



Newsletter February 2024

Interest Groups Timetable for February 2024

Please note that this timetable could be subject to change at short notice. Please check the website or with the Groups' Leaders for latest news.

Group	Date	Time	Venue
Monthly Meeting	Tue 27 th	2 pm	Congregational Church, Ashby. Alan Hiley "The Burton & Ashby light railway"
Arts and Crafts	Thu 1 st	10 am	Packington Village Hall
Breakfast	Thu 15 th	10 am	Moment in Thyme, Pass Courtyard, Ashby LE65 1AG
Bridge	Mon 5 th Mon 12 th TBA TBA	7-9 pm 11 am – 1 pm TBA TBA	Ivanhoe Social Club.
Calligraphy	Tue 13 th	10 am	At Lynda's
Calligraphy 2	Wed 7 th	10 am	At Ann's house. 7 Derwent Gdns
Coffee and Chat	Wed 14 th	10 am	Moment in Thyme, Pass Courtyard, Ashby LE65 1AG
Computer	Wed 7 th Mon 19 th	2 pm	16 Winchester Way
Croquet	-	-	Croquet will restart in the Spring
Digital Photography	Thu 1 st	10 am	16 Winchester Way. Theme 'Pairs'
Drawing and painting	Wed 21 st	10 am	2 Marlborough Way
Family History	Wed 14 th	2 pm	2 Marlborough Way
Food from Afar	Thu 1 st	6 for 6.30 pm	Hispania, The Mews, Ashby
French	Mon 5 th Mon 19 nd	11 am	Ivanhoe Social Club.
Gardening	Thu 15 th	2.10 pm	Packington Village Hall Simon Gulliver, adviser to the National Trust, taking about 'The Plant Hunters'. Entry £4
History	Thu 22 nd	2.15 pm	Packington Village Hall. Yogi Godwin – Course review
Industrial Heritage	Wed 28 th	TBA	Coventry Transport Museum

Group	Date	Time	Venue
Literature	Tue 13 th	1:30 pm	Sandra's house
Lunch	Thu 8 th	12 for 12.30pm	Greyhound Inn, Boundary DE11 7BU
Medium Walks	Mon 12 th	9.45 for 10am start	Meet at the upper car park of Moira Furnace.
Music Appreciation	Wed 7 th	10 am	Sid's at 23 Grange Close, LE65 2PQ
Reading	Wed 21 st	2 pm	Annie's. "Inside the Whale" by Jennie Rooney
Recorder	Thu 1 st Thu 15 th	10 am	St Matthew's Community Hall, Overseal
Science & Technology	Tue 13 th	2 pm	Packington Village Hall. Geoffrey Boulton 'Climate past, present and future'
Scrabble	Mon 12 th Mon 26 th	10.30 am	The Bulls Head, Ashby
Short Walks	Fri 16 th	10 am	Meet at Staunton Harold lower car park
Social Events	-	-	No events this month
Supper Club	Thu 22 nd	7 for 7.30 pm	The Staff of Life, Ticknall, DE73 7JH
Walking	Tue 6 th	9.45 for 10am start	Meet at the Milking Parlour, Southwood House Farm, Staunton, Calke LE65 1RG
Wine Appreciation	Wed 21 st	7 pm	Annie's house.

Interest Groups Timetable for early March 2024

Group	Date	Time	Venue
French	Mon 4 th	11 am	Ivanhoe Social Club.
Walking	Tue 5 th	9.45 for 10 am start	Meet at The Staff of Life, Ticknall
Calligraphy 2	Wed 6 th	10 am	TBA
Music Appreciation	Wed 6 th	10 am	Nev's at 26 Homecroft Drive, Packington
Computer	Wed 6 th	2 pm	16 Winchester Way
Arts and Crafts	Thu 7 th	10 am	Packington Village Hall
Digital Photography	Thu 7 th	10 am	16 Winchester Way
Recorder	Thu 7 th	10 am	St Matthew's Community Hall, Overseal
Food from Afar	Thu 7 th	6 for 6.30 pm	TBA

MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS

An early reminder. Unless you have recently joined or rejoined us, your membership will be due for renewal at the end of March. Renewal forms for 2024/5 are now available on the website.

