



Monthly Talks (October 2017 to September 2018)

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 2017



Niall Dickson — Chief Executive of the NHS Confederation — 'The NHS at 70' — over the hill or ready for the next challenge?'

Niall set the present challenges that the NHS faces in the context of its history. From 2000 to 2009, the NHS was given considerable additional funding to improve access to services, with targets to reduce waiting times for hospital treatment from more than 18 months to 18 weeks. An internal market was created in which health commissioners paid hospitals on the basis of their activity: this extra activity improved waiting times but at the cost of very little investment in community services.

Since the 2009 recession, there has been no additional funding for the NHS and there are now serious problems of insufficient social care services to support people outside hospital, and rising demand due to the increase in older people with multiple long-term health problems — most hospital beds are occupied by people aged 85+ and this age group will double in size in the next 15 years. A further problem for the NHS is recruiting and retaining enough staff. To address these problems, the NHS is now asking health services to work in a different way, through integrated coordinated services which focus on the health needs of the local population, with funding being dependent on improved health outcomes for that population.

There is no political consensus on the future of the NHS and Niall ended his talk by arguing that much more public debate was needed on what sort of NHS people wanted and what they were prepared to pay for.

November



Quentin Peel — associate fellow with the Europe Programme at Chatham House — 'May, Macron and Merkel — where are they leading us?'

We were packed to capacity for the AGM followed by a very topical presentation by Quentin Peel, former European correspondent with the Financial Times, who gave a fascinating insight into the world of Merkel, Macron, and May, and where they might be leading us. We are living in a time of extraordinary confusion and uncertainty and this applies as much in continental Europe as it does in the UK and it's interesting to look at what's happening from a European perspective. This means not just France and

Germany but all the other 25 countries that make up the EU.

Merkel remains a stabilising force in the EU, even though currently she is struggling to put a coalition government together. She remains an extraordinary political operator: she is primarily a scientist and is pragmatic, cautious, and exactly what the Germans want. She has problems within her own party and is in many ways too left-wing for them, but she has saved the Euro and survived the difficulties in Greece, Italy and the refugee crisis; and she has held together the political situation in the Ukraine by pushing through sanctions against Russia. While the refugee crisis may still come back to trouble her, together with her refusal to accelerate nuclear power, she remains dominant in the centre ground of politics and is steadfast in her belief that membership of the EU is in Germany's national interest.

The majority of Germans have really welcomed Macron as president of France. as he too has a passionate belief in the EU. He, too, is an outsider although his background is elitist. He has big ideas on reforming the EU, such as reinforcing border protection, particularly in places like Greece and Italy, he has talked about setting up a European intervention force, and reforming the common agricultural policy. He is positive about the benefits of the multilingual nature of the EU. Although his popularity, too, is currently slipping, he has reached into the centre right and centre left and has presented a very clear reform platform. The trade unions are divided in their opinions on his reforms but, to date, there has been no major opposition from them. French business confidence is increasing. He is working towards coalition politics, but it will take time. Both Brexit and Trump have undermined stability throughout the EU. There have been concerns about the rise of the far right in both France and Holland and a rise in nationalism in Poland and Hungary. The situation in the Middle East and the continuing refugee crisis could all erode the stability of the EU. Both Merkel and Macron are determined to hold the EU together and this is more important than Brexit issues. Although disappointed by the departure of the UK, they want to ensure that Brexit negotiations will not get in the way of all the other critical issues facing the other EU countries. Although May has stated that she wants the EU to succeed, the Europeans remain sceptical about this. The Europeans continue to be concerned about the Brexit timescale proposals, the exit process and a fundamental lack of agreement within the British government on what they want. There is a blame culture developing and still a lack of technical detail from the UK, for example no real solution as to how the Irish border controls will work. They are concerned that the British government views the EU in terms of trade deals rather than a major peace project. They would, however, still like to see May and her government change their minds!

As usual there were many questions raised by the audience and not enough time to debate the answers.

December

No meeting.

January 2018



Professor Jonathan Butterworth, Head Physics and Astronomy Department, University College London, Atlas CERN – Smashing Physics: Journeys to the Energy Frontier.

Jon's talk made a very complex topic accessible and interesting to the layperson. He introduced us to this world of particle physics by presenting a 'Map of the Invisible'. In the west lies the 'old world' of the 'Standard Model' i.e. the world of electrons, waves, energy, quarks, leptons and forces etc. Physicists are journeying further east into unexplored lands, made possible by the Large Hadron Collider and its detectors such as Atlas, the project which Jon has been involved with. The discovery of the "missing" particle, the Higgs Boson in 2012, represents the discovery of the last unverified part of the Standard Model, or does it? Is the Higgs the last fundamental particle? Are there hidden worlds beyond 'Bosonia'? Jon suggested that there are still areas ripe for exploration out there such as gravity, the rotational speed of galaxies, dark matter, neutrinos, super symmetry and further questions to be answered such as why there are three copies of everything or where's the anti-matter?

