

Stratford-upon-avon u3a Newsletter

March 2024

[Stratford-upon-Avon u3a: Home \(u3asites.org.uk\)](http://u3asites.org.uk)

Founded 2000

March 27 2024

Stratford-upon-Avon u3a Annual General Meeting

2 p.m. at the
Methodist Church

Members old and new are very welcome to attend and join us
for tea/coffee and biscuits afterwards.

All relevant documents will be emailed to you before the event. Please bring
them with you if you wish. There will be limited numbers of printed copies
available on the day

This is to be followed by a short talk about scams and how to avoid them.

Unmissable !!

24 APRIL 2024 – NICK MARTIN - STORIES OF OUR BRITISH MAMMALS



**Meeting 2 p.m. at
the Methodist
Church
All welcome**



NEWS FROM OUR INTEREST GROUPS

CHAUCER

Almost at the end of *Troilus and Criseyde* now. We noticed how Chaucer, like Hardy, avoids making a direct statement about the nature of his heroine's downfall. Was Tess of the d'Urbervilles raped or seduced? Did Criseyde really give her heart to Diomedes, as "men say"? We also considered how Cassandra's exposition of Troilus' dream is both an echo of the scene in which Criseyde and her ladies are reading about the siege of Thebes in Book II and a foreshadowing of the fall of Troy.

Next month we will visit the 'Chaucer Here and Now' exhibition in Oxford at the Bodleian.

FRENCH FOR THE TERRIFIED



We were delighted to welcome another new member to the group this month. In our new book we enjoyed an amusing conversation between a child and his Mamie about the days before mobile phones. Lots of practice on forming and using imperfect tenses led to "Les Vacances au Bord de la Mer", an evocative and rather melancholic song from Michel Jonasz.

IMPROVE YOUR FRENCH

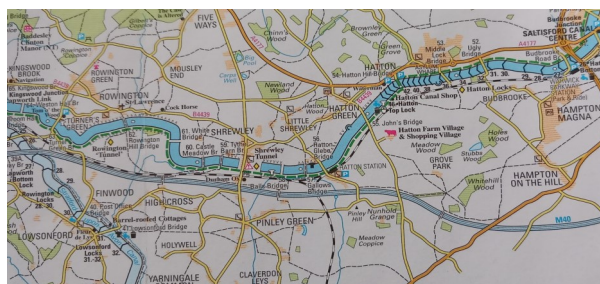
After catching up with everyone's news in French as usual we did some listening comprehension with Qs and As. We tried a memory game, then looked at frequent uses of *avoir* and *faire*, practising in a range of tenses.

LATIN (ADVANCED)

As a change from Horace's poetry, we read a chunk of *The Twelve Caesars* by Suetonius. As our meeting took place just a few days after the Ides of March, we chose the murder of Julius Caesar, and it proved to be suitably horrific - the content, not the Latin! We welcomed a new member whose experience of learning and using classical languages has been quite different. We think he will fit in well. Are there any more of you out there?

STRATFORD HISTORY GROUP

Roger Butler gave an excellent presentation on local canals. He took us with superb slides from Birmingham, along the Grand Union and into the Stratford Canal, past factories, tea and banana warehouses, gongoozlers and more. The motorways of their day, transporting materials of all kinds, canals reduced the price of coal by half. Their building was extremely hard work. Seen then as the future of transport, their heyday from 1837 only lasted 60 years: no-one foresaw the railways. Canal life was very hard: cramped conditions, water in Buckby cans and no sanitation. Our canals are unique in the world in many ways and the Stratford Canal is one of the most picturesque with superb aqueducts, tunnels, bridges, locks and cottages. Derelict and due to be closed in the 50s, it is thanks to efforts of volunteers led by David Hutchings in the 60s that we can still enjoy it today.



Ukes U3a- Ukulele Band and More

Ukulele is a perfect skill to learn and develop. It's a fun instrument that can be learned in its basic form very easily. Because it's a group activity everyone feels very valued.