JANUARY'S MONTHLY MEETING

Ian Maber - Laughing my way around the world

Our speaker this month was Ian Maber, known as The Teller of Tales. As a teacher for 20 years and a consultant working with many high profile companies such as Disney, Sony, BBC, Apple and Microsoft for another 12 years, he has now decided to take early retirement. He has worked in over 43 countries around the world. Ian is also an illustrator, musician and writer.

He now gives humorous talks, over 40 a year, to groups like ours.

This talk was an A to Z of funny anecdotes and stories of things that have happened to him and his colleagues whilst working and travelling the world.

Ian regaled us with a huge number of stories, animated with slides and music, ranging from being treated royally on one flight when he found himself seated next to the mother of the CEO of the airline, to being locked in his motel room in Denmark in -35 deg weather as the motel was not insured against sleep-walkers venturing out in the cold, to being offered warm, fresh horse milk at a banquet in Kazakhstan and to getting privileged treatment at Riyadh airport in Saudi Arabia because his suitcase happened to have a sticker from the Royal Palace on it.

He had many stories of getting lost on the roads of Finland, Germany and the USA due to misunderstanding or being unable to read the road-signs. Of the flight crew on a plane being confronted by a New Zealand team doing the Haka on board.

Ian's stories and anecdotes kept us amused and laughing for a full hour, and brightened up an otherwise dull, wet day.

It was our second largest turnout ever of 121 people, beaten only by last January's 133. We must be keen to get out again after Christmas!

WELFARE

Sharon Woodland, our Welfare person, can be contacted at welfare@ashbyu3a.co.uk or 01530 413867

If you know of any member who is unwell or isolating or has a family member who is unwell, please contact Sharon or any other committee member and we can see if there is anything we can do to help, whether it is collecting shopping or prescriptions, having a chat or just sending a card.

A NEW GROUPS CO-ORDINATOR

Recently we told you that David Spiers would be taking on the role of Groups Co-ordinator. Unfortunately, due to personal reasons, David has had to step down from the Committee.

Estelle Sandles has fortunately agreed to step in and David has assisted with the transition. Estelle was not a member of the Committee, and so in line with our constitution she has been appointed by the Committee to replace David for the remainder of the year and will stand for election in the normal manner at the next AGM in July.

She can be contacted at the usual address interestg@ashbyu3a.co.uk

We wish David well and thank Estelle for stepping into the role.

POTENTIAL NEW GROUPS

We have an abundance of potential new groups trying to get started. These are:

Canasta
Singing
Rummikub
Ukulele

If you are interested in joining any of these, or would like to know a bit more about them, contact Estelle at interestg@ashbyu3a.co.uk or phone 01530 459858.

Sign up sheets will also be available at the next monthly meeting

NEWS FROM THE GROUPS

ARTS AND CRAFTS – Leader: Sharon Woodland - artcraft@ashbyu3a.co.uk - phone 01530 413867

4th January

What a great bit of crafting we did this month! Well, it does not look like much yet. It took the entire time to cut ribbons, cords and threads to size. With everything in place, we are now ready to begin making our Kumihimo necklaces next month. It may take us a couple of months to get them completed. Why do things seem to take so much longer to do than you might imagine? Is it anything to do with the friendly chatter? Anyway it was enjoyed by the ten of us who were present on the day.

Our next Craft gathering will be at Packington Village Hall on 1st February at 10am.

BREAKFAST – Leader: Colin Woodland - breakfast@ashbyu3a.co.uk - phone 01530 413867

18th January – Lakeside Bistro, Moira

Eight of us assembled at the Lakeside Bistro, Moira. As usual, the breakfast was excellent. Most of us went for the full English but, for those with slighter smaller appetites there was plenty to choose from.

