

the northern line

the magazine of north london U3A issue 82 April 2023

Click on the title, go to the page

Editorial	2
As I see it	3
The arts lovers	4
Art we like: looking at pictures	4
Friday afternoon at the movies	5
Grand operas	6
The jazz band	6
A cautionary tale	7
Letterbox	8
My legacy	8
Age concern	9
Flights of fancy	10
Those we have lost	11
Monthly meetings	11
Dateline	11

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- Please send contributions for the next issue to editor@nlu3a.org.uk by 14 July.
- **The editors may shorten or otherwise amend articles to fit spacing and style requirements.**

Editorial

Whatever happened to Members on Their Own? Not the actual members – there are lots of them – but the group: MOTO. Other U3As have these groups, and we used to have one, too, but it has faded into non-existence. Why? Hint: it's coordinator-related. The original coordinator, who did a great job, was no longer able to lead it, and nobody else stepped forward. MOTOs provide wonderful support for people who don't live with other people, who may be lonely and at a loose end. I'm not on my own, but if I were, I'd grab it gratefully. They went out together, met in each other's homes, showed that it's OK not to have children or grandchildren or partners.

At the end of the pandemic, the long-serving coordinators of Singing for Pleasure (SFP)

stepped down. One stayed in the group for a time; one preferred not to. Group members gave all kinds of excuses for not taking over: I don't have the skills; I'm too busy; I'm not good enough. Then they were asked if they wanted the group to fold. Now we have a committee of six, each with a different role, none too onerous. And it works. There are over 30 members and it's growing all the time.

So why not MOTO? Who is unable to keep a list of names, suggest a get-together in a café, find a film for everyone to see? I hope it – and other groups that have fallen by the wayside – come back.

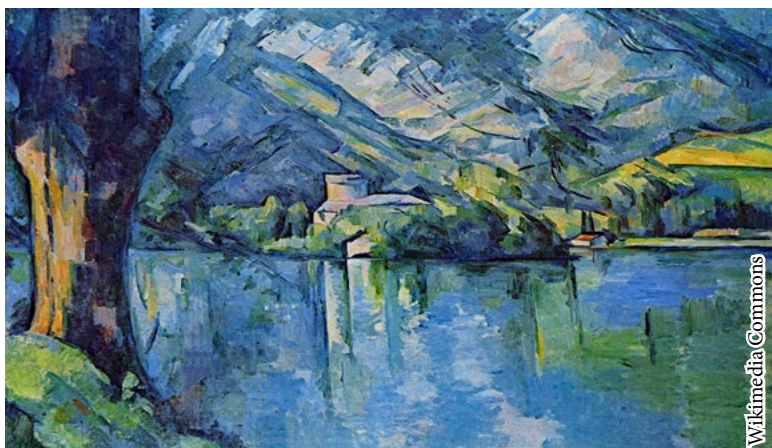
In this issue we introduce four groups that appreciate art forms together but don't create them. Elsa Shamash gives a chilling account of Nazi hatred and the origins of the second



world war. And we continue the debate about whether an injection of younger members is needed.

Happy reading!

LENI GREEN
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Front and back covers

Lac d'Annecy (Lake Annecy) by Paul Cézanne {1896}

commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lac_d%27Annecy,_par_Paul_Cézanne.jpg

See **Looking at pictures** on page 4.

As I see it

Keith Richards has mixed feelings about the direction the U3A movement is taking

In my 90s I am more and more grateful to the most radical educational initiative of the 20th century – more ‘radical’ than the Open University because of the peer-to-peer learning enshrined in our enterprise. During the years of the pandemic, the pleasure and excitement of learning together continued, and Zoom has ensured that those who find even local travel challenging can still meet. I am a member of two U3As and four active and stimulating groups.

Nationally, though, I sense change, even decline. I attended the annual general meeting of the Third Age Trust in the autumn of 2022. Two motions from the board of trustees proposed an annual increase of the capitation fee (which member U3As pay towards the trust) – both basing the amount due on the state (‘old age’) pension. The third age has always been defined as ‘a period in life when members find time and opportunity for education for its own sake’. This could happen at any chronological stage of life: in the past, U3As were often asked not to include

‘pensioners’ or ‘over-67s’ in their publicity. Current officers briskly dismissed my cries of horror. The chairperson of the Third Age Trust wrote to tell me that her preferred term for members is ‘retiree’. Fortunately both motions were defeated, with many U3As eloquently denouncing the connection with ‘old age’ and helpfully reporting many members well below retirement age. Twenty-one amendments were also defeated, leading to a policy impasse.

