

Tavy District u3a

THE NEWSLETTER



Early daffodils. Spring is
on the way!

Photo: John Noblet

No 120

March 2023

u3a

Who's Who in Tavy District u3a

Chair	Paul Ward
Secretary	Randall Williams
Treasurer	Angela Pitt
Membership	Tony Rose
Groups Liaison	Sonja Armstrong
Newsletter Distribution	Caroline Lorenzi
Speaker Secretary	Jane Ward
Two Moors Liaison	Tony Rose
Catering	Isobel Davies
Equipment	Graham Foster

Events Committee
Norma Woodcock
Chris Webb
Janet Hunt
Shirley Smith

Remember:

Contact details of all
Group Leaders and
Committee members
can be found in the
password protected
area of the website

Webmaster: Jan Draper
web@tavydistrictu3a.org.uk

Newsletter Editor: John Noblet

The deadline for the next Newsletter is 20th April 2023

Send contributions to johnnoblet@tavydistrictu3a.org.uk

FROM THE CHAIR

I am embarrassed to admit that until recently I had never been on a Tavy District u3a visit organised by the events team, and I still haven't been on a theatre visit. However, I joined a group that visited the Plymouth Synagogue in February and learnt a variety of things other than aspects of Plymouth's history, the history of the synagogue and the celebration of the Jewish faith. The first thing I noticed was that there were u3a members in the group that I had never knowingly seen before. They were not members of any of the groups I attend, and I do not recall having seen them at our Wednesday speaker meetings.



So, I learnt that we have members who I have never met and know nothing about. I then learnt that the coloured tops on plastic milk bottles – blue for whole milk, green for semi-skimmed and red for skimmed – are being replaced by “bottle coloured” tops for reasons of cost and ease of recycling. Finally, I learnt that a large hairy cat called Dexter lives at the synagogue and has an international fan club. Who would have guessed that? Dexter is a very impressive feline, and he appears to believe that he is in charge! So, there are learning opportunities everywhere, and not necessarily those that we might anticipate from the activity we are taking part in.

People join the u3a for a variety of reasons. Some are seeking to join a specific group in which they can develop existing or acquire new knowledge and skills. Others may be more interested in the speaker meetings, and yet others are attracted by events and theatre visits. Of course, many members take part in a variety of different activities, whereas others may only be interested in one. However, the one thing I believe we are all interested in is the quest for friendship and good company, and the u3a offers both in spades if only we take advantage of the opportunities that membership presents. We are, by our very nature, a group of older people and many of our members live on their own. In such circumstances the social contact offered by u3a membership is even more important. In general, our lady members, who represent approximately 70% of the membership, are more gregarious and make new friends more easily than our gentlemen members. You will have heard the adage that women use far more words in a day than do men! I haven't worked out how many of our gentlemen live alone but I know that some do. One such member, recently widowed at the time, told me several years ago that he didn't know how he would have been able to carry on if it had not been for the support that he had received from other u3a members.

As for life in general, so for the u3a. The more we put into it, the more we get out. The more we get involved, the more people we meet, the more friends we make, and the more we learn. I am really looking forward to the visit to the “From waste to energy” plant in Plymouth at the end of March, and I am wondering who I will meet for the first time on that occasion.

Now, what's on at the theatre?

A big thank you to Norma, Chris, Shirley and Carole for everything they do, and do so well, to organise such a great variety of events and theatre visits for us.

Paul

Forthcoming Meetings and a Poem

Strictly, the title should be “A Poem and Forthcoming Meetings”, since the poem will come before the meeting details. However, following the presentation by Vanni Cook at our February meeting on the subject of creative writing, I feel the need to pay more attention to the words I use and their order and I think that the title above sounds better than the alternative!

A copy of Vanni’s PowerPoint presentation has been circulated to all members with an e-mail address. If anyone without e-mail would like a hard copy, please contact me and I will print one for you.

As members arrived at the meeting, Vanni invited them to write down a word or words which they associated with Spring. At the end of the meeting, she promised to use these words as the basis for a poem which she would write for our u3a. This she has now done and the poem with Vanni’s explanatory notes is below. It has been *“compiled using the words and phrases that were contributed by the group. It was an interesting assortment of words and both the title and final sentence were phrases provided by the members”*.

“(A free verse* poem created using the words contributed by u3a members of February the 1st, 2023.)

Long Desired (Title)

Light illuminates the early morning skies,
Life pushes upwards from the ice-chilled soils.
A chicken pecks with hope,
Around the clusters of snowdrops,
The harbingers of spring,
While daffodils unfurl their frills,
To greet the warming sun.

