

u3a Wirral

[Website] <https://u3asites.org.uk/wirral/home>

Chair's message

Hello Everyone!

First to start with some sad news. We were very sorry to hear of Brian Gill's passing last week after a long illness. We send Monica our heartfelt condolences and will be thinking of her in this difficult time ahead.

So sorry I was unable to make it to the talk about herbal remedies. You really wouldn't have appreciated my coughing all morning. When I went to Heswall u3a country dancing recently I was told there's something going round called 100-day cough, so maybe I need more than herbs for that!

Our next opera at the Light cinema is on Easter Sunday at 2pm and it's Madame Butterfly. I hope I don't have a conflict of interests on that day, as there is a possibility Leasowe Lighthouse will also be open. I can see I shall have to be in two places at once!

Regards

Janet

Newsletter Editor's message

Dear Wirral u3a member,

Janet has told you about the sad passing of Bryan Gill. Members will remember that he's spoken at several meetings. In his last talk in which he regaled us with stories of life in rural Spain where he moved to in the early 1980s, initially with no running water or electricity, and stayed for 15 years. Our thoughts are with Monica.

I occasionally glance at the Liverpool Echo online and earlier this week I was taken on a trip down memory lane in which they had an item on the department store 'Robbs' which used to stand in Grange Road, Birkenhead. That took me back to schooldays and the twice-yearly purchase of school uniform! The Echo history section is well worth a look at – particularly if you are feeling nostalgic!

Joy

Meetings

March 4th

Radio 1 in the early years

Brian Cullen

Brian has been a radio presenter since 1974. He has been broadcasting on Radio Merseyside for many years, while in his early career he had close involvement with Radio Caroline.

March 18th

Thomas Coram and the Foundling Hospital

Judith Foxon

Judith is a qualified children's nurse who also writes children's books from their perspective. In this talk, we will hear about the establishment of an institution in response to children and infants in appalling conditions on the streets of 18th Century London.

Message from the Treasurer

At the last committee meeting, the committee agreed to adopt Beacon, a membership management package developed by the U3A. Currently, roughly 60% of U3As have adopted Beacon, and feedback seems favourable.

In the first instance, using this system is expected to ease the organisation of membership details and make it easier for group leaders to communicate with their group members. Moreover, it should ensure that our branch observes data privacy rules. The first step will be to transfer membership records into Beacon. I will be our administrator for Beacon. The first step is for me to oversee the transfer process and I will invite individual members to check the details he has on record as this process progresses.

Once this initial step has been completed, individual groups will be able to investigate what Beacon can do for them, and whether or not they want to use it.

For anyone interested, there is a short YouTube video introducing Beacon, showing some of its possibilities and potential benefits:

Beacon short demo v4 ([youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com))

Giles

Message about the Website

I am taking over the administration of the website from Derek. It is a logical step since there is a lot of overlap between the newsletter and the website. Derek has also indicated that he would like to stop with this task. I am sure you will support my vote of thanks for all his efforts.

The u3a has been developing a new format for websites and it is my intention to move over to the new format in the next few months.

Joy

Groups

Message from Groups Co-ordinator

If you think you could lead a group, or if you are just interested in participating, please do not hesitate to contact me (Ros) either at the meetings or an email via Derek.

I'm pleased to report that new groups have started. There are also spaces in the French and Music Appreciation Groups. There will be more information at the Monday meetings.

Ros

Book Group

The Book Group meets in the main Birkenhead library at 2.30 on the 2nd Thursday of the month. Our next meeting is Thursday 8th.

We are currently reading Harper Lee's 'To Kill a Mocking Bird'.

Contact **Janice** for more information either via an email to Derek or speak to her at the Monday meeting.

Spanish Conversation Group

The Spanish Conversation Group has started. We meet weekly for an hour in the cafe of the Williamson Art Gallery starting at 10am. We use both Iberian and Latin American Spanish. There is no fee to participate but the café appreciates you buying some refreshments.

On alternate Wednesdays you can stay on for another coffee and chat (in English!) – see next item for details.

Vic is stepping down from the group. He wants to concentrate on learning Welsh. We'd like to thank

him for all his efforts in getting us going.

Coffee Mornings, Williamson Café



Everyone is welcome to meet up for a cup of coffee and a chat in the Café in the Williamson Gallery. We are meeting at 11:00 on the Wednesdays in the weeks we don't have a talk. No need to tell anyone you are coming. Just turn up.

Quiz Group

This is a new group meeting once a month at 10:30 usually on the last Friday in a member's home. Please note that the March meeting is not on the last Friday since this is Good Friday. Instead, the group will meet on the Friday before.

Jenny

Walking Group

An Oxton Walk

A description of Oxton in 1819 reads "mean and small, composed of wretched straggling huts, amongst roads only not impassable.....but a scene of solitude, broken in only by the voice of the cowherd, or the cry of the plover. Bleak and barren moors stretch round it in every direction and exhibit an unmixed scene of poverty and desolation."

