

# u3a NewsLetter

## Soar Valley



### From Our Chair.

Well summer appears to have gone, during which we have had several enjoyable and interesting outings this year. Thank you Alison and team. However, Alison has decided to move on, leaving us with an opportunity for someone new to take over the outings for next year. If you think you could be interested please see Alison's contact details on page 7, or you can get in touch with me via the website.

And Alison and I would like to thank all of you who supported our recent Macmillan coffee morning. You raised an amazing £1,254!

At the last General Meeting we had a fantastic speaker, Alex Leger. Several of you have told me the best ever, and you can find an account of his talk on page 6. Alex has a number of other talks all based on his years of working on Blue Peter. If you would like to hear him again please let Brian Hinnners know (contact details on back page), so we can look to book him again.

The Christmas party is booking up fast. Please email Sue Luczka (details below) to buy your tickets £25. Entertainment will be home grown from our activity groups.

*Ian*

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## Christmas is Coming!



Come and Join in the Festivities

### Christmas Party

6.30pm, Friday 4th December, Rushcliffe Golf Club.

Table served two course festive dinner followed by a hot drink and mince pies. Christmas carols with Ukelele Group and Festive Bingo.

Tickets £25 from Sue Luczka: [suzeluczka@gmail.com](mailto:suzeluczka@gmail.com)

### Carol Concert

7.30pm, Tuesday 15th December, Kingston on Soar village hall.

Traditional carols and Christmas songs. Donations to the MND Association charity welcome.



New member **Sarah Paul** moved to France in 1996 with her family, returning to the UK in 2009. This poem was the first of a series she wrote during her time in France, when she lived among fields of maize that conjured up thoughts of home. And she's translated the poem into French which the Francophiles amongst you may appreciate. Sarah is also leader of the Play Reading group.

## Amid The Alien Corn

During my daily sorties with the dog  
I stop and speak to stooped old dames,  
Relics of an ancient peasant stock  
Whose sons and daughters, sleeping after shifts,  
Have graduated into urban life.

Free-range pullets shoot across my path,  
Scraggy-necked and purposeful.  
The dog disdains to chase them.

I falter on some sort of lost syntax,  
And make my excuses.  
Going home, I find myself  
Pleased with the encounter.

Later, hanging washing on green parallels of  
plastic,  
I observe how, skirting my borrowed garden,  
The new corn spurts its pointedly arching leaves.

Across the flat plain the pale green rows stretch,  
Curved curiously to fit a tree or track.  
The landscape is wide open to my scrutiny.  
I am known by hearsay in these parts.

**Sarah Paul**

## Parmi Le Mais Etranger

Au cours de mes sorties quotidiennes avec le chien,  
Je fais une pause pour parler  
Avec des vieilles dames voûtées  
Reliques d'une ancienne souche paysanne,  
Dont les fils et les filles, qui dorment apres leur travail,  
Ont progressés jusqu'a la vie urbaine.

Des poules élevées en plein air  
Passent en fleche a travers de mon chemin,  
Décharnées et déterminées.  
Le chien dédaigne de les chasser.

J'hésite sur une syntaxe perdue,  
Et présente mes excuses.  
En rentrant, je me trouve  
Contente de la rencontre.

Plus tard, en étendant le linge  
Sur les paralleles de plastique vert,  
J'observe le jeune mais le long de mon jardin loué,  
Ses feuilles projetant leurs arches pointues.

A travers le plat pays s'allongent les files d'un vert léger,  
Courbe curieuse épousant un arbre ou un sentier.  
Le paysage s'épanouit sous mon regard scrutateur.  
C'est par la rumeur que l'on me connaît ici.

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## Cyclists At New Bridge Over The Trent



In September member Stefan Barcikowski (*far right*) led the **Cycling Group** ride that took us past the new Waterside pedestrian/cycling bridge across the River Trent.

Opened in June this year, the bridge connects West Bridgford in the south with Trent Basin in the north and is part of a wider plan to improve walking and cycling networks in Nottingham.

*My grandma is 95 now and she still doesn't need glasses. She drinks straight out of the bottle!*

## A Charming Hotchpotch

**Middleton Hall**, near Tamworth, is not so much a single historic house as an eclectic cluster of buildings that has evolved over the course of some six hundred years. Beginning in the thirteenth century with a stone building, which still stands today, we see later architecture from Tudor, Elizabethan and Georgian times; all of which made for an enjoyable visit by the **History Group** in August.

Owned by the Willoughby family (who also included Wollaton Hall in their collection of country piles) for five hundred of these years, the house eventually passed into other hands and then, in the 1960s, to a gravel extracting company who saw profit in the surrounding land. Sadly, the house itself was neglected and fell into a pitiful state of disrepair. We were shown the photos: it looked a mess! And made worse by rogue motorcyclists joyriding up and down the hand carved staircase.

