

## **September 2023 Newsletter**

Welcome everyone to the start of our new year.

Three times a year we produce a longer newsletter than the usual four-page bulletin but this time I have decided to divide the newsletter in two by separating the Group News from the rest. We now have 24 groups and the majority of them have submitted a report. If I had included these reports in this newsletter, it would have formed a small book! As you will have noticed, our groups are increasing month on month, the sign of a healthy u3a. You will receive Group News shortly.

After the sad loss of David Lloyd, I am delighted that Mick Nolan has taken over as Group Leader of the Current Affairs Group. I'm sure the group will grow under his leadership as he puts his stamp on the meetings. Thank you, Mick.

In this part of the newsletter, you will find the dates of our meetings until the New Year, details of the new Poetry Group, and reports on our Guided Walk of Redbourn and of the talk given by Sue Shanahan of Hertfordshire Trading Standards. Jean Rapier has contributed a lovely account of a visit she and Brian made to Kent last June and Pat Jacques has written reports on two of the subjects discussed recently in the Art Appreciation Group and the Climate Change Group. There is a poem written by a member of another u3a which I thought you might enjoy and finally details of an excellent hat exhibition at Stockwood Park Museum which is there until December.

You will also find there is a reminder to pay your annual sub if you have not already done so. We have kept the sub at £18 which I think is a bargain, so please, don't delay.

Don't forget our first meeting of the year, this coming Thursday, 7<sup>th</sup> September which is an Open Afternoon for you to come and chat, have a cup of tea/coffee and a biscuit to meet the Committee and the Group Leaders who will be all geared up to inform you about their groups. Sadly, I am going to miss it as I will be on holiday but I leave you in the capable hands of our Vice Chairman, Roger Thompson.

Thank you for taking the time to read this newsletter and I hope you enjoy it and the Group News which will be sent separately.

Viv ([viv.vchandler@gmail.com](mailto:viv.vchandler@gmail.com))

## Members' News

This month we are delighted to welcome new members **Lynne James, Michael Hockey, Susan Wood, Dorothy Stokell** and **Owen Owens** and we welcome back **Susan Dillon** and **Pat Seaman** as members after a gap of a few years. I look forward to meeting you all soon.

We also wish **Carol Sander** well as she waits to be fitted with a pacemaker.

## Dates for Your Diary

Below is the programme of General Meetings up to the end of the year 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.

- |                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| <b>7<sup>th</sup> September</b>  | <b>Open Afternoon</b> Please come along for a cup of tea/coffee and a biscuit and meet the Committee and Group Leaders. <b>Visitors welcome., especially prospective members</b> |
| <b>21<sup>st</sup> September</b> | <b>Speaker Meeting 'Wildlife on your Doorstep'</b> by <b>Tom Way</b> , renowned Wildlife Photographer  |
| <b>5<sup>th</sup> October</b>    | <b>Members' Afternoon, Phil Marsh</b> on <b>'The Middle East from the Inside'</b>  |
| <b>13<sup>th</sup> October</b>   | <b>Second guided walk around Redbourn</b> (a few spaces available)   |
| <b>19<sup>th</sup> October</b>   | <b>'Harpenden Village'</b> by <b>David Keen</b> from the <b>Harpenden Local History Society</b> followed by our <b>Annual General Meeting</b>                                    |
| <b>2<sup>nd</sup> November</b>   | <b>Member's Afternoon, Derek Morris</b> on <b>'The Early Life of Captain Cook'</b>   |
| <b>16<sup>th</sup> November</b>  | <b>Speaker Meeting 'MI9 – Secret Escape Lines Across Europe in WW2'</b> – welcome return visit by <b>Helen Fry</b>   |
| <b>14<sup>th</sup> December</b>  | <b>Christmas Social</b>  |

## SUB REMINDER

A gentle little prod not to forget to pay your annual sub which was due at the beginning of August. You received an email on 15 August with a copy of the renewal form and all the details of how to pay so please don't delay and send it to us asap. If, for some reason, you don't intend to renew, please let Alan Thomas, our Membership Secretary at [alan.thomas644@gmail.com](mailto:alan.thomas644@gmail.com) know. Thank you.

