

# HALTON NEWSLETTER

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**November 2022**

The Brindley Theatre, Runcorn



Photo courtesy of Chris Lewis

## **Message from the Chair - Jennifer Lewis**

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There are several anniversaries being celebrated at the moment. The Remembrance Service marked forty years since the Falklands conflict. Channel 4 is marking forty years of broadcasting, the first programme being Countdown, still going strong and helping viewers keep their minds active if they too compete against the clock. The British Broadcasting Company began radio broadcasts from a number of venues the most famous being 2LO operated by Marconi from the Strand. Birmingham and Manchester followed. Research has shown that the Manchester operation was the most professionally run; it was operated by Metropolitan Vickers in Trafford Park. Some years later my father completed his electricians apprenticeship at 'MetroVics' as he referred to it. British Broadcasting Corporation was formed in 1927 and now encompasses television and radio. The Corporation's purpose was to educate and entertain. That is also the aim of u3a, founded forty years ago to enrich the lives of people in their 'third age'. In Halton we are striving to fulfil those aims and be 'fit for the future'. It was pleasing to see so many people

at the last General Meeting renewing their membership or rejoining after Covid. There were even some new members. I hope we can find more ways to educate and entertain in the next year.

## November General Meeting - Blood Bikers

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The talk at the November General Meeting was by Malcolm Ellison of Merseyside and Cheshire Blood Bikers. There are eight powerful motorcycles and volunteers distributing blood and other items such as baby milk and medical instruments for the NHS. Malcolm has been doing this for several years following a heart attack and his daughter-in-law buying him a motorbike which he enjoyed riding.

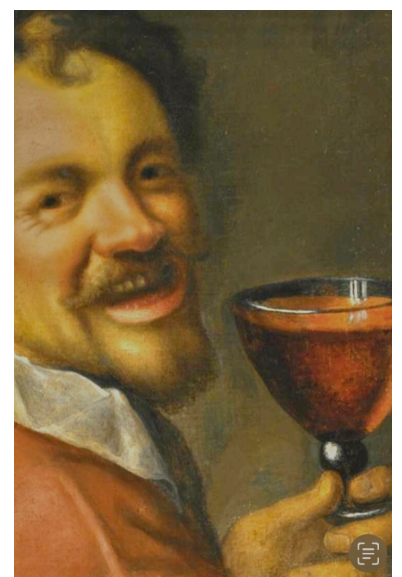
There are about eighty riders for these bikes, twenty four phone operatives and eight fund raisers, all volunteers who support this service doing over six thousand runs a year. It has been in existence for forty years. It is Malcolm's way of giving back to society. Jennifer took the opportunity to sit on his bike as in the picture below. Both her brothers and one of our sons rode or ride motorbikes but Jennifer had not been on one for many a year.



## On the Grapevine - George Mullen, Halton u3a Member

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Yes folks it's that time of the year again when signs of Christmas are all around us. Flashing lights, unlimited festive music courtesy of Morrisons and Baileys making its annual assault on the British public. We all look forward to singing reindeers with our cups of coffee in Rivendell and there are rumours that Easter Eggs might be on sale soon in Asda. And among all of this orange wine will no doubt be prominent on every shelf. The latest trend in our world of woke. Trendy but not new. There is a well known self portrait by German artist Hans von Aachen c1596 showing him drinking a glass of orange wine. Previously called amber wine the term orange wine was coined by British wine importer David Harvey as recently as 2004. Experts believe it was first made in Georgia 8,000years ago. Archaeologists have found evidence of winemaking in the region dating back to 6,000BC. Grapes were fermented in clay pots known as 'Qvevri' and buried in the ground to maintain a constant temperature. Using white wine grapes such as Chardonnay or the indigenous Rkatsiteli would produce the wine we now call orange. It is sometimes described on wine lists as skin contact white wine. The secret is that the grape juice is in contact with the grape skins during fermentation whereas it is not when making white wine. In fact the colour can be lemon or gold or even pink depending on the grape variety used, the ripeness of the fruit and length of fermentation. Orange wine made from Pinot Grigio is known as Romato. So when you are at your Christmas



Hans Von Aachen

party and given a glass of this latest fashionable drink you can impress everyone by telling them that actually it's just a style of white wine.

