

## September Newsletter

Here we are, once again, at the beginning of a new u3a year. This time last year we were dithering about carrying on our meetings by Zoom or whether we could start back again in person. Groups began to recommence meeting face to face but it wasn't until March, just six months ago, that we returned to the Trust Hall for our monthly speaker meetings. Since then, we've had some really excellent talks and I'm looking forward to the ones we have planned for this autumn. The Speaker Meeting team has done a grand job.

Virtually all the groups are up and running again now although we could do with a volunteer to organise our Theatre group. This was such an enjoyable and popular group. It is a shame it hasn't been able to get going again since the pandemic and also since the retirement though ill health of the previous leader, John Booth, who did a wonderful job for many years. If anyone feels able to take this on, I would be delighted to hear from you.

Our new Spanish Conversation group gets going in October and we now have another new group to offer you, Creative Writing. You will find details of this further on in this newsletter.

As well as the normal dates for your diary and group news, we have some interesting articles by members at the end of the newsletter – one by Susan Kerr on her experiences of moving to Harpenden during the pandemic, another by Joyce Bunting on her adventures with Esperanto which is an introduction to her talk on 3<sup>rd</sup> November, then my memories of meeting Olivia Newton-John before she was famous and finally one on Air and Water Pollution by Pat Jacques. Don't miss these.

You should all have received an email re the subscription which is now due. Please don't forget to send the completed membership renewal form to Alan Thomas whether you are paying by cheque or by bank transfer.

Looking forward to seeing you soon.

Viv (01582 766147)

## Members News

Welcome to our new members **Annie Hickson**, **Nicola Graham-Adriani** and **Ida Bugazzi**.

I must also apologise to our new member **Steve Gledhill** who I called Steve Gledwin in the bulletin last month. So sorry, Stephen.

## Dates for Your Diary

Below is the programme of **General Meetings** up until the end of the year. They will all take place in the **Trust Hall** at **2.15**.

**15<sup>th</sup> September**     **Charing Cross to China – The Extraordinary Adventures of a Nurse.**

Speaker: **Jo Laurie**. Trained in London in the late 20s, the nurse Jo will be talking about spent three years in China in the 30s, followed by time in Africa – and all before WW2.

**22<sup>nd</sup> September**     **New Members' Meeting** – by invitation only

**6<sup>th</sup> October**             **Members' Afternoon** (with tea and coffee) – short talk on the causes of the present **Ukraine** conflict by our member, **Tony Wills**, based on his experiences of living and working in Ukraine.

**20<sup>th</sup> October**             **AGM**, preceded by a talk by **David Keen**, Curator of the new Harpenden Museum, on the **Trials and Tribulations of establishing the Museum**.

**3<sup>rd</sup> November**             **Members' Afternoon** (with tea and coffee) – short talk on “**Universal Esperanto**”. Our member, **Joyce Bunting**, with Bill Walker, will share their delight in the International Language.

**17<sup>th</sup> November**             **Walking from Land's End to John o' Groats**. Speaker: **Dave Felton**. Dave says: "On 15 May 2017 I set off from Land's End on a long walk north to John o' Groats to celebrate my 40th birthday/indulge in a multi-month midlife crisis. I reached journey's end 82 days later. It was a wonderful adventure and one of the highlights of my life."

**1<sup>st</sup> December**             **Members' Afternoon** (with tea and coffee) – **Christmas Miscellany** with contributions from members

**15<sup>th</sup> December**             **Christmas Social**

## Group News

### **MahJong Group**

The group of about 20 are lucky enough to be able to meet more or less every Wednesday afternoon from 2 – 4.30 pm in a room at the Salvation Army Hall. There are many ways of playing MahJong, but we stick strictly to 'British rules' on the first Wednesday of the month, and have a sheet of extended 'special hands' to use for the remaining weeks, which include special hands from several other nationalities or ex-pat groups!

There is a charge of £2 per week, paid as a donation to the Salvation Army (occasionally needing to be more if numbers are low, as over the summer months).

The group leader is willing to offer a couple of tuition sessions to would-be players. If interested in joining, contact **Penny Turnbull** on 01582 766824.

## History Group

The next meeting of the History group will be on **September 13** at 2.30 pm, at the usual venue of the Harpenden Trust Hall. **Eric Midwinter** will be giving a talk on **'Middle Age Spread. Everyday life in Medieval England'**. Please note that there is a £1 charge, which is to meet the costs of the hire of the room.

