

Syston and District

u3a

learn, laugh, live

OCT
2026

Vitality!

Official newsletter of the Syston and District u3a

CHARITY No 1180152

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Hi Everyone,

As you will have noticed autumn is quickly approaching and it may be time to look for a new group to join.

As some of you will be aware my wife, Chris, passed away on September 17th. May I take this opportunity on behalf of my family to thank you for all messages of sympathy and your cards of condolence. It has meant a lot to us.

I think you will be pleased to hear that the committee have already started to organise the Christmas Members meeting and we have decided to have the same as last year.

Clive

WE WANTED TO LET YOU KNOW

HAVE A QUERY? WANT TO SPEAK TO SOMEONE?

Occasionally, some members (or potential members) may prefer to speak to someone about an aspect of our u3a, rather than locating an email address or looking on our website.

So, we now have a contact number for Syston & District u3a, which is:



0300 102 1381

At the moment, this number goes through to Steve Kenney's (Webmaster) mobile phone, and if he is unable to answer the query, then he can advise who to contact.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS

RENEWAL NOTICES were sent out some time ago and a reminder follow up to those who haven't renewed. Please check email spam/junk in case the messages ended up there.

If you are one of the few who have not yet renewed, you have now entered a "period of grace". This means you can still renew but need to do so as a matter of urgency, otherwise you won't be able to attend our u3a meetings and groups.

If you prefer to pay via card, please bring your card along to our General Meeting on October 14th at Syston community centre, 9.45am or after the meeting 11.30am.

GROUP NEWS

NEW GROUP IDEAS

If you have any ideas for a new group, please contact Barbara Sargeant our groups co-ordinator sadu3agroups@gmail.com or speak to her at one of our monthly general meetings. Alternatively contact her assistant Angie Baker email sadu3agroupsasst@gmail.com Acting as a group organiser doesn't have to be onerous, it doesn't have to be down to just one person, and it doesn't mean you have to organise everything the group does.



New Proposed Group
Indoor Carpet Bowls
After the success of the
One Off Event
Venue Syston Community
Centre



It will be on a Friday Morning

The room is booked for the 18th September.
12 people maximum - If you are interested please
email Barbara - sadu3agroups@gmail.com
email Angie - sadu3agroupsassist@gmail.com

2ND TAI CHI GROUP

This 2nd group is now full, but you can go on a waiting list.

CROSS STITCH GROUP

The cross stitch group continues to meet on the 1st Friday of the month in the Jubilee room at Syston Community Centre from 10 until 12.

Everyone is working on their own projects, some small and some larger pieces. Our newest member has taken to it like a duck to water and is working on her 3rd piece.

We are a friendly group and have plenty of room for anyone who thinks they would like to have a go. You don't need to bring anything as I have materials and charts, I can provide for small projects. We would love to see you at our next meeting on 6th November.

Gwyn Garner





JAZZ APPRECIATION GROUP

The group held its 2nd meeting on the 1st October. We were unable to welcome a new member to the group because of her illness but hope she can attend next get together.

An emergency road closure also affected arrival times but we still were able to watch probably the best Jazz film ever made - JAZZ ON A SUMMER'S DAY made in 1958 in Newport USA which featured among many; Louis Armstrong, Mahalia Jackson, Sonny Stitt, Thelonius Monk etc (even a young Chuck Berry).

So, the promised History of Boogie Woogie will happen at the next meet plus an appreciation of early electric jazz and blues guitar musicians such as Charlie Christian, Big Bill Broonzy, Wes Montgomery, Django Rheinhardt etc.

Incidentally, always interested in ideas and introductions for future jazz topics because, although people can have quite focused views on what type of jazz they love, it's great to get a good reaction from them when listening to something virtually unknown to them before e.g. what about European Jazz (excluding UK)? Some fantastic artists and bands.

LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

The group looked at the history of Syston's Barkby Road Cemetery and the Cemetery Lodge that sits on the same site and used to house the cemetery keeper. The question of who owned the land sold to the Burial Board had been something of a mystery, one that was only solved when the u3a members who now live in the lodge scoured the house deeds. Except that it only uncovered another mystery, how come the land owner was a commercial traveller of Nottingham? That mystery has since been solved. You can read about that, and the contentious elections for the original Burial Board later in the Newsletter.

FAMILY HISTORY GROUP

We revisited using census data, a topic we haven't covered for some time. The data is collected every 10 years, but the personal level detail is subject to a 100yr embargo. As a result, only data from 1841 through to 1921 is available, but it is information that helps locate our ancestors and find out what they were doing to earn a living. Even, in some cases, if what they were doing wasn't strictly legal. Children who shouldn't have even been working, or not in the roles recorded, show up. Anyone who saw the recent repeat of "Who Do You Think You Are?" will have seen an ancestor of Joe Lycett recorded as a 10 yr old sweep, when using boys of that age was illegal. One of my own family members is shown as a prostitute in Victorian times!

As a reminder - we meet on the 3rd Tuesday each month at Syston Library 10.15 – 12.15. If you want to join us or have any questions please contact me, email juliedjohnson@yahoo.com

LITTER PICKING GROUP



We spent around an hour litter picking and 9 bags of rubbish collected plus a door and car parts. Followed by a well deserve beverage at Church view garden centre. All rubbish reported for collection using 'Love clean street' app. Next month we are litter picking around Meadow Lane, Syston.

SILK PAINTING GROUP

The Silk Painting Group has been going for five months, now and is proving popular. Each month we've tried a different technique as we develop a range of skills. At the most recent session we had a go at producing silk scarves, fixing the dyes using a microwave oven. The results were quite spectacular and surprising. Attached are some photos of members work so far.



CRAFT GROUP 2

A Bit early I know, but the craft group 2 have been busy making some little angels. I have really enjoyed making them and have now started making some flying angels too.!

Helen Disley



EVENTS – PAST, PRESENT & PLANNED

There is nothing to report on this month, but do remember that our Events Co-ordinator Angie Baker is here to help if you have a one-off event you are willing to organise. She will guide you through what is needed, which really doesn't have to be onerous.

You can email her: sadu3aevents@gmail.com

WHAT'S ON NEXT

GENERAL MEETINGS

In the Brookside Room at the Community Centre – talks usually start 10.30am

Tea/coffee and mingling from 10.00am



Wed, Oct 14 at 10:30 AM

BRIDGESCAPES OF SCOTLAND

🕒 Going

A journey celebrating Scotland's bridge and bridge-building heritage. A talk by Bruce Keith.



Wed Nov 11th @ 10.30 AM

Lynda Hill talks about Project Linus UK, which provides love, a sense of security, warmth and comfort to children, who are sick, disabled, disadvantaged or distressed by donating gifts of **NEW, HOMEMADE, WASHABLE** quilts and blankets, lovingly made by UK volunteer knitters and quilters.

Wed Dec 9th @ 10.30am

Christmas Social

The format of the last couple of years will be repeated, with musical and perhaps other entertainment on offer. Along with some nibbles – although as last year was our 10 Year Anniversary, so we splashed out a little more on refreshments. You can come along, be entertained, and chat with other members.



NATIONAL U3A ITEMS

u3a TALKS

citizens advice

Future Lives – keeping warm and cutting energy bills: practical advice and support

This session provides practical, easy-to-understand advice on managing energy costs and staying warm at home. It explains what fuel poverty is, how to spot the signs, and the impact it can have on health and wellbeing.