Important and little-publicised decisions are still being made. One I find particularly wounding is the cessation of the national summer schools, which I helped to organise (usually two of these and once three a year!). These intensive periods of residential study with national representation will no longer take place; the board prefers regional courses which, at present, are few in number and very different in composition.

I spent the latter part of my working life struggling to persuade universities to award academic credit for ‘experiential



learning’. The U3As embodied that concept with peer-group learning at their heart. We have a role to play in the wide-ranging support provided by Age UK and other organisations. But it is specific – it is the provision of lifelong learning for those in the third age.

KEITH RICHARDS IS A FOUNDING MEMBER AND PAST CHAIR OF NLU3A. HE IS ALSO A PAST CHAIR OF THE THIRD AGE TRUST



Harper Adams University, Newport (left) and Royal Agricultural College, Cirencester (right) were colleges which held U3A summer schools in 2011. Subjects of study ranged from geology to Henry James and Joseph Conrad.

The arts lovers

Not everyone has the confidence to make a film, paint a picture, sing grand opera. But we can all appreciate these arts, and appreciating together enhances the experience for all. The coordinators of our four arts appreciation groups tell us how

Art We Like – Talking about pictures



An Old Woman (The Ugly Duchess)
by Quinten Massys {1513}.
Wikimedia Commons.

For many years I taught an Introduction to Art History course and I asked students to present a painting that interested and excited them. This was the germ of the idea for Art We Like, which started in September 2017. Originally, around eight of us met at my house and we discussed chosen works of art, which were displayed on a TV screen. Once the pandemic struck, the group was reluctant to lose their regular

art fix and the social contact. So we moved to emailing presentations fortnightly and then to Zoom. Now we are meeting face to face with 20 members.

So what art do we like? Anything and everything, regardless of subject or period. The range has been enormous. Early selections were safe and predictable, but as confidence grew, the choices became more adventurous. We've discussed works by Holbein, Caravaggio, Velasquez, Manet and Sargent, discovered 18th century Indian watercolours,

traditional Chinese paintings, landscapes by the Norwegian painter Nikolai Astrup, and the contemporary artist Peter Doig. Art of the early 20th century is popular, especially Chagall, and art by relatively unknown women. The most challenging painting we have discussed so far is Picasso's *Guernica*.

We don't all like the same paintings. Someone expressed dislike for *The Red Studio* by Matisse, but after our discussion, knowing the artist's intentions, she had grown to like it. One member told me: 'It has opened my mind to so many artists, works and styles I would never have previously looked at and



Men of the Docks by George Bellows {1912}. Wikimedia Commons.

enhanced my knowledge and understanding. Presenting is a wonderful, enriching experience, researching and learning in depth'. Another commented: 'I joined in lockdown when gallery visits were out and have found I get more out of studying one or two paintings in depth.'

As for me, I have learnt and enjoyed so much art I didn't know thanks to this group.

ANGELA COX

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Another favourite: *Lac d'Annecy (Lake Annecy)* by Paul Cézanne {1896}. (See front and back covers and bottom of page 2).



Copyright explainer

The artists died before 1928, so these works are in the public domain in their country of origin and in other countries and areas where the copyright term is the author's life plus 95 years or fewer.

Friday afternoon at the movies

The origins of the long-running Friday film group have been lost in the mists of time. Initially we met in each other's homes with tea and biscuits to accompany the discussion, but now it takes place on Zoom. Members see the film(s) on their own and then discuss them in the group.

The main criterion for members is to love and be passionate about films. We are less focused on the technical aspect of the film than the emotional, historical and social impact it has on us. We used to choose just one film to discuss, but now there is more variety, with a mix of streaming platforms and new releases in the cinema.

Recently we loved *The Banshees of Inisherin* and other work by Martin McDonagh, who wrote the screenplay for *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri*, starring the excellent Frances McDormand. *Nomadland*, also starring McDormand, spoke to our hearts with its majestic scenery and the essential loneliness of people in its vast landscape. *Empire of Light*, not favoured by the critics, drew

us all in because, as well as the sentimental homage to the cinemas of the past, it dealt with mental illness, racial tensions and the treatment of women at work, all subjects which we could discuss seriously. *Good Luck to You, Leo Grande* was an outlier but a fascinating one. Unfortunately, many members cannot now deal with subtitles so we no longer watch foreign films, but not too long ago we found Alfonso Cuarón's *Roma* excellent, as was *Parasite* by the Korean director Bong Joon-ho. We try to avoid obvious 'turkeys' and choices are made through reviews or members' recommendations, such as the hidden Irish gem, *The Quiet Girl*. Often, after discussion members see more depth and facets in a film than just from their own viewing.

