

Blackbourne U3A News

A University of the Third Age in Suffolk

ISSUE NUMBER 56

WINTER 2007

From the Chairman . . .

At this time of year it is customary to review the previous 12 months and I hope you will all agree that Blackbourne U3A has continued to flourish. This is due to the enthusiasm of the committee, the dedication of the convenors and your support of our lecture meetings and outings. Thank you all for your contributions.

Firm control over membership renewals has meant that we have been able to enrol 66 new members to whom we offer a warm welcome. Our 500 limit has now been reached so if you move away from the district or for any other reason become unable to participate in any of our meetings or groups please let Sally Rands, our membership secretary, know. Those on the waiting list can then be invited to join. I accept this is not an ideal situation, especially when prospective members wishing to join an interest group are unable to do so because of the overall limitation. We intend having an open discussion about this problem at the AGM in March.

At the AGM four members of the committee will have completed their tour of duty and have to stand down. So we need some new blood! Two of the vacancies will be those of lecture secretary and educational visits organiser. Both contribute greatly to your enjoyment – where would we be without them? A new interest group co-ordinator is also required. Please seriously consider putting your name forward, perhaps jointly with a friend for support. There are well tested procedures that can be followed and the current holder will be pleased to show you the ropes.

I wish you all a happy and peaceful Christmas and prosperity and good health for the New Year.
Bryann Ward

NOTICE BOARD

Dates for your diary

Monday 7 January

The real price of fish! *Andy Malcolm*

Monday 4 February

The development of St Edmundsbury Cathedral
Sarah Friswell

Monday 3 March

The return of luxury rail travel worldwide *Dr Gerald Sivor* – preceded by AGM

Monday 7 April

Alfred, Lord Tennyson *Mark Mitchels*

A reminder to convenors

By 15 December will you please pass to our treasurer, Ralph Brighton, a summary of money held on behalf of your group members. You will recall this subject was discussed some six months ago following which a letter was sent to all convenors setting out guidelines. Even if you currently hold no such funds a 'nil' return is required so that we have the complete picture.

PHOTOGRAPHY COMPETITION

The competition organised by the Photography Group attracted 24 entries of a very high standard. The subject for 2007 was 'An East

Anglian Landscape or Seascape'. They were judged by Geoff Meadowcroft at the Interest Groups Exhibition on 15 October. First prize was awarded to Elizabeth Sharpe for her photo 'Aldeburgh before the storm', shown below, and second prize to Ken Weston for his photo 'Framlingham College'. For 2008 there will be three categories: Nature, People and Movement. Full details of the rules will be published on the notice board and on the **Blackbourne U3A website**.

Ken Weston

INTEREST GROUPS EXHIBITION

Our twelfth exhibition was held on 15 October. Over 170 members attended to marvel at the range of talents that we have in our U3A. This year's event was another success with a record 23 stands representing 25 groups.

On display [courtesy of Derek Oldham] were photographs of the very first, held in April 1996, a copy of the minutes of the meeting setting up Blackbourne in May 1994 and also the history of the **Third Age Trust** which celebrates its silver anniversary this year.

AUTUMN ACADEMY

This event, held at Combs School, Stowmarket, on 13 October was arranged by the Suffolk and District Network of U3As, and for the second year running was very well organised.

There were 27 sessions and a total of 200 attendees, 21 of whom came from our U3A. We also provided two of the session leaders and we are most grateful to them for giving their time. Attendees were asked to complete an evaluation form under several headings and the overall impression of the day was rated as excellent or good by 99% of those completing the form. A similar event is to be held next year on 11 October and the organisers are seeking offers to lead a session. It would be good if we can again provide support in this area so if anyone is interested please let Bryann Ward know by the end of January.

