



Issue 53
September 2013

North London University of the Third Age

Newsletter

The best of both worlds

Coalitions may not be in favour with all our members, but **Judith Abbs** makes a case for the North London U3A version

Imagine you have interviewed all the candidates for chair of North London U3A and are down to the final two. How do you make your decision?

Do you choose the person with an excellent knowledge of the branch and all the interest groups, who can read between the lines of any discussion

– including the two big Ps: Politics (of the U3A kind) and Personalities?

Or do you choose the person who is new to the U3A, who can take a fresh look at old ideas and bring some new ideas, without being inhibited by the history – or the big Ps?

Well, you don't choose between them: you appoint both. So Patricia Isaacs and Michael Gandy have become co-chairs, committing themselves to coordination, cooperation and collaboration.

Patricia joined North London U3A four years ago and became a committee member a year later,

taking on the most demanding role: groups coordinator. She and her team keep track of nearly 100 interest groups.

Patricia grew up in Highgate and went to King Alfred's School, well known then for its progressive approach. She worked briefly as a journalist for the *Ham & High* and

ran an adult literacy

unit for ten years before moving to France for

six years in the 1980s. She says that her adult teaching experience has given her an insight into learning for people long out of the education system.

After seeing Patricia deal with a difficult situation, I asked how she managed to be so calm and confident. She said she has learned everything from the U3A – that whatever she gives to NLU3A is equally balanced by what NLU3A gives to her. Patricia, who is now 78, says: 'Everyone of my age, and older, should know that there is still life and adventure to enjoy.'

'Everyone of my age, and older, should know that there is still life and adventure to enjoy.'

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Snippets from the AGM

- NLU3A subscriptions have gone up by £2.00 for individual members and £3.00 for two members at the same address, bringing this year's costs to £34 and £59 respectively. Explaining the increase at the annual general meeting in July, treasurer Leon Levy said: 'We feel it is better to have small increases each year than one large one after five years.' The balance sheet is healthy, though, with a surplus of just over £4,000, compared to a deficit of slightly under £2,000 last year.
- Outgoing chair Janet Home received a round of applause in appreciation of her excellent leadership over the past three years. The post will now be shared by two members – newcomer Michael Gandy and veteran Patricia Isaacs. Who are they? Find out by reading Judith Abbs's interview with them on the first page.
- Membership of NLU3A has increased by 5 per cent over the past year, bringing the total from 650 to more than 680. Membership of the committee has also grown, with three new people elected – Estelle Phillips, Anne Vaughan and Sheri Waddell. Welcoming this, Janet Home said: 'The committee is too small to deal with all that has to be done.'
- Janet also welcomed the new Islington U3A, which will hold its inaugural meeting on Thursday 10 October from 10am to 12.30pm at 356 Holloway Road, N7 (next to Waitrose).



Patricia Isaacs

Whatever the big Ps throw at her, she loves what she is doing.

Michael has lived in north London for over 30 years and spent 10 years teaching Italian at St Aloysius in Highgate.

He has been a freelance professional genealogist for the past 21 years, holding official posts with local, national and international genealogy associations.

When you hear about his family, you can understand why genealogy fascinates him. First of all, the name. We can all guess

the work done by the ancestors of people called Taylor or Archer. But Gandy? Although Michael is used to having his name spelt with a rogue 'h' in the middle, its origin is probably *gantier*, the French term for glove-maker.

The U3A can bring people together in surprising ways. When a Jewish atheist (me) meets a committed Roman Catholic (Michael), you don't expect them to share an interest in early Quaker history. For me, it started with the U3A history group where I presented two papers on George Fox, the founder of the Quaker movement. Michael's Quaker connections are more exciting. His Gandy ancestors established a Quaker meeting at Frandley in Cheshire in 1654; within three years Fox preached there to over 2,000 people.

Michael joined NLU3A a year ago. He says: 'You can become isolated when you work from home. I wanted to find interesting activities that got me out and about to meet people and socialise.'

