



LEARN, LAUGH, LIVE

LEICESTER NEWSLETTER

July 2020

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u3asites.org.uk/leicester



A small weir on the river at Mountsorrel

Photo by Irene Ault

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All meetings of Leicester U3A are currently suspended due to the Coronavirus situation

The membership now stands at 427

Margaret Potter (Membership Secretary)

Message from the Chair

Well it seems ages since the last regular U3A meeting, which is not surprising since it was indeed ages ago that it occurred. At least some things in the wider community are starting to get back to something approaching normality. The reduction in 'social distancing' from two metres to one metre seems to have had an impact on the length of queues outside shops. Pubs and restaurants are to be allowed to open on a limited basis while some sports events are taking place albeit behind closed doors. However, theatres and cinemas remain closed and Curve has cancelled its Christmas show. Churches are to be allowed to open for church services which is a step forward but there is no indication yet as to when Christchurch would be able to start hosting our meetings once again. Of course, progress is far from steady and, as I write this, I hear that the Home Secretary is considering a new local lockdown in Leicester because of an increase in the number of infections in the City. This has apparently led to the R number rising above 1, which means that the number of infections is increasing rather than decreasing.



In the present circumstances therefore, there is no real prospect of activities in Leicester U3A returning to pre-virus levels for the immediate future. Once restrictions are lifted it should, of course, be possible for group meetings, most of which do not require much advance planning, to resume at short notice. Meanwhile, speakers who had previously been booked for those monthly meetings that have had to be cancelled have been offered slots in next year's programme. We have also had

approaches from other potential speakers. So, despite the effects of lockdown there is every prospect that we can bounce back once we are allowed to. In the meantime the Zoom coffee mornings provide the nearest we can get to social contact between members and the Newsheet has suggestions for ways to fill the gaps left by the Covid19 restrictions. Like everybody else, the Committee is reliant on emails and telephone conversations to keep the wheels turning. So, all I can say now is we'll meet again, don't know where (but hopefully at Christchurch), don't know when (but hopefully sooner rather than later).

*Tony Davison
(Chair, Leicester U3A)*

Meet the Convenor

This month's randomly-selected Convenor is Barbara Penrose, Convenor of the Mah Jong Beginners' group and organiser of the Coffee Mornings at The Quaker Meeting House.

Q: Are you originally from Leicester?

No, my family were evacuated to relatives in Yorkshire, which is where I was born. In 1946 we moved down to Portsmouth where my Dad was in the Fleet Auxiliary (the civilian support branch of the Royal Navy). It was in Portsmouth that I was raised. I spent my teenage years running around the harbour. I still miss the sea.

Q: What brought you to Leicester?

In 1962 I went to Bath for my teacher training course, then in 1965 I came to Leicestershire as at the time, this was deemed to be a very good education authority to work for.

Q: What work did you used to do before you retired?

My main profession was as a primary school teacher, though I did have other jobs along the way. I taught ages ranging from newborn up to 11 year olds. I enjoyed the work most of the time, but much less towards the end, when they introduced OFSTED etc.

Q: What made you join Leicester U3A?

After teaching, I had a part-time job at the library, and when I retired from that, I looked around for something to occupy me. I'd heard about the U3A, and I'd seen the banners outside Christchurch when the Monthly Meetings were on as I lived near there. I went to an Open Day, and thought it all looked very promising.

Q: How long have you been a member of Leicester U3A?

Since about 2012 or 2013.

Q: What groups did you join to start with?

I started off with a Monthly Meeting and had a look at what was on offer. I'm not crafty so didn't fancy a craft group, but the Shakespeare group and Singing for Pleasure had just started up I believe, and they looked much more up my street, so I joined those. I am still in those groups. When the Sunday Lunch group started, I joined that too.

Q: What groups do you convene?

