

Tenterden u3a

A COVID-19 Journal

2020 – 2021

Being an account of how Tenterden u3a survived the COVID years 2020- 2021

Compiled from individual journals kept by members of the Tenterden u3a.

COMMITTEES

March 2020 – July 2020

Chair: Jenny Stevens

Vice Chair: Tom Evans

Secretary: Anna Toombs

Treasurer: Rosalind Johnson

Committee: Lindy Bates, Maddie Heath, Suzanne Hore,
Maureen Kavanagh, Richard Parsons, Barbara Sillett

July 2020 – May 2021

Chair: Jenny Stevens

Vice Chair: Lindy Bates

Secretary: Anna Toombs

Treasurer: Rosalind Johnson

Committee: Lindy Bates, Tom Evans, Maureen Kavanagh,
Richard Parsons, Barbara Sillett

May 2021 – July 2021

Chair: Jenny Stevens

Vice-Chair: Lindy Bates

Secretary: Anna Toombs

Treasurer: Rosalind Johnson

Committee: Tom Evans, Liz Hammond, Suzanne Hore,
Gina Robertson, Barbara Smith, Sally White

CONTRIBUTORS

Roy Arnold, Belinda Bailey, Lindy Bates, Elizabeth Breen,
Raymond Crawford, Bob Coulson, Cathy Dalton, Tom Evans,
Jean Fagg, Doreen Healey, Maureen Kavanagh, Kate Manning,
Linda Matthews, Richard Parsons, Tony Richter, Ina Smith,
Jenny Stevens, Peter Sutherland, Anna Toombs, Pam Wait

PHOTOGRAPHERS

Lindy Bates, Cathy Dalton, Jean Fagg, Sue Fergusson,
Lindsay Hammond, Richard Parsons, Ann Reeves, Donald Stevens,
Jenny Stevens, Anna Toombs, Pam Wait, Richard Wheeler

PRODUCTION TEAM

Richard Archer, Lindy Bates, Maureen Kavanagh, Roger Martin,
Jenny Stevens, Anna Toombs, Richard Wheeler

The Beginning

World News

January/February 2020

At the beginning of the year there were rumours of a new coronavirus disease but at that stage it seemed so far away. Memories of SARS and Ebola probably led us to think that, deadly as it was, it would be confined to continents far away. However, by 25 January, the first case of coronavirus is confirmed in France.

After cases of COVID-19 had spread beyond Wuhan, in China, the WHO declared, at the end of January, that it constituted a Public Health Emergency of International Concern.

31 January: This devastating virus crosses the channel and reaches our shores. An overseas student and his mother, who have travelled from Hubei, are both in York when they are diagnosed and confirmed to have Coronavirus. A sense of foreboding begins to spread.

6 Feb: A further three cases have now been confirmed.

11 Feb: The World Health Organisation declares that COVID-19 can be considered a pandemic. The number of UK cases now rises to nine, all linked to a Brighton man who had attended a conference in Singapore.

29 Feb: The first case, not linked to travel, has been confirmed.



Personal Snapshots

January/February 2020

Kate Manning:

2020 was ushered in as every year.....wishing family & friends a Happy New Year. Late January early February there were odd news flashes of a new disease in China. But that was so far away we paid very little attention to this news, it was too remote to bother us.

During February the contagion crept closer.....from a Cruise ship anchored in Japan; across continents until suddenly we had reports of this strange infection in Northern Italy.

Tony Richter:

The year 2020 started as other year since my retirement in September 2018 - a quiet start at home in Smarden surrounded by family from nearby Pluckley and Colwyn Bay in North Wales. In the news, we heard distant rumblings about a new virus in China apparently transmitted to humans from bats, for which there was no vaccine. But it all seemed so far off. No need to panic, we thought. It will pass as SARS did in Asia a few years earlier. How wrong can you be!!

As January passed to February, we were being told by serious looking Government Ministers flanked by even more serious looking health experts, to keep two metres apart, wear a mask in public and to wash our hands frequently. Singing *Happy Birthday* whilst washing our hands would keep infection at bay, we were informed! This seemed a minor inconvenience compared to our friends in Germany and France, who were telling us of much more draconian and far reaching measures being put in place in their countries to prevent the virus from spreading. Typical German thoroughness and French emotional response, we thought. No need to panic.

Once again, how wrong we were!



***“We were informed,
Singing Happy Birthday
whilst washing our
hands would keep
infection at bay!”***

Jenny Stevens:

In February, before COVID-19 took hold in the UK, my son, Anthony, and two children arrived from Shanghai, China to stay with my oldest son and escape from COVID-19.

