

Chair's Report

WELCOME TO 2026, and Happy New Year to you all.
WELL, WELL, WELL . . . Madam Chair's dream has come true!!!

I sincerely thank those of you who took the time and trouble to respond to my little story and the plea for someone to step forward as Business Secretary for our u3a. This is a key role within our organisation, and I am very grateful to two of our members who have agreed to share the responsibilities. Paul Narramore and Julie Angell will be attending the next Committee meeting to meet with us and will then take on the role thereafter. I know that they will be well supported along the way, and I wish them well in this new venture. Thank you, both, most sincerely. And, so . . . I am indeed a very happy Madam Chair ☺

MORE THANKS go to the Conveners and members of Hospitality and other Teams. It was a great afternoon sharing lunch with you recently in the Lancaster Room at the Spitfire. Forty-four members attended, representing 37 different groups and teams, with plenty of opportunities to socialise and mix together. Thanks in particular go to Eve Stephenson, our Groups Coordinator, for organising the event, and to the staff at the pub for the delicious spread of buffet delights.

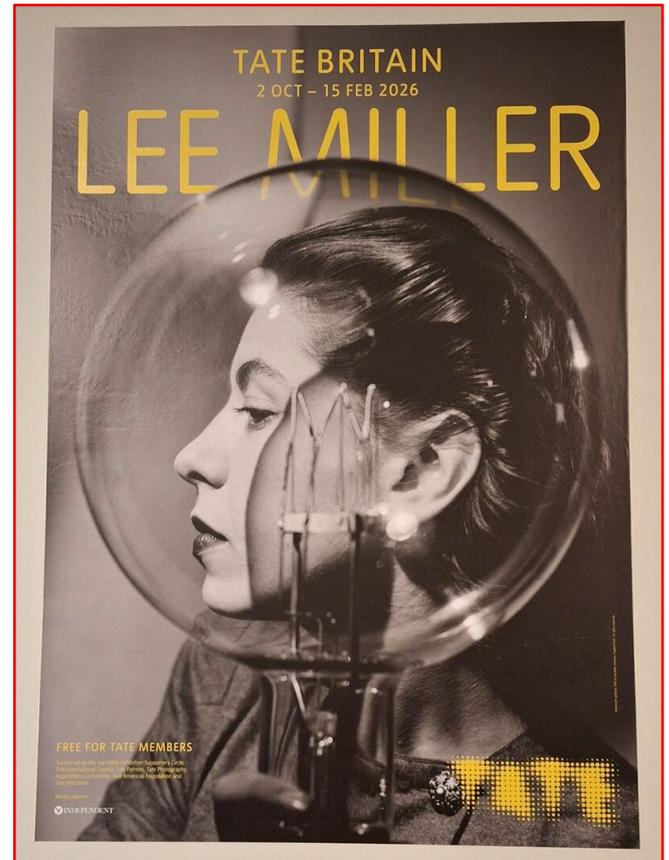
. . . PLANNING FOR THE YEAR AHEAD. During January I have met with other members of the groups that I belong to, and we have been busy planning walks and outings for the months ahead. For London Walks Group 2, and Village Visits Group 2, it looks as though we are going to have some fascinating places to see in 2026.

My thanks, again, to all those who step forward to organise and lead . . . making an important contribution to those groups. So . . . a great start to the year . . . and very best wishes to you all for another year of fun and frolics with our u3a.

Best wishes

Melanie Blewer

. . . FUNNY HOW one thing can lead to another. In the July 2025 edition of our colourful newsletter, I was fascinated to read the article by Makers of History, all about the life of Lee Miller – fashion



model, photographer and journalist/war correspondent. And so, I recently booked tickets to see the exhibition of her work at Tate Britain and thoroughly enjoyed the experience. It's still on for a little while longer . . . I'd highly recommend!

Message = lookout for ways to extend and enhance your own learning and experiences through our newsletter articles.

