



Issue 49  
April 2012

North London University of the Third Age

# Newsletter

## How does live theatre work?

**Janet Home** found out when she joined U3A members from all over the country on a day-long workshop at the Piccadilly Theatre

With such an intriguing title, it was not surprising that 100 people came to the workshop, specially created for U3A by the Ambassador Theatre Group. After a welcoming coffee, we assembled in the royal circle to meet our hosts from Ambassador and to hear an introduction from Philippa Bassett of U3A national office.

We were split into four groups to look at several aspects of theatre: directing, backstage, history and writing. I was in the green group, which started with writing. We gathered in the grand circle bar, where Ali Taylor, a professional writer, introduced us to the skills of adapting a novel to a play. Then we read the opening pages of a children's novel, set in the Second World War, which he had adapted for a children's theatre. He explained that the first scene must establish what the play is about and gave us the first few pages of his script.

The wartime background was created by the sounds of aircraft, explosions and gunfire, accompanied by popular 40s music, and the flash of explosions and searchlights through artificial smoke. So much of the book had



already been told without a word being spoken! The experience was thought-provoking, and one hour was scarcely enough.

On then to theatre history. There was not time to go from mystery plays to the present day, so our review started with the beginnings of West End theatre at the Restoration, when women were first permitted on stage. Only two theatres, Covent Garden and Drury Lane, were licensed by Charles II; performances started in late afternoon and audiences moved freely throughout the per-

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## From the coalface

At the time of drafting (late March), we are all reeling from the shock of the increased postal charges. While this is something the committee has been concerned about for some time, we have done what we can. Because of the alarming forecasts in the press, we decided in early March to invest in a stock of stamps at the current price to put off the time at which the increase will impact our finances. Nevertheless, we shall have to restrict our use of the post to essentials so as to make our stocks last.

Another matter which has been concerning us is the need to refresh our committee. Happily, we already have a co-opted member who will take over as treasurer when the current treasurer stands down at the July AGM. However, that still leaves one empty seat. Next year four more of us will come to the end of the term for which we were elected. So in the next twelve months we have to find five more committee members. There is only one place we can look for them, and that is to YOU, the members. Unfortunately there is no 'they' who will find committee members for us – there is only you.

If you're thinking: 'I couldn't possibly do that: I don't have the qualifications,' forget it. Only one committee member, the treasurer, needs any specific expertise. The remainder of us learn from each other in true U3A fashion, and 'make it up as we go along', guided by our constitution and with guidelines from national office if needed.

We are all volunteers with lives outside U3A and, perhaps surprisingly, we all enjoy our work on the committee. Our meetings are friendly and relaxed. If you would be interested to sit in as an observer to find out what we do, you would be most welcome. You will surely have had some kind of responsibility in your working lives, so you would not find it too hard. You'd be surprised how much you get out of being involved in our U3A. Just phone or email me or any other committee member, and we'll fix it up.

JANET HOME

CHAIR OF NORTH LONDON U3A

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formance, both in the auditorium and backstage. The plays were mostly contemporary comedies concerned with money and sexual intrigue. By the late 18th and 19th centuries, plays were appealing more to an educated audience.

After lunch, the green group had a fascinating and enjoyable introduction to the stage and backstage. We met the company manager, who explained that he and the deputy stage manager were employed by the production (currently the musical *Ghost*), and not by the Piccadilly Theatre. His team is responsible for all company activity on stage and backstage. In addition to the cast of 19, this includes the company manager, stage management team, director, six extra cast members called 'swings' who cover absences in a variety of parts, ten musicians, ten wardrobe and wigs people, three sound engineers, three lighting engineers, and several automation and audio visual engineers.

Faced with only eight weeks' rehearsal time, studios are booked. These provide a space as large as the stage, and the set is marked

out in coloured tapes on the floor. Most of the cast (plus the 'swings') will appear in a variety of parts and have multiple changes of costume, many to be accomplished in barely 30 seconds. During rehearsals everyone has to be measured for all their costumes, which creates serious time pressure. Also during rehearsals, actors may need to learn extra skills, such as pottery-making for the female lead in *Ghost* and guitar-playing for the male lead. Every speaking and singing cast member has a hidden microphone and the leading man, who appears in the second act as the ghost of the title, has a tiny device hidden in his hair which communicates with a computer-controlled light that follows him constantly to give the appropriate ghostly blue glow!

Finally the green group moved to the stalls bar to meet the director, Ben de Wynter, who described a director's work in putting on a piece of theatre. The director must never forget the overriding importance of telling the story. Research is essential, both for the director and the actors. The director must study the script until he knows



it through and through, and also know the background to the play. There may be previous productions, films or an original novel to be read. Casting and design are central to the creation, and the director must keep in constant touch with all departments as changes arise in rehearsal.

Early in rehearsal, moves are blocked using the markings on the rehearsal floor, so that actors learn to move within a set which does not yet exist. Learning their moves helps actors to learn lines, as they can memorize the move and the lines together.

The day ended with a question and answer session back in the theatre. Some of us had taken the opportunity of a discounted ticket to see the performance of *Ghost* that evening. I most enjoyed the technical aspects of the production and can confirm that the ghost did have a bluish glow!

## Magician wanted!

Magician wanted to be part of a programme of pre-lunch entertainment at the December monthly meeting. Fez optional!

Please contact Eve Haddow, [evehaddow@aol.com](mailto:evehaddow@aol.com), or drop her a line at 71 Lyndhurst Gardens, London N31TE.



