

Richmond upon Thames

u3a

<https://rut.u3asite.uk/>



Newsletter, February 2025, Volume 72

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(Cover picture: Heron at Richmond lock - taken by Carole Fletcher)

RICHMOND UPON THAMES U3A COMMITTEE & OFFICERS

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Norma Cook – norma.beagle@gmail.com

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CHAIRMAN'S LETTER

I was intending writing this before Christmas, but Christmas has come and gone and only now am I sitting down to put pen to paper (well, not literally; things have moved on a bit since the days of Charles Dickens). So let me begin by wishing you all the very best for 2025. I hope you have enjoyed the festive season and time with your family, and that the New Year finds you in good health.

Firstly, I am pleased to report that our committee is now close to full strength. Norma Cook who many of you will know and who had previously been our group co-ordinator, has agreed to rejoin the committee. Among other duties, she will act as liaison between the committee and section leaders/group leaders.

This past year has been one of mixed fortunes as regards our monthly meetings. Several were cancelled due to Clarendon Hall being requisitioned by the council for one reason or another. But all those that did go ahead were well attended and members enjoyed an interesting range of speakers.

At the October meeting we had an unexpectedly large attendance of over 160 members. I had thought it was a record for our U3A but looking back through old newsletters I see that the meeting in May 2015 attended by the Mayor of Richmond attracted over 200 members. Perhaps you are surprised that the mayor should be such a draw; I suspect that the committee at the time indulged in a bit of bribery to boost numbers; cake and a glass of prosecco were on offer to all attendees. Whether that was the true reason for the massive turnout, who can tell. Maybe I should try that trick in the future if attendances start to wane.

At our meeting in October, we trialled the idea of a table at the back of the hall where, after the speaker's presentation, new members could congregate and chat over a mug of tea. Gerry Wear introduced the idea and hosted the gathering at that meeting. She was absent for the December meeting but we shall try and repeat the idea at future monthly meetings. If you are a relatively new member and wish to meet others, please find your way to the back of the hall and introduce yourself to Gerry.

Richmond u3a was founded in 1991 and in 2016 we held a number of events to celebrate the 25th anniversary. The year 2021 would have been our 30th anniversary but it coincided with the Covid restrictions, so we were unable to repeat the celebrations. Rather than wait until 2026 for the next significant anniversary, we thought we would try and organise something this year. What form this will take I'm not sure but if you have any interesting ideas, please let us know. Bear in mind that we now have around 1500 members and we want as many as possible to have the chance of participating.

Changing the subject, the sharp-eyed amongst you might have noticed a somewhat different look and feel to the Richmond u3a website. The underlying software has been replaced by 'Site Works', a third-party package which has been customised to meet u3a requirements by various volunteers from within the u3a organisation, under the direction of u3a central office. Perhaps you don't need to know all that, but it helps understand where some of your subscription money gets spent. One big advantage of the new website, once it gets properly implemented, is that it will no longer be necessary to maintain information about groups on both Beacon and the website; the two will be linked so that updates made in Beacon will be automatically applied to the

website. So, a plea to all group leaders, please make use of Beacon to maintain information about your group.

One final word. The AGM this year will again be postponed from its normal February slot to Wednesday March 26th.

John Cardwell: john.cardwell51@yahoo.com

EDITOR'S LETTER

My computer is having fun today and I'm afraid my patience is wearing thin. My first thought is to apologise at the late arrival of this magazine. I'm afraid I was ill just after Christmas and struggling with a badly behaved computer was the last thing on my mind.

But at least it pointed out one thing – that it was at last time for me to hand over this newsletter to another editor whose health is more reliable. I have been editing it since 2016, a job I have loved doing but a new editor will probably bring changes and new ideas and bring new life to it.

I had never edited a magazine before so it was a strange role I inherited. No, that's not quite right. My brother and I started a family magazine called Forest Review in connection with our family name which was Bigwood. I must have been all of six or seven and we were quite proud of the fact that it went to relatives in Australia and America, who offered entries and attempted our crazy puzzles. Our efforts with a foldable typewriter, hand charged printer and wax stencils makes me laugh now.

So let me say now that if you would be interested in taking over this very pleasant job do please let me know and I hope my rather short edition this time will convince you to come up with an inspiring and interesting magazine of your own making. Looking forward to hearing from you.

Sue Wood, susan.orleans@tiscali.co.uk

GROUPS A–Z: MODERN ARCHITECTURE

We meet once a month, do two site visits which we try to make as varied as we can manage, followed by a seminar when we review and discuss what we've seen. Recently we had a guided tour over the Daniel Libeskind graduate centre building for the London Metropolitan University in Holloway, an exploration of Blackfriars railway bridge which spans the river and has a roof of solar panels, and the ticket halls on both the North and South banks. We also looked at the Art Deco Unilever headquarters, and by dint of speaking very nicely to the chap on the door, managed to get access to the amazing atrium, usually 'no public access', and we finished a successful morning in the wonderful Arts and Crafts Blackfriars pub.

