



# Newsletter No: 7

**March 2021**

## **Northamptonshire Network of u3as**

[www.u3anorthamptonshirenetwork.org.uk](http://www.u3anorthamptonshirenetwork.org.uk)

email: [u3anorthantsnetwork@hotmail.com](mailto:u3anorthantsnetwork@hotmail.com)

There have been many interesting talks that we can listen to through the National website, as well as tutorials, a couple of which are being given by Oundle Group Leaders. <https://www.u3a.org.uk/events/educational-events>.

For those of you who do not have a camera or mic on your laptop or pc, it is possible that you can still hear and see talks given on Zoom – you just won't be able to be seen or heard.

### **u3a Day**

It is planned to have this as an annual event and our first ever national u3a day is **Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2021**. The idea is to raise our profile nationally as well as locally.

There is quite a lot of information on the Third Age Trust website <https://www.u3a.org.uk/events/u3a-day> with ideas to explore as well as a closed Facebook page and toolkit.



As well as those events that you are all planning, Northamptonshire Network has been invited to join Leicestershire and Rutland Network in an evening quiz via Zoom on 2<sup>nd</sup> June at 7.30pm. Numbers will be limited and thus it will be first come first served for a place and I will send out reservation details to all of you closer to the date.

### **Network Event: An Afternoon with Gervase Phinn**

Since it is now obvious that we will not be able to hold this even on 23<sup>rd</sup> April this year, we have re-arranged it for Friday 15<sup>th</sup> October 2021, same time and same place (United Reformed Church, High Street, Wellingborough NN8 4HW, at 1.30pm). Tickets that have already been issued will still be valid.

*Stephne Tewson*, County Contact

## Member Link

Mention was made at the recent Northamptonshire Network Meeting of the Member Link initiative.

This is a project to support, connect and strengthen the u3a movement and beyond, bringing members together to share resources, advice and support. If you logon to the u3a national website (<https://www.u3a.org.uk>), there is a whole banner on the Home page showing links to various resources and ideas that are available

Recently every u3a received a coloured information sheet for members and committees about ways in which members could be brought together. There was a black and white version, too, that could be printed off for members without an Internet Link. I hope you have had an opportunity to read it and indeed to consider ways in which some of the ideas could be used in your u3a.

In the next few weeks all u3as right across the country will be contacted via telephone by a Trust Volunteer. They will ask how things are going and offer any help and support that you may require. It might be the case that not a lot has been happening during Lockdown for a variety of reasons. Or it may be that there is a lot going on for which little help is currently needed. Whatever the scenario, no u3a needs to feel unsupported.

Our Regional Trustee, Jean Hogg, has organised a programme for contacts to be made between Trust Volunteers and all 117 u3as in the East Midlands. These Trust Volunteers will then report back to Jean about any support that is needed, about any ideas to be shared with others, about what initiatives are working well and more. In this way there will be a very clear picture of what advice and support is needed and what is happening throughout the Region and hence nationally. You may know the Trust Volunteer who calls or indeed it may be someone from one of the other Counties within the East Midlands Region.

So.....if you get a call from someone who says that they are a u3a Trust Volunteer, calling on behalf of Jean Hogg, then you will know all about why they are calling!

Annie Curtis, Trust Volunteer, Northamptonshire Network Link.

**Northamptonshire Network Get Togethers:** The Treasurers from all our u3as got together via Zoom at the end of February and the Speaker Seekers are planning one at the end of March. These are great forums for those in like roles to discuss any problems they may have come up against and to see if another u3a has a resolution or ideas on how to go forward.

## And now news from some of our u3as in our Network:

**Karen and Steve Gees of Brackley u3a write:**

We have continued to have committee meetings via Zoom. Various groups are also using Zoom and we are offering members the opportunity to watch Mirthy talks each month. We also have a team of members who have produced a magazine called "*The Coronavirus Times*" since lockdown. Each month we ask members to send in various articles. Some months we have certain theme's i.e. Valentine Day when we asked members to send in articles on how they spent this in the past.

**John Bugby Chair of Gt Oakley u3a** has sent us the following:

First Shoots of Spring and a New Start in the first picture  
and if you are stuck and feeling out of luck? Photograph a Duck and a Goose



The Poem:

### **LOCKDOWN ACROSTIC**

Laughing at jokes in the Daily Mail;  
Examine the crossword,  
I hope I don't fail.  
Still, I'll have a go, as I don't think I'm dim,  
Unless my brain's addled, a  
Result of 'shut in'.  
Entertainment is short, but it still gives me pleasure.  
As you can tell, I'm a man of much **LEISURE**.

