

RICHMOND-upon-THAMES



University of the Third Age

www.U3Asites.org.uk/richmond-on-thames



Newsletter March 2021, Volume 58

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The picture on the front cover was painted by one of our members, Ormond Noonan, during Lockdown and you can read about them and see more of his paintings in his article on page 13.

Sue Wood.

RICHMOND UPON THAMES U3A COMMITTEE & OFFICERS

OFFICERS:

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

MEMBERS OF EXECUTIVE:

Membership Secretary: David Wood – davidewood80@gmail.com

Groups' Co-ordinator: Norma Cook – norma.beagle@gmail.com

Committee members:

Peggy Roe
Herbert Wirth
Bob Litherland

SECTION LEADERS:

Art, Science & Music: Graham Shortell

Languages: Norma Cook

Literature, Drama, Philosophy & History: Carole Fletcher

Recreation: Tricia Abrahamsen

CHAIRMAN'S LETTER

This is my first message as Chairman, since taking over from Chris Hack at the end of his four-year term. I am very fortunate to be helping a lively committee in an organisation that has remained active despite the pandemic. Even better, the U3A model of self-help for learning and recreation is what we need more than ever now.

Challenges for U3A for 2021

Soon we will be vaccinated but life will not be normal. The challenge will be to find activities that help our members who want human contact more than ever, while conforming to regulations and offering something that is considered safe. The U3A speciality of small groups meeting in member's homes is impossible during an infectious pandemic. Online meetings, especially through Zoom, have been a great success. We are even able to offer meetings for members who are less physically mobile. The monthly talks on Zoom have been well attended, although some of us miss the tea and biscuits with friends at Clarendon Hall. We do not want to lose the personal contacts. Otherwise, members might as well download an old TV documentary available free on YouTube. Discussions on Zoom can work well with up to ten or so members in a group. For larger audiences, we have not yet found the best way to facilitate discussions.

Of course, some of our members are not online or do not like to use Zoom. We have been bringing out the (hard copy) Newsletter more often, to offer something to those members. Telephone calls to friends from U3A groups also helps keeping in touch.

The best realistic hope is that in the early summer, with warmer weather and some relaxation of restrictions, our groups will be able to combine Zoom sessions with some outdoor meetings. These may be picnics, or gentle walks, or a few people sitting apart on a park bench. Perhaps that will be supplemented by indoor meetings of up to 6 people in the summer. We will have to see what is allowed and what our members feel comfortable with.

On the positive side, U3A is a co-operative where we help each other. We neither receive outside funding nor do we have overhead costs to maintain a building. We are really grateful to our members for showing confidence in U3A by renewing their subscriptions and our membership has stayed high. We will be well placed to increase our activities as soon as we can.

Chris Barclay, crbarclay@hotmail.co.uk, Chairman.

GROUP NEWS

I am typing this just days before the present lockdown is due to be reviewed on February 22, though I am not expecting there to be too many surprises in the announcement. This lockdown has seemed longer and more draconian than the first one, possibly because of the grey skies and cold weather, but nonetheless groups have continued to flourish and I am delighted to report that new groups are starting. A group on Cartoons is underway and there are two potential new French groups under discussion. New Italian groups have started and two Art History groups (via Zoom, of course) have attracted a lot of interest.

Sadly some groups are no longer running, not only because of difficulties during the pandemic but because group leaders have moved away or ill-health prevents them from continuing. As

always, I remind members that if your group leader is not able to continue, for whatever reason, perhaps one of you could take up the reins. If your group is full with a long waiting list, then you may consider starting another group. This has happened recently with the Cryptic Crosswords group. The Beginners' group after nearly a year in existence is no longer a Beginners' group but the waiting list was still long, so a member has set up a third Cryptic Crossword group. Please take note, groups in a similar situation!

Of course, many groups have not been able to meet, under the restrictions in place since Christmas, but I know the leaders are champing at the bit and as soon it is allowed, will be organising their members to meet up. Many of you have kept in touch even though you cannot physically meet and I know this has been much appreciated.

