

**RICHMOND-upon-THAMES**



**University of the Third Age**

[www.u3asites.org.uk/richmond-on-thames](http://www.u3asites.org.uk/richmond-on-thames)



**Spring Newsletter 2020, Volume 53**

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### **DEADLINE FOR AUGUST ISSUE**

Our August newsletter will herald the start of our new membership year. All offerings are welcome and would need to be with me by July 15th at the latest. Please make a note on your calendar.

**Sue Wood** [susan.orleans@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:susan.orleans@tiscali.co.uk)

# **RICHMOND UPON THAMES U3A COMMITTEE & OFFICERS**

## **OFFICERS:**

**President:** Stephen Jakobi  
**Chairman:** Chris Hack  
**Vice Chair:** Libby Barton  
**Secretary / Editor:** Sue Wood  
**Treasurer:** John Cardwell

## **MEMBERS OF EXECUTIVE:**

**Membership Secretary:** David Wood  
**Groups' Co-ordinator:** Norma Cook  
**Committee members:**  
Peggy Roe  
Herbert Wirth  
Chris Barclay  
Bob Litherland

## **SECTION LEADERS:**

**Art, Science & Music:** Graham Shortell  
**Languages:** Norma Cook  
**Literature, Drama, Philosophy & History:**  
Carole Fletcher  
**Recreation:** Tricia Abrahamsen

## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

As I sit here writing this, the government has just issued further lockdown measures. I hope by the time that you are reading this most of them will have been lifted, and we are over the worst. I have no way of knowing.

What I do know is that having to cease all our activities is something none of your committee wanted to do, but which we all realised was essential if we were to protect our members; this is something we realised quite early on in the crisis.

There are perhaps some positives to have been gained from the experience: less unnecessary travel, cleaner air, fewer flights, perhaps a more caring society.

With this last point in mind, I am pleased that many of our group leaders have tried to be positive in finding ways to maintain links with their groups using technology. It is not the same as face to face socialisation, but it is something, and certainly better than nothing.

I hope that we can return to some sort of normality very soon. I am sure that you, like me, are recognising that the U3A is an important part of our lives – and long may it continue to be so. Some initiatives hopefully will make us known to more of our contemporaries in the months ahead. We can all play a part in this too; let friends and neighbours know what we are about: learn, laugh and live.

If we are still in troubled times as you read this, then I hope you are surviving, staying safe – and sane!

**Chris Hack, [chack@onetel.com](mailto:chack@onetel.com), Chairman.**

## PROVISIONAL MEMBERSHIP

Most of our new members join through personal referrals and there is no need to stop suggesting U3A to friends who are looking for something to fill their retirement days.

If you have friends who are bored or lonely, we are currently offering provisional membership which would cost them nothing until we can re-open all our groups and then they would pay the normal subscription.

In the meantime, they would get all our electronic communications via email, which would include our latest newsletter, possibly the opportunity to try out some of the groups which are meeting online, and, of course, have access to our website.

All they need to do is to submit a regular application form (without payment) and they will be sent a provisional membership card and a note summarising what they can expect from us during the lockdown period. Here is the link to the application form:

<https://u3asites.org.uk/files/r/richmond-on-thames/docs/provisionalappform2019-20.pdf>

## A WALK IN MARBLE HILL PARK

Just back from my daily walk. It was warm, the sun was shining and the birds were singing. I suddenly thought: the world HAS stopped, and I HAVE got off! That was how it felt and it was lovely.

**Peggy Roe.**

## **A PERSONAL TRIBUTE TO DAVID JERVIS (1935 – 2020)**

Our long-standing members will well know the name of David Jervis as he was a considerable figure in our U3A for many years. I first knew him as a member of the Committee in 2005 but he had served in that capacity since 2002 as he frequently acted as Chairman when George Hobbs was unwell. Then he was a capable, involved and enthusiastic chairman from 2005 until 2009, when he gave me his blessing to take over from him.

He started, and for many years ran, the Philosophy Group called “Thoughts and Opinions” which was extremely popular and which our current chairman now leads. He loved language and was a true academic and poet, also a knowledgeable, private, generous, and thoughtful person and I am grateful to him for his friendship and support so freely given.

