

the northern line

the magazine of north london u3a

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- Please send contributions for the next issue to editor@nlu3a.org.uk by 19 November.
- The editors may shorten or otherwise amend articles to fit spacing and style requirements.

Editorial

Do you struggle with Zoom meetings because you can't hear what's going on? If so, you're in good company. Data from the Office for National Statistics (2018) reveals that more than 40 per cent of people over 50, and more than 70 per cent of those over 70, have some form of hearing loss. And the NHS says that about 1.4m people in the UK wear hearing aids.

'I'm quite deaf and my hearing aids amplify sound so much that Zoom is stressful for me,' says Patricia Isaacs. 'I have used subtitles for television programmes for many years and, although they were distracting at first, they now add so much to my understanding that I cannot imagine life without them. I

would be able to join in any Zoom sessions in our u3a if they were subtitled or captioned.'

National u3a is helping out by introducing captioning at all online presentations, with subtitles enabled by default. (You can turn them off if you don't want them.) Our u3a has been using microphones for speakers and audience questioners at in-person monthly meetings, and at the July meeting we began trialling live transcriptions (the equivalent of subtitles) on Zoom. This will be extended to subsequent virtual meetings if it's successful, so please let the committee know what you think. Email info@nlu3a.org.uk

In this issue we focus on north London, our home base. We include images of north



London as seen by members; we discover how the Gatehouse theatre in Highgate has survived the pandemic; and we meet a popular Barnet-based artist who makes art out of discarded chewing gum.

Enjoy! 🍷

LENI GREEN
EDITOR

EDITOR@NLU3A.ORG.UK

Our patch

Members share their impressions of north London



Photo ©Barry Davies

Highgate from Parliament Hill, the dome of St Joseph's Church (Holy Joe's) in the distance.

Cover picture: Finchley Central tube ©Leni Green. 'Taken from the concourse at Finchley Central just after sunset. The lighting was so gorgeous I just had to capture it.'

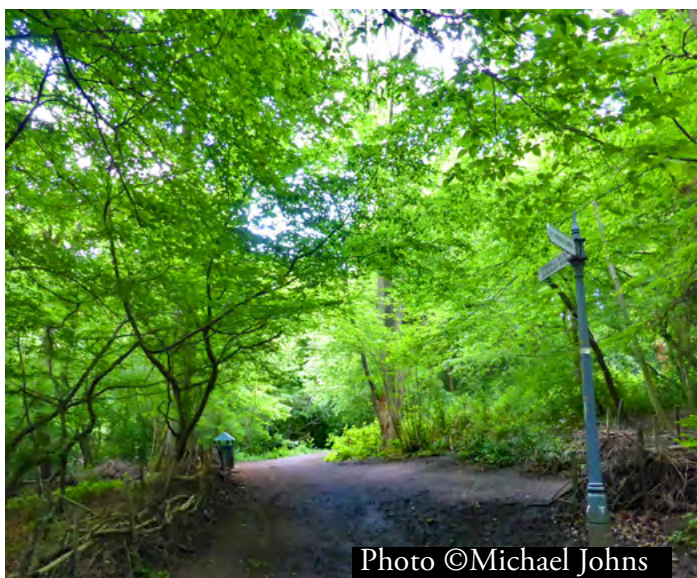


Photo ©Michael Johns

'I offer this to celebrate the many woods and open spaces in north London which kept me going through lockdown.'

Spring and summer on Dollis Way

Now, Spring rain fuelled, confident, it swirls
Swinging against banks
Pulling the earth
Tossing the spoils in speeding, twirling currents.
Whilst above, the patient heron and egret
Statue-like, wait, watchful, still,
Then a white streak, beak down, spears the water
And there a flash where the kingfisher
A gleaming sapphire, dissolves like a comet
Into dark gloomy clustered leaves.
And where children play and point
Parental proud, ducks, geese, moorhen lead their
brood, all in a row, file, and glide to hidden nests
Leaving trails, broken arcs of twinkling light
All around beam the sunshine bursts of buttercups,
dandelions, and coltsfoot.

