



Chester Times

May 2021

u3a learn,
laugh,
live
Chester

Welcome to our new look news sheet, now renamed Chester Times. The look is new; the contents are new and greatly expanded. Many of our groups have begun to send in articles and we hope more will follow their example. Groups are very much at the heart of our u3a so we would love to hear from you. Please let us know what you think.

Musings from the Chair: carrying on with our alphabet theme

K is for kisses, including hugs and touch which we have missed because of our enforced separation from kith and kin and friends. Granted that not everyone likes to be touched, the view of Prof Robin Dunbar is that: *'touch has a long evolutionary history ... that is how primates bond to create friendships. Touch creates a sense of relaxation and calmness and a feeling of trust.'*

If all goes well, we should be able to return to such basic bonding behaviour, even it is only a hearty handshake, on 21st June. After that date we can then restart face-to-face groups and make arrangements for our monthly meetings for all.

L is for Learn, Laugh, Live: the strapline of the u3a. The word '**learn**' can seem a bit intimidating, with its possible implication of compulsion. The u3a has now shed its 1973 birth title of University of the Third Age with its connotations of abstruse learning. The former

title may have caused reluctance by some retirees to become members, wrongly believing it is only for those who have had higher education. We want to do everything possible to dispel that prejudice and to widen our membership. If you have any ideas how we can do this for the national u3a day on 2nd June, please get in touch with me soon.

No one needs to be told about the life sustaining properties of **laughter**. Very young children can do it without any training and apparently even our near primate cousins like chimps do so too.

'Live' is a verb and requires some action on our part, whether it is actively teaching others some skill you have, giving a talk on a subject you know a lot about, organising a local trip or a holiday, having a meal and a natter and putting the world to rights. All these need volunteers. In other words we need **YOU**.

Again, please get in touch with any ideas. *Ben*

'The trouble with having an open mind, of course, is that people will insist on coming along and trying to put things in it.' Sir Terry Pratchett (1948-2015)

So ... Decide on your own mind fillings. Join a u3a group (Chair)

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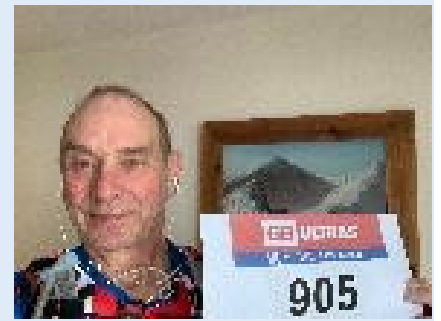
Tuesday Monthly Meetings (Online)

Tuesday 4th May Freedom of Speech - do we really need it?

In the USA, the First Amendment protects freedom of speech and the right to petition government for redress of grievances. But what if the idea or thought being expressed is considered offensive or unacceptable by others? Former president Donald Trump recently claimed that his right to express his opinion on the legitimacy of the 2020 election result was protected by the First Amendment. But was it? In this talk Dr Donna Jackson will discuss the importance of freedom of speech, reasons why this freedom might be limited and why, ultimately, the principle of a 'free marketplace of ideas', which protects groups such as the Ku Klux Klan, far right, or neo-nazis, is fundamental to a free society.

Tuesday 1st June Never Give Up - The Cheerful Insanity of a Long-Distance Runner

The Montane Spine Race is widely regarded as one of the world's toughest endurance races. It hit the headlines in 2019, when Jasmin Paris became the first female to win it, shattering the course record by more than 12 hours, and doing it all whilst expressing milk to breast-feed her baby. So what makes people want to enter? What is the preparation like? And why on earth do it when you reach the age of seventy? Come along to this talk by Garfield Southall and find out (and be thankful it isn't you running...).



Thursday Meetings

Thursday 13th May 10.00am for 10.30am

Today's session will be in two parts:

1. **Brightlife – Christine McMahon**

Brightlife is an organisation started in 2015 in Chester, similar in its aims to u3a, to improve people's social connections. It will be interesting to hear how it differs from the u3a and how they work alongside other charities aiming to reduce loneliness and social isolation for people over the age of 50.

2. **David Atkinson - Music**

Dave, a member of Chester u3a who played a session in the advent calendar, began writing in the late 1960s and has written more than 400 songs, inspired by amongst others Bob Dylan, Leonard Cohen, Joni Mitchell and Kris Kristofferson. Dave has produced two limited-run vinyl albums, *Atkinsongs* (1973) and *The Beggar and The Sand* (1976).

