



APRIL  
2022

# Vitality!

Official newsletter of the Syston and District U3A

CHARITY No 1180152

## FROM OUR ACTING CHAIRMAN

I hope everyone is safe and well. It seems Spring has arrived with the daffodils blooming and the trees in bud. As Spring is the time of new beginnings, why not try a new interest. Details of all our groups can be found on our website or on the boards at our General Meetings.

At the last Monthly Meeting it was very pleasing to see everyone enjoying both the refreshments and the opportunity to chat.

I know I keep mentioning the forthcoming AGM, but we still have positions that need filling for our u3a to continue. If you are at all interested in joining us on the committee, please email me at [sadu3avicechair@gmail.com](mailto:sadu3avicechair@gmail.com) or come and have a chat at our next monthly meeting on Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> April. It should be a very interesting talk by Howard Slater whose subject is "Old Blue Eyes".

Hope to see you soon

Clive.

## WE WANT TO LET YOU KNOW

### **SITUATIONS VACANT** *(With effect from our AGM)*

**(1) Secretary    (2) Publicity Person    (3) Five Committee Members**

Salary: nil

Hours: as few / many as you want

Rewards: the warm glow of knowing that you've helped U3A friends and acquaintances

#### **Secretary**

We're looking for a Secretary to replace the current one who's standing down. We need somebody to tidy up the mess he's leaving behind, provide the Committee with things to discuss and decide, and generally nudge and herd the Committee to do what's needed. A sort of cross

between a sheep dog and a signpost... It's not hard, you won't be on your own, and you don't need loads of experience because we'll support you.

What are we looking for?

- It helps if you can get on with people (some of the time)
- If you can use a computer (at a basic level, like word and things)
- Are reasonably well organized (sometimes)
- And it helps to know how to oil wheels and keep things ticking over. Simple.

Or, if you don't fancy much of the above, just doing Agendas and writing Minutes would be better than nothing.

### **Publicity Person**

We think we'd benefit from having somebody on the Committee who wants to earn an OBE or a Knighthood or an Dame'ship (is there such a word...?) for publicising us.

What's involved...?

It's not hard, it's not about working miracles. We'd like to be a bit more prominent locally, a bit more "out there". That means having somebody who's good at publicity, telling people all about us, giving us "a bit of oomph".

It doesn't mean standing on a soapbox yelling at passers-by, or shouting like a market trader, although you can if you want. We'd help you.

It might help if you can write nice things about us, or use social media, or talk to other local organisations about how much better their Members' lives would be if they joined our merry band.

Fancy it...? We haven't got anyone doing this at the minute so you'd be *The Special One*..... much more interesting than being a boring old Secretary...

### **Committee Members**

If you don't fancy either of the above (don't blame you, to be honest) then being a *Committee Member* might be just the thing to keep you out of mischief. Committees don't run on their own, they need bodies, brains, tea and biscuits. We'll provide the tea and biscuits (there's not been much of either since Gilly left) if you provide the body and brains. What do you say...? "What's involved..?"

- An interest in keeping the U3A going, ticking over, working with the Members
- Adding your ideas into the mix about what we do, how, and what else we might do
- Supporting others on the Committee to do their bit

We need five people, World-Beating Committee Types, full of vim and vigour, with nothing better to do except do "good works" and be highly regarded by all who know you...

### **Interested...?**

If you want more info' about these unmissable opportunities contact the Acting Chair, Clive, at [sadu3avicechair@gmail.com](mailto:sadu3avicechair@gmail.com) or the Secretary, Brian, at [sadu3asecretary@gmail.com](mailto:sadu3asecretary@gmail.com) or phone 0116 21 20 188 for a chat. There are other posts to be elected at the AGM, there's been some interest in them, but if you might be interested in becoming Chair, Vice Chair, Treasurer or Groups Coordinator please get in touch. No obligation, hassle free, and strictly confidential. No gossip will be exchanged. Unless you've got some *really good gossip*....

Go on, you know you want to...

## FROM OUR GROUPS CO-ORDINATORS

### **Board Games Workshop**

Friday 8th April: 10-12

Syston Community Centre

To book your place please contact

Barbara Sargeant: [barbarassargeant@hotmail.com](mailto:barbarassargeant@hotmail.com)

### **Art Workshop**

Friday 6 May: 10-12

Syston Community Centre

To book your place by 5th April please contact:

Sheila Driver: [sheiladriver@hotmail.com](mailto:sheiladriver@hotmail.com)

For further details of both events please see the March edition of Vitality.

The deadline for bookings of the Art workshop has been extended until 5th April

### **Group Organisers Meeting**

Many thanks to all who were able to attend on 4th March. It was great to hear news about the groups and to hear your views and ideas! The notes from the meeting will be on the web site under "Group Organise" as soon as possible.

### **Suggestion for a new Interest Group**

#### **"Art Appreciation "**

If this appeals to you, just email me (Sheila) If we get 6 people interested, I'll arrange for us to meet over a coffee and discuss how you'd like to run the group.

That's how we start new groups!

Best wishes to all,

Sheila and Barbara

## GROUP NEWS

### **FAMILY HISTORY**

The group saw a presentation setting out how a family tree can be created even with limited information. In this case the name of the child, where and when born, and the name of the father were known, but not that of the mother. It introduced the concept of creating trees to discover the relationship between people who share some DNA. That said, the same techniques apply to starting a tree from scratch, whatever the reason.

