

COVENTRY SHERBOURNE U3A APRIL 2021

Check out our website: u3asites.org.uk/coventry-sherbourne.

Due to Covid rules, indoor meetings are suspended

Welcome to the Easter edition of our newsletter. With the slight easing of regulations we are pleased to offer a short walk in the Sowe Valley area this month. It's our first outside event for quite some time. I am therefore especially grateful to Gary Haigh for contributing such an informative lead article, with its River Sowe references and his wonderful wildlife images.

Wild About Photography by Gary Haigh

As a passionate wildlife photographer, I often spend my free time walking along the River Sowe behind Tesco on Dorchester Way in Walsgrave, Coventry. From here I slowly wend my way towards the University Hospital, a walk of about a mile and a quarter.

Being a wildlife photographer I do try and walk quietly and where possible will avoid the gravel footpath and take to the grass, as this cut down on my noise levels and gives me a much better chance of coming into contact with the local wildlife before it hears or gets eyes on me.



Long Eared Owl

The animals present on the Sowe valley are quite diverse and you can expect to see anything from Brown Rats, Red Foxes, all the usual garden birds and if very quiet and on the river at the right time you will also encounter the Muntjac Deer. A flash of iridescent blue flying low and at speed along the river and that will definitely be a Kingfisher on the prowl.

My preferred photography is for birds in flight as I find this the most challenging and also the most rewarding, especially when I nail the shot.

Common Buzzards are a great starting point if you want to photograph birds in flight as they are large birds of prey and will often just sit on the thermal up-drafts and gain height by slowly moving in concentric circles but without having to flap their wings. This kind of soaring allows the photographer plenty of time to get some nice shots.



Common Buzzard

On the other hand, if you see a Sparrow Hawk then you have to be on your toes when acquiring the subject as they move much more quickly than the Buzzards. A Kestrel is also a good bird to photograph as they have the ability to hover which makes photography fairly easy as the bird simply sits motionless in the sky. Kestrels are however small birds, and you need a

reasonably long lens to get a frame filling shot.

I have found that being a photographer has made me slow things down. When I am out and about I am always methodical, looking and listening.

Knowing your surroundings and what you are likely to see also helps and if you want to get a photograph of a specific animal then do a little research, find out when it's out and about and where you are most likely to find it. All of this information will help you in the long run. Sadly, however there is nothing more important in photography than having lots of patience.



Little Egret - often seen in Sowe Valley

I have spent many a morning or afternoon out with my camera and failed to take any photographs at all but, accepting the fact that this will happen to you quite often is part of the job. You simply have to be patient and keep going back out there.

My patience has now paid off as I am an official supplier to the BTO (British Trust for Ornithology) who, I am very pleased to say use my images of birds in their printed

matter and also with their online publications.

If you are perhaps thinking of taking up wildlife photography or bird watching, or, even if you simply want to connect with nature and you would like to ask me a question then you can contact me via email at wildlifesnapper1@virginmedia.com. You can also find me on Instagram and my username is **wildlifesnapper1** and I can be found on YouTube by simply going to the YouTube channel and searching **wildlife snapper1** but make sure you use the space between the words “wildlife” and “snapper”.



Stay well and have a great 2021 – Gary.

If you feel inspired to take your own photos of local wildlife or have any articles to share, please send them to me at:

tonessa.makepeace@ntlworld.com

Short Walk

Join us on a socially distanced Short Walk from Caludon Castle Park on Thursday 22nd April, when we will enjoy a 2 mile walk including a stretch of the Sowe Valley. Each walking group will be limited to 5 and a leader, in line with current regulations, **so early booking is essential.**

Email: covsherb.chair@hotmail.com

Some Cautionary Words On Scams

A full year since lockdown began, and we are edging carefully to a relaxation of lockdown regulations. The world has changed and we have all become more reliant on technology for shopping, and social interaction.

As a result there has been a very noticeable increase in the number of scams and frauds, ready to trap the vulnerable, both online and by through phone calls. I counted 7 scam calls last week telling me that I am owed money or my bank account has been compromised and so on. I don't fall for them, but they are unsettling.

Some years ago I was a victim of ransom ware. I opened a link on an e-mail without checking the e-mail address (the sender's name may look correct, but their e-mail address isn't). I lost access to all the photos that I had saved on the computer and received an e-mail asking for 300 bitcoins to release them. More by luck than good judgement, I had backups of my photos, but regardless of that fact, I would not have paid.

So never open a link on an e-mail if you are suspicious of it. I received one only this week, supposedly from a relative, with the problem being that they have been dead for 2 years!