The group is informal, friendly and 'meets' on the third Friday of each month at 2pm. At present there are nine members, who attend what sessions they can.

MARTA BROWN

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Grand operas

In the early 2000s our first coordinator, Branwen Lucas, decided that she would indulge her passion for opera by sharing her home, her knowledge of the art form and her collection of DVDs with several like-minded friends in NLU3A. By 2012 a second group had to be formed to accommodate the large number of interested members.

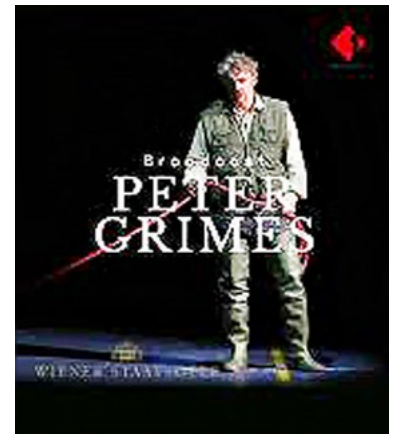
When I became coordinator in 2015, we moved to the New North London Synagogue in East End Road, where a DVD player and TV are provided for our use. We meet monthly and continue Branwen's practice of showing a different opera at each meeting. They come from opera houses worldwide, from a range of composers and centuries, sung by internationally renowned singers.

Our interests are broad and international. Recently we have watched:

L'Elisir d'Amore (Donizetti, Vienna State Opera); *Werther* (Massenet, Opéra National de Paris); *Salome* (Richard Strauss, Vienna State Opera); *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (Mozart, Glyndebourne); *Fidelio* (Beethoven, Zurich Opera); *The Barber of Seville* (Rossini, Royal Opera House, Covent Garden); and *Peter Grimes* (Britten, Metropolitan Opera, New York).

The majority of performances are well received; although some members still go to Covent Garden, very few of us travel to Europe or the USA to see opera. Singers like Jonas Kaufmann, Anna Netrebko, Rolando Villazón, Joyce DiDonato and Juan Diego Flórez are special, but it's good to see all the others too.

The national U3A resource centre provided a wonderful borrowing facility as it had over 400 opera DVDs, but



unfortunately it was closed down in 2020. Our members are very generous, though, and are willing to share their operas with the group. Synopses are easily accessible to read online prior to meetings. We chat about the production, singers and conductors during our break – not perhaps a very intellectual approach but we enjoy our meetings.

Do join us – Thursday 10am-1pm monthly. New North London Synagogue, 80 East End Road, N3 2SY

ANN BRACKEN

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The jazz band

I joined this group in May 2013, when it was based at the New North London Synagogue in East End Road. It had about two dozen regular members, and we used to spend two hours listening to jazz recordings. I took over as coordinator in 2019, when we had to leave the synagogue. Luckily, two of our members were willing to host, enabling our small group of about eight to go on meeting.

We were able to meet 10 times before Covid forced us to stop in March 2020. However, we recently arranged to re-commence our fortnightly meetings. We shall continue much the same as before: in principle we meet every



fortnight. Each session lasts for 90 minutes and usually consists of listening to pieces of jazz music of every kind and discussing any aspects of the music which the members wish.

'Jazz music' is now as broad and vague a term as 'classical music'. I present the majority of our sessions, but other members bring a range of music they enjoy: most people provide CDs, but

one member brings videos, which we watch on a TV set.

In 'free-for-all' sessions, each member brings three or four discs of their own, from which they present one to the rest of us – or they bring their own discs but choose from someone else's CDs. Other sessions involve my bringing a set of CDs that illustrate the wide range of jazz since it was first recorded in the early 1920s. Members call out a number at random, which I use to select an item to play.

My aim is to log my father's 1930s phrase after each session: 'A good time was had by all'.

Bernie Meadows

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A cautionary tale

Why did 6 million Jews die? asks Elsa Shamash

The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing. Edmund Burke

The drive to make Europe Judenfrei (free of Jews) started in 1939, when Hitler marched into Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Ukraine. Over two million Jews were shot. The local populations assisted and happily took over the properties of the victims. In Poland today, people are forbidden by law from even acknowledging their country's part in the atrocities.

