pictures of what they see. Afterwards we will have the opportunity to buy the pictures at a special preferential discount and perhaps meet the young people. Members other than the Art Appreciation group are welcome to come along.
<b>Wine Appreciation Group</b>	When I formed this group my intention was to provide a forum for U3A members who are wine connoisseurs to appreciate good wines and share their enthusiasm with kindred spirits, to sample what the world has to offer in terms of the world's finest wines, the subtleties of different bouquets, textures and flavours. It was not intended that members should become inebriated and be a nuisance to my neighbours. Sadly this has proved to be the case. Last month, for example, several members left my house, proceeded to sing "here we go, here we go" at the top of their voices like some demented football crowd and then attempted (I use the word advisedly) to drive their cars home. Inevitably several collisions with my neighbours' cars took place and frankly I am now a pariah in my road. I must warn all participants they are there to taste wines and then spit out the contents, not drink incessantly. If this appalling behaviour continues it will mean curtains for the group. You have been warned!
<b>Possible Wrestling Group</b>	Jimmy Clarke is interested in forming a wrestling group. If anyone would like to join such a group please contact Jim (01622 222111). Jim is not envisaging that the group would contain experts in the art just a group of members who'd like to learn more about arm locks, chest presses and leg crunchers.

## NEWS FROM THE GROUPS

### Cook and Dine

Not being superstitious, this group had their first meeting on Friday 13 February. The criterion was "dine with a difference". The food was to be unusual, as was the dress code – i.e. come in an outfit that you wouldn't normally wear for lunch.

Jemima Havisham was cooking the main course, so the lunch was at her house. Her mode of dress well matched the surroundings - she was wearing cut-off jeans and looked as if she had just been making mud pies, but then maybe it was black nail varnish

to match the colour of her hands. Perhaps she had been gardening? I was sporting a blonde wig a swirly flame mini dress, black tights and stiletto heels. (When spied in the mirror, the image reflected there looked as though I was soliciting!) Agatha had just returned from scuba diving and still sported her wet-suit. I don't know how Enid wasn't frozen, as she had on her itzy bitzy teeny weeny yellow polka-dot bikini, her figure being very curvaceous in all places.



Once we were all assembled, Jemima handed us each a large glass which she called a "tootie". It was a brownish colour and tasted quite pleasant. We were all enjoying it and appreciating the flavour. She told us it was so easy to make. She had a superfluity of the ingredients right at the front door – it was nettle beer. That did rather colour our enjoyment.

Enid told us that her starter was French inspired. She had always enjoyed winkles as a child, so she was sure we would all love the pickled snails she had prepared. Agatha chipped in that her dessert also had a French origin. She had so enjoyed frogs' legs on her



visit to France (where she'd bought her bikini) that she just knew whole baby frogs in lime jelly would be delicious. The main course was hedge-

hog pie with appropriate accompaniments. The prickles especially tasted gorgeously crunchy, deep-fried in batter. The whole meal was washed down with my home-brewed laburnum wine. We all know the special effects that laburnum concoctions have.

We still have space for another diner. I'm sure you will all be rushing to join us after reading this account of our "one-off" meal. There is a sign-up sheet in the small hall –

first come, first served – but of course you can always start up other groups to taste similar delights.

#### Film Club

11 members of the Film Club met on 7th May to watch 'Effi Brest' a 1974 black and white German film with English sub-titles made by the renowned German film-maker Rainer Werner Fassbinder. The usual lively debate following the film did not happen on this occasion as all members fell asleep within 20 minutes of the start of the film. However, the Film Club can now boast the longest-running U3A event, with the members not waking from their slumbers until 2 am on Thursday morning. Many members claimed that this was the best uninterrupted sleep they have enjoyed for years and requested that the film be shown every month.

#### Music Club

In a change from their usual classical repertoire, the Music Club chose the music of AC/DC, Iron Maiden and Led Zeppelin for their January meeting. Unfortunately their enjoyment was interrupted by the arrival of the police following complaints from neighbours. Group leader Davina Smythe explained 'The problem was we are all a little hard of hearing now so had to put the volume on maximum to re-create our old head banging days. We didn't mean to upset anybody'. Mrs Smythe has been bound over to keep the peace. Next month's music choice is the Silent Symphony by John Cage.

