

HALTON NEWSLETTER

March 2023

Spring is just around the corner



Photo courtesy of Patricia James

Message from the Chair - Jennifer Lewis

It is no wonder that a major topic of conversation for people who live in the British Isles is the weather. Last month I was full of the joys of spring and the signs of growth in the garden. As someone with a background in geography I should have remembered that statistically we are more likely to have snow at Easter than Christmas. Growing up in the Peak District the local Point to Point races were always on the Tuesday after Easter and it invariably snowed. The last date that Easter can fall is 25th April, so I shall stay braced for more cold weather.

Flagg Races were once the highlight of winter activities in the Peak District, attended by thousands including Royalty. Edward VIII when he was Prince of Wales once took part. It

was the last traditional Point to Point over open country, for 364 days of the year the course was fields. I believe the races no longer take place, partly because of the difficulty of getting insurance for an event which involves racing horses on a circuit over dry stone walls across roads and through fields of spectators. Another reason is the lack of volunteers prepared to give time and energy to organising the event.

We are sorry to announce the sudden death after a short illness of Jane Bissenden. Although Jane had not been a member for long both she and her husband, David, have been active members of Halton u3a. Jane, a former accounting technician, became our Treasurer at the AGM. She was always smiling and ready to share her knowledge. At the last coffee afternoon at Rivendell she gave an impromptu craft lesson in Arabesque wool for knitting a Ruffle Scarf using very large knitting needles. It looked very impressive. She will leave a big hole in the lives of her family and friends and also Halton u3a

March General Meeting - Last Orders Please, Elaine Allen

Elaine Allen was our speaker and her enthusiasm for inn signs kept us all entertained. She gave us the historical reasons for having signs starting in Roman times and how historical influences continued to influence signs in Britain's inns and alehouses. We looked at the many reasons for the names of our pubs - royalty, animals, famous people and transport. Elaine had hundreds of photos to illustrate her talk as she is a member of the Inn Sign Society who are trying to photograph all the signs in Britain before they are replaced by modern technology.

On the Grapevine - George Mullen, Halton u3a Member

Sixty years ago a leading Rugby League coach named Joe Egan was asked if he thought the standard of the game had improved over the years. He replied that sports that were measurable, such as athletics, had definitely improved so it was reasonable to assume that other sports had improved also.

An interesting reply and I've often wondered if his theory holds good for other things in life. Wine for example. I'm sure everyone remembers Vin Ordinaire. It was everywhere in the 60's when the French drank wine like the English drank tea. A familiar sight in Paris was three-wheeled trucks branded Nicolas trundling around in the early hours delivering the daily supply of wine just as we had milk floats. The wine was cheap but not so cheerful and eventually the Appellation d'Origine Controlee (AOC) classification system was introduced in an attempt to control quality. Consumption of wine in France today is at its lowest level ever but perhaps Egan's theory was correct and quality has improved.

Then, of course, we had the infamous Aussie White which some people believe must have been made using reject methylated spirit. But today Australia is the fifth largest producer of wine in the world with 65 wine regions and 2,400 wineries. Its wines are very successful worldwide and in the UK accounts for about 23% of wine sold online and in stores. They definitely disrupted the traditional wine industry of the Old World (France) including refrigeration, improved labelling and the widespread use of screw caps. Some people still cling to the notion that cork stoppers are best but wine gurus agree that screw caps are

just as good and more practical. Jancis Robinson says that what we need is a screw cap that goes 'pop' when we open the bottle!

Not to be left out the Greeks gave us Retsina which arrived by accident. When wine was fermented in earthenware pots the lids were sealed using resin from pine trees to prevent oxygen entering. Occasionally small amounts of resin would find its way into the wine and so created a particular taste. People developed a liking for this and so winemakers would deliberately include some resin and Retsina was born. A lot of effort has been made to improve quality but so far I've not found a volunteer willing to check.

Halton Heritage Partnership - Chris Lewis, Halton u3a Secretary

Halton has a unique history and is home to a great variety of organisations and groups who care passionately about local heritage and keeping it alive. It is possible to discover the heritage of the borough through thousands of objects, documents, and photographs. There are over 3,000 items held by local museums, history groups, libraries and the Town Hall. Halton Heritage Partnership (HHP) brings these groups together to work collaboratively, to share their knowledge, their collections, and their enthusiasm for Halton's history with people across the borough and beyond.

