



### **The Chairman's Diary**

We kicked off our Christmas festivities with our traditional lunch, this year at The Royal Oak in Little Neston. More than 50 members had bought tickets so we were really taking over the whole pub and I was worried as to how they would cope. I need not have worried.



They more than coped. With jolly efficiency they served up three huge courses with a choice in each one – and all for £16 a head! You won't get a starter for that price in most of the pubs in the area. The food at The Royal Oak is all home-cooked and the

pub is run by Barry Taylor and his family. It is not part of a chain.

That's the answer. After the meal, when I stood up to thank the staff, there was an immediate round of applause. When do you ever see that in a pub? We added quite a big tip to the bill – the treasurer was away on a cruise and left me with the chequebook, not a good thing to do – to thank them. I later found that some members had been so impressed, they had already showered the tables with change. And such was the size of the portions, people were being provided with doggy bags to take food home. When people were leaving, I was asked: can we come back next year? The answer is a resounding yes! Incidentally, why are they called doggy bags when they contain food for our later consumption – not for the dog?

A week later we staged our Christmas party at the Civic Hall which, this year, was a brilliant musical extravaganza with rousing carols by the Singing Group choir, a song and dance routine from Gemini - Alison and Bernadette - finishing off with old favourites from the



Neston Strummers who didn't want to leave the stage! As always, mulled wine and mince pies were laid on, as well as tea and coffee. Phil ran his popular lottery and Celia had devised a quiz. All this involved the usual volunteers as well as the hall manager Paula who was great as always on the day. In other words, quite a lot of people had put in a considerable amount of work beforehand and on the day to make it a success – but where were all the members? We estimated that there were no more than 50 present, of whom 20 were members of the Singing Group plus half a dozen helpers with the drinks etc. More members come to a normal monthly speaker meeting. More members came to the lunch the previous week! We ended up giving away six boxes of mince pies to worthy causes and there will probably be a bottle of mulled wine in the raffle for the whole year! The party was run along the normal lines, with the exception of the barn dancing which couldn't happen this time. Was there an alternative attraction we didn't know about? I know some members, including some committee members, say they 'don't do parties' but surely that can't be the case for the majority of our 300 members! We will have to rethink this for next time, if only because of the cost. Any suggestions, please let me know.

PS: We liked The Royal Oak so much, we tried to rebook it for my son's annual visit but they had a funeral party the day we wanted so I tried another local hostelry, got through on the phone which was answered by a bright young lady. I started to make the booking but slowly began to realise that I wasn't speaking to a human being at all! The recorded voice asked me all the right questions, even how to spell Grumett and thanked me for making my reservation. I just stopped myself from thanking her/it. Is this the age of AI upon us already?

Happy New Year!  
Michael Grumett

## Neston u3a Gardening Group 2 News

In June the group had a very interesting meeting at a garden created from a blank sheet approximately four years ago. A winding path led to two ponds with Koi Carp of all sizes including a number of 'new born' fish. It was such hot day we were glad to be in this sheltered area with trees creating dappled shade. The planting was varied from shrubs to perennials and it was amazing to see how, in such a short space of time, the plants had become so well established.

The July meeting was planned as a plant swap meeting, an annual event usually in glorious sunshine & needing umbrellas for sun shade. This time we needed



umbrellas to ward off the heavy rain. Janet Boardman was hosting the meeting which should have been in her beautiful garden, recently developed and now looking quite established. Members brought plants from their gardens: plants which had been divided from the parent plant, those which had self-seeded and were

surplus to the owners need, plants which had been cuttings, rooted and needing a new home. Plants for free! Some plants can be a reminder of the member who had them. And in the comfort of Janet's home there was time to chat about gardening matters & other topics. It was a very pleasant afternoon on a pretty dismal day outside.

