

HALTON NEWSLETTER

November 2023



Photo courtesy of Barry Cotterill

PLEASE NOTE THERE WILL NOT BE A NEWSLETTER IN DECEMBER. AS FROM JANUARY 2024 THE NEWSLETTER WILL BE PUBLISHED MID MONTH, THEREFORE ALL CONTRIBUTIONS AND GROUP UPDATES SHOULD BE WITH THE NEWSLETTER EDITOR BY THE 10TH OF EACH MONTH.

Message from the Chair - Chris Lewis

As Chair it is now my turn to write the introduction to the Newsletter and for editions into the future. As you know I have taken over the Chair from Jennifer as no one else volunteered, I am not so sure I did but I, and most of you, want Halton u3a to continue. Without a Chair it could not. We have a Committee comprising of new and experienced members of Halton u3a which I always think is good. We recently had a Committee Meeting which I will report on later in the Newsletter. Pat James continues to be its Editor for which I am very pleased. I know then that the high standards of the past will be continued. I am now going to have my first moan. We have 120 members and only a handful submit articles for the Newsletter, surely some more of you can write articles?

They do not have to cover matters connected with u3a but just something you have done or read about. If you don't I will write articles on railways to bore most of you.

As you know Jennifer and I did not attend the AGM because I had Covid. We had delayed the fifth injection for Covid until we returned from leading our last tour (on the railways of Austria) in case we had after affects. I proved positive the day after we returned. We have both had the injection now with no after affects, not even any signs or feelings in our arms where the injections were done. Perhaps we made the wrong decision not to have the fifth injection earlier! We had it done in the pharmacy in West Bank with no appointment necessary. I am putting this as a gentle reminder if you haven't had one.

As I write this we have about 90 members paid for the next year with several new members included in this. Membership remains at £15 per year and despite inflation, has remained at this level for several years. Our aim is a minimum of 120 members similar to last year and over 30 members have not renewed from last year. Hopefully you will and I shall be including membership renewal forms to you with this Newsletter. Please renew if you haven't already done so.

Recent Committee Meeting - Chris Lewis, Halton u3a Chair

Normally the Halton u3a Committee meet every two months but because of the changes to its members at the AGM it was decided to hold one in November. The u3a Constitution only allows Elected Members to serve for three years apart from the Treasurer who can serve for six years and any Elected Member can become the Chair for three years. (The Constitution is on our website.) Most of you will know the following eight were elected at the AGM namely Me (as Chair), Caroline Nesbitt (as Secretary), Shirley Woodhouse (as Treasurer), David Bissenden, David Findon, Pat James, Patricia Quarton and Elizabeth Wynne (Committee Members). The Elected Members agreed we would invite the following to attend the Committee Meetings so their experience can help in the running of Halton u3a. These are Pat Bunt, Paula Fox, Anna Higgins, Alec Hough and Jennifer Lewis. Susan Page was co-opted to the Committee as she will be keeping the records of membership of Halton u3a.

Obviously we have various topics on the Agenda. For example we looked at the finance position which is in good shape. We discussed the starting time of the General Meetings and it was decided to keep the start time at 1.30pm but we would ask the speakers to start before general u3a matters were discussed. The speakers should then finish at about 2.15pm. It was pointed out that the meeting time had been brought forward from 2.00pm in the past and several speakers had commented that even the 1.30pm start was early.

Two new groups have been formed. David Bissenden has started a Ten Pin Bowling Group that meets on Wednesday mornings and I am starting a group to meet at pubs that have something different about them. Let me know if you want your name added to either group.

Our next Committee meeting will be at the beginning of January.

Travelling Alone - Chris Lewis, Halton u3a Chair

I have mentioned in my introduction about Covid. Since Covid, whilst Jennifer and I have travelled a fair amount including seven times leading railway tours abroad, we have not travelled separately. I had several reasons for going south a week ago and to be fair, I felt slightly apprehensive of going on my own. However, I bought my ticket to go from Widnes to London. Why Widnes to London you may ask? It is the same price as a ticket from Runcorn to Euston that many of you probably use. You probably don't know when tickets are issued there are permitted routes that you can travel. As well as allowing travelling from Runcorn to Euston it is valid from Widnes to St Pancras via Sheffield. Then paying an extra £12 one can sit in first class from Sheffield to London at weekends and have free tea and coffee and snacks. Crossing London (taking some pictures of Tower Bridge) I then travelled from Waterloo to Portsmouth for a school re-union.