The tranquil lakeside view is beautiful. as it was cold but clear and sunny, the lake looked quite mysterious with the morning sun causing a ghostly mist to rise from the water and what looked like steam emanating from the patio furniture.

Our next breakfast will be at 9.30 for 10am on 15th February 2024 at the Moment in Thyme in the Pass Courtyard, Ashby LE65 1AG. Ten people have already signed up to go. Why not join us?

If you wish to join us, please let Colin Woodland know at breakfast@ashbyu3a.co.uk or sign the sheet at the Monthly Meeting.

BRIDGE – Leader: Neil Roberts - bridge@ashbyu3a.co.uk - phone 01530 455957 or 07804 743471

There are dates arranged for the next couple of weeks starting with 5th Feb at 7pm and 12th Feb at 11am but after that there is some uncertainty at the moment. Hopefully future dates will be confirmed shortly.

CALLIGRAPHY – Leader: Sue Cornell - calligraphy@ashbyu3a.co.uk - phone 01530 413345

January

This month we met for our Christmas lunch and have decided when and where we are meeting for this year, up to September.

At the moment we are practising a font of our own choosing to reproduce a piece of work from Shakespeare!

CALLIGRAPHY 2 – Leader: Val Reed - calligraphy2@ashbyu3a.co.uk - 01530 564279

January

The meeting took place in Val's house. As we are starting afresh and needing some advice, we invited Sue from calligraphy 1 to join us.

She was a great help and full of inspiring ideas, I think we have a lot to learn!

This month we are practicing our Gothic writing, before choosing a theme to be a little more creative with.

Next meeting will be held at Ann's house, 7 Derwent Gardens 10-12am February 7th. Anyone is welcome to join us, experience not necessary.

COFFEE AND CHAT – Leader: Colin Woodland - coffee@ashbyu3a.co.uk - phone 01530 413867

10th January - Lakeside Bistro, Measham

Eight of us went to the lakeside Bistro, Moira, for Coffee and Chat on 10 January 2024, the first meeting of the year.

As is usual with this group, Conversation flowed as we enjoyed the coffee and a variety of cakes and pastries. We got to know a little more about each other and one cup turned into two. The party finally broke up as midday approached and we felt it right to make room for the hungry people streaming in for their lunch.

Our next meeting will be at 10am on 14th February 2024 in the Moment of Thyme in the Pass's Courtyard, Ashby LE65 1AG Eight people have already indicated they will be there.

If you plan to join us, please let Colin Woodland know ASAP at coffee@ashbyu3a.co.uk

COMPUTERS - Leader: John Howlett - computer@ashbyu3a.co.uk - phone 01530 461774

15th January

For our first meeting of the New Year, we had seven present.

Mike continued with Sylvia helping her set up her new laptop, in this case working on lining up all her passwords for various devices.

Steve worked on his emails, deleting unwanted ones.

Richard helped Peter in converting PDF documents to Word.

We looked at an in-line adapter for USB C to RJ45 (Ethernet) plug. It doesn't seem to work. Richard will research the correct usage of this device.

Sue needed help with her phone and the storage of files on the Cloud.

Mike and JD discussed the way in which OneDrive accounts should be commonised with the same password across multiple devices if they are all to stay in sync. Unless this is done, different sets of records appear on different devices.

There was no solution apparent for the disappearance of the Micro SD drive on JD's phone.

We meet again on Wednesday 7th February.

FRENCH – Co-ordinator: Tony Smith - french@ashbyu3a.co.uk - 01530 831822

January

If next time we have attendees who are debutant we will work as 2 groups, otherwise the topic next time is arranging a trip in French.

DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY - Leader: John Howlett - digphoto@ashbyu3a.co.uk - phone 01530 461774

4th January

For our first meeting of 2024, six of us gathered to share our interpretations of the themes 'Christmas' and 'Circles'.

Most opted to combine these with pictures of round or spherical objects relating to Christmas, whilst one separated them into two sets: one for round things and one for a most unusual Christmas spent in the skiing resort of Chamonix.

