

# Retired Staff Association

**NEWSLETTER**

DECEMBER 2023  
Issue 47



## A Lifelong Engagement with Russia

The speaker at our autumn 2023 meeting was Professor Christopher Read, Emeritus Professor in the Department of History.

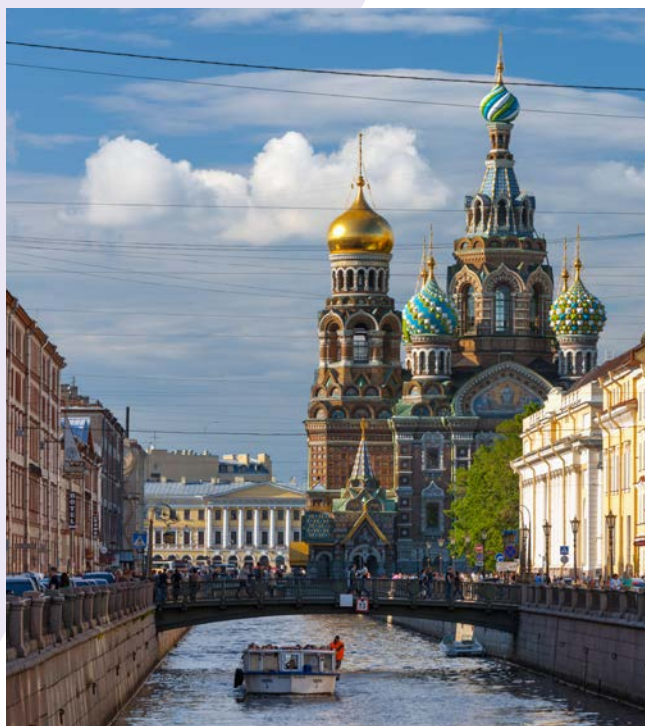
Chris outlined his background and his engagement with Russian history and culture. He emphasised that he had never been an 'ist' - Communist, Bolshevik, Leninist etc. During his studies at Keele, Glasgow and the LSE, he

developed an appreciation of Russia's culture - its novels, music and painting - and has gone on to become a Russian scholar, specifically a historian of the Russian intelligentsia in the early twentieth century.

Chris described the vastness of Russia: Moscow to Vladivostock is the same distance as London to Los Angeles or Johannesburg. A peasant country until the mid-twentieth century, its borders have been fought over and seized throughout its history - notably in both world wars, with German invasions and the deaths of millions. The country has as a result developed a 'defensive mentality' and, despite cataclysmic changes and traumas, authoritarianism has been regenerated in a new form, with the emphasis on a strong state backed by a strong military.

### **A war of choice, not of necessity**

He then turned to the present conflict between Russia and Ukraine, described by Boris Johnson as a war between 'good' and 'evil' and by President Putin as 'an operation to protect people... facing... genocide'. Russian scholars have no doubt that this invasion is Putin's war - a war of choice, not of necessity. Nevertheless, we should try to look dispassionately at claims and counter-claims about the conduct of and the reasons for the war, although the lack of reliable information makes this very difficult. He was not hopeful of Ukraine's success in the conflict, pointing out that, despite the Minsk Accords of 2014 and 2015, designed to secure a ceasefire in the disputed eastern regions of Ukraine, fighting has continued there for years. It was difficult to see how Ukraine could win the present war, without direct NATO involvement, aka WW3 and nuclear obliteration. The prospect for Ukraine seems grim, especially if the USA were to withdraw its support.



Professor Read believes that the West missed a golden opportunity to reconcile relations with Russia during the period of Mikhail Gorbachev's *glasnost* and in 1991, when Boris Yeltsin became President of the newly independent Russian state. Europe and its allies could at that point have worked to bring Russia into the European security apparatus and to calm its fears of being de-stabilised, thus assisting the development of democracy and the rule of law. How different the world might be if this had happened!

### **IN MEMORIAM**

## **Professor David VanderLinde**



We are sad to report the death in the summer of Professor David VanderLinde, Vice- Chancellor of the University, 2001-2006. David led Warwick through a period of fast growth and development: the establishment of Warwick HRI and the opening of the new Mathematics and Statistics Building; the appointment of the first Dean of Warwick Medical School and the opening of the new University Hospital Coventry; the establishment of the National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth (NAGTY) - a government initiative for high-achieving secondary school students.

He encouraged Warwick to develop an enhanced international strategy and to forge closer links with its local community. He stressed the importance of effective University fundraising, and of nurturing the alumni base, and appointed Warwick's first Director of Development, initiating a process that, in just the last five years, has seen 4,500 donors give over £32.8million to the University. He will be fondly remembered by all RSA members who worked with him.

