

the northern line

the newsletter of North London University of the Third Age

issue 62

september 2016



Coming up trumps

A bridge player can walk into a Bridge club anywhere in the world and join a game, regardless of what language anyone speaks. **Leni Green** finds out from **Sue Gold**, coordinator of the Intermediate Plus bridge group, why this game holds all the aces



Bridge is one of the most popular card games. Our U3A alone has five different groups. Can you tell us what all the fuss is about?

That's not easy to answer. Like chess, bridge is about problem-solving. Unlike chess, where an individual pits their wits against another individual, bridge is a partnership played against another partnership. Not only do you have

to work out the probability of which player might hold which cards, you have to 'decode' what both your partner and the opposing pair might be telling you.

Sounds complicated and quite akin to mind-reading. How do players do this decoding?

Through the conventions, of which there are many! You agree with your

A dozen gifts from bridge to English

Be in spades
Call a spade a spade
Come within an ace of
Follow suit
Have the cards stacked against you
Hold all the aces
Lay your cards on the table
Make the best of the hand you're dealt
Play your cards close to your chest
Play your strong suit
Play your trump card
Show your hand

partner before the game which ones you are going to play. You declare these conventions to the other pair so that they can understand what has been bid.

Continued on page 3

NLU3A committee 2016–17

Chair: Patricia Isaacs

8348 8782 chair@nlu3a.org.uk

Vice-chair and monthly meetings: John Hajdu

8883 8114 hajdu.clarion@talk21.com

Treasurer: Leon Levy

8349 3103 leon.levy@btinternet.com

Business secretary: Edmond Cohen

8343 3088 edmondecohen@gmail.com

Groups organiser: Sue Teller

8381 4480 ginpalace@mac.com

Membership secretary: Sandra Breckon

membership@nlu3a.org.uk

Minutes secretary: Ann Dugdale

8346 7194 annmdugdale@tiscali.co.uk

Publicity officer: Micky Mankin

8445 0453 michalmankin@gmail.com

Website manager: Mike Christie

8444 3317 info@nlu3a.org.uk

Our publications

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

Please send submissions for the next Update to Jane Marsh, oriana.jane@btinternet.com by 7 October.

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 Breckon (details above).

Editorial



Is U3A the epitome of democracy? It's run by its members for its members – those on the committee are elected by the membership to serve the U3A as a whole. Group leaders, event organisers and other volunteers are members who take on specific responsibilities and share knowledge or skills that not everyone has. I couldn't bake a cake or build a website to save my life, but I think I know how to edit a newsletter.

In this issue we pose several questions arising from July's AGM (see page 5), so please let us know your views on these via this newsletter or via the committee. Grumbling doesn't improve anything; exercising your right to be heard does.

We also look at one of the most popular activities in NLU3A – or, indeed, anywhere – the game of bridge. And Helena R Green gives an account of what turned out to be a magical spring excursion to North Wales.

I hope you enjoy it, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Leni Green

Editor

helenjuni@ntlworld.com

On other pages

As I see it	3
From the chair	4
Question time	5
Of castles, kings and kinships	6
Interest groups	8
Creating a modern opera	8
Away days	10
Going for green	10
Autumn monthly meetings	12
Term dates	12

Continued from page 1

Can you give us an example of a convention?

Here's a fairly simple one. You start the game making a bid to determine your target, or 'contract', for the game. After a bid of 'one no trump', your partner might bid two diamonds. But your partner actually wants to play in hearts, not diamonds. So, understanding the signal, you reply 'two hearts' which, with no further bids from elsewhere, will be your contract. This convention is called 'Transfers' and your partner was asking you, in code, to transfer from diamonds into hearts.

Why didn't your partner just say this from the start?

Good question and one for another time!

What are the benefits for U3A members?

Bridge is an excellent way of keeping your mind active. You need to be able to remember, count and plan your strategy. It's also a good

way to keep in touch and meet new people.

It sounds extremely complex. What advice would you give beginners, especially those who struggle to remember anything at all?

