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u3a to the rescue!

## A word from the Chair

### Hello and welcome to our Newsletter

May I wish you all a belated New Year and hope that 2024 is a good one for you all. It has started well for our u3a with over 120 members at our January main monthly meeting, which if not a record attendance, is certainly the highest for a very long time and I hope we continue to see a good turnout in future months. Penny was busy collecting your membership renewals but if you were not there and haven't yet posted your subscription please do so as soon as possible or pay at the February meeting.

Roger Kemp our Vice Chairman has received over 100 of your completed survey forms and we would like to thank you all for taking the time to complete these and return them. If you haven't had a chance so far you can still do so. Roger has analysed the information and you will see the results in this newsletter. The committee will review this data at the next committee meeting in February. If you have any thoughts or ideas to improve or develop our u3a, which might not have been covered in the survey, please write them down and pop them in the suggestion box on the table near the front door of the village hall when you arrive.

We will be continuing our trial of serving refreshments before the monthly meeting starts so that we can get an idea of how it works once everyone has got used to the different set up. It always takes time to adjust to something new so it will take a couple more months to be able to fully gauge whether or not this is the best option.

I know that some people do not send Christmas cards these days, preferring to donate to charities, but most of us still receive more post with stamps during December and hopefully you have been keeping these and will bring them to the meeting so that they can be sent to the RNIB.

We have been fortunate in our part of the country that we have not experienced some of the extreme weather other areas have. Hopefully the worst is now over and we can look forward to something warmer and dryer as spring approaches, with the welcome sight of snowdrops and other bulbs coming into flower.

**Don**

## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY 2024

Monthly meetings are in the Village Hall at 10.30am. Doors open 10am.

Please remember to wear your u3a badge and to register when you arrive.

Feb 7th • Pam Litton - *An African Safari*

March 6th • Tricia Thompson - *The Good, the Bad and the Downright Painful*

April 3rd • Chris Foster - *On The Beat in Hatton Garden*

May 1st • AGM, Plant Sale, Chris Smith - *Travel/Nature Photography*

June 12th • Graham Short - *My Life as a Micro-Artist*

(The programme may be subject to last minute change due to circumstances beyond our control).

You are invited to bring your own mug to the monthly meetings as it helps to save on cups but we will continue to make disposable cups available if you forget or do not wish to bring one.

Also bring your used stamps (separated into British/foreign) to put into the RNIB collection box (please do not bring printer ink cartridges as we have no means of recycling them)

### FORTHCOMING TALKS

In February our own u3a member Pam Litton will tell us about her very first *African Safari* in August last year to see all the birds and wildlife she ever dreamed of, during her visit to the Kalahari and the Okavango.

In March Tricia Thompson returns to entertain us with a talk about the history of underwear in *The Good, the Bad and the Downright Painful*. You may remember that she came last year to tell us about the history of shoes so we are now delving into the underworld!

In April Chris Foster will talk about a different kind of underworld encountered during his experiences while policing Hatton Garden.

If you think some of the subjects for talks are not your 'cup of tea' do keep an open mind, you may be surprised! Whatever the topic we can learn something outside our own range of experience and, hopefully, keep our minds flexible even if our bodies are less so! Do come along and show your support.

future dates of the main meetings in 2024 are

1st May

12th June

10th July

7th August

4th September

2nd October

13th Nov

Thursday 5th (note the change of date)

### MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL REMINDER TO COLLECT YOUR NEW CARD

■ Thank you to all the members who have submitted their membership subscriptions.

■ New membership cards for 1st February – 31st January 2025 will be available to collect at the meeting on Wednesday 7th February 2024.

■ If you included a stamped self-addressed envelope with your payment you should have already received your membership card.

### ■ Penny Bulgin

In December Lucy Lewis talked about *Lighting the Fuse* when she went to Sandhurst to train as an officer. As a woman in a male dominated Army she lit the fuse in many ways, as an expert Bomb Disposal Officer she could be called out at any moment to deal with an unexploded bomb or device, including on a tour of duty in Northern Ireland at a time of high IRA activity. [I bought her book and it is a fascinating read. Ed]

In January Roy Atkins enthralled us with outstanding views of scenery and wildlife in Scotland when he came to talk about *Highland Wildlife*. His passion and enthusiasm for his subject shone, not only for the birds but also deer, otters, red squirrels and pine martens, to name a few.

