

Monthly Talks (October 2019 to September 2020)

Here is a record of our monthly meeting talks in iU3A's seventh 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 2019



The Catalan Crisis and its Links to Current European Politics, presented by Professor Sebastian Balfour. The presentation was particularly topical in the light of the recent heavy sentences, against which there have been fierce demonstrations, imposed on nine Catalan politicians.

He focused on two aspects of the story, the process that led to a referendum, and the Catalan position from an international perspective: the roots of the Catalan experience date back to the early 1700s and many feel, even today, that they do not belong to Spain by virtue of their different history, language and culture. Catalonia was at that time part of the Mediterranean Empire, which stretched from Catalonia to the Duchy of Athens. A sense of separateness further emerged with the industrialisation of the rest of Spain and the growth of the middle classes, which failed to establish a sense of identity for the whole of Spain.

In the 20th century many Catalans saw autonomy as part of the struggle for democracy and Catalonia was given autonomy in 1932. However, at the end of the civil war in 1939 attempts were made to wipe out all expressions of Catalan identity including language and self-government, which compounded the Catalan sense of victimhood. It was not until 1977, two years after the death of Franco, that greater autonomy for the region was restored. This, however, was not without its problems: Catalans felt that other regions of Spain were given greater autonomy and more powers. In 2006 a new statute of autonomy was agreed for Catalonia.

The recession of 2008 led to a movement of popular protest as social fissures began to appear and there was much political corruption amongst the elite. A Catalan national assembly emerged: it argued that independence was the answer. But many Catalans, as had been the case for some in the past, were developing a strong sense of a dual identity and there was much immigration, both from other parts of Spain and from abroad, which made many feel they belonged to both Catalonia and Spain.

In 2012, for fear of losing electoral support, the Catalan national assembly jumped on the bandwagon of a separatist cause. A referendum for independence was held in October 2017. This was ruled as illegal by the Spanish Government and there was, as many saw it, a violent repression against a democratic exercise. Despite a low turnout, 90% of those who voted wanted independence. The Catalan government declared unilateral independence. Its MPs were subsequently arrested. A new referendum, organised in Dec 2017, revealed that 51% of Catalonia wished to remain in Spain and 45% wanted independence. Today there is no explicit programme for an independent Catalonia: there are fundamental differences over strategy, and deep divisions within the separatist movement. There is no process for a truth and reconciliation debate and there is a legacy of pain and sadness.

The movement, however, has had a ripple effect throughout Europe. The recession of 2008 and the austerity measures that went with it, have made people in many countries feel alienated from mainstream politics. This has given rise to national populist movements on the right and of the left.

November



Alec Forshaw, the former Conservation Officer for the London Borough of Islington, where he worked from 1975 – 2007, and the author of many books on London’s history, **Smithfield Market – Past, Present and Future**. Smithfield (Smooth field) was originally a weekly Anglo-Saxon marketplace for livestock. It was surrounded by monastic institutions and by the C18th, numerous taverns and slaughterhouses, reflecting its activity as a livestock marketplace. Animals came from afar along drovers’ roads, negotiating many tollbooths as in the one at the Angel turnpike. It became a notorious den of iniquity being the location of 90% of recorded crimes at the Middlesex assizes.

In 1855 the livestock market closed and was moved to an area between York Way and Caledonian Road, forming the new Caledonian Market whose clock tower — still there — was a location aid for drovers and their livestock from out of town. 1869 saw the opening of the Agricultural Hall — still fondly known as the Aggy — as a venue for animal shows. The coming of the railways and the opening of the Metropolitan line in 1863, which ran through Smithfield, enabled the opening of a new meat market in 1868 with a later extension to the poultry market. The coming years saw the introduction of refrigeration with vast underground cold stores enabling meat to be imported. In 1958 a fire destroyed the poultry market and a new market was built, opening in 1962 with the largest domed span in the world. Smithfield withstood the drive to move the big markets out of central London, presenting a powerful argument concerning the impact on the workforce and local traders, a large percentage of whom live in Islington. The future location of the meat market is as yet uncertain but Alec presented us with a vision of future plans for this important site which preserve its iconic buildings and utilize the 120 acres of basement area. They embrace the opening of Crossrail and the relocation of the Museum of London, enabling additional and improved access to its collections.

