



Oswestry U3A News

January 2021

Message from the Chair

Another year and how different from January 2020. Although we are still living with the worst pandemic in living memory, we have learnt to cope with so many pressures on our lives, some that would never have been in our wildest nightmares. But U3A members have taken it in their stride. Over the last months I have seen and spoken to many of you, socially distancing of course, and I have been delighted to hear how you have filled your time and maybe taken on new hobbies and activities. Some of our interest groups have been able to restart or have kept going through emails, Zoom and telephone calls.

As you know your Committee decided to go ahead with our AGM for 2020 in November as we felt postponing it would bring us into 2021 without our usual structure. Ballot papers, minutes and financial accounts went out online and by post to all members without internet access. Everything went smoothly with, out of 312 members, 110 voting (35% of members), a similar percentage to those attending and voting at a normal AGM held in the Memorial Hall. 100% of voters approved the minutes of the 2019 AGM, the Financial Accounts for the year ending 31st October 2020 and the appointment of Stephen Tudhope as examiner of the 2020/2021 accounts. 97% approved all the financial resolutions for 2020/2021. 94% of voters approved the Committee members for 2020/2021 but it is not quite clear why some members were not in favour of the new Committee. You will have a chance to alter that at the next AGM by standing for election! We welcome Mike Grundy and Marjorie Ide as new Committee members and our grateful thanks are extended to Helen Shackell and Rose Waight for all their hard work and support over the years.

Christmas has come and gone, New Year as well and much quieter than we would have liked. I would like to thank Liz so much for the excellent virtual Christmas party and those who contributed to it. It was great fun. I took some of the quizzes into my family bubble where they were enjoyed as well. Thanks also to those who sent out Christmas messages of good cheer via the social email site.

As we enter 2021 it is to the news that Covid 19 is infecting so many more people and we are now back into the higher regulations and rules of our third Lockdown. However, we have the various vaccines coming on stream. We are so reliant on the roll out of these vaccines! Many of us will have our first dose in the near future and hopefully we will begin to see a reduction in infection rates as long as we all follow the rules.

So, with this in mind, I would like to wish you all a peaceful, healthy and more positive New Year and hope that we will, at some point, begin to meet again, although U3A as we have known it may not be feasible for some time to come.

Take care, stay safe.

Marjorie

We have some fantastic photographers in our U3A! Here are some of Christine's photos which particularly reflect the beauty of the winter season. She provides the details.



The two remaining cygnets at Whittington Castle almost making a heart. The sun shining on the water gave the golden colour.



A murmuration of Starlings at Whixall Moss, Pink Footed Geese going in the opposite direction. They then dropped down onto the Moss.



A walk near the Racecourse

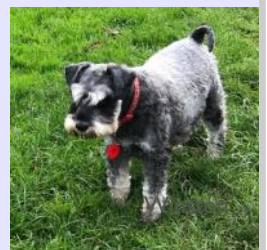
Marjorie is walking out with a new beau!

During the summer and in the following lockdown, I started to walk a friend's dog with two aims in mind: to make sure I had my daily exercise and that Winston also had exercise to help him lose a little weight!

Winston is a miniature wire-haired Schnauzer and like most of this breed is a feisty character, he loves walking, sniffing and racing around off the lead. He is very much a dog of routine, stopping in the same place when it is time to take off his lead or put it back on. But this may be due to the small treat he gets!

Dog walking is not just exercise. You join a friendly band of other dog walkers and this nearly always means a conversation and contact, socially distancing, even though we don't know each other's names. We have a joint affection for our canine friends which I know has been a lifeline for some people during the last 10 months. I have continued to walk even though we are now in our 3rd lockdown.

I was always too busy to consider having another dog, although I did think about it after I was widowed 7 years ago, but walking Winston and, occasionally having my daughter's Schnauzer have allowed me to have canine company and exercise without the bills! My thanks go to my friend Ann for sharing Winston with me. My best wishes to all dog owners in Oswestry U3A. Marjorie





From out of the dark, the long tendrils creep
Carried on mist, whilst we are asleep
As they wend their way over all of the land,
Shaping the landscape with one sweep of the hand.
As we stir in the night – pull the bedclothes up tight,
Unaware of the magic that's woven tonight.

In the light of the moon the world starts to glow,
As the little ice crystals are starting to grow.
Where the icy long fingers have had time to play
Leaving everything white for the start of the day.
The windows, once clear glass, now frosted they stay
With the patterns of ice, in Jack Frost's special way.

In the morning it hangs there, the cloud of damp ice,
This fog in the mornings which so is not nice!
As we get out of bed and get dressed for the day
And see what is out there, to be cleared away.
All the frost on our paving and drives and wind-
screens
We will never be ready in time – so it seems.

