

Tavy District u3a

# THE NEWSLETTER



The Happy, the Exuberant, and the Away  
with the Fairies. (See story inside)  
Photo: Rod Taylor

No 127

May 2024

u3a

# Who's Who in Tavy District u3a

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|                         |                  |
|-------------------------|------------------|
| 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](mailto:web@tavydistrictu3a.org.uk)

**Newsletter Editor: John Noblet**

**The deadline for the next Newsletter is 20<sup>th</sup> June 2024**

**Send contributions to [johnnoblet@tavydistrictu3a.org.uk](mailto:johnnoblet@tavydistrictu3a.org.uk)**

# FROM THE CHAIR

It's time to think about time. Time is a very precious commodity that we rarely have enough of to do everything we want to.



How many times have you heard people say that now they are retired, they are so busy they don't have time to work? The way we talk about time is interesting. We spend time, buy time, pass time, make time, waste time, never have enough time, and sometimes run out of time. On the other hand, we sometimes have time to spare, time in hand, time to fill, or for those of a criminal inclination have to "do" time. And why is it that as we get older, time seems to fly past? But what is time? Certain physicists argue that time doesn't even really exist; that the past, present and future are illusions. So, I am going to put forward the idea that time is "opportunity".

My wife and I have just spent four nights in a mobile home near Looe with our middle daughter, her husband and two young, and very lively, children. It was raining when we arrived on the Wednesday evening and the view, which we had been told was delightful, was completely obscured by thick mist and drizzle. The next day was drier but there was still no view. We went into Looe where, despite the mist, drizzle and cold wind, hardy holidaymakers were having a great time playing on the beach in a very British way. Happily, the weather was much better for the next two days, and it began to feel like springtime. So, the weather didn't stop us enjoying our time together even when it was poor. We spent time together chatting, eating, playing games, which in my case included being beaten at cards by our four-year-old granddaughter, much to her delight. We all agreed that we had had a good time and that it had been a great opportunity to have some quality time together without the time pressures that usually rule our lives. And yes, the view was delightful once the mist finally cleared!

I am only too aware that not all of us are lucky enough to have family living nearby and with whom we can enjoy spending time together. That's where friends come in, and where better to meet up and spend time with friends than your u3a?

I went to the Tavy District u3a coffee morning recently. Very many thanks to Elizabeth, Jacky, Dan, and Gemma for arranging these convivial events. I always find it fascinating that every time I attend a u3a event that I don't usually go to, I meet members I don't think I have met before. There were about 20 of us this time, and the room was full of lively conversation. It was an opportunity to meet one another, have a cup of tea or coffee, enjoy one another's company, and spend time together chatting and sharing news and information. Incidentally, future coffee mornings will take place on the fourth Thursday morning of the month at the usual time of 10:30am. We moved from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday because it clashed with the West Dartmoor u3a speaker meeting. Several members of West Dartmoor u3a are associate members of Tavy District u3a and would like to come to the coffee mornings. Now they can, and so can you. I know you will have a good time if you take advantage of the opportunity.

Best wishes to you all.

**Paul**

# Member Survey Results

**T**hank you to the 70 members who responded to this year's mini-survey. There was a very reassuring response to the question about the overall level of satisfaction with the u3a.

|                    |      |
|--------------------|------|
| Very satisfied     | 92%  |
| Quite satisfied    | 8%   |
| Not very satisfied | None |
| Not satisfied      | None |

By repeating this question in future years, it will be possible to monitor the ongoing satisfaction level. The committee are also using a number of other measures to monitor the effectiveness of the u3a. Membership numbers and churn rate (the proportion of members who do not renew) are shown in the table below.

| Year | Members at 1 April | Failed to renew in that year | Churn rate |
|------|--------------------|------------------------------|------------|
| 2017 | 369                | 60                           | 16%        |
| 2018 | 380                | 60                           | 16%        |
| 2019 | 400                | 58                           | 15%        |
| 2020 | 403                | 61                           | 15%        |
| 2021 | 362                | 53                           | 15%        |
| 2022 | 353                | 73                           | 21%        |
| 2023 | 417                | 47                           | 11%        |
| 2024 | 467                | 58                           | 12%        |

# Member Survey Results *Continued*

Membership numbers grew steadily until 2020. During the pandemic, there were two lean years but numbers rebounded strongly after the pandemic. Having been stable up to 2021, there was an understandable increase in the churn rate at the end of the pandemic but that has now decreased to a very satisfactory extent.

Two further measures are the number of groups and the attendance at monthly meetings. We do not keep a detailed record of these but it is clear that both are currently at a satisfactory level.

Interest was expressed in a number of activities for which there is currently no interest group or because the interest group is not currently taking new members. A summary of those expressions of interest has already been sent out in a circular email and members who have expressed an interest in the same activity have been put in touch with each other to explore the possibility of forming new groups.

Most of the suggestions for improvement related to the monthly meetings, where both the quality of projection and the quality of sound were felt to be in need of attention. There were a number of other suggestions and all will be considered by the committee.

Members reported a large variety of different personal highlights of their u3a year. These included monthly meetings, theatre visits and events, but for many members, the highlight of the year came through involvement in their interest groups. No fewer than 22 different interest groups were mentioned.

Other comments included appreciation of the contribution of the many volunteers that allow the u3a to operate. Perhaps I could finish with two direct quotes from this section:

- "It allowed me to forge new friendships and to integrate well into a new community."
- "The u3a is a wonderful organisation enhancing the lives of so many retired people."

**Randall Williams**

## Cover Photo

Our cover photo this month is from Rod Taylor. He says:

"Originally titled 'Bubble Fun', looking at the 3 kids I changed the title to The Happy, the Exuberant, and the Away with the Fairies.

