



May 2023 Newsletter

Greetings and welcome to our May Newsletter,

In place of my usual 4-page monthly Chairman's Bulletin, every four months we produce a longer Newsletter. As well as the normal information about our general meetings, this newsletter is packed with information about our groups. I want to express my gratitude to all of our group leaders and especially those who have contributed to this issue. Without them, we wouldn't be able to offer such a diverse range of activities.

The group news comes after our usual 'Dates for your Diary'. The groups are listed in alphabetical order, and with 14 pages to read, you may wish to focus on the ones that interest you the most. However, I highly recommend taking the time to read Steve French's clever poem on the back page. Steve is a member of our creative writing group, which was formed at the end of last year and is now flourishing.

As a separate attachment there is a page of photos from last week's Coronation Tea. We held a quiz and a raffle and the occasion was organised by our committee members Jan Warr, Judith Moseley and Barbara William who did a really splendid job so a great big thank you to them and also to everyone who made such delicious savouries and cakes. I think everyone thoroughly enjoyed themselves and we were delighted that Barbara Cordina, our East of England Trustee, was able to join us.

Thank you for taking the time to read our newsletter and I hope you enjoy it.

Viv (01582 766147)

Members' News

This month we are delighted to welcome as new members **Christine Gould, Martha Cadena Lemus, Matthew Hignell, Gill Moorcroft, Rosie Warltier and Adrienne Oxley.** I hope you all enjoy your membership.

We also wish **John Sander** well as he recovers at home after a recent spell in hospital.

Dates for Your Diary

Below is the programme of General Meetings up to the end of July. They will, unless otherwise stated, all take place in the Trust Hall, opposite the Plough and Harrow, at 2.15 on the dates shown. Whereas the Speaker Meetings have a talk by a visiting speaker, Members' Afternoons have a shorter talk by one of our own members, followed by time for a cup of tea or coffee and a chat.

18th May, Speaker Meeting – 'Poisons for Medicine'. Graham Harrison will give us a darkly humorous look at medicines in the 19th century. The reign of Victoria saw the development of chemical medicine from medieval alchemy to modern pharmacy. Chemists lent their ingenuity to provide anything customers wanted. Some made fortunes, some made disastrous mistakes.

1st June, Members' Meeting – 'More of Old London on Camera 1860-1920' by Alan Bunting

15th June, Speaker Meeting – 'A Concise History of our Great British Parks' by Paul Rabbitts, author and historian. (please note the date, incorrect in last bulletin)

6th July, Members' Meeting – "Protect Yourself from Scams" by Sue Shanahan, Senior Trading Standards Officer at Hertfordshire County Council. Sue is a very welcome return speaker following her well-received talk last year.

20th July – Annual Summer Get-Together at the Plough and Harrow.

Before we go on to news from the groups, I want to include the following article from Eric Midwinter that he sent me for inclusion in this newsletter. For our new members, Eric is one of the three founding members of the u3a movement, 40 years ago. He lives in Harpenden and we are lucky to have him as our President. Here it is.

MAKING SURE EVERYONE IS INVOLVED

Eric Midwinter, President, Harpenden u3a

As Third-agers we are already on a waiting list. Time is not on our side. That is why the U3A is a firmly inclusive society, strongly opposed to waiting lists either for general or interest group membership. U3A is dedicated to making sure there is a place for everyone. There are various ways and means to avoid waiting lists.

1. Are You Sure Your Group is 'Full'?.....it is not unusual to find that U3A members go on holiday, fall ill, have a better offer, elope with the milkman. Thus, there are often one or two absentees from each meeting. If you can accommodate ten, then you might risk having twelve members, especially if, as is sometimes the case, members who know they will not be attending keep the convenor informed.

2. Taking turns.....a further device if your group is truly full is for one or two members to drop out each time, so that everyone may be accommodated on a regular basis. Obviously, if this can be operated in conjunction with, as above, known absences, so much the better.

3. Change Venues.....over the years several groups have outgrown household size and processed into 'small hall' usage, with tiny fees of a pound or two charged. Harpenden has a number of such loci.

4. Start a New Group.... not just by advertising it, but by running it: in brief, three or four existing members might join the new group to give it momentum from their experience, dropping out perhaps after it has matured. Don't leave it to be started from scratch.