*Portrait of Professor David VandeLinde  
by John Keane*

## New base for Warwick in Venice

On 22 June, Warwick opened its new base in Venice, situated in the 17th century Palazzo Giustinian Lolin, overlooking the Grand Canal.

The accommodation will be used for teaching Venice Term students in History and History of Art, for researchers and for seminars and summer schools, welcoming staff and students from a broad range of disciplines and international partnerships. Warwick has had a presence in Venice since 1967 and was previously based in the Palazzo Pesaro Papafava in the city's Cannaregio district.

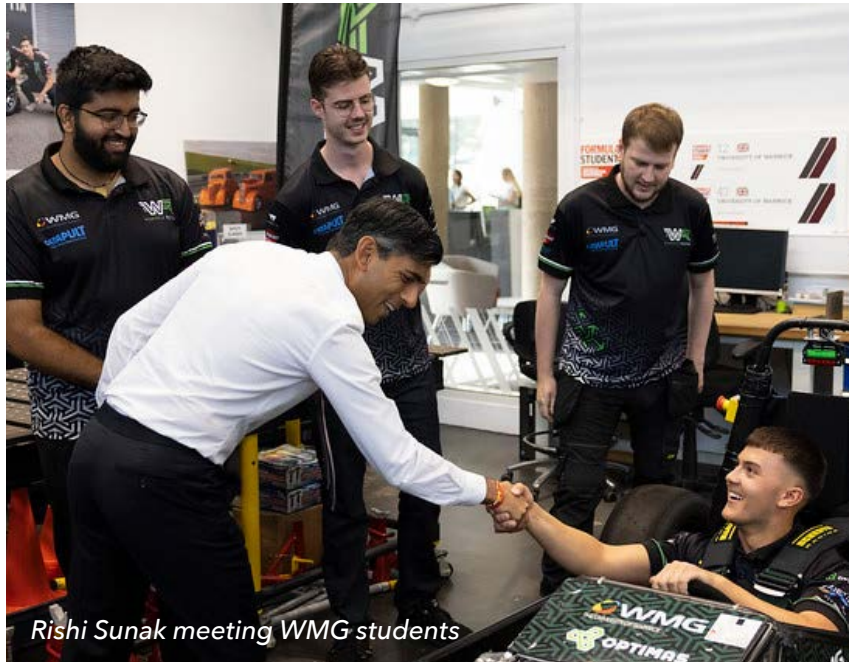
*Warwick in Venice - the new home*



## Prime Minister visits Warwick

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak came to Warwick on 7 September to announce that the UK would re-join the EU's flagship research scheme, Horizon.

This means that UK-based researchers will be able to access funding from the £85 billion programme - a major boost for UK research and for the higher education sector. With our world-class reputation for research and innovation, and close ties with research partners across Europe, Warwick was the obvious choice as the setting for this important announcement.



*Rishi Sunak meeting WMG students*

Mr Sunak was given a tour of the International Manufacturing Centre, where he saw cutting-edge 3D printing and scanning

technology and spoke to staff and students. He also held a private conversation with University leaders.



## Warwick in Top 6% of universities globally



Warwick has been ranked in the top six percent of universities globally by the *Times Higher World Education* rankings, and as one of the top universities in Europe by the first Europe-wide edition of the QR World Rankings. In the UK, the University was ranked ninth in the *Guardian University Guide*, tenth in *The Times Good University Guide*, and seventh in the *Daily Mail Good University Guide*. In the Knowledge Exchange framework, Warwick was placed in the top 20% for its strong engagement with businesses and the community, and in the latest National Student Survey was rated in the top three universities in the Russell Group. And the national Teaching Excellence Framework awarded the University triple gold – an outstanding tribute to teaching at Warwick.

## Kenilworth Castle Trip - STAR Youth Club

Warwick STAR (Student Action for Refugees) aims to raise awareness of refugee and asylum issues and provide practical support through volunteering in the local community. Warwick Volunteers supports the society to run Conversation Clubs, and a Youth Club, in partnership with Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre.

Our Youth Club trip to Kenilworth Castle was the perfect example of why the funding we receive is vital in providing positive new experiences for young refugees. (As Kenilworth Castle provides free entry to those with refugee status, the funding provided was used for transport and food.) The 16 participants, with two members of Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre staff and two volunteers from Warwick STAR, had an amazing time. Some were more interested in learning about the local history, some enjoyed the interactive Minecraft games and some even dressed up in the old-fashioned costumes available. Afterwards, the participants enjoyed lunch in the gardens and played football in a nearby park – altogether, an excellent opportunity for the group to get to know better both volunteers and other participants in such a relaxed, social environment.