Taken recently during a moment when it wasn't raining, I thought it may be time to get the bubble gun out".

**The deadline for the next Newsletter is 20<sup>th</sup> June 2024**

**Send contributions to [johnnoble@tavydistrictu3a.org.uk](mailto:johnnoble@tavydistrictu3a.org.uk)**

# Tavy District u3a Chair's AGM Report 2024

This is the report that Paul Ward, our Chair, delivered to the AGM at the March meeting

It is my great pleasure to present the Chair's report for the year 2023 – 2024. In brief, our u3a is thriving. We are the largest u3a in the Two Moors Network and we are still growing.

**Membership.** Prior to the pandemic we had over 400 members. This fell to about 350 but has now risen to 484. Other than having a stand at the Tavistock Wellbeing Fair in Butchers Hall to promote our u3a, we have not actively recruited new members. People have come to us because of word-of-mouth recommendations and by viewing the website. I would like to thank all of you who help with the "Meet & Greet" at Wednesday meetings. Looking after our visitors creates a very good "first impression" and encourages people to join us.

Membership numbers may fall a little in the next few weeks when we take account of those who do not renew their subscription. May I take this opportunity to remind you that you should have paid by now. If you have not yet paid, and you do not do so soon, then I am afraid you will be removed from the membership list and you will not be able to participate in any u3a activities. If you have any queries about your subscription, please contact the treasurer, Angela Pitt, who will be very happy to help you.

**Speaker Meetings.** The monthly speaker meetings remain very popular, and attendance is increasing. Approximately 150 members came to our last meeting, which is close to the capacity of the Town Hall. We are having to have more seats towards the rear of the hall, and we have received comments that it can be difficult to see the screen. Your committee has investigated how we can affordably improve visibility and as a result we are trialling front projection, which produces a brighter image, rather than rear projection. In 2023/24 our speaker secretary, Jane Ward, arranged an impressive variety of 11 different speakers and topics, ranging from a chilling discussion of "Putin's Russia" to "Trulli, Madly, Deeply", an amusing account of architecture, tradition, and life in the heel of Italy. We did not have a meeting in the Town Hall in August. Instead, we had our third "Party in the Park" where members had the opportunity to enjoy sandwiches, cake, beverages, and one another's company in the Meadows. Speakers have been booked for the remainder of 2024 and Jane is now working on the programme for 2025. I wish to acknowledge the hard work of our "technical officer", Graham Foster, who sets up and manages the audio-visual equipment and looks after our speakers' technical needs. Finally, the speaker meetings would not be the same without tea and coffee enjoyed after the talk, so thanks go to Isobel Davies and the volunteers for organising and serving refreshments.

**Groups.** Whilst the number of special interest groups varies with time, our group coordinator, Sonja Armstrong, reports that there are at least 50 active groups listed on the Beacon administration system. New groups continue to be formed. The variety of topics offered by our groups is truly impressive and I am very grateful to the group leaders who willingly share their time, knowledge, and skills for the benefit of us all. This year I would like to applaud the groups that organise external visits for members, including the "Garden Visits", "Rocks N Ruins", "Weekenders", "National Trust", bird watching, and walking groups. I was impressed that Wine Appreciation Group 2 even arranged a visit to "La Mare Wine Estate" in Jersey for its members.

**Theatre Visits.** Visits to the theatre remain popular, especially to the ballet and musicals. Visits have included, among others, "An Inspector Calls", "Black Sabbath" the ballet, "Jesus Christ Superstar", and "Edward Scissorhands".

# 'Tavy District u3a Chair's AGM Report 2024 *Continued*

One of the most popular visits has been not to a show but to a behind-the-scenes tour to discover how the Theatre Royal, Plymouth functions. My thanks go to Carole Thompson, who organises the theatre visits. This is no easy task given that the cost of performances rises all the time, and some productions require reservation and payment many months before the performance.

**Events.** The activities organised by the events team remain very popular and have been well attended. Events have included a visit to the Energy from Waste plant in Plymouth, a coach trip and guided tour in Bristol, a guided tour of the Plymouth Barbican, a coach trip to Falmouth with a river trip on the River Fal, a guided tour of the Royal William Yard, John Noblet's annual town trail and quiz, and the u3a Annual Quiz. This year's u3a holiday was to the beautiful city of Lincoln and included a trip to Burleigh House and other properties. My thanks go to Janet, Norma, Shirley & Chris for all their hard work.

**Newsletter.** A big thank you goes to John Noblet who edits and produces our excellent newsletter, which must be one of the best around. I have just revisited the year's newsletters as part of my preparation for this report and I am seriously impressed by John's professionalism and the fascinating and varied content. Please remember that the editor relies on members to submit content such as articles and photographs for publication.

**Website** The Tavy District u3a website is often the first point of contact for prospective members and for those offering to provide services such as speaking at our meetings. Contacts are referred to the relevant committee member or group leader as appropriate. I am grateful to the webmaster, Jan Draper, who manages the website and tries to keep it up to date. Jan relies on all of us to provide her with information that she can post. Please let Jan have anything of interest to promote our u3a and to demonstrate how much it has to offer. If sending photographs with recognisable members in them, please check that everyone is happy for their photograph to appear on the website. The same applies for inclusion in the newsletter.

**Miscellaneous.** At Christmas, Craft Groups 1 and 2 again participated in the annual Christmas Tree Festival in the parish church and decorated a tree to represent our u3a, and the recorder group again performed a delightful recital of modern and ancient music. The recorder group also performed in Butchers Hall as part of the Tavy Fringe event in July.

It is very difficult to capture all our u3a's diverse activities in a single report and I apologise for anything I have omitted.