Then the journey to work is pure magic to see,
As the sunlight beams down on the now painted
trees,
As they glow in such glory, with the new film of ice,
And reflect the sun's colours so golden – so nice.
As they twinkle and sparkle in the light of the sun
Like the world is transformed - to this magical one.

If you look at them closely these branches now hold
Some amazing ice sculptures – a sight to behold.
Little pinnacles growing towards the blue sky
How they all seem so perfect – I can not say why.
All the grass and the hedges and also the trees,
The houses, the lamp posts, the cars – all have these.

Jack Frost is not welcome; it is true to say,
As it makes our day harder, to go on our way.
But on this occasion, he gave me such joy
As I felt like a child, with a brand new toy.
With a world which was dusted, and sparkled so
white,
From Jack Frost when he came, in the dead of the
night.

Some thoughts on Lockdown

1. The dumbest thing I ever bought was a 2020 planner.
2. 2019: Stay away from negative people. 2020: Stay away from positive people.
3. The world has turned upside down. Old folks are sneaking out of the house & their kids are yelling at them to stay indoors!
4. Does anyone know if we can take showers yet or should we just keep washing our hands?
5. I never thought the comment, "I wouldn't touch him/her with a 6-foot barge pole" would become a national policy, but here we are!
6. Never in a million years could I have imagined I would go into a bank with a mask on and ask for money.
7. I need to practice social-distancing from the refrigerator.

Jenny writes, 'I have been looking through my Christmas cards to remind myself who had sent them and just two had pictures of robins.

I have had a little Robin in my garden who spends a lot of time in my bird feeder. He is a greedy little bird but very picky about what feed he likes to eat. I have tried to get a picture of him poking his head outside the feeder, which is in the form of a large ceramic Blue Tit, but he always flies away when I approach.

There are many stories about how the Robin got his red breast but the one story that I like especially, as we have travelled through these difficult times, is that a Robin in your garden is a departed family member watching over you.'

Looking forward to better times ahead.



Extract from the book 'Golden Windows' by our late member Evelyn

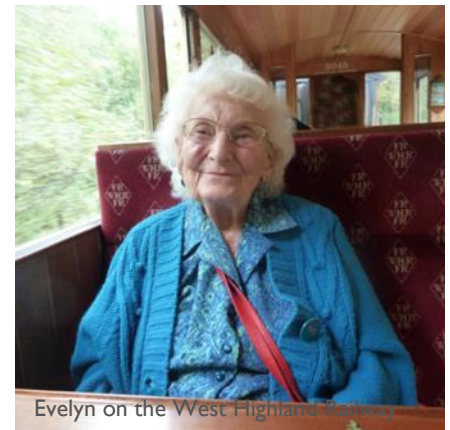
In 1939 soldiers arrived in huge lorries at big army camps in our village. There was a good canteen for them and the land-girls in the kitchen of Deanery Hall and it was much appreciated. Mom used to take her turn serving in it with the other local ladies. It was their way of doing some war work and it was always a pleasure for her to feed folks, especially the lads away from home. The ladies served lovely cakes and sandwiches, and when they couldn't get fresh tomatoes, they made tinned tomato sandwiches.

All the mothers were wonderful feeding their families in those days of rationing. How could they make 2oz butter, per person, manage for a whole week, or 2oz tea, and 4oz each of margarine, lard and suet? I expect they had good training in the Depression years, when, although there was food, there was very little money to buy it.

Meat was rationed to just over 1lb (or 1s 10d worth), per person, later reduced to 1s 1d worth. Offal wasn't rationed. That was liver, kidneys, sausage, pig's feet, tripe, etc. Agricultural and railway workers were allowed an extra ration of cheese. When it was jam making time, people were allowed a bit more sugar. Fish wasn't rationed, but it wasn't available very often except at 'Fishy Jones' fish and chip shop; there would be a queue right up the road. We didn't even have white bread, it was a bit on the grey side, but it was nutritious and we forgot what white bread was like. There was dried milk and dried egg; sweets and chocolate were on a coupon. Later on, bread was on coupons as well. Although it sounds a bit spartan now, it must have been a healthy way of eating because no one went on diets then and everyone had a fair share.

On December 20th 1939 there was the usual Christmas Treat for the children attending Pontesbury School, together with the evacuated children from Liverpool. (There wasn't room for us all in the classrooms at once so we had a shift system and extra classrooms in local halls.) Proceedings opened with humorous community singing and a short sketch. Folk dancing was performed by the Senior girls and Morris dancing by the Senior boys. There was a display of Shadowgraphy given by the Liverpool teachers and a PE display by the Liverpool Senior boys.

