

**RICHMOND-upon-THAMES**



**University of the Third Age**

[www.u3asites.org.uk/richmond-on-thames](http://www.u3asites.org.uk/richmond-on-thames)



**Newsletter January 2023, Volume 66**

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# **RICHMOND UPON THAMES U3A COMMITTEE & OFFICERS**

## **OFFICERS:**

**President:** Stephen Jakobi

**Chairman:** Chris Barclay – crbarclay@hotmail.co.uk

**Vice Chair:** Libby Barton – libby.barton@btinternet.com

**Secretary / Editor:** Sue Wood – susan.orleans@tiscali.co.uk

**Treasurer:** Carole Fletcher – carofletch@aol.com

## **MEMBERS OF EXECUTIVE:**

**Membership Secretary:** David Wood – davidewood80@gmail.com

**Groups' Co-ordinator:** Chris Barclay – crbarclay@hotmail.co.uk

**Committee members:**

John Cardwell (Speakers) – john.cardwell51@yahoo.com

Bob Litherland – boblitherland@hotmail.com

## **SECTION LEADERS:**

**Art, Science & Music:**

Graham Shortell – graham.shortell@blueyonder.co.uk

**Languages:** Norma Cook – norma.beagle@gmail.com

**Literature, Drama, Philosophy & History:** TBC

**Recreation:** Tricia Abrahamsen – tricia.abr@blueyonder.co.uk

## **CHAIRMAN'S LETTER**

A year ago, we all hoped that our troubles from Covid and lockdowns were over so that everything would improve in 2022, perhaps even return to normal. It has not turned out quite like that, but Richmond u3a has done well. Many u3as have faced a decline in membership and are putting more effort into public relations to attract more members.

We are very fortunate in Richmond u3a that our membership totals have stayed high and people are still joining us every month from word of mouth recommendations. Therefore our focus is on finding enough for members to do, rather than on attracting more members. We are a co-operative with all our groups and other activities run by our members. Thus, joining u3a offers scope for helping as well as access to courses. I am very impressed by the range of groups proposed and led by our members.

Our model enables us to keep our costs and membership fees exceptionally low. In addition, we do not require payments from the Government or Local Authority. Indeed, we pay about £4 per member to the Third Age Trust each year, in addition to payments for the Third Age Matters magazine, but we are not part of a centralised organisation. Third Age Trust ensures we comply with Charity Commission rules and negotiates more favourable rates of insurance but otherwise we are independent. We believe that our independence and flexibility is important to our success. What works well in one area might not work at all well in another part of the country, but this is part of the strength of our autonomy.

The committee is also composed of our members, and we welcome any members interested in becoming more involved in our work. Peggy Drummond Roe is leaving the Committee after

years of valuable work, including organising the programme of monthly talks. We are glad that Carole Fletcher joined the Committee and became Treasurer, one of the most important roles, enabling John Cardwell to take on Peggy's role with finding speakers. We are still seeking further committee members as we are currently below capacity.

In March 2022, we found a new venue for monthly talks and meetings, thanks to Vice Chair Libby Barton. We have been able to resume monthly meetings in person after two years when Clarendon Hall was not available and we had to rely upon Zoom. We now use St Mary's Church, Twickenham, the beautiful 18th century church where the great poet Alexander Pope is buried.

**Chris Barclay, [crbarclay@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:crbarclay@hotmail.co.uk).**

## **GROUP NEWS**

I have been acting as Groups Co-ordinator as well as Chairman this year, but ideally we should have a little more central administration of groups, so I would be happy to hear from anyone interested in this role or in one of the roles as Section Leader. We have 108 groups listed on the Beacon website, covering a huge range of topics. Groups are run by the 80 or so Group Leaders, who contribute time, enthusiasm and expertise. Very often they host groups in their own homes. We are enormously grateful for everything that they do. The Group Leaders' Lunch, which returned to its July date in 2022, is our way of thanking them.

Zoom and other online methods helped keep us going during the covid lockdowns in 2020. Although those lockdowns are long past, Zoom continues to play an important part. We mostly prefer to meet in person but Zoom retains an important role. Popular

groups do not have to worry about limitations on numbers. Those living further away do not have to bother with the journey. Many groups that rely on Zoom try to include some face-to-face meeting, for example with visits to museums or a lunch together. That contact is important in making u3a special, rather than just another provider of online material.

