Over the past month I have received many goodwill messages from members and would like to share some of them with you. A big thank you for all your support and for making Royston U3A such a huge success in 2016.

Jackie Gellert, Chairman

“Thank you for all your much appreciated hard work with the U3A.” E&KH

“Thank you for your card. Also for all your hard work for U3A.” D&JG

“Thank you not just for the wine appreciation today but for all the work you do on our behalf throughout. We do appreciate and enjoy the variety of activities that are now available to us through the U3A. Truth is there are not enough days or hours to do it all justice.” JB

“A happy Christmas and New Year to you and all the people who help to make the Royston U3A work.” PvS

Once upon a time - the magical story of pantomime

Just what is it that makes panto so special? The crazy mix of songs, slapstick comedy, bad jokes and cross-dressing actors continues to enthral audiences of all ages.

Leanne Walters from Milton Keynes and Aylesbury Waterside Theatres shone the spotlight on how this peculiarly British tradition has evolved over the centuries at our December meeting.

She explained that the word pantomime comes from Ancient Greek and that’s where it started way back in Athens in 500BC with performances reflecting on life, politics and fashion. But it was in the Middle Ages that touring mystery plays going from village to village laid the foundations for panto in this country.

Street entertainment became so popular that theatres like The Globe were built and the essential elements of today's panto evolved:

● Enter Joseph Grimaldi in the 1800s, the most famous pantomime clown who promoted the clown's face.

● Fairy stories used for the first time in the Victorian era making pantomime much more of a family event.

● Music Hall which introduced the first dame with his over-the-top costumes and risqué lyrics.

Finally, it would all fall flat without that most vital ingredient – an active and noisy audience.

“It's the one time you don't have to keep the audience quiet,” said Leanne. “It just wouldn't be panto without audience participation.”

Pam Dajda

Leanne Walters sprinkling a little fairy dust
Celebrating a great year

There was plenty to celebrate at our final meeting of 2016. Membership numbers have soared past the 400 mark, groups are flourishing and our first fundraising event brought in £600 for the Garden House Hospice. Inviting everyone to celebrate with a festive glass of mulled wine and mince pies Chairman Jackie Gellert said: “It's been an amazing 2016 and we've got so many ideas and plans for 2017.”

Pam Dajda

Care for a Cuppa presentation

Garden House Hospice community fundraiser Jordan Russell came along to thank us again for raising £600 at our first coffee morning. The hospice needs to raise £3 million a year and Jordan said the support of local communities was vital. As well as 12 beds at Letchworth, the hospice offers other services such as nurses helping people in their homes, a support team for family and carers and a day service to provide access to flexible support.

“We couldn’t provide our free services without people like you holding coffee mornings and fundraising events. I’d like to thank everyone,” she said.

Deirdre Smith, who organised the coffee morning with Karen Heaton, presented the cheque to Jordan at the November meeting.

Pam Dajda
Festive garland workshop

On a dreary damp Tuesday afternoon in early December, 10 ladies turned up at Claire Wiggs’ Beautiful Balloons party barn in Bassingbourn for a Royston U3A workshop to learn how to make a festive garland for Christmas. When we arrived we were greeted with a warm cup of mulled wine and Christmas music was playing in the background – that really got us all in the mood to start watching Claire demonstrate the techniques involved in assembling a garland.

We then got down to the task of working on our own garlands, deciding on what foliage, colours and embellishments were needed to make each garland look special and ensuring that the whole thing did not fall apart the minute it was moved.

More mulled wine was offered to keep the spirits high. Then 2 hours later we all agreed that the garlands we had produced were quite magnificent, a real feast for the eye.

A really great fun afternoon was had by all and the best bit was leaving with something we had made ourselves.

A big thank you to Claire and Debbie for making the afternoon so very special.

Jackie Gellert

Joyeux Noël et Bonne Année

It was a festive tapas style lunch for the French Conversation group at The Plough at Shepreth in December for 12 members of the group with their teacher and Royston U3A member, Elisabeth Goodman-Spain.

The one condition stipulated for the lunch was that everyone had to agree to converse in French….well, we did manage it for at least part of the meal.

The group wanted to show their appreciation to Elisabeth for all the hard work she has put in behind the scenes in planning the lessons to make each one of them great fun. She has encouraged the group since the sessions began just over a year ago to spend time learning new vocabulary to improve their conversational ability.

Over the year some people have left the group but as there has always been a waiting list of members wanting to join, new members have always been made welcome.

The group presented Elisabeth with a Christmas hamper as a big thank you.

Jackie Gellert

‘a really great fun afternoon was had by all’

‘everyone had to agree to converse in French’
Double Christmas cheer

Royston U3A wine appreciation groups 1 & 2 met separately over a two week period in December for their annual Christmas get-together.