Our Christmas parties followed a few days afterwards, with the usual very big tree, covered with presents, one for each pupil in the Senior school. Father Christmas would bring presents for the little ones at their party. Even though it was wartime, there would be a lovely tea, followed by games, etc. I have still got the books that I was given from that Christmas tree.



Evelyn on the West Highland Railway

Thanks to Ruth who selected and typed out this extract and to Christine who gave permission for its use and supplied the photo.

Soap for Seniors

Having friends in a care home with no families of their own, **Ruth** sometimes supplies toiletries for them. This experience inspired her, in this most difficult of times, to put together a project to supply toiletry parcels to others in a similar situation in local care homes. Initially her idea was to collect items donated by U3A members at one of our 'bookswaps', but a further lockdown put paid to that idea, so with the support of a few U3A friends, she decided to go ahead with a small pilot project. She liaised with Shropshire Peer Counselling and Advocacy Services to identify clients who would benefit most. Her initial idea of preparing 12 gift bags evolved into 32 (27 ladies and 5 gents) split between four care homes. Not so small then! Care Home staff gave advice on what the relevant residents would actually like and use.

Ruth became an expert on sourcing branded makes at competitive prices and purchased items for sensitive teeth and skin. She used her Double-up Nectar points and a 3 for 2 offer to get some smart gift bags to put the gifts in. The bags were decorated with handmade pompoms and accompanied by Christmas cards signed, "With best wishes from your Friends at the Oswestry U3A." Care homes in 2020 were Llysfield, Meadowbrook, New Fairholme and Woodland. The staff were very touched by the thought and the residents delighted by their gifts.

This year, she hopes we can take a similar project forward as a group. A gift bag costs a minimum of £5.00 but if a lot of us give support we could reach even more than the 32 who benefited this year. Look out for **Soap for Seniors 2021** later this year. In the meanwhile you might wish to save unwanted but suitable toiletries?

Congratulations Ruth, an excellent project. It makes me proud to be a member of Oswestry U3A



John started volunteering at **Knightshayes Court**, his nearest National Trust property, shortly after he retired in 2015. He recalls, 'I had the impression of a drab, dark and boring Victorian house and so the property didn't immediately attract me. However, I had obtained a history degree with the Open University, so initially went along with the idea of volunteering on the conservation side. I had no intention of being a room guide, but they were desperate, and I was persuaded to give it a go. I discovered every guide had their own take on the story of the house, dependent on their interests and through this I gained a rounded knowledge of the property and many interesting stories. My impression of the house was transformed, as I became more intrigued by its story.'

Being a room guide is what you make it, you can just sit there and react if asked questions, but that was not for me. I found it most enjoyable to catch a visitor's eye as they entered a room and say hello, breaking the ice, which saved them having to initiate contact and then if they wanted to chat, they could. It can have its downsides - I've lost count of the long life stories I've been told.

During my time at Knightshayes I also undertook introductory talks when visitors arrived in the property and in the winter took tours around parts of the house not usually open during peak time, providing a slightly different story to the one usually told.

As well as being a guide over a winter period, I learnt how to clean the 2500 books in the library. The training was thorough, starting with the correct way to take a book off the shelf and put it back!

Knightshayes Court is a Neo-Gothic Victorian house built by the 3rd generation of the wealthy Heathcoat-Amory family who made their money out of machine-made lace. The house was designed by William Burges but the family dispensed with his services when it came to decorate the inside and John Crace was employed to complete the decoration. Despite the time and expense in completing the house, the family didn't like the finished result and very swiftly started to paint and cover over much of the work!

The house and estate were gifted to the National Trust in 1972 on the death of Sir John Heathcoat-Amory. The Trust accepted the gift largely to preserve the large award-winning gardens. At the time, the inside of the house showed little of the Burges/Crace designs and the Trust's early thoughts were to possibly convert it into apartments. However, they quickly appreciated that the house was of historical importance. Luckily, the family had retained all the original plans and designs and in addition anything removed had been stored. The decision was made to restore parts of the inside to its original elaborate interior designs with this being carried out over the last 40 years. Hence the house is now a re-creation of the Burges/Crace designs. Needless to say I no longer regard it as a drab, dark and boring Victorian house.'

John will give a Zoom presentation on this topic on 26th January at 10.30

Every evening, since we started shielding almost a year ago and just before we go to bed, Mr T and I tell each other something that has been good in our day and something that we are looking forward to. It is the little day-to-day things we are looking for not the big things that we are all hoping for - like an end to the pandemic.

In May, last year, I was looking forward to seeing the rare Spotted Flycatcher, hoping that a pair would come again from Africa to make a nest in our climbing rose. They did! And I was able to say that seeing them was my good thing for the day. Were they the same ones as last year, miraculously remembering our climber next to our sunroom?