Bank Fraud is the one of the most worrying crimes going around at the moment. March's **WM Regional Newsletter**, which we've emailed out separately, details that 2 u3a branches, as well as individuals, have been scammed and gives further advice.

These scams are often carefully researched on the internet and can lead to the loss of your hard-earned savings, so be careful about the information that you disclose on social media or elsewhere online.

Fraudsters may call you claiming to be the fraud department of your bank or the police and tell you that you need to move your money to another account (their account!) because criminals have supposedly gained access to it. You may feel panic and they appear helpful and seem to know

about you. **Your Bank will never phone you in this way and ask you to move your money!**

If you hang up and try to phone your bank immediately using the same phone, they can stay on the line and then impersonate your bank's call centre when you dial out. So if you think that it may be a genuine call and therefore double-check with your bank, use another mobile or a completely different landline and phone the number on the back of your bank card.

Finally, look out for the widespread fraudulent text message which says that it is from the Royal Mail and that additional postage is owed on a package. Do not reply. It is an attempt to get your bank details and pin so that they can empty your account.

I'm sorry to have darkened the mood, but we all need to be careful and think calmly if you receive the kind of communications that I've described.

Mike Copeland will be presenting the first Zoom Snap Chat on Thursday 8th April at 2.00pm. Members were invited to send in a holiday photo and they will take turns to briefly talk about their own submission. Invitations will be sent out a day or two before the meeting.



All Our Yesterdays Group by Marion Hodgkins

We had an enjoyable first 2021 virtual meeting of All Our Yesterdays on 22nd March. The next meeting will be on the Monday 19th of April at 2.00 p.m. on Zoom. Bring your memories to share. For further information phone Marion Hodgkins

The Writing Project, by Anne Tithecott

Last month the Committee challenged members to take part in a Writing Project on the subject of “Home” in less than 1000 words. The Project ends on April 17th and your fictional or non-fiction submission should be emailed as an attachment to:

This month we feature Mo Ireland’s evocative account of living in Spon End after the War and you could write something too. Come on everyone!

MEMORIES OF MY EARLY CHILDHOOD HOME by Mo Ireland

I was born in Coventry, a few years after the war when there was an acute housing shortage due to war damage and an influx of newcomers to work in the factories. Our rented house in Spon End, which would be classed as a slum these days and even then was pretty awful, was inhabited by mice and cockroaches. It was a terraced, two up two down house, with no bathroom and an outside toilet down the garden.

We shared this house with my mother’s sister, her husband and baby and another of my mother’s sisters lived in the downstairs front room. So, there were five adults and two children in our little house and we shared a communal living kitchen at the back of the house. My mother and her family had all moved to Coventry from Belfast to find work.

I will now describe this house which, as already mentioned, had two upstairs bedrooms and two downstairs rooms one of which was our communal kitchen/living

room. It had a quarry tile floor and a large open fireplace with a high mantelpiece. This was our only heating, although there were other smaller fireplaces in the other rooms, but they were never used. There was an old stone sink with a wooden draining board, a pantry cupboard, and a gas stove which was sometimes lit just to provide some heat on winter mornings.

By the back wall was a dining table and chairs and a door to the coal hole. There was also a door to the stairs which I often fell down due to the dog leg bend in the stairs. Our toilet was down the garden and as our house was at the end of the terrace, it was slightly more private. A communal footpath went across the backs of the houses. Our garden was fenced with chicken wire, as my uncle raised chickens and he periodically wrung the neck of a bird for our dinner. He used to hang the dead bird up on the outside wall of the toilet, and the bird would twitch for ages afterwards which I found rather scary, but chicken was an expensive meat in those days.

At the front of our house was a large open area where houses had once stood, but was now a bomb site, although it had been cleared of rubble. This was our playground. The only building left standing was a block of toilets which were used by the people in the next street. Across the bomb site, was a low concrete wall which marked the River Sherbourne. It was pretty filthy with rubbish and old bedsteads, but it didn’t deter us from playing in the river.

Everywhere we were reminded that there had been a war and even the school I

briefly attended had been hit by an incendiary bomb and there were still pieces of charred wood and rubble lying around. Sweets were still on ration, as were other foodstuffs, so we didn't eat many sweets.

One particular day stands out in my memory in February 1952. I noticed a Union flag flying from the roof of a factory near us, and I commented on this to my mother. She replied that the King had died that day, and I remember thinking that I didn't even know we had a king. My excuse for this ignorance is that I was only 5 years old!

I left this house before my 6th birthday to live with my grandparents in Ireland for the next 8 months of my life and by the time I returned to Coventry, it all seemed to have changed, as re-building had begun and I never returned to the house in Spon End.