**Chris Barclay, [crbarclay@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:crbarclay@hotmail.co.uk),**

## **EDITOR'S LETTER**

As I write this the big news is the very cold, cold snap. But at least the birds are well fed, the goldfinches brighten up the day with their incredible plumage, and we were delighted to see a thrush in the garden yesterday. The robin continues to visit daily and the sparrows dutifully hop around with their pinnies on doing the daily clean up after those messy bluetits and great tits and metaphorically turning into the housewife with the dustpan and brush.

And it's the annual Christmas excitement building up. The presents are accumulating and plans laid for where we will all spend Christmas and New Year's Eve. We will be in Herefordshire for Christmas with my rather large family and with Martin's family for New Year's Eve. Despite being away I have had my requests/orders so seem to have spent days in the kitchen concocting items which can safely be frozen and transported. The tree is in from the garden and the birds look mystified at its absence.

Now I can concentrate on wrapping the presents which is my favourite job and putting the finishing touches to the crackers

which I have made – one of the long-time family traditions which have grown up and we seem to have dozens of those. Another enjoyment is trying out cracker jokes and working out which are the most groanworthy.

It's a very special year for me as I have two new great-grandchildren to meet, one nine months old and one a couple of weeks. One of my sons was born two weeks before Christmas many years ago but I still remember the magic of having a newborn at this time.

Of course, by the time you read this all these things will be consigned to memory and we will be looking forward to seeing the first snowdrops with their wonderful message of the coming Spring. We have planted dozens of bulbs and look forward to a colourful display. And there are other things to look forward to – the baby birds cheeping loudly and demanding to be fed, the warmer weather and the swelling buds on the camellia, the gradual development of the little ones and their delightful wonderment at the fascinating world around them, the planning of more adventurous trips abroad so long denied most of us, the starting of new hobbies or new U3A groups, the consolidating of new friendships and the starting of new ones. I feel warmer just by thinking about them. So where will the New Year take you?

**Sue Wood**, 020 8744 9364, [susan.orleans@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:susan.orleans@tiscali.co.uk)

*The cover photograph was taken from my bedroom window during the cold snap. If anyone would like to offer items for use on the newsletter cover, please let me know. Just ensure that they are in portrait mode please.*

# **SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE FRENCH U3A/UTL AND THE ENGLISH VARIANT**

The first “Université du troisième âge” was founded in 1973 in Toulouse by Pierre Valles, a professor of international law at the University of Social Sciences in Toulouse. The idea spread rapidly both in France and elsewhere and by the 1990s the French name had been generally changed to the “Université du temps libre” (UTL). This was to show it was available to anyone of any age.

When we moved here in 2014, I discovered there was a UTL in Tarbes, about half an hour from where we live. This is the address of its website so you can see the range of programmes offered: <https://www.utl-tb.info/page/1803280-accueil>

The activities take place in accommodation borrowed from the university college in Tarbes and the sessions generally take place in formal lecture halls and are given by current or former university lecturers, often in this case, from Toulouse.

For several years I followed a course on French mediaeval history. The sessions were from 1.30-3.00 pm and, unlike most things in France, started precisely on time. They were formal lectures generally without questions although the lecturer was available afterwards. I also followed a couple on French literature (one on aspects of Proust) and some on modern art. They have all been of a high standard. Generally the attendance at these lectures would have been around 100 and some of the more popular courses are repeated. For these courses there is no need to attend every week.



As well as the lectures there are language courses (both modern and classical) and more practical courses in IT, writing, painting and choral singing. There is also a range of sporting activities including mountain walks, a very popular activity around here.

The covid regulations in 2020 stopped the courses and that is when they started a video and a radio channel.

Membership costs 200€ pa and allows you to attend as many courses as you like. There are a fair number of people who spend much of their time at the UTL. When I first joined this was treated as the equivalent of a charitable donation which meant that 66% of the cost could be set against your tax liability. Unfortunately that no longer works, so the real value is for those attending several courses. For one course it is quite expensive and also, for me quite time consuming - effectively half a day allowing for the travelling.

Considering Tarbes has a population of only 45,000 this is an amazing resource.

For various reasons, I have not got back into attending since covid but will hope to do so again next year.

**J R Barclay.**

## **U3A DAY TRIP TO BRIGHTON, NOV 2022**

There is something very appealing about the seaside out of season – no crowds, no queues for ice cream, no cloying smell of sun lotion, or sunburnt bodies on the beach – just torrential rain and gusty winds when our intrepid party arrived in Brighton for a day out in mid November.