I was glancing at the U3A magazine which arrived recently and paused on the page listing subject advisers. If you would like to start a group, have a look at what advice is on offer. Some topics which caught my eye are Egyptology, Natural History, Quizzes and Murder Mysteries, and Magic! Subject advisers are there to help you get started, if you need a little support, plus, of course, your very own section leaders and me in Richmond U3A.

Norma Cook, Group Coordinator, norma.beagle@gmail.com

GROUPS A–Z BOOK GROUP BIOGRAPHIES

When I moved to Twickenham two years ago, I knew no-one. So I was delighted to find a large and active U3A group in Richmond. I had not been a member previously so wasn't sure what to expect.

Two groups particularly have been an absolute delight - Pat Havron's biography book club and Libby Insall's Kew Gardens group.

Even during the last months of restrictions, we have kept going, which has been a welcome respite from the negativity around us. I have had a good lockdown and I put a lot of that down to these two lovely ladies.

We still take it in turns to choose our monthly books. It is so good to read with purpose. And the standard of the group is so high, you know you must read with discernment. And I have been introduced to books and subjects I would never have come across by myself.

We started the year last September in Pat's lovely living room with its beautiful view over the garden. Then we moved outside and had several meetings in the garden.



When it became too cold, we changed to Zoom meetings. We are fortunate that one of our members has paid for Zoom so we are not limited for time. Not everyone can do Zoom so our numbers are down slightly. But we had seven at our last meeting in February.

January was my turn, and I chose Michelle Obama's 'Becoming'. We had a stimulating discussion, aided by the fact that one of our group is a New Yorker.

Dorothy Gonsalves.

GROUPS A-Z KEW



This group is led by Libby Insall. It runs from September-February and meets fortnightly on Thursday mornings. It covers the history of and current interest in Kew Gardens with walks/visits to the Gardens as part of the programme.

The group has been going for some years. I joined it two years ago when I moved to Twickenham. And I was fortunate that Libby squeezed me in.

It has been a constant joy. Libby's knowledge about Kew is phenomenal. We learn so much each time. Her talks are very varied, encompassing history, engineering, architecture, botany, trees, science and landscapes.

We have adapted to each of the lockdowns. Previously we used to meet at Libby's lovely house on Kew Green for a lecture on her chosen topic, always meticulously researched. We would then visit the gardens through the nearby Elizabeth Gate.

The first lockdown in March 2020 was sad as the Gardens had to close, just as we were about to see the cherry blossom.

However, the second lockdown allowed us to visit, although we were limited to groups of six. We met at the Gardens in two groups and had some memorable tours led by Libby.



The Palm House was a case in point. Because staffing had been reduced, the usual pruning had not taken place. Libby had never seen it so lush and overgrown.

Everyone knows the Palm House, but it was wonderful being taken round by a knowledgeable guide. Plants I would have walked past turned out to have fascinating features or uses.

We were of course also braving the wintry weather. It poured with rain that day but we did not mind.

We were then subject to the 1 to 1 rule so could not go round with Libby. So, Libby provided us with a quiz about trees in Kew. Kew is renowned for its 14,000 trees. We divided into pairs and had fun finding them. Afterwards, we compared notes and photos at our first Zoom meeting, which was a great success. We also created a WhatsApp group to share photos and stories. We took as our symbol my photo of a bird of paradise plant.



Then we faced the current national lockdown and were urged to stay at home unless it was an essential journey.

At that point, I gave up. First, being in the extremely critically vulnerable group, I have to shield and second, I am being more cautious since the new variant. Also, as I have to take an Uber there and back from Twickenham, I couldn't really justify it as essential or local.

But other group members who live nearer are able to take their exercise there. And I love seeing the pics they circulate on WhatsApp, such as the crocuses below.

I am looking forward to our next Zoom meeting on 18 February, which is about fungi.



Dorothy Gonsalves.

