



# Newsletter

Affiliated to the Third Age Trust

Issue 63

Autumn 2009

## *From the Chairman*

*There are two things that always happen at this time of the year. Firstly the days get shorter and secondly our new membership year gets well under way. If you are anything like me I don't like the onset of winter but I do like to see Blackbourne U3A returning to New Green with so many familiar faces attending the monthly lecture meetings. So, to those members who have renewed, welcome back. To our new members, HELLO and welcome to Blackbourne U3A.*

*Having new members join us is always encouraging because it demonstrates how successful we have been in the past and indeed continue to be. It also hopefully, will bring new talents to our already dedicated team of committee members and convenors allowing perhaps the formation of some more interest groups.*

*We have a fantastic line up of speakers taking us up until July next year, together with a number of special events. The first is the Interest Groups' Exhibition, otherwise known as the Cheese and Wine Party, on the 19<sup>th</sup> October. Tickets are limited to 200, priced at only £3...(what a bargain!!) and are available from Joan Bailey at today's meeting so don't delay as they are going fast!*

*Finally, we already have to start thinking about the changes that need to take place on our committee from March next year. A number of existing members will have to stand down by rotation therefore creating vacancies which I sincerely hope we can fill from volunteers rather than calling for the "press gang". We all get a great deal from our membership of Blackbourne U3A but success only comes from having a good committee so please do give some thought to taking up a position and helping to make a difference in the future.*

*Colin Avis.*

## LECTURE NOTES

### IS PARLIAMENT STILL FIT FOR PURPOSE?



On 7 September Lord Phillips of Sudbury gave a serious but delightfully amusing talk telling us that as a Lib Dem he had unsuccessfully fought five elections, the last being in 1983. Having been made a life peer by Paddy Ashdown he made his final appearance in the House of Lords in 2006. Did he think his 13 years were a wasted effort? No!

Being in the Upper House for eight years his view of the political classes was that they were decent, well meaning and conscientious, but the public had become disaffected with politics, especially with the appalling expenses scandal. He then asked how many of us had voted at the last General Election and out of the 192 members present, just two admitted they had not. He said that only 10% of under 25's had voted. In pre-war elections 85% had voted but at the last three elections only 60% - a devastating low number. He then asked how many of us belonged to a political party now and the answer was only one in 15, although more had belonged in the past. He added that the R.S.P.B. had a greater membership than all the political parties.

He considered that in the House of Commons there was no overall control. Fewer women than men were involved in debates and it would be far better if the younger members gained experience in the outside world before entering Parliament. The same applied to the Civil Service, as ministers are moved to different departments on average every

three years and the civil servants continued to hold the reins. Most ministers want to leave their mark and, as there is no audit on the law, we now have 13,500 pages of statute law.

To summarise, Lord Phillips said there is a huge drawback in politics in that we have to search for the difference between the main parties. He is in favour of the smaller parties having representation in Parliament so that we can challenge their manifestos. He is against the whip system and agrees with Roy Jenkins on proportional representation.

Lord Phillips was a captivating and entertaining speaker who lightened his talk with thumb-nail caricatures of some members of the House of Lords whom he had encountered during his time there.

*Joan Smith*

## LECTURE NOTES – continued

### STEP-BY-STEP – THE NORWICH SHOE TRADE – 6 July

Barbara Miller gave an interesting and fascinating talk as she stepped her way through the history of shoes. She began her talk by saying, '*women never have enough shoes and children can never find their's*'. There are many myths about shoes such as '*it is unlucky to put shoes on a table*' and '*shoes tied on the boots of wedding cars bring luck to the bride and groom*'.

We were shown slides of shoes worn throughout history beginning with the Iceman, whose foot coverings were made of leather, pierced to enable a thong to be threaded through and tied. Barbara then explained that the Greeks wore sandals and introduced the first heels, while soldiers mostly designed the Roman sandals. The Vikings changed the fashion and introduced boots and the Normans wore ankle boots with cross gaiting. The French, known for their lead in fashion, wore long pointed shoes, some with bells on their toes. The styles, materials and colours of footwear continued to change throughout the Tudor, Stuart, Georgian and Victorian periods up to the present day.

