

Tavy District u3a

THE NEWSLETTER



The Christmas Tree Festival in St Eustachius' church. See other photos of Tavy District u3a's tree in the centre pages

No 125

January 2024

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	Angela Pitt
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 February 2024

Send contributions to johnnoblet@tavydistrictu3a.org.uk

FROM THE CHAIR

By the time you read this, Christmas 2023 will be just a memory but now, as I write this message, it is a time of frenetic activity.

How will we get everything done in time for the “great day”? There are rooms to sort out for visitors, lights and decorations to put up, food to order and cook, cards to write and presents to wrap; and all this at the same time as doing the “day job”. Somehow everything gets done in time, although when our children were little, we were often still wrapping their presents at 2:00am on Christmas Eve, knowing that they would wake at 4

o'clock and climb into our bed with their stockings to open their presents from Santa while we expressed surprise and stifled a few yawns. Do we miss that time? Yes, of course we do, as, I suspect, do most parents with grown-up children. But it is easier now. Our children are adults and parents themselves. When they stay with us at Christmas our grandchildren wake them, not us, so our day begins in a more leisurely fashion with a cup of tea or coffee in bed.



Once Christmas is over and we are on our own again, it is time to take stock, to reflect on the year gone by and think about the year ahead. It has been a busy year, as usual, with lots of commitments, predominantly enjoyable ones, and we have achieved a great deal even though human nature causes us to think more about the things we haven't managed to do or get done. Our thoughts then extend to the inevitable New Year resolutions, usually along the lines of eating less, taking more exercise, finally sorting out the garden and so on. We even keep some of them, at least for a while.

Which brings me to our u3a. It has been a very good year with some excellent speakers and events, thriving groups, and increasing membership, but we cannot rest on our laurels. We need to think ahead. I am ever grateful to our excellent committee members and Trustees who work so well together to make Tavy District u3a the success it is, providing leadership, supporting groups and group leaders, organising the Picnic in the Park and the December Christmas meeting, and delivering all the “back office” functions needed to satisfy, amongst others, the Charity Commission. Our constitution determines how long committee members remain in office. Without going into detail here, suffice it to say that the duration of committee membership is finite and there is necessarily turnover as new members step into the shoes of those coming to the end of their term. Whilst there is no immediate urgency, we do need to start thinking about succession. We are keen to encourage u3a members, especially the newer ones, to consider putting themselves forward for the committee. If we can identify future committee members in the run up to the AGM in March it would offer the opportunity for new committee members to shadow existing members and learn the ropes before taking on the role in 2025. Please speak to me or one of the other committee members at one of our monthly meetings if you may be interested. You can recognise us by the u3a lanyards we wear around our necks. And if you feel a tap on your shoulder, do react positively if it is suggested that you would make an excellent committee member.

I wish you a very happy, healthy, and fulfilling New Year.

Paul

Membership Renewal

Yes, it's that time of year again and here come the details about renewing your membership. Please read on.....

All memberships are due for renewal on January 1st and we are asking members **not** to renew before the turn of the year, i.e. not before January 1st 2024. This will make our admin much easier!

Annual membership renewals:

Individuals: 15.00

Joint (for two people living at the same address): 14.00 each

Associate (for someone who pays their main membership to another u3a): 11.00

Associate joint: 10 each

Payment:

You are welcome to pay via BACS or via our webpage

This will take you to payment via PayPal and you don't need a PayPal account to use this.

BACS: Please make this payable to Tavy District u3a

Sort code: Account no:

We ask you not to pay with cash. If you need to pay by cheque, please see the Members area of our webpage for details of the Treasurer's address where you can send your cheque, postdated to 01.01.2024.

(For security reasons, we are not supplying contact details here in our newsletter, but will be contacting those without internet access by post.)

A Disappointing Ghost Story

Sadly, our last theatre visit of 2023 turned out to be rather disappointing. I was excited to see a play at last rather than a ballet or musical and encouraged by excellent reviews, but this drama didn't deliver as hoped.

There were loud noises, screams and flashing lights but in the end the most shocking thing about it was the bad language. Four characters getting steadily drunker and nastier at a suburban dinner party failed to engage me with their story or elicit any sympathy, so that the twist at the end was a surprise but not a shock.

Not in the same league as **The Woman in Black**, it was not scary or particularly entertaining.

Carole Thompson

Notice of AGM

The twenty-first Annual General Meeting will be held in Tavistock Town Hall on Wednesday 6th March 2024 at 2.00 pm.

The last two AGMs have been held partly online but this year's will require participating members to be personally present or to vote by proxy. The following business will be considered.

1. Confirm whether a quorum is present and apologies for absence
2. Approval of the minutes of the 2023 AGM
3. Chair's report
4. Treasurer's report and adoption of the accounts for the year ended 31st December 2023
5. Appointment of an External Examiner for the 2024 accounts
6. To approve the level of subscriptions for 2025. The committee's recommendation will be published in the final agenda.
7. Election of executive committee members. A list of those nominated will be included in the final agenda. Further nominations may be made up until 7th February. If you would like to make a nomination, please ask the secretary for a nomination form.
8. Other business – please notify the secretary of any business that you might wish to propose by 7th February so that it can be included on the agenda. Business must be notified in advance.
9. Date of Next AGM

A final agenda will be circulated in the March newsletter along with details of how to arrange for a proxy vote.

