

ROYSTON u3a news

DECEMBER 2023 Issue 42



Christmas is almost here and with it comes an opportunity to reflect on the past year.

2023 has been a good year for Royston U3A after two years of restrictions and isolation. We have been able to meet up at our monthly meetings and interest groups and of more significance, we have been able to socialise once again.

This year has been busy with some wonderful events taking place; superb theatre outings, a fantastic Spanish Wine & Food tasting, a most memorable outing to Sandringham Royal Parkland, House and Gardens as well as the restart of many popular interest groups including Solo Sundays lunches, Singing for Fun and a diverse range of indoor and outdoor activities. We have also enjoyed a variety of excellent guest speakers at our monthly meetings throughout the year.

Thank you for your support and I look forward to seeing you all again on January 30 at the Town Hall. In the meantime, Royston U3A Committee wish you a happy and healthy Christmas and New Year.

Jackie Gellert, Chair



FRAN SANDHAM

Making a New Year resolution to walk across Africa on your own is an extraordinary idea.

But author Fran Sandham wanted a big challenge and after scrimping and saving he remained undaunted and ready to follow his dream.

Preparing for the 3,000 mile trek from Namibia's Skeleton Coast to the Indian Ocean he admitted: "Even though I say so myself it was a bit of a hike."

In a humorous account Fran shared his unique way of discovering Africa at our October meeting.

The first challenge came soon after he set off, heaving his rucksack on his back.

"There's a real art and skill in travelling light that I've never mastered. I arrived carrying everything bar the kitchen sink and was appalled that it weighed 100 lbs."

He tried using a donkey, then a mule, to help lighten the load. Both proved disastrous and were abandoned, with Fran discovering it was better to rely on his own two feet - and his trusty Clarks sandals.

"I did most of the walking in them and when the soles wore out village shoe repairers replaced them with bits of old car tyre," he said.

Covering 26 miles on average a day - equal to one centimetre on his Michelin map - Fran found hardships were completely offset by the hospitality of local people.

"They were so kind and welcoming. Women wanted to mother me and feed me," he said.

It was just as well, as at the end of his year long trek he weighed only eight and a half stone.

"The walk across Africa is the weight loss diet. I was so thin at the end that I looked a wreck."

Leaving Africa with a sense of sadness, he looked back to his high point on the very first evening.

"It was that sense of anticipation of being on the edge of a vast adventure. I didn't have money, but I had time. That sense of freedom and excitement was intoxicating."

● Fran is a former editor at Rough Guides and has written about his experiences in *Traversa: A Solo Walk Across Africa*.

Pam Dajda



Fran enjoying local hospitality.



Fran with a difficult donkey.

Fer Gregory / Shutterstock



Cracking the case with DABS and DNA



CHRIS TURAN

Every case has its own challenges as retired Scenes of Crimes Officer Chris Turan knows only too well.

During his 39 years with the Metropolitan Police Chris examined over 25,000 crime scenes ranging from shoplifting to murder and terrorism.

When he started out DNA was in its embryonic stage. In an entertaining and informative September talk he traced the development of science and techniques to track down lawbreakers.

"Criminals always leave a trace and it's DNA that gets to catch them," he said.

The idea of using fingerprints to identify criminals was first recognised in 19th century India. In 1902 it was used for the first time by Scotland Yard to convict a burglar who left his thumbprint on damp window paintwork.

In 1905 the murderous Stratton brothers of Deptford were the first to go to the gallows on fingerprint evidence after prints were found on a cashbox near the bodies of their two victims.

The National Fingerprint Collection holds six million sets of prints. Computers can search millions in seconds but the final comparisons are still completed and double-checked by fingerprint experts.

"One of our greatest results was the Brighton Bombing in 1984 when a palm mark left on a hotel registration card identified Patrick Magee from the IRA," said Chris.

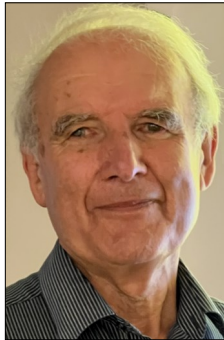
The development of DNA in 1984 and the National DNA database which currently has six million samples has led to some impressive results.

They include the case of a killer who was brought to justice 32 years after he murdered a teenage girl. He was finally caught in 2015 after police matched DNA from her clothing to a member of his family on the national database.

Pam Dajda



Carving out Thaxted's history



RICHARD TILL

is a retired head teacher and an experienced historical researcher. He was involved in work on the late medieval town of Thaxted undertaken by the Thaxted Society in conjunction with the University of Leicester.