December

No meeting.

January 2020



Professor Patrick Pollard introduced us to the society of 'Gay Paris' at the time of Proust and Gide, with a tour of the many arrondissements where homosexual activity took place, including well known haunts such as the Bois de Boulogne and the Public Baths, Cafe Concerts and Ballets Russes. Although French legislation prohibited public indecency and included the protection of minors, unlike England male homosexual activity was perfectly legal, and French society was less repressed and puritanical in such matters.

February



Kathleen Sherit, who served for 22 years in the RAF as a specialist trainer, gave a fascinating history of how the Services have resisted allowing women to take on combat roles, looking at the period from the end of World War Two up to the present. In that war women could aim anti-aircraft battery guns but not fire them, to maintain the fiction that women were non-combatant, a status that negatively affected their pay, pensions, and promotion prospects. Limited change only came after the late 1970s when the RAF, the Army, and finally the Navy, allowed women to carry small arms — for self-defence only. In the 1990s further changes took place with women serving in the Navy on destroyers and frigates, and in combat roles in aircraft in the Gulf war. By 2014 the Army also changed its policy and women served in the armoured corps and the infantry, in operations on Afghanistan and Iraq.

March

Meeting postponed owing to Covid-19.

April



Elain Harwood, on Art Deco. This was our first iu3a lecture delivered using Zoom digital technology during the pandemic. Elain Harwood is an Architectural Historian with Historic England and has recently published a book 'Art Deco in Britain'. Art Deco was a style that developed after WW1, during the 1920s and 30s, which celebrated modernity and glamour. Its origins were an updated form of American classicism but Art Deco drew on divergent sources for its exotic decorative elements such as Greek, Aztec and Egyptian motifs. New construction techniques using reinforced concrete and steel framed buildings made possible the towers and contorted shapes of Art Deco buildings. Elain showed numerous slides of Art Deco buildings, in Britain including the Hoover building on the A40 in west London, the Carlton cinema on Essex Road Islington, the Astoria cinema in Finsbury Park, the Savoy theatre, Claridges Hotel, the De La Warr Pavilion at Bexhill on sea. Art Deco was an international style and Elain also told us about major examples of Art Deco buildings in Vienna, Paris and America. Recording of the presentation (bar the first five minutes, sorry) can be seen below - number 64.
PS: As many are asking: Elain is no relation to our current Chair.

May



Mary Balfour gave us an account of matchmaking and dating over the past 100 years. The First World War having taken the lives of many young men, people rushed into hasty and unsuitable relationships. Also the problem of sexually transmitted diseases being brought home from overseas exacerbated the situation. In 1922 Marie Stopes' "Married Love" opened up the whole debate around relationships, marriage and of course sex. The 1920s were a time of liberation and rebellion but the country remained short of men until well into the 1930s. The famous Heather Jenner Marriage Bureau was a great success and was patronised by those from all walks of life including soldiers and debutantes. Everything was changed by the first computer matchmaking scheme in 1964 and also by the advent of the pill. Mary ran her own business for many years and shared some of her tips with us, for example, how important it is to be realistic when looking for love and to tailor our expectations — both men and women seek someone more attractive than themselves! Now there is an explosion of dating websites and apps but Mary still advocates caution, proceeding slowly and always being prepared to give someone a second date!

June



66. June — Professor Erik Millstone gave us a fascinating summary of present day food production and consumption. He described how laissez-faire economics has favoured vested interests and led to minimal state involvement in food safety. Food is underpriced and price competition has undermined food security by harming its sustainability as well as making products unsafe and nutritionally unhealthy. Local authorities have the task of monitoring standards but have had their budgets cut repeatedly over recent years. The science about what is safe and what is harmful does not speak with one voice, so policy can never "follow the science". Current policies favour the food industry to the detriment of consumers. Brexit, he believes, affects sufficiency, sustainability, safety, health and equity. To view the materials connected with this presentation, click on [this](#) link.



