

HALTON NEWSLETTER

March 2024

Victoria Park, Widnes



Photo courtesy of Chris Lewis

Message from the Chair - Chris Lewis

We had a few spring days this week and it was good and probably enjoyed by most of you. We have welcomed lighter evenings as Jennifer and I often go out at 5.00pm. On Thursday I walked to Widnes Station via Victoria Park. There was a patch of daffodils in bloom and some crocuses. I am sure the other plants will soon give a lovely display. For many years I have thought how well the Council Estates Department looks after Victoria Park and the other parks in Halton. Attention was being given to the bowling green which I noticed opens on Monday, 1st April 2024. To top it all there was no litter and I believe this is cleared every morning. The two swans, resident for several years, have chased off their cygnets of last year and are building their nest for this year's cygnets. If you haven't been to the Park recently, it is well worth a visit.

Two of this year's new groups have met recently. The Aviation Group had over ten attending its first meeting, twice that expected and is planning future meetings and visits. The Lunch Group met on a Sunday and was also well attended and will continue. As you know I have to put a piece in about railways. At Euston recently it was chaos with the departure for Liverpool showing as cancelled. Rather than adjourning to the bar for a hour

I decided to wait awhile. I could see on my mobile a Manchester train was going to be diverted to Liverpool instead and this was then announced. Waiting to leave the train automatic announcements said it was going to Manchester. I knew it was going to Liverpool as I told people around me. The indicators at one end of my coach said Manchester on one and Liverpool on the other! It did go to Liverpool as I knew. What a way to run a railway!

February General Meeting

Jennifer Lewis entertained us last month by showing photographs and describing travelling by rail to countries which are difficult to visit as holiday destinations at the moment. Jennifer and Chris had visited Jordan, Syria and Myanmar (Burma) in safer times. Unfortunately some of the sites they visited have been destroyed. She also explained some of the special arrangements needed in order that the rail enthusiasts can see and film the different trains. This was certainly something unexpected. Thanks to Jennifer and we hope to hear more of their adventures in future.

On the Grapevine - George Mullen, Halton U3a member

In my younger days I used to prefer white wine. This was before I became macho and switched to red. My favourite was Frascati in the days of two for a fiver. Frascati is a commune near to Rome in the Italian region of Lazio. The wine was very popular but fell down the batting order when Pinot Grigio appeared on the scene. Recently it has made a comeback lauded by those who know about these things. My recent tasting was Principe Pallavicini Poggio Verde Frascati Superiore 2022. It's sold by The Wine Society priced £10.50. My memory is too long ago to compare then and now but I'm advised that the quality has improved. One reason is that the grapes now used, 70% Malvasia, are from vines producing a low yield harvest which helps to avoid dilution of acidity and flavour. This particular sample of the reborn Frascati is another in my 'I'm not recommending it just telling you I like it' series of wines.

I'm also adding another to the series called Nero d'Avola, one of my favourite reds. We all know that wine has a long history but, unfortunately, not all of it is good. This is especially true of Nero d'Avola which is made, as the name implies, with a black grape from Avola, a city in the Syracuse region of Sicily. In 1693 an earthquake, lasting just four minutes, devastated the area and resulted in 60,000 victims. Since then it has somehow recovered and today is known for producing this outstanding wine. I'm not at all good with tasting notes even when I refer to my chart of 120 descriptors so I don't suppose I'll ever be invited onto Saturday Kitchen! But here goes. On the nose it has a hint of mushroom and cloves and on the palate it's fruity, as in plums, with medium acidity. It's widely available at Laithwaites, Tesco and Virgin Wines at about £14. In addition to being used as a single varietal wine it is also blended with another Sicilian grape called Frappato to make the prestigious Cerasuolo di Vittoria Classico. This is the only Sicilian wine classified Denominazione d'Origine Controllata e Garantita which is the highest level of Italian wine. It comes in an unusual bottle with a classic scene on the label. It's available online from Eton Vintners of Berkshire at £29.95.

