

Syston and District



# Vitality!

June  
2019

Official newsletter of the Syston and District University of the Third Age

## THE FIRST THREE YEARS – A RETROSPECTIVE

*The Chairman signs off*

Only a few short days to the Annual General Meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> June when, under the terms of our Constitution, I hand over the chairmanship to my elected successor, Michael Wherton.

It has been my genuine pride and pleasure to have had the opportunity to help to establish the Syston and District U3A. Our rapid membership growth from Day 1 took us completely by surprise but, thanks to a dedicated team of volunteers working together in the Executive Committee, we have faced, and, I believe, successfully overcome many of the challenges involved in any new venture involving so many individuals each with their own expectations.

I take unashamed pride in the strength and dynamism of the organisational structure which I leave behind and I am confident that, under new management, SADU3A will go from strength to strength continuing its response to the expressed educational, social, cultural and recreational needs of our local communities.

Of course, I am not leaving the altogether. I will remain an active member. Indeed, I hope to have time to join in more of the existing Groups and, perhaps, help to launch new ones.

May I simply take this opportunity to thank each and every one of you for your encouragement and support and express my sincere appreciation for giving me the opportunity to serve as your founding Chairman.

COLIN GRIMES

I am sure all members would like to say a big thank you to Colin for all his hard work.

# THANK YOU

*Editor*

# News from May

## The Philosophy of the University of the Third Age

### Live, laugh and learn! How we reflect this, here in Syston and District U3A

Another year of the U3A in Syston and District kicks off in May when we begin a new general meeting schedule of invited speakers.

We've a lot to live up to, as in 2018/2019 we often had more than 140 people in the room, and indeed set a record in March when 160 members came along and heard about the adventures of Amy Johnson, the woman who set so many records as an aviatrix – what a wonderful word.

So how do we decide what to put into the programme?

Well, there are two major criteria.

One is to reflect the declared interests of our members, and we do that by including speakers whose interests align with the groups we have. You'll see that in the forthcoming presentations about Family and Local history, as we learn about a local suffragette, or the Leicester trams, about wildlife and gardening, and about the arts in all its forms. We've had Mummers dancing, painting demonstrations, the Little Theatre play producers to name but a few, and this year we'll have a mosaic artist who produced the piece you can go and see in the park in Syston.

Our other objective is to deliver on Live, Laugh, and Learn.

How are we going to deliver on that? To help us with the **Live** aspect, We'll be hearing from the Ambulance First Responders, from an expert on our planet and its place in the universe, and from the local charity, the Syston and District Volunteer Bureau about the life enriching services available in our area.

When we want to **laugh** – and we should try to do that as often as possible, we'll have some notorious villains introduced to us – thankfully historical ones. We'll also have a Wimbledon Umpire telling us some behind the scenes (and sometimes in front of them) stories about our favourite summer television sport. Some people even go out and play tennis, and we can do that right here in Syston as we have a local club.

We're told that we should strive to learn a new thing every day. Especially as we get older and need to work harder to retain knowledge and information. Our programme will help us with that as well as we **learn** about lifestyles and occupations, science and technology, history and geography, and all the things we wish we'd given more attention much earlier on in our lives.

We recognise that it's not possible for everyone to have the second Wednesday morning of the month available to come along to general meeting, so we have a talented member who writes it all up for publication in Vitality! That way we can spread the word and keep us all informed.

Experts who are also good presenters are not always easy to find, so if you know of any and want to recommend them, please let us know. You can do that through a message on the website to the Speaker Finder, or by passing on the contact details to a Committee member.

Let's look forward to another successful year together.

*Pat Wherton*

## Committee News

### MEMBERSHIP UPS AND DOWNS

For various reasons 37 members have decided not to renew their membership for this year and, regrettably, three of our members died quite recently.

However, our membership number of 380 is very gratifying - and more are joining every month. The membership number for our next "raw recruit" will be 554, as we do not re-issue "old" numbers so that any lapsed member deciding to renew in future years can be given their original number.

Thank you all for spreading the word to your friends about the benefits of belonging to "Learn, Laugh and Live".

*Norma Grimes*  
*Membership Secretary*

### CHILDREN AND THE U3A

Members are reminded that, under national guidelines covering third part insurance cover for all U3A activities, children cannot be permitted to attend any activity organised by the U3A.

It is fully appreciated that there are times when childcare duties can clash with attractive U3A meetings and events. Nevertheless, we are clearly advised that the presence of a child at any U3A function would invalidate any insurance cover for that event. In the interests of the wider membership, therefore, and to obviate any potential risk, we are left with no option but to rigidly enforce the "No Children" rule.