## **The Great Flood 1953 - David Bissenden, Halton u3a Member**

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On 31st January 2023 we mark the seventieth anniversary of the great east coast flood, when a 'perfect storm' of high tides and intense winds occurred and led to the deaths of over 2,000 people in Britain and the Netherlands.

Saturday, 31st January 1953 was the night of a predicted spring tide but a deep atmospheric low-pressure system above Scotland, and a northerly gale in the North Sea exacerbated this and caused the water level to be ten feet higher than the expected spring tide. This tsunami of angry water funnelled down the North Sea towards the Dover straits. The high tides smashed into coastal defences all along England's east coast with Lincolnshire and Norfolk severely affected. Further south, forty one people died in Felixstowe, Suffolk and sixty three in Jaywick Sands and Harwich, and other low lying towns in Essex. When the storm surge hit the English Channel, all hell broke loose. To the west the high waters funnelled up the Thames estuary submerging Canvey Island and forcing Tilbury to be evacuated as the sea defences broke down. The flood hit late evening at 11pm onwards, fifty eight people perished on Canvey, this number was probably exacerbated by the poor quality, single storey 'plotlander' bungalows that covered the island. My grandmother's bungalow, at the east end of Canvey, only had damage to carpets and furniture, but in the central/northern section of the island bungalows were completely engulfed as the torrent of water swept past Leigh-on-Sea and up the Hadleigh Ray before breaking over the island's sea fences. People who were unable to climb up onto their roofs, or taken by surprise in the dead of night, perished. Film from aircraft flying over the next day show only the bungalows rooftops visible above the waterline. Tilbury was hit around midnight with water coming over the sea defences between Tilbury and Coalhouse Forts and then racing across the open flat farmland to the south east of the town. The entire population of 5,000 plus had to be evacuated and most houses were flooded but thankfully only one fatality occurred. The flood also affected places closer to London such as Barking and the Royal Docks, but there it was only property that was damaged.

The North Sea surge also affected very badly the east side of the Channel with waters funnelling up the Scheldt and Oosterscheldt estuaries, north of Antwerp, and sweeping onto the flat south Holland farmland. The highest water level surge struck about three am on 1st February and the Dutch Sea defences were soon overwhelmed, and the land, which was mostly below sea level, inundated. A total of 1,800 died from drowning, making it the worst disaster in Dutch peacetime history. The epicentre of the flooding was probably around Zierikzee in Zeeland, about forty miles north east of Antwerp, and a similar distance south east of Rotterdam. Today, in the nearby town of Ouwkerk, is the 'Watersnood Museum,' opened in 2001 which commemorates this disaster.

Both in England and Holland the sea defences at the time were insufficient and both countries were poor and still recovering from the effects of World War II 1939-1945. There was also no early warning system for flooding at the time. Being late at night when the stormwaters hit, most people had switched off their radios and gone to bed. So, it was only when the floods reached their houses that people were aware of the emergency.

Communities on both sides of the Channel still commemorate the anniversary of the flood. Tilbury held an event in January 2013 for the sixtieth anniversary and Canvey Island in 2018 to celebrate the sixty fifth anniversary.

In practical terms sea defences were fortified significantly from 1953 onwards with the Thames flood barrier at Woolwich, completed in 1982, probably the final major act of these defensive measures. The Netherlands has also invested heavily in flood defence, and as 20% of their country is below sea level, it remains a high priority. With rising water levels worldwide, options are now being considered as to what sea defences are required for the 21st century.