Randall Williams, Secretary

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Send contributions to johnnoble@tavydistrictu3a.org.uk

Speaker Programme

Traditionally, the January newsletter contains details of the speaker programme for the entire year and, whilst I have some reservations in repeating this, following a year of multiple changes to the originally advertised programme, I have decided to take a chance and continue the practice.

With the exception of the August meeting, all meetings are held on the first Wednesday of the month in Tavistock Town Hall, with the formal meeting starting at 2pm. In August, we have for the past few years held an outside event and plan to do so again in 2024.

The date for this is yet to be determined.

I am delighted that so many members continue either to come up to me at the monthly meeting or to e-mail me with suggestions for speakers or offers to speak themselves. This year we have no fewer than 3 members speaking on a very wide variety of subjects. Please do get in touch if you have either a speaker suggestion or would like to speak yourself. I have already started to put together the programme for 2025!

Jane Ward

2024 PROGRAMME

Wednesday 3rd January

“Secret World of the Undergrowth”

John Walters, “Artist, Ecologist, Speaker”

Wednesday 7th February

“Daffodils of the Tamar Valley and a Mention of Snowdrops”

Dr Frances Howard

Dr Frances Howard, Tavy District u3a member and Fellow of the Linnean Society will be well known to many of you from previous plant related presentations.

Wednesday 6th March (AGM)

'Vaccination & Immunisation: smallpox to shingles'

Linda Diggle – Tavy District u3a member and former Head of Preventive Programmes, Government of Jersey

Wednesday 3rd April

“Gardening The World”

Rebecca Smith, South West Public Engagement Coordinator, Commonwealth War Graves Commission

Speaker Programme Continued

Wednesday 1st May

“A London to Sydney Car Marathon and Ukrainian Action.”

Anthony Showell, former competitive driver and now charity driver

Wednesday 5th June

“St Luke’s Open Gardens – Behind The Scenes”

Wayne Marshall, New Partnerships Lead, St Luke’s Hospice

Wednesday 3rd July

“A Schoolgirl’s War”

Mary Smith, English teacher and education consultant

A Wednesday afternoon in August

Outdoor event – the date and further details will be circulated in due course

Wednesday 4th September

“La Belle Epoque – The Golden Age of Portrait Painting”

Colin Pethick – Fine Art tutor and portrait painter

Wednesday 2nd October

“Artificial Intelligence – how does it work and why does that matter?”

David Benzie – Tavy District u3a member and former Head of E-Learning at Plymouth Marjon University.

Wednesday 6th November

“War in Ukraine and The Future of Russia”

John Dobson, former diplomat and currently visiting fellow at Plymouth University

Wednesday 4th December – Christmas Meeting - Talk and More

“George Bernard Shaw – Playing the Clown” – a semi-staged one-man show

Brian Freeland, speaker, playwright and author

Andrea Chenier

Watching an up to date recording via DVD is the norm for the Opera Group. But it was given two choices regarding this particular opera. Firstly, we could go next summer to London by train (that might turn up...?) book a £150 + ticket at Covent Garden, and stay overnight in a hotel. Or, we could watch the HD live screened 2012 production via DVD on a large screen telly in our usual fashion en maison, with a cup of tea and cake at the usual u3a sub.

So in time honoured fashion, we plumped up the cushions, kicked off our shoes, put the kettle on and settled down to watch and listen to a glorious but not often performed production of this interesting opera. Like most 19th century composers Giordani was beaten in the popularity stakes by Verdi...

It is the true-ish story of an Italian poet caught up in the vicissitudes of the French Revolution. Written by Giordani for the tenor voice, eye candy Jonas Kauffman doesn't disappoint in any respect. The ROH excels in the no expense spared staging and a tear has to be finally shed at the 'tis a far far better thing'... style ending.



Anthony Pappano, the retiring conductor of the Royal Opera House, has chosen to recreate this production, complete with Jonas Kauffman in the lead role, as his swan song. And when you think of other operas he could have chosen....? See it at the Wharf in July 2024...you won't be disappointed...

Margaret Garton

How Did You Spend Christmas?

I find Christmas a very difficult time. There are magical Christmases and ones I would rather forget. I am sure others will feel the same. My childhood Christmases were always the same. Midnight service - opening stockings - lunch with great aunts ,grandmother - listening to the king or queen's speech. Later when I was working in the theatre I think we slept most of the time having performed two shows on Christmas Eve and due to give two shows on Boxing Day.

I have spent Christmas Day in 40 degrees of heat in Australia and in contrast Weihnachten in Austria with my husband and family. Then the joy of celebrating with my children. Sharing their excitement and now with my grandchildren. One Christmas these days in USA and one in Northumbria. There was the Christmas during the pandemic when I was alone except for zoom calls and a walk to the Pimple with a u3a friend. The sad but treasured Christmas I spent with my husband and children, the last when he was very ill. He made it to the Millennium but died soon after.

Christmas goes on far too long and before we can clear the tinsel the Easter eggs are in the shops.

I hope I will be on my way back from Pennsylvania when you read this, but with the unpredictable weather and the rail strikes who knows!

Caroline Lorenzi

Diner's Delight visit St Elizabeth's House

In November a few of us from Diner's Delight enjoyed an interesting dinner at St Elizabeth's House. A very popular place to eat, in the beautiful surroundings of an historic house in the lovely village of Plympton St Maurice.