He is looking forward to finding out how things work in NLU3A. I asked him which of his



Michael Gandy

transferable skills are most relevant to his new role as co-chair. He said that he combines respect for history with being open to new ideas.

Patricia is sure that she and Michael will work well together.

When Michael was interviewed for Family Tree magazine a few years ago, they asked him about his future plans. He said: 'I'm waiting for the next exciting challenge to come along.' Thanks to North London U3A, it has.

So North London U3A gets the best of both worlds.

Welcoming new members

New members' meetings, which take place in members' homes, are a chance for those who have recently joined to find out more about North London U3A, make acquaintances and meet committee members.

Area	Date	Time	Host
N6 Highgate	Thursday 12 September	3–5pm	Dorothy and Douglas Barnes
N3 Finchley	Tuesday 15 October	3–5pm	Rita Peters
N3 Finchley	Tuesday 19 November	10.30am–12noon	Jenny Clark

Please contact Sue Teller, 7609 5172 or ginpalace@mac.com to reserve a place.

As I see it

The educational ideals of the U3A's founders are thriving, says **Keith Richards**

I have just returned from the sun-soaked first of the two national summer schools and am full of renewed admiration for the resilience of third-agers. We did not legislate for these temperatures, but tutors and students in eight courses carried on (fans, blinds) with great determination and a growing sense of joy. Exhausted at the end, many of us said that it was the best we could recall of these events.

After I had said the usual thank yous at the final dinner, Ursula Steiger (chair of Canterbury U3A and known to many in North London) stood up unexpectedly to pay tribute to the three founders – Michael Young, Peter Laslett and Eric Midwinter. Had they any idea what their initiative would lead to? It was a moving moment and everyone there felt pleased

that Eric is still very much alive and active in the movement so that he *does* know. Some members of North London U3A attended his founders' lecture in May. It is available on the national website and on DVD from the national office.

There was no formal opportunity on the day for the discussion which his radical thesis provoked and I am hoping to chair a break-out group at the coming AGM/conference in Nottingham which will allow members to explore his ideas.

Eric has written a subsequent paper called 'U3A-ery and education' for the occasion. At his lecture there was only laughter and enthusiasm, but afterwards a few people expressed doubts about the practicality of the state system embracing our ideals of self-

help education and experiential learning. Eric is aware of this and sent me a reference to a recent *Guardian* article by Peter Wilby describing the Finnish system. I will only pick out one feature: 'streaming' is against the law. Compare this to recent proposals here to test children – and presumably 'fail' some – at the age of five.

At the Harper Adams summer school Ursula met a group of over 40 recorder players ranging in ability from virtual beginners to Grade eight. In less than 24 hours she had moulded them into a magnificent group who, when I dropped in, played what sounded like complex music with sweating and smiling faces.

Education!

KEITH RICHARDS IS A FOUNDING
MEMBER OF NLU3A



Ursula Steiger conducts the recorder ensemble

Under new management

Michael Gandy, new joint chair of North London U3A, puts his cards on the table

I am delighted to have been elected joint chair of NLU3A and look forward to finding out what I have got myself into. The committee elected me to work with Patricia Isaacs as equal joint chairs; she brings experience and knowledge and I bring innocence and ignorance – I am sure we shall make a great team.

My working background was first in teaching (mainly Italian) and then in historical research, lecturing, writing and editing. I have run my own small business for the last 20 years but I was never in the world of big business or commerce and fortunately never

had to cut throats to survive. My goal in joining U3A was to meet people; for myself, I am keen on larger groups, opportunities for networking and chat, outings with an educational aspect but lots of time for coffee...

The big news this summer has been the inception of an Islington U3A. This is therefore a good moment to point out that there is no sense of 'parish boundaries' in U3A and that you can be a member of as many U3As as you like. We hope that many of those who join Islington will also remain with us for the sake of the friendships they have made

and the groups they are already committed to.