It's daunting at first but if you keep it simple, it makes life a lot easier. I personally find it difficult to remember how many cards have been played and where other cards might lie. But then, I always have, even when I was much younger.

You have to remember what cards have been put down on the table and, therefore, what cards people may still hold. How do you learn to do this?

I'm afraid it's a memory thing and an ability to work out the odds.

Bridge is thought to date from the 17th century, when it grew out of *biritch*, or Russian whist. The aim is to win *tricks* – four cards, one from each player, won by the person who played the highest card. At the beginning, the players *bid* to decide the *contract* – the highest ranking, or *trump* suit. When there is no predominant suit, the contract is *no trumps*, which, apparently, is what *biritch* means.

How long have you been playing?

I've been playing since my 20s. I took it up for social reasons – I was single and many of my friends played. I'm not a natural bridge player but have managed to maintain a certain standard over the years. Most people in our group have been playing for years but some learnt from scratch when this particular group was first formed.

How long does it take to learn?

How long is a piece of string?

As I see it

Lin Jonas, senior executive officer of the Third Age Trust for over 20 years, has recently retired. **Keith Richards** gives a fond appreciation of her

Longstanding members of our U3A will not be surprised to read again of my enthusiasm for the national and international movement of which we are a part. But – as I see it – the most significant event at the moment is the coming retirement of Lin Jonas, who has led the national office and represented us all over the country for so many years.

I almost applied for the job myself once. Facing coming retirement with dread and anxiety,

I was introduced to founder Peter Laslett, who told me about the forthcoming advertisement. One look at the job description and person specification was enough – and the movement was saved.

Instead I set about the exciting founding of North London U3A and soon visited the national office, then situated in King's Cross. I cannot say enough about the impetus of meeting Lin and her small band of colleagues. The help she gave was unstinting. I

know she has given this help again

and again as the number of U3As reaches 1,000 and it does not stop with their initiation.

Lin has always been directly accessible on the telephone – so much so that I have found it difficult to speak to her in the years since I stepped down from



Continued on page 4

Continued from page 3

the chairmanship of the Third Age Trust in 2006. I remember being asked at the time what I would most miss. I replied: 'The chance to speak to Lin every day!'

She has, though, remained a close and valued friend whom I have seen every year at the annual summer schools, where her presence on the opening days is so vital. Members who have been to the annual conference will know her well and those lucky enough



Lin Jonas

to represent us at Nottingham this August will, hopefully,

be able to participate in whatever formal farewell is planned. Although I was unwell at the time, I managed to get to Bromley in July for a surprise party organised by her colleagues for members throughout the

country whom they judged were closest to her.

It is impossible to imagine the

U3As without her, but readers of Third Age Matters will know that a successor has been found. Samantha Mauger – currently chief executive officer of Age UK London – took over on 15 August. I know that during and since the changeover, she and Lin have been in frequent touch.

I wish Samantha every success and look forward to meeting her but still must say that – as I see it – Lin will be a very hard act to follow. All U3As owe her so much. I still look forward to discussing some proposed new developments and hearing her say: 'Over my dead body, Keith!'

**KEITH RICHARDS IS A FOUNDING
MEMBER OF NLU3A**

From the chair, Patricia Isaacs



What does U3A mean to you? I would really love to hear your thoughts; if you are new it would be great to know where you heard about us, what made you decide to join, and what your experience has been. How about suggestions: what would you like to change about our U3A; what would you like us to try and do in future?

Are you interested in

becoming involved with running our organisation? Several quite new members have done just that recently, and we are looking for more. In July 2017 some committee members will be retiring and we need to have replacements ready well ahead of time. If the word 'committee' makes you shudder, let me tell you that we are not a deadly earnest team, and although we take our work seriously, we do have fun – and laughter too! Do please contact me if you want to know more (chair@nlu3a.org.uk).