*Richard was Winner of the British Association for Local History's 'Medieval and Early Modern Essay Prize 2018' for his paper **The cutlers of Thaxted 1350-1420.***

With its medieval houses and magnificent church, Thaxted is considered the jewel in the crown of Essex.

But the town crest, depicting two crossed swords, reveals that Thaxted has another less well-known claim to fame.

During the Middle Ages the town had a thriving cutlery industry that was bigger than Sheffield - and was probably the largest producer of knives in the country.

Historian Richard Till who lives in Thaxted has been investigating the mystery of why so many cutlers settled there.

Sharing his findings with history group members, he said: "It doesn't make sense. Thaxted in the 1300s was an agricultural centre and a typical medieval village."

He pieced together how the resident lord of Audley had links with Tonbridge, a major centre for the iron industry. Economic privileges were given to workers such as not having to pay any tolls to make life easier.

Searching through medieval court records he discovered how all the elements needed for knife production were sourced. Scrap iron was imported to Ipswich from Hamburg. Steel from Spain probably came through London Docks. Wood needed for charcoal was available locally and there was an established leather industry in Thaxted.

East Anglia was already prosperous through the wool trade and Cambridge was the largest market in Europe - an ideal place to sell knives, swords and daggers.

Thaxted's magnificent church stands as a symbol of the town's wealth, which began to fade when Sheffield produced cheaper knives.

However, as Richard pointed out, the decline had an upside, as it has left us with one of the country's most attractive and well-preserved small towns.

"Thaxted wasn't worth investing in if all the cutlers had gone. There are 132 listed buildings that have survived literally because they couldn't afford to replace them."

Pam Dajda



Two fifteenth century cutler merchant houses in Stoney Lane: during the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries this was the commercial heart of the small town of Thaxted.

Current Affairs

The Current Affairs group has found plenty to discuss - from RAAC Concrete, Climate Change, Politics, the Middle East Crisis, HS2, and the Covid Inquiry as Sarah Hillman reports.

Discussion ranged around a fine selection of thorny issues at our **September** meeting: RAAC concrete where maintenance was vital, but budgets have long been cut. As with cladding, nobody is taking responsibility.

On to climate change - where world population growth more than doubling since the 1940s hasn't helped. One cheery soul said, "If we humans were wiped out, the planet would recover in just 30 years." We know what's needed - stop burning fossil fuels - but will we manage to?

Moving on to politics we didn't agree with Rishi Sunak's idea of keeping children at school to 18 and doing maths throughout. An estimated 25 per cent of people have maths learning difficulties, and 66 per cent of those with dyslexia.

Nadine Dorries won our "Most idiotic statement by a national public figure" competition, for her resignation "with immediate effect." "Immediate" meant 11 weeks later!

We started the **October** meeting with the crisis in the Middle East. We felt that Hamas had planned an Israeli 9/11 and did not care about the local Gaza population. Iran had probably prompted Hamas to act so as to block the planned Saudi Arabia and Israel Accord, which it has.

Israel has Western support but needs to retain the moral high ground, especially given the humanitarian crisis in Gaza and watch that it does not provoke Hezbollah to join in. The real danger is the risk of escalation - like the invasion of Poland did in triggering WW2.

Turning to HS2 - we thought the London-centric plan of starting in the south was a mistake, though it would double passenger capacity to Manchester. Some levelling-up might have been achieved had they started in the north, even with HS3 (Liverpool to Newcastle and Hull).

We felt that a UK Spring budget giveaway plus a recovery in about July might be "engineered" to improve Conservative chances. Labour could benefit from potential SNP losses.

In **November** we welcomed two new members - and with over a dozen regularly turning up at meetings discussions are always lively and interesting.

We agreed that the Covid Inquiry is revealing some interesting things, like politicians' "inability to grasp the science." The mixed messages on wearing of masks and lack of enforcement worried vulnerable people. The removal of elderly people from hospitals to nursing homes without Covid testing seemed "callous," even "criminally negligent" as it caused many avoidable deaths.

This led us on to the sidelining of the elderly and we heard of a local example involving supported housing for the elderly and vulnerable, where some key services were removed during Covid and worryingly, even more since. The group made some useful suggestions which may mean that the more troubling issues can be pursued and perhaps dealt with.

New members are always welcomed. Our last meeting of the year is on Monday 18th December in Banyers House at 3pm.



Tai Chi for Beginners

Tai Chi is a series of gentle, graceful movements in slow motion designed to exercise the body and clear the mind.