The first part of this walk took us to some of the older parts of Oxton, parts which probably haven't change in 150 years. Starting at the Shrewsbury Arms which has been a pub since the early 1800s, we walked down Fairview Road passing a row of nice mid-Victorian houses on the way, with some larger Villas part hidden up long drives and behind stone walls. We then turned right into South Bank which still has to discover the benefits of tarmac, or any modern road construction. This can be quite muddy after heavy rain, but fortunately not too bad this day. The outlook for a row of small cottages at the top of South Bank hasn't changed much since the middle of the 19th century.

South Bank leads into Arno Road, so named because it led up to Arno Hill, now an area of parkland and walks, but once a woodland of Birch and Oak, cut through in part by the old quarry. This produced the sandstone on which large parts of Oxton are built. A few steps further on brought us



to The Queens Pub, whose landlord, a Mr. Hughes, gave his name to the road which runs at the back of the pub. To the side of The Queens is Newburns Lane named after local builder who put up the row of small houses nicknamed the 'The Dolly Tub' cottages (see photo), as apparently lines of washing could be forever seen outside. It may be that the tenants provided a clothes washing service to the surrounding community.

Continuing the walk we passed a large house, now split into two separate houses. The entrance to the right-hand house has a Blue Plaque remembering Brigadier Sir Philip John Denton Toosey who lived there before the war. Philip Toosey was held as a prisoner war on the Japanese 'Death Railway' in Burma, showing great courage and striving at all times to assist the well-being of the men under his command. His story was told (after a fashion) in the film 'The Bridge over the River Kwai'. We made our way down the hill to what is now the village centre, and along Village Road

and Alton Road past large Victorian houses many of which have been converted into flats.

We continued our walk into Shrewsbury Road to reach the lowest point at the Williamson Art Gallery, having descended gently from the highest point in Oxton at the Arno. The Williamson Gallery was opened in 1928 funded by money raised by John Williamson a director of the Cunard shipping line and his son Patrick. The gallery contains the UKs largest selection of Della Robbia pottery. We are very lucky that we can hold our Monday talks in such lovely surroundings.

From the art gallery we walked back up Christchurch Road into the centre of the village and a lunch at Hellas for coffee and a cake. A short walk then brought us back to our start at The Shrewsbury Arms.

Thank you to all the members who joined us on a very pleasant morning walk,

Dave

Visits

Several trips are planned before the summer break. If you are interested contact Chris at the Monday meetings.

Mon Apr 29th

A coach trip to **Ludlow** on market day.

Full day trip, £22 p.p. if we book. All our seats have been sold but a reserve list has been opened. Alternatively, you can book separately but it slightly more expensive (£24 p.p.).

Wed May 8th

A trip round the **Liverpool docks** on the Floating Grace. 12:00 to 2:00 pm

£22 p.p. Afternoon Tea included.

Wed Jun 26th

A trip on a **canal boat** from **Christleton** to the centre of **Chester**.

This is a whole day trip, passing through several locks. £16 p.p. Bring your own lunch or visit a local eatery.

Meetings

February 5th

Coal Mining in Neston

Edward Hilditch

Ness colliery was owned by members of the Stanley family, who were major landowners in Wirral and owned properties in Hooton, Storeton, Puddington, Burton and Ness.

Ness Colliery opened in 1759, owned by John Stanley Massey (1711-1794) and four others. It was the first large industrial site in west Cheshire. For many years Ness colliery was more successful than its

Coffee corner moment

Answers to the January puzzle

(a) 17; +35; ÷4; -8; x11; -27; ÷7; x9; +33; ÷3 = **23**

(b) 26; -50% of it; x3; +37; ÷4; x6; ÷3; +87; ÷5; +60% of it = **40**

(c) 11; times itself; x5; -287; -2/3 of it; +1/2 of it; -75; ÷4; times itself; -65 = **376**

February Puzzle

Back to School!

Add the missing vowels to identify school subjects.

1 MSC; 2 SCGLY; 3 NGLSH; 4 BLGY; 5 HSTRY; 6 LTN; 7 RT; 8 SCNC

General Knowledge

1 Who wrote 'Little Women'?

2 Dispur is the capital of which North-east state in India?

3 What does the 'W' stand for in George W. Bush?

4 Who is the daughter of Zeus and Hera who was the cupbearer to the gods on Mount Olympus?

contemporaries in south-west Lancashire and North Wales. The first steam engine in west Cheshire was installed at Ness Colliery.