Projects involving the Large Hadron Collider, whose tunnel at 27km is the same length as the Circle line, are making many discoveries and answering some fundamental questions but the installation of an even bigger collider whose length would be 100km would possibly enable this "smashing physics" to penetrate these hidden speculative worlds.

February



'The myth of the Titanic' by Patrick Mylon

Patrick Mylon has been interested in ships since childhood after seeing the 1957 film 'A Night to Remember' about the sinking of the Titanic. The Titanic was a White Star Line ship, built in Belfast for size rather than speed, as part of the national rivalry between the US and Britain for the best transatlantic liners. On its maiden voyage from Southampton to New York, which began on 12th April 1912, it carried 2,200 passengers. Patrick told us about all the different issues that contributed to the disaster of its sinking with great loss of life.

Like all large passenger ships at that time, it carried too few lifeboats (enough for only 1200 passengers) as the law required only 16 lifeboats. The weather was bitterly cold, but despite receiving six ice warnings the Captain did not slow down or double the lookouts. Although a message about a large iceberg was sent to the Titanic from another ship, the message did not have the crucial 'MSG' indicator that would have required the wireless operators to send the message to the Captain, so they took no action. The huge black shape of the iceberg was finally seen by lookouts at 11.38pm; the ship was turned hard to the left to try to avoid it, exposing the starboard side of the ship to the impact, which was catastrophic, causing it to break in two. It sank within two hours. Another ship, the California, saw the eight distress rockets fired by the Titanic but took no action. Finally the Carpathia reached the Titanic after 3½ hours and picked up the 700 survivors.

The disaster brought about changes in the law and in shipping practice. Lifeboat

drills for passengers and crew became mandatory, as did carrying sufficient lifeboats and operating 24 hour lookouts. And 13 nations operating across the north Atlantic formed the Ice Patrol, a notification system about icebergs.

March



'Researching the Social Science of Pandemic Influenza: Sneezes, Panics and Spies' by Tony Barnett, Professorial Research Fellow, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine

Tony is a social scientist researching infectious diseases such as flu, which is very infectious before symptoms begin. He stressed the importance of frequent hand-washing as the best defence against flu and told us that ordinary facemasks are ineffective. Increasing social distance can help as a defence against infection. but this conflicts with the need to help sufferers.

Important variables in infectious diseases which have an impact on social and economic life include: the reproductive rate of infectious diseases, ie the number of secondary cases from one primary case; the virulence of the disease; and its vectors or transmission agents. The flu virus is unstable and changeable as its genetic material mutates and incorporates new material from its host, defeating our immune systems and making it hard to develop a fully effective vaccine.

Zoonotic viruses that transfer from animals to humans are of particular concern, because if the virus then becomes capable of transfer from humans to humans, a pandemic may result. This is how the Aids virus spread, initially transferred from chimpanzees to humans, and then between humans. Nowadays government and all major organisations have flu pandemic contingency plans because of the catastrophic social and economic impact of a flu pandemic, while at Porton Down work is done to assess whether an outbreak of disease is accidental, natural or intentional.

April



'Telling Stories': why journalism and creativity rely on narrative' by Rosie Millard, OBE

Rosie showed us how the power of stories was at the heart of journalism and creativity, whether this was in children's bedtime stories, every day journalism or in major projects such as the city of Hull's bid to become the UK City of Culture in 2017. Rosie had been Chair of Hull City of Culture during the four years of planning its cultural programme after Hull won this bid. The bid was won because of the power of the bid's narrative: the old story of Hull as a depressed, deprived city had to be replaced by a new story if the bid was to be successful.

Rosie showed us the film made as part of Hull's bid, 'This City Belongs to Everyone', which was filled with different positive stories: Hull's architecture, Philip Larkin, William Wilberforce, the trawler industry, Hull's special geography of rivers and coast, the demography of Hull. This new story of Hull was enhanced, serendipitously, by two recent cultural events which had received excellent international media attention: a Spencer Tunick performance art work involving 4000 Hull residents, and spectacular performances by a French circus

in the town. As a result, the media responded very positively to Hull's planned cultural programme and over five million people visited Hull in its year as UK City of Culture.

May



Julia Weiner, Senior lecturer in art history, Regents University London
The image of the Jew in Medieval and Renaissance art

Julia's interesting and informative talk looked at the image of the Jew in art in Medieval and Renaissance Italy. Art was meant to instruct and edify the laity and images of the Jew reflected canon law where Jews were required to dress differently from Christians so that they could be easily identified. Jews were depicted with bird faces – was this the origin of the depiction in Nazi propaganda of Jews with large, hooked noses? They are shown wearing pointed hats, the required yellow distinguishing bands and various distinctive badges. The Nazis' requirement that Jews should wear the yellow Star of David continued this theme. The turban-wearing Jewish women depicted in the art of this period are shown as sexually provocative.