I'm Convenor of the Beginners' Mah Jong group, which had not long started before we went into lockdown, so I haven't really done much with that yet. I also run the Coffee Mornings at the Quaker Meeting House in Queens Road once a month. It started when I did a talk to the Monthly Meeting about Enid Blyton and her books. After the meeting, I wanted to organise a coffee morning at my home for people who had shown an interest in my talk and wanted to see my books. However, regulations at the time made that difficult as an official U3A meeting, but the idea of a regular Coffee Morning was born. It started off at Don Leone's, a restaurant in Queens Road, and though it was a popular event, it wasn't an ideal location, being on a split level and rather tight for space. Eventually we moved to the current venue of the Quaker Meeting House a bit further down Queens Road a couple of years ago. We are very happy there.

Q: What do you like about being the organiser of the Monthly Coffee Mornings?

I love the idea that people can just come along for a chat about anything, nothing planned, and it's especially good for newcomers to come along

and meet a real mix of members. It's a good way to pass on local information (such as scams currently doing the rounds), and we even get to meet the local Community Support Officers who occasionally pop in to say hello. I've met some very interesting people at the Coffee Mornings who aren't in any of the groups I'm in, so normally I wouldn't meet them. I just really love doing it!

Q: What's your TV guilty pleasure?

My favourite presenter at the moment is Simon Sebag Montefiore, who has a series on TV called 'Blood and Gold: The Making of Spain'. I'm also enjoying watching some great old programmes on Channel 81 Talking Pictures.

Q: What was the last book you read?

I am currently reading A.N. Wilson's 'The Mystery of Charles Dickens', it's extremely interesting and makes me think perhaps we could have a Dickens group!

Q: Sunrise or sunset?

Sunrise (but then I'd have to go back to bed!).

My grateful thanks to Barbara for her answers.

*Steph Smith
(Editor of Leicester U3A Newsletter)*

Reports from the Groups and Members

Travels in Lockdown

At the start of lockdown I wrote that I had looked up Haste Hill and Ruislip Woods where I walked as a child, to see if there were still wood ants and giant ant hills. Since then I have found that wood ants are quite rare now and there are different kinds. Amusingly the northern one is *Formica lugubris* - obviously a Les Dawson of the ant world. Jeanette did some internet searching and found an interesting piece about the area, and Eastcote where I was born, written by a young naturalist, 14 year



old Kabir Kaul. I emailed him mentioning my childhood there during and after the War, and also our U3A Botany group and the fungus foray we did in November. He replied that he would be interested in my memories and also that he knew U3A as he was due to give a talk to Hillingdon U3A. I then sent what I had written for the anthology prepared by our Creative Writing group of childhood memories – my father digging for victory, bottling tomatoes, salting beans and my experience at the local infants' school. Jeanette had taken photos of a magpie bathing and birds on our fence which we thought were turtle doves. Kabir confirmed this and that they were

fledglings. I had also told Kabir that my brother had been a keen naturalist and had kept a slowworm and an injured jackdaw as 'pets' as well as breeding caterpillars and noting birds and their nests. Of course, he wanted to know more so I contacted my brother. He sent photos of a robin which is eating from his hand and also an account of some of the caterpillars he had bred, green ones which shot formic





acid at predators. He had fed them on sallow found by the 225 bus stop. He remembered seeing war planes overhead and finding an incendiary bomb which he and a friend had tried to explode! I could only remember tanks going down our road, searchlights and buzzbombs. I thought my niece would be interested in all this, especially what her dad had got up to, so sent everything to her.

Kabir hasn't so far found wood ants but what an interesting time this has been!

I think there must be a message here that even in lockdown U3A members can Learn, Laugh and Live.

Here is a link to Kabir's blog:

<http://thekauliswild.blogspot.com/>

*Pictures by Kabir Kaul
Margaret Young (Leicester U3A member)*

Digital Photography

For its June meeting, held via Zoom, members of the digital photography group tackled the task of photographing a moving object. Several different approaches were displayed ranging from ghostly images of runners in Victoria Park from Matt, through various images of waterfalls and other moving water features, to multiple superimposed images of the same object in different positions.