# What did you think?

The newsletter questionnaire attracted few but significant responses, as **Helen Green** reports

Thanks to those of you who filled in the questionnaire that we included in the last newsletter. There weren't very many of you – 17 in all (2.7 per cent of members at the time) – but we appreciate the comments we received. Of course we can't decide editorial policy on the basis of so few responses, but here is a summary of the results.

The most popular item was details of forthcoming events, with everyone saying they liked these and nobody opposed. So we will continue to feature them; as someone commented, they are probably the most important part of the newsletter. Second was group news, with a comment that descriptions of group activities need to be brief. Reports of visits and outings and summaries of monthly meetings tied for third place, followed by committee messages and then reports of shared learning projects, which were described as one of the most interesting

activities in U3A. The chair's message and As I See It, which aims to give a picture of the wider U3A organization, attracted an equal number of 'like' and 'neutral' responses – enough to warrant their continued inclusion.

Least popular were obituaries, which could cause offence if some people were included and not others, and poetry. Most respondents were neutral about poetry, and someone requested that only short poems be printed. However, we will continue to publish obituaries for people who have made a significant contribution to U3A and will use shorter poems when space permits. Theatre, restaurant and book reviews and other non-U3A matters were moderately popular. But there was a feeling that theatre reviews could soon be out of date and that other reviews could be picked up elsewhere.

There were requests for cartoons – any cartoonists out there? – letters, competitions, helpful

tips and local shop services, recipes, garden tips, skills and goods swaps, travel articles, information for elderly people and an agony column. Inclusion of any of these will depend on readers sending them in. We are planning to include a letters page, but we do need letters to put on it.

There were, happily, few complaints. There was a comment that articles are too wordy and that we should use pictures instead and an observation that the photos in the printed newsletter are fuzzy and of poor quality. So please, when you send us photos, remember that they will be reproduced in black and white and therefore may not look as good as they do in colour.

The newsletter is a North London U3A publication – by and for North London U3A members. We aim to keep you informed about what's coming up and what's going on but we would like to include other relevant information as well. This is up to you!

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## Welcoming new members

Two gatherings to greet people new to U3A will take place this term. These occasions, which take place in members' homes, are a chance for those who have recently joined to find out more about North London U3A, make new acquaintances and meet some committee members. If you would like to come, please telephone your hosts a few days beforehand so that they know how many to expect.

Postal area	Date	Time	Contact	Telephone
N20 Whetstone	Tuesday 15 May	10.30 to 12 noon	Mikis and Sandry Christodoulides	8368 5006
N6 Highgate	Wednesday 20 June	3.00 to 4.30pm	Dorothy and Douglas Barnes	8341 3592



## Goodswap

**D**o you have a table, TV stand or anything else that you no longer want? Perhaps a U3A member can take it off your hands. Based on the website Freecycle, we will be running Goodswap items in this newsletter, so send us the details, and your clutter may be cleared.

By the same token, you may have a need that another member's skill can fill or a talent to offer in exchange for something you need done. Would you like a pair of trousers altered? Send us the details and we'll publish them in hopes of matching you up with someone who sews. Do you have green fingers? Tell us

and we'll print the information so that someone with an unkempt patch of land can ask for your help. The more you tell us about, the better the chance that this kind of exchange can work.

So let us know what you want or can offer, and here's looking forward to a successful Goodswap.

## Too many books?

**Lilian Rubin** kick-starts Goodswap with a suggestion about unwanted books

**A** few years ago, when we downsized from a house to a flat, we were faced with the problem of how to dispose of a lot of books. We found that second-hand dealers had little interest (despite the desirability of many of our books), and charity shops, even our local specialized one, could not accommodate a large number of books.

We gave away as many as we could. We pulled our dining table out to its full extent and loaded it with books, and when friends came, we asked them to

help themselves. Eventually, we were left with the books that we could accommodate and those we couldn't bear to part with. However, we felt there might have been a better way of solving the problem.

I understand that U3A in London has a room where books can be given and taken, but what about U3A groups that have no permanent storage? I would like to suggest that we store books on a list that would be available to members by computer. Books could be added to the list by do-



nors, who could be contacted by email or telephone as desired, and arrangements made for collection – at monthly meetings, for example.

Do readers have any views on the subject?

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## Making a will?

Show your appreciation of North London U3A by including us in your will, says **Richard Callanan**.

**M**embers often say how much they enjoy their time in their U3A, the friends they have made, the old interests they have followed, the new horizons that have opened up. Have you considered in making your will that you might leave a bequest to North London U3A? Costs for renting premises, printing and mailing are all rising faster than inflation but

we would like to keep the membership subscription as low as possible. This U3A by its constitution is empowered to receive any bequests or donations that would help fund its charitable objectives.

If you mention us in your will, please use our full name, North London University of the Third Age, and our registered charity number, 1048587.

# The expats

In January's newsletter W G Sebald described his feelings at seeing England for the first time; we invited members to do the same.

## Escape from Hungary

**John Hajdu** arrived in England after fleeing the Soviet occupation of his native Hungary. Here he tells his story



In October 1956, having had enough of Soviet occupation, the people of Hungary started a protest that quickly turned into a revolution and the withdrawal of the Soviet troops. Unfortunately, freedom did not last long and the Russian army crushed the uprising with a vengeance. It became clear that life was going to be harder and more dangerous.

We heard rumours that people were taking advantage of the chaos to flee the country. My mother and I concluded that we had nothing to lose and must try to escape, so on 20 November we closed the door of our flat, abandoning everything but some food and my teddy.

We had to cross a bridge over the Danube before dark, since all

the bridges were guarded at night and anybody carrying luggage or looking suspicious was stopped.