March hares dance in welcome,
Looking forward to the end of sharp, snaps, of cold.
Primroses are nuzzled by soft nosed lambs.
Buds on ornamental cherry trees, unfurl their frothy pink and white petals,
Releasing their uplifting perfume through parks and streets,
The tutu-like blossoms of ornamental ranunculi,
Brighten up garden borders,
Jostling with burgeoning buttercups, their family members,
For the best in the garden show position.
The scent of hope is carried on the breeze,
Optimism is wafted through the countryside,
The Earth comes to life at last.

* ‘Free verse’ is an open form of poetry, which in its modern form developed from the French ‘vers libre’ form. It does not use consistent meter patterns, rhyme or any strict set of rules.”

Monthly Meetings March to May 2023

Moving on, below are the details currently available for the next three monthly meetings. As always, suggestions from members for future speakers are very welcome. I am now making a start on the 2024 programme.

Jane Ward

WEDNESDAY 1ST MARCH 2PM (AGM) – Tavistock Town Hall and via Zoom

The History and Restoration of Tavistock Rail Services

Speaker: Richard Searight, Chair, Peninsula Rail Group/ TavyRAIL

In 2014, when the South West Peninsular was cut off by the Dawlish Disaster, Richard decided to start the Peninsular Rail Group (now TavyRAIL). This is devoted to restoration of the inland or Northern Route – partly as a backup for when the Dawlish line closes, as it frequently does and partly to restore West Devon's and North Cornwall's rail communications with the rest of the UK.

During the talk he will cover the railway line restoration which has to be done in three phases. The first is Exeter to Okehampton - which has now been very successfully completed. The second phase is Tavistock Plymouth - which the group is currently working on. The last phase will be the joining up between Okehampton to Tavistock.

Richard aims to firstly describe the historical development importance of the line to Tavistock and the South West, then describe where we are now and finally, where we will be in the future.

Initially Richard worked at the BBC and then started a small film company in the early 80s. Eventually he took over the running of his family charity the Brooke Hospital for Animals, which is now one of the world's largest overseas animal welfare societies, providing veterinary support for working animals in the developing world. His family moved from Wiltshire to Tavistock in 2006 and "from using the train on an almost daily basis he had to learn to rely on the car!"

WEDNESDAY 5TH APRIL 2PM – Tavistock Town Hall and via Zoom

Waste and Recycling

Dilys Lord, West Devon BC

Monthly Meetings March to May 2023 Continued

WEDNESDAY 3RD MAY 2PM – Tavistock Town Hall and via Zoom

Better Balance and Improving Mobility

Prof. Sallie Lamb

There is plenty of evidence that keeping active can help to protect against falls (and other risks during older age). Sallie will explain what the research tells us about the types of activities that are shown to be beneficial and will share examples to inspire us to stay healthy and happy through our Third Age.

Sallie is Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Executive Dean of the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences, at the University of Exeter. An internationally recognised scholar in ageing, disability and rehabilitation, she is also an experienced methodologist in the area of clinical trials and high-quality evaluation of health care practice.

Strictly Ballroom - The Musical

A party of twelve members of Tavy District u3a attended the Theatre Royal in February to see Strictly Ballroom, starring the wonderful Kevin Clifton and choreographed by Craig Revel Horwood.

The theatre had raised its roof to reveal the upper circle and this matinee performance was packed to the rafters. There were great roars when Kevin made his first appearance on stage - I believe he was the reason many of us wanted to see this show.

Kevin's performance was spectacular and supported by superb dancers who also provided the lovely story-telling singing as well as dancing. Kevin, who many of us did not know could sing, in fact had a great voice. I can confidently say that Kevin is Rudolf Nureyev of Ballroom.

At the finale the audience were on their feet and the clapping deafening. How wonderful to be at this amazing live show which lifted your spirits. On leaving the auditorium everyone looked so happy.

Sheila Campbell-Sawyer



AGM Agenda

1. Confirm whether a quorum is present and apologies for absence
2. Approval of the minutes of the 2022 AGM
3. Trustees' annual report
4. Treasurer's report and adoption of the accounts for the year ended 31 December 2022
5. Appointment of an External Examiner for the 2023 accounts
6. To approve the level of subscriptions for 2024. The committee recommend that they remain at the present level but point out that it would be possible to modify the decision later in the year through a Special General Meeting should that be necessary.
7. Election of executive committee members. Angela Pitt has completed her three year term of office as Treasurer and is willing to stand as Treasurer for a further term. She has been proposed by David Rogers and seconded by Rupert Gude. Kate Tuppen is willing to stand as a non-officer member of the executive committee. She has been proposed by Liz Johnson and seconded by Margaret Garton.
8. Other business – none has been notified so none can be considered.
9. Date of Next AGM – 6 March 2024

Members who intend to join the meeting by Zoom are asked to notify the secretary in advance.

Minutes of the 2022 AGM will be available in printed form at the AGM but a copy is available in advance on request to the secretary.