We meet again on February 1st. The theme will be 'Pairs'.

DRAWING & PAINTING - Leader:Christine Dogherty - painting@ashbyu3a.co.uk - phone 01530 411148

17th January

We eased ourselves onto the first session of 2024 getting out pencils and brushes and tackling the subject of 'A Nursery Rhyme'.

Good to be back!

Next month we meet on Wednesday, 21st February to finalise the proposed topic for the Ashby outdoor gallery exhibition 2024.

FAMILY HISTORY - Leader: John Dogherty - familyhistory@ashbyu3a.co.uk - phone 01530 411148

10th January

We had five today for our first session of the year.

Keith is working through loads of Hints.

Eileen is working through the beneficiaries of an old will from the 17th century. She has many named people to research.

Linda is building her tree on Ancestry. She found a fascinating hint for a marriage certificate for her maternal grandparents, with details not available on the basic transcripts. She now wants to visit the church. She also wanted to see how to save it, but her tablet didn't seem to have 'Save', so Eileen showed her how to take a screenshot.

Mary is having fun trying to untangle the Mitchel families of the Leek area in the late 18th Century.

JD is working on the story of his father's life. This follows the story of his great grandfather's life.

We next meet on Wednesday 14th February

FOOD FROM AFAR - Leader: Colin Woodland - food from afar@ashbyu3a.co.uk - 01530 413867

2nd January - Hong Kong Restaurant, Measham

Eight of us turned up at the Hong Kong Restaurant in Measham and were treated to satisfying array of Asian cuisine. The majority of the group entrusted their tastebuds to a set meal, leaving themselves at the mercy of the chef. He turned out to be not only merciful but expert to boot! Replete from the meal, we enjoyed some unplanned and very unexpected Karaoke.

The next soiree will be to the Hispania Restaurant, The Mews, Ashby LE65 1HP, 1st February at 6pm for 6.30. Fourteen people have already signed up.

If you wish to attend, please let Colin Woodland know at food_from_afar@ashbyu3a.co.uk

GARDENING - Leader: Paul Dean - gardening@ashbyu3a.co.uk - phone 01283 295987

18th January - '365 Days of Colour in the Garden'. A talk by Karen Gimson

We had a very informative, and enjoyable talk today given by Karen Gimson, who writes for a gardening magazine, and has a gardening slot on Radio Leicester on a Tuesday. The talk was on 365 days of colour in the garden, with plenty of information on care and propagation, of certain varieties of plants, and on displaying flower heads in water bowls etc. and highlighting some new improved varieties. Over 40 members were in attendance with lots of positive comments on the afternoon. Sign up sheets started for our first 2 coach trips, in May to Arley Hall Gardens and in July to David Austin Roses.

HISTORY – Leader: Yogi Godwin - history@ashbyu3a.co.uk - phone 01530 467840

25th January. - 'A Family Portrait and a Cruel Fate' by Lynda Kovach

For our opening session this year we had a record breaking 58 to listen to one of our own, Lynda Kovach, present a story of privation, loss, and emigration in the 19th Century.

This was about the lives of her great, great grandmother's brother-in-law and his family from Meltham, Yorkshire.

John and Anne had eight children between 1826 and 1839 in an era when life was hard and life expectancy low. After the Napoleonic Wars economic depression across Europe made life even harder. Despite continuing efforts to improve life in factories and education, things were desperate with social disturbance rife. Corn (or Meal) riots, 'Plugger' and other riots and the activities of the Chartists all show just how desperate the population was getting. Starvation was becoming common, and emigration frequently resorted to, leaving homes and villages deserted.

John left home and journeyed to America from Liverpool, unusually keeping a diary of his travels.

He described life on board ship which was at best difficult and at worst horrific during the storms they encountered. He eventually arrived in Ohio, where he intended his family to join him.

Anne duly set out in 1844, leaving five-year-old Nathan behind with her parents to ensure some education for him.

