

## Monthly Talks (October 2018 to September 2019)

Here is a record of our monthly meeting talks in iU3A's sixth year. For more recent talks, go to our web page [here](#). What appears below is almost exactly what appeared on the website immediately after each meeting. .

### October 2018



#### **Christine Coates 'Women Workers in World War One'**

Christine Coates took us through some wonderful archive photographs of women working in a wide variety of occupations, mostly previously reserved for men, during the years of the First World War. Some of these were her own family photos but most were from the TUC collection in Aldgate, where they are available to be viewed by the public. In 1901 the census showed that women made up just 31% of the workforce, most of whom were young and unmarried; about half of them were in domestic service. Men fought hard to keep women out of many work areas and women's work was very poorly paid. Many men felt it unseemly that women should do work outside the home, or work that was heavy, dirty or unhealthy.

But by 1911, thanks to the militant efforts of the National Federation of Women Workers, women had come out on strike against poor working conditions and low pay and by 1918 over a million women belonged to a trade union. The suffrage campaign was not entirely led by middle-class women, as many think. Many women workers, particularly in the North of England, fought for equal rights both in the workplace and in domestic affairs. In 1914 a million men were recruited into the war effort and this was further increased by conscription and the extending of the age range. Women were called upon to report for work and almost 5 million women eventually registered.

Women began work in dangerous and unhealthy work where skill and precision were required. Examples in Islington were the munitions factory in Brewery Road, the gas mask factory in Holloway, the British Ever Ready torch and lighting equipment factory and the Highgate Aircraft Company. They were also employed in road laying and paint shops, as tram conductors, as well as white-collar work as telephonists and secretaries. They fought for equality in the workplace, for improved health and safety standards, nursery placements and leisure facilities and, when the war ended, women expected lasting change; but this was not to be as men returning home were re-integrated and given back their jobs. In 1918 three-quarters of a million women were made redundant and unemployment figures for them rose significantly. Despite some women being given the vote in 1920 and universal suffrage in 1928, the position of women in society diminished and 'The new world looked much like the old one'.

A fascinating pictorial and oral review of the role of women in the war years.

## November



**Roger Hamilton**, one of our Islington U3A members, followed on from our AGM with a fascinating presentation on '**Climate Change and Renewable Energy**'.

He started off by explaining about the frog analogy in relation to global warming, suggesting that if you put a frog into water and gradually add warmer and warmer water the frog won't know until it's too late!

Climate change has been happening at a gradual rate since the Industrial Revolution but there has been a more noticeable change since the 1950s. Carbon dioxide levels continue to increase, mainly as a result of the use of fossil fuels. Greenhouse gases are linked to global warming and global temperatures have been rising gradually, mostly over the Northern Hemisphere. Many greenhouse gases break down in the atmosphere, but carbon dioxide does not. About half of it gets absorbed into the oceans and forests but the rest goes into the atmosphere and stays there. We need to get greenhouse gases down to zero, which we are currently trying to do by 2050. It's a very tall order.

We need increasingly to look at other forms of energy and the costs of both solar and wind energy are getting cheaper. Renewable energy is now up to 25% of all electricity energy but coal is still at 38%.

The CCC (Climate Change Committee), led by New Zealand, are working with many other countries to tackle carbon emissions and are due to report on progress early next year. The G7 nations are committed to cutting carbon emissions. In the UK about 30% of our energy is renewable energy and 20% is nuclear energy and costs are falling; onshore wind is now our cheapest form of energy. Transport makes up 28% of our emissions, but we have the technology to bring this down by, for instance, the use of electric buses and trains using hydrogen fuel. Most of our homes could be better insulated but a further runway at Heathrow will present a significant increase in emissions. As far as agriculture is concerned, we need to reduce our livestock and eat less meat. We also need to increase the amount of land given over to forestry.

As Emmanuel Macron has said 'There is no planet B'.

