



Newsletter February 2025

Interest Groups Timetable for January 2025

Please note that this timetable could change at short notice. Check the website or the Group Leaders for the latest news.

Group	Date	Time	Venue
Monthly Meeting	Tue 25 th	2 pm	Congregational Church, Ashby. Jill Dwyer 'Healthwatch'
Arts and Crafts	Thu 6 th	10 am	Packington Village Hall.
Breakfast	Thu 20 th	10 am	Lakeside Bistro, Shortheath Rd, Moira DE12 6BW
Bridge	Mon 3 rd Mon 10 th Mon 17 th Mon 24 th	11am-1.30pm 7-9 pm 11am-1.30pm 7-9 pm	Ivanhoe Social Club.
Calligraphy	Tue 11 th	10 am	At Caryl's
Coffee and Chat	Wed 12 th	10 am	Bluebell Tea Rooms 2 Belmont Street, Swadlincote DE11 8JU
Computer	Wed 5 th Mon 17 th	2 pm 2 pm	16 Winchester Way
Croquet	Fri 28 th	11 am	Ashby Croquet Club, Moira Miners' Welfare Club, Bath Lane, Moira DE12 6BP
Digital Photography	Thu 6 th	10 am	16 Winchester Way
Drawing and painting	Wed 19 th	10.30 am	Venue and topic TBA
Family History	Wed 12 th	2 pm	2 Marlborough Way
Food from Afar	Thu 6 th	6 pm	Zorba the Greek 9-11 Bold Lane, Derby DE1 3NT
French	Mon 3 rd Mon 17 th	11 am	Ivanhoe Social Club.
Gardening	Thu 20 th	2.10 pm	Packington Village Hall. An illustrated talk by Hildegard Wiesehofer about the glorious NGS gardens of Derbyshire. Entry £4.
History	Thu 27 th	2.15 pm	Packington Village Hall. Yogi Godwin - 'The 2nd Agricultural Revolution'
Industrial Heritage			No meeting in February
Literature	Tue 11 th	1.30 pm	Sandra's house

Group	Date	Time	Venue
Lunch	Thu 13 TH	12 for 12.30 pm	Bull's Head, Market Street, Ashby de la Zouch LE65 1AH
Medium Walks	Mon 10 th	9.45 for 10am start	Meet in the CP at Staunton Harold
Music Appreciation	Wed 5 th	10 am	At Sallie's
Recorder	Thu 6 th Thu 20 th	10 am	St Matthew's Community Hall, Overseal
Rummikub	Tue 11 th Tue 25 th	11 am	Ivanhoe Social Club.
Science & Technology	Tue 11 th	2 pm	Packington Village Hall. 'Genetics - fact or fiction' by Catrin Rutland
Scrabble	Mon 10 th Mon 24 th	10.30 am	The Bulls Head, Ashby
Short Walks	Fri 21 st	10 am	Meet at the carpark nearest the Lime Kilns at Moira Furnace
Social Events			No events in February
Supper Club	Thu 27 th	7 for 7.30 pm	The Old Bulls Head, Woodhouse Eaves LE12 8RZ No need to pre-order.
Walking	Tue 4 th Tue 18 th	9.45 for 10am 9.45 for 10am	Meet at Parson & Clerk Inn, Chester Rd North, Streetley B73 6SP Meet at Bradgate Arms, Cropston LE7 7HG
Wine Appreciation	Wed 19 th	7 pm	Annie's house

Interest Groups Timetable for early March 2025

Group	Date	Time	Venue
Scrabble	Mon 3 rd	10.30 am	The Bulls Head, Ashby
French	Mon 3 rd	11 am	Ivanhoe Social Club.
Bridge	Mon 3 rd	TBA	Ivanhoe Social Club.
Walking	Tue 4 th	9.45 for 10am	Meet at Staff of Life, Ticknall DE73 7JH.
Music Appreciation	Wed 5 th	10 am	At Mike's
Computer	Wed 5 th	2 pm	16 Winchester Way
Digital Photography	Thu 6 th	10 am	16 Winchester Way
Arts and Crafts	Thu 6 th	10 am	Packington Village Hall.
Recorder	Thu 6 th	10 am	St Matthew's Community Hall, Overseal
Food from Afar	Thu 6 th	6 pm	TBA
Industrial Heritage	Fri 7 th	8.30 am depart	JCB factory tour

MONTHLY MEETING – 28TH JANUARY

Christine Varley – Pet Portraitist

This month we were treated to some excellent paintings of pets, mostly dogs, and other paintings and drawings by acclaimed artist Christine Varley accompanied by her interesting story of how she came to be such an artist.

