



January 2023 Newsletter

A very Happy New Year to each and every one of you from your committee. Let's hope that this will be a year when we can complete a full programme without any hitches. If so, this will be the first year that has been the case since 2019.

Until last March when we returned to meetings in the Trust Hall we had relied on Zoom since the pandemic started. Most of us disliked it intensely but it served its purpose and kept us going – in a diluted form– when we were not able to meet personally. Thank goodness we are now back meeting together as normal both at our general meetings and also in our groups. I think we have all realised how much we gain by socialising together face to face.

Please make sure you have made a note of all of our general meetings in your diaries – you will find details of them on the next page. They all look very interesting and there should be something there to suit most members.

We have gained a considerable number of new members in 2022 and I hope you are all enjoying your 'u3a experience'. We like to welcome personally our new members and so we have planned a New Members' Afternoon in the Trust Hall for those who have joined since September. This will take place on Thursday, 30th March where you can meet the Committee and Group Leaders. I will be sending out invitations to this shortly.

The rest of this newsletter is mainly an update on our groups. The groups are the mainstay of any u3a and our 21 groups are flourishing at the moment – a great delight to me. Thank you to the Group Leaders for your contributions.

If anybody has any suggestions for further groups or for further activities they would like to see as part of our calendar, please do let me or any committee member know. We are always open to suggestions.

With my very best wishes

Viv (01582 766147)

Members News

I am extremely sad to report that we lost two of our long-standing and active members just before Christmas. **Derek Gill** died on 20th December from pneumonia and **John Eggle** on the 22nd.



Derek and his wife Ruth (who herself died recently) joined our u3a when they moved to Harpenden 10 years or so ago to be near their daughter and they immediately became active and popular members. They attended most Thursday afternoon meetings and became members of the History, Family History, Current Affairs and Strollers groups. Our condolences go to Jo, Derek's daughter, her brother and both their families at this time.

John had also been a very active member for many years and had served on the committee. Up until the pandemic John arrived early at the hall for our Thursday afternoon meetings and set out the chairs despite his diminishing eyesight. He and his wife, Mavis, were also regulars at the History and Current Affairs Groups and at the now defunct Poetry Group. Our thoughts are with Mavis and their family at this time.



Dates for Your Diary

Below is the programme of General Meetings up to the end of April. They will all take place in the Trust Hall, opposite the Plough and Harrow, at 2.15 on the dates shown (apart from the Seniors Fair, see details below). 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.

19th January **Speaker Meeting – Mike Barbakoff**, a guide at Bletchley Park will talk on 'The World War II History of Bletchley Park'

2nd February **Members' Afternoon** – our member, **Tony Owens**, will give an illustrated talk on 'The Way to Compostela'

16th February **Speaker Meeting – 'Welcome to my World'**, a talk by **William French**, butler to the Royal Family and Stars

- 2nd March** **Members' Afternoon – tba**
- 16th March** **Speaker Meeting – 'William Morris and the Arts and Craft Movement'** This talk will be given by **Mark Lewis**. Mark is a freelance artist, designer, silversmith and semi-retired university lecturer.
- 30th March** **New Members' Meeting** (by invitation only)
- 4th April** **Harpenden Seniors' Fair – 10.30–1.30** at the Eric Morecambe Centre
- 6th April** **Members' Afternoon –** Our Vice Chairman, **Roger Thompson**, will give a short presentation on **'The History of the BBC as it turns 100'**
- 20th April** **Speaker Meeting –** **Bobbie Darbyshire** will give a light hearted, informative talk on **'Where do novelists get their ideas from?'** Bobbie is a prize-winning author of four novels. She has much life experience to draw upon having worked as a barmaid, mushroom picker, film extra, maths coach, cabinet minister's private secretary, care assistant and volunteer adult-literacy teacher, as well as in social research and government policy.

Group News

Art Appreciation Group

Over the last year we have been studying Female artists starting with Artemisia Gentileschi. b.1593.

