

Autumn Newsletter 2023

From the Chair

After a rather dismal July and August we have now had the hottest September on record, with warm weather spreading into October meaning the prospect of a rise in cases of Covid 19 being more than just a threat. We plainly need to take precautions more than we have been doing. I am certainly paying attention to hand washing and hoping that anyone coughing is only suffering from a bad cold. But I am planning to get my jabs for flu and Covid soon. Fortunately, our talks are in the Astor which is well ventilated so it should be safe for us to continue with our schedule of events through the autumn.

The Astor Coffee and hire fees.

On the subject of the Astor, we have had a new manager, Allyson, who is striving to put the finances of the theatre back on track. This has meant a change in the arrangements for hiring the theatre, and inevitably a large rise in cost. Not only that, but we are also being charged additional fees for the use of Anthony, the sound engineer, and extra for the tea and coffee. One flask of hot water will provide 30 small cups. The mugs are larger, so a donation of £1 per cup does not break even on that. We are charged £30 per flask. At the AGM we used more than 2 flasks and were charged £60. Even though we are offered a 50% discount from commercial rates for hiring the theatre, the total is more than double what we paid earlier this year. Although this has now reduced to £30 we would ask you to continue to donate generously.

We currently do not know how many people now wish to have hot drinks, but we do know that the donations do not cover the cost. Please will you donate extra (£2) if you have a mug? And at least £1 for a cup, plus £1.50 for a pack of biscuits. It would be a shame to lose the facility. And sadly, we aren't allowed to do it ourselves anymore because of the Astor's concerns for safety when we used their boiler, and when Ruth volunteered and did a most efficient job.

So, times are changing. Our reserves will allow the current arrangement to continue, albeit at a loss to us, until the end of the year. We are reviewing the arrangements for meetings so that we continue to give our members good value for money. We will have to make some difficult choices. Some u3as only do one talk a month, and others have different events at different venues. We will consider our options fully before deciding.

Outings

We had 2 outings organised in the summer, when many u3as do not have any programme at all. We had 2 groups visit the Supreme Court in London during August and Chris Bell arranged a coach trip to Chiddingstone Castle in September. We hope you enjoy reading about them, even if you weren't able to go.

Some groups also continued over the summer months, thanks to the wonderful group leaders who have such a lot of enthusiastic members that they want to continue all year.

Other things

You may be aware that we now have a Facebook page for members which has news of some of the group activities.

Bill and Mary are hopeful that the Third Age Trust will get the Terms and Conditions for the new website out any day now. Once the new website is live it will allow us to have a much more user - friendly way of letting you know what is happening and allow you to do more things yourselves.

We are also working on some things to celebrate Christmas. We hope to see some of you for the lunch at the Dover Marina Hotel on December 20th, and even if you are not able to go there, perhaps we'll see you for our last meeting of 2023 at the Astor on December 6th. We are working on some entertainment and a quiz to have with our refreshments.

Online groups

Even if you aren't able to join a group in person, please do explore the wide variety of online study groups and research projects which are available from the Third Age Trust. Some of these join people from all over the country with shared interests and can be a way to connect with others without leaving your home. Ask us if you need help in getting on to the website. <https://www.u3a.org.uk/learning/interest-groups-online>

Hoping you enjoy the last of the sunshine and mild weather,

Sue Edwards
Chair WCC u3a
07876561252 mobile

Talks and Coffee Mornings

PLANS FOR 2024

As you may be aware, the Committee is responding to members' requests to offer events in Dover and Sandwich. Although the majority of our members live in Deal, we are very aware that this can prove difficult or inconvenient for those living outside the area. As a result, we are busy planning a timetable of talks and events for next year.

From February 2024 we shall continue to have talks at the Astor Theatre in Deal on the first Wednesday afternoon of each month -- although as the Astor is closed during the Pantomime season, our 3rd January New Year's Social will be held at the Landmark Centre in Deal instead (details to follow).

On the third Wednesday of each month, we shall begin a rolling rota of socials / talks / quizzes -- alternating between Deal, Dover and Sandwich. The dates and venues will be advised as soon as possible, and initially we shall do this on a trial basis depending on the amount of support these events receive. But we hope to continue to be able to provide you with a range of topics of interest and the chance to meet and socialise with your friends. If any members in Dover, Sandwich and surrounding Villages are able to organise some of the socials, or suggest topics for quizzes and small groups, we would be very grateful for your help!

