Dawlish & District u3a Newsletter

January 2022

Living • Laughing • Learning

A very happy and healthy New Year to us all!

u3a Information for January 2022

For most of us, this has been another Christmas when we have not been able to do so much of what we would have liked to do. Nonetheless, I hope you have been able to enjoy some time with family and friends, even if it has had to be remotely or in more limited circumstances.

It seems inevitable that the shadow of Covid and omicron will continue to cast a shadow over much of our lives in the weeks and months ahead. Despite this, I hope we can continue to enjoy as much as possible of our lives in the u3a. Your Committee met (remotely) at the beginning of January to discuss how we should manage meetings and what guidance we should offer interest groups. Even though there have been no new regulations to adhere to, the advice and guidance given before Christmas continue to apply.

CANCELLATION: Monthly Meeting, Monday 17th January

I regret to say that we have to cancel the monthly meeting due to take place on Monday 17th January. Many members were particularly looking forward to the presentation from members of the Social Prescribing Team at the Barton Surgery as it is a subject which is of great relevance to us all across the community. However, they had to let me know this week that the pressures and uncertainty they face from Covid, added to the recent loss of a member of staff mean that they could not commit to joining us. I am sure everyone understands this and sympathises. The better news is that they have offered to come at a later date.

Interest Group Meetings

As outlined in December, the Committee feels that this decision about whether to go ahead with meetings should be left to the members of each group and determined by individual circumstances.

Where the venue and arrangements for a meeting meet the guidance given by government and medical authorities, then members can decide whether to go ahead. I ask conveners to review the guidance and the arrangements for the meeting, and ensure that members are made aware of what is proposed. The issues to consider include:

- Members should take a lateral flow test before attending, and only do so if the result is negative.
- Social distancing of at least one metre, and ideally two metres, should be maintained.
- Members should respect each other's space during the meeting, and as they arrive and depart.
- Face masks should be worn as far as practicable for their own safety as well as for the health and wellbeing of those around them.
- The venue should be well ventilated. (Of course, at this time of the year, this is likely to mean that the room is likely to be rather chilly, so suitably warm clothing should be worn!)
- Hand sanitizer should be provided, or members asked to bring their own.

Please be clear, the Committee is not advising, let alone instructing, interest groups to suspend their meetings.

A number of interest group meetings have already gone ahead this month and more will do so in the next few days: these have been very successful and greatly appreciated by those who have participated. As a personal decision, I will be taking part in and hosting some group meetings. It would be a great pity if those who wish to carry on with their u3a meetings safely, feel unable to do so. However, I stress that the decision about whether to participate in any u3a activity must be made by each individual. There must be no expectation that a member should participate or host a meeting if (s)he does not feel it is the right thing to do.

John Vick, Chair

Members of the **Adventure group** met on December 9th to review our first few adventures and come up with a list of activities for the next few months.

Sorting through the many suggestions, this is what has been proposed:

- **January** - Online escape room
- **February** - Climbing
- **March** - Target shooting
- **April** - Fencing
- **May** - Sailing
- **June** - Quad biking

Adventures are open to all members of Dawlish & District u3a (subject to availability) so if you would like to get onto the Adventure Group mailing list then please contact us via adventure@u3a.dawlish.info. We will send round full information about each of these activities in due course, and make the details available on the website.

In addition to the above suggestions, there was significant interest in a short break to the **Manor House Hotel** near Okehampton. We propose to arrange a visit for the Adventure Group between **Monday 7th November and Wednesday 9th November 2022**. If you think you may like to go then please **save these dates in your calendar now**. We will get back to you later this year with further details so do let us know if you are interested.

Late news from the Adventure group:

We are currently organising a virtual visit to an escape room. Conducted via Zoom. This activity will enable participants to take part in a prison break or Shakespearean themed escape, all from the comfort of their own sofa. Please see the Adventure group news on our website for more details or contact Miggie via adventure@u3a.dawlish.info for further information. The deadline for booking is Saturday 15th January so please act fast.

Miggie Pickton, Convenor

Craft

This is a newly formed Group with 8 members and more are welcome to join us. From January we will meet every first Wednesday of the month in Room 6 at the Manor House from 1.30 to 3.30pm. Members of the group are encouraged to bring with them any craft they are currently working on. Help and advice will be shared amongst the members. Plans for 2022 include attending Craft Fairs and sharing transport, looking at Workshops members might like to attend together and members themselves holding workshops demonstrating their own particular craft. There is a small charge to cover costs of the room and refreshments. Our next meeting will be on Wednesday 2nd February.



Kate McCarthy, Convenor.