Whilst tracing the birth, marriage and death of a person can be straightforward, that isn't always the case. Post civil registration in 1837 it is possible to find these using free online resources. The birth registration allows us to establish the mother's maiden name, that can lead on to the births of other children and the marriage of the parents. In this case, the marriage of the grandparents of the match created a problem. The marriage register stated that the grandmother was a widow, with the first marriage giving her the last name Marson, but her maiden name was Smith. Finding a Smith as a relative complicates matters because

it is such a common name, but Marson is less common. No first marriage of a Smith female to a Marson male could be found, so was the marriage register incorrect? A clue that it might be, lay in the fact that two children of the couple were registered with the mother's maiden name Smith, but a third had Marson. May be the bride wasn't a widow at all, the groom was certainly a widower with young children needing to be cared for.

The 1939 register helped with further clues, the birth dates of the family members. From that, the birth and baptism of the lady as Marson, rather than Smith could be found. An added bonus was that the baptism register included her date of birth, it matched the 1939 register. So why did she claim to be a widow? That question was answered by her granddaughter, she had joined her grandfather's household with a child in tow, as a housekeeper initially. In the 1920's it would have been acceptable for a widow with a child to be a housekeeper, a female with an illegitimate son would have been a different matter. It was this "lie" that had thwarted the attempts of her granddaughter to trace that side of the family. The fact that shared DNA was involved also helped in this case. A Marson branch was part of the family tree of other part of the DNA match, only if the lady was a Marson from birth, would there be shared DNA. That DNA link confirmed what the "paper trail" suggested. See an article on DNA testing later in the newsletter.

## AMERICAN HISTORY GROUP

### James A. Garfield, 20<sup>th</sup> U.S. President

**James A. Garfield, 20<sup>th</sup> U.S. President, is mostly remembered for being assassinated five months into his term of office. However, regardless of his brief tenure, he was still able to attain some good milestones for his nation.**

- \* He turned the U.S. Navy into a power to be reckoned with and committed huge investments into the Service.
- \* He supported the Gold Standard, working brilliantly with his Treasury Secretary William Windom to refinance government bonds which saved the nation millions of dollars each year.
- \* He cleaned up corruption in the Post Office, allowing for unbiased investigation into the Star Route scandal which rocked the Post Office Department in 1881
- \* He pushed for civil rights for African Americans and supported policies and legislation that protected their political and economic rights.

*"The elevation of the negro race from slavery to the full rights of citizenship is the most important change we have known since the adoption of the Constitution of 1787. No thoughtful man can fail to appreciate its beneficent effect upon our institutions and people ..... It has liberated the master as well as the slave from a relation which wronged and enfeebled both."* James A Garfield (Inaugural speech in March 1881)

## PEMBERTON AND COCA COLA

According to history Pemberton's world-famous soda was created in Columbus and taken to Atlanta. The public were concerned about drug addiction, depression and alcoholism among war veterans, and neurasthenia (chiefly associated with emotional disturbance) among 'highly strung' Southern Women.

Atlanta and Fulton County enacted temperance legislation in 1886 and Pemberton had to find a non-alcoholic formula for his French Wine Coca. He worked with owner-proprietor Willis E Venable of the local drugstore to test and perfect the recipe which was formulated by trial and error. Pemberton and Willis finally finalised a set of directions for the preparation.

It was by accident that Pemberton blended the base syrup with carbonated water, which he then decided to sell as a drink rather than medicine. His book keeper Frank Mason Robinson thought of the name Coca Cola as it referred to the two main ingredients and because of the controversy over its cocaine content. The Cola-Cola Company later said that the name was “meaningless but fanciful”. Robinson seems to have taken over the promotion of the drink, and used Spencerian script on the bottles and advertisements. Pemberton made many medical claims for his drink but it was marketed as “delicious, refreshing, pure joy, exhilarating and invigorating”

Dr Pemberton fell ill shortly after Coca-Cola became available to the public. He was sick, desperate and bankrupt and to maintain his expensive morphine addiction he began selling rights to his formula to business partners in Atlanta. He had a hunch that the formula “Someday will be a national drink” he tried to retain a share of the ownership to leave to his son. His son preferred to have the money, so in 1888 Pemberton and his son sold the remaining portion of the patent to Atlanta pharmacist Asa Griggs Candler for US\$1,750, which in 2020 is equal to US\$47,230.

## **THE STATUE OF LIBERTY**

Ask people to come up with an image that symbolizes American immigrant heritage, and many of them will choose the statue of Liberty. A gift from the people of France, she has watched over New York Harbour since 1886. On her base is a tablet inscribed with the words penned by Emma Lazarus in 1883

**Give me your tired, your poor,  
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.  
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me,  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door.**

The Statue of Liberty (Liberty Enlightening the World) is a colossal neoclassical sculpture on Liberty Island. The copper statue, was designed by French sculptor Frederic Auguste Bartholdi and its metal framework was built by Gustave Eiffel (of Eiffel Tower fame). The statue was dedicated on October 28, 1886.

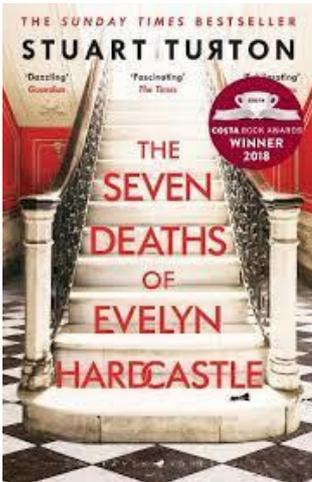
The statue is of Libertas, a robed Roman liberty goddess. She holds a torch above her head with her right hand, and in her left hand carries a tabula ansata inscribed July IV MDCCLXXVI (July 4, 1776 in Roman numerals), the date of the U.S. Declaration of Independence. A broken shackle and chain lie at her feet as she walks forward, commemorating the recent national abolition of slavery. After its dedication, the statue became an icon of freedom and of the United States, seen as a symbol of welcome to immigrants arriving by sea.

