the northern line

the magazine of north london U3A issue 87 January 2025

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• The editors may shorten or otherwise amend articles to fit spacing and style requirements.

Editorial

What counts as 'old?' I'm 80, having reached this 'milestone' last July. I don't feel old. I suffer from various conditions: as I write, my back is complaining bitterly, and my painful index finger really doesn't want to type. I survive on a cocktail of heart drugs. I have family obligations which restrict me. But I can see and hear – and sing! – and I have NLU3A for sustenance.

I love being with people in my age group, engaging in learning activities, being creative, giving each other encouragement. I don't have children or grandchildren – or siblings for that matter – and I prefer not to be with younger folk. I am, as has been said, a childless cat lady! (That could include 'dog'.)

When I joined NLU3A 15 years ago, there were hardly any men. Now there are, with numbers increasing. We could do with more ethnic minority participation, and I think that could be a major recruitment area. We need to make sure that every venue, including private homes, has disabled access. It is essential for U3As to be inclusive; this includes loop facilities for those with hearing issues, support for members with cognitive dysfunction. U3A is run for members by members to the best of their abilities. May it always be that way!

In this issue we look at two groups that treasure aspects of the arts. We learn of a Jewish family that migrated to Britain from southern, rather than eastern, Europe. And we celebrate a successful move to a care home.

Happy reading!
Leni Green
Editor
editor@nlu3a.org.uk

Front cover *(left)*:
Lina Negri néeVeissid (1894–1969) (c. 1916)

Back cover *(centre)*:
Part of Lina's passport from 1916.

Both photos from the collections of Adele Fidlan and Robert Segall.

For the story of Robert Segall's family migrations see the article beginning on page 5.

The arts lovers

Those who can't always do, can always appreciate! The coordinators of two arts appreciation groups tell us how they do it

Armchair Critics

Henrietta Cohen

Edmond (my husband) and I started our version of Armchair Critics in 2019. We meet on the first and third Monday afternoon of each month at our flat in Finchley. After tea and biscuits, we settle down to business in anticipation of learning what everyone has been seeing or hearing or reading, and what we might like to look into for ourselves.

We discuss anything in the arts: theatre, cinema, dance, music, exhibitions, books, TV. Edmond usually says: 'Well, who's been to the theatre in the last couple of weeks?' And we're off! Some people in our group go to the theatre multiple times in a month, and their enthusiasm is contagious. Most of us went individually to see *Fiddler on the Roof* at Regents Park theatre this summer, and it was unanimously acclaimed.

We have also been encouraged to try some wonderful foreign films – from Japan and Korea, for example. This is also true of many programmes streamed or shown on mainstream TV.

Armchair Critics has 12 members and we generally have 8–10 at each meeting. This means that we all have a chance to speak and to give our opinions. We have lively discussions, and many of us are encouraged to try to take in experiences we would not otherwise have considered.

Poetry Appreciation

Lis Vandyk and Helen Roberts

Our Poetry Appreciation group has been running for several years and over time has gradually become more popular – so much so that we have started a waiting list as our meeting space is limited. We meet each month in West Finchley on a Wednesday afternoon, including August and December. Usually we close the poetry discussions at around 4.30 and break for tea and cake.

Each meeting begins with readings from members who have composed their own poems and would like to hear reactions from the group – we have quite a few talented poets! There is no obligation to write poetry, though the comments are always positive and constructive. After these self-composed offerings, we move on to the theme of the month. Members bring poems on a previously agreed topic, or by a chosen poet, who may be from any era. Past examples include autumn, dreams, friendship, parents and grandparents, home, woods and forests. Or we may focus on a poet, for example Robert Browning or TS Eliot, or we might discuss poems of, for example, the Romantic period or even humorous verse. We invite any of the group to suggest topics or poets for future meetings.

At some meetings we discuss poetic forms, for example sonnets, limericks, haikus – a minimal Japanese form containing 17 syllables in three lines of 5, 7 and 5 syllables respectively. Here is an example:

Frost is glistening,
Diamonds set in blades of grass,
A gift from the night.