As the centuries went by the figure of the Jew in Italian art becomes more and more ugly and evil. Michelangelo's Moses has horns, reminiscent of the devil, "horns" almost certainly being a mistranslation of the Hebrew for rays of light in biblical texts. Fear and mistrust of such religious practices as circumcision are reflected in more and more horrific depictions in the art of the time. The belief that Jews murdered young children in order to obtain their blood for their unleavened bread took hold and influences such depictions. Uccello's series of paintings of the Profanation of the Host starkly demonstrates the fear and loathing in which Jews were held, reinforcing anti-Semitic beliefs in those who beheld them. The examples Julia showed us were particularly sobering when we saw them alongside modern day images of the Jew in right wing extremist propaganda.

At the same time it should not be forgotten that the art of Venice at the time also reflected its position as a major trading port, looking towards the Middle East, with its depictions of Venetian and Ottoman fashions and architecture in the same painting. Carpaccio's Sermon of St Stephen is a fine example of this. As well as the depictions of extreme prejudice in art, we must not forget that art can be a way of depicting the rich diversity and beauty of humankind.

June



Jean Willson OBE, 'Growing Up in Islington After the War'.

Jean gave a wonderful talk about her childhood growing up in Islington, drawn from the memoirs she is writing in the IU3A Creative Writing Group. Her family first lived near King's Cross so during the war experienced the repeated bombing of the station area and as a child her playground was the many bomb craters of the area. Her family later moved to the Lower Holloway area, where Jean still lives. Her Nan was a formative influence in her life with exacting standards of behaviour and appearance, and the centre of her extended family life. Jean recalled many details of their daily life after the war which prompted memories in the IU3A audience: the coal man delivering sacks of coal, the rag and bone man with his horse and cart, Vick for chest complaints, bread and butter pudding and the

pleasure of toasting bread on the coal fire, Saturday cinema for children, and family entertainment at home, with singing and dancing. The 1950s brought changes, with immigrants arriving in the area, a fish and chip shop opening and the excitement of lining up in the Mall to see the Queen after her Coronation.

July



British Library: We were delighted to welcome Roly Keating, who is the Chief Executive of the British Library at St Pancras. It's the 20th anniversary of the building, which was opened by the Queen in 1998. The library is, of course, old and new at the same time.

The building emerged after a hard-fought battle in the early 70s after it was agreed that we needed a stand-alone national library to support research and businesses and house the national collections. The site is particularly advantageous, being so close to the train stations and more recently home to technology and digital giants such as Google and Microsoft.

The idea of a library has changed enormously over time and has now embraced both the traditional past, focusing on academia, and the new world of the virtual and a global public. It is for everyone to enjoy and is a library for the world: 20% of visitors are now from overseas. It houses around 170 million pieces of material and every day more is added to this. Research is still at the heart of the service and the 1,200 seats for this purpose are always filled. The library is linked to all major city libraries to help businesses country-wide innovate and grow. Exhibitions and events bring in huge numbers of visitors as well as the thousands of school parties who come throughout the year. It works with international partners around the world and has the biggest collection of material outside the country of origin. The work on digitising all this material is enormous and this is a great global resource. Alongside this, demand for more physical space continues and there are plans to expand the campus to include more exhibition space and more reading areas. The wildly controversial building now has Grade 1 listed status and has been part of the transformation of the neighbourhood.

As usual there were plenty of questions from members and we ran out of time.

August

No talk.

September 2018



Nick Higham: The New River

Nick's highly informative talk demonstrated that the water course we know as the New River in Islington is neither new nor a river. Its origin dates back to the early C17th when it became clear that the supply of generally foul water in London was totally inadequate for the growing population. Edmund Colthurst drew up a grand scheme for a super conduit of water from the Amwell and Chadwell springs in Hertfordshire to the New River Head in Islington, consisting of 42 miles of elm pipes and a number of cisterns. The work began in 1602 but was stopped after 3 miles. Sir Hugh Myddleton, he of the statue on Islington Green, took over the project, making a deal with James 1st who stumped up 50% of the funding. These 2 men were the first examples of notables who became involved with the project over the

centuries. William Chadwell Mylne was the chief engineer of the New River Company in the C19th and father and son held this position for 94 years. During this period the original elm pipes were lined with lead.

Traces of the new river abound in Islington, although its course is almost wholly underground. New River Walk with its original walkman's hut is the only surface stretch. New River Head which is now a complex of residential buildings, includes the former Metropolitan Water Board offices which incorporate a C17th room from the original Water House with wood carvings reputedly by Grinling Gibbons. The East and West Reservoirs off Green Lanes with their 1856 pumping station were known as the Lake District of North London.

Nick showed us that for those who wish to know more about this fascinating subject, maps from the 4 centuries of the New River's existence give a fascinating insight into its construction, course and activities surrounding it.