

u3a Wirral

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

Dear Wirral u3a member,

I missed the first meeting of 2024 and I understand it was a really good session – the presenter even got a standing ovation from some members! You can read Dave's summary below.

In previous editions of the newsletter, I have only given the date, title and name of the speakers at the following month's meetings. In future I am going to try to include a brief description of the content of the talk and the affiliation of the speaker. I hope that this will encourage some more members to attend.

Another change is that I am going to take over responsibility for the website. There is quite a lot of overlap in content between the newsletter and website, so it seemed to make sense. Derek has done great work in keeping the site up to date but feels it's time to step down – so I'm sure you will join with me in offering him a big thank you.

Kind regards

Joy, Newsletter Editor

Chair's message

Hello Everyone,

I feel I've just about caught up with myself after my wonderful month away in Australia. Mind you, the snow was a bit of a surprise.

The talk on January 22nd showed how suppressed women were in the nineteenth century. I remember my grandmother (born in 1890) telling me that if there was an election, I must always use my vote because women had had to fight so hard to get it.

I look forward to seeing you on the 5th February and finding out about the Neston coal mines. Please remember that the u3a is run by the members for the members, so if you are interested in any groups or feel you can make a cup of tea, then please let me or any of the Committee members know.

Best wishes

Janet

Meetings

Feb 5th

Coal Mining in Neston.

Edward Hilditch

Chair Burton and Neston History Society

We will learn about the fascinating history of coal mining on the Wirral which started in 1759 and finally ceased in 1927. We will also hear a recording of voices from the past which will add to our awareness of how life was like for coal miners and their families.

Feb 19th

Herbal Remedies.

John Taylor

Member, National Association of Medical Herbalists

John will bring samples of his herbal remedies, creams and tinctures. You will be able to ask questions if you need advice. He is recognised for his treatment of arthritis and rheumatism.

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 are starting and 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 February.

We are currently reading T.J. Klune's 'The House in the Cerulean Sea'.

Contact **Janice** for more information – 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. The Group is led by Wirral u3a member, Victor, who has lived in Argentina. We use both Iberian and Latin American Spanish. There is no fee to participate but the café appreciates you buying some refreshments.

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.

Walking Group

On Monday, the 29th, 6 of the walking group members enjoyed a stroll around Birkenhead Park. The weather was mild and rain only light. We saw several coots and heard a lot of noisy geese. We



stopped for a conversation with the "walking for health group" who were also enjoying a walk around the park. We learned about the poet "Hedd Wyn" who was from a small farm in Wales, he had the potential to be the Eisteddfod Bard, but was killed on the first day of the battle of Passchendaele on 31st July 1917. Hedd Wynn was awarded "The Black Chair, which was on display in Birkenhead Park, but this has since been returned to the Eisteddfod in Wales.

As the rain got heavier, we called into the visitors centre for coffee. All in all, it was a very pleasant January morning.

The walking group tries to meet every other Monday, alternate to the meetings at the Williamson. Information about the walk, including where to meet, is shared via a WhatsApp Group.

Please let us know if you would like to join us. There are usually several regular walkers at the meetings in the Williamson.

Stephanie

{Editor's note: I'd never heard of Hedd Wynn or The Black Chair but I found this very interesting website with a lot of information about Ellis Evans (Hedd Wynn):

<https://www.visitwales.com/things-do/culture/hedd-wyn-soldier-poet-snowdonia>}

Quiz Group

This is a new group meeting once a month in a member's home.

Jenny

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 on-line. £24 p.p. if you book separately.

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

The Great American Songbook

Our first talk of 2024 was delivered by Roger Brown with a mix of facts, anecdotes, and music, centred around the evolution of American music from mid-Victorian times through to the music written for the film musicals of the 60s and 70s. Roger began by describing how the music of poor African Americans in the cosmopolitan culture of New Orleans developed into the 12-bar blues. This eventually gave rise to boogie woogie, and rock and roll. Rag-time music developed in the 1890s, again amongst African-Americans and had a different feel and structure more akin to marching music and had a great influence on early jazz. It was typically performed on piano. Performers earned their money based on the number of songs they could perform in an evening, a hat being passed round at the end of each piece, the contents paying for the room rent, and the amount left over going to the performer. It suited them to play the short, fast pieces of music which Rag-time delivered. A well-known example is 'The Entertainer' by Scott Joplin as featured in the film 'The Sting'.

Many of the songs written in the 1920s and 1930s were by Jewish composers. A huge number of Jewish people from Europe settled in the Tin Pan Alley district in the East Side, New York, bringing their own rhythms. In a competitive market, they developed a style of music which had to be easy to learn in order to be successful. Jerome Kern's music moved away from jazz rhythms, and wrote 'Showboat' in collaboration with Oscar Hammerstein. This had themes high lighting the racism, gambling, and alcoholism found on a Mississippi showboat. Possibly the most famous song from this musical is 'Old Man River' contrasting the life of a person with the slow peaceful 'life' of a river.

George Gershwin blended jazz and classical music in compositions

Coffee corner moment

Answers to the New Year puzzle

You had to add vowels to the consonants to give the names of some musical terms.

1. SCaLe 2. MeLoDY 3. ViBraRTo

4. CaDeNZa 5. YoDeL

6. FaLSeTTo

This month it's time for some simple maths!

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

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

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

including 'Rhapsody in Blue' and the opera 'Porgy and Bess'. These have become classics of American music, though, at the time, people had difficulty classifying them. He had been influenced by the style of French composers of the time, although he was criticised for this, as it was felt that his compositions had moved away from the expected jazz style.