Our trip included a guided tour of Brighton's Royal Pavilion, and thankfully that was our first port of call. The coach driver dropped us as close as possible to the entrance, and after a short wait we were admitted. We could forget the stormy chaos outside as we were cocooned in lavish splendour. Our knowledgeable and enthusiastic guide led us from room to room, explaining that George, Prince of Wales (later George IV) had commissioned the building in 1787 as a seaside pleasure palace. The style of architecture is described, rather confusingly, as Gothic/Indo-Saracenic. It appears that George was a vain and wildly extravagant man, and certainly the interior décor and furnishings are jaw-droppingly opulent. Archives reveal that George's Coronation Banquet in 1821 would have cost (in today's money) around £27 million, which makes our present royal family look like a model of thrift and economy.

The rain was starting to ease off after our tour. Joss and I were feeling somewhat peckish after hearing the description of the royal banquets, which could run to thirty courses. We had a very abstemious one-course pizza in the nearest restaurant, by which time the sky was showing a small patch of blue and the rain had stopped. We headed down to the sea and took a brisk walk along the pier. The sea was heaving alarmingly, and spindrift from the waves was blowing up in the air like huge snowflakes and settling in piles along the promenade.

Leaving the seafront, we thought we would have a potter around the famous Lanes, but noticing some very ominous black clouds looming, we returned to the Pavilion to have a look around the first floor rooms, which were not included in the morning tour. One room housed a collection of photographs dating from World War I, when the Pavilion was used as a military hospital –

specifically for Indian soldiers who had fought in the British army. It was assumed that they would feel 'at home' with George's idea of Indian architecture, and certainly it would appear from diary extracts that they found it a congenial place to convalesce.

The Royal Pavilion is now run by Brighton and Hove Museums on behalf of the City Council, and it is available for hire! Should you wish to hold your wedding reception in the Royal Banqueting Suite, it will set you back £4,950 (a little cheaper if you book midweek). That doesn't include the food, but after all, who needs 30 courses?

Thanks, as ever, to Libby Barton for organising a very enjoyable trip, and also to the coach driver who got us there and back safely in what must have been awful driving conditions!

**Gillian Wetherall.**

## **DAY TRIP TO WINCHESTER**

Our trip to Winchester, beautifully organised by Libby and Jerry Barton, started off on a clear, cold, crisp morning. As Winchester is "straight down the road" there was no complex navigation and we soon were approaching through the high tail of the South Downs.

Once we had navigated the complex eastern approach (it's been the same since I first visited many years ago) we disembarked in the Broadway. One of the advantages of ancient towns and cities is that everything is usually off the main highway or on a crossway. To someone familiar with the city, it was interesting to see the

1930s bus station still standing with its original arched entrance and faded sign.

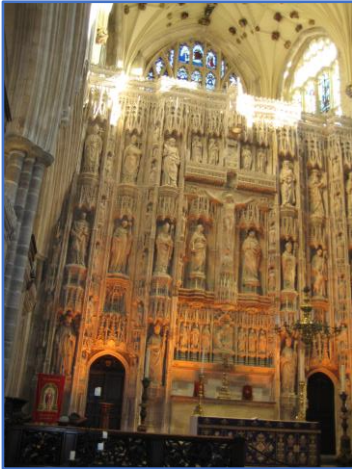


As befits the County Town, walking up the main road, lined by shops and Christmas market stalls, one's gaze was drawn upwards to the Castle Gate. We paused there and looked down a side street to enjoy a comparative moment of peace and calm.

Returning down the High Street we paused for a delicious lunch at a pub which was obviously another piece of Winchester's history.



The high spot for many is the Cathedral with its long history and impressive architecture, unspoilt by later developments. We were



lucky enough to visit whilst a local school was practising with its band and choir for their Christmas concert and this added to the charm and atmosphere of such a beautiful building. Numerous helpful guides were available to point out Jane Austen's resting place, answer questions, etc.

One of the things which I noticed was the growth of tourism in the city. Of the several couples we met who were also on day trips they had all come from different points of the compass illustrating its eternal attraction.

Our return included a length on the old main road, roman straight, as if to show the importance of the city which at one stage was the capital of England.

**Martin Alexander**

## WINE APPRECIATION GROUP

Wine appreciation is one of the groups I attend and it is always very enjoyable, not just because of the wine we taste but also



because of the members of the group. This photo was taken by one of the participants, Geraldine Wear, and conveys the general feeling of the meeting. We enjoy a very pleasant meal with the wine and a

good time is had by all.

