

# HALTON NEWSLETTER

---

February 2023

## Manchester Ship Canal - Runcorn



Photo courtesy of Chris Lewis

## Message from the Chair - Jennifer Lewis

---

I may have mentioned before that February is probably my favourite month of the year. The darkest, not necessarily the coldest, days are behind us and green shoots are beginning to show in the garden. I am not a keen gardener but I can't conceive living without a garden, however small, to potter in and enjoy the change in seasons. The longer days bring the promise of better weather to come and so far this year we have had some spectacular sunsets which make me appreciate how lucky we are to live in Britain. The climate may be changing as we witnessed on our New Year almost snow free visit to Switzerland, but so far we have not seen any major disasters in this area.

As I write this I am painfully aware that our house is less than a hundred feet above sea level and only a mile from the River Mersey. It is unlikely however to be flooded from the river in our lifetime, nor are we likely to suffer a massive earthquake, despite the gentle tremors felt from time to time. I studied geography a long time ago and understand that our world is constantly changing and evolving. Humans have a great capacity to evolve and change too. I hope this is true of Halton u3a. Already this year I have been pleased by members telling me what a difference being a member and having activities to look forward to each month has made to their lives. Like good gardeners the Committee is looking forward to later in the year when many of the members have to stand down. This is part of the development of Halton u3a. I hope members are starting to think about what they can do to ensure that Halton u3a continues to grow and develop.

## February General Meeting - Sweet Memories, Jackie Mafi

---

At this month's General Meeting, Jackie Mafi reminded us all of the sweets and chocolates we had enjoyed in the past when we thought of them as treats. She spoke about the history of sweets leading up to the first chocolate bar in 1847. We all remembered the missing words from advertising slogans going back decades. She brought us up to date with the changes in some of our favourite sweets and chocolate bars. This was a very enjoyable presentation.

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

---

I've often wondered how many 'O' Levels you need to be a celebrity. It can't be a lot because there are so many of the breed around. Now they've found their way into wine. Of course, famous people have always been involved to a certain extent. Champagne specialists Pol Roger have made much of the fact that Winston Churchill said it was his favourite brand. They even have a bottle labelled Cuvee Sir Winston Churchill. Broadcaster John Arlott was famed for cricket and his cellar. Other cricketers associated with wine are David Gower, Phil Tufnell, Ian Botham and Henry Blofeld. South African golfer Ernie Els has his own label Big Easy. A Malbec has recently been released in Argentina featuring footballer Lionel Messi on the label during the World Cup. More celebrities are joining the party. In 2020 Kylie Minogue launched her brand to huge acclaim and great success. Her range of eight wines has so far sold over seven million bottles and is available in thirty one countries. She recently launched an alcohol free pink fizz with one bottle being sold every ten seconds over the Christmas period. Morrisons stock Gary Barlow wines which sold half a million bottles in the first year. The Champagne brand Armand de Brignac is part owned by Jay Z. Despite being teetotal Robbie Williams is planning to enter the ring with a label called Rude Rise.

Brad Pitt owns Chateau Miraval in Provence. A number of wines in Rick Stein's restaurants are under his own label. Portugal's Vida Nova brand belongs to Cliff Richard. Gordon Ramsay recently launched his Italian Collection. Bizarrely, Boyzone is the name of a vineyard in New Zealand. And it



looks like Love Island themed wine could be heading our way as the programme makers have been granted a trademark. But perhaps the most interesting brand of all is called George. The 1940 vintage is sweet, full bodied, well balanced and high in alcohol. It's very often found in wine bars.

## Travelling to the Ashes - David Bassenden, Halton u3a member

---

Nowadays we see cricketers playing all over the world. One day in Australia, the next day in New Zealand and perhaps a few days later a stopover in Abu Dhabi. But it was not always so. Prior to the 1960's, test teams, like most sportsman, had to travel by boat to the far-flung parts of the Commonwealth. So, when did all this long distance travelling start? The first Australian cricket tour of England was in 1868, and surprisingly the team were all aborigines, or as the *'Sporting Life'* said at the time, 'Australian natives'. In fact, their headline was 'Arrival of the black cricketers.'

