

Thoughts from the Chair:

By now, we will all have dutifully provided information about our households for the UK 2021 Census. This headcount is carried out every 10 years and may be the last one to take place, as cheaper and easier ways of gathering data become available. The first official Census took place in 1801 and may have been conducted to find out how many able-bodied men were in the country to fight in the Napoleonic wars. This first Census recorded a population of 9 million; by 2011 our numbers had grown to over 63 million with 13% of residents listed as born outside the UK. The Census provides an invaluable source of information for family historians and researchers.

With the introduction of the Beacon Management System, our u3a now has access to much more membership data that can help guide the committee's decision-making process, particularly useful as we look to relaunch events and activities post-pandemic. So, for example, we know that the majority of members supported our u3a during the past year, but 187 out of 749 (25%) either resigned or didn't renew. Data also shows that 72% of our membership is female and 18% don't appear to be members of any interest groups. Of course, this data only provides us with part of the picture and it's very important that we gather as much information from members to discover the reasons behind the data and, most importantly, how they would like their u3a to develop over the coming months and years.

What can you expect over the next few months? After an awful year of lockdowns, we finally have much more optimism for a return to some degree of normality, as restrictions are slowly being lifted, in line with Boris' roadmap. Your committee is very busy working on two main priorities. First, we've recently set up a small Relaunch sub-committee with a mix of members from across the membership, to ensure that, as soon as possible, there will be a good variety of interest groups and activities available for all members to access. The starting point for this group will be to survey the views and expectations of members via individual questionnaires and a group Zoom session. It's likely that, when we first restart, not all groups will resume their activities and the relaunch committee will be looking to encourage new interest groups and new Group Leaders. Our current GLs do a fantastic job and we are indebted to them for their voluntary work. Second, we have set up a Publicity sub-committee to raise the profile of our u3a and to encourage new members to join us. This sub-committee has got off to a flying start and they have their first article in this month's *Sussex Living* (see our website).

Exciting times are ahead, but there is much to do, not only fully to restore our pre-pandemic events and activities but to gradually make improvements so that our u3a goes from strength to strength and offers many opportunities to all members. Our committee will provide you with regular progress updates and, as always, we welcome your views and ideas.

Sandra Webb

Your committee

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Dates for your Diary

u3a MONTHLY OPEN MEETINGS 2021

Please note that the Zoom meetings will be notified in the usual way via e-mail a few days before the event is scheduled.

Wednesday, 28 April – 2:30pm

Zoom meeting

Speaker: Dan Allen

Subject: The Pig War

The *Pig War* was a trade war between the Austro-Hungarian empire and the Kingdom of Serbia in 1906-8 in which the Hapsburgs unsuccessfully imposed a customs blockade on Serbian pork. At the start of the 20th century, Serbia was, economically, a satellite of the Hapsburgs, its major export being pork, most of which was bought by the Austro-Hungarian empire. When Serbia started trying to evade economic and political control by the Hapsburgs and build links with other countries – particularly France and Bulgaria – the Hungarian government decided to punish the Serbs with economic sanctions. Specifically, in an attempt to reduce its economic dependence on Austria-Hungary, Serbia began to import French rather than Austrian munitions in 1904 and established a customs union with Bulgaria in 1905, ending the sale of tariff-laden Austrian goods in Serbia. . Russia supported Serbia's actions, and war between Austria-Hungary and Russia was averted only because of a German ultimatum in 1909 that demanded the end of Russian aid to Serbia.

Wednesday, 26 May – 2:30pm

Zoom meeting

Speaker: Mary Smith

Subject: A Schoolgirl's War – school life in WW2

Mary's talk is about the experiences of schoolgirls during the 1939-45 war. It includes a selection of fascinating paintings and drawings of an art teacher, documenting the lives of school children as the war unfolded. Comment from Cranbrook u3a: "*Mary held us spellbound with her talk on the experiences of schoolgirls during WW2. It was both humorous and sad in parts and she was one of the best speakers we have had at our club*". She has produced a book entitled "A Schoolgirl's War".

Wednesday, 16 June – 2:30pm (usually held at Meridian Hall)

Zoom meeting

Speaker: Paul Robbins

Subject: Great British Eccentrics

Have you ever wondered why Britain has had so many eccentrics over the centuries? This is a highly amusing talk which looks at some of the world's greatest eccentrics and rogues who just happened to be British! Paul takes you on a light-hearted journey that covers some of the great characters from our past like the Lord who spent many hours floating in a large glass water-tank, writing rude letters to the PM. We hear from a unique singer, and a comically UFO-obsessed peer. Moving to more recent times, we meet great eccentrics of the past 30 years – some immediately recognisable – as well as wonderfully ordinary but eccentric individuals. Undoubtedly a talk to amuse and entertain you, listeners regularly descend into fits of laughter when hearing about these very odd – but great – characters.