#### Computer Club

Last month's talk was met with mixed reviews. Whilst most people found the talk - 'Optimise your Laptop Experience' by Lucinda Fox –the Laptop Lady - both interesting and informative, a minority who had dug out their dirty raincoats specifically for the occasion would appear to have misunderstood the nature of the talk.

#### April Ramble

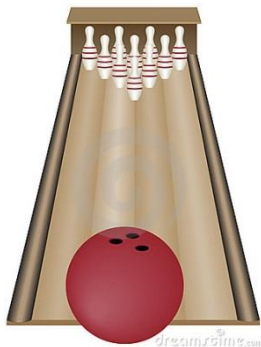
Group Leader Cliff Walker chose a walk to the village of Stansted for the April ramble. He

was keen to try out a new app recommended to him by fellow walker Tom Tomlinson and entered the coordinates into the app. The Group met on Meopham Green on a bright Friday morning. Several members were a little surprised when they started heading back towards Gravesend but such is their trust in their leader that they kept these thoughts to themselves. Cliff too did not expect the walk to follow the A2 towards Dartford but Tom assured him that the app was failsafe and the route would soon become clear to all. The Highways Agency staff were very understanding when they intercepted the Group on the approach to the Dartford Crossing but stressed that it was not possible to make the crossing on foot – not least because several members had not registered for the new Dartcharge.

No doubt by now you will have realised Cliff's schoolboy error – suffice it to say he will be more careful when he uses the app in future – either that or revert to his trusty Ordnance Survey map.

### May Ramble

Members of the group were delighted to learn that a number of lanes to be walked were regularly used by members of the Ten-Pin Bowling Group. Never ones to turn down a walk in the countryside, eleven members were found strolling down Lanes 13, 14 and 15 at the premises of AMF Bowling at the Imperial Business Park in Gravesend. Puzzled expressions abounded at the lack of vegetation around although they were delighted to learn that Harry's Kitchen provided a tasty and mouth-watering selection of hot food, just what one needs after a lengthy walk. Whilst it was clear that each lane was only some 60 feet long, a decent walk could be achieved by strolling down Lane 1, back along Lane 2 etc. Some stopped to admire what they felt to be a patch of a rare red and white



fungus at the far end of each lane but urgently needed to take shelter when giant orange, red, green and blue hailstones skittered down the gutters either side of them. Ivor Habitt, a well-known and frequently inebriated member of The Wine Appreciation Group, joined the ramblers on the understanding that he was always rambling after a few Pinot Grigios. Most people seemed to enjoy the event although several were nursing sore ankles where they had been hit by flying hailstones.

### Ten-Pin Bowling

The group's most-recent games were disrupted by Ivor Habitt who came along to take part as he had noted in last month's Newsletter that all were welcome and that refreshing drinks were served during the course of the event.

Clutching a purple bowling ball in one hand and a bottle of Mateus Rosé in the other he turned his bleary eyes towards little specks of



red and white in the distance. Despite expert tuition from the Group Leader, Johnny Skittle, Ivor staggered towards the foul lane, drew back his arm and, unfortunately for those sitting behind him, released the bowling ball at the highest point of its backswing. Rosie Skittle, Johnny's wife, was the person standing closest to Ivor and took the full force of the ball in her solar plexus. The momentum carried her backwards in the direction of two other bowlers, Terry Oakward and his wife, Theresa. Fortunately, one member, Mark Slowe, always carried a First Aid Kit in his car and bandages and sticking plasters were soon applied. No amount of pleading with the staff at the bowling alley would change their minds about us playing there in future. Ivor Habitt was heard to say as he staggered through the doors: 'I've been barred from



better drinking establishments than this!  
That lager tasted like coffee!

### Wine Appreciation

By now, you may all be wondering why Ivor left the relative safety of the Wine Appreciation Group for the unknown quantity of the Ten-Pin Bowling Group. When 'in his cups' his hearing is not of the most acute and he mistook the word 'bowls' for the far more-familiar, to him, word 'Bols.' You will all know that the Wine Appreciation Group has diversified recently and has taken to its heart a number of other alcoholic beverages, most notably those from the world-famous Bols Distillery in The

Netherlands. That, of course, does not account for his sudden interest in the Rambling Group. The leader of that group, Cliff Walker, made the mistake of mentioning the use of public highways in his most-recent write-up. Of course, the only part that Ivor registered, having had a drink or ten, was 'pub!' We are pleased to report that Ivor has now left our group but we are very concerned about The Photography Group as Ivor was overheard muttering 'schnapps, now that's the group for me!'

