

Editorial



Welcome to the April newsletter and I'm pleased to see the weather is improving (well, the rain seems a little warmer!). Which at least has meant that those of us on grandchildren minding duties during the Easter school holidays could get entice them out in the fresh air for short periods, and were not condemned to having to suffer the seemingly endless array of banal songs from *Frozen* and other cartoon DVDs. Cogges Manor Farm has been busy this past week and its always lovely to see young families out on their bikes - the oldest pleasures really *are* the best!

April is a month when we tend to celebrate the most patriotic of anniversaries – if you're English, it is of course St Georges Day on the 23rd. That date also commemorates the death of the Bard of Avon, William Shakespeare, in 1616 (he was also born on the 26th of April some 52 years earlier). But I've chosen as my editorial cover picture a reminder to our members who haven't yet renewed your u3a membership for 2024/25. If you renew before the 30th of the month you only pay £15, and not the full £20 it would otherwise be from May onwards. The queues at the Membership desk on our last two Guest Speaker days have been long but as I type this, the evidence given to me by John, our Membership Secretary, suggests there's quite a few of you who haven't got around to it. Until last Sunday, you could have spent that £5 saving on 4 first class stamps...but they've gone up again to £1.35.

And talking of first class males, this April edition of the newsletter contains an article by Don, our Poetry group leader, explaining what the group does and the joy that can be had from the iambic pentameter (which I always thought was an Olympic event but it seems I was wrong). And if you prefer the *longer* form of the written arts, the Wychwood Players perform another of their celebrated productions which you can also read about in this newsletter.

So sit back, get out the remains of the Easter chocolate and read on - Mike

Group News

As at the 5th of April, Groups looking for new members are/were;



Art – run by Keith every Thursday at the Methodist Church.



Canasta – run by Shirley and meeting every first Tuesday of the month at the Methodist Church



Cribbage – run by Elisabeth and meeting every fourth Tuesday of the month at the Methodist Church



Croquet – run by Valerie P in Eynsham every Thursday.



Needlework – Jane runs two groups, both meeting in a member's home on the 2nd Monday and the 3rd Friday of the month.



Sewing/Dressmaking – on the 3rd Tuesday of the month, Sandra's group meets at the Methodist Church.



Snooker/Pool group – Keith cues off this gathering every Monday evening, upstairs at the Methodist Church.



Spanish – Noreen hosts this group every other Monday at her home. Gracias!



Table Tennis 2– Steve B runs this group on the 1st and 2nd Wednesday of the month, and then every Monday for the remainder.



Ukulele– Mary runs this group on the 1st and 3rd Monday of the month – uke can find out more by contacting her.

Introduction to the Poetry Reading Group

Do you feel intimidated by poetry? Worried that you don't know Alliteration from an Acrostic or the difference between an lamb and Imagery?

At Poetry Reading Group we don't concern ourselves with the technicalities of how a poem is written or attempt to over-analyse it - we simply enjoy poetry! Our approach is illustrated by the poet Billy Collins who in his 'Introduction to Poetry' first describes how true lovers of poetry:

'...take a poem and hold it up to the light like a colour slide.... or walk inside the poem's room and feel the walls for a light switch.'

By contrast, Collins then goes on to despair (as we do in the group!) of those who:

'...tie the poem to a chair with rope and torture a confession out of it....they begin beating it with a hose to find out what it really means'

So how do we work? Well, for each monthly session we agree on a theme – recent topics have included 'Sunshine and Light', 'Childhood Memories', 'Sleep and Dreams'. We look up anthologies in books or online to find poems inspired by, or related to, that theme. Out of this each of us chooses a poem to read out during the meeting and we also briefly describe why we enjoy the poem and how it has impacted us. There then follows a discussion within the group which is usually lively and often quite therapeutic! It's interesting how poetry often causes us to recall memories, reflect on life events, have a laugh - and sometimes scratch our heads about what the poet might have been meaning at which point we remind ourselves of Billy Collins' exhortation not to over-analyse!

We look at a wide variety of poets; mostly modern (e.g. Seamus Heaney, Edward Thomas, Emily Dickinson) but also going back to, for example, the English Romantics and occasionally as far back as the Elizabethan era – even Shakespeare sometimes turns up! But whichever poem, poet or era we choose we do so because we have all grown to love poetry; appreciating the language and turn of phrase used, the imagery created in our minds, the intellectual and emotional impact of the words.

