

Retired Staff Association

NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER 2024
Issue 48

Celebrating six decades of education, research and infinite curiosity



The Oculus at the University of Warwick

In 2025, the University celebrates its 60th anniversary. Since the first 450 undergraduates came to start their studies in October, 1965, Warwick has risen rapidly: by the end of 2023, it had 28,000 students, of whom over 9,000 were postgraduates; it has consistently been in the top ten UK universities in the league tables and is currently ranked among the top five per cent of universities worldwide, with 92% of its research judged world-leading.



The University is planning a series of celebratory events on campus and in the local community that we are all invited to join. More events will be added as Warwick goes into its 60th year in 2025. Visit warwick.ac.uk/about/60

At WRSA, we, too, will be celebrating Warwick's 60th anniversary: overleaf, our Chair, Malcolm Cooper, outlines our plans.



Marking the University's 60th anniversary

Warwick University has a very significant anniversary in 2025: it will be 60 years old and Warwick Retired Staff Association will definitely be joining in the celebration of this important landmark.

Many of us were here in the early years and remember a very different university. For a start in the pioneering years it was small, unrecognisably small by today's standards and, although this engendered a strong esprit de corps amongst the staff, everything was not always rosy: remember the book *Warwick University Limited* by E P Thompson and the student unrest in the early days. However, the University kept growing, even if it was wedded to white-tiled buildings for far too long! The benefits of having been endowed with such a large campus became more and more apparent as new departments were created in new buildings and often subsequently expanded. The first Sports Centre was opened and our wonderful Warwick Arts Centre was born. At the same time the University progressively achieved higher and higher ratings nationally, increasingly appearing at the right end of the various UK university league tables. It was a success story! Warwick became a great place to be for staff and students alike.

All of us in WRSA have contributed in many different ways to the success of our university and we will be celebrating our 60 years of progress in 2025. To begin with, the WRSA Spring meeting on the 7th April 2025 will feature the Provost, Emma Flynn, who will talk about the University's celebrations. Then on 13th October, after our AGM, the Vice-Chancellor, Stuart Croft, will talk to us before lunch about the University's future plans. On this occasion we will have a 'proper lunch' in the main Scarman dining room and then mount our own afternoon session celebrating our Diamond Jubilee.



Brand new Rootes Residences in the 1960s

Amongst those who have agreed to say a few words about the University in their day are:

Roger Whittenbury

Landscaping the Fledgling University

Robert Dyson

The Rise of the Business School

Denis Welchman

The Work of the Estates Office

Michael Shattock

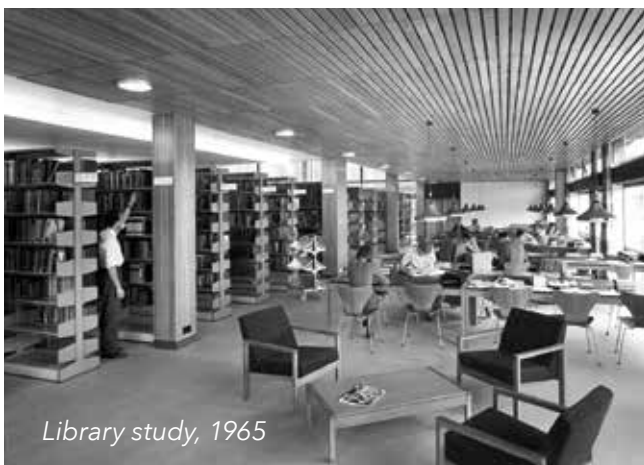
Key Decisions in Warwick's Early Days

Stuart Palmer

The University at the Turn of the Century

Rosie Drinkwater

Financing the University in the 21st Century



Library study, 1965

I believe that Monday 13th October 2025 will be an occasion to remember, especially as many of us have been around from the University's formative years to the recent decades and can identify with much of what our speakers will say. Please make a note of the 2025 dates for your diary and make 2025 a very special year for you as a WRSA member. Now that our web pages are at last 'live on-line' it's so much easier to pay your annual subscription, sign up for our meetings etc. Finally, don't forget to join in our regular ongoing programme of countryside walks and look out for emails about the excursions that will be organised for next year.

