

the northern line

the newsletter of North London University of the Third Age

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Now you know who you are...

Peter Cox has run a family history research group for NLU3A for a couple of years, helping people start to hunt for their ancestors, or giving them a helping hand if they've got stuck. In this article he looks at two stories to illustrate what the internet can reveal. Neither person had any idea what they'd find

The first story concerns someone whose great great grandfather, Richard Cattle, was a London baker and pastry cook, born in April 1829, whose parentage had been a mystery. He was the only child of a single mother, whose name doesn't appear in any census. We didn't know his father, but a lucky strike enabled us to discover that he had been convicted at the Old Bailey in December 1828 of stealing five sovereigns and sentenced to transportation for life. He, too, had been a baker named Richard Cattle. We could read the word-for-word transcript of the trial on the internet. A fortnight later he was in Portsmouth awaiting passage to Australia, leaving his wife five months pregnant. But he didn't turn up there, and for months we had to assume that he'd died on board...

He had been convicted at the Old Bailey in December 1828 of stealing five sovereigns and sentenced to transportation for life

Jewish U3A member knew she'd been born in London in March 1945 and adopted in Leeds that August. Her adoptive parents wouldn't tell her anything about her parentage, and it was only last year that she was motivated to find out if she had any living blood relatives. Had her mother married again and had other children? The law now allows her to investigate, but it's hemmed in by caveats, including mandatory counselling, which your local council is obliged to provide. She had to wait months though – so she asked me to see what could be discovered. She had been able to get from the Leeds Beth Din organisation the name of her mother, Sadie Blackbeer or Blackburn, born in 1919, and we were able to find Sadie's child's birth record. She'd

Later we traced Sadie as a passenger on a ship to Canada in 1957

been registered as Geraldine (nothing like her adoptive name), but her father's name was not recorded. Later we traced Sadie as a passenger on a ship to Canada in 1957, when her occupation is given as milliner. She later married but had no children and died in Montreal in 1988. We have a photo of her gravestone.

At that point we were stuck, but unexpectedly in March the Barnet counsellor turned up with some documents that had lain hidden for 70 years. Among them was the name of Geraldine's father, a hairdresser, married with a two-year-old son – called Gerald! He had apparently met Sadie while they were fire-watching, and he'd paid for their baby's care until she was adopted. Among the papers were letters from Sadie and a photo of Geraldine at three months. As a consequence

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Editorial



What does ageing mean for you? Is it a reason for celebration, a cause for despair or just a matter of course? Do you grasp whatever life now offers, or do you bemoan the fact that you can no longer run up five flights of stairs (if you ever could) or remember where you put your glasses? Hopefully for U3Aers it's the first of each option, and in this issue we talk to long-time U3A member Shirley Meredeen, who epitomises them. Shirley is a founder of the older women's network Growing Old Disgracefully and the Older Women's Co-Housing scheme in Barnet. She talks to Judith Abbs about her life on page 5.

The third age may be a time to look back and uncover your past. Peter Cox relates the stories of two anonymous members of his Family History Research group who unearthed a few ancestral surprises while trawling through the internet.

By the time you read this, we will be well into the summer term. But NLU3A doesn't end when the academic year does – we have a summer programme of indoor and outdoor activities to keep mind and body stimulated and healthy. See page 10 for a taster.

Happy reading, and enjoy!

Leni Green

Editor

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Our publications

The Northern Line and Update are each published three times a year and edited by Leni Green and Jane Marsh respectively.

The deadline for the next Update is 20 May. Please send submissions to Jane Marsh, oriana.jane@btinternet.com

The editors may shorten or otherwise amend articles to fit spacing and style requirements

Membership

For membership enquiries contact Helene Davidian, 8444 3669, helenedavidian@googlemail.com or Sandra Nistri (details above).

Continued from page 1

we were able immediately to track her father's antecedents back three generations to 19th century immigrants from Russia, and discover that both her half-brother Gerald and her father were dead, but that Gerald had fathered four daughters in the 1960s and 70s. So Geraldine has living relatives: cousins and half-nieces who will have known her father, and she is now contemplating making contact – if any of them can be traced.

Now back to the convict Richard Cattle, who we assumed had died at sea. Although his son turned up newly married in the 1851 census, there was no sign of his mother then or in 1841, which is the first census we have.