Christine realised at quite an early age that she was the one at school that others crowded round when she painted and so went on to get a BA in Graphic Design at Coventry. Whilst there she painted pictures of pretty Cotswold villages and sold them to local galleries. She then worked for a publishing company making pencil drawings and watercolours for prints which sold in their thousands. Her drawings included famous people such as Laurel and Hardy and cartoon characters.

She realised that painting animals was her true passion and started going to local horse trials and larger ones such as Burleigh with a small stall offering to do horse portraits. Some of her work went to support the Brooke horse and donkey welfare charity. However she also realised that to paint horses she had to travel to them, you can't bring a horse into the studio! And so she concentrated on smaller pets like cats and particularly dogs which could come to her, either at her studio or to stalls at dog agility shows etc. Later she worked from photographs and now from digital images and she sometimes travels to the pet's home to photograph them herself.

She made a reputation for capturing the character of animals – 'It's all in the eyes' it is said.



After a while she opened a gallery in Warwick rather than work from home which was very successful but started to take up much of her time running the shop rather than actually painting. In 2000 she started a website and closed the shop. This was quite early for online trading. Her husband and later her son help set up and run the website.

From 1999 she has always attended Crufts but has never seen the show as she is always too busy manning her stand! Realising that individual portraits were too expensive for many people she branched out into merchandising with images of dogs, mostly Christine's own, cats, cows and goats on cushions, mugs, key-rings, cards, clocks and tote bags etc. Molly, Christine's own nutty rescue Springer Spaniel has appeared on 7500 cushions.

Her cushions have appeared in the background on TV in ads and programmes, notably several times in Coronation Street.

Christine gave us a fascinating insight into the world of pet portraiture as well as showing us some stunning portraits.

WELFARE

If you know of any member who is unwell or isolating or has a family member who is unwell, please contact welfare@ashbyu3a.co.uk or any committee member and we can see if there is anything we can do to help, whether it is collecting some shopping or prescriptions, having a chat or just sending a card.

NEWS FROM THE GROUPS

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

2nd January

It was good to get back together again after the Christmas break. We returned to working on our Kumihimo necklaces. Great progress was made by the seven ladies present so, in February we hope to be putting the clasps on the necklaces and finally complete the project.

Although numbers were down a little, it was a good turn out considering we met on the day after New Year.

Our next meeting is at 10am at Packington Village Hall on 6 February.

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

16th January - RedZ Cafe Ashby

Ten of us assembled at RedZ Cafe for a hearty breakfast. The choice of dishes was more than adequate and the food was served hot, well cooked and well presented by very pleasant and friendly staff. There was plenty of conversation, covering a multitude of topics and time seemed to pass extremely quickly. A good time was had by all and it was almost midday before the last of us left the cafe.

If you would like to join us at the Lakeside Bistro in Moira on 20 February 2025 at 10am, please contact Colin Woodland at breakfast@ashbyu3a.co.uk and he will add you to the list of attendees. There are nine on the list already!

If anyone would like to have the fun of arranging these breakfasts, please let Colin know and he will be pleased to help you take over the role.

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

The group is meeting at the Ivanhoe Club every Monday in February. On the 3rd and 17th it will be in the morning 11am to 1.30pm, on the 10th and 24th it will be from 7pm to 9pm.

If you are interested in joining us and would like to know more please call Neil Roberts, details above.

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

14th January

We didn't have a meeting in January - we went to the Gelsmoor for our Christmas meal instead. All seven of us made it which was good.

