

# WIRRAL U3A



## MERSEY TUNNEL TOUR

Once more an intrepid band of our members has headed for regions not previously explored by the majority of Merseyside citizens. This time it was a visit to the Queensway Tunnel aka the Birkenhead Tunnel. A quirk of history led to the Queensway Tunnel being opened by a King, and the Kingsway Tunnel by a Queen.

Our day began at the Pier Head Ventilation Building with some confusion as some of the group were initially declared missing, only to be found in the nick of time wandering around Mann Island. My fault for assuming that people were as familiar with that part of the city as I was. A few minutes were spent examining photographs and models in the entrance foyer while some heeded the warning and made use of the time with a sensibly timed toilet visit. We were then asked to don safety helmets by our guides, Alison and Billy who gave a brief history of the tunnel and its construction.

The tour itself then began with a climb up four floors to the former control room. Fears that some would be abandoned on the stairs in a state of exhaustion to be recovered later were groundless and we found ourselves in a control room little changed from the 1960s. As a lifelong lover of anything with dials and meters, your scribe was suitably impressed and a little saddened to discover that the whole thing has now been reduced to a desk computer and a phone line. Alf felt something liquid drop on his head, and we were warned by Billy not to look up as the resident pigeon was roosting above.



This caused Alf some concern, “Just joking” declared Billy. We were soon to learn that many things that he referred to were the preamble to us being fooled and a good job it wasn’t April 1st I say. We left the control room heading down to the tunnel level taking care to avoid too much contact with the handrails. These were covered in some sort of black lead last used for blacking coal grates. Apparently this was the result of having the contractors in. In this context ‘the contractors’ are a form of mythical beast on which all blame can be placed. Reaching the bottom of the stairs we found ourselves at Tunnel level and followed Billy with Alison bringing up the rear to make sure no-one escaped. We arrived at an impressive fire proof pair of doors and made our way through in small groups onto one of the escape platforms above the roadway. Billy had advised us against staring at the traffic too long in any one direction in case we developed tunnel vision (sic).



The area led into a safe room away from any incident.



Interestingly the Kingsway tunnel doesn’t have safe room in this way. As it is a twin tube tunnel, the escape route is into the adjacent tube. Leaving the lower level we climbed back up to a vast internal space reaching from ground level up inside to the top of the building. This was the ventilation machinery room and plenum chamber communicating by massive air ducts to the tunnel. Fresh air is blown in to the tunnel by high capacity fans and then pulled out again by more fans. The original installation consisted of four huge fans around twenty feet in

diameter and seeing one of these being started and brought up to speed was perhaps the thing that impressed me more than anything. These have been largely superseded by high speed modern fans enclosed in smooth casings but not nearly so impressive. At one point we took a detour to view the under deck and support arches of the area between the Cunard Building and the Mersey Docks Board building. This was built on top of the old George’s Dock.

We finished what was an interesting and informative tour after ninety minutes in the care of two knowledgeable and good humoured guides. A trip enjoyed by all.

*Reporter: Dave Buckingham Photographer: Ken Ashford*

## U3A WALKERS

The day after storm Dennis a party of 4 hardy souls walked from St Michael’s station, through the site of the former Festival Gardens and along the prom up to the Albert Dock. The seas were still heavy enough to force the cancellation of ferry services. Debris indicated the previous tide had stormed the southern end of the prom but further north the sea wall was higher so the path was clean. Once at journey’s end we warmed up in the Albert Dock Costa.

Photo Alf Povall



# Dome of Home



On Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> March a group of 12 intrepid Wirral U3A members went on a visit to the Dome of Home in New Brighton. The weather was very blustery and cold but the welcome we received was warm. Three volunteers greeted us and took us on a tour of this very interesting place. The church was built because the former Roman Catholic Church was too small for the needs of the parishioners. In 1920 Fr Mullins purchased the land for £3,000 and during the following 12 years raised £58,000 to build the new church which was built to

emulate the baroque churches of Portugal and Spain. It was named St Peter, Paul and Philomena but was given its nickname of the Dome of Home by sailors returning from across the Atlantic during WW2 as the sight of the dome was so welcoming. The church and its congregation grew for many years but then numbers fell as they did with so many churches across the country. It was in 2008 that the church was closed.

Following a public outcry of dismay, and a large injection of funds from various places, the church was reopened in 2012 as a Shrine Church which is very different from a parish church. A notable factor of this is the celebration of the Mass in Latin which has led to a steady increase in the congregation with people travelling from near and far to participate. The priests in residence at the moment come from France. Our visit concluded with tea in the presbytery and we gave a donation to the church which was received with thanks. The visit was most worthwhile for anybody with an interest in local history or the church.



Reporter: Diane Adams Photography: Ken Ashford

# PLAGUE DIARY

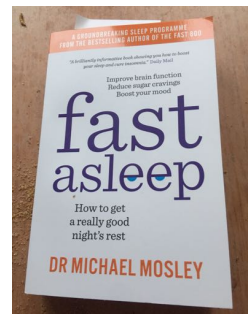


March 23rd.