Gardening Group 2 has thirteen members & would like to welcome other u3a members with an interest in gardening. Contact Pat Mann  
[patmagmann2@gmail.com](mailto:patmagmann2@gmail.com)

**Check out the website: [nestonu3a.org.uk](http://nestonu3a.org.uk)  
for all the information about your local u3a.**

## Concert and Opera-going group

There will be no visit from the Glyndebourne Opera Company as last year.

There will be no visit by the Welsh National Opera (WNO), as last year.

But the good news: the WNO will continue to perform at Venue Cymru, Llandudno.

And there is some talk (and much negotiation no doubt), that English National Opera (ENO) may move their base from London to Liverpool. Olé! Watch this space.

## Transport

Over the last two years we have never mustered more than a car-load for our trips. It is clear to me that we will never be in the business of hiring a coach. Even if we could, then the trips to the Liverpool Empire would only be advantaged by a little as the theatre is so well served by the trains from Port Sunlight to Lime Street Station.

For performances at Llandudno, I have, on every occasion found the traffic to be very sparse, and the driving to be easy. So sharing a car is no problem. (65 minutes each way.)

**New Group Members:** Interested new members, please email me direct: Peter Koch Peterkochuk36@gmail.com

As I only joined u3a in February, I assumed, rightly or wrongly, that the current newsletters were on-line only? Am I cautious or technically thick? I use my iphone/ipad as little as possible. I thought AI was a road number or a blood group!! I think we all need a drink.

Maureen Kelly

*Newsletters are available in print version, Maureen, for those who want or need them. The monthly Bulletins are produced on-line only to keep costs down. Most important news is given out at the monthly speaker meetings.  
Ed.*



First year climber with 7 glorious blooms on my early June birthday lingering longer than the 'here today gone tomorrow' peonies in what was this Spring's almost tropical heat. As with my 'sungold' tomatoes of previous years (700 fruits from just two plants) your blooms will be counted. Only arithmomaniacs (lifelong compulsive counters) like me

would have to know there were 7 single blooms in June, 11 singles in July then clusters totalling 59 in August slowing to 9 singles in mid -September. My dilemma now is which stems to prune, just exactly when and how?

Maureen Kelly

This is to thank all those who helped in any capacity, big or small, to make the Christmas party such a success. It would be invidious to single out anybody in particular. Whatever you did, your contribution was equally valuable. My grateful thanks to all the volunteers. We will be making donations to the charities nominated by Gemini and the Neston Strummers. As the Strummers overran their time - you can't stop them once they get strumming - I did not have time to announce the quiz answers so here they are:

1. 1966 2. Clockwise 3. The Statue of Liberty 4. Nahum Tate 5. In the Bleak Midwinter 6. Irving Berlin 7. I Wanna Hold Your Hand 8. J S Bach 9. Parson Brown 10. 1,000 Brussels sprouts. 11. 1959. 12. Apple 13. Matthew 14. Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs 15. Ceppetto 16. Alice in Wonderland 17. Let It Go 18. Double vision 19. Helium 20. Eight 21. Albania 22. Poet Laureate 23. Harold Wilson 24. Mary Quant 25. The Dead Sea 26. The Pyramids of Giza 27. The Solway Firth 28. Kathy Staff, Peter Sallis, Bill Owen, Brian Wilde, Robert Fyfe 29. Porgy and Bess 30. Greece.

Any queries regarding the quiz should be directed to Celia as she compiled it!

Michael

## With Apologies to Kipling...

If you can climb a staircase, reach the top and still know what you've come for...

If you can take a walk, and when it's done, not feel absolutely done for...

If you can rise from sitting in a chair, and keep from groaning...

If you can read or hear the News without incessant moaning...

If you can spend each morning taking pills and medication...

With optimistic feeling instead of gloomy meditation...

If you can tell the difference between Instagram and Twitter...

Watch technology racing onward and not feel lost or bitter...

If you can think of grandkids' ages and not find it depressing...

And contemplate advancing years and yet still count your blessings...