If any members have photos of the groups they attend and would like to share them I would be delighted to include them in the newsletter even if you don't wish to add any text apart from the name of the group.

Just check that the participants are happy for their photo to be included please.

The Editor

## WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Words are wonderful, aren't they? We use them all the time but many of them have fascinating histories beyond their meaning. We are probably all familiar with wellingtons, cardigans and sandwiches and their origins with British gentlemen of bygone

days. Arthur Wellesley, first duke of Wellington, popularised the style of long boot, though his were not made of rubber. The cardigan was named after James Brudenell, 7th Earl of Cardigan, who led the Charge of the Light Brigade. It is modelled after the knitted wool waistcoat that British officers supposedly wore during the war. The legend of the event and the fame that Lord Cardigan achieved after the war led to the rise of the garment's popularity – supposedly, Brudenell invented the cardigan after noticing that the tails of his coat had accidentally been burnt off in a fireplace. It is said that John Montagu, fourth Earl of Sandwich, during long sessions of cribbage and other card games at public gambling houses, used to order his valet to bring him salt beef between two pieces of toasted bread and so the fast food of the eighteenth century was born.

Perhaps less well-known is the origin of the name for the beautiful plant, bougainvillea, one of my favourites, with its brightly coloured bracts (you all knew that they are not flowers, didn't you?) Admiral Louis-Antoine de Bougainville, Comte de Bougainville, was a French soldier and sailor. In 1766 the French government commissioned him to sail around the world, finding new territories for France. He took along a naturalist, Philibert Commerson, who collected the first bougainvilleas known to western science in Rio de Janeiro. Impressed by the bright bracts, Commerson named them for the admiral, as *Bougainvillea*. Recently, however, there has been an addition to this story. Commerson did go on the voyage and was the botanist. But his housekeeper and lover, Jeanne Baret (Baré) went along as Commerson's assistant. It was totally forbidden for women to go on vessels of the French navy, so Baret disguised herself as a man. Almost certainly she did most of the plant collecting on the voyage because Commerson was frequently unwell. It is likely that Baret probably found bougainvillea and many of the other plants

Commerson described for science. The surviving journals of the expedition barely mention her, through fear of the consequences of admitting that a woman was on board but also because women have often been written out of history!

I am sure that many of you have, at some time, had a *Tradescantia* as a houseplant. John Tradescant the Elder (born in the 1570s and died 15–16 April 1638) began his career as head gardener to Robert Cecil, 1st Earl of Salisbury at Hatfield House, but later worked for, among others, George Villiers, 1st Duke of Buckingham. John Tradescant travelled far and wide looking for new plants. He was eventually employed by King Charles I to be Keeper of his Majesty's Gardens, Vines, and Silkworms at his queen's minor palace, Oatlands Palace in Surrey.

On all his trips he collected seeds and bulbs and assembled a collection of curiosities of natural history and ethnography which he kept in a large house, "The Ark", in Lambeth, London. The Ark was the prototypical "Cabinet of Curiosity", a collection of rare and strange objects, that became the first museum open to the public in England, the Musaeum Tradescantianum. He also gathered specimens through American colonists. From their botanical garden in Lambeth, on the south bank of the Thames, he and his son, John, introduced many plants into English gardens that have become so familiar to us all today.

He was buried in the churchyard of St-Mary-at-Lambeth, as was his son. The churchyard is now established as the Garden Museum which, if you have not yet been there, is well worth a visit. Not just one plant but a whole genus of flowering plants, *Tradescantia*, is named in his honour. The Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew currently recognise 85 species.

**Norma Cook, [norma.beagle@gmail.com](mailto:norma.beagle@gmail.com)**



# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor

As I lived through the 39-45 War, I am often asked how that compared with experiencing the pandemic. I personally didn't suffer from Covid and didn't find the enforced lock down difficult, whereas my memory of the Blitz in my hometown, Bristol, is that it was a hard experience.

Was this because of the constant noise, the search lights, the blackout, the discomfort of sleeping in a cupboard under the stairs? I remember the night when the house opposite received a direct hit and the contents of our front garden were blown through the window on to the sitting room carpet. Walking to school one day I saw some pyjama trousers dangling from a tree and wondered what happened to whoever was wearing them. And there was an unexploded bomb at the end of our street one morning.