It was some time later, while returning to search for her, that we stumbled upon the death of the convict Richard, in London in 1840. How had he avoided transportation – or had he gone and come back? We don't know, but as records are being digitised all the time we have hopes of finding out.

So if you have a family mystery, like the man who discovered that his wife's grandfather was a bigamist, or the man whose soldier grandfather disappeared after World War I, there's still hope that lost records will appear and solve the puzzle. It's fascinating stuff.



The last of England
Ford Madox Brown

From the chair, Patricia Isaacs



Have you ever given any thought to how our U3A is managed? Thanks to a great deal of dedicated hard work from a significant number of our members, it runs amazingly smoothly. Everyone involved is a volunteer, giving up a lot of time and energy – and getting a lot of satisfaction, too. If you would like to know about the many ways in which you could have a part

in keeping things going so well, please do get in touch with me. I have a list of volunteers from cake makers to committee members, some with a regular commitment and others offering occasional help. You could be one of them. I am sure you would enjoy it!

It's almost time for our annual general meeting, this year on Monday morning 4 July. Please make a note of the date and come along; apart from the few formalities there will be an opportunity to ask questions, offer comments and give suggestions on how we could improve our U3A. Information will be sent to all members a few weeks before the AGM.

Spring is here and summer will follow almost too quickly. Enjoy the longer, brighter days and I hope to meet many of you, members old and new, during our summer programme.

Warmest good wishes to everyone for a very happy summer.

Patricia

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As I see it: circles

Going round in... Ever increasing... **Keith Richards** explains why circles are essential to U3A learning

The main purpose of this column has always been to draw the attention of members to the excitement of belonging to a large national and international movement. But as my own participation at that level draws to a close I have been thinking about matters nearer home.

I am a member of two U3As – our own North London endeavour and the U3A in London, based in Belsize Park. Our near neighbour still serves the whole of the capital as it did when it was established in the early 80s. The literature group there, with which I am now involved, has a claim to be the longest running of all interest groups. It is large and, albeit with difficulty, we manage to sit in a circle. At the last meeting the novel we were exploring – Ali Smith's *There but for the* – seemed to demand that it be read again and again

The elimination of the distinction between 'teacher' and 'learner' is fundamental to the development of our method of learning

in a circular fashion, each time revealing more of its essential nature, and we discussed briefly the notion that true education can only take place when participants are so seated with, at first sight to a visitor, no indication of who the 'teacher' is. As readers will know, the elimination of the distinction

between 'teacher' and 'learner' is fundamental to the development of our method of learning. (These principles have been articulated in two recent booklets, 'Time to Learn' and 'More Time to Learn', available from our national office.)

So the circle is an expression of the notion that all members actively participate in the educational experience. It remains radical and, of course, opposed to the current direction of government-imposed ideas of learning. The day after our discussion I read in a newspaper of the testing of four year olds,



with inevitable 'selection' to follow and a sample English test for 11-year-olds which includes: 'Tick one box in each row to show how the modal verb affects the meaning of the sentence'.

The U3As as a body should be screaming in protest at this damaging perversion of education which, as I am always reminding everyone, is derived from the Latin *ex duco*: 'I lead out'. Readers of Muriel Spark's novel *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* will recall what fun she has with this idea: her inspired teacher, Miss Brodie, was a great admirer of Hitler and Mussolini!

Perhaps students of this novel will soon be asked to tick in a box a sentence which illustrates this irony.

KEITH RICHARDS IS A FOUNDING MEMBER OF NORTH LONDON U3A

Welcomers wanted

Are you friendly, interested in meeting people, keen to make new friends? If so, we would like to hear from you. We are looking for people to host welcome meetings for new members – with refreshments (tea, coffee, biscuits) – in their homes. The meetings last about one and a half hours, and the number attending varies from eight to twelve.

Time and date will be arranged to suit you. You will get plenty of support, play a useful role and have a good time.

It is helpful if there is access by public transport, as well as unrestricted street parking nearby, either in the morning or in the afternoon.

Interested? Please contact Aliya Middleton, 3601 1958, aliya.middleton@gmail.com

It's politics – but not as we know it!



When **Shirley Meredeen** looks back on a lifetime of political activity, she is not thinking about party politics. As she told **Judith Abbs**, her version of politics is about helping people to take control of their own lives.

