



## **Branston & District u3a – 8th November 2020**

Dear Member,

As I look outside and see the gloomy autumnal view, I realise that it's just the sort of morning to sit down and write a letter to some friends, so here goes.

Before I go any further, you now have a choice. I learned during the week that the new format doesn't necessarily suit mobile phone users, so you can read the weekly "Keeping in Touch" in email form as below, or load the pdf version attached – your choice. The text will be the same unless I mess up again! However, you'll need the pdf version if you want to see the pictures as I can't incorporate images into Beacon emails.

I don't know about you, but this week I feel that I've lost half a lifetime logging on and off the BBC website waiting for those numbers to change – 243/253|214. Why has the American election been such a draw? I suppose it's because Donald Trump has been such a figure of love/hate/derision/fascination that we just wanted to see how he reacted when the results came in, or did we want to see him brought down a peg or two? I imagine there have been a multitude of other reasons – maybe just a distraction from our present situation. And of course, the story might have some way to go yet, we'll see.

### **Back to Life**

Life has continued to be interesting – and busy – in the u3a front this week. Plans for our return to holding meetings are still progressing, so I trust that you are looking forward to Andrea's "Fallen Women" on 24<sup>th</sup> of this month. I hope to have a short trial session on Monday 16<sup>th</sup> at 2.00pm to see how we cope with a large audience, and I hope that you will join us for that, especially if you are intending to listen to (and watch!) Andrea's talk. We need to discover and overcome any glitches that might occur. I will remind you in next week's "Keeping in Touch", and also distribute an invitation before the meeting – as will also happen with the main meeting.



Last week I suggested that anyone unfamiliar with Zoom but wishing to join our meetings can contact me and one of our team will be happy to take you through the (very easy) process. I have talked several people through the basics of Zoom this week quite successfully. It's usually just a five or ten minute phone call before we are able to continue our conversation on Zoom.

The Family History, Armchair Travel and Photography Groups are also exploring ways of meeting via Zoom, so it's watch this space and see how things progress! No, it's not normality, but things are beginning to pick up once more.

## 1960s and all that!

Janet & Rodger Foster (and, I understand, a friend called Google) have done it again, with the answers to the “Long Lost TV Programs” quiz arriving in record time. Janet claims to be too young to remember most of the programs, and of course, she’s quite right. Which makes it even more remarkable that she got the answers! Glenys Storey also came up with the goods, as did Chris Hodson & Arch, so congratulations to them all. The answers are attached to the email.

Our latest quiz is again from Ron Oxby. The title is “Should have paid attention at school”, and comes as multiple-choice questions in the form of “Who Wants to be a Millionaire”. I have attached two file formats, one in PowerPoint for those who are able to display that, and one in PDF for the “plain vanilla” version. See if you can get to the £1,000,000. I shall be listening out for background coughing when you submit your answers!



Congratulations also go to Garry & Lynn Snelson for their rapid turnaround of the “Find the Gap” quiz, the answers arriving on Sunday afternoon with just one unexpected answer. Wow! They are joined by Chris Stubbings & Daphne Jones, Glenys Storey and Chris Hodson & Arch. The Find the Gap answers are also attached to this week’s email.

The u3a quiz this week follows the “60’s” theme, albeit a different sort of 60, with “Sixty Finds” – sixty cryptic questions on various topics. Let me how you get on with it.

## Ripples



It’s been a wonderful week in terms of Members submitting items for “Keeping in Touch”, and we have what I hope is the first of many short stories from our Creative Writing Group. Someone did suggest that there might be something raunchy coming our way, but not this week. Instead, Lesley Leslie has given us a very thoughtful offering, which I think is a delightful, if sombre, story. I think you’ll enjoy “The Ripple Effect”, it’s attached with the email.

Incidentally, it’s been very encouraging to learn that the Creative Writing Group has continued to operate during the lockdowns and restrictions, and I’m sure that we shall see more of the talent that lies within our u3a over coming weeks.

## Stamps

Jo Randerson has asked me to thank those Members who have sent or delivered stamps for Medical Detection Dogs. She’s most grateful for those, and I’m sure that she will be more than happy to continue receiving them.



## Horse Play

You will recall that last week I ran a request from Bill Fowler who is restoring a family rocking horse. In a quite wonderful follow-up to that, Bill has written the following; “*Within about 15 minutes of it*

coming out, I had a phone call from a lady who lives on Station Road, Branston to say that she had some bits of leather. I went to see her the next day and was delighted by what she had - several large sheets of different coloured real leather that she had no use for - and was spoilt for choice! I eventually took a tan sheet and a red one.



And the wig/hairpiece? Well... I visited to Poppyfields Equestrian Centre this morning, just on the off chance that Jo might have some useful real horse hair trimmings that I could use for at least the mane of the rocking horse, if not the tail. Having heard that I was restoring an old 'family' friend for the next generation, she dived into her office and produced a complete - and very real - horse tail! Apparently it had been the tail of one of her main event horses, sadly no longer with us, which she was keeping for sentimental reasons. She said that she thought it would be fitting for it to be used to give pleasure for another generation of youngsters, so it could live on! All she wanted was a photo of the rocking horse when the restoration was complete, with its "real" hair!

A rather nice tale of a tail, I think!

As Bill also says, it shows the power of "Keeping in Touch", so don't hesitate to use the weekly missives if you are need of anything, however unusual.