---

## New Group

### Poetry Group

**Steve French**, the Group Leader of the new Poetry Group, has sent the following:

The new Poetry Group held an informal get-together at the end of August to discuss how the group would work. It was decided to hold it on a Friday afternoon, once a month with the first meeting on 29th September when the subject will be 3 poems by John Clare. For further information, please contact **Steve French** on 07713 252958.

## u3a Main Website – Online Learning Events

I know that several of our members have enjoyed the online Learning Events laid on by the Third Age Trust. There seems to be something for everyone this month.

The subjects for September are: **Electing the US President in 2024 (3 part series starting 12<sup>th</sup> September); Laughter Yoga; Maths Activities for All; Climate Modelling; Trees, Woods, Climate and Nature; Mindfulness and Meditation; How to Age Better and Feel Better about Aging; History of the British Secret Intelligence Services; Setting Up and Running an Exploring World Faiths Group; The Scottish Colourists 1900–1930; Hidden Histories – Tales of Cycling, Invention and Rebellion; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission and its Archives and Doing Mathematics Together.**

For further information about any of these, please visit the relevant page on the main u3a website <https://www.u3a.org.uk/events/educational-events>

## **Exploring Redbourn** by **Alan Bunting**, reporting on the guided walk in August.

Though Redbourn is, of course, one of Harpenden's close Hertfordshire neighbours, it became apparent during the u3a's conducted walking tour of the village in early August that many of our group – of over 20 members – were barely aware of its geography or even less of its fascinating history.

On what was happily a warm and sunny day, we met our impressively informative guide, Susan Bullen, at the Hollybush pub, in the oldest Church End part of Redbourn, close to the parish church of St Mary's; and we were straightaway plunged into the village's history, because the timber-framed hostelry itself dates from 1591. Originally thatched, it is a reminder of the importance of straw in the life of a 16th-century Hertfordshire village, most notably for the straw-plaiting cottage industry which locally supplied hat manufacturers in St Albans more than those in Luton. A row of slightly later (17<sup>th</sup> century) wattle-and-daub-built cottages remains across the road from the pub.

St Mary's is thought to be a Norman foundation but built on a much earlier Saxon 'footprint'. Just over 30 years ago a new transept was built alongside offering something of an architectural contrast.

Redbourn's strategic position on Roman Watling Street was clearly a vital part of its history. At one time between 80 and 90 stagecoaches a day passed along what was eventually designated the A5 and we learned that their passengers' food, drink and accommodation needs were met by as many as 42 (yes, forty-two) inns; for the record, there are just four today. The oldest is the Bull Inn in the relatively narrow High Street – which, as the main route from London to Holyhead, became much less busy when the by-pass was built in the 1960s.

Another of those inns is the Cricketers which is prominently sited in the middle of Redbourn Common. The building is Georgian, dating from 1820 and for its first fifty years was called the Three Horseshoes, one of its first publicans being Lord Verulam's officially appointed rat catcher. Successive lordships retained ownership of the Common until 1947 when it was duly bequeathed to the people of Redbourn.

Close by is Redbourn Museum, established as recently as the year 2000. It is housed in what was, in the mid-19th century, the manager's house of Redbourn Silk Mill which was reliant on a water supply pumped from the River Ver. We were told that at its most thriving period, the silk mill sustained a workforce of 122; those included children as young as eight. The building later became Redbourn's largest employer. It closed in 1993, ostensibly because of space restrictions which created access difficulties for long, articulated lorries.

After our walk across the pleasant greenery of the Common to the still-busy High Street we passed through a brick archway into the quiet haven of Redbourn's Cumberland Garden with its mature trees and well-tended flower beds, adjacent to the wide-fronted and comparatively

palatial Cumberland House. It was built in 1743 for the eponymous duke as a hunting lodge, initially with stabling for 120 horses. The duke evidently acquired the nickname 'Butcher Cumberland' for the ruthlessness he showed in fighting the Scots at the Battle of Culloden in 1746. In much more recent times, in 1933, the house was the first one in Redbourn to enjoy mains electricity.