At 6.00 the next morning we boarded a train bound for Austria. We knew that

the stations near the border were guarded, so in the afternoon, still some way from the border, we got off the train and started walking.

As we progressed, we found many others going the same way with the same aim in mind. Since we did not know which way to go, we had to ask the local peasants. Aware of our intentions, they were only too happy to help and keep silent (we hoped) in exchange for money and jewellery.

It was a clear, icy night and we were tired and cold. As we neared the border, our route became more difficult and dangerous. We cut across fields to avoid main roads and several times squatted in icy mud to avoid soldiers using searchlights to discover escapees.

At midnight, the moon was

shining and we had to cross a small river without a bridge. Eventually we found some slippery frozen pipes that spanned the river and managed to clamber over.

The place we entered was mined; we knew that though we were near the end of our journey, this was going to be the most dangerous part. We noticed a bridge guarded by a watchtower – the point of entry into Austria.

Having watched the area for some time, we realized that by great good fortune the tower was not occupied: the lookouts were temporarily off duty. So we decided to take a chance.

Although we were terrified, we crossed the bridge and entered Austria unharmed. Having walked approximately 40 kilometres that day and night, we now saw lights guiding us to safety.

At 2.30am on 22 November we came to the village of Andau and were welcomed by the Red Cross and other aid organizations.

We found out that not everybody had been so lucky: some had been blown up by mines, some shot by guards, some drowned in the river, some arrested and taken

back to Budapest and imprisoned. It was only by great providence that we had found one of the few crossings without a guard.

At dawn the following morning we were taken to a previously disused army camp near Innsbruck, which had been turned into a refugee camp for 500 Hungarians. We were well looked after, but the conditions were basic – about 40 to a dormitory, bunk beds, communal toilet facilities. We were given second-hand clothing collected by the locals and some pocket money. On 28 December my mother and I were transferred to Vienna, where the Red Cross gave us pocket money

of 30 schillings a week, vouchers for food and a room to live in.

My mother and I decided to emigrate to England. We started queuing outside the British Embassy on 30 January 1957 with several hundred other hopefuls. After six days of queuing, we were admitted and fortunately given permission to enter Britain. We had two hours to get back to the hotel, pack and catch a Red Cross train leaving for Ostend and Dover.

As I had never travelled outside Hungary, the train journey seemed like a dream. It was difficult to comprehend what had happened to us: we had escaped from

Hungary, lived in Austria for a few weeks, and now we were going to a country we had only dared to dream about. We saw England for the first time at 5.30pm on 6 February, 1957. We arrived at Victoria at 8pm and were transferred by bus to Euston. At midnight we left for Stafford, arriving there at 4am the next day. A reception committee was waiting for us, and we were taken by bus to our first home in this country – a large disused Royal Air Force training camp near Hednesford on Cannock Chase.

It was a wonderful feeling to be safe at last and able to plan our future in peace.

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## One woman, two countries

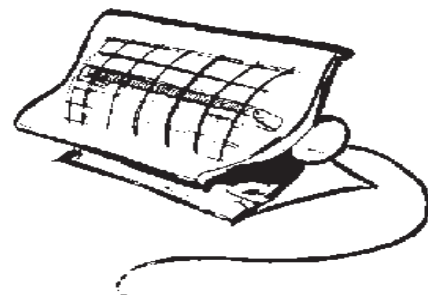
England is not like the USA, as **Helen Green** discovered to both shock and delight all those years ago

**I**t was 80 degrees in Philadelphia when I boarded a plane bound for London on an August evening in 1969, en route to an exchange year in France. When I got off at Gatwick, the temperature had dropped to 50, and I wailed to myself: 'Everything I ever read about English weather is true!'

I was to stay with a late-discovered distant cousin who lived in a place called Hampstead. The taxi driver dropped me off and quoted a price. I looked at the strange money in my hand. 'How many pounds are in a shilling?' I asked. Confused by the answer, I ended up giving him a £20 tip.

My cousin's house was big, ancient and draughty, with many art treasures and horribly antiquated facilities. Instead of central heating, there was a three-bar electric heater, or 'fire' as they called it. My new-found relative persisted in turning the second and third bars off every time I turned them on.

The loo paper consisted of small waxy sheets called Izal Medicated – unpleasant to touch; more unpleasant to use. Instead of a shower, there was a rubber hose contraption that you attached to the bath spigots, with a weak shower spray on the end that you held over yourself as you squatted



down in the bathtub. In addition to the cold taps, there were hot-water outlets called geysers over the sink and bathtub. 'Make sure the pilot light doesn't go out,' I was warned. I had long thick hair (brown if you want to know) at the time, and whenever I took the tube and ran a comb through my

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hair, the comb came out black. How would I cope?

When my cousin cooked, she threw all the vegetables into a pot and boiled them for a while. 'Everything I ever read about English food is true!' I wailed to myself.

But there was much more freedom in England. You could smoke in the cinema on buses and in the tube (you couldn't in the USA). Skirts were much, much shorter. Far from being considered seedy, pubs were happy socializing places. Off-licences had the respectability of corner stores and none of the sleazy connotations of the liquor stores back home.

And everything was really old. In the US, 'old' meant about 100, and buildings that dated to the American revolution in 1776 were ancient. As I did the tourist circuit and visited all those glorious stone buildings, I was awed by the historicity of it all. I discovered the wonderful parks that broke up the metropolitan environment and walked everywhere.

Four years (one in France; the rest split between England and Ireland) and a marriage later, I went back to Philadelphia for a visit. I was surprised at how much my attitudes had changed. Everything – the bread, the bacon (I haven't always been vegan) – tasted sweet. Places that I had once considered too far to walk

to were only ten minutes away on foot. The buildings that had once seemed prehistoric were newer than some of the places in England that people lived in.