The background for these pioneers was, "Women can't paint, the very idea!!" No expectations, no provision. It is a story of sheer determination, against all the odds. There were no courses which would admit them and they learned by watching others at work. The first group of women to study Art were not allowed into life classes. Daughters of painters, like Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun, b.1755, watched and no doubt played in and around the studio. She became a truly wonderful painter and worked at the French court, painting Marie Antoinette amongst others (see an example of her work on the right). She fled to Austria with her art materials and her daughter in her own coach to escape the Revolution.



The other painters studied were Angelica Kauffman, Suzanne Valadon, Berthe Morisot, Mary Cassatt, Gwen John, Georgia O'Keefe, Paula Rego and Bridget Riley.

Mary Cassatt was American and when she came to Paris was befriended by Degas and Manet. She was intrigued by the new way of painting, which developed into Impressionism. The new idea was to paint the effect of light on colour. This theme brought us to study the Impressionists. We have recently immersed ourselves in the work of Monet. Where better to be.

Interested? Please contact **Pat Jacques**.

The Church and Pub group

This is a friendly inclusive group of people with a varied interest in Churches. We meet irregularly to visit a church, and adjourn for a bite to eat and to discuss what we have seen afterwards.

We have met twice so far, first visiting Dunstable Priory followed by afternoon tea, and later Ayot St Peters church, with lunch afterwards at the nearby Waggoners pub.

Plans for 2023 include a train visit to London, aiming to visit both the St Pancras churches, and possibly to see St Leonards Church, Flamstead.

Those who might be interested in joining our next expedition should ask **Roger Fox** to add their names to his email list.

Climate Change Group

The Climate Change Group has had a busy agenda. We have looked at air and water pollution and the state of the oceans. We considered the impact of the long drought this summer. Whilst we enjoyed the sunshine, it meant that we were living on water reserves and there are a lot of us! We have considered carefully measures for conserving water to replace some of our reserves. We also hoped for heavy rain during the Autumn, Winter and Spring in case we have another long dry summer. We flagged up the need for very short showers, few loo flushes, only do laundry with a full load- we developed quite a long list!

We had a very rewarding time looking on line at the Ouarzazate Solar farm in Morocco. Please do have a look yourselves and prepare to be amazed. This type of solar farm has very many mirrors arranged in an array of concentric circles. The power from the sun is beamed from the mirrors onto a central tower that is filled with oil. The oil heats to very high temperatures which drive turbines for generating electricity. And, there is a connecting cable to Europe! On site they also store the heat in molten salt and on the same site water is desalinated. This is such an amazing site other countries have copied the idea. The world's biggest is now claimed to be in Nevada, USA. To achieve this wonder, you need ample sunshine and a good supply of water to power wash the mirrors to clear off the particles of sand.

Now we have had very cold weather, we have dressed for winter, in our warmest clothes. The forecast cost for fuel this winter, for the average home, is £3,000. This has set us thinking about ways to turn down the thermostat. The first item is to dress really warmly, in addition, use very warm curtains and line them with thermal linings, which is inexpensive and also to stop up all the draughts.

At last, a break in the weather means that the heating may well be turned very low or off.

For further information, please contact **Pat Jacques**.

Creative Writing Group

We are a new group with six members and have now met three times. It has been enjoyable getting to know each other and to discover what we like to write about. In December, our theme, not unsurprisingly, was Christmas and you will find Joyce Bunting's contribution 'Pensioners' Lunch' reproduced at the end of this newsletter. Please don't miss it as we are certain you will enjoy it. We meet on the 2nd Wednesday of the month and if you are interested in finding out more, please contact **Brian Ball**.

Exploring London

Roger Thompson writes: I write to inform u3a members that I have been requested to take over the organising of the Exploring London Group. I will be joined in this task by Christine Lea. We will be meeting shortly to plan a programme of visits, which I know are so enjoyable to many u3a members.

The task of Group Leader has for many years been carried out so well by Patrick Kenny, but reluctantly he has now considered that the time is right to pass the responsibility to others. The u3a owes a great deal of thanks for what Patrick has done and achieved for the Exploring Group over his time as Group Leader.