One reason why Jennifer did not come with me (apart from getting rid of me for four days of course) was she was laying a wreath in Victoria Park on behalf of Halton u3a. I observed the two minute silence outside a church in Havant, near Portsmouth before catching a train to Haslemere where I stayed the night with friends we had met on a railway tour of China.

Next day I caught a train to London where I had a Committee Meeting of the Locomotive Club of Great Britain. I am its Treasurer. Then I stayed in Leicester to have a meeting next day on an ex-Laporte site that I still advise on gas and electricity. It uses £2m of electricity annually. After this the lady from Eon drove me to Nottingham to catch the hourly train to Widnes. Jennifer met me there and after a quick drink went home for my dinner.

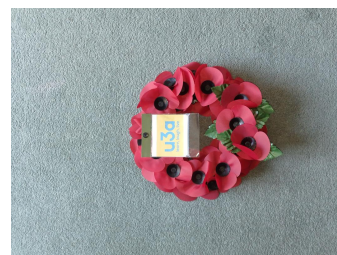
We both enjoyed ourselves and you can see why I bought the ticket at a cost of £68. If I had bought single tickets to cover the journeys to and from London it would have cost me about £120.

November's General meeting - Speaker, David Maidment OBE, The Railway Children Charity

David Maidment OBE spoke at the last General Meeting. He explained how while working in India he became aware of many young children living in terrible conditions in the railway stations. Realising the dangers they faced he decided to do what he could to help and then formed his charity. It was very interesting to hear that similar problems occur around the world and how The Railway Children Charity has tried to improve the lives of many children.

Remembrance Sunday - Jennifer Lewis, Halton u3a member

On Sunday, 12th November 2023 I took part in the Remembrance Sunday service in Victoria Park. There was a good attendance despite the inclement weather. The Deputy Lieutenant of Cheshire was the King's representative. The Mayor of Halton and Derek Twigg MP were among the dignitaries attending. I laid a wreath on behalf of Halton u3a, but was announced as University of the Third Age. I was pleased to be on the official list as I had found it difficult to contact anyone who could tell me how to make sure that u3a was included. By the end of the service the heavens opened so I didn't stay to speak to anyone although I did see other u3a members there for this moving ceremony.



A Great Briton - George Mullen, Halton u3a Member

Occasionally something happens that touches everyone even though they may have no direct connection. I think this is true of the passing of Sir Bobby Charlton. 'Some are born great, some achieve greatness and some have greatness thrust upon them' is a quote from Shakespeare's Twelfth Night. Bobby was born in Ashington, Northumberland, the son of a miner. From a working class start he went on to become a football icon recognised all over the world. I worked for a sports company and my job involved arranging contracts with sports personalities. We had a contract with Bobby who was excellent with customers. One day, thirty seven years ago, I noticed in the Sunday paper that it was his birthday on Monday. He was due in our office on the same day for a meeting. I managed to find a very large birthday card and a cake from a local shop who, when I explained its purpose, decorated it while I waited. When the meeting ended I invited Bobby to have a look at something new in our showroom. He was delighted when he saw the cake and the card which had been signed by everyone in the office. And what did he do? He cried. He was an emotional man, as we saw on the pitch, and one of the nicest guys I've ever met.

On the Grapevine - George Mullen, Halton U3a member

Not too many years ago organic products were a niche market. In any store they would occupy a small section of the shelf space. This was particularly the case with organic wine which was often made by devotees of the trend towards organic products and who just happened also to make wine. As a result the quality was not great. But this has changed and today many of the most reputable winemakers have become involved. Organic wine has gone mainstream.

Conventional farming uses chemicals to control pests and to feed vines and this results in high yields. But constant spraying with chemicals over a long period eventually destroys the natural nutrients in the soil.

