



Issue 54  
January 2014

North London University of the Third Age

# Newsletter

## The universe and everything in it

A sixth Life, Art and Politics group started at the end of last term after a fifth group opened in September. Helen Green asks Patricia Isaacs, who leads one of the groups, why it's so popular



**Q:** Why life? Why art? Why politics? And why so many of these groups?

**A:** Because the title covers just about everything, gives great freedom of choice for discussion, from serious to more light-hearted (in my group, anyway). Why so many groups? Market forces! The waiting lists are always there and parallel groups have to be started to accommodate members.

**Q:** So what do you actually talk about?

**A:** Anything, everything!

**Q:** For example?

**A:** Recent topics have included the pros and cons of faith schools; dishonesty in society (bribery, fraud, medical malpractice); asylum and immigration; fair trade and globalisation; capital punishment and alternatives; three-parent families (ie, with surrogate mother).

**Q:** Well, that takes care of politics. What about art? Where does life come in?

**A:** Art – one member gave us an introduction to paintings and how to look at them, with illustrations and books on the table. On a few occasions we have used show-and-tell, with members bringing along an item of particular significance or pleasure: a music CD, a piece of wood or pottery, a painting, a photo, a poem. As for life, it comes in with a nudge or a bump, and to give you an example we are considering using our own lives with a short talk on our own backgrounds and in some cases our country of origin; no personal therapy session, this, but perhaps a view of adjustments and cultural changes.

**Q:** So is that how you do it? Each member gives a presentation and the rest comment? Seems a bit

traditional.

**A:** What's wrong with traditional? We enjoy it that way – but we have open minds. What would you suggest as an alternative? The word is 'discuss' rather than comment and discussion can get heated and be remarkably informative.

**Q:** I still don't understand what makes Life, Art and Politics different from other discussion groups. What is it that makes it so popular that you keep having to open parallel groups?

**A:** The difference is that Life, Art and Politics groups cover everything. Understanding the EU, for example, covers that alone; Current Affairs groups discuss, in principle, a recent event from radio or newspaper; Let's Talk Politics does just that. And perhaps that's why the groups are so much in demand.

## North London U3A Committee 2013–14

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Newsletters and Updates are each published three times a year. They are edited by Barry Davies and Helen Green with assistance from Judith Abbs, Helen Killick, Judith Litherland.

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Contributions to Barry Davies, julibar@blueyonder.co.uk

**The editors may shorten or otherwise edit contributions to fit spacing and stylistic requirements.**

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or Sue Ward, as above.

## On other pages

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## Thank you

Letters of praise are rare in journalism, but here's one.

I would like to thank everyone who set up, catered for and performed at the seasonal brunch in December. I was guilty of sneering when I heard it was a brunch rather than a lunch but was pleasantly surprised.

There was enough food; it was tasty; there were no queues to be served as in the past, and nobody had to worry about parking. The poetry readings were lovely and the drama group was brilliant. And brava, Judith Rosen, who sang solo interludes!

Special thanks to my sister vegan, Sue Collingridge, for the immaculate vegan sandwiches and desserts. It's so nice to know there are two of us in North London U3A.

HELEN GREEN

# Charitable U3A?

Should our U3A raise funds for good causes? Joint chair **Michael Gandy** thinks we might



Unsurprisingly, we receive a number of requests for donations to worthy causes, but our income is derived almost wholly from subscriptions, which are obviously ring-fenced for running our own U3A. Our constitution forbids us to get involved with anything political or religious, but

there is a wide range of, say, medical and cultural charities which many of us would be in favour of.

For example, University College London has set up a format in which various post-graduate students – pitching for a grant of £2,000 – give short presentations on their research to U3A members. I am sure some of us could raise that much.

For those who favour the cultural aspect, Lauderdale House in Highgate has launched an appeal for funds to refurbish. This is a beautiful and historic building used by a number of our groups, and they might like to find a way to help. It would be nice to see a

photograph of our people handing over a large cheque.

Some people say (quite correctly) that this is not our purpose but we would still be happy to support any of our members who want to raise money for a cause (perhaps one appropriate to their group).

Donations are also good publicity and the committee will be considering both fund-raising and publicity at their January meeting. If you have expertise, suggestions or opinions, Patricia Isaacs (my co-chair) and I would be very pleased to hear from you. My email is [mgandy@clara.co.uk](mailto:mgandy@clara.co.uk); Patricia's is [patricia.highgate@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:patricia.highgate@yahoo.co.uk)

## London Region – what's that?

The U3A is divided into a dozen regions, one of which is London. But what does a region do? **Janet Home** explains

What is the London Region, you may have wondered! Well, it is a network of the current 35 U3As in London, each of which can send two delegates to the quarterly regional meetings. No fees are paid, and each U3A is automatically a member. North London U3A's delegates are joint chair Michael Gandy and treasurer Leon Levy.