I went to stay with them several times to help with home schooling as Anthony was still teaching on-line. I saw what a struggle it was for a single parent to juggle teaching his own pupils, having management meetings on-line and living in a different country and home.

SAGE – Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies

Scientific experts provide evidence and advice as part of the SAGE process. HMG attendees listen to this discussion, to help inform policy work, and are able to provide the scientific experts with context on the work of government where appropriate.

25 February 2020

SAGE discussed a paper modelling four non-pharmaceutical interventions: university and school closures, home isolation, household quarantine and social distancing, including use of interventions in combination.

All measures require implementation for a significant duration in order to be effective.

Any combination of measures would slow but not halt an epidemic. NHS needs must be considered in any decisions to alter the epidemic curve.

The UK government will need to clearly communicate its rationale for its decisions.

www.gov.uk SAGE 10 minutes: Coronavirus (COVID-19) response, 25 February 2020

March 2020 Political

8 March: England has now had its first death from COVID-19 and the daily number of infections has risen to 273.

10 – 13 March: The Cheltenham Festival goes ahead – will this lead to more cases?

12 March: Public Health England stops doing any contact tracing as it is overwhelmed.

17 March: Government guidelines instruct the over-seventies and vulnerable people with underlying health problems to self-isolate for twelve weeks. London is in virtual lockdown. As the pandemic develops, it becomes apparent that London is two weeks ahead of the rest of the country in terms of the severity of COVID-19 infections. NHS England announces that all non-urgent operations in England will be postponed to free up hospital beds.

23 March: To prevent the escalating rate of spread of COVID-19, the Government announces a three-week Lockdown to begin immediately. In a surreal moment,

Community

The growing feeling amongst the community, that Lockdown and Social Distancing was on the horizon, was gaining pace. Panic buying bordered on a frenzy of buying and hoarding food and goods. Supermarket shelves in Waitrose and Tesco, were stripped bare and this was reflected in the country at large. Bizarrely, toilet rolls and pasta were the first products that disappeared.



Lockdown: Panic buying of groceries continues and on-line delivery bookings from supermarkets are booked up within moments of release. There is so much information for the population to process. So much change. There is a growing silence on land and in the skies. There is stillness. Few cars, few people on the High Street. The public are processing reams of information that is coming from all directions. St Mildred's Church has immediately responded to the crisis by launching

“DO NOT ENTER THE SURGERY. - COVID-19 is now a national and international problem”

Tenterden u3a

THE CHAIRMAN'S DIARY

13 March: Tom Evans sends an email to all members stating the risks posed by COVID-19. All monthly meetings, drop in for coffee, any group meetings in public premises are cancelled. The committee promises support and continued contact. Letter going to all those not on email explaining the above.

17 March: The Strictly Singles group sets up a buddy system, one person phoning seven others each week.

19 March: First lockdown. Sub-committee group meets on Zoom (Tom Evans, Jenny Stevens, Lindy Bates and Linda Matthews). We get organised very quickly, as we have a committee meeting planned for 2 April. Tom helping people use Zoom. Tom sends 'best practical advice' to committee members to make it as easy as possible. We specifically discuss how to support groups to keep 'meeting' using on-line resources. All COVID-19 related information to be put on Tenterden u3a website. Find out information regarding AGM. We are thinking that we might hold it on 20 August (three months after it should have been held). Tom stresses the need for positive thoughts: how we can work well together with groups; take

the country stops. No cars on the roads, no people on the streets, motorways empty.