## RAMBLES

Wednesday February 21st. Meet in the car park next to William Penn Leisure Centre, Shepherds Lane, Mill End, Rickmansworth WD3 8JN at 10.00 for a 4 mile ramble towards The Swillett, Chorleywood.

Wednesday March 20th. Meet in the car park on the edge of Whippendell Woods in Grove Mill Lane at 10.00am. The ramble of about 4 miles goes through Whippendell Woods then along the canal before following the trails around the grounds of The Grove.

**Don**

### OUR SURVEY SAID.....

Thank you to the 39% of members who completed the 2024 survey. No doubt a few more will trickle in. It is useful for the committee to get the views of our members (it is after all your u3a) to ensure we take it in the direction that you want to go, as well as following the guidance from the Third Age Trust.

Of those who completed the survey 60% regularly attended meetings. The option for tea/coffee when you arrive or at a later point was split 50-50. Several people offered to help with refreshments and four people expressed an interest in joining the Committee. We will be following up on these shortly.

In respect of new groups, there were nine people interested in a theatre group but no offers to lead or jointly lead it. Interest was also expressed for card games, languages, yoga, cycling, walking, play-reading and photography.

Thanks also to Penny Bulgin for getting the surveys distributed to 289 members and collecting the returns.

**Roger Kemp**  
**Vice-Chairman**

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**All u3a groups are run by the members for the members - we need you, come on in and join us!**

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## WALKING GROUP

Hats off to 12 of us turning up on 23rd January in spite of rain forecast for all morning. So we shortened the route to 5 miles, avoiding the most muddy section. Leaving Chipperfield Common we went via Croft Lane to Tower Hill, then onto the Hertfordshire Way. Happy to see Judy Jones back with us, glad to have the Harrisons guiding us through places they know so well, including the necessary logs in Woodmans Wood for our most welcome coffee stop at 3+ miles. Back via Little Windmill Hill admiring snowdrops there, after which 8 of us were ready for lunch at Blackwells to round off a most enjoyable morning.

John Swainson led our last walk in 2023 which was an example of 3 seasons in a day. Mist at Chorleywood to start, brilliant sun for coffee by the River Chess, and a thorough downpour with thunder sound effects as we got back to our cars!

Undeterred, John led the group again to start off 2024 on one of the coldest days in January... "we enjoyed continuous sunshine throughout the walk but with a cold wind".

Back in November walk leader Don, assisted by Jean Machin and Richard Bulgin rescued a sheep! They found said shaggy sheep caught in brambles near Gaddesdon Place. Lucky they were passing by.

### Val MacDonald

[I'm no expert but judging by the picture on the front page the sheep looks like a Valais Blacknose. Hailing originally from the mountains of Switzerland, it has a big woolly coat, ideal for that harsh Alpine weather but less so if caught in brambles. Ed]





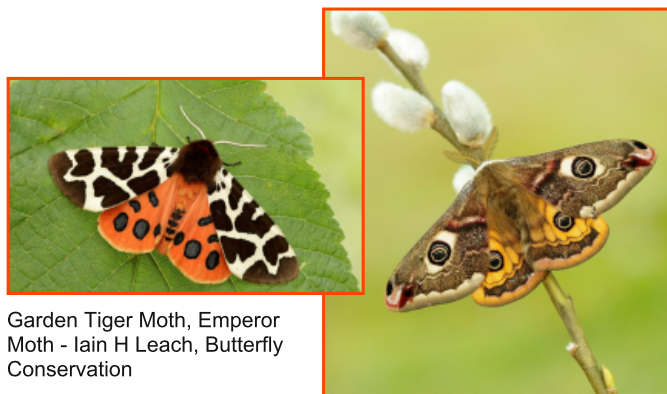
When might you see a tiger in your garden or on a ramble? When it is a Garden Tiger Moth! And what about the Emperor Moth in it's finery! Moths can be just as beautiful as butterflies as you can see if you look at the A-Z identification parade of moths and butterflies at [butterfly-conservation.org/moths/a-to-z](http://butterfly-conservation.org/moths/a-to-z)

*'Moths are a crucial part of the ecosystem. They pollinate, they don't just flit around at night - they are part of the food chain'*