Wednesday 21 October at 2pm

Free – online via Zoom

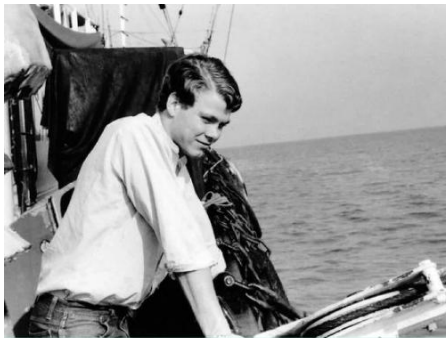


Preparing for an AI world

Explore the world of AI in this practical four-week course for beginners. Discover how to use AI chatbots, create and edit images, work with documents, improve your prompts, explore useful tools, and consider how to use AI safely and responsibly. Mondays for four weeks starting:

Monday 2 November at 2pm

Free – online via Zoom



The history of pirate radio

Nick Bailey, Bingham u3a member, will be giving an illustrated talk about his time on board the original pirate ship Radio Caroline.

Friday 30 October at 10am

Free – online via Zoom

u3a Rewind

Book [here](#)

Book [here](#)

Book [here](#)

More talks can be found [here](#)



u3a radio podcast | S3:EP59

How to get published, Commonwealth Games and life as a music exec for EMI



1X

15

15

35:19

PRIVACY SHARE SUBSCRIBE

The u3a radio podcast, set up in 2020, showcases the amazing things happening across the movement. It's created by a team of u3a members who all have radio experience and features interviews with members, interest group leaders, Trustees, national volunteers and Subject Advisers.

So you're thinking of writing a book - or already have a manuscript tucked away in a drawer – what to do next - where do you start? You're about to find out from Alysoun Owen from Bloomsbury. We talk to Bill Tancred about the Commonwealth Games on passion, friendship and lifelong learning that can stay with us long after the medals have been won. We also meet Sven Peterson - Music executive for EMI who has looked after artists like David Bowie, Pink Floyd and Tina Turner! If you would like to share your story with the u3a Radio Podcast, get in touch by emailing communications@u3a.org.uk

NOT u3a BUT YOU MIGHT BE INTERESTED



Several of the images on the next couple of pages are clickable links to more information about the event including booking places/tickets.

Birstall & District Art Society

31st Annual Art Exhibition
At the Village Hall, Birstall, LE4 4DH



Free Admission
Free Parking

Refreshments
Available

Supporting
LOROS

Saturday 31st October
Sunday 1st November

9:30 to 4:00

WWW.BADAS.UK



FRISBY PLAYERS PRESENT TWO ONE ACT PLAYS



LAST TANGO IN
LITTLE GRIMLEY
AND
A JOLLY
SINISTER JAPE

BY
DAVID TRISTAM



Frisby Village Hall
Water Lane, Frisby on the Wreake LE14 2NP
Fri 20th & Sat 21st November 2026
Doors open 7pm - curtain rises 7.30pm

TICKETS £10.00 - available from Tony Bird 07971472762
School children FREE
Payment can be made by bank transfer or cash



ZANDRA RHODES ARCHIVE UNFOLDED EXHIBITION

7th October - 15th January

DMU Art Gallery, Vijay Patel Building, Leicester, LE1 9DH

[Visit website](#)



UNIVERSITY ARCHAEOLOGY DAY

26th October

St Martins House, 7 Peacock Lane, Leicester, LE1 5PZ

[Book now](#)



STEAM WITH THE TEAM GUIDED TOUR OCTOBER 2026

24th October

Abbey Pumping Station Museum, Corporation Road, Leicester, LE4 5PX

[Book now](#)



LEICESTER CASTLE – THE CASTLE THE CITY FORGOT BY MATHEW MORRIS.

10th November

The Guildhall, Guildhall Lane, Leicester, LE1 5FQ

17 October @ 10:00 am – 31 October @ 4:00 pm

Belvoir's Enchanted Halloween Trail

Belvoir Castle Parklands Belvoir Castle, Leicestershire, United Kingdom

A pesky witch appeared at Belvoir and cursed the whole estate. The adventure playground is enchanted. The Animal Park animals have been transformed. Even the cauldron in the Retail Village has started bubbling. Only a properly brewed counter-curse can break the spell – and that means Curse Breakers. You!