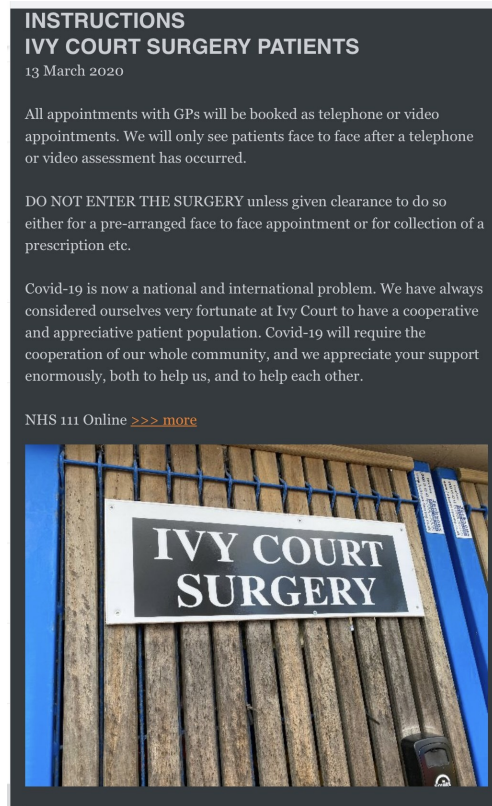


Social distancing – to maintain a two-metre distance between people – is implemented. Everyone is instructed to “Stay Home, Protect the NHS and Save Lives”. The Government webpage is directing the vulnerable to stay indoors and self-isolate. Whilst the UK has felt a strong growing undercurrent and the inevitability that a lockdown is imminent, the air of stunned shock and surprise is tangible. A financial package (furlough) for PAYE workers of 80% of weekly pay is to be paid by the state. A package has been drawn together by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rishi Sunak, to help the millions of self-employed during this period of lockdown. Deaths from COVID-19 continue to rise dramatically.

The Viral Times, a newsletter that is sent out every morning to the congregation and anyone else in the town (and beyond) who supplies an e-mail address and signs up. It provides both a spiritual and a psychological boost everyday with its gentle humour, caring words and plenty of spiritual thoughts and prayers. It is through The Viral Times that many learn that Dr Neil Pillai, an immensely popular member of the Ivy Court Surgery team, has COVID-19 and has been hospitalised.

My Tenterden, the on-line newsletter run by Sue Ferguson, aims to keep the town informed and up-to-date throughout the pandemic.

The first alert, March 2020, starkly announced from Ivy Court Surgery “DO NOT ENTER THE SURGERY. COVID-19 is now a national



and international problem”. It is not possible to physically see a doctor, all appointments will be by telephone or video. The next week’s news was of Helping in Tenterden, asking “Can you help? Do you need help?”. This was the start of the volunteer organisation in the town which grew to over 200 volunteers helping on over 1000 calls in the first six months, collecting and delivering prescriptions, shopping, giving advice, telephoning the lonely and walking dogs. Truly, the Tenterden community excelled at this time.

photos of Spring flowers for the Update. Test run for committee meeting

23 March: Maddie Heath, Group Co-ordinator, sends an email to Group Leaders regarding Zoom. Inundated with information from National Office with advice on managing AGM’s during COVID-19 and coronavirus guidance sheets.

23 March: We hold a trial Zoom meeting for the committee. As Tom has to resign as Vice-Chair, after 3 years, Lindy agrees to step in but only for one year. We agree we need new committee members and a prospective Vice-Chair, then Chair. Maureen Kavanagh agrees to write a diary of Tenterden u3a’s experience of the COVID-19 emergency.

24 March: Tom runs Zoom tests for u3a Art of the Image and French groups. It takes time and effort as people struggle with unfamiliar technology but, in the end, we are getting there and almost everyone manages to connect correctly. The Literature group keep their spirits up by sharing the wealth of entertaining cartoons that are appearing on-line. A very British response to a very frightening situation!

Personal Snapshots

Richard Parsons: During March, we were enjoying ourselves in our motorhome in Portugal, buoyed by the relaxed reaction to Coronavirus exercised by the Portuguese people, when suddenly it became more serious! A BBC report popped up to say that some European countries were considering closing their borders. We thought it was time to go home! So a dash to Blighty started across northern Portugal and Spain, where we made good progress in bright weather and incredibly quiet roads. We learned that there was a sort of lockdown on Sunday but the traffic on Monday in France made up for this with very heavy traffic in appalling weather. After a long day, we crept inside the French border at night and relaxed in the knowledge that France would be only too pleased to see us leave their shores in two days. Fortunately, on hearing that our supermarkets were overwhelmed, we were able to shop in France in a supermarket, normally full of British holidaymakers, which was deserted. With relief we were able to catch the first available ferry home having driven 1300 miles in two and a half days. We learned later that other motor-homers were a bit slower off the mark and found that they had to leave their vans behind and fly home with all the accompanying stress. We were very pleased to see the White Cliffs of Dover and arrived home much relieved.

Kate Manning: March catapulted us into a strange new world... new vocabulary... new restrictions... new faces on the TV screen every night. We were ordered to 'shield'... to stay in our 'bubble' to protect the NHS. Daily hospital admissions were broadcast and the death toll reported in gloomy tones. The Economy shut down; transport was reduced to near zero and the sky was cleared of aircraft as we all had to stay at home. Cities became ghost towns as people were ordered to work from home. The Government began giving out enormous sums of money to people unable to work.