Forty-plus years later I have dual citizenship and I have spent longer here than there. When I go back, everything seems ... American. Shop assistants are uncaring; 'please' and 'thank you' are rarely heard words; people see the US as the centre of the world and can't believe that anyone would choose to live anywhere else.

But I have, and so I return to London, hear the accents and wonder what I'm doing here. I feel totally transatlantic and probably always will.

## Monthly meetings and visits

### Cops and robbers

Shirley Meredeen gives an insight into the illustrious career of a police detective



There were belly-laughs at the February talk by ex-Metropolitan Police detective inspector Steve Roberts when he reminisced about his successful and less glorious memories of 30 years' service.

Perhaps the most hilarious story Steve told was of the forensic inspector who threw him a skull which he had gone to some efforts to protect while cordoning the area off during a murder investigation. Startled, Steve queried the action only to be shown that the

skull said 'Made in Hong Kong'.

He started on the beat in Poplar (when he had one O-level, in pottery) and progressed to Scotland Yard's Flying Squad and Kidnap and Anti-corruption Units. At the beginning he was heavily involved in 'jump-ups', where local criminals would jump up to heavy goods vehicles to steal their cargo. He described a hair-raising episode when he himself jumped on to a vehicle as part of a chase and discovered the load was



of meat carcasses – the nearest he ever got to cattle rustling was how he portrayed this adventure.

While describing the enormous amount of background research involved in surveillance and preparing to ambush armed robbers, he mentioned the tension

involved and the potential danger the police were under. Steve's talk was full of hilarious anecdotes – one where his chase vehicle was travelling at 29 mph to block an escaping vehicle, but in reverse; of investigating Snakeheads (Chinese criminals); as hostages; fraud and

extortion, corruption.

The audience was kept laughing at the dry way he told these stories and we were reminded of the benefit of the old bobby on the beat of our childhood years. We wished that they could return, despite the ominous cuts now threatening.

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## Assisted death – a human right

**Douglas Barnes** reports on a thought-provoking talk on the right to choose to die

Everyone has the right to control the moment of their death, asserted Pieter Vlieland, a member of the voluntary organization Dignity in Dying, when he spoke at the monthly meeting in January. But at present the law is unclear and open to dispute, so that anyone who facilitates the death of another is vulnerable to prosecution and possibly lengthy imprisonment.

Even though the director of public prosecutions has recently asserted that assisted death is lawful 'if motivated by compassion', this has not been firmly established in law. Social attitudes in our society have, however, been changing: one survey reported that 80 per cent of people questioned wish for a statutory change. The speaker urged us all to make our opinions known.

We were told of a draft law that would make assisted death legal, but only if death was imminent and the person wishing for help was well-informed about what they were asking for, was making a voluntary choice and

was persistent in asking for help. The Falconer committee recently recommended to the independent think-tank Demos that the right be given only to the terminally ill, that two independent doctors be consulted, that two weeks be allowed for reconsideration, and the means be self-administered.

Pieter Vlieland insisted that assisted death must go hand in hand with palliative help. Experience in other countries which had already passed enabling laws showed that the proposed change would not lead to an excessive number of deaths. The estimated figure was 1,000 cases per year, which would be only 0.2 per cent of the annual total of deaths in this country. Many of these would soon have occurred in any case.

As the law stands, GPs are in an ambiguous and unsatisfactory situation. Everyone knows that some doctors carry out unacknowledged acts of assistance, but in so doing make themselves open to prosecution. Even in countries where assistance is legally accepted, some doctors choose not to be involved.

When Pieter Vlieland turned to those who oppose change, he accused the churches that have proclaimed: 'Care, not killing' of a desire to control our lives. He included some politicians and newspapers in this.

Some of us felt that his jokes at the expense of those who disagreed with him were out of place on a topic where the moral and legal complexity called for rational analysis.

During a full and thoughtful discussion, people pointed out that in many cases sufferers are incapable of taking the action themselves and would thus be excluded if this were a requirement. A member from Holland expressed general approval but pointed out that the complexity of the process made it socially selective. Several members emphasized that we should all make an 'advanced decision'\* – which used to be called a 'living will' – since doctors are now legally required to take such documents into account.

*\* For more information see the article on the next page*

## Making difficult choices

Retired lawyer **Anne Ballard** writes about the legality of advance decisions and how they differ from lasting powers of attorney

**B**oth advance decisions (ADs) and lasting powers of attorney (LPAs) deal with the issue of medical treatment when the patient is unable to give or withhold consent.

**ADs** (sometimes called 'living wills' or 'advance directions') deal solely with **refusal of medical treatment**. It is unlawful for any treatment specified in the AD to be given: the patient's wishes must be followed – unless the request is for something illegal such as, at present, assisted suicide. ADs don't deal with any treatments patients **do** wish to receive.

ADs are quick, easy and cheap to make. The specifications can be as broad or narrow as required. They can be drawn up informally or through a solicitor. They come into immediate effect once signed and witnessed (preferably by the patient's GP or medical specialist). They don't need to be registered, but copies should be deposited with medical and legal advisers, family or friends.

LPAs have replaced the enduring power of attorney. They come in two forms: property and financial affairs LPAs and health and welfare LPAs.

The scope of a health and welfare LPA is much broader than that of the advance direc-

tion. It appoints an attorney to make decisions on such matters as residence, day-to-day care and consent or refusal of medical treatment. The attorney can't make decisions on life-sustaining treatment unless the LPA expressly authorizes this, and must make decisions *in the patient's best interests*. However, if the patient has made a valid AD, this takes priority over the LPA and must be respected, even if it is felt to go against the patient's best interests.