Later in this newsletter you will find a report by Norma Windle on the Group's visit to Southwark in the autumn.

If you would like to be added to the mailing list for this group, please contact **Roger Thompson**.

Family History Group

Family History is not just about tracing your family back as far as you can but also about finding out what was happening in their lifetimes that would affect choice of jobs, movement around the country, immigration and emigration, size of families, social class, choice of religion etc. This leads to some very interesting meetings and helps us understand our ancestors' decisions. We have a variety of experience amongst our members from beginners to those who have been researching for many years. If this interests you, please get in touch with Viv Chandler.

History Group

The History Group meets on the second Tuesday of each month at 2.30 pm. The meetings are held at the Harpenden Trust Hall, and each attendee is asked for a contribution of £1 to cover the hire cost of the room. The numbers attending the meetings have grown but members of the u3a can attend meetings, and that position will only be reviewed if the meeting room's capacity begins to be exceeded.

The Group has a programme of presentations for the next 6 months, and those for the remainder of the year will shortly be agreed. The details about each of these are always included in the Chairman's monthly bulletin. A letter about each meeting and the topic being presented is also sent to history group members. It is also pleasing that there is an increase in the numbers of members who are making presentations, so a greater range of topics are now being given. The topic for the next meeting on **Tuesday, January 10th**, is 'The Chinese Civil War' presented by Gerald Cuff. Gerald was a former History Group Leader so we are pleased to welcome him back.

Finally, I wish to give great thanks to **Eric Midwinter**, who has now decided it is time for him to relinquish his Group Leader role. Eric has been a wonderful ambassador for the History Group, and we are all pleased that he will continue to attend meetings of the Group and make his wonderful presentations.

To be added to the mailing list for the History Group, please contact **RogerThompson**.

Hot Issues Seminar Group (HIS)

Up to 14 of us meet once a month to analyse and debate hot issues of the day. In preparation for each session, one of us either writes a paper and/or provides a reading list and then makes a brief presentation to introduce the topic at the meeting.

This autumn our topics were Levelling Up, The BBC, Ukraine and The British Economy. In each session we tried to draw conclusions on what might be done. The collective knowledge and wisdom of the group is amazing and we sometimes feel that we should contact the government with our policy recommendations.

We start the New Year with a discussion on Water and the state of our rivers and oceans. Future issues are Crime and public disorder, The NHS and Social Care, The Electoral System and Propaganda and Power.

Regretfully as a group we are full, in fact over large already. The ideal number for discussions like ours would be 10. We have discussed the possibility of creating a second group. One or two of our present group would be prepared to help start it up. So if you are interested in joining, please put your name forward and if and when we have sufficient interest, we'll see what we can do.

Chris Marsden, HIS Group Convenor

Local History Group

The Local History group now has thirteen members which is getting to be a bit of a tight squeeze in our meeting room.

Since we started in July, we have covered Harpenden Common, Made in Harpenden, Harpenden Ghosts, Jarvis and Hodgson and Harpenden Schools. Topics to come include Shops, Houses, Population Growth and Names.

We meet once a month on Wednesday afternoons. For further information, please contact Paul Gardiner.

Needlecraft Group

We have been meeting most months on the 1st and 4th Wednesday afternoons of the month in members' houses and managed to get some stitching done as well as catching up with each other. One of our members has been doing a cross stitch sampler of her life story designed by herself with small pictures of events in her life. It is getting near to completion and will be something she can hand on to her family as a memento. We are looking forward to seeing the finished article.

We are still restricted to 6 as we meet in members' homes and we need quite a bit of space for our work so unfortunately, we are not able to take new members at present. I already have one lady who has been patiently waiting for a vacancy for well over a year.

Reading Group 1

Jean Rapier writes: Our group meets in members' homes on a Tuesday afternoon, usually once a month, and there is a strong social element to our gatherings. We continue to use the excellent service provided by H.C.C. libraries service. The list they produce of available books is updated each year.

Books we have generally enjoyed include "The Foundling" by Stacey Halls, "Klara and the Sun" by Kazuo Ishiguro "The Beekeeper of Aleppo" by Christy Lefteri and "A Place Called Winter" by Patrick Gale. Unfortunately, there are no vacancies in this group.

