

Tavy District u3a

THE NEWSLETTER



Pam Morris's entry in the u3a National Challenge.

Hopefully you know by now that u3a are running a monthly challenge to encourage people to paint or draw a piece of artwork, then take a photo of their work and submit their pictures via an online form. u3a are posting a different theme each month and inviting members to submit photos of their creations on that topic.

It is not a competition and is not about artistic ability – what is wanted are interesting pictures, possibly different perspectives on everyday scenes or objects, anything which has inspired you to paint or draw.

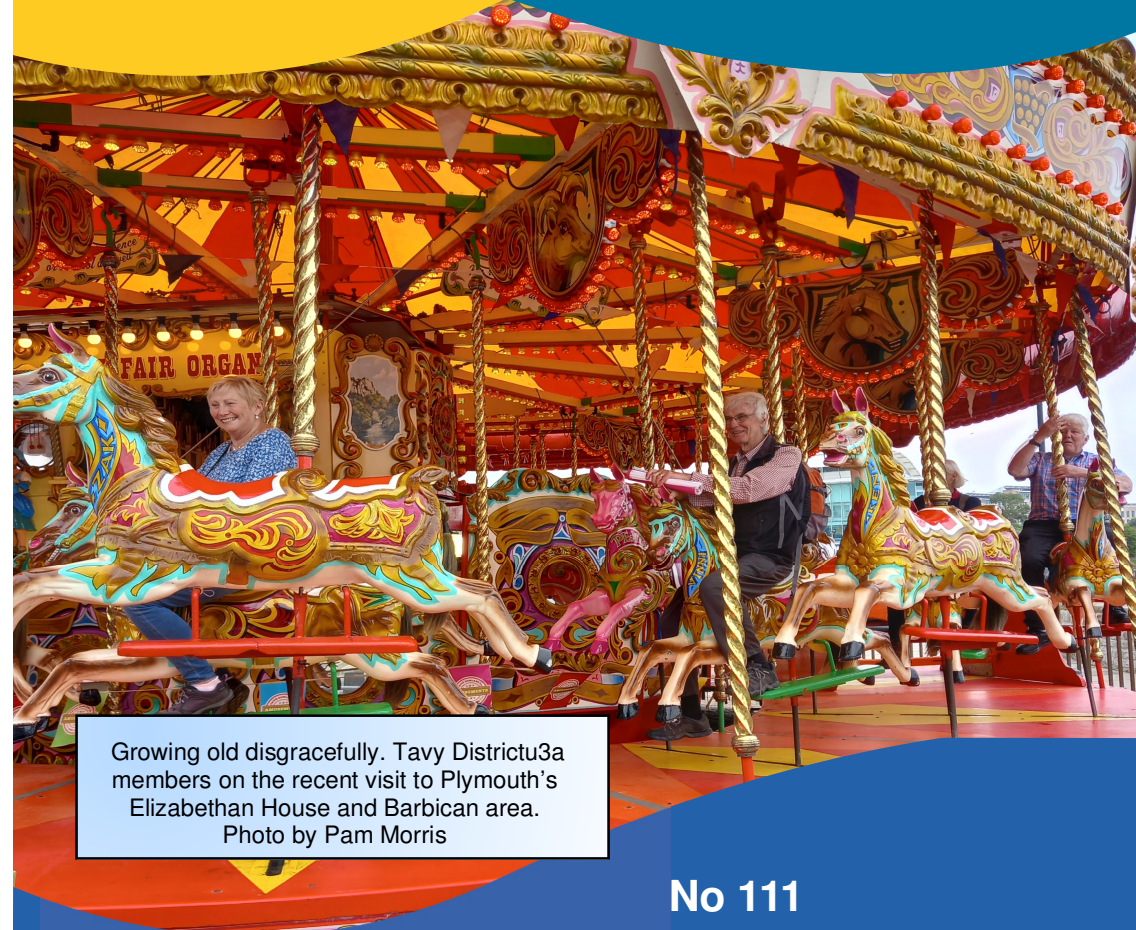
Pam said of her entry “Who would ever have thought I would travel to the other side of the world? I saw this map of the states of Australia made out of native woods when I was there and it inspired me to try something similar but in needlefelt”.

Well done, Pam.



Doesn't apply to me, though.

Seen by John Noblet in Tavistock



Growing old disgracefully. Tavy Districtu3a members on the recent visit to Plymouth's Elizabethan House and Barbican area.
Photo by Pam Morris

No 111

September 2021

u3a

Who's Who in Tavy District U3A

Chair	Robin Neave
Business Secretary	
Treasurer	Angela Pitt
Membership	Tony Rose
Groups Liaison	Pippa Gardner
Newsletter Distribution	Susan Neal
Speaker's Liaison	Jane Ward
Two Moors Liaison	Robin Neave
Equipment Officer	David Glover

Events Committee

Norma Woodcock

Chris Webb

Diana Smirles

Janet Hunt

Shirley Smith

Don't forget, contact details of Committee members and Group Leaders can be found in the password protected Members area of the website.

