



Members Newsletter

Easter 2021

A Message from the Chair

As I write this today, it is wonderful to realise that one year after this horrendous virus seemed to take over our lives, the end to most of the restrictions is in sight. This means that on the committee we can begin to make plans, albeit tentatively, to get back to meeting in St Michael's Parish Hall in September and to resuming our full u3a programme.

Happy Easter

Kathy Platt

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Zoom Groups

The table below shows the Groups currently Zooming or continuing by other suitable methods. If you are interested in attending any of these Groups via Zoom, click on the Group and this will take you directly to that Group's page on the Alnwick u3a website.

ARCHAEOLOGY	ARCHITECTURE	ART APPRECIATION	BOOK GROUP 1
BOOK GROUP 2 (Fairfields)	BOOK GROUP 3 (St Michaels)	CREATIVE WRITING	HERB GROUP - Exploring Plant Medicines
HISTORY	LATIN ADVANCED GROUP	LATIN FOR IMPROVERS	PHILOSOPHY
POETRY 1	POETRY 2	POPULAR CLASSICAL MUSIC	SCIENCE

As mentioned in the previous Newsletter, there is also a scheme running to enable you to temporarily join groups in other u3as until this pandemic is over. If you would like to see what's available, have a look at the Northumberland Regional Website:

<https://u3asites.org.uk/northumbria/page/56749>

Anne McMillan, Group Coordinator

BRAIN TEASERS
(the answers are at the back – don't peep!)

1. You measure my life in hours and I serve you by expiring. I'm quick when I'm thin and slow when I'm fat. The wind is my enemy.
2. I have cities, but no houses. I have mountains, but no trees. I have water, but no fish. What am I?
3. What is seen in the middle of March and April that can't be seen at the beginning or end of either month?
4. I speak without a mouth and hear without ears. I have no body, but I come alive with wind. What am I?
5. What English word has three consecutive double letters?
6. What is always in front of you but can't be seen?
7. What can you break, even if you never pick it up or touch it?
8. I come from a mine and get surrounded by wood always. Everyone uses me. What am I?
9. What gets wet while drying?
10. You see a boat filled with people, yet there isn't a single person on board. How is that possible?
11. I have branches, but no fruit, trunk or leaves. What am I?
12. The more of this there is, the less you see. What is it?
13. What question can you never answer yes to?
14. What is full of holes but still holds water?
15. What has to be broken before you can use it?
16. Where does today come before yesterday?
17. What invention lets you look right through a wall?
18. If you've got me, you want to share me; if you share me, you haven't kept me. What am I?
19. What goes up and down but doesn't move?
20. It belongs to you, but other people use it more than you do. What is it?

A Possible New Alnwick u3a Group

Are you interested in saving the Environment? How would you like to start a new Environment or Eco Group, or something of the kind? Prudhoe & District u3a Eco Group has booked a speaker for their April meeting, Ruth Drake, who lives in Prudhoe and is a "Greenspeaker" for Greenpeace. (For information visit <https://www.greenpeace.org.uk/volunteering/greenpeace-speakers/find/> and select North East; Ruth is at the bottom of that list).

The talk will focus on individual actions and what your u3a Eco Group could do, rather than Greenpeace's arguably more questionable protest activities. There will be an opportunity for questions.

The Prudhoe group would like to invite anyone who would like to set up in other Northumbria u3as to join them for this meeting, which will be on Wednesday 7th April at 10am on Zoom.

If you would like to set up a Group for Alnwick u3a please contact Anne McMillan, Groups Coordinator, at groups.alnwick.u3a@gmail.com.

Spring is here



Swan and birds at Druridge Bay Country Park – taken by Trevor Robinson



Snowdrops nearly over and daffodils just coming into flower – taken by Trevor Robinson near Acklington



Lambs with their mum – taken by Colin Platt



A duck with daffodils – taken by Colin Platt

Spotlight on a Group From Judy Williams, the Mahjong Group Leader

Mahjong is a Chinese tile game played on a table by 3 or 4 people. It involves collecting matching sets of tiles and the winner is the first person to complete their sets. There are rules and rituals, but it is a game of strategy and luck, and fun!

We are a friendly group and welcome newcomers. Come along and give it a try (when we can meet again).



HELP WANTED

In celebration of Alwick u3a being in existence for 21 years, it is hoped to produce a booklet showing the local organisation's history and a selection of events and activities which took place during those years.