Recently a friend contacted me bursting with enthusiasm for a red wine called Umani Ronchi Fonte del Re Lacrima di Morro d'Alba. That's a mouthful in more ways than one. Lacrima is an ancient grape grown only in a small area near the town of Morro d'Alba in the the province of Ancona in the central Italian region of Marche. It's named after the Italian word for teardrop due to its tendency to weep droplets of juice during ripening. This is reflected in the design of the label. I have to agree with my friend that it is special. It's sold online by Tannico priced £16.24.



Grape of the Day - George Mullen, Halton u3a Member

Once upon a time someone decided that a whole year was too big to manage in its entirety and so it was divided into 365 parts called days. This made life much easier for anyone who wanted to claim a piece of it. Lots of Saints got involved including Patrick, George, David and Stephen all claiming their own day. Mother took a day as did Valentine. For years I've been petitioning for Uncle George Day but no luck so far. Winemakers have been quick off the mark nominating days to be paired with a particular grape variety. These are a selection of some of the more well known.

16th February is Syrah day

13th March is Riesling day

1st April Tannat

17th April Malbec

6th May Sauvignon Blanc

17th May Pinot Grigio

23rd May Chardonnay

10th June Chenin Blanche

18th August Pinot Noir

And onwards until 16th December when it is Pinot Meunier day.

The most well known is Beaujolais Nouveau day, featuring the Gamay grape, which is held on the third Thursday each November.

A long period of time can elapse between harvesting the grapes in September, fermenting them into wine and ageing for sometimes several years before the wine is ready for sale.

This puts a considerable strain on the financial resources of winemakers. In the late 1800s wine makers in Beaujolais began releasing their wine in November after only a few weeks of fermentation. In the 1950s and 1960s it was very popular with wine merchants involved in well publicised competition to be the first to stock it.

Beaujolais Nouveau is still around today but perhaps not so prominent.

Making Your Mark - George Mullen, Halton u3a Member

When I was a youngster I was passionately interested in newspapers. I wanted to be a writer like Arthur Helliwell in The People or William Connor, aka Cassandra, in the Daily Mirror. They were known as columnists. I'm told that today I would be called a blogger. I think they said blogger. We no longer need newspapers so much. With mobile phones and other devices we can communicate and catch up on news whenever we wish instead of waiting for the daily paper. But we need to be aware of the potential pitfalls of predictive text. I once received a text addressed to OGRE! Of course I got a heartfelt apology

immediately and a promise never to let it happen again. But the damage to my ego was already done.

I always check my texts carefully before sending. The other difficult area is punctuation especially involving the much maligned apostrophe. We have all seen examples of *it's* misuse some of it the result again of predictive text.

There is an organisation called The Apostrophe Protection Society whose mission is to prevent these errors and ensure that it is used as a proper punctuation mark. This can include indicating possession as in the boy's cycle, contraction of words as when I have becomes I've and omission of letters such as in fish'n'chips. The Society states that apostrophes are NEVER used to indicate plurals. Somebody forgot to tell this business in America.



Bin End - George Mullen, Halton u3a Member

In case you missed it. Sainsbury's has installed AI-enabled cabinets in some of its stores to prevent shoplifters targeting expensive bottles of booze. The new self-locking cabinets require customers to go through a four-step process via the touch screen and in-built speakers before they can access the drinks. The system will alert store staff to any suspicious activity and record data of any suspected shopper or activity such as doors being open for too long. I'm not sure whether customers will be advised how long they can leave the door open. Perhaps time targets will be issued based on individual shopping records which, no doubt, are readily available on file. You have been warned.

Things People Say - George Mullen, Halton u3a Member

Before we were invaded by television in 1953 radio was a very popular source of home entertainment. But not exclusively. We played games like Charades, Ludo and something you may remember called Housey Housey.