After some teething problems have been ironed out, the Zoom experience is becoming smoother, though the forty minute limit may become a problem for future meetings if members have more images to show.

Cliff Ault (Digital Photography group member)



Photo by Cliff Ault



Photo by Cliff Ault

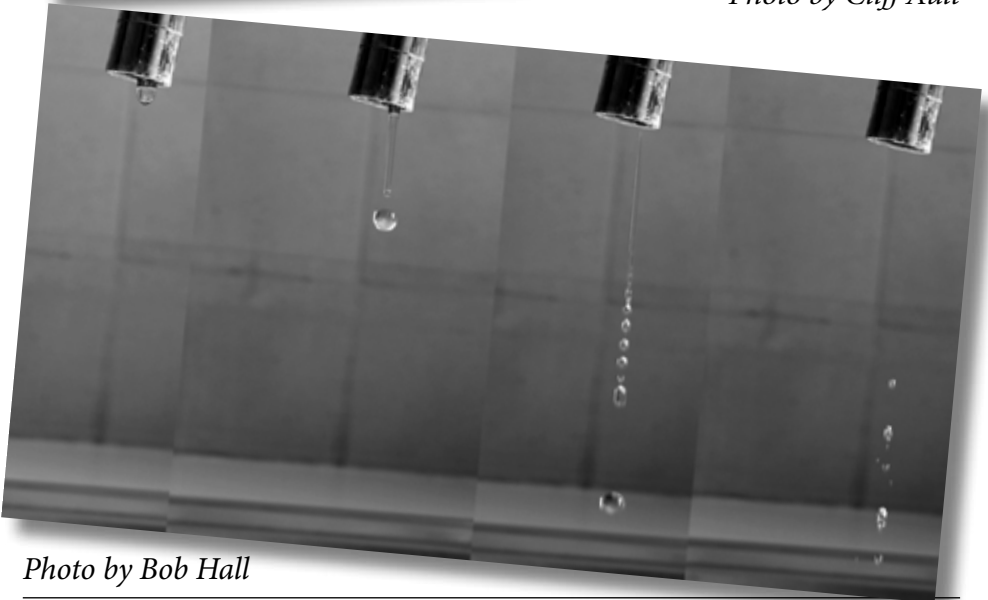


Photo by Bob Hall



*Photo by Irene Ault
(the boat sank about 6 months after this photo was taken!)*

Reading for Pleasure

In May, as an extra bit of exercise for our brains, we had the Ten Book Challenge. We each made a list of our ten 'top books of all time'. The outcome was a diverse list, and showed how different the reading preferences of group members are. Various 'classics' emerged, with the Bronte sisters and Jane Austen proving popular. Hilary Mantel and Margaret Attwood were favoured modern novelists.

The final list has given us plenty of new ideas for reading, and may be of interest to U3A members too, so here it is.

Cider with Rosie
Pride and Prejudice
Wuthering Heights
Tenant of Wildfell Hall

Laurie Lee
Jane Austen
Emily Bronte
Anne Bronte

Wolf Hall/Bring Up the Bodies
...starting with the Belgariad
Discworld plus anything