The Network is a forum of U3As in the county that meets twice a year to exchange views and ideas and arrange area gatherings such as the Academy. For these meetings at least 2 or 3 members of each U3A, not necessarily on the committee, are encouraged to attend. At the recent meeting it was proposed to organise some form of study day, perhaps featuring just one subject with a speaker, in the spring of 2009 to complement the autumn academy.

LECTURE NOTES

Private Lives of Butterflies

214 members attended the lecture on 3 September to hear Rob Parker speak on the subject of 'The Private Lives of Butterflies'. Rob is a member of Blackbourne U3A and is also the Conservation Officer for the Suffolk branch of **Butterfly Conservation**. His interest started as a young lad on the bomb sites of West London and, after retiring from the RAF, his interest intensified. September is a good time for butterflies. They especially like rotting fruit where they can drink fermented juice and get 'tiddly'. Butterflies that hibernate are very good at camouflage, often looking like dead leaves. Big butterflies have big tongues for getting into big plants, and small ones for small plants. Peacock females can carry up to 500 eggs which they lay in batches of 100 at a time on nettle leaves. Male butterflies have black bands on their wings to enable the females to seek them out for mating. Scarce migrants are Painted Lady, Clouded Yellow, and Camberwell Beauty. We should all do more to encourage butterflies in our gardens.

Vera Hurding

Kathleen Ferrier

Christopher Fifield, a conductor of note for 35 years, came to Blackbourne U3A on 1 October to speak to 239 members on '**The Life and Voice of Kathleen Ferrier**'. She was born in Preston, Lancashire, in 1912, left school at 14 and worked for the Post Office until she married a bank manager. She entered the Carlisle Music Festival in 1937 and won a prize for piano, and also her first singing prize which prompted her to take singing lessons. During the war she travelled the country with ENSA, giving recitals with a broad appeal. She had a natural musical instinct, and in 1942 John Tillett advised her to move to London, get rid of her Lancashire accent and have singing lessons. This she did, with her parents and sister. In 1951 she was diagnosed with breast cancer, but continued with her concerts, living in Frognal, Hampstead, with her father and sister, until her death in 1953. We were entertained throughout the talk with examples of Kathleen's skill, finishing with a moving recording of 'Blow the Wind Southerly'.
Jean White

Theatre Royal, Bury St Edmunds

On 5 November Colin Blumenau continued the story he started in May 2002 when he told us about the plans for the restoration of the Theatre Royal. Now with restoration complete and the Theatre once again open for business it was a great pleasure to hear more about this achievement and to have a comprehensive history lesson showing its place in theatre history.

The **Bury St Edmunds Theatre Royal** is a unique building providing the missing link between the Elizabethan Globe and the Victorian theatres. William Wilkins Junior was the architect and he combined English and European traditions with a classical influence.

Much research was done in the restoration, using old cartoons and pictures of theatres, and artefacts found on site. Paint analysis was used to find authentic paint shades. We were shown slides of skies, friezes, seats, columns, arches and lights leading to the designs used.

There are plans to use 19th century repertoire as well as contemporary, and international collaborations have been formed. The future looks bright but, in answer to a question, Colin pointed out the difficulties in balancing the books by mixing different kinds of performances to keep the income coming in. It was no surprise to

find that the annual pantomime brings in the most money.

Mya Turgoose

Thoughts on our U3A

I moved to Suffolk seven years ago and knew no-one except my daughter who lives in Walsham le Willows. It was a huge wrench to leave behind the close contact I had had with good friends amassed over my lifetime in Hertfordshire, and I knew I had to take positive steps myself to accumulate new friends. It wouldn't just happen!

By getting to know one person in my village who was an ardent fan of U3A, I was drawn in several years ago and I have enjoyed fully all the lectures and events I have attended, plus I have made loads of excellent friends I might otherwise not have met. I have also attended many of the day outings arranged so professionally.

I think U3A means different things to different people, and the nice thing is I can choose what I do and what interests me. I have always believed in life-long learning and through the U3A you have helped me to keep that belief alive. I thank all the people who organise everything on our behalf.