Webmaster: Jan Draper

web@tavydistrictu3a.org.uk

Newsletter Editor: John Noblet

The deadline for the next Newsletter is 20th October 2021

Send contributions to johnnoblet@tavydistrictu3a.org.uk

John's Tours *Continued*

The final outing was a trip to Plymouth with a difference. We went by train on the Tamar Valley Line. This scenic, and rather sedate railway, is on our doorstep but some of the group had not been on it for years. Rather misty on the way out, but the weather gods relented and we had splendid views on the return journey.

First it was a stroll down to the Barbican through the often overlooked back streets, for a visit to the Elizabethan House.

This had only just reopened after a multi million pound restoration. The fact that it has survived at all as it was once scheduled for demolition and saved at the last minute. It is one of Plymouth's oldest buildings, dating from the late 1500s, and the audio visual tour telling the story of the house over the centuries, is fascinating.

After a picnic lunch in the Astor Gardens by the remains of Plymouth Castle (the one on the coat of arms, not the Citadel) the group explored the Barbican area before being distracted by the gallopers by the Mayflower Steps. A ride on the carousel by senior citizens who should know better revived childhood memories and gave a certain amount of entertainment to the bystanders.

In true u3a fashion it was supposed to be an educational walk, but the ice cream van by the Gogmagog and Trojan warrior figures caused a second distraction.

We finished at the copy of Tavistock's Drake statue on the Hoe before retiring for some quick retail therapy and the train home.

If you would like to join this group on any future outings you will be welcome. Just let me know.

John Noblet



Photos by John Noblet and Pam Morris

John's Tours

John's Tours, aka Tavy District u3a National Trust Visits Group got under way again almost as soon as Lockdown restrictions were eased. They were keen and eager to get out and about, although with a declared appetite for staying local. This has meant that there has been some diversification to places other than National Trust or English Heritage.

The first outing at the end of July was to Buckland Abbey. After the obligatory coffee (Lockdown had changed nothing there) the group went on a leisurely stroll around one of the estate walks in the summer sunshine. After lunch in the courtyard, it was a visit to the formal gardens and, for some, a tour of the house itself.

Another u3a group went on a stroll around the waterfront and historic parts of Devonport, a repeat of the walk that we did in January 2020 when Covid was just something happening on the other side of the world. First the military bits, Boer War (Doris gun), Raglan barracks (Charge of the Life Brigade), Cumberland barracks (Cullodden) and one or two more. Then the grand and rather pretentious civic buildings when Devonport was cocking a snook at its smaller neighbour, Plymouth.

Past the Scott memorial (we love our heroic failures, don't we?) to Mutton Cove and the original parts of the dockyard before returning along Richmond Walk with views of The Royal William Yard and Plymouth Sound beyond.



It was a wet Tavistock August day when we went on a tour of the Robey Trust workshops.

The steam engines of the Robey Trust are a familiar sight in Tavistock and some members have been in the town long enough to remember when "Stumbles" was a plaything in the Meadows. A very informative couple of hours were spent there. (Thanks to Hywel Edwards for organising it for us).

Then it was out into the rain to explore the upper part of the Tavistock Canal.

The canal was a major engineering feat when it was built in the early 19th century and is a key factor in the World Heritage Site status of Tavistock and West Devon. Not only was it designed with a gradient so that it provided power to water mills along the route, but has one of the deepest canal tunnels in the country and an incline plane down to the river at Morwellham.

The original plan had been to visit some of the recently installed Poetry Trail along the canal and go as far as Crowndale (where Francis Drake was reputedly born) but the rain refused to let up so a visit to a coffee shop was the preferred option.



FROM THE CHAIR

Last week, the weather was kind to us and the sun shone for the majority of the August social meeting in the Meadows on Wednesday afternoon. Members turned up in their finery with seating, mugs and cakes (as requested); Blue Skies laid on a lovely spread and a good time was had by all.

But none of this would have been possible were it not for the members of the Committee, who are all volunteers. We turned up beforehand armed with garden forks, bunting, put up the bunting; stewarded the event and then tidied up again.

I am not saying this in order to get thanked or patted on the back – many of those who attended went out of their way to thank us on the day and in follow-up emails, so we know that it was appreciated. However, now more than ever, organisations like our u3a which run on the volunteering model are in danger of collapse. You may think that I am exaggerating but we are struggling to fulfil our legal requirements regarding the number of committee members/roles and a number of groups will not be resuming once we are back to normal. Whilst recognising that some of this is normal and natural with people 'retiring' after years of service, it has possibly been exacerbated by the pandemic.

Volunteering is an incredibly rewarding experience – I work with volunteers on a daily basis and know that they get as much out of volunteering as the organisation they volunteer for gets out of them. However, it has been an Extremely difficult and challenging few years and many of us have yet to resume our 'old' routines and habits, let alone take on new ventures. But, now more than ever, the voluntary sector needs help – charities, along with all other sectors of the economy, have suffered with decreased revenue and increased demand for the services they provide.