Dates for future talks: Wednesday 8 & 29 September, and Friday, 22 October

Venue: hopefully Chequer Mead, but necessarily subject to conditions obtaining at that time.

The AGM is scheduled for Wednesday, 17 November, hopefully at Meridian Hall, and will include a speaker.

The Christmas lunch will be in December (date/venue to be confirmed)

All the events immediately above will be detailed in our July Newsletter.

FROM THE EDITOR

First, I really must thank all our contributors to the *Newsletter* this month – interestingly, we’ve had several pieces of poetry – which is great, and most acceptable! Next, and rather as I wrote back in January, fellow members of the committee have been doing a brilliant job, keeping our u3a functioning throughout the cold months of this current lockdown period, mainly *via* the medium of Zoom; thus since Christmas, we’ve had several interesting talks by outside speakers, a photo competition and no less than three enjoyable quizzes. Danielle, our events lady, has been doing great work putting together a programme of talks and other activities, which take us almost through to the end of the year and are summarised on page 2 of this *Newsletter*. It’s also pleasing to see how many of the groups are managing to keep going during these trying times. The new P & C sub-committee are now getting down to business; you can read more about developments on page 4. Nationally, the Third Age Trust are intending to put on a “**u3a day**” on Wednesday, 2 June; this should help with publicity and making the general public more aware of the u3a movement in the UK.

For my little essay this time round, I thought I would say a few words about an institution which has never been out of the headlines, especially over the past year or so, and upon which we in “Generation u3a” increasingly tend to rely: I’m, of course, referring to the *NHS*.

Dating back to its formation in July 1948, the *NHS* was an important component of the reforms to welfare originally proposed in a seminal paper of 1942 by Liberal economist and academic, Lord William Beveridge. His report recommended that government should find the means of dealing with what he called the “five giants on the road of reconstruction” viz. want, disease, ignorance, squalor and idleness. *Plus ça change?* The *NHS* was essentially the vehicle set up to tackle disease in the population. I wonder how many of you, like me, can remember – back around 1950 - the *NHS* orange juice and cod-liver oil, provided, presumably, to get vitamins into us children. My mother was very keen that I should partake of this bounty!

However, the present *NHS* is a very different creature from that set up some 72 years ago; then, medicine was *far* less technological and did not make use of the sophisticated testing and treatment methodologies now available. Physics and chemistry currently play a huge role in the practice of medicine.

Returning to 1948, were you aware that life expectancy then was only about 68 years? With retirement at 65, the new service was mostly treating children and people of working age, needing one-off therapies. Fast-forward to today where people are living, *on average*, some 13 years longer, and nonagenarians are not uncommon. Thus, we have many more elderly people in our population who often have multiple long-term conditions (including mental ill-health) and who account for the major part of the work of the *NHS* in the 21st century. It’s hardly surprising that there have been so many reviews and reorganisations of the service over the years – indeed, the present Secretary of State has recently put forward proposals for reforming the changes effected by his predecessor just a decade ago!

One major revision that has eluded politicians has been the integration of health and social care; back in 2011 the report from Sir Andrew Dilnot (like Beveridge, another Oxford economist) was published, in which he made a whole series of what I thought were quite sensible suggestions. Sadly, it would seem, as a society, we don’t want to pay and hence “Dilnot” has been collecting dust in someone’s in-tray ever since.

A feature of the *NHS* for much of its lifetime is that it has been chronically under-resourced compared to other comparable societies around the world. Here’s a few figures for you: in the UK we pay only around 7.2% of GDP on health, whereas in France it’s 11.2%, Germany 11.7% and the US 17%. We come out at 17th place out of 18 advanced western countries. Spending on health is now only marginally above where it was in 2008, during the financial crisis. The *NHS* undoubtedly gives tremendous value; wouldn’t it be great if it really was a *health* service rather than merely an illness service? Now that *is* something to think about!

Publicity and Communications Sub-committee

At the start of the year, we felt that finally we could begin to make plans for when we can all meet up, face-to-face. A number of our groups have kept going throughout the pandemic using Zoom, but for many, who have not been able to meet, it will feel like a fresh start – almost as though we are re-launching our u3a.