The trip could not have gone ahead without Warwick Volunteers, Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre or Warwick Retired Staff Association – thank you on behalf of Warwick STAR for all the help and support!

**Beck Broom**  
(STAR Student Exec and Youth Club Project Leader)

# WALKING GROUP NEWS



## Walking Group Report

Our walks have been well attended this year, with around 15 participants on each walk and there have been some excellent pub lunches. Our usual length of walk is between four and five miles and we have managed to avoid the bad weather every time. It is clear that the opportunity to be out in the fresh air, to enjoy good company and to eat together is much valued by the participants, but our activities are limited in the absence of walks leaders. Please take courage and organise a walk. It is not difficult- just find a sympathetic pub to begin with!

If you would like to join us for a walk, let me know and I will send you details of the date, time and place ([walkswras@gmail.com](mailto:walkswras@gmail.com)).

For a number of reasons, I would like to hand over the role of Walks Organiser in the near future, and if anyone is willing to take it over, I would be pleased to hear from them.

With best wishes for Christmas and for good walks in the New Year to all members,

**Godfrey Carr**

*Walks photos courtesy of Franc Buxton*

### Leek Wootton walk,

28 February 2023

Seventeen WRSA members gathered in the car park of the Anchor Inn in Leek Wootton on a pleasant morning, though the ground was still quite wet underfoot in places, following recent rainy weather. The leader was to have been Godfrey Carr, but as he was suffering from a strained achilles tendon, Bob Cooke stepped in. We ordered lunch before we began the walk.

We set off along the Warwick Road, turning right to pass through the churchyard and on to enter the Warwickshire Golf Club course at its south eastern corner. From here we walked past the Fitness Centre and onto the perimeter road, which took us, after about a mile, past the Driving Range.

From here, we crossed the course to its northern edge, where the path, outside the golf course, followed the edge of what used to be the Earl of Warwick's fish ponds. We avoided a muddy stretch of the Centenary Way by using the driveway to Goodrest Farm, passing a WW2 artillery position, before turning right onto Rouncil Lane. About 200 yards along here, we went through a lay-by on its south side, to reach a path across an arable field

which took us back to the eastern edge of the golf course, where it runs near to the Warwickshire Police headquarters.

This path took us to just before the church, where we turned left on a 'tink-a-tank' passageway between high hedges. Apparently, the term comes from the echo sound produced by boots when the sides are walls or fences rather than hedges. This passageway, followed by Woodcote Lane, took us back to the Anchor Inn, where we had a very good lunch.

**Bob Cooke**



## Bluebell Walk

April 2023

Around 20 members enjoyed a four mile spring walk in Brandon Woods, followed by lunch at The Roseycombe pub in Binley Woods.

We walked in the wood, around the edges and across the heath. As well as the bluebells, there were many other wild flowers to see - buttercups and celandines, primroses and cowslips, violets ... although fewer butterflies than the week before, as it wasn't a very sunny day.

Margaret Parker



## Thurlaston to Drayton

23 May 2023



Thirteen of us met on Main St, Thurlaston, in ideal walking weather. We set off down a lane and then across a huge ploughed field which would have been rather sticky in wet weather.

Then we emerged into a very impressive golf course which we traversed, finding a well hidden entry into a right of way at the far side. This took us via a rather insubstantial bridge over a small stream into a marshy area of woodland. After emerging and crossing a field we were on a minor road leading to Draycote with very fine views of the reservoir and distant Northamptonshire. We walked underneath the bridge of a disused railway leading to Rugby which has now been converted into a cycle track. Almost immediately turning left, we entered a small but special nature reserve owned by Warwickshire Wildlife. The grassy field was full of green winged orchids.

When we carried out the pre-walk two weeks earlier the orchids were accompanied by hundreds of cowslips - a sensational sight! The area is a rare example of ancient unimproved meadow. A gate in the corner of the field led to a path back towards Thurlaston. As we entered the village we took a track past some very old farm buildings on the right and a lovely pond in a huge garden on the left. We spent some time watching a grey wagtail flitting back and forward over the pond looking for prey. It was an idyllic scene and we were dismayed to hear later that there were proposals to build where the farm buildings stood. Regaining Thurlaston, which once had a pub but alas now does not, we drove to the Friendly Inn at Frankton which lived up to its name and provided a very pleasant and reasonably priced lunch.

