

HALTON NEWSLETTER

September 2023

The Catalyst Museum, Widnes

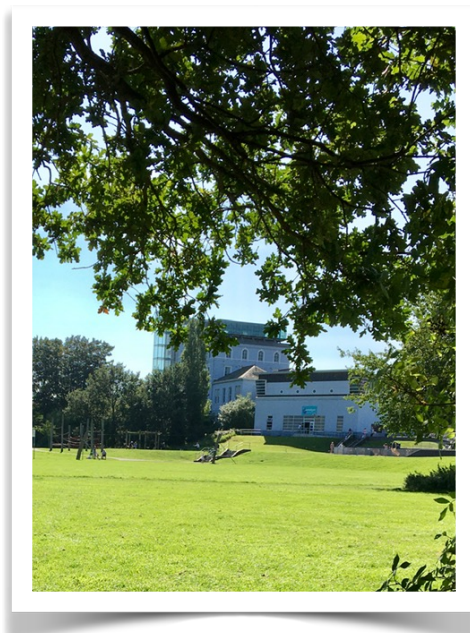


Photo courtesy of Patricia James

Message from the Chair - Jennifer Lewis

As I write this England is experiencing some of the warmest and sunniest days of the year. This is often referred to as an Indian summer, meaning warm and settled weather in the autumn. The term does not have its origins in the sub-continent or the days of the Raj as is often supposed. Rather it is of North American origin and probably originates from the Mohawk Tribe of native Americans. An Indian summer allowed them to extend the hunting season and build up their larders before winter set in. I'm not sure how much hunting goes on in Halton but I certainly enjoy knowing that the days will be warm and settled for the time being. Of course an English summer during whatever time of year was described by King George II as 'three fine days and a thunderstorm'. There is a good meteorological reason for this, the sun warms the sea surrounding our island causing faster evaporation. The wetter atmosphere generates areas of low pressure. Moist air rises, cools and dumps the moisture as rain. Three days seems to be the optimal time to complete this cycle.

How quickly time passes, it doesn't seem very long since I became Chairwoman of Halton u3a. Now I have almost finished my three year term of office. The u3a constitution means that officers are restricted to a three year term. We are looking for additional Committee Members to move Halton u3a forwards with new ideas and enthusiasm. The elections will take place at the Annual General Meeting in October.

A Letter to the Editor - George Mullen, Halton u3a Member

I can't believe that three years have passed so quickly and Chris and Jennifer's term in office is coming to an end. I remember the start of the term when I noted the names of elected officers.

Chair, Jennifer Lewis
Vice Chair, Jean Lewis
Secretary, Chris Lewis

My favourite author is Peter May and one of his novels is entitled 'The Lewis Trilogy'. I'm surprised he chose to write a book about Halton u3a. At the first General Meeting I attended a few years ago the hall was crowded. I took the only chair available and found myself sitting next to Jennifer and Chris. That wasn't the first time we had met. I've known them for over thirty years. Jennifer has often supplied me with wonderful Derbyshire oatcakes as well as excellent macaroni cheese. Not to mention that she is an expert guide to a variety of local hostelrys with the aid of a portable searchlight which helps me avoid falling down potholes. I enjoy a regular chat with Chris over a hand pulled pint. I never realised sulphuric acid was so interesting. I've heard a rumour that the BBC are planning to serialise his emails on Radio 4. They both rescued me from my frozen home earlier this year when icy weather shut down my heating system. To their close friends they are known as CnJ. This gives them equal status with CnA, MnS and BnQ. Over the last three years their contribution to Halton u3a has been exceptional bringing energy, initiative and commitment in abundance. Thank you and best wishes to them both.

Appearing by Chance - George Mullen, Halton U3a member

We all know that some people seek publicity whereas others, like myself, prefer to stay modestly in the background. But, of course, we are not always in full control and sometimes fame is thrust upon us whether we like it or not. My TV career was quite unexpected but perhaps inevitable.

I made three appearances on Question of Sport including one of the early episodes involving David Vine as Chairman and recorded in a converted church in Rusholme. This and the second appearance involved just being an extra in the audience. More recently it was at Media City where I was seated immediately behind Mick Fitzgerald's team from where I made myself available to offer help with any difficult questions. I successfully contributed the answer of Lee Osman of Everton but I can't remember the question.

I took part in Mastermind playing a supporting role on the front row of the audience just behind the big black chair. John Humphrys started to ask a question but suddenly a man with headphones, a clipboard and a loud voice called a halt and came over to me. He asked me to remove my wristwatch as it was reflecting the studio lights and the cameras were picking this up. I did so and John Humphrys carried on with the quiz. That

contestant never did thank me for gaining him extra thinking time. More intense was Question Time with Robin Day in Stoke Town Hall. It was quite intimidating with cameras permanently trained on the audience. Later I nervously watched the recording to check if the cameras had caught me off guard. No, but they caught the guy next to me yawning!