The head wears a crown with seven spikes. Some say the seven spikes represent the seven seas and seven continents. The Statue’s replacement torch, added in 1986, is a copper flame covered in 24k gold. It is reflective of the sun’s rays in daytime and lighted by 16 floodlights at night.

The ceremony of dedication was held on the afternoon of October 28, 1886. President Grover Cleveland presided over the event. A parade was held in New York City. Nearly a million people

watched the parade. As the parade passed the stock exchange, the traders threw ticker tape from the windows, beginning the New York tradition of the ticker-tape parade.

## THE LIBRARY BOOK GROUP



Our next meeting will be at Syston Library, Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> April, starting at 10:30. We will be discussing “The Seven Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle” by Stuart Turton, followed by more general book-chat and the selection of a shared read for the following meeting. If you would like to join us, you will need a Leicestershire Library card with Smart access – any county library can help with this, you can arrange it online, or contact the group organiser.

Best First Novel prize in the 2018 Costa book awards.

Reached The Sunday Times bestseller list

7-episode series being made by Netflix

## WHAT'S ON NEXT

### GENERAL MEETINGS

As Covid regulations in England relating to meetings have effectively been withdrawn, there is no requirement to wear face masks. However, Government guidance is that it is prudent to wear them in places where people congregate, who do not normally mix with each other. Covid has not gone away. It is also not sensible to attend such events F2F if you have any signs of infectious illness, covid restrictions have reduced our immunity to these.

**You do not need to book a seat for future talks; therefore, I will not be sending out separate emails for everyone. The April and May talks will be zoomed into the Community Centre. You can also log into the talks using zoom.**

If you have any questions, please email me on [sadu3amembers@gmail.com](mailto:sadu3amembers@gmail.com)

**Wed 13<sup>th</sup> April** by Zoom at the Brookside Room or watch at home

**“Old Blue Eyes”** by Howard Slater

Francis Albert Sinatra known as “Old Blue Eyes” was a singer, actor and producer who became one of the most popular musical artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, selling more than 150 million records worldwide.

In this talk we hear the story of his rise to fame and listen to recordings of his famous songs and some of his lesser-known songs along with his very first recorded song.

**Wed 11<sup>th</sup> May** by Zoom at the Brookside Room or watch at home.

## **“Inn and Out at the Top”** with speaker Neil Hanson

Neil Hanson tells us about his time as the landlord of Britain’s highest inn, so high above sea level that it had its own climate. Cut off by snow in the winter for weeks on end and subject to winds that could rip a car door from it’s hinges. Its next-door neighbour was 4 miles away. Customers could be tight-fisted farmers, eccentric characters even naturists. There were “lates and lock-ins” with police raids by appointment. You may have seen the Inn on TV as it was the venue for the shooting of a famous double-glazing advert. So come and hear the stories from a man who lived through it all.

## **Wed June 9<sup>th</sup>** in the Brookside Room

June’s General Meeting is a little different. Most of us are from the “Swinging 60’s” and in June we are taking you back to then with an interactive reminder of **“Juke Box Jury”**. David Jacobs became famous as the presenter for the BBC. Sadly, he died in 2013 but we have booked Roger Prescott to bring us his version of this iconic program.

4 members of the audience will act as the voting panel. We will hear some familiar (maybe forgotten) songs from the 60’s. The panel will give their comments and vote HIT or MISS (no cheating by remembering what actually happened). If the vote is a tie, then the rest of the members listening will give the “studio audience” vote to decide. Jog a few memories? Interested? Come along and join in.

By the way there will be a short AGM for a few minutes just before the fun but we think it will be worth coming to relive our youth.

## **THEATRE TRIPS**

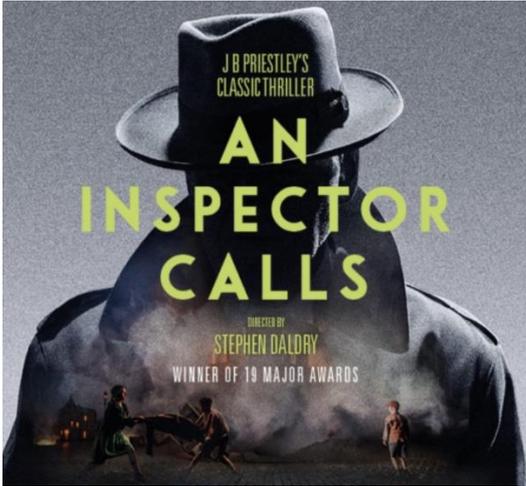
### **LORD OF THE DANCE**



Theatre trip tickets for Lord of the Dance 16<sup>th</sup> April 2022. I will have your tickets at April's GM meeting which is just a few days before the show. Anyone who wants their tickets before that, email or ring me to arrange a convenient collection.  
[elaineyarwood@outlook.com](mailto:elaineyarwood@outlook.com)

Sister Act Saturday matinee 22 October 2022. There may still be a few tickets for this - please let me have your names U3A number and email or phone number. Payment for the tickets £33.50 not required until August's U3A meeting.





**Stephen Daldry's** multi award-winning **National Theatre** production of **JB Priestley's** classic thriller returns.

Winner of 19 major awards and hailed as the theatrical event of its generation, *An Inspector Calls* has thrilled more than 5 million theatregoers worldwide.