With best wishes,
Paulin
Committee Member (Talks)

Talks Coming Up

- Coffee Mornings, with a Talk to follow, start at 11am (Doors open at 10.30)
- Afternoon Talks start at 2pm (Doors open at 1.30pm)
- These events are also listed on the White Cliffs Country u3a website, and we usually send out an email to members the week before a Talk with a bit more information.

1st November Afternoon Talk

Author Martin Lloyd will discuss his successful book: Passports, Assassins, Traitors & Spies

15th November Coffee Morning & Talk

Daniel Walsh: What Happens to our Bins?

A talk by a member of Dover County Council on waste & recycling

6th December Afternoon CHRISTMAS EVENT

Details to follow.

20th December NO MEETING

(Talks will re-start after the Christmas holidays and will be advised at a later date.)

A few thoughts on talks and coffee mornings from the Committee.

It's been good to see so many of you attending talks and coffee mornings. We are one of only a few u3a s who do both, so it's good to see our efforts are supported and enjoyed.

We would like to remind everyone who attends to turn their phone off or put it on silent before they come into the meeting. If anyone needs a bit of help in finding how to do this, please ask any of the Committee, we'll all be glad to help or find someone who can. If you really need to take a call, please go outside to do so.

Sometimes unforeseen things happen to members of the Committee like illness or family commitments, and we can't all be in attendance at every meeting. We're all volunteers and life just gets in the way sometimes. We will always do our best to have someone cover for us if we are away, but this isn't always easy, especially if that cover involves introducing speakers and having to get up on the stage to talk using a microphone. There are some of us on the Committee who just can't bring ourselves to do it and others who find speaking in public an incredibly hard thing to do. So, when someone does step up to the mark and fill in, why not give them a bit of support and encouragement.

Lastly, the water dispensers in the Astor are very difficult to use and do require a lot of force to get the water to come out. Give any of us a shout if you can't manage it, rather than going without or getting hot water on yourself.

Visit to the Supreme Court 11 and 18 August

We met each other by the statue of Nelson Mandela in Parliament Square just next to the Supreme Court, and near to the Houses of Parliament and the Treasury. Each of these buildings represent different aspects of how power is exercised in the UK. Parliament makes the laws; the Court interprets them; and the Civil Service acting for the government of the day applies the laws. When there is a point of law of general public importance, it ends up in the Supreme Court as the final appeal court, to give an interpretation of what the point of law means.

The building has been refurbished as the new home of a newish court, the work was formerly done by the Judicial Committee of the House of Lords, which used to sit until 2009 in the Houses of Parliament. Concerns that we should have a Court which was not only independent of the lawmakers, but seen to be independent, led to the creation of the Supreme Court.

We learnt how judges are appointed now. No longer are they recommended by a “tap on the shoulder” by a mysterious bunch of worthies, people now have to apply and be subject to a more open process for appointment. More female and black judges are being appointed, though oddly, we have fewer women now than in 2009. Diversity is happening slowly.

We visited 3 courts. The first is in the old Middlesex Guildhall, built in the early 20th Century as the seat of Middlesex County Council. But with the creation of Greater London, it became Middlesex Crown Court. It still has magnificent original carvings and panelling.



We had a young and well-informed tour led by Daisy, pictured, and a chance to sit in the judges' seats and pretend to be Lady justices. In the new court, which was very modern, custom-made carpets and curtains represent all the nations of the UK whose cases are heard in the Court. Court 2 is very light and a complete contrast to the sombre oak furnishing and panelling. A real tribute to craftspeople of the 21st Century.

We also saw the court where the cases from Commonwealth Countries which do not have their own equivalent of the Supreme Court. Cases are referred from all over the world, as represented by the many flags on the bench. Afterwards we had a cup of tea in the café, where, I think, defendants were kept in custody before their appearances in the Crown Court! I write remembering visiting one there many years ago in my past life. But that's another story....