**Committee** Whilst the majority of our u3a's activities are organised and run voluntarily by members in accordance with the self-help and mutuality principles of the Third Age movement, your committee assures compliance with the essential administrative, financial and legal requirements associated with being a registered charity, regularly reviews and updates our policies and procedures, including introducing a new Serious Incident Reporting policy, and determines our overall direction of travel. During the year, a mini member survey was undertaken, following which some new interest groups were formed. Two members of the committee, Angela & Paul, represent Tavy District u3a at meetings of the Two Moors Network, where we have an opportunity to meet with committee members from neighbouring u3as and discuss issues of mutual interest. Your committee is gradually dragging us into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We have introduced a card reader at the events table so that you can pay for events and visits by credit or debit card. If this is successful, we will obtain a second machine for the theatre table.

# 'Tavy District u3a Chair's AGM Report 2024 *Continued*

We have also introduced a label printer at the reception desk so that we can provide those attending speaker meetings with a clear legible label without wasting paper and resources printing labels for members who do not attend.

In addition to the "office" functions, members of your committee have organised and delivered specific events including coffee mornings for new members at the Wharf, coffee mornings for group leaders, a group leaders' lunch in the Parish Rooms, the Picnic in the Park event in August, and the catering for the Christmas meeting. It is a great pleasure working with the committee, all the members of which go above and beyond their roles to ensure the smooth running of our u3a and the best possible experience for our members. Some members of the existing committee will be standing down in March 2025, so we are looking for people to stand for the committee at next year's AGM. Some u3as have closed for want of a functioning committee. Please don't let that happen to us. Come and talk to any of the existing committee if you would like more information.

## **And finally ...**

I wish to congratulate and thank all our members for contributing in so many ways to a very successful year. Tavy District u3a would not exist without your active participation. We now look forward to the next twelve months.

**Paul Ward**  
**Chair, Tavy District u3a**  
**4<sup>th</sup> March 2024**



Seeing the last of the snowdrops at St Raphael's Church near Huccaby! The lunch at Fox Tor cafe was enjoyed by all!

Photo Teresa Cooper



The Rocks N Ruins Group went to see the target railways on the Okehampton range on a sunny but blustery day in April.

Here are some of the group outside the engine shed which still houses one of the target trolleys.

Photo: John Noblet

# Monthly Meetings

Below are the details of the next three monthly meetings, all of which will take place in Tavistock Town Hall at 2pm. Once again, thank you to those who have provided me with speaker suggestions since the last newsletter. Do keep these coming.

**Jane Ward**

## **PROGRAMME - MAY – JULY 2024**

### **WEDNESDAY 1<sup>ST</sup> MAY 2024 2pm – Tavistock Town Hall**

#### **A London to Sydney Car Marathon and Ukrainian Action**

2 illustrated talks:

- driving competitively between London and Sydney in the 1970's and 1990's
- a unique charity driving and donating, now, 260 vehicles to Ukraine.

*Speaker: Anthony Showell - former competitive driver and now charity driver*

### **WEDNESDAY 5<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2024 2pm – Tavistock Town Hall**

#### **St Luke's Open Gardens – Behind The Scenes**

A talk about what goes on behind the scenes with the Open Garden scheme, now in full flow for this year.

*Speaker: Wayne Marshall, New Partnerships Lead, St Luke's Hospice*

### **WEDNESDAY 3<sup>RD</sup> JULY 2024 2pm – Tavistock Town Hall**

#### **A Schoolgirl's War**

*Speaker: Mary Smith, English teacher and education consultant*

Mary spent her career in teaching English to teenagers and adults, and in school leadership. Her involvement in the subject of her talk came about because, while she was head teacher of a large secondary school, two fascinating discoveries were made there which provided a vivid and highly unusual insight into school life in World War 2. The first was an extensive set of tunnels used as underground classrooms, and the other was the discovery of a fascinating and exquisite set of paintings of wartime schooling.

## **REMINDER: WEDNESDAY 21 AUGUST 2024 – PICNIC IN THE PARK**

## **AMENDMENT TO 2024 PROGRAMME**

The meeting to be held on Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> December will now feature a talk by Dan Bishop entitled "Seeing the World with Mr Punch".

# Monthly Meetings

The Third Age Trust has just launched a new service for u3a members – a series of discounts and other benefits. More than a dozen High Street outlets and numerous other organisations are offering discounts – and a particularly attractive offer for Tavistock residents is a 4% discount at Morrisons. To access the offers, it is necessary to sign up to the u3a Friends Newsletter – the Third Age Trust press release below explains how.

u3a Friends Extra is a benefits website developed exclusively for members of the u3a Friends newsletter community. The website provides access to a wide range of offers, discounts and additional services. Friends Extra is completely free to access. Anyone signed up to the u3a Friends newsletter can now also make savings on well-known brands, shopping, travel, days out and more.

Offers and services on Friends Extra include:

- Health and wellbeing
- Shopping savings on major brands and retail discounts
- Travel and holidays
- Leisure offers, like family days out, trips to the cinema and theatre
- Insurance offers on car, travel and medical insurance
- Access to financial advice and a legal helpline.

To become a 'Friend', simply sign up to receive the Friends Newsletter on the u3a website: <https://www.u3a.org.uk>. Each issue of the Friends Newsletter will include a link to the Friends Extra benefits website and highlight one of the offers. This is just one element of the u3a Friends newsletter, which brings together stories from local u3a groups, learning opportunities and news of upcoming events to highlight the fun and learning within the u3a community.

## Leads and Natter

**A**nyone wanting to join us for a convivial dog walk (of about 1 hour)? We will meet at the car park outside the Long Ash Garden Centre at 10.30 a.m. on the third Wednesday morning of each month.