And he goes on to say: "We had a successful On-line AGM with 64 participants which compared well with our last AGM, where 73 members were present.

"At the moment we are looking at how we can move forward with new initiatives including On-Line events, meetings in the open air and meetings/parties in the park.

"Like everyone we are looking to meet in person again and are looking for a new venue as the Village Hall will not be available to us when we get out of our personal prisons."

### **Di Tebbutt, Chair of Kettering u3a writes:**

We have been lucky in recruiting a new member of the Committee who has volunteered to take on the role of Public Relations Officer, as she has a background in this type of work. The Committee continues to meet regularly and is keeping in touch with members via Zoom, email and phone calls. Many of the Group Leaders are also maintaining contact.

Our Treasurer attended the Treasurers' Get Together and we also had representatives at the "Preparing for u3a Day" and the "Retention and Recruitment" meetings. We are hoping to liaise with Ise u3a so that we can organise a joint event for u3a Day in June and have set up a sub-committee to sort things out.

[www.u3akettering.co.uk](http://www.u3akettering.co.uk) website has had 11,870 visits since March 2018 which is an average of 330 a month and our Facebook page is also popular.

Some of our groups continue to meet via Zoom. The Family History Group continues to be very popular. Its page on our website has received over 5,000 visits since 2016. Group members have watched 78 video tutorials since March 2020 and hold a weekly Zoom chat. In February, members joined 1 million others in the world's largest ever Family History Conference, Roots Tech Connect.

Other groups meeting regularly are Spanish, French and Singing and when restrictions are lifted the Walking Group hopes to start again. Other groups are also functioning in a less formal way through phone calls and one to one online meetings.

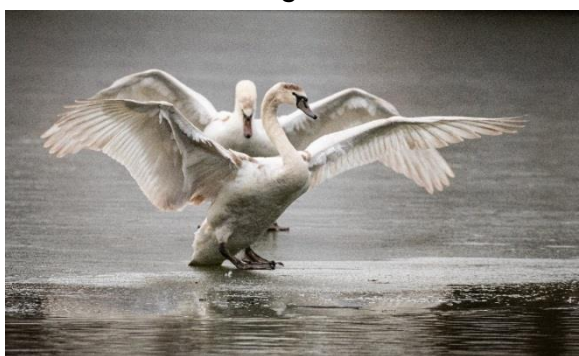
**Gill Potts Chair of Oundle & District u3a writes:**

It was good to get together virtually with other Northamptonshire u3as for our Network Meeting earlier this month. I thought it was a particularly useful meeting as there was much sharing of good practice. It was also good to meet Chris Hartny-Mills, our new regional PR Advisor.

Barbara Bett, our new Membership Secretary, has been working very hard chasing Members for their Annual subs. Some of our Members have decided not to renew at the moment so on Beacon they appear as 'lapsed' in the hope that they will return to the fold when our normal activities resume, hopefully later this year. We have decided to have new Membership Cards, rather like credit cards, and these are currently being produced.

Our Monthly talks continue via Zoom, but we have moved away from the pre-recorded 'Mirthy' talks to 'live' talks, where we can welcome Members, thank our Speaker and give out any appropriate information. It just feels more like a monthly meeting! January featured Great British Eccentrics, February was all about the Forgotten Art of the Picture Postcard and this month we had '*The Weird and Wonderful World of the Law*', so a very varied and interesting programme so far. Gill Phillips, our 'Speaker seeker', has also linked up with Peterborough u3a and we now share a second 'Mirthy' talk at the end of the month, thus giving our Members another chance to come together as a group.

Our Newsletters continue to be bumper issues and I am grateful to everyone who contributes. It is encouraging to know that more and more Groups are now meeting 'virtually'. Our Quiz 'n' Puzzles Group set us a quiz each month, and we update our Members on any issues discussed at Committee meetings. Our March issue featured some fabulous photos from our Photography Group—and also the results of our Annual Poetry and Prose Competition. If you are interested in reading all of the entries, or



*Barbara Betts*



*Deborah Cox*

looking at the Photography competition entries, please have a look at our website: <https://u3asites.org.uk/oundle/home>

## **Carol Lucas, Chair of Towcester u3a writes:**

At Towcester we are so grateful to our Interest Group Leaders who have kept their groups going over the past year. They have been so creative in finding ways to adapt their activities and keep their groups going by email, Zoom or even telephone. I am sure everyone here appreciates their efforts. They have given us something positive to focus on and kept spirits up through difficult times.