Hilary Mantel
Series by David Eddings
Terry Pratchett

The Handmaid's Tale/The Testaments	Margaret Attwood
Small Great Things	Jodi Picoult
Jane Eyre	Charlotte Bronte
Tales of Wonder	(book from childhood)
Discworld	Terry Pratchett
As I Walked out One Midsummer Morning	Laurie Lee
The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Society	Mary Ann Shaffer and Annie Burrows
The Kashmir Shawl	Rosie Burrows
Heartstone	CJ Sansom
The Enchanted April	Elizabeth von Armin
The Shaking Woman	Siri Hutsvedt
The Woman in White	Wilkie Collins
Far From the Madding Crowd	Thomas Hardy
Rebecca	Daphne du Maurier
The Good Liar	Nicholas Searle
The Thirteenth Tale	Diane Setterfield
Hagseed	Margaret Attwood
The Rosie Project	Graeme Simson
Gentlemen and Players	Joanne Harris
The Final Act of Mr Shakespeare	Robert Winder
The Colour Purple	Alice Walker
Sapiens	Yuval Noah Harare
Neapolitan Quartet	Elena Ferrante
Brooklyn	Colm Toibin
A View of the Harbour	Elizabeth Taylor
Winnie the Pooh	AA Milne
Alice in Wonderland	Lewis Carroll
A Death in the Family	James Agee
The Museum of Innocence	Orhan Pamuk
Middlemarch	George Eliot
Howards End	EM Forster
Neapolitan Quartet	Elena Ferrante

The Plague
A Suitable Boy
Pigeon English
Mr Pip
To Kill a Mockingbird

Albert Camus
Vikram Seth
Stephen Kelman
Lloyd Jones
Harper Lee

Swallows and Amazons
The Robot series
Hobbit/Lord of the Rings
The Belgariad

Arthur Ransom
Isaac Asimov
Tolkien
David Eddings
Philippa Gregory
Joanne Harris
Tracy Chevalier
Dorothy L. Sayers
Agatha Christie

Nature and wildlife books

The Canterbury Tales
The Herries Chronicles
The Forsyte Saga
Tales of the City

Chaucer
Hugh Walpole
John Galsworthy
Armistead Maupin

In addition, anything by the following authors was highly recommended by at least one, and sometimes more group members :-

Kate Atkinson
Jane Austen
Maeve Binchy
The Bronte sisters
Tracy Chevalier
Helen Dunmore
Jojo Moyes
Maggie O'Farrell

Jill Reville (Convenor of Reading for Pleasure group)

Wildflower Challenge

Those of you who know me will know that I'm a long-time member of a well-known slimming club. We're still meeting, by Zoom and on Facebook, and as a way to try to keep us active there have been various initiatives to get us outside, including a scavenger hunt. Every day, we post pictures on our FB page of items suggested, eg. something red, a road sign, something round etc. One day recently, we were asked to find 'a wildflower'. I don't need much of an excuse to go out and look at wildflowers, but this time, I went to Aylestone Meadows, starting from the steps down to the canal at Soar Valley Way and walking along, past Kings Lock (the café is open "when the sun shines"!) to Aylestone Meadows and through to the Aylestone Road car park near the junction with Grace Road. I walked home from there. My mission was to photograph all the wildflowers I could see, and what a challenge that turned out to be. Whenever I thought "That's it, you've got enough", I would see some another little gem peeping at me from some unpromising bit of waste ground or kerbside! I was out of the house for three hours, during which I took 183 photos, of around 60 species. Of these, I knew 47 by sight and spent a very enjoyable afternoon with my books and apps identifying the rest. Most of them I recognised the name once I'd found it, but some, like Goats Rue and American Water Plantain, were completely new to me. But what to do with all my pictures? I do realise that not everyone is interested in wildflowers so I won't be putting 60 pictures of flowers on here. But I do have a selection of 18 pictures in this collage, and this is the picture that I posted for my scavenger hunt! The sharp-eyed amongst you will notice that one of them isn't a plant: it's a Banded Demoiselle Dragonfly: at one point I was surrounded by dozens of them. I tried stalking them, trying to get a good picture but couldn't get close. Then one landed right next to me, and I got my shot! They are so beautiful. Aylestone Meadows is such a fantastic resource, with a mix of habitats, I would recommend it to anyone who wants to get away into the 'countryside' for a while. For anyone interested in the plants, there's a list after the picture: names are in rows, from top to bottom.



