

# the northern line

the magazine of north london U3A    issue 81    January 2023

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- Please send contributions for the next issue to [editor@nlu3a.org.uk](mailto:editor@nlu3a.org.uk) by 17 March.
- **The editors may shorten or otherwise amend articles to fit spacing and style requirements.**

## Editorial

What's in an age? I once saw a cartoon in which a hippy celebrating his birthday told his mates that he'd turned 30, and they all ran away. I used to think anyone older than me was past it, but now, in U3A, some of my friends are older and some are younger, and it really doesn't matter. We are all getting older; this has been the case since the day we were born. And with ageing come illnesses and impairments – are you familiar with the organ recital? It is triggered when the answer to 'how are you?' is not 'fine; how are you?' but a recitation of ailments a concerto in length.

The third age isn't about chronology. It's the time in a person's life when, freed from full-time employment or family-raising responsibilities, they have the opportunity to

undertake learning (among other things) for its own sake. This can happen at any age, and people in their 20s have been known to join the U3A.

Our U3A has been going since 1994. It has given enough to members – no, that's wrong. Its members have given enough to each other and the organisation – that they have stayed with it, and of course they've got older. People in their 80s and 90s play musical instruments, partake in sporting activities, lead groups, play mind games. But eventually the inevitable will happen, so we really need new, younger members. Where do we get them from?

In this issue we visit another long-standing group, A Sideways Look at History. John Dugdale reprises his revelations of Finchley's history with a



Photo © Ali Shahriari

stroll down Hendon Lane. And Christine Stammers explores the trees of Stephens House. 🌳

**HAPPY READING, AND HAPPY  
NEW YEAR!  
LENI GREEN  
EDITOR  
[editor@nlu3a.org.uk](mailto:editor@nlu3a.org.uk)**

## Unanimity – and a reshuffle

**Susan Watt** reports on NLU3A's annual general meeting

On a Monday morning in October, nearly 50 members of North London U3A braved the cool and breezy weather and arrived at the bright, pleasant St Margaret's

Church in Finchley. After tea and coffee, the outgoing chair, Edmond Cohen, welcomed everyone to a combined monthly meeting and AGM. Mark Lewis, a folklorist, treated us to a lively

account of the Thames in London and its architecture, activities and importance over the centuries, from Roman times to the present.

Edmond then opened the formal proceedings, noting

# As I see it

Tips from **Patricia Isaacs** on keeping your brain active and your body warm



new – several somethings, in fact, with five Open University introductory and intermediate courses. There are over a thousand to choose from, varying between 5 and 20 hours, and they are free, although if you follow them up with a more advanced course you will pay the OU fees. There are several reasons for doing this: to challenge my lazy mind, for stimulation, to test my memory, and for the pleasure of learning – and to see if I can do it!

There are no deeper purposes and no qualifications to gain, but the sense of achievement is significant. Why not you? We are heading towards a new year, and that's a good time for a new start; just don't call it a new year resolution, always a risky idea.

On another topic of concern to U3A members, there are many items in the media offering suggestions for keeping warm this winter without breaking the energy bank. You won't see me wearing a onesie, but I'm interested in the plan a friend has drawn up. She will start each weekday with porridge, warming and filling, and make thick vegetable casseroles for lunch, using odd shapes and leftovers rather than spending on perfect vegetables. Different vegetables go into thick, spiced soup in the evening, and before she has a chance to get bored, she will allow herself treats each weekend. Sounds like a good plan! ☺

Happy new year to everyone!

**PATRICIA ISAACS IS A PAST CHAIR  
OF NLU3A**

*Unanimity — and a reshuffle cont'd*  
that no amendments had been received. The first three items (2021 AGM minutes, chair's report, treasurer's report) were approved unanimously, as were all the proposed appointments of the committee and officers.

There has been something of a reshuffle (due to the lack of more volunteers joining the committee): Michael Johns becomes chair, replacing Edmond, who becomes vice-chair (having served the maximum allotted time as chair). New committee member Dorothy Carr took on the role of membership secretary, while Ruth Silver moves to business secretary. Sadly Dorothy has since had to

resign, so Ruth continues to cover membership pro tem.

On the budget side, the proposal to increase the annual membership cost attracted plenty of comment, with one member querying why we are raising fees to £40 when this is above those of neighbouring Crouch End U3A, and another member suggesting it might be wise to increase fees even more to ensure solvency. After treasurer Roy Seger responded, the proposal was overwhelmingly approved – although not quite unanimously as there were three abstentions.