**Sue Wood**

## **GROUP NEWS**

I am writing this in lovely sunshine at the end of March, but as well as the sunshine we are in *unprecedented times, worrying times, unique times of self-isolation* and social distancing. These are words we are all getting used to, reluctantly of course, but I hope that by the time this is published we shall all be more or less back to normal and all our families are safe.

A number of new groups have started in 2020 or are due to start. The two gardening groups, Practical Gardening and Garden Enthusiasts obviously have been unable to get started; Walking Rugby is a touch activity – definitely forbidden and Tai Chi has had to be put on the back burner for a while.

Some groups cannot be conducted remotely for obvious reasons, but a number of group leaders have been letting me know that they have set up, or are in the process of setting up, online activities of different sorts.

I suspect that very few of us had heard of Zoom until recently, but it has become another of the buzz words of the day. There have been a number of groups experimenting with this platform, some are Skype conferencing and others are sharing thoughts and ideas via group emails. At the moment most of us are still in the experimenting stage but I look forward to reporting to you in greater detail in the next newsletter.

Stay well and safe.

**Norma Cook**, Group Coordinator, [norma.beagle@gmail.com](mailto:norma.beagle@gmail.com)

## **GROUPS A – Z: CRIMINAL LAW GROUP**

### **Meeting by ZOOM**

It worked! Four households with 5 group members getting together on our computers and tablets to hold our first trial Zoom meeting. I am no expert and this was my first attempt at hosting a Zoom meeting. Using the Zoom App, I had scheduled the meeting and invited the group members by email.

At 2.00pm I opened the meeting and suddenly there we were. Five bemused and smiling faces were present, with four pictures quartering the screen, ready to start - but where was our leader? Four chatted informally, while Lee made a hasty mobile call to Stephen. Our leader had not yet managed to access Zoom.

However, undaunted, Lee made a brilliant improvisation – he kept Stephen on the mobile phone with the loudspeaker on and held it near his computer screen. We could hear him and he us – not ideal without pictures but it worked. In our group the leader’s presence is vital as he is the only lawyer with essential expertise to underpin our discussions.

Our meeting should have been cut off after the 40-minute free limit for group sessions, but a message appeared on my screen (as host) that Zoom were extending the free period (a Covid concession?). Though, had the cut off happened, one enterprising member had already scheduled to host a meeting at 2.35 with the same invitees and we could have simply switched over to his meeting for 40 minutes and so on.

By our next meeting I’m sure we will all have overcome the technical difficulties (Stephen is now an expert) and will encourage more members to join in – one sent her apologies later: she had forgotten the meeting and was in her garden enjoying the spring sunshine!

Two additional points:

1. Anyone can sign up for free Zoom membership. This can be done by downloading the Zoom App onto your smart phone or tablet or signing in directly through their web page on a computer. You can then schedule and host your own meeting for up to 100 members.

2. No longer constrained by the number of chairs in a sitting room, groups might consider encouraging other U3A members to ‘drop in’ to a meeting to find out if they might be interested in joining, at least while the meetings are being held on Zoom. Anyone interested in the U3A Law group please contact Stephen Jakobi: [stephenjakobi@gmail.com](mailto:stephenjakobi@gmail.com)



**Sally Simon.**

*Members may like to know that there is help with using Zoom on the U3A National Office website.*

*Apparently, Stephen is now a total convert to Zoom as he even uses it for family gatherings online.*

## **GROUPS A-Z: RENAISSANCE ITALY, WEEKENDERS**

Like everybody else, we were taken by surprise by the increasingly strict Government advice against meetings this March. At first, it seemed that we could cancel a few group sessions and then restart. However, it soon became clear that the restrictions are likely to last for months. We thought it important to try to maintain some groups, wherever possible, during this period. Apart from anything else, people who are not allowed to go out to meet friends may be glad of some activity.

We are still at an early stage of seeing how well we can use IT to operate groups online. Nothing, of course, is quite like sitting together on a sofa talking about the subject. However, it is no use wasting time on what is not available. Much better to think about what we might be able to do. Here are some examples of what we have tried.