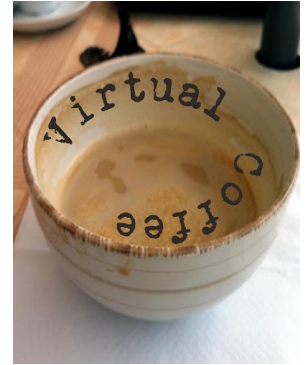
Dave will be doing a mix of his own songs and some that will be familiar. If you go to his website - <http://www.atkinsongs.co.uk/> - you will see what he has produced. Dave will try and oblige if you want to make a request based on what you see on the website.

Thursday 20th May 10am-12 noon

The virtual **u3a Café** is moving to the third Thursday of the month as there were so many apologies for the last session. The time will be the same. This is an open invitation to all members. Pop in and out as you please just like a real cafe. It is an opportunity to find out planned social events

and 'have your say' about your u3a, which we can always feed back to the committee. If you are a new member and would like to know more, it is a great way to meet fellow members in a relaxed atmosphere. Come along with any question or topic you would like to discuss or listen to – all contributions appreciated. Please bring your own coffee and cake!!

If you would like to invite a friend, please send them the link – all are welcome. The Zoom link will be e-mailed to you close to the meeting date so that you do not lose it!. Please join us.



Future Thursday Meetings

Thursday meetings are aimed at members' contributions. This has been difficult during covid, so we had to change things a bit. It is now time to move back. We would appreciate more input from members, so we are putting forward two possibilities:

1. A session based on the TV quiz show 'Would I lie to you?'. A member would tell/read a short story (it may or may not be true) and the rest of us can question the member using the 'chat' function or by raising a hand. After a few questions the audience may vote on whether you think the story is true or not. It could be fun!
2. We could hear a member's life story. We have all been to the 'University of Life' so all of us have a story to share about all or a snippet of our life experiences.

If you would like to have a chat about either of these ideas, please call 01244 680460 or email Thursdays@chesteru3a.org.uk . If you wish to take part but need help with Zoom, please contact us.

Jenny and Dave – (Thursdays coordinators)

Bird of the Month

1. Chiffchaff

(by Alison Betts, Bird Watching 1)

The warm southerly airflow that brought us some glorious warm days at the end of March also heralded the arrival of some of our summer migrant birds returning to breed. The chiffchaff is part of the early cohort. It is one of those birds often described by birders as an LBB, that is a "little brown bird", not easily distinguished when spotted fleetingly in the trees. It is olive brown above and dull buff white below, with a pointed beak and pale eyebrow stripe, a little smaller and more streamlined than a robin. It feeds on insects, spends most of its time flitting about in the trees and is quite common though more rarely spotted. A complication for true birders is that it is virtually visually indistinguishable from a willow warbler.



A story told by a bird ringer at an observatory is of great deliberations as to whether they were recording a chiffchaff or a willow warbler. Finally settling on willow warbler they released the bird which promptly called "Chiff Chaff".

That is the beauty of this little bird; it announces its name to those who care to listen. Any stroll through trees in these summer months might reward you with the sound of the chiffchaff. Good Listening!

Bird of the Month

2. Great Tit

(by John Quinn, Bird Watching 3)

Here is one colourful visitor you may get in your garden - a great tit. They're about the size of a robin. They eat seeds, insects particularly caterpillars and may be found near your garden feeder, being partial to sunflower seeds, peanuts and fat. The RSPB website described their call as a two-note descending call repeated several times, usually described as 'tea-cher, tea-cher!'



Wednesday Walkers

Description of a walk from Tarporley, by Ian Cross

Tarporley – the *Terra Incognita*?

It was the third Wednesday of April, so u3a Wednesday Walkers, newly released from lockdown, took their chance to get out and 'walk local', given the remaining covid constraints – no car sharing, Rule of Six, social distancing etc. The walk took us into the countryside around Tarporley, on paths which even the most experienced among us had not trodden before.

Beginning in Tarporley, we headed west to join the Sandstone Trail, then north to the sleepy hamlet of Fishers Green. We then turned east past historic Utkinton Hall, now rather dilapidated, which James I is supposed to have visited after a hunt in 1617. The walk then skirted the Portal Golf Course, where, as instructed, we kept between the blue posts and remained alert for cries of 'Fore!' A sunken lane took us down to Eaton, where we turned back west, crossing the golf course again to take us back into Tarporley.

Start point: parking in Tarporley on Utkinton Road, or in the Poppy Lane Car Park (check current restrictions).