PPS . . . In September last year I visited the Communigrow charity as part of our Village Visit to East Malling. They have recently been in touch to promote a new free gardening group aimed at people living with Type 2 Diabetes and/or High Blood Pressure. There's a Taster Session on Friday 6th February at 12.30pm. Booking is essential, so don't delay, find out more by emailing info@communigrow.org.uk

Best wishes

Melanie Blewer

Next Monthly Meeting

FEBRUARY Monthly Meeting
Thursday 5th February, 1.45pm.

LOUISE CAMBY

**BEES AND THE AMAZING PRODUCTS
FROM THE HIVE**

From first-hand experience, Louise shares her knowledge about how the hive works and the importance of bees to our ecosystem.

MARCH Monthly Meeting
Thursday 5th March, 1.45pm.

SUE SHAW

HEART OF KENT HOSPICE

Stories about why it is a privilege to help our local hospice.

Groups Coordinator

FIRSTLY, THANKS to all those who turned up to the Conveners Lunch last Friday. It was great to see so many of you there. Unfortunately, quite a few didn't turn up, so we had a lot of wasted food, which is always disappointing.

Sadly, the flower arranging group has closed its doors for the time being.

The good news is that we have received several enquiries regarding the London Walks groups . . . all the current groups are full to bursting, so we need to think about starting a new group. If you are interested in joining a new London Walk group, please contact me at groups@kingshillu3a.org.uk

Eve Stephenson

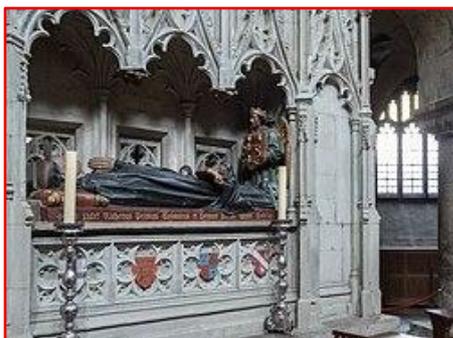
News from our Groups

London Walks 3

OUR JANUARY walk was to St Barts Hospital Museum and was arranged to be mostly inside as weren't sure how the weather would be – just as well as we got snow!! St Barts Hospital is the oldest hospital in Britain. It opened in 1123, founded by Rahere, a 12th century Anglo-Norman priest. Thankfully, none of us had appointments there today so we could enjoy visiting the museums which have been recently restored.



We started in the North Wing with the Grand Staircase and Grand Hall, home to William Hogarth's famous murals, The Pool of Bethesda and The Good Samaritan. Until the birth of the NHS in 1948, the hospital was funded by donations; the names of the benefactors and the amount they gave are recorded on the walls of the Great Hall.



We then went on to visit the hospital museum which tells the story of nine centuries of healthcare at the edge of the City of London, using stories from the hospital's archives and object collec-

tions. We learned a lot more about Rahere, the hospital's founder. From there we visited the Churches of St Bartholomew the Lesser, then passing the spot where William Wallace was hung, drawn and quartered, on to St Bartholomew the Great where, amongst other things, we saw Rahere's tomb and Damien Hurst's spectacular golden sculpture 'Exquisite Pain'.

By this point, the snow was still falling, so we took refuge in the Butcher's Hook and Cleaver for lunch, a pub which used to be half bank



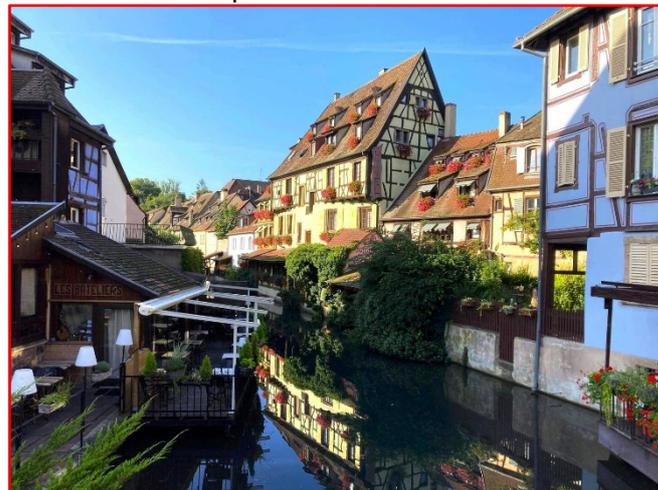
and half meat wholesale shop (due to its proximity to Smithfield Market).