Our next meeting is at Caryl's on Feb 11th where we will plan our future work.

CROQUET – Leader: Rupert Knapton - croquet@ashbyu3a.co.uk

The group was due to meet on 31st January but I've not heard if the weather prevented this. The remaining winter Friday sessions on 28th February and 28th March are booked and hopefully the weather will be on our side.

New Members are always welcome - do come and meet us at Moira Miners Welfare at 11.00 am.

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

8th January - Planters Garden Centre Café, Bretby

The Bretby Garden Centre comfortably housed thirteen of us for coffee and cake . This was our first visit to Bretby. Their self service system was efficient and well organised. Carrying your own tray across quite a large area to get to the table was a struggle for some but, with a little help from their friend, everyone negotiated the room and safely arrived at the table complete with food and drink. Towards the end of our time, things did get a bit noisy as the lunchtime customers arrived. Nevertheless, it was a good time and a number took the opportunity to browse the shelves on their way to the Garden Centre exit.

Our next gathering will be in the Bluebell Tea Rooms at the top of Belmont Street, Sawdlincote DE11 8JU at 10am on 8 January 2025. The carpark nearby gets very full so it may be advisable to park in the Morrisons Carpark and walk the short distance to the tea room. There is a lift down from the car park to the high street if required.

If you would like to join us, please let Colin Woodland Know at coffee@ashbyu3a.co.uk. There are seven on the list so far and there is room for more.

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

20th January

Seven of us today had a couple of knotty problems to solve.

The first was Lesley's husband's laptop. She needed to open it to locate and salvage important photographs and other documents, but did not have the password. Richard worked with her and solved this problem with some classic detective work. It remains for Lesley to back up all these documents off the laptop for long term security.

Peter had a problem enabling FM Radio on his new phone. We were unable to solve this in the meeting, unfortunately.

Richard showed John D how to limit the field of sensitivity for his Ring Doorbell. It is currently picking up dog-walkers and double decker buses!

Finally, and most importantly, Mike was able to open one of John H's wine bottles. (Not for consumption at the meeting!). Others have reported that screw top bottles are getting harder to open. Is this a trend, or is it because we are all getting older and feebler?

We meet next on Wednesday February 5th

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

January

There was no meeting on January 2nd (being a bit too close to the festivities & recovery therefrom.)

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

15th January

Just a 'select' few folk managed to evade the January coughs and ills and spent a busy morning inspired by illustrations from last year's calendar.....to be continued next month on February the 19th at Lesley's

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

8th January

For our first meeting of the New Year, we had four round the table with two others contributing from home.

Ana has had an exciting, and interesting, time applying for information involving the origins of her name from a Dutch museum. She had to translate their enquiry form into English! We await the results with interests.

Dora (from home) was working on her father's cousins who emigrated to New Zealand in the 1920s. One of these was on the Scottish 1921 Census, yet married in NZ in 1921 also, so that narrows her search time span a bit.

Mary has been doing admin work transcribing a list of people who lived in Ashby in 1918 as part of her work of the history of the town.

Linda (from home) also worked on the 1921 Census (which is generally giving a great deal of useful information) Her findings have confirmed the provenance of a family heirloom from the early 20th century; and the fact her grandfather worked in the same company as his father.

Eileen has been gleaning much from the 1921 Census about her parents and Grandparents. Including one hilarious mistranscription that had her grandmother with a 20-year-old son aged 27!

John D continued working on his own biography, and the evidence of his father's very first school as an Assistant Master in 1921. This led to his first headship in Wakefield in 1924, where he met John's mother. But the mystery off how they met remains.

We meet again on Wednesday 12th February

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

2nd January - Flying Horse Indian Restaurant, Coalville

The award winning Flying Horse Indian Restaurant in Coalville lived up to its reputation when it tickled our tastebuds with some well prepared and delicious dishes. Thirteen of us enjoyed the sumptuous feast laid before us and we were all replete and full of gratitude for the chef by the end of a most enjoyable evening.