We squeeze in our last U3A walk the day the government issues new instructions to stay at home. Here we pose at the WHO recommended distance of 1 metre apart. We are reprimanded twice, once for straying on the private part of the golf course and once for being too close together.

March 24th

Another gorgeous sunny day. Decide to walk before breakfast inspired by book *Fast Asleep*. The author suggests getting outside for at least 20 minutes first thing. The book is a present for an insomniac friend but being unable to hand it over at the moment I begin to dip into it myself.



## Introduction

1. How we woke up to sleep
2. What puts us to sleep and what keeps us awake
3. Are you getting enough?
4. Tried and tested ways to boost your sleep
5. Eating your way to a good night's sleep
6. The Fast Asleep programme
7. How to manage shift work and jet lag

Boris sends me a text which appears on all my devices. Well not him personally. I surmise our government has told the phone companies to message all their clients. So I am puzzled when some friends get in touch to suggest meeting up. Why have they not received the same message? Or do they just not check their inbox. My niece thought it a hoax but I assure her it is genuine. The link takes you to the government website.

I re-instal 2 large bird baths which I replace every winter with smaller drinking dishes and they are instantly popular

with the wood pigeons who seem to think they are ducks. A friend phones to query why the birds are ignoring her sunflower seed which she stocked up on. She has only bought the black and white striped kind. I tell her if there are any passing parrots they will be in luck but otherwise she could try baking the seeds to see if the husks will split.

March 25th

Date of my car MOT. I had to wait over a week for an appointment then the Stay Home regulations began. Phoning the garage at 8:30 this morning I am amazed when firstly someone answers and secondly I can take my car in. I walk home, not daring to board a bus. I take advantage of the space on my drive to tidy my shed and do a bit of DIY which for me means adding a few more hooks. I trudge wearily back to the garage. I am tired and it has suddenly got very warm. Insects are buzzing about. I have to change into lighter clothing. The mechanic tells me police are having to move people on in parks. They are not taking the regulations seriously. Only commercial vehicles have been given 3 months respite on MOTs.

Am eating just 2 meals a day now but have re-introduced carbs into my diet. Despite this I am not putting on weight.

One of the neighbour's has an argument with his wife. I wonder if the divorce rate will go up as it does after Christmas.

March 26th

My wooden shed is so dry the paint is soaked up straight away. Next I tackle my most unruly border and plant up an Amelanchier and a thorn free pyracantha which were bought some time ago. Then I plant out some pot bulbs which have finished flowering, siting them under trees where the grass struggles to grow. The friend with the striped sunflower seeds knocks so we have a conversation through the window and I hand over sunflower hearts. She hasn't tried the oven method yet.

Our treasurer phones simultaneously so I call him back when my friend has gone and am touched that our U3A is doing their bit to help those who are isolated.

March 27th

Whilst crouching down filling the birds' breakfast tray my 2 pound loaf tin falls out of the cupboard and clouts me on the back of the head. A bump swells up immediately. Then I set off on my early morning walk and trip over a bunch of daffodils whilst rubber-necking. I end up on my hands and knees. Undeterred I carry on. Once home I give the shed its 2nd coat-hurrah, that's 2 tins less cluttering up the shed. Somehow I have acquired 4 weed spray guns. I use up 2 of these. Then I get my own back on the neighbours who spent hours using some noisy device. I creosote my gate! After this I resort to gardening.

March 28th

What a good job I cracked on with the gate and shed during sunny weather because today is cold and grey, chilly enough to warrant keeping on the heating. Having watered my recent plantings I retire indoors to compute my diary.

March 29th

On my walk I meet by chance a friend who in working life was a pathologist. When I quiz her about Covid 19 she thinks there are several strains of the virus which could account for the varying death rate in different countries. She also tells me the clocks have jumped forward. I had noticed my smart watch was an hour ahead of my lounge clock but assumed I'd overslept and the latter had stopped.

I begin the U3A newsletter, creating it on my I pad. With the closure of libraries I am unable to email anything created on my laptop. The programme behaves differently. I remind my neighbour to put out her milk money. Some days ago I gave her homemade bread and fixed her up with doorstep delivery after her family were unable to buy bread and milk. She is housebound. She cannot get a slot for internet groceries till the middle of April.

March 30th

Neighbours across the way are busily tipping the contents of their garage into a skip. Their cat decides it needs a better viewpoint so it jumps from the garage roof onto the up & over door. It's weight depresses the door just as father emerges from the interior. What a good job he's not very tall. I set off on a shopping expedition for myself and my neighbour. As usual there isn't any bread flour. Seeing raspberries I decide to try out a new recipe. My neighbour asks for frozen cauliflower but the best I can find is a medley of heads. The raspberries combined with black beans, figs and almond flour makes a yummy brownie. Easy preparations, not a lot of messy washing up. No eggs required which is a bonus as it may be difficult to find them on my next shopping trip.