Mary Gunn

A series of family tragedies finally caught up with me 12 years ago and I decided to take early retirement. Over the next two or three years new activities were interspersed with spells of anxiety and depression, and confidence was at a low ebb.

Then in 1997 a neighbour introduced me to Blackbourne U3A. I started to attend Monday lectures and realised that this was an organisation where I might find the intellectual stimulation that had been missing since I gave up work.

Ten years on Blackbourne U3A has become part of my extended 'friends and family'. Being a member has helped to rebuild my confidence and restore my mental health. The U3A gives me intellectual stimulation, companionship and opportunities for travel. It has indeed enriched my 'third age'.

Judith Constantine

INTEREST GROUPS

Church Crawlers – a Personal Appreciation

As keen walkers, with interests in archaeology and local history, my wife, Sue, and I have over the years visited many churches or, perhaps I should say, churchyards, having found the church itself to be locked, and with no time to seek out a key holder. Country churchyards, often remote from the communities they serve, provide walkers with tranquil spots for lunchtime picnics or coffee breaks, and if access, to the porch at least, is possible, so much the better, particularly if the weather is less than perfect.

When we joined Blackbourne U3A, three years ago, we were delighted to discover the Church Crawlers Group, giving us the opportunity to explore local churches, both inside and out, dovetailing with our other interests, which are, in turn, enriched.

Our first visit was to Brockley on a rather damp Tuesday afternoon and, since then, we have visited, probably, in excess of **sixty churches**, a handful of them just over the border, in Cambridgeshire or Norfolk, in good company and under the guidance of our Convenor, John Robinson.

During the past year our visits have included a cluster of parishes close to the Norfolk border, the most memorable being Wortham, where the round church tower, now in ruins, is said to be the largest in England. The 29 ft diameter tower is thought to have originally been a watchtower, built for defensive purposes in the early 11th century. The church is a mile to the north of the present village and much closer to the River Waveney, perhaps the source of a perceived threat of invasion in the past?

Works of restoration in Victorian times regularly feature in our local churches and one of the most extreme examples can be found in Brome, a few miles to the east of Wortham, where the church is said by Mortlock, in his excellent *Popular Guide to Suffolk Churches*, to have been 'enthusiastically rebuilt' between 1857 and 1863 by 'a wayward and idiosyncratic architect'. If this is not to your taste, the peacocks, visiting from next door, provide light entertainment.

However, the undoubted highlight of the year's visits, in our opinion, has been the medieval 'Doom' painting, depicting the Last Judgement, on the chancel arch of Stanningfield church. It would be impossible to describe this

work of art here and a visit is strongly recommended.

Phil Prigg

Birdwatching Group

We have enjoyed many and varied trips this year, including a visit to the **British Trust for Ornithology**, Nunnery, Thetford where we had a tour of the site by the site manager, who explained all the work being done there. In September we visited the Bird Observatory at Landguard Point and, after touring the nets used to collect birds, we saw birds being ringed, measured and weighed before being released. It amazed us to see how calm and unafraid they were. All details are recorded and sent to BTO. On the Wildlife Reserve afterwards there was a flock of meadow pipits, some wheatears and redwings. A visit to Barton Broad, and a trip on the solar-powered boat, *The Ra*, was our October outing where we learned of the restoration of the Broad to its present healthy state. The boat itself is a wondrous sight, being made of stainless steel and teak and making very little sound or water disturbance. Now we look forward to 2008. The group is fully subscribed at present.