The atmosphere inside the house is then complemented by the service. Whilst I've been there a few times before, I have a good friend who lives locally in Plympton who is making it her goal to try each item on the menu! We'd had to pre-order from the interesting menu so were enjoying courses from pan fried scallops to ballotine of chicken with tarragon and truffles. A real treat in good company.

Diner's Delight success is through members volunteering to organise a lunch or dinner at a local restaurant. Although St Elizabeth's was a bit further than most, we're always on the look out for new places to experience and also generally supporting our local hospitality venues. Give us a try! !

Shirley Smith

New Year - New Folk Session

Expressions of interest are invited to investigate the feasibility of a general folk session held on a monthly basis. Informal playing together in supportive environment, acoustic folk instruments, traditional songs and tunes from a variety of genres. Not a 'taught' session although learning will undoubtedly take place! Repertoire provided by participants.

If you think this could be for you please contact me on email [and](#) I hope to arrange a preliminary meeting. Happy New Year!

Arnie Blake



The Recorder Group playing in St Eustachius during the Christmas Tree Festival.
Photo: Julie Brownlie

Recorder Group - A Joy to be Part of it!

When I moved from semi- to full retirement in the summer of 2021, I decided that I would like to take up one further activity within u3a. By chance, this coincided with a circular e-mail from Randall saying that there were spaces in the Recorder group. His e-mail was very reassuring:

"Many of us had not played since primary school when we joined the u3a group. If you can read music, even if you have not played the recorder before, it should not take too long before you are able to play along with the group..."

As I had indeed played the recorder at junior school, I thought I would give it a go although I did wonder whether returning to recorder playing after playing the clarinet in my teens and twenties might be a bit of an anti-climax. How wrong I was.

We play a wide range of music - from late 16th century (or sometimes earlier) to the present day - arranged for descant, treble, tenor and bass recorders - for an hour and a half twice a month on a Wednesday morning and the balance between taking it seriously and trying to do the best we can and having fun at the same time is just right.

We take it in turns to choose which pieces we play for the first half of each session - we are about to expand from two to three folders worth to choose from! - and then move on to pieces which require rather more work, either because they are more challenging for some - in my case, this includes most of the jazz! - or because we intend to perform them in public.

Our first public performance since I joined was at the Christmas Tree Festival in St

Eustachius Church in December 2022 and this was followed by a slot at the Tavi Fringe Festival in July 2023 when we played in Butchers Hall. I was really sorry not to be able to play at this December's Christmas Tree Festival but others did and the programme was well received. Apparently, the most popular item with the audience was Joseph Hartmann's March of the Little Plastic Soldiers composed in 2010. Who would have thought that a group of recorders could produce music which sounded just like a fairground organ?

When Randall circulated his recruitment e-mail in July 2021, there were 11 group members. Since then, some have moved on to other things but more have joined and there are currently 18 members with 14-16 on average attending each session.

We meet in Tavistock Library which is both comfortable and convenient and also ideally situated for a post-rehearsal coffee at the Wharf Café. At our recent "AGM" we agreed to continue rehearsing there and acknowledged that we could fit in a few more players.

Looking ahead to 2024, we hope to play again at the Tavi Fringe festival on 13th July and the Christmas Tree Festival in December.

Randall has suggested that we might like to try out playing a different recorder to our usual one for part of our next rehearsal. I'm currently weighing up whether to have a go on my treble recorder instead of my usual descant or whether that might be a step too far. I think I'll decide on the day!

Jane Ward

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Reverend Richard Coles - Borderline National Trinket

The Weekenders set out for a fascinating evening, meeting Richard Coles in the Quad Theatre at Marjons on his first national tour in November.

He spoke about his life in a softly spoken and modest way, with wit and joy. Nothing was off the table (as it has been in some of the gigs I have been to). So, we heard about his life at school, as a choirboy, and the gradual but strong calling to be part of the Church, and his ministry in a parish where he felt he was really able to support and help his parishioners. Indeed, although he is a retired Rev he still keeps in touch with his last parish.

The fascinating things are what he did before and in-between. As a multi-instrumentalist his pop stardom started when he met Jimmy Somerville, and formed the Communards and enjoyed three top ten hits.

The Rev has a strong belief that everyone has a voice, whatever their sexuality, beliefs, and who they were in their lives, developing safe havens in the 70s and 80s for the gay communities in London. He spoke movingly about the illness and death of his husband. Strictly gave him some 'interesting' moments – never to be repeated!

He has been frequently seen on programmes such as 'Would I lie to You?' and QI, and hosted BBC Radio 4's Saturday Morning Live until he moved house and couldn't manage the journeys.



In-between, he is a best-selling author, so it was obvious the next thing he should do was a national tour! Oh yes, and he is the Chancellor of the University of Northampton, and....

A couple of reviews from important titles that I think sum up the Rev Richard Coles; "Coles is a witty, intelligent and sage raconteur with a fascinating story" "The comedy equivalent of Afternoon Tea that will leave you pleasantly entertained" Here, here, said all of the group, having had a wonderful evening!

Janet Hunt

The Weekenders went to the Rev's evening, found on the website of Comical Entertainment, and you can find out what else is being offered in The Quad Theatre by going onto their website.

