

# u3a Wirral

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

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## Dear Wirral u3a member,

Welcome to the first newsletter of 2023.

We have had a good start to the new year. There were two excellent speakers for the first meetings of the year. They both had clear slides with the revolutionary idea of including some text! They were also prepared to use the microphone. Let's hope that we can keep this up.

It was also good to see some new members.

At the end of this edition of the newsletter, I've included a reminder about the new requirement for photo identity if you are intending to vote in person in the local elections in May. There was a report in the news this week that the percentage of people from the group whom the Electoral Commission have estimated would need to apply is worryingly low.

See you at the next meeting.

Joy

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## Chair's message

Hello Everyone!

I hope you are still managing to keep your new year resolutions? Mine was not to make any new year resolutions and so far, it seems to be working quite well. The benefit of experience along life's path!

We have had 2 excellent talks in January, although the numbers have been a bit disappointing. I know this is the time to escape to warmer climes, but if you have any friends who are wondering what to do with their Monday morning, please bring them along. Looking forward to seeing you in February.

Take care.

**Janet**

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## Upcoming Events

### February 6

Brush Up Your Shakespeare  
Coral Greenwood

### February 20

My Life with Animals  
Teresa Ferguson

### March 6

Witches and Superstitions  
Jean Finney

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## Outings

### 16th March

Liverpool bus tour

Hop on/Hop off. Lasts 50 minutes. Departs from Albert Dock.

£8. Pre-booking not required.

This is a Buddy Trip.

Contact Dave Buckingham

### 28th February

Llandudno and Colwyn Bay

£21 per person BUT second person only pays £10!

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## Venue

We have returned to the Williamson!

Tea and coffee are served at 10.00am. The speaker starts at 10:45.

Entrance fee is now £2.

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## Meetings

### Queen Victoria

Elizabeth Davey

There have been so many books and films about Queen Victoria that most of us can claim some knowledge of her reign and personal life. Nevertheless, Elizabeth Davey gave a unique presentation which was clearly well resourced and made links with the Queen's visits to Liverpool (when it always seemed to rain – the Queen took particularly care to record this in her diary!). Queen Victoria appears never to have made official visits to the Wirral.

Elizabeth Davey showed some of the frustrations the young queen experienced in her efforts to escape the discipline imposed upon her by her dominant mother and others who expected her to submit to their own personal bids for power. Elizabeth Davey led us skilfully through Victoria's public and private life showing the young queen's transformation from a much repressed and nervous teenager to the great queen who ruled wisely and whose reign influenced royalty and members of the public all over the world.

There were amazing changes in technology during Victoria's reign with many new inventions appearing. One was photography which was not available to record her Coronation. Instead, the public had to rely on artists' impressions.

Victoria married her cousin Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Saalfeld in 1840. With the support of her beloved husband, Victoria gained knowledge of economy and industry. She was devastated when he died aged 42 in 1861. While his cause of death was given as Typhoid Fever, re-examination of the symptoms he'd been experiencing for several years, suggests he may have had Crohn's disease or even abdominal cancer. After Albert's death, Victoria withdrew from public life. Even so, she is credited with having had an enormous and stabilising influence so much so that her subjects regarded her in many ways as a mother figure. In 1896, Victoria became the longest serving British monarch (until she was overtaken in 2015 by Queen Elizabeth II) and the nation celebrated with a Diamond Jubilee. Only 5 years later, the nation was plunged into a different mood: deeply shocked and in mourning when Victoria passed away aged 81.

**Monica** (with some additions by Joy)

{**Note from Newsletter Editor:** There is a wonderful first-hand description of a village celebrating Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in Flora Thompson's 'Lark Rise to Candleford'.}

## Coffee corner moment

### Christmas cracker jokes(?)

What kind of motorbike does Santa ride?

*A Holly Davidson*

Why couldn't the skeleton go to the party?

*Because he had no body to go with!*

(Thank you Joan)

What do elves learn at school?

*The alphabet.*

(Thank you Janet)

What do you call a musical fish?

*A piano-tuna*

What goes woof-woof-tick?

*A watch dog.*

Someone stole all the toilets in the Police Station

*The police have nothing to go on*

(Thank you, Joy)

I think that's enough of those until next Christmas!

## Walk through Liverpool

Cledwyn Thomas

Cledwyn gave us a whistle-stop tour through Liverpool, featuring some of the sites, buildings and memorials, dating back to the 18th century.

