

History of the U3A London Region Summer School



2013-2023

The U3A London Region Summer School

**Held annually at the
St. Bride Foundation,
off Fleet Street, London**

**from 2013 until 2023
(except in 2020!)**

This booklet has been compiled by
London Region of U3As Events Team 2023
in celebration of the
10th anniversary of the Summer School

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The St. Bride Foundation

Established in 1891, and housed in a
Grade II listed Victorian Building
just off Fleet Street, behind St. Bride's Church.



It was set up to serve
the nearby print and
publishing trade and
is now used by
designers,
printers and
typographers
who attend
design events
and workshops



Originally, the venue also had baths and a laundry.
As there's not much demand for these in modern day
Fleet Street, the baths have been converted into
the Bridewell Theatre



and the old laundry is now the theatre bar



Earlier history: Bridewell was the name of Henry VIII's palace 1515-23. It was given to the City of London Corporation by Edward VI for use as an orphanage and place of correction for wayward women. By 1556 part of it had become Bridewell Prison which was demolished 1864. Further information:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bridewell_Palace



There are several rooms for hire at the institute.
 In 2012, after looking at various other venues in central London,
 the St Bride Foundation was chosen
 for the London Summer School.



Gwen Wright, Phyllis Rosenberg and Chris Feldman
 being shown round the venue in 2012

The Summer School uses three of the rooms -

Bridewell Hall is graceful, large and airy. It can seat 60, with enough space for registration and serving lunch



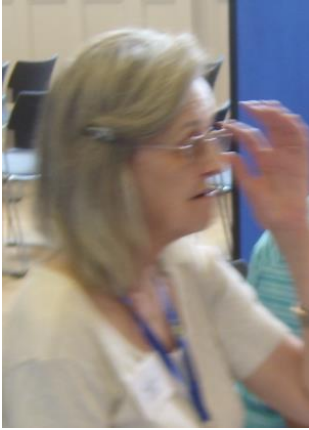
Farringdon Room can accommodate 60 people



Salisbury Room, an elegant boardroom, can hold 22 and is more suitable for workshops and other smaller sessions.



Original Team 2013 - 15



Gwen Wright,
Harrow U3A,
Regional Trustee 2011-14,
and founder of the event



Chris Feldman,
Barnet U3A,
first Treasurer and
later led the team



Phyllis Rosenberg,
U3A in London



Jo Livingston,
Bexley U3A

Both involved from the beginning

U3A Summer Schools

By 2012, most U3A Regions, and the national office ran summer schools of some kind, and many of these were residential (mostly for 3 days).

Residential schools work well in rural areas, where venues are not too expensive but travel can be difficult, and costly in both time and money.

London is the opposite – a day venue is expensive and overnight accommodation would be prohibitive

But London has good transport, so we decided on a three-day non-residential event in central London which is easily accessible to members in the region (and beyond) --

even better with a Freedom pass!



Picture: Transport for London

Arrival



There are many routes to
St. Bride's



and if required, there's a step-free approach
from Fleet Street via the terrace!

The day has always started with registration



coffee/tea and
biscuits

2013



This was the first Summer School and we learnt a lot from it.

Members were asked to book for the whole 3-day event --
there were three sessions each day and the
talks lasted 90 minutes – the day ended at 5pm.

Although tickets sold out and we made a surplus,
not all members were happy with this arrangement.

We always knew it was experimental. Most of the feedback was
appreciative but with some qualifications.
The event was generally held to be a success and we prepared
to improve on it the following year.

2014



Building on what we learnt from the first year, a thematic approach was adopted.

So the sessions on Day 1 focused on Art or History; Day 2 Science or Music; and Day 3 Literature plus more History and Art.

Talks were 1hr each; workshops could be 2hrs or longer. Highlights included a ukulele workshop and a session on geological maps, led by the Subject Adviser for Geology.

A new approach enabled members to book for one, two or three days.

2015

There was no theme this year but the topics covered a very wide area, from the Underground at War to Post-Imperial Africa and from Books of Hours to planetary systems, so something for everyone.

Workshops included drawing dinosaur fossils and a study of Hamlet. The music sessions ranged through Tchaikovsky, jazz, and electronic music.

Some members came for one or two days, while a sizeable number attended all three days. Each day attracted about 100 participants.



2016

Another year with no theme. Talks and workshops covered a wide range of subjects -- history, literature, art, music and science, with a few curve-ball subjects –

Do We Live in a Democracy? Law and Order in the City and Homelessness.

This was the first time walks were included-- two 2hr walks were offered per day. They included City alleyways, the Chelsea Physic Garden, Spitalfields and a City Ale Trail.

The introduction of guided walks was popular and enabled us to offer a broader programme and increased attendance (without increasing our room rental costs!)

Over the years we've had to cope with extremes of weather, sometimes rain but also heatwaves in several years, which are more challenging when experienced in central London and on public transport.