Rocks N Ruins Group

The Rocks N Ruins Group have had an eventful and varied year. 2023 saw visits close to home at Merrivale, Mary Tavy and Weir Quay and further afield to Exeter underground passages and Pengelly Caves at Buckfastleigh. The year was rounded off by and excellent lunch at the Peter Tavy Inn after John Sparks took us around the remains of Devon Friendship mine.

Plans for 2024 are well advanced with several on Dartmoor including Ditsworthy Warren, Eylesbarrow mine and the military railways near Okehampton. Further afield will be Kelly Mine at Lustleigh and the Naval Heritage museum in Devonport.

John Noblet

2023 Christmas Tree Festival



We hope that you enjoyed the combined efforts of Tavy District u3a Craft Groups 1 and 2 at the Christmas tree Festival this year.

Our tree was in a very convenient position this year, unlike the year before last when none of us could reach the top, even with a step ladder so Santa Claus had to be content with sitting part way up the tree.

This year we completed the task very quickly and had time to enjoy a cup of tea at the Bedford afterwards. Most of us enjoyed making the bells, and in the end made more than enough. We gave the bells to charity shops after the Festival in the hope that they can make some money for good causes.

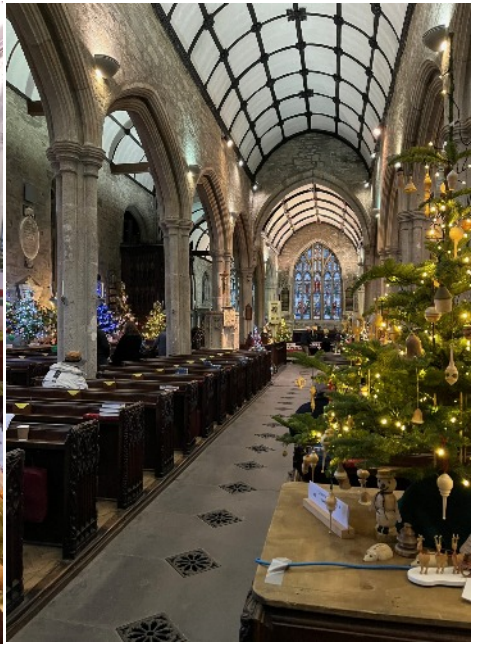
Both groups meet once a month in our homes and as we are all of mature years, we like to do our own thing and prefer to make things that we want. Several members are knitting very complicated jumpers. How they can concentrate when there is always some chatter, I don't know. When I tried I spent most of the next day, pulling it all out! We have done some felting, paper flower making as well as cross stitching and card making this year.

Both groups have comfortable numbers of members but we are happy to have a few more people.

Barbara Chalk

Photos by Pam Morris and John Noblet

2023 Christmas Tree Festival



Weekenders



Margaret, Teresa and Janet went to Longleat

French Novel Group

Yet again our summer news featured another major maritime tragedy with the sinking of an unseaworthy boat full of immigrants in Aegean waters. Unrest about the numbers of Sub-Saharan refugees in Tunisia also attracted headline attention.

French novelists of the 2020's often choose current social dilemmas as a basis for a novel, creating fictional characters to live out the experiences of real people.

"Eldorado", a land of milk and honey, is the concept of European society for many of the African population living in war-torn or semi-desert regions. Laurent Gaude's novel links two plots in the final chapters. The author relates the life of Salvatore, an Italian coastal patrol office employed for twenty years in rescuing desperate refugees crossing in unsuitable small boats. These people are then conveyed to detention centres on Lampedusa, an island off the Sicilian coast. Having escaped the perilous waters of the Mediterranean, few reach mainland Europe but are returned to their country of origin.

At that point they are broken and penniless having paid extortionate amounts to cross from Libya. Salvatore has only saved their lives at sea to send them back to a worse fate.

After a dramatic encounter, he decides to abandon this career, buys a small boat and crosses to Libya himself. Wherever he travels he tries to convince would-be migrants to remain where they live. Europe is not the paradise for which they yearn. However, Salvatore also finds himself destitute and unknown in a foreign land and becomes a kind of wandering spirit. He realises finally that the dream of Eldorado is fixed in the minds of so many that it can no longer be erased and can lead to incredible feats of endurance.

Suleiman is a young Sudanese who is the narrator of his experiences. He seeks a new life away from conflict and determines to cross the Mediterranean. Reaching the border with his beloved elder brother, he suddenly finds that he must continue alone to Europe.

Traffickers taking a group to the coast rob their passengers and leave him for dead. Having now lost all his money as well as his brother he is befriended by another disabled traveller called Boubakar. Their fellowship and mutual support is invaluable in their goal of reaching a Tunisian port. The incidents on their dangerous journey may be fictional but they illustrate what is happening currently in North Africa.

The two plots converge with a chance meeting between Salvatore (note the name of a 'rescuer') and young Suleiman who is encouraged to continue in his quest. During the harrowing scenes of the refugees' attempt to pass over the barbed wire fences, we see the strength of the bond between Suleiman and his new "brother" Boubakar. Together with his renewed courage given him by Salvatore, they will reach their Eldorado at last.

This novel, with its lyrical and poetic descriptions, is outstanding.

We see dramatic rescues from stormy waters, the fish market of Catania; we feel the atmosphere of sleepy, dusty and dangerous North African market towns. A story teller entrances the nomadic travellers with tales around an evening campfire.

