

ROYSTON
U3A NEWS
 THE UNIVERSITY OF THE THIRD AGE



2020 was a year we won't soon forget. Since there is no sign when we will next be able to meet up in person again, we will continue to rely on the amazing technology to make a difference and to keep us all connected.

Despite current lockdown restrictions quite a few of our interest groups have resumed and are meeting up virtually. Our guest speakers with their wide range of subjects have ensured well attended, enjoyable and stimulating virtual monthly meetings.

Life may be different now but it's not all bad news. We have longer and sunnier spring days ahead to look forward to. I hope by the time you read this you will have had your first Covid vaccination and that you are managing to stay positive. Hoping 2021 is a far better year.

'Stay safe and keep well'

Jackie Gellert, Chairman

SOLDIERING ON - AND A SENSE OF HUMOUR HELPS!



Andy Smith

As a young boy Andy Smith loved reading the Victor comic and was fascinated by war stories.

But his elderly neighbour called Pop Jones had fought in the First World War and put him straight about the hell of the western front.

Pop's experiences inspired Andy to record his family history in poetry - with a mixture of war and romance making for

riveting listening at our January Zoom meeting.

War is grim but romance doesn't come to a grinding halt and we were entertained with the story of how in 1917 Andy's soldier grandfather met his true love when she tripped on the stairs of a bus and fell into his arms.

We were moved by his account of the misery his father endured when he was evacuated on a 'tearful, fearful winter's day' in 1939 and how the trauma of it still affects him at the age of 93.

And the story of Andy's mother never throwing away a scrap of food because of the long-lasting impact of wartime rationing struck a chord with many of us.

Through it all was the message how much a sense of humour can help - especially in the latest war against Covid.

"I'm convinced that one of the things that got Britain through the second world war was the British sense of humour," he said.

*Oh...be joyful, lockdown Britain
 Oh...press on and persevere!
 Let's hope this 'batty' virus
 Will be conquered by next year!*
 from 'Lockdown Family Christmas'
 by Andy Smith

Pam Dajda

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Getting into the Christmas spirit despite lockdown

We all knew Christmas 2020 was going to be completely different, with no big family celebrations, carol services or pantos to look forward to.

So it was a welcome tonic to be able to get together on Zoom for a festive programme of seasonal cheer with music, carols, a Christmas reading and topically themed quiz.

Around 90 members sat back to enjoy singing along with Adrian Jacobs on the piano, listening to Carla Bailey's reading of Susan Hill's short Christmas story '*Lanterns across the snow*', and taking part in a fun quiz with question master Sandra Walker.

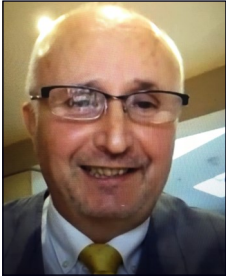
Chairman Jackie Gellert thanked everyone

involved for making the one time 'Christmas Special' such a success.

Sandra Walker added that special thanks should also go to Jackie. "She's really brought Royston U3A back to life in this lockdown," she said.

Pam Dajda

THE SPY WHO SOLVED HIS OWN MURDER



Paul Barwick

Stranger than fiction - the extraordinary story of former Russian spy Alexander Litvinenko who traced the source of his own poisoning as he lay dying - made for riveting listening.

In hours of recordings made to police at his bedside he revealed how he had been given a cup of tea laced with radioactive polonium at a London wine bar in 2006.

The impact of his death reverberated around the world and former police intelligence officer Paul Barwick gave us an insight into the shadowy world of international espionage at our November meeting.

Litvinenko had been an officer in Russia's FSB spy agency, investigating organised crime. "He was an extremely moral man, dedicated and above all, honest," said Paul.

So when he learned that a Russian tycoon was on the Kremlin hit list in the new Putin regime he not only warned him but called a press conference to expose it.

From that day he was a marked man and the target of smear campaigns and arrests. Two years later he fled to London with his wife and son and claimed asylum.

*From top:
Litvinenko in hospital.
His dying statement.
The prime suspects.
Public enquiry conclusion.*

He became a consultant for MI6 and co-authored two books on corruption including Putin's work with crime gangs in St Petersburg in his rise to power.

A first assassination attempt failed but he fell ill after drinking tea with two former agents in November 2006.