I have booked 20 seats for Saturday 25 March 2023 matinee performance at Curve Leicester, payment not due till January. Yes, I know it's an early booking but it's very popular. Let me know if you are interested. Elaine Yarwood

## NATIONAL U3A ITEMS

## U3A RADIO PODCASTS

The u3a radio podcast, set up in 2020, showcases the amazing things happening across the movement. It's created by a team of u3a members who all have radio experience and features interviews with members, interest group leaders, Trustees, national volunteers and Subject Advisers.

The entire series is available to listen to on our [YouTube channel](#), and since January 2022, has also been available to listen to on podcasting platforms.

The team are always looking for more stories – [please get in touch](#) if you'd like to contribute.

## U3A TALKS

Free talks continue via Eventbrite,



APR 05

**Crochet Workshop: How to Crochet a Creature**

by [The Third Age Trust](#)  
3332 followers [Follow](#)

Free

Book [here](#)



APR  
20

### Do All Religions Lead to the Same God?

by [The Third Age Trust](#)

3332 followers [Follow](#)

Free

Book [here](#)



APR  
12

### Roger Black - From Olympics to Now

by [The Third Age Trust](#)

3332 followers [Follow](#)

Free

Book [here](#)

Details of the wide and varied programme available can be found [here](#)

## LEICESTER AND RUTLAND NETWORK NEWS ITEMS

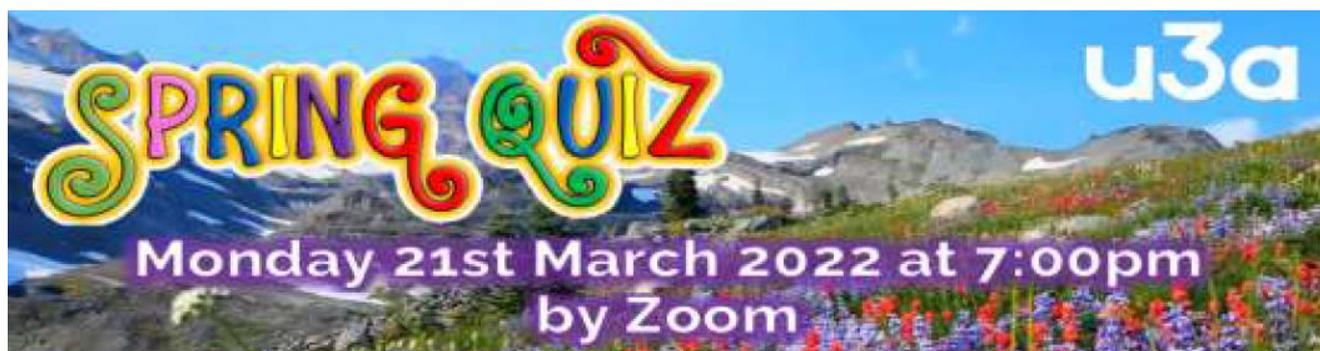


I am writing to introduce myself as Partnership Manager for the C and Museum based in Laxton, Nottinghamshire. I am looking to work with local community groups to promote visits to the museum and be inclusive for those that do not necessarily know that we are here or, indeed, why.

We are an established museum and education centre, and we offer school visits, which are highly successful. We are keen to increase the offering and awareness within local adult groups and wider community. Whilst we do have current bookings for u3a groups, we would be delighted if you could promote this to your area to enable us to welcome more u3a groups to the centre.

Group visits of more than 10 people are charged at £7.50 per person. This includes entry to both our main exhibition and The Journey exhibition. We would kindly request a £50.00 deposit to secure your booking, with the balance invoiced on your final numbers after your visit. We have capacity for 120 adult group visitors at any one time. Jill Robinson

<https://www.holocaust.org.uk>



### *Spring Quiz Goes International*

A massive thank you to all members who took part in the Quiz last Monday. Around 100 members took part from across the East Midlands and beyond – Scotland, Austria & Dubai. The winning duo from Oundle u3a, Northants scored 73 out of a possible 85. Congratulations to them.

## NOT U3A BUT YOU MIGHT BE INTERESTED

### Free Guided Tours Of Belgrave Hall and Gardens

Join a free guided tour of Belgrave Hall and Gardens and learn more about the families who lived there and the fascinating history of the building

2 Apr 2022 to 3 Apr 2022 *Various Opening Times*  
20 Apr 2022

**Where:** Belgrave Hall, Church Road, Belgrave, Leicester, Leicestershire, LE4 5PE

**Contact details:** +44 (0)116 2532569

# The Leicester Blitz – the German Air Raid on Leicester, 19-20 Nov. 1940

This exhibition commemorates Leicester's 'Blitz Night' when 108 people were killed by German bombers.

This exhibition returns to Newark Houses after a short run at the museum last summer.

It commemorates Leicester's "Blitz Night" when 108 people were killed by German bombers. Leicester was bombed several times in 1940 and 1941 but the raid on the night of 19-20 November 1940 was by far the worst.

The exhibition shows how Leicester prepared for air raids and covers all the German attacks. It also shows how people acted on those nights, often in the words of those who were there.

Accompanying their stories are many photographs and paintings of the damage done.

## Easter Eggstravaganza

Enjoy Easter crafts and paint your own Easter egg in either a traditional or contemporary design

9 Apr 2022 to 24 Apr 2022 *Open 10:00 - 17:00*

**Where:** King Richard III Visitor Centre, 4A St Martin's, Leicester, Leicestershire, LE1 5DB

**Contact details:** +44 (0)300 300 0900

## Easter Activity Trail

Celebrate spring half-term with a family friendly Easter adventure at Belvoir Castle.

