



University of the Third Age

**u3a**  
learn, laugh, live



Stratford-upon-Avon u3a

Newsletter

January 2023

**Meeting, Wednesday 25 January: The Graffiti on Shakespeare's Walls**

An illustrated talk by Pam Devine, our local expert on the Guild Chapel graffiti and author of the book 'Writing on Shakespeare's Walls'.

**February 22nd meeting: Secret Wildlife of my Garden**

Some surprises from Nick Martin, a fabulous wildlife photographer, who transformed his garden into a wildlife haven with amazing results

**HAPPY NEW YEAR!**

email: [savu3a@gmail.com](mailto:savu3a@gmail.com)

Items for the February newsletter to

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<https://u3asites.org.uk/stratforduponavon/home>

**NOVEMBER MEETING : Christmas Songs through the ages—from Boars Head to Bing Crosby**

Presented by Richard Churchley

Richard began with lines from a Worcestershire Mummers' Play and a wassailing song wishing good health to all, both popular at Christmases past. We joined in with the Boar's Head Carol, a 1521 macaronic, singing the chorus in Latin, and enjoyed the 1531 Coventry Carol which Richard accompanied on his cittern, an instrument not unlike a lyre, popular in Renaissance times.

Worcestershire carols had a character all their own, as we heard in the Bitter Withy Carol: Mary beats Jesus with willow twigs for causing the drowning of three rich lads who refused to play with him; a curse placed on the willow/withy made farmers afraid to use it to drive their cattle.

Richard took up his accordion to play us two tunes popularised at subsequent Christmases in the 1970s by Mike Oldfield. He then launched into Deck the Halls, originally a 16th century Welsh carol, Nos Galan, with us singing the fa la las. Nearer to home we learned that Christina Rossetti, author in 1874 of In the Bleak Midwinter, had been a visitor at Ipsley Court in Redditch when it was occupied by fellow poet Walter Savage Landor; Richard sang her words to the tune Cranham, named by its composer Gustav Holst after the Cotswold village where he was then living,



Our journey through the ages ended in America with three of the most famous Christmas songs of all time. Jingle Bells was the 1857 work of choirmaster James Pierpont in Massachusetts. And the second most famous Christmas song ever was based on a character created in 1939 by an American jingle writer, Robert L May, to cheer up a child with a sore red nose. Rudolph became phenomenally successful after the song was recorded by Gene Autrey ten years later, its popularity only eclipsed by Irving Berlin's White Christmas. Originally written for the 1942 film Holiday Inn, it was used again in the film White Christmas the following year. Never waste a good song, especially when it's sung by Bing Crosby!

To round off this most entertaining afternoon we all sang the old Mummers' favourite 'We wish you a merry Christmas' and gave warm thanks to Richard who never fails to please his audience.

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The above entertainment followed a Special General Meeting where there was a unanimous vote for exploring the possibility of merging with another local u3a, given the difficulty of filling major posts on our committee. Further developments will be reported in due course.



## DECEMBER MEETING: Christmas Quiz

Our December meeting was held in suitably wintry weather (thank you, Bing Crosby). A few intrepid members came to the Hall with snowshoes and troikas; rumours of a husky sled are yet to be verified. Weather in the hall matched the temperature outside but, although our bodies were cool, our minds were on fire!

The Ukulele Group warmed us up at the outset but unfortunately lived up to their team name in the quiz - The Naughty Ukuleles. Nevertheless they came a worthy second to 'The Red Nose Reindeers' who showed an impressive knowledge of Christmas songs, food, and the Christmas Morecambe and Wise specials. Any perceived lack of knowledge in the participants was made up for by discretionary marks awarded willy-nilly for politeness, smiling, being pleasant.

One of our members, Colin Rose, wound up the formal entertainment in fine style with a display of magic and prestidigitation which gained "ooohs and aaahs" worthy of the City of Varieties Music Hall in Leeds. Yummy Christmas cake in the foyer sent members off warm and happy to find their troikas.

**Maureen**

**NB.** If you missed Colin's performance, simply put 'Colin Rose magician' into your browser to find him on Youtube, including on a show with David Nixon (remember him?) on TV. Be sure not to miss the magic money making machine!



## NEWS FROM OUR INTEREST GROUPS

### Ambling Group

On 11th January seven members had an enjoyable lunch at the Red Lion. The food was good and we had time for a chat and natter. The walk on Wednesday 8th February will be a local walk around Stratford. We will assemble at the Gower Memorial in the Bancroft Gardens at 10:30am. Hopefully the weather will be reasonable.

**Joyce Steckel and Olive Puzey**

### Brush up your German



Jo told us about Würth, the international electronics company with its HQ in Baden-Württemberg where her son works. It is known for looking after its employees, including running its own school and providing health care. This led on to an absorbing discussion on German education, welfare, care of refugees and other social issues. We never know where our topics are going to take us, but this was particularly thought provoking.