Reading Group 2

A second Harpenden u3a Book group was formed recently because the existing group had become full and had a waiting list for new members. I took up the challenge to start a new group and am pleased to report that it has been a great success with ten members rapidly joining; membership around ten is generally considered to be about the right number, with a good gender mix.

At the group meetings we decide on a book for us all to read and a month later we discuss it and agree on the next book. The first choice was a recent published book 'Lessons in Chemistry' by Bonnie Garmus about a female in the 1950s confronting male dominance. It is being made into a TV series for Apple TV and was the first Book at Bedtime on Radio 4 in 2023, and is very popular. To illustrate our eclectic tastes the second book chosen was 'Murder on the Orient Express' by Agatha Christie. It has some interesting issues including a major moral dilemma and racism.

At the time of writing, we have had only two discussion meetings plus one additional one for Christmas lunch. The lunch was a great opportunity to get to know each other socially; it is a welcoming and friendly group.



The group meets on the second Thursday of the month at 12 noon in The Engineer pub in Southdown. We can probably squeeze in another member or two if you would like to join; contact Steve Gledhill on 07785 381912.

Singing for Pleasure

Our Singing group recommences on **12 January** with following sessions on **26 January, 9 February, 23 February, 9 March and 23 March**. We meet in the Renwick Hall at the Harpenden Trust Halls at 2pm for an hour and there is a small charge toward the hall cost. All welcome. We really enjoyed last term when we sang Christmas carols, some of which we shared with you at our Christmas party in December – see photo below.



Spanish Conversation

Since our first meeting three months ago, we have been working on finding the right level as meeting the expectations of a wide range of linguistic ability is not easy. However, we have settled down with six regular attendees, a very practical size for conversation. Participants are being encouraged to each lead a session, choosing their own topic and delivering a short piece on it, on which the ensuing conversation is based. We also cover areas of grammar as they occur. For further information, please contact **Rosemary Fenton**.

Walkers

The Walking Group meets fortnightly on a Monday morning, come rain or shine, with different members leading the walks. It is good news that we have joined with other u3as within the East of England region to help produce an 85-page booklet illustrating walks across the area. This was a project for the 40th Anniversary of the u3a last year.

Our Walking Group is a very popular group and 15 of us sat down to a most enjoyable Christmas lunch at the White Horse in Hatching Green, photo below.



Report of London Explorers' Visit to Southwark – Autumn 22

Norma Windle writes: In the autumn 13 of us met our guide, Colin Oakes, at Blackfriars Station to explore the Southwark tourists do not see.

We started by walking over Blackfriars Bridge admiring the Thames and embankments in the sunshine and seeing the old pillars of the first bridge and the dragon denoting the City boundary. As this was the limit of the police authority it made Southwark a haven for criminals and prostitutes.

The name Southwark came from 'south' and 'work' because it was the area, originally marshy, swampy and dirty, at the southern end of London Bridge where there were docks and manufacturing, i.e. chocolate and ice cream making, and where there was a super abundance of brewers due to the proximity of fields of grain and the Kent hop fields. This was also an area famous for licensed and unlicensed brothels ("stews") many on church property. King Henry VIII closed down some but licensed some of his own. Bear and bull baiting was also a favourite pastime.

One place of interest tourists may miss is the Kirkcaldy Testing Works where there is a 48ft long hydraulic machine built by a Scottish engineer, David Kirkcaldy, in 1865. It tested the strength of all the new construction materials coming into use, including eucalyptus trees which proved to be of very little strength for house building. It is now a working museum.

Another is the Hopton Almshouses (built 1746) founded for poor men of good character from a legacy from Charles Hopton, a wealthy member of the Fishmongers Guild. It is still in use and kept in good condition but is overshadowed by a modern overpowering glass and steel building.

We also saw the Crossbones Graveyard in Redcross Way, which was excavated in 1990 when the Jubilee Line was being built. It was the burial place for licensed medieval prostitutes and later paupers and is now a garden of remembrance with a boundary fence adorned with ribbons and banners giving names and dates.