Lis Vandyk

As I see it

Old age can limit you – or you can limit it, says **Patricia Isaacs**

A dear friend in her early 90s has to use a walking frame now. As she told me, we don't anticipate the limitations old age can bring; they descend upon us suddenly, and certainly unexpectedly. I am a little wobbly and unbalanced now and I walk with a stick, and it is hard to learn to live with lessened mobility. I deeply miss the days and years when I walked all over London, on Hampstead Heath, in European towns and cities without a moment of concern. No doubt some U3Aers reading this are in a similar situation and will have the same thoughts; others will find it hard to believe that they, too, may reach this place in life.

A cost-free and truly effective medication against the blues is to make yourself laugh: just begin and you will laugh at yourself laughing

What to make of it? Well, facing the fact that it isn't possible to go backwards, the only way forward is to make the best of it, to enjoy the pleasure of spending more time in an armchair with a book, music or coffee with friends and marvellous U3A groups. There is so much to enjoy when moaning and misery are banished! A cost-free and truly effective medication against the blues is to make yourself laugh: just begin and you will laugh at yourself laughing …

At the moment I am still able to live independently without need for carers, but I realise this may not last. Until that day I will make the most of having the good fortune to look after myself.

PATRICIA ISAACS IS A PAST CHAIR OF NLU3A

Meet me in … St Margaret's!

Once again, along with autumn winds, falling leaves and the clocks going back, October brought **North London U3A's annual general meeting**

Despite rainy weather, 67 members turned up to St Margaret's Church on 14 October for an easily quorate AGM. After some enjoyable mingling over tea and coffee, members sat down to hear a talk by Stewart Maugham on the composer George Gershwin. But there were problems with the IT equipment, so at NLU3A chair Michael John's suggestion, the meeting moved straight to the formal business.

Michael's report contained the welcome news that NLU3A membership is rising, with 618 members currently (up more than 10 per cent on last year). Further welcome news was that, due to steps taken over the past year to reduce costs as well as the increased membership, treasurer Roy Seger had advised that the annual subscription rate can be kept the same as last year. This proposal passed almost unanimously.

Roy's report elicited the meeting's only question from the floor, prompting a conversation about accounting methods. The questioner asked whether membership fees should be shown in the accounts for the membership year to which they relate, rather than the year in which they are paid; Roy explained that NLU3A was moving to the latter 'income and expenditure' accounting basis, as this is what most charities do.

This was Roy's last AGM as treasurer as he has served the maximum constitutionally allowed time in this post, so he is handing over to Stewart Maugham, a new committee member. The election of all the committee members went through in a single vote, saving so much time that the AGM business was over in less than an hour. Members were then finally treated to Stewart's entertaining talk, with images, music – and fully working IT!

Who's afraid of public speaking?

You needn't be, says **Michael Johns**

I was saddened recently when an able member of NLU3A said she was declining a particular role because she wouldn't take on anything that required public speaking. She was cutting herself off from so much. Because though you may never become a great orator, with a few tips most of you can learn how to hold an audience. Here's how:

- Think about what your audience already knows and believes about your topic and speak to that.
- Have an introduction (telling them what you're talking about), a middle, (telling them in full), and a conclusion (telling them what you have said). A good conclusion is all important and often the difference between applause and silence. I have heard all too many talks drift away at the end, missing the chance to stress what you want people to remember.
- Humour helps; but laugh at yourself rather than others.
- By all means write your talk out in full, but then make notes and speak to those; don't read.
- Practise once, and then practise again.
- Look as many members of the audience as possible in the eye.
- Vary your tone and pitch; a continuous monotone will send everyone to sleep.
- And above all, keep it short. Your diffidence will actually help. The worst speakers are the over-confident ones, who like the sound of their own voice and go on … and on … and on.

So have a go! You can do it and no less a person than the headmaster of Eton says it's the key to success today.

Michael Johns is chair of NLU3A
chair@nlu3a.org.uk

Jewish migration from southern Europe

Robert Segall charts his Jewish family's migrations – from Spain to Greece to Britain

My maternal grandmother, Lina Veissid, came to Britain from Salonika (now Thessaloniki) in Greece. Jews, mostly from Spain, had settled there (and in other Ottoman cities) after the expulsion of 1492: the Sultan commenting how stupid the kings of Spain were to expel artisans and merchants who boosted the economy and paid their taxes.

Jews were in the majority from around the 17th century up to the First World War. The rest of the population was split between Greeks and Turks. The Jewish population was represented at all levels in society: from porters and stevedores at the docks to merchants and financiers. Business was generally conducted in Ladino (Judeo-Spanish) and the docks closed on the Sabbath (Saturday).