Organic farming uses manure and compost as feed but this reduces the yield by 20-25%. As a result it makes the wine more expensive. A number of alternative methods are used for pest control. One which has been used in French vineyards since 1996 is sexual confusion. This involves dispersing an artificial pheromone which causes the insects to fly off to seek other locations in search of a mate. Another method, which is even more fascinating, is practised by, among others, Vergenoegd Wine Estate in South Africa. They have a flock of a special breed of ducks called Indian Runner Ducks. No, not rubber ducks! Every day the army of 1100 ducks is let loose in the vineyard when they charge through gobbling up all the insects until they've cleared the site. Stellar Organics Winery has a wine label featuring a Running Duck and makes wine using Merlot, Shiraz and Chenin Blanc grapes. I haven't tried them but Merlot is usually very quaffable with soft tannins which are easy on the palate. They are available online from The Broadway Wine Company priced £9.87.

What a Coincidence - George Mullen, Halton u3a member

Or is it? Some people don't believe in coincidences. Albert Einstein said it was God's way of staying anonymous, whatever that means. Stephen Hawking died on 14 March 2018 which would have been Einstein's 139th birthday. Sherlock Holmes said that people who don't believe in coincidences must live very dull lives.

John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, two prominent political adversaries in America, both died on 4 July 1826 exactly 50 years after the two men signed the Declaration of Independence.

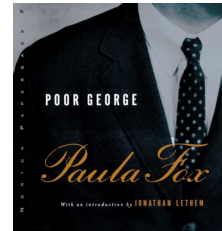
On BBC TV Harold Steptoe was played by Harry H. Corbett who included an H in his name to avoid confusion with Sooty's mate Harry Corbett. There were two film actors called James Stewart but one changed his name to Stewart Granger. In the radio soap Mrs Dale's Diary, which ran for 21 years, the role of husband Dr Jim Dale was played by actor James Dale. A couple of years ago two racehorses with identical names ran in the same race. This was possible because they were registered in different jurisdictions, one in Ireland and the other in the USA.

Many years ago, when I was driving through the centre of Leeds on a very busy day, I stopped to let a young lady use the pedestrian crossing. Part way over she turned and waved to me. She was David Findon's daughter Helen who was at university there at the time.

Sir Hugo Brunner once told Bob Roach's Science Group about his great uncle Roscoe Brunner who was involved in negotiations that led to the formation of ICI. Over a gourmet meal in the Church View I explained to Sir Hugo that I was born in Brunner Road in Widnes in my grandparents' house, and their name was Roscoe! He was suitably astonished. But don't tell Albert Einstein.

The most remarkable coincidence I've experienced happened in 1967 in New York. I was about to cross Fifth Avenue but was stopped by a lady who advised me to wait for the green light. Otherwise it was a serious offence. We chatted while we waited and, recognising my accent, she asked me which part of England I came from. I told her I was from a town near Liverpool called Widnes. She said she had lived in New York for 21 years but she was born in Widnes. She grew up with my stepfather!

Perhaps coming a close second is a novel I chanced upon a little while ago. It's called *Poor George* and was written by an American author named Paula Fox.



A Question of Christmas - George Mullen, Halton u3a Member

It's that time of the year again when we all indulge ourselves in excesses of food, drink and wall to wall TV. As an aid to staying awake a short quiz might be helpful. And remember, awaiting the winner is the orange rolled over from last time.

1. Which former Bradford policeman was Chairman of the popular BBC Radio panel game Twenty Questions.
2. What sort of food is Baron Bigod.
3. How many bones do we have in each ear.
4. What is cicchetti.
5. What is a group of pandas called.
6. Authentic Italian food only uses fresh pasta. True or False.
7. Which country has the longest coastline in the world.
8. What is the chemical formula of ice.
9. Ljubljana is the capital of which country.
10. Which is the best selling music single of all time.
11. Which country produces the most wine.
12. Name the traditional Welsh vegetarian sausage whose main ingredients are cheese and leek.
13. What is the connection between broadcaster Andrew Marr and Ashley Way in Widnes.
14. Who is the Patron Saint of winemakers. There is a clue in his name.
15. Which is the smallest country in the world.
16. Which British Prime Minister was an accomplished musician and had the same name as a bandleader.
17. Which wine has the same name as a cake.
18. What is an Arbroath smokie.
19. Who was the Galloping Gourmet
20. Italy's national dish is Spaghetti Bolognese. True or False.