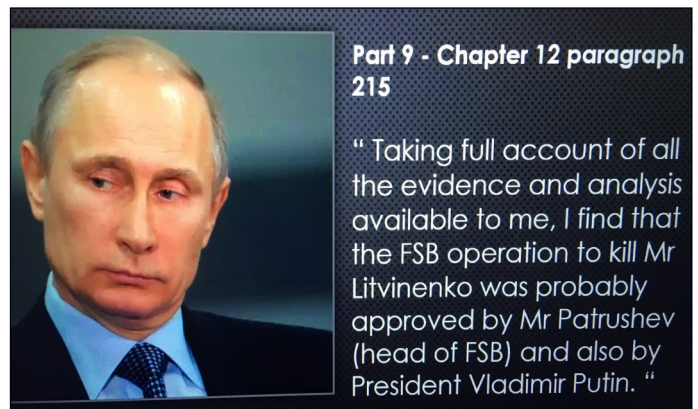
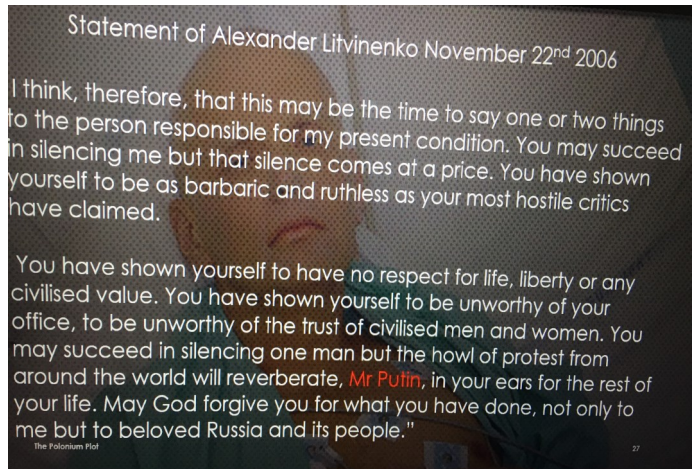
From his hospital bed Litvinenko was able to recall events in forensic detail enabling police to follow the polonium trail across London and Europe.

"The scale of the operation was breath-taking. It remains the largest single murder investigation for a single fatality the police service has ever done," said Paul.

The prime suspects protested their innocence and Britain issued arrest warrants which Russia declined.

After years of pressure from Litvinenko's wife Marina a public inquiry was held. Published in 2016 its conclusions are a damning indictment of Putin and the regime he controls.

Pam Dajda



SCRATCHING A LIVING IN VICTORIAN LONDON



Graham Harrison



Costermonger.



Street herbalist.



Pure collector.

We get a good idea of how grim life was for the poor in Victorian England from the works of writers like Charles Dickens.

But for a rare and detailed look at the reality of street life a journalist called Henry Mayhew was a trail blazer of his time.

Our October speaker Graham Harrison revealed how Mayhew, a co-founder of Punch magazine and an advocate of reform, interviewed those on the margins of society in Victorian London.

Drawing on Mayhew's notes, Graham painted a

vivid picture of London as a noisy, smelly place where a large number of people conducted almost all their business in the street.

Beggars, flower sellers, market traders and entertainers rubbed shoulders with cheats and conmen. Costermongers in their distinctive dress of silk neckerchief and pearl buttons were a familiar sight selling fruit and vegetables in their donkey drawn carts.

Street herbalists promised cures with quack medicines like kalibonka root – a 'never known to fail' remedy

for pneumonia, bronchitis and consumption.

"As 16 per cent of deaths were from respiratory infections, a cough was very frightening in Victorian times. So anything that was going to help was considered important," said Graham.

Recycling was a way of life – with street scavengers like bone grubbers and rag gatherers literally turning other people's rubbish into money.

Probably the most bizarre was the pure collector

who scooped up dog mess to sell to leather tanners. It was a job not to be sniffed at as dog faeces were a noted way of softening raw leather and a lucrative way to make money.

Mayhew's descriptions of street markets and his vivid evocation of the sights and sounds of London undoubtedly influenced Dickens and other writers.