But all was not lost. In the 1980s a restoration trust was established and, largely through the efforts of an army of volunteers, the buildings have been lovingly restored to their former splendour. crooked windows included.

What we see now is a charming hotchpotch of dwelling styles from bygone ages, set in 42 acres of woodland with a walled garden. It's all very pleasing to the eye. But it would never get planning permission today!

*Our thanks to Sally Dicker for organising the visit.*

**Brian Hinners**



## Tea and Cake



Around eighty members turned out for a social get together at Normanton on Soar village hall on a sunny afternoon in September. Decked out in their smart red scarves and bow ties, the Soar Valley Singers got things moving with a medley of popular songs, followed by tea and a sumptuous selection of cakes prepared by our members. And, to keep those grey cells working, a challenging quiz rounded things off.



Our thanks to Sue Luczka and the social team, plus all those marvellous bake off ladies, for a very pleasant afternoon and a great atmosphere.

## Beaumanor Hall in WWII

In July the **History Group** enjoyed a memorable, informative and enlightening WWII themed private tour of **Beaumanor Hall** and outbuildings, which had a massive contribution to play in the war.

Our group of 14 people were welcomed by our superb guide Jonno, who proved to have a vast knowledge of the hall and its history. During the war this location became a top secret venue. He explained that the house we see today is actually the third one on this site, the previous two having been demolished under new ownership!

In 1939-1945 the hall and grounds were sold for military purposes during the Second World War, and a number of outbuildings were constructed and cleverly designed to look like farm buildings, barns, cottages etc, to disguise their real purpose – monitoring, reading and reporting on German radio and Morse Code messages.

We were shown the Morse Radio Room where a large number of highly skilled operatives worked 12 hour shifts with a break at 6 hours, because the work demanded total concentration! It also had a

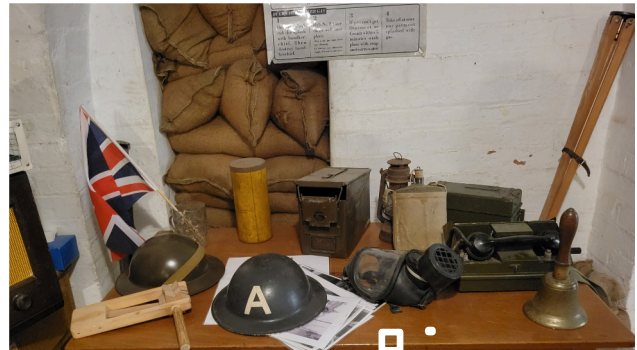


highly sophisticated Enigma coding machine (left), captured from the Germans! Once the Allies managed to break the codes on this machine, it enabled them to interpret the messages sent by the Germans, read them and

react accordingly, all without them knowing we had such access. Once deciphered, messages were then forwarded to Bletchley Park for further action. We were told that this was a critical factor in shortening the duration of the war.



We then returned to the basements of the hall, where we visited the labyrinth of corridors leading to the air raid shelters, used during bombing raids. It was a very sobering feeling sitting there!



Jonno then took us back into the main part of the hall and upstairs, past the beautiful stained-glass window half way up the main staircase, which shows the coats of arms of the Herrick family and the connections by marriage from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. This magnificent work was completed in 1848 at a cost of £228. We also admired the quality of the carved wood on and around the staircase. The first floor rooms have been restored, and have interesting historical documents and photographs on display. One of the rooms is now licensed for wedding ceremonies.

*Our thanks to our extremely experienced and enthusiastic guide Jonno, for a wonderful tour, in which he shared his vast knowledge of Beaumanor and its background.*

**Pam & Paul Hobson**

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## Noticed Anything Different About This Newsletter?

You might have spotted that there's a new title banner on the front page and the grid lines on the outer margins have disappeared. A little tidying up to mark the 100th edition of our Newsletter.

What you might not be aware of is that, for the past fourteen years, the Newsletter has been produced using Microsoft 'Publisher' software, and then converted into PDF format for distribution. But as of October this year Microsoft is no longer supporting Publisher so we've had to find a replacement. This copy of the Newsletter was originated in 'Affinity Layout', a relative newcomer to the field. It's a very comprehensive programme. And the good news is it's free!



Pictures from the **Rockingham Castle** and artisan market coach trip on Sunday 27th September.

This was **Alison Lloyd's** final trip as Outings Coordinator and we would like to express our appreciation for this and all the other visits that Alison has organised over the past three years.



## Groups Update

The autumn changeover has now completed with some of our summer groups pausing for the winter and our Snooker Group (open to new members) resuming on Wednesday mornings. The latest group to make a start is our Spanish Group which has now held a first meeting - details on the web site - [https://soarvalley.u3asite.uk/u3a\\_groups/spanish/](https://soarvalley.u3asite.uk/u3a_groups/spanish/).

