

Richmond upon Thames

u3a

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Newsletter, November 2023, Volume 69

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(The photograph on the cover taken by John Hockley is of a Petanque game in progress - please see article on Page 13)

RICHMOND UPON THAMES U3A

COMMITTEE & OFFICERS

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CHAIRMAN'S LETTER

At this time of year, some new members have joined and most of our existing members have renewed. We hope that there will be a range of activities to suit everybody, or at least the great majority. We have a monthly meeting and talk on the last Wednesday of the month, coach trips from time to time and a large number of groups.

Most of us welcome the return of meeting face-to-face after lockdown a few years ago, but zoom activities are also useful, particularly for those with limited mobility.

As a co-operative, we have managed to keep our costs very low. Our method of working is flexible and we can adapt better to changes than we could if we had a large building of our own with fixed costs.

Chris Barclay, crbarclay@hotmail.co.uk.

EDITOR'S LETTER

Currently I'm enjoying a sneaky pleasure in buying a "Peter Rabbit" for the imminent arrival of the son of my grandson to whom I gave one when he was born. It became his constant companion and when it went AWOL, I had a desperate call from his mother and I had to dash out to M&S for a replacement.

Yes, growing older, as they say, is challenging but it also brings rewards and sneaky pleasures in strange and unexpected ways!

Recently I came across the recipe from Deborah James on dealing with the diagnosis of incurable cancer - "Find a life worth living,

take risks, love deeply, have no regrets and always, always have rebellious hope,” and felt it was surely a recipe for a happier life at any moment in time.

In my last newsletter I talked, at some length my kids would say with a sigh, about my journey with U3A and asked for members’ experiences. I had one very touching response but sadly that was all. Are we the only ones for whom U3A had a beneficial effect? Or perhaps you are all toooooo busy with your Groups and subsequent friendships.

I am grateful every day for the friendships I gained from joining U3A. I am glad for the opportunities it gave me to realise that I could continue to learn and grow in untried and scary directions. So, I would add one thing to Deborah’s mantra and that is to be grateful for all the good things in our lives and to try to accept the frustrations and difficulties which accompany getting older.

Now, before I get too “preachy” let me say that our new prospectus is online and now in the post so please give it a glance and see what new fields it can tempt you to explore. And if your new field is not there then let us know and we’ll try to link you up with others with similar interests to share your exploration.

Finally, my lovely garden birds have got their colourful winter coats and are their usual cheeky and demanding selves, even flying into the lounge to look for more food when they have emptied their feeder. Our garden mice attempt to invade the birds’ food whenever we’re not watching and, although we’re never fleet of foot enough to actually catch them, it gives us some much-needed exercise.

Autumn tends to lead us into reflective mood and the stores, short of playing White Christmas at us, seem anxious to make us start

planning our Christmas feasts, but that can all wait a while. Let's enjoy autumn first, carols come later on.

And if you want to write something for the next newsletter it will be due out in January so you can start writing it now.

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

PEGGY'S LETTER

What does/has U3A meant to me?

When I retired at about 67, single, no partner and no children but, thankfully, lots of dear friends, the future loomed like an empty chasm. Sounds pathetic I know. I joined U3A without great expectations of it but was amazed by what I found. As a concept, I couldn't believe it could work. I've marvelled about it ever since. It relies, of course, on the willingness of people to contribute, and I found contributing is enormously rewarding in itself. I was on the committee for several years, but my contribution was tiny compared to that of colleagues. I still can't believe the time and energy they give.

Now ill-health prevents any active participation on my part. The magazine arrived today and I almost didn't read it for that reason. I'm glad I did. I was struck afresh by the vibrancy and generosity of the organisation and realise I didn't "use" it nearly enough.

Thanks all for all you have given over the years and love to all.

Peggy Drummond-Roe

Since writing this Peggy has died. She organised the speakers for our monthly meetings for many years and her bravery in the face of illness was a real inspiration.

GROUP NEWS

The new prospectus for September 2023 to August 2024 has recently been completed, with copies available online and in hard copy, thanks to a great deal of work from Carole Fletcher and David Wood. It is difficult to get the correct information at a point in time and there will always be many changes during the year. We have well over a hundred groups from sports, languages, book groups, philosophy, poetry and much more.

Our groups vary enormously, depending very much on the personality of the group leader. We see that as a strength, and we do not try to standardise activities or pressure group leaders to act in a particular way.