Pam Dajda

Keeping spirits up during lockdown

Most businesses are closed, retail therapy or a walk around the shops is banned, everyone is stuck at home, and there is no clear indication as to when everything will return to normal. In these exceptional circumstances an increase in the consumption of alcohol seems like a good idea to help one stay afloat. Well, that's my excuse anyway...

Over the past few months, the Wine Appreciation group has taken the

welfare of its members to heart and has held a couple of virtual one-off special tastings with more being planned.

Wine professional James Aldridge of Corney & Barrow live-streamed and hosted an exclusive Royston U3A talk on the history of gin, the different types of gin, where and how gins were originally produced and discussed the vast array of gins on sale today.

To expand our understanding of the various gin flavours available and to discover which gins were liked most, James guided us through a gin tasting experience and demonstrated how to make two gin-based cocktails for those members who already have quite a healthy gin collection.

At the sequel wine tasting session one month later in December,

again with James hosting, this time saw us discussing and experiencing the finest reserve port, ruby port, and late bottled vintage port.

Twenty-eight members participated and both tastings were entertaining, informative, made me feel a little bit tipsy and helped me to forget about lockdown.

Enjoy your favourite tippie. Bottoms up!

Jackie Gellert

Strumming into 2021 with Royston UKE3A

Royston ukulele members are still strumming along, meeting once a week via Zoom, writes group leader John Bishop.

We normally have at least 12 members playing together on Tuesdays at noon. They live as far apart as Eaton Socon, Buntingford, Ware, Baldock and Melbourn as well as Royston, all having joint membership to play with our group.

We are musically led by John Fowl or Cathy Carlin, while I look after the admin side.

We've been together for three and a half years, playing and singing from a growing 80 plus variety of songs ranging from George Formby, Joe Brown, and the Beatles, to Elvis, Cliff, Abba and many other artists.

We are very keen to get together again for weekly sessions at Coombes Community Centre, and would also like to get back to entertaining residents at nursing homes, local groups and at venues like Royston market.

In the meantime we carry on playing via Zoom, not only for the joy of playing the ukulele but also the social side, to have a chat and keep in touch. We have a total of 18 in the group and are always looking for new members, two having joined in the last six months .

Now the commercial:

The ukulele is easy to play basic chords, so as you've got little else to do at present get yourself a reasonable £45-£60 uke via Amazon, Ebay or

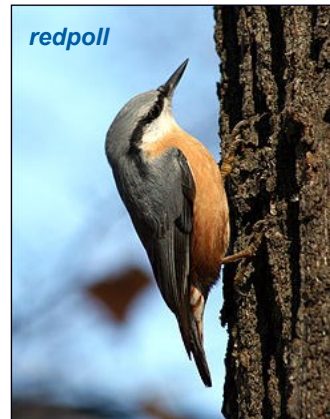
CODA in Old Stevenage, learn a few basic chords from YouTube or free online lessons, and come and play and sing along with us also for free.

Please give me a ring on 01763 246703 or text 07778 492432 or email bishop190@btinternet.com if you would like some advice.

Happy New Year from everyone at Royston UKE3A ukulele group.

John Bishop

Bird watching in lockdown



Although actual outings have had to be put on hold, Birding group members are still getting together for a coffee and a chat on Zoom.

Group leader Carol McGeogh says the online meetings, held on the first Wednesday of the month, are going well.

The group's last trip out was in early December, when, as Carol writes, eight members went to the Sandy RSPB Reserve, travelling in separate cars.

The weather, although staying dry, was very cold and we were well wrapped up. We had our Christmas coffee together with some of Brian's delicious short-bread while watching treecreepers in the trees overhead.

We formed two groups of four and the first group moved off followed at distance by the second group. We headed for the heath to look for the Dartford warbler, but although searching carefully it remained elusive, as did the stonechat.

My group moved off so we missed Reg seeing the redpoll, a very good find and identification. We walked round the reserve, which being on sandy ground doesn't get very muddy, eventually arriving at the house and formal gardens where we located the feeders and spent a while watching the birds on them. We were lucky to see the nuthatch and greater spotted woodpecker.

From there some of the group went home and because the sun had

come out some of us made our way to benches which made a perfect spot for our picnic lunch. As the clouds came over and the temperature dropped, we all made for home, arriving just as the rain started. What a good day out.