THE BIG LOCKDOWNS

We are all only too aware of the terrible details of life under this nightmare virus as we move towards the second year of its effects. My wife Kate, and I were totally absorbed, in a state of shock, daily watching the news of the virus's progress from China, Europe and into UK. With the contributions of so many in our community and a real effort of our own we managed to reduce the amount of time we spent listening to and watching the dreadful news of the daily toll the virus was having on the whole world.



Spring of 2020 brought us a long period of beautiful weather which absolutely helped us to break the spell. Park walks and shared garden teas till late into the evening, zooming

with friends and family, glorious Netflix till early hours have all been our good fortune to enjoy. Our age and health issues have precluded us from doing anything more useful for our community other than self-isolation/shielding as directed. Kate has exchanged some foodie packages with her U3A groups and they have a fortnightly ZOOM chat. We both benefit from the contacts and friends we have established through our membership of the U3A and really appreciate how it has enriched our lives.





On a personal level we have focused on our interests as way of getting some normality into our lives. In that regard I would like to share one of the important things that has engaged me throughout the past 11 months. Having started the year still life painting I was encouraged by the onset of good weather to paint my way around the garden. The past few months and enforced shielding has driven me back indoors and

apart from painting fruits and imaginative things, I have indulged in a couple of self-portrait sketches. These sketches resulted from the sight of the stranger I occasionally meet when looking into the mirror these days.

I would be pleased to see what others have been doing during this time. Best regards to all U3A members.



Ormond Noonan

SOME MORE OF ORMOND'S PAINTINGS



ON BEING THE TREASURER

I became the treasurer of Richmond U3A almost by accident. In January 2014 my predecessor, Jim Davidson, became ill and requested some assistance. At the time, he not only carried out all the duties of treasurer but also many of the IT tasks associated with maintaining our membership database. I offered to help and had a series of meetings with Jim with a view to taking on some of the work. But it soon became apparent that Jim was too ill to continue as treasurer. The committee asked me if I would be willing to take over from Jim; I was invited to a meeting, plied with strong drink, and duly agreed. Within the month I had been elected to the post at the 2014 AGM.

In taking over from Jim, I found the most difficult part was understanding all the different tasks and then devising procedures for carrying these out in a reasonably efficient manner. I was fortunate to inherit from Jim a custom-built accounting system written by one of our members, Danny Rybowski. This system is used to record all financial transactions and provides a degree of automation of many of the tasks involved in maintaining the accounts. I still use it today, preferring 'the devil I know' rather than Beacon which incorporates equivalent facilities.

There are many aspects to the job of treasurer besides the accounts themselves. I deal with all the organisations who provide us with facilities (e.g. room hire) and services such as printing. In a typical year there may be more than 150 invoices to settle.

Our main income derives from members' subscriptions which during my tenure as treasurer has grown by around 65% in line with our increased membership. Because renewals fall due on the 1st September each year, there is a lot of work around this time both for the treasurer and for the membership secretary. One unforeseen but welcome consequence of the pandemic is that more members have switched to paying their subs electronically, either by Standing Order or Direct Credit via online banking. This has considerably reduced the workload in processing renewal payments.

As treasurer of Richmond U3A I am one of the five elected officers of the organisation. Because we are a registered charity, we must obey the rules laid down by the Charity Commission; the officers are responsible for this. Tasks include updating our entry on the

Charity Commission web site and filing with the CC our annual report and accounts where they can be scrutinised by any member of the public.

The committee also have to take on board a lot of information and advice coming to us from U3A central office. As the government's rules on charities have evolved, U3A central office determine what implications these have for U3A branches like us. The London Region also run the occasional seminar on topics such as the role of treasurer and the use of Beacon, an opportunity to learn and to meet up with colleagues from neighbouring U3As.

So, you can see from the above, the role of treasurer is quite varied and not just about bean counting. There is an element of keeping abreast of the technology, e.g. forms of electronic payment. But also in dealing with a variety of people and organisations. I have found the role quite satisfying and something to occupy my time when not on the golf course.

John Cardwell.

A PLAGUE ON YOU

This is a grave story.