They arrived in New Orleans and set forth up the great Mississippi by riverboat. But sadly, this was to end in disaster. In an event recorded in the US papers, the riverboat they were traveling on, the 'Persian' became involved in one of the all too frequent races, and her boiler blew. Anne was badly burnt, but all seven of her children died.

John walked from Burlington, Ohio, to Napoleon, Arkansas to meet Anne. They set up as farmers and had two more children, and in 1853 received a letter from their last surviving child in England, Noah (now 14). The letter, although not well written to our standards at least showed he had had an education of sorts. It said he was going to come to them by himself. It seems he had become a troublesome youth at home and just wanted to get away. He sailed to St. Louis, intending to take a riverboat upstream. But he never arrived. It seems that he may have been lost overboard en-route, although the full facts were never elicited.

Lynda did have a better end to her story than we might have expected, as she was recently contacted by descendants of Anne and John from America, who came over to meet her and her husband, and visit the memorial to the family in Meltham churchyard. They had with them a packet of letters which had been handed down through the family. What a goldmine!

Lynda held us all spellbound with her amazing, tragic story. But one that showed that, despite tragedy such as we might never want to encounter, John and Anne still managed to make a new life out of the dust and ashes of the old.

INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE – Leader: Mike Stow - indhist@ashbyu3a.co.uk - phone 01530 469152

24th January. City of Caves, Nottingham

For our first outing of the year, we returned to the caves under Nottingham which used to be accessed from the Broadmarsh shopping centre. As that no longer exists, the entrance is under the tram flyover coming up to the Lace Market. Despite the fact that we had visited before some 7 years previously, this proved popular with members and sold out quickly with 20 of us heading to Clifton South in the morning to catch the tram into the city.

We were welcomed by our guide who was to show us around the caves and tell us all about them. There are apparently over 800 caves under Nottingham, all man-made, carved into the soft sandstone. We were only to see six of them, but they were all fascinating with a rich history.

Some of the caves date back to at least the 9thC and were mentioned by the Bishop of Sherborne in his 'The Life of King Alfred' of 893.

It isn't so noticeable now but the city, like the castle, stands or stood on a cliff overlooking the Trent marshes. This made it easy to tunnel into the cliff face to create some of the caves. Others were dug down from the houses above to create water wells and cess pits. These later expanded into storage areas and later still into cheap dwellings. Two caves dug in from the side in 1250 were originally a home but after a rockfall in 1400 were abandoned. By 1500 they had been cleared and turned into the only known underground tannery in Britain. The front opening allowed them access to the river where they would wash the skins in the town's drinking water! This was banned, so they snuck out at night to do it anyway.

Many of the caves were interlinked particularly the pub cellars, which allowed much illegal activity such as cock-fighting and gambling to go on unnoticed and with many exits should the authorities come looking. The Chartists used to meet in one of the caves.

Also many of the caves were inhabited from at least the 17th century until 1845 when the law was changed banning the renting of cellars and caves as homes for the poor. By this time they had degenerated into one of the worst slums in Britain, rife with disease.

Some good came of the caves during WWII when some of the caves were joined and turned into as many as 86 public air-raid shelters, and one of them is set out as it might have been then. A severe bombing raid on 8th May 1941 created much damage above but all those below were unharmed. The sand that was dug out for the shelters was used to fill sandbags.

This was a most interesting tour and our guide talked us through the various phases of the caves using explaining it all very clearly and informatively.

Afterwards we retired to the Canalhouse pub which, in keeping with our Industrial Heritage theme, was once a canal warehouse and actually has a wharf inside the pub complete with floating barge. The food and drink were pretty good too!

We returned by tram to Clifton South to pick up the cars and hence home.

LITERATURE – Leader: Sandra Harris - literature@ashbyu3a.co.uk - phone 01530 416653

The literature Group gets together once a month to discuss books which they have read in the weeks before. They discuss the plot, the style of writing, the start and finish of the storyline, the meaning (if any) of the story and of course whether they liked it or not. Discussions can be quite lively. They are going to branch out and try reading plays and poetry in future.