In France, the architect Le Corbusier, who had Nazi sympathies, offered to build a concentration camp in Vichy. In Holland hardly a single Jew survived. The Swiss demanded that the / be printed in passports, so that Germans – Nazis – could enter freely, but Jews could be identified and sent back at the border.

But in Denmark the king chose to wear the yellow star, so that Jews could not be easily identified. Because they were spirited to Sweden, a neutral country, few died. This was also the case in Norway.

The only country in occupied Europe that had more Jews at the end of the war was Albania. The small Jewish population was given false papers. With their belief in traditional honour and hospitality, Albanians claimed the Jews were part of their family and did not hand any over to the Germans.

America, the potential country of refuge with its vast empty spaces, closed its doors to the refugees, just as they (and we) are doing now. In fact, most countries closed their doors to immigrants, especially Jews, who were stripped of their belongings to get exit visas from Germany.

After 9 November, 1938 – Kristallnacht (the Night of Broken Glass), when it was obvious that staying in Germany was lethal – British Quakers, some MPs and prominent Jews went to Chamberlain and begged: 'At least take the children!' Provided it would cost the government nothing, children from birth to 17 were allowed to come, on condition that they left again when they turned 18.

Luckily there was no Suella or Priti, who conveniently forgot that they too had been immigrants, and 10,000 children were saved. Many ordinary families accepted children into their homes.

So good people prevented some evil.

I came on the Kindertransport on 2 March, arriving the next day, not having had a risky journey like the children now. I came with my brother and we were lucky; one of my uncles, who had arrived here a few months earlier from the Free State of Danzig with money, had sponsored us. We were sent to boarding school. I had to say goodbye to my brother, so was bereft and completely alone.

The boys' school was a proper prep school, but the girls' school

could have come straight out of Dickens. There was not a single qualified teacher. The headmistress was the sister of the headmaster of the boys' school. Lessons: copy so many lines from the New Testament and learn by heart; copy so many lines from *Twelfth Night* and learn by heart. As I had never done any French, I was given a book called *Teach Yourself French*: copy and learn by heart. Church twice every Sunday! Food cooked by a 14-year-old runaway girl. Inedible! But we had to eat. It was freezing cold, with one little open fire in a corner – certainly not what I had been used to from a well-to-do home. Despite the lack of pursuit by Nazis, the environment was hostile. But I was safe.

Luckily, my penniless parents also managed to get to England, only because my uncle put down a huge amount of money. My father, a doctor, was not allowed to work, paid or unpaid. We had applied for an American visa in 1938 and expected it to arrive any day. It did arrive – 10 years later. By that time my father was able to work as a GP and I had graduated with a degree, so I stayed with my very elderly parents, who needed me.

ELSA SHAMASH HAS BEEN A U3A MEMBER SINCE 1984.



Elsa Shamash aged 11



Elsa Shamash

Letterbox

The January issue of The Northern Line carried a letter by **Barry Davies** objecting to a plea by a meeting of London U3As to recruit 'younger people for a fresh input of talent and energy'. Barry felt that it was 'a thundering disgrace' for third agers to suggest that 'only younger people provide talent and energy'. Here are two letters from members objecting to Barry's objections. His reply is below.

I disagree with Barry Davies, (letter in January edition of The Northern Line). We do need younger members. The positioning of the piece 'Those we have lost in 2022' underneath his letter provides a stark reminder of why.

But perhaps if we rephrased it and said: 'We need people who are as young as we were when we first joined', would that make the plea more acceptable?

GILLIAN GARDNER SMITH

I agree with most of Barry Davies' comments on today's U3A. Like him, I am upset that the word 'university' has been dropped from our title; our purpose is learning and teaching, which is what a university is for, and a university for the third age is unique.

Like him I am upset and angry that there is so little recognition of the talents and enthusiasm of older people, even within U3A. There is evidence in plenty that age does not deter us from adventure and excitement, and it certainly does not restrict our delight in learning.

Where I disagree with Barry – and I believe he has missed the point – is in the need to recruit younger members. Attracting members leaving the world of work has a positive outcome. And an ageing membership goes with the territory; when we die, who is going to take up the reins? We need lose nothing of our enthusiasm with the arrival of younger members

I'm in my late 80s and hugely enjoy the company of friends in their 70 and 60s, and cannot see any reason why we can't have it all!

