

SOMERTON u3a

Newsletter 22 January 2022



Chairman's Message

I recently read an article about New Year traditions around the world. Did you know, for instance, that in Colombia, South America, the locals carry an empty suitcase around with them, signifying, apparently, that they will have twelve months of adventure ahead?

Well, I don't propose we all follow their example, but I do believe we should all think about the adventures that lie ahead of us. The theme of many New Year celebrations is to say goodbye to the old year and greet the new. So let's try to think of self-improving resolutions for the coming 12 months. We have many varied and interesting groups and I believe with your help we can grow these self-learning groups even further.

If you have your 2022 diary to hand, please make a note of Somerton u3a 25th anniversary celebration; the date is still to be confirmed but it should be in the summer. Also, the 40th anniversary of the u3a will be between 17th and 24th September.

Your thoughts, ideas and help will make both these occasions truly amazing.

So, as I dust down my suitcase ...I wish you all a very safe and healthy New Year.



Judi

Poem of the month

Many classic poems on the theme of January concentrate on the bleakness and cruelty of the winter weather on humans and animals alike, but Rossetti's poem presents an idyllic picture of perhaps the imagined court of King Arthur and Camelot where all is well.

The wind may blow and snow cover the landscape but inside all is well with "mighty fires and torches lit" and "smooth silken sheets". Even the snow is unthreatening, "soft handfuls of the fair white snow".

Perhaps we should not be surprised as Rossetti, a member of the Pre-

Raphaelite Brotherhood was a shameless romantic in his paintings and poetry.

Perhaps this January we need little bit of indulgent escapism from the uncertainties that face us this coming year.

January

For January I give you vests of skins,
And mighty fires in hall, and torches lit;
Chambers and happy beds with all things fit;
Smooth silken sheets, rough furry counterpanes;
And sweetmeats baked, and one that deftly spins
Warm arras; and Douay cloth, a and store of it;
And on this merry manner still to twit

The wind, when most his mastery the wind wins.
Or issuing forth at seasons in the day,
Ye'll fling soft handfuls of the fair white snow
Among the damsels standing round, in play;
And when you are tired and all aglow,
Indoors again the court shall hold its sway,
And the free Fellowship continue so.

Gabriel Dante Rossetti

Festive Feasting

Over 90 members, along with some friends and family, arrived at Edgar Hall on Friday 10th December for early Christmas festivities. The tables were set with white cloths, red runners, Christmas crackers and poinsettias along with the usual accoutrements for enjoying a sit-down buffet.

There was a wonderful display of raffle prizes tempting us to part with our money. Centre stage was a splendid Christmas cushion made by Sarah Kamm and I know that many of us had our eye on it. Prizes of drink – alcoholic and the other sort - chocolates, biscuits and other items, reminiscent of those on the conveyor belt of The Generation Game, were set out in alluring fashion.



Celebrating Christmas in the time of Covid

Once we had chosen who we wanted to sit with and taken our places (and with Covid at the back of our minds) Judi, our chair, sent us up a couple of tables at a time, to help ourselves to the wonderful spread of cold meats and salads of all descriptions. Not quite reminiscent of our old school dinner days was the wearing of masks and gloves - just to be on the safe side of course. There were the non-obligatory paper hats retrieved from our crackers for those that wanted to wear them. Personally, I love a paper hat so wore mine with pride.

Once the dust had settled on the main buffet and the rather empty plates had been collected, it was up for the desserts – two by two once again. I defy anyone to not find something to their liking between the trifle, profiteroles, Christmas pud and cheese and biscuits. There was agreement all round that our caterer Kath and her team had done us proud.

We were then regaled with carols by the Singing for Fun group with Chris Cox on the electric keyboard?

Chris invited us to sing along and the words were (intermittently) displayed. Best laid plans and technology were not good bedfellows but as most of us knew the words anyway, it didn't really matter.