You may have been fortunate in having a family member who was good at reciting monologues. These were very popular and there were a number of professional monologists. That's a word you don't hear mentioned much in the pub. William Robertson Russell Bennett was a comedian better known as Billy Bennett. He specialised in parodies of dramatic monologues such as The Green Tie On The Little Yellow Dog which was his version of The Green Eye Of The Little Yellow God a 1911 poem by Milton Hayes. Stanley Holloway was well known as a skilled performer and is particularly remembered for Runcorn Ferry a monologue better known by its punchline tuppence per person per trip. This was written by Marriott Edgar in 1933 and featured Mr and Mrs Ramsbottom and their son Albert.

A year earlier he had written The Lion and Albert in which the Ramsbottoms visited Blackpool Zoo where Albert fell into the lion's den and was eaten. The Ramsbottoms weren't too worried because Albert was insured with the Prudential and, believe it or not, this cost tuppence per person per week!

People are very often remembered for the songs they sang, speeches they broadcast or the comments they made. Perhaps you can recall who is associated with these gems.

1. Peace for our time.
2. You've never had it so good.
3. Let's be havin' you.
4. The lady's not for turning.
5. And for those of you watching in black and white the pink is next to the green.
6. Et tu Brute.
7. As I said at the Brighton conference.
8. There are some people on the pitch. They think it's all over. It is now.
9. I'm worried about Jim.
10. I'll be back.
11. It is a far far better thing that I do than I have ever done. It is a far far better rest that I go to than I have ever known.

Catalyst - Chris Lewis, Halton u3a Chair

Following on the article about Widnes Historical Society I have chosen Catalyst as the next member of the Halton Heritage Partnership to cover. Incidentally I forgot to tell our Editor that Bill Slater, Secretary to Widnes Historical Society, wrote that article, not me.

Some of you will have visited Catalyst or to give it its full name, Catalyst Science Discovery Centre and Museum. All those I have shown around, scientists or not, have been fascinated. Its beginnings go back to the late 1980s when a group of people thought that the industrial heritage of Widnes and Runcorn should be recorded. West Bank was the beginning of the chemical industry in the UK.

I was invited to join the Committee of the Friends of Catalyst in 1991 and have been involved ever since, including the Chair of the Friends for fourteen years. I edited and produced its Newsletter for most of that time. It is a registered charity and its mission is to inform, educate and inspire the widest audience about the relevance of chemistry, through its unique offerings and hands-on experiences, its industrial heritage archives and its strong links to the local area. It is a premier visitor attraction, recognised as the best Science Discovery Centre and a unique Museum of this area. Apart from adult visitors thousands of school children visit each year and find that science is interesting.

Two of the famous men who started their careers in Widnes were Sir William Gossage, who started the manufacture of Gossage Soap in 1855 and Sir John Brunner who came to work in Widnes in 1861. The latter started the company, Brunner and Mond which became a major part of ICI. Grandsons of both are associated with Catalyst now, Peter Gossage and Sir Hugo Brunner. I have had the pleasure of meeting them both several times.

There is a cafe and if you pay to go around the Museum entrance is then free for one year. As Jennifer and I are Friends we have free entry. (Bob Roach is Chair of the Friends.) For more details see: www.catalyst.org.uk