MUSIC APPRECIATION - Leader: Mike Stow - musicapp@ashbyu3a.co.uk - 01530 469152

3rd January

This month we met at Sallie's house for the first session of the new year.

Brenda started us off in fine style with Fred Astaire singing "Putting on the Ritz" while Janet reminded us of the time in the 60's when income tax was 98% for the highest earners with The Beatles song "Taxman".

Sallie also reminded us of a similar period in time with BJ Thomas's hit "Raindrops keep falling on my head" from the wonderful film "Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid".

Nev brought us back to The Beatles with "I'm only sleeping" from the same Revolver album as "Taxman".

Sid had a very funny song by the great Ella Fitzgerald, "Waiter with the water". Great verbal gymnastics.

Mike's first choice of the year was Paul Simon's "Diamonds on the soles of her shoes" with great backing from Ladysmith Black Mambazo.

Yogi brought us our first classical piece of the day "The girl with the flaxen hair" by Debussy. Very relaxing. Heather speeded us up a bit with the "Skater's waltz" by Émile Waldteufel who despite his name was actually French.

For round two, Brenda chose Dianne Warwick and "Walk on by", a classic of the 60's.

Staying with the sixties, Janet had chosen another Beatles piece - "Here, there and everywhere" also from the Revolver album.

Sallie offered for comment Placido Domingo singing "Over the rainbow" which we all agreed was nice but a strange choice for an older man to sing.

Nev continued with his love of Joe Brown songs, this time choosing the excellent instrumental version of "Brother can you spare a dime" played on acoustic guitar.

Sid's next choice was the uplifting "Shiny happy people" by REM. A great song which they apparently hated performing!

Mike then played Emmylou Harris and the lovely but thoughtful song "Lost unto this world"

Yogi offered us the Choir of St Johns Cambridge singing "The lamb" by John Tavener, a beautiful choral piece.

Heather changed the mood with the great Willie Nelson and "For the good times" a song written by the actor and singer Kris Kristofferson, while Nev continued in a similar vein with Eric Clapton and "How deep is the ocean".

Sallie closed the session with a fun piece – Eric and Ernie singing "Bring me sunshine". A great way to end another great session.

READING – Leader: Annie Scotney - reading@ashbyu3a.co.uk

January

Sorry to have had to cancel January's session but I discovered a large patch of black mould behind my book cases. I am hoping everything will be under control by next month but keep your eyes open for emails giving updates.

If you want to come and join us please contact me.

LUNCH – Leaders: Colin and Sharon Woodland - luncheon@ashbyu3a.co.uk - phone 01530 413867

11th January – The Bull's Head, Market Street, Ashby

Twenty Four gathered in ye olde Bull's Head for lunch on 11th January 2024. By happy coincidence, the Bull's Head was offering massive discounts on most meals throughout January: an offer of which most people took full advantage. However, the meals not on the special offer were still very competitively priced. The staff were generally both helpful and hospitable. The only disappointment was that very few of the pudding selections were available. Judging from the general hubbub and eventually empty plates, a good time was had by most.

The next lunch will be on 8th Feb at the Greyhound Inn at Boundary. This lunch will be a set carvery. Seventeen people have already indicated they will be there but there is plenty of room for more.

If you wish to join us, please let Colin Woodland know ASAP at luncheon@ashbyu3a.co.uk.

RECORDER - Leader: Joan Gibson - recorder@ashbyu3a.co.uk

4th and 18th January

On 4th January, we had 8 attending, including a new member, and we played some well-known (to us) pieces, while continuing to get to grips with our new challenge, "The Planets' Feet", which is a modern work, written for recorders, unlike much of the music, which is adapted from other arrangements. It is quite tricky, but we are slowly making progress, and coming to like it. Most of us, anyway.