The tour commenced with Compton House on Church Street, currently occupied by the Marks & Spencer store. Compton House was built in 1867 as a department store for the brothers William and James Jeffrey, who came from Plymouth but were in Liverpool by 1832. The building replaced an earlier one destroyed by fire in 1865. Compton House was one of the first purpose-built department stores in Europe. Le Bon Marché, the large department store in Paris, was built in 1869. William Jeffrey suffered a stroke, leaving his brother to run the store alone. Eventually, the cost of running the store outran the income and in March 1871 the store closed. Subsequently, the building was converted into a hotel, named the Compton Hotel, which opened in 1873. Although a hotel, the ground floor featured a number of shops. The hotel catered mainly for American, hence the inclusion of symbolic eagles within the building's architecture. However, with a decline in the economy, the hotel closed in 1927. Marks & Spencer moved into Compton House in 1928. Note: The Marks & Spencer store is due relocate in mid-2023 to the vacant Debenhams store in Liverpool 1. What will become of Compton House now?

Cledwyn Thomas gave a condensed history of the origins of the Marks and Spencer company. Michael Marks (from Belarus) met Tom Spencer (from Skipton) in Leeds and they formed a company in 1894. Michael Marks had a stall in Birkenhead open market in 1901. In 1903 Marks and Spencer were allocated stall numbers 11 and 12 in the centre aisle of the market hall and they opened one of their famous Penny Bazaars. The company left Birkenhead market in 1923.

Marks and Spencer called their original stores "Penny Bazaars", adding the words "Admission Free". This was a successful marketing ploy, encouraging customers to browse without any obligation to buy. Whilst this is the norm now, it was unheard of then.

Cledwyn showed a photograph of the Marks and Spencer Penny Bazaar on Lime Street. The photo was taken circa 1912, but the store was probably open by 1900. Incidentally, Tom Spencer died in 1905 and Michael Marks died in 1907.

Cledwyn went on to mention St Peter's Church (after which Church Street is named). It was built in 1700 and was almost directly opposite the buildings between Williamson Street and Tarleton Street. St Peter's was the pro-cathedral, before construction of Liverpool Cathedral commenced in 1904. Sometime after 1904, there was a proposal to demolish St Peter's, and use funds from the sale of the site towards the cost of building the cathedral. Two retail companies were interested in purchasing the site, Harrods and Woolworths. Harrods pulled out, so Woolworths went ahead, purchased the site and built a large flagship store, which opened in 1923 (and closed in the 1980s).

A brass Maltese cross, set in the granite pavement, marks the exact position of doors into the church (from Church Street). This cross is directly below the clock which was above the entrance to the former Woolworths store and now marks the entrance to Liverpool One from Church Street.

By the way, the first Woolworths store in the UK was opened in Liverpool in 1909, in the building currently occupied by Clarks shoe shop. Woolworths was already seeking to expand their very successful store when they learned about the opportunity to purchase the St Peter's site. (Some

people posting on Liverpool history sites have mistakenly suggested that the large store, which opened in 1923, was the first Woolworths store in the UK).

Cledwyn described the Sailors' Home, which used to occupy the site on the corner where Paradise Street crosses Hanover Street. The Home was a splendid building, open from 1850 to 1969, providing safe lodging for sailors. The entrance to the home was protected by gates, which were closed at night to prevent seamen from entering the home after the strict 10 pm curfew.

The gates were elaborate decorative pieces of ironwork and were very heavy. Due to damage in WW2, the gates were removed in 1951 and taken to Sandwell. After restoration, the gates were returned to Liverpool in 2011 and re-erected in the pedestrian section of Paradise Street, close to the original site of the Sailors' Home. The gates are a monument to the thousands of Merchant Seamen who passed through them during the years the Sailors' Home operated. The Home itself was demolished circa 1975 and the site then remained empty until construction of Liverpool One. The new John Lewis store, which opened in 2008, was built on the site.

Sadly, while the home was in operation, two separate deaths were caused by one of the gates falling (due to poor maintenance). The first death was in 1852, when a gate fell on Mary Ann Price, the wife of the porter, as he was closing the gate. The second death occurred in 1907, when a police officer was killed in a similar accident.

The next stage of the "walk through Liverpool" concerned Chorley Court, which was off the eastern end of Dale Street, just east of Trueman Street. Chorley Court was an area of very poor housing and was still in existence in 1925. It was the birthplace of Robert Morris (1734-1896). At the age of 13, Robert migrated to Maryland, to join his father. Later, Robert moved to Philadelphia and worked in shipping and banking. Eventually, Robert was a signatory of the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, and the United States Constitution. Of the men who signed both the Declaration and Constitution, only two men also signed the Articles of Confederation. One was Robert Morris (the other was Roger Sherman) who is widely regarded as one of the three founders of the financial system of the United States.

Cledwyn later mentioned St George's Church, which stood in the middle of Derby Square. The church opened in 1734 and closed in 1897. It was built on the site of the old castle. In fact, the tower and spire were built over part of the rubble-filled moat. This unstable base caused structural problems, so the church had to be re-built, between 1819 and 1825.