Your full co-operation would be greatly appreciated since, in the words of the signage found in many corner shops: ***"Please do not ask. Refusal might offend!"***

### MAY Monthly Meeting

144 members attended this engaging talk on life on the canals

#### **Roses and Castles – life on the canal networks**

Mary Matts' talk *"A brief history of canals and the lives of people who lived and worked on them"* was a gentle, enthralling, rich insight into social history, industrial heritage, and a past way of life. History that's rooted in industrial revolution, far from today's calm, relaxed canal and narrowboat world.

We start in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century with James Brindley, the father of today's waterways, and the Duke of Bridgewater who built one of the very first canals. In 4 years from 1791 to 1795 Parliament passed 44 Acts that enabled new canals to be dug - a rate of progress that today's politicians can only dream of. This was a time of industrial revolution, when the emergence of factories brought massive changes in how people lived and worked.

Boats working the canals superseded the pack horse as a means to carry goods and materials, faster and with greater capacity. And greater capacity for profit. As well as moving goods and materials the boat provided a home for the family - a tiny cabin 7 feet x 7 feet. For the family it was a hard, demanding, 7 day week existence, food might be scrounged, scavenged or bartered in exchange for the materials they were carrying, from coal to cabbages.

Standing on a boat's stern in all weathers needed resilience; this was work, not recreation – no tying up and resting till the rain passed! Rest came with loading or unloading; overnight stabling for horses was needed, as well as a smithy for shoe'ing the horse.

The three main utensils on the boat were the cooking pot, the “dipper” for collecting water, and kettle: essential, functional, and durable. Utensils and belongings were highly painted, often in a Roses and Castles design, along with the boat's interior, horse's harness, doors, furniture, all with bright and cheerful scenes. Some had motifs – “*A present from Manchester Assizes*” Oops!

They had few clothes so looked after what they owned; clothes were passed down - a mother's frayed skirt would be cut down for a daughter. Children wore smaller versions of their parents' clothes, no fashion items here, no Primark! Elaborate crocheted bonnets and clothes were functional – warm but loose fitting to allow ease of movement around the boat. A woman's shawl made it easier to move around than a coat which would restrict movement.

Shawls weren't the only crocheted things: muffs for the horse's ears offered protection from winter's icy winds. Look after your horse – it's your boat's engine and key to your livelihood. The towpath enabled the horse to work, unlike today when towpaths are favourite places for walkers, joggers, and anglers.

1830's onwards canals gave way to rail and road - faster and carrying greater quantities, just as the narrow boat had superceded the pack horse, and after WW2 they fell into decay. 1948 nationalisation in the form of British Waterways, but improvements were slow. Now canals are managed by the Canal and River Trust - their motto “*Life's Better By Water*”.

20<sup>th</sup> century industry returned to the canals - the “leisure industry”, motto - “*Work Is The Curse Of The Drinking Man*”. More boats than ever before – but no buckets for washing now, merely decoration, boats have central heating, solar panels, tv's, showers and toilets - a far cry from the days of the bucket....!

Remember Rosie and Jim? TV favourites from 1990 to 2000 who brought canals and boats into the hearts of young children with their own boat “Ragdoll”. And a recent series featuring Timothy West and Prunella Scales, cruising the canal network?

Now 2,000 miles of canals provide a rich haven for wildlife, endless walking opportunities, and take us through some of the country's finest countryside. Canals offer us 2,700 listed structures, 50 scheduled ancient monuments and five World Heritage sites. Not all are restored to their former working glory: the M6 north of Lancaster cuts 14 miles off the Preston - Kendal canal at Tewitfield. But at least the Longlands Inn offers a pint to soften your disappointment!



*Roses and Castles decoration on utensils*



*A working boat on the Grand Union*

## News from the Groups

### Walking

#### Baslow to Chatsworth and Back

A walk of 6.6 miles with 380 ft of ascent and no Steep Sections!

It's early May and I was leading the Walking Group (aka "*The Mountain Goats*" for some reason). We met up in Baslow, Derbyshire, for our annual day out. Some said we're taking civilisation to Foreign Parts, a mission like, others said don't be daft we're going for a walk.

When we parked up the ticket machine was out of order – hooray, much rejoicing! We didn't have to pay. With boots laced, sinews stiffened and deep breaths all round we set off up to Wellington's Monument and a stroll along Baslow Gritstone Edge. We had fine views over heather moorland and the valley to the imposing buttresses of Gardom's Edge. I reckon you can't beat an imposing buttress on a nice stroll. A few brave souls peered down the valley from the top of the buttress, then at an intersection with a path coming up from the valley we dropped down to the Robin Hood Pub for lunch.