LPAs are complex and should be drawn up through solicitors. They become effective only if the patient becomes mentally incapacitated and must be registered with the Office of the Public Guardian – a slow process. They are also more expensive than ADs.

If a person is seriously or terminally ill it might be a good idea to have both documents as the AD takes effect immediately and can be used before the LPA has been registered.

For more information, legal advice should be sought. Also, the Law Society has produced a practice note (Lasting Powers of Attorney Practice Note 8 December 2011). It is written in plain English and can be downloaded from the internet ([www.lawsociety.org.uk/product-sandservices/practicenotes/lpa/5046.article](http://www.lawsociety.org.uk/product-sandservices/practicenotes/lpa/5046.article))

## 'William Morris: Art, Life and Politics'

How a boy born to prosperity became a socialist influence. Helene Davidian reports on Roger Huddle's account at the March monthly meeting

**W**illiam Morris was born into an affluent family in Walthamstow in 1834; his father was involved with the stock exchange. The family later moved to

Woodford in Essex, where Morris was to spend a lot of time in Epping Forest. This gave him a love of nature that would influence his life and art in the future.

In 1853 he went to Oxford, thinking he would go into the Church. Instead, he met Edward Burne-Jones, Philip Webb, Charles Faulkner and PP Marshall, who

would all feature in his life from then on. They read authors including Ruskin and went on a tour of France, which gave Morris a love of Gothic architecture and values. They vowed to make useful and beautiful things in the society they founded – Morris, Marshall and Faulkner Company, based in Red Lion Square.

Webb built Red House in Bromley, where they lived in commune fashion but only for a short time as it didn't work out well. Morris later bought Kelmscott Manor in Gloucestershire jointly with the artist Dante Gabriel Rossetti. He also had a town house in Hammersmith, where he spent more and more time towards the end of his fairly short life – he died in 1896 aged 62. The doctor said: 'He died of simply being William Morris.'

In 1848, the last Chartist protest to Parliament took place, concerning the effects of industrialization on the workforce. Instead of being responsible for the entire production of an item, workers, now on production lines, made only parts. This resulted in a loss of any personal pride and involvement with the finished piece. This issue of capital versus labour was to excite Marx, Engels, Robert Owen and many more as well as Morris himself.

Morris, Marshall & Faulkner now became simply Morris & Co. Morris changed his working practice in the 1860s to concentrate



on wallpapers, tapestries, ceramics and tiles. His ethos was: 'If you haven't got art you haven't got life.' While travelling in Iceland, he translated Icelandic sagas and decided that happiness came through great poverty.

While Disraeli and the Tories were in power, Morris the idealist joined the Liberals under Gladstone. War with Russia was brewing, and in 1877 he wrote to British workers urging them to be sympathetic to Russian workers and against the English Mill and factor owners. Gladstone was elected in 1878, but he disappointed Morris (who had revered him previously) by supporting the imperialists. The Liberals proved to be worse than the Tories by siding with the Turks against Russia and oppressing the Irish.

Morris was involved in discussion clubs for workers, a particular club being the National Secular League in Stratford. Morris looked up to HM Hyndman of the Marx-

ist Social Democratic Federation, which he joined. Later, he led a breakaway which formed the Socialist League. He wrote an essay entitled 'Art and the People', as he believed in the 'value of intelligent work...of people's hands, guided by their brains...rather than the unintelligent work of machines'. He has influenced workers all over the world.

Morris's aim was to convert people to socialism through education and publicity. He believed that coming together in a free society would mean that art would be so much part of life that it would no longer need to be called art, but 'freedom and fair play for all'. He also helped set up the Socialist Sunday Schools movement. Three hundred children would attend these every Sunday in Walthamstow to discuss concepts such as 'Workers of the world, unite!' Morris's political influence proved much greater than his artistic one.

# Group news

From **Patricia Isaacs**

**D**ear members,  
I'm writing this trying to avoid looking out of my window; the sun is shining, the sky is a clear blue, the trees are greening, and the garden looks delightfully pretty. If I look at it again I will want to go out there, or walk on Hampstead Heath, and this won't get written. So – eyes down to tell you that activity in and around groups is ongoing, almost all of it is successful, and the occasional hitch has been overcome with talk rather than daggers drawn.

Several coordinators have voiced concerns regarding attendance. It is important to let coordinators know if you are going to miss a meeting – especially if the group is held in a member's home – or if you can no longer attend. Someone on a waiting list could join the group in your place.

Several new groups have started since our last newsletter reached you, and more are on the way. The Sunday Tea Party meets once a month for naughty-but-nice goodies to eat and for friendship. At another monthly event, knitters knit squares for charity; they



will soon sew their first blanket together over chat and teacups and then start new squares.

If you are interested in Scrabble, you might want to join Scrabble 2, as Scrabble 1 is full; and there is Beginning Yoga, which is able to accommodate bodies no longer quite so flexible, and which is so popular that we might need to start Beginning Yoga 2. A meeting will soon take place to arrange a new Chess group – we haven't had one for a while, and mention of it on the website has delighted quite a number of members; a new member who is a keen chess player will guide the group in the early days with his exciting proposals.

Exploring the Thames now has a new coordinator, who is looking forward to continuing walking along our beautiful and historic river, taking over from Joanne Crawford, whose knowledgeable and enthusiastic leadership has earned everyone's gratitude. The Science group also has a new leader – or rather, a cooperative of three with terrific new ideas and perhaps a new format, but the hows, whys and wherefores relating to science will carry on as they have done under the guidance of Cyril Dainow. Cyril has been an inspired group leader, and we all owe him our thanks.