Sue Edwards
Chair WCC u3a

Chiddingstone Castle trip Wednesday 13th September by Judith Oakley

We set off bright and breezy with Rob, our trusty coach driver at the wheel and Chris Bell, our trip organizer making sure we were all present and correct. It was an overcast morning with a slight chill in the air from the previous day's rain.

The journey was uneventful until we were about 8 miles from Chiddingstone. Rob had cleverly avoided an accident on one of the A roads but our newly planned route (courtesy of the sat nav) brought us to a road closed sign, barring further progress. A nifty 3-point turn was carried out (no easy feat in a coach stuck in the middle of a tiny Kent village!). On our way again, we shrugged and settled back in our seats, only to find that the sat nav had taken us in a complete circle and, 15 minutes later, we were back where we started, at the road closed sign! At that point, it became a team effort with members consulting their phones and helping Rob plan a new route. Following a lot of deliberation and live directions coming from the staff at Chiddingstone over Chris's mobile, we eventually arrived with a big cheer and a sigh of relief from us all. We were all dying for a coffee....and the loo!!



*Front view of
Chiddingstone Castle*

I think everyone enjoyed their food in the courtyard at the castle. There were ploughman's lunches, soup and cream teas on offer. As we were late, the 'coffee on arrival' merged with the lunch for some of us, but I don't think anyone minded too much. Cream teas were also enjoyed by many. The sun put in appearance, but unfortunately so did the local wasp population who thought all their cream teas had come true at once! At 2pm those that had booked the tour of the castle were taken around by the curator. It was interesting to hear about the castle throughout history and of its last owner Denys Eyre Bower, who seemed an interesting character. He was an avid collector of ancient artifacts from Egypt but also had an interest in the Japanese culture of the Samurai. Denys carried out a lot of his antique wheeling and dealing from a cell in Wormwood Scrubs. If you want to know why he was there, I will let you investigate for yourself!



*Views from the
interior*

Aside from the organized tour, we were able to look around the castle in our own time and take a leisurely stroll through the gardens to the village of Chiddingstone. There are some beautiful old houses and a pub in the village, with the church opposite. A short walk then took you to the Chiding Stone, from which the village probably took its name. Folklore suggests that the stone was used as an altar by the Druids and then by the Britons and Anglo-Saxons as a place to discuss judicial matters, or it was possibly a boundary marker. In medieval times nagging wives, witches or wrong doers may have been brought to the stone to be 'chided' by the local villagers.



Chris gets a ticking off from the Chiding Stone!

Back in the grounds of the castle, a film production team were in full swing. It looked an odd affair with people doing what looked like Tai Chi moves on one leg and a man in a rather smart military uniform who was waiting to put in an appearance on set. I chatted to one of the team who was preventing members of the public from straying too close. He explained that they were filming a commercial for a well-known Canadian Bank both in English and in French. So, I guess we'll never get to see the finished production unless we hot foot it over the pond.

By 4.30pm I think we were all ready to head home, feeling a little bit tired after such an enjoyable day. We had a pleasant journey home, whilst chatting to each other and sharing experiences of the day.

Thank you to Rob, our lovely driver who got us there and back safe and sound despite the challenges of the road network and a belligerent sat nav. His skill at turning around in the smallest of places and negotiating the lowest of railway bridges, resulted in a show of appreciation from all. Thank you also to Chris Bell for organising the trip. She says she really enjoyed doing it and can't wait to do it all again next time (actually, she might not have said that last bit!!).

And finally, a big thank you to all you wonderful members who came and helped make the day so enjoyable. Hopefully, we all made some new friends or put faces to names (or vice versa). And a special thanks to all for being at the pick-up points and departure point so promptly. We didn't have to send a search party out for anybody, which is always a bonus. Thank you too, for your good humour when we did begin to wonder whether we would ever get there. I'm sure that made poor Rob feel better.

We look forward to seeing you on the next trip, which if you would like to help organise, we would be very grateful.

Can You Help?

Do you live in Walmer, and do you drive? If so, might you be able to sometimes give a lift to one of our members who lives not far from the Walmer sea front? She would welcome a lift to u3a talks at the Astor Theatre on a Wednesday. If you are interested and able to help, even if only occasionally, please email our committee member Paulin at: wccu3ameier@gmail.com, who can put you in touch with her. Thank you.