Malcolm Cooper

Appointment of new University Chancellor

The University has announced the appointment of Namibian lawyer, diplomat and social justice advocate, Bience Gawanas, as its new chancellor. Bience fought against the South African apartheid-era government and was forced into exile. She came to Warwick as a refugee to undertake her legal studies as part of a scholarship scheme, graduating in 1986 and qualifying as a barrister at Lincoln's Inn the following year. Her subsequent career involved important public roles in Namibia, in the African Union, and as an Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations. Bience will be Warwick's seventh Chancellor, taking over from the outgoing Chancellor, Baroness Catherine Ashton, in January 2025.



Bience Gawanas

Warwick announces £700m capital investment on campus



The University has recently unveiled a £700m investment in campus facilities, as part of its ambitious Connect Programme that focuses on the Social Sciences and STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), facilitating an expansion in interdisciplinary education, research opportunities and new courses in both areas. Construction for the STEM Connect Programme will begin in the next 12 months, providing innovative spaces, from teaching rooms to laboratories, for new state-of-the-art research and education programmes. This is the largest single investment in campus facilities in the University's 60 year history, and aims to create an environment combining excellence with an interdisciplinary culture to address the world's most pressing challenges.

Students' Kitchen Kit market raises £5000 for charity

The Kitchen Kit Market, organised by Warwick students during Welcome Week, raised £5000 for Carriers of Hope, a Coventry-based charity supporting refugees and asylum seekers. Over 1000 students were able to purchase pre-loved kitchen items on a 'pay as you feel' basis, picking up bargains to fill their new homes and simultaneously reducing carbon emissions by preventing around two tonnes of kitchenware from going to waste.



The Warwick Kitchen Kit Market

High rankings for Warwick

The University has been ranked 106th globally in the 2024 Times Higher Education World University Rankings, placing it in the top 5% of the 2000 universities ranked and underscoring its sustained strength in teaching, research quality, research environment, international outlook and industrial collaboration. In the latest Knowledge Exchange Framework Assessment, Warwick again excelled, surpassing the sector average in key areas such as business engagement and research partnerships. And Warwick's Centre for Teacher Education has earned an 'Outstanding' rating in a recent Ofsted inspection which praised its excellence in preparing trainees for successful, long-term careers in education.

Developing sustainable alternatives for plastics

Warwick researchers have made significant progress in the search for sustainable alternatives to plastics – for long a mainstay in modern manufacturing, but with a significant impact on the environment that has increased demand for eco-friendly alternatives. The research team, based in the Department of Chemistry, has discovered that certain mixtures of small organic molecules form interesting glasses and liquids that are promising candidates for replacing polymers in various products.

Talking to Marco Polo



Researchers at Warwick have unveiled AI Marco Polo, technology that allows users to have interactive conversations with the legendary explorer, delving into his adventures and the different cultures he encountered on his journeys. This initiative has been launched as part of the Marco Polo International Programme, in which Warwick is collaborating with 36 global institutions to champion the power, importance and impact of cultural interaction and engagement. The programme, in which the Warwick Venice Centre is greatly involved, underlines Warwick's commitment to connecting cross-cultural and global connections.



In memoriam: Sir Shridath 'Sonny' Ramphal

We are sad to announce the death in August of Sir Shridath 'Sonny' Ramphal, Chancellor of the University from 1989 to 2002. Sir Sonny was Warwick's third Chancellor, leading the University at a time of great growth and expansion. Student numbers rose to 18,000 in 2002 and over £150m was invested in new buildings on campus, including a new teaching building, the Ramphal, named after the Chancellor himself. Sir Sonny was an international statesman, who was Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, 1975-1990, and Special Adviser to the Secretary-General of the United Nations on Environment and Development; in his home country of Guyana, he was Minister for Foreign Affairs and Justice. Many of us remember the grace and obvious enjoyment with which he presided over our degree Congregations, clearly taking pride in the achievements of our students.