If any of you want to let off steam about any aspect of the branch then do bend my ear at any time. However I rather glaze over at random moaning or sentences beginning 'I'm ever so worried...' U3A is for people with sharp brains who want to keep them sharp, so if you think something should be done differently, come forward with a sensible plan and volunteer to do it, or find some volunteers who will. This is a hands-on organisation and almost anything can be done your way – by you.

Interest Groups

A warm welcome from groups organiser Patricia Isaacs

Hello to all our members at the start of a new U3A year, and farewell to some living in the Islington area. Congratulations on starting a new U3A! We wish you every success and look forward to hearing of your plans.

A relationship has developed over the past year with Trees, a residential home in Highgate where four of our groups meet. It's an excellent venue, and to show our gratitude for their hospitality our photography group offered them some beautiful pictures of trees they had taken locally; Trees selected four, which our photographers enlarged, framed and presented to them.

They are delighted with the gift, and we are delighted with our relationship with them.

New groups. You will know by now that I have called a one-year moratorium on new groups. The workload for the groups organiser team, the website manager and others had become unwieldy, and a number of groups were too small to be viable. The team and the committee will discuss proposals for new groups next spring, and we will aim to include some of these in the 2014–2015 interest groups booklet.

This year, in spite of some cuts there will be almost 100 enticing, stimulating groups, so there is still plenty of choice. This includes several new groups that were already in the pipeline: a Drama Workshop, Understanding the European Union, Family and Local History, History of America and

Freestyle Embroidery.

New faces. Several committee members retired after the AGM in July, having served three years, and we will miss them. I've learned so much from all of them (I'm now entering my fourth year as groups organiser) and I'm looking forward to working with new committee members, and serving as joint chair with Michael Gandy. More changes: Ann Elliott and I have welcomed three new members to our groups organiser team. New ideas and new approaches will avoid old ruts.

Very best wishes from the groups organiser team.

Patricia

Group updates

Street chess

North London U3A's Chess Group co-hosted a chess café, featuring a game of giant street chess, at the Hampstead summer festival in June. The group had a strong presence, with Jack, Margaret, Joyce and Felicity playing good games.

Chess can be serious but it can also be great fun and a chance to meet new people across the age range. We are fortunate to have Adam Raoof, a director of the English Chess Federation, as our tutor, and we hope new members will join us in the autumn.

DAPHNE BERKOVI, CHESS COORDINATOR



Faraway days

The next faraway days outing will be to Red House, designed in 1859 by William Morris as a 'Palace of Art' for himself. Red House is in Bexleyheath, south London, and the excursion will take place in late September or early October; for exact details, please visit the website (www.nlu3a.org.uk), come to monthly meetings or phone the organiser, Melvyn Rees, on 8446 3029.

Correction!

Unfortunately, two entries in the interest groups booklet give the wrong venue. Singing for Pleasure and Listening to Jazz both meet at the New North London Synagogue in East End Road (N3), and *not* at Finchley Progressive Synagogue or Avenue House.

Kentish delights

Gardens and garrisons, castles and coastal resorts – we visited these and more in North London U3A's spring outing to Kent, says **Rochelle Simmons**

We all felt a frisson of excitement as we were handed a wad of notes with fascinating information on the visits we would make over our five-day tour of Kent. There were 37 of us, and Margaret Kennedy had on this, her fifth U3A trip, done her homework as before. It was to be an intensive experience in the U3A ethos of shared learning.

The trip had been planned with the precision of a military operation, by that feisty triumvirate –

Rosemarie Nixon, Krishna Dutta and Margaret.

We made two or three visits daily to venues of great variety. Our journeys took us to the houses of 'the great and the good', from gardens to garrisons, from castles to coastal resorts – all supplemented with copious cups of tea. Our dedicated organisers even managed to lay on good weather!

At Chartwell, we were fascinated with Sir Winston Churchill's study, where we saw the original

Cinque Port Standard. Proud of his position of Lord Warden of the five coastal ports, he had requested special permission from King George V1 to use this as the Chartwell flag. We fell in love with the house and studio and the gardens overlooking the Weald. We felt that, had we been privileged to live there, we would never have wished to leave this idyll. Fortunately for Britain, Churchill reasoned otherwise.