You are more than welcome to come and join us on our journey! Poetry Reading group meets every 3rd Tuesday of the month at 10:30 am in the High Street Methodist church; feel free to pop in for an initial ‘taster’ so you can see what we do before deciding to ‘join up’!

Speaker Meetings

Thursday, April the 18th, Witney Methodist Church

‘Astronomy Past and Present’ with Mary McIntyre



This talk covers the history of astronomy, from prehistoric cave paintings to robotic telescopes. It includes stories about important people who were pivotal in their contribution to astrology, the changes in theory and science behind the subject and how modern life has benefitted from space science.

Mary is an amateur astronomer communicator, astrophotographer and sketcher based in Oxfordshire. She is a fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society and co-host of Comet Watch. If you use YouTube, search for ‘Mary MacIntyre astronomy’.

New Member Meetings

New members have a chance to meet on the 1st Monday of the month at 2pm in the Methodist Church Coffee Bar (except for Bank Holidays). In April, the New Members are scheduled to meet on **Monday the 8th of April**.

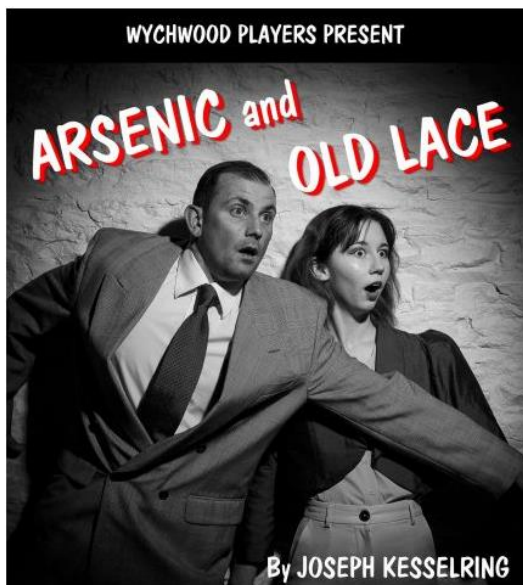
The get together normally lasts about 1 to 1.5 hours - there is no charge and coffee/tea is available. The New Member’s meeting is organised to provide new

members with some background information about the u3a organisation and more specific information about Witney u3a.

There is a chance to discuss the interest groups available and to register any group interest.

Editor's Note: welcome to your first Newsletter those that have joined in late March or early April. Contributions always welcomed if you have anything to say or promote.

The Wychwood Players



The Wychwood Players' next production will be the very funny black comedy 'Arsenic and Old Lace' by Joseph Kesselring.

It tells the story of Mortimer Brewster who is newly engaged and visits his two seemingly charming and gentle aunts. He discovers that they are in the habit of killing off a series of their unfortunate lodgers. Mortimer must decide if he can help his aunts and protect his fiancé whilst also keeping himself sane!

Performances are on the 25th, 26th and 27th of April with curtain up at 7:30pm. The venue is the New Beaconsfield Hall, Shipton under Wychwood, Oxon OX7 6BQ. Tickets are £12 plus booking fee from www.wychwoodplayers.com.

IT Training



If you have recently been dragged into the digital age, kicking and screaming, or your family has given you their old, unwanted mobile technology, Jackie and Mike may be able to help you come to grips with it. We can advise on best use of your laptop, tablet or smart phone, and we are very patient! Booking essential via Wendy on: **07732 597087** or email **infowitneyu3a@gmail.com**

Pop Quiz Question

It was 60 years ago yesterday, April the 4th 1964, that the songs of the Beatles filled the first 5 places in the US Singles Chart (it was also 20 years ago *today* that Sergeant Pepper taught the band to play...but that's another story!). How many of those 5 hit singles can you name?

Answers at the end of the newsletter.

P.S. I'm expecting high marks from Ted's *Pop Music Through the Decades* group!

National u3a On-Line Learning Events



The National U3A website (www.u3a.org.uk) hosts a variety of educational and self-help learning events which you may find of great use. This month, they are running:

Thursday the 11th of April – ‘Live Cookery Demonstration – Spring recipes’ with Chef Alex

Chef Alex from ‘Vegetarian For Life’ demonstrates his delicious Spring recipes live on Zoom.

Free online via Zoom – starts 10:30am

Thursday the 11th of April – ‘AI News: April’ with Barry Claydon

Interested in learning about AI? Join others discovering this much vaunted and publicised tech world via Barry Claydon, the u3a Trust specialist advisor on AI.