Face timing my big brother In France I refer to the high infection numbers in Italy. He tells me Italians live in multigenerational homes so the older folk cannot self isolate. I also learn you can bake paper at 60 Centigrade for 15 mins that will kill the virus. They have made their own hand wash using alcohol. "Not the expensive stuff all the French guests clubbed together to buy for your Golden Wedding" I gasp. My sister-in-law plays clarinet in an orchestra so all the players and spouses were at the party. She later ends me a link to an hilarious item on YouTube which I have turned into script for you on page 7.

March 31st

It becomes obvious to me that the bin wagon will not get down our street due to double parking. Normally folk would be at work at this time of day. I spend a long day in the back garden. Robins can tell the difference between forks and spades and hand forks and trowels. As soon as the 2 former are produced they are underfoot. My friend of the striped seeds tracks me down and leaning on the newly creosoted gate tells me she has a pair of song thrushes coming to her bird table. I am deeply envious. Although the green bin wagon eventually gets through the brown bin wagon never materialises today and I wonder if there aren't enough crews to man the wagons.

April 1st

I am beginning to see more people on my early morning walk. We hail one another. Rarely is an individual wearing something across their face. You should hear my housebound neighbour on the topic of face masks. Having worked in an factory producing medicines she is au fait with hygiene practices.

Two Open Reach vans are parked with 2 workmen from 1 standing shoulder to shoulder at the driver's window of the other van, smoking and deep in conversation about Covid 19. As I pass by I overhear a remark about "old people". Oh dear. Later I see a light van delivering to a corner shop. The driver is carrying in bottle of milk in his arms. He isn't wearing gloves. What a contrast to the lorry delivering to a supermarket. The driver and his mate were kitted out in gloves and face masks.

I spend ages trying to add a page to this document. The Help section isn't proving very helpful. I create a series of blank pages at the end of the document but I can't move them up to where they are needed. Finally I decide to cut and paste. Nor can I delete a page. Delete one and you lose the lot! Also the machine thinks it can spell better than me. I appreciate auto-correct but not cavalier substitution of correctly spelt items. Some of the sentences read like those instruction sheets for assembling items where the author has a rocky grasp of the English language. My smart watch is unhappy that I am spending so long sitting so hourly tells me to stand up and move about for a minute. I pacify it by performing 20 star jumps.

When the Globe is delivered this evening I see the front page news which solves the mystery of why I kept passing houses today where rainbows were displayed in windows or crayoned on paths.

April 2nd

Copses nearby are carpeted by wood anemones. A Queen Bumble Bee exploring for nest holes taps on my window several times. She has been fooled by the plants on the window sill. She will be lucky to find anywhere in local gardens. Yesterday I put out 5 almonds that had defeated my nutcrackers. The squirrel still hasn't found them. I'm awaiting delivery of bird food but it still hasn't arrived. Delivery men at least are finding folk at home these days when they call. Today I clean window frames. I am sorry to say the outside is cleaner than the interior. By donning reading glasses I can see just how dirty they are. Without glasses my home looks immaculate.

# Sexing Computers

A class of mature students studying computers were asked by their tutor to spend 10 minutes deciding what sex computers should be. Prior to embarking on discussion the students were divided into 2 groups on a gender basis.

*The men suggested computers should be female because*

- ▶ *Only their Creator can understand their internal working logic*
- ▶ *When communicating with each other they use a code known only to themselves and a handful of experts*
- ▶ *Any mistakes you make are stored on the hard drive forever and can be retrieved in an instant*
- ▶ *As soon as you commit to one model you spend half your pay cheque accessorising it*

*The women said computers should be male because*

- ▶ *Despite being packed with data they couldn't think for themselves*
- ▶ *You had to "turn them on" to get their attention*
- ▶ *They are supposed to help solve problems but often they are the problem*
- ▶ *After you commit to one particular model you realise if you'd waited that little bit longer something better would have appeared on the scene.*

On 9th March 6 U3A Walkers explored the Sefton coast at Crosby. This comprises attractive terraces fronted by a series of marine gardens. Beyond this lies Crosby lake and other pools. Once we'd walked the length of the gardens we headed to the beach, passing an area where sea buckthorn had been scrubbed out to create a grassy breeding ground for skylarks. A JCB was

busily engaged on scooping sand off the prom and returning it to the beach. All the iron men were underwater.

It was too cold to linger so we left the prom, taking the shortest way back to



civilisation. We installed ourselves in a bistro, part of a leisure complex quite close to the Seaforth docks. My attempts to take a photo of the giant mural on the gable end of one of the Seaforth sheds were frustrated by buildings in the foreground. Daphne later took the photo using the telephoto lens on her mobile phone.



Part of a mural seen on our walk up to the Albert Dock on 10th February



The money awarded for assisting the magician at our Williamson meeting. Sadly a fake.



Seen at Ness Gardens. Suggestions please as to what on earth they are? Finally ..... to cheer you up .....