Fran, Pamela, Ruth and Viv selling raffle tickets

The raffle was part drawn at this point and Celia Green's ticket was first out. Valerie Taylor went straight for the coveted Christmas cushion which I am assured by Celia now has pride of place in her home.

Next, we thoroughly enjoyed SUBS - no not the annual thing that we pay but the Somerton Ukulele Band & Singers. They entertained us with Christmas songs old and not so old which, once again, we were invited to take part in. Between their playing and their attire, they did a splendid job for us.



Somerton u3a Ukulele Band providing after lunch entertainment

The rest of the raffle was drawn and the majority of us then discarded our unlucky tickets – no prizes for me but it was surely all about the taking part!!

After three hours of mixing with our Somerton u3a friends, and enjoying excellent food and entertainment, we headed off home with carols resounding in our heads. We really did Deck the Halls.

See you next year.

Liz Short

Somerton U3A Geology group

Group

News

This newly reconstituted group has the aim of increasing our appreciation and understanding of how the geology beneath our feet has shaped our landscape and even our everyday lives. Initial interest was registered from twelve members in October, and the first meeting took place in the Edgar Hall on 4th November. The theme was a look at the geological history of the Mendips from seabed sediments to their uplift as part of a Himalayan-scale mountain range and subsequent erosion. During that history, our little part of the Earth's crust journeyed, by the magic of continental drift, across the tropics and life on land evolved from the first plants to the age of the dinosaurs.

Our second meeting was to show a snapshot of the geological evidence for this story through a visit to one of Britain's classic geological sites – Vallis Vale, near Frome. Although perhaps not the most picturesque locality in Somerset, Vallis Vale and the area around

Hapsford Bridge, Great Elm and Mells has much of interest for its industrial archaeology and flora as well as geology. Our focus was on just two localities; the De La Beche unconformity (Sir Henry De La Beche was the the first Director of the British Geological Survey, from 1835 to his death in 1855) shows how the Jurassic seas of 190 million years ago first eroded away and then deposited new sediment on the Mendip landscape. At Tedbury Camp, near Great Elm, the rocky seabed on which the Jurassic rocks were laid down is exposed, so our group could wander over the seabed of 190 million years ago – possibly in the footsteps of paddling dinosaurs.

The group meets on the first Thursday of the month (next meeting February 3rd). We hope to follow the pattern of an indoor meeting and discussion followed by a field visit in future – depending on the weather!

Trevor Ryder



Members of the U3A Geology group standing on the Jurassic seabed, with a Jurassic cliff in the background. From left to right John Rix, Dennis Brown, Lesley Blake and Trevor Ryder. Clive Baker was behind the camera.

Group News

Bird Watching

Bird Count at Hurds Hill, Langport

December's bird watch was a change from our 'normal' visits to a wetland reserve – we began to record birds in a Langport garden, as a start to knowing how many different species visit throughout the year. The intention is to return in spring when some of the usual migrants, swallows, cuckoos, etc. have returned, and again in later summer when there may be a different population present or maybe others passing through.

The garden is fairly large with a woodland belt next to the road, with a flower garden and orchard to the rear. We identified thirteen species in about an hour, twelve of which were in the wooded area. Not surprisingly we found the rooks and others of the corvid family in the trees and we were pleased to find a nuthatch and a woodpecker as well as most of the tit species. Having

no leaves on the trees certainly helped us. I guess the reason the winter birds were here is because food in the form of insect larvae and spiders was present in the fissures in *the bark*. *Apart from the 'colonial' rooks which of course eat out on the surrounding fields we only saw small numbers or singletons of each kind.*

The only bird we found in the rear garden which comprised lawns and flower borders was a blackbird – well, a cloud or grind of blackbirds. Perhaps in our spring visit this area will be more fruitful when other food sources should appear and we can also see if there is a difference between the borders and the orchard.

I wonder how many nests we shall find?

