

ROYSTON u3a news

FEBRUARY 2024 Issue 43

Curtain up on the history of panto



As this is the first issue of Royston U3A News in 2024 I would like to wish you all a belated Happy New Year and a healthy and peaceful year ahead.

Many of our interest group activities are doing well but others are looking for additional members and, of course, we are always looking for members to start up new interest groups. Our groups really can improve members' minds and also help in preventing isolation, loneliness and even at this stage in our lives, they can improve our knowledge and skills.

In order to avoid having to increase our membership fees from 1st April 2024, the committee has decided to stop providing members with a hard copy of Third Age Matters publication after the next edition. We will, however, be providing you with a free electronic link to the online version but this will not include any pictures or advertisements.

I look forward to seeing you at the monthly meetings or at some of the interest groups. I also want to welcome several new members and I hope you find this issue of Royston U3A News an interesting read.

Jackie Gellert, Chair



JIM STEBBINGS

Pantomime is a traditional part of Christmas that many of us have been involved in - performing, directing or attending performances all over the country.

But panto has absolutely no connection with Christmas at all said Jim Stebbings, who traced the history of this unique form of entertainment at our January meeting.

What is pantomime? Originating in Greece, the word 'pan' means every or all. And the first performances were mimed so everything was accentuated and over the top.

Many a young actor has found himself or herself asked to play one of the two occupants of the panto skins, usually a horse or a cow. The actor losing the toss often finds themselves playing the rear end - starting his or her theatre life at the bottom, so to speak.

Over the centuries pantomime evolved throughout Europe and stock characters took to the stage such as the cunning Pantalone, Pierrot the sad clown, and cheerful Harlequin with his patchwork costume and magical powers.

Speech, music and spectacular special effects were largely introduced in the Victorian era. Add extra ingredients - slapstick comedy, a pantomime dame and the essential role of audience participation - and you get the distinctive mix of the panto we love today.



Among fascinating facts Jim revealed:

- the stories most English pantos are based on originated in France
- the word slapstick comes from a wooden device used by clowns to make a loud slapping noise
- Pantomime dame Widow Twankey is named after a cheap brand of China tea

For many theatres it is a vital source of income, bringing in around 30 per cent of annual revenue.

And panto has another key role, said Jim. "Pantomime is usually the first theatre performance children go to see and, hopefully, it's an introduction to the love of theatre."

Pam Dajda

Joseph Grimaldi 1778-1837 'Joey' - developed the image of the Clown, the successor to the Harlequin.



An Afternoon of Words, Music and Song

Making an early start to Christmas were veteran Cambridge entertainers Rosemary Wheeler and Rex Freeman whose seasonal offering was an invitation to join the inhabitants of a village vividly imagined in words and song.

Deirdre and her team had already worked their magic with mulled wine and mince pies so a receptive audience settled into their seats for the story to unfold.

Setting the scene each element of the imagined village was introduced by Rosemary - the villagers, the Manor House with Squire and Cook, whilst in the Church the Parson was rehearsing the choir...giving the first cue for three of the best loved carols, "See amidst the winter snow", "O little town of Bethlehem" and "While shepherds watched their flocks by night" with many of the audience joining in.



ROSEMARY WHEELER



REX FREEMAN

Strangers appear in the village - a man and a woman - and the story became theirs as they asked for help from villagers in turn, pleading for food or shelter, and it became apparent that the story being told was an allegory of the story of Christmas in words and carols concluding with the birth at midnight of a new baby.

Ending the afternoon's seasonal entertainment was a short finale from Rex of popular song and anecdote: Bing Crosby "If I'm not recognised by a taxi driver I just hum a few bars of White Christmas and they always know me - and never charge!"

Carla Bailey



Current Affairs – from stop the boats to sub-postmasters

We voted "stop the boats" as the most ridiculous and unattainable statement by a national public figure, at our **December** meeting, *writes Sarah Hillman.*

This led us on to immigration. The UK has welcomed many waves of migrants who have become well integrated, to our benefit. Net migration is about 745,000 yearly. We would need more than 200,000 houses built annually to house migrants, let alone for our current population!