I have been asked about a second Cycling Group – if anyone else is interested, please contact me - [paul.fileman@btinternet.com](mailto:paul.fileman@btinternet.com) - so that I can put you in touch with other interested people.

Bird Watching 1 has a new Group Contact and is in search of new members. They meet on the third Monday of each month. - [https://soarvalley.u3asite.uk/u3a\\_groups/birdwatching-1/](https://soarvalley.u3asite.uk/u3a_groups/birdwatching-1/)

For any groups finding it difficult to find a suitable venue, I have been compiling a list of venues and costs. Please email me at [paul.fileman@btinternet.com](mailto:paul.fileman@btinternet.com) for a copy.

A couple of notes for our group leaders:

- Please remember that the definitive statement, accessible to all, regarding groups with vacancies, is on our web site. Please check the page for your group and ask our webmaster to update it if required.
- Please check the contact information for your group shown on the members portal and let me know if changes are required.

I now have a long list of groups where at least one person has expressed an interest, but we have not yet managed to get a group started. Here are just five of the recent suggestions: Ghost Hunting, Antiques & Collectibles, Classic Cars, Pickleball, Walking Football. If any of these (or anything else) is of interest to you, please contact me.

Please look at the groups page on our web site (<https://soarvalley.u3asite.uk/groups/>) where you can find information on all of our groups and quickly identify those that have room for new members.

**Paul Fileman, Groups Coordinator**



## Blue Peter Revisited

Our speaker at the September general meeting, **Alex Leger**, had spent 36 years working in the BBC, mainly as a producer for the Blue Peter programme, which incredibly you can still see on TV today.

He'd developed an interest in Blue Peter whilst an engineering student at Loughborough University, but it took a spell in the army and several attempts before he got an 'attachment' position at BBC. Chance opportunities then eventually took him onto the Blue Peter programme.

Alex told us so many wonderful and amusing stories, brought to life by video clips. In 1977 for example the much loved John Noakes was filmed climbing 169 feet to the top of Nelson's Column. When he'd scaled the tricky overhang at the top, the sound man had recorded an 'unusable comment' from John as he got there. So he had to do it all over again. John always looked for a joke in his presentation.

Another memorable moment many of us could remember was Lulu, the rogue baby elephant. Totally uncontrollable, the little animal, peeing and pooing, dragged his poor keeper round in circles to hilarious laughter.

Blue Peter was always keen to push the boundaries. Alex told us, whilst filming the eruption of Mount Etna in 1983, suddenly confronted by a roadblock of molten lava, his carefully pre-prepared script was blown out of the window. The presenter's report had to be spontaneous. A big risk in those days - film stock was too expensive to be wasted. But it worked.

And new technology ushered in another milestone. Cameras began to go digital in the 1980s. They got lighter and more portable so producers started to become cameramen too. We saw some great footage that Alex had taken himself of gorillas in Uganda.

But for Alex, 36 years in the business was a long time. TV production is mainly a young person's field. And when the BBC Television Centre in West London was sold in 2012, Alex decided to 'get out before he was found out', as he put it. He now does around 40 talks a year, to organisations like ours, and on cruise ships. And what a brilliant speaker he is!

**Brian Hinners**



## What Has The BBC U3A Ever Done For Me?

Well, quite a lot it seems. Earlier in the year the Third Age Trust carried out an online survey of u3a members. Over 10,000 responded with many positive comments about their u3a experiences. 95% said that the u3a had improved their life in some way, saying things like:

The u3a gave them opportunities to keep learning and stay curious

They've expanded their social connections and made friends

Their sense of well being has improved

The u3a has helped them stay mentally and physically active

And being part of the u3a has reduced feelings of loneliness and isolation

You can read the whole report [here](#).



## Good Reads

Member **Michael Webb-Ingall**, Group Leader of the Book Group, writes a regular column about his recent reads. Here's an extract from his summer article. You might find something that takes your reading fancy!

First up is **Nonesuch** by **Francis Spufford**. This story is set in the early years of the Second World War and involves both science and magic! There is a right-wing plot to go back in time to ensure that Winston Churchill does not become Prime minister. There is some excellent period detail to go with this interesting plot line. From the way the book finishes, there is probably going to be a sequel. In an earlier column I mentioned **A Language of Dragons** by **S. F. Williamson**. This is a Young Adult fantasy title. The second volume, **A War of Wyverns**, is just out and I have to say that I was not overly impressed. There is a lot of detail about dragon speech which I found got in the way of the story. You may disagree?