If you are interested in joining this proposed new group please contact Joan Westcott, Groups Co-ordinator (contact details on page 8).

The incredible taste of Spain

It rained buckets on the days before and after the Wine Appreciation group annual special summer event. But we were lucky on the day as the weather could not have been better.

After a brief break to mingle we were handed the perfect summer wine, a glass of sparkling Cava Reserva Brut from Catalunya.

The first course Gazpacho was served accompanied by a refreshing Albarino white wine from Rias Baixas in Galicia. Then two delicious red wines followed, a Salterio Mencia from Bierzo, Castilla y León then an excellent Belezos Rioja Gran Reserva to complement an excellent Spanish Paella cooked by group member Alan Derr.

The grand finale, a Moscatel Oro dessert wine that went exceptionally well with the Spanish orange cakes prepared by Jackie Gellert and Jenny Derr.

The wines selected for the event were well chosen by James Aldridge of Corney & Barrow.

Thank you to everyone for making this event so enjoyable and especially to Alan for his hard work prepping and cooking an authentic Spanish Paella for thirty group members.

Jackie & Ralph Gellert

Wine Appreciation group member Alan Derr preparing a fiesta of flavours with his amazing Spanish Paella.

James Aldridge of Corney & Barrow delights the group with his winning selection of Spanish wines.



Jackie Gellert and Jenny Derr with one of the Spanish orange cakes they baked for dessert.

Walking in Wimpole

Five Mile Walking group members stepped out in the classical 18th century landscape around the Wimpole Estate, writes Eric Heaton.

The forecast for our November walk from Orwell to Wimpole Park was for lots and lots of rain! However, the weather was kind to us with no rain and a gentle breeze.

We had a very enjoyable walk in Wimpole Park with beautiful views in great company, which set us up for a good lunch at The Chequers in Orwell.

It wouldn't be November without a little mud and we all managed to return with plenty of mud on our



Five Mile Walk, November.

boots. This was our last walk for 2023 and we next meet on Wednesday 10th January 2024 at The Woodman at Nuthampstead.

Why not join us for a gentle walk in good company followed if you wish for lunch at the pub.

Eric Heaton

Carry on competing at Croquet!

Royston U3A Croquet group members have hit a winning streak at regional and national level, as Sue Barnes Bishop reports:

The Royston U3A group has been meeting every Monday since the season started in April and hope to continue playing until December weather permitting.

It is great fun and combines lots of laughter with gentle exercise.

Some of the group enjoy the game so much that they have also joined Meldreth Croquet Club and play competitively against other clubs.

For the second year running Meldreth have won the East Anglia Croquet Federation handicap competition. The team pictured above with the trophy at this year's final 1 to 4: David Edwards, Roger Wallbridge and Sue and John Bishop.



The winning team.

It is quite impressive that three quarters of the team learnt to play croquet through U3A. The same team also reached the semi-final of the Federation Shield against other regional winners this year at Henley-on-Thames.

If anyone is interested in learning this fascinating game please get in touch with Sue Barnes Bishop via the groups section on the Royston U3A website.

Sue Barnes Bishop



The theatre group went off to the Cambridge Arts Theatre to see an amazing show!

Blood Brothers by Willy Russell first appeared in our theatres in the 1980s and many of us had seen it then. But, my word, seeing it again all these years later was truly amazing!

The sets and acting were wonderful and the familiar songs were a joy to hear again.

Briefly the story is about twins being born to a mother unable to cope with her ever-expanding family. She is persuaded to give away one of her twins shortly after they are born.

We follow their separate lives as they grow up in very contrasting circumstances. Without giving away too much, everything has to end tragically.

The theatre group are on tour at the moment so if at all possible do go and see the show if you possibly can. We all thoroughly enjoyed it.

Thank you to everyone who came along to support the theatre group and hopefully we will meet up again before too long.

Deirdre Smith

Dates for your diary

DECEMBER No monthly meeting

JANUARY

Tuesday 30, 2pm at Royston Town Hall and via Zoom

THE HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH PANTOMIME

Guest Speaker: JIM STEBBINGS

For many families, a visit to a pantomime over the Christmas period has equal importance to the Christmas celebrations as the Christmas Tree. Lost to most will be the history and surprising background to this typically English form of entertainment..

FEBRUARY

Tuesday 27, 2pm at Royston Town Hall and via Zoom

THE AMERICAN CEMETERY, MADINGLEY

Guest Speaker: SUZIE HARRISON

Cambridge American Cemetery is the only WWII military cemetery located in the UK. The graves of more than 3,800 WWII fallen are taken care of by dedicated staff members, among them Suzie Harrison, interpretive guide, who will talk about her work at the American Battle Monument Commission.