To this end, a Publicity & Communications Sub-committee has been set up, which, very broadly, will look at ways to raise our profile. It's surprising how many people don't know about our u3a and the u3a movement more generally – in fact, there will be a nationwide campaign in the summer in the press and on TV.

Of course, **you** are really our best publicity. I don't know how you heard about the u3a, but often it is by word-of-mouth. I know how grateful I am that a friend told me about it when I retired.

The sub-committee had its first meeting (by Zoom) in February, and, as a result of this, there will be an article in the April edition of *Sussex Living*, and over the next few months articles in our local publications e.g. *East Grinstead Living*.

We have various other ideas for the summer which we'll publicise in due course.

Susan Hodgson (Chair)

Poetry Corner

(I'm pleased that we've received some poems for this edition – I hope you'll enjoy them! Ed)

We salute you, Capt. Sir Tom

So it's goodbye Captain Tom, a 100 years at an end
Old soldier and fighter and everyone's friend
Reluctant hero, for neither fortune nor fame
Ever smiling and cheerful, always the same
You gave hope, inspiration, persistence and grit
And taught all people to care – to all do our bit
100 laps of your garden, walk frame in hand
You strode the last laps to a welcoming band
And raised 33 million for our stretched NHS
Never seeming to weary, never showing the stress
With strength and endurance you defied all your years
The sight of you striving drove many to tears
But determined, courageous you still battled on
Assured us "one day....this war SHALL be won"
Well done Captain Tom, of all men you're the best
With thanks and remembrance, in peace may you rest.

/over

One of those days!

Got up grumpy this morning, I'm sorry to say
Just had a feeling t'would be a bad day
Stumped toe on the bedpost, slipped on the stair
Fell over a book – now WHO left THAT there?
Went into the kitchen, the kettle to use
A bang and a flash – damned thing blew its fuse!
Got out a saucepan, put that on to boil
Bile starting to rise and anger to roil
“Do something useful” a thought had crept in
Tidy the kitchen – empty the bin
I picked up the bag to take to the door
Bloody thing broke all over the floor
Pan had run dry and thoroughly burned
“What is it I've done? This day to have earned”
Enough is enough I said in my head
With big toe a-throbbing I stormed back to bed.

Some days you should never get up!

Lin Kanji

A Sonnet to the Vaccine (with apologies to W. Shakespeare!)

Shall I compare thee to a nation's prayer?
Thou art more timely and more wonderful:
This virus shook the world both far and near;
Last summer's lease was all too short and cruel;
Sometime we think we have the answers made,
A virus comes and all our lives are dimm'd;
And every one of us our parts we played,
But death and illness struck and eyes with tears are brimm'd;
But by this dose of vaccine we are saved,
And once again our lives we can begin;
And loved ones hugged, so long we've craved,
And we will learn to feel the joy of simple things:
So long as we may live our eyes can see,
Without you, vaccine, just where would we be?

Charmian Gilbert

(More poetry over the page. Ed)

Watching

As you pass by my window
Glance up
Just a glance
And there's a chance
You'll meet my eye.

As you pass by my window
Look up
Look in
It won't unlock a lockdown
That locks up

But
As you pass by my window
You could smile
May be linger a while?
Perhaps even wave?

As you pass by my window
Remember I'm alone
Not so much lonely
But on my own

As you pass by my window
Just be clear
There's someone here
So
As you pass by my window
Smile
And I'll smile back!

Barbara Tomkinson



Litter Matters

A number of our u3a groups have been maintaining contact via ZOOM – a lovely word which used to mean “dashing off”, “speedily travelling” and so on. Will we ever be able to use it in this context again?

Obviously our group cannot carry out its activities on such a digital platform, so like other outdoor groups, we must be patient.

Picking up carelessly discarded litter calls forth the usual questions of “Why?..... Who?.....Can’t they just....?”

This pandemic and other recent events have thrown light on so many facets of human behaviour, some entirely commendable, some quite shameful.

We often hear the argument that an area which is heavily littered will encourage more littering. People will do the right thing provided it is convenient and there are plenty of bins in public spaces.

That certainly has an element of truth, but I’m still puzzled by what I see on my lockdown walks – such as a Coca Cola can “neatly placed” on a fire hydrant marker post in a residential street, within 2 metres of a clearly visible public bin. Ah well, the complexities of human behaviour!