We will be throwing ourselves at the mercy of Zorba the Greek in Bold Lane Derby DE1 3NT on 6 February 2025 at 6pm. Eleven have already signed up for the adventure but there is room for more. Secure parking is literally across the road from the restaurant. It also may be possible to park at the roadside right by the restaurant, but be aware that Derby often charge for street parking up until 8pm. If you wish to attend, please let Colin Woodland know at [food from afar@ashbyu3a.co.uk](mailto:food_from_afar@ashbyu3a.co.uk).

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

January

Last meeting we did a quiz about France as an exercise in understanding some of its culture and history. We also completed an exercise based on choosing the correct tense to fill in the blanks in various sentences. That said in each session we continue to promote conversation in French - just recently, for example, about Xmas and the New Year. We meet Mondays 11am at Ivanhoe Club, Wilfred Gardens, Ashby. Next meeting Monday 3rd February.

GARDENING - Leader: Paul Dean - gardening@ashbyu3a.co.uk - phone 07707 862762

16th January - Gardening for Wildlife

For our first meeting of the year, we had a talk given by Karen Gimson, who has a feature in Garden Answers magazine, and is also on Radio Leicester.

The theme was gardening for wildlife and she identified some plants that were beneficial for insects, how water features, log piles, bug hotels, grasses etc. are also good for them. If you have wooden fences surrounding your garden area you can make a small hole the size of a CD that should allow hedgehogs to enter.

She has had swifts visiting for 33 years, and they always use the mud to build their nests, but one year there was no mud, and Karen and her husband created the mud themselves and the swifts used it.

A very interesting talk with excellent pictures.

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

9th January - The Sump, Burton upon Trent

Twenty five members filled the Conservatory dining area for lunch at the Sump. The staff were extremely efficient and helpful, quickly setting an extra table when more than the original booking number turned up. The food was well presented, hot and tasty. The view of the sump was unusual in that the flooded Trent had completely covered the weir. We have become accustomed to good service at the Sump and they certainly kept up to their high standards this time.

February's venue is the Bull's Head, Market Street at 12 noon on 13 February. 24 have already signed up for the event, but there is plenty of room for more. The luncheon gathering in March will be at the White Hart in Market Street Ashby on 20th March. I understand that they have had a revamp since last we were there and it will be interesting to see how things may have changed.

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

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. A full list of the books we are going to read this year will be on our webpage soon.

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

The January meeting should have been on New Years Day but we thought that many would still be sleeping off the celebrations and so reluctantly we decided to skip this month.

The next meeting will be at Sallie's house on Feb 5th.

RUMMIKUB – Leader: Betty Vos – rummikub@ashbyu3a.co.uk

The Rummikub group meets every 2nd and 4th Tuesday at 11 am at the Ivanhoe social club. We are a friendly mixed group of new and experienced players so if you are looking for gentle mental activity Rummikub might suit. We welcome new players.

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

23rd January. 'A memorable article'

For our first meeting of the year, we had a very interesting change to the format. 25 of us turned up as instructed with a 'memorable article'.

We had no idea how the afternoon was to be organised, so were interested to see that the room had been laid out with the chairs in a large horseshoe arrangement.

First, Yogi gave us quick review of several events last year then a little advance notice of the forthcoming programme, in particular the visit to Liverpool, and the several presentations to come on the various revolutions that have formed modern society. He also underlined the Planning Meeting in September and that every member is welcome to advance suggestions for events and even put themselves forward if they have a suitable topic of interest.

He then itemised a few memorable anniversaries around this date, always an interesting feature of our meetings. In 1902 occurred the worst mountaineering disaster in history, when 199 out of 211 Japanese soldiers died in a blizzard of -40deg whilst attempting to establish a route through the Hakkōda Mountains of northern Honshu.

In 1957 the Wham-O Manufacturing Co. of California began producing the Pluto Platter — soon renamed the Frisbee

In 1879, the worst defeat to that date of the British Army took place at Isandlwana, only 10 miles and one day's march from Rourke's Drift, the setting for the film 'Zulu'. 20,000 warriors attacked 1,800 soldiers and virtually wiped them out.