After making our way leisurely back across the Common we concluded our engrossing exploration of Redbourn with a convivial pre-ordered sandwich 'and liquid' lunch at the Hollybush before heading for home.



Outside Redbourn Church



The Hollybush

## A Kentish Treat by Jean Rapier

Last June, our granddaughter's wedding (twice delayed by COVID ) finally took place. It was to be in Kent, south of Tunbridge Wells, and my husband and I decided to turn the event into a short holiday.

We both grew up where London touches Kent- me on the Kent side and Brian just inside London (SE9). Brian used to go on long cycling trips with his friends as a teenager, around the Tonbridge area going over the north downs and into the Weald of Kent. I used to go on bus trips with my friends, through Bromley and onto Keston Ponds, which were brilliant and brimming with newts, frogs and toads- much to my delight.

We married at 21 and moved up to Norfolk while Brian finished his National Service. It was a wonderfully flat county- you could see for miles, and we loved Wells-next-the-sea which we reached on Brian's motorbike. When he started work, we moved to Manchester and experienced the craggy beauty of the Pennines contrasting with the flatness of Cheshire. After eight years we relocated South and settled in Harpenden with its glacial valley geography and the multitude of Commons nearby. Kent became a place of tedious journeys to see family and later to cross the

channel – by ferry at first, then the Channel Tunnel shuttle service and finally the splendour of a Eurostar trip down to Marseille.

This time we drove round the M25, over the QE 2 bridge. and continued onto the A21 through Tunbridge Wells to Pembury where we were staying.

The next morning, we set off for the wedding following the SAT NAV, which soon plunged us into lush countryside. Suddenly memories of our teenage years came flooding back. The leaves on the trees were larger, the grass was taller and thicker the flowers were more luxuriant – birdsong was everywhere. We drove on in breathless wonder. The wedding took place in the grounds of a small Manor House, which was part of an eco-farm and once again the grounds were wildly burgeoning with dense hedges and wildflowers and bird song. The wedding itself went very well and then we were left with some free time.

Our first resolution was to visit Battle Abbey of 1066 fame. It was a game changer for our history, and I always felt rather ashamed that I had not visited when living South East of London. It is a large site, all beautifully managed but further from the sea than I had anticipated. Undaunted, we proceeded towards the coast to Pevensey Castle on the edge of Pevensey Bay where the Normans actually landed. Once again, we found the castle was further from the sea than expected because the land has built up over the years. Some very talented person has painted a mural along the castle wall which shows how that famous day would have looked.

This part of Kent also has a large number of gardens open to the public. We decided to visit Batemans, the home of Rudyard Kipling. As a child, I loved his Just So Stories and The Jungle Book. The garden was amazingly tranquil, with long walkways of glorious herbaceous borders, and a lovely Lily Pond (below left).

Our last treat was to visit Sissinghurst Gardens (below right) designed by Gertrude Jekyll and planted by Vita Sackville West. These were a riot of colour. The main garden was divided into rectangles – in one the flowers were orange and yellow, and another in shades of purple. In another they were white, and yet another had shades of pink. It was really quite breath-taking

We drove home with our heads full of glorious colour and lushness. I have to say that Hertfordshire seemed a bit dull!



## Keeping Fraudsters at Bay – Alan Bunting

Alan Bunting reports on a talk given to us in July by **Sue Shanahan**, Senior Trading Standards Officer at Hertfordshire County Council.



Sue (left) gave an interesting and informative talk spelling out in detail the many ruses employed by unscrupulous traders in trying to part people, typically older householders from their money, through dishonest and shameless trickery.

Sue pointed out that fraud perpetrated against private individuals was the UK's fastest-growing type of crime, though regrettably the least reported in the media. She categorised 'doorstep crime' as being the most prevalent, typified by 'cold callers'. They would often offer to rectify non-existent faults or damage.

Rooves, guttering and trees were favourites for the fraudsters' attention, and whose condition many householders would be unlikely to have heeded but which could cause concern to the gullible. A verbal quote would be given, there on the doorstep, which was obviously 'negotiable', but which the rogue trader would try to use to metaphorically get his (or her) foot in the door. And one should always remember, Sue pointed out, that what appeared at first sight to be a small job was likely, according to the 'cowboy' trader, to be blown up into a much larger, more costly and probably more unnecessary one.

