

DISS U3A MONTHLY MEETING REPORTS

For the **August** talk, **Frances Hart** as **'Mrs Mozart'** gave Diss U3A an enlightening talk on her marriage with the famous child prodigy, composer and musician, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1751 – 1791). This talk was in costume and with excerpts from Mozart's repertoire, including his final, unfinished Requiem Mass.

Constanze Mozart tells us that her husband learned all his early music skills from his father Leopold, who recognized his son's extraordinary talents and nurtured them rigorously. Some



people even accused him of hothousing his son, although his input was better appreciated after his death. As young children, Wolfgang and his sister Nannerl, were taken around Europe to listen to concerts and to perform. He met Marie Antoinette and became infatuated, at an early age, dreaming of marrying her.

By the age of 16, Wolfgang had composed several operas and concertos, still leaving time to travel, listen to gossip, roll a billiard ball and entertain others with his jokes. He was also a very good linguist.

When he was 25, Wolfgang moved to Vienna. He lodged with Constanze's family and took a fancy to her older sister, Aloysia, a soprano singer. However, when she moved away to pursue her singing career, Wolfgang and Constanze began a romance, resulting in a marriage that lasted until his untimely death. They married in 1782 when Constanze was twenty, much to the horror of Leopold. Wolfgang was not earning enough and Constanze was not the wealthy woman he had hoped his son would marry! The two young Mozarts lived beyond their means, spending money on expensive clothes, food and drink for their lavish social life. They exchanged many love letters during this marriage and had 6 children. In 1791, Wolfgang was



commissioned to write a Requiem Mass. He would start at 4.00 and work frenziedly all day. Sadly he became very ill and died before it was finished. Constanze told us she believed it was food poisoning at a Masonic lunch! Others think the rival composer Salieri poisoned him.

After Mozart's death, Constanze had no income and became destitute. Mozart had a third class funeral, for which she pawned his watch. Fortunately, one of Mozart's pupils completed the Requiem Mass. Constanze, aged 29, set up an opera company to perform her husband's works having received considerable financial support from admirers of Wolfgang such as Haydn. Constanze moved into a smaller flat in Vienna and arranged the publication of Mozart's music. She remarried to a Danish diplomat who wrote a biography of Mozart and she lived until she was 80. It is a great shame that Mozart did not live long enough to enjoy more of his successes.

Portraits of Mozart and Constanze taken from Wikipedia

The next meeting of Diss U3A will be on Thursday 3rd September, starting at 10.30 am in the United Reform Church, Diss.

The guest speaker will be Anne M. May (granddaughter of Ezra John Potter), who will give a talk entitled "A Striking Village" – Burston School Strike

For further information on Diss U3A please visit the website:
www.dissu3a.org.uk

In **July**, a talk on the original **Mid-Suffolk Light Railway and the current MSLR Museum** was given by **John Stark**, the Vice-chairman of the Board of Trustees and the Station Master at the current museum.

John explained that the Mid-Suffolk Light Railway, affectionately known as the 'Middy', was a classic case of a line built too late for the great railway age and which never paid its way. Indeed, it was effectively bankrupt before it opened and the line was never completed, the rails just petering out in the middle of a field. This gave the Middy its other nickname of "The railway to nowhere". However it still managed to struggle on, providing a useful service to the people of the area for 50 years, finally closing in 1952.

He explained the Middy was a standard gauge railway but that it was lightly constructed, hence the light railway tag. He suggested that it should be thought of as a country lane of a railway meandering through the depths of the Suffolk countryside.

The original 1900 proposal for the Mid-Suffolk Light Railway was an ambitious one. It planned to use the 1896 Light Railway Act, to fill a railway void in the middle of Suffolk and thus address the local transport problems and lessen the impact of the agricultural depression. They planned to build two lines; one from Haughley, near Stowmarket on the GER London to Norwich main line, to Halesworth, on the GER East Suffolk Line, and a second line branching off from Kenton, near Debenham, to Westerfield on the outskirts of Ipswich.

Construction of the line began in 1902 and 19 miles of line from Haughley to Laxfield were constructed together with 1½ miles from Kenton to the outskirts of Debenham. These lines opened to goods traffic in 1904. Sadly due to technical difficulties but mainly financial problems, the line to Halesworth was never completed and the spur down to Debenham was soon abandoned. Unfortunately the contractor building the line proved to be unreliable, the chairman went bankrupt, and the railway went into receivership. Despite these troubles, the railway continued to operate goods trains successfully and even opened for passenger traffic in 1908.

The line then settled down to a regular pattern of 3 trains per day each way and 1 train each way on Sunday. The trains were mixed trains, i.e. trains with wagons as well as carriages. The railway now started to provide a vital community transport service for its passengers as it meandered through the heart of Suffolk. Similarly the Middy provided an essential local transport service for all manner of goods traffic (even animals). This service was never more vital than during World War 1.

In 1924, the London and North Eastern Railway agreed to take over and run the "Middy", but only after the settlement of its debts. The Haughley to Laxfield line, as the LNER called it, continued to operate despite gradually losing most of its passenger traffic to improved roads and buses. The railway's busiest period was during World War 2 when RAF Mendlesham and RAF Horham needed supplying. The railway was even upgraded to branch-line standards, so larger locomotives could be used.

John drew the meeting's attention to the fact that World War 2 offered women full-time permanent employment on the line which continued after the war. One female porter was given temporary employment for a couple of years in World War 1. He commented upon the impact that the arrival of US airforce personnel at the two airfields on the line was a massive cultural shock for both parties. He also commented on the importance of regular permanent employment on the railway during the 20's and 30's even if it was poorly paid. He also mentioned the railway's enrolment of its staff in the local hospital benevolent fund.

The line eventually became part of British Railways on 1st January 1948, but after WW2 the railway carried less and less goods traffic and hardly any passenger traffic. British Railways therefore decided to close the line in July 1952.



One of the earliest pictures of a Middy train at Laxfield

A current MSLR train with "Wissington" pulling two Victorian carriages



Everyone might have forgotten the Middy except for Peter Paye's book in 1986 which did show a few Middy buildings were left. So in 1990, despite the fact that almost all traces of the line had disappeared, a group of enthusiasts decided that this small country railway, once so important to the area, should not be forgotten. The 'Middy', a fine example of rural English history, has been resurrected as Suffolk's only railway museum and is, ironically, probably busier now than it ever was.

Based at the old Middy station at Brockford and Wetheringsett in the heart of rural Suffolk, the MSLR Museum offers much more than just a steam train ride.

The atmosphere of a quiet country light railway in the early 20th century has been painstakingly re-created using original buildings and artefacts, together with rolling stock appropriate to the period. Educational displays and a varying programme of exhibitions all help the visitor to understand the importance of the railway to this isolated area, and to appreciate a time when life took a slower pace and everything went by train.

The Mid-Suffolk Light Railway Museum is an independent organisation controlled and operated by a Company Limited by Guarantee. It is an Accredited museum, a Registered Charity and is run entirely by volunteers. In 2014 it welcomed over five thousand visitors, with steam trains running on 30 days throughout the year, the museum opening regularly between May and September. With its unique atmosphere, the museum has won numerous awards including the Heritage Railway Association 2012 Interpretation Award, and 2014 Suffolk Museum of the Year.

Additional photos



The Middy ending in a field just Mendlesham beyond Laxfield



An afternoon train stops at in the late 1930's



A short goods train passing a little grey "Fergie" tractor in 2012



Wissington and our Victorian at Brockford station in 2012