

Kingston u3a Newsletter

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www.kingstonu3a.org.uk

Welcome, everyone!

Can we hope the better weather is now on its way, so we can leave our umbrellas at home and go out and benefit from the sunshine and warmth? It's pleasing to think some of you might enjoy our free visits to Kew Gardens in pleasanter conditions.

As ever, we have some excellent accounts of the various GAS outings that have taken place since our last newsletter – to the Postal Museum, Strawberry Hill House and the Bank of England. And Lionel Beer and the Train group have been investigating the back streets of Waterloo Station where once the London Necropolis Railway trains started their journey.

There are some changes to our Committee to note. We're saying goodbye to Jane Hoyland and our Treasurer, Fiona Tolmie, and welcoming Helen Brett in her place. You'll find details of all the arrivals and departures inside.

I finish on a melancholy note. We recently announced the death of Shirley Miller. Some of us attended her funeral on 22 April, a fitting and moving farewell to a beloved family member and a dear and respected colleague. It was comforting to hear, too, that Kingston **u3a** had meant so much to her over the years and we thank her in turn for her many years of service.

Best wishes to you all

Joy Garvey, Chair

Ringing the Changes

The last few months have seen some changes amongst Committee members and other people who help keep Kingston **u3a** running smoothly. Chair Joy Garvey reviews the changes, saying goodbye to some and welcoming others.

Membership Secretary

We are very sorry to lose Jane Hoyland from the Committee. She's been our hard-working Membership Secretary for many years and welcomed so many new members into the **u3a** from her desk at the back of the hall during our monthly meetings. We'll miss her friendship, experience and measured input in all things. We're glad she'll continue as a member and look forward to keeping in touch with her.

Jane: I joined Kingston **u3a** in 2004 to take part in a book group and subsequently an art class. And then in 2008 I was asked to take on the role of Membership Secretary.

In those days all the payments were handwritten on to a list by me: numbers varied from year to year, 700 to over 1,000. Completed membership forms were then taken to our Database Manager, who entered the details on to our somewhat basic computer system.

Over the years members started to pay by standing order, which cut down the paperwork. Today most pay by bank transfer or standing order. Cheques are still used but not in the numbers they were then. As an example, back in

September-December 2008 over 500 cheques and £300 in cash were paid into our bank account. Now, using the Beacon database, the Membership team enters all renewals and new members' details directly on to the system.

Over the years I've been on many interesting excursions and wonderful holidays. I shall still enjoy belonging to Kingston **u3a**. Now, with more free time, I'll get my paints out and do a bit of daubing!

Our thanks to Marcia Mayeda who is stepping into Jane's shoes as Membership Secretary. She will handle all applications and subscription renewals. In the meantime, if you need to change your membership details, please download and complete the updated form from our website: www.kingstonu3a.org.uk/membership/ Send any membership-related forms to Jan Murphy, who has kindly offered to help Marcia in her work.

Treasurer

We're sorry to be losing Fiona Tolmie from the Committee after all her hard work alongside me to take on the Treasurer's role. We wish her well in her move to Orpington. In her place we welcome Helen Brett, as both Treasurer and Committee member. Fiona has been busy easing her into the role.

Fiona: When I agreed in early 2023, after four years as a member of Kingston **u3a** and four decades living in the Kingston area, to join the Committee and

take over from Joy Garvey as Treasurer, I wasn't expecting to be writing a farewell note from Orpington in April 2024. But last September I decided to move closer to my daughter and her family (which includes a granddaughter starting school soon and another expected this summer).

I was lucky and managed to sell my flat in Kingston more quickly than I expected and buy somewhere just five minutes' walk from my daughter.



Kingston **u3a** is very lucky, too, that Helen Brett has volunteered to take over from me (she has much better

qualifications to be Treasurer than I do) and I shall step down from the Committee once we've dealt with the complicated bureaucratic hurdles demanded by the bank. I've enjoyed being part of the Committee and would encourage others to think about getting involved. Hopefully there won't be a vacancy for Treasurer for a while but there are other gaps.