With wonderful festive wines provided by Gil Riggans of Corney & Barrow, we sampled some exceptional sparkling, red and white wines followed by a tasting of an outstanding sherry followed by an even more outstanding classic vintage port.

Several group members made a variety of naughty but nice nibbles that included the lightest and tastiest mince pies. Then a selection of cheeses including a really good Stilton put everyone in a Christmas mood.

Despite Gil’s valiant efforts to give an insight into the wines he had brought with him for the afternoon sessions, the ambience and the joviality of the occasion made it very hard for him to be heard but we all left a lot jollier and full of Christmas ‘spirit’.

Jackie Gellert

Current Affairs group

The group meets monthly and so far the topics discussed have been extremely newsworthy which has led to some very interesting and incisive discussions.

Two of the recent topics discussed were: ‘How could we manage if tight immigration rules were imposed in the UK?’

‘How to handle living to 100, the help needed and how to obtain it.’

The group’s numbers have never exceeded 10 but the core of 6 members keep the sessions lively. Each month a different topic is chosen and, coincidentally, a few days after we decided the topic for January 2017 would be ‘How will automation affect our lives?’ a headline article on this very subject appeared in the Sunday Times – so we are well and truly ahead of the broadsheets.

Jackie Gellert
Birding group

Our December 7 meeting was to the Fen Drayton reserve, which we managed to navigate to, avoiding using the M11 and A14. The weather was perfect, with the occasional muddy patch along the paths not being difficult to traverse despite the previous day’s rain.

All of us have our favourite over-wintering birds we hoped to see, especially Slavonian Grebe, Golden Eye and Smew. We were not disappointed, with many other species also seen; literally hundreds of fieldfare, ‘charms’ of Goldfinch; plenty of duck species such as Shell duck, Gadwall, Shoveller, Widgeon and Pochards. Whilst we had a great view of a Marsh Harrier ‘working’ the fields on the far side of the lake, surprisingly a bittern was spotted flying over.

At one time it seemed unreal patiently watching the ‘diving’ ducks, including the smew constantly disappearing under the water for many seconds only to come up ten yards further away, whilst the guided buses between Cambridge & St. Ives were passing nearby at around 55mph.

Eight of our group continued on for an ‘impromptu’ lunch at the Three Tuns pub at Fen Drayton village which offered a very tasty ‘Pensioners’ special lunch menu. We all want to visit again, especially as the pub offers discount on main meals to people showing their RSPB membership cards.

Our next meeting will be on January 4 when we shall be visiting the lakes and bird hides at Amwell, near Ware, with an opportunity for a ‘late’ Christmas lunch at a pub in nearby St. Margarets. New members to our group are always welcome, no experience or knowledge necessary.

Carol McGeoch & Reg Hounsell

Jazz group Christmas meeting

Our December meeting was one week earlier than normal, but was well attended. We had decided to have a Christmas themed evening, with members having a ‘Bring and Share’ buffet. We were delighted that the Conservative club had decorated the Derek Walker room. By candlelight we ate very well whilst listening for three hours to a large number of different artists recordings of great ‘Jazzed up’ Christmas music; including ‘Sleigh Ride’ sung by Ella Fitzgerald, ‘Christmas in New Orleans’ by the great Louis Armstrong and the Dave Brubeck quartet’s version of ‘Santa Claus is comin’ to Town’. Despite doing our best we couldn’t finish all the food brought in.

We again have booked the room for all our dates in 2017 (the 2nd Wednesday each month) and would welcome more Royston U3A members along to join in our relaxing evening listening to jazz music from across the spectrum. Of course, the opportunity to purchase a fish and chip supper is always available.

Reg Hounsell

Reduced membership fees

If you know of anyone who may be thinking of joining Royston U3A, please let them know that they can become a member for only £5 from January 1, 2017 until March 31, 2017.

The Royston U3A membership year renews on April 1, 2017 when the full membership fee of £15 will become due (or £11.50 if they are already a member of another U3A).

For further details please contact Marion Martin, Membership Secretary: marionroystonu3a@gmail.com
Five Mile Walks group

We walked along field boundaries and into the woodland, through farm buildings across open land in an area few of the walkers had been before. The walk took two and a half hours with most staying for a welcome lunch at The Chequers.

If you would like some gentle exercise with good company out in nature, followed by lunch then why not join us in January. What better things have you got to do? Have a look at the photograph. There may be people you know, and you can see what to wear.

Eric Heaton

The Five Mile Walks group taking a break

Who’s minding the shop then...

Royston U3A committee members plus non-committee members Annette Guttridge and Rob Whatmough got together for a relaxing and enjoyable Christmas lunch in December at The Old Bull.

As the committee members all lead very busy lives, they don’t have time to meet socially so Christmas lunch is a great time to switch off from planning and organising and to simply sit and chat and reflect on what has been achieved by Royston U3A in the year gone by and to talk about the year ahead.