There are two questions I wanted to include but didn't because I don't have answers. Perhaps you can help.

- Why is abbreviation such a long word
- Why is there only one Monopolies Commission.

Group report

- **iPad Group (Group Leader, Paula Fox)** - November's session at the Apple shop in Liverpool One continued with exploring what is available in IOS 17.0, with a reminder from the tutor to always keep software up to date. To enable this, the device should be connected to the mains and to wifi. We also discussed open questions from the group members which proved to be very useful. Monthly free workshops are at the Apple shop, Liverpool One, 11.30am - 12.30pm on the first Thursday in the month. On the third Thursday each month meetings are at Cronton Methodist Chapel Hall, Chapel Lane, Cronton, WA8 4NT, 11.00am - 1.00pm. A free car park is opposite the chapel. Beginners welcome.
- **Bowls Group (Group Leader, Paula Fox)** - Maintenance to the green plus regular downpours have prevented much chance of play, although officially, the season doesn't begin until April. If you think you might like to have a go in 2024, the group meets every Tuesday at 10.00am - 12.00 noon at Hough Green Bowling Club, Hough Green Park, Royal Avenue, WA8 8HL. Beginners welcome and bowls are available to borrow.
- **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. This month the group tackled Thomas Hardy's classic 'Tess of the d'Urbervilles'. We agreed that this was a hard text review in the light of modern values. Both Tess and Angel Clare, the main male love interest, struggle with issues that in our world would be fairly easily resolved. Also Hardy's writing does not travel well through time. On the one hand there are many uplifting descriptions of life in Hardy's time, for example bringing in the harvest, rich in detail that has almost been lost to us, giving us a real sense of time and place. But on the other hand there are many, many paragraphs in the book that are beyond understanding to the modern reader due to the archaic language used. To sum up, the book offers a real glimpse of the past in rural England, but the emotions that drive the characters don't relate very well to our modern sensibilities.

- **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. Unfortunately this month the group failed to meet due more pressing commitments and illness, we hope to meet before Christmas for a crafty meal.
- **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 completed our look at Artificial intelligence by:
 - considering how driverless cars will operate, and
 - looking at examples of chat bots - you ask them a question and it gives you a speedy answer. I found these invaluable for getting a quick description of a somewhat complicated topic. The answer always comes with a reminder that there could be inaccuracies in it.

We are now looking at the Earthshot Prize that is led by Prince William. Its purpose is to seek novel ways of combating the concerns about climate change. Presented by Prince William, there is a description of what it is about on this link on the BBC iPlayer - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m001sg9f/the-earthshot-prize-2023>

Now that I've been running the group for over 6 years, I have invited the group to rethink its future.

New members most welcome to our chatty sessions. Please contact Bob Roach through the website.

- **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. Continuing with our approach of 'shared learning', we have now nearly completed the era of George V as King of England – he reigned from 1910 to 1936. We still need to do a little bit more about the rise of Adolf Hitler in that era and how the severity of the peace terms imposed on Germany at the end of World War 1 possibly contributed to his emergence. We will then go on to discuss the short reign of Edward VIII before he abdicated, with George VI (father to Queen Elizabeth and grandfather to King Charles) unexpectedly becoming king.

New members most welcome to our chatty sessions. Please contact Bob Roach through the website.

- **Family History Group (Group Leader, Alec Hough)** - The group now meets only once per month - on the third Monday of each month. Our next meeting at the library will be on 15th January in Room 11 at Widnes Library, Victoria Square, WA8 7QT. However, it is possible that we will be meeting elsewhere in December, please use the blue pigeon on the Family History page of the Halton u3a website to find out. 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. 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 to get you started. 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 Groups peregrinations around the area have been limited, apart from organising our Christmas Lunch at the Ring O'Bells in Frodsham on Friday, 15th December 2023, to which about ten of our members are attending. I hope to resurrect our Brewery trip to J.W. Lees Middleton Brewery for the summer, which was well attended prior to Covid. I doubt it will be the same price of £10.00 per head with as much food and drink as you could cope with, plus a full tour of the Brewery. Have a good Christmas and New Year.
- **Gardening Group - (Leaders, Chris and Colin McConnell)** - We had a Green Shoots Gardening Group meeting on Monday, 20th November 2023 at Rivendell Garden Centre. We had discussions on planning a New Year meal for our next meeting on Monday, 15th January 2024, venue still to be decided. Seven of our members had recently attended the Wonky Gardens Japanese floral arrangement session where they all had an enjoyable morning making displays they should be proud of. We also discussed the Plant Hunters fairs for 2024, the types of compost bins and making compost for your garden and how to overwinter chrysanthemums and dahlias.