It's farewell to the Committee but not yet to my Kingston **u3a** groups (a MOTO group whose activities are often in central London and a couple of walking groups whose walks sometimes start at places still convenient for me). It's not farewell to the **u3a** either since, as soon as my new house is a little straighter, I'll be investigating the Orpington **u3a**!

Helen: Up until I retired, I always worked in Finance. Around 1987 I was delighted to have the opportunity to live and work in Paris for three years. My last role before retirement was project management with the YMCA.



I joined Kingston **u3a** in September 2023 and my first experience was the new members meeting in November that year. At the end of that meeting Marcia Mayeda asked me if I would be interested in the Treasurer role, which was to become vacant. I met with Fiona Tolmie and Joy Garvey and the handover began. Assuming things go to plan, I'm hoping to take over as Treasurer formally at the Committee meeting on 29 May.

Like Fiona, I recognise that, if Kingston **u3a** is to continue in its current healthy state, it needs some of the more recent, younger members to get involved and I am pleased to be part of this.

As yet, I haven't joined any groups but, when I have a bit more time, I'm hoping to join one of the book groups and I'd like to do some 'just for fun' singing. I like to keep fit and enjoy a number of regular activities, which include modest amounts of running, cycling and swimming.

I'm looking forward to meeting you at some of the meetings!

Group News

A reminder of the announcements we published in the April Bulletin plus information about a new group:

Bridge Group 1 and Climate Emergency: Lost Contact Details

After a computer crash, leader of these two groups, Christine Thompson, has lost some contact details. If you are no longer receiving emails for these groups but still wish to be part of either group, please email Christine: chris.cpt3@tiscali.co.uk

Canasta Group

Jan Goodyear and a few friends occasionally meet up to play the card game canasta. They wondered if any of you would be interested in being part of a new **u3a** Canasta group to play regularly. At present this is still at the 'idea' stage but if you think you might be interested, please send Jan an email and she'll arrange an initial meeting to discuss possibilities: jan.goodyear@gmail.com

French for Beginners on Zoom

Laila Eletre has vacancies in her group. Emphasis will be on pronunciation and grammar. If you are interested in joining, please contact Laila: 01932 232287, eletrelaila@gmail.com

Gentle Walks Group

This group has proved so successful that

there is now a waiting list. Leader Jan Goodyear is having to arrange two walks a month rather than one.

It would be good to be able to accommodate those already on the waiting list but, to do that, Jan needs additional help. If you think you might be able to lead a group on a gentle walk, please contact Jan who'll be able to tell you exactly what is involved:

jan.goodyear@gmail.com

Mah Jong Group



Clare Francis is willing to start a new Mah Jong group. If you are interested in joining such a group, please contact Clare for further details: 07649 966380.

Wine Tasting 2

This is a new group which is finding its way around the broad subject of wine. The current members meet at 7pm approximately once a month at members' houses, as agreed at the previous meeting. Currently there are two vacancies. If you are interested in joining, please contact Colin Robson: robsonc@bluerow.com

The Necropolis Railway Experience

On Saturday, 16 March I met some members of our Train group at Waterloo Station and, over hot drinks in Brewdog, I outlined the history of the 'Magnificent Seven', the big London cemeteries established in the 1830s and 40s, among them Highgate and Brompton.

In 1801 there were fewer than a million people living in London, a number which had grown to two and a half million by 1851. The 300 acres of burial space had increased little in that time. The cholera epidemic of 1848-49 killed some 15,000 residents in London alone. Disgraceful things happened: graves were dug up, coffins reused or sold for firewood and bodies crammed into huge pits. Disinterred bones were shipped up north, crushed and used as phosphate fertiliser.

The London Necropolis Scheme was approved by Parliament in 1852. It provided for the new Brookwood cemetery near Woking. The London Necropolis Railway was opened in 1854 to carry the coffins and mourners there, mainly using the existing tracks of the London & South Western Railway but with branch lines to the York Road Station (now Leake Street) at Waterloo and at Brookwood itself. Trains from Waterloo to Brookwood took 50-60 minutes, 40 after electrification.