Just in case you are wondering...they all paid for their own lunch!

Jackie Gellert

Clockwise from far left: Sylvia Fuller Eric Heaton Marion Martin Annette Guttridge Kathy Hounsell George Karger Karen Heaton Deirdre Smith Pam Dajda Rob Whatmough Reg Hounsell Jackie Gellert
Christmas Concert at Cadogan Hall

Some 39 members of U3A attended the Christmas Cracker at the Cadogan Hall just one week before Christmas. The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Nick Davies, and two soloists did not disappoint. The musicianship was superb, and the sight of the choreographed Tritsch-Tratsch-Polka will remain with us all for a very long time.

For the second half all the musicians and most of the instruments were fully decorated for Christmas with glittery tinsel and silly hats. To see double basses, violins and cellos doing a full 360 degree turn (simultaneously!) and still keep in time to the music was a great sight! Everyone enjoyed the audience participation, and Rose got a very well-deserved round of applause for coming out of the audience to sing the solo for ‘Once in Royal David’s City’.

After the concert the coach met us dead on time and Carl, our driver, brought us home via Regent Street where the lights were beautiful angels flying across the width of the street.

A good time was had by all. Our next concert visit is February 7, 2017 when we go to the Royal Festival Hall, where we shall hear the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Pinchas Zukerman, play three of Beethoven’s works, all well-known ones.

Thank you to all who support the outings and concerts. We wish all members a happy Christmas, and a prosperous new year.

Annette Guttridge

Dates for your diary

January
Tuesday 31, 2pm Royston Parish Church
Sue Price will give a talk on
WIMPOLE HALL: THE INSIDE STORY

February
Tuesday 28, 2pm Royston Parish Church
Mike Levy will give a talk on
THE GREAT MUSICAL THEATRE PARTNERSHIPS

March
Tuesday 28, 2pm Royston Parish Church
Grazyna Tutak will give a talk on
THE RESTORATION OF CALDECOTE CHURCH

April
Tuesday 25, 2pm Royston Parish Church
Christine Adams will give a talk on
MAY SAVIDGE MOVES HER HOUSE

Easy Guide to Interest Groups

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For frequency and contact details about all interest groups please see the chart on the next page or check out our website for more information www.u3asites.org.uk/royston. Announcements about future theatre trips and excursions will be posted on our website when details become available.
**Interest Groups**  Don’t forget to check out our website for more information

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<td>Wed am</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>Carol McGeoch</td>
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<td>Janet Burton</td>
<td><a href="mailto:janet.a.burton@gmail.com">janet.a.burton@gmail.com</a></td>
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<td><a href="mailto:ladytowers@gmail.com">ladytowers@gmail.com</a></td>
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<td>Tues pm</td>
<td>Fortnightly</td>
<td>Mike Thrower</td>
<td><a href="mailto:mike.thrower@ntlworld.com">mike.thrower@ntlworld.com</a></td>
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<td>Frank Martin</td>
<td><a href="mailto:tf.martin@ntlworld.com">tf.martin@ntlworld.com</a></td>
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<td>Mon pm</td>
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<td>George Karger</td>
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<td>Jeremy Burr</td>
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<td><a href="mailto:jackieroystonu3a@gmail.com">jackieroystonu3a@gmail.com</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

and finally…. If anyone has a physical disability and would like to get involved in a group activity, please contact Jackie Gellert, Chairman, in the first instance to see if suitable arrangements can be made.

**Royston U3A Committee**

- **Chairman**: Jackie Gellert  jackieroystonu3a@gmail.com
- **Vice Chair & Groups Co-ordinator**: Reg Hounsell  regroystonu3a@gmail.com
- **Treasurer**: Kathy Hounsell  kathyroystonu3a@gmail.com
- **Secretary**: Deirdre Smith  deirdroystonu3a@gmail.com
- **Minutes Secretary**: Marion Martin  marionroystonu3a@gmail.com
- **Publicity**: Sylvia Fuller  sylviaroystonu3a@gmail.com
- **Royston U3A News Committee Member**: Pam Dajda  pam@dajda.net
- **Co-opted Committee Member**: Ralph Gellert  ralphroystonu3a@gmail.com
- **Co-opted Committee Member**: George Karger  01763 245988
- **Non Committee-Web Management**: Barbara Andrew  barbearoystonu3a@gmail.com
- **Co-opted Committee Member**: Karen Heaton  karenroystonu3a@gmail.com
- **Co-opted Committee Member**: Eric Heaton  ericroystonu3a@gmail.com
- **Web Management**: Rob Whatmough  robroystonu3a@gmail.com

**Get it in the News** If you’re involved in a group why not publicise it in Royston U3A News? Send in a short report of your latest meeting or outing - photos welcomed too - to Pam Dajda at pam@dajda.net or phone 01763 246234