Halton u3a is represented by Bob Roach emphasising it has general history and family history groups. I represent the Widnes Railway Club though I have a great interest in u3a obviously and the Catalyst Science Discovery Centre and Museum. The latter contains many records of the Chemical Industry in Halton and these can be found on its website. Items of particular interest can be seen by appointment.

Nearly twenty organisations now have joined the Halton Heritage Partnership and many can be seen on its website:

<http://haltonheritage.co.uk/halton-heritage-partnership/>

The website is being updated and it will be relaunched at the end of April.

Committee News - Chris Lewis, Halton u3a Secretary

Later this year at the AGM, Jennifer and I will complete our three years of Chair and Secretary of Halton u3a. The time seems to have passed very quickly. However, this raises the question of our successors. The national u3a lays down rules for the running of our u3a as it does for all of them. These are incorporated in our Constitution which can be found on our website.

The management of Halton u3a is carried out by the Executive Committee which must be at least six members and these are elected at an AGM. The Officers in this Committee are the Chair (Jennifer), up to two Vice Chairs (Jean Lewis and Pat Bunt), the Treasurer and the Secretary (me). These are appointed for three years. At the end of the three years none, except the Treasurer, can stand for an alternative office except for the position as Chair. The Treasurer can do an extra three years as Treasurer. We also have David

Bissenden and Caroline Nesbitt on the Executive Committee which was agreed at the last AGM. This means we currently have seven on the Executive Committee.

I conclude from this that any member except Jennifer can stand as Chair for the next three years. No one has come forward yet to show interest so we are looking for volunteers. We have a member, Caroline Nesbitt, who is showing an interest to take over the Secretary's role.

The Executive Committee can invite others to attend Committee Meetings. At present these are Malcolm Broadbere (who keeps records of the membership), Paula Fox (co-ordinator of the Groups and first Chair of our u3a), Anna Higgins (responsible for our website), Alec Hough (as a source of valuable knowledge and ex-Treasurer), Pat James (Newspaper Editor) and Elizabeth Wynne (Membership Secretary). Both Paula and Malcolm have declared their intention to relinquish these roles at the AGM so again we are looking for volunteers.

New Arrival

One of our members, Viv Wright, had a wonderful Mother's Day surprise, a great granddaughter Layla Rose, born four weeks early! Our congratulations and best wishes to the proud parents. Viv also has a great grandson Harry.



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

- **iPad Group (Group Leader, Paula Fox)** - March's workshop at Apple was, as always, interesting and useful. The topic was around how to create and save documents in 'Pages'. The iPad Group members meet on the first Thursday each month at the Apple shop, Liverpool One and at St Paul's Church Hall, Widnes, WA8 7QU at 10.00am on the third Thursday. Apple iPad users of any level are always welcome.
- **Bowls Group (Group Leader, Paula Fox)** - April is approaching with longer and warmer days for the start of the bowling season. In the meantime, the group continue 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 every Tuesday morning at 10.00am. 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)** - The March meeting of the Reading Group saw a lively discussion about 'The Girl You Left Behind' by Jojo Moyes. The book has an easy to follow split timeline, switching to and from a small French community during the First World War and modern day London. The first part of the story focuses particularly on one young woman Sophie and her family and neighbours. Before he leaves for war Sophie's artist husband paints a portrait of her. Both she and the painting attract the attention of the German Kommandant, when the town becomes occupied by the Nazis. The latter part of the story centres on the young woman Olivia who has been given this painting as a wedding present by her husband who dies early on in their married life. She becomes involved in a bitter court battle to establish the legal ownership of the painting 'The Girl You Left Behind'. A new love interest for Olivia is also thrown into the plot at this stage.

Separated by almost a century both women fight desperately for what they love and hold most dear to them. The book was enjoyed by the majority of the group especially the scenes set in France leading up to Sophie's eventual arrest and deportation from the village. However the book was not without faults. As one member suggested the reader was "manoeuvred by coincidences". Some we felt were much harder to swallow than others but on balance they did not spoil the book.