As members of the u3a, we are uniquely placed to volunteer and I know that many of you already do, so please forgive me if I am preaching to the converted! It would be lovely to have a list of all the organisations that members have or currently volunteer for – I feel that it is probably already extensive! Looking and talking to our members, between us we have a vast amount of experience and expertise and still have much to offer to society. Although I work part-time I still volunteer and, when I cut down on working and/or fully retire, I already have a list of organisations that I would like to volunteer with. Whatever your talents and expertise, there is somewhere in the voluntary sector for you!

And, if you want to keep it closer to home, what about us? We always need committee members – you don't have to have a specific role. You could join the committee and just help the rest of us out! And we are always on the lookout for people willing and able to start up and run new interest groups – again, you don't have to be an expert. There is so much stuff out there on the internet that you could start a group in an area that you are interested in and, with the help of YouTube videos, learn together as a group. Potential groups are endless: Quizzes, Meditation, Short Stories, Comedy, Film Discussion, Food/Cookery, Genealogy, Fashion - the world is your oyster (if only from the comfort of your armchair, at present!)

In the meantime, please continue to Learn, Laugh and Live!

Robin



National News and Updates from the u3a

u3a's 40th Anniversary

Next year marks the 40th Anniversary of the u3a and, obviously, this cannot go unremarked upon or uncelebrated. We need to start thinking as to how we, as Tavy District, can mark this milestone. So, get your thinking caps on – maybe we could have a social event like a Garden Party; maybe we could have a trip out or a Quiz Night or....!

In the meantime, the National u3a have launched an **Anniversary Quilt** project on the theme of Positive Aging. The best 40 squares received from members by the closing date of November 15th will make up the quilt. For more information should you be interested, go to the u3a anniversary tab in the Events section of u3a.org.uk

Virtual Science Event

The third in this series of lectures will be taking place on **Thursday 14th October**. Following on with the format of the previous two, it will consist of three different lectures from three different presenters with the opportunity to ask questions and chat. If you are interested, check out the u3a science network website.

u3a Branded Items

Various items including caps, tote bags, pens and mugs with the new colourful logo are now available to buy by all members. The range will be constantly expanding. I am not yet sure as to whether diaries will now have to be bought through this means – I will let you know as soon as possible. In the meantime, go to u3abrand.org.uk and have a look at what is available.

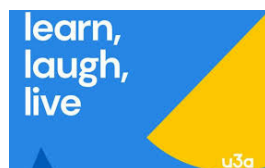
Third Age Matters Magazine

The committee that is responsible for the magazine is looking for a new member to help them ensure that the magazine continues to be informative, useful and entertaining. Whilst they would prefer someone with a publishing background, all applications will be considered. It is a voluntary role and should take up no less than one day a month. If you are interested, email Clive Grace at clive.grace@u3a.org.uk for details.

Summer Learning Programme

There is a large range of activities that are available as part of the u3a's Summer Learning Programme. Details can be found at u3a.org.uk/learning/national-programmes. For those of you interested in fashion and/or crafting, there is **Upcycle Your Wardrobe** with hints, tips and examples of how to revamp and recycle clothes; if, like many of us, you are not travelling abroad check out **Cuisines of the World** which features different chefs from different countries sharing their favourite recipes; there is a **Grow Your Own** section which allows members to share tips and photos of their prime produce; and don't forget the regular **u3a Radio Podcast** which is released on the 17th of the month.

So there really is no excuse not to "Learn, Laugh, Live"!



Walking

Planned walks for September and October are:

Tuesday 14th September

Walk from Lydford taking in the River Lyd and crossing Fernworthy Down. 4½ miles.
Meet at Lydford car park opposite the Castle Inn. **Diana**

Thursday 23rd September

A coast walk from Treyarnon Bay to Porthcothan Bay. Coffee and snack at Treyarnon before the walk and bring a packed lunch. 6 -7 miles with one fairly steep climb.
Meet at the free Pixon Lane car park at 9.00 am if you are happy to car share but please let us know if you will be joining this walk. **Chris and Jennie**

Tuesday 19th October

Park at Prewley (just above the cattle grids) SX545910. Walk to Sourton, Cleave and under Lake viaduct. Easy moorland, footpaths, lanes and old railway. Possible tea shop stop. 5½ miles. **John**

Thursday 28th October

Walk to be announced nearer the time. Check the website. **Tony**

All walks start at 10.00am unless otherwise stated and more details, including a map of the approximate start point and leader's contact details are on the Walkers Group pages of the website.

Remember, ALL WALKS have to be booked in advance with the leader by text or phone.

PS Contact details are on the password protected area of the website.

Back to the Theatre *Continued*

So, I will have a handover from Janet in September and prepare to start taking bookings for shows in the New Year.

Personally, I am desperate to get back to the theatre but also cautious and would like to be certain that we can go back safely, with a high degree of confidence. The Theatre Royal is not offering socially distanced seating and the wearing of masks is optional so I want to see how everything goes over the next few months before making any bookings.

I am delighted that Shona Dickinson has already agreed to help with the bookings but it would be an enormous help if we could have one or ideally two other volunteers to help us to run the group as we will both have to take some time out for other commitments.

Please let me know if you would be interested in helping and, if you would like to, please let me know how you feel about attending live performances as we attempt to progress toward some form of normality.