If you can love time present, and not regret time's passing...

If you can find the fresh and new exciting not harassing...

If you can suffer Brexit when YOU preferred remaining...

If your 50<sup>th</sup> Christmas Newsletter can still be entertaining...

**THEN YOU'RE A BETTER MAN THAN I AM GUNGA DIN!!!**



Singing for Fun Group at the Christmas Party



## **Day out at the Salt Works and Anderton Lift.**

On the 19<sup>th</sup> September our Outings Group set out for Northwich to visit the famous Salt Works. It was opened over 100 years ago, but closed in 1987.

Doesn't sound very interesting, does it?

Well you would be very surprised, as were we.

We had a very knowledgeable guide, which was a pleasant surprise as we had been told there was none available on that day.

We were shown the offices, the old working areas, the heavy machinery and then, outside, the old salt pans etc.

It's well worth a visit.

After a coffee break we joined the bus again and were taken to the visitors' centre at the Anderton Lift for the second part of our day out, which included a sail on the River Weaver, which was lovely, with an excellent guide telling us how the river was used in those days.

The weather wasn't brilliant but our group is never put off, we just keep going.

Thanks to you all for helping to make this a great day out.

Doreen and Dot



## And more on the same subject from Peter:

The rain came whilst we were in the museum. Dark but exhibits well lit. It was interesting to see how earlier generations earned their living. The café was cheerful. For the transfer to Anderton, the rain obligingly ceased. The café there served good snacks. After a bit of a delay we went aboard, dropped in the lift and cruised on the River Weaver to Northwich and back. The commentary was entertaining. A tramp up the hill to our coach and home. No whinges, everyone happy.

Your trip advisor assessment: Salt Works 9/10; Anderton Lift 10/10  
Organisation 12/10.



Anderton Lift Cafe

## Lunch Club

The lunch club will recommence in February. Marianne will be at her table at the rear of the hall before the meeting commences to take names of those who would like to attend. We haven't actually booked a venue as yet, but will have done by the time the January meeting comes round so you'll be able to join in if you wish to. Everyone is welcome.



## Jodrell Bank with the Earth and Beyond Group

The group visited Jodrell Bank radio telescope site at the end of October. This Group encompasses Meteorology, Geology and Astronomy. (But not astrology!) The vast dish of the radio telescope was the brainchild of Sir Bernard Lovell and came into its own during the 1960s space race. It is used nowadays for exploring the cosmos. The site is large and has many exhibits and interactive displays suitable for children of all ages. 3D Films are shown in a planetarium like new Dome building; quite extra-terrestrial in a subdued sort of way. The talks were enlightening and interesting. The programme filled the day and the Group agreed, it had been a good outing.

Your Trip advisor's verdict:

Jodrell Bank 10/10.

U3A organisation 12/10.

From Peter



## YOUR U3A

‘No, I definitely don’t want to join the U3A, thank you.’ Secretly I thought that at 69 I was much too young, too active and preferred the company of younger people.

However, stuff happens and my life was suddenly turned upside down. Due to my husband’s cycling accident I found myself in charge of a disabled person and unable to continue my own cycling activities.

I took a deep breath and went to one of the U3A monthly meetings. Since I did not know anyone, that first meeting was a bit overwhelming. However, on the way out I met another newcomer, Di Clayton. That was the start of a beautiful friendship.

Colin and I have always had a variety of interests including country dancing. We laboured under the illusion that everyone we met would enjoy these interests as much as we did, if only they had the chance to try them.

Rather surprisingly this turned out to be true! Country dancing became very popular.

It has therefore given me great pleasure to know that the dancing will continue without me, thanks to my fellow callers, Joyce Seaton, Pam Irving and Pat Cross.