Now, Summer drought.
Dollis crawls along
Lingering, fingering its dusty way, around and
between silty heaps
Then sinking, disappearing into thirsty sands.
But there, reappears in a grassy bed or spring
Shining in the sunlight
In silent, wetland corners
Still, and secretive behind leafy boughs.
Shrouded by Marsh buttercups oxlip and willowherb
Newts and frogs lurk
Reed hidden, half sleeping in lazy heat, below a
cloud of buzzing dragonflies and gnats

©PAT KREMER



Photo ©Vivien Preston

Granary Square, Kings Cross. Taken 1 July.
'It was the first time I'd seen the fountains in operation for some time. It was warm and sunny, with kids paddling and people getting ready to watch tennis by the canal. Almost like normal!'



Photo ©David Ramsey

Corner store, junction of Hendon Lane and Victoria Avenue, Finchley Central, N3. 'With the gradual demise of the corner shop, I tried to capture the essence of a modern shop but process it in an old-fashioned way to bring back some nostalgia.'

Our patch continues on next page



Painting ©Miriam David

Flower meadow. Based on the gardens of the Harington project – the garden behind Miriam's flat – a Haringey and Islington gardening project for people with learning disabilities.



Photo ©Joan Swann

Central London from the top of Hampstead Heath.

As I see it

Is your glass half full or half empty? **Patricia Isaacs** tries to ensure that hers is always at least half full

Among our members, positive attitudes dominate and we are 'independent, curious, intelligent and friendly' according to u3a's guide to ageing in celebration of u3a day, which took place in June. And yet, apparently, one in three of our members has come across age discrimination, although I'm not sure what forms this takes and I cannot recall it having affected me. Acquaintances and strangers take me for a much younger woman (I'm 86) and of course that is truly flattering; but

I am convinced that membership of a u3a goes a very long way to sustain and increase positivity

is there still a stereotypical 'oldie'? Not among my friends, and rarely among older people I meet – for the most part they are diverse and interesting and enthusiastic about Life with a capital L, refusing

to let age (or the consequent aches and pains) put an end to enjoyment; even when limitations get in the way of pleasure, we still laugh at ourselves, laugh with one another.

I am convinced that membership of a u3a goes a very long way to sustain and increase positivity, recognising the

importance of continuing to learn, of friendships, of being a participant, not an outsider.

Covid-19 has certainly caused some hardship, but it hasn't stopped our members from remaining young in heart and mind, even when struggling to do so. Let others see us as 'past it' if they will, and let that glass be forever half full! ☺

PATRICIA ISAACS IS A PAST CHAIR OF NLU3A



Running a theatre through the pandemic

The pub theatre Upstairs at the Gatehouse in Highgate Village has reopened, writes **John Plews**, its artistic director

Monday 16 March 2020 was a significant date in the history of British theatre. I remember listening to Boris Johnson's 5.00pm announcement that ordered all hospitality venues, including theatres, to close. We do not open on Mondays, but I felt sorry for theatregoers already on their way to the other 7.30pm shows.

Upstairs at the Gatehouse was hosting a visiting company staging the musical *Once Upon a Mattress*. We had to begin refunding ticket money and arranging for the actors to come and pick up their personal belongings. Lighting and sound equipment had to be returned to hire companies, websites and posters needed changing and future programming had to be put on hold.

As chair of the Society of Independent Theatres (SIT), I started lobbying government ministers.

Many of us had never heard the word 'furlough' before, let alone figured out how to sign up! The rate relief and small business grants helped tremendously but we really needed a major contribution from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS).

Government departments are huge. The competition for attracting the attention of the minister (Oliver Dowden) and the senior figures within the DCMS is frightening. Along with culture, there is sport (powerful organisations such as the Football Association and the England and

Wales Cricket Board), media (all the film and TV companies) and digital (electronic games). Then within culture we are vying for a place at the table with museums, libraries, cinemas, music, opera, dance and all forms of theatre.