Jewish emigration started after the Young Turks took over the government of the Ottoman Empire in 1908 and extended the requirements for army service. Four of my grandmother's siblings were in Britain before or early in the First World War.

My great-grandfather, reputedly a fruit merchant, had died some years previously. By 1916, my great-grandmother decided that it was time to

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The Veissid family at the wedding of Caleb Veissid to Marie Saragossi c 1925. Lina Veissid (now Negri) is second from the right in the middle row. Photo from the collections of Adele Fidlan and Robert Segall.

leave and join her family in London. She (aged about 57), my grandmother Lina (aged 22) and her youngest brother (aged 15) left for London.

I have my grandmother's passport, issued by the Kingdom of Greece, for the journey. It is a large folded sheet of heavy paper, rather than a booklet, as nowadays. It says that my grandmother was 1m 65cm (5ft 5in) tall.

The passport was issued on 3 May, with a visa dated 18 May. She left Salonika by ship on 25 May, arriving in Marseilles on 26 May. Her visa for travel to London via Paris was endorsed by the Commissaire de Police, Prefecture des Bouches-du-Rhone.

The trio took a month to arrive in Paris, where Lina's passport was endorsed again, this time by the Prefecture of Police of Paris on 27 June. On the same day there is a stamp from the British Permit Office, Paris, to allow travel to London via Le Havre for the purpose of joining family at 121 Amhurst Road (Hackney). The military visa was also confirmed by the British vice-consul.

They must have left Le Havre that day or early the next, as the final stamp is from the Aliens Officer at Southampton on 28 June.

By 3 July, Lina had a registration card, perhaps in the previous couple of days having heard the guns at the Battle of the Somme.

Leaving Salonika was a wise move, as over 98 per cent of the Jews of Salonika were murdered in the Holocaust.

What the Dickens?!?

Diana Toeman makes an unexpected discovery in Highgate

On an autumn walk up the hill towards Highgate Village, I passed a house that looked different from the other red brick buildings that surrounded it. 92 North Road is covered in a creamy stucco, and fixed to its front wall is a blue plaque with the words: 'Charles Dickens, 1812–1870, author, stayed here in 1832.' Intrigued, I knocked on the door and was

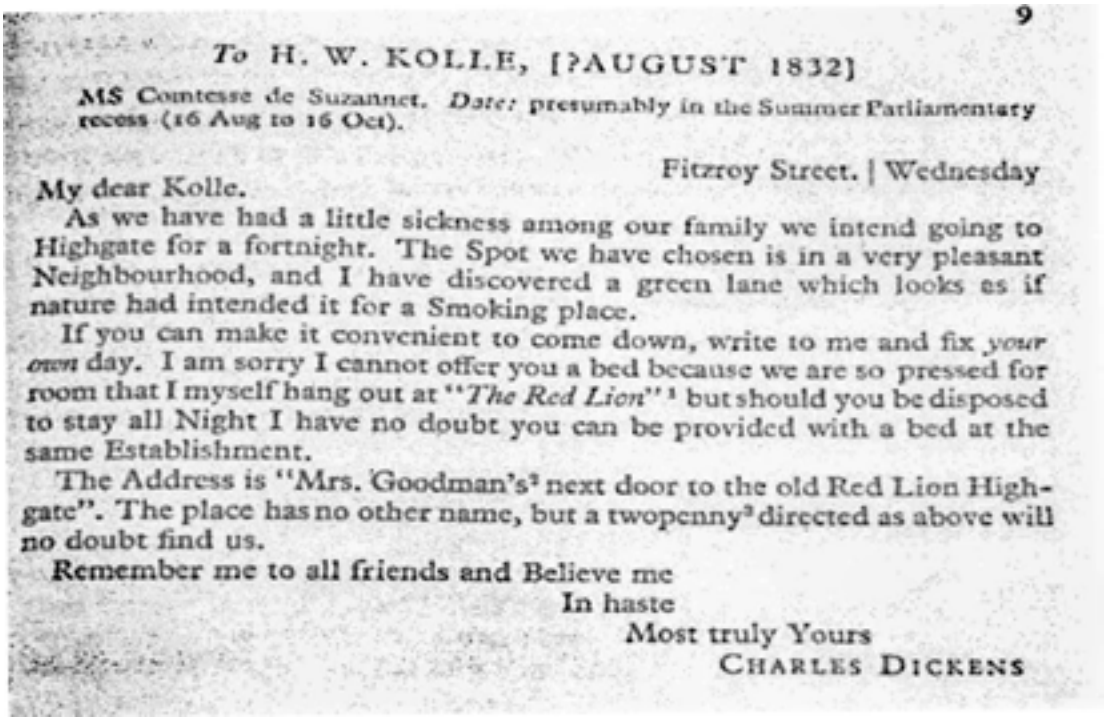
greeted by the owner who, when I questioned him about the plaque, said he knew no more than that Dickens stayed for a few weeks in the house and that his family was put up next door in what was then The Red Lion Inn, now number 90 North Road.