In my Renaissance Italy group, about eight of us used to read material together and watch short films either on DVD or free online on You Tube. My first attempt to transfer this model online has been to search for material that is free online. Many old books are available in English in full text. In order to be out of copyright of course, they are normally old, often Victorian, translations. There are also many art lectures and old TV programmes freely available. I will find material and e mail links to members of the group, with a few lines from me explaining the theme and how

they relate to each other. Of course, we then have to find a way to discuss it. The first attempt was by using group e mail. We started at 10.30 on Friday, the time of the original group. During the Friday I received 28 group e mails and sent out 13 replies or comments on the material. The discussion spread over the whole day, partly because some people were not available in the morning, when the group had previously met. Similarly, on a smaller scale, with my book reading group I suggested the amount we would read by a certain day, and we exchanged group e mails.

The next stage will be to try a group meeting via Zoom. Meetings on Zoom are free for up to 40 minutes. Norma, David and I have been practising. I know some other group leaders have also been using this method and are further down the road than us.

The Weekenders group is harder. Libby and I set it up to offer activities at weekend, especially for those living on their own, who often found the weekend a dull time because so many activities took place during the week. It is easy to see that the lock down poses particular problems for those living on their own but it is not easy to see what we can do about it. We are trying to set up a buddy scheme, where people telephone those on their own. At least that might offer more communication for those who are suddenly cut off, and who might be glad of contact as time goes by without direct human contact.

Please contact us if you are using Zoom or Skype or some other IT method to keep a group going online, or if you would like to participate in our buddy scheme.

**Chris Barclay.** [crbarclay@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:crbarclay@hotmail.co.uk)

## **GROUPS A – Z: SCIENCE MATTERS**

The group met for the first time on the 16th of January this year. Met again in February and has now, along with others, gone into limbo. Felled by Covid-19, an invisible organism. When it is all over, those of us in the Science Matters Group will, no doubt study its ways and once again, begin our exploration into the wonderful world of science.

But, Covid-19 has done something science cannot do - it has brought out the best in us. It has made humanity pause to re-evaluate its values, shed our selfish selves and made us sacrifice self for the common good. It has shattered our complacency and heightened our vulnerability. But it has made us become one people again. We have discovered immense reserves of resilience, kindness and courage. And we have put life before money, people before things and put science in its proper place - as our servant.

Science may deliver solutions to our current predicament, but it is sterile without those who wield its magic wand. It is, indeed, at times like this that we appreciate the sacrifice that those in the caring professions make for us whilst they risk catching our maladies as they respond to our urgent calls for help and cure and comfort us in our distress and sorrow. To them we owe a great “Thank You”.

But life goes on. Science has given us the tools to keep in touch even as we isolate ourselves from the unseen danger without. So, when we re-emerge from our enforced rest into the daylight, like Plato’s Shadow People, we will emerge into the new reality of a subtly changed world. See you all then.

**Mahen Tampoe.** [mtampoe@aol.com](mailto:mtampoe@aol.com)

## **ANCIENT and MODERN**

O tempora, o mores, as Cicero often said. In these changing circumstances we have to adapt to survive and the thought of no Latin Literature or Beginners' Ancient Greek was too much to bear, so we have resorted to modern technology to study the ancient world. We have communicated via Skype. (Although I am conscious that this is probably considered ancient, having been around for at least 16 years).

We met up first for a short time, to make sure we knew what we were doing, that we were talking to the right people and to get over the self-consciousness I felt at looking at myself on screen. I felt much better once I realised that I became a very small image at the top of the screen.

Both groups have worked well, each one lasting more than 90 minutes, and that's without the usual half an hour for coffee, biscuits and chat. There were only three of us each time, but we didn't interrupt each other and are determined to continue to meet in this virtual way, I am very pleased to say.

**Norma Cook**, [norma.beagle@gmail.com](mailto:norma.beagle@gmail.com)

## **ZOOMING THROUGH LIFE**

In the 1980's the talk in the computer industry was all about Teleworking and/or Telecommuting. According to this theory more and more people would opt to work from home using computer mediated conferencing, document transfers, emails and so on. Therefore, these theorists argued, there would be a corresponding reduction in physical commuting traffic at local and global levels. In reality what happened was that people ended up working from home and also commuting to work. But, it enabled those who

preferred to or had to stay home to earn a living and contribute to society.