Unfortunately we ran out of time, but judging by the number of members who clustered around Roger at the end of the meeting, there were still many, many questions left unanswered. We will invite him again.

## December

No meeting.

## January 2018



**Frank Dobson**, who was Labour MP for Holborn and St Pancras from 1979 until 2015, gave a fascinating and amusing talk about his time as Secretary of State for Health in the Blair government from 1997 to 1999. He took us through some of the headline issues of his time such as: ensuring new effective meningitis vaccine was available for children; establishing NICE, the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, which focussed on the cost-effectiveness of

clinical treatments and became a model for other countries; managing blood supply scandals such as CJD infected blood; establishing the NHS helpline NHS Direct; and reorganising children's intensive care services. In all these cases, as Secretary of State he was always having to weigh up conflicting advice from representatives of different professionals and interest groups, and find funding when there was no money in his budget, as well as bear in mind how the public respond to the issue.

## February



### **Rosemary Seton: British Women Missionaries Overseas 1800-**

**1950.** Rosemary's talk highlighted the role women played in the "misguided endeavour" of being a missionary in India and China in the C19th and C20th. Despite the prevailing attitude at the time that the role of women in missionary activity was to support men as their wife (travel for "unprotected" single ladies was actively opposed and submitted to ridicule) we were given examples of brave, pioneering women who founded schools and colleges, hospitals and schools of nursing and medicine, some of which are still carrying on their work. Women could not call themselves missionaries but were referred to as agents and were regarded as holding back progress in what was exclusively a male domain.

In India notable examples are Hannah Marshman, who could be regarded as the first missionary in the sub-continent. As many women missionaries did, she went out as a teacher and established schools for Eurasian children, moving on to Indian children and the first school for girls. By the end of the C19th the mission schools were the first to offer girls secondary education, in line with developments in England. Kinnaird College, which was established in 1914 for Christian converts, is still in existence today. In the field of health care, missionary women such as Fanny Butler brought much needed primary health care to women and their children. Edith Brown established the North India School of Medicine for Christian Women at Ludhiana, which taught thousands of nurses and offered training in dentistry, radiography etc. It is still working today, staffed in the main by Indian nationals. Missionary activity ended in India with independence in 1947 and the coming of India and Pakistan.

In China, women missionaries met with active opposition from the Missionary Council, on which men and women did not meet together until 1932. Despite this, women such as Mary Ann Aldersey answered the call for unmarried ladies to go out and teach English to the "heathens". Gladys Stephenson established a nursing school in Hankow and the redoubtable trio of Mildred Cable and Evangeline and Francesca French conducted an itinerant mission. After the fall of Singapore in 1942, women missionaries played a key role in the detention camps, maintaining morale and providing health care, particularly after the Japanese took over in 1944 when conditions deteriorated considerably. After the Second World War missionaries were denounced by the government. By 1953 all missionaries had left China.

## March



Our **March** speaker was **Robin Weiss**, who told us about the '**Two Gentlemen of Verona**' — two physicians/scientists with strong links to Verona, who, despite living hundreds of years apart, contributed immensely to our understanding of how diseases are transmitted.

The first man was Girolamo Francastoro (1478-1553) who became aware of syphilis in 1494 when it was brought back by the Italians from the West Indies and transmitted backwards and forwards across the seas as explorations continued. The disease was virulent and reached epidemic proportions. Francastoro discovered that tiny particles could transmit infection by direct or indirect contact over long distances. He recognised that the disease had a latent period and that it was sexually transmitted. Inevitably it was foreigners who were blamed for the disease but wherever Europeans travelled the death of natives ensued and the disease had a huge impact on native populations. There is a portrait of Francastoro in the National Gallery which has been recently attributed to Titian, speculation being that he painted the portrait in exchange for treatment for syphilis. The second 'gentleman' was Domenico Antonio Rigoni-Stern (1810- 1885), who contributed to our understanding of the spread of cancer. He discovered that cervical cancer was more common in married women and widows than in nuns and virgins and that celibate women were more likely to suffer from breast cancer than sexually active women. He linked this to the fact that pregnancy can be a protective factor in the prevention of breast cancer. His thinking was way ahead of his time and his findings mark the birth of cancer epidemiology.