Normal life died and we were thrust into a strange world where only COVID-19 was treated as serious... on national news only COVID-19 seemed to be important.

Tom Evans: *22 March* – It is another fine morning and the first time the ground has been dry enough for months to take the dogs for a walk in the fields, which are deserted in the spring sunshine. Jack the terrier races off across the grass, still with touches of frost in places, chasing his tennis ball, bringing it back to be thrown again. Otto the dachshund (long and silky of fur, very short of leg) romps along merrily behind, his tail raised like a flag to show his pleasure. The world is a better and less anxious place.

23 March – At lunchtime, a text from the NHS arrives with the unwelcome and unexpected news that I am in the 'extremely high risk' category and must be shielded for at least twelve weeks. No leaving the house for any reason, keeping two metres away from Francesca at all times, sleeping in a different room, using a different bathroom and lavatory, and eating separately. Very shaking.



27 March – We sign up for regular deliveries of milk, yoghurt and bread. Francesca goes to the market to buy vegetables, a loaf, and sausages and mince from the butcher. She spots a moment when Boots is almost empty, dives in and gets my prescription and a small bottle of hand sanitiser. In the evening, checking the Waitrose site, I get a priority delivery slot for Sunday morning. Feel very smug and place a large order. To my delight there are tissues, lavatory paper and paracetamol! I include two bottles of wine and two of tonic, but forget several essentials.

29 March – Waitrose delivery arrives, bang on time. Francesca takes it in, disinfecting all the packaging before putting all the groceries away. We are getting better at keeping our distance, doing the ‘two-metre tango’. I unload the dishwasher and put away clean cutlery and crockery; Francesca handles the dirties and does the manual washing-up. It is my turn to cook this evening.

Anna Toombs: The Beginning: the weekend of March 14/15 we were in Devon. We knew the virus was spreading but there was no sign of it in Dartmouth, just one restaurant commented on a few cancelled bookings. We could not work the TV in the rented flat and we heard no news. On the Monday we drove to Winchester where we had booked two

nights in a hotel. The TV news that evening showed cases rising, medical staff in PPE and supermarket shelves empty of loo rolls and pasta. I was very alarmed and we decided to go home the next morning. At 8am I walked to a

small town-centre supermarket and bought food for a few days. We reached home and felt safe in our ‘burrow’, contacting family and friends by phone or email. A week later lockdown was declared. My strongest feeling, apart from general concern and uncertainty, was worry about getting food. The next day I was third in the queue waiting to go into Waitrose. They were opening early for the elderly and vulnerable and again I bought for several days. My younger son then made me promise I would not go into shops; he insisted, I promised. I booked the only available on-line delivery slot, a whole month ahead. Neighbours helped with perishables, the same son did one shop for us which took him four hours queueing outside and again at the checkout. He was working at home and doing half the home schooling for three primary age children - I could not ask

him to do shopping again. We managed somehow, and a few weeks later had a system; a priority status for booking a Waitrose delivery as we are 70+ and Ian has diabetes, and a regular order to collect from Cranbrook Farm Shop - they carry it out to the car for me.



Pamela Wait
To Alan Bates
15 Mar 2020 at 12:19



I can't believe this lockdown news and if we can't get out or let people in it's crazy.

I will have to just breathe the garden air if the weather allows as I can't even get on my bike to have a good cycle if this comes to pass! There are a large percentage of grandparents doing kiddy care so how will that help the country to keep working? We have to wait to get the full picture really.

My elder son is financial director of a company and says we are in for much turbulence. He says there is genuine fear and panic in the business world, many will go bust.

He cited BA being troubled even before the news broke yesterday. Many small businesses will go, especially anything attached to the travel industry but think of all the unemployment and lack of standards of living the young folk are accustomed to. Not to mention the Brexit problems.

It's giving us a little taste of the dreadful fear and changed social conditions of life in Europe during the many medieval plagues.

I will get on to Diane Davies who will probably agree to changing to next year.

I feel claustrophobic!! Love Pamxx

Sent from my iPad

Tony Richter: In March, with horrific news and Downing Street Briefings every evening about the NHS being stretched to breaking point with very sick patients and steadily increasing numbers of deaths due to COVID-19, we found ourselves in a complete national lockdown. News was full of a severe lack of personal protective equipment (PPE) for NHS, care personnel and other staff collectively known as ‘front line’, who had to look after the vulnerable and sick patients. There were also shortages of ventilators for the sickest patients, with companies like Dyson being encouraged to switch production into life-saving machines. All these people became the new heroes fighting the invisible coronavirus enemy, putting their lives at risk every day treating patients, who had caught the virus against which there

was no antidote. Every Thursday night at 8pm we would step outside and clap for the front-line workers! Posters with rainbows expressing our gratitude for the work they were doing appeared in the front windows of almost every house.