Chris Barclay, crbarclay@hotmail.co.uk,

GROUPS A-Z: CYCLING GROUP

A reflection on 2023 with the Richmond U3A Cycle Group

The October ride marks our last outing of the year. We used to ride during winter months, but we were usually “frozen out” (literally), so now we ‘rest’ during the winter months. We have a maximum number of eight people on a ride, our aim is for everyone to have the chance of a ride (sometimes two rides) each month.

Our routes are varied, with a range of between 18 and 25 miles. We mix urban and rural routes, always aiming for off-road terrain. Our routes this year have included:

1. From Brookwood (train from Clapham Junction), along the Basingstoke Canal, the Wey Navigation, and the Thames back to Hampton Court and Bushy Park.



2. From Barnes, along the Thames Path South to Wandsworth, then follow the River Wandle down Carshalton Ponds.



3. From Richmond, along to Syon Park and Brentford, then follow the Grand Union Canal to Southall. Then Cranford Park, Hounslow Heath and back to Twickenham via the lovely Crane River Walk.

4. From Barnes, along the Thames Path South to Battersea Park, then cross the river to return via some of East London's green spaces back to Putney.

5. Train To Virginia Water, then tour of Windsor Great Park, back to Windsor and a ride along the Jubilee River on the return to Windsor and Eton.



The group has room for another two members - the first ride of 2024 will be February 12th. Please contact me if interested....

Stewart Perkes, stewartperkes@gmail.com

GROUPS A-Z: COLLECTING and COLLECTIONS

Our fledgling group had its second meeting in October. We have an impressive range of private collections between us, best viewed in situ in our homes. And we have identified twelve public collections in the Borough, and just beyond, to visit.



Stamps, postcards, pottery and glass feature most frequently, with four or five of us having our own mini or substantial collection of one or more of these; each collection is different. Add individual collecting enthusiasms - Marilyn Monroe posters, book plates, coins, football and theatre programmes, Ladybird books, King Penguins, contemporary non-precious jewellery, beer mats – and we have many interesting meetings to look forward to.

Conversation flows readily. What stories do our collections tell? What prompted our collecting? Where do we get items? What are the pleasures of collecting? Have our tastes changed over time? Have we made any plans for what is to happen to our collection?

Our October theme was pottery. We viewed a beautifully displayed collection in a member's home. It included decorative pieces by



Charlotte Rhead (1885-1947) and Poole pottery (founded 1873), as well as 1960s' and 70s' German Fat Lava vessels, so called owing to their thick, lava-like glaze.



Another member brought along examples of W.H. Goss (1858-1939) miniature crested porcelain, sold as souvenirs, including Richmond, Teddington and Chelsea examples. One person brought two examples of early 20th century Moorcroft pottery, one with pomegranates and the other a landscape design. We admired a



photo of a 1950's Sylvac squirrel jug, hiding in a member's garage.

We meet monthly on a date, at a time and venue agreed by members. New members are more than welcome; you don't have to collect anything yourself.

Photos in order 1) Charlotte Rhead plate, 2) Poole Vase, 3) Fat Lava piece, 4) Sylvac squirrel jug.

Olga Janssen, olga.janssen@btinternet.com

GROUP A-Z: ITALIAN

I am mad about Italy and 12 years ago I was learning Italian as a complete beginner, which at first in the class at the City Lit was terrifying, but I persevered.

Unfortunately, all the Italian groups at U3A were full, but I thought there must be many members who like me want to practice Italian and who love Italy and might want to get together. So, with some trepidation, I started an Italian group.

It was and is still a success. Before the Pandemic there were 14 of us, far too many really, but it was difficult for me to turn people away. I have met so many brilliant, interesting people who have become friends.

Obviously, the group isn't for everyone, because there is no structure and we just chat in Italian about any topic and help each other along with the aid of google translate. We do lapse into English a lot, which horrifies some potential members who say not enough Italian is spoken, but everyone is happy (even happier when one of us celebrates a Birthday with a bottle of Prosecco!!) and to get together and be happy that's the most important thing.

I am hoping my story might encourage others!!!

Rosamund Francis, rosiefrancis@live.co.uk

GROUPS A–Z: KNITTING

Discover the Joy of Knitting in a Cozy Group

Are you searching for a warm and welcoming community of fellow knitters? Look no further than our Knit and Natter group, where camaraderie is as comforting as your favourite sweater.