Jackie Ellis

Wine Enthusiasts

OUR THEME this month was 'The white wines of Alsace'. Located in north-eastern France, Alsace has one of the driest climates in the whole of France due to the rain shadow effect of the Vosges mountain range.

Fought over for countless centuries between France and Germany, Alsace was finally ceded to France in 1919, only to be retaken by Germany when France fell in 1940, but then returned again to France after World War Two. Its turbulent history and different influences have resulted in stunningly attractive towns and villages, arguably some of the most scenic to be found in France, and possibly in the whole of Europe.



With many of the wineries having direct family connections going back to the late 16th century, the region has developed its own unique wine culture, with a leaning towards German rather than French wine regions. Whilst telling us about Alsace and its 'noble grape varieties', we tasted our first wine of the evening, a Crémant, made using the same methods as Champagne. Receiving very high praise,

it was clear that the Crémant would be a hard act to follow!

A delightful surprise was the announcement that all the food on the table had been selected by Chat GPT AI as being especially suitable for pairing with our wines. These included various cheeses, including a triple cream cheese, almonds, apricot chutney, a delicious mushroom pâté, tasty meats and brioche bread.

Our second wine was a Riesling, which is the most planted grape variety in Alsace but, as a rule, is often richer and drier than its German counterpart. Again, the wine struck just the right note with the group and again received high praise.

Our third and fourth wines were a superb Pinot Gris and a Gewürztraminer, the latter being renowned for its intense floral flavours of rose and orange blossom, as well as exotic aromas and flavours of lychee, passion fruit, peach, ginger and Turkish delight.

After a wonderful tasting experience, Les Comtes de Ribeauvillé Crémant d'Alsace (£15, Majestic Wine) received the highest overall score; although on another evening, any of the wines could have secured first place.

Our thanks to our host, Simon, for such an enjoyable evening during which we learnt a lot while sampling an excellent choice of wines and tasty food.

John Warren

London Walks 4

OUR INVITATION said our first adventure of 2026 would take us to meet the Soke of Cripplegate, tygers, a brave dog and a weasel . . . all before lunch. We found ourselves travelling in tandem to London Bridge and then Old Street with a group from Makers of History.

On arrival the Soke turned out to be, not a casualty of the previous night's wine club meeting, but a medieval term for an area granted the right to hold a court. We were on the edge of the City of London in what is now present-day Finsbury. In Fortune Street there is a blue plaque to the Fortune Theatre. Edward Alleyn, the actor son of an innkeeper who played the title roles in Christopher Marlowe plays, built it here in 1600. It was constructed by the same contractor who built the Globe Theatre in 1599, but it was square rather than round. It earned the thespian so much money that he founded Alleyn's School in Dulwich as his 'college of God's gift'. Alleyn also filled the post of 'Master of the King's games of bears, bulls and dogs' for James I. He once sent three large dogs into a lion's cage at the Tower of London. The first two were badly mauled and suffered fatal injuries but the third seized the lion by its lower jaw and gripped it for some time before it



was injured by the lion's claws and forced to let go. The brave dog was nursed back to health by the king's son and lived out its days in luxury at the English court.

We crossed into Bun Hill Burial Grounds – the name came from Bone Hill – where we stopped at the graves of William Blake, artist and poet of *Tyger*, *Tyger Burning Bright* and *Jerusalem*; Daniel Defoe, author of *Moll Flanders* and *Robinson Crusoe*; and John Bunyan, who we were told wrote *Pilgrim's Progress* and invented the corn plaster!

After visiting the Methodist 'cathedral' in City Road to learn about the life of John Wesley, a stroll up Shepherdess Walk took us to see some hidden



mosaics. Roman? asked one of the group. No, created in 2012 in time for the London Olympics.