Our AGM in July was very well attended despite the sunny day and the temptation of gardens competing with the meeting. As usual, suggestions and comments during the forum following the AGM were varied and a number of very useful points were raised; these

will be discussed at committee meetings during August and September, and where possible they will be implemented. Minutes of the meeting are available on the NLU3A website – www.nlu3a.org.uk

The summer programme occupied our break; it has been described as 'superb' and 'the best programme ever' and I hope that many of you made full use of the exciting sessions on offer. By the time those sessions came to an end, we were ready to begin the new term, with groups flourishing and reunions with friends adding to the pleasure of learning.

Warmest good wishes to everyone for an excellent start to our 2016–17 programme.

Patricia



Question time

In her introduction to the AGM our chair, **Patricia Isaacs**, said: 'Everyone is an unpaid volunteer, giving time, energy and enthusiasm on our behalf'. So we need to work together in the coming year to resolve issues raised at the AGM

HI-TECH OR LO-TECH?

Well over three-quarters of our members now use email and receive NLU3A information electronically every month. However, although we have an efficient website (see banner above), we know that many people do not use it.

→ **What can we do to encourage more people to use the NLU3A website regularly?**

EXPANSION OR CONTRACTION?

NLU3A's membership has grown to more than 750. But will a further increase in size lead to a decrease in sociability?

→ **Should another U3A be started in the north London area to meet the growing demand? If so, which area is the best choice to add to the six neighbouring U3As (Barnet, Islington, Mill Hill, Palmers Green, Southgate and U3A in London [aka Belsize Park])?**

EFFECTIVE NETWORKING

Patricia Isaacs reported that a North London networking group, consisting of the chairs of the

north London U3As, meets once a term 'to exchange ideas on groups, on problems we have come across and how we have dealt with them ... and on running a U3A'. Members of other U3As may attend NLU3A groups if there is no waiting list, but they must give way when the group is full and a North London member needs their place. Unfortunately, not all U3As have this policy.

→ **Would you like the networking group to agree a shared policy on cross-U3A interest group attendance? What other issues would you like the network to take up?**

ACCOUNTABILITY

In 2015 we made a loss of £2,819, largely explained by increases in rents. The good news is that we have healthy reserves of £33,000, which is well above the Charity Commission's requirement of £6,000. As a result, there will be no increase in membership fees this year.

→ **Do you have any ideas for interesting projects that could make good use of this money?**

We want to hear what you think, and we would love to publish your opinions in the next issue of TNL. Remember: NLU3A belongs to all of us – not just a participating few. So send your ideas to Patricia Isaacs at chair@nlu3a.org.uk, or to Leni Green at helenjuni@ntlworld.com – or ask a friend to send them if you don't have email.

Of castles, kings and kinships

Sunshine, scenery and Snowdonia contributed to the unforgettable NLU3A spring tour to North Wales. **Helena R Green** reports



Conwy Castle ramparts
Photo: Susanna Robinson



Gwydir Castle
from the courtyard
Photo: Susanna Robinson

In North Wales, 'castle' is a much-used word for places that aren't. Nevertheless, we discovered several structures that are well worth the name.

The walls of two of the castles that Edward I built, for

example, are as menacing in the 21st century as in the 14th. Caernarfon's greensward is a perfect performance space (hence the investiture of the Prince of Wales), and within its walls Conwy Castle is almost cosy. The views from the ramparts were worth the climb, as long as the spiral stairways didn't make you dizzy.

Cosy is not a word for Penrhyn Castle. Funded by slate and sugar, its 1780s makeover has produced a castle

worthy of Hollywood. Inside, it is like an over-the-top film set that takes you to Citizen Kane's estate, Xanadu. We thought we were in another Hollywood set when we arrived at the south-western edge of the Menai Strait. But we found ourselves enchanted once we were through the gates and over the drawbridge of the (miniature) ramparted Fort Belan. Created by the local MP, Thomas Wynn, in the 1770s to ward off an American invasion, its green, edged with little dwellings, is now being recast as a performance venue.