As usual, there was not enough time for all the ensuing questions from the audience but the talk provided a fascinating insight into early medical research.

## April



**Karen Thurman**, Art Conservationist, '**Photography as Art**', RfL Conference Hall + Seminar 5. Art gallery owner, environmentalist, photographer and corporate escapee, Karen Thurman is most likely to be found in one of two places: in her tent in some remote Scottish location with her husband and dogs, or in her darkroom printing her images of the woodlands and forests that so move her.

Her gallery and environmental movement centre around the idea that art can be used to inspire the protection of nature. Karen gives talks on various art, nature and photography-related topics around the country. Her talk "Photography as Art" looks at the development of photographic techniques and how they both drove artistic innovation and followed general art trends in the 19th and 20th centuries. This is followed by a brief discussion of the power of photography to bring about social change, then a look at contemporary photography and what makes photography

## May



**Frances Wood — 'The Silk Road'**. Frances took us on a fascinating journey along the Silk Road, for centuries the main trade route between China and the west. It gained its name in the 1st century AD when silk was traded to Rome, silk being a precious commodity whose origin was unknown. As well as the east-west trade, commodities such as grapes, cucumber and peas and beautiful Arab horses were traded from the west to the east.

Religions such as Buddhism and Islam moved along the road to China, which saw the construction of the Indian Buddhist cave temples at Dunhuang.

Travel for nineteenth and early twentieth century explorers was difficult, given weather extremes and the harsh terrain. We're now lucky to be able to use fast roads and trains. Sir Marc Aurel Stein was perhaps the most influential of all the archaeologists and collectors: he made detailed maps of the area and took hundreds of annotated photographs. Most important was his discovery of hundreds of manuscripts in the Dunhuang caves, including the Diamond Sutra, the earliest printed book, dated to 868 AD, and artefacts such as a star chart and a calendar. Much of this material is housed in the British Library's collections, available to view on request or as part of a group visit. Some will also be on display in a Buddhism exhibition in 2020.

## June



**'Social Policy after Grenfell'** by Professor **Anne Power** from the London School of Economics. Prof. Power began by considering why social housing had declined from 6½ million houses in 1980 to only 2 million now. After World War 1 social housing had been seen as a key housing and social solution — Homes Fit for Heroes — but by the 1930s this was too expensive. In order to address the many still-existing slums and chronic overcrowding, a programme of slum clearance was developed, which favoured large families, and created homes outside the city centres in large estates and higher blocks. These were too large and had too little management so problems soon developed and by the 1970s in Islington people refused to move to council properties in large estates. The Thatcher years drove forward a huge privatisation initiative with the right to buy for council tenants in which a third of council housing was sold. Councils also transferred two million council homes to Housing Associations. Government policy also uncontrolled rents, and brought in outsourcing of public assets to private contractors.

The current situation is that there are now four million homes in the private rented sector, with high rents. Councils have to contract with the private rented sector for housing for homeless people, so a very large public subsidy goes into this. Government policy also focussed on demolishing and rebuilding existing estates rather than refurbishing them, but there has not been any serious commitment to rehousing all tenants. Private developers rely on first building luxury homes for private sale to finance the remaining units of social housing in any development: inevitably this means in practice that fewer social units are built than needed and there is no incentive for a private builder to build community facilities, such as playgrounds, GP surgeries, employment advice offices etc.

The Grenfell tower block was council-owned but the quality of the cladding was reduced to save money: the council ditched the original contractor for a lower-

cost contractor. Importantly, there was no proper system of oversight or checking by the council of key fire regulations and no on-site management. Nationally there is no system for overseeing the way buildings are built and run, no records and no standards.