1 Apr 2022 to 18 Apr 2022 *Open 11:00 - 17:00*

**Where:** Belvoir Castle, Grantham, Grantham, Grantham, Leicestershire, NG32 1PE

**Contact details:** +44 (0)1476 871001

## Bradgate Park Ghost Walk

Discover Grey's ancestors who owned the land for near on 500 years.

14 Apr 2022

**Where:** Bradgate Park, Bradgate Road, Newtown Linford, Leicester, Leicestershire, LE6 0HE

**Contact details:** +44 (0)7931 417539

## IF YOU MISSED THE MARCH GM TALK .....

### Thomas Fowler Inventor – by Pamela Voss

Unfortunately, we had some audio issues with this talk. As a result, I have searched for information to try and clarify some of the content. I have added some details which may not have been mentioned by the speaker.

Thomas Fowler was born in Great Torrington Devon in 1777 to humble parents. His father was a cooper (maker of wooden casks and similar products). Thomas had only a basic education at the local school. He was apprenticed to a fellmonger, (a person who prepares and deals with animal skins for leather and associated products), but began to study maths. He was self-taught, using a book, The Young Mathematicians Guide by John Ward.

By his early 30's he was a stationer, printer and bookbinder in his home town. His first invention was his own printing press. In Europe the printing machine had developed from the wine press, Fowler's machine was based on this.

He married Mary Coppin 1813, the couple went on to have 11 children, although several of them died young. Those that did survive carved out success, daughter Caroline for example was a notable illustrator, who assisted her father in his printing business from a young age. Son Hugh became a clergyman, who later wrote a biography of his father.

He then became involved with heating systems for glass houses, using atmospheric pressure rather than pumps to circulate the hot water. A side effect of this was the creation of hot beds to grow seeds ahead of the usual time. It was considered a significant invention and led to several commissions for the product. Although he secured a patent in 1829 for his thermosiphon as it was called, it was infringed. However, he could not afford to take a case to law. The situation effectively ruined him financially at the time. (Apparently the patent system of the time was poor, it could be circumvented by relatively minor changes in design) Some also credit this greenhouse system as being the beginnings of the household central heating system.

He became a town councillor and church organist. A barrel organ was converted by him into a "proper" organ. In 1835 he became the local inspector of weights and measurements. He then became partner and manager in the local bank of Messers Loveband & Co. He also took charge of financial matters for the Union Workhouse. This led him to produce mathematical tables to assist in the calculation of charges to the parishes that formed the Poor Law Union. He used both binary and ternary systems. Binary was later to become the key to computers, but this was the 1840's not the 1940's. The tables were published and widely used. They were followed up by a second book exploring the ternary scale. This was put into code using, -, 0, +. 1 = +; 2 = + -; 3 = +0; 4 = ++.

He began to explore calculation by machine. By this time Charles Babbage, another important figure in calculating machines was also at work. The machine he built in 1830 was a large beast. Fowler wanted to produce a desk top machine. Ternary was his choice. Whilst Babbage used wheels in his machine, Fowler used rods – a little reminiscent of the abacus. By now Fowler was in his 60's. He toiled alone to protect the integrity of his invention. After the issues with the patent on his thermosiphon, his dilemma was how to protect what he had produced, whilst still achieving recognition for it. He demonstrated his machine to Babbage, who was mightily impressed. An invitation by the President of the Royal Society to prepare a detailed description of his machine for their next meeting followed. Such invites were not readily issued. However, so keen was Fowler to protect his work, that what he sent to them, fell well short of what was required. Augustus De Morgan produced a paper attempting to give more detail, but he couldn't provide a full account. Pure mathematician George Bidell Airy became involved, but Fowler continued to resist sending drawings. His resistance to fully describe and display his machine for the British Association for the Advancement of Science in Plymouth, at the Athenaeum, was effectively an own goal. Although he did

show it elsewhere in Plymouth. He wanted academic recognition, but in producing tables to convert decimal/ternary momentum was lost. However, he persisted and produced a machine that was capable of operating in any scale without the need for conversion. Again, he built the machine alone. Fowler only gave up a detailed description of the machine on his deathbed, he died 31<sup>st</sup> March 1843. It was dictated to his daughter and published under the title New Calculating Machine. Pamela Vass was part of the team involved with production of the machine from information they tracked down. The replica can be seen at the Great Torrington Museum (more information and pictures can be found at [www.torringtonmuseum.org.uk](http://www.torringtonmuseum.org.uk) ). It is also depicted in a memorial window to the family, (see extracts below) in the parish church, along with the thermosiphon.



Fowler's calculating machine is regarded by some as more significant than that of Babbage, they feel it might have led to earlier computers, had he not been so protective of the details. The man may have also been more famous and achieved better recognition in his lifetime, not to mention the financial rewards he might have gained.

## FROM OUR MEMBERS



This photo came from Dave Steadman – not actually taken by him.

Some clever work I suspect combining two images to create an illusion.

Dave suggests the caption to go with it of “OOPs!”

# A Story of Rubber

Part two of Pierre Castille's article, part one appeared in the March newsletter.



**A map of Brazil, note City of Manaus (top left)**

Rubber trees grow naturally in the Amazonian rainforest. Manaus, 1,000 miles up the Amazon River was the main centre of operations where rubber tappers would bring their rubber for loading on to ships bound for Europe and North America.

