

NEWSLETTER for Oundle & District

Edition Number 196
February 2025

If you would like to find out more about Oundle & District u3a,
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Registered Charity Number 1183800

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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Three encounters with social history came very close together for me recently. I received a book at Christmas about amateur theatre, aptly entitled '*Break a Leg*'. I did worry that it might simply contain a lot of 'luvvies' anecdotes but this certainly was not the case. It talked about the am-dram decline in the 1960s, which was blamed on the rise of television and the fracturing of communities but recent reports show an increase in participation in local theatrical productions. One participant commented 'it's the idea that, being so engrossed in something, you forget anything else is going on'. Does that strike a chord?

The following week, a new series about the social history of Britain since WW2 started, presented by Simon Schama, gave his personal view of the cultural and artistic life of this country. I won't go into the details because you may have already seen it or be planning to do so. The word 'fractured' was also used by Schama when talking about how our society has changed over the years.

My third encounter was on a visit to Compton Verney where, apart from the wonderful exhibition on Miniatures, I looked at the Folk Art display, described as 'objects made within the context of a community's everyday life'.

So, my theme is 'belonging to a community'. I do wonder whether we are the last generation of 'doers'? Many of our u3a Members are also members of other local organisations or clubs. We are the sort of people who enjoy company and want to be part of a community. Our reasons for doing so may differ: keeping the brain active, getting out of the house, warding off loneliness, helping others, meeting people, learning new skills – but the motivation to be involved in something is at its heart.

We know the importance of being with other people. The WHO has described social isolation and loneliness as a 'global public health concern' and a professor at the University of Warwick recently stated 'social relationships play an important part in keeping us healthy'.

I do worry that many younger people now lead much more sedentary and solitary lives, both in their work and in their leisure time and do not volunteer or get involved in local events. In which case, what will happen to our local organisations in the future?

I am so glad that our u3a Members are as involved and enthusiastic as they have ever been. Thank goodness – and long may it continue!

I hope to see you out and about soon,

Gill

MONDAY 10TH FEBRUARY

Alex Leger

and his talk will be on

'Life on the Licence Fee'

Queen Victoria Hall,
Oundle

Doors open at 2.00pm
for tea/coffee and
biscuits

MONDAY 10TH MARCH

Chris Forse

and his talk will be on

'On the road in the American West'

Queen Victoria Hall,
Oundle

Doors open at 2.00pm
for tea/coffee and
biscuits

MONTHLY MEETINGS



A record number of one hundred and nine members turned out on a chilly afternoon on Monday 13th January 2025 to hear PC Joanne Barlow and her Cyber counterpart, David Reed from Northamptonshire Police, speak on the subject of Cyber Awareness: scams and fraud. They told us how to protect ourselves from scams and frauds and what to do if we were victims of such an event. They told us about phishing, smishing, spoofing and quishing and updated us on what the police do to combat and disrupt crime in these areas. It was an interactive session with several relevant and interesting questions coming from the audience. David and Jo also stayed at the end of the afternoon to answer individual queries, such was the enthusiasm shown. Information leaflets were handed out and more will be available at future meetings. (See also information leaflets on the subject in our u3a November and December Newsletters.) We were sorry to hear that these talks to the general public are to be discontinued in 2025, as our record turnout demonstrates the need for such presentations to raise awareness: we know that what we learnt will be cascaded further to our families and friends. We wish Jo every success in the next stage of her career.

On **Monday 10th February 2025** we shall be very pleased to welcome Alex Leger to speak at our Monthly Meeting on the subject of '**Life on the Licence Fee**'. He joined the Blue Peter programme in 1975 when the presenters were John Noakes, Peter Purves and Lesley Judd. You may remember John Noakes climbing Nelson's Column and Lulu, the baby elephant who ran amok on the set. Alex remained at the BBC, working as a television programme maker for 36 years, during which time he saw many pivotal events in broadcasting and had memorable encounters with an erupting volcano, gorillas in Uganda and a life-threatening storm at sea.



Our speaker on **Monday 10th March 2025** will be Chris Forse who came to us in January 2024 to talk about his experiences of 30 years travel in China. This time he will take us on a journey through the history and the scenic glories of the American (and Canadian) West, a 'journey' of over fifty years in his talk '**On the road in the American West**'. He will also celebrate the 'great American road trip' from Greyhound buses and hitch hiking to self-drive journeys of over 3,000 miles, with stories of encounters with Native Americans, fundamentalist Christians, Highway Patrol men, and of the brief friendships that make travel in this region so rewarding. Chris was a teacher in Hong Kong for over thirty years and on his return to the UK became chairman of one of England's largest u3as, Warwick District. We are looking forward to welcoming Chris back for his second visit to Oundle.

Please remember to bring your membership card to the meeting as it makes signing in a lot quicker.

Third Age Trust elections

As you probably know from u3a emails from The Trust Office, voting for the new Board is currently taking place. Your Committee will be deciding who to vote for at our meeting on February 3rd.

We are part of the East Midlands Region and our two representatives on the new Council will be Barry Appleby and John Lewis. We wish them both well in their new roles.

