

## June newsletter

Welcome everyone to this edition of the Solihull U3A newsletter, I do hope you found the last one an interesting read. With two bank holidays now behind us, we have much to look forward to as we head towards the summer and long sunny days.

There were two meetings in May, beginning with 'Monday morning at the movies' led by John. I asked John how he made choices of films for the U3A. Never at a loss for words, we have a very interesting potted history of his love of film. I wonder, after reading this, whether you had similar experiences of movie going and watching films.

### ***Why I chose the films for "Monday at the Movies".***

*The last film I showed at "MATM", "M, Hulot's Holiday", was also the first I ran at u3a, back in 2002. We had just bought our first laptop and digital projector, thanks to the efforts of Doug Cross in obtaining a grant from the lottery fund, and films were an appropriate addition to our Monday morning activities. My original intention was to select films of significance in the history and development of cinema, and so, "M.Hulot", and the historic GPO documentary "The Night Mail", made up our first double bill.*

*I grew up in the 1950's / early 60's when cinema was king. It was our window onto the wider and cultural world. Hollywood provided most of the product, and much of it was of very high quality. Films were made by people of moral and intellectual probity, many of whom, including directors Elia Kazan and Jules Dassin, lost their livelihoods and were forced into exile by the McCarthy blacklist. The list of my favourites starts with "On the Waterfront", like many of the others, scripted by Tennessee Williams, starring Marlon Brando, and directed by Elia Kazan.*

*Choices were not, however, restricted to the output of Hollywood; I remember the queues outside the cinema of people keen to see Laurence Olivier's portrayal of "Hamlet". And, thanks to the local film society, we had access to worldwide cinema. My hometown was not so much a "one horse", as a "two- cinema" town. Cinemas were the privately owned "Olympia" universally known as "the Lymp", now the local Wetherspoons, and the "Workman's Hall", a complex of cinema, library, meeting rooms, and a 7 table snooker hall, which, incidentally, offered the possibility of being conned out of your newspaper round earnings by the great Ray Reardon (when you're young and daft, a 50 points start seems like a good bet). Governance of the town was still rooted in a Victorian sense of propriety, so pubs weren't the only places closed on a Sunday – so were cinemas. However, a private film club showed films, once a month on Sundays in the main cinema of the Workman's Hall, and mid-week, with a portable*

*projector in the meeting room. The film society was mainly run by two masters from our grammar school – the deputy head, and senior maths teacher, and the senior English teacher. As educators, they were actually pretty awful – unless you were a natural at maths, or enthralled by the poetic possibilities of the English language you had no chance. They were, however, great at opening young minds to the possibilities of the wider world, and so they encouraged us to join the film society. Initially to me and my mates, it meant access to a cinema on Sunday evening, with all the usual associated activities of hormone-sodden teenagers.*

*There, however, I found the magic of world-wide cinema, and I loved it. I saw films from the great Italian directors, Roberto Rossellini (“La Strada”, “Nights of Cabiria”, Verdi’s “Aida”, Sophia Loren, obviously dubbed, in her first starring role), Vittorio da Sica (“The Bicycle Thieves”). Swedish director Ingmar Bergman provided “The Seventh Seal”, and “Wild Strawberries”. Exiled US director Jules Dassin’s work was represented by “Celui qui doit mourir” (He who must die) – based on the novel “Christ Recrucified”, by Greek author Nikos Kosantzakis, best known as creator of “Zorbat the Greek”. It starred Jules’ wife at the time, the great Melina Mercouri, and is available on Youtube. The midweek showings usually consisted of silent classics – Buster Keaton films, D.W. Griffith’s “Intolerance”, etc. I suspect the showing of silent films was partly a consequence of the poor quality of the portable sound system – a bit like our u3a! Having said all that, I have to confess that my ultimate criterion for selecting films is running time. When we showed in the WI hall, and members brought their own coffee, we didn’t have a mid-session break, and so, I was able to go with a running time of 100, or 105 minutes. Under our current meeting structure, including coffee break the best I can handle is 85 -90 minutes, and they are not easy to find. Suggestions will be gratefully received.*

Thanks John, always guaranteed to have something to say!