Walking Group news

WRSA members have always enjoyed their walks, and, of course, the pub lunches afterwards! We are keen now to find someone to take on the role of Walks Co-ordinator. Please contact the WRSA Chair, **Malcolm Cooper**, if you feel you could do so.

Image: Pixabay

'This brought us to the corner of Elkin Wood, famous locally for its spring displays of bluebells'

We crossed one of these fields, taking in part of the Coventry Way, to our only stile of the walk, and further on reached a single track road, Harvest Hill Lane. No cars passed us as we walked along this quiet country lane admiring a few very attractive rural properties. At this point walkers were side-tracked by huge, delicious, blackberries hanging from the bushes. We turned off and covered more farm land which was scattered liberally with harvested potatoes. This brought us to the corner of Elkin Wood, famous locally for its spring displays of bluebells, where we joined another very narrow old country lane, Watery Lane. With only one car passing us, we strolled back up a long, gentle, drag to the Bull and Butcher where we enjoyed typical English pub grub.

A few partakers expressed surprise at the quiet, rural, area sited so close to a major city. No problem with the rain gods this month!

Les Rainsley



Image: Franc Buxton

Bulls, Butchers, birds and blackberries 22 August 2024

Twenty- two walkers met at the Bull and Butcher public house in Corley Moor, eager to explore the scenic Warwickshire countryside and enjoy the good weather after having been cursed by the rain gods the preceding month.

We set out down Windmill Lane admiring the windmill before turning through an almost unnoticeable kissing gate into a green wooded pasture. This led us between hedges and

trees into The Heart of England Centre which has a few large ponds within the grounds. As we passed through, several flocks of large geese descended over our heads to join the large throng of swallows and pied wagtails on or by the water. The chosen path meandered through the grounds and out onto farm land where a few fields appeared to be planted with beautifully coloured wild flowers... winter feed?

Image: Franc Buxton



Walk near Wootton Wawen

25 September 2024

On Wednesday 25th September, seven of us gathered for a walk from The View restaurant near Wootton Wawen. The walk had been planned by Margaret Parker but because of the sudden illness of her husband Richard she was unable to lead it. Nothing daunted and encouraged by ideal walking weather, we set off and it transpired that two of us had done the walk in the opposite direction some years before. In beautiful sunshine we crossed an enormous field full largely but not entirely of sunflowers. There were also many other seeding plants including an at first mysterious dark red plant which we eventually identified as quinoa. At first we thought that the farmer had been negligent and that some of what we saw was last year's crop, but we eventually realised that this was a field for the birds (or at least for bird seed). It was a splendid spectacle. We then passed through an attractive wood before

descending to the canal and walking along it back to The View, passing a busy canal basin with many colourful narrow boats. We all had very good lunches and enjoyed the excellent view from our table on the first floor in the restaurant. Perhaps the heavy rain in the previous days had put off more takers for this fine walk, but in fact the going was very good all the way, and we are very grateful to Margaret for suggesting it and giving us a memorable day out.

Godfrey Carr

'In beautiful sunshine we crossed an enormous field full largely but not entirely of sunflowers'



Image: Pixabay

Recollections of eight years as the Committee Visits Organiser

by Denis Welchman

Kew Gardens. Image: Unsplash

I took over from Alan Foster in October 2014, having been persuaded that it did not take too much time!

I selected Bletchley Park for my first foray in May 2015. *The Imitation Game*, starring Benedict Cumberbatch as Alan Turing, had been fairly recently filmed partly at Bletchley and in the main house there were various artifacts from the film. However, my interest lay elsewhere. My father's cousin was Gordon Welchman, in charge of Hut 6 working on German army and naval messages. Whilst Turing improved the early computer designed to interpret and break the German Enigma codes, Gordon developed it into a much more powerful instrument by his additional element, known as the Diagonal Board. His contribution was somewhat overlooked by the British authorities and Gordon departed after the war to the USA where he took up a post at MIT.