Strollers

Our first 2022 Strollers walk will be on Thursday January 13th when we're exploring Dawlish Countryside Park

From Teignmouth we're catching the number 2 Exeter bus leaving from WH Smiths bus stop at 12.11pm...same bus leaves Dawlish Brookdale Terrace at 12.25pm

Plan is to get off bus at bus shelter by Langdon Hospital entrance

We will then walk up the grassed footpath to the right of the hospital ...this leads us up to Port Rd ..back down Port Rd we cross over and walk uphill along the lane to the right of St Mary's cottages

At top of lane we enter the Countryside Park ..cleverly we'll already be at the top of the park where there's stunning county views plus seating

We can then explore the various paths around the park ...hopefully the refreshment trailer will be open for drinks and maybe cake.

Finally there's a short walk via car park to nearest bus stop by St Mary's Cottages ..possibility of either 2 and 2B buses for our journey home

NB Just 5 of us on last Thursday afternoon's Dec Strollers walk ..we enjoyed exploring Tessier Gardens at St Marychurch where we were almost mugged by some over friendly and well fed squirrels...we then walked along Babbacombe Downs but decided not to go on to Walls Hill due to deteriorating wet weather...instead we adjourned to the nearby Angel cafe for refreshments...where only one Stroller was tempted to order a cream tea.





Jean Gitsham

The **French** group continues its lively and well attended chats. We have currently 10 members with a few on a waiting list, maybe 6 or 7, though a couple are at a different level but nonetheless keen. We are back to meeting on zoom because of our new friend "omicron" We meet twice a month and have covered topics (we try to have a topic) like "Can you tell us about a frightening experience you have had" " What would you like to be if you come back in another life?" "For what would you like to be famous?"

In our youth, we all had great ambitions - to become a great singer, a dancer, a star, an organ player, a football player, a writer, a naturalist, but we all concluded that in the end what we ended up aiming for was to be a good person, remembered as such, especially by our children and grandchildren. We were all proud of our families and their main achievement, that of staying together, in spite of geographical distances and other barriers.

And, at our last zoom session last week we talked about Christmas and the new year. We heard about a tradition in France and Belgium on January 6th, "Day of the Kings" (Magi) when they have a cake / tart (galette) … a bit like a Bakewell tart which contains a small charm, fève, which could be a figure of Jesus, but also means broad bean! The person who gets the slice with the fève then puts on a crown and chooses a person to be the other king or queen of the day. Nobody had made any new year resolutions!

Our next meeting is January 20th and we've not yet got a topic.



Bridie Cushion, Convener

In Our Own Write.

I am a bewildered apprentice convenor for the newly formed overspill from the main creative writing group. It is hard to actually say much when we are in the very early stages although we have gelled amazingly well. Three of us met for the second time and we had another participant who came along to see whether she wanted to join. Apologies from a fifth member.

Three of us had written about Christmas customs in a country we know well. We were transported to the Canary Islands where the main square in the town where Eileen lived was transformed into Bethlehem complete with the manger and sad looking donkeys.

Then on to Germany where an old lady reminisced about the Christmases of her childhood with traditional nutcrackers, Christmas angels, advent wreaths and stollen.

Further north we then went to Sweden where everything stops on Christmas Eve at 3 pm for the nation to be glued to their TV screens to watch a montage of Disney cartoons (the same ones every year), before sitting down to a smorgasbord of smoked lamb and pickled herring.

Our fourth member, Marion, read out a very evocative description of a local market where she used to live in France. You could virtually see and smell the stalls of fresh vegetables and flowers and wonder at the expertise of the hat maker whose creations rivalled an upmarket boutique.

Our next meeting will be on Monday 10th January where we will be reading out a story developed from newspaper headlines selected at random. Each session we will also hope to improve our writing technique by discussion and exercises.

Travina White, Convener





The Creative Writing Group will be meeting via Zoom on 24th January. The topic is to write a short piece including at least three of the following: caterpillars), kitchen chair, a quiz, a nun, a locked door, a limerick or Limerick.

Alison Symons, Convener

QUIZ GROUP

December saw us having one zoom quiz and then we were going to join in a four round Christmas related quiz in the monthly meeting. However as we are aware unfortunately the meeting did not take place. This said, the questions will be filed away until December 2022!

The 6th December quiz saw us answering questions on Fictional schools, Marys, General knowledge, Starting, Puppets/Dummies and Josephs. Being the Advent season is it surprising that Mary followed by Joseph had  the  best scores of the evening?

After a well-earned Christmas break to recharge the batteries and the brain cells, the next quizzes will be held on 10th and the 24th January followed by 14th and 28th of February.

The group continues to enjoy great banter and fellowship. Any one else who would like to join in the quiz would be warmly welcomed.