New members are welcome. Please contact me via the u3a website.

Anne White

*(I was appalled by the continuous linear trail of litter along the side of the road when travelling between Crawley and Horsham along the A264 recently. I’m pleased to report that the A264 between East Grinstead and Crawley is rather tidier!
PS Before you ask.....It was an essential journey, as we were going to the dentist!!!* Ed)

On lockdown reading

(In my e-mail, sent out via Beacon, I was wondering what you’ve been reading. Here is one response. Ed)

I seem to be chasing all the novels I can get hold of by three writers: Lionel Shriver, William Boyd and Ian McEwan, and so I’d like to ask everyone else some related questions. Does anyone have a trio (or any number) of authors like this that they want to “suck dry” (in the nicest possible way)?

Perhaps, more relevantly for older readers living in East Grinstead, two further questions: what do you think of the Library fiction service? - and, do you mind getting fiction in non-standard formats like Talking Book and Large Print?

Peter Ellway

(Is this one for members of our book groups to respond to, perhaps? Ed)

A new website of possible interest

One of our members, Susan Berkshire writes:

Members might be interested in a new website called “Goldster”.

It offers a huge range of classes for our age group – reflexology, art, acting, painting, nutrition to name but a few. It has been free until now, but will charge £9.99 per month in future. I have been following it for a month now and enjoyed the classes very much. No – I don’t have shares in it!

It might help to tide us over until we “gain our freedom”.

Susan Berkshire

THE E.G. u3a ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION LUNCH

Wednesday, 7 July 2021 at 1:00pm



To celebrate the 25th anniversary of our East Grinstead u3a, we have arranged a special Party Celebration at the Meridian Hall, a year late, owing to the pandemic. The u3a was set up in May 1995 by Yvonne Wavell who unfortunately cannot join us for this event. The programme is as follows:

12:30pm – Reception: A glass of sparkling wine or orange juice on arrival

1:00pm – Lunch: (served by the Caterers' staff)

Menu: Free range slow-roasted Sussex Hog – served with apple sauce, BBQ sauce, onion chutney, spring onion coleslaw, stuffing, baby leaf salad, tomato & mozzarella salad, cucumber, roasted potatoes, bread.

Vegetarian Option: Deep-filled vegetable quiche **Vegan Option:** Vegan Burger

Dessert: Choose one from: New York cheesecake, fruit salad or lemon tart

Tea/coffee

Wine: 1 bottle red/1 bottle white per table – you may bring your own wine if you prefer

Entertainment: Magician and singer Marco Seymour will entertain us during the reception, followed by a cabaret show in the afternoon.

Carriages: 4:30pm

Total price: £12.50 per person

To book your place, please send this slip with your cheque made out to:

East Grinstead U3A to: Danielle Clarke, 55, Lancaster Drive, E.G., RH19 3 XJ

Telephone: 07917 694 736 (Cheques will only be banked in June)

Name(s).....

Number of places..... Tel. No.

Vegetarian Vegan.....

Please let us know your choice of dessert:.....

Please let us know if you wish to book a whole table (tables of 8) – with names, or who you would like to sit with.

(for the hard copy version, use the back of this slip, if necessary)

Getting lost

A tale with a moral!

We got lost in St. Petersburg once. The tour leader had warned us to stay with the group, but we preferred to go off alone. She had told us to take the SECOND metro sign we saw to get a train back to our hotel, but Alan dived down at the first sign. It was just like Piccadilly Circus in London and we went round and round the area, passing the same lady ticket collector several times. Everything was in Cyrillic script and we spoke no Russian. Eventually, we met a young man who spoke English, and were pushed hard on to a train. (No politeness there as the trains start without warning). I worked out the name of the station for our hotel by the shape of the script and, luckily, I was right!

The second time we got lost was on a Norwegian Coastal voyage. Some of us got off the boat to go by coach further along the coast. We lagged behind the group and lost them. We had a choice to turn left or turn right. We chose right..... and found them again!

Moral: Carry your passport and a phrase book, and keep up!

Margery Poole
Ed)

(Surely the moral is: STAY WITH THE GROUP...could this perhaps also apply to u3a members?!

Science & Technology Group

Since the lockdown in March 2020, the Science & Technology group has held regular monthly meetings, using Zoom, with a typical attendance of around 35-40.