Shirley has been an active member of NLU3A for 20 years; she joined two years after it was launched. She was a committee member for seven years, organising the monthly meetings. With her background in journalism, she led a creative writing group for five years, as well as taking part in a number of other groups.

Her life of non-party political activity started about 55 years before that, when she was elected as a member of her school parliament. She started secondary school in 1941 and had to be rescued after she fell into a frozen ditch – dug to deter enemy planes from landing – as she walked to school across Canons Park; exams were held in the air raid shelters.

She started work as a shorthand typist at the News Chronicle, then became assistant to the editor of another publication and a freelance journalist. During her marriage, she moved to Scunthorpe and wrote the women's page of the Grimsby News.

Shirley (who then had no qualifications) enrolled as soon as the Open University first opened

to students in 1971. She completed three credits but had to drop out when her marriage ended in 1974 and she had two sons to support as a single mother.

She worked at further education colleges as a welfare and housing officer, taking a counselling qualification as a day release student. After a ten year gap, she completed her OU degree. By the time she retired at the age of 60, she had valuable experiences that informed all her pioneering projects.

The first of these was to set up Growing Old Disgracefully (g.o.d.) to empower older women to get the most out of life. Shirley, along with the other founding

members, came from a generation when the majority of men were breadwinners and responsible for the money, while women devoted their lives to childcare and the household. If women had a job, it was in order to help with limited family finances – it was not a career. These women were not equipped to cope with life on their own when they were widowed or divorced.

Shirley ... came from a generation when the majority of men were breadwinners ... while women devoted their lives to childcare and the household

Shirley sees g.o.d. as political in that it challenges stereotypical views about growing old, along with creating friendships and offering a choice of adventurous activities.

Shirley's next project was as a founder member of the Older Women's Co-Housing scheme in Barnet (OWCH). After 17 years of development, Shirley is the only surviving founder member and will move into the new flats this summer. She has been on BBC TV and in national and local newspapers, talking about the political challenge of changing attitudes and transforming the limited living choices for the increasing number of older women who live alone.

This spring, as she recovers from a fractured knee and a broken wrist, the projects to which Shirley has contributed so much will provide her with a well-earned reward. At the age of 86, she will have an independent home within a supportive, self-managing community. Through OWCH, g.o.d. and NLU3A she will also have a plentiful supply of mental stimulation, friendship and fun.

Meetings

Music has charms ...

William Congreve thought it would soothe a savage breast* but **Professor Susan Hallam** told us how music does so much more, as **Judith Abbs** reports

Every story in the media is bad news, but Dr Hallam's talk on active ageing with music was all good news. Anyone who sings or plays an instrument – including many NLU3A members – knows how positive it feels. Research by the UCL Institute of Education provided evidence to confirm its benefits.

The project involved 451 people who were taking part in musical activities at the Sage Gateshead, a sheltered housing project in east London, and Westminster Adult Education Service. About 80 per cent of them were women; most were aged between 60 and 80. The control group consisted of people of the same age taking part in various non-musical activities, including language classes, art or craft, yoga and book groups.

Researchers found that older people were able to develop musically regardless of their

previous experience. People taking part in music groups scored higher than control groups on all measures of wellbeing, such as having fun, improvement in memory, more vitality and generally feeling good. Almost all of these benefits were retained as people moved from their mid-seventies into their eighties, with very little

measurable deterioration. Choir members over 80 were healthier and saw the doctor less; they had fewer falls and used less medication.

Music really does have magic charms.

*William Congreve, *The Mourning Bride*



Hall 1 at the Sage Gateshead

Hot off the press

After a brief flirtation with butchery, 14-year-old **Peter Durrant** went to work in Fleet Street as a copyboy. All the rest of his working life – and retirement too – has been associated with Fleet Street and its journalists, editors and proprietors, whom he recalled with warmth and humour at our monthly meeting in February, as **Pat Taylor** recalls

Peter made the history of Fleet Street, one of the oldest parts of the City, come alive. The

journalist's church, dedicated to St Bride has been there since 400 AD. Wynkyn de Worde, assistant

to merchant and printer William Caxton, set up a print shop there in around 1500.



