



Affiliated to the Third Age Trust
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Newsletter

Issue 116

December 2023

Message from the Chair – December 2023

I am writing this as we approach Christmas 2023. I feel I have settled into my role as much as anyone can and remain eternally grateful for all the efforts of the Committee in undertaking their not inconsiderable parts in keeping Blackbourne u3a open!

We have tackled mostly basic issues I would say, in ensuring compliance with the Charities Commission, made a start on revising and updating the website which remains work in progress and introducing a more sophisticated data system that is useful to all roles across the committee. This has included a change in how you are all emailed, collection of membership details and fees and made the Theatre and Garden visits so much easier to manage I am told! I claim none of the plaudits for this.

Our lectures for 2024 are planned and I am sure there is lots to interest us all in the coming year. We are a “broad church” so I hope the variety of speakers will appeal. Our numbers are steadily growing but we still have room to welcome other friends to join us.

Spread the word!

Next year we are planning to consider if we can improve our communication systems with you and also look at succession planning to try and have in place, members who are willing to undertake roles on the committee or in a support role to the committee. Definitely a challenge for the committee and indeed for Blackbourne u3a as a whole!

On a personal note, while both international and national news is thoroughly depressing, I remain positive and thankful that some things do go well, be they holidays, time with loved ones and the wonderful colours that the changing seasons bring to us all. My four new roses are still alive and that is my personal achievement for 2023. What will I achieve in 2024... ..

Happy Christmas to one and all! Liz

Creative Writing Group

This group has been meeting on the fourth Monday of each month since March 2023. We have eight members whose writing genres are mixed and include poetry, short stories, radio plays and family history. We meet in a member's home which limits our space, but we could take one or two new members if there is anyone who wishes to join us in our quest to become better writers.

We try to keep things informal but organised. Our aim is to encourage members to enjoy writing, and to experiment with different styles and methods if we choose to.

Each month we pick a topic or challenge for the next meeting and set a word limit. Everyone gets a chance to read their work if they wish and we have had some interesting and encouraging discussions.

We held our festive meeting in November, as the fourth Monday in December will be Christmas Day. Our topic was 'The Festive Season', and we enjoyed mince pies as well as our usual tea and coffee.

Finally, we have joined the National U3A Creative Writing Association which provides information and advice for groups like ours. They are running a poetry competition, closing date in January 2024, which is open to any U3A member, not just those who belong to a Writing Group. If you feel like having a go, the link for further information is <https://www.u3a.org.uk/learning/poetry-competition>
Ann Hunter, Group Leader hunterann25@yahoo.com

Monthly Lectures

Start promptly at 10.00am
Refreshments served until
9.45am

Tuesday 2 January

My Creative Journey

A career through film,
television and theatrical cos-
tume design.

Amanda Sutherland

Monday 5 February

Tales from the Top Table

Neil Hunt

The speaker is a past president
of the National Association of
Toastmasters.

Monday 4 March

A.G.M.

Followed by a talk on Suffolk
Witches

Pip Wright

“THE DIG” BY CHARLIE HAYLOCK

The new season started on 4th September and 130 enthusiastic students attended the first U3A lecture. In educational terms the audience was entertained to a talk from Charlie Haylock who is well known to most of his audience as a very humorous, skilful and interesting speaker. On this occasion Charlie added the local interest of the Sutton Hoo dig and the film starring Ralph Fiennes as Basil Brown the amateur archaeologist who supervised the dig.

Charlie was approached by the production company to act as the Suffolk Dialect Coach for the film and one of his first tasks was to, as he called it, “Suffolkcate” the script. This meant making sure that as far as possible the actors, especially Ralph Fiennes, were using an authentic Suffolk language script but not using obscure words that a national audience would not understand. The actors needed to have a local accent not, as Charlie described it, a West Country drawl - Suffolk people do not live in Bristol.

Charlie had, in Ralph Fiennes, a very willing student who spent many months learning the accent including visits to local pubs and the two developed their own hand signal code to enable Charlie to communicate with Ralph during filming sessions. To get the feel of the part Ralph wore his outfit all day every day for two and a half months including whilst on a casting trip to America. Ralph also cycled many miles on the sort of bicycle used by Basil Brown. This included a ride from Rickingham, Basil’s home village, to Sutton Hoo to get a feel of the effort made by him.

Charlie’s audience was entertained and educated as is appropriate for U3A students. After having previously heard this talk elsewhere I watched the film which allowed me to fully appreciate the excellent educational job carried out by Charlie and the success of his star pupil.

Laurie Marshall

My Tutu went AWOL

Dressed in a tutu our speaker, Iestyn Edwards, introduced himself as Madame Galina, prima ballerina and performed a short solo to music from Giselle. After this we were regaled with details of the tour made to entertain troops in Iraq and the time spent at the camp in Basra with 42 Marine Commando. It was imperative during the visit to wear helmets and body armour all the time but as this was impractical at meal times it was necessary to practice putting on the equipment speedily should the alarm sound.