Our return found us gathered outside the Eagle pub to sing the 1850's pop song *Pop Goes The Weasel* with its lines: Up and down the City Road, In and out the Eagle. That's the way the money goes, Pop goes the weasel. In Victorian times the Eagle was not a pub but a music hall where Marie Lloyd first took to the stage when she was 14. The weasel? Take your pick from the many theories: a spinners' weasel was a mechanical thread measure which gave out a popping sound to indicate the correct length had been reached; pop meant to pawn your weasel after spending your money on drink; or perhaps you pawned your weasel and stoat, Cockney rhyming slang for coat; or perhaps you had a purse made out of weasel skin which opened and closed with a pop.



Done pondering, it was time for lunch at the Three Crowns in Shoreditch, still bearing the sign of Barclay's Stouts and Ales from when the banking family owned the largest brewery in the world. We drank to that.

Maurice Chittenden

Ten Pin Bowling

WE BOWL on the 1st Wednesday and 3rd Monday every month (excluding School Holidays) at Hollywood Bowl Maidstone.

The cost is £10.90 for 3 games or £7.20 for 2. Car parking at Lockmeadow is £2.90 for 3 hours which is sufficient time.



I have booked Wednesday 4th February for our next visit. We arrive at 10.55am in time for an 11am start.

If this is of interest to you or would like more information I can

be contacted on 07305 926811 or roycsimpson@hotmail.com

Roy Simpson

Art Appreciation

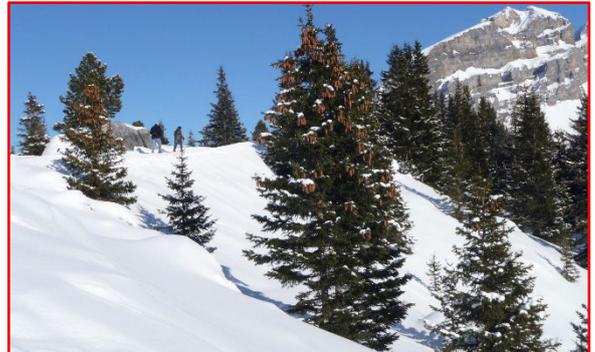
FOR OUR January meeting we had a New Year lunch celebration in the Spitfire restaurant, with delicious food and excellent service as always.

We planned our meetings for the coming year and thanks to those members who volunteered to do presentations during 2026. The programme looks very varied and interesting, covering Leonora Carrington, British Coastal Art, the Iliad, Spanish Artist Sorolla, Radical Harmony, Charles Rennie MacIntosh, Wild Life, Medicine in Art, John Atkinson Grimshaw and Eric Tucker. It should be an exciting and informative year, and hopefully we'll be able to fit in one or two gallery visits at some point.

Jill Rutland

Digital Photography 1

OUR FIRST theme was 'Winter' and snowy scenes were in abundance, some even taken from our own doorsteps. However, a lot were resourced from our back catalogues including this winter scene taken near Kandersteg in Switzerland. Other photographs included snow-drops, Christmas lights and the winter sky.



We then moved on to 'Wheels'. Ferris Wheels proved popular as did exercise wheels, bicycle wheels, those used in promotions and the Falkirk Wheel. We also had wheels used in war as seen at this War memorial in Sainte Suzanne, North West France.



'Beginning with B' brought a very varied selection including photographs of beaches, boats, beds, babies and Blackpool. This lovely photograph of two bridges with reflections shows the West Country at its best.



Cathy Sargent

Historic Transport

A LAST MINUTE text on Christmas Eve from a non-member got one of us to Farningham on Boxing Day. It got very crowded and about 300 motorbikes had turned up by 11am. However, almost all the bikes were 1980 or later; not really



'Historic'. The photo was taken at about 9.15am and the Pied Bull car park was already quite full. Most had to park in the High Street and it did cause a problem to the few cars that crawled up or down the road before lunchtime. Several of the car drivers gave up, turned round and went the long way round on the A20.



On 3rd January, Sevens & Classics had an open morning at their premises at Brands Hatch. They deal in Caterham 7s and other classic cars. Four of us went to have a look and see what else was being displayed. It was a bitterly cold day with snow and ice everywhere. There were a lot of Caterham 7's and a few other cars like the Morgan with a 'MOG' numberplate. Some people had turned up in their vintage cars as well; the Model T Ford and the Austin 12 were just two. It was an interesting visit and the free drinks, sausage rolls and cake also helped stave off the cold!