Bird List : - Goldcrest, Blue tit, Great Tit, Coal Tit, Long-tailed Tit, Robin, Blackbird, Nuthatch, Great - spotted



*Maggie, Kay, Jan and Dave on a bird count at Hurds Hill.
Why are we laughing – it's pouring!*

Roast Potato Club

Group News

Sunday Lunch at the Kingsdon Inn

Six members of the Roast Potato Club treated themselves to lunch at the Kingsdon Inn on the last Sunday before Christmas. The Kingsdon is renowned for serving food a cut above the ordinary and did not disappoint us.



Jane, Glennis and Jill outside the Kingsdon Inn



Viv looking particularly pleased at the choice of wine!

Fully booked every Sunday, our 2pm booking meant that we were really looking forward to our meals. Following the landlady's recommendation, we chose a New Zealand sauvignon blanc. Looking at Viv's face, I think she was particularly pleased!

One of the desert options - Caramelised rice pudding, mulled apple sorbet, roasted plums, toasted almonds

Although the five choices of starter promised to deliver little plates bursting with flavour we all opted to go straight to the mains.

Being Sunday lunch, all the usual favourite roast meats were on the menu, all served with carrots, cabbage, beans, broccoli, cauliflower and red cabbage.

The choice of five desserts finished the meal in fine style.



Group News

Science and Technology

S&T meet by Zoom at 10am on the 4th Thursday of the month, and in 2021 we have had a full schedule of fascinating topics. To list a few:

Treating COVID patients, Visiting Mars, Fusion Reactors, and All about Cephalopods (Octopuses). My thanks go to all our speakers for their excellent presentations.

Coming up are:

27th January – The history of the Earth; “4.5 billion years in 60 minutes” and given by Dennis Brown.

24th February – “A visit to CERN and the Large Hadron Collider” and given by Leigh Edwards.

31st March – “Use of flowers in medicine” and given by David Robins

I hope that you had a great Christmas, and are looking forward to learning something new in 2022!

John Light

Raspberry Pi Group

As sales of the Raspberry Pi computer (designed and built in Britain) pass 40 million worldwide, two new versions were launched in 2021. One costing just £3.60, and the other £13. During the year the group have built projects using both of these new computers.

Currently the group have two projects ‘on the go’. The first involves logging details from a house fitted with an air source heat pump. This is the way we are all going to heat our houses in the future, but controlling them efficiently is not that simple and hence this project.

The second project is a thermal camera. This camera does not detect light, it detects heat, and the picture opposite is of me showing how much heat I am losing from my head.

The idea will be to photograph our houses on a cold day to see where the heat is escaping, and hence where better insulation would be ideal.



John Light

Editor's Note: Apologies to John and members of the 2 groups for leaving out this notice in the previous edition.

Anniversary of Somerton u3a

Did you know that Somerton u3a will be 25 years old in 2022. The Third Age Trust issued a certificate of membership on 10th October 1997 and the first newsletter was dated January 1998. Records show that the original membership was 40.

As this a special anniversary, the committee are already thinking of ways to make this an extra special celebration. A key part of the plans will hopefully be the production of a souvenir booklet of the history of Somerton u3a containing not just facts but

reminscences, anecdotes and, of course, lots of photos.

We are particularly interested to hear from, not only anyone who was one of those original members but anyone who would like to share thoughts and memories of your experiences with Somerton u3a, no matter how long you have been a member.

If you would like to contribute to the booklet in some way, please contact me via the email address at the end of the newsletter.

Kay

Monthly speaker programme

All meetings are at the Edgar Hall on the 4th Friday of the month.*

Friday 28th January

Lottie Dale - *Falling with Style*

Daughter of a WW2 fighter pilot, Debbie always yearned to follow in her father's footsteps. Deterred by the costs involved, Debbie took up the next best thing, skydiving. Over 17 years she has made more than 1,200 jumps, including surviving a malfunctioning canopy.

Debbie has taken part in various air display teams, including demos onto the Normandy beaches, the Paris Air Show and even Wembley stadium.