Theatre and Outings 2025



Did you have any thoughts about our outings for 2025? So far I have only had three replies from Members. By the time you read this, we will have had our next Theatre and Outings Group planning meeting on 4th February but do please contact me.

I know that some of you may never have been on any outings, which are open to all Members. Are the outings to places you are not interested in? Do you prefer to drive yourself so that you can be flexible about timings? Is it that you don't want to join a large group? Are the outings too expensive, especially if there are two of you? Are they too far away? Are there any other reasons?

Please let me know! oundleu3achairman@gmail.com

Blood Brothers. I apologise to those of you who signed up for the outing to see *Blood Brothers* in March. We have had to cancel this.

On a positive note, we have gone ahead and booked the following:

Tuesday 20th May – a visit to Bomber Command Memorial on the outskirts of Lincoln, followed by a tour of Lincoln Cathedral. The cost will be £41.50 per person, including coach and entrances. Please contact me for further details or sign up at the February meeting.

Friday 13th June – a theatre visit to Tolethorpe, near Stamford, to see Agatha Christie's '*The Mirror Crack'd*'. The cost will be £34 pp (ticket and coach). Please contact me for further details or sign up at the February monthly meeting.

ICT help at Oundle School

ICT support is resuming this term. If you feel that you need help with how to use your devices (laptop/phone/tablet), the students run a free drop-in session on a Wednesday afternoon from 2.30pm–4.00pm during term-time. As we don't want to overwhelm them, please let me know if you would like to go along so that I can organise a timetable.

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PROPOSED NEW GROUP

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Journey through Dante's *Inferno* With Robert-Louis Abrahamson

For a poem over 700 years old, Dante's *Inferno* remains a fresh and lively story, with a series of encounters with a wide variety of damned souls, punctuated by the ups and downs of Dante's relationship with his guide, Virgil. Setting ourselves one or two cantos for each session, we will slowly go through the poem, watching the drama, and appreciating the poetic imagery and narrative inventiveness. There will inevitably be discussions about the moral and psychological insights in a poem that does not tell us what hell will be like for sinners after death, but that offers us images of what we become when in everyday life we choose self-centred acts that destroy community.

Robert-Louis Abrahamson has taught Dante at university level and, after retiring, with the WEA. He has produced 102 podcasts on Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and his book *Going through Hell* is waiting for publication. After twenty years away, he has returned to Oundle and old haunts.

If you are interested in joining this group, please would you contact Lydia by email, the address of which is given above.

Following on from Jane Morris's article about the Group's choices of biographical books for the last meeting of 2024, below is a resume of the books read by us over the course of the past year.

The Feast by Margaret Kennedy: Many of you will be familiar with her famous novel *The Constant Nymph*, but we came fresh to this story about a disparate group of people who are staying or working at a hotel in Cornwall in the early post-war period. We know from the outset that there is a tragedy whereby the hotel collapses into the sea with several lives lost. The seven deadly sins are represented by some of the characters, so who will be killed and who will survive?

Blood and Sugar by Laura Shepherd-Robinson: Set in 1780s London in which Harry Corsham, an aspiring politician and former soldier, sets out on the trail of a murderer and gets far more than he bargained for. A good deal of the book is set in Deptford, then a thriving dockland area and the author has obviously done a great deal of research in bringing it vividly to life. The novel presents a troubling panorama of the slave trade in Britain at the time and combines the genres of history, crime and detection.

The Alchemist by Paul Coelho: This short novel, first published in 1988, became a widely translated best seller. The story follows a shepherd boy called Santiago on his journey across North Africa to the Egyptian pyramids after he dreams of finding treasure there. En route he meets many characters, some helpful and kind, while others are the reverse. The novel has a universal theme based on an international folk tale called *The Treasure at Home*.

The Island of Missing Trees by Elif Shafak: The novel follows the relationship between Greek Cypriot Kostas and Turkish Cypriot Defne, their eventual migration to London and the impact of their past on their daughter Ada, whose only connection to Cyprus is the fig tree in the garden of the family home. The story is told in the third person, interspersed with chapters narrated from the perspective of the fig tree. Not surprisingly, the 1974 conflict plays an important part in the story.

Go Set a Watchman by Harper Lee: Published after her death in 2015, and initially regarded as a sequel, it is now accepted as a first draft of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. However, there are significant differences between the two novels. Suffice to say that Scout Finch, depicted here as a young woman of 26, returns home to Maycomb, Alabama for her annual two-week visit to her father Atticus. Various events occur that make her question her relationship and view of her father, but what will be her opinion of him by the end of her stay?

The Forgotten Waltz by Anne Enright: With each chapter headed by the title of a pop song, this Irish novel is set during the period of the rise and fall of the Celtic Tiger economy and plays a not insignificant part within the story. First person narrator Gina recalls the trail of lust and happenstance that brought her to fall for the love of her life, a married man with a young daughter who has health problems.

Because of You by Dawn French: Two young women, Hope and Anna, enter hospital on the same day and give birth to their daughters. Tragically Hope's baby is stillborn. A little later she finds herself with an opportunity to take Anna's baby, which she does and subsequently raises her as her own daughter. Truth will eventually out, but how will the situation resolve itself?