January 9th saw a gathering of eight of our group at The Wateringbury for a New Year's lunch. The general opinion was that the food and company was most enjoyable.

Some of us managed to get to the Bredgar & Wormshill Light Railway, near Sittingbourne which opened its 2026 season with their 'Winter Steam Up' on 24th January. This was just a taster as they



don't open fully until 30th May. They do run some trains during the school holidays in February and April but only with diesel engines. Bill Best (the owner) told us that, apart from the engines, they are



also currently rebuilding a rescued, British Rail, footbridge to go over the track.

At our January meeting at the Spitfire, we were shown a film of the Stockton & Darlington 150 year celebrations that had been commissioned as part of their 200th Anniversary celebrations. It was fascinating to see the evolution of steam trains from Locomotion in 1825 right up to the engines in the late 1960s. The film is a wonderful record of the history of the railways in the UK with the last steam train run by British Rail in 1968.

Possible future visits coming up are to the Morgan Museum in Rolvenden, the Eastchurch Aviation Museum on the Isle of Sheppey, and some of us are already booked for a visit on 27th March to the Mail Rail (the Post Office Underground) combined with a Hidden London Tour under Moorgate Station up in the smoke (London).

Our next meeting will be in the Briefing Room at The Spitfire at 2pm on 27th February. Anyone interested in any form of historic transport is welcome to come and meet up with a view to joining our group.

Hilary Kilborn

Makers of History

FOLLOWING ON from our November talk on the multiple prize-winning architect, Zaha Hadid, a small group of us did something different this month by visiting the practice she established in London for a fascinating tour of the offices and excellent presentation by one of their leading architects.

On arrival at the ZH office we were given a friendly welcome at reception and invited to have a look round their state-of-the-art exhibition area.



Doris Luming

Models of previous architectural projects and bespoke ZH designed furniture were on display and continue to resonate with the bold curves and lines which typify Hadid's unique work.

After our hosts welcomed us, they took us to the model-making area where an impressive array of 3D printers and huge robotic arms are used to produce stunning prototype designs to support submissions for architectural competitions around the world. We were introduced to the staff who provided us with an insight into how they work, with time for us to ask questions.

Coffee was served as the presentation began, which emphasised that, as an Iraqi woman, Zaha Hadid had a mountain to climb to be accepted in her chosen field and her legacy continues today with diversity key to their business. We were told of the company's early days and how Zaha Hadid, along with her hardworking dedicated team, built the global architectural business that remains true to her vision years after her untimely death in 2016.

The company thrives by collaborating with multiple partners all over the world to ensure structural efficiency with technologically advanced and environmentally considerate designs for both external and internal design projects.

My thanks go to Tricia Francis for organising such an interesting visit and to the two members of Zaha Hadid Architects who so generously gave their time to provide a fascinating insight into their diverse work and extraordinary achievements globally.

We ended the day with a convivial lunch in a very typical English pub, a world away from the futuristic designs we had been so immersed in shortly before.

Joan Warren

Whist

A GOOD TURNOUT for our first meeting of the year and pretty high scores all round – encouraging to see that several weeks of festivities hadn't dulled the Whist brain!

Top of the board was John P; Jo, Mary, Ivor and Maggie D were the closest as a table with only 24 points between them, and Ivor had a cracking couple of hands (calling 7 then 8) which saw his score leap from 58 to 102

As always, the Spitfire looked after us very well and it was a great way to spend a dreary January morning.

Lin Martin

Pies, Pubs and Pints

EVEN STORM Chandra could not stop us! Informed with three days to go that our original venue for lunch was unreachable because bad weather had knocked out a bridge, we were lucky to find a welcoming port at The Walnut Tree in East Farleigh.



The building dates from the time of Henry VIII and has been a pub since at least 1900. It is supposed to be haunted by genial ghosts from the hop picking community who were regulars in its early days.

We stayed off the spirits and kept to beer to go with our lovely steak and mushroom pies.



Maurice Chittenden

Wine Appreciation 2

WE KEPT the wine night simple. Easy drinking, relaxed atmosphere with no formal table to taste around. Shot glasses with samples of each wine. The only questions were: do you recognise a style from our last nine years of tasting; could we guess a country; and did we like it?

