

Newsletter Oct 2023

October meeting

Around 150 people came to the October meeting to hear Louise Reed talk about Mary Kingsley and her travels in West Africa.



At the age of 28 Mary bought a one-way ticket on a 6 week voyage to what is now Gabon. She described the country as "disagreeable, smelly and loud".

After paddling up the Abgouli river she found a village and set up home.

Hippos, crocodiles, snakes and mosquitos were common and malaria, sleeping sickness and smallpox were endemic.

She spoke about many of her experiences including falling into an elephant trap and being the first woman to climb Mount Cameroon.

When questioned about where her man was she always replied that she was searching for him!

Her first stay lasted 9 months but she returned soon after because 'Africa called'.

Sadly she died quite young after catching fever.

It was a fascinating account of a woman who was many years ahead of her time.

September meeting – Rebecca Clarke



Rebecca explained that she was archivist for her family and developed an interest in the man who married her husband's great great Aunt. Sir William Pearce was born in 1833 and in 1851 he became a Shipwright's apprentice at Chatham Dockyard. By 1861 he was supervising the building of the first iron-hulled ship—HMS Achilles. He was poached by Lloyds Register to work in Glasgow and shortly afterwards joined Napier's Shipyard. In 1878 he became Senior Manager at Elders later renamed Fairfields.

While there he was involved in building ships that set records for transatlantic and channel crossings.

The company did a lot of work for the Royal Navy and it had a reputation for building ships very quickly. It built Troop Carriers in 30 days.

In 1885 he became MP for Govan.

He became extremely rich and owned a number of properties in Glasgow and London.

What really interested Rebecca was the man behind the business.

In 1882 as a married man, he began an affair with a lady who was the same age as his son. He later abandoned her and arranged to have her confined to an asylum.

While there he paid a doctor £5,000 to marry her. After her husband's death she married again but later returned to an asylum and was certified as a lunatic.

He had a reputation for affairs with actresses. With one in particular he fathered 2 children.

He died suddenly in 1888 and left a large sum of money to his son who inherited his father's attraction to actresses.

After a long affair he married Carrie Cook in 1905 and died 18 months after the wedding.

It seems that the women who came into contact with father and son did not have a great life.

Rebecca is writing a book (Pearced) about the lives of these women.

August meeting

A welcome return by Andrew Baker, who has already spoken to us twice before. This time his subject was the obscenity trial against Penguin Books, the publisher of DH Lawrence's novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.

Andrew took us back to 1960: "When we'd won the war, but returned to a world in which we were told what was proper and what was not. But the old world was in retreat from the mid-'50s to the '60s... and the establishment found itself in wholesale retreat."

The paperback book – affordable to all at just three-and-sixpence – was the first subject of a trial under the 1959 Obscene Publications Act because of its references to sex. The prosecuting barrister calculated that it contained 13 instances of the F word and 12 of the C word, and he famously asked: "Is it a book that you would even wish your wife or your servants to read?"

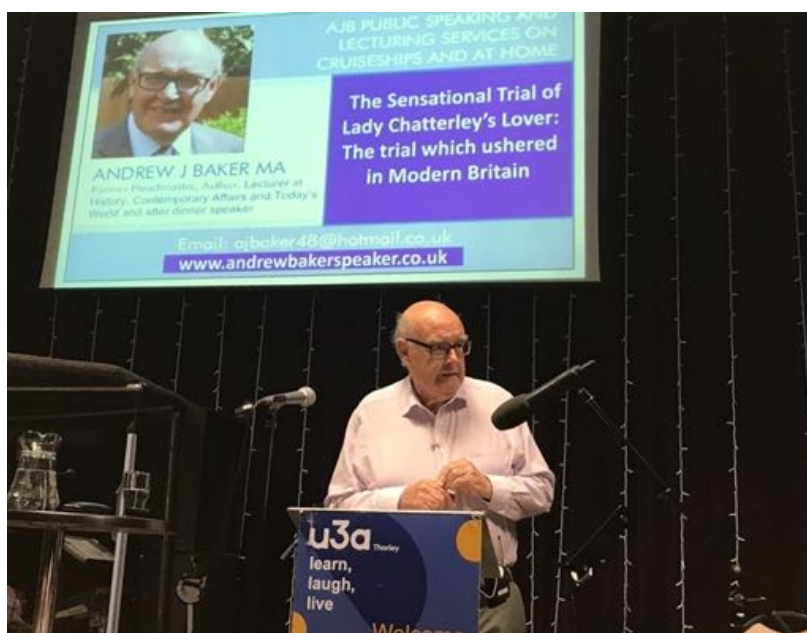
The defence wryly commented that by 1960 a lot of people did not have servants!

It was telling that no witnesses could be found to condemn the book, while the defence lawyers produced 35 eminent writers, critics, academics and other distinguished witnesses to give evidence in its favour.

The jury, consisting of nine men and three women, took just three hours to return their verdict that the book was not obscene but was a work of literary merit.

This meant that *Lady Chatterley's Lover* could legally go on sale. The first print run of 200,000 sold out in a day and eventually 3 million copies were sold.

It was a watershed moment, the beginning of the "permissive" or "civilised" society of the the 1960s. As Andrew said: "It was the first substantial battle between the forces of liberalism and those whom George Orwell characterised as the striped trousered."