For more details about joining the group contact Carol on 01223 207354 or carol.mcgeogh@hotmail.co.uk

Still lunching with Solo Sundays

Having lunch out with friends may seem a distant memory, but the Solo Sundays group has found a great way to get together.

Members used to enjoy meeting up at restaurants around the area on the second Sunday of the month.

So to keep up the tradition they are meeting on the same day for a post lunch coffee or glass of wine together on Zoom.

“We normally have about 12 of us and it’s a good way to keep in touch while we’re having to stay at home,” said group leader Sandra Restall.

“We meet at 2.30pm for a chat and catch up. It’s worked quite well as even though we can’t physically meet we’re still in touch.”

“It’s really nice to see everybody because while you can spot each other at the monthly meetings you can’t really chat. This gives us an opportunity to

have a good natter and catch up.”

For further details about Solo Sundays contact Sandra on 07775 508533 or sandra.restall@gmail.com

Keep up to date with Current Affairs

If you feel like letting off steam about the way things are going at the moment, why not come along to the next Current Affairs meeting.

The theme - **Which member of the Cabinet would you choose to replace?** – is bound to provoke a lively discussion.

The group meets on Zoom on February 15 at 3.30pm, and new group leader John Kershaw is keen to attract new members.

“I’d like to encourage more people to come along and widen the range of topics we discuss,” he said.

The theme of January’s meeting was **Overseas aid and Britain’s place in the world**. Introduced by Peter Andrew, members considered whether the government was right to reduce its overseas budget by 40 per cent when set against historical and political circumstances and the fact that Britain is the fifth most wealthy nation in the world.

The group discussed aspects that may be impacted by this decision such as our desire to assume a greater international presence following our exit from the EU, the present hardships

endured by many third world populations, the financial impact of the pandemic suffered by populations both here and overseas and changes in Britain’s international reputation as a consequence of this budget reduction.

In December Steve Westcott led a debate on **Have we lost our moral compass?** The discussion focused on areas that have seen most change in our lifetime including religion, politics and respect.

Highlighting ‘the cult of the self’, Steve pointed out: “It is not new and has been

around for many decades, but now finds expression in ‘selfies’ and the various social media outlets devoted to this activity. It is very introspective and has, in my view, great potential to do harm to the mental health of our young people. I am aware of it, and do not fully understand, but I wish to learn more.”

If you would like to join the next online meeting on February 15 contact John Kershaw on 01763 248555 or jk4business@yahoo.co.uk

Keeping fit at home? No problem!

Making time for exercise is one of the top tips for staying healthy in lockdown.

As well as being good for the body, it improves your mood and is an opportunity to get together - as many members of the Keep Fit group have discovered.

Since the first lockdown they have been enjoying online classes run by their regular instructor Irene Gibson and her team. Keep fit and seated exercise sessions,

previously held in the Market Hill Rooms, are continuing on Tuesday mornings online and any members are welcome to join in, including a Friday morning Pilates class. There’s also the opportunity to take part in a wider range of Zoom classes run by Irene for U3A groups and the general public.

The main advantage of these sessions is that, just as when they met in pre-lockdown days, members

have to complete medical forms so the instructor can check everyone is exercising safely and to the correct level.

Group leader Kathy Hounsell said: “That’s really important and Irene contacts people to give weekly updates. Members can choose which sessions to do to suit them and can try classes they haven’t done before.”

“It’s brilliant,” said her husband Reg. “We both

take part in five different sessions each week and feel the fitter for it.”

Members pay a small weekly fee for online classes. If you’re interested in finding out more contact Kathy or Reg on kathyroystonu3a@gmail.com or phone 01763 241805.

Please note: By opening the fitness groups up to non U3A members these groups have lost their U3A focus and are currently no longer Royston U3A groups.

Lockdown advice to lighten up your day!

Everyone please be careful because people are going crazy from being locked down at home!

I was just talking about this with the microwave and the toaster while drinking my tea, and we all agreed that things are getting bad.

I didn't mention any of this to the washing machine because she puts a different spin on everything!

I certainly couldn't share with the fridge, because he's been acting cold and distant!

In the end, the iron straightened me out! She said the situation isn't all that pressing and

all the wrinkles will soon get ironed out!

The vacuum, however, was very unsympathetic... told me to just suck it up!