Like butterflies, many moths drink nectar, but they also need plants on which to lay their eggs. Some things you can do to help if you have a garden:

Grow a wide variety of nectar-rich flowers.  
Place the same types of plant together in blocks.  
Deadhead to prolong flowering. Well-watered plants produce more nectar.  
Grow caterpillar foodplants for butterflies and moths.  
Let an area of grass grow long.  
Allow a patch of 'weeds', such as Dandelion and Bird's-foot-trefoil to flourish.  
Place large stones in sunny borders, where butterflies can bask.  
Provide shelter, trees, shrubs, climbers on walls and fences which will protect butterflies and moths from the wind, rain and frost.  
Make a log pile, where butterflies and moths can hibernate. Some moths breed in dead wood too.  
Don't be too tidy – leave borders intact over winter, allow leaves to accumulate under hedges and create a 'wild' area that you don't touch very often. These areas will provide shelter for insects to hibernate and rest.  
Lastly avoid pesticides, nature can find its own balance.

Info from [butterfly-conservation.org](http://butterfly-conservation.org), you can find a lot more on their website.



Garden Tiger Moth, Emperor Moth - Iain H Leach, Butterfly Conservation

**Nick Bowles will be giving us all a talk on the fascinating world of butterflies and moths at the main meeting on Wednesday 2nd October. Nick chairs the Upper Thames Branch of Butterfly Conservation and will be busy conducting surveys during the summer months.**

## GARDENING GROUP

Our group got off to a flying start in January with a visit from Lisa Comfort, otherwise known as Jazzy Rose Flowers. This enterprising young woman moved to Chipperfield less than two years ago and has set up a business growing flowers in a local field. She engaged us all with a presentation about how she started this enterprise, managing to have flowers to sell after 18 months of very hard work. She showed us pictures of the bare field and how it gradually progressed into a sea of colour with larkspur, peonies, poppies, and almost every other flower you could think of. Lisa sells these from a little cabin near to where she lives in Chipperfield and has a delivery service. What she doesn't sell fresh she dries. These too look wonderful and Lisa demonstrated how to make a wreath from dried flowers and seed heads. She also runs workshops and open days. We were all impressed with her enthusiasm for her business and it is so good to be able to buy locally grown flowers without the airmiles! We hope to have a visit to her flower field later in the year, during August.

### Dawn Pitts

We are working on plans for this year so here are some dates for your diary. Meetings and trips out are scheduled for the second Monday of the month. All members are welcome.

**February 12th** - Delphinium specialist Graham Austin will be giving a talk in the village hall about his preparations for Chelsea and what it takes to become a Gold Medal award winner! We also plan to have a seed swap so please bring along your spare packets of seeds (viable within date please). We also need you to start sowing seeds, making cuttings and raising plants for the Plant Sale which will be on 1st May at the main meeting and AGM

**March 11th** - Ian Barrow from Sunnyside Trust is coming to SVH to tell us about the work of the Trust and to talk about planting up and maintaining hanging baskets. He also hopes to bring for sale some of plants raised by the Trust.

**April 8th** - A talk about Luton Hoo Walled Garden.

**May 13th** - visit to Ashridge House (car share) tbc.

**June 10th** Coach visit to Savill Gardens. For the month of June Savill Gardens have a partnership arrangement with the RHS which means admission will be free for RHS members. If you are not a member the admission cost will be £11.50 plus the cost of the coach. All members are welcome to join the trip but we need to find out if this is viable as the total cost for non RHS members could be about £30.

**Sept 9th** coach visit to Hyde Hall. As our group has affiliation with the RHS entrance is free for this visit. Coach costs will be about £18.00