Meanwhile Jill Stebbings recounts some of her childhood memories.

Memories of School in the 1940's

By Jill Stebbings

When I was seven we were told we were going up into the 'Juniors'. The Junior School was in the same building as the Infants, which could be gained through a door at the end of the hall. My memory is of being marched from our classroom in the Infants, through the door and into our new room in the Junior School.

In the Juniors we had exercise books and pencils instead of slates and chalk. When we were considered ready, we graduated to pens, which were dipped into an inkwell in the desk. The first time I tried it I made such a mess that I was put back on a pencil! You had to be very careful not to drip blots in your writing book, and we usually went home with inky fingers. Naughty boys tried

to dip the girls' pigtails into the inkwell. If the teacher left the room they flicked pieces of paper across the room with a ruler. Sometimes they dipped the paper into the inkwell first. Later they learned to use the pens as darts, ending up with unusable crossed nibs.

During the early years after the war, paper was still a scarce commodity. I remember art lessons using newspaper. At Christmas we painted the newspaper in different colours, cut them into strips and made them into paper chains for decorations.

My first teacher in the Juniors was the music teacher for the school, so sometimes we had other teachers while she taught other classes. On Thursday afternoons Mr. Algar (Mr. Alligator to us) made history as dull as it was possible to be. Occasionally the headmaster, Mr. Dewar, came and read to us. As far as I remember it was always the same story - about George Washington and the cherry tree, ending "I cannot tell a lie. I chopped down the cherry tree."

The school day began each morning with assembly. There was no big hall, so partitions between three classrooms were pushed back and children came from other rooms to sit three at a desk built for two. Assembly consisted of a hymn and prayers. At home times, noon and 4 p.m. there were prayers in the classroom, either said by the teacher or sung together; verses such as "Thank You for the World so Sweet", or "Hands together softly so, little eyes shut tight. Father just before we go, hear our prayers tonight".

The first lesson of the day was always Scripture, followed by Arithmetic. That pattern continued throughout the Junior School. I hated Arithmetic - particularly mental arithmetic when my mind would invariably go blank. Times tables were the bane of my life. The teacher would hear us say them and mark off in his book each table that had been successfully completed. In those pre-decimal days, they went up to twelve, presumably to help us with our money sums. The worst for me was the seven times table. I tried and tried but without success. In the end I listened as a child in front of me in the queue at the teacher's desk recited 'Once seven is seven.....', and at last was able to complete it for myself. I have since had many reasons to be grateful to that diligent teacher who made sure I knew my tables.

Money sums were complicated. The smallest coin was the farthing (¼d) with a picture of a wren. There were four farthings to a penny (1d) and two in a ha'penny. The penny pictured Britannia and the ha'penny had a ship. We used to take ship ha'pennies to Sunday school to finance the John Williams missionary ship, which sailed the South Seas. Twelve pennies made a shilling (1/-), and two shillings a florin, whilst half a crown was two shillings and sixpence. Between the penny and the shilling was the threepenny bit and the silver sixpence.

Notes were 10/-, £1 and £5. The £5 notes were very large and white. The only time I ever saw one was when Uncle Arthur took one out to show me. This was at a time when Dad's weekly earnings were less than £5.

Getting to Know Our Ancestors is the name of our new family history discussion group. Our first Zoom meeting will take place on Wednesday 28th April at 10.30am and the theme will be "The family history discovery which surprised me". Invitations will be sent out to all a day or 2 before the meeting.

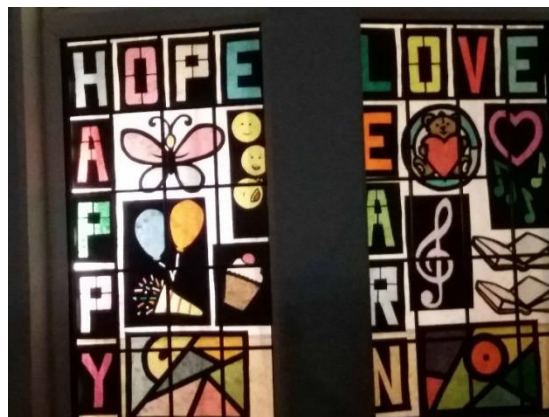
Window Wanderland - A Lockdown Project, by Bill Day

One of the most time-consuming projects in our house has been Window Wanderland. I previewed it in a previous newsletter, so I hope that some of our members were able to view displays in their area.