But what do you call a group of knitters, you ask? We fondly refer to it as a "cozy" of knitters, for good reason.

Knitting: A Tradition, A Therapy

Before delving into the delightful camaraderie of our group, let's explore the rich history of knitting. Did you know that knitting's origins trace back centuries? From its humble beginnings in ancient Egypt to its intricate patterns in medieval Europe, knitting has been an enduring craft that has spanned the globe.

Fast forward to today, and knitting continues to weave its magic. Much like yoga, knitting engages both your hands and mind, ushering you into a state of mindfulness that soothes the soul. The rhythmic, repetitive motions of knitting have a transformative effect, offering a profound connection to the world around you.

Stitching Happiness

Moreover, knitting isn't just about history; it's also about happiness. This craft is renowned for its therapeutic benefits. It's a gateway to relaxation, reducing stress and anxiety. The act of knitting stimulates your brain, enhancing focus and memory.

In our Knit and Natter group, these soothing benefits are amplified. You'll experience a sense of togetherness that combats loneliness and isolation. With a cup of tea in hand and your latest project in progress, you'll find solace in the company of like-minded individuals.

Join Us Today

So, whether you're a seasoned pro or a novice with needles, our Knit and Natter group welcomes one and all. Share patterns, swap tips, and enjoy the therapeutic, age-old art of knitting in the best way possible—among friends. Knit your way to serenity and join us today in our cozy gathering of kindred spirits.

Sangeeta Gardiner, sandsgardiner@hotmail.com

GROUP A-Z: PETANQUE

On Monday 16th October at 6am we had our first zero temperature of the coming winter, not a very good sign for that day's game of pétanque. However, come 10:30 and well wrapped up it turned out to be a glorious sunny day for playing outside.



Pétanque is one of those activities that can be picked up at the first game but can take years to perfect. The game is very simple, the first person throws the little wooden ball (jack) followed by the first boule as close as possible to the jack, play then continues with each side

trying to get closer to the jack.

I don't intend to explain any more rules here but simply the general idea of the game. Firstly, this is a game where men and women are equal, the men intend to be a bit 'gung-ho' attempting to knock everything out of the way leaving the women to come gently behind to pick up all the points. I don't know if it's my imagination, but I always seem to lose when playing against a women's team. In every game we all seem to find hidden stones that send our boule flying off course but it's a great delight for one's boule to end up exactly at the intended place and taking the points, sometimes the game. Ours is a very friendly group where we applaud both teams' good play.

This is a great way to get outside in winter and meet likeminded friends. No special clothing or equipment is needed, we can supply boules although most regular players tend to get their own set.

We play on Mondays and Fridays at 10:30 in Palewell Park, East Sheen, throughout the year. If you would like to come along and give it a go; please contact John Hockley.

John Hockley, johnedwardhockley@hotmail.com

GROUPS A-Z: SPANISH INTERMEDIATE

This Spanish Conversation group has been meeting for over 8 years now and members, new and old, have all progressed well.

The emphasis is on oral communication with people telling the group about their various activities etc. and the rest of us asking questions as well as general discussions that just come up during a session.



We often tackle an article in Spanish where we take turns in reading sections out loud to the group then translating. Grammar is not systematically covered as we did in the early years of the group, but grammatical points often come up and are discussed and explained as the need or desire arises. We all find we need to remind ourselves of the finer points of grammar now and again!



We are a friendly and relaxed group who are mindful of each other's linguistic abilities and personal opinions. The meetings are fun as learning a language ought to be a source of pleasure. We managed a trip to the seaside this summer which was a great day out.

Pete Whateley, whateleypete@gmail.com

GROUP A-Z: TOMORROWS WORLD

Interested in what things might look like in ten to twenty years' time? Then come and join our Tomorrow's World Group.

We cover a wide range of topics, including science, medicine, economics, technology and politics. We usually have a presentation and then a discussion. Recent topics have covered, "The Continuing Decline of Democratic Forms of Government?", "Income Inequality", "Adapting to an Ageing Society" and "Social Media – it's origins, evolution and impact, today and in Tomorrow's World".

We meet every third Monday from 2.30 to 4.30 currently at the ETNA Centre in East Twickenham. Our next talk will be on the 20th November where the topic will be "Food Glorious Food!"

Contact: **Andrew Holt**, aholt171@gmail.com

VOLUNTEERING: FOUNDLING MUSEUM (FM)



The picture here shows the Founder Captain Thomas Coram by Hogarth 1740 (©) Coram in care of the Foundling Museum. London.