Finally, Responsibility... it is too easily forgotten that it is implicit in 'The Objects and Guiding Principles' of the U3A that it is not just the duty of the committee but of ALL members to ensure that no fellow Third-ager should be denied access to U3A activities.

Postscript from Viv – this article by Eric is particularly pertinent to me. Last week I spoke to my 75-year-old sister-in-law who lives some distance away. She has had a difficult life, was widowed in her forties, has lost two young grandchildren, one to cancer and one in a car accident and now is suffering from considerable health problems amongst many other things. I have suggested she join her local u3a. Yesterday she told me she had looked at the website (which she found very uninviting and old-fashioned – and it is) but a large number of the 140 groups were fully subscribed or had a waiting list. That u3a has over 2,000 members and perhaps this is a way of discouraging further members to join but my sister-in-law would find it so beneficial. I find it really sad that she has been completely put off trying to join.

GROUP NEWS

New Groups

I am pleased to say that the proposed **Science and Technology** group has now attracted enough members to start up and I hope their first meeting will take place very shortly.

A second **Needlecraft** group and a new **Play Reading** group are close to starting and we have had interest in a **German** group and a **Latin** group and recently a **Cycling** group has been suggested as well as a second **Strollers** group to take place on a weekday. Please let Viv Chandler know if you could be interested in any of these.

Art Appreciation Group – report from Pat Jacques, Group Leader

The group has studied the works of female painters which led us on to the French Impressionists. Slightly pre-dating the Impressionists were three famous English painters, Thomas Gainsborough 1727–1788; John Constable 1776–1837 and Joseph William Turner 1775–1851.

Gainsborough was famous for portraits and landscapes. One of his most famous paintings, Mr and Mrs Andrews, shows the newly married pair on the left of the painting and a lovely view of farmlands behind them, theirs! His highly accomplished portraits show not only a likeness but something of the character and mood and also the attire. At that time all garments were hand made and the ladies' wonderful dresses, were often silk and decorated with magnificent lace trimmings. The quality of the craftsmanship must be without equal.

Another of his famous paintings was titled, The Blue Boy. Apparently, Gainsborough owned a number of splendid outfits, wonderful dresses and the blue outfit. The outfit was the subject and the young man just to show it off! It is a wonderfully accomplished painting.

How do you paint these wonderful fabrics which shine in the light? The image of shining folds is created by putting light and darker tones of the same colour close together, creating the tonal contrasts, in very shiny fabric the move from dark to light tones is short whereas when painting velvets with slightly lower high lights the change from dark to lighter tones is more gradual, softer, giving the muted changes from light to dark.

John Constable's work was driven by his pursuit of the truth, he painted as he saw and he revered the actuality and the poetry of his countryside. He grew up in Suffolk and loved the lush scenery there. At that time landscape painting was formulaic, with warm browns in the foreground and pale skies in the distance. Constable disregarded that approach and found his own way, breaking the rules to do so. His work shows animated brushwork and colours local to the scene. Constable was elected as an Associate to the Royal Academy in 1819.

To capture the ever-changing light and atmosphere in landscape is challenging in the very evanescent nature of the subject. He said that painting is a science and should be pursued as an enquiry into the laws of Nature. He often painted on large canvasses, 6 feet across. He often included agricultural workers whom he saw as man in harmony with nature.

There is an awesome quality in Constable's skies, his use of colour and form creating a mood for the setting. He was admired for catching the truth of nature and for avoiding any bravura and pretentiousness.

Constable gave to the world a dazzlingly clear view of the natural world that remains unsurpassed.

J W M Turner must be one of the greatest painters, ever. He was acquainted with a group of watercolour artists who painted landscapes. They captured the atmosphere in their paintings. The joy of watercolour is its transparency. Light travels through the pigments and bounces back from the white paper, giving a jewel-like quality.

Eventually, this enthusiasm matured for Turner into capturing the light. He eventually transposed the capture of light from watercolour into oil painting, not relying so much on transparency as on his use of paint and his expert use of the brush and choice of colour. Oil paint is often opaque, thus not having the transparency of watercolour.

When Turner saw the paintings of Claude Lorrain, he was smitten by the way the painter had captured the light. It struck a note with him as he had been fully aware of the light and the reflected light coming from the River Thames, which he knew so well.