Duration: 3 hours 45 minutes
Distance: 7.9 miles
Total ascent: about 350 feet

NB: if you wish to do this walk please note that the above is not intended to be a step-by-step guide. You should go appropriately equipped, eg with a map, keep to footpaths with rights of way, and observe current covid guidelines.



Some Wednesday Walkers, celebrating release from lockdown

April's Tuesday Meeting Talk: Wirral Vikings, by Dr Clare Downham

Reviewed by Ian Cross from the History Group

Go back 1200 years and travel 10 miles north of Chester. You would have found yourself on the edge of a profound linguistic boundary. You may think that it's just the same today, but this was a boundary between Anglo-Saxon to the south, and Norse-Irish on the Wirral to the north. Dr Clare Downham, Reader in Irish Studies at the University of Liverpool, in her talk on 'Viking Wirral' treated us to a fascinating analysis of place-names in the area, showing how a tenth century incursion of Vikings expelled from Dublin had transformed its toponomy – Thingwall, Heswall, Kirby, even Tranmere are all derived from Old Norse.

And then did you know that one of the most significant battles in English History probably took place at Bromborough? This was the battle in which King Athelstan of Wessex, in 937 CE, made his claim to rule all England a reality, by defeating a combined force of Vikings, Scots and sundry others. And there isn't even a Visitor Centre? Why not? Because generations of scholars have disputed the location of the battle referred to in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle as *Brunanburh* – even which county it was in (Michael Wood says it was 'somewhere along the Don valley in Yorkshire').

Dr Downham took us expertly through all the evidence pointing to Bromborough as the site of the battle – the fact that it's the only place-name that fits, the fact that the sources point to a nearby landing of the Viking fleet, and the likelihood from a strategic point of view of a landing in friendly territory, where a quick getaway was possible in the event of defeat.



She also took us through the counter-arguments, persuasively explaining them away. The object of the Viking force was to recover the Viking Kingdom of York – but this was accessible from Chester via the surviving network of Roman roads. A twelfth century source, John of Worcester, referred to the fleet landing in the Humber, but he was writing long after the events, and he tended to embellish his stories. As a southerner, he was also a bit hazy about northern geography.

Perhaps nothing has changed there either!

If you want to learn more about this subject, there is a downloadable app, 'The Viking Age in the North West', authored by Dr Downham for the University of Liverpool.

Treasure Hunt

We have a winner! Congratulations 😊
Mike and Pat Pollard completed the treasure with all photos correct in record time, and they have received two (plastic-free) Easter eggs, one dark and one milk chocolate.



Art Appreciation 2 by Terry McHugh

Prior to the pandemic, Art Appreciation 2 meetings were a mixture of visiting exhibitions and giving presentations to the group. Now we have embraced Zoom and meet fortnightly instead of monthly. Several good new ideas have emerged, such as virtual walk-through visits to the Courtauld Institute and rather more adventurously to the Prado in Madrid.

The format of our meetings is little changed; we choose a theme, an artist or artistic movement and group members volunteer to present for 10-15 minutes about a particular work or works, followed by group discussion. In the Prado visit for example we discussed Velasquez' Las Meninas and Goya's Third of May in their particular historical context.

We have looked at Modigliani, the art of Japan and female artists from around the world including Frida Kahlo, Kathe Kollwitz and Artemisia Gentileschi. Most recently we have picked on one word themes including 'propaganda', 'cartoons' and will next be

looking at 'trees'. The cartoon theme may seem trivial but you would be surprised.

Among the artists discussed was James Gillray who around 1790 poked fun at the thought of a vaccine against smallpox: perhaps the first anti-vaxxer. We looked at Marjane Satrapi, the iconic feminist with her poignant but funny views of the cruelty and even persecution of women in Iran which still exists today.

Our very last presentation was a thought-provoking piece on the work of Charles Schulz, demonstrating how the apparent simplicity of Charlie Brown, Lucy, Linus and Snoopy hide the complexities of human characteristics and emotions.

We hope this shows Art Appreciation 2 is a serious group and certainly our presenters do significant amounts of research before they enlighten us. However we have never taken ourselves too seriously to lose the fun and enjoyment of learning more about art and artists.

Book Review by Lesley Knaggs from Literary Appreciation 1

10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World, by Elif Shafak, 2019

Prostitute Tequila Leila, born to traditional Muslim parents in Van, is murdered, her body stuffed into a bin and abandoned on the outskirts of Istanbul. What follows is the story of her childhood and life as it is recollected during the few remaining minutes of her still active mind, full of vivid memories of Turkish life.