Europe is having even worse problems - 11 countries have shut their borders. A first step must be to speed up applications processing to cut costs on, for example, accommodation.

We moved on to climate change, liking the quote that holding COP28 in an Oil State was "like Alcoholics Anonymous holding a meeting in Wetherspoons." Attenders flying in didn't help credibility!

Vital infrastructure like railways and water companies should be owned by us, so we can ensure that they work well without hidden detriment, "run by honest people who do a proper job."

In **January** we discussed the recent flooding which is likely to worsen with climate change. As seas rise, flooding of the Fens will reach Ely in 25 years - possibly sooner! We need to dredge more

rivers, stop building on flood plains - and invest in the electricity grid so all solar farms can connect.

On sub-postmasters, the cover-up - for decades - is outrageous. Many ministers didn't demand answers. Other public bodies also behaved in the same way - hospitals, water companies, police, etc. Directors' accountability seems better in the private sector - as Shell sorted similar problems promptly.

The Current Affairs group meets on the third Monday of the month at 3:15pm for 3:30pm in Banyers House. For further details contact Sarah Hillman.

Time for tea

The unsung heroes behind Royston U3A were thanked at an afternoon tea celebration before Christmas.

The leaders of more than 20 interest groups were invited to tea and cakes at the Old Bull Inn in appreciation of the vital role they play.

“Without group leaders there is no U3A!” said Chair, Jackie Gellert. “On behalf of the committee I’d like to thank you for making it happen.”

Interest groups are a core part of the ethos of U3A which relies on group leaders to run a wide range of activities for members.



Royston U3A is continuing to grow and currently has well over 400 members. New group leaders are always welcomed and recent groups to start up include Canasta, Singing for Fun and Tai Chi.

“The success of our groups is a direct result of the inspiration, leadership and efforts of our group leaders. We greatly appreciate all they do,” said Jackie.

Tucking in: group leaders enjoying cakes and a chat.



Come and try Canasta

If you’re a fan of card games come and try your hand at Canasta.

Canasta fan Sue Clark set up a group in July and has six regular players but would like to attract more members.

“It’s a fun and versatile card game and it’s much nicer if you play in pairs,” she said.

“The easiest way to learn is to get started and pick up the rules as you go along. It’s a mixture of luck and strategy.

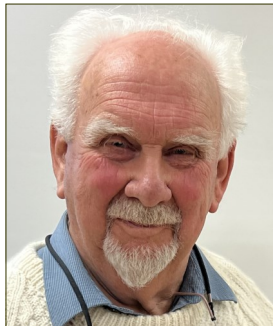
“A new couple recently started and they’re really enjoying it.”

The group meets at the Banyers at 2pm on the first and third Thursday of the month.

Canasta is a great game for socializing with small groups of people. It is played with two full decks of cards and was devised in Uruguay in 1939 as a game that was as engaging as Bridge.

If you’re interested in trying Canasta please contact Sue at suehelenclark@hotmail.com

The Hollywood star who invented Wi-Fi



ALAN OSBORNE

Hedy Lamarr appeared to have it all. Known for her great beauty, the Hollywood star was said to be the inspiration for Catwoman and Snow White.

As if that was not enough, she had a brilliant mind as a gifted scientist and innovator.

But Hedy's outstanding achievement – pioneering 'frequency hopping' to jam Nazi interception of wartime military radio communications – was not fully recognised until her final years.



Hollywood legend HEDY LAMARR

History group speaker Alan Osborne traced the extraordinary life of the Austrian - American actress who had an inventing table installed in her trailer during filming.

"One of her observations was: 'people seem to think that because I have a pretty face I'm stupid. I have to work twice as hard to convince people I have something of a brain'," said Alan.

The US Navy refused to implement her frequency hopping system, and the patent expired before she ever saw a penny from it.

This technology served as the foundation of mobile phones, Bluetooth, Wi-Fi and satellite systems – now with an estimated worth of £30 billion.