With a death toll approaching 150,000 are we, in England, living in a more dangerous time than in previous plagues?

We have had two great bubonic plagues in the last two thousand years.

There are three types of bubonic plague infection – pneumonic, (affecting the lungs), septicaemic, (blood infection), and the third type where there are swellings in the armpit, groin and neck. With the first two types there was little chance of surviving. There was about a 30% chance of surviving with the third.

The first Great Plague, called the Justinian Plague, named after the Roman Emperor of the time, took place mainly around 541-549 A.D. It continued sporadically for another 150 years, covering most of the Roman Empire from Iran to England. It is thought to have contributed to the downfall of the Empire, due to so many deaths in the army, i.e. they were not able to defend themselves. Modern estimates suggest half the population of Europe died. Figures are quoted of a death toll overall of 30-50 million up to 100 million. Huge numbers.

The second Great Plague arrived in Europe in 1346, coming to England in 1348. There were continuous outbreaks of the plague somewhere in Europe from 1346 to 1671, apart from one year, 1445. England “survived” better in that there were “only” outbreaks roughly every 8/9 years from 1348 to 1625. The first one in 1348 in England probably killed 1½ million. The last large one was in 1665, when about 100,000 people in London died out of a population of 446,000. In Europe about 75-100 million died. Huge numbers.

Other killer diseases were around. With smallpox, thought to have been brought back to Europe by the Crusaders, you had a 30% chance of dying. Other common diseases were dysentery, flu,

diphtheria, typhoid and leprosy. Starvation was ever present when crops failed.

Samuel Pepys wrote in his diary on 16th October 1665, “but there are great hopes of a decrease, (of deaths), this week. God send it.”

Thank heaven for Scientists, who have worked diligently to provide the vaccines available today, which hopefully will save many, many lives.

Bill Stevenson.

THE YEAR WAS 1946

The year was 1946 - a miserable year, full of hunger. Nothing to buy except on the black market. And cold, bitter cold. So cold that the river Elbe froze over. There, where normally a ferry crossed the river, was now a path, marked by brush wood.

On Christmas Eve of 1946 my parents wanted us children, myself, my younger brother and my two older cousins, out of the house so that they could prepare the only living room left to us for Christmas.

And so we decided to go for a walk across the Elbe, something we had not dared before. The frozen surface of a river is not a plain sheet of ice but a carpet of ice floes which constantly move. And all the time you hear the water underneath your feet rushing and gurgling. And the ice floes make eerie noises when they push over and under each other, groaning, swishing, scratching. Sometimes there is the loud noise like a canon being fired when floes collide. It was so frightening and also so exciting.

But we made it across and back, hands and feet frozen in icy mittens and frozen shoes. When we arrived back home it was nearly dark. Unsure if we were allowed to come in, my cousin opened the outer shutter of the living room window and we peeped in. And we saw it - Christmas! In a corner stood a Christmas Tree with a few candles already lit. On a little table next to it a merry-go-round with little white horses pulling tiny carriages illuminated by little lights, going round and round and round. Underneath the table was a little sky-blue wooden wheelbarrow and in it two little stocking dolls, all made by our parents.

It felt like peeping into paradise.

That Christmas of the miserable year 1946 was the most wonderful, the most magical Christmas I ever had, and I will never forget it.

Elke Nauke.

I CAN'T WAIT TO SHARE THIS

1. The Bucket Tale (A Giggeworthy Cautionary Tale)

I have an old schoolfriend who lives on her own in Canberra with whom I am in touch by email and whom I visited in February last year. She sent me this tale of woe which made me laugh so much I felt I must share it with you. I should add that she's reasonably slim. Anyway, she's a good sport and agreed that I could use it as a cautionary tale.

We have just had a weekend of wild weather across the east - you will have heard from your brother I'm sure as it just bucketed down with rain in the mountains. Having had some years in drought everyone has an explosion of weeds and everything has become very green - it's a feast or a famine.



