HALTON NEWSLETTER

July/August 2023
(Please note there will not be a separate Newsletter in August)

The Brindley Theatre - Runcorn

Photo courtesy of Chris Lewis

Message from the Chair - Jennifer Lewis

Summer holiday season is here again and travel opportunities are back to pre-Covid levels. As many of you know Chris leads holidays for a company that travels by train. I go along as a paying customer and unpaid assistant. Most of the people who travel on these holidays are over seventy and have various reasons for not wanting to fly. One of the reasons people choose an organised tour is that if anything goes wrong there is a leader who will sort things out, something Chris enjoys. Another reason is for companionship and making new friends. Over the last year I have not been surprised to find that many of our fellow travellers are

also members of u3a. Often at dinner the chat turns to the opportunities offered by u3a. I often wonder how many of our fellow travellers who are not already members go home and make enquiries about their local u3a.

On a recent day long steam train excursion we sat at a table for four with two gentlemen both in their eighties. They didn't know each other or us but it turned out that we were all u3a members. Both of these men were widowers and both had found friendship through u3a. One had replied to one of the personal ads in Third Age Matters. That was an aspect of u3a membership that hadn't occurred to me.

Halton u3a is looking to the future as the AGM approaches. The u3a constitution is drawn up specifically to prevent the committee carrying on for years and thereby to encourage new people and new ideas. Many of the existing officers have to stand down so we are looking for new committee members to take over and grow Halton u3a in the future. There are possibilities for new groups including a Transport Group and one off meetings for a special interest.

Meanwhile contributions to the newsletter are welcome, the more the merrier, either from the groups or just anything of an interesting general nature – photos, cartoons, jokes, riddles, poetry, prose, anything goes.

July General Meeting - My Life and My Career, Mahmoud Ahmed

Mahmoud Ahmed was the speaker at our July General Meeting. His talk 'My life and my career with the Lancashire Constabulary' had everyone fascinated. His early life was in a village in Pakistan then his family moved to Oxford where he went to school. He then moved to Bradford and finally to Lancashire. He told of people and events that had influenced his life and changes of career beginning in a bank and ending in the police.

Anyone for Tennis - George Mullen, Halton u3a Member

By the time you read this Wimbledon will have ended. This year's titles have been won and, no doubt, some of last year's lost.

In what now seems a previous life I was very keen on tennis. I've been to Wimbledon seven times and loved everything about the tournament but especially Steffi Graf who, in my wish list, came second only to Alma Cogan. She couldn't sing but she was a better tennis player.

I was a member of a group called the British Association of Tennis Supporters otherwise known as BATS. We went to lots of tournaments especially Davis Cup ties. We travelled to Buenos Aires to watch Argentina play Great Britain flying out on Thursday and returning on Tuesday. Some people said we were BATS in name and bats by nature. They were probably right.

We had a contact in the LTA called Gavin Somebody and he used to organise extra perks for us. On the eve of the tie in Buenos Aires we were invited to a reception for both teams in the Sheraton Hotel. It was a posh do with the Duchess of Gloucester and the British Ambassador. For those of us fortunate not to be playing the Champagne was free flowing and the spread would have done justice to the Church View. At first the hotel staff thought we were gatecrashers until John Lloyd the Great Britain captain explained we were with him.

pasajes de Ecuador a
Miami y Nueva York.

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José Alvarado / EL UNIVERSO

La alegría de los hinchas británicos tras la ventaja de su equipo 2-0 contra Ecuador en Copa Davis.

Gran Bretaña aventaja por 2-0

While we were in Buenos Aires we had a young man called Henry looking after us. He arranged our transport and a number of outings including a visit to Eva Peron's memorial and a surprisingly enjoyable tango show. On day one of the tie he took us to the stadium. There were 20 of us and about 12,000 Argentinians. But all went well, it was a good day. Next morning we were waiting for our transport to the stadium and there was a newspaper in the hotel lobby. On the front page there was a photo of us! The headlines were in Spanish but we could tell they were about us. We asked Henry what the article said but he seemed reluctant to tell us. We pressed him and eventually he did. When it was announced that Argentina would host Great Britain in the Davis Cup there was a lot of concern in Buenos Aires. It was not many years since we had been at war with Argentina and the locals had a vision of football type hooligans coming over and looking for trouble. But when we arrived in the stadium they thought we looked like nice gentle folk dressed like Benny Hill! Henry assured us this was meant as a compliment. On our arrival on the second day we received a great reception and a lot of the very friendly crowd sat with us. I enjoyed that trip so much I went back a month later on my own. No tennis this time, strictly for the Malbec.

The 2001 competition had taken us to Guayaquil in Ecuador known as the gateway to the Galápagos Islands. The match was played on an improvised clay court in a bull ring and Great Britain scored a notable victory defeating the legendary Lapenti brothers. We were invited to a post match party for both teams organised by the local Chamber of Commerce. We were immortalised in Ecuador folklore when our photo was published on the front page of the main national newspaper. I explained to everyone that I didn't know the lady in the white cap next to me who was going berserk even though she claimed she married me.