### Garden Group Team

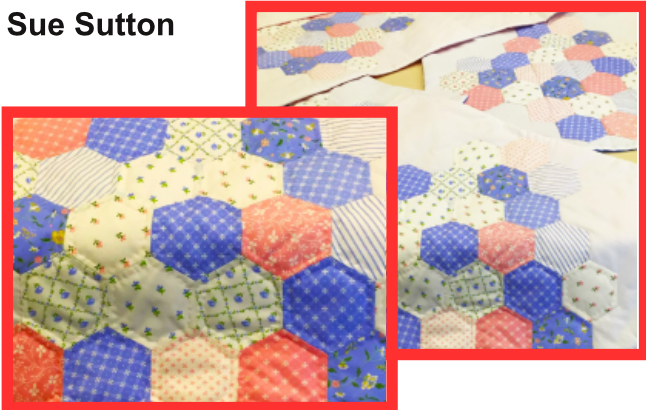
*Wild Inside* on Radio 4 (11am, 30/1/24) featured a fascinating insight into the secrets of why the life of an aphid is such a success. It seems that each female carries around 72 embryos which are born live and already pregnant so they can produce clones of themselves, telescoping the generations. When they need to find another food source they can produce winged versions and one aphid can land on a plant and start breeding immediately. The gardener's best defence? Lacewings and Ladybirds (and their larvae) are the top predators as well as Blue Tits and other small birds, or a jet of water to knock the aphids off. Also grow a wide range of wildflowers to encourage predators and pollinators.

## CRAFT GROUP

Last year we were donated some Laura Ashley material hexagons and, as an ongoing project throughout the year, we decided as a group to make quilts for babies. We have now completed the project and have made six quilts which we are intending to give to charity. The charity we have chosen is The Project Linus UK whose mission is to provide love, a sense of security, warmth and comfort to children (who are sick, disabled, disadvantaged or distressed) by donating gifts of new, homemade, washable quilts and blankets, lovingly made by UK volunteer knitters and quilters. See [projectlinusuk.org.uk](http://projectlinusuk.org.uk) for info.

Anyone is welcome to come along and see what we do, we meet in the small hall at SVH on 2nd Thursday of the month from 10.30 - 12.30.

### Sue Sutton



**Beacon** is a national u3a database used by many u3a branches but which keeps the data secure and separate for each u3a. We use it for Sarratt & District u3a and most information is sent out by email using Beacon in order to keep costs down. If the newsletter is not reaching you call Penny on 01923 776143 she will be pleased to get your details updated. If you don't have access to email, arrangements can be made to post the newsletter to you in return for a small administrative charge to cover costs - speak to Penny.

Please remember to take photos of your u3a activities which we might be able to use on the website or the rolling screen or in the newsletter. Some 'action' photos would be welcome and try different perspectives sometimes. If you enjoy what you are doing it will show. If you take pictures of people please check that you have permission as it is assumed that any u3a members shown in photos submitted for the newsletter are happy to be included.

## ENGINEERING GROUP

For our first meeting in 2024 we gathered together in the village hall to watch a video about the Antikythera Mechanism. This told an extraordinary story about this ancient Greek artefact recovered in 1901 from a shipwreck which had taken place around 70BC off the Greek island of Antikythera. It is unknown how the mechanism came to be on the cargo ship but the team retrieved numerous large objects, including bronze and marble statues, pottery, unique glassware, jewellery, coins, as well as the mechanism.

Incomplete and fragmented after being on the seabed the artefact was a challenge to researchers and was discovered to be an ancient Greek hand powered orrery (model of the solar system) described as the oldest known example of an analogue computer and used to predict astronomical positions and eclipses in advance and more!

The video was presented to us by one of our members, Alan Crawley, who went to Greece as one of the team who used computer x-ray tomography and high resolution scanning to image inside fragments of the crust-encased mechanism and read the faintest of inscriptions on the outer casing. This artefact is so fragile that it could not be moved from its home in the National Archaeological Museum in Athens and the extremely heavy specially made scanner (weighing several tons) had to be transported to Greece to carry out the scan!

*"The Antikythera mechanism had the first known set of scientific dials or scales, and its importance was recognized when radiographic images showed that the remaining fragments contained 30 gear wheels. No other geared mechanism of such complexity is known from the ancient world or indeed until medieval cathedral clocks were built a millennium later"*.\*

This was a completely riveting story – thank you Alan. We followed the screening with our annual lunch at The Cock and next month, on Tuesday 27th February, we are having a talk presented by Dr Rudi Newman on the History of Cassiobury Park Railway.

### Sheila Malin

\*[britannica.com/topic/Antikythera-mechanism](http://britannica.com/topic/Antikythera-mechanism)

**Copy for next newsletter no 105 (April/May) should be submitted to the Editor Janet by 23rd March 2024. It would be lovely to have input from some of the other groups. If you have any comments about the newsletter or items you would like to see contact Janet at [j.taylor0402@ntlworld.com](mailto:j.taylor0402@ntlworld.com)**