On a lovely day this week I took a chair, very large bucket and the recycling bin up to the washing line area which is paved and sat there sorting out cuttings from a shrub and throwing bits into the bin as I went.

I got up to get another branch, didn't look behind me and sat down - supposedly on my chair - except it was the bucket!

I had a very soft landing on a bed of leaves but couldn't get out of the bucket!! My legs dangled over the rounded edge of this bucket but didn't reach the ground so I could not get any purchase to get out - I tried rolling sideways but it must be the most stable bucket ever created and that didn't work.



I decided I would have to wait until someone walked up the park adjacent to the garden and I could

ask for help (how embarrassing!!!) and also decided that in the meantime I had to think up another way. In the end I managed to "shuffle" the bucket with me firmly in it, inch by inch towards the metal pole of the washing line [this took about half an hour] I then grasped the pole and could roll out.

My children have found this hilarious and the moral of the story is "never go anywhere without your mobile phone"!!!

Sue Wood

2. DECEPTION.

Amazon Prime Video

A gripping and intriguing tale of naivety, pride, passion, artistry and lies. Starring Geoffrey Rush (King's Speech), Donald Sutherland, Jim Sturgess and Sylvia Hoeks. Directed by BAFTA winning Giuseppe Tornatore.2014.

'Esteemed art auctioneer Virgil routinely scams the auction world out of the masterpieces he deliberately undervalues until he strikes up an unlikely friendship with a beautiful young heiress.'

Available to watch on Amazon Prime Video. Highly recommended

Jan Daniel

3. *Where the Crawdads Sing* by Delia Owens

A lushly written page turner, set in the remote marshlands of the North Carolina coast, it combines a murder mystery with vivid descriptions of nature and the coming-of-age tale of a solitary abandoned girl shunned by her narrow-minded neighbours. It is the first novel by Delia Owens, a nature writer, with degrees in zoology and animal behaviour, and has been enormously successful in the U.S.A.

Sue Blake

DID YOU KNOW

The U3A Mutual Aid Principle

Each U3A is a mutual aid organisation, operationally independent but a member of the Third Age Trust, which requires adherence to the guiding principles of the U3A movement.

No payments are made to members for services rendered to any U3A. Each U3A is self-funded with membership subscriptions and costs kept as low as possible.

Outside financial assistance should only be sought if it does not imperil the integrity of the U3A movement.

AIRPORT SIGN – GUESS WHERE?



NEXT NEWSLETTER

I'd like to thank all our contributors to this issue. I find it so interesting to read of their experiences. So please don't hold back if there's something you too would like to share. Whatever it is we'd like to hear about it. The next issue will be due in May/June so please let me have all your offerings by the end of April.

Sue Wood, susan.orleans@tiscali.co.uk

RICHMOND U3A SPEAKERS MAR – JUN 2021

Until Government regulations allow us to meet in Clarendon Hall, we will hold these meetings via Zoom. Members will be sent an email “invitation” to join prior to each meeting.

Meetings are held on the last Wednesday of each month at 14:30.

31st Mar: Mark Scudamore, Chris Hack, Brian Holding – Rotary

Rotary is an international service organisation that has been going for over 100 years. It brings together business and professional people to provide humanitarian service and to advance goodwill and peace around the world. You will learn what Rotary is today and about the activities of one of the Rotary clubs in our Borough.

April 2021 – No meeting. Clarendon Hall requisitioned for electoral purposes.

26th May: Andy Thomas – Unexplained Mysteries and Cover-Ups

Today Andy explores some of the most famous global mysteries, finding intriguing linking threads. What is the truth about real-life ‘X’ files – UFOs, ghosts, the Bermuda Triangle, strange creatures, religious apparitions, psychic phenomena and visions of the future? Are we really told the truth about the world we live in, and if not why not? A lecture guaranteed to spark debate.

30th Jun: Jenny Malin – A British Raj Family

Jenny is an award-winning author and public speaker. Here she delivers a fascinating insight into five generations of her family who lived during the days of the British Raj in India. With an extensive collection of family sepia photographs, she brings her stories vividly to life.