

HALTON NEWSLETTER

January 2023

Gateway Bridge from Halton Castle



Photo courtesy of Chris Lewis

Message from the Chair - Jennifer Lewis

Happy New Year to all Halton u3a members, new and longer established. I have been a member of Halton u3a from the beginning. I became a Committee Member in 2019 and for the last two and a bit years have been the Chair. u3a is run by volunteers, all of whom have an important role to play, especially the group leaders, who are the unsung heroes allowing the different activities to take place. Halton is a small u3a with a small pool of volunteers who lead the groups. Many of the group leaders have been in position since the beginning of Halton u3a. During my time in the chair I have realised that some of our group leaders have no assistants or deputies so there is no back up plan if the group leader is unavailable. Some of the newer groups have been started by members who have had a good idea for a new activity and worked together with others to establish a new group, this is a good way forward. However nothing can happen unless members volunteer. I know many bigger organisations struggle to find volunteers to fill all sorts of positions, some much bigger clubs have closed, the pandemic leading to lack of volunteers to continue running the club. I hope that will not happen at Halton, if you value the activities that we offer perhaps the New Year is the

time to think about what you get out of the activities and how you can contribute to the future smooth running of those groups or even a new group.

The u3a constitution is designed to prevent a few people dominating the organisation, so officers only remain in place for three years. This means that Chris as Secretary and I as Chair, have to stand down at the next AGM. If the organisation is to continue, a new Chair and Secretary are needed. Time to think about volunteering and as a first step perhaps finding out what the roles entail. I really don't want to be the last Chair and would like to encourage interest now rather than later.

January General Meeting - Stephen Burrows, Halton Council, Health and Trading Standards

Stephen Burrows from Halton Council's Health and Trading Standards gave an interesting and informative talk about the areas his department covers. He told us about the historical origins and current practice. They cover five disciplines looking at our surroundings and how they affect our health, housing, air quality, environmental protection and food safety. He was able to reassure us that they are working hard to improve conditions.

On the Grapevine - George Mullen, Halton u3a Member

Here it is. The moment you've been waiting for. Answers to our wine quiz.

1. Bekaa Valley is in Lebanon. It is home to two very famous vineyards, the legendary Chateau Musar and also Chateau Ksara which is one of the oldest vineyards in the world. On 15th February 1971, the day the UK decimalised its currency, a bottle of Chateau Musar cost 69 pence. Today it retails at £33-£40.
2. Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier are the three grapes traditionally used to make Champagne.
3. Chianti is in the Tuscany region of Italy.
4. Spumante is an Italian word which translates into English as sparkling wine. Frizzante means semi sparkling and Tranquillo is still.
5. Claret is an unofficial term to describe Bordeaux red wine. It is sometimes confused with Clairet which is a deeply coloured type of rose wine.
6. Burgundy reds are made with Pinot Noir. White Burgundy is made in the Chablis region using Chardonnay. A less well known white Burgundy grape is called Aligote. Bourgogne Aligote has been spotted in Morrisons.
7. The third Thursday in November is Nouveau Beaujolais Day.
8. Shiraz is a red wine grape, the other two are white.

9. Italy produces the most wine in the world. Followed by Spain, France, USA and Australia.
10. Camel Valley vineyard is in Bodmin, Cornwall.
11. Nuits St Georges is the favourite wine of James Bond.
12. A Jeroboam equals 4 bottles.
13. Rioja is a region of Spain. It has nearly 700 wineries and the most well known grape is Tempranillo.
14. BBC's 'Last of the Summer Wine' was filmed in Holmfirth which is also the name of the local vineyard.
15. The name used for French sparkling wine produced outside Champagne is Cremant. It is made using the Champenoise method just like Champagne. It is made in eight regions and they often use grapes native to the region.
16. False. You can make white wine from any grape except a small number called Teinturier which have pink flesh. The most well known is Saperavi which is prominent in Georgia.
17. Marlborough is famous for Sauvignon Blanc. The region accounts for over 60% of New Zealand's wine production.
18. Pecorino is a White wine which shares its name with a hard cheese made with sheep's milk.
19. Wine from the Douro Valley in Portugal is fortified by adding Brandy.
20. Claude Moet was born in Paris but his parents were Dutch. Moet is a Dutch name pronounced Mowett.

Unfortunately, nobody has submitted a maximum score so the orange will be rolled over until next time.