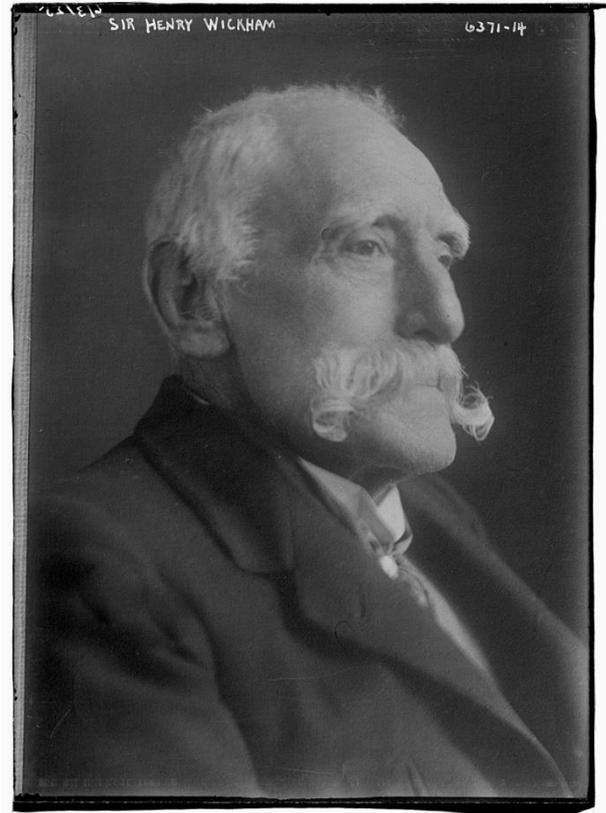
Sensing an opening in the market, the British sent Henry Wickham to Peru and Brazil to collect rubber seeds



**Seeds of Hevea brasiliensis**

Henry returned to Kew Gardens in 1876 with 70,000 seeds where 2,700 germinated. The young plants were kept alive in warden cases, miniature greenhouses, as they were transported

to tropical regions of the British Empire, particularly Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Singapore and Malaya where they formed the basis of rubber plantations that would transform rubber production from a gathering operation to an agricultural enterprise.



**Sir Henry Wickham (1846 – 1928)**

It takes a rubber tree only 6 years to grow to a stage when rubber can be harvested. This 'smart move' by the British doomed the far less efficient harvesting of rubber in Amazonia.

To give you some idea just how wealthy you could become gathering rubber in South America, I will tell you about St George Bernard Delisle Gray. He told me that when he left school he applied for a job in the City of London with a company with interests in South America. They told him to come back when he could speak and read Spanish, which he did six-months later. After a probationary period, they told him he was going to South America to act as an agent for the company. They bought him twelve white suits (what an English businessman would wear in the tropics) and a ticket to Manaus. He learnt Portuguese very quickly.

The trouble with working in the richest city in the world is that all labourers are busy out in the jungle collecting rubber. He, like all other businessmen, would send their laundry by steamer to Paris. (Paris, France!)

Eighteen months later, he returned home to England with the money he had earned, in gold coins, sufficient gold to pay his way through medical school so he could train and qualify as a doctor.

Dr St. G. B. Delisle Gray was my grandfather. The First World War saw a huge demand for rubber. Not just rubber tyres, but also waterproof clothing for troops, gas masks and other paraphernalia of warfare. The British controlled 45% of all rubber production and set the price, infuriating the Americans. It created bigger problems for the Central Powers.



Dandelion flower stalk oozing latex

Have you noticed that when you pick dandelion flowers the tubular flower stalk exudes a milky white substance? That white liquid is latex, the stuff that makes rubber. Their roots produce much larger quantities. During WWI Germany resorted to make rubber from dandelions. At the conclusion of WWI the Americans tried to make life difficult for the British because we controlled the price of rubber on the world market. Henry Ford tried to set up commercial rubber plantations in Brazil, with little success. As the demand for rubber grew in the inter-war period so too did the research into manufacturing an artificial substitute for rubber, with the Americans and Germans leading the field. The British were not interested in finding substitutes, why would they try to put themselves out of business?

The invasion of Malaya by the Japanese in WW2 put paid to British dominance of the rubber industry but luckily, large quantities of synthetic rubber became available from the Americans at a price.



If rubber is white or cream coloured, why are tyres black?

Natural rubber breaks down when exposed to sunlight. Carbon black added to the rubber absorbs light, protecting the rubber. Most rubber that is exposed to the weather is black for this reason. Rubber used indoors is white so that it doesn't leave unsightly marks when it rubs up against furniture and flooring.

We find rubber a very useful substance, the question is why do plants make it? About 10% of all plants make latex.

Land plants contains two different types of plumbing. There are tubes that carry water and minerals from the roots to the leaves and there are separate tubes that carry food made by the leaves down to others parts of the plant. Latex is produced in cells and tubes called lactifers. Latex does not move around inside the plant; it is not part of a transport system. Latex is a weapon against animals that try to eat the plant.



Poppy heads being cut to stimulate latex production

An animal, most usually an insect, attempting to eat the poppy head will end up with a mouth full of glue welding its jaws together. If that isn't sufficient deterrent, a chemical in the latex interferes with its nervous system, sending it to sleep. Poppies are grown in Afghanistan and their latex is harvested, not to make rubber but to make opium and heroin.

*Hevea brasiliensis*, the rubber tree, is a member of the Euphorbia family of plants that are notorious for the production of latex laced with chemical nastiness. Rough handling can result in horribly blistered hands unless you wear gloves, made of rubber of course.



**Euphorbia damarana in Namib Desert**

Plants that live in deserts face a tough challenge from a shortage of water, high temperatures and hungry animals.

### A sad story

Uis is a tiny town in the middle of the desert in Namibia, a country that was once part of the German empire.