In the 19th Century there were 1,355 standard lengths of wooden patterns as shoes became individually made. In Norwich James Smith farmed out the making of shoes to home workers. However in 1886 Charles Winterson introduced the first shoe factory and, along with his wife, Jane built an excellent export business. Norwich shoe manufacturers were well known namely Startrite, Norvic, Hodderston and Bally. However progress the 1960's saw the demise of the shoe trade in Norwich, the shoes now being made in India.

Barbara concluded by saying Saint Crispin is the Patron Saint of shoe-makers.

*Joan Smith*

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## EDUCATIONAL VISIT

### CHATHAM DOCKYARD – 29 June

For 400 years the dockyard and naval base on the River Medway at Chatham played a crucial role in supporting the Royal Navy. In 1984 the yard closed as an operational base and work began to preserve it as a museum. It is now the most complete dockyard of the Age of Sail to survive anywhere in the world. The comprehensive guide book suggests allowing up to five hours to explore the site's 80 acres, and we certainly needed this amount of time!

There are Covered Slips housing various exhibits including The Story of the RNLI with its collection of historic lifeboats; and the Wooden Walls gallery which re-creates the sights, sounds and smells of 1758 by telling the story of the construction of a 74-gun ship.

The buildings of these covered slips are themselves of architectural interest. That housing the Wooden Walls gallery is timber framed and clad having been used to make and store masts and in a loft above the patterns of ships were scribed into the floor. Other slip buildings are also timber clad but the frames range from timber, through cast iron to wrought iron, demonstrating the rapid pace of technological change in the 17-year period of the 19th century during which they were built. The roof construction of Number Three slip is breath taking.

Visitors are able to explore three historic warships situated in dry docks; HMS Gannet, built in 1878, representing the heyday of the Victorian Navy; HMS Cavalier, a 1944 destroyer in which you can pretend you are at action stations and, if you are nimble, you can crawl through the hatches of HM Submarine Ocelet (1962).

At the far end of the site is the brick built Ropery, a building about a quarter mile long where hawsers and cables are made from sisal or manila, a practice which continues today on a commercial scale. Guided tours are given around the Ropery to explain the history and method of rope-making and, as well as being able to watch the process in action, visitors also have the opportunity to make their own length of rope.

Not all the buildings are open to the public but they do demonstrate the architecture from the early 1700s to mid 1800's. The Commissioner's House (1704) and the Admiral's Offices (1808) are of particular note.

Everyone found something of interest in this exploration of the period when Britain really did 'rule the waves'.

*Bryann Ward*



# INTEREST GROUPS' NEWS

## TRAV2

### RIVER TRIP



On 14 June a group of 12 from Trav2 made their way to Gloucester to board the m.v. Edward Elgar, a small privately owned river boat of just 11 cabins, 6 of which were occupied by our party. The owner's son was captain, his fiancée the waitress and cabin maid, a retired merchant navy man the engineer and first officer, and a superb chef who was everybody's friend, made up the crew.

The whole thing ran like clockwork and within a very short space of time all 22 passengers and 4 crew were on first name terms having a great time, particularly as the bar prices were very favourable. It has to be said that the cabins were quite 'cosy', but the bunks were comfortable, there was plenty of storage space and a perfectly adequate wet room. The weather was kind to us and we were able to sit on the top deck every

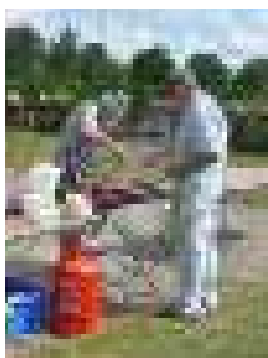


morning and admire the scenery, bird spot, watch the manoeuvres through the locks and listen to the commentary when passing scenes of particular interest. We were very excited to learn – amid rousing cheers – that one of our party was the overall winner of the quilts competition and on the last evening she duly received a certificate and a box of chocolates for her prize. On

three evenings there was a table quiz and on the final evening an entertainer came on board with a most amusing routine of song and humour which was very well received.

Each morning the boat travelled along the Severn, mooring up from about mid-day until next morning at different stopping points along the river. Upton-Upon-Severn was our first stop, Worcester the second, and Tewkesbury on the return journey back to Gloucester. There were maps and information literature available for each stop and further tips given us by the crew on what to see and do at each place, and it was lovely to see these towns from a different perspective. We were all agreed that our little jaunt, in the main away from traffic and noise, was time very well spent.