Part of the Flintshire coal field extends under the Dee estuary to Neston and Ness and the aim of the Ness colliery was to extract coal from this coalfield. Circa 1789, Thomas Stanley Massey (1755–1795) took control of Ness Colliery. In 1790, two underground canals, known as Navigations, were constructed. The two canals were dug 55m and 86m below sea level and stretched under the Dee Estuary for about 1.5 miles towards Flint. Near the coal faces, coal was loaded into narrow wooden boats, known as “starvationers” because of their prominent ribs. Once the boats were full, they were propelled along the canal to the exit shaft by a technique known as legging.

Building of Denhall Quay commenced in 1791. Ships at the quay were loaded with coal for export to North Wales, Ireland and the Isle of Man while limestone and building materials were imported. The quay fell out of use in the 1850s because of silting in this part of the Dee estuary. However, the line of large sandstone blocks that formed the quay is still visible today,

When Massey died in 1795 ownership of the Ness Colliery was in the hands of his executors until 1813, when two of his sons, Thomas Stanley (1782–1841) and Charles Stanley (1787-1861), became joint owners.

Thomas Cottingham (1746-1825) opened the Little Neston colliery in 1819. He was born in Burslem, Staffordshire, although members of the Cottingham family had lived in Little Neston since 1628. Cottingham's colliery was situated at the western end of present-day Marshland Road and was just north of the Ness colliery, owned by the Stanley family. There was intense competition between the collieries, which led to two acrimonious court cases. The first, in 1821, related to the use of the underground canal, which had been built under Cottingham's land. The court found in favour of Cottingham and he was awarded £100 damages for trespass.

The second case, in 1822, was more serious. Cottingham sued Stanley for trespass and wilful damage to his mine. His claim was for £10,000, representing lost sales and a punitive element for Stanley's malicious intent. The jury found in favour of Cottingham and awarded him only £2000, since no motive of malice could be attributed to Stanley.

Charles Stanley became the sole owner of Ness Colliery after his brother Thomas's death in 1841. Charles lived at Denna Hall (at the bottom of Denhall Lane) with his wife Barbara and two children. In 1854, Rowland Errington (1809–1875), a nephew of Charles Stanley, became the proprietor of Ness Colliery. Rowland became the 11th (and penultimate) Baronet of Hooton after the death of his elder brother, William Thomas Stanley, in 1863. He enjoyed horse-racing and gambling which led to levels of debts that obliged him to sell Hooton Hall and leave the country.

The Little Neston Colliery, owned by the Cottingham family, was closed circa 1845 and Ness Colliery was closed in 1855. However, the Little Neston colliery reopened in 1873 and became the Wirral Colliery. Profits from the coal mines had fallen, once coal shipments to Ireland and North Wales ended, due to the silting up of the River Dee. However, the railways provided an alternative method for transporting coal. A mineral line was built, linking the Wirral Colliery to Parkgate Station, which was (until 1886) the terminus of the branch line from Hooton to Parkgate. This mineral line was in operation by 1875.

The Wirral Colliery was taken over by the British government during the First World War returning to

private ownership after the war. However, increasing competition from larger mines precipitated its closure in 1927 and it was finally abandoned in 1928. A housing estate now occupies the site.

The miners at the collieries worked long hours in hazardous conditions for meagre pay. There were several accidents resulting in injuries and deaths but how the accident rate compared with contemporary collieries is unclear. The miners lived in miserable accommodation and the infant mortality rate was high.

William Williams Mortimer (1797-1862) in his book "The History of The Hundred of Wirral", published in 1847, describes Ness: "The village is one of the most miserable in the Hundred, consisting of a mere mass of hovels inhabited by the colliers; the greater part of the land is of very inferior quality and much of it absolutely worthless".

Jo

Useful link for Neston Collieries: <https://www.nestoncollieries.org/>

Plus a book 'The Neston Collieries' by Anthony Annakin-Smith

Personal connections: some reflections by Jo

Elizabeth Sharp (1827-1895) was my 2x great grandmother. She was born at Ness Colliery but lived in Saughall Massie from the time of her marriage in 1846. Her father was Thomas Sharp (1801-1887) who was born in Little Neston but lived at Ness Colliery for most of his life. He was a basket maker there, probably until it closed in 1855. Thereafter, Thomas was an agricultural labourer. I wondered why a basket maker was employed at the colliery, but I eventually discovered that, at the coal face, coal was loaded into large baskets. Four baskets at a time were loaded onto a boat, which was then propelled along a canal to the exit shaft, by leg power.

The father of Thomas Sharp was Stephen Sharp (1872-1847). He was born in Little Neston but lived in Ness. In 1841, at the age of 69, Stephen was working at Ness Colliery as an engine tender, a person who oversees the working of a steam engine. I wonder if this was the first steam engine introduced to the area, circa 1759?