Lively trip to Liverpool

Our late August holiday to Liverpool was action packed! On arrival on the Monday we had time to explore the beautifully restored Albert Dock, with its galleries and cafés, before heading to our hotel... where a surprise awaited us.

It turned out that the Dixie Dean Hotel specialises in hen parties at the weekends, so all of its glamorously decorated bedrooms sleep at least six and some up to 28! Mid-week there were no parties, but all of our U3A couples and singles enjoyed enormous bedrooms, mostly with jacuzzi baths. Very comfy, with a choice of beds!

We also enjoyed lots of sightseeing. On Tuesday we had a guided tour of all the sights of Liverpool, then spent the afternoon in the lovely Victorian seaside resort of Southport.

Blackpool was the destination on Wednesday. Think piers, promenades, kiss-me-quick hats and of course the famous Tower, where some of our members danced to the Wurlitzer in the famous ballroom to celebrate Julie's birthday.

That evening we were concerned we might have to cancel our planned quiz because the hotel public rooms had low-level lighting designed for youthful party-goers. But the ever helpful staff came to our rescue with lots of candles!

On Thursday we headed to Port Sunlight, the pretty village built by soap magnate William Lever to house his factory workers. And no trip to Liverpool would be complete without the Beatles tour, which we did in the afternoon, followed by a ferry across the Mersey for some of our group.

Friday it was time to head home, but not before enjoying a couple of hours in Lichfield at the halfway point.

A huge thank you to Maggie Bennett for organising the holiday – you made 45 of us very happy.

Pictures on next page by Nick Ambrose, Liz Happer and Carmen Konopka



Singers enjoy a garden party

Members of the U3A Singers got together for a Garden Party in August, to enjoy tea, cakes and a fun social afternoon.

Members also brought prizes for a raffle, so everyone left with a prize and we raised £45 towards choir funds.

The choir is currently practising for its Christmas Concert on December 2nd, when there will be a very varied programme, ranging from classical songs to sea shanties, pop to festive music.

Anyone who would like to join the choir would be very welcome. At the moment we are all ladies, but we would also like to recruit some gents. Our practice sessions are on Thursday afternoons at the Havers Community Centre.

You don't need to be able to read music and there are no auditions – we just ask that you can sing in tune.

If you're interested, please email Carmen Konopka at carmen.konopka@btopenworld.com



U3A Singers join Choir Festival

The U3A Singers were among the six choirs taking part in the Bishop's Stortford Choir Festival at the beginning of October.

Like the other choirs, they performed a three-song programme – *It Must Be Love* (made famous by Madness), Billy Joel's *Lullabye* and a traditional gospel song.

Then all six choirs sang together. The joint performance of two rounds – a Ghanaian folksong called *Tue Tue* and Purcell's *Laudate Deum* nearly raised the roof as around 250 voices combined!

The event, held at the Methodist Church, was a great opportunity to be a part of the town's vibrant music scene and all the U3A Singers enjoyed it enormously.

The festival also raised funds for Isabel Hospice, with a four-figure sum being raised by singers paying a sub to join the event and by donations made for the tea and cakes served by hospice volunteers.



Art Group

On a rainy Friday several of the U3A Art Group went by coach with the Bishop's Stortford Art Society to the Patchings Art Festival which was in Nottinghamshire. As you can see from the photos, it was not packed. All the stands were under cover with the weather very wet.

Most of the art stands held free demonstrations of their products and these were very informative. Paul Greeves, an artist, had a demonstration with water colours of how to use green in many different ways.

Soraya French gave a demonstration using ink and knife. As you can see it was wonderful and very informative

Unfortunately we did not get long enough to give the Craft Marquee our full attention. The time went too quickly. As you can see the trip was a huge success.



Family History Group

In July we thoroughly enjoyed a talk from Kathy Chater. She is a recognised genealogist and has been tracing her own ancestry for over forty years. She is a published author of several Family History books and spoke to us about 'Turning Your Tree into a Tale'. She offered many excellent ideas including using newspaper, setting our ancestors in the context of their local and social history and thinking about their typical working day and leisure time.



In September we had a members' session when many contributed to tell of the unusual happenings in their family trees. It was surprising to hear of ancestors being hounded out of the Scottish Presbyterian church for 'fornication before marriage', bigamists, finding that ancestors weren't actually your relations and death recorded as slipping on a banana skin!

Garden Group 2

Garden Group 2 visited Heyrons at High Easter on Monday July 17th.

The well manicured garden stretched out to the adjoining fields and had a variety of shrubs, dahlias, poppies and the last of the roses and a selection of lovely pots.



Garden Group 2 visited Impington Mill and Gardens near Cambridge on August 21st

As well as a guided tour of the Gardens they also had the opportunity to go up into the mill and were able to see the internal structures and workings.



Thorley U3A Committee



Carmen
Konopka
Chair



Sue Warren
Vice-Chair



Ken Blethyn
Treasurer



Diana Austin
Groups
Co-ordinator



John Bailey
Asst Treasurer



Roger Doughty
Membership
Co-ordinator



Tom McNeeney
EDI Officer



Anne Willett
Events organiser



Pam Archer
Business
Secretary



David Willett
Communications
Co-ordinator



Linda Maxwell
Speaker
Co-ordinator