Sue made a number of doorstep scam-avoiding recommendations. If you can see who was ringing the doorbell and they were unfamiliar and/or suspicious in appearance, one shouldn't even open the door. If a job needs doing on the house, rely on word-of-mouth recommendations from neighbours to find an honest and reliable trader.

Among the more obvious advice, as well as asking for a written quote, is never to pay first-time traders 'up front', even when asked for money to buy materials to start the job. One's suspicions should also be raised should the individual insist on being paid in cash – a likely sign that the Exchequer is being deprived of some tax revenue.

'Goods' as well as 'services' come into the realm of doorstep fraud. Sue brought to the attention of her audience what traditionally would have been classed as hawkers or pedlars, endeavouring to sell household items on the doorstep, for example, the Nottingham Knockers selling dusters or ironing board covers, usually cheaper than in the shops. Such items might or might 'have fallen off the back of a lorry', the seller being innocent – or otherwise.

Such hucksters are likely to accompany their sales patter with a tale of woe, typically that they have recently come out of prison and are now wanting to go straight – a story which tends to subtly combine intimidation with invited sympathy. The advice therefore was to politely but firmly decline their bargain offers.

**Note** – Sue emphasised that if anyone feels they have become a victim of a scammer, then to get in touch with the Police and also with Hertfordshire Trading Standards immediately. **VC**

## Vermeer – Pat Jacques

The Art Appreciation Group has been looking at the works of Johannes Vermeer, 1632–1675, the Dutch painter living in Delft, a small town famous then for its pottery, textiles and beer.

The Story of Art, by E H. Gombrich, shows a domestic scene on the cover, a painting by Vermeer, known as the Milkmaid. This scholarly text has an overview of the development of Art, all of Art and yet the front cover is a homely domestic setting. How can this be so? Might it be that the author, in his wisdom and scholarship has chosen Vermeer because of his magnificent painter's hand and mind, consummate skill and ability; perhaps he is simply the best.

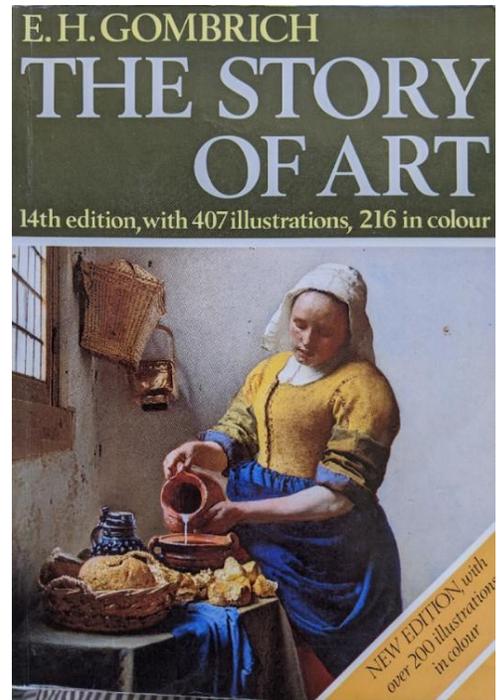
How then could such a painter die of hunger aged 43?

It seems that his family fell upon hard times and his paintings were given to their creditors, so they were no longer his to sell.

When Vermeer married, he lived with his wife's family and was obliged to convert to Catholicism. They had 11 children, the cost of keeping such a large family can only be imagined, but perhaps the older ones were at work when the little ones arrived. His wife tried to keep Vermeer's favourite painting from the creditors. It is called The Artist at Work, in which we see him from the back, painting at his easel, wearing very smart clothes. He had a naughty sense of humour as his socks are rolled down loosely for comfort.

Vermeer's work has been in the news lately and an exhibition in London, made us decide to study Vermeer and then to study Rembrandt the next time, though chronologically Rembrandt was a generation earlier.

I hope that you may have time to look at Vermeer's work, you can judge for yourself whether he is simply the best. Look at his painting of textures and his painter's appreciation of the impact of light. Enjoy.