I am enjoying another YA writer, **Anne Cassidy**. I have started **Talking to Strangers**, and have another title, **Looking for JJ** on my bedside table. The former is about a young girl who goes missing and the involvement of an older girl who was the last to see her before she disappeared. Could the strange man who has just moved in next door be a suspect? I am enjoying this one partly because it is set in a part of London where I used to live, Walthamstow. The latter title is about three children going off on a walk and only two coming back. Six years later things come to a head. I have just finished **The Fox Hunt** by **Caitlin Breeze**, another YA fantasy set in a university town not unlike Cambridge. There is a powerful secret society at the centre of the story, and the heroine turns out to be an unwitting sacrifice. I would happily read a sequel to this one. Last one on the YA list is a very odd one, **The Ruthless Lady's Guide to Wizardry** by **C. M. Wagonner**. There are some very adult themes to explore as Dellaria Wells, a petty con-artist, occasional thief and partly educated fire witch takes a job guarding an aristocrat from unseen assassins.

On a more grown-up level, I am reading **The Incredible Need to Believe** by **Julia Kristeva**. This short but very dense book takes a deep look into Christianity. Philosophy and psychology play their part as the author explores the roots of belief. This book is part of a series called European Perspectives – A Series in Social Thought and Cultural Criticism. A wet towel round the head might be required! I found **Ghost Stations (Essays and Branchlines)** by **Patrick McGuinness** in a charity shop in Caernarfon. This is an easier read by far and covers a wide range. His childhood visits to a small town in Belgium, his time in Oxford exploring the area around the Morris Cowley works, Baudelaire, Mallarme, Yeats and R. S. Thomas. There are some evocative photographs, poems and drawings throughout. Another thought-provoking read is a novel called **Helen of Nowhere** by **Makenna Goodman**. The book comprises a number of quite short paragraphs exploring the nature of reality. It starts with a list of characters; Man, Realtor (Estate Agent), Helen and Wife. There are six acts: Man, Realtor, Helen, Helen and Man, Wife and Man and Wife. The man is a disgraced university professor, he is being shown round a house by the realtor who extols the virtues of the property and also Helen the previous owner. The man is being offered the chance of true happiness, but at what price? I hope you seek this one out and get as fascinated as I am in negotiating the story.

**Michael Webb-Ingall**

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## HELP! Our u3a Coach Trips Need a New Organiser!

Our coach day trips have brought us lots of fun, friendship, laughter and lovely days. I've enjoyed organising the trips but, after three years, it's time for me to pass the reins to someone new. You don't need to be an expert organiser. I'm happy to share my experience and explain how everything works and hopefully you'll work with a team. If you're even a little bit interested, please do have an informal chat with me to find out more.

**Alison Lloyd**

**Tel: 07725 224295, Email: [alison.lloyd1955@gmail.com](mailto:alison.lloyd1955@gmail.com)**

## IT Support

If you are finding using a tablet or computer a bit daunting, help is at hand. Please contact **Paul Fileman** to be put in touch with someone who can help you. You can reach Paul on [paul.fileman@btinternet.com](mailto:paul.fileman@btinternet.com) - or if an email is a stretch too far try 07969 188820. Be prepared to let Paul know what sort of device you are having trouble with (and how old it is) so that he can best find someone to help you.

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Facebook Members: [Click](#)

## General Meetings Guest Speakers

2pm at Normanton on Soar Village Hall

Tuesday 24th November

### Travels with a Tiger - Riding the Western Front

Phil Drabble



Travelling the length of the WWI Western Front on his Triumph Tiger motorbike, Phil crossed some of Europe's most evocative and beautiful scenery, from the Swiss border, riding through Alsace, Lorraine, Champagne, the Somme and Flanders and finishing at the North Sea in Belgium.

Phil's talk is a homage to people on all sides who fought and died on the Western Front, focusing in particular on the fate of two men from his native Nottingham.

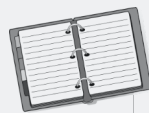
Tuesday 26th January 2027

### History of the Fire Service

Mike Stone



Mike is an ex fireman and his talk will cover fire fighting from the beginning of time through to the modern day.



## Diary Dates Reminder

24th Nov - General Meeting  
4th December - Christmas Party  
15th December - Carol Concert  
26th January - General Meeting  
1st March - Subscription Renewal

## Help Keep Your Newsletter Alive!

We're always looking for contributions. Do you have something to tell us that could interest other members? An unusual pastime or hobby, a memorable experience or trip, a piece of personal history, a short story or poem, a favourite recipe? Anything that you'd like to share with others. We'd love to hear from you. Please get in touch.

Brian Hinnars: [brian1@hinnars.co.uk](mailto:brian1@hinnars.co.uk)

We're sad to announce the passing of members, Andrew Daykin who died in August and Pat Goodwin who died in September.