Group Reports

- **iPad Group (Group Leader, Paula Fox)** - On the first Thursday each month, members attend a free workshop at Apple, Liverpool One. These fun sessions, led by in-house Apple experts, have been invaluable in helping members gain confidence and get the most from their iPads. In February we learnt aspects of some security settings, including the importance of nominating a trusted person as a Legacy Contact. On the third Thursday each month, we meet at 11.00am at Cronton Methodist Chapel, Chapel Lane, Cronton, WA8 4NT, to follow up and revise what was learnt at the Apple sessions and also to share tips and know-how and learn from each other. Forthcoming meetings are Apple Shop at 11.00am on Thursday, 4th April 2024 and Cronton Methodist Chapel at 11.00am on Thursday, 18th April 2024. Beginners welcome, all you need is an Apple iPad and a notebook
- **Bowls Group (Group Leader, Paula Fox)** - The group meets to play at 10.00am every Tuesday from April to September at Hough Green Park Bowling Club, Royal Avenue, Widnes, WA8 8HL. No experience necessary and spare bowls are available to borrow. Over the winter, essential maintenance to the green and surroundings has taken place, so it should be in tip top condition for when we commence play at 10.00am on Tuesday, 2nd April 2024. In the meantime, there will be a social gathering with hot drinks at the clubhouse at 10.30am on Tuesday, 26th March 2024. Complete beginners are welcome to join us.
- **Bridge Group (Group Leader, David Burrows)** - The group meets every Thursday at 10.00am in Ditton Community Centre, Dundalk Road, Widnes WA8 8DF. 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.
- **Reading Group (Group Leader, Barry Cotterill)** - At our February meeting we discussed our latest read 'Jamaica Inn' by Daphne du Maurier. This novel could be described as 'a ripping good yarn' and was greatly enjoyed by most of us. It is set in nineteenth century Cornwall. The main character Mary Yellan is orphaned in her early twenties. She follows her late mother's wishes by going to live with her mother's sister Patience and husband Joss in a remote coaching inn on Bodmin Moor. Mary has not seen her aunt for years and finds her much changed. Her once cheerful and carefree aunt is now downtrodden and fearful. Her husband is a violent rogue who is heavily involved in smuggling. Customers at the inn are few and far between and when they do appear they are not particularly salubrious characters. Although Mary's initial inclination is to escape this environment as soon as she can, she bravely stays to protect her aunt hoping that she might given time persuade Patience to leave. As the tale develops Mary witnesses at first hand the distressing and brutal activities of the smugglers. Although she believes she has found an ally in the shape of the local vicar all is not as it seems. All in all a most gripping and thrilling read to the end. The group usually meets on the third Wednesday of the month at 10.30am on the ground floor of Widnes Library. Visitors and new members are welcome. If you are unable to find us the library staff will always point you in our direction. Each month we leave with a book provided by the library to read and chat about at our next meeting. Our next book is 'The Museum of Broken Promises' by Elizabeth Buchan. A full list of the group's 2024 reads is on the Reading Group page on the Halton u3a website

- **Photography Group (Group Leader, Barry Cotterill)** - The group continues to meet monthly on the third Monday of each month at 10.30am at Rivendell Garden Centre. The next meeting is on Monday, 18th March 2024 where the topic will be spring. Please bring along any pictures you wish to share, ideally on a card or memory stick so we can show them on the laptop. On Monday, 15th April 2024 we are planning to meet at 7.00pm at the Pump House, Albert Dock, Liverpool to take pictures of the sunset/lights on the river front. Weather permitting of course. New members very welcome. If you would like to join us please come along to Rivendell or join us in Liverpool.
- **Science is for Everyone** - The group will continue but members are in the process of discussing its format for the future. If you haven't already expressed interest in its future, please let Chris Lewis know.
- **History (Group Leader, Bob Roach)** - The group meets at St Paul's Church Hall, Widnes at 1.00pm on the first and third Tuesdays in the month. The group is aimed at people who may not know a great deal of history but are interested in building up their knowledge. No one is an expert, our approach (true to u3a thinking) is one of 'shared learning'. For practical reasons, we have hopped forward to the Attlee Government towards the end of World War II after the defeat of Churchill at the General Election. This involved rationing, the establishment of Israel and the setting up of the NHS. At our next session we will be hopping back to significant aspects of the latter part of World War II, e.g. D Day, Pearl Harbour and the use of the atom bomb. Now that we are catching up with modern times, we will shortly have to decide what era or area of history we will move on to.
- **Family History Group (Group Leader, Alec Hough)** - The group meets monthly on the third Monday of each month from 2.00pm to 3.30pm in Room 11 at Widnes Library, Victoria Square, WA8 7QT. Our next meeting will be on Monday, 18th March 2024. All members are welcome whether or not they have started researching their family's history. For those who want some help in getting started, we offer one-to-one sessions at dates to suit you in your local library to show you the basics. You may be surprised at what you find out about your family.
- **Living History Group - (Group Leader, Geoff Dutton)** - Due to the bad weather Living History Group's peregrinations around the area have been limited. I hope to resurrect our Brewery trip to J.W. Lees Middleton Brewery for the summer.
- **Gardening Group - (Leaders, Chris and Colin McConnell)** - We meet at Rivendell Garden Centre, Widnes at 10.30am on the third Monday of the month. At the last meeting members were informed of the NGS Gardens we are planning to visit. Dates and venues will be announced when NGS books are available. We also discussed topics for discussion for the months ahead and what we should be doing this time of the year ready for the new season. Chris gave a general interesting talk on Clematis; growing and pruning of the different varieties. The next meeting will be on Monday, 18th March 2024 at Rivendell Garden Centre, Widnes, WA8 3UL. Everyone is welcome