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. At our next meeting on Wednesday, 19th April 2023 we will be discussing 'How Green Was My Valley' by Richard Llewellyn. More information about the group can be found on the Halton u3a website.

- **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.

- **Science is for Everyone (Group Leader, Bob Roach) -**

Human Evolution from the Chimpanzees - The group meets at St Paul's Church Hall at 1.00pm on the second and fourth Mondays in the month.

Having had a look at what is involved in walking (more to it than you might think) we went on to when our long ago ancestors lived in the trees with chimpanzees. But we split off from them, got down from the trees and got around by walking. Being able to move about and have your hands free had some benefits, e.g. carry things, such as weapons to chase after your dinner.

But it was a gradual change, identified by a series of key fossil discoveries. By 1990 the consensus was that all humans originated from Africa, having moved away about 60,000 years ago. Job done - time for fossil hunters to find new careers. But then things moved on, such as with the use of DNA (e.g. we all have a little bit of Neanderthal DNA in us!), fossil findings that didn't fit that model, etc.

- **History (Group Leader, Bob Roach) -** The group meets at St Paul's Church Hall at 1.00pm on the first and third Tuesdays in the month. In a good example of the u3a principle of shared learning, we read up about aspects of an identified era (currently King George III and IV and what significant events happened in that era. We also talked about:

- Jacobite Rebellions, Battle of Culloden, Bonnie Prince Charlie fleeing to France.
- Napoleonic Wars (Battles of Trafalgar and Waterloo).
- East India Company and Clive of India.

- **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.

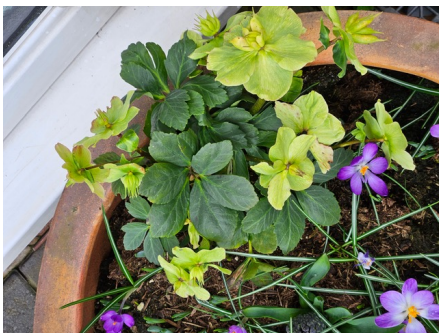
All members and prospective members are welcome, it doesn't matter if you haven't started researching your family tree or even if you have no intention of doing so. At our Monday afternoon sessions we have been tracing interesting stories which our members have discovered during their researches into emigration records, workhouse records and military records. We recently had an excellent and very well attended talk by a local family historian who talked about the importance of preserving our research for future generations and we hope to arrange a visit soon 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.

- **Living History Group - Group Leader, Geoff Dutton**) - The group's study of Chester's walls was postponed due to the fact that Tuesday was a bad day for some members and the weather is mixed in March, so it has been rescheduled for a Thursday in early April. If you are interested and haven't received an email from Geoff, please contact him through the contact page on the website.
- **Gardening Group (Group Leaders, Chris and Colin McConnell)** - The Green Shoots Gardening Club met at Rivendell Garden Centre on 20th March 2023. It was another good turnout by the members. We discussed a visit to a garden on the National Garden Scheme and arranged a visit to Parm Place in Great Budworth, CW9 6HF. We will be meeting at the George and Dragon Public House at the top of High Street in Great Budworth at 1.30pm on Sunday, 2nd April 2023.

Topics also discussed at the meeting were what plants to grow in shaded areas, growing rhubarb and which varieties to grow, making compost in plastic bins, feeding plants and vine weevil which made a very interesting discussion.

The next meeting will be at 10:30am on Monday, 17th April 2023 at Rivendell Garden Centre. Hopefully we will be having a speaker, who is a staff member of Rivendell Garden Centre, talking about outside plants.



Hellebore plant



Bleeding heart plant

- **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, Chris Lewis.

Next General Meeting and Coffee Catch up

The next General Meeting in April has been postponed until further notice as it is the same time and date as Jane Bissenden's funeral which Jennifer and Chris will be attending. Further information will be sent out by our Secretary, Chris Lewis.

The May speaker is Carole Codd, who will talk about 'Names and Registration Thoughts'.

The April coffee catch-up is at 2.00pm on Thursday, 27th April 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