The team set off from Sydney in March 1868 in the teak-built three masted sailing ship, the *'Parramatta'*. This boat was classed as a 'Blackwell frigate' which was a slightly slower version of the China clippers, of which the most well known is the *'Cutty Sark.'*

The ship arrived in Gravesend on 13th May and the team played a game at Malling in Kent, near Gravesend, before moving on to the Oval in London where they played Surrey County Cricket Club on 25th May. Over the next few months, they played forty-seven matches in total before taking the long journey back to Australia. Interestingly the *'Sporting life'* listed the entire team, both native and anglicised names; the first player on the list was *Jungunilnanuke* which translated as *Dick-a-Dick!*

The team seemed to be none the worse for the long sea journeys which were both arduous and dangerous at the time. They had to go via the Cape of Good Hope, as the Suez Canal was not yet open.

From then onwards The Ashes test tours were regular affairs with the MCC going to Australia and New Zealand, and both these countries visiting England and Wales.

Obviously the ships improved over time and by the mid twentieth century a typical voyage between the nations was forty two days long.

Typical of these tours was the 1948 Australian tour team, led by Don Bradman, which arrived at Tilbury Cruise terminal on the 16th April 1948 having sailed from Fremantle in Western Australia. They sailed on the *'SS Straithard'* which was one of the P&O 'White Sisters' which consisted of five boats that ran the Australian route and all had white liveries. A sign of times was that the team brought 17,000 food parcels from Australia as gifts to Britain which was still suffering from rationing. The voyage from Australia included a stopover in Colombo, Ceylon where they played a match.

Many of the cricketers who played during the 50's and 60s, and had travelled by sea and air to the ashes, spoke fondly of the long voyage and the chance to really get to know teammates and create a strong team bond. They kept fit by running around the decks and doing press ups. Others got fed up with the forty-two day voyages. Boredom was an issue and stopovers at different ports a welcome distraction. However in 1953 the Australian tourists perhaps took this too far as a drunken night at their stopover in Naples ended up with some of the team arrested for drunkenness!

In the autumn of 1960 the *'Straithard'* took West Indian players, who had been playing summer long in the Lancashire League, to Australia for their tour there. The next year that boat was broken up for scrap. The days of the ocean liners was past and pretty well from then on touring teams have flown to their destinations.

## Committee News - Chris Lewis, Halton u3a Secretary

---

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

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

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

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

Please let me know if you have an interest in the above roles.

## Activities in Halton

---

**Active Bingo** - Active Bingo is a game of prize bingo (tickets and boards provided) with a few gentle chair based exercises thrown in. Ideal to get a little bit of movement while having fun and socialising.

Join in every Wednesday at 2pm for £2 at Frank Mylers Pavilion, Liverpool Road, Widnes. Please call for further information from Paula Perla on 0151 511 8550

**Widnes Floral Art Group** - The group is holding a floral demonstration at 7.30pm on Wednesday, 1st March 2023 in Farnworth Methodist Church Hall, Derby Road, Widnes. The subject is 'Every Picture tells a Story' by Isobel Liston. Entrance is £8 including tea and coffee.

**Nordic Walking** - are you interested in getting a little more active? Why not join Elizabeth Kerley every Monday morning at 11.30am - 12.30pm in Victoria Park, Widnes. Tuition and poles are provided. Anyone interested can contact her on telephone number 07803 037332 or just turn up, we meet at the entrance to the park lower down than the cafe.

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

---

**Group Leaders' meeting** - Since Halton u3a started the Group Leaders have met a couple of times each year for a get-together, but due to Covid, this had not been possible. However, nine of the leaders finally met recently for a very enjoyable 'working lunch' at the Ring O' Bells, Frodsham, which was a great opportunity for everyone to get to know each other, discuss group matters and exchange thoughts and ideas and we all agreed not to leave it so long until the next time. Thanks to all the Group Leaders who attended.