FROM OUR MEMBERS

When Victorian parishes outgrew their churchyards, the Burial Acts required them to form Burial Boards — small elected bodies responsible for choosing a site, purchasing land, and managing the new cemetery. In Syston, the creation of such a Board in 1878 proved anything but routine. What should have been a simple civic appointment became a sharp contest between Church of England and Nonconformist interests, played out in packed meetings and reported in the local press.

The Syston Burial Board Elections — Church vs Nonconformist, and a Very Victorian Row

When Syston set out to form its Burial Board in 1878, few could have predicted that the process would turn into one of the most heated local contests the village had seen. What should have been a straightforward administrative step — choosing nine men to oversee the new cemetery — instead exposed deep religious divisions, competing political instincts, and accusations of questionable election tactics.

The press reports of the time make the picture clear. The central fault line was Church of England versus Nonconformist. At the first public meeting, a Churchman suggested a balanced Board: *four Churchmen, four Dissenters, and one Independent*. According to one newspaper, the Nonconformists “scouted” the idea and insisted they would not accept fewer than six out of the nine seats. Another report, however, corrected this version: the “Independent” candidate was himself a Churchman, and the suggestion was dismissed on those grounds. Either way, the proposal never became a formal motion. What happened next set the tone. The Nonconformists nominated six candidates. The Church party nominated eight.

Polling took place in the National School-room, and the village’s usual quietness “was laid aside for the day”. Crowds gathered, policemen stood by in case of trouble (none occurred), and both sides campaigned vigorously. The Nonconformists were supported by figures from Leicester’s Liberal Association — Mr Haseldine, Mr Cooper and Mr Benskin — showing how seriously they took the contest.

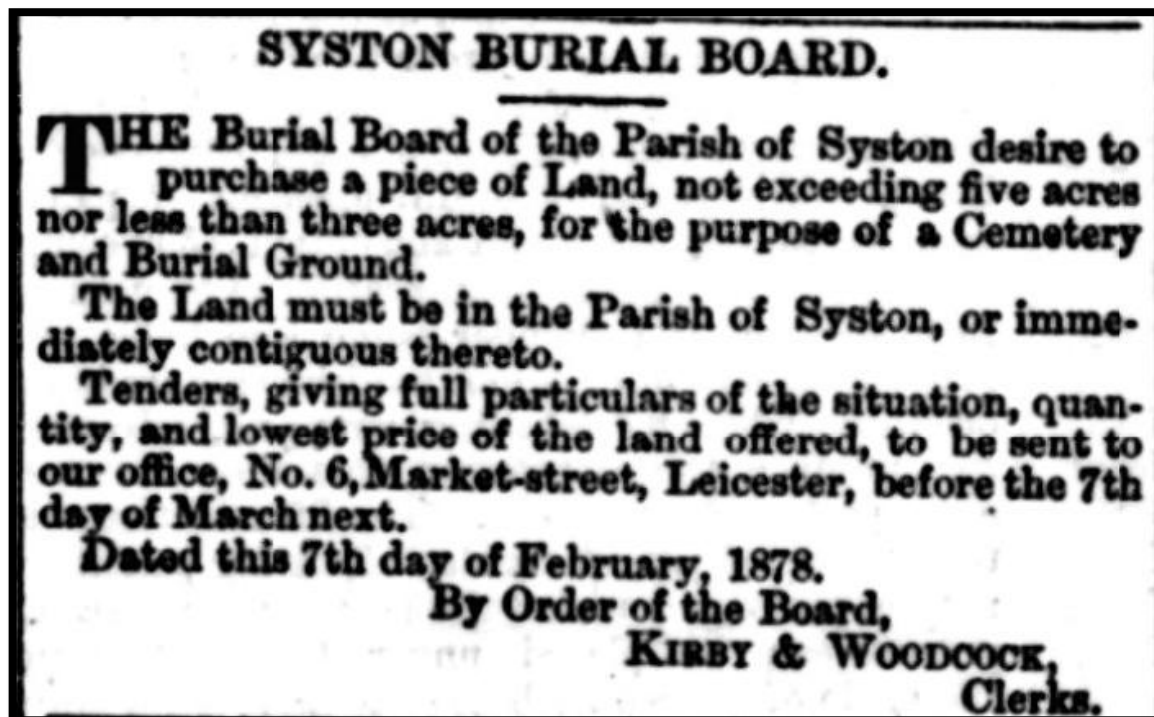
The result was decisive. All eight Church candidates were elected, along with Mr North, the Independent. Every Nonconformist candidate was defeated, and by large margins: Church candidates polled around 345–369 votes each, while Nonconformists received 158–196.