This is a relatively flat walk and walkers are reminded that they are responsible for their own four legged friends.

The walk will conclude with a coffee/tea etc at the outdoor seating area of the cafe in the garden centre. The first walk will be on May 15th.

**Elizabeth Kemp and Ginnie Parker**



# Discussion Group

The Discussion Group in February turned its attention to the question of how the Government should direct our national resources to enhance our economic growth, quality of life and welfare.

Mindful of an approaching General Election, the group did not want to stray into the unreal world inhabited by politicians wanting our votes and who claim they have all the answers or make undeliverable promises.

To anchor the discussion in the world of the current national reality, a briefing note gave an overview of some of the issues we needed to address. Stagnant GDP, over 9m people of working age (16-64) not in or seeking employment, inflation double target, low productivity, tax at historically high levels, national debt c 100% of GNP costing more to finance than education, poor/deteriorating public services, health and infrastructure.

It was recognised that the UK has been in decline relative to many other countries since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century as our industrial and economic ascendancy and Empire were challenged and further undermined by two major wars in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. That historical source of national wealth and power has gone but it has left a cultural legacy that the group thought made it difficult for the Government to accept and respond to the changed realities. Also in the wider population there is a tendency to feel more comfortable in our past than addressing the challenges that now confront us. Like John Lewis, a previously successful business, we need to adjust our “business model” if the UK is to remain internationally competitive.

The group had a wide ranging discussion with no shortage of suggestions.

There were too many financial and regulatory impediments for viable businesses to develop, unemployed people should be expected to undertake socially supportive activities including a type of community

“conscriptio” could encourage greater engagement especially for the young. Also if retired people take a job the income it generates should be untaxed to incentivise an increase of the employed workforce.

There was a wide level of agreement about efficiency failures, waste and incompetence by government. Projects being poorly managed, overspent, delayed or cancelled. Examples cited included the lack of contingency planning for Covid, Brexit, HS2, or building aircraft carriers without aircraft. Similarly, the level of transparency, oversight and accountancy relating to national governance was thought to be inadequate especially given the prevailing financial stringency.

Consideration was given to the allocation of government spending which based on the 2023/4 National accounts is running at £42000 per household. Unfortunately, only £37000 of this is paid for by tax with another £5000 per household being financed by extra borrowing thereby increasing our national debt. Borrowings are essentially deferred tax to be paid by future generations. Borrowing to invest for long term productive benefit is one thing but it is of concern if it is to pay day to day running costs.

The importance of future generations to take the country forward featured prominently in our discussion.

With virtually no extractive industry and a contracting manufacturing sector it is essential that we fully develop the creative and technology potential of the young. In that regard, concern was expressed about education in the national accounts. The statistics indicate that government spending on education as a % of GDP peaked in 2000 at 5.4% but fell for each of the next 20 years to 4%. Approximately 93% of our children are educated via this state funding but if the private funded residual is included, education accounts for 6.1% of GDP, one of the highest in the world.

## Discussion Group *continued*

Whether this represents the best way to optimise the potential of all our children in the national interest is questionable or whether it promotes social cohesion.

It was thought that many of the assumptions that post WW2 generations were able to make are now being challenged, due in part to our inability to maintain a dynamic, growing economy to finance our expectations; the NHS is falling progressively behind its founding vision, its national dental care provision appears in terminal decline, the judicial/court system has been seriously underfunded, the list of our institutions being hollowed out is a long one and without a fundamental change on economic performance recovery appears problematic. It is inconceivable that a tinkering with taxes will be the “magic bullet” that is proffered by some as the solution.

All national governments must develop policies to meet foreseen challenges and respond to the unexpected. Many of the problems facing the country have their roots in history but recurrent governments have failed to develop credible strategies to address them. One of the reasons for this was thought to be our political system in which ministers are moved so quickly they are rarely in post long enough to master their brief before the “merry go round” spins again.

Investment, especially from overseas, is vital but a government report in 2023 concluded that unlike other countries we have no policy to attract it. Is it possible that since the 2015 election we have had seven Business Secretaries and seven Chancellors could be a factor?

The group thought less time should be spent on sound bites announcing new policies and more time developing and implementing well thought out policies. Part of the failure to do this was thought to be the background, experience and motivation of MPs.

The media has a key role in a democracy linking those in power with the electorate to assist voters making informed decisions. Concern was expressed that the media for many reasons, both financial and political, could be more effective in this role. At times more media time is spent on personalities than a critical analysis of the issues and the veracity of the claims being made.

It is impossible in such a meeting to determine a blueprint in response to the deep seated issues facing the country in our fast changing world.

The post Second World War order is fading, we have lost our Empire, flirted with the EU and has now rejected that. Over 60 years ago it was said, “Britain has lost an empire but has not yet found a role”. In many aspects of national governance, that search continues but we need to answer these questions if we are to build trusting partnerships on which we depend economically and politically.

We are no longer a first rate power but we have a lot to offer the world if our leaders can agree and unite round that reality.

### Malcolm Cooper

It was only a matter of time, first hybrids  
then electric and now vegan.



Thanks to Sonja Armstrong

# Wine Appreciation 2

Another hugely enjoyable afternoon was spent sampling wines at the group's get together, this time hosted by Jackie and Alan. The selection was taken from The Wine Society's "Generation Series One", the first of four sets of limited edition wines, specially produced to celebrate The Wine Society's 150th anniversary. The Generation Series will be introduced throughout 2024, each of the series symbolising a 50-year period in The Wine Society's history. This first release covers the years 1874 to 1924. Nibbles were provided by our hosts to complement each wine.