Covid-19 has made telemeetings popular again amongst amateur users. Zooming is now forced on us and, for some, it enables them to escape the feeling of solitary confinement this isolation could cause. So, are we likely to continue zooming from our homes once a vaccine has been found to counter the adverse effects of Covid-19 or will we all start zooming around in our cars, buses, planes, trains, trams, electric cycles and other mobility systems when the all clear is sounded?

My guess is that we will get back to meeting and greeting our fellow citizens and leave the zooming to those who have no choice but to use it for business or social purposes. However, if our amateur efforts of Zooming prove successful a whole group of U3A members who cannot now attend group meetings will be able to join groups and share the sessions from home. And that is something worth aiming for.

**Mahen Tampoe**, Science Matters Group. [mtampoe@aol.com](mailto:mtampoe@aol.com)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Sue

You may have heard Tim Spector, Kings College London, on Radio4 recently encouraging more people (especially older people) to sign up to this App which is enabling a large-scale nationwide study on self-reported Covid symptoms. I have downloaded the App and joined the study. It is very simple.

I feel very strongly that this is good way in which those of us who are older, and possibly relying on others to help us, can ourselves

help the wider community. They are especially looking for more older people to sign up.

Help slow the spread of #COVID19 and identify at risk cases sooner by self-reporting your symptoms daily, even if you feel well 🙏. Download the app: <https://covid.joinzoe.com/>

With kind regards

Sally Simon

## THINGS TO DO IN LOCKDOWN

One way of exercising the old grey matter, I thought, is to try composing topical limericks. If you have a taste for the works of Edward Lear, they can be great fun. So, summoning all my mental energy, I tried it. Here are my two first attempts:

There was a young man with a Mazda  
Who filled it with loo rolls from Asda.  
By the time he got home  
all the loo rolls had flown  
though he could not have driven any faster.

A friend is in lockdown in Spain.  
She prefers it because there's less rain.  
When the Wuhan flu spread  
she took to her bed  
and never ate dumplings again.

After composing these two I emailed them to a group of my friends with whom I regularly play golf. As none of us could be out on the course and had time on our hands, the more gifted (and some less

so) got busy composing their own – usually on a golfing theme. Here are a couple of their contributions:

There was a boy, Gareth, from Rhyl  
Who swallowed a dynamite pill  
So just for a change  
He walked to the range  
And his balls ended up in Brazil.

There was a good golfer called Frank  
Playing well but then his heart sank  
He hit the ball right  
Sailing far out of sight  
He so wishes to be rid of his shank!

I forwarded them to my Canadian friend who replied with this:

I have a good friend called John  
Whose patience has finally gone.  
As the world needs some cheer  
At this time of great fear,  
So, humour, thought he, is a balm.

And she in turn forwarded them to members of her extended family, some living in the UK, others in Toronto and Vancouver, and some in Detroit and Washington DC. The impact was immediate with everybody it seemed joining in.

We had a few on the theme of the British royal family:

A family royal and prolific  
Ran away to the northern Pacific  
They stayed for a bit  
Then decided to quit  
When they learned that the taxes were wicked.

But mostly people used them to relate what they were doing during lockdown.

We've come down very ill in E8  
So, we're sorry this limerick is late  
We're filling our time  
Watching Amazon Prime  
While friends chuck bog rolls over our gate.

We have gloves, masks and wipes to go shopping  
When we see friends, we wave without stopping  
We all meet on Zoom  
To lighten the doom  
Because all of our stocks have been dropping!

The most amazing one ran to ten verses – too many to reproduce here - during which we learnt that the dog rescue shelters in Washington DC have run out of dogs – everybody wants a new friend during lockdown. Or perhaps they provide one of the few valid excuses for going outside.

So, give limerick composition a try and email your efforts to your friends. You'll have great fun and it's something everyone can try their hand at, as the above story proves.