**Chaucer**

### A reflection on Troilus and Criseyde

I've got a bad feeling about T and C.  
Their relationship surely won't last.  
The end of the story is already known:  
Their future is all in the past.  
In spite of their passion they'll soon have to part  
And Criseyde will be sent to the Greeks,  
And there she'll take Diomed as her new love  
To provide the protection she seeks.

Though Pandarus feels he's controlling the plot,  
However he schemes and connives  
It's really Dame Fortune who's running the show  
And ruling the young lovers' lives.  
So don't be too hard on poor faithless Criseyde:  
It wasn't her fault she's untrue;  
She's simply fulfilling her predestined role  
And that goes for you and me too.

**Patricia Richardson**

### Gardening

Our planned January lunch at Doreen's home was cancelled as Doreen was preparing to leave Stratford to live with her son and his family near Leamington. She has been a member of the group since its inception and has hosted us on a number of occasions. We will miss her. Our very best wishes for this new beginning, Doreen! In February we plan to visit Batsford Arboretum when the snowdrops will be at their best.



## Folk Dancing

Our January session was most enjoyable even though numbers were low. First an energetic Virginia Reel got us warmed up and in the mood for dancing. This was followed by a more complicated dance, Country Bumpkin, performed in sets, then a slower circle dance, Misir Lou, to the most beautiful Greek music so that we could catch our breath! We finished the first half with a circle waltz. After a sociable coffee break we warmed up again with Broken Sixpence. Then it was Greenwich Hospital followed by a hornpipe which was quite stately despite its name. Finally we finished with an old favourite, a hornpipe circle dance which involved quite a lot of clapping.

All in all a most enjoyable morning. Many thanks to our caller, Julian who steered us through these dances with good humour and patience. If you would like to join us for our next meeting on Tuesday 14th February at 10.30 a.m. at St Andrew's Church Hall, Shottery, please contact Sue at [sue.crowley25@googlemail.com](mailto:sue.crowley25@googlemail.com).

## Latin (Advanced): Aeneid Book IV Dido and Aeneas

The inevitable conclusion is now just a few lines away. So, having read Dido's last words in Vergil's masterly account, we sat back and listened to Janet Baker singing Dido's lament, "When I am laid in earth". Perfect.

## Piano

We enjoyed pieces from some new composers this time: Howard Blake, Eric Coates, Hannes de Maeyer, Andrew Lloyd Weber and Moritz Moszkowski, as well as perennial favourite Nikki Iles, with a lovely duet by Faure to finish.

## Spanish

We all spoke about a book, film or story we have enjoyed - and made some interesting discoveries. For February, in a version of the game **Articulate** we are preparing sentences describing a number of things, people or places which the others must then guess by asking further questions in Spanish. Should be fun!

## Stratford History Group

Our talk on the Stratford to Moreton tramway had to be deferred until Michael has recovered from his nasty accident. Instead, with the aid of a quiz and street plan we delved into the history and development of Old Town, learning about its many cottage industries, the coming of the railways and the important national role played by the Royal Label Factory. For next time we will each research a topic of our choice to present briefly to the others.



## Useful French

We are beginning to settle down with a reliable small group of members all needing help putting their rusty French to better use. So we are not a conversation group. We meet fortnightly with two different leaders and use stories, cartoons, songs and situations for practice. It seems to be working well.

## OUR WEBSITE

When the Trust's previous host unexpectedly suspended the Site Builder web account in November, all uploaded files containing pictures and documents were lost. Access problems are now resolved but replacing photos is very time-consuming as previous links can no longer be used, so it means sourcing suitable photos again from scratch. Apologies if our site looks rather bare at the moment, but I'm working on it. **Margaret**

## SPRING TEA ROTA

January 25	Piano
February 22	Revive your French
March 29th	Chaucer
April 26th	Portuguese
May 31st	Gardening



**OTHER NEWS**

**National Trust volunteers wanted**

The Trust is currently recruiting for volunteers at its Baddesley Clinton, Coughton Court and Packwood properties. Opportunities include welcoming visitors in reception, helping out in the café, helping with admin support, taking part in archaeological surveys and more.

Find details on the NT website: [myvolunteering - National Trust](http://myvolunteering-nationaltrust.org.uk). For more information drop in (no need to book) at one of the Trust's relaxed coffee mornings and afternoons:

- Thursday 26 January, 10am-12 noon, Coughton Court
- Saturday 28 January, 9am-11am, Packwood
- Sunday 5 February, 11am-1pm, Coughton Court
- Wednesday 15 February, 9am-11am, Baddesley Clinton
- Saturday 18 February, 9am-11am, Baddesley Clinton



**Noreen.Clarke@nationaltrust.org.uk** (Admin Volunteer)  
**amy.evans@nationaltrust.org.uk** (Senior Volunteering and Community Officer)