We are a band, so invite other players of other instruments to join us.

There's a choice of ukeleles: the little soprano, slightly bigger concert, larger tenor and baritone which is like a guitar, and the wonderful bass for accompaniment.

We learn to play not just a backing track to singing but also to play tunes by tablature in parts. This is sometimes a challenge but sounds great when we get it right!

Having an absorbing hobby like this can really help with keeping the brain active and the mind healthy. It can be life changing.

We like to perform a variety of music from the 60's and beyond. This is often led by those who participate. We hope to share this love with others as we develop our skills together.

Music is a great source of joy and relaxation. We have found it to be the key to friendship, and fun.

If you are interested, please email me.

Mjclc2002@yahoo.co.uk

Mary Lamming Stone (Leader of Ukes3a, U3a Stratford Upon Avon)

With apologies from your editor, this article about ukeleles should have been in last month's newsletter



Tai Chi Yoga fusion

We meet in the New Room at the Methodist church every Tuesday for an hour of gentle exercise and relaxation. If you are interested then please get in touch via the group co-ordinator at

groups@stratfordu3a.org.uk

Spanish Intermediate

The well-established Spanish Intermediate group is now being supported by a native Spanish speaker. We are finding her support very helpful. We welcomed a new member who spends time in Spain. We discussed, in Spanish of course, our recent travels. Several of our members are now spending time in Spain and enjoying the lovely sunshine. We still meet on the first Thursday of the month in the afternoon.

The Playreading Group

At our January Meeting we finished reading Mike Harding's **Comfort and Joy**, a play that was suitably festive in December and seemed, if anything, funnier still after the festivities had ended.

It looked at the pressures and problems created for Margaret and Martin who were entertaining several generations of family plus other halves, misbehaving pets and neighbours in a small suburban house and also providing a traditional Christmas lunch with all the stresses that involves.

In February we moved on Alan Ayckbourn's play, **How the Other Half Loves**. *This* centres on three couples. Fiona Foster and Bob Philips are having an illicit affair unbeknownst to each other's partners and their cover-story involves helping an unaware third couple, the Featherstones, leading to farcical misunderstandings and events.

In March we're moving to a new venue, Trinity Manor Care Home. This will give us more space than we have now when we meet in a member's, home which means that we can take a few new members.

If you're interested in joining us, please contact groups@stratfordu3a.org.uk

Note from your editor

Your contributions to the newsletter are always welcome including pictures. Please could you send them to me at

annefostersavu3a@gmail.com

Somehow I missed a couple of items for last month, they should be above, my apologies.

I do reserve the right not to include everything if there are more than 10 pages of items.

The deadline is 17th of each month, it is very helpful if you stick to this.

Yes, these really are Christmas cracker jokes!

What did the duck say when it bought a lipstick? Put it on my bill

Why are eggs no good at telling jokes? They keep cracking up

Who invented fire? Some bright spark.

Month	Group
March	Latin Intermediate
April	Piano
May	Chaucer (ref Patricia)
June	Portuguese
July	Playreading 1
August	Italian
September	Useful French (ref Margaret)

TEA ROTA

The tea rota is printed in this newsletter every month. Please check to see when your group is down to help.

If there are any problems, please talk to a member of the committee

Chatty Table

Do you come to meetings on your own? Would you like to come but want someone to talk to?

When we have tea/coffee after the meeting come and join the Chatty Table—exactly what it says— a table to sit and chat. New members especially welcome.

I wanted to put a picture here but couldn't find a suitable one, would anyone like to supply a photograph?