Free online via Zoom – starts 3:30pm.

Wednesday the 17th of April – ‘The Road To Clean Water: Beginnings of a sewage system in Victorian London’

Very topical at the moment – a look back at 1858 when Parliament passed a law enabling Londoners to drink clean water, given the dreadful state of the Thames.

Free online via Zoom – starts 10am

Podcast



The March edition of the u3a podcast (episode 38) – can be listened to and watched now. And I never tire of saying (nor do I tire of his stentorian tones) that Witney u3a's own Peter C once again hosts the show. This episode includes discussion on Mindfulness and Meditation, presented by the u3a subject matter experts John Darwin and Mike Pupius of the Sheffield u3a. And a favourite topic of mine, the cryptic crossword, its mysteries and its pleasures, is explored by Henry Howarth of the u3a. Ann Cowburn, a u3a member, recounts her life as a young ballet dancer growing up in a Hampshire village and how she eventually became a professional. And Don Mobley, former US Air Force pilot, gives us an insight into the future of aviation including (whisper it quietly) pilot-less aircraft! Don is from Stowmarket u3a in Suffolk, the home of many former and current US air bases of course.

The podcasts are available on Spotify and other podcast platforms but are probably most easily obtained on YouTube by simply searching 'u3a podcast'.

Local Events



Those all-important 'dates for your diary', coming to a town, civic or church hall near you SOON.

April 5th: Witney Jazz presents **The Randolph Mathews/Nic Meier Band**. Vocal led jazz and world music vibes. **Corn Exchange, Witney**. Doors open 7pm, show starts 7.30pm. Table seating £20, row seating £18. For tickets see www.cornexchangewitney.org.uk

April 6th: **Craft and Gift Market, Corn Exchange Witney** 10am to 4pm.

April 6th: Rotary Club of Witney presents **The Oxford Male Voice Choir Charity Concert in aid of Bridewell Gardens**, the mental health recovery service located in West Oxfordshire. 7.30pm at the High Street Methodist Church. Tickets £15 from www.eventbrite.co.uk

April 9th: Cineworld Witney are screening **Royal Ballet Live: Macmillan Celebrated** at 7.15pm

April 9th: Corn Exchange Witney Classic Film Club are screening **Scarface**, starring Al Pacino, at 7.30pm. Tickets £7.21 - £8.83

April 12th: **West End Magic**, London's longest running magic show, comes to The **Corn Exchange, Witney**. An evening of magic and variety acts. Doors open 7.00pm, show starts 7.30pm. Tickets £20.50. For more information see www.cornexchangewitney.org.uk

April 14th: **Ducklington Fritillary Sunday**. The Snake's Head Fritillary grows in abundance in a meadow near the church. On one day each year this field is open to the general public. There is also Morris dancing, music, a plant stall and cream teas or ploughman's lunches are available from the village hall.

April 18th: Cineworld Witney are screening **An American in Paris: The Musical** at 7.30pm

April 20th: **Witney Model and Collectors Club Show**. 10am to 4pm at St Mary's Church. Entry free.

April 20th: Cineworld Witney are screening **Opera Live: Puccini's La Rondine** at 5.55pm

April 21st: Cineworld Witney are screening **An American in Paris: The Musical** at 3.30pm

And in early May we can look forward to...

May 1st: Cineworld Witney are screening **Royal Opera Live: Carmen** at 6.45pm

May 4th to 27th: **Oxfordshire Art Weeks**. Artists' open studios and exhibitions across Oxfordshire. All free to visit. For information see www.artweeks.org

May 4th (a.k.a. Star Wars Day): **Craft and Gift Market**, Corn Exchange Witney, 10am to 4pm.

May 11th: **Cogges Spring Fair** 10am to 4pm. A day of family fun, activities and crafts at the farm. Standard ticket price admission

May 11th: Cineworld Witney are screening **MET Opera Live: Madama Butterfly** at 5.55pm

Acknowledgements

Heartfelt thanks as ever go to Wendy, Doreen, Don, Ralph, Peter and everybody who contributed to the production of this newsletter.

And finally...answers to the Beatles quiz (page 6)

Please Please Me, I Want To Hold Your Hand, She Loves You, Twist And Shout and Can't Buy Me Love were the top 5 singles in the US Charts of April 4th 1964. Aah the memories!