We started with a Bucelas 2022; a Portuguese wine made from the arinto grape variety. This is described as a "fresh, dry white... with clean citrus and green apple aromas and crisp acidity." It has "a core of minerality and the potential to develop greater complexity with bottle age." This wine was the first type bought by The Wine Society in August 1874. It was otherwise known as Portuguese Hock – an absolute snip at 1s.7d. a bottle! The modern version comes from the Quinta da Romeira estate, which has been producing wines since 1703. It was universally liked by the group and considered to be worth every penny of the £13.50 price tag.

The next white was a 2022 Mâcon-Villages, a white Burgundy made from chardonnay grapes. The food match recommendations are extensive, and include fish, poultry, charcuterie and soft French cheeses. We all enjoyed it, although felt it was somewhat eclipsed by the Bucelas.

Back to serious enjoyment and acclaim for a 2019 Haut-Médoc, a Bordeaux from Château Beaumont in the Médoc. A delicious red made from 55% cabernet sauvignon and 45% merlot, which The Wine Society describes as "a Sunday roast classic". It would have been wonderful to conjure up a roast to test that theory, but we can report that another recommendation, Cheddar cheese, is a marvellous accompaniment too! Even members less enamoured of reds

considered this a real winner. This one was £14.95 a bottle.

A 2020 rioja came next – one that had been aged for several years, including 10 months in French oak, before bottling in 2023. The production technique replicates the way in which the wine would have been treated during the period 1874 to 1924. To reflect the way the wines were labelled at that time, 'tercer año', meaning third year, appears on the label. The main grape used was Garnacha, with some tempranillo.

The last of the reds was a Régnié 2022. It is made using gamay grapes and was matured in stainless steel tanks. This wine divided opinion, with some of us thinking it excellent, whilst others being relatively unimpressed. The price, at £12.50, seemed about right.

Then for the final treat.... a truly delicious cake, made by Jackie, was brought out as a surprise in honour of Linda's imminent birthday. To accompany this was the final wine – a 2020 Crémant de Loire. The blend of grapes is 54% chenin blanc, 27% cabernet franc, 12% chardonnay and 7% grolleau, and the wine had spent 30 months on the lees. The members' reviews on The Wine Society's website indicate that this is a popular fizz and compares very favourably with champagne. Our group agreed and, at £14.50, no doubt some of our members will be placing an order!

**Chris Rose**

## Theatre Royal Backstage Tour

Most of us will have visited a theatre more than once but it is only with the benefit of a backstage tour that the enormous complexity of its operation becomes apparent. The sheer size of the area behind the Theatre Royal stage often surprises even accomplished actors and allows some of the biggest shows to be performed there. From the soaring Fly Loft with its myriad ropes and pulleys to the depths of the 50 piece orchestra pit, everything and everyone is focused and committed to presenting productions of the highest quality.

It is not, however, merely a question of size being important. During our visit the last performance of a show in the more intimate setting of the Drum was about to take place where the audience was strictly limited to six and the show specifically designed for people with sensory issues.

All in all our recent tour, led by the Theatre's Technical team, gave us a fascinating insight into the workings of a large theatre where, for example, the Assistant Stage Manager's role is so complex that the handbook (a weighty document in itself) for each show has to be followed to the letter.

Few theatre-goers would realise that the working schedule demands that once the final performance of a show is given, everything is immediately dismantled, loaded onto pantechnicons and on the way to its next destination by 04:00 hrs the following morning whilst preparations for the next show have already begun.

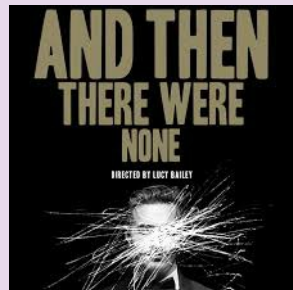
The tour demonstrated how fortunate we are to have the opportunity to enjoy the experience of top quality productions so close to home.

**Rosemary Turner**

**The deadline for the next  
Newsletter is 20<sup>th</sup> June 2024**

## And Then There Were None

The Theatre Visit's recent outing was to the Theatre Royal for Agatha Christie's 'And Then There Were None'.



Just finding our seats was a thrill! The stalls are numbered on the underside of the seat which is impossible to see in the subdued lighting. Happily, we can all still count.

Ten disparate characters are invited to an island, based on Burgh Island. All have unlovely episodes in their lives which have led to deaths. These are revealed by a recording from their absent host. All, of course, are repudiated. A storm isolates the group from the mainland. One by one the truth of each malfeasance is uncovered and the perpetrator meets his or her end. As the numbers are reduced the tension mounts and in true Agatha Christie style the tale engages to the last.

The generally well-experienced cast, most names familiar from many television programmes, gave a good performance on an interestingly contrived set. The penultimate death was breathtaking! It was an entertaining afternoon. I had never been to a matinee before and found the whole experience very enjoyable though I did have difficulty at times suspending belief when the actors complained of their inability to leave the island. I kept thinking 'Just wait for the tide to go down then walk ashore'.

Thanks to the Theatre Group organisers for their very important role.

**Val Turner**

# Cotehele Daffodil Festival



**A**s the Weekenders set off for Cotehele there was some anxiety about the abundance of daffodils we would see due to the very early Spring weather. The daffodil displays were still there and some of the later daffodils in the garden, and with a very sociable coffee and lunch in the cafe, with a visit to the shop, the visit was deemed a great success.

**Janet Hunt**

## National Trust Visits Group



**T**he National Trust Group also saw some daffodils in March. They went to Plympton and the obligatory coffee was followed by a stroll to climb the remains of the Norman castle and walk along the historic Fore Street to see the Grammar School.

Then they went to Saltram House where there are said to be 120 varieties of daffodils in the gardens.