Canterbury and its cathedral



Ightham Mote. Photo by Margaret Kennedy

gave us a chance to refresh our knowledge of this historic place. History apart, the cathedral remains of immense aesthetic appeal. It was pleasing to see that we were not in a time warp as there were contemporary sculptures including an Antony Gormley body, made from iron nails taken from the repaired cathedral roof. There was also a burned and restored pietà, a moving charred sculpture, exhibiting its own resurrection.

We walked in the tunnels under Dover Castle, with its 2,000 years of guarding our shores.

Our journeys took us to the houses of 'the great and the good'... all supplemented with copious cups of tea.

Here we considered the main aspects of the Second World War. After a film of the evacuation of 340,000 soldiers from Dunkirk (Operation Dynamo), we had our own casualty: one of our number, Coral, fell and was admitted to Ashford hospital. She has recovered well, but we missed her and were sad that her holiday ended so abruptly. The Dover experience, with its Vera Lynn songs on a loop, brought back recollections for some, but for all of us a deeper understanding of what our parents had gone through.

It was interesting to see the new Turner art gallery at Margate.

Some of us took a nostalgic walk on the sea-smoothed sand. Now in our 'anecdote', we shared memories of traditional coastal resorts. In this one, mercifully, the amusement arcades remained closed, awaiting the season.

We compared an excavation of a Roman house with a fort used throughout the occupation (AD43–410).

We were at Sissinghurst the day before the celebration of the 70th anniversary of the garden's opening and 100th anniversary of the marriage of its designers, Vita Sackville-West and Harold Nicholson.

Where, I wonder, will we go next year? I suspect plans are already stirring.

Curiouser and curiouser

Shelly Meehan recounts the tale of the infamous Thomas Smethurst, as told to North London U3A by Peter Maggs, author of *Smethurst's Luck*

In the 1800s Thomas Smethurst qualified in England as an apothecary and later became interested in what he called 'hydropathy' – an application of very cold water alleged to cure everything from toothache and syphilis to cancer. He travelled to Germany on holiday and while there purchased a qualification as an MD from a university. On his return to the UK he set up a clinic offering hydropathy and went on to write a book entitled *The Water Cure*, which was even quoted from in *The Lancet*. His business flourished and he was able to retire at the age of 50. He was married to a woman called Mary, who, in her 70s, was considerably older.

In 1859 Smethurst was tried for murder by poisoning of his supposed wife, Isabella Bankes. He had underhandedly deserted Mary, his wife of 30 years, on the excuse of working away from home. He married Isabella in secret and resided with her in Richmond. But he stayed in communication with Mary and even paid her rent, continuing to tell her he was still

'working away'.

Isabella was a sickly woman of considerable wealth, and when her health rapidly deteriorated and she subsequently died, he was accused of poisoning her and was arrested and charged with her murder. The trial was a heated affair; various experts argued about the validity of the tests performed on his late wife, some suggesting poisoning, others saying there were only small traces of poison and still others saying that no traces of poisoning were evident.

Smethurst was found guilty and sentenced to death by hanging. There was a huge outcry from many doctors and lawyers, and even Mary wrote to say that he was a kind and considerate person who could not possibly be a murderer. Others were enraged and called him a ruffian.

Tuesday 5 September 1859 was set as the execution date. It was to be in full public view on the front roof above the entrance gate at Horsemonger Lane Gaol. Four days before the due date, he was reprieved and granted a full

pardon.

On his release, he was immediately re-arrested on the charge of bigamously marrying Isabella and so had no entitlement to her will, which she had written in his favour... In the following trial his defence counsel showed that his 'first' wife, Mary, was actually titled 'Mrs Johnson' and she had a son by a Mr Johnson. When the son was brought into court, he gave evidence that HIS father, Mr Johnson, was still alive and married to another Mrs Johnson. So it appeared that Mr Smethurst's wife Mary had committed bigamy on him, making his marriage to her invalid. But did this make his subsequent marriage to Isabella legal?