Voting through a proxy is available on request to the secretary.

Randall Williams,
Secretary

The Story of Reading Group 1

As our name suggests, we were the first Reading Group to be established in our u3a in 2005 by Renate Edmonds. The Group has met monthly since then and we consistently have eight members who rarely miss a meeting so we must enjoy ourselves. I took over the leadership of the group in 2011 and I recall asking the members the reasons for their enjoyment in belonging to a book group.

- Reading books that you normally would not have chosen.
- Being introduced to new authors.
- Learning something new about people and the World.
- Broadening one's perspective of different topics.
- Participating in discussions about the book and its related topics.
- Feeling the need to persevere to finish a book to be able to contribute to the discussion!

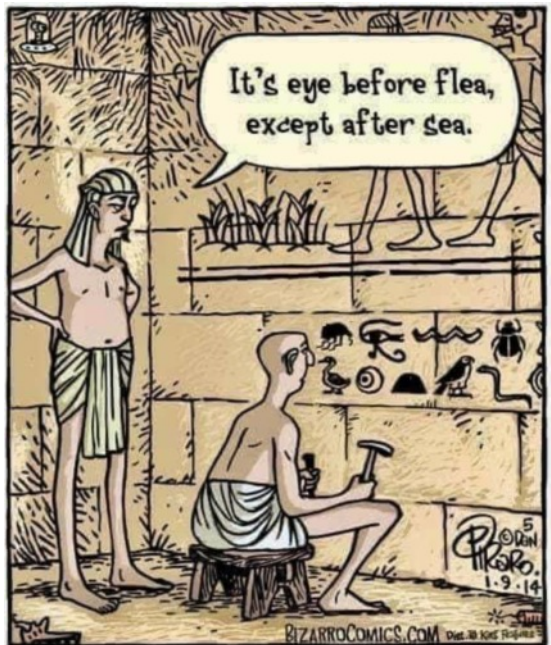
We have participated in the excellent Exeter Library scheme for reading groups since 2010 and as it provides us with a list of over 500 books each year, both fiction and non fiction, which are available in sets, it has certainly helped us to achieve an excellent variety of books. Fortunately, they include about 200 new titles each year. We choose 24 a year so we can be sure to receive 12 for our monthly meetings.

You may be interested in the titles of some of the books which have provided us with excellent discussions and are well worth a read.

- Home Fire by Kamila Shamsie - the novel follows three orphaned siblings who leave London for Syria to work for Isis.
- Ascension by Oliver Harris – an unusual thriller set on Ascension Island, where there is a British and American military base and several highly classified government projects.
- Exit West by Mohsin Hamid – an excellent novel about the up-to-date problems faced by refugees and migrants.
- The House of Glass by Hadley Freeman – a non fiction book about the Glass Family who spanned the 20thC and lived through the most dramatic times endured by the World's Jews.

There are now 4 reading groups in our u3a and always room for more. Contact Sonja Armstrong if you are interested in being part of a group.

Chris Webb



Thanks to Margaret Garton

Music Appreciation Group

The last Monday of the month is here
That's when we meet to bring some cheer
To the start of the week. our music plays
To lift our spirits on these days.

our group, though small, make no mistake
Is always ready to partake
And we can make a merry sound
When our music goes round and around.

But wait, now there are others here,
We all can sense them in the air,
Yes, those who gave such wondrous sounds
Their spirits now with us abound.

And so it seems that in this place
It surely brings us face to face
With those great masters gone before
As once again they take the floor.

They're welcome as the flowers in Spring
For so much joy to us they bring.
They come alive again as we
Together join in harmony.

But though they do delight us
They can also make us weep
When the power of mixed emotions
May take us to the deep.

Then when our time is over
As we go our separate ways,
We always will remember
Just how we felt these days.

Janice Willie

Play Reading

My play reading group has been meeting for twenty years. We meet at my house every second and fourth Wednesday with a short break in the summer. Occasionally we have places for new members. At the moment we have eleven people in the group. This makes it quite hard to choose plays to read.

We are able to borrow plays from Exeter Play Sets library and we have a copy each. The library have a very extensive list of available plays. I email a very friendly librarian called Luke who sends the plays to Tavistock library.

Recently we have read "Flare Path" by Terence Rattigan. This was written during the war and is about a group of RAF pilots and one Polish pilot and their wives and girl friends. It was written and first performed in 1941. We felt it was a very strange time for this to be performed as it did not hide the fact that so many pilots did not return. Judith, one of the group, found out that Rattigan was asked to write the play to emphasise the role played by the Polish men who had joined forces with the RAF.

Another recent play we have tackled was "Lion in Love" by Shelagh Delaney. Never as well received as her more famous play and film "A Taste of Honey"

The play was very much a forerunner of the 'kitchen sink' dramas. It was set in a very working class street in the north of England and portrayed the sort of characters one might encounter in "Coronation Street" today.