In May the group will be going to Lanhydrock, hopefully to see lots of bluebells and with the opportunity to get up close to the Gallery ceiling which is undergoing long term restoration. Come and join us.

**John Noblet**

## Reflections

Clouds drifting across the sky  
Cause patterns on the water  
Buffeting waves shift these  
shapes  
And the patterns alter -

The images we see  
Are the images we weave  
Into our lives  
Reflecting new meanings  
With the passage of time -

**Beverley Beck**

Photo of Abbey Bridge: John Noblet

## Weekenders



At the RNLI's 200th birthday celebrations on Sunday 2nd March with the Weekenders.  
Photo Teresa Cooper



Margaret Garton's view on Weekenders

**The deadline for the next  
Newsletter is 20<sup>th</sup> June 2024**

# Garden Visits Group - Caerhays

Luckily the weather dried out at last for the garden visits group day out at Caerhays. Brought forward from later in the month to take full advantage of the famed magnolias and azaleas in flower, three cars drove down increasingly narrow roads to this spectacular castle near Mevagissey.

The castle lies behind a lake which flows down to a beach, but as the guide told us, to avoid the Barbary pirate raids big houses in Cornwall tended to be built away from the coast. The gardens slope up behind the castle and can be explored using winding paths between huge champion trees, pink, red and white magnolias, undercarpeted with bluebells, primroses and ramsons. Many of these specimen plants were gathered by famous Victorian plant hunters from Asia, expanded by breeding and hybridisation to produce interesting varieties by Charles Williams.

As we arrived we found a coach party just descending so we booked our tour of the house for a later 2.30 pm, and went into the café for a light lunch (excellent pasties with salads) eaten in the courtyard behind the main house. We walked this off with a long wander around the spectacular gardens, before collecting under the carriage portico for a guided tour of the house with the excellent Juliet.



Evidence has been found of Iron Age and Roman settlement, but the manor and original castle was built by the Trevanion family, one of the most significant families in Cornwall, with intermarriages with the Bodrugans, the

Edgumbes and the Arundells. In 1808 John Purnell Bettesworth Trevanion undertook extensive development of the house, choosing the architect Sir John Nash, whose ambitious scheme resulted in an elegant and interesting series of beautiful rooms, but sadly many mortgages and ultimately bankruptcy for the family.

The house was bought by the Williams family despite its rather decrepit and neglected state – geese nesting in the drawing room – which probably meant a keen price. The house at this time did not have a sea view, but a recession in mining provided workers needing employment to remove a hill between the house and the beach.

Wealthy from mining interests, John Michael Williams was said to be the richest man in Britain, and had funds to restore the house to its original design. Well furnished with paintings, furniture and fabrics, and a comprehensive collection of minerals, the house is still the home of the Williams family. During WWII it provided a home to 24 evacuees, and is now the hub of Burncoose Nurseries, showing gardens at Chelsea, and sending plants out to many gardeners.



We had a most pleasant and fascinating visit and we owe thanks to Janet and Jennie for organising it for us, and to our drivers, and I for one was delighted to tick this off my wish list.

**Rosy Griffith**

# Science Group Continues into Second Year

The Science group continues through into its second year and is doing well with between 12 to 14 members (of the group's 19 strong membership) attending each month. We meet each fourth Monday at 2.30pm in the Printworks.

The group is ably led by Linda Diggle and meetings had been presided over by the polymath Jim Barnes. Sadly, after a short 6-week illness, Jim passed away on 21<sup>st</sup> December 2023 and has been much missed by members of the group. Rupert Gude took over chairing our meetings and Clive McGavin stepped forward to offer further support with group leadership.

We've now established a format that incorporates one or two 'long' presentations by members per meeting alongside multiple 'short' science items for discussion. Following a suggestion from within the group, we bought ourselves a projector. The projector interfaces with mobiles and laptops and is aiding visual presentations – plus is negating the need for printing paper handouts!!

The quality of presentations at each meeting stimulates much discussion. Topics have included the worrying rise in the surface temperature of the Atlantic Ocean and what it means (more rain!) and we've considered the record of temperatures for central England over the last 400 years, leading us to much consideration of climate change - or not?? A presentation on infinite series had most of us baffled but entertained, the cannonball problem was explained, and learning about the Collatz Conjecture had all of us coming down to two then one.

Members have shared presentations on Quantum computing, the nuclear clock, and the detection of magnetic fields by migrating birds. We've considered predictions of the UK's power supply needs for 2035, we've learnt about National Grid peak demands and power sources associated with it, along with an account on producing fusion power as an energy source with Stellarators and Tokamaks. As group leaders, we get excited

when props are brought in to aid explanations and we were fascinated with how a glass, a ball and a hula hoop helped visualise the movement of the sun and moon using the concept of the ecliptic.

We frequently find ourselves discussing medical matters ranging from new evidence of the Epstein Barr virus in the causality of Multiple Sclerosis to how low-level interventions to stimulate dopamine and improve gait are helping patients with Parkinson's disease.

We've learnt of the possibility for predicting carpal tunnel syndrome or Dupuytren's Contracture by genetics, we've been warned about the dangers of too much ultra processed food, and we've discussed the loss of cognitive function after a Covid illness. A personal story of peripheral neuropathy by ciguatera fish poisoning showed the importance of local knowledge when living abroad.

We've been entertained by the description of experiments in rocket science in the back garden to garner interest with the grandchildren. We've heard about forces from gravitational to electrical and magnetic and have learnt of the process of making glue from the waste products of wood.

We've pondered sodium-sulphur batteries, been prompted to consider cognitive biases whereby our unchecked bias comes to the fore and have learnt of novel ways proposed to repair our numerous potholes including the potential for self-healing roads using bacteria.