## Hydrogen Power: Transport July Meeting, Climate Change Group

As we recall from school science, Hydrogen is the smallest atom with only one proton in the nucleus and only one electron. The proton has a positive electric charge and the electron is negative. It therefore has its own electric provision. Our dreams of Hydrogen power are being pursued on several fronts. The University of Birmingham is working with the company, Porterbrook, who build trains. The new trains are being developed under the Hydroflex Project.

The Tees Valley is planning to become a hub. Most importantly there are plans to retrofit current trains. Retrofitting means much money can be saved by avoiding the cost of new vehicles. Ultimately many more trains and buses will be hydrogen ready. The cost of new electric buses was so huge that one northern city council decided to opt for retrofitting, setting a new approach to de-carbonising. What an excellent idea.

These new industries will provide many new, green jobs in regions that have been hard-pressed for consistent areas of work.

£23m Transport Programme will initiate hydrogen energy usage in all areas of public transport, including marine. It will be very interesting to keep abreast of these plans to observe the uptake and suitability of Hydrogen across the range of transport systems.

Currently, several large transport items are powered by diesel. In some port areas the local population developed respiratory illnesses and the shipping companies were obliged to fit their diesel-powered ships with lighter fuels for their approach to the port.

How wonderful that we are planning to use hydrogen as a fuel. It is abundant, it is free, and it is a green fuel, provided only that it is created using green energy. The blue hydrogen is made by using oil power. Its only emission is water. What could be better?

There is an excellent site on the web on Birmingham University's flagship project, Hydroflex.

**Pat Jacques**

## **So, What Shall I Do Today?**

by **Jennifer Snashall** of King's Norton u3a (reproduced with her permission)

So, what shall I do today?

Shall I have a little bus ride or take a little drive?  
Shall I visit some friends to show I'm still alive?  
Shall I go to a club or do some volunteering?  
Shall I go to keep fit and try over-60s mountaineering?

I could go out with my camera and watch some birds,  
I could go to that book club and read some fancy words,  
The u3a is crawling with interests galore,  
They have things like play-reading and bee-keeping to explore.

I need to find some classes to keep my brain from shrinking,  
Archaeology, astronomy, wine tasting (or do I mean drinking!)  
So many things to do that it's doing in my head,  
But I'm sure I will do something if I can just get out of bed.

## Hats Made Me

**The Culture Trust, Luton present *Hats Made Me*, a major exhibition that explores the global significance of hats and headwear. The exhibition, staged at Stockwood Discovery Centre, features objects from the world's most celebrated fashion and performance milliners as well as 400 years of hats from the collection. It runs until 10 December.**

Featuring more than 200 objects, the exhibition includes a red visor design chosen by Beyoncé for Vogue, a bridal hat worn by Cara Delevingne in Vogue, Michael Keaton's cowl from *Batman*, a velvet hat donned by Kate Sharma in the Netflix hit show *Bridgerton*, and a lace mantilla worn by Queen Isabella II of Spain.

This is one of the largest exhibitions of its kind, pulling together practical and purposeful headwear with wonderful and whimsical costume from stage and screen. The exhibition explores why we wear hats, and how headwear is used to protect and transform, to say something, and to mean something.

*Hats Made Me* presents iconic headpieces that transport the wearer into an instantly recognisable character. From Sylvester McCoy's *Doctor Who* hat, to Cate Blanchett's headpiece for her Oscar-nominated role playing the monarch in *Elizabeth: The Golden Age* made by Stephen Jones OBE, to a Stormtrooper helmet from *Return of the Jedi*, the exhibition presents hats and headwear that have featured in global film and cinema.

*Hats Made Me* also represents Luton's own social and cultural heritage, with a stunning array of headpieces including a durag, an Irish Catholic communion veil, silk and gold Ghanaian headdresses, Muslim prayer caps and Sikh turbans. Also on display is a Miss Vauxhall Tiara worn by the winner of a beauty pageant sponsored by Vauxhall Motors – an object that unites the hat and motoring industries that built Luton.

This is a rare chance to see hats that defined an era, headwear that made a scene, and your favourite pop culture items from stage and screen.