Taking the side exit of Waterloo station, we walked along Lower Marsh to find the entrance to Leake Street with its arches and tunnels. The spray-paint



covering the walls and ceiling is amazing. A pair of kerb stones pointed to the likely road entrance to the former York Street Station of which nothing now remains.

Exiting through a side arch, we came to the original road entrance in Westminster Bridge Road below the former Eurostar terminal. Further along the road we admired the 1900 red facade of the old Westminster Bridge Station (now Westminster Bridge House), which eventually replaced York Street Station. Round the corner at the end of Newnham Terrace, we all managed to climb the steps to the triangle where the station platforms were



The old Westminster Bridge Station

We're asking group leaders to liaise with their members and to fill in the form in the centre of this newsletter. Visits can be at any time until 31 October this year when our allocation expires.

Please note: tickets allow general entry to Kew Gardens but not to any special exhibitions there at the time of your visit. Note, too, that these tickets are valid only for Kingston **u3a** members and you cannot bring along friends and family who are **not** members.

Once you have been allocated a place, your group leader will receive confirmation and details of how to gain admission.

If you are subsequently unable to use your allocation, please contact Francesca Cura: 07808 716224, secretary@kingstonu3a.org.uk

located in 1900, now occupied by prefabricated art studios.

At the bottom of the steps, under the arches of what was once the Necropolis Station (destroyed in air raids in 1941), are some bathroom showrooms. We explored the tunnels in there, after which the receptionist kindly gave us some hot drinks. A nice way to end our visit.

Lionel Beer

Free Visits to Kew Gardens

In the Winter Newsletter we sent out in February, we advertised some free tickets to Kew Gardens for those of you who don't already have your own Kew Gardens membership.

GAS organised one trip in April and we now have a further 70 tickets to offer.



GAS Outings and Reports

Marble Hill House: Guided Tour

Marble Hill House is a Neo-Palladian villa (Grade 1 listed) in Marble Hill Park in Twickenham. It was built between 1724 and 1729 as the home of Henrietta Howard, who lived there until her death.

In 2018 it was closed for conservation work funded by the National Lottery. It has now fully reopened and we have arranged a guided tour of the house.

After the tour you can visit the café in the park or take the 10/15-minute walk along the Thames to Orleans Gallery. It's free to go in and also has a pleasant café.

Our return route will be a walk back across the park to get the bus to Richmond Station. Alternatively you can be adventurous and take the passenger ferry across the Thames to Ham House (National Trust) on the opposite bank. If you do venture to Ham House, there is a half-mile walk to Sandy Lane bus stop to catch the 371 back to Kingston. You may also return to Marble Hill House in

the afternoon to wander around at your leisure (free entry).

Date: Wednesday, 26 June

Travel: Meet in front of Richmond Station at 10.20am. We'll travel by bus 490, R68 or R70 to the gates of Marble Hill Park. It's then a short walk up to the house. Alternatively, you may wish to drive to Marble Hill Park. There's a car park but you have to pay unless you are a member of English Heritage.

Meeting Time/Place: We shall meet up outside Marble Hill House. Please check in before the start of our 11am tour.

Cost: £12.75, including the guided tour

Accessibility: There is a newly installed lift to the first floor.

If you would like to join us, please fill in the form in the centre of this newsletter and send it with your cheque, made payable to **Kingston u3a GAS**, to:

Pamela Crisp
284 Raeburn Avenue
Surbiton KT5 9EF

Tel: 07846 722278

Please keep this page for reference.



Kingston Town History Tour

Kingston is rich in a history dating back to the Anglo-Saxon period and there's much evidence of it around the town.

We've booked a guided tour to help us understand Kingston's history. The hour-long tour takes in All Saints Church, the Market Place, the Coronation Stone, the Guildhall, the Anglo-Saxon and Tudor buildings, the famous drapers and many other things you may not know about.

After the tour there'll be time for lunch before making your way to the United Reformed Church for our regular **u3a** monthly meeting.