A practical demonstration of the topology of the Möbius strip and its application had us astounded. Poor air quality near sites of new UK schools was highlighted and we've been educated on underground high voltage transmission and lines that prove to be very expensive. Alas, we haven't space in this newsletter to mention every item brought to meetings, but they've all been fascinating.

## Science Continued

Whilst most members have a science-based background, some of us are keen amateurs with a science interest. As group leaders we'll happily admit we don't always understand everything that gets discussed, but the numerous and varied contributions certainly stimulate everyone's grey matter.

Given the quantity and quality of items covered at meetings thus far, we don't envisage we'll run out of science topics to learn about anytime soon.

**Rupert Gude, Linda Diggle, Clive McGavin**  
– Group Leaders



Randall Williams helping us to visualise the movement of the sun and moon using the concept of the ecliptic

## Diner's Delight

The Diner's Delight Group has been operating very successfully for over ten years with members arranging eating out events sometimes linked with other events such as walks, garden visits or other activities. The Co-ordinators (Group Leaders) introduce new members to the group, advise them on how the group works and communicate with the members to advertise events and generally manage the programme of events.

Typically, the group had a monthly eating out event, but there was no designated frequency, and the volunteer organisers got to choose the venue and the date. The general philosophy is to enjoy good food in good company with venues ranging from pub grub to fine dining.

However, in the last year or so, following Covid 19 and the lockdown, there has been a real falloff in the number of new members wanting to join the group, and in members volunteering to organise events. This has resulted in fewer events being organised with fewer people attending and generally the organisation being left to a small number of old hands.

Rather than let the group continue to decline, the current coordinators Andy and Caroline Paskins are looking for an enthusiastic person or persons to take over the group, to develop the group's activities for the future and to enthuse new members to join the group and organise eating out events.

For further information please look at the Diner's Delight page on the Tavy District u3a website:

We have a long list of venues we have visited over the last ten years for lunch or dinner, some close to hand and some at greater distances from the general catchment of Tavy District u3a. Andy and Caroline would provide advice and assistance to anyone wanting to develop the group into the future.

If anyone is interested, would they please contact Andy or Caroline.

We look forward to hearing from you.

# Ballet Appreciation Group

Growing up in post 2<sup>nd</sup> World War Plymouth, the opportunities to see ballet performed were extremely limited. Although we regularly went to the Palace Theatre to see pantomimes and musicals, I do not remember any opportunity to see ballet there, so my only experience of ballet then was that fabulous film, 'The Red Shoes'.

Working and living in the home counties, opportunities, and costs, also offered limited opportunities, so, before moving back to Devon, my experience was limited to the classical ballets of Swan Lake, Coppelia and The Nutcracker Suite, mostly via Christmas television performances. I do recollect also, on visits back to family in Devon, seeing at the (?new) Theatre Royal in Plymouth the Ballet Rambert and Matthew Bourne, but you can understand that my experience and knowledge was very limited.

So it has been a very great pleasure, as well as an education, to attend the Ballet Appreciation Group, where Linda Webb-Taylor has a fabulous DVD collection of ballet performances. I have been greatly impressed by the skills, interpretation, presentation and differences between the Bolshoi and Australian Ballet Companies, for example, as well as seeing many ballets I had never even heard of.

I have been amazed at the development, not only in stagecraft and the physical skill of the dancers, but in the ability to convey emotion and a story line through physical movement, much more strongly than had been apparent to me in performance, however beautiful, of some of the classics I had seen.

At our annual New Year 'Bring and Share' supper, we viewed DVDs of two ballets brought by a member, firstly, 'The Cellist', a new ballet outlining the love of Jacqueline du Pre for her cello, her struggles with her



marriage to Daniel Barenboim, and the effects of her illness. The performance was profoundly moving.



Then, by contrast, we watched the humorous, colourful 'Elite Syncopations' – Scot Joplin's ragtime music, with extraordinary figuring and amazing costumes - even the onstage band formed part of the scene of a louche Parisian bar. Another stunning performance, of quite a different character.

**Melody Dougan**

**The deadline for the next Newsletter is 20<sup>th</sup> June 2024**

## Just the usual, but more of it

Our weather from December to March has been generally miserable. That's not a meteorological description, of course, but no amount of rainfall or temperature data would sum it up quite so well. In the days before the Met Office was busy with issuing warnings and telling us to take care, there was time for the late Hubert Horace Lamb to study our climate. He looked at the weather maps every day from 1861-1971 and realised the UK had certain recurring patterns that could be clearly identified as westerly, easterly, cyclonic etc.

His definition of the Southwesterly type was: 'Generally unsettled or changeable weather, usually with most rain in northern and western districts of the British Isles. Winds shifting rapidly between S and NW ... mild in winter with frequent gales.' That is where the UK has been since early December except for a short colder spell in January.

In winter this type of situation is typical of our country perched on the eastern fringe of an ocean, and the only odd feature has been its persistence. In a way you could say the weather has been even more normal than usual.

Some facts from the Met Office: winter (Dec/Jan/Feb) UK mean temperature 5.3°C, 5th highest since 1884; UK rainfall 446mm, 8th highest since 1836. But Dartmoor and the southwest had it much wetter. Sticklepath recorded 648mm and even in my back garden just off New Launceston Road we got 613mm.

The jetstream, a very strong current of air 5-7 miles up, has been controlling the unending series of depressions coming at us off the Atlantic. The circulation is anti-clockwise round these things and their track is such that Tavistock gets a lot of southwest winds straight off the sea bringing the inevitable wet, mild and cloudy conditions.