After lunch it was into Chatsworth Park, along the forest and farmland ridge to the Hunting Tower. Although this was further than I'd planned we took in the lakes that feed the waterfall and fountain, a picturesque scene looking down to the House along the aqueduct. Then more rest and recuperation at the Tuck Shop where there was tea, cakes, and pies, boots were unlaced and sinews unstiffened before the drive home. They like their food these Mountain Goats.

A good day out, a pleasant walk with good friends.

Rob Crosby

For more information on the "*Mountain Goats*" go to <https://u3asites.org.uk/syston>

#### A few local history facts from Rob:

**The Hunting Tower:** 400ft above Chatsworth House, was completed in 1582 for Bess of Hardwick. She was well up in Elizabethan Society, the second richest woman in the country, married 4 times, a smart business woman who increased her inheritance from 3 of her husbands!

**Nelson's Column:** this is 3 metres high, erected by local businessman John Brightman in 1810 on Birchen Edge to commemorate Nelson's victories, 30 years before the Trafalgar Square version. It now has a 30cm stone ball on top (it wasn't there when I used to climb the crag, the ball was fitted to stop climbers like me doing that! The 3 large rocks near the column are named after Nelson's flag ships: Victory, Defiance and Royal Sovereign. There's hard but fairly short climbs along the grit stone edge, with nautical names like, Crow's Nest, Top Sail, and Nelson's Slab.

**Wellington's Monument:** was erected on the other side of the valley on Baslow Edge in 1815 by a local Army man, Dr Wrench, to commemorate the Battle of Waterloo, and to counterbalance Nelson's memorial at Birchen Edge.





Nelson's Column at Birchen Edge



The Three Ships



Wellington's Monument above Baslow

## Gardening

Gardening Group Visit to Westbrooke House, Market Harborough

We were somewhat nervous about our visit to this garden as neither Lesley nor I had visited it previously.



However, we need not have worried! 40 members of the Group were met by the owners, Brian and Joanne Drew, who were extremely welcoming and gave us a tour round their beautiful, newly-designed 6-acre

garden. They have created a delightful pleasure garden in the former walled kitchen garden with a display of 7000 tulips, to be followed by a wonderful planting of roses and herbaceous perennials.

After wandering around the wilder areas of the gardens, we enjoyed the obligatory tea and cake. It was a great afternoon.

*Sue Blaxland*

## **Liverpool**

A small group of us travelled to Liverpool for a short break, after a comfortable journey there we checked into our hotel overlooking the "Royal" Albert Docks. Having only just been given the title Royal by Prince Charles and Camilla two weeks earlier the area has many listed buildings so the signs can't be changed without special permission.

Once we had settled in we went off to explore. Some of us had a ride on an open top city explorer bus others visited the many museums and excellent cafes and restaurants. The cathedral was a magnificent site as was the Leonardo Da Vinci drawings in the museum. Beatles fans would be in heaven as almost everything is named after them or their music.

In the evening a visit to the Everyman Theatre to see Sweeney Todd was booked by a few who fancied seeing a bit of blood and pies, this was enjoyed by some but not enough blood for others ! Some of us booked to see "An evening of 60s music" at the Liverpool Philharmonic Theatre. The main band was Vanity Fair supporting Brian Poole ( who must be nearly 80 ), Dave Berry who looked quite frail but sure could sing and top of the bill was Peter Noone who was so full of energy he had us all up and dancing. After a good nights sleep we had the rest of the day to ourselves to explore more of the area until 4pm when we set off back home.

There is so much to see in Liverpool we barely scratched the surface. Maybe we can do it again next year and stay for a couple of nights. A great big thank you must go to Ann Winter for her hard work booking this trip.

*Barbara Sargeant*

## **British History Group**

Well, we covered a lot of ground yesterday in our British History group, and dealt with issues large and small as we move into Victorian times.

We learnt that:

From 1837-1840 Rowland Hill changed the postal system. Until then, postage was paid by the receiver, and not the sender. The introduction of the 'penny post' equalised costs across the country, led to the inventions of the letterbox and the pillar box, and post could be delivered up to 12 times a day.

- Robert Peel led the introduction of peacetime income tax in 1842 Britain because, he argued, and recorded in Hansard, that we couldn't go on with a deficit budget, and needed to reduce tariffs to increase trade.