Ellis Roberts (1854-1938) aka Peg Leg

Ellis Roberts was born in 1854 in Iscoyd, near Malpas. By 1876, he was working at the Wirral Colliery. Circa 1876, he and several others were buried while sinking a shaft. His right leg had to be



amputated. Subsequently, Ellis was fitted with a wooden leg, made by the colliery carpenter (see photo – Ellis is on the left (source Liverpool Echo 19 Jul 2022)). Thereafter, he was known as 'Peg Leg'. Ellis was only 22 when he lost his leg. He married Annie Jellicoe in 1878. The couple had eleven children between 1878 and 1899, but four died in early childhood. After his accident, Ellis continued working for the colliery but as a coal carrier (1881 & 1891), as a watchman on the railway (1901), and as a lamp lighter (1911). By 1921 Ellis was an agricultural labourer. Ellis died in Neston in 1938, at the age of 84.

Sadly, Richard Roberts, the youngest child of Ellis and Annie, was killed in a shunting accident on 9 March 1917 when he fell under the wheels of a coal wagon in the colliery sidings. The accident was witnessed by his mother, Annie.

Edward Thomas Roberts (1880-1959), second surviving son of Ellis and Annie, married Mary Hannah

Sharp (1882-1944) in 1903. Mary Hannah Sharpe was a granddaughter of Thomas Sharp (1801-1887). In 1861, Martha Sharp (1843-1928) was working as a servant for Thomas Cottingham (1775-1861), his wife Sarah, and their son, Thomas Leacroft Cottingham (1830-1905). They were living at Glentor House. Martha Sharp was the sister of Elizabeth Sharp, my 2x great grandmother.

Herbs for Health

John Taylor

19th February

We were thoroughly enlightened by John, a practising herbalist for over twenty years, about herbs for health. He kept us fascinated with his immense knowledge of herbs and their incredible benefits. We had a 'cook's' tour of herbs such as dandelion leaf (a diuretic with the root great for constipation), chickweed (the anti-itch weed), nettles (an effective anti-inflammatory amongst its many other uses) and anti-viral herbs such as thyme, sage and rosemary. Recipes were given for our ailments from simply placing chopped onion in a screw top jar and covering it with honey to make a cough linctus, to the process of making nettle tea for arthritis. Anti-mucous herbs (expectorants) are peppermint, elderflower, yarrow and liquorice for soothing a sore throat. Also, for colds, onion, garlic and the vitamin C from lemons and strawberries, all boost our energy levels, immune system and assist us to full recovery.

Not only ailments such as retention of fluid, circulatory problems, colds and flu, high blood pressure, sciatica, skin problems and anxiety can be treated with herbs but John gave us valuable information on how to get a good night's sleep – something we all value at our age! With the help of camomile, passionflower and lavender as a mixed tea before bed, a soothing sleep is promised. As a standby, it's advisable to reach for a valerian capsule should you wake in the night. To reinforce the notion of good sleep habits, we were even introduced to breathing exercises, much appreciated by us insomniacs.

I shall be out collecting nettles for sure (but not from roadsides or doggy walking routes) to rinse away those toxins. It seems nettles tackle a wide range of ailments, but I will definitely not be thrashing myself with those stinging leaves to relieve arthritic pain.

Lesley

www.johntaylorherbalist.com

Poetry Corner

I thought this was a really nice poem about February by an American poet I'd never heard of and have had difficulty finding anything out about her. She doesn't even have a Wikipedia entry!!!

Leap Year

Annette Wynne

Little month of February,

You are small, but worthy—very!

Will you grow up like the others,

Like your sister months and brothers?

Every four years with a bound

With a leap up from the ground,

Trying to grow tall as they—

All you stretch is one small day!

Even then you're not so tall

But just the shortest month of all.

Around Wirral and its Environs

Williamson Art Gallery

Going to the Match

19th April - 27th July

An exhibition of Lowry's paintings including 'Going to the Match' will be on show alongside some of his other works together with a selection of pictures from the Williamson's collection. The intention is to place Lowry in the wider context of painting in Northern England in the mid-20th Century.

Entry is free.

Oxton Secret Gardens

Sunday 12th May 10:00am to 5:00pm.

£10 on the day, or £8 in advance from several shops in Oxton Village. Information either phone 07962 248 268 or email: secretgardens@theoxtonsociety.co.uk



Leasowe Lighthouse

Open days begin on March 3rd from 12 - 4 on first and third Sunday of the month. The opening hours will be from 12 Midday until 4 pm with the last tour starting at 3:30 pm.

The ground floor is free to enter where you can buy Tea, Coffee, cold drinks etc. there as well as small gifts and information leaflets. To visit the rest of the building you need to buy a ticket for one of our regular guided tours which cost £2 for Children and £3 for adults. There are some restrictions for children – so check the website or ask Janet (our Chair).

<https://leasowelighthouse.com/wp/2023/07/22/a-visit-to-the-lighthouse/>