I, as I have said before, am happy to help someone else start a play reading group. Our next play is an Agatha Christie's "The Unexpected Guest"

Caroline Lorenzi

Two Bedford Cottages Through Time

For those of us in Tavistock and the Tavistock District who have ever lived in a Bedford cottage built for the miners rather than those built for the Mine Managers and Mine Captains, we will know how small and cosy they are. But how many of us have thought about the previous residents and the hard lives that they may have lived through. The miners' working day did not start until they reached the mine face. For the women running the home for these large families, regularly being pregnant over and again, although infant mortality was high, they had none of the modern appliances that we now have, not even an indoor cold water tap or toilet.

The 20 semi-detached Wheal Maria cottages were built in 1853 close to the first of what was to become the five mines of the Devon Great Consols Mining Company. They were built from rubble-stone and cost in the region of £70 per house. They had a kitchen/living room, scullery/washhouse, parents' bedroom, boys' bedroom and girls' bedroom. Outside there was an ashpit privy, pigsty, drying ground and large garden. Each pair of cottages were served by stream water fed to a shared outdoor standpipe over a small granite trough.

The Census returns for 5 & 6 Wheal Maria from 1861 to 1901, just before copper mining ceased in the area, show a succession of copper miners and their families. In 1871, No. 5 was lived in by John Down, his wife and their 7 children ranging from age 2 to 14 years whilst in No. 6 were Francis Clemo, his wife and their 10 children, ranging from age 1 to 23 years. A total of 21 people between the two cottages!!!! Of Francis and Susanna's five sons, four were also shown as miners including the 12 year old. What a hard life they must have had. Francis and Susanna had already buried a son aged 16 months and a daughter aged 19 months and in 1872 Susanna herself died aged 45 followed by Francis in 1874 aged 50. By the 1881 census their son Francis was still living in No. 6 with

his wife and two of his sisters. The younger Clemo children were to be found spread around the homes of their older married siblings.

The 1911 census shows No.5 with a farm labourer and his family whereas No.6, as with several other cottages, was standing empty now that the mine had closed. During World War I some empty pairs of cottages were knocked into single dwellings to house the large families of Belgian refugees given a home by the Duke of Bedford. After the war most of these families returned to their own country. This was the case with 5 & 6 which were shown in 1921 as one dwelling lived in by 35 year old widow Mrs Adelaide Jewell and 5 of her 7 children, her husband John having died the year before also aged 35. The two cottages had been altered internally with No. 5 scullery and kitchen knocked into one large living room but No. 6 left as two rooms, a scullery and "best" parlour. Upstairs in both houses, the boys' and girls' bedrooms had been knocked into one larger bedroom, making this a four bedroomed house with one adjoining door upstairs and one downstairs.



Jackman Family - the first six children

Two Bedford Cottages Through Time *Continued*

My grandfather Albert Jackman and his widowed mother Eliza Jane moved into No.13 Wheal Maria in 1919 after he returned from the War and he married my grandmother Violet, a Land Army girl working locally in 1920. Their first son was stillborn but by November 1925, Granny had given birth to three more sons, my father being the eldest. It was agreed that they would exchange houses with Mrs Jewell and her youngest children and our family of 3 adults and 3 boys would move to 5 & 6.

Granny and Grandad then had more than their fair share of good and bad times, losing twin boy and girl within hours of being born, followed in succession by three healthy girls. In February 1933 the Tavistock Gazette headlined with "Tragic Deaths At Wheal Maria, Triplets Pass Away Soon After Birth". Granny had given birth to triplet girls but the babies only lived for half an hour. Their births and deaths were registered as Faith, Hope and Charity. Grandad's mother still lived with them at this point but died the following year aged 82. It wasn't until 1938 at the age of 42 that Granny gave birth to their last daughter, making 7 children to be raised in this house and where Granny and Grandad lived out the rest of their lives.

When my parents married in 1946 they too lived in 5 & 6 with Granny and Grandad, and my brother and I were born in this house. Having moved away to Yorkshire when we were young children, in 2011 my husband David and I had the chance to buy the cottage where my 86 year old bachelor uncle had continued to live since he was 10 months old and was now moving to live with his widowed sister next door. We still have two staircases, one in each half which can be useful with visitors staying and we combined the scullery and "best" parlour in No 6 to make a kitchen/diner. Upstairs we made one bedroom into a bathroom. We enjoy full central heating and all mod cons including indoor hot and cold water and indoor flush toilet!! What would those first residents have made of such luxuries?

My father and his two brothers are no longer with us but my four aunts keep going strong aged 95, 94 (living in Australia since she married in 1952), 92 and the baby is 84. In 2025 my Jackman family will have lived in these two Bedford cottages for 100 years. What a celebration that should be and who will live here long after we are gone to continue the story of "Two Bedford Cottages Through Time"?