The SIT members that I represented needed to make sure the small independent sector was not forgotten.

We achieved a reasonable result. The Cultural Recovery Fund was secured for the arts and out of the 1,900 theatre companies that applied, just over 1,300 were awarded grants ranging from £50K to £3million.

Financially it made no sense, but as theatre practitioners we felt we could stay closed no longer

Upstairs at the Gatehouse received £56K, without which the theatre would have closed. The building was shut from 16 March 2020 to 1 June 2021. We reopened with a reduced capacity in the auditorium, with all the Covid protocols in place – socially distanced seating, mask-wearing and sanitisers everywhere.

Financially it made no sense, but as theatre practitioners we felt we could stay closed no longer. It's only through the generosity of our patrons and shareholders that we were able to re-open. We have also had help from



Katie and John Plews, who run Upstairs at the Gatehouse

Camden Council's re-start grant and our landlords, who gave us a rent reduction from September to June. Our first show was the American musical *Forever Plaid*.

The announcement about the extra four weeks of restrictions was a headache. But I think theatre will recover. It will be a long process as people gain the confidence to return to Covid-safe buildings. We spent much of our grant on protecting the audiences, cast and staff from coronavirus, and the knock-on effect is that many theatres now have greatly improved facilities.

It is irksome to see 22,000 people at a football match and tickets being sold for the Wimbledon finals while small theatres like ours are restricted to an audience of just 45.

However, none of our SIT venues have been forced to close. Please support your local pub and/or independent fringe theatres. Their intimate nature will provide a rewarding and enriching theatrical experience. Find out what's on at upstairsatthegatehouse.com 🍷

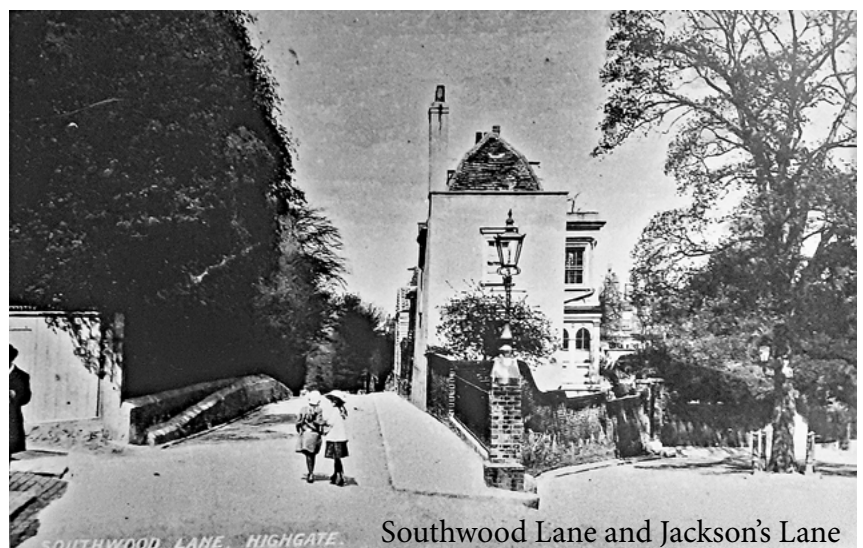
Where I hang my hat

What part of north London do you call home? **Patricia Isaacs** introduces the delights of Highgate

I am a Highgate girl, spent my childhood here, moved to various parts of London, Dartmoor and then France before returning to England. I've been back in Highgate for the last 15 years, loving it, and looking at what has changed. Far more traffic, of course, and some new bus routes. When my sister and I were girls, we took the 210 to school; it still exists, although no longer as a single decker. The only other local transport was the 611 trolleybus, with the overhead lines ending at the turn-around by Pond Square. Some shop fronts are almost familiar, and the tiny sweet shop where we bought tiger nuts, humbugs or lemon sherbet dips for a farthing is now a cake and coffee shop; or perhaps it was the estate agency next door – my memory is less sharp than it was as a child or teenager!