Other novels have been set in a variety of interesting places: Toulouse at the time of Resistance activities of young people in World War 2; Algiers with the story of a bookshop owner who encouraged young writers such as Albert Camus in the 1930's; the Saint-Lawrence seaway in Canada with shipwrecks affecting the lives of an immigrant family; Beirut and Tel Aviv for family life after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire; Paris for a mystery thriller based on stolen identity and undercover secret agents.

My thanks to our group for their continued support and our lively discussions.

Frances Stephens

Wine Appreciation Group

Our November get together was another enjoyable afternoon ...good company ...tasting a selection of Pinot Noir wines. With busy lives we weren't a full complement. However, our tastings were interesting, and more so with the research we shared on information about the grapes used, and about the countries of origin. The grape is very difficult to grow. The grapes are tightly bunched with thick skins and better in cooler climates so if it's Chilean, the higher the better.



Pinot Noir is meant to be the healthiest red because of high resveratrol which improves heart and brain health. It's also low in sugar and calories so that 125 mls is only 89 cal. Therefore, we were very keen to try them! It suggests that it's opened 30 minutes before drinking, but not decanted.

Descriptions versus comments on the aromas and flavours often differed.

Confirming previous tastings some 10 years ago, the higher priced Chilean wine of the Region de Aconcagua at £9.50 from Morrisons, and the Californian Purple Owl at £12.99 from Laithwaites, proved to be the favourites, with more body and flavour.

The lower end of the price scale, like the £6.99 from Aldi, specially selected Burgoyne 2021 was described as subtly earthythe less said, the better.

We felt the lower priced Pinot Noir wines were not so good, but still quite drinkable. We agreed that you 'get what you pay for'.

By the time you read this, we will have met for our Festive Feast. Watch this space!

Hilary Dawe

Environmental Enthusiasts Group

Three of us had a cosy and fascinating meeting talking about environmentally inspirational writing. We had selected very different writers and needless to say our discussion roamed far and wide! Here are three of the sources we chose.

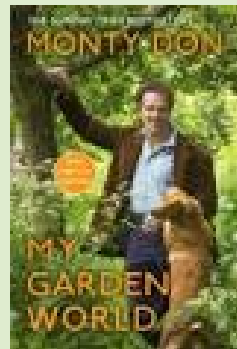
'Rebirthing' by Benedict Macdonald, with a vision of a British landscape with wildlife, including pelicans, restored (Transition Tavistock Sustainable Book Group)

'My Garden World' by Monty Don.

'Matrix of Man' by Sibyl Moholy Nagy

Our next meeting will be on Wednesday 17th January
2.30 at 1 Church Lane

Ginnie Parker



I'm Fine

There is nothing the matter with me.
I'm as healthy as I can be.
I have arthritis in both my knees
And when I talk, I talk with a wheeze.

My pulse is weak, and my blood is thin
But I'm awfully well for the shape I'm in.
Arch supports I have for my feet
Or I wouldn't be able to be on the street.

Sleep is denied me night after night,
But every morning I find I'm all right.
My memory is failing, my head's in a spin
But I'm awfully well for the shape I'm in.

The moral is this, as my tale I unfold,
That for you and me who are growing old,
It's better to say "I'm fine" with a grin
Than to let folks know the shape we are in.

How do I know that my youth is all spent?
Well, my "get up and go" just got up and went.
But I really don't mind when I think with a grin
Of all the grand places my "get up" has been.

Old age is golden, I've heard it said;
But sometimes I wonder as I get into bed
With my ears in the drawer my teeth in a cup,
My eyes on the table until I wake up.

Ere sleep overtakes me, I say to myself,
"Is there anything else I could lay on the shelf?"
When I was young my slippers were red,
I could kick my heels over my head

When I was older my slippers were blue,
But I still could dance the whole night through.
Now I am old, my slippers are black,
I walk to the store and puff my way back.

I get up each morning and dust off my wits
And pick up the paper and read the obits.
If my name is still missing, I know I'm not dead
So I fix me some breakfast and go back to bed.

I was recently sorting through some family documents and came across this poem. It will have amused my Uncle Ern and was among his things.

Valerie Blair

Garden Visits 2024

After our end of season fantastic meal together at Riverford Field Kitchen in Dartington, we look forward to an exciting programme of 2024 garden visits commencing in January. Watch this space and further Newsletters for springtime visits.

We welcome details of any garden you have been to or have read about that you would like us to visit!



New Year Get Together Friday 26th January at The Garden House Buckland Monochorum. in the café at 11am.

A Visit to St Raphael's Church, Huccaby near Hexworthy, on Saturday 24th February to see the snowdrops and then an optional visit to Fox Tor Café for lunch. Meet at Pixon Lane free carpark at 10.20, ready to leave at 10.30.

Cotehele Daffodil Festival on Saturday 16th March. See the daffodils and enjoy a coffee and maybe a light lunch. Bring your NT card, if you have one. Meet at Pixon Lane car park at 9.50, ready to leave at 10.00.

Cornwall Flower Show, Wadebridge on Saturday 6th April for a day visit. Entry fee £12. Meet at Pixon Lane carpark at 9.20, ready to leave at 9.30.

Caerhays Castle Gardens on Friday 3rd May, hopefully to see the magnificent Magnolias, Camellias and Rhododendrons. Meet at Pixon Lane car park at 9.20, ready to leave at 9.30, arriving in time to have a late coffee followed by a walk around the gardens then a snack-type lunch.