Val Blair



5 & 8 Wheal Maria today

French Novel Group

Last year we discovered a new author Valerie Perrin and were pleased to read two of her first three published novels. There are similarities of style in both "Changer l'eau des fleurs" and "Les Oubliés de dimanche". One story is narrated by Violette whose husband had disappeared without trace for years until located by a detective from Marseilles. This commissaire is visiting the cemetery where Violette lives as the very capable superintendent and caretaker. The second book is also narrated by a woman, Justine, a young dedicated carer in a residential home.

Both women have a difficult childhood and as adults are fascinated by the lives of other people they meet through their work. Violette reads the long personal journal written by the detective's mother Irene and Justine writes up the life story of Helene, a resident whose husband returned from a prisoner of war camp. Although unable to remember his former happy married life, he was restored to health. Lucien then married his nurse and they had a daughter together. When finally traced, he returned to his original village in an attempt to rebuild his life with the woman who had always loved him. Difficult relationships are an interesting feature of both novels

There are also mysteries to be solved. Who was responsible for the fire which took the lives of four little girls on an organised Summer Holiday? Where had Violette's missing husband spent so many years? Similarly, what had happened to Helene's husband after returning to France after 1945? And what was the true cause of the car crash which had killed Justine's parents?

Many fascinating characters are to be found in Valerie's Perrin's novels.

As a complete contrast, "Petit Pays" by Gael Faye is concerned with the events of the war in Rwanda in the 1980s as told by a wealthy young boy living in Burundi. Gabriel's father is French, a construction engineer and

administrator, and his mother coming from a Tutu family, had fled from Rwanda as a child. Based on the author's own experiences, this was an insight into the intense political situation and the relations between the various ethnic groups in the area. The atmosphere of the colonial way of life, the unrest amongst the townsfolk, the bloodshed in the countryside and even the problems of an unhappy marriage are all to be found here....and seen through the eyes of a teenage boy.

This was a moving account of a disastrous war, portrayed with great depth of feeling.

We always enjoy reading Fred Vargas, a popular French detective novel writer, whose books are translated and published world wide.

"Temps Glaciaires" was as complex as ever. Connected serial murders took us to different regions of France. An original incident on a remote strange rocky island in Iceland was an integral part of the mystery. Yet also involved was a well-heeled Association that concentrated on the reenactment of trials led by Robespierre during the French Revolution. The society's President and sponsor lived in a massive country estate and his unexpected death led to a criminal investigation of far-reaching proportions. We even met a "Guard Boar" called Marc who joined the huge cast of players in this really entertaining novel.

To restore a balance between up-to-date literary works, detective stories and books about current affairs and social issues, we have read a classic by François Mauriac. He was a prolific 20th century writer who was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature and many other accolades. We had an extremely interesting discussion about "Le Mystère Frontenac" although the reading of the novel became more of a duty than a pleasure. My admiration for our group increases as the years go by!

French Novel Group *continued*

A close-knit family with a long-established Bordeaux business concern keep it going smoothly after the death of the young managing director. The secret life of Xavier, the surviving unmarried brother, is an integral part of the plot as he takes responsibility for his sister-in-law's young family. There are some memorable scenes in Paris and lyrical descriptions of the countryside, but we do not feel much empathy towards the members of La Famille Frontenac. They are an elite set of characters who do not readily accept outsiders and I reckon that we also feel excluded.

So our present novel is another by Michel Bussi. A murder (perhaps 2 or 3?) to be solved with plenty of clues and "red herrings" swimming in Monet's lily ponds at Giverny. An excellent choice!

My thanks to all the group members for their continued support.

Frances Stephens

Opera Group

In the seven years the group has been in existence we had never watched a production of an opera that included a performance by Luciano Pavarotti..

However, we broke that habit with a 30 year old filmed production of him as the lothario and lecherous Duke in Rigoletto who deflowers the village maidens as a bit of a pastime. Despite his expressive and lyrical vocal interpretation, he looked for all the world a dead ringer for depictions of Henry VIII in his later years, very broad of girth and short in leg. Defo not my type.

It brought to mind the debate as to whether we now expect our opera stars to not only have magnificent voices, but whether they should look the part too...(wonder whether George Clooney can sing...?)

Screen productions, in cinematic style, have undoubtedly brought in wider audiences - some with different expectations, and certainly directors with implausible productions. Carmen in a gorilla suit comes to mind as does the occasional full bodied Mimi in La Boheme dying of consumption. Maybe it is the close up, adding a new dynamic, revealing all, but not available to original or current theatre audiences.

Probably for most of us it's what the composer tried to achieve with layered voices within the story, although 'trousered' roles for the female voice work with castrati is habit of the past....