We have a son living in Halifax, Nova Scotia, which is on about the same latitude as Bordeaux but on the other side of the Atlantic. Their climate is, he says, bracing, with a short summer and a cold winter. It snows from December to March.

Maybe we shouldn't complain too much about Tavistock's weather.

**Ivor Williams**

## The Wizard of Oz

When a small group of us went to see the wonderful Wizard in Plymouth, I admit I was feeling a bit apprehensive having discovered that the Wicked Witch of the West was to be played by an apparently famous drag artist known as *The Vivienne*. I was also concerned because the original MGM film was so perfect I was not sure that any stage show could capture any of its magic. In the event I found the show was a delight and great fun to watch. Because, because, because, because, BECAUSE...

This Wizard kept very close to both the script and spirit of the film, with only a few little tweaks and additions by Lloyd Webber and Rice, which were barely noticeable. The production values were exemplary, the singing and dancing first-rate and The Vivienne played his (or her) part with great aplomb, without dominating the show, as I had feared he would. Of course on stage flying houses, emerald cities and balloon trips present some challenges, but all of these were dealt with creatively using some excellent stagecraft and video projection. There were some pantomime elements which were not appreciated by everyone, although the many schoolchildren in the audience clearly enjoyed them. By channelling my inner child, I did too!

**Carole Thompson**

# Forthcoming Walks

## Thursday May 30th

Meet at Pixon Lane at 9.30 for a 9.40 departure to car share to Bennett's Cross just past the Warren House Inn.

This is a circular walk to see the fields of bluebells around the Headland Warren Farm.

A few ups and downs on moorland tracks, about 5mls.

Optional lunch at the Warren House Inn, bring coffee and snack.

This walk will be led by Tony James.

## Thursday June 27th

Meet at Pixon Lane at 9.30 for a 9.40 departure to car share to Sourton on the A386.

This is an open moorland walk with a steady climb at the start, about 5-6 mls.

Optional pub lunch, bring coffee and snack.

This is the walk which was postponed because of bad weather in April and will be led by Val Blair.

Contacts for all walks:

**Chris Webb**

**Jennie Youngs**

N.B. The walks may change according to weather conditions. Please wear clothing and footwear for Dartmoor conditions.



.The walkers at Lopwell Dam. Photo by Val Blair

# Theatre News

## Theatre Bookings 2024/2025

We have booked tickets for the following shows at the Theatre Royal. If you would like to go to one of these, you can sign up for a ticket at the next monthly meeting or by emailing me on [tavyu3atheatre@gmail.com](mailto:tavyu3atheatre@gmail.com)

## 2024

**The History Boys** by Alan Bennett on Thursday 19th September at 2.30pm. Seats in the Stalls £37, payment by June.

**Agatha Christie's Murder on the Orient Express** on Thursday 26th September at 2.30pm. Seats in the Stalls £34, payment by May.

**Frederick Ashton's La Fille mal gardee**, Birmingham Royal Ballet on Saturday 12th October at 2.00pm. Seats in the Circle £43, payment by June.

**Matthew Bourne's Swan Lake** on Thursday 14th November at 2.30pm. Seats in the Circle £60, payment by June.

## 2025

**The Book of Mormon** - a Musical Comedy on Friday 24th January 2025 at 2.30pm. Seats in the Circle £70 payment by July 2024.

**Cinderella**, Birmingham Royal Ballet on Thursday 10th April 2025 at 2.30pm. Seats in the Circle £43, payment by July 2024

## Hamilton 2025

We will be booking tickets for this show for July and August next year at the end of April, so by the May meeting we will have dates and ticket prices for firm bookings. Based on recent experience it is likely that the tickets will be expensive and we will be expected to pay for them within a month of making the booking, so by early June this year. I will email details so that if you are unable to attend the May meeting can book by email.

We now have a variety options to allow you to pay for your tickets! At the meeting you can use our card reader, or pay by cheque or cash as usual. Otherwise you can pay by bank transfer or posting a cheque.

## Not able to attend a performance?

If you have purchased a ticket, discover that you cannot use it and are unable to find another u3a member who wants it, please get in touch with me and I will advertise to all members that a ticket is available. If I find someone who is able to use the ticket I will put them in touch with you to arrange collection and any payment to be made. I am not involved in this part otherwise it becomes too complicated.

**Carole Thompson**

# The Events Committee

**You can pay for the visits using cash, cheque, BACs and the debit/credit card reader.**  
If you are paying by **BACS** these are the details you will need;

- **Account** Tavy District u3a. **Sort code**
- **Account number**
- **Reference** Your surname/ trip name

NB this is a different account to the one you use for paying your membership, but once it is set up BACs is very easy. Do please check!

## COACH TO EXMOUTH, BOAT VIA CANAL TO EXETER

Friday 31<sup>st</sup> May Cost £28

Depart 8.30 am opposite Bedford Hotel

We board the boat in Exmouth and cruise up the River Exe and the Exeter Canal to Exeter with the Stuart Line. There will be time for lunch/sightseeing/shopping, before returning to Tavistock by coach.

**May meeting is the final date** for signing and paying for this trip.

## COACH TRIP TO BATH

**Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> July with optional 2-hour WALKING TOUR** by professional Blue Badge Guides.

Cost £26 coach, £10 walking tour (numbers limited)

Depart 8.00am opposite Bedford Hotel

Arrive in Bath 11am

Depart Bath 4.15pm

**Booking starts at the u3a meeting on Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> May.** If you are unable to attend the May u3a meeting, after that meeting you can contact Norma

## COACH TRIP TO LOOE

**Wednesday 11 September. Enjoy a day at leisure by the seaside!**

Cost £12

Booking opens at the June meeting and continues in July. More details later.  
contact Shirley