Delamore Sculpture and Art Exhibition, Ivybridge on Tuesday 14th May £12. Meet at Pixon Lane free car park at 10.20, ready to leave at 10.30.

Visits later in the year are possibly likely to include;

Pentillie, Wildside, Stone Lane, Thorn House, The Italian Garden at Ipplepen Chilli Farm in South Devon. An end of season meal for us all in a beautiful location. More details in the newsletters.

There will be signing up sheets for each garden at the Wednesday meetings. Please do sign up so we can plan car lifts if we are leaving from Pixon Lane, to make parking at the venues easier. If you need a lift, please indicate on the signing up sheet.

If, by any chance Pixon Lane car park is ever closed meet just inside the entrance of Bishopsmead.

Contact details Jennie or Janet

And now for something completely different!

Birmingham Royal Ballet dance to the music of Black Sabbath

Astonishing, superb, mesmerising, fabulous were some of the superlatives that u3a members used to describe this

With a ballet company best known for performing classical ballets and Black Sabbath famous for their sometimes outrageous performances of Hard Rock/Heavy Metal, it seemed likely that the only thing that these two diverse groups would have in common was their Birmingham origins. It was a surprise to discover that the unusual combination produced something rather wonderful.

Divided into three thirty minute acts, the choreography gave a thrilling interpretation of the music which was enjoyable even for those of us who recognised few Sabbath numbers. The dancing was modern rather than classical, and as well as a rock guitarist on stage for a large part of the show, the company even did some singing. The performers seemed to be really enjoying themselves and thankfully, no heads were bitten off any winged creatures during the performance!

Carole Thompson

Jesus Christ Superstar

On the 9th November a number of the Theatre Group had the opportunity to enjoy this electrifying re-enactment of the last week in Jesus Christ's life and crucifixion - a new production reimaged by the Regents Park Open Air Theatre.

I make no apology, in writing this review, as I cannot give a balanced opinion. I adored the whole powerful performance from beginning to end.

Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber in an early collaboration, what could go wrong? So many very well-known emotional songs.

The Biblical story was brought into the modern age, hopefully engaging a new generation of theatregoers. The costumes in the main were plain, drab, colourless with baggy trousers and hoodies, which worked very well.

The choreography was dynamic, fast, athletic and energetic, yet solid and perfectly synchronised.

Three aspects really stood out to me: The innovative use of microphones including the handovers, the simple portrayal of the last supper and the exceptionally moving

representation of the 39 lashes of Jesus Christ. Whilst being counted out loud, handfuls of glitter were aggressively thrown at Jesus's back whilst he was on the ground.

All the main characters had very strong singing voices, especially Mary, played by Hannah Richardson, whose delightful rendition of "Everything's Alright" was crystal clear.

There was, in contrast, a very amusing scene of cross dressing which came as a nice surprise.

The final scene of the crucifixion, whilst moving and sensitive was not overdone. It was peaceful and tender. I was not the only one discretely drying my eyes, the audience was completely still and silent, as if spellbound.

The impact of the show was even greater on me, as, at this time last year, I was actually in

Jerusalem, including the Garden of Gethsemane, and of course is amplified by the horrific events at the present time.

Caroline Paskins

Matthew Bourne's Edward Scissorhands

I hadn't seen the film before going to the Theatre Royal to see Matthew Bourne's Edward Scissorhands, and wasn't sure what to expect as my husband said it was a horror film. I should have trusted my previous experience of the magic of Matthew Bourne.

A brief explanation of Edward's Scissorhands curse proved the opening of a spectacular delight, as Edward is accepted by a small town community of six families, all varied in character from friendly cheerleader to mayoral candidate to sexy neighbour with a bumbling husband. Edward has contacts with them all through a succession of scenes, some with comedy, some with friction.

His scissoring skills lead him to amusing haircutting, topiary, beautiful sculpture settings, and pas de deux with the lovely

young cheerleader. The scene changes are swiftly executed with lighting, props and scenery making full use of the Theatre Royal's staging facilities.

The charming costumes change constantly and appropriately with colourful variations from frothy skirts, slinky tights, jeans and tartan shirts, topiary characters and threatening gangsters. The settings, lighting and music speed breathtakingly through different moods until the final moving ending.

A standing ovation was richly deserved after a thoroughly enjoyable afternoon. Many thanks to Carole and her theatre table team for enabling us to share it together.

Rosy Griffith

Gardeners Group

We have had a busy year visiting some very interesting member's gardens throughout spring and summer.

We started in February going to The Mount at Delamore to see the snowdrops in the woodland. The group spent a sociable lunch in the pub in Cornwood after the walk. We had a lovely tour of Anne's spring garden in Yelverton in April with many Camelias and bulbs. In June we visited Nikki's garden which had some fascinating reclaimed containers for growing veg and fruit. We explored the charming garden of Glynne's who lives in Clearbrook in July, which is cleverly landscaped into various levels on the side of the valley. In August we visited Janet's mature wrap around garden.

September was spectacularly hot which is when we explored Reiko and Stephen's garden on the hillside in Whitchurch

with great views across the valley. In October we had a tour of the Sensory Garden by the head gardener giving the history of its inception and also all the names of the trees and shrubs within. We then visited Wildside garden in Buckland Monachorum and explored the completed memorial garden which contained many varied plants still flowering.