On our way along Bankside to our lunch venue at The Founder's Arms, Colin pointed out a house associated with two of King Henry VIII's wives and Sir Christopher Wren, (we'd left the red-light area by then!) also the Tate Modern art gallery which used to be a power station and both the new Globe Theatre and the site of Shakespeare's building.



He also demonstrated how the ferryman's seat would have been used in the days when watermen waited for the cry of "Oars !" ready to ferry his passengers 'Westward Ho' or 'Eastward Ho' along a very busy river. There is plenty more of interest in the other side of Southwark including the Cathedral which started off as the parish church of St Mary Overie but perhaps that will be explored on another occasion.

Below is Joyce Bunting's Contribution to the Creative Writing Group's December Meeting

Pensioners' Christmas lunch

Christmas Day, 11.30 am. First on Reg's list for the Pensioners' Lunch was Mr. Andrews. He was waiting in his wheelchair, cheerful and full of Xmas spirit.

"I'm Andy – Randy Andy. That's what all the girls call me," he said in his wavery voice.

"Who's coming with us?"

"Mrs. P and Mrs. W," said Reg.

"Ooh, good! Very good! Delilah and Jezebel! That'll be fun," he said with a twinkle.

Reg pushed his passenger towards the front seat.

"I'll sit in the back, if you don't mind."

"OK," said Reg. This was his first time doing the Christmas Lunch run, and he wanted to be obliging. It took some time to shift his passenger from his wheel chair into the car. He got him comfortably seated and belted up and offered a blanket.

"Yes, please," said Mr. Andrews, "It's jolly cold this morning. I had a couple of glasses of sherry to warm me up. You don't get much down at the Sally Army, you know."

Reg stowed the collapsed wheelchair in the boot. When he pulled up outside the flats, two well-dressed elderly ladies emerged. They peered into the car and immediately started arguing.

"I want to sit in the front," said Mrs P.

"I've had two hips done, I need the leg room," said Mrs W.

"You sat next to the driver last time."

"Don't be so selfish. Move over."

Reg was astounded. "What's the matter ladies?"

"She wants to sit in front," said Mrs P. "I said she can't. It's my turn."

Mrs W retorted: "I have to be very careful with my legs. Mustn't get them knocked."

"Look ladies," said Reg in a tone he hoped was pacifying, "One of you can sit in the front now, and you can swap over for the return journey."

"No! No!" they both said as one.

This is tricky, thought Reg, and arguing out here in the cold won't do us any good.

"Why don't you move the old man to the front and let us sit together in the back?"

This was a complete volte-face. Reg didn't get it.

"It took me ages to manoeuvre him in there, and we'll all be frozen before I get him into the front."

They muttered rebelliously.

He adopted his best managerial voice. "Ladies please. It's only a five minute drive. Let's do it alphabetically. Mrs P, please get in the front seat now. And Mrs W, get in the back."

Reg opened the rear door. Mr. Andrews was looking smug.

"I'm not going to sit next to him," said Mrs W, stepping back. "You go in the back seat."

"Not likely!" said Mrs. P, "he put his hand up my skirt last year. He ought not to be allowed out with respectable women. He's got no shame."

"What?" said Reg. "You can't be serious, he must be at least 90."

"90 or not, I'm not getting in there with that lecherous old goat," said Mrs W. "You should have put him in the front next to you. Didn't they tell you that?"

Actually, the organiser had said something about putting Mr. Andrews in the front seat, but Reg hadn't taken it seriously.

"Either you move him, or I'm staying at home," said Mrs. P.

Her friend backed her up. "Me too." She slammed the car door, took Mrs. P's arm and pulled her away.

Reg sighed. "OK," he said. "I'm not going to waste any more time. I'll take him to the lunch first and come back for you in 15 minutes. You'd better wait indoors."

So much for Happy Christmas and Good Will to all men, he thought.

He wished he'd stayed home with Geraldine and prepared the sprouts.

Joyce Bunting