I am now pleased to give advanced notice of the next three meetings of the History group to be held in 2022. On **11 October**, **Malcolm Rainbow** will be making his first presentation to the group on **'Why did Britain lose the American War of Independence'**. On **8 November**, Roger Thompson will make a presentation on 'The Events leading to the Holocaust'. On **13 December**, there will be our **Christmas Social** event, including a history quiz.

Work is in hand to prepare a programme for 2023. Already, there have been discussions with two new members about giving talks in 2023, which is very positive. Other offers from members would always be welcome.

In particular, both Eric and I, the group leaders, would welcome views from History group members on the talks that have been given this year, and also whether there are topics which members would like to be included in our programme, (whether we could find someone to deliver the talk might be a problem, of course!) We will try and have a brief discussion about this at one of our future meetings.

We also want to record how pleasing it is to see the increase in numbers attending History group meetings, which is a very welcome development.

Roger Thompson (01582 620811)

Eric Midwinter (01582 713405).

## Singing for Pleasure Group

This group keeps growing and growing. It is well-known that singing is good for your mental health and we certainly all leave the Trust Hall on a high after our hour of singing every fortnight. Towards the end of the coming term, we will, no doubt, be practising our carols for the Christmas Social. If you fancy joining us, these are the dates for next term: **29th September, 13th October, 10th November, 24th November, 8th December**. We start at 2pm. For further details please contact Viv Chandler (01582 766147).

## Creative Writing Group

One of our new members, Brian Ball, belonged to the Creative Writing group in his previous u3a and wants to carry on writing and so he has offered to lead this new group. We already have a couple of members keen to have a go so if there are any others who have had a secret wish to become the next J K Rowling or John Betjeman, please contact Brian. Please don't be concerned you won't be good enough; this group is not for 'professionals' but for people who want to try and have a go.

## Church and Pub Group

The first outing for this new group saw six of us off to Dunstable Priory and was enjoyed by all. We were astonished to find that it was in the Lady Chapel of the pre-Dissolution Priory that the annulment of Henry VIII's marriage to Catherine of Aragon took place when Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury and three other bishops signed the document. We expect to make our next visit in October to St Pancras Old Church. Please contact Roger Fox (07768695916) if you would like to be added to the group's email list.



Church and Pub group

## Family History Group

We meet once a month on a Tuesday afternoon in the Randall Room at the Trust Halls to learn how to trace our families back in time – or to discover them for the first time as several members have managed to do by using genealogy and DNA. We share our knowledge and have many a laugh at the same time. Our next meeting is on 27<sup>th</sup> September when we will be hearing about an unexpected family discovery. For more information, please contact Viv Chandler on 01582 766147.

## Strollers Group

We meet most **Saturdays** at 10.30 am, rain or shine, and visit various pubs in the locality for lunch. The stroll is 2 to 3 miles in the surrounding area. Great camaraderie and fun!

Everyone welcome to come and explore highways and byways with us.

Please contact Sylvia Cutler on 01582 761548.



Strollers stopping for a rest

## RSPB Local Group, Harpenden

The local group of the RSPB has been in conversation with our committee recently about joining up with activities. Our constitution prevents them becoming a formal u3a 'group', so we have agreed with them that we will 'advertise' their activities so that an additional and important 'missing plank' in our education programme is added on wildlife conservation.

Meetings are held at All Saints Church Hall, Station Road commencing at 8pm and a small charge of £4 is levied to cover costs. Refreshments are provided.

The autumn term's programme is: 15 September – British Butterflies, 13<sup>th</sup> October – the RSPB's Hope Farm near Cambridge and 10<sup>th</sup> November – Water Voles in the River Ver.

For more information, please contact Geoff Horn (01582 765443) who will be pleased to help or head for their website at: <https://group.rspb.org.uk/harpenden> .

## **Exploring London Group – Visit to the East End**

On Saturday, 23rd July, 17 of us met up at Harpenden Station for the first trip to London since the pandemic shutdowns. Colin Oakes met us at St Pancras and shepherded us on the tube to Liverpool Street station where there was a lot of interest before we even started walking. The station itself was built on the site of the Bethlem Royal hospital (usually called Bedlam now) which was just outside Bishops Gate one of the seven gates built into the Roman wall around London, all now demolished but commemorated by streets with their names. The station is close to St Botolph-without-Bishopsgate and Colin explained how this denoted its position outside the City. All the Gates have interesting origins which Colin told us about, one being Cripplegate which was said to have healing powers so that sick people gathered there hoping for a cure and, of course, Newgate which was a prison.