I suppose if some visual portrayals are hard to swallow there is always the radio and CDs, or maybe just closing eyes (and dreaming of...?). Pavarotti's voice and lyricism was sublime and possibly will never be matched. It would be a great shame if singers with wonderful voices are denied roles simply because they are 'physically incorrect'. But I suspect the jury is out.

Margaret Garton



Plymouth Synagogue Visit

I must admit, I was a little nervous going, as it was the first trip I'd done through the u3a. However, there was nothing to fear. I was met by a lovely welcome committee, who directed me into the Synagogue, and after getting a cup of tea and cake, I found people I knew from other groups – phew, I could now relax!

Before going into the Synagogue, our guide (Jerry) provided a fascinating history of how it had developed alongside Plymouth itself. Whilst it survived the bombings of the second World War, the new post-war town plan moved housing from inside the city. Therefore, the land around the Synagogue became places for people to visit, not live. This had a massive impact on the congregation, as worshippers could only walk half a mile to the Synagogue; many could no longer come there to worship, and membership decreased from 200 to just 34. However, services still take place on a Saturday, which anyone can attend.

As an aside - I had often wondered why the cannons on the Citadel pointed not only out to sea, but also into the town. From Jerry, I learnt that during the English Civil War, Plymouth had sided with the Parliamentarians and had withstood a siege for over four years. When Plymouth was eventually defeated and the monarchy restored, King Charles II pointed cannons into the town as a reminder, not to go against him again!

The Synagogue itself was beautiful with many stained-glass windows and exquisitely carved furniture and ironwork; there was an air of peace about it; you can see a short virtual tour at:
<http://www.plymouthsynagogue.com/video/virtual-tour-of-plymouth-synagogue.aspx>

Jerry explained the roles within the Synagogue in an entertaining way – getting 'volunteers' to come out, don a shawl (or other piece of apparel) and become one of the many roles required for the Synagogue to run smoothly. I enjoyed this (coming from a Primary School background) and could see myself carrying out my assigned duties!

I would love to return to Plymouth later in the year to take part in the Jewish Cemetery audio tour and hopefully to see a play about Solomon Hart, the first Jewish member of the Royal Academy of Arts. His massive painting, 'Lady Jane Grey at the Place of her Execution', had been stored, unseen for over a century. Our guide, Jerry, was one of the many people instrumental in making this happen.

A great tour, informative and entertaining. Thank you!

Jacqui Foster



Paul, our chair, setting an example
More photos are on the website

The deadline for the next Newsletter is 20th April 2023

Send contributions to johnnoble@tavydistrictu3a.org.uk

Warning: El Niño is Coming

In the olden days bad weather was blamed on the Gods; they were in a huff about something and must be appeased or else they would send another earthquake or thunderstorm. We know better, of course, and say it's due to global warming. Just now, though, the climate people are worried about El Niño. This from *The Guardian* in January: 'The return of the El Niño climate phenomenon later this year will cause global temperatures to rise "off the chart" and deliver unprecedented heatwaves, scientists have warned.'

Why are the scientists worried? It is all to do with the Equatorial Pacific trade winds. They normally blow gently westwards, moving the warm surface water from South America towards the islands of southeast Asia. When they weaken, warm water is pushed the other way, towards the coast of South America. Long ago Peruvian fishermen christened this warm current El Niño (the Boy Child, or little boy) because it came around Christmas time and brought welcome rain. Lima relies on rivers from the Andes for its water; its *annual* rainfall is about the same as one summer shower in Tavistock.

During La Niña (little girl) events the trade winds are stronger, moving more warm water westwards, which results in a greater increase in the upwelling cold water along the coasts of Ecuador and Peru. Rather unusually, we have had three consecutive La Niña years but seem to be moving towards an El Niño spell. We now know that these huge natural changes affecting the Pacific Ocean cause severe weather events throughout the southern hemisphere and occasionally much further afield than that.

In 1903 Sir Gilbert Walker, then working for the British Colonial Service, became director of an Indian Observatory with the job of trying to forecast the onset and severity of the monsoon season. As he studied the observations from meteorological stations all over the world, he saw that there was a long-term see-saw of pressure going on between the eastern and western Pacific, and later this was linked to El Niño as part of what is called the ENSO

phenomenon (El Niño/Southern Oscillation), much written about in the last few years.

There was a very severe El Niño event in 1997-1998, causing (it was thought at the time) vast bush fires in Australia, floods in Somalia, snow in Jerusalem, and torrential rain and gales in California. Looking back a bit further, there seems to have been another severe one notable for the very cold winter of 1939-40. Russians will ever be thankful for the awful weather late in 1941 which helped to stop the German army.