The fascinating and moving Foundling Museum explains how the Foundling Hospital, finally established in 1739 by royal charter saved over 25,000 babies at risk of abandonment and brought them up. The Handel Collection of Handel artifacts and scores is on the top floor.

I find it really rewarding to volunteer there as a room guide for 3 hours on a regular day each week, explaining the historic exhibits and interiors and safeguarding these. I can sit, as I have minor mobility issues and we move between rooms each hour. The friendly staff provide excellent training and are most understanding if one must miss a week.

Support by artists like Hogarth and Handel is continued by creatives of our time including Jacqueline Wilson, Tracey Emin and Lemn Sissay. Music recitals, some free to ticket holders, are often held here.

The FM includes family activities and children can try on replicas of the pupils' uniforms.

Volunteer perks include free entry to exhibitions at the British Museum, Royal Academy of Arts etc, free monthly guided tours of

other galleries/museums and seasonal volunteer parties also enabling one to socialise with other volunteers and staff.

The FM is open Tuesday to Sundays, has a lift to all four floors and is near Russell Square Station, an easy journey from Richmond. DO visit – free to Art Fund members or to enquire about volunteering contact volunteers@foundlingmuseum.org.uk.

Ros Newnham, forestgirl101z@gmail.com

VOLUNTEERING: GARDEN CLUB

2020, A new house, a new area, a new volunteering opportunity. Gardening experience required to help Grey Court School Garden Club advertised in the Ham and Petersham magazine.

Do I think I can help the School? Can I provide the expertise and experience required to make attendance at the Club an enjoyable learning experience for Year 7 students with special educational needs, and students from Strathmore School? Hopefully. I volunteer to help in early 2021 just as we are beginning to think we will all have to learn to live with Covid.

On meeting the Chair of Ham United Group (HUG) I learn that the Garden Club allotment is supported and run by volunteers from HUG as well as several members of staff who give up their lunch break to be there. HUG is a local organisation here in Ham supporting environmental projects for the benefit of local residents. If I am to run the Club I will be expected to become a

Director of HUG. I thought meetings were a thing of the past when I retired.

However, after a visit to the Garden Club, completing an online vulnerable person/children course and having a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check (passed!) I am asked to take it on. Nowadays the School also require two references which I have had to provide in retrospect.

I attend my first Club in May 2021 and find there is another volunteer with excellent experience. She shares an allotment. Together we work hard to bring the School allotment back to life after a long year of Covid shutdowns. Students attend. Some are quite experienced and good at gardening. Staff appear and help out. It is very relaxed and enjoyable.

I learn about the background, objectives and history of the allotment at the School. There is a long history as it has been part of the School for many years and on its current site at the back of Newman House for ten years.

We have excellent facilities although somewhat run down now after ten years of use. There are 8 raised beds, a large fruit cage, a shed together with an array of tools. Water is available and there is space to make additional beds or for students just to dig a hole because that is what they want to do. But no funding, ah well....



I have relevant horticultural skills with a BSc in Horticulture completed on retirement and a number of years running a Community allotment. But....working with these students needs a whole new skill set: patience, humour and understanding being a few. It had been a long time since I had contact with a bunch of 11- and 12-year-olds. I had forgotten how it works.

Now starting my fourth academic year running the Garden Club it has been a steep learning curve. Sometimes challenging,



always enjoyable, fun at times and frankly educational for me. I have learnt to plant for the terms and not for succession so that there is something to harvest when the students are there, I have learnt much patience and I marvel at how quickly the students learn how to do things like planting potatoes, seedlings etc. I explain, give a demonstration and then let them carry on. It works, mostly.

We grow vegetables, herbs and fruit as well as some flowers. This year we have had good harvests of potatoes, spinach, chard,



broccoli, leeks, pumpkins, beans, courgettes, corn the badger ate and cucumbers, plus apples, grapes and rhubarb. And of course, raspberries, a favourite for most of the students to snack on. The students harvest and take home what they like to

eat. We encourage them to try when they pick. Carrots and cucumbers have been favourites. We have one student whose

mother has been making weekly bowls of leek soup because leeks are what he likes to dig up and take home. Last week he took spinach. Spinach soup?

In spring I grow plants off site and we get the students to do the planting, a lesson in straight lines and the right way up, the latter not successfully done with the garlic cloves this year. Maybe I didn't explain it properly. We battle snails and slugs and often don't win. These are frequently rehomed by students in the nettles surrounding the plot but the molluscs seem to find their way back only to be rehomed again.