Strolling around Highgate is always delightful: walking around the streets to see the beautiful old houses, sitting under the trees in Pond Square, walking down Fitzroy Park to the ponds on Hampstead Heath. Waterlow Park marks the lower end of the village, still beautiful and has hardly changed at all, although the trees are far taller and greener, and there are many more donated benches. In my early teens I would occasionally play truant from school and hide in the park with a book. Fond memories!

Highgate is still a village: noisier and busier, but still a friendly, lively place, high on its hill with great views over central London. Full circle – I began here and I'll end my days here. ☺



Patricia shares these postcards, which show Highgate some 100 years or so ago. I tried to stand on the spot where the original shots were taken. Not so easy today because the traffic means taking one's life in one's hands. I had to wait for three-quarters of an hour for the high street to clear of a number of parked vehicles.

BARRY DAVIES

Something sticky this way comes

Ben Wilson, aka the Chewing Gum Man, is a local artist who, for the past 15 years or so, has turned masses of trodden-in blobs of gum into miniature works of art. **Marion Fitzpatrick** introduces him

A lot of Ben Wilson's creations can be found in Barnet, where he grew up, and Muswell Hill, where he now lives with his family. Over 400 of his colourful pieces can also be seen along the Millennium Bridge, near St Paul's Cathedral. Unless you look closely, the works are easy to miss, some being no larger than a coin.

Wilson attracts a lot of attention when crouched on the ground, spending



Photo © Marion Fitzpatrick

hours or even days on his task. He has a large book where he keeps requests for personal gum paintings, which he does not charge for.

He first heats the gum with a small blow-torch, then coats it with acrylic enamel before creating the image with acrylic paint and finishing with a clear lacquer seal.

He is careful to paint only the chewing gum, not the public surfaces, in case he is accused of vandalism. In the early days he encountered unwanted attention from the authorities, but because he was only painting rubbish, he was not found to be breaking any law.

Discover his art on your travels! ☺

Note perfect

Ann Dugdale, who was minutes secretary of nlu3a for over six years, has retired. We owe her thanks for taking on this 'extremely onerous' role, says nlu3a chair **Edmond Cohen**

In addition to taking the minutes at our monthly committee meetings, which are usually about two hours long, Ann managed to contribute to the discussions at the same time. And she produced a first draft of the minutes within 24 hours.

This was particularly difficult during lockdown, when we conducted meetings on Zoom, where it can be much more difficult to clearly hear and transcribe what has been said.

But Ann was always so accurate that there were virtually no corrections to be made.

On top of all this, Ann organised our annual general meetings, from sending out the paperwork to overseeing procedures on the day. She was

also ever-present at our monthly meetings in St Paul's church with her husband, John, who organises the audio visual equipment.

When we decided to hold a meeting of all coordinators two years ago to ask for their views on various matters, it was once again Ann who brought it together with superb efficiency.

Ann kept the rest of the committee aware of the tasks they should be carrying out and was a tower of strength to the committee and nlu3a.

She stepped down from her role in July, and I would like to express the thanks of all members for all the work she has done. We are certainly going to miss her from the committee, but fortunately not from nlu3a. 🐾






Photo: Ann on her north Finchley allotment with a trompetto (a kind of gourd) she grew, and where she will now, happily, be able to spend more time. ©John Dugdale.

• If you would be interested in this role, please email events@nlu3a.org.uk

The eyes have it

Dingbats are visual word puzzles – upside-down, sideways or otherwise jumbled up – from which a well-known phrase or saying has to be gleaned. They are derived from a board game that was created by cartoonist and illustrator Paul Sellars in 1980. Dingbats involve solving rebuses, puzzles in which a common word or saying is hidden in a unique arrangement of symbols. As Roy Walker, past host of the TV show *Catchphrase* would have said: 'Just say what you see!'