Bridge groups are evolving under new banners too; the changes are not radical, and we still have several bridge groups, but we are now able to make room for more, to include the probable newcomers of varying ability who

will be placed on a waiting list that will start in September.

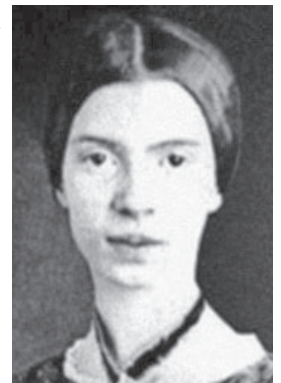
A new poetry group will begin in September. It will be called Poetry Aloud, and

members will read poems of their own choice, perhaps following a theme; as with any new group, the first meeting will decide the format for future sessions. There has been a suggestion about starting a different kind of book group: Let's Read Non-Fiction, which will cover any genre that members choose. All it needs now is a coordinator and a venue, and if anyone might be interested in beginning this group, please let me know.

Some of these groups will be taking part in our summer programme, and all of them will be listed in the new interest groups booklet for 2012–13, which you will receive in August. If you would like information before then, please contact me (preferably by email).

Enjoy your groups, enjoy your involvement with North London U3A, and I look forward to meeting many of you at some of our monthly meetings.

Very best wishes to all of you for a lovely summer.



Emily Dickinson

PATRICIA ISAACS  
GROUPS ORGANIZER



## The Islington Chapter

The Islington Chapter of our U3A, under the leadership of Jackie Roe and Margaret Orrell, is preparing to expand. Proposed new groups will start as soon as coordinators and venues are found for them, and we plan to have them up and running by the autumn term, perhaps with taster sessions in the summer programme. These proposals include a book group, a poetry group, creative writing, languages, opera on DVD, and singing for pleasure. Members living in the Islington area should contact Jackie or Margaret to find out more – and if anyone reading this would be interested in leading one of these groups, they would be particularly pleased to hear from you!

Jackie Roe, 7226 5977, jackieroe@waitrose.com

Margaret Orrell, 7607 7968, margaret@tidey.net

## Cherry-picking Dickens

The 'Let's read Dickens' group began in spring 2011 to commemorate the author's forthcoming bicentenary. **Rosalind Reece** describes what members discovered about his life and works – and about misrepresentations of these by the media

We started in the spring with Dickens's first novel, *Oliver Twist*. In the autumn we read *Dombey & Son* from his middle period and in the winter, his last novel, *Our Mutual Friend*, so that we could track his progress as a novelist. Before each weekly meeting we read three chapters, the same number as Dickens published monthly.

As his bicentenary in February 2012 grew closer, there was a burgeoning of BBC presenters filling their slots with their particular 'take' – they seem to have cherry-picked and swotted up for their allotted time. As I was preparing for *Our Mutual Friend*, Radio 3 gave

five consecutive fifteen-minute talks by different speakers. I listened carefully, prepared to 'pinch' enlightening material. But they popularized Dickens in a shallow fashion and over-idealized his work. One contribution alluded to Dostoevsky and Tolstoy but did not underpin their works with conviction.

Overall there was one glaring omission – the writing itself. During the 19th century two of his avid readers were Henry James and George Gissing, and both took him to task when they thought he deserved it.



All our group's reactions are based on Dickens's inimitable construction of words and personalized punctuation. Many of

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his shorter sentences have the rhythm of a jazz musician playing a riff. He deliberately juxtaposes a demanding emotional chapter with a lighter-hearted one. Knowing himself to be unusually observant, he uses his psychological insights to describe both main and minor characters. He dares to intrude with personal diatribes on moral and societal subjects close to his reformer's heart and

is even cheekily sarcastic about creations he dislikes. He wants us to know what he feels about his inventions because such is his empathy that he becomes them. Yet despite these descriptions, the direct speech of his characters tells us more of their inner feelings. Their conversations range through passion, love, hate, snobbery, poverty and great comedy: they could transfer directly to the stage as ensemble pieces. His descriptions

of nature are intertwined with the moods of the people and their drama. Londoners are lucky to have their A–Z to follow most of his familiar locations. He records Victorian industrialization as he perceives it.

Sometimes there are inconsistencies and untied-up story endings. We cannot always agree with his view of certain characters. Our group has the leisure to approve and disagree in depth.

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## Women's learning lives – a new member's perspective

Thursday mornings took on new significance when **Daphne Berkovi** became a member of U3A and the Learning Lives group



Miriam David

**T**his course, which I began in mid-2011, having just joined North London U3A, proved a splendid introduction to the organization.

I received a warm welcome from a group of women who related their fascinating learning histories. This was combined with stimulating conversations, skilfully led by our tutor, Miriam David, who was collecting research material for a book on women's learning lives.

We looked at several themes concerning gender and generation in relation to changing forms of education, social class, university and the influences of family relationships. Miriam led sessions on reflective moments of learning that had transformed and inspired

us; we discussed a poem or another piece of our writing that had been stimulated by some major issue.

Although Miriam has collected enough data for her proposed book, our group wishes to continue with another course that will focus on women in the 21st century. I am looking forward to resuming the class, as it has been an enriching experience on all levels, and I am grateful to Miriam, all the women in the group and North London U3A for making my fortnightly Thursdays so enjoyable.