Jacqui Hine
85 Richmond Park Road
Kingston KT2 6AF



Please keep this page for reference.

Visit to Strawberry Hill House

Time: 10.45am for start of tour at 11am

Date: Monday, 1 July

Meeting Place: Under the Golden Queen in the Market Place.

Cost: The guided tour is **free**.

Please note: This is a walking tour and may not be suitable for some members.

If you'd like to come along, please fill in the booking form in the centre of this newsletter and send it to:

I have lived near Strawberry Hill House for years but never visited it, so I welcomed the chance to go there with other **u3a** members.

Horace Walpole, who built the house, was the son of England's first prime minister, Robert Walpole. Horace was a Whig politician, bibliographer, art historian and an avid collector of objets d'art, who wanted somewhere to display his collection. He owned a lease on a small property close to the Thames and decided to build a house there between 1749 and 1776 in the Neo-Gothic style, inspired by the medieval cathedrals and tombs he'd seen in Europe.

The exterior and interior design of the house avoids traditional stonework, columns and lines and presents a much more delicate form of decoration using brick, wood, plaster and papier mâché.

After Walpole died the house and contents passed through his cousin to brothers John and George Waldegrave, whose dissolute lifestyle depleted the family fortune, unfortunately necessitating a two-week sale of the complete contents, which today consist of many paintings, a collection of books in the library and items of period furniture.

Our excellent tour guide explained the history of the house as she took us round the rooms, starting with the hall, which is quite gloomy but dominated by an ornate and well-lit staircase. Not your usual stately home staircase but full of ornate and delicately carved balustrades and pillars. This leads to the library with its beautiful painted ceiling, its Gothic-arched carved bookcases and fireplace. Next door is the Turkish Smoking Room, this time with a ceiling of plush velvet.

Then it was into the Holbein Room with another beautiful papier mâché ceiling based on one from Windsor Castle. On the walls are reproductions of Holbein's stunning drawings for the Royal Collection.

Many other large and small rooms followed, impressive in their ornate decoration and each in a unique Gothic style. The highlight was the stunning Gallery, the largest room by far, with its luscious walls in crimson damask. The white, fan-vaulted ceiling is embellished

with gilded papier mâché decoration, the design based on that of the side aisle of the Henry VII Chapel in Westminster Abbey.

Our tour concluded in the Round Drawing Room, the design for the fireplace and rose window inspired by another Gothic masterpiece, Edward the Confessor's tomb at Westminster Abbey.

Strawberry Hill House is unique in so many ways and completely different from any other great house or stately home I've been to. The one description I've seen that best captures it is 'a fairy palace'.

Well worth a visit, there's also a fine café and some lovely grounds.

Our thanks to Pamela Crisp for arranging the visit.

Bill Carnaby

Visit to the Postal Museum

The Kingston **u3a** members met at Waterloo Station, took the 243 bus to Mount Pleasant in EC1 and then walked the short distance to the Postal Museum (www.postalmuseum.org/).

There, we went downstairs to the Mail Rail station, which contains a system of tiny trains with a two-foot gauge in tunnels just nine feet in diameter. These carried mail (not passengers) a distance of six and a half miles, seventy feet below London's congested streets, linking sorting offices from Paddington to Liverpool Street.

This railway took over from a previous unreliable, pneumatically operated system.

Construction took place between 1913 and 1927 (slow because of limited funding and materials during the First World War).

At several platform stops we were shown videos explaining how the system worked, the life of the staff and how, in the Second World War, priceless art from the National Portrait Gallery and the Tate Gallery was stored for safe keeping. In the 1990s the system was fully automated but in 2003 it was closed, later to be reopened to carry a few passengers, with a rail museum in the station and a postal museum across the road included in the entrance price.



All aboard the Mail train

Despite the small size of the trains and the rickety ride, a good time was had by all, both on the train ride and visiting the exhibits.

This tour proved so popular that two visits were organised to accommodate everyone who wanted to come. Our thanks go to Jacqui Hine for arranging both outings.