Have a go at this puzzle, sent by **Ruth Silver**. The answer to number one is 'fork in the road'; the answers to the rest are on page 10. 🐾

ROFORKAD	1	POLMOMICE	11
J  B	2	FA ST	12
STEPSTEPPETS	3	SEARCH	13
CCCCCCC	4	SEARCH	14
COVER	5	HOAWNLD	15
COP	6	BTUWSOH	16
HAMLET	7	G  D	17
words words	8	BJAOCKX	18
words words	9	ABCDEFGHJMO	19
S	10	PQRSTUWXYZ	20
T		€  G	
ONE		O	
BUS		V	
BUS		E	
EVER		R	
EVER TUESDAY		S	
EVER		ATfrankfrankRA	
MAN			
BOARD			

What price freedom?

London Mayor Sadiq Khan has so far managed to protect the Freedom Pass during his negotiations with the government over the future of Transport for London (TfL). But it is clear that ministers have the Freedom Pass in their sights and see the pandemic as too good a chance to miss. **Francis Beckett** reports

The pandemic was devastating for TfL's finances. Fares income fell by 90 per cent at the peak of the crisis. As part of a £1.6 billion rescue package last summer, the government insisted that free travel was temporarily suspended for Freedom Pass and 60+ Oyster card holders at peak times. You cannot now use your Freedom Pass, or your 60+ Oyster Card, between 4.30am and 9.00am on weekday mornings.

At the end of October, after more difficult negotiations, the mayor got a further six-month funding deal to keep tube, bus and other TfL services in the capital running until March 2021, but he was forced to agree to continue the limitation on the use of the Freedom Pass.

The mayor did manage to fend off a government proposal to completely remove all concessions from Londoners which do not exist elsewhere in England. This would have meant the end of the 60+ Oyster Card, which is available to Londoners over 60 but not yet 65, and therefore not yet eligible for a Freedom Pass. But he had to agree that London would raise the funds to cover the cost of the concession itself from the start of the financial year 2021–22 onwards.

Mayor Khan is determined to keep the 60+ Oyster Card and is supported by Age UK, which said: 'Taking travel concessions away from older Londoners who live in the city with the worst pensioner poverty rate in the country, and some of the highest

living costs in the world, will drive up poverty and exacerbate the capital's social isolation crisis.'

However, it's not just the 60+ card, but the Freedom Pass itself, which may be under threat. We hear that the special adviser who has been imposed on the TfL board, former journalist Andrew Gilligan (an old friend of Johnson), is pushing for the axing of the Freedom Pass. 🗨️

What you can do

Write to your MP if you feel strongly about protecting the Freedom Pass. Find out how to contact your MP here: members.parliament.uk/members/commons

Coming soon to a future near you?

We continue our series of books by members with *England's Trump Card, and other things that haven't happened yet*: a collection of stories by North London u3a member **Francis Beckett** (formerly the editor of *Third Age Matters*)

These 12 stories are set in an England we haven't yet seen. Some are in an imaginary future. Some are in a past that didn't happen but might easily have taken place.

They are about what might become of us – or what might have become of us, if things had panned out slightly differently.

Some of these stories first

appeared in anthologies published by Oxford University Press and by Biteback Publishing, or in the *New Statesman*. Others are new.

The stories show us:

- London in the future: third world poverty, tuc-tucs on the streets and an authoritarian tyrant in Downing Street
- The prime minister addresses the nation during the blitz – but

it isn't Winston Churchill

- The Ghost of Christmas Past copes with the age of the internet
- The strange premiership of Jeremy Corbyn. 🗨️

Paperback £10.36 from TSL Publications; ebook £2.58 from lulu.com

Cartoons by Kipper Williams.

The Italian connection

Looking to dust off your perhaps long-unused Freedom Pass with a visit to somewhere new? You can't go wrong with the Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art, says **Patricia Isaacs**

The Estorick Collection resides in a Georgian house, a minute from Highbury Corner. The entire building was renovated in 2016, extending the exhibition space and other visitor attractions.

There are six galleries, a bookshop, an art library for researchers, and an excellent café too, with outside tables in a pretty courtyard garden. To match the collection, the menu is Italian.