Easy Guide to Interest Groups

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
AM			Book Club 1	Birding	Walkers: Strollers	Book Club 2
		Golf Croquet	Fitness	Book Club 3		
			Seated Exercise	Life Stories		
				Singing for Fun		
				Walkers: Five Mile		
PM	Solo Sundays	Art	MONTHLY MEETING last Tuesday of month	Clay Shooting	Canasta	Classic Novels
		Current Affairs	History	Film	Gardening	Petanque/Boules
		French Conversation	Ukulele	Wine Appreciation	Golf	
		Pottery (Hand Building)	Yarn & Chat		Quiz	
EVE				Jazz Appreciation		

For frequency and contact details about all interest groups please see the chart on the final page or check our website for more information. Announcements about future Events & Outings and Theatre Trips will be posted on our website when details become available.

Interest Groups

GROUP	DAY	TIME	FREQUENCY	GROUP LEADER
Art	Mon	2:00pm	Monthly last Mon	Sylvia Jordan
Birding	Wed	8:30am	Suspended	Carol McGeoch
Book Club 1	Tues	10:30am	Monthly 1st Tues	Deirdre Smith
Book Club 2	Fri	11:00am	Monthly variable	Janet Burton
Book Club 3	Wed	10:30am	Monthly last Wed	Elizabeth (Lee) Towers
Canasta	Thurs	2:00pm	2nd and 4th Thurs of month	Sue Clark
Classic Novels	Fri	2:00pm	Monthly last Fri	Sue Biggs
Clay Shooting	Wed	2:00pm	Monthly variable	Frank Martin
Current Affairs	Mon	3:30pm	Monthly 3rd Mon	Sarah Hillman
Curry Club	Mon	12:00pm	Suspended	
Events & Outings (open to all)	Variable	Variable	Occasional	
Film	Wed	2:00pm	Suspended	
Fitness	Tues	9:30am	Weekly	Kathy Hounsell
French Conversation	Mon	2:00pm	2nd and 4th Mon of month	Barbara Fielden
Gardening	Thurs	2:30pm	Suspended	
Golf	Thurs	1:00pm	Weekly	Peter Walden
Golf Croquet	Mon	10:15am	Weekly	Sue Barnes Bishop
History	Tues	2:00pm	Monthly 2nd Tues	Reg Hounsell
Jazz Appreciation	Wed	7:30pm	Suspended	
Life Stories	Wed	11:00am	Suspended	
Patchwork	Wed	10:00am	Suspended	
Petanque / Boules	Fri	2:30pm	Weekly	Jane Dottridge
Pottery (Hand Building)	Mon	2:00pm	Suspended	
Quiz	Thurs	2:00pm	Suspended	
Seated Exercise	Tues	10:45am	Weekly	Kathy Hounsell
Singing for Fun	Wed	11:00am	1st and 3rd Wed of month	Jackie Gellert
Solo Sundays	Sun	12:00pm	Monthly 2nd Sun	Brenda Brown
Theatre Trips	Variable	Variable	Variable	Deirdre Smith
Ukulele	Tues	12:00pm	Weekly	John Bishop
Walkers: Five Mile	Wed	9:45am	Monthly 2nd Wed	Eric Heaton
Walkers: Strollers	Thurs	10:15am	1st and 3rd Thurs of month	Christine Cawdell
Wine Appreciation	Wed	Variable	Monthly in-person or on Zoom	Jackie Gellert
Yarn & Chat	Tues	2:00pm	1st and 3rd Tues of month	Reg Wells

Don't forget to check our website for regularly updated information

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 welcome too -
to Pam Dajda at publicityroystonu3a@gmail.com

Contacts

Please use the Royston U3A website contacts page to email us with any queries.

For general information about Royston U3A please contact the Chair.

For information about interest groups please select the option Interest Groups Co-ordinator stating the group in which you are interested.

For information about membership please select the option Membership Secretary.

For queries about our website or if you wish to send updates please select the option Website and Updates.

Royston U3A Committee

Chair	Jackie Gellert
Treasurer	Barbara Andrew
Secretary	Marion Martin
Membership Secretary	Marion Martin
Minutes Secretary	Sylvia Fuller
Groups Co-ordinator	Joan Westcott
New Members Contact	Carla Bailey
Publicity	Pam Dajda
Royston U3A News	Ralph Gellert
Speaker Secretary	David Edwards

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FROM RETIRED TO INSPIRED