Peter reminded us of four great men associated with Fleet Street and its surroundings: Sir Christopher Wren, architect of 51 churches, not least St Paul's and St Bride's, which were rebuilt after the Great Fire of 1666; Samuel Pepys (only five feet tall!), who lived there, as did Dr Johnson and

Daniel Defoe, who was pilloried at Temple Bar. Defoe is known as the father of modern journalism.

The Daily Courant, the first news sheet, came out in 1703 and was published by a woman, Elizabeth Mallet. There were also pubs: the Wig and Pen, which survived the Fire, and El Vino's, notorious for not letting women stand at the bar or wear trousers.

Peter told us how that attitude met its end. Three barristers came in (the legal world is near Fleet Street) and one was a woman in trousers. The management tried to eject her for this, so she removed her trousers. Victory for women! The regulation



Winkyn de Worde 1455-1534

disappeared very soon after.

Peter certainly lived up to the name he gave himself – 'a humble creature of the Street'.

Where country meets town

Is there anything we don't already know about Hampstead Garden Suburb? wondered **Wilson Briscoe**. Amazingly there is, as he discovered at the March monthly meeting



John Hajdu always organises outstanding monthly meetings, but I came with a slight doubt to this one. Frequently we know little about the topic and hope to learn, but in this case would the audience be experts? Who in NLU3A has not visited it or lived there? Quite a challenge for a speaker!

We were soon disabused. David Davidson, architectural advisor to the Hampstead Garden Suburb Trust, gave an outline of

the early 20th century garden city movement and some of its protagonists: Ebenezer Howard (author of *Garden Cities of Tomorrow* and town planner); Henrietta Barnett (social activist); and Parker and Unwin (architects of Letchworth Garden City). Dame Henrietta acquired the land from Eton College and set up a trust to implement development and manage the settlement. Simple guidance notes were prepared.

Development was limited to the use of traditional materials, with low-rise, mixed-class houses to encourage social cohesion. Most of the brief was concerned with landscape and garden: tree-lined wide roads, shared public parks and gardens, stone and brick paving, hedges instead of walls and fences. David's slides showed that the Trust, now 100 years old, has kept faith with its founders, and the gardens and parks survive unscathed, even if some of the newer houses are not as lovely as the older ones.

It was a good lecture and I think we all learnt something. Personally, I cannot think of any other major development where the landscape so dominated the brief. I came away with another small doubt: in our current society could we build a modern Hampstead Garden Suburb?

Interest groups

Photocall

Time to get your camera out and take part in our second photographic competition, says groups organiser **Sue Teller**

After last year's successful photographic competition, it is time to think about what you would like to see on the front of our interest groups booklet this year.

These days many of you will be out taking pictures of north London scenes, and I hope you will enter some of these images in the contest. The photos, which will be judged by two professional photographers, can be of anything in our area: a place of interest, wood, street scene, garden, house – perhaps something unusual

or less well known. The only requirement is that they should be in landscape format and of a size that will wrap around the front and back covers of the booklet. First prize will be £25, with second and third prizes of £15 and £10 respectively.

Please send your pictures (high resolution jpegs) to ginpalace@mac.com. Or you can send a memory stick or a print to me at 27 Midholm, NW11 6LL. If you're a winner, we will need a print of the original image for the booklet.

Closing date is 30 June, and all winning entries will be featured on our website. This competition is open to all North London U3A members – so get out your camera and see what you can do.

Let's hope the weather continues to improve so we can all enjoy our various activities. If there is any information you need, please call or email any member of the groups organiser team, listed below.

Best wishes

Sue

Group news

There have been some venue changes. Trees in North Hill have decided to keep only Bridge at their centre, so the other groups that meet there – **Women and Wisdom** and **History of America** have had to move. We have also had one or two changes to coordinators. All of this information is on our website, so please check if you are unsure.

- We have found a coordinator for an **Art Appreciation** group and are hoping to arrange a preliminary meeting very soon. For up-to-date information in the meantime, please ring Sue on 8381 4480.
- The **Poetry Appreciation** group have found themselves with spaces – so if you are interested in this group, please ring Helen on 8346 0709.
- The **Tuesday Bridge** group is looking for new members. if you are at improvers level, please give Esther a call on 8348 5865. This takes place in N6 (Highgate).