Our AGM is planned for May and the Third Age Trust have just approved our revised Constitution which we will be presenting to members for their approval in May.

I am delighted to tell you that one of our members Kate Bartlett has been selected as one of the ten winners of the nationwide search for the best poem written by a u3a member. There were nearly 200 submissions from members across the movement. Kate is a committee member and also has the role as Groups Liaison which may have influenced her poem which was entitled "Group Therapy "

**The committee** continue to meet monthly via Zoom. Our AGM is planned for May and the Third Age Trust have just approved our revised Constitution which we will be presenting to members for their approval in May

Thanks to the other members of the network for sharing their news and ideas

## **Virtual Mixed Craft Group**

With no end in sight for groups to meet up our Virtual Craft group is helping crafters to keep in touch. In February our theme was hearts and the results were shared on our Facebook page, March will see our theme as Easter. This is a virtual group created during lockdown and all our members are welcome to contribute, ask advice etc.



## **Creative Writing**

Each month, the Creative Writers take, as their inspiration, a word or phrase or a common everyday item. Sometimes, it is a painting or photograph.

This month, we wrote a piece about a painting. The painting was by an artist called Trevor Owens. (You can see the painting at the beginning of the story that is included here.)

I anticipated that the stories would include something about the characters in the picture. I was largely right on that count; but one story in particular, took a very different direction. Jane Morgan based her story around the artist himself. It is a fascinating story – we, the members of the group – all loved it. I hope you do too.

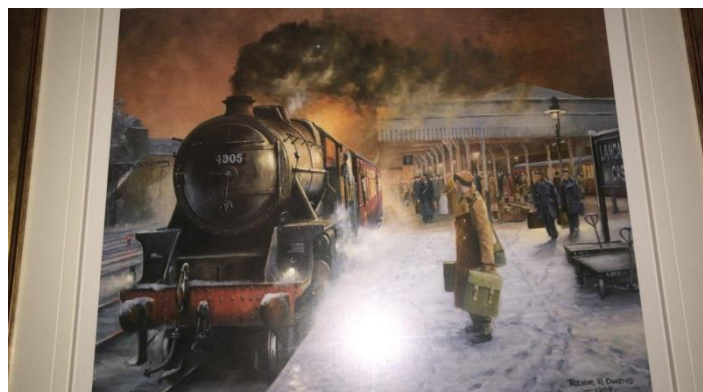
By the way, if you are captivated by the painting, prints are available from Trevor Owens' website [£29 unframed].

Anne Webb, Creative Writers co-ordinator



He stretched and stepped back from the easel, wiping the brush on the oily rag as he did so and looked critically at the progress he'd made today.

'Not bad', he nodded. He did feel as if the '*Black Five*', as the trains were called, had



depth, had impact. Maisie had been right: the engine, not the people, should be the focal point that one's eye was drawn to **and** it was a brave decision to make it occupy a third of the canvas, but it worked; it gave the image power. It had stopped being simply a '*Black Five*' and become almost a mythical monster, breathing fire...'

'Now, hang on, Trev,' he smiled,

realising he was 'doing the sales room thing' that he and Maisie sniggered at, elevating something observed and beautifully crafted – he could admit that to himself – into the realms of fantasy; this wasn't a Leonardo, or perhaps closer, a Degas, it was, hopefully, going to sell to the railway enthusiast or those nostalgic for the 'good old days'. Most importantly, according to Adrian, the local gallery owner, it should sell in a limited print run, so they'd have enough to pay the rent, buy four year old Tim some trainers, put food on the table, until the next commission came along.

There was the pounding of feet on the stairs as Maisie herself appeared.

'I've been calling and calling, but you were too...Oh,' she put an arm around his waist and they gazed at the canvas together, 'that's rather good. Yes,' she too put her head on one side, 'I want to reach out to the engine casing to see whether it's freezing or warmed by the boiler and I like that gush of steam onto the platform: I can almost hear the swoosh as the train stops. I always think – silly I know – it's giving a great sigh of relief at finally coming to a standstill.'

'No, I like it.' He looked again at the engine. 'I wonder if it's a measure of artistic success, if you imagine you can hear – as well as see – a painting? It might be.'

Ever the practical partner in the relationship, she broke the thoughtful silence. 'Anyway – must go and get Tim from school. The light's going now, so how about greeting us with some tea and an After School snack when we get back?'