Carole Thompson

The Events Committee

At last we have been able to meet together to plan the events which we can, hopefully, offer to you in the near future. We have many ideas for your enjoyment and we look forward to giving you the full details when it is clearer about what we will feel safe doing. The following has been booked for September and there will be an opportunity to sign up for it at the September meeting in the Town Hall.

Plymouth, Mayflower 400 Guided Walk Led by Jane Dymock

Many of you will have been on Jane's excellent guided tours before and this one was a culmination of 4 years research on her part but a pandemic hit just before she was able to do any of the tours. We hope that you will be interested to join her a year later to revisit the events. It will involve walking round the streets and harbour locations of the Barbican.

Date: Wednesday 29th September 2021
Time: 11.00am – Meet outside the Tourist Information Centre on the Barbican
Tour Duration: 2 hours
Cost: 7 per person, Maximum group size is 20.

As you will know, we were forced to cancel many planned events during the pandemic and we look forward to being able to rebook some of the popular events in the coming year. Fingers crossed!

If you want to go on this guided walk but are not able to attend the September meeting in the Town Hall please email me

Chris Webb

Back to the Theatre

When I asked Janet at our recent Party in the Park when the Theatre group was restarting she explained that she had retired from running it and asked if I would be interested in taking it on. It took me about twenty seconds to think about it and agree.

This was mainly because my relationship with u3a has much to do with the theatre. Around twenty years ago, I had a part time job working for the Milton Keynes theatre organising group bookings. It was the most enjoyable job I ever had, in part because I had to go to every show in Milton Keynes in order to talk to different groups about them. This was when I first came across u3a, who were one of my major customers.

When I moved down to Devon a few years later I started to go to the Theatre Royal, which seemed familiar being designed by the same architect as Milton Keynes. I was sometimes able to get friends or a reluctant husband to accompany me, but when I found I was going to the Thursday matinees on my own I remembered u3a and joined Tavy District, so I had others to go with. Apart from Theatre group I have had so much out of u3a out of the last seven or so years that now it seems appropriate to pay something back.

Continued on the next page

From the Speaker Secretary

Our speakers for the next few months are:

Wednesday 1st September 2021 at 2pm - Tavistock Town Hall and via Zoom

Una storia breve di pasta (A short history of pasta)

Paul Ward

A short text written in Italian by a member of the Tavy District u3a Italian Improvers group about "strangozzi", a particular pasta shape popular in Umbria, triggered an interest in this iconic foodstuff and sent the presenter down a rabbit hole of research to learn about the origins of pasta, the Arab occupation of Sicily, the difference between "hard" and "soft" wheat, the hatred of the clergy in the Papal States, the use of pasta as a murder weapon, the industrialisation of pasta production and the foundation of a new "religion".

Paul Ward, a member and former chair of Tavy District u3a says that his only qualification for speaking on this topic are an inquiring mind and a love of both food and Italy.

Wednesday 6th October 2021 at 2pm - Tavistock Town Hall and via Zoom

The Bedford Estate and Workers' Housing in Tavistock in the 19th Century

Andrew Thompson

When the Industrial Revolution transformed Tavistock from rural town to mining centre, a rapidly growing population was crammed into insanitary and overcrowded housing in the central streets. Ranging from the World Heritage Bedford cottages to the speaker's 'ordinary' terraced house, this illustrated talk explores the complex and conflicting cultural, economic, political, social factors which influenced how the Dukes of Bedford responded to the 19th century housing crisis.

Andrew Thompson is a historian and archaeologist based in West Devon who works as a self employed heritage consultant.

Wednesday 3rd November 2021 at 2pm - Tavistock Town Hall and via Zoom

How to Survive and Thrive in Business during a Global Pandemic

Martin Swarbrick

Martin Swarbrick owns the de la Torre's delicatessen in Tavistock. He has over 40 years experience in the food sector moving from trained chef working in some of the best country house hotels in the UK to, following a degree and career change, 16 years at Riverford Organic Vegetables, where he was the driving force behind franchising Riverford. He has also worked as a freelance consultant helping to grow small organic food businesses.

NOTE: Please check the website and keep a lookout for emails for any late changes to the planned arrangements

Exploring World Faiths

I recently attended a Zoom presentation by Dr Peter Rookes who is the subject advisor within u3a for 'Exploring world faiths'. His presentation outlined the difference between religion and faith, he identified the main faith groups and he gave a historical context to the development of faith and religion through the centuries.

His definition of faith was; a strong belief in God or a set of religious doctrines not sustained by empirical evidence.

His definition of religion was; a cultural system of designated practices, world views, texts, sanctified places, history, prophecies and ethics that relate humanity to the transcendental. He suggested that a spiritual faith was a belief in the supernatural quest for ultimate sacred meaning beyond material aspects of life.

There are around 170 different religions worldwide of which Hinduism is the oldest followed by Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism and the Baha'i religions.

Taken from the 2011 census data, in this country there are 33 million Christians, 4.8 million people who follow Islam, 1.5 million Hindus, 0.8 million Sikhs and 0.5 million Jews. 14 million people follow no religion. There are many more religions in the UK than I have listed here, but this is just to give an example of numbers.