Graham Carey, Convener

Art Appreciation Group

Our December meeting held in the Mayor's Parlour at the Manor House was a group effort. Members were invited to choose and comment on a picture on the theme of Celebration or Entertainment. As always, the diversity of the pictures selected was impressive and enjoyably surprising. Artists included Bruegel, Severini, Renoir, Rubens, Van Gogh and Degas. We also enjoyed seeing an illustration from a medieval Book of Hours depicting a medieval banquet. Most unexpected were three paintings on the theme of Croquet by Manet, Winslow Homer and Larry Smart.



You can view one or two pictures by these artists on our website news.



Our presentations were followed by a quiz with pictures on the same theme. Members were asked to identify the artists. Amongst paintings by a number of highly regarded artists, I also included one or two contemporary popular artists such as Beryl Cook and Jack Vettriano. Although I tried to catch them out, the knowledge of members was impressive, and I didn't manage to fool everybody all of the time. Many thanks to David Gearing for being our expert projectionist.

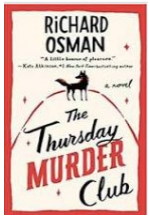
We will meet again at 2pm on Tuesday 11th January when John will give a presentation on Hogarth. We will obviously be mindful of the ever changing situation with regard to Covid before confirming arrangements.

Lynne Vick, Convener

The **Page Turners** met in December to discuss 'The Thursday Murder Club' by Richard Osman which we hoped would be a little more lightweight than last month's exciting but disturbing read. Unfortunately, thanks to Covid, we were low in numbers but members not present sent in their thoughts to add to the discussion.

This was a first novel by someone who has a large fan base for his work in entertainment and it may be assumed that this is what drove high sales initially. We were interested to discuss whether we felt it deserved its popularity.

Some members very much enjoyed the book. They found it funny, warm and entertaining. They liked the setting of a retirement village and found the characters to be well observed and engaging. It is unusual to have such a cast of older characters and we dared to wonder if we felt more in tune with



them because we were closer to them in age than the characters in some of the books that we read.

Other members were not so keen on the book. They felt it was sparsely written with insufficient 'meat' to really engage them with the characters or the story. This led to them being confused by the large cast of people. They were disappointed with the final chapters and felt that the resolutions for several characters were unsatisfactory. The ending seemed to be focussed on setting up the next book, although that did not lead to these members wishing to read it.

For next month we will be reading 'Golden Hill' by Francis Spufford. At the next meeting we will also be making our selections for future months from recommendations made by members.

Deborah Wallis

DISCUSSION GROUP

The Discussion Group met on Monday 13th December to talk about how the NHS National Health Service should be paid for. The question accepted the need for universal health care. Some basic figures were given. The country pays a little over 200 million pounds a year at present, some 20% of all public expenditure. Some comparisons with other countries were attempted, with the UK having the second lowest proportion of GDP spent on health care in the G7 countries.

We talked about how to raise the money required. National Insurance contributions were generally seen as paying for health care, but in fact end up in the same taxation pot as the rest of government revenues. It was felt that a more direct link between contributions and expenditure would be helpful in getting consent for higher levels of spending.

Further discussion was held about how to control the money spent. How to balance the approach of doctors to medical need with the professional administration of the money available was important, and felt to be out of step. It was felt that profit should never be the driving force behind health care provision.

A further topic relating to what treatments and drugs should be available on the NHS was raised. Concern was expressed about the over prescribing of drugs, and the issuing of equipment never returned. Mention was made of cosmetic surgery and infertility treatment, and the difficulty of dividing people into those whose mental health was affected by these issues, and those prompted more by an assumption that there was a medical solution to all problems.

Addiction was mentioned, in particular the high number of emergency admissions in which alcohol was a contributory factor. It was noted that tobacco, alcohol and gambling all attracted extra taxation, but that more information between the cost of the harm caused and the taxes raised through sales would be helpful.

A few comparisons were noted with French and German health provision, and in particular payment of GPs in the UK, based on patient rolls rather than the appointments made was commented on.

There was recognition that the contributions people made during their lifetime had paid for the care of previous generations, and that no effort had ever been made since the creation of the NHS in 1948 to change this. The future projections of a smaller working population supporting more elderly people requiring more sophisticated treatment was likely to have serious consequences in due course. More effort should be made to inform people of the costs of providing health care and how it relates to the taxes they pay. This will make for a better understanding of the issues involved.

Please note that the views expressed by the Discussion Group may not represent those of the wider Dawlish and District membership.

Michael Heyden, Convenor



Thoughts from the Chair

One of the many pleasures of my life in the Third Age is the leisurely start to the day. This usually includes reading in bed before breakfast, and then listening to some of my favourite radio programmes between 9 and 10am. Radio 4 is my station of choice, although I often move to Radio 3 when the mood takes me. I find that BBC programme controllers use this slot to schedule some of the most interesting and stimulating programmes. My favourites include *The Life Scientific*, *In Our Time, Desert Island Discs* (hosted by 'the girl next door' from my home in Sunderland!), *More or Less* (which should be compulsory listening for all politicians, journalists and voters) and, last week, the outstanding series *Rethink*.