Top row:

Goat's Rue *Galega officinalis*

Bittersweet *Solanum dulcamara*

Banded Demoiselle *Calopteryx splendens*

Row 2:

Black Medick *Medicago lupulina*
Greater Stitchwort *Stellaria holostea*
Wall Speedwell *Veronica arvensis*
Ribwort Plantain *Plantago lanceolata*
Hard Rush *Juncus inflexus*

Row 3:

Black Horehound *Ballota nigra*
Tufted Vetch *Vicia cracca*
Greater Burdock *Arctium lappa*
Wall Barley *Hordeum murinum*
Sun Spurge *Euphorbia helioscopia*

Row 4:

Common Sorrel *Rumex acetosa*
Great Burnet *Sanguisorba officinalis*
Scarlet Pimpernel *Anagallis arvensis*
Blunt-Flowered Rush *Juncus subnodulosus*
American Water Plantain *Alisma plantago-aquatica*

Steph Smith (Leicester U3A member)

Pics by Steph Smith

My Activities in June 2020

What did I do during June lockdown? Not much, just...
25 social media video calls on Zoom/Google Meet/Skype
15 WhatsApp calls, mainly to U3A members
12 landline calls
1 haircut
75 rounds of bridge
10 hours of gardening
8 hours on the Wii, including yoga and golf
Read 3 books
Hosted 3 people in the garden with social distancing
Hosted 2 fancy dress zoom birthday parties

Earned over £120 online from selling surplus books/CDs and online surveys

First takeaway in months

3 walks in the country

Started organising virtual Current Affairs Group

Watched 3 box sets on TV

Sorted 5 lots of grocery shopping

Watched 6 football matches on TV

Henry Paulinski (Convenor of Current Affairs 2)

Lockdown Paintings

I've set my task of a painting or drawing every day during the period of the lockdown. The choice of subjects within the house is not inspiring. There can be unexpected sources: a glistening bowl of fruit being washed in soapy water caught my eye to photograph. Steph (Ed) suggested I should paint it, but I realised that the ambition was beyond my skills, so



I put the idea aside. It kept niggling at me and eventually I tried when I had another soapy fruit bowl. Bubbles are even more difficult a subject than the gloss and shades of the fruit.



The head was part of experimenting with oil colours and a different style of shading. Like trying to get the colour of the fruit, I looked up the work of various exponents and it helped in building the confidence to do the still life fruit.

Paintings by Anthony Locke (Leicester U3A member)

Welsh Improvers Group

During the lockdown we have all been studying hard to improve our Welsh skills but we were missing the time we spent together where we could practise our conversation and learn from each other's mistakes – and laugh and drink tea and munch bara brith or Welsh cakes. So, for the last three Wednesdays when we would have met here at my flat, some of us, sadly not all, have been Zooming.

Having decided on a subject, we have sent 'homework' round by email, so that we would be ready to discuss our responses, correct each other's pronunciation and grammar, and ask each other questions.

The subjects have included quizzes on Welsh history, geography and personalities, and research based on articles from a magazine called 'Lingo Newydd' which is all about Welsh people and places and designed for learners of the language.

We still laugh a lot but it will be so good if and when we can all meet again on the first and third Wednesday of each month.

Brenda Worrall (Convenor of Welsh Improvers group)

Creative Writing Group

Churchill's visit

One Saturday morning in 1941 there was a knock on our back door in Leeds.

It was a neighbour, bringing us the extraordinary news that Winston Churchill himself was scheduled to make a public speech at midday on the steps of Leeds Town Hall. The news had apparently been relayed since dawn by the city's tram and bus conductors but had not been mentioned in the press or on the radio, a procedure I guess, was designed to minimise the possibility of the Luftwaffe hearing about it soon enough to take action and ruin the event. The previous month Leeds had

experienced its heaviest air raid, which had included a direct hit on the town hall itself.

It being Saturday morning, my dad, big brother Tommy and I were free of commitments. So we caught the bus and got down there. The highly unorthodox communication system had worked and the space in front of the town hall steps was filled by several thousand people to witness the event.