Nationally there are 12 regions, and each sends one trustee to the national executive, which also meets quarterly. These meetings are presided over by our national chair (Barbara Lewis), two vice-chairs, a treasurer and the Third

Age Trust's senior executive officer/company secretary (Lin Jonas). All trustees also serve on other national committees such as communications, research, and governance.

The region's role is to promote the U3A movement in its area by such activities as assisting in setting up new U3As and running locally based summer schools and study days. Our region ran its first summer school, on a variety of topics relating to London, last July at St Bride Foundation, near Fleet Street, and is running another at the same venue next July. London Region's annual music study day will take place in March at the



Wigmore Hall. Links to all these regionally arranged activities can be found on our website, [www.nlu3a.org.uk](http://www.nlu3a.org.uk). Do look and spread the word. It's your region, so make the most of it!

# As I see it

Keith Richards reflects on why his retirement was a rebirth rather than a bereavement



I have always written this column from a national perspective but would like, on this occasion, to indulge myself in personal reminiscence. On

Friday 13 December (significant date!) I coordinated a North London interest group – Modern and Contemporary Literature (James Joyce) – for, very probably, the last time. It was not a sad occasion, as in the new term I will be a member of the group extending the exploration of 20th century literature by addressing the work of WB Yeats.

The new coordinator was an amazingly creative influence in

our James Joyce sessions. This is as it should be. This group began soon after our U3A was formed in June 1994. I was still at work and viewing retirement as a ‘bereavement’. Three people attended the first session; one did not return, but gradually, numbers grew and I soon realised that I was embarking on a teaching assignment which surpassed any I had been involved in during 40 years in the state system (secondary schools, college of education, polytechnic and university).

***‘Those who teach shall also learn; those who learn shall also teach.’***

While I was involved in the course it took many forms – at

one point we worked on ‘Shakespeare the Modernist’; at another we spent several years reading Proust. I can honestly testify that I have come away from each meeting both exhilarated and educated. As one of the U3A’s three founders, Peter Laslett, said: ‘Those who teach shall also learn; those who learn shall also teach.’

When this radical principle works, one’s whole notion of education is transformed. When

I left the group, it transformed itself into Reading the World, now led by a triumvirate and thriving on Thursday afternoons at Lauderdale House, our first home. When I saw this year’s innovative programme I felt a stab at the limitation of my approach. I guess some history teachers feel the same when they hear about our Side-ways Look at History.

So 1994 was not a bereavement but a birth. I had no idea that almost 20 years of work lay ahead. I can only hope that members joining our U3A this year will feel the same in 20 years’ time.

Last year Richard Callanan and I did something new by introducing U3A-type learning to residents at the Mary Feilding Guild, a residential home in Highgate. At first people there were reluctant to take up the ‘self-help, participative’ challenge but that is no longer the case. At the most recent session someone said, with a grin: ‘I think we are beginning to get the idea!’

So maybe December 13th was not an end but another beginning. In a U3A anything can happen.

KEITH RICHARDS IS A FOUNDING MEMBER OF NORTH LONDON U3A

## Welcoming new members

New members’ meetings, which take place in our 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. Please contact Sue Teller, 8381 4480 or [ginpalace@mac.com](mailto:ginpalace@mac.com) to reserve a place.

Area	Date	Time	Host
N6 Highgate	Tuesday 27 January	11am	Joan Coleman



# Talks and meetings

## When the worst happens

Who would you turn to if you were attacked in the street or witnessed someone else being attacked? **Melvyn Rees** reports on a reassuring talk by Victim Support, a charity whose purpose is to provide the help you would need

Each of us belongs to one of just two classes: those who have not become a victim of crime – not yet anyway – or those who have. But if and when we suffer a crime there is always someone to turn to – Victim Support, the UK charity dedicated to supporting victims and witnesses of crime.

Our October meeting saw a presentation by Sharon Dearman and Jeanne Conry of Victim Support. Jeanne introduced us to the charity's anti-social behaviour programme. I was surprised by how wide the definition of anti-social behaviour is, ranging from intimidating groups to nuisance neighbours via fly-tipping, among others.

The support offered is of two principal kinds: 1) emotional sup-

port, including phone calls and visits, moral support and mediation; and 2) practical support encompassing advice on how to report anti-social behaviour, arranging pre-trial visits to court, and supporting victims at court.