Although we often say to group leaders 'stay away from discussion on religion and politics', Peter is encouraging the development of new groups to look at all religions and faiths from the perspective of developing our understanding and broadening our learning.

I would like to help set up such a group and wonder what interest there might be out there for this topic?

The general ethos would be;

- 1) An objective exploration of different faiths
- 2) No proselytising
- 3) No suggestion that any faith is superior to any other
- 4) No suggestion that people of faith are superior to people of no faith
- 5) Approach the subject with respect and an open mind.

If anyone is interested in helping me to set up or is just interested in joining a group like this then please contact me. When I have enough interested people, I will look at where we might meet. This is likely to be a venue that is large enough for us to be spaced out and is well ventilated or where we may have to pay a small amount to rent, like the library.

Pippa Gardner

Classical Music Appreciation

We last wrote about our group in October 2020 and ended with our hopes for holding meetings face to face in 2021. Well that hasn't happened yet! However, despite the continued lockdown we've continued to share a choice of music each month. Three cheers for the internet.

We've seen each other's faces via Zoom (less frequently now that we're all out and about more often now) and we've listened to and watched some magnificent performers and orchestras through YouTube whose resources are never ending.

We've continued to look at unfamiliar composers especially women, including Lili Boulanger (sister to Nadia Boulanger, also talented musically who taught many musicians including Burt Bacharach, Daniel Barenboim, Lennox Berkeley, Aaron Copland and Quincy Jones). Lili died when only 24 but still managed to leave behind a range of inspiring music.

In March the chosen composer was another woman, Florence Price, the first African-American woman to be recognized as a symphonic composer, and in May we featured Amy Beach (1867 –1944), an American composer and pianist. She was the first successful American female composer of large-scale art music. Her "Gaelic" Symphony, premiered by the Boston Symphony Orchestra in 1896, was the first symphony composed and published by an American woman.

April saw us watching a range of festival music for Spring, including works by Berlioz and Respighi and in June we tuned in to the BBC's broadcast of the Cardiff "Singer of the World" competition.

We don't know for certain when we'll finally all sit down together and share music together. But I do know that for many of us music has been something to turn to in these strange times.

Liz and Mick Johnson

Music Appreciation

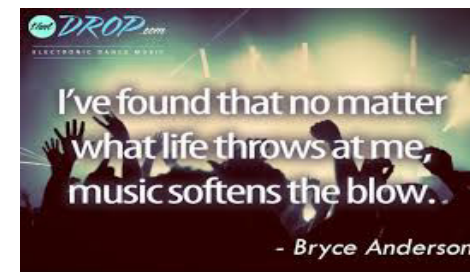
After many long months we were able to meet on the 26th July and because of it the music seemed all the sweeter. It was actually too hot to sit in the conservatory as we usually do in summer, with the sun pouring in and where the view is best, so we needed to be inside where it is cool.

Having listened to our music choices it was time to celebrate our return with a buffet lunch, together with - Christmas crackers - well why not wear paper hats and read out silly jokes when it's been so long!

At this point I would like to say a big thank you to the Committee and everyone involved with putting on a wonderful party in the park on 4th August. Such a lovely occasion greatly enjoyed and good to get together again. So well placed too with trees shading one half of the area and sun shining over the other half. What organisation!

Jan Willie

The deadline for the next Newsletter is 20th October
Please send to
johnnoble@tavydistrictu3a.org.uk



Strange Tales from the Bathroom

Shortly after moving into our house we had the bathroom upgraded, which apart from redecorating, we reorganised to allow the installation of a bidet, at my wife's specific request. The only ***** *bidette* in the village said our builder.

Recently. I was called urgently by my wife who yelled *come quickly the bidet's making a funny noise!*

I immediately dropped what I was doing to find out what the problem was. On arrival in the bathroom, coming from the bidet was the sound of water escaping under high pressure. I looked around but there was no sign of a leak – but the noise continued.

After checking both taps to ensure they were still working there was still no indication of any leak, but the noise continued unabated.

I checked again for leaks or flooding to no avail. I then decided that the best thing to do would be to turn of the mains water tap, which I did.

Even with the water supply turned off and residual pressure released by opening the taps, the noise continued.

I examined all the accessible plumbing on the bidet – and then I saw it!! My wife's Oral-B Pulsar electric toothbrush resting in the angle between the bidet and the wall – but it appeared completely stationary.

I removed it and to my amazement found that it was working. The noise diminished and when I switched it off the noise ceased. I turned the mains water supply back on – still no noise to my great relief. Problem solved!

The toothbrush is bright yellow and should have been obviously visible. It should also have been visibly vibrating. I have tried to recreate the conditions without success, the brush always vibrates noticeably and moves around which was not the case. The noise generated by the brush was also less intense. I can only conclude that the specific location of the brush caused the cavity in the bidet to resonate.

Looking back on this phenomenon, I wonder how the brush was switched on, and how we both failed to see the brush or that it was the cause of the problem.

I also wonder what else has the potential to dumbfound us in this way?

Anon

Discussion Group 1

The Discussion Group (original one) is looking for one or two people to join it.