It is apparently possible to plot El Niños back for a hundred years or more, and some climatologists go even so far as to claim that two disasters in March 1912, in very different parts of the world, were due to this little boy. Icebergs were drifting much farther south in the Atlantic that spring, as the *Titanic* found out too late. And at the same time Robert Falcon Scott, far away on the Antarctic mainland, was struggling bravely with his team in what was only recently found to have been a very exceptional cold spell, even for that part of the world.

Cartloads of blame have been heaped on El Niño, some possibly earned but much open to doubt. Newspaper reports typically begin with their careful phrase 'according to many experts', before going on to bring in the Black Death, Napoleon's defeat in Russia, the Irish potato famine, and even the French Revolution.

But we have to be careful before we sneer. In the first half of the last century everyone laughed at the idea of whole continents drifting around.

Doubtless many of you will be sorry that the UK got pushed a thousand miles too far, away from that lovely Spanish sunshine.

Ivor Williams

Rocks n Ruins - A Visit to Exeter

The day dawned for another Rocks n Ruins adventure. The weather was kind if a little chilly but at least the trains were running. A lovely trip on the Dartmoor Line from Okehampton saw us deposited in the middle of Exeter at Exeter Central just along from our first stop, the Royal Albert Memorial Museum or RAMM for short. We were cordially welcomed by the staff and each of us set off to explore accompanied by a sometimes unruly set of children. You can imagine, I'm sure, what John made of that!

Whilst I am not the best at exploring museums (too much writing) two things did catch my eye. Firstly the lace on show particularly the beautiful flowers and plants.

This snowdrop is made in East Devon (Honiton) bobbin lace. These finely made pieces are naturalistic representations of wild and garden plants. They were made on a lace pillow using bobbins wound with fine cotton threads.



Secondly I was fascinated by the telling of the discovery of 68kg of Roman coins by a detectorist in Seaton near the site of a Roman Fort. In total, the archaeologists unearthed 22,888 coins in the Seaton Down Hoard and three ingots that weighed around 150 pounds. They were in good shape, the rulers and the members of the imperial family that they depict being clearly visible. The coins were issued between 260 and 348 CE by 17 separate mints situated right across across Europe.



This hoard was declared a trove due to its historical value. When the coins were actively in circulation, they weren't considered very precious, and the hoard itself was probably the savings of a Roman soldier or a merchant. The type of coins found at Seaton is called a *nummus*, which are coins used in everyday purchases.

I am sure if you visited RAMM you would find something to interest you.

Our day did not end here as we still had Exeter's underground tunnels to explore.

We were met by a medieval stone mason a clever talking figure with a moving screen for a face – it certainly made me jump.

The tunnels were designed to bring clean drinking water from natural springs outside the walled city. The water came through lead pipes into the heart of the city. The pipes sometimes leaked and repairs to buried pipes could only be carried out by digging them up as we do today. To avoid this disruption the passages were vaulted. It is down some of these vaulted passageways that we were guided.

A Visit to Exeter Continued



It was certainly a fascinating journey underground the main streets of Exeter, with the ceiling at times being so low that you had to bend over. I went through a very low part being about a metre in height and ended up on my knees. Definitely not for you if you are claustrophobic.

Thanks go to John Noblet for another fascinating day out.

Jan Draper

R n R Postscript

There is surely no doubt that more people have driven through Merrivale without knowing they have done so than those that did. Nobody could have travelled from Princetown to Tavistock without wincing at the huge 'bite' taken out of the hillside above Merrivale.



The whole area has been a hive of human activity which ranged from a Bronze Age ceremonial complex to medieval tinning and later rabbit warrening, quarrying and stone cutting.

So it was that the Rocks n Ruins group explored the area on their February outing in bright sunshine. After looking at what is usually referred to as the "Merrivale Antiquities", they went across the road to Over Tor and to one of the medieval blowing houses in the valley below.

John Noblet

Craft Group 1

Craft Group 1 started in 2004 when the original craft group could take no more people.

At first we tried all sorts of crafts including making cardboard gift boxes, greetings cards, felt Christmas decorations, salt dough modelling, teabag folding for cards, tissue and wire models, card nativity models, patchwork and quilting, cushion covers for charity fund raising, mosaic work, decoupage, bead necklaces, marbling paper, padded boxes plus anything else I may have forgotten.

This was interesting but proved to be quite expensive so we decided to concentrate on the crafts we really wanted to do. Nowadays it's mostly knitting, a bit of sewing, enjoying a cup of tea (and cake if it's someone's birthday) and a lot of chatting and laughter.

We really enjoy each other's company and look forward to our monthly meetings.

Mary Brock

Forthcoming Walks

Thursday 9th March

Meet at Pixon Lane, leaving at 9.40 to car share to the Tamar Trails.

This walk will be led by Val Blair who lives at Wheal Maria, read all about her family in the Newsletter.