In 1905 a march to the then Winter Palace of the Czars in St Petersburg to present a petition was bloodily put down by the Imperial Guard. The event has been called 'Bloody Sunday'.

After a few more fascinating reminders of the past, Yogi provided to the business of the day. He issued cards to each member, then asked us to form into groups of four each with the same number of card (this meant that the 'face' or 'court' cards would also group in fours). Then each member within each group would present their 'article' to the others, 15 minutes being allowed to the total discussion.

We had to choose the best item for presentation to the entire meeting but choose a different person from the possessor to do the presentation. This was an exercise in how well each presented their article, how well the presenter remembered the salient facts, and how well the presenter presented. As most had never done this sort of thing, (and at least one was a complete newcomer to the Group) the exercise was most instructive in arranging one's thoughts and speaking in public. Everyone joined in enthusiastically and we were treated to some excellent revelations and interesting items.

During coffee and biscuits there was much informal additional discussion, which served to underline the value of the afternoon.

Many thanks. Yogi, for a very helpful learning and teaching afternoon.

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

For our first trip of the year we headed off to the Taylors Bell Foundry in Loughborough. This is now the only surviving bell foundry in the country after the Whitechapel foundry closed down in 2017.

Taylor's is now the world's largest working bell foundry having started in the 14thC and the Taylor family took over in 1784. Originally bell foundries were set up at the church where the bells were to be hung by itinerant bell founders. This eased the transport of heavy bells. Taylors moved to Loughborough in 1839 to cast bells for the nearby church and realised that the adjacent canal and railway offered an easy way to transport bells around the country. They moved into the present building in 1859.

The company went into administration in 2009 and was rescued by a consortium who later transferred ownership of the buildings and equipment into a Trust in perpetuity. The trust has received funding from Historic England and the Lottery Heritage Fund to maintain the buildings and set up the museum on site.

18 of us met at the museum for the start of the tour where we had a chance to look round before watching a video about the company's history and then setting off on the tour. Our excellent volunteer guides were a wealth of information as we toured the various departments where bells were being repaired, iron frames are cast (not today sadly), the wooden wheels which swing the bells are assembled, finished bells are tuned and finally we could look down on the foundry floor to see where the bells are cast. Unfortunately visitors are no longer allowed on the foundry floor as health and safety have deemed it too dangerous, despite no casting actually taking place.

Our first stop was the yard where some bells were being unloaded from a lorry and being brought in for refurbishment. After a while bells get chipped or flats form on them where the clapper strikes the rim and the crown where the bell attaches to the headstock may start to crack. Taylor's can repair all these faults and more before reinstalling them in the church or belltower they came from. Our guide, a bellringer himself, pointed out that bells can last a long time. One bell in a peal that he rings dates to the 1300s!

We watched a very skilled carpenter making part of a wheel to which the ropes are attached in order to swing the bell. These wheels can be up to 3m in diameter are made similar to a cartwheel but much more accurately and each part is made from different woods to suit the loads or wear on that particular part.

The bells are cast from an alloy of copper and tin called, strangely, bell metal! The largest bell cast by Taylors is the Great Paul in St Pauls Cathedral, London which weighs an amazing 17 tonnes. However the largest existing bell sits in the Kremlin and weighs 216 tons but it cracked in a fire before ever being suspended or rung. A bell cast in 1484 in Burma supposedly weighed 300 tonnes but it sank in the river whilst being carried on a raft and has never been found.



English bells are tuned by removing metal on a lathe at different points to give 5 different notes, and also tuned to the other bells around them. Taylor's currently has just one man doing this work but he is nearing retirement and so he is training an apprentice to replace him. Without tuning the bells they cannot be run in a peal.

There was much more to see and report from this fascinating piece of English history.

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

January

For our first meeting of the New Year, after all the Christmas carols, eight of us returned to “normal” by digging out some old favourites, and finding some new music to play.

We started with “Pastime with Good Company” (very appropriate), possibly by Henry VIII, but more likely by one of his court musicians. We followed this with Fun Folk, a medley of folk tunes, including a tango, with 2 tenor parts. Then came a canzon: “La Galuppa” from the 16th or 17th century. The more we play this piece, the more we are getting into it, and it feels better. The parts move separately, and it can be confusing, and tricky to keep in time and together.