When we went for our evening exercise while the event was running in the Stoke & Wyken area (it ended on 19th March), we were very impressed with just how inventive people can be and the level of engagement with the project. We were lucky in our street to have quite a few displays so

that the overall effect was quite striking. I feel sorry for those households in some other neighbourhoods who may have put on an amazing display, but which was not widely viewed because their project was relatively isolated and was therefore missed out of people's walking trails.



Maureen Day's Window Wanderland display

From talking to other people, I know that we were not alone in feeling that our home had been taken over by sheets of multi-coloured tissue paper, sugar paper, glue and paint as the display was assembled. The theme that was agreed for our street was "Words of Encouragement" and I have included photographs of part of our display. Unfortunately, I can't claim the credit for what you see as Maureen, my wife, is very handy when it comes to paper and glue, with skills which are far superior to mine and I had no hesitation in editing my own efforts out of this newsletter. My excuse (which I'm sticking to) is that I was concentrating on the organising and promoting of our local project and wasn't able to give our own display my full focus.



Chris Porch's window

Also included are photos of Chris Porch's admirable display. It was nice to see her pictures

as I wasn't able to venture to Chris's neighbourhood.



Chris Porch's window display

This Window Wanderland project is not necessarily the last to take place in the City. Some of the fees for website support, which came out of the City of Culture budget, will still be valid in future years so keep an eye open for events next year or even later.

My Allotment Diary for March by Ann Karabinas

Hi everyone. This edition I'm focusing on our Shakespeare Street Gardens Allotment. This is mainly because it is the allotment where we have actually been able to do some work this month and some planting, namely broad beans.

We started off, as usual these days, running to catch up or fire fighting. We would preferably have had the beds cleared and dug in autumn, but the wet weather then prevented this plan. So, come March, we have one bed dug after potatoes were harvested which had to be dug over again, raked, and tamped down.

Of the other two beds, one had Spinach in it, which due to the wet winter had not done well, several of the plants having rotted off at ground level. I was, however,

able to harvest enough to make lentil and spinach soup. The final bed had Calvo Nero Kale in it which, because the weather had been too wet to go up and harvest as we should have done, has produced sprouting Kale. We decided that, as we needed the bed for beans, we would pick all that we could and then remove the plants in order to prepare these two beds. These were also dug, but of course not only were there the crop plants to get rid of, but also annual weeds like groundsel and shepherd's purse, but in addition the bane of my life, bindweed. This is mainly under control now except along the hedge where it grows roots resembling thick white spaghetti and which needs taking out now before it starts to sprout its strangling, wandering stems.

I went up the allotment to dig that final bed one very grey morning. I managed to dig all down one side, from the edge to the middle, 2 feet wide. I had just finished that side when the heavens opened and I spent about an hour sitting in the shed, doing my Duolingo, wrapped in warm coats. Then I beat a hasty retreat home before the rain started again.



I was able to finish digging it on Saturday morning, then raked and tamped the soil down. We then had three beds ready for planting. We decided to try a different planting system of two double rows of

beans with rows about 1ft apart and 10inches between plants.

Whilst planting, we noticed that the seeds, bought from a reliable seed merchant, were very small. We had a lot of seeds because we had bought the large pack, so two went in each station, but we decided to use a spare bed to grow broad beans for seed (as we successfully did for runner beans last year, to plant this year).

On Sunday morning that bed just needed raking and tamping down. We then planted that bed as well.



We then needed to net the beds to keep off pigeons who eat anything young and green, squirrels who just like to dig holes, cats, well you know cats and foxes who just like to roll on freshly raked soil.

Lazybones Buns [luilakbollen]

By Ness Makepeace

Luilak is a Dutch festival held on the day before Whit-Sunday.

Young people crowd the streets at 4.00am, whistling, banging, and making as much noise as possible. Any young person who does not join the gathering is considered a Lazybones. As well as making lots of noise, they eat lots of goodies, including these tasty buns.

It is one of easiest yeast bun recipes I have ever made.



Ingredients

375gms strong white flour

50g Caster Sugar

50g Butter [cut into cubes]

150ml Milk

1x7g's Sachet of yeast

½ Teaspoon of salt

1 Teaspoon of ground cinnamon

1 Lemon or an orange zest

1 Large egg [if you have small eggs use 2]

125g Mixed dried fruit

Baking paper to cover baking tray.

Tips

If your dried fruit is dry, just run under a warm tap in a sieve and dry in kitchen paper. Add dried apricots cut up small as it makes the dried fruit plumper.

Remember that times for proving vary depending on how warm it is. The times are just a guide and are not written in stone, as yeast is a living thing.