We then crossed the road and began our tour around the myriad tiny streets and alleyways where it was surprising to see how many buildings had escaped the extensive bombing of WW2. We had constantly to try to picture the area as being fields in the ownership of the church in the time when most were named mainly after the trade or activity carried on there. Catherine Wheel alley though was named after a public house Dick Turpin was supposed to have frequented and not a firework. Artillery Lane was fields used by bowmen for practice after the dissolution of the monasteries and Artillery Passage used to have shops and houses and now has Georgian houses with retail use on the ground floor, some with original panelled front doors and decorative ironwork. One very attractive street of now des.res. started life as properties used by Huguenot silk weavers and later by Jewish clothing manufacturers.

We went in and out and round and round these alleys all with interesting stories and passing Middlesex Street which is the Petticoat Lane Sunday market eventually reaching our destination Spitalfields market originally in the 'hospitality' area of St Mary Spital (spital meaning hospital). The fields around here were used by the Huguenot weavers to stretch out their woven cloth on tenterhooks. It is now a lovely market with a great number of eating places so we split into groups to 'do our own thing' for an hour before Colin guided us all back to Liverpool Street station and St Pancras although he found things of interest even then, Dirty Dicks public house being one as it is credited as being the inspiration for Charles Dickens' Great Expectations. A wealthy business man lost his beloved so stopped washing and cleaning himself and his property until eventually everything was rotting, smelling, hanging in cobwebs etc and he died. This became a tourist attraction, people evidently enjoyed seeing the mess complete with dead cat but then 'health and safety' took control and now the story is told in the pub by means of plastic artefacts.

A good day out was had by all.

**Norma Windle**

## **TIPS ON WATER CONSERVATION by the Leader of our Sustainability/Climate Change Group, Pat Jacques**

Because of the serious heatwave and drought this year we have been using water reserves. Our population is very large and we consume a great deal of water.

We must conserve all we can.

### **Tips for Saving Water:**

- Have only brief showers, not baths. Take a bucket into the shower, the water can then go on the garden or be used to flush the toilet
- Reduce the number of toilet flushes
- Wash up once a day
- Do not leave taps running when tooth cleaning
- Only use the washing machine when it's full of laundry

Every little saving helps as there are so many of us; what little we use and save scales up to be substantial.

## **NEWBIE IN HARPENDEN**

After forty years in one place, my first year in Harpenden was a huge adjustment – still ongoing. Friends in Chiswick say, 'You're so brave.' Well, needs must. I write haiku; here's one from spring 2021.

*south-facing window  
I memorise the light  
learning to leave*

Yes, I was miserable at times, especially as winter and that new round of Covid closed in. But first months: summer, fresh clean air with a tang of farm, tidy houses, hills, breezes, the open common, big sky, kites cruising on thermals, people in shorts at pavement cafes – it felt like a holiday resort.

Thirteen ways to reinvent yourself. 1) The great conversation opener: 'I've just moved to Harpenden.' Talk just naturally flows. 2) Join Facebook Harpenden Network, moderated so there's no nonsense, all kinds of useful information to garner, or ask. 3) The Co-op notice board. 4) Art on the Common and Open Studios. 5) Harpenden Learning for Leisure course. 6) Harpenden Arts Club – a treasure! Every Thursday evening. 7) The Arts Society, lectures at the brand-new EMC. 8) A kind neighbour leads to street WhatsApp groups 9) Church, in my case St John's in Southdown – a very friendly welcome and good coffee. 10) Seniors' Fair at EMC. 11) Library card and Book Group. 12) U3A! 13) Have I missed anything?

Half way through the year I realised this was a bit like an extended Freshers Week. Seek out, connect, try anything! u3a local history, that's for me. But u3a Singing for Pleasure – me? Yes! The discoveries and reinvention continue. I am putting down roots and growing in surprising ways. Here is a haiku after a year of living in Harpenden.