'Will do.' But he didn't move after she'd left. The white space on the easel glowed empty in the darkening room. Who was on the platform? Where were they going? Was it to a new exciting future or back to a humdrum existence, or, perhaps, a warm hearth? It should be a significant journey, but what?

Sitting on the floor hours later, dutifully slotting toy wooden track into a layout so the tiny red engine could arrive endlessly at the station, he wondered about the fascination of trains: they just trundled on parallel lines, endlessly repeating journeys, labouring up hills, hissing into stations, yet small boys and, later, grown men found them entrancing. Was it the science: steam power translated into motion? Did the fire that burned within them echo our hidden passions? Was their bulk and size somehow frightening and therefore turned to lifelong awe?

'Da-ad', Tim, prone in front of him, was indignant, 'what are you doing? We need a bridge there.' He took the track from his father's hand, 'so it can arrive at the platform fast and

– look – these people,’ he grabbed some small wooden figures, ‘to wave at the train as it passes.’

‘Got you.’ He reconfigured the set-up and entered into the drama: Tabby the cat knocked the engine in passing and, anticipating repercussions abandoned her usual nonchalance and left speedily; that meant the train was derailed; miniature fire-trucks and ambulances rushed to the scene; tragedy was averted and the track replaced.

*Thomas the Tank Engine* was the obvious bedtime story as was the usual debate: was Thomas or Gordon the better engine? Trev was drawn to Thomas – that wonderfully optimistic, apple-cheeked face and cheery smile. Tim was astonished and explained carefully. ‘But Gordon’s faster, Dad and, well, he’s just cooler.’

Trev smiled, nodded, ruffled the blonde head, turned off the bedside light and lay beside him listening to the shallow breathing as the boy tumbled into sleep. He flicked through memories of his father. Thirty years ago had they shared stories or played trains; had his dad ruffled his hair? He had moments of memories, snap shots in the album of his mind: being hit by a cricket ball and howling into the warmth of his Dad’s shirt; on his shoulders feeling like a giant, above all the grown-ups; singing ‘When the Saints..’, marching together like soldiers on a country lane.

The following day, he was looking at the unfinished work again, meditatively, composing it, mentally sketching it. The bustling warmth, the mass of humanity under the platform canopy in the background was fine, deliberately fudged, blending into the glowing sky; just the figure in the foreground to do now. The train was still an elemental force, but this traveller would give the scene heart. Figures in a composition were more than focal points; they were the flash point, they invited the viewer into the scene and now he knew who it would be.

He mixed umbers, ochres and, leaning in closely, set to work; these softer colours would be the counterpoint to the black bulk of the train, set against the trodden snow and the brushwork needed to be delicate, invisible. He stepped back, looked critically at the emerging man in khaki.

‘Oh, I like that.’

He started; Maisie had appeared soundlessly behind him. ‘Is he going on leave or going back to barracks?’

‘Back, definitely, back.’

‘Well, either way, he’d have luggage: a gas mask, a case or two?’

‘Agreed – yes. Like it.’

He added hedgerow greens to the palette, mixed in a little more ochre and leant into the canvas again, smiling, mentally composing the ‘explanation’ he’d give to Adrian when they studied it together:

‘The bags? They work in a practical sense, obviously, but, perhaps also symbolically? A nod to the responsibility, the duty a serving man had to his family, his country?’

Adrian would nod sagely, remembering it as part of his ‘pitch’.

Maisie again: ‘Will he be looking at us, do you think, or at the train?’

‘Oh, the train, I think.’ There was a moment’s silence as she nodded and wordlessly slipped a hand into his.

‘Oh, Trev,’ her voice was careful; ‘he’s your dad, isn’t he? On that last Christmas leave?’

He nodded, looking at the painting, blurred now as his eyes filled. He couldn’t paint his father’s features; it was always too close, still raw after all these years. The scene was a memory he didn’t have obviously: he remembered the hugs at the door and the scratchy uniform on his face; he remembered his mother’s tears, which, aged four he

hadn't understood; he could still see the hand raised in a final brave, mock salute from the end of the street; then the purposeful stride out of sight and out of his life.

As he picked up the brush to begin, he looked at the scene afresh; he saw that the train wasn't just a monumental presence: the belching smoke, the fiery glow were also a vision of the hell that had been the last things his father saw on that Normandy beach all those decades ago.