Ann Taylor

*I sent out a request for comments about the Christmas Lunch and Party and there was quite a good response - so many thanks to those who took the trouble to send me an email. Some people preferred not to have their names mentioned so I’ve kept everyone anonymous to make life simpler (and in case, God forbid, I should make a mistake and name someone who prefers not to be known) Ed.*

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I am so glad everyone enjoyed the Royal Oak! I am one of the old dears who lunches there every Sunday and I have been singing their praises loudly for years. I hope you will go again.

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Yes, the Christmas lunch was indeed excellent, with good food and good service. Unfortunately a few days later I succumbed to some sort of cough/cold/nausea bug, which I'm still trying to shake off, so I was unable to go to the Christmas party at the Civic Hall (or the History Society Christmas Party that evening!)

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Hi Shelagh, happy new year to you and all the committee.

I don't wish to be rude but many people told me they did not want to go to the party because the singing was so awful (excruciating is a word I heard often) and also some of us are too young to want to listen to WWII songs. Sadly, if like me and my husband you don't like Ukuleles either, then it really did not have anything to recommend it apart from meeting up with other U3A members which we did at other events.

I hope you are not offended but better to know why!

*It's absolutely better to know why so thank you for speaking up. Ed.*

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I agree that the Christmas lunch was absolutely fantastic. Well done for everyone who organized it. With regard to the Christmas party and the lower attendance, I can only think that is based on the experience of last year. I don't know how it can be improved, and I wonder if we even need one in future. I appreciate that a lot of work goes into these things, I've been there myself. So please take this as constructive criticism.

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I would like to make a comment about the Christmas meal at The Royal Oak. I have never had such a Christmas Lunch outing in 80 years as good as this one and I have been to some high class restaurants over that time. The food was cooked to perfection and the wonderful staff added to the lovely experience. It was certainly great value for money and the atmosphere was wonderful.

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Sorry I was unable to attend Christmas party. I had a virus and bad cough, but as with other people, a lot else on. Perhaps an earlier party, ie In November would attract more interest.  
Hope this helps.

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I thought the entertainment at this year's party was better than last year. The singing group were really good and the Strummers are always fun. I don't know why people complain, where else can you get a drink, a mince pie and an afternoon's entertainment for £2?

The Christmas lunch at the Royal Oak was excellent.

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I haven't any really bad comments other than because the attendance was poor, people didn't join in the fun. A smaller venue would have been more party like (the URC in Moorside lane?). The choir and dancers were great. The quiz was really good but we were left without answers. There were some superb Bell Ringers at the Town Fair that would have gone down well. I've heard a better ukulele group who practice at the youth Centre in Burton Rd. But thanks to all the committee who pull their tripe out to get it done.

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The Meal at The Royal Oak was excellent. The venue was clean warm and friendly. I only saw two main members of staff, either serving at the bar, and or serving the meals at the table. They were well organised, efficient and helpful. The car park was adequate, if we went again I would suggest using a mini bus or sharing lifts. The problem with the civic hall that put me off and may have put others off, is the parking. You had to have registered your car registration in advance, and the parking was limited. I do not feel safe walking from The British Legion or the public car park to the Civic Hall. It is a very busy road, there is no safe or adequate pavement to walk on the side of the Civic Hall. I have an artificial knee, arthritis, and have cancer. I use a walking stick and find it extremely difficult. Yes there is limited car parking outside the Civic Hall - some is reserved for speakers, but there are never any disabled parking spaces free. The majority, if any, of the cars parked there quite often do not display a disabled badge. Can your committee solve that problem?

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I went to the U3A lunch. It was a really good meal and excellent value for money. I had the Pate and Ron had the soup. Traditional Christmas dinner was my choice. Ron had Roast Beef with a really good selection of veg. I had Christmas Pudding. Ron doesn't like Christmas pudding or meringue. He was quite happy with what he had eaten but they brought him ice cream. Everyone on our table got on really well and all agreed it was great.