To round off the meeting, new chair Michael Johns gave a glimpse of his ideas for the

present and future of NLU3A: he is not a believer in 'change for the sake of it'. However, he would love to hear from any members about their thoughts regarding NLU3A, and would welcome any and all suggestions for improving what we do. Write to Michael at [chair@nlu3a.org.uk](mailto:chair@nlu3a.org.uk) or contact any committee member: you will get a considered response. ☺

The photo on the front cover was taken by David Ramsey in the grounds of Stephens House and that on the back cover of trees in autumn by Richard Litherland. See article on Page 7.



# From a plague pit to a pointed tower

Last January **John Dugdale** introduced part of Hendon Lane in Finchley, from the King of Prussia pub (where Charles Dickens once imbibed) to an old dairy at the junction with Victoria Avenue. What will his second instalment uncover? Photos by **David Ramsey**



Church End Gardens - the rumoured 'plague pit'

In Hendon Lane just before the now disused library is a small plot of land known as Church End Gardens. The Finchley Society ([finchleysociety.org.uk](http://finchleysociety.org.uk)) suggested in their 2008 newsletter that it's the site of a 16th century plague pit, which could be why it has never been developed, though it does have benches where people come and eat their lunch. I've spent some time researching plague pits on the internet, and

it's amazing with the Cross Rail and Elizabeth Line construction how many new burial sites have been discovered. If anyone wants to research the London plague, try Peter Ackroyd's *London: The Biography*;

Daniel Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year*; and *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*. (However, Historic London UK has admitted that solid evidence for the existence of plague pits can be hard to find. Shovels, anyone?)

Moving on we come to St Mary-at-Finchley Church, the oldest church in Finchley: there has been a house of worship on the site since 1274. It is possible that there was one even before this date, as during the 19th century a Norman font bowl and ambry (place for storing sacred vessels and vestments) were discovered. During the 1940 London Blitz, the church was badly damaged, but in 1949 it became a Grade II listed building and was substantially rebuilt in 1953.

Churchyards can give an insight into local history. I discovered that John Cartwright (1740–1824), a former naval officer and political reformer, was buried at St Mary's. He came from an interesting family: his younger brother was Edmund Cartwright, inventor of the power



St Mary's church tower

loom, and his older brother, George, notably explored Labrador. There is a memorial to John Cartwright in St Mary's churchyard. This, like the church, is Grade II listed and was restored in 2019 with a grant from Historic England.

Moving on down Hendon Lane our next landmark (and yes



Memorial to Major John Cartwright



Christ's College



another Grade II listed building) is Pardes House, formerly Christ's College. I always find it very imposing, with its pointed 120-foot tower and buildings designed by Edward Roberts. Christ's College was opened in 1857 as Finchley Hall School and was renamed Christ's College in 1860. A browse through the sporting history of the school

reveals a strong connection to rugby, and the following former pupils have left an indelible mark on the game: Charles Monro, credited with introducing rugby to New Zealand; William Percy Carpmael, influential in creating the Barbarian Football Club (often known as the Baa-Baas) and representing them on 20 occasions; Richard Shepstone

Giddy, influential in introducing rugby to South Africa.

A final bit of rugby trivia - where was the rugby scrum cap invented? You've guessed it - Christ's College - and introduced to be used by the 1st XV (15) team members; unfortunately I can't establish the date but what a sporting legacy for the school! 🏉

## Side by side

History doesn't have to be viewed from top to bottom, or bottom to top. It can also be examined sideways, as **Michael Johns** and **Christine Barnard** explain

*Pictures Wikipedia Commons*

In 2005 Jenny Clark started a new interest group with the unusual name 'History - a Sideways Look'. Her aim was to look at a decade in history and see what was happening then throughout the world. They started with the 20-year period 1490 -1510 and shared papers on topics as varied as the Ottoman Empire, the Middle East, China, North and South America, Russia, Scandinavia and India as well as the better-known subject of the Renaissance in Western Europe.

The formula proved a great success and today there are two Sideways groups. I, Michael Johns, only joined NLU3A because a Google search of things to do turned up the Sideways group. I immediately saw it was made for me. I have always had a strong interest in history, and when people ask: 'What is your period?' I always reply: 'I don't have a period. I want to know what happened in the whole of the world throughout the whole of history.' Sideways fed my appetite for just that, jumping back and forth through time from year to year and looking all

round the globe as it does so.