Poetry

Groups organiser team

Sue Teller	Groups organiser	8381 4480	ginpalace@mac.com
Candiss Waldram	New groups	8883 1395	scwaldram@yahoo.com
Henrietta Cohen	Venues organiser	8343 3088	henanded@gmail.com

Impro Drama: Free-expression acting

No script, no props; laugh lots.
Join in, have a go. Welcome to Impro!
Every Thursday 2–4pm
Trinity Church, Livingston Hall
Nether Street, North Finchley N12 7NN
Please phone Pat Solomons, 07949 761 033 for further information

Singing leader wanted

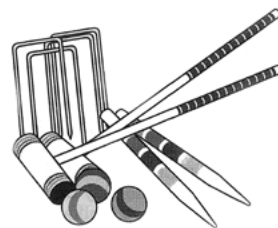
We, the Joyful Noise singers of North London U3A, have an excellent pianist but are seeking a singing leader. We sing everything from classical to musicals. We meet weekly on Thursdays, 10.30am–12noon, at St Margaret's



Church, Victoria Avenue, Finchley Central, London N3. Please contact Joyce Piper: 8349 9873, joycepiperuk@googlemail.com

Croquet

Croquet starts again on 20 April. A gentle exercise in pleasant surroundings, it meets every Wednesday morning from 10am to 12.30pm at Fellowship House, Willifield Way, N11. Contact Geoffrey Cox, 8458 5790, geoffreywcox@hotmail.co.uk



Good enough to eat



Embroidery and Textile Art group exhibition in

This delicious looking plateful of fabric and embroidery cakes is just one of many works that will be on view at NLU3A's Freestyle

late summer. The show will be held at Burgh House Museum in Hampstead from 3 August to 25 September, and displays will range from individual artwork to joint projects such as last year's 21st anniversary banner. A partnership event, it will include workshops, talks and organised visits.

The exhibition and museum are open Wednesday to Friday and Sundays from 12 noon–5pm, and entrance is free. The address is New End Square, Hampstead NW3 1LT. You can find out more about Burgh House Museum and how to get there at www.burghhouse.org.uk. They hold events and exhibitions all year round and they have a great café.

Summer is icumin' in!

And we need YOU to help plan the summer programme!
Could you organise:

- a cafe or restaurant lunch
- a museum, gallery, market, park or garden visit
- swimming, walking or other sporting activity
- sewing or crafts at your house (with tea and home-made cake!)
- a home-cooked lunch in your garden
- a cinema, theatre or concert excursion
- an away day by train?

Need ideas? Contact the team, who will give you all the support and advice you need.

Annie: 7263 2806, anniehopewell@hotmail.co.uk

Kathy: 7263 6885, kathleenkyriakides@hotmail.com

Christine: 7263 0090, christinestammers@gmail.com



'If not a great soldier
he is at least a great
poster' — Margot
Asquith

London region summer school

26–28 July

Cost: £35 per day

A non-residential summer school at the St Bride Foundation off Fleet Street. Talks, workshops and guided walks.

Application forms from

www.u3asites.org.uk/london-region

National Gallery study day

2 June, 11am to 3pm

Topic: The age of baroque – spectacle and style.

Cost: £18.

Details from national office (8466 6139) and the U3A website members' area: www.u3a.org.uk

Away days booking form

Name(s) _____ Membership number(s) _____

BLOCK LETTERS please. No more than two names per application form.

Phone number _____

Date	Name of visit

- Cheques payable to NLU3A
- Send booking form and cheque to Sue Teller, 27 Midholm, London NW11 6LL. A separate booking form and cheque are required for each visit.
- You will be notified **by phone if you have a place (or not)**. Your cheque will be banked or destroyed accordingly.
- If you are unable to attend the visit, please phone Sue Teller on 8381 4480 so that your place can be offered to another member, or mobile 07748 478 428 for last minute cancellations.

Away days

Organised by Jim Sweeney, John Hajdu and Sue Teller

The Royal College of Physicians: building, contents and garden

11 St Andrews Place,

NWI 4LE

Friday 20 May

We have been able to arrange an unusual extended conducted tour of the historical, architectural and botanical highlights of this distinguished venue. First we will explore the 500-year history of the Royal College of Physicians and its important collections of artefacts and portraits of eminent doctors by artists such as Thomas Lawrence and Johan Zoffany – all of this, while moving through its architecturally distinguished 1960s Grade I listed home. After a refreshment break we will be taken around what is arguably the biggest collection of medicinal plants in Europe and will learn about their historic, current and future therapeutic applications and value.