Sport always provided me with good opportunities. I have appeared in tennis, cricket and athletics events in numerous locations. One of the most memorable experiences was horse racing at Haydock Park. Whenever I went and the meeting was on TV I would record it so that later I could check where my horse had disappeared to. At one meeting it was a lovely day and I decided to sit outside and study my Racing Post. There was a convenient bench occupied by two young ladies and they were happy to let me join them. As usual, later that day, I watched the recording to confirm why I had returned home penniless yet again. Rishi Persad introduced the programme. He said the lovely weather had brought big crowds to Haydock including the young and the old. At which point there was a full screen shot of the two young ladies and me! I'm still convinced I was set up by Rishi and Channel 4.

I went to a cricket match at Old Trafford. It was a memorable game between England and some other team. Next day in work everyone asked me if I'd enjoyed myself. Apparently I was caught on TV downing a pint with commentator Ritchie Benaud remarking 'He's certainly enjoying that'. It's a good job I'd booked a day's holiday.

I went international when I was interviewed on TV in Australia. For some reason they wanted my expert opinion on Sydney airport. But, of course, my real forte is drama. Out shopping in Widnes one Saturday morning we met a group of people outside Calverts shop. They had a lot of equipment including cameras and cables. I was wearing a very bright red sweater and was quickly spotted by the guy who seemed to be in charge. He said they were filming an episode of Juliet Bravo and would we help. We were to stand chatting and not looking at the camera. When he blew a whistle a woman would run out of Calverts (Hubbards in the programme) and dodge round us. She was a shoplifter and was pursued by an actor playing the store detective. I was delighted when I recognised her as my favourite TV actress, Margery Mason. But she didn't dodge round and instead rushed into me and hurled me at the detective. He responded and hurled me back. This was definitely not in my contract. Eventually the Director shouted cut and my ordeal was over. The episode was called Aunt Sally and has been repeated on TV several times. But last time I saw it there was a blurred red image on the screen where previously I was the focus of attention. I don't know why they cut me out but it's most likely jealousy.

I've been surprised how difficult it can be sometimes recognising well known faces if you meet them in person. For ten years I organised a corporate golf tournament at Mere Golf and Country Club. On one occasion I asked a guest his name. He was Roy Walker of Catchphrase. I don't think he was very impressed that I had to ask. Another time, when somehow finding myself in a bar in Munich, I was quite startled as I suddenly realised that the lady next to me was Sue Barker. We had both been to the European Athletics Championships. She was working for the BBC but I wasn't.

An awkward moment arose when I was standing in the Tesco checkout queue in Northwich behind Gary Barlow. He didn't look anything like he did when he appeared in Coronation Street. Perhaps I was confusing him with his brother Ken.

Remembering Radio Times - George Mullen, Halton u3a member

If, like me, you have fond memories of growing up listening to the radio every night you will find a website called radioechoes.com, very interesting. It gives access to old radio programmes in 21 genres including comedy, serials and drama. There are 5,008 episodes labelled Adventure and 10,239 in the Detective genre where you can relive the Adventures of PC49. Everything from Hancock's Half Hour and Paul Temple to Thirty Minute Theatre which has 40 episodes including one with the interesting title of 'The infamous Mr Georgie' which revealed that comedian Jimmy Jewel was a very good actor. There are 28 episodes of Shakespeare and a dramatisation of Victor Canning's brilliant comic novel 'Mr Finchley goes to Paris' starring the excellent Richard Griffiths. A lot of the items are American but there are plenty of British. I must admit I'm disappointed there are no episodes of Mrs Dale's Diary. I rushed home from school to listen to son Bob's wedding. If you are multi lingual you can listen to German and Swedish radio among others. Even Australian if you speak Oz. The source of some programmes is interesting with occasional adverts popping up and not always in English. The website claims to contain a total of 120,889 episodes but I've made no attempt to check.

Visit to the Buddhist Temple in Runcorn - Chris Lewis, Halton u3a Secretary

Some members of Halton u3a made a visit to the Wat Phra Singh UK Buddhist Temple and Meditation Centre in Runcorn Old Town, Cheshire. When the Runcorn Temple opened ten years ago they were the eleventh Thai Buddhist temple in the UK, today there are over thirty, the main one being in Wimbledon which is owned by the Thai Government. The Runcorn Temple extends over four floors including the very spacious basement. It was built in 1830 by Greenall Whitley, the local brewery, as an eight bedroom hotel to serve the growing trade on the adjacent Bridgewater Canal. We were welcomed outside and shown around by Tony Collacott. Tony was born in Frodsham and now lives in Helsby. He paid his first visit to Thailand over 40 years ago and was immediately attracted by the country and Buddhism. He converted to Buddhism a few years later. He showed us the work going on outside to make space to build the new Ubosot Hall. He also showed us the grass bank which will soon become a Peace Garden, a new publicly accessible local amenity. He then took us into the main room, the Shrine Room on the first floor. Here there was a large Buddha, a replica image of the 1,000 year old Phra Sihing Buddha in the parent temple, Wat Phra Singh, in Chiang Mai, Thailand. This beautiful bronze statue was a gift from supporters in Chiang Mai. On this floor there was also a public room, the dining room, foyer, toilets and a kitchen.

On the second floor there is a large meditation room overlooking the canal basin, an office, three bathrooms and four bedrooms for anyone to stay in whilst there. The top floor is the monks' private quarters providing three large bedrooms and two bathrooms.