On our most recent visit, we had a conducted tour of the Clore extension to Tate Britain by the Head of Conservation of works of art on paper, which included a fascinating visit to the Conservation Studio. We are very fortunate to live somewhere that offers so many fascinating visits within easy reach; we already have the new Brentford football stadium and Cadogan Hall on our list for the New Year.

We currently have a waiting list of 15, and our most recent recruit had been waiting over two years to join. We've found we have to restrict our numbers because otherwise our site visits, tours, etc. just become too unwieldy to organise.

I shall end with a plea: if anyone would like to organise a second group, I could perhaps pass on a list of all the sites we've visited in the past and if they wanted to, the new group could choose from those to start with.

Lyn Keay, spillings@hotmail.com

GROUPS A-Z: SINGING FOR PLEASURE GROUP

This has been going for so long that no one seems to know exactly when it started. When I joined more than 10 years ago, it was led by the amazing opera singer Ava June who had started the group when she retired from professional singing. It was a very large and enthusiastic group, and it continued successfully despite losing two leaders in those years, but it was Lockdown that had the most devastating effect, of course.

We kept going via regular emails with news and links to songs, etc, but even when we were able to meet again, some people were understandably wary of joining a group, and further, of singing in a group. However, we've carried on as we have a core of long-standing and very dedicated singers, and at last our numbers are increasing again as new members join us and some old ones return.

We sing a wide and eclectic range of music from Handel to Joni Mitchell and everything in between, and we recently had our best

turn-out this year. Of course, it's always possible that the tea and homemade cakes we always have afterwards is part of the appeal, but our pianist Sally, our Conductor Nick and I all hope that it's really the music and the great pleasure of singing together that draws them!

We would welcome more singers and especially men into the group, as they are very much in a minority, and it would be good to have a more balanced range of voices.

[Lyn Keay, spillings@hotmail.com](mailto:spillings@hotmail.com)

THE LONGEST YARN

A Thread through History

Our u3a knitting group recently enjoyed a very memorable visit to the Royal Garrison church in Aldershot, two days after Remembrance Day. On display was an amazing exhibition, called The Longest Yarn, A Thread through History, an 80-metre knitted and crocheted work depicting the events of 6th June 1944 – The Longest Day - and created for the 80th Anniversary of the D Day landings.



An Englishwoman, living in Normandy, had the idea to make a knitted topper for her garden wall in the village of Houesville, near Carentan to commemorate the anniversary. She discussed it with a few other knitters and the whole enterprise grew until now it's a work, which we all think is

comparable to the Bayeux tapestry. It is divided up into 80 scenes, which have been created by people from around the world from Australia, New Zealand, United States of America, Canada and here in Europe.

Each panel depicts a scene from June 6th, 1944, from a weather map to men loading up in England, the landing beaches in Normandy, parachutists stuck in greenhouses or a church tower, Pegasus Bridge and a temporary cemetery in Normandy.



When the 7 of us arrived, there was a very short queue outside the church, but as we entered, an ex-military man, a volunteer, explained the unique queuing system –a sitting in a pew queue. We went where directed, sat in the warmth, and waited our turn for an hour and a half, wondering if we should have brought our knitting. One of our group, a little older than most of us, entertained with her memories of D Day, as her family lived very near Portsmouth and told of all the tanks lined up in their street.



It was definitely worth the wait. The 80 tableaux, filled with exquisite detail, both knitted and crocheted, are almost impossible to describe and photographs do not do justice to the artistry and skill involved. Each

scene is historically accurate to the extent that we began to forget that we were there to marvel at the craftsmanship, and we became immersed in D Day itself. The last display case contained a single knitted helmet, a very poignant conclusion to a most memorable and moving experience. We all agree that we have been very fortunate to be able to see this event, which was much more powerful than we imagined it would be, when we decided to go.

Julia Chia's Knitting & Crocheting Group, chiaj14@yahoo.co.uk



If any of you are interested to find out more or see more photos, go to: <https://www.thelongestyarn.com/>

RICHMOND U3A SPEAKERS FEB – APR25

Meetings are held on the last Wednesday of each month at 14:30 at Clarendon Hall next to York House, Twickenham, TW1 3NJ, near the Civic Centre off Richmond Road. Served by bus routes 33, R68, R70, H22 and 490 (Lebanon Court stop). Walk towards the Council offices.

26th Mar: Bernard Lockett – “The Heritage of Gilbert & Sullivan”

The 14 G&S works are much valued parts of our cultural heritage and still enjoyed enormously to-day throughout the world. Apart from Sullivan’s exquisite music, Gilbert’s words are full of social comment and consideration. This is not just a wonderful reflection of Victorian society but equally applies to so much in our lives today.

Bernard has been a life-long enthusiast of G&S. He has written two books on the subject and broadcast on several BBC programmes. He is a Trustee of the International Gilbert and Sullivan Festival which takes place annually in Buxton, Harrogate and Malvern, as well as providing a touring programme to English theatres every autumn.

30th Apr: Roger Browne – “The Great American Songbook”

Roger is a professional pianist, raconteur and singer. In his presentation he will discuss and performs music from the Great American Song Book including the works of Gershwin, Kern, Porter, Rodgers, Berlin, Carmichael, Fats Waller and others.