PATRICIA ISAACS

Barry replies:

'I welcome "younger" people. The point I was trying to make is that there seems to be a tendency to downplay the value of "older" people. We have never set age limits to recruitment, neither upper nor lower. We welcome all. Fresh talent comes with all new members. What is young; what is old? To see whether or not we have a problem we must have data on the age of joining members and how that has changed.'

BARRY DAVIES

My legacy

How do you want to be remembered? The Women and Wisdom group set members a task: write your legacy. **Patricia Isaacs** shares hers

During my adult life I've volunteered in a number of ways: for example, driving an ambulance for the Red Cross, and helping at a social club for young adults with mental difficulties. My school-age

children were involved in both these activities, and that helped them to recognise their own advantages.

Later, I volunteered with Victim Support, starting with people who had been burgled

or robbed, before training as a counsellor to support victims of rape; it was hard and deeply emotional but I believe I was able to help some distressed women. These included a group of four who, by chance over a morning

coffee, discovered that each had been sexually abused by the same man a few years previously. The women were prepared to 'go public' but the authorities – in the early 80s – were disbelieving and refused to take any action. In the only case of rape on my list that went to court, I put pressure on the police and court officials, insisting that the judge allow a screen to be in front of the woman I was helping as she could not, would not, look at the rapist. Screens were not accepted in most courts at the time. We won that case; the rapist went to prison. The young woman went on to have a baby and marry the father: a happy ending.

However, another voluntary job would be my principal legacy as it provided practical and life-changing use for very

many men and women. I ran an adult literacy unit for ten years, running training courses on one-to-one tuition, then matching a tutor to a learner. It was an uphill task persuading people to talk to me and then accept help; being unable to read and write leads to humiliation and despair. Sadly, the problem persists today. I tutored a number of the learners myself and found it immensely rewarding work, although the results could be slow. The tutors also found the giving and commitment more than satisfying, and some developed a friendship with the learner.

Of those I taught, a few stand out: the bar lady who wanted to write her own Christmas cards, though she could barely write her name; the couple who could only choose packets of cereal and other

packaged foods if the picture didn't change; the 60-year-old man who wanted to read bedtime stories to his granddaughter; the long-distance lorry driver who could not read road signs, maps or directions but who wanted to read a book; and the baker who ran his own business but was entirely dependent on his brother for bookkeeping and general administration. There are some delightful, occasionally amusing stories behind all of this, but best of all was the certainty that things would be far easier, communication with others less fraught, and life more enjoyable for every one of these people.

That is my legacy for my children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren: concern for others less fortunate and a healthy dollop of kindness.

Age concern

Save your pennies! If you have to be somewhere before 9am, it will cost you, warns **Leni Green**

Gone are the days when you could grab your Freedom Pass and hop on a bus or the tube to get to an early morning hospital appointment, class, job or anything else. TFL has cancelled the right to 24-hour-a-day free travel for holders of the Older Person's Freedom Pass and the 60+ Oyster Card. Now you have to pay to travel before 9am on weekdays (though not weekends, but who has medical appointments at weekends?). It will cost you £4.40 to get from Finchley Central to UCH (for example) if you pay by Oyster card; £6.70 if you use cash. Mercifully, those with a disabled person's Freedom Pass are

not affected.

According to research by Age UK London, two-thirds of Londoners who travel before 9am do so to attend a health appointment (31 per cent), for work (28 per cent) or for caring responsibilities (8 per cent). Over a quarter say they have had to cut costs elsewhere to afford the travel fares now that the concession has stopped.

If that's not enough age-bashing, the state pension age is going up – from 66 now to 67 by 2028 and 68 by 2046, though rumours are that the Treasury wants the rise to 68 to come in earlier. It was 65 when I retired in 2009. It's 62 in France, and there have recently

been huge, sometimes violent, demonstrations against a planned increase to 64.

The National Pensioners' Convention, which campaigns for pensioners' rights, has found that men living in affluent locales such as Richmond-on-Thames will, on average, live healthily until age 71, while for men in underprivileged areas like Blackpool, a healthy life expectancy is just 53 years. So they could wait in bad health, unable to work for more than a decade, before qualifying for their state pension. Groups like family carers and disabled workers are particularly vulnerable and many will find they are too old for work, but too young to retire.