Times

Please note that we meet at the earlier time of 10.20am in reception for a 10.30 start. But kindly try to avoid arriving before 10.15. We will finish around 12.30.



Travel

From Warren St tube station, you can walk westwards for 15 minutes or take a bus for one stop along Euston Road. St Andrews Place lies a little to the north and can be reached via Park Square East.

Cost

£7.50 including refreshments, payable in advance.

Booking is essential.

Please use the booking form on page 10 or send us a note with the requested details and your cheque.

Mayfair unpacked

Gambling clubs, broken hearts, diamond dandies and workmen's spades

Friday 24 June



White's club 1851

Our popular guide, Eileen, will take us through fashionable Mayfair, built on the field, which were the dowry of the 12-year-old

wife of Sir Thomas Grosvenor. There will be gossip, old and new; talk of property prices; and views of the shops, pubs and clubs. We will pass the double Cs – logo of Coco Chanel, lover of a Duke of Westminster – and see where the famous Regency dandy, Beau Brummell, would emerge from his rooms, but only after 'the morning was well aired'. Crossing

Piccadilly, we will finish at St James, passing gentlemen's clubs such as Whites where, in a gaming room known as Hell, 'young noblemen were fleeced and corrupted by fashionable gamblers and profligates'.

Travel and times

We meet at 10.50am at Bond Street tube exit for an 11am start. We will finish at about 12.30 near either Green Park or Piccadilly Circus tube stations

Cost

£7 each, payable in advance.

Booking is essential

Please use the booking form on page 10 or send us a note with the requested details and your cheque.

Books by NLU3A members



Dennis Evans FRSA served in the Royal Air Force from 1953–5. His seventh poetry collection, *Service Days* (Celebration Press, London), depicts his experiences as a national serviceman at RAF Hednesford in Staffordshire and RAF Tangmere in Sussex. *Service Days*, priced £5 (p&np free), is available from Celebration Press, 58 Helen Close, London N2 0UU, celebrationpress3@gmail.com

Miriam David, professor emerita of education at the UCL Institute of Education, has two books coming out in the summer. *Reclaiming Feminism: Challenging Everyday Misogyny* (Policy Press, Bristol University), priced £14.99, is about the contradictory rise in new generations of feminisms and the backlash of new forms of everyday sexism. *A Feminist Manifesto for Education* (Polity Press, Cambridge), priced £15.99, deals with how to use education to counter domestic or sexual violence and sexual harassment and sees the rise in school league tables as 'misogyny masquerading as metrics'. Both will be available from Waterstones and other bookshops.

Spring monthly meetings

All take place at 10.45am St Paul's church, 50 Long Lane, Finchley N3 2PU. Refreshments are served from 10.15.

Monday 9 May

Creating a modern opera: Mozart, Da Ponte and their time

Mozart's three operas written with Lorenzo da Ponte – *Le Nozze de Figaro*, *Don Giovanni* and *Così fan tutte* – were groundbreaking in their day. Composer **Robert Hugil** will look at the contemporary background to the collaboration between the youthful genius Mozart and the characterful Da Ponte, and how they used contemporary styles of music and drama to create work which remains fresh and modern today.

Monday 13 June

The age of the pyramids: the world's first pyramid

Egyptologist **Janet Diamond** will investigate the world's first pyramid: the evolution of early pre-dynastic burial practices, architectural and theological influences – all to be found throughout the 5,000-year-old Step Pyramid complex at Saqqara. She will then discuss the great pyramids at Giza.

Monday 4 July

Annual General Meeting

Please note that this is *not* the usual second Monday in the month.

Monday 5 September

Open Day

St Paul's church, 11am to 1pm.

Term dates

These are guidelines only; groups are free to make their own plans.

Term	Start date	Finish date
Summer	11 April 2016	15 July 2016
Autumn	12 September 2016	16 December 2016
Spring	9 January 2017	31 March 2017
Summer	18 April 2017	21 July 2017

Some groups and event organisers may like to note the following future dates: **Easter** 14–17 April 2017; **May bank holidays** 1 and 29 May 2017; **Passover** 11 April 2017; **Rosh Hashanah** 3 October 2016, 21 September 2017; Yom Kippur 12 October 2016, 30 September 2017.