But the fan was very optimistic and gave me hope that it will all blow over soon!

The toilet looked a bit flushed but didn't say anything when I asked its opinion.

But the front door said I was becoming unhinged and the doorknob told me to get a grip!!

You can just about guess what the curtains told me: they told me to 'pull myself together!'

WE WILL SURVIVE !!

Dates for your diary

February

Tuesday 23, 2pm on Zoom

A COURAGEOUS AND SKILLED SHOT; Montenegro's photographer princess, Xenia Petrović-Njegos (1881-1960)

Our return guest speaker, **Elizabeth Gowing**, will share with us the remarkable story of Princess Xenia, the eighth daughter of King Nikola, showcasing her amazing talent as a photographer portraying the history and culture of normal life in the Balkans which is just now beginning to be visited by British travellers pre lockdown.

March

Tuesday 30, 2pm on Zoom

MANNERS PLEASE DEAREST! The Do's and Don'ts of Victorian Etiquette

Our guest speaker, **David Allen**, is a storyteller with a fascination for history and an eye for the absurd. You are all invited to attend a Victorian Finishing School for Young Ladies where you will discover the Do's and Don'ts of courtship, how to walk, sit and talk, calling cards, dinner etiquette and the mysterious language of the fan. Great Fun!

Easy Guide to Interest Groups

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
AM		Art	Fitness (non U3A)	Birding	Walkers: Strollers	Book Club 2
		Golf Croquet	Seated Exercise (non U3A)	Book Club 3	Who do you think they were?	
				Life Stories		
				Patchwork		
				Walkers: Five Mile		
PM	Solo Sundays	Current Affairs	MONTHLY MEETING last Tuesday of month	Clay Shooting	Gardening	Classic Novels
		Curry Club	Book Club 1	Film	Golf	Petanque/Boules
		French Conversation	History	Wine Appreciation	Mixed Crafts	Pilates (non U3A)
		Pottery (Hand Building)	Ukulele		Quiz	
		Tai Chi				
EVE				Jazz Appreciation		

For frequency and contact details about all interest groups please see the chart on the final page or check our website for more information. Announcements about future Events & Outings and Theatre Trips will be posted on our website when details become available.