Friday 25th February 10,30am

Linda Fisher – *A talk on will making.*

More details later

Friday 25th March

Brian Pearson - *Return of the Loose Canon*

By popular demand, the return of Brian Pearson, retired vicar and Somerton u3a member, whose previous talk, *Tales from the Bishop's Bagman*, was much enjoyed by his audience at the Edgar Hall.

Friday 22nd April 10.30am

Debbie Bertwisle - *A talk on the work of the DSAA, Dorset and Somerset Air Ambulance*

Members of the committee felt that Debbie's talk on the work of Somerset and Dorset Air Ambulance service, given in October by Zoom was so inspirational that they felt it should be repeated, if possible, to a live audience at the Edgar Hall.

Some members' comments sent in after

the talk.

"I have learnt so much about the DSAA - never knew they were totally self-funded".

"Those volunteers are unsung heroes. Not just in the emergency but their time given over to research and development of new products and life-saving procedure."

"I am about to amend my will - the money might save my loved ones now".

"Just on my way to the post box with a form for a monthly donation after this morning's talk about the amazing Air Ambulance, all unbelievably self-funded".

Friday 27th May 10.30am

Ashley Jones – *Regional Fraud Protect Advisor, Avon & Somerset Police*

Recipient of an MBE in 2019 for services to charity and older people.

Senior Safety

Ashley is internationally recognised as an expert in the field of crime prevention in the financial exploitation of the vulnerable and senior citizens and will be giving a talk on how we can protect ourselves from fraudsters.

Friday 24th June

Roger Brown - *The Great American Songbook*

From the age of 4, Roger has had an amazing life in music. He sings, he acts, he composes and directs. He is also a jazz pianist and has accompanied many of the greats including Louis Armstrong, George Melly and Humphrey Lyttleton amongst many others, across all of the USA and various other countries of the world.

In his talk Roger traces the history and music of this genre, including the great composers such as George Gershwin, Jerome Kern, Cole Porter, Irving Berlin, amongst others who influenced so much popular music between the wars.

Roger illustrates his talk with live examples on the piano and hilarious stories about the people, places and events connected with this iconic music.

Roger gave a Zoom talk last year to Somerton u3a. It was very well received and one member commented,

"What a wonderful hour. Just this was worth the £18 subscription."

Friday 22nd July

Dr Tony Davies - *How Did the Kings Find Bethlehem?*

The Kings arrived in Bethlehem following a star? Actually, how would you do that? In this talk we, who are used to the magic of satnav, will investigate how navigation has evolved over the centuries and consider possible solutions to the Kings' problem.

Tony is a 78 year old who follows new developments in maths and science with great interest and aims to illustrate these ideas in an amusing and entertaining way in his illustrated talks.

Live talks may need to be suspended and be given by Zoom instead due to possible changing Covid restrictions

Future Events

You'll be pleased to hear that the committee are still planning events for 2022. Hopefully, circumstances will look very different and we will be able to meet up again as we did before.

The committee would like to share with some of the ideas that we think will make membership of Somerton u3a an even more enjoyable experience with individual members having a greater input into what we do.

As part of a general plan to regenerate Somerton u3a, when the time is right, the committee hope to hold face-to-face meetings with members throughout the whole year. These are some of our ideas; some are definite, others, just thoughts at the moment.

No dates obviously, have been set for any of these events.

An open forum meeting with members to discuss plans

A meeting with group leaders to launch the newly updated group leaders' guide,

Beacon training sessions for group leaders,
New members' coffee mornings

A meeting to discuss the planning and organisation of large events such as National u3a, the 25th Anniversary of Somerton u3a. This could be 2 separate events or 1 combined. We would love to know what you think and if you would like to join the team.

Christmas events 2022. Obviously a long way ahead and we would welcome members' comments on past events and possible new ideas.

Happy New Year!

Please send all articles for the Newsletter to the editor

kaywilliamson46@hotmail.com

Deadline for the February edition...20th January

No entries can be accepted after this date.

Pictures welcome, but keep script brief

Minimum formatting please...no pdfs!

Web site: <https://u3asites.org.uk/somerton/home>