Method

1. Put sugar, butter, and milk in a small saucepan. Heat very gently until they are combined and smooth [it is very important that you check the temperature as if it is too hot when you add the yeast it dies]. Use your little finger - if you cannot leave it in the mixture, it is too hot. It should be warm but not hot.
2. Pour tepid milk mixture into heat proof bowl, add sachet of yeast, stir and leave for at least 10 minutes until a light foam forms.
3. Mix flour, salt, cinnamon and zest in a large mixing bowl. Put somewhere warm.
4. Whisk egg into yeast mixture, then pour into flour. Mix with a wooden spoon until it forms a ball.
5. Turn mixture out on to a lightly floured work surface. Now for the fun part - knead the dough. You can really take out your frustrations on the dough, punch it and generally give it a good beating. You will find the texture of the mixture changes and it becomes smoother.
6. Combine the dried fruit into the dough, by flattening and adding a little at a time, until it is evenly combined. Roll into a ball.
7. Place the dough in the mixing bowl cover with cling film [I use a shower cap].
Leave for at least 2 hours or somewhere warm, until it has doubled in size.
8. Return the now spongy dough onto a lightly floured worktop and knead till it is roughly the same size as when you first started getting it together.

9. Divide into 8 portions roll into balls [I weigh them, so they are roughly the same size].

10. Cover baking trays with baking paper to stop them sticking. Cover the buns on the baking tray loosely [to allow for expansion] with lightly oiled cling film [I use beeswax's sheets]. Leave for an hour.

11. Pre-heat oven to 190 degrees/375/gas mark 5. Cook for approx. 20 minutes, having removed cling film before baking. You will know when they are done, because when you tap the base they sound hollow.

The buns freeze well [although mine have never survived uneaten for that long] or keep in an airtight tin.

Our final helping of nostalgia this month is provided by Joseph Connell from his book:

[A1940's Childhood, by Joseph Connell](#)

Apart from the ponytail, Muriel's most attractive feature was the way she held one's gaze in a very direct and significant manner. Remembering the spectacles worn whilst she played the piano I realise now that this was not a subconscious signal, but rather an attempt to focus.

Deficiencies of eyesight were very common among our group – a surprising number had eyes which operated independently. Jean from number 14 was a very lively girl and self-appointed spokesperson for members of that gentler sex. Like her mother, the typical stance was with hands on hips. She wore spectacles all the time, one lens covered with a pink plaster. In conversation she would tilt her head so that the clear eye was higher than the plastered eye. A

complementary tilt in return was not appreciated.

Her claim to fame was selection as 'Lockhurst Lane Co-Operative Society Pageant Princess 1948'. She was horse-drawn in a parade through local streets sitting on a throne of milk churns covered with a blanket and attended by the local church brownie troop. On this most auspicious of occasions, she did not wear her spectacles and must have been almost completely blind.

Another generic weakness was the condition of teeth. Any problem with a tooth, however slight, and automatic treatment seemed to involve its extraction. Fillings were virtually unknown. Among adults a common philosophy favoured losing the lot in one visit on reaching one's majority, saving subsequent time and trouble.

My visits to the dentist are deeply etched in memory. Refusal to open the mouth for injection meant application of the dreaded Mickey Mouse face mask under physical restriction until submission to gas. That sense of clammy rubber and suffocation are with me still.

Maybe some things have improved ...

Plant Sale

Mary Kettley is raising bedding plants for sale in aid of Cherish Dementia Care [holidays]. The plants will be available from early to mid May at "to collect" or "delivered" prices. Early ordering is advised as last year Mary ran out of geraniums.

Finally, we have a quiz from **Sue Grute** to keep your brains active. This one is called

famous Georges. The answers will be given in next month's newsletter.

Famous Georges

1. 1st President of USA
2. Film producer responsible for the Star Wars and Indiana Jones franchises.
3. Member of the Beatles.
4. Film actor, star of 'A Perfect Storm'
5. Music Hall star who played a ukulele.
6. Actor who, like David Niven, played James Bond in just a single film.
7. 43rd US President
8. Composer of "Porgy and Bess".
9. BBC Newscaster – presenter of News at Six.
10. Author of Middlemarch.
11. Alcoholic Manchester United and N.Ireland winger.
12. Mountaineer who lost his life on his 3rd expedition to climb Everest.
13. Member of the 1966 World Cup winning squad.
14. Archbishop of Canterbury 1991-2002
15. Invented and developed the Rocket Steam Engine.
16. Artist who specialized in drawing horses.
17. Playwright famous for writing Pygmalion.
18. David Cameron's Chancellor 2010-2016.
19. Muhammed Ali beat him in the Rumble in the Jungle.
20. Author of Animal farm.