**John Cardwell.**

*As promised in our last newsletter, here are the recipes for Chicken Tagine and Frangipane Tart with Seasonal Fruit as produced at the Healthy Kitchen Adventures Group led by Tony Rowe*

## **HEALTHY KITCHEN ADVENTURES**

### **CHICKEN TAGINE**



**Ingredients:** 6 large chicken thighs – organic and free range for maximum flavour from well cared for birds. 1 onion, chopped 2 garlic cloves, finely chopped 1 butternut squash, cubed 5cm piece fresh ginger, finely chopped Spice mix - 1 tsp each of dried cumin, coriander, turmeric, harissa paste and 2 cinnamon sticks 6 prunes and some fresh coriander 1 can of organic tinned tomatoes A little vegetable oil for frying

**Method:** Marinate the chicken in the spice mix overnight. In a large frying pan, fry off the chicken in the vegetable oil until golden brown, then transfer to a plate. Add onion, garlic, butternut and ginger and fry for 2 -3 minutes. Transfer chicken to a heavy bottomed casserole pan, add a can of tomatoes and cover with water. Bring to the boil, and then simmer for 30 minutes, add 6 prunes and fresh coriander. Return to the hob and simmer for a further 15 – 30 minutes. Check that the chicken is cooked through, check for seasoning.

**To serve:** Serve with couscous and preserved lemon

*2 medium chicken thighs, without skin, in a stew will give you: 83% of your RDA for niacin (B3) which keeps your cells talking to each other, is vital for your energy production and may protect you from cancer; 46% of your RDA for selenium which regenerates the activity of vitamins C and E, contributes to your antioxidant activity and enhances your immune system; 44% of your RDA for riboflavin (B2) for your blood cleansing and works with other vitamins to protect you from chronic disease; 41% of your RDA for pantothenic acid which enables your liver to cope with toxins; is vital for generating energy and keeps your cells healthy; 38% of your RDA for vitamin B12 which is required by every cell in your body to work normally, is critical in creating your energy and maintaining the chemical balance of your body. \* RDA based on an average adult*

*Prunes are fat-free and, as they are a fruit, they are mainly a carbohydrate. Because of their high fibre content, prunes don't cause a large spike in blood sugar as the fibre helps to slow down the release of sugar from the fruit. They are also a good source of potassium, a mineral needed to ensure our heart muscle works properly; iron which helps to make red blood cells and transport oxygen around the body; and vitamin A, needed to support the normal function of the immune system (as well as being helpful for keeping our skin and eyes healthy).*

*The health benefits of butternut squash include preventing constipation, improving eyesight, keeping the bones strong, protecting the skin, boosting the immune system, reducing inflammation, managing diabetes, supporting good lung health, etc. Even though butternut squash is a fruit, it is often used as a vegetable while cooking. It can be toasted, roasted, mashed, and pureed. The nutritional value of butternut squash is extremely amazing. It is fortified with Vitamin A, B1, B2, B3, B5, B6, B9, C, E, folate, beta-carotene, fibre, calcium, phosphorous, zinc, iron, manganese, potassium, and magnesium.*

*The garlic bulb is an excellent source of vitamin B6 (pyridoxine). It is also a very good source of manganese, selenium and vitamin C. In addition, garlic is a good source of other minerals, including phosphorous, calcium, potassium, iron and copper.*

*Turmeric is loaded with essential minerals, including magnesium, potassium and calcium. It's also an excellent source of fibre, vitamin B6 and zinc, and contains healthy amounts of vitamin C and magnesium.*

## **FRANGIPANE TART WITH SEASONAL FRUIT**

**Pastry Ingredients:** 375g flour 200g butter 1 egg 100g caster sugar 1 tbsp iced water

**Frangipane Ingredients:** 125g ground almonds 125g sugar 125g butter 25g flour

**Seasonal Fruit:** For example - plums, apricots, pears

**Method:** Stone the fruit and sweat in a little butter

**Frangipane:** Blend ingredients together to a smooth paste.

**Pastry:** In a large bowl mix the flour, sugar and butter until it resembles fine crumbs, then add the egg and water to form a soft ball. Grease a flan dish and roll in the pastry, making sure the pastry is pressed into the sides of the dish. Put in the fridge for 30 minutes to chill. Once chilled cook blind with parchment and dried rice to weigh down for 15 minutes at 180°C for 15 minutes. Remove parchment and rice and cook for a further 10 minutes.