This was followed by ‘A bit of Betjeman’ with our very own Ivan. No one can dispute the brilliance of Betjeman’s poetry but Ivan shared a much darker side to his character – extra-marital affairs galore!

**Lunch club** started again at the Mason’s Arms in Solihull. Here’s what Toni has to say:

*This was always a good event organised by Derek and Penny Hoskins at the Mason’s Arms (opposite St. Alphege church) every four weeks at 12.30pm.*

*It was always good to dine and meet up with other U3A members. Unfortunately, Derek and Penny had to stop organising social events so I offered to keep Lunch Club going.*

*We met on Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> May at 12.30pm at the usual venue. A Tuesday has always proved to be the best day for the majority of members.*

*The menu is good and very reasonably priced at £8.95 for a main meal plus a soft drink or tea/coffee. Wine can be purchased for an extra £1. Desserts can be ordered from a separate menu.*

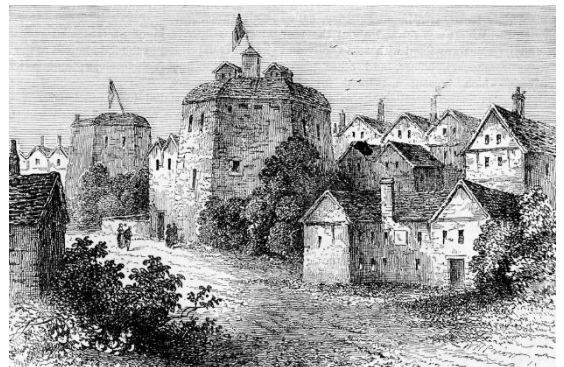
*I hope all enjoyed 12<sup>th</sup> May – there were eleven of us.*

*Next Lunch Club will be Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> June at 12.30pm.*

Thank you, Toni, for stepping in and continuing the Lunch Club every month. There is a sign-up sheet at the Monday morning meetings should you wish to join the group

### **June in history**

**29<sup>th</sup> June 1613**, the Globe theatre in London burnt to the ground. A “special effects” cannon was fired during a performance of *King Henry VIII* (also known as *All is True*) – specifically as the king made his entrance on the stage. While cannons had apparently been used for years without a problem, this was not to be the case this time. It is said sparks from the cannon landed either directly on the theatre’s thatched roofing or a roof beam near the thatch and caught fire.



Those attending the theatre apparently thought the smoke was simply from the cannon blast. Even when smoke began to curl upwards, no one paid much attention; in the words of one eyewitness, “their eyes [were] more attentive to the show”. But within minutes the fire had run around the inside of the roof “like a train”, and the Globe was doomed. Apparently, the day was hot and dry, and within little more than an hour only smoking ruins were left.

The audience – the theatre is thought to have housed some 1,000 people seated and a further 2,000 standing – is thought to have escaped unharmed. The most severe casualty was said to be a man whose breeches caught fire, which were put out with a bottle of ale.

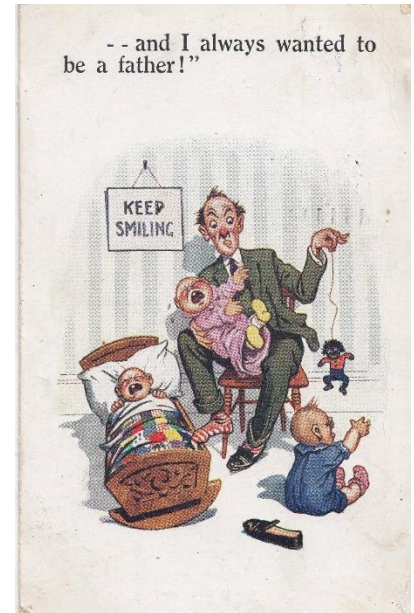
Not only would the theatre have to be rebuilt – in an era before buildings insurance, they would have to foot the cost – it needed to be done in a hurry, because every day without a playhouse depleted their reserves even more. The company could continue to perform at the Blackfriars, but that theatre only seated a few hundred ticket-buyers; at the open-air Globe, they could cram in as many as 3,000.