Both groups have met on Zoom since the lockdown - Sideways 1 on Friday and Sideways 2 on Wednesday - and stayed that way because it enables members with mobility problems or who have difficult journeys to stay members. In both groups members choose a

**Five of the remarkable women of 1850-1914 being studied by Sideways 1 this year.**



*Clockwise from top left Marie Curie, Empress Cixi, Clara Schumann, Harriett Tubman, Eleanor Marx*

period at the start of the year and take it in turns to produce papers on a chosen topic within their chosen period, which can be from political, military, economic, social, biographical or any sort of history. The two groups have slightly diverged in one respect. In Sideways 1 the papers are circulated in advance and

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discussed on Zoom; in Sideways 2 the paper is first presented on Zoom and then discussed, finally being circulated after the meeting.

While normally we move onto a different period each summer, Sideways 1 has stuck with the period 1850 –1914 for a second year because we didn't feel we had done justice to it in one year. In that time our subjects have included Marie Curie (the first woman to win a Nobel prize, who went on to win a unique second Nobel prize and had a daughter who won a third!); the last empress of China, Cixi, who



Waldseemüller world map 1508

with huge consequences for all aspects of life throughout the world; and Leopold I of Belgium and his freelance colonisation of the Congo as his personal property, which set off the 'scramble for Africa'.

While most papers fill a whole session, we sometimes have a collection of 'shorts' – papers taking 10-15 minutes or so – and we have been so impressed by some of the women we have come across

that we plan two sessions on 'remarkable women'.

Sideways 2 meets fortnightly on Zoom, also in person once a term for lunch or tea. Zoom has proved invaluable for showing maps and other images. We also find that we 'socialise' more on-screen than we did before. Help is available for those new to online learning. Last term we began

recording the sessions so we can review presentations or catch up if we missed one. We're a friendly group and very much welcome new members.

*...we began recording the sessions so we can review presentations...*

Each of us prepares a topic in which we are interested; some write notes, others more formal texts. The latter are circulated after the meeting. Presentations are full- or half-session, always with time for discussion. Like Sideways 1, we have the occasional 'shorts' of 10–20-minute presentations.

This year we are studying the 18th century. Topics so far have been: food (in fact a social history of 18th century England); finding Australia; Jonathan Wild, 'Thief-Taker General'; and John Gay's Beggars' Opera, with Hogarth's paintings from it; money and banking; the Indian perspective on the British East India Company; debt and debtors; the development of sign language.

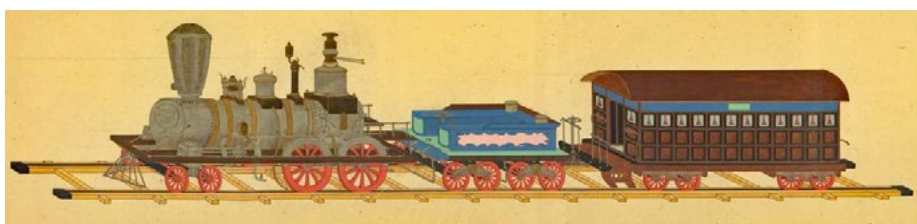
**The link below will take you to recordings of our sessions on Google Drive:**

<https://tinyurl.com/389ubktz>



Rotated 16th century misaligned map of New Holland's (Australia's) east coast

effectively ruled the vast empire and tried hard but unsuccessfully to resist the incursions of the European powers; the Japanese, who in contrast to Cixi alone of non-Western powers, found a way to adopt enough Western ways to resist colonisation; the impact of the railway and the telegraph, which speeded up communication immeasurably



Gift of model train to Japan by US Commodore Perry as part of the move to open up the country



# As lovely as a tree

A tribute to trees by **Christine Stammers**. Photos of trees at **Stephens House** by **David Ramsey** and **Leni Green**



Photo © David Ramsey

**M**eeting friends at The Woodman pub in Highgate, I grumbled that I had to write a piece about Avenue House and its trees. ‘Here you are,’ offered one of them. ‘A booklet about Avenue House. Did you know the garden is full of trees?’

## So I began—

In 1832 Henry Stephens, or Inky Stevie, owner of Avenue (now Stephens) House, invented an indelible ink, later modified by his son, which was so effective that ever since all legal documents in the UK have had to use it. He also planted hundreds of trees. Let’s celebrate them by looking at a few of the roles trees have and still play in the work of creative people.

## Wisdom

Trees are poems that the earth writes upon the sky.