The person designated to supervise the visit, Corporal Stacks, was apprehensive about supervising a “drag act” but he was informed that Madame Galina is rather a female impersonator. We heard several anecdotes in connection with Stacks, “the youngest serving decorated marine”, including the circumstances around the visit of the senior officer who made the award.

There was also an incident when a visit was planned to check that the men were maintaining the correct appearance by measuring their sideburns. Fortunately rumours had

been received about this visit so that by the time the team arrived there was nothing to measure!

Madame Galina was also persuaded to try to “annoy” the visiting brigadier when he was present at one of the performances by pretending to forget his rank.

As apparently ordnance has a “sell by date” a promise was made that the actors would be allowed to fire some guns on the firing range. When the party left Stacks would have been pleased that he no longer observed “tights being dried on the walls”!

Mary Dunbavin

Friday Longer Walks Group

The Friday Longer Walks group meets on the second Friday of each month. Walks are up to 5.5 miles, occasionally up to 6 miles, taking about 2–2.5 hours.

This year has been a little different to most, in that we have had to cancel some walks due to circumstances beyond our control – heatwave, gales, closure of the A14 due to an accident but we are hoping for a full programme next year.

We have enjoyed walks from Pakenham, Garboldisham, Wyverstone, Great Finborough, Rougham, Cockfield and East Wretham.

We have not been able to arrange a lunch after all of our walks, but we are looking forward to our Christmas lunch in December. Our group is friendly and welcomes new members so if you would like to walk with us, please contact:

Andrew andrewadams900@gmail.com

Sue sueadams900@gmail.com

The Lady in the Van

This was a most enjoyable outing to Tolthorpe Hall Open Theatre to see Alan Bennett’s “Lady in a Van”. Prior to the performance we were able to enjoy a picnic in the lovely grounds of the hall.

Poignant and hilarious in equal measure, the play is based on the mostly true story of playwright Alan Bennett’s encounters with Miss Mary Shepherd, a crabby, eccentric, homeless woman whom he befriended in the 1970s. Bennett kindly told Miss Shepherd she could park her van in the driveway of his Camden home “for three months”. She ended up staying 15 years.

The cast was excellent especially the leading lady. The set with the numerous vans and the costumes and make up were superb. A wonderful experience in a lovely setting.

WRITING FOR CHILDREN, MORE THAN CHILD'S PLAY

The November talk was given by Sam Scott, an Essex based author of books for children. Her initial output was a trilogy of books for children aged between eight and thirteen but she has now moved to writing for older children.

Sam woke up on her 40th birthday and decided that, to mark the event, she would run a marathon and write a book. She told her husband who suggested that she would do neither. She has done both.

Sam told us that all authors have different ways of progressing from idea to finished item and described how she sets about the task. She thinks that writing is the easy part and she has a detailed plan with a huge amount of research; once started she writes a chapter each week. Having completed the first draft she edits it. In order to get to a publisher one must have a literary

agent who will submit the book on one's behalf and even then there is a slush pile of "never read" books.

It can take up to ten years from idea to publication so Sam considers that she was very lucky to achieve this in four years. When Sam first started she signed a contract to write a trilogy and this has now been achieved.

During the course of her talk Sam read an extract from two of her books. Sam has a wide range of interests and tasks that made me think that she needed a ten day week to accomplish everything. She spends a lot of time visiting schools to read to the children and giving talks to groups like ours.

Sam has a high level of self assurance and enthusiasm that may have encouraged some of her audience to write their first book. But not me!

Laurie Marshall

Book Review - by Stella Chamberlaine

"WHO OWNS ENGLAND? - How We Lost Our Green & Pleasant Land & How to Take It Back"

This is said to be "A formidable, brave and important book" and one which I would thoroughly recommend when it's too hot (or wet!) to do much outside.

Basically, behind this simple question lies this country's oldest and best-kept secret. This is the history of how England's elite came to own our land - from aristocrats and the church to businessmen and corporations - and an inspiring manifesto for how to open up our countryside once more. It goes on to say that this book has been a long time coming - since 1086, in fact. For centuries, England's elite have covered up how they got their hands on millions of acres of our land, by constructing walls, burying surveys and, more recently, sheltering behind offshore shell companies. But with the dawn of digital mapping and the Freedom of Information Act, it's becoming increasingly difficult for them to hide.

Trespassing through tightly-guarded country estates, ecologically-ravaged grouse moors and empty Mayfair mansions, writer and activist Guy Shrubsole has used these 21st-century tools to uncover a wealth of never-before-seen information about the people who own our land, to create the most comprehensive map of land ownership in England that has ever been made public.