She and her five best friends, whose stories are also told, are marginalised but vibrant characters scraping their livings and taking their comfort from each other in an unpredictable Istanbul, itself a key character in the narrative. They live their lives against a backdrop of local and international events, one of which is the visit of the USA's 6th Fleet, which triggers riots in Taksim Square and leads to Leila meeting the student she later marries. She then loses him during demonstrations when more than

thirty people are killed.

Following her post-mortem, Leila is buried in the Cemetery of the Companionless, from where her shocked friends plot to retrieve her. The final third of the book recounts the increasingly fraught action they have to take in their determination to ensure a dignified burial for their companion. The result is not what Leila had imagined for herself earlier – and not what her friends had envisaged either.

Nonetheless, she is rescued from the ignominy and loneliness of the Cemetery, and her friends can eventually celebrate her life in the way they had wanted to.

As with much of Elif Shafak's writing, this is a novel of great humanity.

My Life Less Plastic, by Sue Foy

Some of you will remember my talk to Chester u3a following the short course 'A Life Less Plastic'. Since then I have done more research, and been off on a virtual mini-tour of a few other u3as giving my ever-evolving presentation. The most recent of these was Flintshire, and they have been kind enough to allow me to share it with those of you who didn't see the original. It is now shorter and snappier, and includes a section on micro-plastics. You can see it here: <https://youtube/bemrCLxquEM>

At the same time I have been further reducing my household's consumption of plastic, and it occurred to me that there might be other people interested in some of the ways in which I have done it. This month the focus is on food.

Supermarkets have driven the ever-increasing use of single-use packaging, and in their supply chain a single item can be wrapped in throw-away plastic multiple times. Other than growing your own food, the best way is to use local suppliers.

Hoole Food Market (<https://hoolefoodmarket.co.uk>) will supply you with a fruit/vegetable box which you can specify you want to be plastic-free, and you can also add dry goods to it. They deliver free within a 15-mile radius of Chester. You can place either a regular or a one-off order, and they try to source as much as possible from local farmers. You can even say

you want all items to be UK grown. They have at least one customer who does just that, although you have to accept that you are unlikely to get, say, lemons.

Pen-y-lan Pork (<https://penylanpork.co.uk>), whom some of you will remember from the very moving talk that Mike Ford gave us at a Thursday meeting, will supply bacon, sausages, and hams, and again you can specify plastic-free, and they deliver. I get a larger order and freeze some.

Lastly, takeaways: the first from Harker's Arms (<https://www.brunningandprice.co.uk/harkers>). When I went to collect mine, I was delighted to see that the packaging was entirely paper-based and highly effective. They tell me the same applies throughout their chain. (NB. Harker's, since re-opening, are now only doing takeaways on Saturdays and Sundays.) Also the fish and chips from Weston Grove chippy are not only plastic-free, but they won third place in the national fish and chip shop of the year award in 2020 (<https://fishandchips.atwestongrove.co.uk>).

One fact to note – three years ago it was really difficult to find an Easter egg without plastic. This year, it was difficult to find one with. If you vote with your money, retailers (and manufacturers) will listen.



PenyLan Packaging



Hoole Food Market



Harker's Packaging

Gardening Group, by Rosie Archer

After the years of waiting since the first announcement of the project, at last it is very nearly time for the opening of the RHS Bridgewater Garden, here in the North West. The big day is Tuesday 18th May, both for the garden itself and the Garden Centre. Entry to garden is by pre-booked time slots only. Go to: www.rhs.org.uk/gardens/bridgewater.

Monday–Sunday: 10am–6pm

Booking is not required to visit the Garden Centre

Monday–Saturday: 9.30am–6.30pm

Sunday: 11am–5pm (browsing from 10.30am)

Tasks to do in May



Late May is time for the “Chelsea chop”. Mild, moist spring weather can encourage lush growth in summer perennials, leaving them floppy and vulnerable to strong winds and heavy rain. Cutting them back by up to a half encourages regrowth that is more compact, stronger and self-supporting, producing more – albeit smaller – flowers.

This April has been notable for frequent overnight frosts, which are likely to continue well into May. Tender plants will need protection until at least the middle of the month, as well as hardening off outside in the daytime.

Strawberries! Lovely to grow your own but they can be a lot of work, only to find your luscious fruit has hidden away and rotted, or been eaten by slugs and insects. Try container planting in hanging baskets, window boxes, special strawberry planters or even wall pockets. Hanging from a container they stay off the ground, keeping them clean and safe from unwelcome visitors. Do remember to remove runners from container strawberries, keeping them tidy and directing all their effort into producing fruit and – above all – don’t neglect the watering.