A cacophony of peacocks welcomed us to Gwydir Castle (a castle? no, a Tudor courtyard house near LLanrwst). We were



Inside Fort Belan *Photo: Helena R Green*



Seagull at Caernarfon Castle *Photo: Carol Holt*

turned their cottage into a work of art, where second-hand wood carvings have been jigsawed together to cover the walls. The Ladies became legendary during their long lives and were hostesses to the great and the famous, proving that celebrity is not just a 21st century phenomenon!

The highlights of the tour were, undoubtedly, the unexpected places and experiences. The weather was surprising: we never saw rain and even had sunshine. This was the first visit for

enthralled as Judy Corbett, author of *Castles in the Air*, related how she and her partner had bought the wreck 20 years ago and have transformed this former ancestral home of the Wynn family back into a truly historic dwelling.

Two other visits had a family connection. Erddig, near Wrexham, is a house where the Yorke family gave their servants immortality by having their portraits painted and honouring them in verse. The Yorke family from Erddig also owned Plas Newydd, the home of the Ladies of Llangollen from 1780–1829. These two noble Irish émigrées



Penrhyn Castle *Photo: Frances Heidensohn*



Menai Strait from Bangor University
Photo: Frances Heidensohn

most of our group of 29 to the area, and we were taken aback by its beauty. Our ascent to the summit of Snowdon (by train) and the breathtaking landscapes of the National Park were particularly memorable. So was the unexpected view of the Menai Strait from the garden of the Bangor University management centre, where we were based. For much of that we have to thank Frank Kelsall, our tour leader: his itinerary and accompanying notes were a true 'Open Sesame!'

Interest groups: innovations

New term, new groups, new names. Groups organiser **Sue Teller** explains

Warm greetings to everybody! I would like to introduce you to five groups that have just started: Armchair Critics; Art Appreciation; French for Beginners; Technology for Today and What Lies Ahead; and Thoughtful Topics, which is a new discussion group. As always, their details are in the interest groups booklet and on the website. If any of them catch your eye, please give the coordinators a call to find out more.

Unfortunately, due to the recent sad death of its coordinator, Ena Duffley, History of Gardening is on hold. Unless somebody with a good knowledge

of this subject offers to help, I fear this group will disappear. If this could be you, please phone me on 8381 4480. Alternatively, email ginpalace@mac.com

A name change: iPad Learners is now called Portable Computing to better reflect the various devices that are being used.

I would like to make a plea on behalf of the Computer Buddy scheme, which is always looking for people to help other members with their computers. There is no expertise needed – only a willingness to pass on whatever you know. If you are able to help, please get in touch with Carl Rose: carl.rose@bigfoot.com or

07968 400 314, or Roz Davy: redavy@waitrose.com or 07957 972 941. There are usually more people who want help than helpers. You don't need to be a computer expert to share your general knowledge, so think about it, please.

Keep your eye on the website, where all news is updated periodically. In the meantime, enjoy the many activities and groups NLU3A offers. I look forward to meeting you at the monthly meetings.

Best wishes to all of you from the groups organiser team.

Sue

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

Creating a modern opera—Mozart, da Ponte and their time

Mozart is world famous but who has heard of da Ponte? However, at the May monthly meeting, Robert Hugill* told us that da Ponte made a vital contribution to the success of Mozart's operas, as **Ann Bracken** reports

By 1785, Mozart had composed around 17 operas, with only moderate success, while Lorenzo da Ponte was an established opera librettist and poet. After they began collaborating, they produced

three of the most famous operas ever written: *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Don Giovanni* and *Così fan Tutte*.

Working with da Ponte, Mozart abandoned German Singspiele – combining spoken

dialogue and singing – for Italian Opera Buffa in which the dialogue is sung. All action took place within 24 hours, eliminating long historical recitatives.

The new style reflected



Lorenzo da Ponte

enlightenment ideals, bourgeois tastes rather than aristocratic pretensions, and contrasted comedic with serious characters and themes.