Rene Brown

Garden Visits

In September we visited **Lucy Redman's School of Garden Design** in Rushbrooke, near Bury St Edmunds. Although it was a very wet and windy afternoon 25 hardy souls turned up for what was an extremely worthwhile visit. Since 1999 Lucy has created a brilliant garden from 'a row of poplars, a beech hedge, some climbing roses, an old apple tree and a walnut'. Today it is stunning, consisting of a sedum-roofed garden pavilion (where Lucy runs her garden design courses), Falkland Island Beds, Willow Tunnel, Grass Parterre, Unusual Bulb and Rhizome Garden, Cedar Greenhouse, Potager, Plough Breast Sculpture, Butterfly Walk, Willow Igloo, Copper Beech Spiral and Trampoline Beds. This is a garden full of interest not only to gardeners but children too. There are also some very desirable, unusual sculptures dotted around the garden to give added interest.

In October we ventured much further afield to Rye in East Sussex to experience the delights of **Great Dixter**, the family home of the late Christopher Lloyd who devoted his lifetime to creating one of the most experimental, exciting and constantly changing gardens of our time.

Here we saw a wide variety of interests from yew topiary, mixed borders, natural ponds, a formal pond and a beautiful Exotic Garden. We were also privileged to have a conducted tour around the house – often described as the original for the nursery rhyme 'There was a crooked house . . .' – it certainly was! Although we had a very early start and did not get back until 8.00 pm the 48 of us who went had a most enjoyable day.

Barbara Milner

Then and Now Group

The group is going from strength to strength with over 40 members now. In August and September we had two walking tours of **Bury St Edmunds**. The first, led by Martin Taylor, had us looking at some of our local history which is 'Written in Stone'. We saw stone tablets, interesting walls, unusual buildings and memorials, and were told about some of the owners and builders who, many years ago, helped to develop our lovely town.

Rob Butterworth led us on a tour entitled 'Not St Edmund's Men', the story of the Jewish community of historic Bury St Edmunds. One section of the walk was in Hatter Street – formerly Heathenman's Street – where the Jewish community once lived and where, hidden away, are the remains of an ancient synagogue. Interestingly there are two Stars of David on the top section of the Abbey Gate. Do they tie in with the old Jewish influence in Bury St Edmunds?

The following month we had a fascinating tour of the Brewery and discovered that, despite its huge growth over recent years, **Greene King** still has a very caring attitude to its workers. The magnificent view from the top of the main building enabled us to see Bury St Edmunds from a very different viewpoint. The new Cathedral tower stands superb and to be able to look down on the site of the home of the last Abbot, John Reeve, who died shortly after his beloved Abbey was virtually sold off at the Dissolution was quite moving. Fortunately our spirits were raised in the attractive hospitality bar where we were able to sample a few of Greene King's products.

By the time this appears in print we will have visited the Fire Station and also had a talk about the Bury Cross.

Social History – Thurston Group

The joint visit with the Barningham group to the newly restored **Theatre Royal** was fascinating. Deidre Dobson had organised a tour of the

theatre, led by a knowledgeable guide. We covered every area including the boxes with their inventive folding seats, tried the slightly hard, but quite authentic seating in the pit, viewed the stage from the wings and looked down from 'the Gods' – a bit like looking through a letterbox I thought! Finally we had a cup of tea in the new restaurant area. This was a very interesting visit – thank you Deidre.

Jeanne Crook and Daphne Hammerton gave us an interesting and informative seminar about education. Daphne told us about the Burston and Shimpling School Rebellion and Strike which started in 1914 and lasted into the 1920s. Jeanne explained about the role of a modern School Governor. Both topics led to discussions involving the whole group. It is so sad that we may lose Daphne and Bill Hammerton as they could be moving from the area. They were among the founder members of Blackbourne U3A and will be sadly missed, having contributed a lot to our U3A as well as to the Social History Group. Thank you Daphne and Bill and our best wishes.

Our next topic is 'Popular Music in the 19th Century'.

End of Year Quiz

The Annual Quiz is with us again – for the second year – does that qualify as 'annual'? Entries have to be in by 7 January. Sales are going well and all profits go to a local charity. Last year St Nicholas Hospice benefited by £100. I am told the quiz is slightly easier this year. It has an interesting range of topics from questions about our county of Suffolk, through general knowledge, events of 2007, 'steam radio' and even local dialect. Something for everyone – I hope. Please make sure you have got your copy, £1 each, available at Monday lectures.