In her later years she became a recluse, but shortly before her death in 2000 she received the recognition she richly deserved. In 2014 Hedy Lamarr was finally inducted into the National Inventors Hall of Fame.

The film star known as 'the most beautiful woman in the world' now has a more impressive accolade as 'the mother of Wi-Fi.'

Pam Dajda

Getting into the Christmas spirit

Please excuse the above pun!

The Wine Appreciation group held its annual special pre-Christmas get-together with a tasting of very special wines that we had sampled and enjoyed during the past year.

We managed to secure a couple of bottles of an outstanding wine that scored highest points at a previous tasting but is now in short supply - *Young Wisdom Mataro Barossa Boy 2019* from the Barossa Valley, South Australia.

The wines were complemented by excellent cheeses, biscuits and delicious home-made mince pies specially baked by group member Angela Kennion. A most enjoyable pre-Christmas get-together.

Jackie Gellert

Mics, mixing desks and making sound effects at the BBC



Steve, far right, and the outside broadcast team celebrating Harry and Megan's wedding with two special guests!



STEVE RICHARDS

Crawling under the Glastonbury stage or scaling the roof of King's College Chapel was all in a day's work for Steve Richards.

During his 40-year career as a sound engineer at the BBC, Steve worked his way up from cutting tape

to travelling the world with Outside Broadcasting, covering Football World Cups, the Olympics and major royal events.

A lifelong Royston resident, Steve gave History group members an entertaining insight into the world of broadcasting.

From an early age he loved music and studied electrical engineering at university where he was also a student DJ. He applied to the BBC and got the job because of his musical interests and engineering background.

Starting in External Services, he moved to News and Sport, responsible for sound at Glastonbury, the Royal Albert Hall Proms and Eurovision. A favourite role was working in the sound mixing truck at Kings College Chapel for the Christmas Eve carol service.

He was lead BBC Radio engineer for coverage of royal ceremonial events for 23 years, ending up as engineering manager.

Life was never dull - as Steve highlighted during coverage of Prince Harry and Meghan's wedding.

"Our hotel had bizarrely decided to put some cardboard cutouts of the happy couple in their reception, so we invited them to have a drink with us," he said.

"I wasn't laughing quite so loudly when the Police called me at 2.30am later that night on the morning of the wedding. They claimed one of our outside broadcast vehicles was blocking them from placing barriers across one of the access roadways (it wasn't) and I had to walk from Slough to Windsor over the bridge to sort it out."

Pam Dajda

Stepping out into 2024



Taking a break by the watercress beds at the RSPB site at Fowlmere.

Eighteen members of the Strollers group set out for their first walk of 2024 on Royston Heath, writes Chris Cawdell.

The weather was kind to us after the icy conditions of previous days and we were led by Brian on a route which avoided the worst of the January mud and slippery inclines. Not easy this time of the year so we thank him for that.

Afterwards some of us enjoyed a warming drink in the Heath Cafe which was much appreciated.

Our next January outing took us to the RSPB site at Fowlmere. We walked there from the Green Man, Dunsbridge Turnpike and

still had the return journey to negotiate - three and a half miles in total.

This year we will continue to walk on the second and fourth Thursdays of the month.

We aim to walk approx. three miles on a circular route, visiting various places in Royston and

the surrounding villages. An email is circulated the week before with details of the next walk and where to meet. If you would like to join us on any of the walks do contact me via the Royston U3A website and I will add you to the mailing list.

Chris Cawdell



Best part of the walk - refreshments and relaxation!

Relax and unwind with Tai Chi

Gentle exercise in a relaxing environment is proving popular with the new Tai Chi group.

Weekly classes started in January and 16 members are enjoying learning basic tai chi's slow, flowing and calming movements.

The group meets at the Market Hill Rooms at noon every Tuesday for hour long sessions with an experienced and enthusiastic teacher. No special clothing is needed - just wear something comfortable, advises group leader Joan Westcott.