Khalil Gibran

The tree is a slow, enduring force straining to win the sky.

Antoine de Saint-Exupery



Photo © Leni Green

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Photo © Leni Green



Photo © David Ramsey

The best time to plant a tree is twenty years ago.  
The second-best time is now.

Chinese proverb

The kingdom of God is like ... a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and cast into his garden; and it grew, and waxed a great tree; and the fowls of the air lodged in the branches of it.

Luke 13:19; King James' Version

### Poetry

I think that I shall never see  
A billboard lovely as a tree,  
Perhaps, unless the billboards fall,  
I'll never see a tree at all.

Ogden Nash

### Autobiography

I saw my life branching out before me like the green fig tree in the story. From the tip of every branch, like a fat purple fig, a wonderful future beckoned and winked. One fig was a husband and a happy home and children, and another was a famous poet and another was a brilliant professor, and another was Europe and Africa and South America. I saw myself sitting in the crotch of this tree, starving to death, because choosing one meant losing all the rest, and, as I sat there, unable to decide, the figs began to wrinkle and go black, and, one by one, they plopped to the ground at my feet. 🍌

Sylvia Plath

## Works by members

**Francis Beckett's** new play, *Vodka with Stalin*, tells the true story of a British woman, **Rose Cohen**, who in the 1920s was courted by the future communist leader **Harry Pollitt**.

**S**he left him for Lenin's agent in Britain, with whom she went to Moscow and had a baby – just in time to be caught up in Stalin's purges. As a foreigner and a Jew, she was naturally suspected of being in

league with Trotsky.

Can her former lover, now Britain's communist leader and a drinking chum of Stalin, do anything to save her? Francis Beckett's last play, *A Modest Little Man*, about Clem Attlee, played

to full houses at the Gatehouse, received rave reviews, and was taken to Liverpool while the 2022 Labour Party conference was in the city. 🍌

Performances Wednesday 15 to Saturday 18 February at 7.30 pm and Sunday 19 February at 4 pm.  
Tickets at £20 (£18 concessions) Wednesday–Friday at £22 (£20 concessions) Saturday and Sunday, from [upstairsatthegatehouse.com](http://upstairsatthegatehouse.com)



# Scamwatch

Even the most vigilant of us can become scam victims, as **Leni Green** found out

I have been scammed! I, who am usually so careful and untrusting...

A friend (so I thought) send me an email asking me to help her out by buying an Amazon voucher for a sick pal, as her own credit card had been refused. Dubious, I emailed her and asked if she'd sent me an email; she said she had. So I bought the £200 voucher with my credit card. Shortly after that, she asked me to buy another one as the amount hadn't been enough, and I refused. 'I am not rich, and your friend is greedy,' I thought. Later I discovered the email address I was using had been hacked and none of it was true. Others had received the email and had phoned her (learn something here!) to ascertain it was valid.

After reporting it to the bank and Action Fraud, I tracked down Amazon's Dubious Transactions section. It was unclear whether

they'd help as the gift card had already been cashed, but they did and refunded every penny. Whew!

The moral of the story? When in doubt, don't! I receive emails and texts from Virgin Media almost every day telling me that my latest bill is ready: just click on this link. Rubbish; I pay by direct debit anyway – so why send a bill? Other 'click on this link' frauds include signing up for a covid/flu booster; checking eligibility for a £400 energy grant; rearranging a parcel delivery and paying a fee for the privilege; self-assessment messages from HMRC. They warn that you should look out for grammar and spelling mistakes, but honestly! Fraudsters have learnt how to spell, and link addresses look more and more authentic.

Some people react to this by not using email or never making online transactions. And they say older people are more likely to

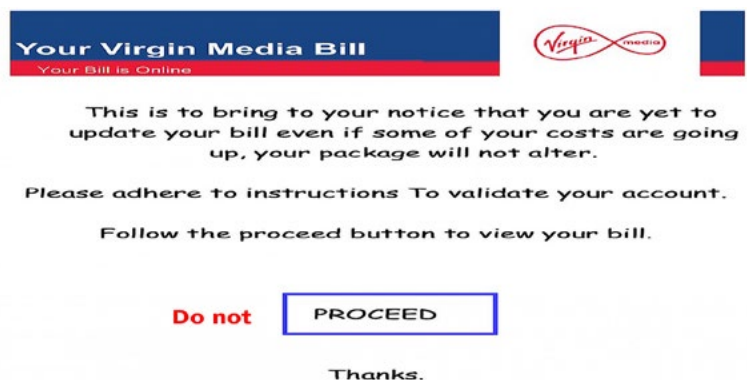
be targeted. I don't know if this is the case, or if it's just an ageist assumption, but there are things you can do to try to stay safe.