With my appetite whetted by this information, I contacted Emma Harper, the curator of the Charles Dickens Museum in Doughty Street, London. She sent me the following email:

Many thanks for your enquiry. I can confirm that Dickens stayed at The Red Lion in Highgate in August 1832. Please see a copy of the letter below, from 'The Letters of Charles Dickens'.

He says he might be able to get lodgings for his friend Henry Kolle at the house next door. Dickens was 20 years old at the time. He would marry Catherine Hogarth in 1836. At this time he was working as a parliamentary reporter. I'm not sure how long Dickens stayed at The Red Lion, but he moved to Bentinck Street in London in February 1833, when Parliament resumed session. I don't know if he lived permanently at The Red Lion from August to February, which is possible, or if he may have done trips back and forth from a relative's home in London (Fitzroy Street which is where he's writing this letter from). I don't believe he was yet writing anything that has been published – his first article appeared in December 1833.

Photo by Diana Toeman



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To H. W. KOLLE, [?AUGUST 1832]

MS Comtesse de Suzannet. *Date:* presumably in the Summer Parliamentary recess (16 Aug to 16 Oct).

Fitzroy Street. | Wednesday

My dear Kolle.

As we have had a little sickness among our family we intend going to Highgate for a fortnight. The Spot we have chosen is in a very pleasant Neighbourhood, and I have discovered a green lane which looks as if nature had intended it for a Smoking place.

If you can make it convenient to come down, write to me and fix *your own* day. I am sorry I cannot offer you a bed because we are so pressed for room that I myself hang out at "*The Red Lion*"[1] but should you be disposed to stay all Night I have no doubt you can be provided with a bed at the same Establishment.

The Address is "Mrs. Goodman's[2] next door to the old Red Lion Highgate". The place has no other name, but a twopenny[3] directed as above will no doubt find us.

Remember me to all friends and Believe me

In haste

Most truly Yours

CHARLES DICKENS

Letter reproduced courtesy of the Charles Dickens Museum, London.

The right move

What to do when you find yourself rattling around in a large house meant for a family when the family has dispersed? **Jenny Clark** describes her triumphant move to a care home

Photo by Patricia Isaacs

We are all living longer than we did 100 years ago. And I don't think that we have worked out how best to enjoy those extra years. Many of us are left on our own, often in the family home, with more space and responsibilities than we can comfortably manage.

Maybe the answer is to adapt that home? Or to let someone else take on those responsibilities? Or maybe to move to a care home?

When I turned 90 after my much-loved husband had died, I decided to look at alternatives. My daughter and I viewed as many care homes locally as we could face. I was tired of managing everything involved in running a large – and very empty – house.

The homes varied, unsurprisingly, and it is only possible to get the feel of somewhere by visiting, looking, talking to people who live there, and discussing (at length!) impressions, and reactions.

What is not to like with the prospect of no household bills (especially not insurance!); no housework; no cleaning, washing or ironing; no cooking, no gardening or shopping in Sainsburys? There is a doctor available when you need one, nursing care if that is required. Staff order your medication for you – no running out of anything and having to rush to the chemist for emergency supply. You have a private bathroom, a TV, a telephone, and air conditioning/heating. If you need help, you ring a bell, and one of the carers appears. You have company when you want it, and – marvellously – help with all that IT. And there is a private cinema, where they show films on Netflix – or DVDs. We can access YouTube and its endless resources. A hairdresser comes in, and so does a chiropodist, and an optician. We are really pampered.

