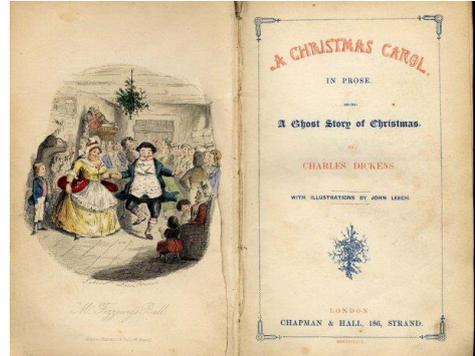


With many thanks to Pauline Adams for putting these notes together on our last three speakers.

"A Christmas Carol" – November 2016

Jonathan Jones drove all the way from Farnham, Surrey, to give the Blandford U3A pre-Christmas Open Meeting a dramatised reading of Charles Dickens's "A Christmas Carol". Although not a professional actor, Jonathan has been Farnham's honorary town crier for over 13 years, and gave us a lively rendition of this traditional festive moral tale in his strong, clear voice. He certainly looked the part in a beautiful, specially commissioned waistcoat - one that Dickens himself would have admired.



As Dickens entitled the work "A Christmas Carol", the chapters are called staves (i.e. stanzas of a song). He wrote it in only six weeks. With a publication date of 19 December 1843, the 6,000 copies, priced at 5 shillings (£22 in today's money), sold out by Christmas eve. By the end of 1844 eleven more editions had been printed, and since then it has never been out of print.

Written at a time when carol singing was being revived and new Christmas traditions like trees and card giving were becoming popular, Dickens tapped into and contributed to these traditions, including popularising the phrase "Merry Christmas".

Jonathan Jones follows in the footsteps of Dickens in his dramatic reading of "A Christmas Carol". Up to the year of his death (1870) Dickens had performed the story 127 times.

"Treading the Boards off Stage" – January 2017



The new year got off to a great start with a fascinating talk by Wayne Bennett, a former stage manager at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden.

Wayne grew up in North Wales, the oldest of four children, which, he claimed, "makes you a bit bossy", trains you in leadership skills and prepares you for a life as a stage manager at the Royal Opera House! Although he originally wanted to go to the BBC, he found the stage more exciting. After a stage management course at the Academy of Music and

Arts he worked at the Royal Court and the Greenwich Theatre. Wayne loves music and was delighted to become stage manager at the Royal Opera House.

Originally a playhouse, in 1734 the first ballet was presented and a year later Handel's first season of operas began. The current building is the third on the site, following disastrous fires in 1808 and 1856, and only the facade, foyer and auditorium date from

1858. Almost every other element of the present complex dates from an extensive reconstruction in the 1990s.

Although giving the venue a unique and special atmosphere, the Royal Opera House's historical character causes problems too. Wayne spoke about the old, and modern, techniques used to put on a production, as well as the formidable talents who have worked there, both on and off stage.

“The Road to Mandalay” – March 2017

The March Open Meeting heard about Christine Shaw's visit to Myanmar (formerly known as Burma) in Spring 2012. It was only the second such tour group to visit the country in recent years. She was struck by the charm of the people and impressed by the magnificent temples in one of the most devout Buddhist countries in the world.

Shortly after arriving in Mandalay, Christine went on a trip which started in the early hours of the morning. It was still dark when she was guided up teak steps onto a bridge which, at 1,320 yards long, is the longest teak footbridge in the world. Eventually Christine arrived at a small place to have tea and enjoyed the spectacle of Ubein bridge, reflected in the shallow lake it traversed, gradually coming to life as villagers began their morning commute.

In a backstreet garage, a play was performed by the Moustache Brothers. In 1996 they had performed in Ang San Suu Kyi's garden. Two of them were arrested and imprisoned for 5 years (with hard labour), although released two years early after criticism in America. Told they could not be hired for work in theatres or public places, they now do demonstration performances without makeup or costumes, but only for foreign visitors, every penny earned going to political prisoners and their families.

Christine showed some of her beautiful photographs taken during her trip. She enjoyed a boat trip to visit villagers making exquisite crafts, and was captivated by the Shwedagon Pagoda. At over 300 feet high, gold plated, with a diamond at its tip, the Shwedagon Pagoda was the highlight of Christine's trip.