The newspapers did not hold back in their commentary. One congratulated the Church party and declared that the Nonconformists had “egregiously over-reached themselves”. Another, more sympathetic to the Dissenters, argued that the Church victory was partly due to landowners having multiple votes — “from one to six, according to the amount at which they were rated”. It also alleged “unscrupulous and unblushing practices” aimed at securing working-class votes, summarising the situation with the memorable line: “*The union of the Church and the Beer Barrel secured the present government their majority.*” The Nonconformists, that report insisted, “came out of it with clean hands”.

Looking back, the Syston Burial Board election is a vivid reminder that Victorian local governance was anything but dull. Religious identity, political influence, social hierarchy and even the price of a pint could shape the outcome. The cemetery that resulted from these decisions is a quiet place today — but its origins were forged in a contest full of energy, rivalry and very human passions.

The first practical task for the newly elected Burial Board was to purchase suitable land for the new cemetery. The Board themselves knew exactly who owned the Barkby Road parcel when they bought it in 1878 — but for us, looking back more than a century later, the vendor’s identity was far from obvious. Local histories didn’t record it, and the name did not appear in the press coverage of the time. It was only when members of our u3a examined the original deeds to the cemetery lodge — now their home — that the answer emerged: the land had been sold by George John Mountford Swain, a commercial

traveller living in Nottingham. Why a Nottingham traveller owned land in Syston, is the subject of the second article in this issue. Below is the advert that appeared in several local newspapers of the day.



George John Mountford Swain (1849–1899): The Man Behind the Cemetery Land

When Syston's Burial Board began searching for 3–6 acres of suitable land for a new cemetery in 1878, they eventually purchased a parcel on Barkby Road. The seller was George John Mountford Swain, a man living in Nottingham — a detail that was puzzling. But George's story shows that his connection to the village was stronger than his later address might suggest.

George was born in Syston in 1849, his birth registered in the Barrow upon Soar district and his baptism recorded in Syston Parish Church. He grew up on The Green, the son of John Swain, who began as a butcher and later became a cattle dealer and farmer. The 1851 and 1861 censuses show the family firmly established in Syston.

"John Swain... Butcher... Syston" (1851 census) "John Swain... Cattle dealer... George Swain... Scholar... Syston" (1861 census)

John died in 1866, leaving personal effects under £800. As "real estate" was not included in probate valuations at the time, any land he held would not appear in that figure. George was only 17, so any inherited land would have been held in trust until he reached legal majority at 21.

By 1871, George had moved to Nottingham, lodging in St Mary's parish and working as a commercial traveller.

"George Swain... Lodger... Traveller... Birth place: Leicestershire" (1871 census)

He married Annie Maria Whitehead in Nottingham in 1873 and continued working as a traveller for many years. The 1891 census shows him again in Nottingham, living with an adopted daughter — a reminder of the informal adoption practices common in Victorian households.