From secret military islands to tunnels deep beneath London, Shrubsole unearths truths concealed since the Domesday Book about who is really in charge of this country - at a time when Brexit is meant to be returning sovereignty to the people. Melding history, politics and polemic, he vividly demonstrates how taking control of land ownership is key to tackling everything from the housing crisis to climate change - and even halting the erosion of our very democracy. It's time to expose the truth about who owns England - and finally take back our green and pleasant land.

Quite a claim, all that, but I found it very eye-opening, instructive and, in conclusion, actually rather positive and up-lifting, particularly the author's ten-point Plan of Action on how to correct these age-old wrongs.

Exhibition

The Art and Mixed Media group held their annual exhibition in Pakenham Village Hall on Saturday 28 October. There were over 100 paintings by members on view, covering a variety of subjects, styles and media.

Public attendance was good, with friends, family, U3A members and locals paying us a visit, generating an interest in the U3A .

The homemade refreshments provided an additional attraction!



A three parish walk (Wyverstone, Bacton and Westhorpe)



A sunny October day saw 12 members of the Thursday Walks with Interest Group traversing the footpaths and bridleways of Wyverstone, Bacton and Westhorpe led by Bill Blackaby.

We started at Wyverstone Village Hall and struck out towards Church Hill and Wyverstone Road and thence along Wash Lane, a public footpath that runs alongside a water course that eventually ends up as a tributary of the Waveney. We then travelled a short stretch of road towards Earls Green before turning to traverse a short footpath to enter Bacton Parish that ends adjacent to the Bacton Scout hut. We crossed Rectory Road and walked through a field where several Jacob Sheep were sunning themselves. The group walked through several fields before turning towards Bacton Church, St Mary the Virgin. The building dates from the 14th and 15th centuries but unfortunately it was locked so on this occasion we were unable to have a quick look around. We crossed Church Road, passed Bacton Village Hall and on to Finningham Lane, a bridle way that ends at Ladywell Road in Westhorpe parish. As

we walked along Ladywell Road we saw a red kite land in the adjacent field to pick over the carcase of a rabbit. Crossing over a ford we turned westwards towards Carr Lane, another bridle way that led us southwards to Carr plantation. After passing through the plantation we briefly re-entered Bacton parish before passing back in to Wyverstone parish. Bill pointed out a field that has been found to include evidence of a Roman Villa site plus possible Iron Age round houses. The adjacent site once accommodated the Bacton Middle School now demolished, with the site awaiting redevelopment. The group then turned back on the Wyverstone Road and returned back to Wyverstone Village Hall.

This was a very pleasant walk of just under 6 miles (taking about 2½ hours) in some lovely Suffolk countryside and definitely worth a revisit in the future.

If you would like to see some great parts of the Suffolk countryside new members are very welcome to join the group led jointly by Lynda Hayward (heywood.kinver@gmail.com) and Di Finney (di.finney@outlook.com).

Bill Blackaby

Future Outings

We have had a very successful year with Garden Visits and Theatre Trips, with four currently planned for 2024. Brief details of these are:

Wednesday 7 February. *Walsingham Abbey and the snowdrops.*

Tickets available at £34.00

Contact Tina – tt121@talktalk.net

Wednesday 14 February.

The King and I. Dominion Theatre. Fully booked

Sunday 17 March

Thriplow Daffodil Day. Fully booked

Thursday 11 April.

Tina the Musical. Aldwych Theatre. Booking closed

Contact Margaret – Margaret.knock@sky.com

However, we are currently unable to offer any outings to places of interest, educational visits or even day trips to the seaside. These have proved very popular over many years and it would be really good if such visits could restart.

If you would like to join our 'team', or find out more about what it would involve, please contact Tina or Margaret who will be happy to discuss with you. The previous Educational Visits organisers are also willing to give advice.

How about a Visit to Northumberland?

The Travel and Tourism group are organising a visit to Northumberland on 9th July next year, staying in a hotel for five nights with excursions included.

Departing from New Green Centre and travelling by coach.

There are a few vacancies.

If you are interested please contact Wendy Wheeler for more information: 01284 764356 or 07876 254840 or

wendywheeler@email.com

To all Music Lovers

Some members may remember that my late husband, John, and I for some years ran a couple of Opera Appreciation groups. He had a long career as an opera singer and over that time collected many vocal scores of the operas in which he performed. I am now trying to find a home for those scores and hope that one of our U3A members might be interested in taking some or all of them off my hands. Or perhaps someone might know of a musical organisation that would find a use for them. Do please get in touch if you have any ideas.

Deidre Dobson 01359 221643

Items for the next newsletter due to be published in March should be sent to bryann@brysuward.plus.com by Feb 21 2024