In August, I was looking forward to going on holiday and seeing the sea. Luckily, I was able to travel to our family cottage in Yorkshire and I saw the sea but could not dip my toes in the water or feel the sand under my feet. There were too many people there with the same idea! We went inland instead and my good things for the day were my visits to isolated churches, where I could sit in the sun and read the history of the villages.

In November, I was looking forward to Christmas; I was hoping to see my eldest sister. I had not seen her for a year. My hopes were dashed when the five days for Christmas were cancelled. But there was still Christmas Day and, to my joy, I formed a Christmas bubble with her and talked to her from the safety of my car. My niece and Godchild were there too. So that was my incredibly good thing.

Now in January 2021, I am looking forward to seeing the Green Woodpecker who cheers me with his laugh. He sometimes comes to our field searching for ants underground. I have not decided on my good thing yet today, it is only midday, and anything could happen before bedtime.

Vicky



During the first lockdown we spent a lot of time gardening. As much of the garden is now dormant, apart from the weeds of course, birdwatching has become a favourite pastime of many.



Alex is wondering what has happened to his Field Fares. 'The Cotoneaster tree produced just as plentiful supply of red berries in 2020 as it did in 2019, but there have been no Redwings or Fieldfares to help the Blackbirds to eat all the berries. Even in this cold weather only Blackbirds are eating them. Plenty of Blue Tits, Coal Tits, Great Tits and other varieties of small birds come to eat from the feeders containing sunflower seeds, peanuts, niger seeds as well as fat-balls, but they do not show any interest in the berries. The Blackcap, an occasional visitor, spent several minutes rummaging round in the Mahonia bush, that is in full flower, the other day, and then on the Damso trees, but wasn't interested in anything else.'



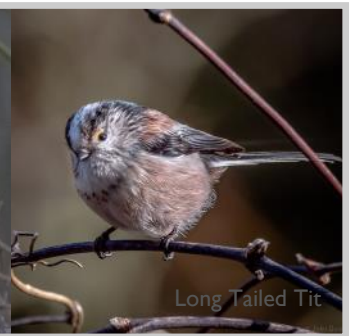
Christine, who leads the Bird Watching Group has, not surprisingly, been watching the birds in her back garden. Winter is a good time to see birds as they are not so obscured by foliage. Her photo of a Wren is particularly interesting. She writes, 'The Wren found the caterpillar of what I think is a Winter Moth and shook and knocked it on a branch. I was surprised to see a caterpillar at this time of year!'



John, who runs the Photography Group has also been putting his camera skills to good use. The photos below are a small selection of the birds that have visited his garden.

Thanks to all three for sharing their stunning photos.

If you would like to join either the Birdwatching or the Photography Group please let me know and I'll put you in touch.



The **Walking Group** have tried to keep going, when regulations allow. We are lucky as we are outside and an official organised group. Before the latest lockdown we could legally have up to 30. In practice though it's normally about 10. The group leaders have put in place risk assessment, and rules to follow. There is no doubt that walking is good for both your physical and mental health, and I know members have found comfort in the social aspect too. Like many others we have had to cancel our traditional outings, for example our last walk before Christmas was always to Powis Castle, ending with coffee and mince pies in the tea room. Our Christmas Lunch is normally in January, with a walk around Queens Head, finishing at the pub for lunch.



Right now of course due to lockdown we are not permitted to walk as a group. Most of our members are still walking either on their own or with one other. We are all looking forward to the Spring when we hope we can get back together.

Here's to better times, keep safe and see you soon! **Phil**

On the whole, members of **Reading Group 2** thoroughly enjoyed reading **The Curious Charms of Arthur Pepper** by **Phaedra Patrick**.

It tells the story of a man who, upon the first anniversary of his wife's death, finds a charm bracelet belonging to her. Underneath one of the charms is a telephone number that he uncharacteristically rings and there begins his journey to discover the story behind each of the charms. He uncovers a whole hidden life of his wife before she met him and of which he knew nothing and reveals hidden depths to his own character. It is told in a very clever way never sliding into mawkishness or total unbelievable fantasy.

The characters are all 'nice' people and reflect the innocence and goodness of both Arthur and his wife. Further discoveries change Arthur's opinion of his wife and his adventures change his attitude to life and people around him.

Lynne, leader of the group says, 'I felt that this was a book about how one person dealt with bereavement and changed from an isolated to an outgoing individual. It reminded me of 'The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry' by Rachel Joyce which we read in October 2015. In all a charming book speckled with humour. As one group member said "It was a perfect book for a wet day in Lockdown".'

The next OU3A News is planned for mid March. We would love to have an article from you. Please post to The Stables, Gibraltar Lane, Treflach, SY10 9HF or email to OU3Asocial@aol.com