If anyone feels able to contribute or would like more information, please contact Kathy Platt.

Monthly Alnwick u3a Meeting

On 18th March, we had our first full u3a meeting since last March, via Zoom. We were treated to a very informative and entertaining talk given by Colin Gough, with the title "Digging up the family".

This was about tracing ancestors to populate a family tree. Colin told us that when he was younger he knew very little of his family history prior to his grandparents. So when he had the opportunity to take a three month sabbatical in 1996 he used some of the time to do some digging.

This was before the internet had really taken off, so the investigations involved looking at parish records and accessing microfiche and microfilm records. Census returns are also a very useful source of information, and I was surprised to learn that data concerning individuals does not become publicly available until 100 years after the census. So you will not get any details from the census we have just had – but your great great great grandchildren will be able to!

Working backwards, Colin found that his family had lived in Wolverhampton in the mid-19th century, and going back further he was able to trace one branch of his family back to 1660, living as tenant farmers in Weobley, Herefordshire.

Colin warned that you must record the information you find in a systematic way, and be prepared for dead ends, and different spellings for the same places.

Colin also said that as you move forward in time with family tree research, you find changing types of employment, from agricultural worker to barman or butcher. One Victorian ancestor was involved in fabric design and became quite wealthy. Colin noted sadly that none of that prosperity trickled down on his side of the family!

In conclusion, Colin told us that when doing family research, you get to visit places you may not otherwise go to, and to find that families can over time go up and down in prosperity.

I think we all found the talk very enjoyable; I know I certainly did. A huge vote of thanks to Colin.

I know Kathy is organising more monthly full u3a Zoom talks, so look out for these.

Trevor Robinson

Feedback & contributions are very welcome!

Please send any comments on this newsletter, suggestions for improvement and contributions for future editions to:

Newsletter.Alnwick.U3A@gmail.com

The next newsletter will be published on 10th May: contributions deadline is 7th May.

Hobbies and Interests

This is a regular item in the Newsletter, where u3a members can tell us all about their hobbies and interests. If anyone would like to write something for a future Newsletter, please do contact us at Newsletter.Alnwick.U3A@gmail.com. This contribution is from George Ellames.

Owning up to being a Chess Player elicits a range of responses. These vary from a coy fluttering of the eyelashes, above a modestly held fan, and a muttering of "Oh, you must be sooo intelligent ..." to the sort of look I give someone who tells me they collect bus tickets. Yes I do play chess seriously. In normal times, I play with Alnwick Chess Club on a Thursday evening and with Morpeth Chess Club on a Wednesday. I also spend roughly 5 weekends a year playing at Chess Congresses around the North of England, at places ranging from the delightful Scarborough and Whitby to the less obviously but equally delightful, Doncaster and Preston.

I do this because I actually enjoy it. I am very competitive and don't like losing. Playing chess, you have to learn to lose gracefully. I have only twice, in over 1700 competitive games, had my opponent throw a piece across the board at me and storm out of the room. What I enjoy is the fact that, if I am to stand a chance of winning, I need to concentrate on just that one thing for a time that may be as long as 4 hours. If I don't, and my opponent does, I will probably lose. When things were difficult at work, playing chess was the one way I could get it all out of my head.

Generally, I don't get philosophical about chess, but it does teach you some important things. Firstly, Chess Players come in all shapes, sizes, genders and whatever. I have played Company Directors, University Professors and people who look like they have just walked in from Cardboard City. I have played really rather attractive young women, and men who frankly look as if they haven't come within social

distancing of either a woman, or a bar of soap, in decades. But none of this actually affects their ability to play chess.



Secondly, the game of chess, like life, isn't the best of three. You get one game. If you make a mistake, then you have to make the best of it and find compensation in some way. You just have to put whatever mistake you made behind you, look at the board and say, "This is where I am now, how can I get out of this?" I am sure it has aided my planning and calculation skills. I have always tried to look ahead and calculate various "what if" scenarios and this helped me at work, where I was notorious for always having a "Plan B". To counterbalance that, it maybe has made me a bit calculating, devious and hard-nosed. But was that the chess playing or just me?

You really don't have to take chess as seriously as I do. People, who seem outwardly perfectly normal, do play chess for fun - so I've been told. A small number of them assemble at the Rugby Club at 7:30 on a Thursday evening (in normal times). Anyone wishing to dabble would be very welcome.