It had all got so complex by that time that the U3A audience was sitting in total silence, enthralled and intrigued as the larger-than-life story unravelled. The final outcome of Mr Smethurst's life is so entertaining that a read of Peter Maggs's book is highly recommended.

Letters

A warning

I would like to draw attention to the difference between 'beneficial joint tenants' and 'tenants in common'.

There must be many elderly couples like us who are aiming to protect their survivor by leaving their house to him or her. However, if the owners are named as 'tenants in common', the house has to go into probate. This causes delay and expense – it is

necessary to have a 'joint tenancy' on the purchase deeds.

This is a warning! The survivor of tenants in common can be left to deal with repairs and upkeep when the owners' joint accounts are closed and any dividends also go into probate – ie c/o the solicitor.

MIRIAM DOMB

• **People who are concerned about this should seek professional advice. (Editor)**

Celebrating Josephine

Josephine Zara – long-standing stalwart of North London U3A – turned 90 in June, and in typical fashion partied her way through to her birthday, says **Miriam David**

A champagne breakfast on 20 June, organised by Women and Wisdom, a group with which Josephine has been involved for over two years, kick-started the festivities. This special event was held in the jungle garden of my home in Tufnell Park and attended by 10 other members.

We presented Josephine with a festschrift – a collection of works in her honour – as a birthday booklet. Entitled 'Josephine @ 90' and published by ourselves, it featured cover photos of Josephine and group members and contained essays, poems and messages from 14 members of the group.

We wanted to acknowledge the inspiration that Josephine has been to us across many groups and activities. Through her feisty feminism and commitment to political anarchy, she has helped us make our lives delectable. She



Left to right: Herbert Trent, Josephine, Ann Elliott, Patricia Isaacs, Charmian Birtill

is also a formidable teacher-leader, as became clear at her family party at the home of her companion, Herbert, in Highgate on Sunday. Here, many more members of her U3A poetry, writing and other groups, including friends made through her teaching in Spain

and Italy, mingled with her family across several generations.

Over yet more glasses of champagne together with savoury dishes, birthday cake and other sweetmeats, we all proclaimed Josephine a truly wise and wonderful woman – an example to us all!

An exhibition

Earlier in the year three of our members, Mary Callaghan, John Wosner and Richard Callanan, joined a London Region shared learning project* with members from other U3As and the Archives Department of King's College London. The subject was a collection of illustrations that were linked to a little literary magazine called *ADAM International Review*. Now the group has organised an exhibition of the images and some of their research findings. The pictures include works by Jean Cocteau, Joan Miró, Duncan Grant and cartoonist

Nicolas Bentley. The exhibition takes place in the Council Room at King's College London from 14 to 25 October. It is open to all and entry is free. Use the college entrance on the Strand (near the Courtauld Institute) and follow the signs.

* Shared learning projects are research activities that deal with a topic proposed either by an institution or by U3A members and culminate in a publication produced by the team.



GoodSwap

If you have a spare piano stool or know someone who does, please contact PATRICIA HAVELL
patriciahavell@yahoo.co.uk 8920 0878

CATRIONA STUART is looking for a carpenter/DIY person to help her renovate a small tatty pine stepladder. Please telephone 7249 1978.

BARRY DAVIES is giving away a camera tripod which is too heavy for him to carry around on public transport. Please phone 7226 7658

Away days

Organised by Jim Sweeney,
John Hajdu and Sue Teller

Wake up and smell the coffee. A conducted walk.

Friday 18 October



The George and Vulture is on the left

How did the financial City develop and diversify in the coffee houses and alleyways around Bank junction? We will find out as our experienced Blue Badge guide leads us past the site of the Roman Temple of Mithras, the motto of whose followers,

Dictum Meum Pactum (My Word is my Bond), was borrowed by the Stock Exchange. We will then go down the narrowest of alleyways to the George and Vulture, a chophouse since the 1600s, to see the spot where the first coffee house in Europe opened.