**Some of the 16 Uis graves**

It is at a crossroads with a small supermarket, a petrol station and a restaurant. We stopped there for supplies on a journey from Windhoek to the Skeleton Coast. On the edge of town there is a row of some 16 graves. There are no headstones.

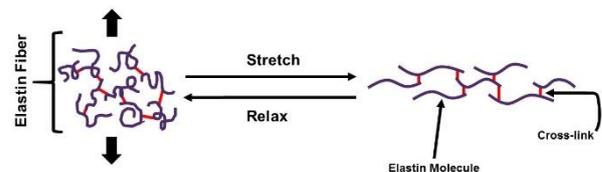
Some time ago, no one is sure when, sixteen men arrived in town. They bought meat from the local shop, set up a camp, collected firewood and roasted the meat.

Through ignorance, they had chosen *Euphorbia damarana* branches to cook with, not knowing that latex would be exuded to taint their meat. Their bodies were found the next morning. They carried no documents so presumably they were itinerant workmen, unknown, unrecognised and buried together at the edge of town.

No one recorded their deaths or even the date of the terrible tragedy. Some say it was in the early 1900s and others think it was in the 1960s.

### Do Animals make rubber?

Animals use special proteins as an elastic material. The natural tautness of the skin of a well honed body is due to **collagen**, an elastic protein. The natural stretchiness of blood vessels and other body plumbing is caused by another elastic protein called **elastin**.



Elastic proteins are very important in jumping animals, such as kangaroos.

Elastic proteins are able to absorb energy efficiently (without loss) as a jumping animal lands and then use the stored energy to catapult the animal back up again.

This ability to store energy and release it very quickly is very important in small insects.

Mosquitos can beat their wings a thousand times a second because of the springiness of **resilin**, another elastic protein. Fleas and click beetles use resilin to catapult themselves into the air when they jump.

## DNA – to test or not to test? From Julie Johnson

Many people who are not family historians are taking DNA tests. This seems to be because they are interested in their ethnic origins, but not their full family background. There are specialist companies that offer tests aimed at providing medical information, but the majority of tests are with companies connected with family history. However, if you are interested in your ethnic background, a DNA test will not give you fully accurate results. Below is snapshot of my own results –



### Ethnicity Estimate

- 81% England & Northwestern Europe
- 16% Scotland
- ⊕ 2 Other regions

I only tested a little over a year ago, my original results had a slightly higher Scottish element. People who tested several years ago will have had several changes in their breakdown. It's also important to look behind these "headline" figures. So, for my Scottish 16%, I find that it could actually be anywhere from 0 – 31%. Notice that English is actually described as England and Northwestern Europe, and it could actually be 100% for me. My other 2 regions are Ireland and Scandinavia. In other words, the results don't tell you exactly where your ancestors came from. In essence, the testing companies don't have the level of information they need to come up with precise results. They have been gathering more over the years, which is why people's estimates have changed.

My family tree indicates that I don't have any Scottish ancestry, but I do have a bit of Irish, and given the Viking exploration of our island, a bit of Scandinavian is to be expected. But DNA testing has more far-reaching implications than just ethnicity.

Put very simply, we inherit half of our DNA from each parent, they in turn inherited half from each of their parents. So, we inherit a quarter of our DNA from each grandparent and in turn 12.5% from each great grandparent. However, brothers and sisters will inherit a different 50% from each parent, and their aunts, uncles and cousins will get a different mix from their parents and grandparents. We should share a measure of DNA with our close relatives, but may not share any at all with some of our more distant relatives. However, we will share some DNA with some of our more distant cousins. It is this "sharing" that can help family historians to confirm their "paper" research, and in some cases overcome gaps or inaccuracies in the paper trail. At its most far-reaching, DNA testing may help adoptees to trace their biological family, or vice versa. Working out how we connect with our "DNA matches" can help to solve mysteries, or can reveal surprises. Some of these revelations might cause family difficulties, like a father who turns out not to be a biological father, or the discovery of a half-sibling.

My own DNA testing was aimed at trying to discover if a father named on a marriage register was indeed the biological father, also whether the man who married a great grandmother only 6 weeks after she gave birth to a grandmother, was the biological father. I have a partial answer to the first question, but have yet to uncover evidence on the latter.

What I didn't consider, was that my DNA results and my family tree, might hold the key to unlocking someone else's mystery. The DNA I share with a 2<sup>nd</sup> cousin, who was adopted as a baby, gave her an initial link to her birth mother. Up to that point, all she had was a name on her adoption paperwork. The lady concerned had a name that was common enough for there to be too many possibilities, but fortunately I

knew that she had 3 brothers. Men are easier to trace than women, they rarely change their surname, added to which, the brother's forename combinations were less common. One of them turned out to live only a few miles away. The birth mother is still alive, but the birth was a secret. I don't yet know whether there will be the happy ending my cousin is hoping for, a line of communication is open through me, I can only hope that, once the lady has had time to reflect, she will use it.

So, there could be far more to a DNA test than the person taking it might have considered, something to bear in mind before spitting into that tube, or swabbing that cheek.

## DECLUTTER DEN

Do you have anything sitting in a cupboard, or on a shelf, that you no longer want? Might one of our groups be able to use it? Might one of your fellow members be able to use it?

Robert Wise has some garden items – if you are interested email: [mema@5edt.uk](mailto:mema@5edt.uk)



1) Compost bin as photograph

2) four, cane support frames for use with grow bags. As photographs (but not including the grow bag or canes).

If required, I could deliver them within a 3 mile radius of Syston.