We are a lively, talkative group, all interested in politics. Anyone joining would be expected occasionally to introduce a discussion/ prepare a topic (ten minutes).

Our recent topics have included:

The United Kingdom: for how long?, China: model for the world?, Women's Rights – what's still to do?

We meet monthly on the morning of the 3rd Monday.

If you are interested please contact Ian Gasper for further details.

There has never been a monthly meeting quite like this before



The August "monthly meeting" was held in the Meadows on 4th August.

Amazingly, it wasn't a case of sheltering under the trees but needing shade from the Tavistock sunshine.

A good time was had by all.

Roasted Summer Stone Fruits

Serves 4

You will need:

175 gms caster sugar
1 vanilla pod, split lengthwise
5 cardamom pods
Zest + juice 1 lime
6 apricots, halved and stoned
3 peaches, quartered and stoned
3 nectarines, quartered and stoned



Method

1. Add sugar, vanilla pod, cardamom, lime zest and juice into food processor. Blitz until blended or use pestle and mortar.
2. Place fruit into baking dish and add sugar syrup solution, ensuring fruit is coated.
3. Place in oven 200C/gas 8 until fruits have softened but not collapsed (usually 15-20mins.)
4. Serve with cream (or even ice cream!).
5. Can be stored for 2 days in fridge.

Shirley Smith



Tavy District u3a walkers enjoying a splendid view of Burrator reservoir from Lowery Tor.

No shortage of water this year.

They ended the walk in true u3a fashion with an ice cream!.

John Noblet

Comment

Please don't call us pensioners, say the over-60s

Rose Wild
Feedback



@TIMESFEEDBACK

Philip Burt says he objects to the word pensioner. "It's disparaging. We should be referred to as 'seniors'. Much more respectable."

It might be respectable but heaven forbid. My dictionary (Collins Online) confines the use of "senior" as a noun to professional golfers or tennis players who are too old for the main tournaments. It hasn't gained much traction elsewhere unless you're buying cheap cinema tickets.

Mr Burt does have a point, though. At some point over the last 20 years or so "pensioner" has become a catch-all description for more or less anyone of advanced years — or at

least anyone older than our headline writers — despite the qualifying age for a state pension creeping ever upwards.

Don Grocott wrote from Walton-on-Thames after reading Times2's interview with Paul Merton and Suki Webster. "You described Merton, at 64, as 'nearly a pensioner'. It's odd enough to use a person's source of income to define them — why not 'wage-earner, Boris Johnson'? — but state pensions start on a sliding scale of age. Surely it's time to drop this patronising and pejorative descriptor. After all, Merton is extremely unlikely to stop work and rely on his pension any time soon."

David Howes from York, agreed. Writing about a recent news story he says, "You referred to a murder suspect as a pensioner in the headline, though the story only mentioned a 65-year-old. I always assumed the term 'pensioner' referred to someone either in receipt of a state pension or at least old

enough to claim one. I am 65 and will not be a pensioner until my birthday next year, and my younger brother will have to wait for his 67th birthday. I know current legislation allows people to draw a pension from the age of 55, but this applies only to private or occupational pensions, and people in receipt of a pension before they reach state pension age are usually described as having 'taken early retirement'."

Messrs Grocott and Howes may be pleased to know that the style guide has copious entries on this subject, even if we haven't entirely followed their advice in these examples. On "pensioners" we are advised to proceed with care. "Some readers take exception to 'ambiguous' usage, so it should strictly be confined to people drawing their state pension. If in doubt, write older people, the elderly (but beware) or, as a last resort, senior citizen."

If tempted to use words like "elderly" or "aged" the suggestion is to be extremely sensitive. "People are living longer and remaining active longer; many dislike being defined by their age and described in language that makes them sound much older than they feel. None of these descriptions should be used for anyone under pensionable age."

"Retiree", the guide adds, is "a ghastly word" and there are no prizes for guessing the thorniest of all. "Think carefully before using 'old' to describe almost anyone under 80. A safer, less loaded alternative might be 'older people'."

This was in The Times on 7th August 2021.

Do you agree with these thoughts?

Record - breaking Weather

Warmest year ever known! 'Rainfall highest ever recorded!' 'Spring arrives earlier than ever!' Whenever you see headlines like these, put your brain into its most critical state. Our climate settled down a long time ago, when the last Ice Age packed up and went home to the Arctic. Doubtless the few (if any?) shivering Devonians were glad to see it go, as it had been around for a very long time.

Since then, in the subsequent run of about 10,000 years up to the present, we have reasonably confident temperature figures for only 362 of them, and nowhere else in the world has meaningful data for temperature, rainfall or anything else for even half that. We therefore only have proper data (even in England and only for temperature) for 3 per cent of that time.

But even that comparatively short run tells us something about our climate. One man is responsible more than any other for producing the figures, now known as the Central England Temperature Series. Professor Gordon Manley (1902-1980) obtained these by ferreting about in obscure diaries, pamphlets, notebooks and other dusty papers held in country houses, vicarages and museums all over the country.

Temperatures were often measured in cold rooms rather than outside. Thermometers were not standard; one instrument in Upminster was three feet long and had a freezing point of 82.2°. Manley puzzled out this one by comparing the Upminster extremes over eight years (of 58 and 186) with other readings.