### Nature Watch

You will have seen at the top of the letter that Janet Webb has been busy photographing Long-tailed Tits, and she also managed to "shoot" one in flight, as you'll see here. Birds are not always easy to photograph as they take off, as they're so unpredictable, but Janet managed this one nicely.



### Lockdown Lessons

I have been wondering whether to ask how Members have prepared to keep themselves occupied during this second lockdown, having learned a few lessons first time around. But even before asking the question, Judy Crowe provided me with the first answer, as she says, "I have decided to use the time to try and teach myself some computer programming as the garden doesn't quite have the appeal it had in the Spring and Summer. I have started with the children's programme 'Scratch' (I know my limitations!) and aim to progress on to Python. It's good fun and I am quite proud of having produced my first



*animated game, probably worthy of a 4 year old, but every journey starts with a single step as they say.*" (The illustration is NOT Judy's work, by the way).

Another Member to whom I've spoken during the week has been busy preparing to get his jigsaw puzzles out, and maybe you would like to let me know what you will be doing to pass the time, even if it involves programming, jigsaws, photography or vodka (no, maybe not vodka!). Meanwhile, I've been trying to get back to some railway modelling, but as one of our Members says, "Life just gets in the way", and that includes Zoom lessons and producing "Keeping in Touch"! But what about you? I'd love to hear what projects you have in mind or in progress during this second lockdown.

### **A Christmas Cake – with a Difference!**

A few weeks ago, I suggested that it might be good to share some recipes, especially in the run-to Christmas. Well, I didn't expect this one from Andrea White, which maybe explains where we go wrong in our household – no vodka! This is Andrea's (with apologies for some of the language);

This year I've had loads of requests for my vodka Christmas cake recipe so once again, here goes. Please keep it in your files as I'm beginning to get tired of typing this up every year! (Made mine this morning).

1 cup sugar  
Half pound butter  
1 tsp baking powder  
1 cup water

1 tsp salt  
1 cup brown sugar  
lemon juice  
4 large eggs

Nuts  
1....bottle vodka, large  
2 cups dried fruit  
4 cups self raising flour



Sample a cup of vodka to check quality.  
Take a large bowl, check the vodka again to be sure it is of the highest quality, then repeat.  
Turn on the electric mixer.  
Beat one cup of butter in a large fluffy bowl. Add 1 teaspoon of sugar. Beat again  
At this point, it's best to make sure the vodka is still Ok  
Try another cup just in case

Turn off the mixer thingy. Break 2 eggs and add to the bowl and chuck in the cup of dried fruit.  
Pick the fruit off the floor, wash it and put it in the bowl a piece at a time trying to count it. Mix on the turner.  
If the fried druit getas stuck in the beaterers, just pry it loose with a drowscriver  
Sample the vodka to test for tonsistency. Next sift 2 cups of salt, or something. Check the vodka. Now shit shift the lemon juice and strain your nuts. Add one table  
Add a spoon of sugar or somefink. Whatever you can find.  
Greash the oven. Turn the cake tin 360 degrees and try not to fall over  
Don't forget to beat off the turner. Finally, throw the bowl through the feckin window. Finish of the vodka and wipe the counter with the cat.

Well, that should guarantee a Christmas to remember! Or maybe you wouldn't remember it at all.

## Plus or Minus?

On to more serious items, and John Stones has been in touch with a tale of woe over his relationship with broadband suppliers Plusnet, as he says; *"On Sunday I received a mailing from PLUSNET ,my phone supplier, ending the 2 year contract I agreed with them in March. I know what you're thinking ...but...no...my rent was paid up front until March 2021.Apparently they had some sort of administrative glitch ,but instead of asking me nicely to contact them and help them sort out the issue, most of the letter was threatening me with disconnection on 18 November if I didn't contact them by then. When I contacted them on Monday it turned out they were seeking an increase in rent of over 22%,and had calculated the refund I was due at under two thirds of what it should be. I have lost most of the last. three days in phone calls lasting several hours to them, transferred from pillar to post and bullied and threatened to a degree I just couldn't believe. I think it's nearly sorted now,but have determined to do what I can to warn people. I had believed their adverts about them being an award winning supplier, but I find on Trustpilot that they score 1.4 out of 5 stars, and 83% of customers regard their service as poor!"* (I've added the image as a matter of irony).



Late addition to the story, just this morning I received this note from John; *"I'm hoping my problems with PLUSNET are sorted as instead of the 22% increase in rent they wanted, they've ....eventually...agreed the same rent as it was under the original contract. And instead of only refunding me their offer of less than two-thirds of what I calculated they owed me on the original contract, they eventually agreed to refund me the full amount (after an intermediate attempt to shave a bit off it!). And so fair are they that when I said I wanted to pursue the complaint I had made despite having agreed terms, they said that, they would not proceed with the new contract and would cut me off on 18 November if I didn't immediately agree the complaint at their derisory token payment for my inconvenience! The best part of a week of my life wasted!"*

And I have also received the attached scam warning from Brian Haynes via Garry Snelson.

Well, I think that's it for now, I see that the sky is brightening a bit. I even saw a glowing disc up there somewhere – and then realised it was the reflection of the room light, which was quite a relief as it would have been 90 degrees adrift of where the Sun should be – Phew!

Trusting that you will stay safe and well,

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James'.

James Hewson

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