Social Events

Thursday 2nd December

“Great Days Out” Christmas Lunch with 70s entertainment at The Queens Hotel, Chester. £29. 10.30am – 3 pm. Deposit £5 + £24 due by end of August. Includes 3 course meal. Contact Sue Proctor to book (01244 335943) or email Social Committee: social@chesteru3a.org.uk

The Shrewsbury Flower Show trip has unfortunately had to be cancelled.

Nerdal's Nook

Each month, Nerdal will set a puzzle. This will be of a mathematical or scientific nature. Some will be easy, some will be not-so-easy, and some will be devilishly difficult. An answer to the puzzle will be given in the Chester Times of the following month. No prizes will be given for solving the puzzles, just a warm glow of satisfaction that you have outsmarted Nerdal.

Gold Coins

You have six piles of gold coins sold to you by Alana, Ben, Caoili, Dexter, Eric, and Fran. One of these acquaintances is trying to rip you off. The true weight of these coins should be 10.00g each, the fraudster has made his/her coins slightly lighter at 9.95g and passes them off as the correct weight.

It is possible to find the fraudster using a digital balance that weighs to an accuracy of 0.01 g. I can find out the fraudster in only one weighing. How?



Good Luck, Nerdal

A message from one of our (anonymous) members

Our group has managed to meet twice weekly via Zoom during covid, one day for our lesson and the other for a chat, which proved very valuable to us all, especially those living on their own without close family support. Because of this we have kept all our group members and are still at full capacity. As we ease out of lockdown we plan to meet outside within government guidelines until we can get back to some sort of normality.

I feel that our group proves how invaluable u3a can be as we have supported each other and have maintained constant contact and care during the past year or so

Bridge

1. Guilden Sutton. We propose to reopen the u3a Bridge Club on Tuesday 22nd June, if things go to plan. It will be in the main room at the Village Hall from 12:30 pm until 4 pm. We have a membership of 40 but have space for one or two more members. We have a host system so you do not need to have a partner. Please bring your own water and sanitiser. The new coordinator for this group is Val Johnson. Please ring her on (01244) 795102.



2. Vicars Cross clubhouse.

We hope to restart this beginners group, most of whom are now intermediates, on Monday 7th July from 1.30 to 4 pm. Please contact the new coordinator, Dave Woodward, on (01244) 336958.



Social Media

I'm not sure how many of you are aware that Chester u3a has a Facebook page. It would be great if anyone who already uses Facebook could go to <https://www.facebook.com/chesteru3a> and give us a 'Like'. Likes, Shares and Comments are always welcome. It would be good to use it as a forum to share ideas, interests, holiday snaps, recipes, memories, suggestions for future talks or groups – (almost) anything. There are limits and just in case anyone shares something that's against u3a ethos, it will be removed.

If you haven't yet dipped a toe into social media water, then it can be a really fun and an easy way to get to know people, or to keep in touch with those you can't meet in person at the moment. If anyone uses different social media and would like us to get involved, do get in touch and we'll see what we can do. Twitter? Insta? TikTok, anyone?

Mal Waite

And Finally ... A little story sent in by our chairman, Ben

A fire started on some grasslands near a farm and the fire department was called to put it out. The fire was more than the department could handle. Someone suggested that a nearby volunteer bunch be called. Despite some doubt that the volunteer outfit would be of any assistance, the call was made. The volunteers arrived in a dilapidated old fire engine. They rumbled straight towards the fire, drove right into the middle of the flames and stopped!

The firemen jumped off the truck and frantically started spraying water in all directions. Soon they had snuffed out the centre of the fire, breaking the blaze into two easily controlled parts. Watching all this, the farmer was so impressed with the volunteer fire department's work and was so grateful that his farm had been spared, that on the spot he presented the volunteers with a cheque for £1,000.

A local news reporter asked the volunteer fire captain what the department planned to do with the funds. "That ought to be obvious," he responded, wiping ashes off his coat. "The first thing we're going to do is get the brakes fixed on our fire engine!"

The cut-off date for the next Chester Times is Wed 19 May 2021.

Please send contributions to: newsheet@chesteru3a.org.uk or: PO Box 167 Chester CH1 9FB.
This month's editor: Joyce Carrington

The next (June) edition will be a Special Edition to tie in with the national u3a day on 2nd June. It will highlight what Chester u3a has achieved and how it has changed in the last challenging year. We have several major contributions already lined up, but we would still like to see your own items, either from our groups or from individuals. Please do get in touch.

There will be joint editors next time: Rosie Archer and Joyce Carrington

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