Wanted: a commissioner for older people

U3A has signed a statement, along with more than 70 other organisations to call for a commissioner for older people and ageing. This should raise awareness of the issues people face in later life and bring together decision makers to make change happen.

Singing for Pleasure is a friendly, successful music group that sings in harmony as well as together. We have over 30 members – but very few of them are male, so there's a lack of lower voices. If you like to sing in lower registers, why not give us a try? Tuesday 10.30am to 12noon, St Mary's church hall, Hendon Lane N3. And of course you can come if you like to sing high, as well!

Contact: Rena Prozzer, rena.prozzer@gmail.com or 07956 966647.

Flights of fancy

Getaway? You should be so lucky, says **Francis Beckett**

Perhaps you have the antiquated idea that airports exist to get you on and off planes. In fact, they are sophisticated machines designed for the precision task of separating two closely knit elements.

Just as the hadron collider splits the atom, so the airport splits travellers from the contents of their wallets. They keep the latter, and throw away the former, for who wants a traveller without a full wallet?

I saw the ruthlessness on 2 March. At ten minutes after midday, someone was killed by a train between East Croydon and Gatwick Airport, and all trains ceased to run. A few minutes earlier, I boarded a train at Hendon, in plenty of time for a flight to Rome at 4.40 that day.

I will not describe the next few hours of my life, because you do not want to see a grown man cry, and you have not got all night. Since no one told the station staff what was going on, I had to make wild guesses, which included two taxis and a very slow train to somewhere called West Croydon.

My taxi from there joined a very long queue at the airport, because hundreds of passengers were in my position. So I jumped out and ran the last half mile.

My taxi, nonetheless, had to pay the £5 charge that Gatwick now makes to let a car drop off its passengers, though it avoided the additional £5 that it would have cost me to go on to the north terminal, my ultimate destination. The lack of trains, so irksome for its passengers, was a windfall for Gatwick.

I arrived breathlessly at departures just as my flight closed, but was told that I could still catch it: the easyJet people would get me through security, if I could find them, which, eventually, I did. They told me that my flight would still be open.

Gate 107 is down endless corridors, up and down several staircases, and through a long, winding route they force you to take between expensive gift shops, which would be a fraction of the distance if you could do it directly.

They closed the flight just before I and five more passengers

arrived, panting and stressed. We tapped pathetically on the window as we watched the ground crew fill the hold. They could have let us in, but there was a small risk that they might lose their slot, which would cost easyJet money.

It took two hours for easyJet to book me on a flight the next morning and inform me that they would not provide a hotel for me (though they own hotels at the airport) nor even book one for me. So at 6pm I walked into the nearest, the Hilton, which an American couple told me they had just booked for £150. By the time I got there, the hotel had realised that the airport was teeming with desperate travellers who had missed their flights, and put their prices up to £205.

We were all tired, stressed and impoverished by unexpected taxi fares, and all the airport and its associated airlines and hotels saw was a chance to make money from our misery.

FRANCIS BECKETT IS A JOURNALIST AND PLAYWRIGHT AND FORMER EDITOR OF THIRD AGE MATTERS.

Those we have lost

We remember the following members, who died in the first quarter of 2023

James Crawford

Linda Day

Rosalind Furtado

Jutta Lawrence

Shirley Meredeen

Patricia Pearce

Sue Teller

Spring term monthly meetings

These 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.

15 May

Biting political satire: cartoon etchings in late Georgian Britain

During a period of social, political and economic upheaval, Britain's caricaturists of the late 18th and early 19th centuries made highly original contributions to national debates. In this illustrated lecture, Jasper Jennings will explore how satirical cartoons were marketed and consumed, their impact on the public and 'Westminster bubble' of their time – and how we, in the 21st century, can still engage with these humorous yet often challenging images.



12 June

Ernest Shackleton, Antarctic hero

Shackleton is justly famous for escaping, with all his crew, from the icy grip of the Weddell Sea during his momentous expedition of 1914–16, and for his incredible 800-mile sail from Elephant Island to South Georgia. But he achieved more than this. In 1909 he got to within 100 miles of the South Pole, the first expedition to get so far on the Antarctic plateau. He lived up to his family motto, 'By endurance we conquer'.

10 July

Frank Kelsall. Topic to be announced later.

Dateline

The summer term starts on 17 April and ends on 21 July.

In between there are bank holidays: Monday 1 May, 8 May (for the coronation), Monday 29 May.

Britain still has fewer public holidays than any country in Europe!

The autumn term starts on Monday 4 September.