Something a little different was a trip to Luxembourg where the National Tennis Centre is almost as big as the David Lloyd Club in Warrington. I spent the three days of the match sitting next to a very nice man called Peter who turned out to be Tim Henman's father-in-law. He didn't tell me this, I found out later from friends who watched the match on television. They said the TV commentator had identified Peter but said he didn't know who I was. Obviously, I need a new agent.

I played a lot of tennis until my late sixties when I finally accepted I wasn't going to make the Davis Cup team. I always fancied my chances playing Real Tennis. This is regarded as the original racquet sport and is a sort of hybrid of tennis and squash. The courts have eccentric features such as dedans, tambours and penthouses. There are several active clubs in the UK including Queen's Club in London, MCC at Lords and Manchester Tennis and Racquets Club whose court I have graced a number of times. In a very rash moment I

challenged the professional to a game at The Royal Melbourne Tennis Club. I was beaten of course not so much by him as by the weird scoring system which I never did understand. But I am convinced that's why I lost so many matches. I bought a book on the rules written by Chris Ronaldson, a legend of the game, but it made no difference. Eventually I decided I had more chance of finding fame and fortune if I concentrated on attending Davis Cup receptions.

On the Grapevine - George Mullen, Halton U3a member

One of the great success stories in wine over recent years has been Prosecco from Italy. It's almost impossible to read a wine list or visit a wine shop without seeing it. Perhaps its popularity has now peaked as it faces competition from new entrants to the huge sparkling wine market including Cremant from France and the increasingly popular English sparkling wine with Gusborne reporting an increase in sales of 49% in 2022. But all is not over yet. It's fighting back with a very interesting variation on what we have become used to.

Sparkling wine normally involves a second fermentation. In the case of Champagne and Cava this is known as the Champenoise or Traditional Method and takes place in the bottle. Prosecco is fermented a second time in a tank in what is called the Charmat Method named after French oenologist Eugene Charmat who invented it.

But we now have a new version of Prosecco with a single fermentation in the bottle. This is known as the Ancestral Method and is actually the original way of making sparkling wine. Such wines are described as Pet Nat which is easier to say than Petillant Naturel.

I seldom recommend a wine simply because it's a matter of personal taste. But a leading wine guru is very enthusiastic about Case Paolin Col Fondo Prosecco 2020 so I expect it to be good. It is made in Asolo which is a commune in the Veneto region of north Italy.
Col Fondo literally translates from Italian as 'with the bottom'. This indicates there is sediment in the bottle which in fact is the lees or dead yeast cells remaining after fermentation. Normally these would be removed in a process called disgorgement but not with Col Fondo. This results in a cloudy wine which should provide a talking point at your next party. You can impress everyone by explaining that this is the latest trend.
You can also tell them that this particular wine is in the highest classification of Italian wine being DOCG ie Denominazione di Origine Controllata e Garantita. That should earn you a few brownie points. Normally Prosecco contains 12-17 grams per litre of residual sugar but this Col Fondo has zero sugar and so is bone dry. It's available online from wine merchants Woodwinters in Edinburgh priced at £17.

Another Prosecco described as outstanding is called Conte Collato e Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore San Salvatore 2021. But by the time you arrive at Morrisons you will have probably forgotten its name.

Link to Halton Libraries newsletter

Below is Halton Libraries' July newsletter. You will see that they've included our website link in their Communities section.
https://mailchi.mp/halton/halton-libraries-jul2023-9324702?e=b0f9b55e82

Thank you letter from Medical Detection Dogs

I am writing to thank you and the members of Halton U3A Cheshire on behalf of Medical Detection Dogs for your generous donation of £133.00.

I hope you all enjoyed learning more about the work of Medical Detection Dogs from one of our key volunteer speakers, Barry. If you were inspired by the talk and would like to be more involved with our charity, there are many ways to help us train more life-saving Medical Alert Assistance Dogs and turn our research into the reality of assisting clinicians in the early detection and diagnosis of cancers and other life-threatening diseases.

Without our volunteers we simply wouldn't exist and as the demand for our work increase so does our need for volunteer speakers, fundraisers, and professional help. We always have fundraising events that you can get involved in or we can support you in arranging your own.

There is always a warm welcome to anyone who would like to volunteer here at Medical Detection Dogs and if any of these volunteering opportunities are of interest to you, please contact us on: 01296 655888 for further information.

Group report - Paula Fox, Halton u3a Groups and Venues Co-ordinator

- **iPad Group (Group Leader, Paula Fox)** - iPad group meetings are on the first and third Thursday of the month. First Thursday - at the Apple shop, Liverpool One, 11.30am - 1.00pm,. This is a free workshop each month. At the last workshop we discussed mobile data, hot spots, back-ups, photo albums and other queries that the group had. On the third Thursday in the month meetings are now at Cronton Methodist Chapel, Chapel Lane, Cronton, WA8 4NT, 11.00am - 1.00pm. A free car park is opposite the chapel. Beginners welcome. Please note there will be no meeting at the Apple shop In August.