- **iPad Group (Group Leader, Paula Fox)** - February's workshop at Apple was, as always, interesting and useful. The topic was around how to organise desktop favourites into more manageable folders for quick and easy access, instead of having a random selection in no particular order. The iPad Group members meet on the first Thursday each month at the Apple shop, Liverpool One and at St Paul's Church Hall, Widnes, WA8 7QU at 10.00am on the third Thursday. Apple iPad users of any level are always welcome.
- **Bowls Group (Group Leader, Paula Fox)** - April is approaching with longer and warmer days for the start of the bowling season. In the meantime, the group continue to meet socially and keep in touch for a chat, a cuppa and maybe a game of dominoes, darts or a board game in the cosy clubhouse every Tuesday morning at 10.00am. Beginners are always welcome and bowls of varying sizes are available to borrow. Meet Tuesdays, 10.00am at Hough Green Park Bowling Club, Royal Avenue, Widnes, WA8 8HL.
- **Bridge Group (Group Leader, David Burrows)** - The group meets every Thursday at 10.00am in Ditton Community Centre, Dundalk Road, Widnes WA8 8DF. The group is running well, back in our original room at Dundalk Road with usually between 3 and 4 tables playing. We are a friendly group with all levels of bridge skills and welcome members new to bridge but familiar with whist. We have a library of tuition books free to borrow to get new players familiar with bidding and techniques. Meetings usually start with an analysis of a hand played elsewhere and a discussion of how the hand was bid and played which is both informative and appreciated. Sessions vary between free play and themed instruction with a short talk followed by play based on the theme of the week which is stay-man and transfers. Several of our members also belong to local Bridge Clubs, details of which widens the possibility to play more

than once a week. Bridge is a great way to meet people and have fun exercising the grey cells.

- **Reading Group (Group Leader, Barry Cotterill)** - The book for discussion at our February meeting was 'Wolf Hall', the Booker Prize winner by Hilary Mantel. It is the first book of a trilogy. The book concentrates on the rise of the central character Thomas Cromwell, from a poor and very difficult childhood, to eventually become Henry VIII's chief minister. Many of you will be familiar with the storyline as the title was adapted for a television serial in 2015 and there have been more recent repeats.

Discussion on the book was rather brief as there were fewer of us than usual gathered and also because most people were still reading it. At 670 pages it was a rather lengthy, sometimes tedious, and an extremely demanding read. The library had agreed to a further extension to the loan period so we will return to discussing the book at some point in the future. The general consensus was that it was an excellent story but could have been improved by being so much shorter.

At our next meeting on 15th March 2023 the book will be 'The Girl You Left Behind' by Jojo Moyes. There is a full list of our 2023 book selections on the Reading Group page on the Halton u3a website which also tells you more about the group. There is no charge for meetings and all our books are kindly provided free by Halton Library. New members are always welcome. We meet once a month in an open area in Widnes Library. If you don't recognise our faces, the library staff will always point you in our direction.

- **Photography Group (Group Leader, Barry Cotterill)** - The group continues to meet monthly at Rivendell Garden Centre, Widnes. The next meeting will be at 10.30am on Wednesday, 22nd March 2023. New members are welcome, you don't need a fancy camera, phone images are fine.
- **Science is for Everyone (Group Leader, Bob Roach)** -

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

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

So, what is a reasonable stance now - hopefully we will figure that out at our next meeting!

- **History (Group Leader, Bob Roach)** - In a good example of the u3a principle of shared learning, we read up about aspects of an identified era (currently King George III and IV and what significant events happened in that era. We also talked about:
  - Jacobite Rebellions, Battle of Culloden, Bonnie Prince Charlie fleeing to France.
  - Napoleonic Wars (Battles of Trafalgar and Waterloo).
  - East India Company and Clive of India.
- **Rather Leisurely Walkers Group** - Bob Roach has recently retired from leading the Rather Leisurely Walkers Group. If anyone would like to take over this group please contact our Secretary, Chris Lewis. Bob is happy to provide support and encouragement.
- **Family History Group (Group Leader, Alec Hough)** - The Family History Group meets from 2.00pm to 3.30pm on the first and third Mondays of each month in Room 11 at Widnes Library, Victoria Square, WA8 7QT. There are car parking places and bus stops nearby. Those attending pay £2 per session to cover the cost of hiring the room.