*summer high street  
lots of grannies out  
pushing baby buggies*

**Susan Kerr**

## **Vilnius with the Esperantists, 2005**

It is said that Lithuanians are obsessed by bees. I hadn't heard about that when I visited in 2005, but was enchanted by the **Lithuanian Museum of Ancient Beekeeping**. The open air museum, was established in 1984 in the Aukštaitija National Park, north-eastern Lithuania.

Bee hives – many of them grotesquely carved tree trunks – are quite unlike those we are used to. Some of the museum's wooden sculptures actually contain bee nests. The sculptures represent the Lithuanian god Babilas and goddess Austėja. Bees go in and out of the mouth.

After a wander round little fields full of bees buzzing around the wild flowers, we were sat down at rustic tables among the trees, and treated to a 'tasting session'. Slices of bread were offered on which to dribble the delicious honey. No plates or serviettes were provided, so we ended up very sticky. One resourceful lady suggested washing fingers in a little stream – it was pure and clean, so most of us followed her example.

Why was I in Lithuania at all? I was attending the World Congress of Esperanto, held in Vilnius that year. More the 2,000 Esperantists from all over the globe came to this lovely country of gently rolling hills, forests, rivers, streams, and lakes. We were centred at a Conference Centre/Hotel by the river. It seemed very new at the time. We were able to learn a little about the language – an ancient Indo-European tongue – but the only word I can remember sounded like *Ah Choo* meaning 'thank you'. This amused the Esperantists because it sounds just like our phrase for 'Oh, really?'

An Esperanto World Congress is held in a different country each year. The host Esperanto Association presents international choirs, musicians, entertainers and lecturers in many subjects, as well as meeting space for special interest groups. So, we enjoy a full and varied programme.

Esperantists do not aim for nations to relinquish their own language – far from it. They regard language as an expression of freedom and heritage. World Congresses are a wonderful opportunity for local guides to uncover the secrets of their cultural heritage to people from all over the world **saying it only once** – in the International Language.



Of course, excursions to local places of interest are particularly popular. So are opportunities to sample local cuisine. One day I wandered round looking for a suitable restaurant where about 8 of us could sit out and dine together. Mostly the menu appeared in Lithuanian and was incomprehensible to me, but odd dishes were flagged up in English. I was very struck by the idea of pigs' ears, and tried to get the group to join me there. But one or more of our group were strict vegetarians and wouldn't hear of it. I think we ended up with rib-sticking local dumplings – which must have been even heavier than the *Hertfordshire Clanger*.

*Foot note: The clanger is an elongate suet crust dumpling, a savoury type of roly-poly pudding. Its name may refer to its dense consistency: "clungy" and "clangy" are adjectives meaning heavy or close-textured.*



Pictures of the beehives at the Bee Keeping Museum from Wikipedia.

### **Joyce Bunting**

Note: Joyce and a fellow Esperantist, Bill Walker, will talk to our u3a on 3<sup>rd</sup> November. (See dates for your diary.)

## My Memories of Olivia



Attribution – *Larry D. Moore CC BY-SA 3.0.*

Last month we heard that Olivia Newton-John had sadly died – difficult to believe as for many of us she will be forever Sandy in 'Grease'.

However, my own memories of Olivia start in 1967. I had recently started work (after a disastrous five months in my first job) with a PR company in New Oxford Street which runs between High Holborn and Tottenham Court Road. I'm amazed I lasted beyond the first day as within a couple of hours of walking in the door I had managed to push a typewriter off my desk on to the floor and it had to be sent off for a costly repair! I can still remember the looks of disapproval.

I shared a small office with one of the executives and then we were asked to squash up a bit as we needed to accommodate a third person. I would be secretary to both. This second person was a German born lady from Australia called Irene (pronounced Erayna) Newton-John. She had a beautiful face with a fine bone structure and always wore a small triangular scarf round her head, tied under her hair at the back. They must have been in fashion then as my Mum and I both had similar scarves.

Irene had a strong German accent and struggled a bit with the PR work, having been used to the slower Australian way of working. She was the daughter of the famous scientist, Max Born, who won the Nobel Prize for Physics for his work on quantum mechanics in 1954 and was a friend of Einstein and Max Planck. Max Born and his family had left Germany as the Nazis came to power in 1933 and Irene soon met her husband-to-be, Brinley Newton-John at Cambridge and they lived there (Brinley worked for MI5 at Bletchley Park during the war and was later Headmaster of a school in Cambridge) until the family moved to Australia in 1954 when their youngest child was five, where Brin worked at the University of Melbourne.