Interest Groups

Don't forget to check our website for regularly updated information

GROUP	DAY	TIME	FREQUENCY	GROUP LEADER	CONTACT DETAILS
Art	Mon	9:30am	Suspended	Sylvia Jordan	sylviahjordan41@gmail.com 07599 212882
Birding	Wed	8:30am	Monthly 1st Wed on Zoom	Carol McGeoch	carol.mcgeoch@hotmail.co.uk 01223 207354
Book Club 1	Tues	2:00pm	Monthly 1st Tues on Zoom	Deirdre Smith	deidreroystonu3a@gmail.com 01763 244700
Book Club 2	Fri	11:00am	Monthly Variable on Zoom	Janet Burton	janet.a.burton@gmail.com 07984 600295
Book Club 3	Wed	10:30am	Monthly last Wed on Zoom	Elizabeth (Lee) Towers	ladytowers@gmail.com 01763 241488
Classic Novels	Fri	2.00pm	Monthly 3rd Fri on Zoom	Sue Biggs	biggs1633@gmail.com 01763 847200
Clay Shooting	Wed	2:00pm	Suspended	Frank Martin	thoefmartin@outlook.com 07831 898234
Current Affairs	Mon	3:30pm	Monthly 3rd Mon on Zoom	John Kershaw	jk4business@yahoo.co.uk 01763 248555
Curry Club	Mon	12:00pm	Suspended	Reg Hounsell	regroystonu3a@gmail.com 01763 241805
Events & Outings (open to all)	Variable	Variable	Suspended	Sandra Walker	sandraroystonu3a@gmail.com 01763 241896
Film	Wed	2:00pm	Suspended	Carla Bailey	carlaroystonu3a@gmail.com 07968 261101
Fitness (non U3A)	Tues	9:30am	Weekly on Zoom	Kathy Hounsell	kathyroystonu3a@gmail.com 01763 241805
French Conversation	Mon	1:00pm	Fortnightly Variable on Zoom	Barbara Fielden	fieldenbarbara@hotmail.com 07850 455211
Gardening	Thurs	2:30pm	Monthly Variable on Zoom	Val Fairbanks	t.fairbanks@ntlworld.com 01763 230724
Golf	Thurs	1:00pm	Suspended	Ralph Gellert	ralphroystonu3a@gmail.com 01763 248097
Golf Croquet	Mon	10:15am	Suspended	John Bishop	bishop190@btinternet.com 01763 246703
History	Tues	2:00pm	Suspended	Reg Hounsell	regroystonu3a@gmail.com 01763 241805
Jazz Appreciation	Wed	7:30pm	Suspended	Reg Hounsell	regroystonu3a@gmail.com 01763 241805
Life Stories	Wed	11:00am	Suspended	John Bell	john.bell99@btinternet.com 07710 176161
Mixed Crafts	Thurs	2:00pm	Suspended	Rosie Cowsley	rosie.cowsley@ntlworld.com 07809 047380
Patchwork	Wed	10:00am	Suspended	Maureen Strugnell	maureen.strugnell@ntlworld.com 01763 241967
Petanque / Boules	Fri	2:30pm	Suspended	Sue & John Bishop	bishop190@btinternet.com 01763 246703
Pilates (non U3A)	Fri	1pm & 2pm	Weekly on Zoom	Kathy Hounsell	kathyroystonu3a@gmail.com 01763 241805
Pottery (Hand Building)	Mon	2:00pm	Suspended	Rosie Cowsley	rosie.cowsley@ntlworld.com 07809 047380
Quiz	Thurs	2:00pm	Suspended	Sharon Camilletti	sharon.camilletti19@gmail.com 07725 847303
Seated Exercise (non U3A)	Tues	10:45am	Weekly on Zoom	Kathy Hounsell	kathyroystonu3a@gmail.com 01763 241805
Solo Sundays	Sun	2:30pm	Monthly 2nd Sun on Zoom	Sandra Restall	sandra.restall@gmail.com 07775 508533
Tai Chi	Mon	3:15pm	Suspended	Reg Hounsell	regroystonu3a@gmail.com 01763 241805
Theatre Trips	Variable	Variable	Suspended	Deirdre Smith	deidreroystonu3a@gmail.com 01763 244700
Ukulele	Tues	12:00pm	Weekly on Zoom	John Bishop	bishop190@btinternet.com 01763 246703
Walkers: Five Mile	Wed	9:45am	Suspended	Eric Heaton	ericroystonu3a@gmail.com 01763 242989
Walkers: Strollers	Thurs	10:15am	Suspended	David Walker	djwalker3@aol.com 01763 241896
Who do you think they were?	Thurs	10:45am	Suspended	Sharon Camilletti	sharon.camilletti19@gmail.com 07725 847303
Wine Appreciation	Variable	Variable	Variable on Zoom	Jackie Gellert	jackieroystonu3a@gmail.com 01763 248097

Royston U3A Committee

Chairman	Jackie Gellert	jackieroystonu3a@gmail.com	01763 248097
Vice Chair	Sandra Walker	sandraroystonu3a@gmail.com	01763 241896
Treasurer & Speakers Secretary	Barbara Andrew	barbararoystonu3a@gmail.com	01763 245363
Secretary	Karen Heaton	karenroystonu3a@gmail.com	01763 242989
Membership Secretary	Marion Martin	marionroystonu3a@gmail.com	07526 930168
Minutes Secretary	Sylvia Fuller	sylviaroystonu3a@gmail.com	01763 243006
Existing Groups Co-ordinator	Joan Westcott	joanroystonu3a@gmail.com	01763 220812
New Groups Co-ordinator	Mel Chammings	melroystonu3a@gmail.com	07713 837086
New Members Contact	Carla Bailey	carlaroystonu3a@gmail.com	07968 261101
Publicity	Pam Dajda	pam@dajda.net	01763 246234
Royston U3A News	Ralph Gellert	ralphroystonu3a@gmail.com	01763 248097
Co-opted Committee Member	Eric Heaton	ericroystonu3a@gmail.com	01763 242989

Get it in the News

If you're involved in a group why not publicise it in Royston U3A News? Send in a short report of your latest meeting or outing - photos welcomed too - to Pam Dajda at pam@dajda.net or phone 01763 246234