### SUMMER BARBECUE



In July we held our summer barbecue at New Green Centre. It was a glorious day so the doors of the conservatory and bar could be opened wide and the outside tables used, along with the bar and meeting room facilities. From our membership, now reaching ninety six, eighty of us were able to join in the fun. To compliment the succulent chicken, sausages and burgers, a splendid buffet, generously provided by members of the group, was laid out along the length of the conservatory. Meats, bought from Pete our local butcher, were valiantly prepared on the barbecue by our "Chefs Extraordinaires", Phil and Brian, aided at times by

Bob. All three ended up only slightly smoked by home time. Scrumptious desserts, again provided by our culinary queens, together with cold drinks and wine, completed the feast. With so many members present, it was a splendid way to socialise and chat with old friends and welcome the new, and it was lovely to see everyone mixing in and clearly having a good time.

*Jean White*

## CREATIVE COMPUTING

If you are interested in using your computer for studying any of the following topics, with a view to forming a new group in January 2010, please contact  
Judith Constantine  
01359 241079 or  
[buza@anjucon.co.uk](mailto:buza@anjucon.co.uk)

Publishing  
Desk-top publishing  
Web publishing  
Blogs, social networking

Multi-media  
Slide shows, photo editing  
Movies, video editing  
Audio, voice recording, music  
Animations

Computer Aided Arts and  
Crafts  
Graphic design and drawing  
Embroidery and knitting  
design  
Greetings cards  
Papers and printing  
Interior and garden design

This group is not suitable for  
beginners – you should  
already  
be comfortable with most  
aspects of everyday computing

## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

**Monday 19 October**  
Interest Groups' Exhibition  
*With wine and cheese*

**Monday 2 November**  
Two Suffolk Artists -  
Gainsborough & Constable  
*Mark Mitchels*

**Monday 7 December**  
Christmas Waits - A Merry  
Seasonal Entertainment  
*Martyn Harrison*

**Monday 4 January**  
My Day at the Palace  
*Adrian Williams*



## GARDEN VISITS

This continues to be a very popular group of keen people interested in all aspects of gardens and we learn so much from the clever planting we see on our visits. I'm sure most of us have neither the space, nor the money to replicate these gardens but we all get inspired with ideas to help us when we get home.

Since our last Newsletter we have visited:

Peckover House Gardens in Wisbech;

Saling Hall Gardens in Great Saling, Essex;

Coton Manor, near Guilsborough, Northamptonshire;

Royal Horticultural Society's gardens, Hyde Hall at Rettenden, near Chelmsford.

Next month we are looking forward to visiting Kew Gardens - leaving Thurston at 8.30a.m. on Wednesday 21 October. There are so many things to see there and, even if the weather is poor, lots of interesting indoor displays.



Hyde Hall Gardens

### WORTH A THOUGHT

Dust if you must, but wouldn't it be better  
To paint a picture, or write a letter,  
Bake a cake, or plant a seed;  
Ponder the difference between want and need?

Dust if you must, but there's not much time,  
With rivers to swim, and mountains to climb;  
Music to hear, and books to read;  
Friends to cherish, and life to lead.

Dust if you must, but the world's out there  
With the sun in your eyes, and the wind in your hair;  
A flutter of snow, a shower of rain,  
This day will not come around again.

Dust if you must, but bear in mind,  
Old age will come and it's not kind.  
And when you go (and go you must)  
You, yourself, will make more dust.

*Remember, a house becomes a home when you can write  
"I love you" on the furniture...*

Anon

## U3A WEBSITES

Visit the U3A website to find out more about the Third Age Trust, and resources offered for your particular interests:

[www.u3a.org.uk](http://www.u3a.org.uk)

Our own website is [www.blackbourne-u3a.org.uk](http://www.blackbourne-u3a.org.uk)  
Please send your contributions, with relevant photos about your current activities to our Webmaster, Sue Prigg, at [webmaster@blackbourne-u3a.org.uk](mailto:webmaster@blackbourne-u3a.org.uk)

If you do not have Internet access you can call Sue on 01638 751289

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## FROM THE EDITORS

Please share with us details of any places you have visited or interesting experiences you may have had and help to make the Newsletters more varied. These experiences need not be limited to those involving the U3A.

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