He gradually turned his discoveries into a monthly mean series from 1659, and a figure for every day since 1772. The work is now carried on by the Met Office Hadley Centre, based on data from three or four reporting stations across the English midlands.

It is curious that when Manley was publishing his first paper in 1953 he thought his work would contribute to a greater understanding

of the past; his studies, he said, 'may provide the key to many of the events of the post-glacial period.' He had no idea at the time how important his data was to become in our concern about climate change.

Temperature figures tell us nothing about weather but a great deal about climate. Interesting snippets from the tables: coldest winter 1683-4 (the one described in Lorna Doone); warmest summer 1976, of course, but it was only 2 tenths of a degree warmer than the summer of 1826.

The coldest month in the records is January 1795: minus 3.1° (26.4°) - and bear in mind that is an average for the whole month. The same month in 1963 was the next coldest: minus 2.1 (28.2°F). The warmest months were: July 1983, 19.5°C (67.1°F) and July 2006, 19.7°C (67.5°F). The coldest year was 1740, George II on the throne, two days to reach London from Exeter, and Alexander Pope writing poetry that is hardly remembered now. Average temperature for that year: only 6.8°C (44.2°F) compared with 2020's 10.7°C (51.3°F).

This month's message: beware of any 'records' that claim to be the worst/highest/lowest ever. What happened was only the worst, highest, lowest since we began to measure our weather seriously. What we know about the world's weather is like the opening paragraph in a 500-page novel. If 97 per cent of our weather is unknown, then records will be broken, and will continue to be broken, for a long time to come.

Are the recent slightly warmer years caused by our carelessness as we gaily chuck carbon dioxide into the atmosphere? On top of that, are we still recovering slowly from the Little Ice Age which ended around 1850? And are we also having a simple climatic adjustment?

Never mind, we'll find out eventually. Another thousand years should give us a better idea.

Ivor Williams

Playreading Group 2

This group has not been able to meet during lockdown in view of the various difficulties – obtaining copies from the library, limits on numbers indoors, mask wearing etc. Not to mention group leader apathy!

We did try one Zoom meeting with screen sharing of a funny one act play written by a u3a member for u3a groups. This worked quite well and was entertaining, but finding another suitable play on line has proved difficult.

Hoping to have an actual meeting face to face outside, we had planned to meet in a garden in view of the nice weather, but ran into difficulties with lack of numbers perhaps due to caution or pinging!

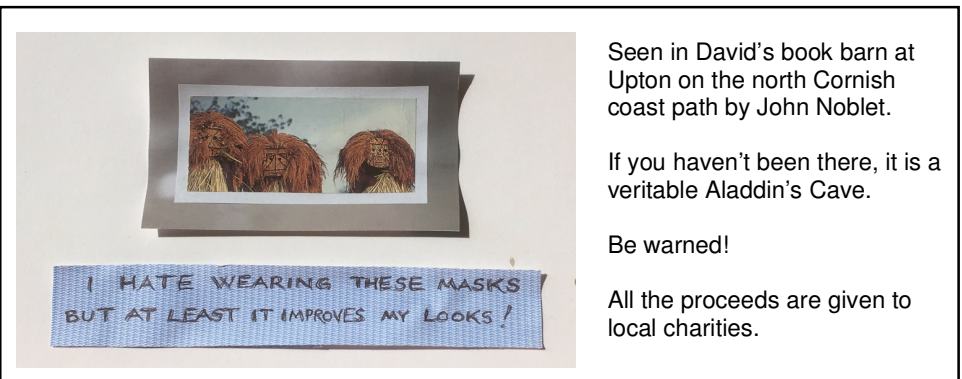
As a compensation I recommended looking on iPlayer for the film version of Importance of Being Earnest – the play we had planned. This is a truly frothy delight – gorgeous settings and costumes and some extra scenes only mentioned in the play to give background.

Lots of English actors doing what they do best – the two male leads played by Rupert Everett and Colin Firth bringing out the clash of character. The sophistication of Gwendoline (Frances O'Connor) contrasted with the sly innocence of Cecily (Reece Witherspoon) played out in lovely sunny settings. Anna Massey gives Miss Prism a prim

determination for the pursuit of the shy Tom Wilkinson as Chasuble. The two butlers lead a group of familiar faces amongst the servants. Judi Dench gives the well-known lines a subtle extra dimension despite a huge wig and hat, and a fox tippet with a wicked snarl.

I know some like the Margaret Rutherford and more traditional versions, but this one is definitely my favourite, and hopefully will provide some comfort for those unable to get together to read themselves. Maybe soon...

Rosy Griffith



Seen in David's book barn at Upton on the north Cornish coast path by John Noblet.

If you haven't been there, it is a veritable Aladdin's Cave.

Be warned!

All the proceeds are given to local charities.

Reading gives us someplace to go

And this quote about reading was never more true than during the recent pandemic when, at various times and for various durations, we were 'confined to barracks'!