In *The Marriage of Figaro*

Almaviva (the count) is pitted against Figaro (the servant); in *Don Giovanni* it is Leporello (comic servant) contrasted with Donna Anna (serious lady); in *Così* the military are lampooned, Despina spouts tabloid views, and loose women (Fiordiligi and Dorabella) drive the plot.

The drama was developed by and through the music. The soloists were accompanied by an orchestra – including clarinets for the first time – not a harpsichord. All this changed the way opera would be written, composed,



performed and viewed in the future.

This was an interesting and informative talk. A pity there was no music!

* www.planethugill.com

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 07748 478 428 for last-minute cancellations.

Shakespeare in London

Friday 14 October

This year marks the 400th anniversary of William Shakespeare's death. We will celebrate his legacy with actor Lance Pierson on this guided walk around the city.

Although everyone knows that Shakespeare came from Stratford-upon-Avon, all of his famous working life was spent in London. We will follow in his footsteps and see the places where he lived, wrote and acted. At each stop we will be further transported with extracts from Shakespeare's plays connected with that location.

We will see the original site of the Globe Theatre; its sister, the Blackfriars Theatre; and two houses where he lived. The walk will pause at the modern Globe for a comfort break (and a chance to visit the shop) but won't visit the actual theatre.

'All the world's a stage' and our entrance will be at London Bridge Station. 'Our revels' will end near Blackfriars with options for post-walk refreshments.

Times and travel

We meet at 10.50am for 11am at the Tooley Street exit of London Bridge tube/rail station (you may have to go through the main station concourse first). We will finish near Blackfriars up to two hours later.



Booking is essential. Please use the booking form on the previous page or send us a note with the requested details and your cheque.

Cost
£7.00

Going for green

In this, the first in a series of members' favourite places in London, **Alison Watson** introduces the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park

The Olympic Park is one of London's undervalued treasures. The site offers guided tours of the Olympic Stadium; low-cost swimming in the Olympic pool; and fine buildings, such as the Aquatic Centre, with

its beguiling wavy roof; and the Velodrome. The park was developed with a plan for new local housing. The flats in the former athletes' village are already occupied, and building of new accommodation, 36 per cent of

which will be social housing, is continuing.

But for me the joy is in the planting and waterside walks. Three water courses run by or through the park: the River Lea; the Lea Navigation, Waterworks



and City Mill River; plus Carpenter's Road Lock, Grade II listed and currently being restored by English Heritage. The planting, designed by Nigel Dunnett four years ago, is maturing, with wildflowers and swathes of colourful bedding from all over the world. There is a permanent watering system which is entirely self sustaining, and the trees, plants and flocks of birds are flourishing. There is a hidden British garden and a beautiful wetlands area.

You can walk around the park,

cycle or take a free buggy ride. These run on the hour from the information point near Stratford station or various stop-off points. Car parking is possible at the Aquatic Centre, but it's rather a nightmare to drive there.

My preferred way in is from Hackney Wick overground station, which avoids coping with the gigantic shopping centre at Stratford. Turn right when you leave the station, take the first turning on the right and go straight ahead, crossing the bridge over the River Lea into the

park. To help you find your way round, there is a big map on an information board as you enter the park.

Enjoy!

- Is there a place in London that you think everyone should visit? Tell us why by sending a brief description to helenjuni@ntlworld.com with a photo to show us why it's wonderful.



Autumn monthly meetings

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

Monday 10 October

The secret life of lighthouses – the amazing history of their construction and the lives of their keepers

Mark Lewis, artist, designer and amateur 'pharologist', will discuss his passion – lighthouses and lightships. He will explore their life-saving role, the fascinating challenges faced by their builders, the lonely lives of their keepers, and some of the heroic stories associated with them.



Monday 14 November

The age of the pyramids: the world's first pyramid (*postponed from last term*)

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.

Term dates

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

The following may affect openings of some of the venues we use:

Easter	14 – 17 April 2017
May bank holidays	1 and 29 May 2017
Passover	Starts 11 April 2017
Rosh Hashanah	3 October 2016
Yom Kippur	12 October 2016