We've had a number of excellent presentations on the following subjects:

- The development of the first UK nuclear bomb (George Pearson)
- Developments in space exploration (Gary Wood)
- Scottish police helicopter accident investigation (Ray White)
- Advances in sound recording technology (John Wells)
- What lies behind a typical website (Ivor Humphries)
- History of British civil aviation (Mike Vivian)
- UK Narrow gauge railways (Clive Kessel)
- An introduction to autorotation (Ray White)

Each of the talks has been well-received with plenty of discussion afterwards. Given the slightly detached atmosphere of Zoom meetings, we seem to have been able to enjoy a good level of social "contact" too, which bodes well for the day when we can revert to proper meetings again.

Whether or not you have a background in the Science & Technology sphere, I am sure you would enjoy being a member of our group. The talks are always interesting and pitched at a level that, hopefully, doesn't leave anyone lost and floundering.

A reminder that we are NOT oversubscribed. We are really looking forward to returning to our "home" in Crawley Down church hall just as soon as we are allowed.

If you feel this is for you, please get in touch via the u3a website and we will be happy to include you.

Ray White

Freedom

(I received this poem from Anne more or less as I was “putting the Newsletter to bed”, so I’ve added it as the final item. Anne is a former colleague of mine from our Imberhorne days, she used to be u3a secretary and currently is a member of our Creative Writing Group #2. It nicely rounds off this edition. [John Wells has placed it on the website]. Ed)

How strange to live in space so confined
a prison of sorts without bars.
Visitors may come but access is restricted
and we are quite restrained.

We can enjoy nature in modest doses.
Yet we are indefinitely tethered,
allowed out to graze in narrow clearings,
our movements held in check lest we stray.

We are fed and watered, lack nothing
except the joy of freedom to wander.
Our invisible chains pull tight
should our imaginations tempt us to soar.

Holiday vocabulary paces impatiently at the back of the queue
While new ones enjoy their time in the spotlight.
Upstarts like social distancing, lockdown blues, Covid deniers,
came from nowhere and are now centre stage.

Once upon another life we moved unobstructed.
Choice encircled us knowing no bounds.
No limits – unfettered, we would consider
the world and its plentiful offerings.

The sun, the sea, the hills, the pretty towns,
cosy tea rooms, fancy restaurants, salty air.
The world was our oyster then
And we didn’t even know it.

But we know now and when we are unhitched,
we will not be the same after such deprivations.
We can never be creatures with finite dreams.
We are already planning, foiling our captor.

Will there be merry-making, festivals, feasts?
Will we get it all back and bound away,
ungoverned, somewhat diminished, but no frustrations-
perhaps timidly, at first, then without constraint.

The earth and its creatures have had a reprieve,
They surely have not missed our absence,
but we are wanderers, trekkers, voyagers.
Guilt, gratitude, relief, sorrow will be travelling companions.....

Until we forget them.

Anne White

STOP PRESS: *The March Photography competition*

Back in February the Committee had a bright idea: why not run a monthly photographic competition? We are very keen to involve everyone that we possible can whilst this lockdown goes on and on, and our approach to the use of Zoom has been very productive.

(I do wish that I had shares in. that company....).

We have been running a more or less monthly online quiz with considerable success, but whilst thinking laterally we hit upon the idea of the competition. It wouldn't be a competition for professional photographers, because we wanted to get the greatest involvement of our members. We published a theme for the first four months, and I am delighted to say that it appears to be working. The MARCH quiz has just closed ; we stopped taking votes after 31st March. Edwin Cowley masterminded a weighted scoring routine and we asked members to vote for their top three images – all to be seen on the website or available for a download from Dropbox.

The statistics are interesting!

- 33 members expressed an interest in joining the competition.
- We had 50 entries in total.
- 45 members decided to vote for the top three images.
- The winner was **"Stalagmites in Hollow Lane, East Grinstead"** From Patrick Jackson
- Second was **"Robin's Viewpoint"** from Joyce flower, and third was **"Tracks in the Snow"** from Diana Roud
- An honourable mention goes to fourth placed entry - "Beautiful Sunrise across the Playing Fields" from Diana Roud

You can see all about the MARCH Photo Competition from here by visiting our website at

<https://u3asites.org.uk/east-grinstead/page/110693>

Why not enter the APRIL competition – it's free and fun. To find out more go straight to the APRIL 2021 page <https://u3asites.org.uk/east-grinstead/page/110694>

Meanwhile, here is Patrick's winning image. Caught frozen in time – literally. On a freezing cold day, with surface water on the road surface, passing traffic splashed water on to the verge, and this was the result



John Wells