“George J M Swain... Commercial Traveller... Leicestershire, England” (1891 census)

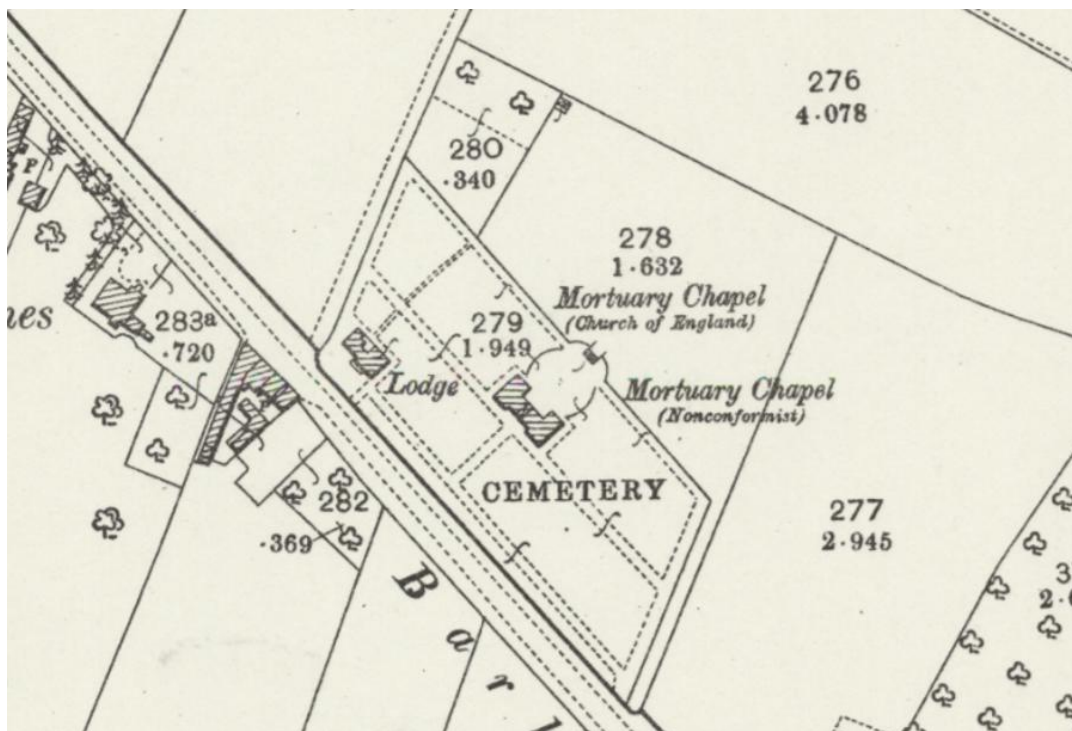
The key moment came in 1878, when Syston Burial Board advertised for land suitable for a cemetery. George, now well into adulthood and long past the age of majority, sold the Barkby Road parcel for £1000, describing himself in the deed as “of Nottingham”. The timing aligns neatly with his inheritance: he reached majority in 1870, married in 1873, and sold the land when the Board needed it.

In later life, George lived in Long Eaton, Derbyshire, where he died in 1899. His personal effects were valued at £10 — typical for someone who had sold inherited land decades earlier and worked in a travelling occupation.

“SWAIN George John Mountford... commercial traveller... Effects £10.” (Probate, 1899)

George’s story links Syston’s agricultural past with its civic development. The land his father farmed — and which George inherited — became the site chosen for the village cemetery. Although George spent much of his adult life in Nottingham and later in Long Eaton, his Syston roots were deep, and the land he sold in 1878 shaped a key part of the village landscape.

Today, visitors to Syston Cemetery walk on ground once owned by a local butcher-turned-cattle dealer and his son, the commercial traveller whose family’s land quietly became part of Syston’s history.