From the Newspapers

You can sometimes find jokes in newspaper letters pages. The two below were spotted in The Times.

The world is made up of three sorts of people: those who can do maths and those who can't

Two conspiracy theorists walked into a bar...or did they?

Covid stories

It's been a great blessing to be at home with the wife these last few months.

We've caught up on everything I've done wrong in the last 20 years.

Tom's Tales

These announcements were actually made in church bulletins, or at church

The sermon this morning: 'Jesus Walks on the Water'. The sermon tonight: 'Searching for Jesus'.

Ladies, don't forget the rummage sale---it's a chance to get rid of those things not worth keeping---bring your husbands.

Don't let worry kill you off---let the Church help.

Thanks to Tom Burroughs for this

Maureen's Memories - Out of necessity stems tradition

Quite early on in the development of our U3A, we decided that we did not want to follow the academic year pattern of having a break in the summer months. We had not reckoned on the difficulties of using educational premises in school holidays and the requirement to have a caretaker on duty. Many group activities could carry on, as they were held in members' homes, but monthly meetings presented us with a problem.

We had not booked a speaker for the July 2001 meeting but, as it fell just within term time, we held an indoor garden party in the Lindisfarne hall. Members were asked to contribute to a pooled tea and bring flowers and greenery to brighten the place up a bit. Bryan Gardner organised a programme of quizzes and competitions, interspersed with light entertainment from the choir and some of our talented members. A pleasant afternoon was had by all and ran over its allotted time - probably something to do with the wine.

August presented our first real problem. When we thought about it, we realised that many of our activities could carry on outdoors and extra ones could be added - all we needed was a base somewhere and a programme for the day. Margaret Kilvington kindly offered her garden in Craster and we drew up a list of possibilities - walks, geology, birdwatching, painting and drawing, photography, local history.....the range seemed endless. The whole thing was scuppered by foot and mouth disease, which restricted access to the countryside, but we decided to go ahead anyway and do as much as we could. I seem to remember that we didn't do very much except enjoy sitting in the sun in Margaret's garden and eating her scones, but the tradition of 'awaydays' was born.

2001 was the last time we had a garden party. The following year we arranged a River Tyne boat trip for the July meeting - and so began the tradition of searching each year for outings that involved boat trips.

Maureen Stephenson

Are You An April Fool?

The first day in April is the day most commonly called "April Fool's Day". Practical jokes, silliness, and foolishness are a big part of the day. Nobody is exactly sure where the tradition started, though many people think it can be traced back to a change in the calendar in 16th Century France.

When King Charles IX introduced the Gregorian calendar in 1582, it changed the first day of the new year to January the first. Before that, it was celebrated during the week of March 25 - April 1. Those that refused to acknowledge the change continued to celebrate on April the first and were considered "fools" for not changing. It became common place to play jokes on these people.

Now, people all over the world use April fool's Day as an excuse to play practical jokes on friends. These are not mean-spirited tricks, just silly jokes.



KING CHARLES IX of FRANCE

Many newspapers, radio personalities, television shows and internet websites participate in the celebration.

One of the most famous April fool's Day hoaxes was carried out in 1957. The BBC show, Panorama, announced that Swiss farmers had grown a wonderful "spaghetti crop" and showed a video of them picking spaghetti from trees. This fooled hundreds of people.

Anne McMillan, History Group Leader

Brain Teasers – Answers

1. A candle
2. A map
3. The letter R
4. An echo
5. Bookkeeper
6. The future
7. A promise
8. Pencil lead
9. A towel
10. All the people on the boat are married

11. A bank/building society
12. Darkness
13. Are you asleep yet?
14. A sponge
15. An egg
16. In the dictionary
17. A window
18. A secret
19. A staircase
20. Your name

End Piece

Corona Virus

Caught us all unaware
 Ordinary lives disrupted.
 Restrictions to our daily life
 Observed by some, flouted by others.
 Never the end quite in sight, but
 Always hope with the vaccine.

Various rules often changing
 Interesting data to peruse.
 Regretful situation continues
 Untimely deaths each day.
 Salvation on the far horizon.

Jen Armstrong

Out of February

Lost in winter's chill, branches tentacle
 the air in search of light

Aconites ignite, snowdrops glow

As taking its last chance the wind claws
 its way

Out of February's grasp

Mary Atkinson