The gallery was founded by

an American sociologist, Eric Estorick, who came to live in London after the second world war. His knowledge of Italian art and culture was considerable, much of it gained during a number of visits to Italy with his wife Salome, also American.

The collection is unusual, beautifully housed and presented, a place of peace. The website (estorickcollection.com) gives details of exhibitions; currently

there is a show of works by French post-war painter Olivier Debré entitled 'Fervent Abstraction'. Be quick, though – it ends on 26 September. 📷

Address: 39a Canonbury Square, London N1 2AN. Transport: Highbury and Islington tube or overground station. 271 bus to the door from Highgate or Archway.

Do you have a favourite place in London, accessible with a Freedom Pass? Send a brief description to editor@nlu3a.org.uk telling us why it's special. Don't forget to include a photo or two!

Lockdown library

One of the best things to come out of the pandemic for **Hilary Segall** has been the chance to indulge in a favourite pastime – reading. She shares some of the books she has enjoyed over the past year

• *The Mirror and The Light*, the final instalment in **Hilary Mantel's** Thomas Cromwell trilogy. This was a brilliant read, although I had to keep one finger in the dramatis personae page and use the other hand to support the book – fine in the middle but difficult at either end! Cleverly written, with Cromwell knowing his fate once he

had persuaded Henry to marry the Flanders Mare (Anne of Cleves).

• *Troubled Blood* by **Robert Galbraith** (aka JK Rowling). Another monster read that kept me hooked from the first page. It didn't feel 900 pages long – everything was pertinent to the story, which was a continuation

of her Cormoran Strike detective novels. Set around Denmark Street, where Strike's office is situated, and Clerkenwell, where the novel's murder was committed, it brought London alive at a time when we weren't allowed to visit London.

• *A Single Thread* by **Tracey Chevalier**. A single woman in

Answers to Dingbats on page 8:

1. Fork in the road. 2. An inside job. 3. Two steps forward one step back. 4. Seven seas. 5. Undercover cop. 6. Play on words. 7. Corner stone. 8. Double decker. 9. Forever and a day. 10. Man overboard. 11. Mom-in-law. 12. Breakfast. 13. Search high and low. 14. Bird in the hand worth two in the bush. 15. Good-looking. 16. Jack in the box. 17. Missing link. 18. Ping pong. 19. Left-overs. 20. Frank Sinatra.

her 30s, whose sweetheart was killed in the Great War, leaves her stifling Southampton home and moves to Winchester to start a new life. She volunteers at the cathedral as an embroiderer of church appurtenances – hassocks, altar cloths, and so on. I felt utterly immersed, but I won't say any more lest I spoil the book for anyone.

- **Remarkable Creatures**, also by **Tracey Chevalier**, and made into the film *Ammonite* with Kate Winslet. Two 19th century ladies from different backgrounds bond over their love of fossil-hunting on the Jurassic coast. They encounter difficulties when Mary Anning, uneducated with an eye for fossil collecting, is effectively pushed aside when she finds a complete ichthyosaurus on the beach but is not given credit for her find.

- **Tidelands**. Many of **Philippa Gregory's** historical novels

concentrate on the Tudor period, but here she diverts to the 17th century. England is in the middle of a bloody civil war and people's allegiance to the king has to be kept secret. Set in the tidelands of West Sussex, it is the story of a 'wise woman' accused of possessing dark secrets. She falls in love with a recusant priest, who, while pretending to be of the Church of England, is determined to restore Catholicism and the king.

- If you like a gripping read in the Frederick Forsyth and John le Carré vein, then **Frank Gardner**, the BBC correspondent who was injured in a terrorist attack in Saudi Arabia in 2004, provides a wonderful read. Both **Ultimatum** and **Crisis** are fast-paced thrillers racing against time to find the perpetrators of an attack planned in London and the avoidance of a new Gulf War.

- Considerably less pacey but beautifully crafted are the novels of **Elizabeth Jane Howard**.