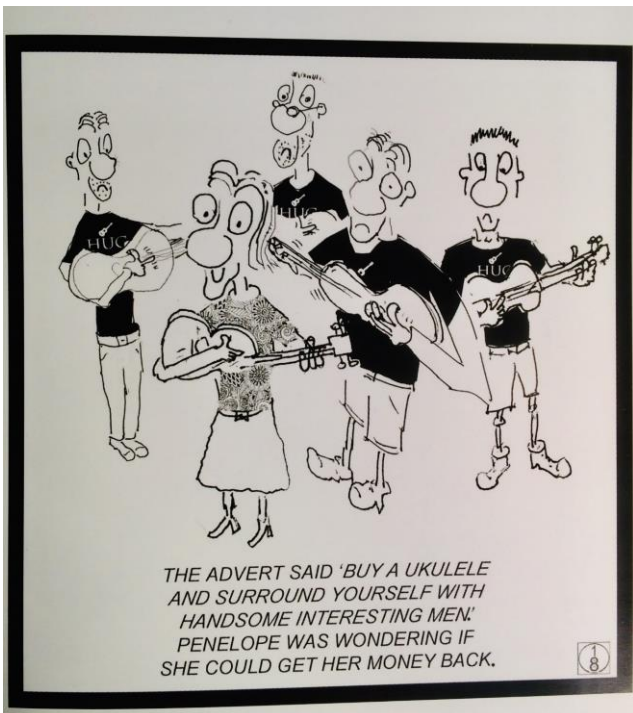
- 4500 British soldiers died in Afghanistan between 1838-1842 as we fought a war to keep the Russians from gaining access to India. Eventually we withdrew as the terrain benefitted only the Afghans defending their lands from invasion.
- The first Opium War in China in 1839 centred around trade and the use of opium, and Britain's role in supporting illegal imports which led to mass addictions among the population.
- Charles Dickens published Oliver Twist, weaving social commentary about the effects of life in the workhouse into fiction. Reading groups were established as people paid to hear it, and other Dickens works, read in public settings.
- In 1842 The House of Lords gave a ruling insisting that the Church of Scotland continued to allow the landowner to appoint Ministers without input from the congregation, and although, after 10 years of argument, the Church voted to accept the ruling, one third of the clergy and their supporters broke away and established the new Free Church of Scotland. An interesting example of a State and Church clash.

For our 10<sup>th</sup> June meeting we'll be moving on to the next chapter of Victoria's reign with another packed programme as we pick up the threads of;

- The Introduction of the Census – inviting our U3A Group leader from the Family History Group, Jane Vale to come and tell us more about that.
- Moving into the Arts, Norma will introduce us to the Pre Raphaelite Brotherhood established in 1849, and their works, many of which will be familiar.

*Pat Wherton*

## Syston Ukulele Band



The U3A Syston Happy Ukulele Band started about 16 months ago. Presently we have about 50 hardworking diligent members. The overwhelming majority had never played any musical instruments before they joined the band.

The band meets every Friday at The Brookside Club, next to the Brookside Café, near the blue bridge, otherwise known as the Millennium Bridge, Syston, at 1.45pm to commence at 2pm and finish at 3.30. Over the last year we have performed at numerous local venues, the most recent being at St. Peter and St. Paul's Church, Syston on Sunday 12th May. The audience enthusiastically joined in the singing and one person said it was better than a "West End Musical".

Len, or Dave, offer personal one to one tuition in a member's home or elsewhere to enable brand new members to catch up.

If you would like to have an enjoyable weekly sing-along and lots of laughs why not pop in on a Friday afternoon. Any existing Syston U3A member is more than welcome to attend before they purchase a ukulele, as well as those that are considering becoming U3A members. No prior musical knowledge or prior musical ability whatsoever is required due to the innovative teaching methods used.

*Len Abraham and Dave Houseman*



# COMING UP

## June Monthly Meeting

This month's topic is: What are micropubs?

Refreshments are available from 10.00, the meeting starts at 10.30a.m

12<sup>th</sup> June at Syston Conservative Club.

## Quizzing

We need a willing quizzier to restart the Quiz group and prepare for the Regional Network quiz in the autumn. We have the questions, we need the Question Asker! Please contact Sheila Driver if you are interested.

Sheila Driver at [sheiladriver@hotmail.com](mailto:sheiladriver@hotmail.com)

## You might be interested in:

### Race Night

Held by Syston Volunteer Centre

When? Saturday 15 June 7.30pm

Where? The Malt House Suite  
Syston Conservative Club

How Much? £10 per head to include supper

For tickets Contact :Ann Carter on 07521 393137 or  
Mark Smith Syston Volunteer Centre 0116 2607888