Brian Milner

NEW GROUPS

Blackbourne U3A is amazing! The number of new groups keeps growing and we are able to find willing convenors to help organise them. Thank you to all volunteers.

The **CANASTA GROUP** has recently formed and already has had two successful meetings. Thank you Sue Russell, who is also going to help organise the **THEATRE VISITS GROUP**, which attracted 26 members when launched at November's meeting. I understand more people are waiting to join next month.

Felicity Stemp will convene the **WRITING YOUR MEMOIRS GROUP** which has a large enough nucleus to get underway. Will we be allowed to read their stories – warts and all? Watch this space!

A new **INTERMEDIATE FRENCH GROUP** has a small number of members and probably could do with a few more. We have secured the help of an experienced French speaking member to act as Convenor.

The **SINGING GROUP** is starting its sessions but could do with more men I am told – no doubt a few more women too! A musician to play for them would be appreciated. Do join in and, you never know, you might soon be serenading us at our meetings.

Brian Milner

AUTUMN ADVENTURES

Visit to the Yorkshire Dales

On a damp Monday afternoon in September 15 members of the Walking With Interest Group arrived at the Golden Lion Hotel in Settle for a four-night stay in the **Yorkshire Dales**.

By the following morning the rain had cleared and we set off to catch the steam train from Embsay to Bolton Abbey for the day's walk. The stepping stones across the Wharfe were under water so no one was tempted to cross the river that way and instead used the bridge. A fine view of the ruined abbey was to be seen from above the river before descending to the Cavendish Pavilion for refreshment. With renewed energy we ventured up to the Strid before making our way back for the return train journey.

Wednesday morning dawned bright and fresh. Five decided to visit Carlisle by the picturesque rail line over the Ribbleshead viaduct while the rest tackled the Ingleton waterfalls walk. After the recent rains there was plenty of water cascading over the numerous falls and many photos were taken.

All 15 completed the last of the walks. This time a gentler ramble between the pretty villages of Clapham and Austwick with time after lunch to visit the church or nature reserve although two intrepid souls decided to climb to the top of Pen-y-Ghent!

Many thanks to Trevor and Rene for organising our accommodation and itinerary.

Bryann Ward

Travel To Group Visit to Dinant, Belgium

The four-night trip was arranged in conjunction with Success Tours who contracted Simonds coaches to take us. We set off from New Green at 7.45 am Wednesday 17 October arriving at Dover in good time for the ferry. After a smooth crossing we were soon on our way through France and Belgium and arrived at **Dinant** at 6.30 pm local time. The Ibis Hotel has clean comfortable rooms with wonderful views overlooking the river, marvellous showers, and an excellent and wide selection for buffet breakfast.

Thursday we cruised up the River Meuse to Chateau Freyr where we were met by Baron Axel Bonaert, a wonderful host who took us around his home and gardens. Returning to Dinant for a short lunch break we took our coach to the Citadel, way above the town, for a guided tour.

Friday we travelled to what was once rated as the smallest town in the world, Durbuy on the River Ourthe, a picturesque village with incredible topiary gardens. We then travelled through more beautiful scenery to La Roche-en-Ardenne, a delightful town surrounded by verdant hills.

Saturday we went to Namur for a guided tour of the city and its surrounds finishing at the Citadel. We then had free time to explore the town before rejoining the coach to visit the fantastic Jardins d'Annevoie and returning to Dinant.

Sunday we journeyed home, stopping off at a hypermarket before catching the ferry. All in all we had a most enjoyable and successful trip. The weather throughout was perfect, the slight morning mist on the river and the later sunshine bringing alive the seasonal colours of the autumn leaves, all combining to make this another adventure to stay in the memory.

Bob Mountfort