67. June — Gill Hopkins: Over a period of 20 years and before countries like China and Iran started opening up to mass tourism a group of a dozen Canonbury residents came together to explore them. They called themselves CanTravel. Developing an M.O. to ensure the success of an early trip exploring the Camino de Santiago, they nominated a daily Duty Pilgrim to 'manage' the complex logistics of the day, and write up the day's adventures in a colourful journal of the trip. Every evening another member entertained the group with a pre-prepared 'CanTravel Tale' on any topic of their own choosing. So these journeys offered multifaceted enjoyment. Their destinations included much of the Silk Route, South America, and many European destinations. Along the way they were reminded on several occasions of Britain's Imperial history, discovering a ship on Lake Titicaca that had been built by a British shipyard in kit form for use by British explorers, and unearthing the story of the arduous journey and lifestyle of a 21 year old English gentlewoman accompanying her new husband to China, with only three weeks' notice.

At a time when travel is impossible this was both a charming reminder of journeys before mass tourism and an inspiration for journeys of the future. To view the presentation, click on [this](#) link.

July



68. July — Philip Leech: The Sutton Hoo Dane Burial Ship was discovered in 1939 in Woodbridge, Suffolk. It contained several items of treasure, although many had already been stolen. None of the wood remains, but a "shadow" of the ship was found at the mound site which has enabled a team of professional craftspeople and volunteers to embark on the biggest experimental archaeological project in Europe. They are building a replica ship using only traditional tools, many of which have had to be made specially, and traditional methods. The project is run by a charitable

trust and further information can be found on their website. To view the presentation, click on [this](#) link.



69. July — Martin Plaut took us from Ethiopia's distant past in Biblical times to the present day. Its relationship with other countries in the region, especially Eritrea, remains crucial today. We learned about the involvement of Italy, Cuba, UK and Russia in the past: now many countries have military bases in the area. There is much internal unrest and a lot of people are internally displaced. We see the effects of this as asylum seekers arrive on our shores. This was a fascinating glimpse of a historic and interesting country. To view the presentation, click on [this](#) link.

August



70. August — Jo Livingston gave us a fascinating insight into this condition, which many of us had probably never even heard of. Its medical name is prosopagnosia and it has been identified and diagnosed in people of all ages and in all walks of life. Jo shared with us how hard it was sometimes to even recognise her own husband! She now visits groups and organisations all over the world and campaigns to raise awareness of this debilitating condition, for which there is as yet no cure.



71. August — Dr Alexandra Wood and Anna Byrne brought us up to date with the current developments in Alzheimers research. We learned how our brains have billions of neurons and how synapses are crucial for transmitting messages. The formation of plaques and tangles inhibit this transmission and brain scans show that Alzheimers patients' brains have these deposits. There is no cure yet but the research indicates that healthy lifestyles can aid prevention. Trials are

ongoing for drug therapy and the hope is for a vaccine eventually. To view the materials connected with this presentation click on [this](#) link.

Researchers need patients and healthy volunteers so if anyone wishes to help in the research here are two contacts: www.joindementiaresearch.nihr.ac.uk, email imperial.memory.research@nhs.net

September 2018



72. September — The Colourful History of Watercolours: Mark Lewis took us chronologically through the most distinguished of the watercolour painters during the 18th and 19th centuries. He explained the sublime versus picturesque movements which dominated the period and showed how individual styles eventually became more dominant. Watercolours are now a popular art form in their own right but at first were used as studies for oil paintings. Their translucence enables white paper to show through and to become part of the work. Watercolours are widely admired for their luminosity, delicacy and freshness. The slides were varied and beautiful and Mark brought them to life for us. To view the presentation, click on [this](#) link.



73. September — Pioneers of Photography: "Drawing with light" developed out of the drive to look at images in other ways than with our eyes. Roger Mead took us through the history of the inventors and pioneers of photography from the early nineteenth century to the present day and the invention of the digital camera. The first photo was taken in 1827 by Niépce in France and needed an exposure time of eight hours! We really enjoyed Roger's slides and his knowledge and enthusiasm for his fascinating subject.