Back to 1967. Irene had come back to the UK to be with her younger daughter who had won a talent/singing contest in Australia with the prize being a trip to London and an introduction to a recording studio. Her name was Olivia. Irene stuck photos of her two beautiful daughters on the wall in front of her desk and she seemed particularly proud of the older daughter, Rona, who was doing well as a model in London and wanted to become an actress and had already had a part in The Benny Hill Show!!

Olivia used to pop in to see her Mum and would sit in our office for a coffee and a chat but it was always Rona that Irene spoke about and of whom she was proud. Mind you, that probably changed within a few years as Olivia's fame grew.

When Irene returned to Australia, she gave me the pot plant on her desk which I took home with me. I can't remember what the plant was but it grew and grew and my Mum had it meandering further and further around her living room walls for years and years.

I saw Olivia again a couple of years later. This time it was as I was walking home in Totteridge. A large convertible car was slowing down at a crossroads. Music was blaring from the car, everybody in it was singing and I noticed Bruce Welch (and I think, Hank Marvin) of The Shadows in the front seats. Sitting up on top of the seats at the back were a couple of girls and I recognised Olivia. They were, I presumed, on their way to visit Cliff Richard who lived in Totteridge at the time.

Olivia was engaged for several years to Bruce Welch. The engagement didn't last but her career went from strength to strength. I always felt a small connection with her but I'm afraid I was too snobby to go and see 'Grease' when it first came out at the end of the 70s but how wrong I was. I don't have it on DVD but if I did, that would be the first thing I would turn to when I felt really down although 'Mamma Mia' would now run it a close second! As you can see, I have left my elitist musical tastes and snobbishness behind as I've got older.

So, goodbye, Olivia. It's sad you are no longer with us but from all the tributes that have been pouring in from around the world, how satisfying it must be for your husband and daughter to know how much you were loved and how much pleasure you brought to so many people during your life.

**Viv Chandler**

## **From the Sustainability/Climate Change Group: an article on Air and Water Pollution by Pat Jacques**

### **Air Pollution**

The main emitters of air pollution are Traffic, Industry and Domestic.

The pollutants are listed as: –

Sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, particulate matter, ozone and volatile organic compounds, toxic organic micro-pollutants, carbon monoxide, which is toxic as are the heavy metals. It is extremely alarming that we inhale these substances. The impact on children is worse.

The UK Government has required the setting up of air quality monitoring stations across the country in places which include heavy traffic and motorways.

Within our collective memory are the smogs of our youth, caused by coal smoke. The Clean Air Act made a huge difference to the quality of the air, but since then traffic volumes have increased substantially and also you cannot see the emissions! Air travel too, and large container ships have added to heavy emissions which are very bad both for the climate and for our health.

In the near future is the coming of electric vehicles, in numbers to provide scale and then following hard behind is the advent of hydrogen fuel. Hydrogen buses are hugely expensive and there are plans for retro fitting the existing buses with hydrogen energy. That is the way to go! Hydrogen has been tested for suitability in trains, ships and large vehicles. Aircraft engineers are working on hydrogen for aircraft. We live in exciting times!

### **Water Pollution**

Water too, suffers from pollutants, the largest problem is the run off from farms. The nitrogen, as part of fertiliser, is taken up by the plants, so we have good harvests but that not taken up finds its way through the soils and into water courses and on into the sea where it causes algal blooms which block the light and interfere with oxygen production.

A new solution is to plant the new crop through an existing one, avoiding ploughing, which dries the soil and kills off valuable microscopic life vital to feeding the soil.

There is also a problem of overflowing sewage, which is raw, not treated, into rivers, eventually going into the sea, where it does not belong. Human sewage contains pathogens, diseases. It is not good news.

Historically, pollution comes from Industry, and it still does. The textile industries capture their waste on site and deal with it there. In so doing they have set a model for the future. Waste must be dealt with at source and made safe so that it cannot escape, untreated, into the wild.

Clean air and clean water are vital to healthy life on earth. It must be a priority to ensure that it is not tainted. We have work to do in this regard but at least we know some of the solutions to existing problems, thanks to environmental science.

**Pat Jacques.**