## June celebrations

### **Father's Day**

The celebration of Father's Day probably originated in America. It is thought that it started with a woman called Sonora Smart Dodd in Washington. After her mother died in childbirth with her sixth child, her father brought up the family. In 1909, Sonora heard a speech in church about Mother's Day and thought dads should also be celebrated. She proposed the idea to local religious leaders, and the first Father's Day was celebrated in Spokane on June 19, 1910. US President Richard Nixon signed the day into law as a permanent national holiday in 1972 in America.

It was brought over here following WWII when our culture became more heavily influenced by the United States and was promoted as a companion to Mother's Day. Father's Day in the UK was gradually adopted from the American tradition in the 1950s and 1960s before becoming widely popular by the 1970s. It is not a public bank holiday in the UK but is universally celebrated on the third Sunday of June.



### What's on at the Core in June.

I have chosen just two of the many things the Core has to offer. Take a look, you may fancy seeing one of these shows!

#### **Exhibition on Screen: Frida Kahlo**



Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> June at 1.30pm & Monday 6<sup>th</sup> July at 7pm cost - £12

The film takes you through her life and her art, revealing her deepest emotions and delving into the secrets and symbolism in her art.

We recently had a talk on Frida Kahlo by Mary and this would tie in very nicely with that.

#### **Strange, But True Crime**

Wed 17 June at 7.30pm cost - £25

Join former forensics lecturer and police recruit trainer Jennifer Rees to explore the world's most shocking and hard-to-believe crimes.

### **Isolation Hospital**

I do hope you enjoyed reading about the isolation hospital in Catherine de Barnes. Angela would like to add more information to this. Read on.

*Following on from the history of the hospital at Catherine de Barnes and the use of the hospital to isolate patients with smallpox, many memories came back.*

*The first outbreak in 1966 was relatively mild. My husband was a medical illustrator and had to photograph the patients for teaching purposes as most newly qualified medical students had never seen smallpox. Although similar to chickenpox, the rash is not quite the same.*

*Needless to say, we all had to be vaccinated. After this episode, the vaccine was kept under strict security in a laboratory at Birmingham Medical School.*

*However, in 1978, it escaped, at first, thought to be through an air duct. Another medical illustrator, Janet Parker, was infected and isolated at Catherine de Barnes where she sadly died.*

*The WHO declared the world free from smallpox in 1980. Samples of the virus are now kept in America and Russia.*

What an interesting piece, thank you Angela!

### **Touchwood Hall**



I wonder if anyone remembered this place?

Touchwood Hall was situated at the north end of Drury Lane (near to the site of Beatties today) and was built in 1712. The source of the name is unknown but may have replaced an earlier moated house on the site. A 17th century garden wall and belvedere indicated an earlier dwelling on the site. Touchwood Hall was the home of the Holbeche, Madeley and Martineau families in turn.

Touchwood Hall stood in Drury Lane for over 250 years until its demolition in 1963 to make way for the Mell Square development. By the time of its demolition, the house was derelict, although it was argued by some that the walls, floors and ceilings were mostly sound. There were hopes that the hall could be restored in the same way as the Manor House had been almost 20 years before. However, suggestions that it could be retained as a museum or meeting place came to nothing and a compulsory purchase order was taken out on the building prior to its demolition.

If you would like to find out more about Touchwood Hall follow the link below. It makes for a very interesting read.

<https://solihulllife.org/2026/01/04/touchwood-hall/>

And finally, who recognises this building? Find out more next time



Thanks for taking the time to read our newsletter. If you have anything you would like to share with our group, let me know.

Chris

Should anyone require a paper copy of the newsletter, please let me know.