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LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Greetings and Welcome to our December Newsletter

The Third Age Trust is forming a NEW u3a Council. It will act as a conduit between us members and the Board. Nominations are being sought for a Council Representative, a Council Chair and a Board Trustee. Any member can apply up to 19th December. Voting will then take place between 13th January and 21st February next year, 2025. This is a great opportunity for any member wishing to take a role in the future structure of the u3a.



More locally, members can apply for support for new or existing activity Groups to the Treasurer via [Duncan Platts](#), our Groups Liaison.

I am going down South now to distribute the family cards and presents as usual, I hope you all have a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Hope to see you all in 2025!

Richard Lewis [Chair](#) *Furness u3a*

COMMITTEE NEWS

We look forward to welcoming all the u3a members who have purchased tickets for the Christmas Social at the Coro Hall on Tuesday 3rd Dec.



Remember that during this festive month, there will be no Speaker Meeting and there won't be a Drop-in either. Back to normal on January 14th for a talk by Julian Blatchley on 'Titanic, a Seamen's Perspective'

[Ann Wilson](#) Vice Chair

GROUP NEWS

LOCAL HISTORY

One of our members, Geoff Holme, gave an excellent presentation about the construction of a miniature ride-on railway built at Holywath, an estate in Coniston, up behind the Ruskin Museum. He showed a short film of Major Hext of Holywath briefly showing how the railway was begun and how it became extended over time. Rail enthusiasts, including Geoff were depicted riding the train which runs on a narrow seven and a quarter inch rail gauge.

Geoff explained how the site first developed in the 1950s. Major Hext undertook a survey of the site but knew nothing about curvatures, gradients, tunnels etc and had to learn as the track developed. Cuttings were blasted out by quarrymen, trees cleared to prevent fires from sparks, but gradually a mile of track was laid down and he began his search for railway stock. This took 50 years, but he built up a miniature railway with several small engines from all over the country with a platform, and a signal box which came from the Furness Line. Once operating, there needed to be a maintenance gang for derailments, and all trains had to have a tail light to show that all was safely connected. A detailed register was kept of each 'journey'. These items were displayed for us to examine. One or two members of the group remember riding on this railway many years ago, when there were open days, but mostly this was an adventure for the family and guests to enjoy.

Sadly, when Major Hext died in 2009 the estate had to be sold and the whole site was dismantled.

There will be a meeting on Monday December 9th. Stan Aspinall, who is well known to many of us, is coming to talk to us about the intrigues of the Strickland Family of Sizergh Castle – following new information during research. Please come and support him, – there will be mince pies on offer.

[Sue Lydon](#)

VISITING GARDENS

On Tuesday 21st January 2025 (scary!!) we are having our planning meeting. As usual it will be at Ulverston Golf Club and starting at 10.30am. Please be early as then you will have time for coffee and, for those who wish, ordering their lunch. There will also be a slide show of all our trips this year. I have to limit the numbers so please book your place by contacting me [Diane Hill](#)

Have a great Christmas and New Year. Diane

ENVIRONMENT MATTERS



The Environment Matters Group have been out and about once again this November. For some of us, it was a first visit to Oxen Park Cinema to see the film 'Six Inches of Soil', a documentary film featuring three new farmers on the first year of their regenerative journey to heal the soil and transform the way they produce food. A fascinating film which explores the vital issue of soil health, highlighting how learning how to heal the soil could transform the future of farming.

Back in March, Hayley Slack, Communications, Education and Liaison Officer, Renewi UK Services Limited (now Biffa) gave us an insightful talk on what happens to our rubbish and invited us to visit Barrow's Waste disposal site later in the year.

And so it was, that we accepted an invitation to visit the Mechanical Biological Treatment Centre site in Barrow, one of only two sites in Cumbria, the other being on the outskirts of Carlisle. It is surprising what can be found off the A590 in Sowerby Wood Business Park.

We were met by Hayley and our visit began with a recap of the main points of the talk she had given earlier in the year. She then introduced us to Nick Clark, the site manager who showed us around the site. The plant is fully automated, and members of the group were fascinated watching how the waste was monitored from the control room.

Wagons come into the plant and empty the waste into the reception pit. From there it is put through a shredder before being transferred into the drying hall. The drying hall contains rows of waste from around the county, each row being one day's waste. It stays there for approximately two weeks as it is dried out. This is done by drawing air down through the waste and out through the floor. The air is released through a bio filter outside, which stops smells coming out of the plant. The waste is reduced in mass by around one third through this drying process.

After this it is then put through a series of drums, sieves, trommels, flip flops and magnets to take out any materials that can be recycled. We were reliably informed that none of the waste goes to landfill. So many of us throw away our rubbish after recycling as best we can, and have wondered what happens next to all this waste. Seeing behind closed doors at the MBT Centre is quite a revelation!

And another area for research and action has been highlighted for our group – BATTERIES. But more of that next time.

[Jean Ashworth](#)

WORLD HISTORY

This month in World History we looked at the period of the High Qing between 1683 and 1799. Only three emperors ruled during this time; the Kangxi Emperor, the Yong Zhang Emperor and the Qianlong Emperor.

This was a productive and expansionist period for China. Over 25 years, two Qing emperors sought to finally defeat the Dzungars.

In 1720, the Kangxi Emperor sent soldiers into Tibet, forcing the Dzungars out and taking control. In 1755, the Qianlong Emperor took advantage of a civil war in the Dzungar Khanate and defeated them once and for all. He showed the Dzungars no mercy. The conquest of Xinjiang was completed in 1759, bringing the desert cities and Uyghur population of southern Xinjiang into the Qing empire. The Qing had reached its largest extent. They ruled an empire over three times larger than that of the Ming.



The Qing were very successful in expanding agriculture by growing new crops such as sweet potato, tobacco and maize, leading to greater amounts of trade and commerce. The population also expanded. We also looked at the examination system which led to an unusual style of government administration based on a meritocracy.

Over the next few months, we will continue to look at the Qing and their relationship with the rest of the world, including the Opium wars and the eventual downfall of the Qing Empire.

Email me at [Rosie Kyles](mailto:Rosie.Kyles) if you would like to learn more about the joining the group.

OTHER NEWS

PHOTOGRAPHY COMPETITION

North West Region have announced a Photo Competition! It is to initiate a members' photo library for members. There is a range of prizes, so send your entries, a maximum of 2, via jpeg, png or iphone to editor.nwu3a@gmail.com with your name, the name of your u3a, and activity in photo. Closing date is 28th February 2025

NB: To email members of the Furness u3a Committee, go to the [Committee](#) page