However, this is a wine tasting group and group members must take heed of my message at the start of this newsletter.

## Trip to the National Gallery – April 2015

This promised to be a really good visit and 20 of us made our way by train to London on a lovely sunny day. Arriving at 11:45am we split up to visit the galleries of our own choosing, agreeing to meet for lunch in their rather nice café.

We had a hiccup in the café, though unfortunately it wasn't the food caused it. Albert used his credit card to pay for his lunch and there then followed a long de-



lay at the checkout. We thought their machine wouldn't work but suddenly the security man arrived and took Albert away. His wife, Lily went with him and, as the leader, I thought I'd better accompany them. In their closed room the security man declared Albert's credit card to be stolen. Two policeman arrived shortly afterwards. Albert turned a beet-root red and just kept saying "No comment" to all the questions. Lily then got a bit aggressive and actually hit one of the policemen. They were both arrested and taken away.

In the afternoon there was a bit of a rumpus in one of the Impressionist Galleries. Molly had obviously liked one of the very small pictures and was pointing at it excitedly to Mary. She'd got too close and she gave it a hard push with her finger and the picture fell off the wall. The picture seemed OK but the frame was shattered. Molly gets very confused these days and most people would have just found an attendant, explained and apologised. In her confusion, though, Molly pushed the pieces of frame into a little pile and rolled up the canvas and put it in her bag. The poor dear had decided to get a new frame at Boots and then return it the following week. Of course she had been spotted by other visitors and shortly afterwards she too was arrested. Her friend started arguing and she was arrested too as an accomplice.

After that things went really well and we had another very pleasant half hour before leaving. Of course it meant that only 16 of us returned and unfortunately our U3A have now been banned from all London Art Galleries. Fortunately museums are still available to us - for the time being, at least. The names have been changed to protect the identities of those concerned.

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## FORTHCOMING TRIPS

### Visit to Soho

A trip has been arranged to Soho and its night life on 27 October 2015. It will start with a male and female strip club in which we will meet some of the strippers backstage. This will be followed by a visit to an adult only cinema and will be rounded off with a visit to a Chinese Restaurant in Chinatown in



which we will all get a chance to go into the kitchen, see how food is prepared and help with the dish washing.

A coach will provide transport to and from Gravesend and by the time the evening is over you will need it!

The cost for the evening is only £100 per person. If you wish to be part of this exciting event please complete the sign-up sheet.



### Walk the Pilgrims Way - the whole of it!

Your Social Committee has organised a special trip to Winchester so that we can enact the original pilgrims' journey to Canterbury. We will take a coach to Winchester from whence we will commence to walk to Canterbury (a mere 119 miles). During the walk we will see many interesting sites relating to ecclesiastical Britain and the walk will end with a visit to Canterbury Cathedral and the shrine of St Thomas Becket.

Please note that the walk may take several weeks and it will be necessary to sleep outside during the pilgrimage. Participants will be expected to pay for their own food. The trip is therefore unlikely to appeal to any member over the age of 60 who has medical problems or finds walking difficult.

The cost is a mere £50 for the coach to Winchester and then from Canterbury to Gravesend.



## Visit to Pentonville Prison



Have you ever wondered what it is like to be “in the nick?” Well now you can find out. As part of Pentonville Prison’s community liaison initiative U3A members will be given the opportunity to spend a night in a cell with a real prisoner. Those taking part will arrive in the afternoon, be frisked and have all personal possessions removed and be taken to their cell where they will meet their cell mate. They will then be treated just like normal criminals until their release at 9.30 am the next morning.

If you are interested in being part of this exciting scheme please enter your name on the signup sheet.

## FROM U3A HEADQUARTERS

A Boot Camp is being organised from the 15th to 21st June at Sutton Coldfield in Warwickshire. Participants will be expected to walk an average of 12 miles a day and take part in assault courses, military drills and other exercises. Feedback from participants in previous years state that it is an ideal way to lose weight and get fit. “After a week on this course”, said one participant, “dieting went out of the window”.

## NEXT MONTH'S SPEAKER....

.... We are delighted to welcome back Lola Smith, a BBC television producer, whose subject is going to be “Professional Masterchef - what really goes on.”

Ever wondered why Monica is such a bitch, what makes Gregg cope with the rubbish the chefs produce and why did Michel Roux really leave? Listen as Lola reveals all and gets the knives into the backs of so-called professional chefs.