Prof. Powers underlined that one of the key learning points from Grenfell was that offering up council estates for demolition and development was a policy that needed total rethinking. These schemes always argue that it is cheaper than upgrading/retrofitting existing housing but their figures do not stand up to scrutiny. The social, environment and financial imperatives must be to upgrade/retrofit existing housing, with social landlords such as TMOs (tenant management organisations) present and active on site with tenants. Increased provision of social housing could be funded through capital gains tax and from an uprating of council tax, which is still at 1991 levels.

## July



**'Diaghilev in London'** presented by **Graham Bennett**, who told a light-hearted story of the incredible links that formed between Russian and English ballet during the early 1900s, mainly through the work of Sergei Diaghilev, who was born in Chodovsky District of Russia in 1872. Diaghilev grew up to become an art critic, patron, ballet impresario and founder of the Ballet Russe — probably his greatest achievement. Created in 1909, the productions of the Ballet Russe revolutionised 20th century arts and continue to influence cultural activity today.

Diaghilev helped to launch the careers of many artists who remain well known today: Igor Stravinsky, Russian dancers Mikhail Fokine and Vaslav Nijinsky, and exotic designer Leon Bakst. Coco Chanel, Picasso, Alicia Markova, Isadora Duncan and Ninette de Valois all had links with the Ballet Russe. Although he gathered a wide range of composers, choreographers, designers and performers around him he always maintained ultimate control of his productions.

Following its success in Paris and New York, the Ballet Russe came to London in 1911. Russians were astonished to find that the theatre where they were to perform was surrounded by a fruit market. A local girl, Hilda Mannings, aged 15, had joined the troupe and became their first English ballerina. She performed in *The Rite of Spring*, a scandalous production which played to packed houses. Hilda was later to change her name to Lydia Sokolova.

The Russian ballerina Lydia Lopokova joined the Ballet Russe in 1910 and became romantically involved with the economist John Maynard Keynes, who turned up nightly in London to watch her perform. They later married and together founded the Cambridge Arts Theatre. With her assistance he became an adviser on the constitution of the Arts Council.

The English ballet scene owes much to Diaghilev, and the Ballet Russe was a forerunner for Marie Rambert, Sadler's Wells, The Royal Opera House and The Festival Ballet (now the English National Ballet).

## August

No talk.

## September 2019



**'The NHS at 71 - is it time it retired?'**, presented by **Valerie Iles**, who started by giving a brief overview of seminal events in the NHS over the last 70 years: new management structures post-war; the creation of District General Managers in the Griffiths reforms of 1983; purchaser-provider split in 1991 under the Thatcher government; new GP contracts in 1991 in which GPs took on public health issues; and New Labour's A&E and treatment targets in the later 1990s. Valerie argued that for 50 years we have all contributed to the problem of 'McDonaldisation' — thinking that everything can be measured and that key performance indicators should be used to measure progress towards a goal. But this leaves professionals feeling treated like a resource whose productivity is constantly measured. She suggested it is more useful to differentiate between a puzzle — for which there is one right way forward; a problem — in which there are various ways to proceed; and a mess — which is a complex interacting system where we can only proceed step by step and see what works.

Valerie argued that privatisation is not the real issue — we need to liberate people from McDonaldisation and think about the kind of care we want for people and what national system will encourage this. This means building relations, not management, so clinical staff are supported and enabled to be the best; investing in junior staff; using money more wisely by helping people better understand costs; involving senior clinical staff in strategic decisions not external consultancies; innovation and a focus on patient experience; being ambitious for all diagnoses — dementia as well as cancer; understanding how flows through a system work; effective good value treatments for all conditions instead of privileging pharmacology; citizens' juries for difficult and political decisions. She suggested that the key issue is choosing between a single system or a market. There are many different market models, some of which (eg Netherlands health market and compulsory health insurance) work well, particularly as we now have much health data for designing services. She advocated a moonshot approach in which we would specify our priorities and potential health care providers would design services to achieve them — but this would require cross party political support!