On 18th January, there were only 5 of us, which gave us the opportunity to do things differently. Neither of our usual tenor players was there, so one of our descant players, who has been quietly practising the tenor at home, stepped into the breach, joined by one of the trebles (who also plays tenor at another u3a group). That left us with one descant, one or two trebles, two tenors, with the half treble swapping to bass where needed. Not a bad ensemble. We were able to play all the music on our playlist. We just had to miss a second descant part in one work. It can be a challenge to swap between instruments, but it can be fun, as long as you don't worry about the occasional mistake!

We can tell that we are making progress, as we are able to play more complicated music than we tried a few years ago. We still have more music to attempt when we've mastered "The Planets' Feet"! We continue to have fun, laugh together, and make music.

SCRABBLE - Leader: Sylvia Tuck - scrabble@ashbyu3a.co.uk

Nothing to report this month, but continuing to meet fortnightly on Mondays at the Bulls Head in town.

SOCIAL EVENTS - Contact: Glenys Morrice - socials@ashbyu3a.co.uk

25th January. - Burns Supper

This year we were able to meet on the actual date of Burns Night, at our customary venue - the Willesley Park Golf Club, where they made us welcome as usual. The evening started with Don Jarram piping in the haggis and leading Bill Wilson, bearer of the haggis, around the room before Bill gave the Address to the Haggis and its ritual disembowelling. (Not as gory as you might imagine).

This was followed by the Toast to the Haggis and the Selkirk Grace (*Some hae meat and canna eat, And some wad eat that want it, But we hae meat and we can eat, Sae let the Lord be Thankit!*) before we all tucked in to the delicious meal.

Afterwards we were entertained with Bill's singing, Tony's stories of the life of Burns and with Colin's excellent and hilarious self-penned poem 'The Address to the Lassies'.

We finished with a rousing rendition of 'Auld Lang Syne', although most of us have still not learned the words to the second verse! Maybe next year!

9th January. 'A Universe from Scratch' by Dr Julian Onions

Dr Julian Onions is a researcher and lecturer in the Astronomy Department of the University of Nottingham and has done research into using computer modelling to describe how the Universe is evolving. This is a subject where distances and numbers are so large it is difficult to relate them to those used on Earth, or even in our own Solar System. An open mind helps.

Julian started by describing briefly the telescopes used to explore the cosmos, the Hubble Space Telescope, now at the end of its life, and the James Webb Space Telescope, the new and larger tool that is exploring the most distant and youngest galaxies ever seen. Because light from these galaxies has taken billions of years to reach us, they show us what they looked like shortly after the 'Big Bang' that created the Universe 13.7 billion years ago. A European Space Agency mission called 'Gaia' is creating a three-dimensional map of stars in and beyond our Milky Way galaxy, and will provide data needed to answer questions on the origin, structure and evolutionary history of our galaxy. Julian showed computer simulations of the relative motions of the stars in the constellation of Orion, the pattern changing radically over millions of years.

The challenges of Julian's work include how to model celestial 'stuff' that cannot be seen; Dark Matter and Dark Energy, being only detectable by its gravitational effect on visible or 'real' matter. To compound the problem, Dark stuff is far more abundant than real stuff. Julian showed how hydrodynamics was being used to model motions of celestial gas and dust, comparing their motions to that of vortices of milk as it is stirred into coffee. All this modelling takes massive amounts of computer power which limits the resolution, a dot on the computer screen representing groups of ten thousand stars, rather than individual ones. As a rule of thumb, in the past, available computer power doubled every 18 months, but this now seems to have reached its limit. The relative movements of planets in our Solar System was shown as a good example of computer simulation, Jupiter moving much closer to the Sun and Uranus and Neptune swapping places as the system evolved.

For me, the abstract nature of the subject of the talk challenged my imagination to the limit. A group member commented to me afterwards, that although many facts were unproven, hypothetical, and of little relevance or practical use, it was refreshing to gain an insight into the theoretical world of cosmology.