## **Catalyst Science Discovery Centre - Chris Lewis, Halton u3a Secretary**

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As some of you know I am involved with the Catalyst Science Discovery Centre in Widnes. I joined its Friends' Council some thirty years ago and was its Chair for fourteen years and still keep involved with it now. A few weeks ago I was invited to a celebration at Catalyst following a major refurbishment. Grants were obtained for a million pounds and if you haven't visited it recently you should go and see the improvements. Amongst the many guests were the Lord Lieutenant of Cheshire, Lady Alexis Redmond, who officially opened the new improvements and Steve Rotheram, Metro Mayor of the Liverpool City Region, whom I had taken around Catalyst three years previous. Lee Juby, its Chief Executive and Diana Leitch, Head of Trustees led the occasion and read out letters from Derek Twigg MP, Peter Gossage and Sir Hugo Brunner, the latter two's great grandfathers famous for being major figures involved in the start of the chemical industry in Widnes. They could not attend because of the rail problems. These three are staunch supporters of Catalyst and are Patrons and it has been my privilege to have met them. It was also announced on the day that the Earl of St Andrews, son of the Duke of Kent, has become a Patron. Jennifer has met him before and found him very approachable. She has nicknamed him "Call me George" as this is what he said to her.



Lady Alexis Redmond, Lord Lieutenant of Cheshire

Catalyst needs help and is looking for volunteers to do various things. If you are interested, please let me know. You will quickly 'catch the bug of Catalyst' and enjoy the experience of being involved as Jennifer and I have.

## **Remembrance Sunday - Chris Lewis, Halton u3a Secretary**

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A procession and service were held at Victoria Park to commemorate Remembrance Day. As always there was a very good turn-out. It is good to see so many youths in most groups including young cadets for the various services. The two minutes silence was followed by the laying of the wreaths and prayers and hymns. Jennifer laid a wreath on behalf of Halton u3a. It is still strange to sing "God save the King" after a lifetime of "God save the Queen". Jennifer and I had a short chat with Derek Twigg MP and I asked him if he would agree to be our President for another year and he readily agreed. He said he

would like to attend a meeting of the u3a. It is difficult when he is in London at least for Monday to Thursday but perhaps there will be an opportunity. I said we were privileged to have him as President. When I think about it I have known him for nearly forty years, since he was a Councillor. I will always be grateful to Derek for several things, one in particular that he took me around Parliament himself many years ago, a fascinating place.



## Group report - Paula Fox, Halton u3a Group Co-ordinator

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- **iPad Group** (Group Leader, Paula Fox) - The members continue to meet every first and third Thursday of the month, alternating with the excellent free workshops at the Apple shop on the first Thursdays, then at St Paul's Church Hall on the third Thursdays to follow up on what we have learned at Apple. At November's workshop, we each borrowed a new iPad and an interactive Apple pen and had great fun experimenting with Procreate, the drawing app, to create moving artwork called GIFs, which we then sent to each other. We soon discovered that it was a highly addictive activity. Details of the Group meetings can be found on the Hu3a website.
- **Bowls Group** (Group Leader, Paula Fox) - Inclement weather has not stopped group members meeting at the clubhouse every Tuesday at 10.00am, although not to play bowls on the green, which has had its winter feed and is now beautifully carpeted with golden autumn leaves. We continue to meet socially at the club and enjoy a chat and banter over a hot drink. Last week, one of the members brought a card game called Uno, which was fun just getting to grips with the rules, but undaunted, we figured it out and played a dummy game, discovering in the process, that there's more to Uno than you might initially think. We all agreed that we had enjoyed a very happy morning together. New members are very welcome. We meet every Tuesday at 10.00am in Hough Green Park Bowling Club. No experience necessary.
- **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.

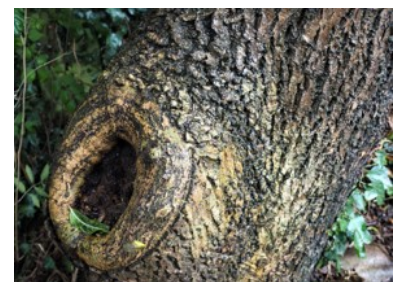
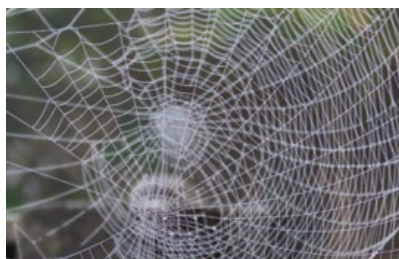
- **Reading Group** (Group Leader, Barry Cotterill) - The Reading Group's last read was 'Tidelands' by Philippa Gregory and is the first of a trilogy. Setting the scene - England in 1648 was a dangerous time for a woman to be different. Any woman who lived an unconventional life risked being accused of witchcraft. There was a civil war between a renegade King and a rebellious Parliament. Alinor, the heroine of the story, struggled to bring up her two children on her own and in such dramatically uncertain times. She stumbles across a stranger in a lonely churchyard after midnight on Midsummer's Eve....and there begins a love story in such turbulent times and which webs its way right through the book.