In 1802 he was elected a full member of the Royal Academy. When he was 32, he was elected Professor of Perspective also at the Royal Academy. At age 35 he went to stay with his patron, Walter Fawkes, of Farnley Hall in Yorkshire and for the following decade toured in Europe. In 1831 he toured in Scotland researching locations to be included in the volume of Sir Walter Scott's verse.

In 1834 the Houses of Parliament caught fire and Turner made some brief sketches from the scene for subsequent paintings. At this time, he was considering a quieter life and took a cottage on Cheyne Row, Chelsea.

Turner's revelations of atmosphere and light answered the need for a new artistic language. He was, without doubt, Genius at work.

For further information about this group, please contact Pat Jacques on 01582 713166.

Creative Writing

For our group meeting in April, we all wrote stories about ghosts rather than ghost stories. And it was amazing how different the stories were. Some were serious, some were humorous and some brought to life memories we'd long forgotten.

The topic for our May meeting is 'Victorian murders'. No doubt they will be dark and full of twists and turns. While the month of June will keep us busy preparing our entries for the u3a national creative writers' competition.

One of our members, Steve French, has written an excellent acrostic poem which you will find at the back of this newsletter. Please read it.

If you are interested in this group, please contact Brian Ball on 07751667551 / 01582 624579.

Family History

Researching your family history is a mixture of a good detective novel and a jigsaw puzzle and can be just as frustrating and finally satisfying.

There are so many old records out there that it can be very confusing. What we have to remember is that these records were written for a purpose – usually for local or national government use and not for the use of family historians many, many years later. Luckily, so many records are now online that researching is now easier than it was but it can still be immensely confusing which is what we try and redress in our enjoyable meetings.

We meet on the fourth Tuesday of the month at 2.30 in the Randall Room at the Harpenden Trust Halls and our next meeting will continue our theme of **How to Break Down Brick Walls in our Research.**

Have you ever thought of tracing your family history? If so, please contact Viv Chandler on 01582 766147.

History

The History Group continues to meet on a monthly basis, with the meetings being held on the second Tuesday of the month at 2.30 at the Harpenden Trust Hall. There is a significant variety of subjects and presentations made, with a pleasing increase in the number of members who are responsible for making the presentations.

The next two rostered presentations are to be held on Tuesday, 9th May, when Roger Thompson is to give a talk on the subject '**Was the Allied bombing of Dresden a War Crime**'. The following talk is to be held on Tuesday 13th June, when the subject of the talk will be '**The Middle East: The Insiders and the Outsiders.**' This presentation will be made by Phil Marsh.

Further information from Roger Thompson on 01582 620811.

Local History

Paul Gardiner, the Group Leader writes:

The group this year has looked at Harpenden Names, Population Growth, and Houses and Shops. The next meeting will be on **Romans in Harpenden**.

The group meets on the third Wednesday of the month at 2.15pm in the Ted Allen room behind the allotment shop on Dark Lane just up from the Tip.

I can be contacted on 01582 768593.

London Explorers

Here is Alan Bunting's report on the last London Explorers' trip to London in March:

On a cold but bright Saturday in March, in spite of what was an enjoyably educational day of London exploration for our 12-strong u3a group, we encountered repeated themes of mediaeval death, disease and barbarism, during our two-hour peregrination of the historic Clerkenwell area on the western side of the city 'square mile'.

We were met at Farringdon station by our admirably clear-speaking guide Colin Oakes, a familiar face to most of us. Colin reminded us that our Thameslink train from St Pancras down to Farringdon followed the exact route of what is claimed to be the first 'underground' railway in the world, albeit constructed back in the 1860s by the hugely disruptive 'cut and cover' method, rather than by deep-level 'tube'.

There, on the southern edge of Clerkenwell, we were close to the now completely enclosed River Fleet flowing south into the Thames at Blackfriars. But until 1880 it was an open and wide but malodorous stream, into which was deposited every kind of detritus, most disgustingly of all perhaps, the butchery waste from Smithfield meat market.

However, long before the days of refrigeration, in order to prolong the effective 'shelf life' of Smithfield meat, it could be flavoured during cooking with saffron, often supplied by merchants based near the market on what duly became Saffron Hill, on the west side of the Fleet.

From the station we walked eastwards along Cowcross Street, its name coming from the route taken by animals on their way to be slaughtered. It is a street which, until the 1930s, was particularly noted for its specialised workshops manufacturing clocks, telescopes and other precision instruments. A little further on we paused at 'The Rookery', now a discreet luxury hotel but, in past days, in utter contrast, a centre of extreme poverty and deprivation, where pickpocket and 'cutpurse' activity was rife.