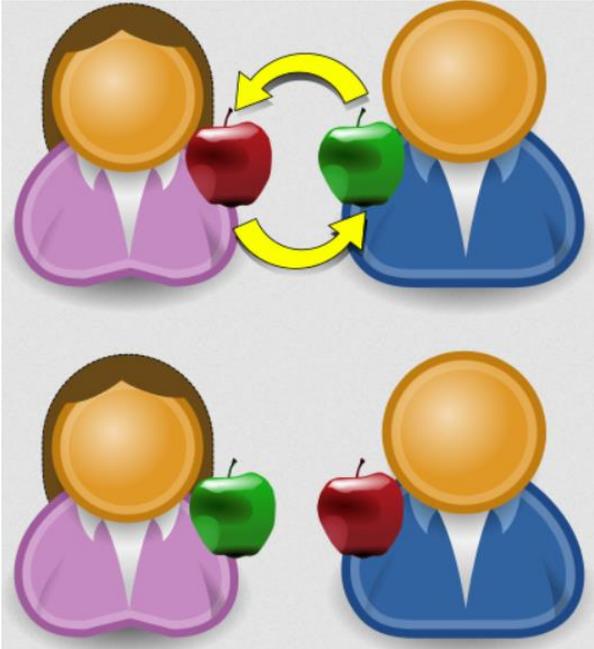


If you have something that you are prepared to give away – **strictly no items for sale!** Let me know and I'll put it in declutter den as soon as the current situation changes and hopefully we can help each other free up some space, whilst giving others something they have a use for, even if we don't.

Let me have details at [sadu3aed@gmail.com](mailto:sadu3aed@gmail.com)

## NEW FEATURE !!

### SWAP STOP



Maybe you don't have something you are willing to give away, but how about swapping it with something from another member?

Are you a jig-saw fan looking to exchange with another jig-saw fan and give both of you a new challenge?

Do you have books you've read and would like to swap some with another bookworm?

Gardeners, how about swapping your surplus plants for ones you don't have, but would like to have?

Let me have details of what you have and what you want and we'll try and connect you with another member who wants what you have, and has what you want. The usual email address applies.

## POETRY CORNER

### ODE TO MARIUPOL' Robin Perry

Where streets were promenades  
with gardens decked with flowers  
and bustling life along them,  
there now lie black holes  
and craters smoking death  
for those lingering long to look.

The theatre is a crumbled ruin  
rivalling those of ancient Rome  
and the stench of death out here  
knows no pity, only certainty  
as acrid fumes fill the sky  
and debris and corpse are one.

You should still be a free port  
to the sea to quit this place of hell  
but man's hostile fury unassuaged

has locked you into circles of death.  
No ships will pass from here  
as guns offshore boom out their warning.

Towered flats once filled the skyline,  
yes uglier than those older homes,  
but now their soul-less blackened rooms  
stare out like eyes of death scowling  
at an enemy that has no answers,  
knows no mercy beyond the bomb.

Ghosts now stalk out here  
where people used to thrive.  
They stumble the empty streets  
past deserted dead buildings,  
now stripped of happy memories  
now stripped of all vitality.

## And finally.....

### Some Easter Traditions from other countries

In **Bermuda**, people fly homemade kites on Good Friday. The tradition is said to have started when a local teacher had trouble explaining Jesus's resurrection to his Sunday school class. So, he made a kite to explain the concept.

In **Sweden**, children dress up as Easter witches and wear old clothes. Rather like to our Halloween, they walk around their area, but they trade artwork for sweets.

In **Florence, Italy**, locals celebrate a 350-year-old Easter tradition known as Scoppio del Carro, or "explosion of the cart." An ornate cart packed with fireworks is led through the streets of the city by people in colourful 15th century costumes before stopping outside the cathedral. The Archbishop then lights a fuse during Easter mass that leads outside to the cart and sparks a fireworks display. The meaning behind the custom dates back to the First Crusade and is meant to ensure a good harvest.

If you're in the southern French town of **Haux** on Easter Monday you can tuck in to a feast. Each year, [a](#) giant omelette is served up in the town's main square. It uses more than 15,000 eggs and feeds up to 1,000 people.

On the morning of Holy Saturday, the traditional "pot throwing" takes place on the **Greek island of Corfu**. People throw pots, pans, and earthenware out of their windows, smashing them on the street. They are often filled with water. Some say the custom derives from the Venetians, who on New Year's Day used to throw out their old items. Others believe the throwing of the pots welcomes spring, symbolizing the new crops that will be gathered in new pots.

In **Poland**, pouring water on one another is an Easter tradition called Śmigus-dyngus, or Wet Monday. On Easter Monday, people try to drench each other with buckets of water, squirt guns, or anything else they can find. Tradition claims that girls who get soaked on Wet Monday will marry within the year.

"Sprinkling," a popular Easter tradition in **Hungary**, is observed on Easter Monday, also known as "Ducking Monday." Boys playfully sprinkle perfume or perfumed water on girls, supposedly after getting their permission. Young men used to pour buckets of water over young women's heads, but now they sprinkle them instead, and ask for a kiss. It was believed that water had a cleaning, healing, and fertility-inducing effect.

Czech boys also have their sights on the girls, They tie ribbons to willow branch whips on Easter Monday and gently "whip" girls to wish them good luck and health. Though some Czech women disagree with the tradition, others say it's an important piece of folklore and culture.

In Russia, the Easter meal is accompanied by a knob of butter fashioned into the shape of a lamb. In ancient times it was considered a lucky omen to meet a lamb. Why a lamb? Because you can be certain it's not Satan in disguise. Old Beelzebub can take on the form of all animals except the lamb because of its religious symbolism.