We have just been to see the Garland at Cotehele with a sociable lunch afterwards. Some of us visited the Peter Tavy open gardens in July which were spectacular. Definitely a must for next year. We are having a break for January and will be planning more for 2024 very soon.

Jill Turner



Royal Citadel Guided Tour

On a gloomy but dry afternoon on Thursday 12th October, a u3a group of around 14 gathered outside the entrance to the Royal Citadel, which stands at the eastern end of Plymouth Hoe overlooking Plymouth Sound. Here we were met by our English Heritage guide, Chrissie, who proved to be both interesting and informative.

The Royal Citadel is still occupied by the military. Since the 1960s it has been the base of 29 Commando Regiment of the Royal Artillery. We therefore had to provide proof of ID before entry. We also could not take any mobile phones or cameras inside and had to don high visibility jackets.



Photo: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=3166995>

The entrance itself, guarded by an armed guard with a sentry box, was originally approached by a drawbridge over a dry ditch. It is built in Portland stone and was designed in baroque style by Sir Thomas Fitz.

It features the Royal Coat of Arms supported by a lion and a unicorn. Below that is the date 1670 with a flanking tablet bearing a Latin inscription, translated as: 'Charles the second by the grace of God, King of Great Britain, France and Scotland'. The niche below the tablet was intended to hold a life-size statue of King Charles II but now holds three cannon balls instead. Over the top of the archway itself is the coat of arms of the Earl of Bath together with the Grenville motto of "Futurum invisibile"

Before starting our two-hour tour, Chrissie gave us a brief history of the fortress, which is a Scheduled Monument with many of the buildings inside being Grade II Listed. The Citadel was built in the late 1660s to the design of Sir Bernard de Gomme (1620 – 1685), a Dutch military engineer. Somewhat surprisingly, considering that England was at war with the Dutch Republic three times between 1652 and 1674, de Gomme was engineer-in-chief of all the King's castles and fortifications in England and Wales. As well as designing the Royal Citadel, he was involved with surveying many fortifications including those at Dover, Harwich and Portsmouth. He enlarged Tilbury Fort from 1670 onwards to form a star-shaped defensive work, considered by the historian Paul Pattison to be the "best surviving example of their kind in Britain" although Plymouth's Royal Citadel must be at least a close second. Although completed a few years earlier by another engineer, the bastioned defences of Berwick-Upon-Tweed are also most impressive.

De Gomme was a contemporary of the French military engineer Vauban (1633 – 1707), generally considered to be the greatest engineer of his time, and one of the most important in European military history. In the course of his career working under Louis XIV, Vauban supervised or designed the building of more than 300 separate fortifications, including 30 major forts in two lines on France's northern borders. He is perhaps best known for his designs of forts in the shape of a five or six-pointed star with massive bastions forming the points and protecting the vulnerable walls together with strategically placed outer works. The fort of Rocroi (or Rocroy) is a good example of his work.

Vauban was also an expert in siege-craft, supervising more than 40 sieges. No fort is impregnable, but the fortifications were designed to hold up an enemy for long enough to allow a relieving army to arrive.

Royal Citadel Guided Tour *continued*

It was possible, using his methodology, to estimate the strength of a fortress and the forces and time needed for a successful siege. As a result, it became popular to place bets on the length of a siege. Fortresses designed according to Vauban's principles continued to be a major obstacle to hostile forces for many years. For example, in 1812, it cost the Duke of Wellington three sieges and some 5,000 casualties to capture the French-held Spanish fortress of Badajoz, which had been strengthened according to Vauban principles in 1690-1700, despite considerable advances in artillery in the intervening years. There is no doubt that de Gomme, a contemporary of Vauban, was heavily influenced by him.

Chrissie also drew our attention to the Musée des Plans-Reliefs in Paris which houses around 100 replicas (mostly in 1:600 scale) of fortifications - see the picture below featuring the citadel at Calvi, Corsica. The models were built from 1668 onwards to help plan the defence of France's new borders under Louis XIV. The king's engineers built relief-maps of all the fortresses the military was, or might be, concerned with both inside and outside France. The purpose of this was not only strategic but as proof of the power of the monarchy and as commemorative works of great battles and sieges. The models were an excellent tool for developing the fortifications, teaching the theory of siege craft and training soldiers who were to be stationed there. Production of these relief-maps only ceased in 1870 as fortifications with bastions began to disappear and it became less militarily important to know their precise dimensions.

De Gomme's original designs for the Royal Citadel clearly show the intention to follow the five-pointed star pattern with three complete bastions forming the western side of the fortress and the partial outline of two further bastions at the north and east.

The reason for the irregular shape of the north-eastern section was the decision to incorporate elements of an earlier fort, which had been built under the direction of Sir Francis Drake in the 1590s.

Much of the above information was imparted as we walked anti-clockwise along the ramparts, intermittently examining various cannon that pointed out of the many embrasures as well as admiring the wide-ranging views. The guns would have covered not only the seaward approaches but also the landward, including Plymouth itself; Plymouth's support for the Parliamentary side in the recent Civil War had not been forgotten. Only a few cannon still remain but, in the 1750s, the fort was equipped with 113 guns.

At intervals we were able to get a glimpse of the walls. These are built of local limestone with granite dressings and are some eight metres high and 14 metres thick with an embrasured parapet. On one of the bastions, there is a base projecting from the parapet, evidence that there were originally projecting sentry boxes (or échaugettes).