At the junction of Charterhouse Street we entered an area of London noted for the sites, in close proximity, of three ancient monasteries, the oldest dating from the late 12th Century, from where Knights Templar embarked on their crusades. More benevolently, St John's Monastery founded today's eponymous and greatly revered Ambulance Service.

Walking further eastwards we entered the open space of Charterhouse Square, the notorious burying place of thousands of victims of the Great Plague in 1665 where, during the last decade or two, excavation of the tunnels for the new Crossrail line uncovered many of their skeletal remains.

Crossing Charterhouse Street we entered the architecturally grandiose Victorian structure of Smithfield Market built in 1855. Partly as a result of the Covid pandemic, it has greatly scaled down its traditional business, which was to butcher and sell the meat from cattle, sheep and pigs mainly slaughtered elsewhere, for example at Caledonian Road market in north London. Following the pattern set 40 years ago by Covent Garden fruit and vegetable market being turned into the London Transport Museum, Smithfield is now destined to become part of the city's Museum of London.

Adjacent to the market buildings is another open space, that is West Smithfield, today accommodating a large faceless car park. But in olden times it was the designated place for public executions, typically of convicted criminals brought from nearby Newgate Prison. It is clear that there were no limits to the extent of the barbarity practiced by the executioners, frequently egged on by bloodthirsty crowds with fewer alternative 'entertainments' available.

Many of those convictions were 'pronounced' at London's Central Criminal Court, colloquially referred to as the Old Bailey, though that is the historic street in which the court is situated and from where our perambulations led us along to the junction with Ludgate Hill. From there we glimpsed the west frontage of St Paul's Cathedral and learned that before Sir Christopher Wren created his architectural masterpiece there was an earlier St Paul's on the site which was much more 'down to earth', so to speak, inasmuch that it was open for all kinds of secular activities, some of which for example involved horses driving through the church.

At the bottom of Ludgate Hill we re-encountered the line of the River Fleet which gave its name to



Fleet Street leading westward towards the Strand. But we turned left into New Bridge Street (leading south to Blackfriars Bridge) to reach our designated lunch venue, a venerable pub called The Albion, where our hunger pangs were suitably assuaged before we walked along to catch our homeward train from Blackfriars Station, pausing only for a group photograph outside the historic and picturesque 'Black Friar' hostelry.

MahJong

The MahJong group, which meets weekly on Wednesday afternoons at the Salvation Army Hall, has continued to go from strength to strength, with the result that we have to consider our membership group of about 24 as having reached its maximum size for the time being. Penny, the group leader, has organised occasional teaching sessions through the year, with some of those who attended going on to join the group, and some opting to set up a St Albans u3a group which meets in the King William pub there.

Penny Turnbull (01582 766824)

Needlecraft

The Needlecraft group meets twice a month but unfortunately has no room for any more members as they need space with all their work materials. However, a second Needlecraft group is in the process of being set up. So, if you fancy some time 'stitching and chatting' please contact Judith Moseley on judithmoseley@hotmail.co.uk

Reading Group 2

There are many reasons why people join a book group. For some, it is to meet with like-minded people and to discuss the book that everyone in the group has just read. Friendships arise from meeting with group members. For others it provides the impetus to revive a reading habit, there is an obligation to read a book a month which for members is a pleasure, not a chore.

First and foremost – it is fun!



The Harpenden u3a second book group was formed last year because the first group was over-subscribed. Six months later the new group has around ten members and is thriving. Meetings are held on the second Thursday of every month in The Engineer in Southdown from 12 noon. Members take it in turns to nominate a book for each month, a list is circulated so that everyone knows well in advance what the selected books are. The person who nominates the book leads the discussion of the chosen book. We discuss our reactions

to the book for an hour – time flies by! After the formal part of the meeting, most members choose to stay on and continue discussions and have a light lunch and a drink. In this way, the members have got to know each other well and many have become friends. Alliances extend to the walking group because four book group members are also walkers.

All books so far have been novels, they are 21st century and have covered scenarios including Germany before the war, modern USA and Stalin's Russia. The book for June will be a Thomas Hardy written in the late 19th century. In contrast later this year two non-fiction books have been selected, 'Invisible Child' by Andrea Elliott and 'Wilding: the return of nature to a British farm' by Isabella Tree. Group members are balanced in terms of gender and there is a good mix of those with science, engineering and arts backgrounds. There are a few vacancies – contact Steve Gledhill if you are interested in joining on 07785 381912.