Despite initial reservations as to its origins – ‘syrop of soot or essence of old shoes’ was suggested – coffee became a roaring success and the sudden explosion of coffee shops in London seems to coincide with the beginnings of the modern financial services sector. Lloyds, the Baltic, and the Stock and Metal exchanges, for example, were all founded in City coffee houses, and we will hear their stories in the streets where it all percolated through.

Times and facilities

We meet at 10.50am at Mansion House tube station – Bow Lane Exit at street level. We will finish near Monument station. There are many cafés/coffee houses in the area.

Cost

£7, payable with application.

Travel

Mansion House tube station is on the District and Circle line.

Booking is essential.

Please use the booking form on the right

Medieval and Renaissance Galleries

Victoria and Albert Museum

Cromwell Road, SW7 2RL

Friday 22 November



The V&A Medieval and Renaissance collection contains some of the greatest treasures of the period 300–1600 AD. Ten new galleries opened in 2010 to great acclaim to display paintings, sculpture, glass, metalwork, furniture, ceramics and jewellery. We have arranged for our excellent Blue Badge guide to focus on some of the highlights, including sculpture by

Michelangelo, the Becket casket, an 11th century carved crystal ewer, Holbein's Reliquary of St Sebastian, and Paul Pindar's London mansion façade.

Times and facilities

We meet at the V&A at 10.50am inside the Cromwell Road entrance, close to the cloakroom on the right as you enter. Some might like to visit one of the well-marked cafés on the ground floor first.

Cost

£6, payable with application.

Travel

South Kensington tube station is a few minutes' walk away.

Booking is essential.

Please use the booking form below

Away days booking form

Name(s)_____ Membership number_____

Block letters please. No more than two application names per form.

Phone No_____

Date	Name of visit

- Cheques payable to NLU3A
- Send booking form and cheque to Sue Teller at 4 The Gin Palace, 36 Market Road, London N7 9PW. A separate booking form and cheque is required for each visit.
- You will be notified **by phone if you have a place (or not)** on the visit and your cheque will be banked or destroyed accordingly.
- If you are unable to attend the visit, please phone Sue Teller on 7609 5172 so that your place can be offered to another member.

2014 Diaries

A limited number of diaries will be on sale at the October monthly meeting. The cover is burgundy and the price unchanged at £2.00.



Autumn monthly meetings

All take place at St Paul's Church, 50 Long Lane, Finchley N3 2PU. Refreshments from 10.15am.

Monday 14 October

Jeanne Conry talks about Victim Support

Set up over 35 years ago, Victim Support is the oldest and largest national charity for victims of crime, witnesses, their family, friends and anyone else affected across England and Wales. They also speak out as a national voice for victims and witnesses, and they campaign for change.

'Every year we offer help to over 1.5 million victims and witnesses, whatever crime they've suffered, whenever it happened and whether or not they've told the police. We help victims and witnesses find the strength to move on with their lives.'



Monday 11 November

On the enjoyment of art



Robin Blake has been a professional writer for 30 years, having previously worked in broadcasting and teaching. His books include *Anthony Van Dyck: A life 1599–1641*, *George Stubbs and the Wide Creation*, and *Essential Modern Art*.

The approach to art often involves doubt. Even with established Old Masters, you may feel yourself saying 'I know I *ought* to like it, but...', and faced with the anything-goes art of today, this uncertainty can increase to levels of foggy bewilderment. In this talk Robin will suggest a way through the confusion and offer a few principles for how best to relate to art, whether it's Ghiberti and Giorgioni or Gilbert and George.

There is no meeting in December

Term dates

Term	Start date	Finish date
Autumn	23 September 2013	13 December 2013
Spring	6 January 2014	4 April 2014
Summer	28 April 2014	19 July 2014