No right answers were needed as the wines were all blends. The clear winner by a mile was Gathering Storm a Spanish red from Majestic Wines with 62 out of 80. First tasted at one of our garden parties with a group four and the most popular on that occasion as well. Some were confused as in a different setting and atmosphere and they did not recognise it.

After the samples everyone poured their choices in normal glasses and the chatter flowed as well. We had lots to talk about. Our tenth anniversary is on 22nd February and as we are the same eight people a lot has gone under the bridge. We came as strangers, maybe a bit wary, but open to a new experience and new acquaintances. It could have gone so horribly wrong but from the start we became firm friends, with fun and laughter and enjoying each other's company and supporting each other in all ways.

I asked for quotes – so here are a few:

“Have we lived, laughed and learnt? You bet we have.”

“One laugh was, to quote the old song, one old lady got locked in the lavatory. After what seemed like a lifetime a rescue came in the form of a 2p piece”.

“I have learnt a lot about wine over that time. Whether I can apply it is another matter”.

“I have learnt a lot about the different wines, I don't always get it right but I now know what I like.”

“It's not all about the wine. It's the people that matter and the reason I keep coming.”

“Over the years, being diligent in our quest for the perfect wine, we have even scored the labels!”

“We have done tastings blindfolded, leaving some of us confused as to whether we were tasting a white or red wine! It turned out to be surprisingly difficult with no visual clues. We clearly need all our senses to have even a chance to work out the wine we are tasting.”

“On one occasion, we all donned our glad rags and went on a 'cruise' for a very memorable tasting. So lovely to see the men in their dinner jackets and the women in sparkly dresses to match some excellent sparkly wine!”

“Wine and friends are a great blend”.

“The motto of the u3a is 'Live, Laugh, Learn', perhaps we could say the motto of our group is 'Uncork, Unwind, Enjoy'.”

I think that says it all. Here's to the next ten years.

Val Pratt

MOTO

TWENTY OF us had our Christmas lunch at the Friars in Aylesford. There were choices of soup, pâté or melon, braised beef, turkey or salmon and Christmas Pud (homemade and absolutely delicious), Berry Wreath or Chocolate Torte. Then coffee or tea and mince pies. What a lovely feast. Unfortunately, not one of us remembered to take photos!

A small group of us went to the cinema to see *Hamnet* and *Song Sung Blue*. Both good in their way. *Hamnet* was considered excellent acting and *Song Sung Blue* had everything, comedy, lovely story based on a true story, brilliant songs and all well sung.

Our weekly table tennis group at the Spitfire continues to thrive with people playing on alternate Mondays and Thursdays.

Diane Kerry

London Shows

WOMAN IN MIND

ALAN AYCKBOURN'S psychological drama at The Duke of York's Theatre is a thoroughly entertaining example of his brilliance as a playwright and wordsmith. It is gripping; intriguing; amusing and sometimes, deliberately confusing.

SHERIDAN SMITH



Ayckbourn immediately creates a sense of confusion and uncertainty in the opening scene as his protagonist, Susan (wonderfully portrayed by Sheridan Smith), lies prone, concussed after stepping on a rake. Her attending doctor (Romesh Ranganathan in his first West End appearance) appears to speak incomprehensible gibberish. We hear what she hears and we too struggle (and fail) to understand: “Score grounds appeal cumquat doggy Martha had sick on the bed . . . climb octer bin sur, December bee?” (i.e. “You're bound to feel groggy after that hit on the head . . . I'm Doctor Windsor, remember me?”).

The play prompts questions in your mind throughout. What is going on? Who's real? Who's not? Why are they there? What (if anything) do they represent? In doing so, we experience something of the turmoil of Susan's mind. Her marriage and family life are unfulfilling, unrewarding, unloved. She creates a perfect fantasy family and lifestyle as an antidote to her lacklustre life. They become increasingly insistent and persistent throughout the play. She becomes increasingly mentally fragile resulting in an inevitable breakdown in the bizarre, climactic final scene where both her real and imaginary worlds combine and she struggles to hold on to reality and her sanity.