The informative meeting was again well attended.

The next Green Shoots Gardening Club meeting is cancelled at Rivendell Garden Centre on Monday, 18th December 2023 due to Christmas commitments. Some gardening club members are still turning up on that day at 10:30am for a coffee and social meeting.

Col and Chris wish all Halton u3a members a Merry Christmas and a Prosperous New Year.



Flower arrangements by members at Wonky Gardens in Widnes

- **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)** - A new group has been formed. The Ten Pin Bowling Group meets at 10.00am on Wednesdays 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

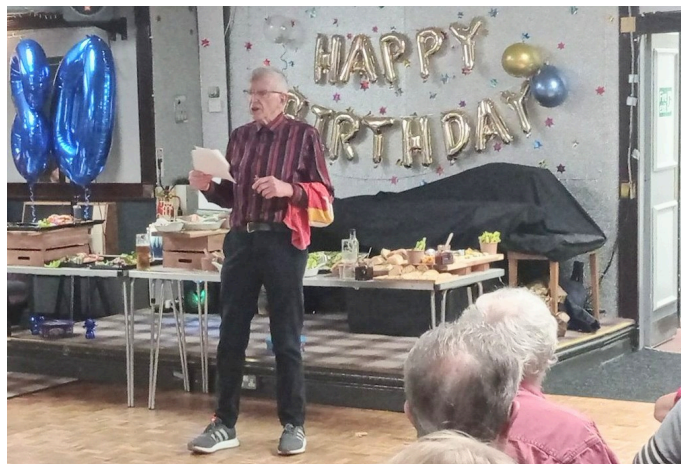
available to over 50's Monday to Friday, 9.00am to 11.00am (two games take a little over an hour - one game option is also available at £6.99). Participants are of course responsible for their own fitness and ability to take part and should supply emergency contact details. Members interested can contact me through the website or just turn up.

- **New Group - Visits to Interesting Pubs (Group Leader, Chris Lewis)** - The group met for the first time at the Society in Runcorn. We are looking to visit pubs or bars that have character, not run-of-the mill estate pubs. The Society is under the railway bridge between Runcorn station and the Mersey. The main room is the old Cooperative butcher shop. The owner is renovating the building and has exposed the original tiled walls. Eight of us gathered and enjoyed ourselves. The food served, mainly of eastern Asia variety at a very reasonable price, was enjoyed. But most importantly to me one beer is hand pumped and of excellent quality. Jennifer and I have been going there for over four years. It was certainly unique for our first get together.



George

We will not have a meeting in December because bars tend to be filled but will in January. The next meeting was meant to be at the Castle in Runcorn but it is closed at the moment. Rumour has it that it is to re-open soon. There are other suggestions but welcome ideas on other venues. Because the evenings get dark early we are not combining these visits with a short walk before but intend to in the spring. If you would like to be on the group mailing list please let me know.



Bob Roach, Group Leader, recently celebrated his 80th Birthday

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 Christmas Social will take place at 1.30pm on Thursday, 14th December 2023 in the Masonic Hall, Widnes. There will be entertainment in the form of a Ukulele band and we will be making a charge to cover the cost of refreshments. We hope to have a raffle and will be collecting raffle prizes at future events. Tickets are £10 and need to be purchased before the event.

There will be no coffee catch up in December.

The January General Meeting will take place at 1.30pm on Thursday, 11th January 2024 at the Masonic Hall, Widnes. The speaker is Elaine Allen a blue badge guide. Her talk will be about the buildings of Liverpool.

The January coffee catch up will be on Thursday, 25th January 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 at www.u3asites.org.uk/halton](http://www.u3asites.org.uk/halton)