All this, of course, follows once you have paid the (not inconsiderable) fees. But most of us have a house or a flat that we can sell, and the price of property in north London, as we all know, will certainly pay the fees for some years.

What do you lose? The space for one thing, and living in one or two rooms is different, with fewer belongings; it's a way of discovering which of your possessions, including books, genuinely matter to you. Is it the watercolour your mother gave you? The encyclopaedia (in several volumes) which the children used when they were small? The ashtray someone gave you all those years ago, when people smoked cigarettes? Is it the photo album, with real photographs stuck in and the date written underneath each one? Or that beautiful blouse which you bought in Italy and haven't worn since 1985? Or that delightful dinner service which you inherited from your grandmother, and have never, ever, used?

Is it worth it? That is what each one of us has to decide, but it has worked out well for me, and as happily as it could do.

I have a room with a patio and patio door on the ground floor. I face south, and I look out on the garden. I get all the sun that there is. Everything is to hand, and I have my own pictures on the wall. If I need something doing, I just have to ask: I don't have to call the plumber if the shower starts dripping. I have company when I feel like it. I have made new friends to add to those who live nearby, and I have my radio, phone and emails, as I always

My world is smaller than it was, but it is very pleasant – and I chose it.

did. I have shops nearby if I want to walk to them to buy some toothpaste...

I sold my car earlier in the year, and this is a loss too, but one that I chose; the fact that I can no longer just drive down to see my local friends is a shame, but I am happily becoming a taxi lady – and I suspect even taxis are cheaper than running a car (buying it, insurance, servicing, repairs, petrol…).

So I am settling in to my new home, surrounded by my own belongings, to join in with whatever is going on or to enjoy my own company. My world is smaller than it was, but it is very pleasant – and I chose it.

Jenny Clark is a past chair of NLU3A

The receptionist will triage you now

A new app a day keeps the patient away. **Francis Beckett** tries to get an appointment with his GP

When I telephone my GP surgery, an automated voice reads me a lengthy lecture. It used to begin: 'Our staff may need to ask you questions in order to connect you to the right person.'

That's gone. They have re-recorded the message and now it says: 'Our staff may need to ask you questions in order to triage your call to the correct clinician.'

You see what's happened? They had a clear, straightforward sentence that everyone could understand. Fortunately someone spotted it, and replaced it with a dollop of managerial gobbledegook.

Why was it so important to make the sentence difficult? To understand that, you have to know about the NHS app. My GP surgery, like several others, will not communicate with patients by email, because when they let patients email them, patients do email them. The result was an awful lot of emails, more than the staff could cope with.

So they had to make it harder for patients to get in touch, and that is what NHS managers created the NHS app for.

Here's my story. Stop me if you've heard it before. On second thoughts, don't. You probably have heard it before.

©Dave Coverly/speedbump.com

I tried, as instructed, to communicate with my surgery through the NHS app. It refused to connect me because, it said, I had contacted the surgery before.

However, it said, if I went into the surgery and asked for my Linkage Key, ODS Code and Account ID, and inputted these precious codes, then the app would permit me to talk to the surgery.

So in I went. I had hardly said the words 'NHS app' before a weary receptionist handed me a sheet with these codes. I was not, it seemed, the first to ask for them.

I took them home, inputted them, and the NHS app said it could not use them. Apparently it thought I had used them before, and I can only use them once. So it still wouldn't connect me.

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My story has a happy ending. I wrote a begging letter to the practice manager and he kindly provided me with a means of talking to the surgery that did not involve the NHS app.

When a service can't cope with the demand, there are two things it can do. One is to put the money in, and enable it to cope. The other is to make it so hard to get in touch that many people will give up. So far governments have chosen the second path.

Will it all change now we have a Labour government? Maybe. But every time I hear ministers talking about finding creative ways to use new technology, my heart sinks; for these are generally creative ways of keeping you away from the doctors and nurses who might be able to help you.

More than 30 million Brits have the NHS app, boasts Health Minister Wes Streeting, who thinks the app 'represents an opportunity to transform the health service.' Mr Streeting, they have all the communications technology they want, and more. What they need is more doctors and nurses.