Spread frangipane on to the pastry shell, top with the fruit, and bake at 180°C for 35 minutes.

*Almonds are a high-fat food, but they are largely a monounsaturated fat which helps to protect the heart by maintaining levels of (good) HDL cholesterol versus (bad) LDL cholesterol. They are a great source of fibre and protein, and contain important nutrients including vitamin E, selenium, zinc, calcium, magnesium and B vitamins, especially folate and biotin (vitamin B7). The natural instinct is to assume that almonds aren't beneficial for weight maintenance, as they are high in fat. However, research by the British Journal of Nutrition found that consuming nuts as part of a healthy diet, around 55g a day, is not only beneficial to reducing the risk of heart disease but also has limited risk of weight gain. A study from 2013 also concluded that almonds, when consumed as a snack, help to reduce hunger and do*

*not increase the risk of weight gain. Almonds are rich in nutrients that can help protect the heart including unsaturated fatty acids, phytosterols, magnesium, vitamin E, copper and manganese. Two research studies in 2012 and 2014 found that almonds can improve the risk of heart disease, specifically in overweight individuals. Further research has shown that almond consumption helps to reduce LDL cholesterol which helps to reduce the risk of heart disease. Almonds are a good source of nutrients that are important for brain health, including vitamin E, folate and unsaturated fatty acids, as well as l-carnitine which is known for its neuroprotective benefits. It would appear that consuming almonds is good for the gut. A 2016 study found that consuming moderate amounts of almonds or almond butter not only improved diet quality in both adults and children, but also altered the composition of the gut microbiome, possibly in part due to their high fibre content.*

*Why does eating seasonal British produce matter? It makes economic sense to eat seasonally as fruit and vegetables are sold more cheaply when there is a glut. Consider making tomato sauce using surplus tomatoes in late summer to see you through the winter months. Eating seasonally has health benefits too: foods in season contain the nutrients, minerals and trace elements that our bodies need at particular times of year. For example, British Food Fortnight marks the shift from summer to winter and the fruit and vegetables that are coming into season then, such as butternut squash and apples, are packed with vitamin C to boost our resistance to winter colds. With calls for us to eat at least five portions a day, fruit and vegetables are taking a more prominent role in menu planning. Think about pairing fruits and vegetables with produce that are grown or reared in the same locality e.g. watercress and trout from the rivers of Hampshire or apples and pork from the orchard-filled fields of Gloucestershire.*

**Tony Rowe, [roweanthony61@gmail.com](mailto:roweanthony61@gmail.com)**

## SWEET TALK

I was born the year after sweet rationing came to an end in 1953. I could be tempted to blame this for the dental problems which plagued me in middle life, except for the fact that my brother has had as much trouble with his teeth as I have. He was born nine years earlier, just at the end of the war, and never really had a sweet tooth. Comparing notes in later life, we agreed that part of the blame must lie with the dentist we both attended as children. He was of the old-school style of dentistry, blasting into even the tiniest hole with his drill and thus permanently weakening the whole infrastructure.

Pocket-money sweets in the early sixties were many and varied and seemed to be composed largely of E-numbers (not that anyone knew what they were in those days) and highly coloured sugar. The best value were small chewy sweets which came in two flavours, fruit salad or liquorice. They sold at four for a penny, which should have meant they were a farthing each...but sadly farthings had gone out of circulation by the time I had money to spend. Still, two for a halfpenny wasn't bad!

Also, within my budget were love hearts, refreshers, wine gums, flying saucers and – my favourite – sherbet dabs: a lump of toffee on a stick in a bag of fizzy powder. I didn't like sherbet fountains quite so much; I didn't think liquorice went so well with sherbet, and anyway it was difficult to suck the sherbet up the liquorice pipe without choking.

Sometimes for a treat my mother would take me to a small, dark sweet shop just off the High Street, where an elderly man in a grimy white overall sold toffee in trays. I would watch in fascination as he broke it up with a little silver hammer and wrapped portions up in white greaseproof paper bags for us to take home. It was quite the best toffee I've ever tasted, and I

would love to think that it's still made, somewhere in England, in gleaming copper pans over an old kitchen range, perhaps. But I would have to concede that dentures and hard toffee are really not compatible, and toffee's no fun if you just have to suck it till it disappears.