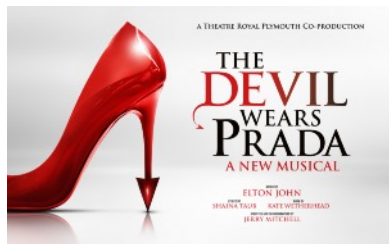
We walked around about three quarters of the circumference of the fortress before descending a ramp beside a barrack block the into the fortress itself. We were not able to visit any of the casements inside the walls but were able to visit the garrison chapel of St Katherine-upon-the-Hoe. The original church on this site was licensed for services in 1371 but was demolished in 1666-1671, with the present nave, chancel and sanctuary being rebuilt on the same site. Galleries and transepts were added in 1845, giving a symmetrical cross-like structure to the building.

We spent a few minutes reading some of the many memorials to soldiers of the fort who had died as well as admiring the stained glass windows, featuring both St Catherine, with wheel motif, and St Barbara (the patron saint of artillerymen), with tower motif. Some of the stained glass had come from the Devonport Church of Saint Michael and Saint George after that church was destroyed in the Second World War. Then it was time to return to the entrance to end a most interesting tour.

Chris Bellers

Theatre Update

The **Devil Wears Prada** is a new musical with music written by Elton John, co-produced by the Theatre Royal on Plymouth which will be previewing in Plymouth next summer before moving to the West End. We have booked for the matinee on **Thursday August 8th 2024**. Tickets are £35 for the Circle and we have to confirm numbers by the end of January and receive payment for tickets by the February meeting. As this is likely to be a popular show we have to commit far in advance. Talking about advance booking



Hamilton is coming to the Theatre Royal in the summer of 2025. What we know so far that it will be on from 30th July to 6th September and booking will open in Spring 2024, no earlier than April. We can be certain that it will be enormously popular and that tickets will sell very quickly once they go on sale. We will have to pay for tickets very soon after booking because the theatre won't want to hold any seats back.

With this in mind we will start a list in January for u3a members who would be *'interested'* in going, to give us a clear idea of the number who might want to go as part of our group and therefore how many seats to book once they are on sale. As we will not have dates or prices at this stage there will be no obligation to purchase tickets when we make the booking. Once we have a firm date and prices then we will ask you to confirm and pay for the tickets.

Please don't be put off seeing **Hamilton** because you don't like rap music, I am not a fan of rap but, having seen the original Broadway production on Disney Plus, I can assure you that it works and that this musical absolutely lives up to the hype. It is, as someone suggested to me, a little like saying you wouldn't like Shakespeare, because it is written in iambic pentameter! Well, perhaps not quite, but I took the point.

Sound in the Theatre Royal

I have been making enquiries recently about sound in the theatre for those of us who, like me, are a little deaf. I learnt that the theatre has a built in amplification system that will link to hearing aids with a T loop if the user wears a hearing enhancer, which can be provided free on request by the theatre.

Where you sit in the theatre can be important, while seats in the circle provide the best view and are fine for sound for musicals and ballets, seats in the stalls can be better for plays where it is necessary, but not always easy, to hear the dialogue. Many actors who tour in plays have a television background and have not necessarily learnt to project their voice from a stage. Whether the actors in a production wear microphones is down to the touring company, most seem to now but if they are not 'miked up' then the amplification will not work. I was also told that the amplification system works better if you are sitting in the middle of the theatre rather than towards the end of the row.

If you are going to see a play with us and have hearing difficulties, please let us know when you sign up and we can put you in the best position for sound.

Carole Thompson

Forthcoming Walks

Thursday January 24th

Meet at Pixon Lane at 9.30 to car share to Bellever Visitors Centre.
A circular walk through the woods to Bellever Tor and back on moorland paths.
About 4 - 5 mls on good tracks with some ascent and descent.
Bring coffee and snack and optional lunch at Foxtor Cafe.

Contacts: Chris Webb
Jennie Youngs

Thursday February 29th

Meet at Pixon Lane at 9.30 to car share to Burrator Quarry.
A circular walk along the old railway line and back along the leat.
About 4 - 5 mls on easy tracks. Bring coffee and snacks. Optional pub lunch.

Contacts as above.

N.B. The walks may change according to winter weather conditions so please check with Jennie or Chris

Christmas Walk to Cotehele to see the Garland



The Walkers went from Calstock to Cotehele on their annual walk to see the garland.

Photos by Chris Blumer and Jo Randall

The Events Committee

We are looking forward to a busy and interesting year!

Thursday 8th February

Annual Quiz and Cream Tea in the Parish Rooms, start at 2pm. £6 to be paid on the door. Limited numbers, but there are still a few places. Sign up at the January meeting or

Contact Norma

Monday 25th March

Tiverton and Knightshayes. A coach trip leaving from opposite The Bedford Hotel at 9am, and returning around 5.30. The cost will be £20.

Knightshayes is free to NT members. Non NT members, will you please pay separately for yourselves as you go into the property, see online for the cost.

Contact Norma

These are some of the trips we are planning;

A day trip to Bath by coach in July

An Exeter canal trip from Exmouth to Exeter in May.

The details and signing up sheets will be available at our February meeting.

And Finally.....

Thanks, as usual, to
Margaret Garton