STRATFORD-UPON-AVON u3a - SPEAKERS FOR 2023-4

**We have an interesting and varied programme of talks and entertainment for you.
Please come along, and tell your friends!**

27 MARCH 2024 –AGM and a talk about scams

24 APRIL 2024 – NICK MARTIN - STORIES OF OUR BRITISH MAMMALS

29 MAY 2024 – KATY BELLAMY – “SLEEP, PERCHANCE TO DREAM” – The Neuroscience of Snoozing.

26 JUNE 2024 – JANICE FISHER - CHARLES ROBERT ASHBEE – ARTS & CRAFTS

MOVEMENT

31 JULY 2024 – RICHARD CHURCHLEY - LOCAL PLACENAMES IN WORCESTERSHIRE AND WARWICKSHIRE

28 AUGUST 2024 - ABBY WATSON – DOGS TRUST SUPPORTER RELATIONS OFFICER - DOGS TRUST AND ITS WORK

25 SEPTEMBER 2024 – ERIC LAWLEY – CHEDHAM’S YARD

30 OCTOBER 2024 – CATS PROTECTION AND ITS WORK

27 NOVEMBER 2024 – SUSAN DRAGE – RECYCLING WITH A DIFFERENCE. UPCYCLING AND CRAFTING OPPORTUNITIES.

Cyril Bennis – The Swans of Avon

This meeting attracted 57 members and 11 visitors, who were entertained and informed about swan behaviour and history. Cyril was pleased to tell us that avian flu has not affected the birds this year, after the awful disasters of 2021-2022. Cyril's work is varied, from collecting strays from car parks to dog attacks in the recreation grounds. The recent flooding has attracted the birds onto the grass there, but this makes them vulnerable. Some people think that the attacks are from foxes, but foxes eat the head of their prey to subdue them. Dogs do not. The swans seem to be nesting 2-3 weeks earlier than before. They are establishing nesting territories now.

The town's love affair with swans began in 1867 when the vicar of the Holy Trinity church presented a pair to the corporation. In 1874 Swan Upping began, when the swans were counted and marked to show ownership. It was common to mark the beak, but Stratford punched a hole in the foot, which had to be repeated annually as the hole healed! Even Marie Corelli was involved in these occasions. They are ringed now, with a yellow leg tag.

By the 1960s the town had too many swans, so many that it was proposed to give some away, which is not allowed, as they are crown property! King Charles is the present patron. Mute swans are the only birds owned (in England and Wales) by the Crown, since the 15th. century. In the 1970s lead weights from fishing and the poor quality of the water led to their decline. This resulted in a fund-raising campaign, led by the mayor, Ken Boyden, to replace them and create a reserve for them to breed. Cyril and the staff of the Hilton lured them with food to the reserve and the first pair was named Tom (after the Hilton's general manager) and Roxanne, after Cyril's wife! Another pair lived at Lucy's Mill.



Cyril makes it clear that he does not hold the title of H.M. Swan Keeper, which was held by Mr. John Turk when the title was mistakenly attributed to him by the local newspaper in the 1990s. Cyril is often called the Swan Man or the Bird Man. His fame has grown due to social media, especially Facebook. He has even had calls for help from Stratford in Ontario!

Cyril has kept records since 1981. There were 9 swans then, 142 in 1998, and there are about 60 now. There were problems from fast boats on the Avon but now the speed is lower and there are electric boats. However, too many tourists could become a problem, and also climate change. Swans have about 20,000 feathers to preen. They lay about 8-9 eggs over 2 weeks, but they are all hatched on the same day. They are taken straight to the river and they are very vulnerable to being eaten by pike, gulls and magpies, but not from otters, despite local concerns about this. They breed after 4 years, but they do not socialise in large groups, unlike geese, so they survive less well. Swans are good parents and defend their young fiercely, although they will leave the weakest if it cannot keep up!

There were a number of questions including the following matters: Swans are fairly faithful and usually mate for life. The male finds and defends the nest site but the female makes the decision between several suitors. Bread, fed in moderation, is not harmful and does not cause "Angel Wing", a genetic deformity. It should not be thrown onto the grass where it attracts rats. It was a very enjoyable talk, much appreciated.