Sharon, service delivery manager of Victim Support in Islington, gave us a few statistics: founded in 1974, last year the national charity made over 1,167,000 phone calls and around 74,000 visits; they supported 26,700 vulnerable or intimidated witnesses.

The whole operation is made possible by an army of volunteers, each of whom receives core training before they can specialize.



The charity does not just offer its support to victims; it also supports witnesses – those who will have to give evidence to the police or courts.

I leave you to think about Victim Support's constant reminder: 'Find the strength'. Should we fall victim to crime or need to become a witness, Victim Support can help us find the strength we need to cope and do what is right.

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## Who's afraid of the big bad art museum?

Many people are intimidated by works of art, but there is no need to be. Art historian **Robin Blake**, who spoke at the November monthly meeting, tells why



Visiting an art gallery can be a joyless experience. Our responses to art are often lazy and perfunctory, or else we find our response disabled by fear of thinking or saying the wrong thing.

One should look at art fearlessly but with respect. Give it time and question it just as one speaks

to a person one meets for the first time. This makes it much easier to decide what it means to us. The enjoyment value of art is personal, not universal.

Beware of accepting the conventional view of an artist uncritically. Don't be fooled, for example,

*Continued on page 6*



Robin talked about this picture *The Great Purifying Storm*, painted in 1962, by Lossonczy. It is a huge canvas that saw a restoration of the artist's full creativity. Photograph: Kieselbach Gallery

by conceptual art that is based on the artist having fun at the public's expense. There is a lot of poorly conceived conceptual art about and there is no reason to be intimidated by it.

Actually, all art is more or less conceptual and enjoying it requires some appreciation of the concept. For example: Christian art is very much enhanced when one knows the traditions and teachings of Christianity; it is useful to know that the clarity and truthfulness of an artist like Holbein is related to his interest in the New Humanism of the Renaissance; and much 20th-century art is existentialist in inspiration, so its appreciation is enhanced if

one knows something about that strand of thought.

On the other hand, far from being systematic thinkers, artists are magpie-like in their sources. The graphic art of MC Escher draws on surrealism, existentialism and mathematics as well as on art history to produce its strange effects. Much art is about mystery and its effects can be mysterious. An enjoyment of art (especially abstract art) is not particularly rational.

A good rule of thumb:

***There is a lot of poorly conceived conceptual art about and there is no reason to be intimidated by it.***

first look at the work of art carefully, then look at the label. Once a work or body of art attracts one's interest, the artist's biography will provide useful deepening insights. But this ought to come after one has viewed the work for oneself.

Finally, remember that no-one owes a duty to

art. There is no art work which it is mandatory to like, or to dislike. The enjoyment of art comes down, finally, to the freedom of personal choice.

# Interest groups

## New Year greetings from Patricia Isaacs, groups organiser and joint chair



**H**ello to all of you. I hope you are looking forward to an interesting and enjoyable 2014. Our membership continues to grow: welcome to all who are new. I hope you are enjoying any groups you have joined, and I look forward to seeing you at our monthly meetings.

Memories are still in my mind of our lively, successful open day in September. It was, according to the many comments received, the best yet, and it was a pleasure to see a queue of attendees wanting to join us.

I know that some new, and possibly some existing, members occasionally have difficulty in joining a group. Once again, I want to make a plea to all group coordinators to take special note of this, and to remember that we

take waiting lists seriously. Coordinators who are approached by would-be members should note their details and pass them to Henrietta Cohen, who looks after waiting lists; her contact details are [henanded@gmail.com](mailto:henanded@gmail.com) or 8343 3088. If the coordinator does not ask for these details, please contact Henrietta directly. When a waiting list has several names, we will start a parallel group. (These are not affected by the current moratorium on new groups as they are a continuation of an existing group.)

We will shortly be looking at proposals for new groups to start in September, perhaps with a summer taster session. So if you have an idea for one, we will be happy to consider it – particularly if you are willing to lead it.

Although the moratorium on new groups will end, we won't take on

groups that would not be viable: groups that attract only two or three members stretch resources too thinly. We will also need to limit the number of new groups so that we are able to give proper attention to every group. Sometimes 'less is more'! That said, I would be interested in any constructive comments you may

have on the numbers of groups you would consider sensible, and any other relevant comments.

How many group leaders use the national resource centre? This free offering, available on the U3A website, provides useful information, practical help, and inspiration for all groups. In addition, *U3A Sources*, which is sent out to all U3A members with the magazine *Third Age Matters*, gives details of subject advisers who can provide, free of charge as in a library, DVDs, audio CDs and other resources for use in groups.