Having read *The Cazalet Chronicles* some years ago, I decided to try more of her work and chose **The Long View** and **Love All**. Each book has a character one might dearly love to shout 'Get a grip!' at. Well, the characters do get a grip in the end without any help from me! *The Long View*, about a failing marriage in the 50s, traces a marriage from its end back through the decades to when and how the couple met. *Love All* is a classic tale of growing up in the late 60s, of love and loss, childhood and innocence, giving way to life and death.

And there are plenty more that haven't made the cut! ☺



Meet...

Chris Owen: actor, singer, writer... Interview by Christine Stammers

Passing along the front path leading to a delightful Victorian house, I got drenched by rain-soaked, suburban, flowering shrubs but



Chris and Joy Owen were smiling and their welcome was warm.

Chris joined nlu3a, encouraged by Joy, and his great pleasure is London Walks. 'They are terrific,' he enthuses. The group sees something new every time; it feels like a family to him, and he particularly enjoys the camaraderie. He's a member of Singing for Pleasure and he joins the Local Short Walks group for coffee.

Chris was born in Edgbaston, Birmingham. In his final year at school he took part in a school play. His comic performance, based on two of his teachers' idiosyncrasies, was a triumph and brought the house down, and his future was decided: he had to

become an actor.

RADA was next, followed by the Old Vic. He told me he once played Henry Higgins in GB Shaw's *Pygmalion*. When he spoke the lines 'I've grown accustomed to her face,' the audience in the gallery started to sing from the musical: 'She almost makes the day begin!'

Later he wrote 'A Parson's Tale'. This story of a 19th century country parson in which Chris was the sole actor, toured all over rural UK, then Cyprus and the Gulf States. Reviews described it as 'outstanding', 'totally engrossing', 'brilliant'!

He appeared in the film *The Bank Job* with David Suchet,

Continued on page 12

Continued from page 11

where he played Mountbatten, which must have suited his height, elegance and patrician looks.

TV appearances are many, and include *Doctor Who*, *The Bill*, *House of Cards*, *Inspector Morse*, *Basil* (with Derek Jacobi) and *Callan*.

Christopher is an award-winning published writer. His latest work is *America Awaits*

Us, My Lovely and Other Stories, published by Troubadour Publishing (troubadour.co.uk/bookshop) and available there or at any bookshop, real or online. The first story is based on his grandmother's experiences in North America.

He believes nlu3a is a great organisation because of the groups, which are 'a delight'; the members, 'so full of enthusiasm'; the walks, 'so interesting'; the camaraderie, 'so, so important'! ☺



Monthly meetings and other dates

The September meeting will take place on Zoom. You will have to pre-book a place by sending an email to meetings@nlu3a.org.uk by 6.00pm on the Friday before the meeting. For future meetings, which begin at 10.30am, read the monthly emailed newsletter or check the website (nlu3a.org.uk).

6 September

Opera houses, concert halls and theatres

This talk will look at theatre buildings, including opera houses and concert halls, and how they have evolved and changed over the last 70 years. It will start with a Greek amphitheatre and finish with a 20-seat amphitheatre in Slovenia. It will embrace many of the most significant theatres of this period and explore how architecture was changed by the TWA Flight Centre at New York's JFK Airport and its influence on the Sydney Opera House. The speaker is David Staples, a theatre consultant, who has advised clients, architects and governments on the building of new theatres, concert halls and opera houses around the world. He is co-author of the book *Modern Theatres 1950–2020*.



La Scala

13 September

Open morning for new members

This will take place at St Paul's Church, Long Lane, N3 2PU from 10.00 to 11.30am.

Term dates

1921-22

Autumn	6 September	17 December
Spring	3 January	1 April
Summer	18 April	22 July

Jewish holidays

These may affect groups that meet in synagogues

Rosh Hashanah, Tuesday 7 and Wednesday 8 September

Yom Kippur, Thursday 16 September

Sukkot, Tuesday 21 and Wednesday 22 September

Simchat Torah, Tuesday 28 and Wednesday 29 September