Trip number two was to Cardiff in November 2015. Memorable for the wrong reasons. Coaches are equipped with a device which allows them to pay road tolls remotely without stopping. However, on this occasion, the 'thing' attached to the windscreen refused to work at the Severn Bridge. The driver had no cash, so I ended up passing him a £20 note to enable us to proceed. The first 'named storm' of the winter was due to arrive that day and it duly did: by the time we left, it was pretty awful. However, members enjoyed the day and managed to see some of the sights including the Castle and the National Assembly for Wales.

In November 2016, we were off to Bath for the Christmas Market. We had a crisp, dry day and the

various stalls were delightful. Bath was my wife's local 'place to go' as a child and teenager, so she was able to reminisce and try to find the places she remembered. Bath offers so much with the Abbey, the architecture and the Baths, and the Pulteney Bridge over the River Avon.

In May 2017, we were off to the Churchill War Rooms off Whitehall in London. After the M40, the traffic got worse and worse and the driver tried to find an alternative route but every turn was met with a traffic jam. We twisted and turned, even going through Berkeley Square (no nightingales singing at the time). We had a timed slot for the venue but were an hour late. Luckily, they managed to find us an alternative slot and we were ushered into a private briefing room. After the briefing we were free to explore the underground facility used by Churchill throughout the Second World War. It was a fascinating day.

The late 2017 trip was to Cambridge. Again, an almost capacity coach set off on a chilly but fine day. Students were everywhere, all going in different directions from their colleges to lectures etc, or whatever students get up to! The architecture of the colleges is something to behold with King's College Chapel being the highlight for me. The Corpus Clock, outside the Taylor Library of Corpus Christi College, is possibly the strangest clock in the world, unveiled in 2008 by the late Stephen Hawking and only accurate every five minutes. It wasn't an ideal day for punting but there were a few out enjoying the view of the Backs.

It must be 40 years since I visited Kew Gardens, so I thought it was time to return in May 2018. We had a glorious day with perfect May weather. With so much to see, it was difficult to choose – Queen Charlotte's House, the Treetop Walk, The Palm or Temperate House, or the Pagoda? Unfortunately, the Treetop Walk was closed, but the Palm House was definitely a highlight of the day. As always with Kew, time ran out.

Next came to Supreme Court in London in August 2018. The Court is relatively new (2009) and replaces the House of Lords as the final court of appeal in the country. It occupies a building in the south west corner of Parliament Square, formerly Middlesex Guildhall, opposite Westminster Abbey. Once through security we were met, appropriately, by a Warwick graduate who guided us through the three court rooms and the library, normally not open to the public. The Courts have a different feel from the usual layout, with the judges sitting at the same level as the rest of the court. There is no witness box and the court doesn't try cases. Lawyers present the facts of a particular case of public interest and the court decides on the law. A fascinating day.

A change of direction for the May 2019 trip: off to Tynesfield in North Somerset. Tynesfield is a

National Trust property, owned by the Gibbs family from 1844. Their wealth came from guano in Peru which was used to fertilise agricultural land. The house was enlarged and 'modernised' by three generations of the family but the Wall Street Crash, and the Second World War took its toll on the house and family fortunes and the last Gibb member died in 2001. The National Trust managed to secure it for the nation as one of the most complete Victorian country houses and estates along with a unique collection of family possessions. It was a very interesting day and, once again, the weather gods were on our side.

For the Christmas visit in 2019, we headed north to York. The Christmas market was in full swing and there was a great atmosphere. There are many attractions in York, such as the Jorvik Centre, the Shambles, the Cathedral, the National Railway Museum, the Mansion House, plus many fine restaurants. The big disappointment was that St John's University was holding its Degree Congregation in the Cathedral which was

closed for the day. I personally wanted to see the Railway Museum again, not having been there since 1982. Whilst Jill and I managed a few minutes there, the departure time was fast approaching and a hurried walk back across the river was necessary.

Then came covid ...

In August 2023, I began thinking about a winter trip. I had never been to the Black Country Living Museum and hoped it would appeal. We managed to get around 35 members to sign up. However, right at the last minute we had to change the date. Fortunately, only a few members were unable to change their plans so with a modest 30 or so on board the coach, Kay Rainsley very kindly hosted the day as, unfortunately, I was unable to make it.