Map Extract from 1883 courtesy of National Library of Scotland



POETRY CORNER

THE HERO OF THE HUSTINGS

The honourable gentleman upon the hustings stood
For two hours of a summers day—a feat of lustihood—
And shouted forth, and saw'd the air with all his force and might,
The temperature higher than a hundred, Fahrenheit.
The sun above him blazing from a blue unclouded sky,
He frying like a sausage that could feel itself to fry:
It rain'd upon him cats and dogs; and likewise, it is true,
However strange the circumstance, that he was dripping too.
The undeveloped offspring of the gallinaceous tribe,
The free and independent men with many a taunt and gibe,
Launch'd also at the candidate's unvenerated head,
And frequently advised him to go home and go to bed.
Not only did this hero spout thus long upon his legs,
And brave the sun, the puppy-dogs, the kittens, and the eggs;
Not only he incurr'd the execrations of the mob,
But lost above a thousand pounds, moreover, by the job.
Such lots of money, fortitude, exertion, pluck, and nerve,
It costs to gain the privilege those gentlemen to serve,
Who yell at you and pelt you with all sorts of nasty things;
Surely a seat in Parliament some vast enjoyment brings!
Reprinted from *Punch*, in the *Wiltshire Independent*, 22 July 1852.

A COMMENTARY ON THE ELECTIONS

By the Beadle of Somerset House

Well, lawks-a-day! things seem going on uncommon queer,
For they say that the Tories are bowling out the Whigs almost everywhere;
And the blazing red of my beadle's coat is turning to pink through fear,
Lest I should find myself and staff out of Office some time about the end of the year.
I've done nothing so long but stand under the magnificent portico
Of Somerset House, that I don't know what I should do if I was for to go!
What the electors are at, I can't make out, upon my soul,
For it's a law of natur' that the *whig* should be atop of the *poll*.
I've had a snug berth of it here for some time, and don't want to cut the connexion;
But they *do* say the Whigs must go out, because they've NO OTHER ELECTION;
What they mean by that, I *don't* know, for ain't they been electioneering—
That is, they've been canvassing, and spouting, and pledging, and ginning, and beering.
Hasn't Crawford and Pattison, Lyall, Masterman, Wood, and Lord John Russell,
For ever so long been keeping the Great Metropolis in one alarming *bussel*?
Ain't the two *first* retired into private life—(that's the genteel for being rejected)?
And what's more, the *last* four, strange to say, have all been elected.
Then Finsbury Tom and Mr. Wakley, as wears his hair all over his coat collar,
Hav'n't they frightened Mr. Tooke, who once said he could beat them *Hollar*?
Then at Lambeth, ain't Mr. Baldwin and Mr. Cabbell been both on 'em bottled
By Mr. D'Eyncourt and Mr. Hawes, who makes soap yellow and mottled!
And hasn't Sir Benjamin Hall, and the gallant Commodore Napier,
Made such a cabal with Cabbell and Hamilton as would make any chap queer?
Whilst Sankey, who was backed by a *Cleave-r* for Marrowbone looks cranky,
Acos the electors, like lisping babbies, cried out "*No Sankee?*"
Then South'ark has sent Alderman Humphrey and Mr. B. Wood,
Who has promised, that if ever a member of parliament did his duty—he would!
Then for the Tower Hamlets, Robinson, Hutchinson, and Thompson, find that they're in the wrong
box,
For the electors, though turned to Clay, still gallantly followed the Fox;
Whilst Westminster's chosen Rous—not Rouse of the Eagle—tho' I once seed a
Picture where there was a great big bird, very like a *goose*, along with a Leda.
And hasn't Sir Robert Peel and Mr. A'Court been down to Tamworth to be resealed?
They ought to get an act of parliament to save them such fatigue, for its always—ditto repeated.
Whilst at Leeds, Beckett and Aldam have put Lord Jocelyn into a considerable fume,
Who finds it no go, though he's added up the poll-books several times with the calculating boy, Joe
Hume.
So if there's been *no other election*, I should like to find out
What all the late squibbing and fibbing, placarding, and blackguarding, losing and winning, beering
and ginning, and every other *et cetera*, has been about!

Appeared in Punch on 17 July 1841

And finally....