Chewing gum had become popular during the war, although it was frowned upon in my household, and banned outright at school – along with its even more vulgar cousin, bubble gum. Although I was generally quite a law-abiding child, when someone surreptitiously handed me a stick of Black Cat bubble gum (the latest craze) I wasn't likely to refuse. It was, as its name suggests, black, and having spent most of one playtime chewing it to the right consistency, I managed to produce an impressively large black bubble – which burst in my face just as the bell rang to summon us back into school. With black goo attached to my eyebrows, eyelashes, nose and chin, I had little hope of escaping the attention of my teacher. In fact, I was in need of assistance, as the gum had temporarily sealed up one eye.

My rather lame excuse – 'Well, it was sort of a black sweet that exploded in my face!' – was received with stern scepticism, but as my teacher led me away to get me cleaned up, I thought I detected a smile lurking behind the frown. At any rate, no punishment was forthcoming, so maybe she thought that having my face rather firmly washed with school carbolic soap was punishment enough. Certainly, I have never been tempted to try bubble gum again – chewing gum, though, was a lot more discreet.

Nowadays, of course, we are advised to watch our sugar intake, and pretend we really enjoy chocolate that's 85% cocoa – just two small squares after our evening meal. Well, I could manage that – followed by a chaser of Maltesers or chocolate buttons...

**Gill Wetherall.**

## **“LEAVE IT WITH ME”**

In the summer of 1942, our grammar school was bombed, burned to the ground. So, where do you put 600 girls who need to be educated? Answer – an old mental hospital built in the 1890s by a local philanthropist. After a few St Trinian-like pranks, we settled down to a nearly normal school life.

This entailed a long walk to our Sports Field on the other side of the city. Every weekday afternoon, each year, a hundred or so Young Ladies would straggle along past a row of fine houses, some of which had been commandeered by the army for overflow accommodation. Soon rumours spread quickly through the school of a ‘strange man’ seen at a bedroom window of one of the houses. When, the next Tuesday, it was our turn we saw what all the fuss was about: a soldier, trousers round his knees, waving at the passing girls who didn’t know whether to giggle or scream.

Now, in those days, nobody spoke openly about sex and we were mostly very innocent, but we vaguely knew that this was WRONG and ‘Someone Should Tell’. Hence the next morning found me standing in the little queue outside the Headmistress’s room. In some trepidation – how could I explain without using Rude Words?

“Come in!” she called, and I went in, carefully closing the door behind me. There she sat – austere, dignified, terrifying Miss Spencer. I haltingly recounted the story, when she asked impatiently, “But what did he do?”

“He wagged his willy at us,” I blurted out.

There was a long pause, then she stood up and without expression said, “Thank you. Leave it with me,” and I scuttled out.

Exactly what happened after that we never knew, but the naughty soldier was never seen again.

I've often thought I would like to have been a fly-on-the-wall when some nervous subaltern opened the door to find such a forbidding and awesome lady on the doorstep.

What she said I can only guess, but next time we passed, the house was empty and deserted. The Army knew better than to upset Miss Spencer.

**Oubliette.**

## **HOW IS NORMA?** (This is supposed to be a true story!)

A sweet grandmother telephoned her local hospital. She timidly asked, "Is it possible to speak to someone who can tell me how a patient is?"

The operator said, "I'll be glad to help, dear. What's the name and room number of the patient?" The grandmother in her weak, tremulous voice said, "Norma Findlay, Room 302."

The operator replied, "Let me put you on hold while I check with the nurse's station for that room."

After a few minutes, the operator returned to the phone and said, "I have good news. Her nurse just told me that Norma is doing well. Her blood pressure is fine; her blood tests just came back normal, and her physician, has scheduled her to be discharged tomorrow."

The grandmother said, "Thank you. That's wonderful. I was so worried. God bless you for the good news." The operator replied, "You're more than welcome. Is Norma your daughter?"

The grandmother said, "No, I'm Norma Findlay in Room 302. No one tells me anything."

**--- END OF NEWSLETTER---**