You can read a longer version of this article on the WRSA website: warwick.ac.uk/assoc/rsa



The Royal Crescent, Bath. Image: Unsplash

*'Students were everywhere,
all going in different directions
from their colleges to lectures
etc, or whatever students
get up to!'*

Diamonds and AI

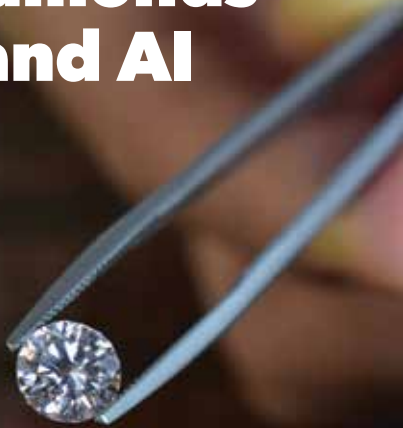


Image: Pixabay

The speaker at this year's spring meeting was Professor Mark Newton, Department of Physics who talked about diamonds – not just the sort that are 'a girl's best friend', but 'industrial' diamonds used in industry because of their hardness and synthetic or lab-grown diamonds, now frequently used in jewellery.

Mark explained that diamonds have the potential to outperform traditional materials in areas such as, for example, optics and electronics. A fascinating talk, including an interesting moral problem: what do you do if someone proudly shows you a diamond ring, under the impression it's a 'real' diamond and you know it's actually synthetic?

At our October meeting, Luke Robert Mason gave us a talk entitled 'AI's Guide to Being Human'. Luke is a PhD student in the Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies whose research focuses on the public perception of humanoid robots. He talked about our relationships with robots and our approaches to them. He discussed the need for universities to make decisions about students' use of AI and described how this had been done at Warwick. AI, he said, makes us question human identity, but digital humanity is a skewed humanity. We greatly enjoyed Luke's talk, shedding light on a subject that for many is both baffling and worrying.



Image: Pixabay

Volunteering with Coventry Citizens Advice

Are you looking for a new challenge?
Do you want to help people in Coventry struggling with rising household bills, employment issues and energy prices?

Coventry Citizens Advice are a local, free, independent advice-giving charity. They need volunteers from all backgrounds, who can give their time to help people in Coventry find a way through their problems. Full training and support are provided to enable volunteers to not only support clients but also flourish themselves.

The right advice can change someone's life for the better. A client from the outreach project in foodbanks said, 'I just cannot thank you enough for everything you have done for us. You can't imagine the relief I feel, like a huge weight has been lifted.'

Not only are clients' lives changed but volunteers also find it fulfilling to give something back to society. Volunteer, Anna, said:

'I enjoy volunteering at Coventry Citizens Advice in a multi-cultural environment. I'm learning new skills, meeting lots of different people and making a positive difference to client's lives. I really enjoy what I do.'

Volunteers come from all walks of life and choose to volunteer for a variety of reasons. Marian Nelson, Volunteer and Training Co-ordinator said:

'If you are passionate about helping others, interested in people, patient and methodical, and have the time to offer we would love to hear from you.'

The charity requires a minimum time commitment of one day per week, which can be spilt over two days, plus time for home learning. Initial training and supervision will take place at our offices in Coventry. Following this flexibility to volunteer from home is possible. Volunteers are reimbursed for reasonable expenses they incur.

More information can be found on the website www.coventrycitizensadvice.org.uk/volunteer/



Volunteer Anna, making calls



Image: Pixabay

Membership Secretary's Report

A message from WRSA secretary, Brenda Wilson

On 5th November 2024, I was made aware that BT has changed its safety protocols and is blocking emails from 'rsa@warwick.ac.uk'. I have written from my gmail account to all those members with btinternet.com addresses with this advice:

1. Go to the Settings tab on your BT email account (tab usually looks like a cog wheel)
2. Select the 'Safe Senders' folder
3. Click 'Add'
4. Enter the email address you want to mark as safe: **rsa@warwick.ac.uk**
5. Click 'Save'
6. A confirmation message will appear to confirm the email address has been added.