The general consensus of the group was that it made an excellent read with an excellent story line. Gripping was the word used.

There followed a very interesting and enjoyable discussion about the book and we were all impressed by the detailed historical research that must have been done by the author. Despite a few Mills and Boon moments the book got a five star rating from the group and is definitely well recommended.

The group will not be meeting in December and will reconvene on Wednesday, 11th January 2023 at Widnes Library when we will be discussing 'Half A World Away' by Mike Gayle. New members are always welcome. We sit around a table on the ground floor and if you don't recognise anybody the staff at the library desk can always point you in our direction.

- **Photography Group** (Group Leader, Barry Cotterill) - There are no group outings at present but we are setting a monthly challenge and then meeting at Rivendell Garden Centre for a chat, coffee and of course a look at the pictures we have taken. October's challenge was textures and I have attached a few of the images below. November's challenge is of course autumn and we will be meeting at Rivendell at 10.30am on Wednesday, 7th December 2022 to review our pictures. New members very welcome. You don't need a fancy camera just an interest on photography. Phones and iPad's / tablets are fine. Ideally we need pictures on memory stick or card so that we can show them on a laptop but this is not essential. If you would like to join us just come along to Rivendell at 10.30am on Wednesday, 7th December 2022.



- **Science is for Everyone** (Group Leader, Bob Roach) - The group continues to meet at St Paul's Church Hall at 1.00pm on the second and fourth Mondays in the month. Having considered the science of acoustics and how we hear (sometimes with difficulty as we get older) we are now 'having a look' at the science of optics and how our vision works. A possible topic to follow this one is 'Walking - how humans developed the way they walk'.
- **History Group** (Group Leader, Bob Roach) - The group continues to meet at St Paul's Church Hall at 1.00pm on the first and third Tuesdays in the month. When working our way through the Civil Wars, we had covered how the future King Charles II had had to escape abroad after being defeated. However, when no good alternative could be found to run the country after Oliver Cromwell died, Charles was invited back to rule, provided he kept to certain conditions. But that wasn't the end of discord of both a military and religious nature. There were concerns about the Catholicism James II and VII that led to William of Orange invading.
- **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.

Please note that we will have only one meeting in December which will be on Monday, 5th December 2022. 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 present in our Monday afternoon sessions we are tracing interesting stories which our members have discovered during their researches in emigration records, workhouse records and military records. We've also looked at how the detail in censuses can lead us into an understanding of our ancestors day-to-day lives. 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) - Hopefully, Living History will be able to start visiting interesting places again shortly, along with many more walks in the local area.
- **Gardening Group** (Group Leader - Chris and Colin McConnell) - The Green Shoots Gardening Club had their meeting at Rivendell Garden Centre on Monday, 21st November 2022. We had another good attendance and discussed various garden problems followed by a very enjoyable fun gardening quiz. It was agreed to have our Christmas meal on Monday, 16th January 2023. Ideas welcome for venue.



Cosmos growing well in November

- **New Group - The Cinema Group** - A new group has now started and run by Hazel and Judith. If anyone is interested please contact our Secretary, Chris Lewis. It will be meeting up on Tuesday afternoons depending on what films are currently on the Reel Cinema in Widnes. Chris Lewis will email those interested when cinema meetings are taking place.

***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**

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The Christmas General Meeting will be at 1.30pm on Thursday, 8th December 2022 at The Masonic Hall, Widnes. There will be a Christmas Beetle Drive and buffet followed by a raffle. Donations for raffle prizes would be most welcome.

There will be a coffee catch up on Thursday, 15th December 2022 at 2.00pm at Rivendell Garden Centre, all are welcome.

The speaker for the General meeting in January will be Steven Burrows. He is the Environmental Health and Trading Standards Manager for Halton Council.

**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](http://www.u3asites.org.uk/halton)***