If you use our excellent website, please spread the word. There is a lot of information there, and Mike Christie regularly updates all the pages. A new one which will be of interest to anyone considering joining another group is the page called 'Groups with spaces'; you will find the link under Groups in the black bar on the home page. Remember, the NLU3A website belongs to all of us, and it's a great place for sharing and learning.

Remember, too, that we are here to help you, to make NLU3A successful and pleasurable, so do get in touch if you need advice or have a point to raise.

Very best wishes for a happy and healthy new year from the groups organiser team.

*Patricia*

***The NLU3A website belongs to all of us, and it's a great place for sharing and learning***



# All roads lead to Rome

When you see a row of people on their knees with their heads bowed, you probably assume you are observing some kind of prayer meeting. **Judith Abbs** explains that on this occasion you would be quite wrong



What has brought the history group to its knees? All roads lead to Rome

The history group meets every fortnight to take a sideways look at history – not a direct chronology but a zigzag route through lifestyles, climate, culture and so on. This term our focus is on the beginning of the end of the Roman Empire around 476AD. At our last November meeting I talked about why all roads lead to Rome – and how they got there.

Painted in 1265, the *Tabula Peutingeriana* is a unique parchment scroll illustrating the road system of the Roman Empire. It doesn't show the geographic, but the relative positions of Roman cities and settlements, roads, rivers, mountains, forests and seas in order of travel – pre-dating by 1,500 years the Harry Beck schematic diagram of the London Underground based on the same concept.

I took an internet copy to the London Print Centre in Archway Road and explained that I wanted the minimum size at which the

place names were legible. While he was working it out, the Turkish man behind the counter told me how the Ottoman Empire compared with the Roman Empire. When he finished, I was startled to find that he had made 17 A3 prints (for which he charged about half price).

By the time I had matched the pages and stuck them together, the *U3A Tabula* was about the same size as the original! At the end of our session, I unwound the scroll from one corner of the room to the other.

Ann Bracken described the reaction: 'People were initially stunned. Then they got to their knees and started examining it: "Where's Rome?" "Where's Constantinople?" "I've found Cyprus!" "Have you found London?" "I thought that was forest." "No, no, that's the Mediterranean." "OK, where's the Adriatic?" It was an incredibly joyful experience.'



*Tabula Peutingeriana: the British segment*



Below: A blanket created for HRH Prince Charles by the Knitting for Charity group as a gesture of thanks to him for being a patron of World Jewish Relief (WJR), the charity for which they knit blankets.

WJR sends humanitarian aid including gifts in kind to Eastern Europe, where there is a large poor and underprivileged population living in neglected housing, without heat, running water, adequate food or medicine. Prince Charles has personally supported a community project in Krakow.



Above: Members of the Singing for Pleasure group and some residents of Dr French's care home (North Finchley), for whom they sang in December.

## Away days booking form (See next pages)

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_ Membership number \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

Date	Name of visit

- Cheques payable to NLU3A
- Send booking form and cheque to Sue Teller, 27 Midholm, London NW11 6LL. Please use a separate booking form and cheque 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 8340 4480 so that your place can be offered to another member. For last-minute cancellations, please phone her mobile – 07793 257 679.

## Away days

Organised by Jim Sweeney,  
John Hajdu and Sue Teller

### The Cinema Museum

2 Dugard Way  
(off Renfrew Road)  
London SE11 4TH  
7840 2200  
Friday 24 January

The Cinema Museum is devoted to keeping alive the spirit of cinema from the days before the multiplex. Set in historic surroundings in Kennington, in the old workhouse where Charlie Chaplin was institutionalised as a boy, it houses a unique collection of artefacts, memorabilia and equipment that preserves the history and grandeur of cinema from the 1890s to the present day, including posters, uniforms, stills, signs, cinema seats, carpets, ticket machines and projectors.

Knowledgeable and enthusiastic volunteers will guide us through the collection, and there will be the opportunity to see a programme of short films in the screening room – while enjoying some tea and biscuits.

#### Times and facilities

We meet at 10.50am for an 11am start. The visit lasts about 90 minutes.

#### Cost

£7, including tea and biscuits, and a screening of some short films.

#### Travel

Nearest tube/train station is Elephant and Castle (Northern and Bakerloo lines, and BR) From the tube exit at the Elephant and Castle shopping centre, walk straight ahead to the pedestrian traffic lights. Cross over to where there is a building site, go left and continue walking from Newington Butts into Kennington Lane. Take the first right into Renfrew Road and turn right immediately after the Jamyang Buddhist Centre. Go through the open gateway and the museum is to your left. (Some street guides lack sufficient detail, so you are advised to take these instructions with you.)



#### Booking is essential.

Please use booking form at the bottom of page 9.