There were of course hardships over food rationing, which was a burden for my mother. I recall wearing some strange garments made of parachute silk because that could be obtained without clothes coupons. Altogether adolescence was not much fun.

I do understand that the pandemic has caused great difficulties for those at school now. We were able to have our lessons in the cellar of the old building which was my school. Surely it has proved a good thing that technology has made it possible for many to work at home. Certainly I have benefited from the many neighbours who, at the onset of Covid, offered help. Perhaps there have been good and bad results from both experiences. Should love to know what any others in my age group found?

**Pat Havron.**

Hello Susan

Just reading newsletter November and recognise the front photo I am always there in all seasons. Perhaps so people know where it is Water Gardens...Hampton Hill Gate, Bushy Park.

Kind regards, **Joan Walkden.**

Dear Sue

I am an active member of a couple of Richmond u3a groups. Many of us predate comfortable familiarity with today's digital world. One group I know, would benefit from access to and advice and support for digital projection and 'casting' to smart TV facilities at our meetings. I wonder if the committee might consider whether it is practical to seek volunteer help to advise on a digital projection for small group use.

Assuming the hardware could be provided, this would need a volunteer to advise plus perhaps occasional training sessions for potential users - yet another demand on the goodwill of our digitally competent fellow members. If it could be facilitated, it could help groups to enjoy visual presentations.

I would like to add that I have nothing but praise and gratitude for the work, effort and commitment of every Group Leader I have encountered.

Best wishes, **John McM Moore.**

*I am happy to say that we have now been able to accommodate John's wishes by resurrecting a projector previously used by another group.*

*And an email sent to Norma Cook, which she felt would be of wider interest and I absolutely agreed. So, with Ellie's kind permission you too can marvel at the coincidences.*

Dear Norma,

I was so pleased to read your article in the U3A Newsletter about Moon Tiger and The Fortunes of War. Years ago I read Moon Tiger (and many other Penelope Lively novels) and would love to read it again, but I expect there will be such a high demand for the book in our local libraries that it will take a while for me to get hold of it.

The Fortunes of War was adapted for television by Alan Plater, who was married to my ex-sister-in-law Shirley. While the production was being put together and casted, Shirley and I would have sessions where we would suggest to each other the names of actors who we thought to be suitable for particular roles.

I remember proposing a particular actress (who shall be nameless) for Harriet, and Shirley shooting down my proposal, saying "Would you really want to look at that face every week?" Of course, Emma Thompson was perfect in the role. Also my stepdaughter's partner at the time was the actor Mark Drewry, who played the part of Dubedat. I would love to see Fortunes of War again.

Regards, **Ellie Weld**.

**Next edition** *of the newsletter will be due in April so if you have anything you would like included, please let me have it well before then.*

**Sue Wood**, [susan.orleans@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:susan.orleans@tiscali.co.uk), 020 8744 9364

## **RICHMOND U3A SPEAKERS JAN – APR23**

*Meetings are held on the last Wednesday of each month at 14:30 in St Mary's Church, Church St, Twickenham, TW1 3NJ. The church overlooks the river and is close to the Civic Centre off Richmond Road. Served by bus routes 33, R68, R70, H22 and 490 (Lebanon Court bus stop).*

### **25<sup>th</sup> Jan: Bobbie Darbyshire – Where Do Novelists Get their Ideas From**

From initial spark to realisation on the page, Bobbie explains how the complex world of character, location, plot and subplot arrives in a writer's mind. She won the 2008 fiction prize at the National Academy of Writing and the New Delta Nonfiction Prize 2010.

### **22<sup>nd</sup> Feb: Alan Sanderson – Age Related Hearing Loss**

The talk will give an overview of the current understanding of presbycusis or age-related hearing loss. Associated issues like listening in the presence of background noise, tinnitus and dementia will be discussed. In-line with Alan's research interests, the talk will detail some key scientific discoveries and give examples of modern hearing aid devices.

### **29<sup>th</sup> Mar: Alison Mees – Living the African Dream**

Alison is a keen wildlife photographer and since the age of 5 had wanted to travel to Africa. For the last 16 years she lived and worked in Africa, in the safari industry, but also working and supporting the cheetah researchers

### **26<sup>th</sup> Apr: Howard Slater – Buckingham Palace**

The Seat of Scandal - the centuries-old home of the British royal family. A landmark that is this old is bound to have a lot of stories and secrets that aren't common knowledge.