Cole Porter had been influenced by Gilbert and Sullivan. He had a Protestant upbringing, however he started to write songs in a minor key which made them sound more Jewish. His many hits include 'I Love Paris', 'Night and Day', and 'Begin the Beguine'. His song 'Miss Otis Regrets' came about while dining with a friend one lunch time. He bet that he could write a song based on the next words he heard spoken by fellow diners.

Irving Berlin came from a very poor background but met and married a wealthy Roman Catholic socialite. They were disowned by her family, but this changed when he started to make money from his music. Early on he wrote 'Alexander's Ragtime band' and subsequently went on to write the music for 15 Hollywood films and 20 Broadway shows. He wrote one of the biggest selling songs of all, 'White Christmas' even though he was Jewish. Apparently, he wrote almost all of his music in the key of F sharp, so he could play it all on the black keys on a piano.

The 1940s and 1950s, saw the partnership of Rogers and Hammerstein produce music for many stage shows and film adaptations. These include 'The King and I', 'Oklahoma', 'South Pacific' and 'The Sound of Music', which had been their last work together. Additionally, Oscar Hammerstein collaborated with Jerome Kern to produce their 1927 musical 'Showboat'.

Dave

The Trial of Dr Tomanzie

Angela Brabin

The presentation on 22nd January gave us an insight into the social attitudes in Victorian times and beyond towards unmarried mothers and some of the strategies women took to deal with the stigma. I was surprised to learn about the Mental Deficiency Act of 1913 which allowed the incarceration of single mothers, since they were considered to be 'mentally defective', in asylums or the workhouse. I was even more surprised that the Act was only repealed in 1959!

If a woman found herself pregnant, one strategy was for her mother to fake a pregnancy while the daughter would be sent away until the child was born, bringing the baby back to her mother in secrecy, who would then 'give birth' and bring the child up as her own. There were also women who would, for a sum of money, foster the child. Angela told us about one of these women: Amelia Dyer who made a living out of adopting children many of whom died while in her care. It is now thought that she possibly murdered more than 300 children. She was eventually caught when a body was found in the Thames wrapped in paper which had her address on. She was tried and hung for murder in 1896.

Another step that a woman could take was illegal – to have an abortion. This was a decision taken by a 27-year-old local woman, Elizabeth Twist, who worked in the Angel Hotel in Liverpool. She borrowed £3 from her father to pay a Liverpool doctor, Ethens de Tomanzie, to perform the procedure. Dr Tomanzie was (possibly) born in Burma and there is considerable doubt about his qualifications – the BMC considered he wasn't a qualified medical practitioner but he nevertheless he continued to practice (see editor's note). A friend who had accompanied her, testified that Elizabeth had spent half an hour in his surgery and was very distressed when she emerged. The procedure seems to have gone wrong. She said she'd been chloroformed. She remembered waking seeing Dr Tomanzie standing over her with a long metal rod. Elizabeth miscarried that night. She got up for work the next morning but became too ill to work. Yet she walked to the Mersey Ferry for Birkenhead to go to her parents where she eventually died. Dr Tomanzie was confronted by Elizabeth's roommate, but he said he saw so many women he couldn't remember her while he told her sister that he'd only given her medicine. However, a postmortem showed that she had died of

blood poisoning caused by an internal injury to her uterus. The police were able to obtain a warrant for Dr Tomanzie's arrest. He appeared at Chester Assizes in February 1886 charged with Elizabeth's murder by performing an abortion - a charge he strenuously denied. The jury agreed with him and found him not guilty much to the annoyance of the judge who clearly disagreed. Dr Tomanzie appears to have had a lot of public support and when he left the court the street was lined with people who clapped on his appearance. He died some 3 months later of pneumonia and was buried in Liverpool Necropolis (now a park).

Joy

{Editor's note: There is a lot more information about the issues raised during Angela's presentation in this article about Amelia Dyer https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amelia_Dyer

I was also able to find a lot of information about Dr Tomanzie – this article is particularly interesting: <https://www.dib.ie/biography/de-tomanzie-ethens-a10251> - but nothing about Elizabeth beyond passing references to her in articles about Dr Tomanzie.}

Poetry Corner

Our poem for January is **Ring out, wild bells** by Alfred Tennyson. He wrote this poem in the year he became Poet Laureate (1850). It is thought that he was inspired by hearing the bells of Waltham Abbey Church ringing out the old year and ringing in the new one.

Ring out, wild bells, to the wild sky,
The flying cloud, the frosty light:
The year is dying in the night;
Ring out, wild bells, and let him die.

Ring out the old, ring in the new,
Ring, happy bells, across the snow:
The year is going, let him go;
Ring out the false, ring in the true.

Ring out the grief that saps the mind
For those that here we see no more;
Ring out the feud of rich and poor,
Ring in redress to all mankind.

Ring out a slowly dying cause,
And ancient forms of party strife;
Ring in the nobler modes of life,
With sweeter manners, purer laws.

Ring out the want, the care, the sin,
The faithless coldness of the times;
Ring out, ring out my mournful rhymes
But ring the fuller minstrel in.

Ring out false pride in place and blood,
The civic slander and the spite;
Ring in the love of truth and right,
Ring in the common love of good.

Ring out old shapes of foul disease;
Ring out the narrowing lust of gold;
Ring out the thousand wars of old,
Ring in the thousand years of peace.

Ring in the valiant man and free,
The larger heart, the kindlier hand;
Ring out the darkness of the land,
Ring in the Christ that is to be.