"It's an informal and friendly group and the classes give a sense of wellbeing," she said.

If you would like to try tai chi please contact Joan Westcott for further details.

On target with Clay Shooting

Clay shooting is hitting the target with members who are pictured taking aim during a recent session.

The group meets at the Nuthampstead Clay Shooting Ground and is led by experienced shooter Frank Martin with the support of instructor Peter Godfrey.

The popular sport of shooting flying clay targets is safe, challenging and fun. Hitting the target requires skill, timing and hand-eye coordination - and beginners get friendly advice and encouragement from regulars.

Equipment hire, clays and cartridges and expert instruction are provided. New recruits are given all the necessary training in safety and techniques from a fully qualified instructor.

Monthly sessions are held on Wednesday afternoons and as numbers are limited it is vital to contact Frank Martin if you are interested in joining. New members must complete a health and safety training introduction before taking up the sport.



The action photos show:

- *John Patterson waiting to line up on a crossing clay.*
- *Rosie Frost in the foreground taking aim and Bill Hooper in the cage behind waiting to shoot his 'down the line' discipline.*
- *Frank Martin watching Rosie Frost taking a shot at a 'going away' clay. Other shooters looking on awaiting their turn in the shooters cage.*

Mud glorious mud to celebrate the new year!

Five Mile Walkers celebrated their first walk of 2024 with a muddy walk around Nuthampstead, writes Eric Heaton.

A record turnout of 15 members set out on a new route of just over five miles towards Barkway on a bright chilly winter's morning.

The walk was everything that we could have hoped for followed up by lunch at The Woodman at Nuthampstead.

Looking at the state of my boots I'm thinking of changing our name from the Five Mile Walking Group to **THE MUDDY**

BOOTS WALKING GROUP.
What do you think?



Dates for your diary

FEBRUARY

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

CAMBRIDGE AMERICAN CEMETERY AND MEMORIAL, Madingley.

Guest Speaker: SUZIE HARRISON will talk about her work at the American Battle Monument Commission.

Cambridge American Cemetery and Memorial is the only American military WWII war grave cemetery located in the UK. It provides a final resting place for 3,812 soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, and civilians. The inscribed Wall of the Missing records the names of 5,127 others most of whom died in the Battle of the Atlantic or in the strategic air bombardment of northwest Europe.

APRIL

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

IN THE GARDEN WITH WILLIAM MORRIS: FLORA AS ART.

Guest Speaker: FIONA ROSE

More famous for his work inside the home, William Morris (1834-1896) made a significant impact on the evolution of the English garden.

This talk examines William Morris' gardening principles drawing from Morris's lectures, letters, poetry and prose. It also explores Morris' own gardens that served as an inspiration behind his flower-based designs.

MARCH

Tuesday 26, 2pm at Royston Town Hall and via Zoom

FOOD, GLORIOUS FOOD!

Guest Speaker: CATHY SHELBOURNE

As we chomp our way through gargantuan breakfasts, lovely lunches, tasty teas and delicious dinners, spare a thought for where our food originated from and how it reached us.

The seafarers and circumnavigators discovering new lands brought back unknown and exotic foodstuffs - such as chocolate, pineapples and bananas from central America, and oranges from Madeira - which had a huge influence on our palates (and our waistlines?).

MAY

Tuesday 28, 2pm at Royston Town Hall and via Zoom

THE WWII HISTORY OF BLETCHLEY PARK.

Guest Speaker: MIKE BARBAKOFF is a volunteer guide at Bletchley Park.

This talk provides an overview of the history of the Government Code and Cypher School and Bletchley Park as its WWII war station. Specific areas covered include why Bletchley Park was chosen; the challenge of the Enigma ciphering machine; selection of the workforce and the development of Colossus, the world's first computer.

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		
			Tai Chi	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	1st and 3rd 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
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
Tai Chi	Tues	12:00pm	Weekly	Joan Westcott
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	2nd and 4th Thurs of month	Christine Cawdell
Wine Appreciation	Wed	2:00pm	Monthly variable	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