We had another look at “Three Dances for Recorder Quartet”, which we are still learning. The Frog Dance is going better than the others, so we persevered with this. It’s a jolly tune.

Back to the more familiar: 3 of the Twelve Trios for Recorder Ensemble, then 3 madrigals by Casulano. We had a short look at “Spring Song” by John Hawkes: it starts as a fugue, and the parts gradually join in. It’s a more modern piece than the last two, having been published in 2020.

In our second meeting of the month (eight of us again), we persevered with some of the previous meeting’s music. We didn’t play the madrigals, but, instead, played Andrew Challinger’s “Variations on Greensleeves”, which we have played in the past, and most (?) of us like. We had our first look at Gaspar Sanz’ “Spanish Airs and Dances”. The last of these (Canarios) sounded familiar (you can hear it on YouTube if you search for it, played on guitar). We tried this one, getting to grips with the rhythm, and how to count the beats. Knowing the tune is an advantage! We had a quick look at the first one, which, while it had its tricky bits, seemed playable. We then tried “Jolly Joan’s Fugue”, which is fun, but has a few tricky accidentals, and some of us had to check the fingering of the higher notes!

The treble section had to leave a little early, so the rest of us ran through “The Goroum” with a hole in the middle. Not quite the same, but still fun.

Next month we will be back in the usual routine with meetings on the first and third Thursdays of the month, February 6th and 20th.

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

24th January – Burns Supper

We returned to the Golf Club again for our celebration of the Scottish Bard’s birthday.

Don Jarram was on hand to welcome us with traditional tunes on his pipes. Once we were seated, the haggis was duly piped around the room before Bill Wilson gave the address to, and ritually cut open, the Great Chieftain o the puddin’ race and we raised a glass to toast it.

Bill said the Selkirk Grace - ‘Some hae meat and canna eat, And some wad eat that want it, But we hae meat and we can eat, And sae the Lord be thankit.’, before we sat down to the meal itself.

The soup was followed by the haggis, neeps and tatties and then Cranachan dessert to finish. Delicious all of it.

Then came the entertainment. Bill sang an impassioned ‘My love is like a red, red rose’, Colin Woodland gave a very humorous ‘Toast ta the lassies’ which praised many of the assembled ladies.

Don gave us a fine medley of Scottish tunes and finally we all gathered in a circle to sing ‘Auld Lang Syne’ before drifting off into the night.

A big thank you to Bill and Don for their respective performances, to Tony Smith as the evening’s host and to Glenys for organising it all.

SCRABBLE - Leader: Usha Sood. Group contact: scrabble@ashbyu3a.co.uk

Some of our group have decided that they would like to play every week and so we shall be at the Bull's Head, Market St, 10.30 every Monday from now on for fun sessions of Scrabble. Send an email to the address above if you'd like to try us out. It's fun and sociable.

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY - Tanya Dempster, Paul McKay, Bill Devitt, Kurt and Lynda Kovach - science@ashbyu3a.co.uk

14th January. - 'Discovering the Night Sky' by Martin Bradley

Our guest speaker was Martin Bradley who is a member of Chesterfield u3a Astronomy Group. He specialises in landscape astro-photography, producing images of the night sky with interesting scenes in the foreground. However, his talk today started with the basics of astronomy and he stressed that a large telescope was not needed as many starry views can be enjoyed with the naked eye. The phases of the Moon, the brighter planets (Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn) and meteor showers require no equipment. However, you need to allow time for your eyes to adapt to the dark. They do this by slowly dilating the pupils, allowing more light to fall onto the retina of the eyes, but it can take about 30 minutes, and you must avoid looking directly at any white light source (including the Moon). With dark-adapted eyes more stars gradually come into view and the main constellations, Orion, Pegasus and The Great Bear become apparent.