The meeting also included a review by Tanya Dempster of some science-related items in the news. These included how the rare Amur leopard at Dartmoor Zoo became a hit on a dating site and how a 40 stone 'silver back' gorilla was 'habituated' by carefully managed human contact. This should pave the way for the return of tourism to the jungle of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Tanya also talked about development of a new antibiotic against an infection that causes up to a 60% fatality rate in critically ill hospital patients. Finally, she talked about how the world's food shortage in some regions could be solved by improving the efficiency of a crop's photosynthesis - its conversion of light and gases to biomass.

Our next meeting will be on Tuesday 13th February when we will hear from Geoffrey Boulton on how our oceans and glaciers can reveal changes in our climate.

SUPPER CLUB – Co-ordinators: Colin Ellis and Mike Stow - supper@ashbyu3a.co.uk

The Supper Club traditionally takes a couple of months off at this time of year as the Dec and Jan dates clash with Christmas and Burns Night celebrations. However we are back in business on 22nd Feb at the Staff of Life in Ticknall. If you wish to join us, let us know at the above email address or phone Mike on 01530 469152.

WINE APPRECIATION - Leader: Annie Scotney - wine@ashbyu3a.co.uk

January

Sorry to have had to cancel January's session but I discovered a large patch of black mould behind my book cases. I am hoping everything will be under control by next month but keep your eyes open for emails giving updates.

In February we shall be tasting a selection of wines (hopefully scoring 10) as recommended in 'The Best Wines in the Supermarkets 2024' by Ned Halley.

If you want to come and join us please contact me..

SHORT WALKS - Leader: John Howlett - ShortWalk@ashbyu3a.co.uk - phone 01530 461774

19th January. From Hood Park gates, Ashby.

A beautiful crisp cold day for three short walkers to walk around Ashby. We set off along the mews to Market street which we crossed and took the path by the Lamb Inn to South Street. We turned left and up to St Helen's church where we spent some time looking at the graves before taking the path by the castle, Mount walk, and on down Prior Park Lane and crossed into Bath Grounds. We followed the path around as far as the cricket pavilion and out onto Station Road.

We crossed the road to the old station approach and took the footpath through the bungalows to Pithiviers Close and Wilfred Gardens. This leads to the allotments. After the allotments we walked through the graveyard onto Kilwardby street. Back in town, we chose to go to the new Lounge restaurant for coffee and toasted teacake. The place was busy but we were served quickly. In John's case it arrived before he got back from the bar where he'd placed the order!

MEDIUM WALKS - Co-ordinator: Alison Thompson - mediumwalk@ashbyu3a.co.uk - phone 07930 557432

8th January. Lount, led by Alison

This was a memorable meeting of the medium walking group as we beat our last recorded attendance record by just 1 walker. The previous highest was in February 2023 when we had 17 and 18 took part on this walk from The Ferrers Arms in Lount.

This was a usual walk for the group at this time of the year with a planned meal in the pub after the walk.

Initially over fields to the Staunton Harold access road, on to Heath End, joining The Ivanhoe Way, through Alistair's Wood and along the track bed of the disused Derby to Ashby railway line. The walk was also memorable for being exceedingly muddy for long stretches, particularly on the last stretch of the Ivanhoe Way!

4.5 miles and a good meal in the pub afterwards.

LONGER WALKS - Leader: Kevin Green - walks@ashbyu3a.co.uk - phone 07470 227536

16th January. Calke Estate, led by David and Lilian

Having experienced heavy rain over the preceding weeks with mud in the fields and woods, it was decided that the walk would proceed from the Staff of Life pub in Ticknall, in and around the Calke Estate, on recognised footpaths and tracks. There was a heavy frost on the morning of the walk which meant that there was a "frosty" crust over the mud in the fields leading to the Estate.

The walk passed by Betty's Pond up to the outbuildings at Calke where we had a cup of tea or coffee. We then proceeded to Staunton Harold reservoir and returned via Ticknall limeyards. The walk was attended by 16 Members and we all had an enjoyable meal with good company at the Staff of Life.

Here is a list of your committee members and how to contact them:

Role	Name	Contact email
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Treasurer	Val Reed	treasurer@ashbyu3a.co.uk
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