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## Eight women in search of a man – or two

**M**en who enjoy acting are invited to join our play-reading group, which currently has about eight women and only one man. The group meets on alternate Wednesdays from 2–4pm in North Finchley. For further details contact Shelagh Taylor, 8346 6543, [shelaghtaylor@aol.com](mailto:shelaghtaylor@aol.com)

## Summer programme 2012

This summer the media will be overwhelmed by the Olympic Games. We would like to offer an alternative that is entertaining, edifying and educational.

Our summer programme will run for six weeks from 23 July to 31 August and we need your help to fill it up. We would like to include all our tried-and-tested favourites – walks, tea parties, films, days out, dancing, barbecues, play-reading, book circles, bowls,



croquet and more. But how about something new? What would you like to see? What have you enjoyed in past years? What can you offer? The summer programme is a good place to try out an idea before it becomes a regular in our groups booklet.

Please have a good think and let us know. We have already started to plan and would welcome your input. Phone either of us or email Barbra with your ideas. Or we will be chasing you!

Barbra Landes 8349 0215 blandes48@aol.com  
Ruth Mendick 7263 3960

## Qui parle français?

An advanced French conversation group takes place fortnightly on Wednesdays from 2.30 to 4pm, either in Muswell Hill in a member's house or in Kenwood. The maximum number of members is six to allow sufficient time for everyone to participate. We converse only in French

about a variety of subjects and there is now a vacancy for one person.

For further information please contact Barbara Tucker, 8883 0366.



## Letters

### Prison reform – why bother?

As a local JP for 24 years, I would like to offer an alternative viewpoint on December's monthly meeting, which advocated prison reform as a way of rehabilitating offenders.

Statistics show that a huge amount of crime goes undetected. When a suspect is apprehended the odds of a conviction are low, and even when convicted, the majority of defendants are not sent to

prison.

Why, then, has the prison population increased? Is it because there are more police, more arrests, better detection and more

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advanced forensic evidence (such as DNA)? Or has there been a higher rate of convictions since prosecutions have been brought by the Crown Prosecution Service and not the police?

Other factors could be high youth unemployment, widespread drug and alcohol abuse and an increased immigrant population. During my last visit to Pentonville Prison we were told the ethnic mix had changed over the years – there is a much higher proportion of foreign nationals now.

Magistrates have the power to imprison for up to six months, but over the years this has become a rarer option. Prison is imposed when the offence is so serious that only custody is appropriate.

Crown Courts, which hear more serious cases, may be more likely to imprison offenders. Often the defendant is a career criminal and the public and victims have a right to protection from them. Magistrates and judges have to act on the public's behalf.

Alternative sentences, such as community punishment, are often seen as a soft option – not just by the general public but the defendants themselves. However, there are many ways to customize the sentence to suit the offender and the offence.

We all like to think that prison will rehabilitate its residents. For this to be realistic, we would need massive investment in training programmes and courses for all prisoners. And with unemploy-

ment projected to go higher and many jobs dependent on a clean record, what are the chances of an offender turning over a new leaf?

That is not to say prison should not be reformed. Loss of liberty is the punishment and we would like to think that prison is civilized. At the end of the day, though, prisoners have chosen to commit crimes and there has to be a deterrent if we are to keep the public safe.

U3A members may find a day in court in the public gallery an interesting proposition. See what you would do when you have heard the facts.

VALERIE COWAN

*See the January newsletter for a report of the monthly meeting on prison reform*

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## Americanize?

It is a sad truth that editors who seek to maximize the number of their viewers, listeners or readers obviously feel it necessary to make them angry. Having received only one letter from our own readers in response to our request, I feel it might stimulate interest if I raise a subject with huge potential for controversy – English spelling.

You will have noticed that we have for some time been using verbs like 'anglicize' with an '-ize' ending. This has led to the comment that we are going American because that is the way they spell.

Well, yes, Americans do invariably use the '-ize' form but they often know more about our language than we do.

My *Fowler's Modern English Usage*, (admittedly not the authority it once was) prefers '-ize' because the suffix is in its origin the Greek *-izein*, Latin *-izare*. The '-ise' form is closer to French. There are a large number of words, such as 'demise', 'advertise', 'devise', where '-ize' must not be used. Perhaps because of the difficulty in remembering them copywriters and printers have tended here to use

the '-ise' ending for everything.

But that other authority, the Oxford English Dictionary, prefers '-ize'. That was my deciding factor in changing when Helen Green, who actually preferred '-ise' because she thought it British, joined me as editor of this newsletter.

Nevertheless, as so many of the articles submitted to us continue to use '-ise', it is a pain to alter them all. So we are thinking of reverting.

What do you think we should do?

BARRY DAVIES



# Forthcoming events

## Brains: the mind as matter

The Wellcome Collection

183 Euston Road, London NW1 2BE

*Wednesday 30 May*

This is a major new exhibition that explores what humans have done to brains in the name of medical intervention, scientific enquiry, cultural meaning and technological change.

Featuring over 150 artefacts including real brains, artworks, manuscripts, artefacts, videos and photography, 'Brains' follows the long quest to manipulate and decipher the most unique and mysterious of human organs, whose secrets continue to confound and inspire.

'Brains' asks not what brains do to us, but what we have done to brains, focusing on the bodily presence of the organ rather than investigating the neuroscience of the mind.

We have arranged a highlights tour conducted by a Wellcome guide, after which we can revisit the exhibits at our leisure.