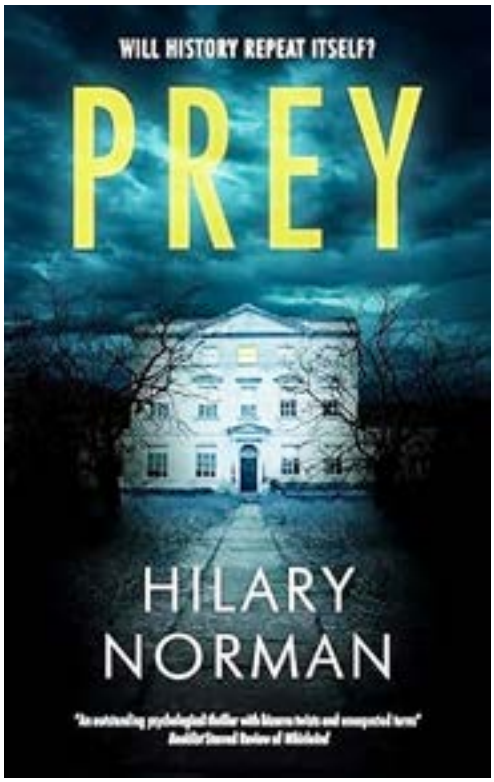
Francis Beckett is a journalist and former editor of Third Age Matters

Books by members

Prey by **Hilary Norman** (aka **Hilary Kern**)

In Hilary Norman's 26th novel, moving from a London deep in the terrors of the Blitz to the seemingly safer London of 2019, two women must fight for their lives to survive a ruthless killer in this dual timeline psychological thriller.

Published by Severn House on 1 October 2024, available in hardback (£21.99) and on Kindle (£12.99).



Looking for Joan and Other Stories by **Christopher Owen**

Published by Troubador in February 2024: available through the publishers, bookshops and online outlets. https://www.troubador.co.uk/bookshop/poetry-short-stories-and-plays/looking-for-joan-and-other-stories

Stories are set in the UK, Ireland and USA.

Those we have lost

We remember and pay tribute to NLU3A members who died in the past year. We aplogise if we have left anyone out.

Dorothy Barnes
Tessa Clark
Jill Lyall
Gwenan Williams
Hilda Wilson

Spring term monthly meetings

NLU3A Monthly Meetings usually take place on the second Monday of the month and are held at St Margaret's United Reformed Church, Victoria Avenue, London N3 1BD. Doors open at 10am, when refreshments are served. Meetings start at 10.30. The venue is a short walk from Finchley Central tube station, or it can be reached by buses 13, 125, 143, 326 and 460 from Hendon Lane or Regent's Park Road.

US Capitol Building. Credit: ttarasiuk/Flickr.com

13 January

The US elections 2024. On 20 January 2025, Donald J Trump will be inaugurated as president of the United States for the second time. Dire predictions have been coming fast and furious since his electoral victory. So how does the American political system work, and will the famed checks and balances provide any guardrails to constrain a Trump presidency? Speaker: **Thomas Arms,** London-based American journalist who has been reporting American, British and world affairs for half a century.

10 February

London's Air Ambulance. Speaker from **London's Air Ambulance**

10 March

Hard times: Social realism in British art. Speaker: **Angela Cox**. Details to follow. Please see website (www.nlu3a.org.uk) for details.

The **spring term** begins on 6 January and ends on 28 March.

N° 311

VU au CONSULAT GÉNÉRAL de GRÈCE à MARSEILLE

26 Mai 1916

BON POUR SE RENDRE

en Angleterre

N° L.C. 752

LE CONSUL Gérant

VU à la Préfecture de Police pour se rendre en Angleterre

Paris, le 27 juin 1916

Le Préfet de Police

PRÉFECTURE DE POLICE - L'ÉTAT - BOULEVARD DU PALAIS

PERMIT OFFICE, PARIS.

BEARER IS PROCEEDING TO London

IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

VIA Havre

ADDRESS 121 Amherst R.d

FOR PURPOSE OF Journey family

SIGNATURE Ηλιακός DATE

ALIENS OFFICER 28 JUN 1916 SOUTHAMPTON

MILITARY VISA CONFIRMED

Richard Lyle

BRITISH VICE CONSUL PARIS

CONSULAR SERVICE

27 JUIN 1916

VU A L'EMBARQUEMENT

Le Havre, le 27/6/1916

Le Commissaire Spécial

COMMISSARIAT SPECIAL DE POLICE

HAVRE