Scrabble

Scrabble Group meetings rotate between the homes of those members who have enough table room. We play two games at once when there are enough players, then swap round after refreshment and do it again. We don't take ourselves too seriously and aren't into championships! More experienced players share their expertise and tactics. It's a lot of fun. We meet on the first and third Tuesdays of each month at 10am. Come and join us if you like word games. Contact Joyce Bunting on 01582 760564.

Spanish Conversation

We formed our Spanish conversation group In October 22 and have been meeting fortnightly since then. There are 7 regular members with varying levels of proficiency, but it doesn't seem to matter. We share our knowledge and enjoy practising Spanish in a friendly, relaxed environment. Members have suggested a range of topics on which we base our sessions, ranging from la Comida Espanola.....



to La Reconquista.....



.....Y mucho mas

If you are interested in Spanish language, culture and cuisine and want to improve your existing level of spoken Spanish, then please come along and try us out. You will be warmly welcomed! The meetings are held on Tuesdays fortnightly between 10 – 11.30 at the Halls next to Southdown Coop. There is a small charge to pay for the hire of the room. Tea and coffee are provided. For further information contact Rosemary Fenton on 07443 425826 or email defenton@hotmail.com

Saturday Strollers

Our group of up to about fifteen 'unhurried' walkers has dutifully maintained what amounts to our regular Saturday morning explorations of the Hertfordshire countryside, usually following footpaths which are preferably 'off the beaten track'. They are generally not too challenging in terms of distance, though in recent months the main hazard has been mud! But we remain undaunted, buoyed up by the knowledge that within an hour or so we'll be arriving at a welcome pub, where we have normally pre-ordered lunch. Typical of those not-too-strenuous Saturday strolls was our recent two-and-a-half mile perambulation around Gustard Wood, after meeting up at 10.30 at our eventual lunch venue, the Cross Keys pub on the edge of the common. Through narrow paths, across open fields and through woodland thick with lovely bluebells in full bloom, and with ever-present mud under foot, we in due course crossed Lamer Lane and navigated our way, via Gustard Wood golf course, back to the Cross Keys, ready for pre-lunch thirst-quenchers.



Walking Group

From the Group Leader, Hugh Fricker: A big thank you, first, to Tessa Abberley, who stood down from organising the group in February. We are all very grateful for her hard work, and pleased that she is remaining a member. Thank you, too, to those members who take turns to plan and lead our walks. Hertfordshire has such a fine network of footpaths, and since

New Year we've enjoyed lovely countryside and good company on walks from Rothamsted, Nomansland, St Albans, Wheathampstead, Flamstead, Colney Street and Redbourn. And now that we can share cars again, we hope to venture further afield from time to time – most recently for a fine walk round the Woburn estate. It has been a real pleasure to welcome several new members recently. We hope they will enjoy it, and we all look forward to more good walking through the summer months.

For further information, please contact Hugh Fricker on 01582 767999.



AND FINALLY, something you might find of interest.

Until 11th June there is a Free Exhibition at St Albans Abbey

"Why not visit St Albans Abbey before the 11th June and see the Creation stories reimagined in this outstanding quilt exhibition by Devon-based textile artist Jacqui Parkinson. Let yourself be enchanted by 12 large-scale and colourful embroideries while you look, imagine and question the Book of Genesis in a completely different way."

Nothing to do with our u3a but an exhibition many of you may be interested in visiting.

CREATIVE WRITING

Create at your own pace, and in your own time
Rules are your own, no matter if it doesn't rhyme
Early morning, coffee break – there's no bottom line
Anarchy at first, then simmer, then refine
Time to play, erase, put in, or scrub out
It's all yours, welling up from your own verbal spout
Verbal fencing, tilting, jousting, duelling
Everything – your creative appetite fuelling

Wars between bewitching and beguiling words
Resolving, jostling, then finding chiming chords
In your mind, just whimsically playing
Time's secondary; it's ok delaying
Individual seeds then carefully sowed
Now it's done. Completed. All's neat and bowed.
Grounded, still. Your verbal chicks, now ready to
release.

Steven French

Harpenden

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