Guided walk to Spitalfields

LUNCH AND REFRESHMENTS

Lunch is always an important part of a U3A event,
as well as lots of tea and coffee



*"Buffet lunch was much
enjoyed as ever" —
"Fabulous custard tarts!!"*

With increasing numbers attending each year (now about 170 per day), lunch queues have been a challenge, but when we started to use pre-packed boxes during Covid, that speeded up the process a lot!



On a fine day, the terrace is a good place for lunch



Behind the scenes clear-up in the kitchen!

2017

For the first time there was a dominant theme to the Summer School programme. As it was the centenary of the Russian Revolution, we were able to arrange talks on many aspects of Russia – the political history, art, music, drama, literature and Russian contributions to science.

“I really enjoyed speaking to such a warm-hearted and appreciative audience, and it was great to be able to hear the other two talks about Russian composers that inspired me to choose Glinka to complement them.

There were also plenty of other subjects to choose from – Shakespeare, the Golden Age of Caricature, City Gardens, How the Memory Works and many more.

The six walks were all popular -- exploring Fleet Street, mediaeval London religions, legal and illegal London, City gardens, and Huguenots in the City. The stroll with cameras provided a chance to practise photographic skills



2018

This year we commemorated the centenary of the 1918 Representation of the People Act, and many of the sessions, including walks, looked at the achievements of women -- politically, in music, art, science, and The City.



Drama
(written by
a u3a
member)
about
Women's
Fight for
Equality

As usual there were also many other varied topics to choose from such as the Teenage Brain, Illuminated Manuscripts, The Planet and the Pendulum, Face Blindness and Climate Change



Walkers assembling on the Terrace

Contributors

Most of the Speakers, Workshop Facilitators and Walk Leaders are members of u3as within or near the London region.

Occasionally we benefit from links with universities and various community organisations, or individuals such as professional speakers and guides who generously donate their time.

Analysis of feedback forms indicates a good response rate by attendees and high levels of satisfaction, with the majority of sessions being rated as 'good' or excellent'

There's evidently an appetite for not only high-quality information and presentation, but also stimulating debate and interaction.



Many contributors also enjoy the experience and have agreed to participate on more than one occasion.

We are very grateful to all the contributors.

Participants

Although many attendees are enthusiastic returnees, we also attract many newcomers to the event each year, so there is always a vibrant atmosphere.

Articles are regularly published about the Summer School in Third Age Matters and Sources, and booking online is quick and easy.

Whilst the vast majority of attendees come from London u3as, an increasing number belong to u3as outside London – mostly within commuting distance -- but some from as far away as Porthmadog, Camelot, Whitley Bay, Edinburgh, Norwich...

It seems that those coming from further field often like to make a holiday of it, staying with family and friends and enjoying London.



Some of the feedback from attendees:

“This was my first Summer School and I was very impressed”.

“I can’t emphasise enough how much I enjoyed the sessions I attended. A wonderful opportunity to learn about new things and meet new people and if I can I’ll certainly come back next year”.

“I wanted to let you know how much I enjoyed the three days at the Summer school. It was well organised, with a variety of sessions for everyone’s taste and interest.”

“I travelled up from Devon and as I have family in South London my accommodation was no problem over the three days.”

“The London Summer School is gaining popularity and kudos all due to your hard work. Please convey my sincere thanks to the planning committee for their efforts and commitment to pursuing continued learning for the over 55 cohort”.



2019

The general theme this year was “Celebration of the Sea”, and included excellent talks on maritime art, finding one’s way in an empty ocean, seaborne disease, air/sea rescue, migration, and the archaeology of the Thames foreshore.



In addition there were stimulating presentations on other topics including various aspects of music from Bach to jazz; current affairs in China and India; a history of the moon; botanical painting; trends in antiques dealing.

Workshops included ‘The Versailles Treaty’, ‘The Silk Roads’, ‘Greek Comedy’ and ‘Cryptic Crosswords’, all of which proved extremely popular.

Six guided walks offered the opportunity to explore adjacent areas of London, especially its maritime connections.

This year’s event coincided with a heatwave that included the UK’s hottest day on record. but those who attended were able to cool off in the air conditioned lecture halls.



Like so many other things in 2020,
the in-person Summer School
was cancelled
due to the Covid pandemic !

To keep members connected and engaged during lockdown,
we began a series of online talks via Zoom
during the summer of 2020,
continuing into the winter of 2020/21.

The talks were fortnightly on Mondays from 5.30-6.30pm, which
proved to be a popular time, and attracted large audiences of
between about 200-500 attendees.

Subjects included Islamic Art in Spain; Gardening for Climate
Change; Clement Atlee; a Nurse in the Trenches; Art of the Silk
Roads, Family History, Antarctica, Fate of the Universe,
Chinese Art, Keats, Controlling Stress, Urban food production;
Cryptic Crosswords; Medicinal plants.



2021

At the start of 2021, not knowing how long the lockdowns would continue, we began rolling out the 2020 Summer School Programme fortnightly online and this continued throughout 2021.