### **Sally Muldowney Chair of Wellingborough u3a says:**

I took over as Chair in December at our AGM which took place on Zoom and we had approximately 70 people attending. We have a strong and proactive committee thanks to the previous leadership of Bob Watts. Our groups coordinator, Julie coined the phrase "I want to concentrate on what I Can Do and not on what I Can't" and we have all taken this to heart and are working to achieve this.

Prior to this we began planning the reintroduction of our monthly meetings on Zoom and our first meeting saw the maximum number of members registering of 100. We had some issues with members not being able to get into the meeting but we ended up with over 70 people enjoying the talk offered that month. The issue over joining was resolved and since then we have taken on the large meeting licence to allow more members to attend each month and for the March meeting we had 158 people registering for the meeting. As this is so successful we are considering offering a Zoom monthly meeting in January and February each year.

Currently membership renewals are taking place after giving members 6 months free. We have until the end of March before we can judge what our situation is going forward. Already we have over 400 members who have renewed and we anticipate losing about 20% of our membership. On the bright side though we have signed up some new members since the beginning of the year.

Following the presentation given to members by Ian McCannah we have established a Relaunch subgroup. We have undertaken a number of activities which includes:

- a) Sending out a questionnaire to group leaders to establish how much they are interacting with members
- b) We know some groups have not engaged at all so we want to look at the barriers
- c) Working in partnership with Northamptonshire Adult Learning (David Yarnall) who have provided free workshops to learn about Zoom. We are also planning further workshops around different technology and social media as we have a large number of members who do not engage well with technology
- d) We are beginning piloting one off taster sessions and workshops using Zoom.
- e) We are starting a number of new groups which we anticipate will primarily use Zoom with only occasional face to face meetings.

A u3a Day subgroup has also been set up plan and organise what we are able to do for June 2<sup>nd</sup> 2021. We are:

- a) Using a small grant obtained from Wellingborough Borough Council which to part fund advertising in local publication, printing of posters and flyers
- b) Developing a new leaflet for distribution on u3a Day and for use on a longer term basis
- c) Using Facebook, improving our current website and YouTube



- d) Awaiting information from u3a and the Government about what activities can take place
- e) Being aware that there may be issues around confidence from members to engage with any future face to face activity
- f) Considering range of outdoor activities which we can engage with on or around the week in which u3a day falls.

This is quite a long list regarding our thought processes and things that we have been able to put in place. We recognise that we will lose some members and groups following the difficulties of lockdown but we are working towards mitigating these issues. Everyone on our committee has contributed to this process and we are excited that we managed to already achieve some of our aims and hopefully over the coming months we will see us achieving more. One interesting fact is that we, as a committee, are all learning a lot as we progress.

## March's Quiz –

### Part One – Do you know your flowers?

1. Which small flower, usually with 5 blue or purple petals, is associated with freemasonry and has the scientific name *Myosotis*?
2. What flower did the Victorians call a gilliflower?
3. Saffron comes from which type of flower?
4. The largest horticultural campaign in the U.K. is called 'RHS Britain in ...' what?
5. What does the term perennial mean?
6. Which flower inspired the William Wordsworth poem 'I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud'?
7. Which poisonous, sweetly scented woodland flowering plant with bell-shape florets dangling from a thin stem has the scientific name *Convallaria majalis*?
8. *Dianthus barbatus* gets its common name from a story about young lovers separated by the sea; how do we better know this flower?
9. Which flower is often called the 'winter rose' or Christmas rose'?
10. Which flower is sometimes called the sword lily?
11. The anniversary of which prime ministers death is commemorated in the U.K. as Primrose Day?
12. Which flower had been known under various names but was named Galanthus in 1753?
13. Which authors wrote the following books with flowery titles: (a) The Secret Garden, (b) The Chrysanthemums, and (c) Daisy-Head Mayzie?
14. Which blue flower of the genus *Veronica* is also the name of the ship which was to accompany the Mayflower with the Pilgrim Fathers?

## Christmas Quiz Answers :

**Part One:** 1. Christmas Day; 2. King George V; 3. A game of football between British and German soldiers; 4. 1843; 5. The Christmas cracker; 6. Indian Ocean; 7. Capricorn; 8. Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh; 9. William the Conqueror (William I); 10. Australia; 11. Poinsettia; 12. Four.

**Part Two :** 1. Present; 2. Stocking; 3. Cracker; 4. Santa; 5. Elves; 6. Tinsel; 7. Tree; 8. Lights; 9. Dinner; 10. Carol