- 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.
- Ten Pin Bowling Group (Group Leader, Davis Bissenden)** - The Ten Pin Bowling Group meets at 10.00am each Wednesday at Widnes Super Bowl, apart from during school holidays. Two games of bowling, including coffee and bacon roll, cost £7.99 under the 'Nifty Fifty' option which is only available to over 50's Monday to Friday, 9.00am to 11.00am (two games take a little over an hour - one game option is also available at £6.99). Participants are of course responsible for their own fitness and ability to take part and should supply emergency contact details. Members interested can contact me through the website or just turn up.
- Visits to Interesting Pubs (Group Leader, Chris Lewis)** - The group continues to meet on the third Thursday of the month. We are looking to visit pubs or bars that have character, not run-of-the mill estate pubs.
- Walking Group (Group Leader, Rob James)** - The second walk of the group was on the Within Way starting and finishing at Hale Park. It had been exceedingly wet prior to the walk and some areas were very wet and muddy, especially on the path down to the Mersey estuary and through the woodland area back to the Park. Well done to everyone who turned up on what was a lovely sunny winter's day. There was lots of historic landmarks on route including the Childe of Hale Statue and his grave in St Mary's Church, then heading down to the estuary and passing the old Ford crossing on the Mersey where Prince Rupert crossed during the English Civil War and then following the estuary path and passing Hale Lighthouse with its 45 foot tower which was decommissioned in 1958. The post walk social took place in the Childe of Hale Pub. Check the website for the next two walks taking place in March.
- Lunch Group (Group Leader, Patricia Quarton)** - Ten members gathered at the Cook House on 18th February 2024 for a Sunday carvery lunch. There was a good choice of meats and veggies, the food was good quality and fabulous value at £7.50 per head. Definitely one to do again.
- Day Trip Group (Group Leader, Patricia Quarton)** - Our first day out with Ashcroft Travel is on Thursday, 4th April 2024 to York, the cost is £26.00. Members wanting to go will need to pay for the trip at the General Meeting on Thursday, 14th March 2024.



- **Proposed New Group - Aviation Group** - My name is Colin and I have over 50 years experience in aviation and am hoping to gauge interest in a group interested in all things aviation. Anything goes perhaps talks about aircraft, visits to local museums, airfield history, perhaps you have a story to tell. We are surrounded in Halton by much aviation history, airfields and manufacturers. To be honest never done anything like this before but if you are interested, please contact Chris Lewis through the contact page the Halton u3a website.

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, Caroline Nesbitt.

Next General Meeting and Coffee Catch-up

The March General Meeting will take place at 1.30pm on Thursday, 14th March 2024 at the Masonic Hall, Widnes. The speaker will be Paula Parle, Sport and Physical Activity Development Officer for Halton. Her talk will be on Physical Activity for Health. She will include a taster session of active bingo with a small prize!

The March coffee catch up will be at 2.00pm on Thursday, 21st March 2024 at Rivendell Garden Centre, Widnes.

The April General Meeting will take place at 1.30pm on Thursday, 11th April 2024 at the Masonic Hall, Widnes. The speaker is Sharon Brown who will be talking about the Liverpool Overhead Railway.

The April coffee catch up will be at 2.00pm on Thursday, 25th April 2024 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 Chair, 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 10th of each month.

Further information and contact details can be found on the Halton u3a website