Godfrey Carr

# Back to the Past - visit to the Black Country Living Museum



**I can honestly say that I have never banged my head so much as I did in our 30 minute trip down the coalmine. Nobody would describe me as tall so it is a novelty for me to have to bend down when passing through spaces.**

Luckily we were all wearing helmets and there was a constant banging as people crashed into the pit props. In addition to the uneven floor we were sharing one torch between four. Our torch bearer was a six year old lad with a broken foot in a boot. It didn't seem to slow him down as we made our way through the seams of the pit. Working in candlelit, cramped, damp, conditions the miners of yore extracted coal and slack from the drift mine to feed the fires of furnaces and homes. Pit ponies hauled the trucks along the passages and lads (some as young as ten) helped by leading the ponies and opening the door as the carts approached. Women worked outside on the coal heaps separating coal from slack. The ensuing smoke and dust led to the area becoming known as the Black Country. This is where we chose to start our tour.

Other members of the group chose to ride in the buses which criss-crossed the 26 acre site taking in a row of shops, the canal, the forge, the steel mill, the school, a wide variety of houses and outbuildings including outside toilets and various pieces of machinery. There is plenty to look at and a nostalgic harking back to the 'good old days' was tempered with memories of freezing bedrooms, badly lit rooms and washing day which led to the washing being dried inside due to the filthy air outside. The roaring fires in some of the dwellings were a welcome respite from the cold.

It's a little disconcerting to recognise so many of the brands and products in the shops, which

are, after all a museum, and the sweet shop with its rows of jars brought back happy memories of choosing a quarter of pear drops or pineapple chunks on the way to Brownies.

The school promised a sound introduction to the alphabet, writing along straight lines in 'real writing' and a good grounding in reading and arithmetic. Desks were joined together in pairs (as were mine when I was at school) and the teacher was in control at all times.

We dropped into the cinema which was showing a Laurel and Hardy silent movie. There was a class of schoolchildren inside with their teachers. I don't know whether the teachers were as surprised as we were at the obvious enjoyment of the film by the kids who laughed and giggled all the way through. It was certainly one up for Laurel and Hardy for their brilliant acting capabilities. Time passed quickly and we struggled to look at everything in the allotted time. The one disappointment of the day was that the much revered Hobbs and Sons Fish and Chip Shop wasn't serving fish on the day of our visit. We consoled ourselves by buying a steak and onion pie and a portion of chips cooked in beef dripping. The smell of the chips brought in more customers from our coach party and the sight and taste of the meal didn't disappoint.

We left the past and ventured into the present as the coach delivered us back to the aptly named Memorial Park in Coventry.

**Kay Rainsley**

# Membership News

## Membership Secretary's Report

The Warwick Retired Staff Association (RSA) currently has 182 members. Formal resignations were received from 8 people this year and there are 8 new members. Last year we had 191.

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:

<https://warwick.ac.uk/assoc/rsa>

Membership for 2024 will run from January to December and the subscription for the year is £15 per person. Members may include their partner for no extra charge as an Associate Member. Please include both names on the Membership Renewal Form. Associate Members can join in all RSA activities but are not entitled to a card to use the Library and Sports Hub. Widows/widowers of people who were previously full members are also welcome as associate members.

Full 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 would like one, please request by email to the Membership Secretary who will advise you about the process. Apologies to members who have experienced problems with these cards this year: the transition from an old to a new card system at the University in October 2023 caused problems for members who use the library and those who requested a new card. We have been advised that the glitches in the new card system have now been resolved.

The membership renewal form for 2024 is enclosed.

**Helen Blunt**

**WRSA Membership Secretary**

## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

**8 April 2024** - Spring Meeting

**7 October 2024** - Autumn meeting and AGM: speakers for both meetings will be announced on the website.

[www.warwick.ac.uk/assoc/rsa](http://www.warwick.ac.uk/assoc/rsa)



## Addressing sustainability in a round-about way

The roundabout at the bottom of Scarman Road – a familiar landmark to all of us going to RSA events – has been named Roundabout of the Year, in recognition of its planting that promotes biodiversity and protects the local ecosystem. It will appear in Kevin Beresford's *Best of British Roundabouts Calendar 2024*.



### The RSA Committee, 2023-2024

**Chair:** Malcolm Cooper

**Treasurer:** (temporarily)  
Russell Moseley

**Secretary:** Brenda Wilson

**Membership Secretary:**  
Helen Blunt

**Visits Co-ordinator:**  
Kay Rainsley

**Minuting Secretary:**  
Alexandra Withnall

**Committee members:**  
Denis Welchman  
Helen Wollerton

Ala Szczepura  
Robert Dyson

**Newsletter Editor:**  
Roberta Warman