Family Affairs by Alison Lurie: Published in the mid-1980s and very much of its time, the story revolves around Vinnie Miner, an Anglophile American academic, on one of her periodic trips to the UK. Because of Vinnie's connections already made on previous visits, the worlds of literary and media London meet with some comic effect. Furthermore on her flight over, Vinnie makes the acquaintance of Chuck and, much against her better judgement, allows him to be drawn into her world.

Oblivion by Robert Harris: Based on historical events. Following the Restoration, those responsible for signing the death warrant of Charles I were ruthlessly hunted down and many were murdered or executed. The novel follows two such characters who escape to America, hoping to find refuge among the Puritans there. For a while they are moderately successful, but as the situation deteriorates they have to live as fugitives for many years. One man, who has his own personal agenda, is determined to bring them to justice.

At our most recent meeting, we took a vote as to which novel we had enjoyed the most and *Oblivion* was the undoubted winner.

NEWS FROM THE GROUPS



Shakespeare 4: We still have vacancies – come and join us. We meet in each other's homes on the second and fourth Thursday afternoon of each month from 2.00pm to 4.00pm



Playreading 2 has space for a couple of new members. We meet on the first Thursday of the month from 2.30pm – 4.30pm and the play we are reading this month is *Abigail's Party*. If you are interested, please contact us by clicking on the group email link on the website.



Chinwaggers next meets on February 27th from 10.00am 'til noon in the Snug of the Talbot Hotel Oundle. All welcome.



Singing Group: We are very sorry that Eve has retired from her role as accompanist and we thank her for everything she has done over the past two years. We are now looking for a pianist to play for us. If you could help, or know someone who might be interested, please let me know. We meet on the third Monday of the month from 2.30pm to 4.00pm in Oundle Methodist Church. oundleu3achairman@gmail.com



Shakespeare Group 2 is looking for a couple of members to join their group. If you are interested in exploring the life and works of William Shakespeare, please come along and see if you would like to join us. We meet on the third Wednesday each month from 2.00pm in each other's houses and enjoy watching various productions of the plays, discussing how different adaptations present the plot and different actors portray the characters. We are currently looking at *As You Like It* and will be finding out more about the plays written under the reign of James I. We all love Shakespeare and meet as friends with a common interest and are currently planning our annual trip to Tolethorpe. Please contact Jane Morris via the link on the website if you would like some further information or are interested in the group.



A new group **Italian Language and Culture** has just started – the world's most beautiful language on your own doorstep!

Whether you are starting from scratch, looking to improve your delivery, or just wanting a good old natter at whatever level you have reached, you are sure of a warm welcome in our new Italian Group. You learn Italian by speaking it, so take the plunge – and remember, "If Italy didn't exist, we would have to invent her!"

If you are interested in joining this group, please contact Richard Greenwood on 07860 206608 or via the link on the Groups page on the website.

SPOTLIGHT ON THE FLOWER GROUP

Not so many flowers around at this time of the year so our theme this month was "Minimalist". This was



interpreted in many different ways. Some people used one type of flower and foliage while others arranged with just a few stems.

Our next meeting is Tuesday March 18th at 1.45pm. If you would like to join us at the Joan Strong Centre, please contact us via the link on the Groups page.



February's Quiz

Part One: January and February are the months for snowdrops – this month's quiz is based around the themes of **SNOW** and **DROP**

1. Who was the TV analyst of general election results between 1969 and 2005?
2. Which TV sitcom was set in the offices of GlobeLink News?
3. What is the cloud storage service that allows you to store, share and sync files across devices?
4. What animal is Snowball in George Orwell's novel 1984?
5. Who is the former American NSA intelligence contractor and whistleblower who leaked classified documents and is now a naturalised Russian citizen?
6. Who kicked the drop goal in 2003, giving England the victory in the Rugby Union World Cup?
7. What changed its name to Yr Wyddfa in November 2022?
8. Who is the current Earl of Snowden?
9. In which film is the song *Raindrops Keep Falling on my Head* sung?
10. Kit Harrington plays which character in the TV adaptation of *Game of Thrones*?
11. Which band recorded *Chasing Cars*, reportedly the most played song of the 21st century?
12. What name is given to a person who migrates from the colder northern states of America to the warmer southern states in the winter?

Part Two – It's Valentine Day month, so do you know the answers to the following trivia?

1. Cupid has what name in Greek mythology?
2. In Roman mythology, Cupid is the son of whom?
3. "Wearing your heart on your sleeve" has origins from honouring which Roman goddess?
4. Who invented the first Valentine's Day chocolate box?
5. Letters to Juliet are sent to which city every year?
6. William Shakespeare mentions Valentine's Day in which of his plays?
7. In which year was February 14th first declared to be Valentine's Day?
8. Which notorious gangster orchestrated the St Valentine's Day massacre?
9. Which major invention was patented on Valentine's Day?
10. What fruit was once known as a "love apple" for its alleged aphrodisiac properties?
11. The oldest living love poem was written on what?
12. Which emperor called for St Valentine's execution?