I wish I could tell you what the great man had to say to us; my nine-year-old brain retained nothing of the words but strong recollections of the black overcoat, and the Homburg hat being waved to us on his departure in an open Rolls Royce. And, of course, the totemic cigar. No doubt the Leeds reference library will have a copy of that speech in the local newspaper. But I have a suspicion that Leeds was not the only major city to get it at that particular time. Politicians of that era needed physical feedback from live audiences. Churchill was not alone in this respect; Hitler, Mussolini and Roosevelt all did it often in vast spaces such as sports stadiums in a way that is no longer needed, with universal television systems.

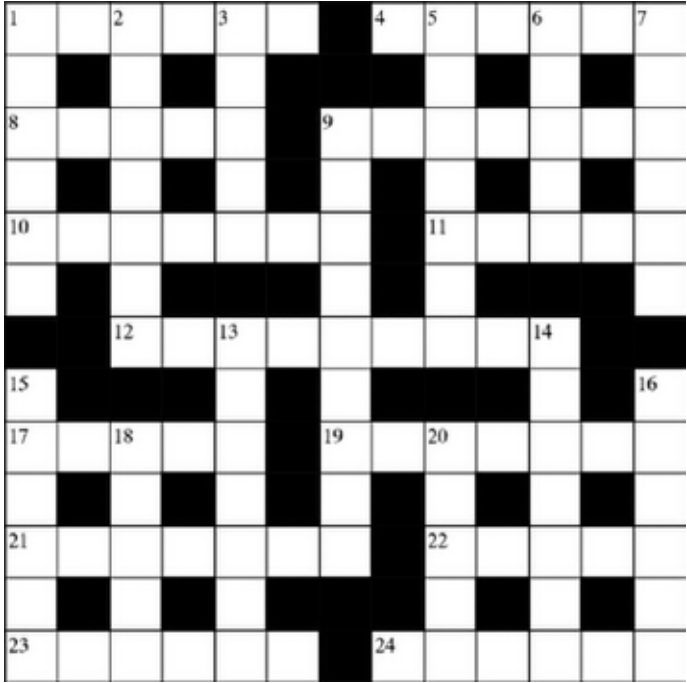
It occurs to me that the great majority of people in that crowd may have been hearing Churchill's actual voice for the very first time. Of course, nearly everyone in that era actually owned, or had access to, the contrivance then known as a wireless set. And, of course, the man had been Prime Minister for over a year, and had already made some speeches of memorable defiance to Hitler's conquest of the European mainland and the likelihood that he wanted to overwhelm us too. But our Prime Minister made his defiant speeches only once; in a House of Commons which had no links to the BBC and had no voice recording system of any kind during the period when those speeches were made. Everyone knew the content of his most legendary diatribes, such as the forthcoming beaches battles speech and the Battle of Britain one, because they read them verbatim in the newspapers, or they had been comprehensively quoted by the radio newscaster. That was how people acquired their information in the pre-television era.

Many people will perhaps query these facts because in later years they may well have heard the authentic Churchill voice saying those now legendary sentences. The fact is that, after the war when he was no longer in government, he was asked by the BBC to record some of his speeches for the archives. Some of this is known to have been done at his country retreat, Chartwell. It is also a matter of record that a well-known radio actor called Norman Shelley was capable of a credible audio impersonation and did some examples for subsequent dramatic productions. The BBC has always been rather coy about the exact facts regarding these stories but, when a guest on Desert Island Discs wanted to hear an excerpt of one of the legendary speeches, the presenter had to say that it was not available because of copyright issues.