Steve Ransome

Visit to the Bank of England Museum

The best things in life are free, as was Kingston u3a's outing to the Bank of England Museum on Wednesday, 13 March.

Actually it was two outings rolled into one. The museum is divided into sections, the first of which shows some of the Bank's history, for example, how the architecture evolved over the decades until 1920, when a large increase in staff – originally only 19, now over 4,000 – led to the construction of the present building.

The history of money, including the use of cheques, promissory notes and cash to enable transactions, is described with the help of diagrams. Bank notes initially promised the bearer gold but in 1931 Britain came off the gold standard. Nevertheless the vaults below the Bank contain 400,000 gold bars.

Only two gold bars are owned by the Bank and they are in the museum. One is of particular interest. It rests in a secure case with an aperture so that visitors can get one hand in to see if they can lift it. In common with all the other gold bars, it weighs nearly 13kg. Children seem particularly keen to test their strength. Not everyone I witnessed managed it but yours truly – with some wobbles – did.

The rapidly changing types of money in this modern age were illustrated. The recent lockdown accelerated the decline in the use of cash, which is expected to be no more than seven per cent of all

transactions by 2035. But notes are still being printed in large quantities. One reason, it was suggested, is that people like the feel of notes. I'm afraid I thought avoiding tax might be another.

King Charles III notes are not yet in circulation. The delay is out of consideration for the environment. The most common notes used in ATMs are £20 ones. The first King Charles III notes of this value will be out on 15 June.

Many in the group had lunch in the excellent Soho Café nearby or, like me, had a walk around the area to see the Royal Exchange, Lombard Street, Leadenhall Market and Pudding Lane.

Round Two was a presentation, specially laid on for our group. Alison, from the Bank, explained in more detail

its vital activities in trying to control inflation and how the base rate is determined. She refused to call cryptocurrency a currency because it lacks collateral.

At the end of her talk she described how, in 1836, a man wrote to the bank saying he could get into the vaults. He wasn't believed but, when given a date and time to be in the vault, he was discovered sitting there. It transpired he was a sewage worker who had found some loose planks. He hadn't taken anything, so he was rewarded with £800. The floor was promptly repaired.

A free day out sitting atop billions in bullion. Beat that! Our grateful thanks go to Nanette Gray for arranging this trip for us.

Jeremy Passmore

Monthly Meetings

Meetings are held at the United Reformed Church in Kingston on the first Monday of each month unless it is a bank holiday. Doors open at 1.30pm for a prompt 2pm start. Entrance fee is £1. Tea/Coffee and biscuits are available at the end of the meeting.

Date Topics/Speakers

13 May Aviation's Greatest Pioneers – Andy Richardson

Former RAF pilot Andy will give a brief outline of some aviation pioneers, then invite the audience to choose six, about whom he will then talk in greater detail.

3 Jun The speaker booked for this meeting is now unable to attend for medical reasons. The meeting will still take place and we'll let you know nearer the date what form it will take.

1 Jul Inn and Out at the Top: Running the Highest Inn in England – Neil Hanson

Author and former landlord of Tan Hill Inn in the Yorkshire Dales, Britain's highest, will share his experiences of eccentric characters, local customs, police raids, naturist weekends and lock-ins.

Kingston u3a Executive Committee 2023/2024

Registered Charity No. 1011295

Chair	Joy Garvey	020 8399 9323 chair@kingstonu3a.org.uk
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Change of Address

Please email updates to:
Chris Cheek, database manager at
database@kingstonu3a.org.uk

Newsletter Contributions

We welcome reports on your group's activities, **u3a** outings or on your personal interests and experiences. Contributions should be about 250-500 words but there's room for smaller items, too.

Photos (in .JPG format, please) help illustrate your contribution but please

include the names of any people shown. Send photos as separate files and not embedded in an email or a Word document to:
communications@kingstonu3a.org.uk

Distribution

Newsletters are posted out in early February, May, August and November.

Please contact Susan Hinchsliffe at:
communications@kingstonu3a.org.uk
if you have any problems in receiving these publications.

Thank you.