The circular structure of the play has Susan in this final scene, echoing some of Dr. Windsor's words from the opening scene, as she realises her pitiful mental state, poignantly remarking: "The ambulance is on its way . . . December bee."

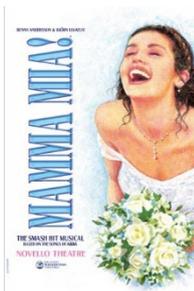
Jim Spellane

Tickets were hard to come by for *Woman In Mind* so we had to go in two groups. Twenty members went to the January 14th matinee and we have 13 going in the evening on Tuesday 17th February.

MAMMA MIA!

A group of 23 members are going on Thursday 12th of February matinee to complete our total of 67 going to Mamma Mia! this winter.

...I am in the process of booking more shows for the next six months so if any u3a members wish to join the London Show Group you would be most welcome. You can email me at lauriefrowde@icloud.com



Laurie Frowde

Don't Get Me Started!

TRIAL WITHOUT A JURY was our January topic. Trials without juries now happen in the UK, especially for less serious crimes or complex fraud. The Government is expanding judge-only trials for crimes under three-year sentences to tackle backlogs, removing the jury right for many; although serious cases like murder or rape will keep juries.

David Lammy, the Justice Secretary, recently announced the limiting of people's right to trial by jury in England and Wales. This move is to address the backlog of 78,000 cases yet to come to trial, partly due to the pandemic and, many argued, due to lack of investment in the court system. The numbers are expected to rise to 100,000 by 2028. This means that currently a suspect being charged with an offence today may not reach trial until 2030. Currently, six out of ten victims of rape are said to withdraw from prosecutions because of delays.

David Lammy reported that the new system would get cases dealt with a fifth faster than jury trials. Critics, including the Law Society and almost all barristers, argue that restrictions will not have any impact on the backlogs, as the real problem has been historically cuts to the Ministry of Justice.

Almost all in the group agreed the urgent need to address the 78,000 awaiting trials. Despite fears and evidence of ethnic minorities, who believe there is an unlikelihood of a fairer hearing with magistrates alone, this reform is set to go ahead. Through these reforms the Labour Government is proposing a swift and fair plan to get justice for victims, thus dismantling an 800-year-old justice system.

Angelene Rothwell

KHaD u3a Information

KHaD u3a Committee

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Newsletter

SIG reports and photos deadline Friday before each General Meeting.

Editor: Laurie Frowde
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To see us on Facebook @u3aKingshill

Let us hear from you . . .

THE NEWSLETTER would be keen to hear from members about anything connected with the u3a. Any observations or comments on the Newsletter – especially new ideas – would be welcomed.

All correspondence will be acknowledged and some even published.

Email: newsletter@kingshillu3a.org.uk

Monthly General Meetings

These are held on the 1st Thursday of each month in **The Kings Hill Community Centre**, off Gibson Drive, Kings Hill, West Malling (near ASDA) at 2pm. We usually have a speaker following refreshments and a social get-together. Our meetings are normally very well attended, and it is recommended that members plan to arrive early (soon after 1.30pm) in order to secure parking and reduce queuing for registration and refreshments.

Entry to the monthly meetings (including refreshments) is included in an annual £20 fee (currently reduced to £15), which also includes membership in the Special Interest Groups. Guests may attend monthly meetings for a maximum of three visits, at no charge, prior to becoming full members.

Special Interest Groups (SIGs)

The Special Interest Groups meet at various places, and often these are in a member's house to avoid fees for hiring a venue. Contact the Groups Coordinator and convener before you attend.

See the website for a full list of SIGs and contacts, and watch the Newsletter for their latest activities.

Cancelled Meeting

If the General Meeting must be cancelled for any reason we will try to get a note on the website by 11am on the morning of the meeting; so please check there if you are uncertain.

Parking

There is a small tarmac-surfaced car park at the Community Centre, but this fills quickly. There is an additional parking area to the east of the Community Centre. Otherwise, there is a large public car park behind **ASDA** (3-hour parking limit) and another on **Crispin Way** to the south. All of these parking options are shown on the map below . . .