- **Bowls Group (Group Leader, Paula Fox)** - The group meets every Tuesday morning when the weather is dry and not too cold, but since the start of the season in April, there has been quite a bit of rain which hasn't always been conducive to play. Instead, the members have enjoyed some lively chat over a cuppa in the clubhouse. Lately, there has been a good turnout of members plus one or two guests, and a few decent ends have been played with the usual good humoured banter. It's a great way to spend a sunny Tuesday morning, with a friendly group and a bit of gentle exercise too. Beginners are very welcome and spare bowls are available to borrow.
  Meetings are every Tuesday 10.00am - 12.00 noon at Hough Green Bowling Club, Hough Green Park, Royal Avenue, Widnes, WA8 8HL. Park on the road.

- **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)** - The group usually meets on the third Wednesday of each month at 10.30am in Widnes Library. New members and guests are always welcome. Our books are provided by the library. The group has not met recently due to holiday commitments.

- **Photography Group (Group Leader, Barry Cotterill)** - The group continues to meet monthly at Rivendell Garden Centre, Widnes at 10.30am on the second Wednesday in the month. New members are welcome, you don't need a fancy camera, phone images are fine.
  This month the group had a visit to Liverpool, the weather was good so it was a last minute choice. We started on the docks and gained some good shots of the boats in the Albert Dock. We then progressed to Liverpool One and we completed some street

photography, i.e. candid shots of people in and around the area. The tiers of Liverpool One lends itself to this, the old saying is very true, 'people never look up'. All in all a good, rain free day.

- **Science is for Everyone (Group Leader, Bob Roach)** - The group meets at St Paul's Church Hall at 1.00pm on the second and fourth Mondays in the month.

  We have completed a series of sessions on 'Homo sapiens - how did we get to here?' About 15 years ago, just when the archaeologists thought they figured everything, the scientists came up with the analysis of ancient DNA. This highlighted several surprising issues, such as the fact that we all have a little bit of Neandertal in our DNA. The scientist who developed this technique was awarded the Nobel Prize for Medicine and Physiology in 2022.

  We have now moved on to Artificial Intelligence. Once we identified this as the next topic, we began to notice numerous sources of information and a range of concerns about it. Some more sessions to go on this yet after the August break.

  New members most welcome to our chatty sessions.

- **History (Group Leader, Bob Roach) -** The group meets at St Paul's Church Hall at 1.00pm on the first and third Tuesday in the month.

  The group has completed a series of sessions discussing (on a shared learning basis) the reign of Queen Victoria. Since then, we've had two sessions on Edward VII, a son that Queen Victoria didn't have much regard for! As well as the Royal family side of each era, we looked at what other developments there were in that era. In the case of Edward VII there was the appearance of the motor car, some fine buildings, particularly in city centres, e.g. The Royal Liver Building in Liverpool.

  King Edward VII was scheduled to open the Runcorn to Widnes Transporter Bridge in 1905 but was unable to attend because of illness. In his place Sir John Brunner, who had been the lead figure getting the bridge constructed, opened it instead.

  When we meet again in September, we will consider the reign of George V, the great grandfather of King Charles. In visiting Widnes in 1913, he travelled along St Bede's Road from the town centre – it was then renamed Kingsway!!

  New members most welcome to our chatty sessions.

- **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 now meets only once per month - on the third Monday of each month - so the next meeting will be on Monday, 21st August 2023.

  We meet from 2.00pm to 3.30pm 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 latest Monday afternoon session we have been looking at old photographs and how to date them. We plan to visit a local records office in the near future for a look at the records and guidance on how to undertake research there.

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."

- **Living History Group - (Group Leader, Geoff Dutton) -** The group recently had a visit to Chester with a walk around the walls. They have also had a visit to Lymm Dam. In August Geoff is hoping to organise a visit the Wat Phra Singh Temple in Runcorn. Details to follow from Geoff.

- **Gardening Group - (Group Leaders, Chris and Colin McConnell) -** The visit to the NGS garden was cancelled by the owners because of the weather on that day. It has been a quiet month regarding the club members getting together. Thank goodness for "Whats app" which the members wanted to start. I must admit it has worked well for us, making it easy for us to pass on gardening information and queries to everyone. There will be no meeting in August due to holidays, the next meeting will be at 10.30am on Monday, 18th September 2023 at Rivendell Garden Centre.

- **The Cinema Group (Group Leaders, Hazel Landon and Judith Byrne)** - The Cinema Group meets 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 What's App Group.

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

There will be no General Meeting in August but there will be two coffee catch-ups at 2.00pm on Thursday, 10th and Thursday, 24th August 2023 at Rivendell Garden Centre, Widnes.

The next General Meeting will be at 1.30pm on Thursday, 14th September 2023. Meetings are held in the Masonic Hall, Kingsway, Widnes. As September is Heritage month, Bob Roach will be speaking on Widnes Heritage.

The September coffee catch-up is at 2.00pm on Thursday, 28th September 2023, venue to be confirmed.

The AGM will be at 1.30pm on Thursday, 12th October, 2023, speaker to be confirmed.

Please note there will be no newsletter published in August. Chris Lewis will send out any important messages.

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