Don't reply to any email that calls you 'Dear customer' (for example) instead of using your name. If you do click on a website, make sure it has a lock before the address (though I'm sure these can be forged just like everything else). Never give any personal details in an email. This includes friends; if someone asks you to email them your bank details, for example, don't, because hackers have eyes everywhere. Remember that old-fashioned thing called 'paper'? Use it! And once you've made a record of someone's personal details, shred the paper, and tell your friend to do so, too. In fact, shred anything that has your name and address on it; don't just throw it in the recycling bin. ☺

**This common scam came in a text message. They fool you with the 'gov.uk' address and make it look secure with 'https'. Do not click on the link! The genuine payment will come automatically.**

GOV-UK: Due to the Energy Bill Support Scheme, you are owed £400 under the discounted energy bill. You can apply here: <https://personal-rebate-uk.web.app>

**This is another plausible-looking scam. Note the punctuation errors**





# Letter:

## What has happened to the University of the Third Age?

September's Northern Line carried an article, 'Not getting any younger', about an online meeting of London U3As whose conclusion was that 'the greatest threat to the U3A movement was the lack of younger members' and that, like every organisation, we need to keep recruiting 'younger people for a fresh input of talent and energy'. Unfortunately the attitude that only younger people provide talent and energy is prevalent in everyday life. For an organisation set up for people in their third age of life it is a thundering disgrace.

In the same vein, Radios 3

and 4 admit that most of their audience is older, and still shout about configuring its output to attract the younger. Has that done much for the threatened BBC? I recall in my earlier career drafting advertisements for job vacancies in which the organisation insisted I had to insert words like 'aged between 25 and 40'. It is illegal to say that now but has the attitude disappeared?

I joined the University of the Third Age some years ago because of the enthusiasm of Keith Richards, one of the founders of NLU3A. 'Third Age' showed that it was for people in my situation. And 'University', defined in the

Oxford English Dictionary as 'A corporation of teachers and students formed for the purpose of giving and receiving instruction in a fixed range of subjects at a level beyond that provided at a school', distinguished it from other organisations. This learning and teaching principle appealed at age 68 and still does. But now 'University' and 'Third Age' have been dropped from our name. Faced with the bald 'U3A' and without Keith's enthusiasm, would I have joined? Not from an ad on Facebook, or *Meta*, as it calls itself now; thank you very much, Nick Clegg! 🙄

Barry Davies

## Those we have lost

We pay tribute to those of our friends who died in 2022. We apologise if we have missed anyone; this is the information that was available to us.

Magie Airey

Eve Brenner

Joan Booth

Audrey Jancovich

Margaret Kennedy

Lionel Halpern

Ben Marshall

Lourdes Morais

Eva Rockwell

Geoff Taylor

## Events

## Away days

**Friday 27 January**

**Linley Sambourne House, 18 Stafford Terrace, Kensington**

The house was the home of Edward Linley Sambourne (1844–1910), artist and illustrator, best known for contributing

more than 3000 cartoons to *Punch* magazine. It was inherited by his granddaughter Anne, later Countess of Rosse, mother of Antony Armstrong-Jones, who





Photo Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea

preserved the Victorian interiors almost intact and eventually gave the house to the Victorian Society, which had been founded there in 1958. It is now administered by the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea.

The visit is limited to 12-15 people and costs

£15 per head, so book early. ☞

### Contact

Frank Kelsall, 020 8346 5139 / 07808 063880  
frank.kelsall@architecturalhistory.co.uk

## Spring term monthly meetings

**T**hese take place at St Margaret's United Reformed Church, Victoria Avenue, N3 1BD. Doors open at 10am, when refreshments will be served. Meetings start at 10.45am

**9 January**

### London's lost department stores

Where have they gone? Michael Lewin will analyse their demise. ☞

**13 February**

### What price energy?

**A**cross the world prices for oil, gas and electricity have risen dramatically. Why has energy become so expensive – and does it need to be? Dr Alan Morton, former curator of energy at the Science Museum and co-founder of Muswell Hill Sustainability Group, will discuss why energy prices change, what could be done to lower them, and what's likely to happen next in energy markets. ☞



**The spring term** runs from 9 January until 31 March.