Tony gave us some facts about Buddhism. For instance monks must not chew food after midday. However, they can eat ice cream as it does not require chewing. It was a very interesting visit to a place which many of us travel past when coming off the old bridge.

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

- **iPad Group (Group Leader, Paula Fox)** - Meetings are on the first and third Thursday of the month. On the first Thursday in the month meetings are at the Apple shop, Liverpool One, 11.30am - 1.00pm. This is an excellent free workshop each month with expert support to show us how to get the most out of our iPads. On the third Thursday in the month meetings are at Cronton Methodist Chapel, Chapel Lane, Cronton, WA8 4NT, 11.30am - 1.00pm. The group members usually revise what they learnt at the Apple workshop and also share things that we have discovered ourselves. A free car park is opposite the chapel. Beginners welcome.
- **Bowls Group (Group Leader, Paula Fox)** - The group meets every Tuesday morning during the season from April to September, when the weather is dry and not too cold. The green is usually in excellent condition but despite the TLC and regular maintenance, the green began to deteriorate early in the season. This was diagnosed as a condition called Localised Dry Patch, caused by a fungus which coats the grass roots with a waxy substance, preventing the absorption of water. In hot weather the roots dry out and the grass dies off, leaving severe bare patches. The specialist treatment that is required is very expensive but fortunately, a grant of £2,000 was awarded by HBC towards the work, so we can look forward to a velvety green once again for next season.

INDOOR BOWLS - If anyone is interested in playing over the winter, a team is being organised, so for details, please let me know. Beginners are very welcome and spare bowls are available to borrow.

During the outdoor season, meetings are every Tuesday 10.00am - 12.00 noon at Hough Green 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 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 'This is Going to Hurt' by Adam Kay. The book is a no holds barred look at a modern obstetrics unit in a large city hospital. Kay is writing from life experience and worked in such a unit a few years before leaving to work in TV production. It is not for the faint hearted, with graphic descriptions of the frantic pressure endured in modern medicine. There is also quite explicit sexual references and more a smattering of very bad language. So why should you read the book? Well everyone should read it to understand the risks doctors have to take just to get through their shifts, how dangerously understaffed the NHS really is and how brutally doctors are treated by their peers. Not an easy read but a necessary one.
- **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. Last month the group met at Rivendell to review images taken on a tour around Liverpool. The actual day had been good and the images were also good. We collected some great candid shots of people enjoying the sunshine, and some novel views of very familiar landmarks. All in all a good 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. Two recent meetings have been on the topic of Artificial Intelligence (AI). These have included how computers and the thinking about AI developed. How driverless cars operate will be included the next meeting. 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. As we work our way through the Monarchs, we are now finding out what we can about George V, King Charles' great grandfather. We are looking at:
 - the activities of the monarch themselves,
 - what significant national and world events took place in their reign (World War I, Irish Home Rule in relation to George),
 - what happened locally, (how local industry responded to World War 1).
 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. For our September meeting we visited Lancashire Record Office in Preston for a guided tour of the archives.

Our next meeting will be held from 2.00pm to 3.30pm on Monday, 16th October 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.

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) -** The group recently visited the Wat Phra Singh (Temple of the Holy Lion) Buddhist Temple in Runcorn. The group had a very interesting and informative visit where Buddhism was explained succinctly by Tony Collacott, the Administrator of the Temple. A report from Chris Lewis is included above.



- **Gardening Group - (Group Leaders, Chris and Colin McConnell) -** We had a Green Shoots meeting on Monday, 18th September 2023 at Rivendell Garden Centre, a good turnout considering the weather in the morning. Thank you to everyone who sent their apologies. Although we did not have a meeting in August we still carried out a visit to Shrewsbury Flower Show which was enjoyed by those who attended. Thanks to Julie who organised the visit. We are hoping to visit the Southport Flower Show next year, if anyone is interested in attending please get in touch with Julie Thornett.

We kept busy on the u3a Gardening Group 'What's App' throughout the summer, with a lot of members actively informing and learning. We discussed the good and bad things that had grown for us. The last NGS garden visit for the year was on Sunday, 10th September 2023 to the Wonky Gardens in Widnes. We are now starting to plan for other activities for the rest of this year and 2024.

The next Green Shoots Gardening Club meeting will be held at Rivendell Garden Centre, WA8 3UL at 10.30am on Monday, 16th October 2023 everyone is always welcome.



Grasses at Abbeywood Gardens



Chinese Streamside Garden, RHS Bridgewater

- **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

The next meeting will be the AGM at 1.30pm on Thursday, 12th October 2023. After the AGM Carole Codd, an ex-registrar of births, marriages and deaths, will entertain us with more stories of her career.

The next coffee catch-up will be on Thursday, 26th October 2023 at Rivendell Garden Centre, Widnes.

At our General Meeting on Thursday, 9th November 2023, David Maidment, who was a senior manager in British Railways, will tell us about the organisation he founded called the Railway Children. During visits to India he found children who had run away from home for various reasons and lived on stations. He set up his organisation to help, including educating many of these children.

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