

# The Victorian Era: a U3A Study Day 5<sup>th</sup> June 2019

200 years and 12 days after the birth of Queen Victoria, 45 local U3A members settled down to a number of presentations about some of the cultural and technological highlights of her long reign– the longest in British history save for that of our current monarch. At the outset we learned that she was known to her family as Drina, after her first name Alexandrina, and that she ruled for 64 years from the age of 17.

Ann Johnson began by showing us a brilliant collection of Victorian paintings from Landseer to Leighton which illustrated the favourite tastes of Victorian society such as idealistic and fantastical landscapes, classical femininity and a great deal of sentimentality and moralising.

Mike Pilling then had the unenviable task of covering Victorian scientific developments in just 45 minutes which he succeeded in doing admirably without even touching on his favourite topic, entropy.



After this, the Poetry Exchange group led by Jenny Dixon, entertained us with a wide-ranging selection of readings featuring Matthew Arnold, Emily Bronte and Gerard Manley Hopkins among others. These were beautifully performed with great charm and feeling.

After a splendid lunch provided by Julie Houseman and her team, I offered a quizzical and light-hearted approach to female Victorian novelist by presenting a number of unusual facts about them and their books. The poetry group then returned with the promise of more cheerful fare than before and made us chuckle with the likes of *Jabberwocky* and the poem (later WWI song) that ends 'it's the same the whole world over, it's the poor what gets the blame...'



Finally, in spite of a failure of modern technology, Robin Leleuex was able to regale us all with a spirited explanation of how the nineteenth century railways managed to change virtually all aspects of Victorian life for the better. He included a number of contemporary quotations which informed and enhanced his talk superbly.

Many thanks to all concerned particularly to Stephen Walker who was responsible for publicising and organising the event. True to say that 'a good time was had by one and all'.

**Roger Bainbridge**