News from Catalyst Science Discovery Centre - Jennifer Lewis, u3a Chair

A new Dementia Cafe initiative, to support members of our local community living with dementia, is being held on the first Sunday of every month at the Catalyst Cafe. It is a great meeting place for those suffering with dementia and members of their families to chat to people in similar situations.

Catalyst is delighted to announce the installation of a temporary exhibition from the British Geological Survey. Until April 2023 visitors to Catalyst will be able to learn more about the science behind geothermal energy, the clean energy beneath our feet.

Train Tickets - Chris Lewis, Halton u3a Secretary

As some of you know I have had a life time interest in railways and often travel by train to London (Euston), usually from Runcorn, for various reasons including cat sitting for our son and partner. The UK and Ireland have the highest rail fares in Europe but this is for non-discounted tickets at peak times. Peak times are up to, and include, the 09.02 train to London from Runcorn, and returning from London during four hours in the afternoon, both Monday to Thursday. These full fares are £494 first class and an unbelievable £343 standard class. The term second class was dropped many years ago. Virgin Trains, whilst operating the service, increased these fares out of all proportion to the cost of living.

It is probably right to mention the Senior Railcard at this stage for those over 60. This gives a third reduction on fares so reduces the above to £326 and £226 respectively. These cost £30 for one year or £70 for three years so you could recoup their price on one journey. Comparing off-peak fares, assuming a Senior Railcard is used, travelling on the 10.03 or later from Runcorn on a Monday to Thursday or anytime on Friday to Sunday in standard class is £65 return, but not valid to return in the peak times from London as above but also before 10.00 weekdays. This price shows a considerable reduction on the peak fare. This is because the increases allowed to fares each year are regulated. Virgin Trains and now Avanti would have made larger increases if they had been allowed.

The above fares give reasonable flexibility on travel times. Many years ago cheaper fares were introduced if booking on specific trains. If you miss the train the ticket value is lost. For example looking at going to London a week after I write this the cheapest single fare is £81 first class and £20 standard class.

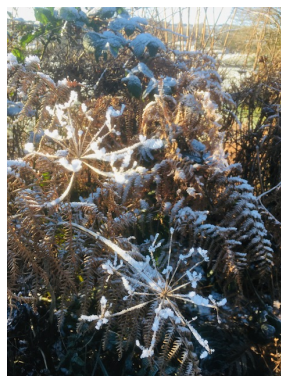
Because the high fares (and Covid) deterred passengers travelling first class the concept of advanced first class tickets was introduced. These gave first class seats (much more space) with food and drinks (including alcohol) and use of the first class lounges at Runcorn and Euston. The fares could be as cheap as £30 single, a bargain. We used these a lot. However, Avanti changed the name to Standard Premier and seems to have put the prices up a little and stopped the food and drink (to reduce staff costs) and use of lounges. First class passengers have migrated to Standard Premier as they still have the room and Avanti has lost a lot of revenue. We now pay the £65 off-peak standard return with its flexibility. We buy the tickets about a week in advance and can always reserve our favourite seats in standard class that give extra legroom. These are at the north end of Pendolinos in the quiet coach A. There are six seats, three at windows, numbers 37/38/41/42/45/46.

New trains are being introduced to the Liverpool to London route, made by Hitachi in Japan and North-East England. They should have been introduced last month but are very late. The first one has been completed but they will be tested for most of this year. When they are introduced they will operate two trains an hour from Liverpool to London stopping en route at different stations. Latest thinking is both will stop at Runcorn so will increase the number of places served direct.

Photos courtesy of Paula Fox, Halton u3a Group Co-ordinator



Coniston water reflections.