The RSA Committee, 2024-2025

Chair:

Malcolm Cooper

Secretary

Brenda Wilson

Minuting Secretary

Alexandra Withnall

Treasurer

Cathy Charlton

Membership Secretary

Helen Blunt

Visits Co-ordinator

Kay Rainsley

Walks Co-ordinator: TBA

Committee Members

Sandra Beaufoy

Robert Dyson

Ala Szczepura

Helen Wollerton

Newsletter Editor

Roberta Warman

The Warwick Retired Staff Association currently has 186 members as at the start of October 2024. Twenty-five new members have joined this year and twenty-eight did not rejoin from 2023 for a variety of reasons.

We are keen to increase the membership so please encourage any former colleagues who have retired to join. Applications for membership will be accepted from people who worked for the University at some point in their career and have retired. Further information and an application form can be found on the Retired Staff Association website: **warwick.ac.uk/assoc/rsa**.

Membership for 2025 will run from January to December and the subscription for the year is £15 per person. Membership must be renewed each year by completing the membership renewal form and paying the subscription before 31st March.

Members can have a University ID retired staff card which enables them to borrow books from the University Library and use the Sports Hub at the preferential rate for staff. If you have a card already, it will continue to be valid for as long as you retain your membership of the Retired Staff Association. If you do not have one and would like one, please indicate this on the renewal form and the membership secretary will get in touch with you to ask for additional data which is required by HR to produce the cards.

Spouses and partners of members can be included in the membership as Associate Members (please note that this only applies if the spouse/partner did not work for the University as all those who were employees will be full members). There is no subscription charge for Associate Members and they can join in all Retired Staff Association activities. However, they cannot hold a University retired staff card to use the Library and Sports Hub. Widows/widowers of people who were previously full members are also welcome as Associate Members and will be able to complete a membership form indicating that they are joining/re-joining in this capacity.

The renewal form and subscription payment for 2025 is available online at **warwick.ac.uk/assoc/rsa/membership/renewal**. For those who prefer not to use the online form, please complete the form overleaf and post it to the Membership Secretary with a cheque for £15 (per full member) payable to The University of Warwick, by 31st March 2025 at the latest. After that date, members would need to re-join, as personal data cannot be stored due to data protection law.

Helen Blunt

WRSA Membership Secretary

Renewal of Membership 2025

The Renewal of Membership form and subscription payment for the Retired Staff Association is now online at: warwick.ac.uk/assoc/rsa/membership/renewal. Please note that a separate form is required for each person, irrespective of whether you are a full member or an associate member.

The Annual Subscription is £15 each for full members and free for associate members.

The deadline for renewal is 31st March 2025. Members who have not renewed by this date are welcome to re-join but will need to complete an application for new membership form available on the website as the Association is unable to hold historical personal data.

The form below is provided for existing members who prefer to renew their membership by post.

Please send a cheque payable to The University of Warwick together with the completed renewal form, to the Membership Secretary at the address given on the form. The cheque should be for £15 for each full member. There is no charge for associate members.

The Association's primary way of communication is by email, although some communication such as the Newsletter is sent by mail, so please give both addresses so that we can keep in touch with you.

Dates for your diary

7 April 2025

Spring Meeting
Speaker: Emma Flynn,
University Provost

13 October 2025

AGM/Autumn Meeting
and a celebration of the
University's 60th Anniversary

8 December 2025

Christmas Lunch

warwick.ac.uk/assoc/rsa



University of Warwick Retired Staff Association Renewal of Membership 2025



Name(s) (BLOCK capital letters please):

Address:

Post code:

Telephone no:

Email address:

Membership category: (please tick appropriate category)

- Full member (Retired University staff)
 Associate member (partner of retired member of University staff)

I/We wish/do not wish* to renew my/our* Membership for 2023 (*delete as appropriate)

Signed:

Every Member is requested to complete this form and return by 31 March 2025 at the latest to:
Mrs Helen Blunt, WRSA Membership Secretary, 3 Brese Avenue, Warwick CV34 5TS
Email: membershipwrsa@gmail.com