This will be a leisurely walk on paths, about 5mls. Bring a snack and a packed lunch.

Thursday 23rd March

Meet at Pixon Lane, leaving at 9.40 to car share to Hexworthy, snowdrops at St Raphael's Church, Huccaby and then a circular walk in the Swincombe Valley. About 5 mls with a few ups and downs. Optional lunch at Hexworthy Forest Inn, bring a snack.

Thursday 13th April

Meet at Pixon Lane, leaving at 9.40 to car share to park for a circular walk to Morwellham, then to follow the River Tamar back to the cars. Downhill to start and uphill to finish, about 4 -5 mls. Bring a snack and a packed lunch. This walk will be led by Val Blair.

Thursday 27th April

Meet at Pixon Lane, leaving at 9.40 to car share to Calstock for a circular walk to Cotehele via the Danescombe Valley. Return along the river, bring National Trust card to enjoy the daffodils. Optional lunch at Cotehele or bring a packed lunch. About 5 mls, uneven paths at times and a steep downhill.

Contact details for all walks:

Chris Webb

Jennie Youngs

Theatre News - a quiet summer ahead!

Our first post-pandemic visit to the Theatre Royal in 2022 was a joyous production of **Fisherman's Friends** last September. This was followed before Christmas by two ballets, the classical **Coppelia** and Matthew Bourne's **Sleeping Beauty**.

We have had a busy start to 2023 having seen **The Commitments** and **Strictly Ballroom** to date. We have booked to see two well-known plays during March- **An Inspector Calls** and **The Mousetrap**, followed by the musical of **The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel** in April and **The Magic Flute** at the end of May. Some of these have proved more popular than others with u3a members and I hope I am getting more of a feel for what members may want to see, which is, apparently, not always what I would have thought!

Sadly though, I have made no bookings for the summer period because from June through to September. The Theatre Royal offers a programme consisting almost entirely of repeats, mainly musicals, and productions aimed at children.

I think this is, in part, a result of the theatre needing to catch up financially after Covid and relying on the tried and tested in an attempt to fill the theatre. This lack of innovation is not confined to our regional theatre, the big new theatrical event in the West End is, apparently, **'The Great British Bake Off Musical'** which is proving popular with theatregoers. What next I wonder, Happy Valley - the opera?

Another problem that 'live' theatre is facing is genuine competition from the Big Screen Events where popular plays, operas and ballets from the West End are beamed into our cinemas - for example at the Wharf or the Vue in Plymouth. This is a wonderful innovation which allows us to see many great productions locally, for a fraction of the price of a West End theatre ticket, and certainly at the Vue, in considerable comfort !

The universally-acclaimed theatrical event of last year, **Prima Facie** starring the astonishing Jodie Comer, was available to see in cinemas. Also shown was the hilarious **Jack Absolute Flies Again** - from the same team as One Man Two Governors. I felt enormously lucky to be able to see both of these fabulous productions. This March **The Life of Pi** is being shown, a film of the critically-praised London show, which has now closed.

Good as this is, I still believe no film can replicate the magic of live theatre. As the great Dame Maggie Smith explains, in theatre ***'There is a kind of invisible thread between the actor and audience and when it is there it is stunning and there is nothing to match that.'***

So I am waiting for Theatre Royal's autumn programme to be announced with great hope and everything crossed.

Carole Thompson

The deadline for the next Newsletter is 20th April 2023

Send contributions to johnnoble@tavydistrictu3a.org.uk

The Events Committee

Tuesday 18th April

The **coach trip to Bristol is now fully booked**. If you *haven't already paid (£26)*, will you please pay **Norma** at the *March meeting* at the Town Hall or contact her on
Norma

Just a reminder about the arrangements. The coach will leave from opposite the Bedford Hotel at 8.45. Most people have signed up for the 2-hour Blue Badge guided walking tour. We will leave Bristol at 4.15 and expect to be back in Tavistock around 6.45.

Thursday 11th May

A guided stroll from the Barbican around Sutton Harbour with Chris and Norma. Meet at the Mayflower Steps ready to leave at 11am. Contact
Norma
Chris

Tuesday 13th June

Join us on a coach trip to Falmouth, with a cruise up the picturesque river Fal and creeks, with time for shopping/sightseeing in Falmouth. The coach will leave Tavistock at approx. 9.00 and return at 6pm. Times and cost tbc. Further details later. Contact
Shirley

Monday 10th July

Join our Blue Badge guide Chrissie for a guided tour of the Royal William Yard. £5pp. There will be limited number for this visit. Full details tbc. Contact
Janet

And Finally.....

The Garden Visits Group went to see the snowdrops at The Garden House at the end of February.

The sun may not have shone but the snowdrops were wonderful.



u3a
Tavy District

Photo: John Noblet