When not planting there is plenty for students to undertake from weeding, watering, raking leaves and moving compost onto beds, to tidying the shed and, under supervision learning to use a saw. We intend to involve willing students in pruning this coming winter. All this involves lessons in patience and the right amount of intervention by the adult supervisor to keep the students safe but still learning.

We currently have around 15 to 20 students attending the sessions. Sessions are informally run and we hand out tasks such as the bulb planting and nettle removal to willing trainee gardeners however others choose to barrow up compost, weed the paths and plant donations such as some hellebores we had been given.



After several weeks into this new academic year we are beginning to be student led as they decide what needs to be done. It is their allotment.

Safety is of paramount importance when working on site so students are taught the right and safe way to use tools and to keep others safe when working in close proximity. They can use any of the tools but the rule is one tool at a time safely used and put away at the end of the session. However, we seem somewhat short on the hand tools this half term.

We hope next year, with the School's support, to enter London in Bloom and possibly open under the Open Gardens in Ham and



Petersham event. We opened the allotment in 2022 with students doing tours for the visitors explaining various things that we were doing on the plot. The feedback from visitors was great and one student managed to recruit our current great volunteers

who support sessions as and when they can.

I am so grateful for the volunteers who help keep the sessions safe and support the students. I am hoping that we, the volunteers, are also able to impart some horticulture knowledge from planting and caring for plants to the harvesting and eating.

Over the year we watch and see how the Club is helping the students, from learning to be part of a team, to making friends, to feeling more comfortable in the less challenging non-academic environment, to just enjoying digging and putting their hands in

the soil, getting as close to nature as they can get. And of course, acquiring a few gardening skills on the way.

We are always on the lookout for donations of tools, plants and seeds. But more importantly at this point we are in need of some more horticulture experience particularly if you grow vegetables. Have you had or do you currently have an allotment as that is an excellent grounding for volunteering with us. I rarely miss a session but if I do my supportive and willing volunteers do not have horticulture knowledge so need detailed instructions to run the sessions.

The sessions are held on Tuesdays, in term time, from 12 noon to 1 pm for the students. The volunteers turn up from 11.30am to prepare for the session and leave around 1.30 pm. We, the volunteers also keep the allotment watered and weeded as necessary over the holidays also helping ourselves to anything that needs picking.

So, can you help? Do get in touch if you would like more information or feel you would like to help out.

Helen Erhardt, erhardthelen21@gmail.com
Lead Volunteer Grey Court School Garden Club.

MEMBERS' PHOTOS

Anne Lynch kindly sent me these photos of the Badminton 2 Group, which meets on a Monday 1-2p.m. at All Hallows Church Hall in Twickenham.



Anne Lynch, annelynch57@icloud.com

RICHMOND U3A SPEAKERS NOV23 – JAN24

Meetings are held on the last Wednesday of each month at 14:30 in Nov/Dec at St Mary's Church, Church St, Twickenham, TW1 3NJ, near the Civic Centre off Richmond Road. From Jan 24, at Clarendon Hall next to York House. Served by bus routes 33, R68, R70, H22 and 490 (Lebanon Court bus stop). Walk towards the Council offices.

29th Nov: Francis Beckett – Clement Attlee

Francis Beckett is an English author, journalist, biographer, and contemporary historian. He has written biographies of four prime ministers – Attlee, Macmillan, Blair and Brown – but his biography of Attlee is the most substantial, considered by Roy Jenkins – Attlee's first biographer – to be a landmark work.

13th Dec: John Field – ‘The Amazing World of Magic’

John is a practising solicitor whose main passion in life is magic. He has been performing as a magician for almost 50 years and is a member of the world-famous Magic Circle. In his talk you will hear about the oldest magician known to mankind, the oldest trick in magic, scams based on that trick and how to avoid being caught out, the first book written about magic, the dawning of respectability, two famous magicians and the current magic scene. You will also see magic which will entertain and amuse.

31st Jan 24: Mark Lewis – ‘The Amazing History of Lighthouses’

A general introduction to “pharology” – the study of lighthouses and other navigational aids, giving an outline from the prototype – the Pharos of Alexandria, through the evolving history of their construction, methods of illumination, operation and maintenance, the lives of the keepers, including some of the extraordinary heroic stories associated with them.