St George's church was both owned and maintained by the City Council and it was the place of worship for the mayor, council and judiciary. In 1863 Charles Mozley, who was Jewish, was elected mayor. Consequently, the minister at the church (James Kelly) delivered an anti-Semitic sermon. He preached against the election of a Jewish Mayor and said that Charles Mozley would not be welcome in his church. As a result, the mayor and corporation ceased to attend St. George's. After that, the congregation dwindled. Eventually, the church was closed in 1897 and subsequently demolished. In 1902 the site was used for the construction of the Victoria Monument.

Cledwyn then moved on to talk about sea-bathing. He mentioned the bath house, which was built in 1756, close to the shoreline at the north end of where Princes Dock is now located. The road to this bath house was called Bath Street, which still exists. The baths were purchased by the local authority in 1794 but they had disappeared by the time Princes Dock was built. Construction of this dock started about 1810.

From 1816 to 1843 a floating bath existed, just off Princes Dock. It was very popular with bathers but had a negative impact on shipping, so was removed by order of the Harbour Master in July 1843.

St Georges Baths opened in 1829 and were the UK's first publicly owned baths. They were on the waterfront, between the river and Georges Dock. The present ferry terminal marks the location of these baths. They may have been owned by Liverpool Corporation, but the price of admission was beyond the reach of the working classes.

Cledwyn referred to the tragedy that occurred in February 1810, when the steeple of St Nicholas' church collapsed, killing 25 people, most of them young girls from the Moorfield Charity School, and their teacher (who was only 14). The church was badly damaged in WW1, so was rebuilt circa 1950. The restored tower has four clock faces. Three of them have white backgrounds but the fourth, on the east side of the tower, as a dark blue background, representing the colour of the school uniform for the Moorfield Charity School.

Cledwyn conducted a speedy tour of the monuments at the Pier Head (by which time my concentration was flagging). However, a few stood out. Firstly, the memorial to the Chinese seamen, who were deported after WW2, without their wives and families being told, causing much anguish and misery. Secondly, the Memorial to Heroes of the Marine Engine Room. I was unaware of its presence, but I'm pleased to learn of its existence, as my father was a marine engineer. In WW2 he served on Atlantic Convoys before transferring to submarines. Thankfully, he survived. The third memorial which caught my attention was the Canada Boulevard, the avenue of maple trees commemorating the sacrifice of Canadians during the Battle of the Atlantic.

**Jo**

## **Liverpool Memories**

I asked members if they would be willing to share memories that Cledwyn's talk brought back. I'm very pleased that Jo responded with a family reminiscence.

### George and Annie

St Nicholas church in Liverpool has been the sailors' church for many years. Until 1899, when Georges Dock was filled in, fishermen would sail into the dock to unload their catches. St Nicholas church was just a short walk from where they had moored their boats. My great-grandparents, George Bird and Annie Salisbury, were married at the church in February 1880. George Bird was a Hoylake fisherman. Like many other Hoylake fisherfolk, George and Annie may have sailed to Georges Dock for their wedding. There were several reasons for this. Firstly, travel by boat from Hoylake to Liverpool would have been easier than a trek along muddy roads, followed by a ferry ride across the Mersey. Secondly, St Nicolas Church apparently held mass weddings from time to time and the cost of these weddings to the participants was considerably cheaper. Finally, the clergy at St Nicholas had a more relaxed attitude towards brides who were pregnant. In fact, my great grandmother already had a child, Joseph, born in October 1879. Annie went on to have thirteen more children, sadly dying with the birth of the fourteenth. Poor girl.

**Jo**

## Groups

### Walking Group

#### Meyer Park and Port Sunlight Village

The Walking Group first walk of 2023 started at Meyer Park in Bebington. Some of us had been on a walk led by Richie the Ranger (a speaker from last October) and had to trawl the memory banks for what he'd told us about the history of the Park and the House. When I was a child, the House was the Public Library. I loved going into the small rooms lined with books – just like in some of the books set in 'Country Houses' I'd read about. The park planting also seems different – less sign of annual bedding (OK this was January!).



We wandered through the park, under the railway line and into Port Sunlight. We walked along the Dell where there were signs of snowdrops emerging. Spring can't be far away. 😊

**Joy**

## More Important News

### Photo ID to vote

From 4 May 2023, voters in England will need to show photo ID to vote at polling stations in some elections including the forthcoming local elections. Don't panic! You may well already have the right documents with a photo you can use (eg passport, driving licence and bus pass). If you are not sure, then you can check on the Electoral Commission's website:

<https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter/voter-id/accepted-forms-photo-id>