Hoar frost over
Hawkshead, bringing
sparkle to the
hedgerow



Hurry up summer and
bring the flowers to
my garden

Group report - Paula Fox, Halton u3a Group Co-ordinator

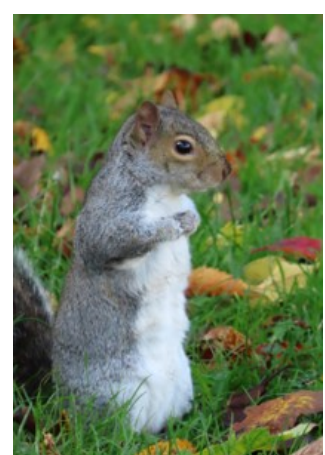
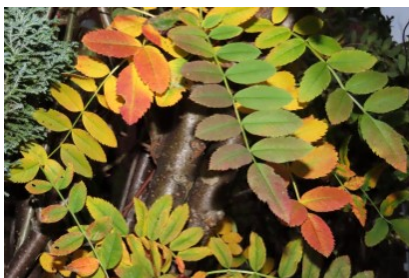
- **iPad Group** (Group Leader, Paula Fox) - January's session at the Apple Shop in Liverpool unfortunately had to be cancelled because of the train disputes. It was agreed among members that bus travel took too long and that traffic could be heavy if going by car, so it was best to postpone until the next session at 11.30am on Thursday, 2nd February 2023. Consequently, the first meeting of the year was on Thursday, 19th January at St Paul's Church Hall, Widnes, WA8 7QU. Apple iPad users of any level are always welcome.
- **Bowls Group** (Group Leader, Paula Fox) - The snow and freezing temperatures put paid to the first meeting of the year at Hough Green Bowling Club on 17th January 2023. Although it is not currently the playing season, the group like to meet socially and keep in touch for a chat, a cuppa and maybe a game of dominoes, darts or a board game in the cosy clubhouse. Weather permitting, informal weekly meetings in the clubhouse will continue every Tuesday morning at 10.00am until the green is suitable for bowling. Beginners are always welcome and bowls of varying sizes are available to borrow. Meet Tuesdays, 10.00am at Hough Green Park Bowling Club, Royal Avenue, Widnes, WA8 8HL.
- **Bridge Group** (Group Leader, David Burrows) - The group meets every Thursday at 10.00am in Ditton Community Centre, Dundalk Road, Widnes WA8 8DF. The group is running well, back in our original room at Dundalk Road with usually between 3 and 4 tables playing. We are a friendly group with all levels of bridge skills and welcome members new to bridge but familiar with whist. We have a library of tuition books free to borrow to get new players familiar with bidding and techniques. Meetings usually start with an analysis of a hand played elsewhere and a discussion of how the hand was bid and played which is both informative and appreciated. Sessions vary between free play and themed instruction with a short talk followed by play based on the theme of the

week which is stay-man and transfers. Several of our members also belong to local Bridge Clubs, details of which widens the possibility to play more than once a week. Bridge is a great way to meet people and have fun exercising the grey cells.

- **Reading Group** (Group Leader, Barry Cotterill) - 'Emotional and gripping' were the words used to describe the Reading Group's latest read, which we discussed at some considerable length at our January meeting. The book concerned was 'Half A World Away' by Mike Gayle. This novel revolves around two half-siblings, who have been separated at an early age and have grown up in extremely different circumstances. They come together again well into adulthood with children of their own. Along the way the book touches upon many complex issues including single parenthood, race and class. Sadly not a book with a happy ending but still recommended.

Our next meeting is on Wednesday, 15th February 2023 at Widnes Library, when we will be comparing notes on 'Wolf Hall' by Hilary Mantel. Our books are provided free of charge by Widnes Library. New members are always welcome. Meetings are usually held on the third Wednesday of the month starting at 10.30am. We sit around a table in the library and if you don't recognise any faces the library staff at the desk can point you in our direction. A list of all our 2023 planned reads will soon be on the Halton u3a website on the Reading Group page.

- **Photography Group** (Group Leader, Barry Cotterill) - The group continues to meet monthly at Rivendell Garden Centre. This month's personal challenge is simply anything you have photographed on your phone or iPad. The next meeting is 10.30am on Wednesday, 25th January 2023. The February meeting will be at 10.30am on Wednesday, 22nd February 2023. The challenge for February will be wildlife. Hopefully we will be able arrange some group outings for the rest of the year. New members always welcome. You don't need a fancy camera, phones or iPads are fine. If you would like to join us just come along with a few images, preferably on a memory stick and we will show them on a laptop.



- **Science is for Everyone** (Group Leader, Bob Roach) - Our recent meetings have continued to find out more about aspects of science that are of particular significance to aspects of human life. We have now covered:
Acoustics - the science of sound; how our hearing works, why it tends to deteriorate as we age, etc.

Optics – the science of light; how vision works, long and short sight, colour blindness, the history of humans learning how to produce light by means (at first) of fire and only in the last 150 years of so, creating light with bulbs and the like.