### The Georgian Rooms National Portrait Gallery

St Martin's Place  
London WC2H OHE  
Friday 21 February

The 18th and early 19th centuries saw dramatic changes in Britain's character in the arts, sciences, politics and nascent industrialisation. We will meet the extraordinary men and women behind these

changes. The royal line of the Stuarts gave way to the Hanoverians, starting with the first two Georges, who hardly spoke English and left the government mainly in the hands of Robert Walpole. The most significant

events in politics were the movement for the abolition of slavery and the Great Reform Bill of 1832. Great military events included the loss of the American colonies and the victory over Napoleon. In the arts, famous names included Handel, Reynolds, Dr Johnson and the Romantic poets.

Our excellent Blue Badge guide will describe the remarkable personalities, portraits and painters of this period.

#### **Facilities and access**

The main toilets are in the basement, as is the café. There is a third floor restaurant and lifts to all levels.

#### **Times**

We meet at 10.30 am in the onsite basement café or 10.50 for an 11am start inside the main St Martin's Lane entrance. Our tour will last around 90 minutes,

plus a five-minute break in the middle.

#### **Cost**

£6

#### **Travel**

Leicester Square and Charing Cross tube stations are nearby. Numerous buses serve St Martin's Place and Trafalgar Square.

**Booking** is essential.

Please use booking form at the bottom of page 9.



## **The Magic Circle Experience**

12 Stephenson Way

Euston

London

NW1 2HD

7387 2222

Monday 24 March

**W**e have arranged a visit to the headquarters of the famous Magic Circle. We will hear about the fascinating history of mystery, magic and past masters of the craft during a guided tour of the building, which houses magical treasures, memorabilia and posters and contains a fine staircase with hand-painted murals depicting magic from its early beginnings to the present day. We can enjoy some entertaining close-up magic presented by a skilled member of the Magic Circle and as a memorable finale, a unique live magic performance in the fully equipped theatre, where magicians over the world meet to discuss their latest miracles.

#### **Times and Facilities**

Doors open at 11am for an 11.30 start. There is a lift and wheelchair access to all public areas and the

theatre has a hearing loop.

#### **Cost**

Tickets £15, which includes morning coffee or tea and biscuits plus the live theatre performance.

#### **Travel**

The Magic Circle headquarters is less than a minute's walk from Euston Station, three minutes from Euston Square and Warren Street and 10 minutes from Kings Cross. Stephenson Way lies between Euston Road and Euston Street.

**Booking** is essential.

Please use booking form at the bottom of page 9.



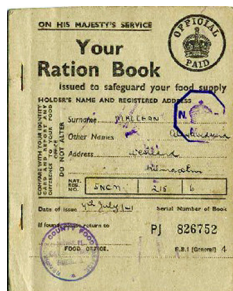


# Monthly meetings

From 10.15am at St Paul's Church, Long Lane, London N3 2PU

**Monday 13 January**

## Fair shares for all – rationing in Britain during and after the Second World War



Rationing in Britain lasted, to a greater or lesser degree, from 1940 until 1954 with nearly all essential supplies on ration at one time or another. This talk looks at some of the ways in which the rationing system functioned and was administered.

Rationing was not limited to the United Kingdom and the talk will also look at some of the ways in which this phenomenon affected other countries – notably France and the USA.

David Evans is a registered City of London and City of Westminster guide who, apart from these duties, has talked to many different groups over the past 10 years. His interests are the rationing period, London in the First World War, cinema-going in the 1940s/early 1950s and the Vichy Regime in France.

**Monday 10 February**

## Parkinson's disease

**PARKINSON'S<sup>UK</sup>**

Kieran Breen is director of research and innovation at Parkinson's UK and is responsible for the development and implementation of the charity's research strategy. Its aim is to find a cure and improve treatments for all people living with Parkinson's. He will describe the key areas of research that are being funded by Parkinson's UK and how they complement research elsewhere in the world. He will also outline future research plans which will build upon the results from currently funded projects.

**Monday 10 March**

## Inventors, pioneers and producers: film-making in North London, 1895–1914



Gerald Turvey will talk about the important contribution to the growth of early cinema in Britain by film-makers in the North London area. He will begin with the pioneering inventors of both equipment and film, Birt Acres and Robert Paul (each a major figure); move through the early production companies established in Finchley and Muswell Hill (including East Finchley's British and Colonial company, one of the top three producers at the time of the First World War); and close with comments on the art of the cinema developed by the Royal Academy painter Sir Hubert Herkomer at Bushey in 1914.

## Term dates

Term	Start Date	Finish Date
Spring	6 January	4 April
Summer	28 April	19 July