"He has all the virtues I dislike and none of the vices I admire." — *Winston Churchill*, speaking of Stafford Cripps

"If I were two-faced, would I be showing you this one?" — *Abraham Lincoln*, during the 1858 debates

"A politician is a man who will double-cross that bridge when he comes to it." — *Oscar Levant*

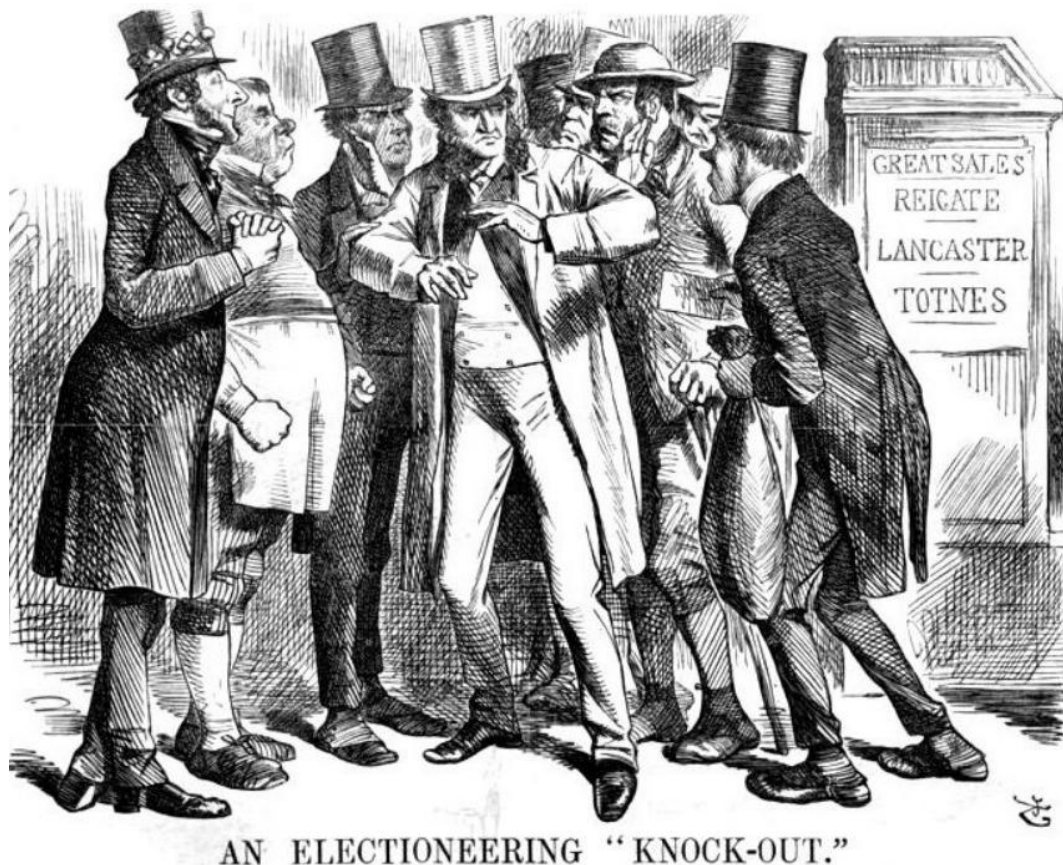
"He knows nothing and thinks he knows everything. That points clearly to a political career." — *George Bernard Shaw*

"Instead of giving a politician the keys to the city, it might be better to change the locks." — *Doug Larson*

"Politics is the art of looking for trouble, finding it everywhere, diagnosing it incorrectly and applying the wrong remedies." — *Groucho Marx*

"Suppose you were an idiot, and suppose you were a member of Congress; but I repeat myself." — *Mark Twain*

"One of the penalties for refusing to participate in politics is that you end up being governed by your inferiors." — *Plato*



An Electioneering "Knock-Out" by John Tenniel. *Punch* (October 6, 1866). Image from Internet Archive