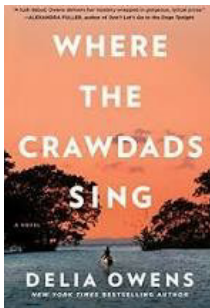
It will come as no surprise to you that, as an ex-English teacher and part-time manager of a charity bookshop, I love books and reading.

Like all readers, I usually have several books on the go and shelves full of books (not to mention the piles under the bed, beside the bed...) I have even managed to buy a book only to discover that it is already in one of my 'yet-to-be-read' piles!

Reading, for me, is escapism which is probably why my preference is fiction. I do read non-fiction but my go-to is always the created worlds of literature. However, I am always trying new genres, attempting to push myself out of my comfort zone – as I used to tell my pupils, you don't have to enjoy a book to appreciate it! For example, although personally, I don't particularly like the novels of Charles Dickens. I can acknowledge that he was the master of the semi-colon and his characters were memorable and uniquely 'drawn'.

I set myself a Lockdown Reading Challenge at the start of the year to read at least 26 books of differing genres. Unsurprisingly, I have already completed this, given that the weather was so poor and so I thought that I

Like many, I devoured the best-seller ***Where the Crawdads Sing*** by Delia Owens and am eagerly awaiting the film. *To Kill a Mockingbird* is one of my all-time favourite novels and this reminded me of that in some ways, being set in the Deep South



would share some of my favourite reads from this time with you. and with racism as one of its main themes. Interestingly, I know just as many men who have read and enjoyed this as women.

If you would prefer something lighter and closer to home, then I thoroughly recommend ***The Secret Life of Albert Entwistle*** by Matt Cain – the story of a quiet, semi-reclusive postman with a secret set in the north of England. It is a sad, funny and ultimately uplifting novel that left me with a smile on my face.

An interesting, more literary read was ***Light Perpetual*** by Francis Spufford which took the idea of what would have happened to a group of children if they hadn't been killed in a bombing raid in WW2. A fascinating read which jumped from character to character building their lives and experiences – not necessarily for those of you that like a more linear read!

My daughter is shortly going to start a new job in mental health nursing so I was intrigued to read ***The Devil You Know*** by Dr Gwen Adshead & Eileen Horne – a recent Radio 4 Book of the Week, about Gwen's experiences as a psychologist treating inmates at Broadmoor Hospital. Fascinating, thought provoking and ultimately, saddening. So many lives blighted and ruined by mental illness.

Another non-fiction book I encountered on a rather gruesome subject was ***This Party's Dead*** by Erica Buist (written before Covid).

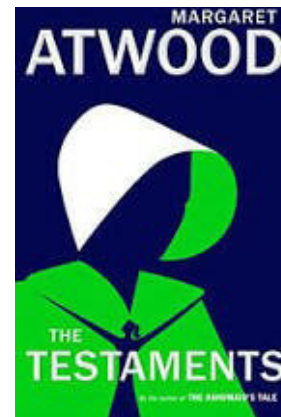
After the author's father-in-law died, she became somewhat traumatised by the whole idea of death and so decided, as a journalist, to investigate how other cultures deal with death by attending various festivals around the world. Again, very thought-provoking, it really made me think how we in this country approach this taboo subject.

I read classics (***Agnes Grey*** by Anne Bronte

when we have to stay where we are... Continued

autobiography (***A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*** by Betty Smith – absolutely delightful); crime (***The Coffin Maker's Garden*** by Stuart MacBride – rather gruesome); war (***Blackout*** by Simon Sparrow – loved it, hope he's going to write some more); best-seller (***The Thursday Murder Club*** by Richard Osman – undemanding but fun) and thrillers (***Tall Bones*** by Anna Bailey – disturbing but engrossing).

However, my favourite read of 2021 is a Booker prize-winner ***The Testaments*** by Margaret Atwood.



I have read, studied and taught *The Handmaid's Tale* and genuinely thought that she was never going to let us know what happened to Ofred but, finally, she did.

This book continues the story of Gilead but through the eyes of three very different women and straightaway I was gripped. It was the kind of book where you start to read more slowly and ration yourself so that you don't finish it too quickly!

Hopefully, I have tempted you to read some of the books that I have read myself or pushed you into trying a different genre. We do have two reading groups at present so maybe you could join one or even start a new one.

We don't have a Short Story group – that would always be a good one to begin with and there are lots of amazing short story authors out there! And if you want any further recommends, I am always happy to oblige.

Pop into the Oxfam Bookshop – I'm there at least 4 days a week, trying to resist buying even more books to read!

Robin Neave

Craft Group One

In the July heatwave Craft Group One met in my garden under the welcome shade of a large tree. How far removed it seemed from the lockdowns and other restrictions we had endured. With this in mind I asked everyone if they could suggest at least one positive outcome from our very changed lives. This is what they said:

I painted my porch and larder.

I turned out all the cupboards knowing I was planning to move house.

My son visited every Monday and did my shopping.

I am happy in my own company as long as I have some craft to do with my hands.

I dug the garden.

I was in touch with so many people by phone, zoom, email and even letters.

The lack of traffic made it so quiet and peaceful.

I got in touch with nature again on my daily walk.

Best of all though was being back together again.

Mary Brock