Luckily, most of the Speakers trained themselves on Zoom and were still keen to participate.

The theme was 'The Twenties – A Dynamic Decade'. The programme featured the art, music, politics, literature, film, science/technology and social issues primarily of the 1920s but also dipping into the 2020s.

Getting back into the swing!

As government restrictions were lifted in August, we decided to offer a one-day event on 17th August to encourage members to meet up again face-to-face.

The programme included three talks, a live piano performance, and six guided walks -- all from the original 2020 programme. It was quickly fully booked with 140 applicants, indicating that u3a members were keen to meet again in person.

Walks were a major part of the programme and many members only booked walks. For many, this was their first time in London for more than a year and being outdoors made them feel more confident about coming back. We increased the total number of spaces for walks to 150.

Thanks to the careful risk assessments and preparations by the committee and the staff at St Bride's, a Covid-safe environment was designed with socially-distanced seating in the large, airy Bridewell Hall. The usual balance of indoor/outdoor sessions was reversed with so many participants out on walks.

Instead of the traditional open buffet, lunches were served in pre-packed boxes which were more hygienic and also faster to serve, thus reducing the congestion of the lunch-time queuing.



Bridewell Hall, social distancing, Covid style, 2021

Feedback forms included the following comments:

“Wonderful to be back”, “A very well planned programme, topics interesting and speakers good”, “Excellent day’s education overall”, “Good to meet people from other u3as”, “Very well worth doing and everyone I spoke to seemed pleased to be there”.

“It was a pleasure to watch initially apprehensive attendees relax as they realised how carefully their safety had been considered. For many it was a first tentative visit to a large gathering for many months, and the smiles of pleasure suggested that they had really enjoyed the experience”.

2022

Although Covid-19 was still an issue to be aware of, we were encouraged by the success of the 2021 event and subsequent lifting of all Covid restrictions. We decided to proceed with a two-day event to enable members to gather again in person.

We continued to conduct risk assessments, but what we were not expecting was the late announcement of a national rail strike, just after our cut-off date for refunds. Some members outside central London cancelled due to transport difficulties. Happily most applicants were able to overcome the challenges and apart from one speaker, all contributors were also able to deliver their sessions in person.

The theme this year was London – Past, Present and Future.

Anticipating a strong demand for walks again this year, we organised 8 with a total capacity of 160 places, and restricted applications to one walk per person per day.

All walks naturally had a London focus.

Talks covered West End theatres; Art of the Underground; ‘Symphonic’ London; The Port of London; County Lines drug dealing; London’s waste management; and Pearly Kings and Queens.

Participation in workshops

is always much enjoyed and these included writing a play; changes in European/British art; and playing with Shakespeare.



2023: our 10th Anniversary!

Fortunately we escaped the Tube and train strikes this year. As usual most members were from London, but about 25% came from u3as elsewhere in the UK. For about 50% of applicants, this was the first time they had attended a London Region summer school, indicating that the event continues to attract interest.

There were 29 different sessions on offer including 17 talks, 4 workshops and 8 walks. There was no specific theme this year.

Talks covered a wide range of topics e.g. Indian politics; global warming; Eastern Europe; rainbows; London's water supply; the Harmonic series in maths; music by royal composers; Ballets Russes; Venice and the British; addiction and morality in literature; boys' education; London's historic landscapes



Workshops included quilting; ukulele; analysing film, and American early 20th art.

The weather was ideal for the walkers who explored various nearby areas such as Shakespeare's London, Secret Gardens, the City Walls, the River Thames, and Literary London.



London Region Events Team members 2013-2023

Name	u3a	Dates
Libby Barton	Richmond	2019-2023
Philippa Bassett	Croydon	2019-2023
John Bent	Barnet	2023
Mike Black	Ealing	2015-2017
Rona Black	Dulwich & District	2017-2023
Johanne Carstairs	Barnet	2019-2020
Liz Day	Dulwich & District	2021-2023
Angela Elkholy	Hammersmith & Fulham	2017-2020
Chris Feldman	Barnet	2012- 2020
Jim Jenkins	Barnet	2017-2022
Sue Leigh	Wandsworth	2019-2023
Brian Levy	U3A in London	2015-2017
Jo Livingston	Bexley	2012-2023
Ella Marks	Ealing	2015-2017
Vivek Nanda	Islington	2021-2023
Phyllis Rosenberg	U3A in London	2012-2018
Cariss Smith	Croydon	2023
Rikki Wallman	Redbridge	2021-2023
Stuart Wallman	Redbridge	2021-2023
Catherine Ware	Merton	2015-2023
Gwen Wright	Harrow	2012-2015

and beyond?

In addition to the large number of interesting activities to choose from, one of the joys of the Summer School has always been the buzz --
the chance to meet members from other u3as and
exchange ideas in person

Help to keep it going!
This will be important as we move into our second decade and
the world moves increasingly online...

*More volunteers
always needed!*