All members and prospective members are welcome, it doesn't matter if you haven't started researching your family tree or even if you have no intention of doing so. At our Monday afternoon sessions we have been tracing interesting stories which our members have discovered during their researches into emigration records, workhouse records and military records. We recently had an excellent and very well attended talk by a local family historian who talked about the importance of preserving our research for future generations and we hope to arrange a visit soon to Liverpool Public Records Office. For those who do want to research their family history but aren't sure how to start, we offer one-to-one sessions at dates to suit you in your local library to show you the basics and get you started. You may be surprised at what you find out about your family.

- **Living History Group - Group Leader, Geoff Dutton)** - Geoff is leading a visit to Chester's Walls on Tuesday, 21st March 2023, meeting at the Little Roodee car park at 10.00am followed by lunch at the Bear and Billet. If you are interested and haven't received an email from Geoff, please contact him through the contact page on the website.
- **Gardening Group (Group Leaders, Chris and Colin McConnell)** - We met on Monday, 20th February 2023 at Rivendell Garden Centre with another good turnout of members and a thank you for all the apologies received.

The members were informed of the N.G.S. gardens we are planning to visit over this year for April, May, June, July and September, dates and venues will be sent out to members in the March 'Jobs to Do' sheet. We also discussed what we should be doing this time of the year ready for the new season. Informed the members of a visit Chris and myself had to Rode Hall Snowdrop trail at Church Lane, Scholar Green, Stoke-on-Trent. It showed that spring was here with the Snowdrops and Daffodils, also Bluebells breaking through along the trail, it was really enjoyable and worth a visit.

The next meeting will be on Monday, 20th March 2023 at Rivendell Garden Centre, Widnes, WA8 3UL.

- **New Group - The Cinema Group** ((Group Leaders, Hazel Landon and Judith Byrne) - The new Cinema Group will meet on a Tuesday afternoon (usually around 2.00pm) when a 'good' film is showing. This will not be every week; it is a come when you like group.
  - Sometimes it will be short notice, information will be published on the Cinema What's App group as films for the week are only released on a Sunday.
  - Tickets are usually about £5.95. You can get a Combo ticket for an extra £1 which includes a drink.
  - We meet in the Foyer so that we can get a row of seats together.
  - Car share is encouraged, as is bring a friend.
  - If you are interested, please let Chris Lewis know along with your contact details, so that Judith can put you on the Cinema Whats App Group. We have had 19 members sign up already.
  - A film we may see next that has been recommended is 'Empire of Light'.

***If you are interested in any of our groups and would like further information, Group Leaders can be contacted through the contact page on the Halton u3a website, or you can contact our Secretary, Chis Lewis.***

## **Next General Meeting and Coffee Catch up**

---

The next General Meeting will be at 1.30pm on Thursday, 9th March 2023 at the Masonic Hall, Kingsway, Widnes. The speaker is Elaine Allen, her talk is titled 'Last Orders Please, Pub Names'. The April speaker is Carole Codd, who will talk about 'Names and Registration Thoughts'.

The March coffee catch-up is at 2.00pm on Thursday, 23rd March 2023 at Rivendell Garden Centre, Widnes.

**If any members would like to give a presentation at a future event, or would like to contribute a short article to the newsletter, please contact our Secretary, Chris Lewis, or send articles to the newsletter editor through the contact page on the Halton u3a website. Please note the last date for contributions to the newsletter is the 20th of the month.**

***Further information and contact details can be found on the Halton u3a website at [www.u3asites.org.uk/halton](http://www.u3asites.org.uk/halton)***