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## Christmas Cake in the Bush

We had to make a choice. The next day's cycle ride could be 70 miles of tarmac or 50 miles of unsurfaced track. The shorter distance won. Was that a look of pity that crossed the faces of the Guest House owners? Did they know something which we didn't? Of course they did. They knew that the hot dry wind would be against us all the way, the surface rough and gradients steep. In fact we found that it was all we could do to keep the pedals turning in bottom gear. Even the downhill offered little respite due to the wind and loose gravel. Slowly but surely the track was wearing us down. When we reached a clearing in the forest we collapsed exhausted on the tinder dry leaves. Suddenly one of us produced a package wrapped in foil. Of course Christmas cake. Oh how we enjoyed the sweet icing and the rich moist fruity inside. With every mouthful we felt our good spirits and energy returning, even enough to make another attack on the track.

I rode along with Bruce, our adopted Aussie, for a while. His mother Di had made the cake. I told Bruce about the hallucinations I was having. They took the form of tankards of brown foaming liquid. As I suspected, he was suffering from the same effect. We made a pact to stop at the first pub. It turned out to be miles away.

I am sure that if it had not been for Di's cake we would have been caught out in the dark with the wombats and kangaroos. The recipe for the cake must have been handed down through the generations. What a blessing that those early pioneering women did not forget the traditional Christmas fare of the old country.

Ann Taylor

*Ann, that reminds me of our cycling marathon along the Canal du Midi in France. I think it took about 5 days on a very bumpy towpath and my poor bum was shredded after day one. Nobody told me you weren't supposed to wear knickers under the cycling shorts – but 5 days without clean drawers? Perlease! (Ed.)*

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## Editor's bit

It might be a bit late but Happy New Year anyway.

It's been so good to receive emails and comments from so many members this time. It's your u3a and you should chip in whenever you have something to say. All ideas, suggestions, complaints will be raised at committee meetings and chewed over. I'm not saying there'll always be a solution but we try.

I was interested in the point raised that there are not always disabled parking spaces available outside the Civic Hall. I would like to ask that people who don't have any problems walking, or those who are not bringing equipment and need to be near the entrance, don't take up the available spaces. It's a subject close to my heart. My first husband was very disabled and if you've ever suffered the rage and frustration of trying to find a disabled parking space when they're all filled up with able bodied people, you'd have a great deal of sympathy for Blue Badge holders. Just stop and think about it now and again. I don't think the Civic Hall parking bays are labeled as disabled, but I've put the thought into your heads now. Don't use them unless you have to. Please. (You'll be old and knackered yourself one day!)

Educating Michael – people ask for doggie bags because they're too embarrassed to ask for leftovers for themselves. I always take a plastic box with me when I go out to eat and I grab leftover everything. I have no shame and they're obliged to chuck out the leftovers – terrible waste! Whatever can't be turned into soup goes to the birds. Did you know that wild birds appreciate chopped up roast potatoes? The RSPB says so. So if they like roasties, it stands to reason that they can also have leftover chips doesn't it? Carbs and fat. They love it (don't we all?) and they need it in the cold weather. So I happily grab all the spare chips as well. Waste not, want not, pick your.... no, maybe I won't say that bit.

I've had a request from Tina, who looks after the book sales table. She's not selling enough. Please stop by and have a look, there might be something that takes your fancy. It's a lot of work, getting them out, putting them away etc. So if nobody's looking or buying, it's hardly worth the bother. And I miss the freebie magazines. I love a freebie magazine and I have a few to give away - I don't want

to throw them into the recycling. What do you think? Should we re-instate the freebie mags? Can you be persuaded to visit the book table?

And don't forget to buy a raffle ticket! There'll be bottles of mulled wine up for grabs for the foreseeable future. And if you've got any unwanted Christmas pressies, bring them along. Somebody might want them. Let recycling be the buzzword word of 2024. You'll be doing the Planet a favour.

Toodle pip and best wishes from Shelagh

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Jolly times at the Christmas Party

## A happy New Year to all our members.