Walking – how we left our chimpanzee relatives in the trees and started to get around on two legs on the ground and the way we make effective use of that ability.

We are now going to consider the different stages from us parting with the chimps to 'where we are now', the history of human development.

- **History Group** (Group Leader, Bob Roach) - When we were finding out about the British Civil Wars, it was interesting to find how significant Warrington was in that - any thoughts why? We have now moved on from the Stuart era and are considering their successors, the Georgians, when there was less internal strife and some major changes in life in Britain, e.g. the Agricultural and Industrial Revolutions. With the members of the group doing their own 'reading up', much of the meetings are spent sharing information that we have come across - a good example of the u3a theme of shared learning.
- **Rather Leisurely Walkers Group** - Bob Roach has recently retired from leading the Rather Leisurely Walkers Group. If anyone would like to take over this group please contact our Secretary, Chris Lewis. Bob is happy to provide support and encouragement.
- **Family History Group** (Group Leader- Alec Hough) - The Family History Group meets from 2.00pm to 3.30pm on the first and third Mondays of each month in Room 11 at Widnes Library, Victoria Square, WA8 7QT. There are car parking places and bus stops nearby. Those attending pay £2 per session to cover the cost of hiring the room.

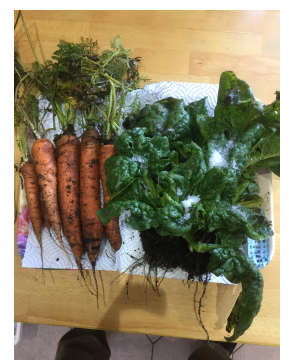
All members and prospective members are welcome, it doesn't matter if you haven't started researching your family tree or even if you have no intention of doing so. At our Monday afternoon sessions we have been tracing interesting stories which our members have discovered during their researches into emigration records, workhouse records and military records. We've also looked at related social history including literacy, education and housing. In the near future we will be having a talk from a local family historian who has published a book about his family and we hope to arrange a visit to Liverpool Public Records Office.

For those who do want to research their family history but aren't sure how to start, we offer one-to-one sessions at dates to suit you in your local library to show you the basics and get you started. You may be surprised at what you find out about your family.

- **Gardening Group** (Group Leader - Chris and Colin McConnell) - We did not have a Green Shoots Gardening meeting this month, due to our 'New Year' lunch which we had at The Griffin Inn, Bold Heath. There were sixteen members, including two new members who were introduced to the group, and a very good time was enjoyed by all.



Chris and Colin's frozen vegetable plot



Managed to dig some out

- **New Group - The Cinema Group** ((Group Leaders, Hazel Landon and Judith Byrne) - The new Cinema Group will meet on a Tuesday afternoon (usually around 2.00pm) when a 'good' film is showing. This will not be every week; it is a come when you like group.
 - Sometimes it will be short notice, information will be published on the Cinema What's App group as films for the week are only released on a Sunday.
 - Tickets are usually about £5.95. You can get a Combo ticket for an extra £1 which includes a drink.
 - We meet in the Foyer so that we can get a row of seats together.
 - Car share is encouraged, as is bring a friend.
 - If you are interested, please let Chris Lewis know along with your contact details , so that Judith can put you on the Cinema Whats App Group. We have had 19 members sign up already.
 - A film we may see next that has been recommended is 'Empire of Light'.

If you are interested in any of our groups and would like further information, Group Leaders can be contacted through the contact page on the Halton u3a website, or you can contact our Secretary, Chis Lewis.

Next General Meeting and Coffee Catch up

The next General Meeting will be at 1.30pm on Thursday, 9th February 2023 at the Masonic Hall, Kingsway, Widnes. The speaker is Jackie Mafi, who will talk about Sweet Memories, the history of sweets. The March speaker is Elaine Allen, her talk is titled, Last orders please, pub names.

The February coffee catch-up is at 2.00pm on Thursday, 23rd February 2023 at Rivendell Garden Centre, Widnes.

If any members would like to give a presentation at a future event, or would like to contribute a short article to the newsletter, please contact our Secretary, Chris Lewis, or send articles to the newsletter editor through the contact page on the Halton u3a website. Please note the last date for contributions to the newsletter is the 20th of the month.

Further information and contact details can be found on the Halton u3a website at www.u3asites.org.uk/halton