Mike Westmoreland (member of the Creative Writing group)

Puzzle Corner

Cryptic Crossword (created by Cryptic Crossword 2 Group)



CLUES ACROSS

- 1 Restrung? - for the best performance (6)
- 4 Gibberish - it's very loud in Cymru without end (6)
- 8 Constant girl in form (5)
- 9 Repair tableware for the Navy say (7)
- 10 English way is within my understanding (7)
- 11 European governor from the east is in fashion (5)
- 12 Given a new name for mark identifying cattle in grass (9)
- 17 Amphibians from four directions and time (5)
- 19 Small boy, very little, finds his fate (7)
- 21 Hip and pear mashed makes you merrier (7)
- 22 Aimed to reform the press, TV etc (5)
- 23 Up in an old part of Yorkshire (6)
- 24 Meaning to use temporary accommodation (6)

CLUES DOWN

- 1 Chair to disturb Her Majesty? (6)
- 2 Bell ringer out at 8pm on Thursdays in Spring 2020? (7)
- 3 Place again on TV perhaps (5)
- 5 A confused driver still got there (7)
- 6 Figure head and Heather have an affair (5)
- 7 Number which, with "addition", was an exam (6)
- 9 TV channel attacker from the air (9)
- 13 Basin to become a prop (7)
- 14 Wither away to a dissipated wild end (7)
- 15 Female insect? - what might excite a bee (6)
- 16 Ryan unusually in an island race is a slave-driver (6)
- 18 Stole - no saint - and cleaned up (5)
- 20 A simple disciple? (5)

Avoncroft Visit

The coach trip to the Avoncroft Historical Museum near Bromsgrove in Worcestershire has been postponed to 2021. All the members who had booked have been contacted to ask for their views. The overwhelming response was that we should leave it until next year. Maintaining social

distancing on the coach and during the visit would have been extremely difficult. Booking will start again next year, the applications from the people who booked this year will not be carried over to next year.

Veronica Matthew

Creative Writing Competition

Got a short story inside you, or fancy a go at a poem or prose? The Creative Writing Group is holding a competition for all Leicester U3A members.

Work to be no longer than 500 words.

There will be three categories, as mentioned above, to be judged by John Kitchen, Leicester poet and playwright, whose work has been featured on Radio 3, and who runs Tangent Poets in Leicester. There will be prizes for the winners.

If you would like to enter, please send entries to Stella Memory, Creative Writing Group Convenor at creativewriting@leicesteru3a.org.uk.

The closing date has been extended to Wednesday 26th August.

Good luck!

Stella Memory (Convenor of Creative Writing Group)

Crossword Solution

¹ R	E	² C	O	³ R	D		⁴ W	⁵ A	F	⁶ F	L	⁷ E	
O		L		E				R		L		L	
⁸ C	L	A	S	S			⁹ S	E	R	V	I	C	E
K		P		E			K		I		N		V
¹⁰ E	M	P	A	T	H	Y		¹¹ V	O	G	U	E	
R		E					R		E				N
			¹² R	E	¹³ B	R	A	N	D	E	¹⁴ D		
¹⁵ A					A		I				W		¹⁶ T
¹⁷ N	E	¹⁸ W	T	S			¹⁹ D	E	²⁰ S	T	I	N	Y
T		I		T			E		I		N		R
²¹ H	A	P	P	I	E	R			²² M	E	D	I	A
E		E		O					O		L		N
²³ R	I	D	I	N	G			²⁴ I	N	T	E	N	T

About the Newsletter

Delivery

The Newsletter is currently only being delivered to members by email as a pdf file with one page per side.

Contributions

The deadline for items to be included in the September 2020 Newsletter is Sunday 23rd August. Contributions (from members) should be sent to the editor: newsletter@leicesteru3a.org.uk

If you want to submit your entry as hard copy, please contact the Editor, or the Secretary, to get an address to which you can send it.

I am always pleased to receive brief reports from groups about their recent activities and I extend my thanks to all the authors who have done so. Please keep them coming. The occasional picture would be welcome as well. Please keep all articles to a maximum of 500 words. If you have a story or a report that is considerably longer than that, we can edit it into 2 (or more if it's very long!) shorter articles to be published in subsequent Newsletters.

When the current restrictions are lifted LEICESTER U3A will resume its meetings on the second Tuesday of each month (except August and December) at Christchurch, Clarendon Park Road, LE2 3AH, and many special interest groups will then continue to meet regularly in members' homes and elsewhere.