Martin explained that with even with small binoculars or telescope, clusters of stars such as the Pleiades and the Double Cluster can be seen as well as Jupiter, (and 4 of its larger moons), Mars, Venus and Saturn. But it takes time to grasp the scale of the constellations and where to find these objects. A simple cardboard star chart or planisphere can be adjusted to show the current view of the night sky setting the date and then by holding it up to align it with the sky view. Planetarium apps for mobile phone or tablet are even better as these allow zooming into specific areas and can be switched to red light to avoid spoiling your night vision.

Martin then showed some of his incredible images taken with a telescope in his own observatory, including star clusters, galaxies and nebula, most of which cannot be seen with the naked eye. He explained how the study of stars with variable brightness by Henrietta Leavitt at Harvard Observatory in 1912 led to the discovery of a way to measure the vast distances to these stars. Tragically, she was not given full credit for this discovery until after her death. Martin invited us to guess the names of the nebula based on their shape; the Eskimo, Jellyfish and Horsehead nebulae being some of the easy ones.

To illustrate his talk several binoculars and telescopes were on display. Martin explained that refractors used a lens for its main component, as invented by Galileo in the early 17th century, whereas reflectors used a parabolic mirror, as invented by Sir Isaac Newton 50 years later. To round off the talk S&T Group member Dave Warren demonstrated the operation and showed images from his Seestar 50 e-telescope. This very small telescope is controlled remotely from a mobile phone, does not have an eyepiece but uses a camera sensor to record images, some of which were shown on the screen. There were many questions after the talk including some for which even professional astronomers have no agreed answer, like 'what is a black hole' and what came before the 'Big Bang'? Answers anyone?

Before the main talk Tanya reviewed a 2024 Booker Prize winning book called *Orbital* written by Samantha Harvey. It is based on the lives of 6 astronauts in the International Space Station (ISS) who are there to collect meteorological data and conduct science experiments. They have to exercise regularly to avoid the damage weightlessness causes to the body and carry out routine vacuuming to keep the confined spaces clean. It also focuses on how they are absorbed by the view of planet Earth from space, its colours, its countries, and reflect on the people they have left behind and the fragility of our planet. This set the theme nicely for the main talk.

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

The Supper Club didn't meet in January as it would have been too close to the Burns Supper.

Our next gathering will be on Feb 27th at the Old Bulls Head in Woodhouse Eaves. If anyone wishes to join us, drop a line to the email address above.

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

22nd January

This month we were tasting wines left over from the Christmas session and also some wines Annie had bought for Christmas and didn't get round to drinking!

We started with one of the left-overs, Vieux Papes, an 11% Vin de France at £5.25 from Tesco. This was a fresh, crisp, appley white wine probably from the cote du Rhone although it didn't say so on the bottle. Very easy drinking and very good value. A great start to the evening. It scored 6½/10

Next was I quite different white. A 2023 Tesco Finest Chablis costing £14 (bought at 25% off). This was a very typical Chardonnay but more in the New World style than French, unoaked but with a distinct Chardonnay taste. Creamy but still fresh. Not all of us liked it, some did. Tesco reviews are also split. It scored 7/10

Third was a Viognier from Virgin Wines, also from France but with unknown provenance. 2023 vintage, 13% and £13. Pure Viognier wines are fairly rare but catching on. They have a distinct off-dry taste of peaches and ginger and can be very nice. This was pretty good and scored a bunch of 8s from us and some 7s. Average 7.5/10

On to the reds. First was a very unusual Sancerre red made with Pinot Noir grapes from the Loire Valley which Annie had bought at a wine fair in Oxford. This was 2018 vintage 13.5% and Annie thinks cost in the region of £25. Most thought that this was delicious despite having a slightly unusual taste which we decided was because it was a bit old and about to go over. Several of us scored it 9 but one person didn't like it at all. It still averaged 8/10

Lastly came a very traditional French red, Mouton Cadet from Bordeaux. 2022 and 13.5% alcohol. This is the house wine of the very prestigious Chateau Mouton Rothschild blended from various grapes to keep a consistent flavour from year to year. It is a typical Claret and a very nice one at that. Smooth, just a little oaky vanilla, blackberry and blackcurrant. Rounded and full-flavoured. Definitely the best wine of the night. Normally £14-15 but on offer at present in Tesco at £9. A treat with a Sunday roast and our recommended wine of the month.