### Meet

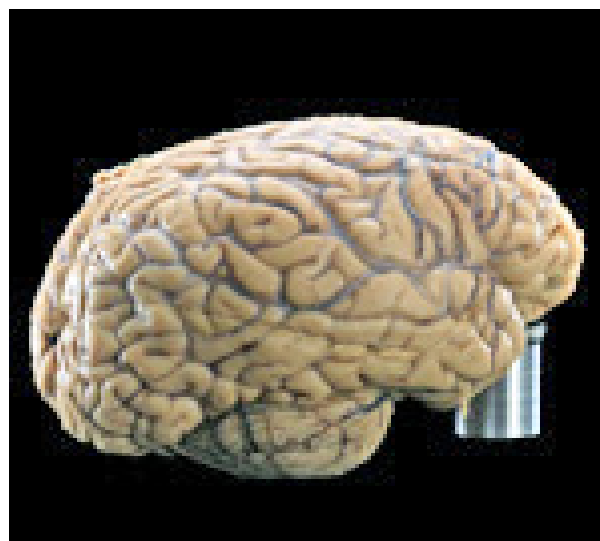
At information/reception desk, 10.50 for 11am.  
(Or in on-site café at 10.30am.)

### Duration

The tour lasts half an hour. Allow at least the same again to browse.

### Cost

Nil



### Travel

The Wellcome Trust is a few minutes' walk from Euston, Euston Square, Warren Street and King's Cross underground stations. Many buses pass nearby, including **10, 18, 24, 27, 29, 30, 59, 68, 73, 88, 91, 134, 168, 205, 253, 390.**

### Facilities

Lifts and toilets, including disabled.

### Booking

Either use the enclosed or downloaded booking form and send with a stamped addressed envelope to Jim Sweeney, 22 Cholmeley Park, London N6 5EU or email your application to [jimsweeney@waitrose.com](mailto:jimsweeney@waitrose.com) giving your name, phone number and trip title.

Awaydays are co-organized by Jim Sweeney and John Hajdu.

**I** prefer to travel on Italian ships because there is none of that women and children first nonsense.' Noel Coward.

# The Brunel Museum

Railway Avenue,  
Rotherhithe, London SE16 4LF  
Wednesday 27 June

The Brunel Museum is on the site of the Thames Tunnel, now part of the London overground, but originally the first tunnel under a navigable river anywhere in the world. It was the only project which both Brunels (father Marc and son Isambard) worked on together, and when it first opened in 1843 it was described as the eighth wonder of the world.



Within the first 10 weeks of opening, an estimated million people had walked through.

The museum is housed in Marc Brunel's original engine house and features a fascinating exhibition on the Thames Tunnel's construction and history. After the opening, the Rotherhithe shaft was transformed into the Rotherhithe Grand Entrance Hall, which also became a massive attraction.

We have arranged a talk and a visit to the entrance hall, which is now normally closed.

## Meet

At reception desk, 10.50 for 11am. (Or in onsite café at 10.30am)

## Duration

The talk and grand entrance visit will last about an hour. We are then free to devote more time to whatever catches our interest.

## Cost

£6.00

## Travel

**Overground:** Rotherhithe station is only a hundred yards away.

**Underground:** Bermondsey or Canada Water on the Jubilee line and then a 10-minute walk. Or change at Canada Water for London overground and Rotherhithe station.

**Bus:** 381 and C10 stop outside Rotherhithe station. 1 and 188 stop at Canada Water.

## Facilities

Toilets in the café. Access to the grand entrance involves moderate stooping and stairs.

## Booking

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# Away days booking form

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_  
*Block letters please. No more than two application names per form. Open only to North London U3A members.*

Phone number \_\_\_\_\_

Date	Name of visit	Accepted/ Not accepted

Leave blank

Send this booking form and a **stamped addressed envelope** to  
Jim Sweeney, 22 Cholmeley Park, London, N6 5EU

If you are unable to attend a visit, please phone Jim on 8340 9282 or 07930 974752.  
**Kindly note that failure to do so often causes needless problems.**

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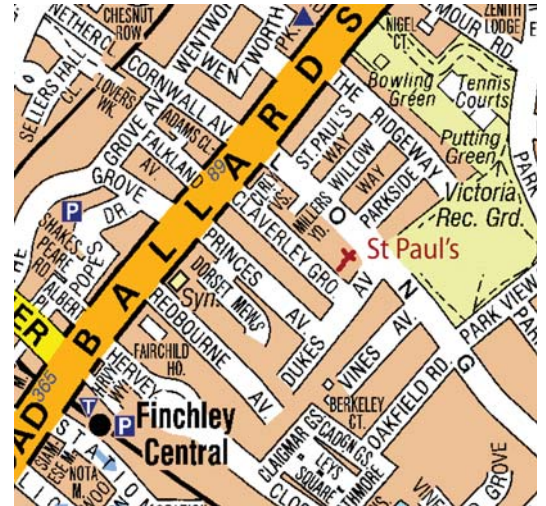
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## Monthly meetings in the summer term

All take place at St Paul's  
Church, Long Lane, Finchley.  
Refreshments from 10.30.

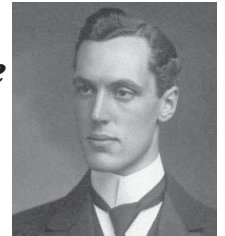
There is no meeting in April



**Monday 14 May**

### *Spedan's partnership: the story of John Lewis and Waitrose*

A computer programmer by trade, Peter Cox joined John Lewis after university and retired 35 years later as the IT director of Waitrose. He is now a member of North London U3A.



**Monday 11 June**

### *Who do you think we are?*

On our 18th anniversary Keith Richards with other founder members will remember the birth of North London U3A. He will introduce Eric Midwinter, one of the three men who founded the University of the Third Age in the UK thirty years ago.



### **Monday 9 July** *Annual General Meeting*

followed by discussion.

## Term dates

Term	Start	Finish
Summer	23 April	13 July
Autumn	17 September	7 December