In this, the excellent broadcaster and journalist Amol Rajan hosted discussions on five successive days on the subject of Population. He assembled different groups of leading academics and thinkers from around the world to analyse questions such as 'Are there too many people on our planet?' The surprising answer for the most part was No – in fact quite the opposite as we face declining birth rates and population contraction in many regions, and not just in Europe. Most of us are aware that birth rates are declining in richer countries but might not realise that the same is happening in many poorer countries as well. In Nigeria, by contrast, the population will grow rapidly by 2050. The contributors showed how societies are responding in very different ways to the challenge of an ageing population. One episode attempted to answer the question of how we can continue to live well when so many people being born today are forecast to live to a hundred.

I was particularly interested in what was suggested about how society may adapt as the proportion of older people grows in the decades to come. What does that mean for the economy, for politics, for the work force, for relationships between the generations, for provision of health and care and so much else? This sort of discussion is often accompanied by much gloom and despondency but on this occasion, that really was not the case. There was a consensus that older people are not a 'burden' but are an asset to society – and will be seen to be so.

There were fascinating insights into what is already happening around the world. One which particularly delighted me was that in Singapore, all citizens are entitled to vouchers which enable them to participate at no cost in a very wide range of education and training programmes at any age. In China there is now a university which caters entirely for students aged over 70. Now I wonder what they call it. Could it be the u3a, or as it was known until recently, The University of the Third Age? There really is not much new under the sun!

If you want to listen to *Rethink* for yourselves, you may like to follow this link Rethink - Rethink Population - Is demography destiny? - BBC Sounds

John Vick

The **Philosophy and Psychology** goup agreed to postpone its December meeting to January 28th, when we will also welcome a guest speaker on the topic of Transgender. The Swann Inn at 3.15! **Dana Dima, Convener**

Boules Group

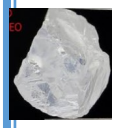
Having consulted the weather forecast, and more importantly my collection of seaweed, the group decided to meet outside on the Lawn on the Wednesday before Christmas. The weather was kind, festive clothing was encouraged and we played for a short while before trying the mince pies and mulled wine provided for the occasion. We are now reverting to our normal winter meeting in the Strand Hall at 10.30 on Friday 14th and Wednesday 26th January to play an indoor game loosely connected to boules, before the more important matter of drinking coffee. All welcome, £1 per person.

I'm also consulting with our members (and anyone else with an opinion) as to how we might go on when the weather improves. At present we play on the second Wednesday and fourth Friday of each month, but if you'd like to play but you are only available in an afternoon, for example contact me and we could discuss extra meetings.

Michael Heyden, Convenor



LITERATURE



The Moonstone by Wilkie Collins

This book, published in 1868, is regarded as the first modern detective story.

The Moonstone concerns the theft of a valuable diamond which had been previously looted from the forehead of an Indian idol. It is valued at £20,000 (£2.5 million approximately in today's money). To the Brahmin priests, to whom it is sacred, the Moonstone is priceless and they have a duty to get it back.

The diamond is considered to be cursed, so when the British officer who looted it bequeaths it to his niece, her mother strongly suspects that his motive is to punish the family for disowning him.

Different characters narrate the story and as befits any mystery novel, there are plenty of red herrings and misdirection. Someone who seems to be suspicious and sinister at first turns out to be innocent or helpful and the seemingly good are anything but.

Most of us thought it was a good and gripping story satisfyingly resolved, but we all agreed that it was overlong and some felt that the method of discovering how the diamond went missing was a little far-fetched.

Set in Victorian times, attitudes towards women and the Indians made us wince, but there was an insight into the way large houses were run, particularly in the attitude towards the servants, not exactly part of the family but valued members of the household. The police inspector was quickly told to treat them with respect during his investigation.

We found the writing style ponderous for our modern taste and some characters rambled on to such an extent that we struggled to get to what was being said but, of course, that is normal for Victorian novels.

Recently, the Discussion Group debated the return of artifacts to their rightful place, and it was interesting to note that, at no stage in the book did anyone say that they didn't want this (literally) damned diamond and suggest sending the Moonstone back to the temple it was stolen from in the first place.

We awarded the book 3 out of 5.

As this was our last meeting of the year we closed the meeting with each one of us reading a poem either of a favourite poet or a newly discovered one. Wine and nibbles followed and suffice to say a good time as usual was had by all.

Our next read is Good Girl Bad Girl by Michael Robotham.

Liane Goulding