Our second choice, and much cheaper, would be the white Vieux Papes. Both available in Tesco.

We found out at the end of the evening that it had been Annie's birthday the day before. Happy Birthday Annie. A nice way to celebrate it.

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

17th January. A walk around Ashby

A good turn out of 13 walkers and a dog met at the gates to Hood Park on North St on a dry but grey morning. We set off on the dot of 10am along The Mews, then through the alley just to the left of The Lamb and onto South St. Turning left, we headed up to St Helen's churchyard. At which point, the walk leader got a phone call from two more walkers who had mistaken the meeting point as gates further up North St and wanted to know where we were. We continued up through the churchyard at a gentle pace and turned right along Mount Walk. A pause at the far end allowed them to catch up with us. And then we were 15.

Our route then took us down Prior Park Lane and into Bath Grounds where we followed the path round to the exit onto South St. From there we bore left onto Station Rd, crossed over into Wilfred Place, on into Wilfred Gardens and onto the path through the allotments at the far end. There were just a few hardy souls preparing their plots for spring planting. From there we turned off to walk through the cemetery, coming out by the water tower and walking down Kilwardby St into Market St and finishing up back in The Mews at the Lil Bo's cafe for hot drinks and cake. A pleasant walk of just over 2 miles.

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

13th January. From Hartshorne, led by Alison

A really good turnout this month with 17 of us meeting up for the 1st walk of the New year. We had 4 new members to our group and hope to see them again in the future.

From the car park on Manchester Lane we set off up the side of the churchyard and through the Ladyfields Plantation, along Mere oak Lane and onto Heath Lane. At this point the walk leader was given a 10 out 10 for mud control but then the group had to cross 2 muddy fields and so the perfect score was down graded - well it is January!!

It was then back to the car park via Several Wood in time for our traditional winter lunch at the Bull's Head at 12.30. 4.5 miles completed.

A plea from Alison, Leader of the Medium Walking group

A walk leader is needed for March 10th as Alison and Gary will be away. Is anybody able to volunteer to lead a walk of their choosing on that day? If so, can you contact Alison on either 07930 557432 or email mediumwalk@ashbyu3a.co.uk

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

7th January There was no walk this week.

21st January. From Woodhouse Eaves, led by Tony

14 members of the walking group met up at the Old Bulls Head pub in Woodhouse Eaves for a 7.5 mile walk on what turned out to be a very pleasant day- cold but bright and dry.

We headed off out through the village of Woodhouse Eaves and into Longcliffe Golf Club as the walk followed the 'Leicestershire Round' across the golf course and then through woodland to the edge of Bradgate Park. We entered the park and took the various paths that led down to the Visitor Centre where we took our coffee break.

We then exited the park at the Cropston Reservoir gate and went into Swithland Wood. We had intended going through to Swithland Village but feared that the fields we needed to cross were likely to be water logged. Instead we traversed the wood and came out by Brand Hills. The route back to the pub took us partly by road and partly by paths back to Woodhouse Eaves. We then had lunch at the Old Bulls Head before returning home.

Your Committee

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

Role	Name	Contact email
Chairman	John Pilgrim	<u>chairman@ashbyu3a.co.uk</u>
Business Secretary	Tony Smith	<u>secretary@ashbyu3a.co.uk</u>
Treasurer	Val Reed	<u>treasurer@ashbyu3a.co.uk</u>
Membership Secretary	vacant	<u>members@ashbyu3a.co.uk</u>
Interest Group Co-ordinator	vacant	<u>interestg@ashbyu3a.co.uk</u>
Welfare	vacant	<u>welfare@ashbyu3a.co.uk</u>
Speaker seeker	Yogi Godwin	<u>speakers@ashbyu3a.co.uk</u>
Communications	Mike Stow	<u>webmaster@ashbyu3a.co.uk</u>
Social Secretary	Glenys Morrice	<u>socials@ashbyu3a.co.uk</u>