Jenny Stevens: My son and two grandchildren left England to return to China. Little did they know when they arrived at the airport that they would all be tested positive for COVID-19. They went through an extremely difficult time for the next month. The first night the children were separated from their father and sent to a different hospital. After getting help from his employer, he was reunited with the children but they then had to stay in hospital for two weeks until they all three had negative tests results.



“Tom encourages us to stay positive and capture the beauty of the spring for the Update.”



April 2020 Political

Prime Minister Boris Johnson is admitted to Saint Thomas Hospital, London, on 6 April, after he tests positive for **COVID-19**.

The Prime Minister is then transferred to Intensive Care, where he remains until 10 April. Foreign Secretary, Dominic Raab, leads the government meetings during this period. Daily media briefings are held each evening.

In contrast to the continuing crisis, the weather on this Easter weekend is glorious and sunny. The main message for the country from the Government for this Easter weekend is to “stay at home, stay safe and look after the NHS

“Lockdown and social distancing still a necessity”

12 April: The Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, leaves hospital for Chequers after a week at Saint Thomas’ Hospital. On leaving hospital, Mr Johnson gives an emotional thank you to staff.

Community

We in Tenterden maintain our social distancing. Daily walks for exercise are a social highlight of the day. When passing people on the pavements or fields and at a safe distance, people have time to say ‘Hi!’ The feeling within the area is one of care and community.



Life is moving at a calmer pace. The quiet on the roads with the lack of cars, the air space quiet with lack of planes, all makes for a tangible silence. The summer hum of the local Kent and East Sussex steam railway is missed. The post office, supermarkets and delivery persons are keeping the domestic wheels running, whilst the NHS are dealing with the medical pandemic of COVID-19. There is a new rhythm to daily life and it’s quiet, yet it is a quiet against a greening spring landscape bathed in sunlight and birdsong. The lessening noise pollution brings to the forefront the sound of the birds.

Tenterden u3a

2nd April: *Committee meeting via Zoom*

At committee meeting we decide to await a date for AGM until we have more information.

Tom has a Zoom licence meaning that we aren’t limited to 40 minute meetings. We agree to buy one officially for U3A so that we can facilitate group meetings. We are aware that a few members are not on-line – we volunteer to contact them individually by phone and see if there is anything we can do.

Roy Arnold’s *Daily Diversion* is spreading good cheer amongst the Strictly Singles and friends.

Backup for four committee posts is agreed, in case of illness etc. A somewhat chilling moment as we each realise that the ‘etc’ means something rather more final.

As April goes on, many groups start communicating with each other: by Zoom, e-mail, Whats App and telephone providing both support and entertainment. Our phone calls to off-line members seem to be appreciated – Lindy managing to cheer one couple by organising a delivery of wine!

14 April: The Chancellor, Rishi Sunak, delivers the daily media briefing and the Cabinet's decisions and thoughts regarding the social and economic point we have reached. The Chancellor reported that deaths from COVID-19 have tipped 10,000 and the UK economy could shrink by 35%, with two million job losses. He concludes that the cabinet are monitoring and planning, yet lockdown is set to continue until the time is right to loosen social distancing, return people to their work and get the economy buoyant.

15 April: Daily media briefing: Health Minister Matt Hancock reports on Care Homes and the impact of COVID-19. Intense questioning by the correspondents and professionals as to why deaths from COVID-19 in care homes have not, until recently, been included in the national death statistic. Politicians are further questioned as to why a plan to protect this vulnerable group have not, until now, been put in place and protective materials been issued.

16 April: Lockdown is extended for an additional three weeks, as social distancing is showing signs of being effective. Whilst the death rate from COVID-19 appears, from the data, to be increasing, there are signs however of a potential plateauing. An additional one point six billion pounds is being given to councils to enable the continuation of the basic working

Thursday, 16 April: At 8pm, people open their front doors, step outside and clap hands in recognition for all NHS staff, Care Workers and key members of society. Throughout the world, all nations are doing this. This simple action is uniting communities on a micro level and the world on a macro level. Drawing humanity together. The weather is remaining dry and the sun shining. An eight-hour concert "One World Together at Home" is streamed on Saturday 18 April. "One World: Together at Home" is a campaign rallying funds for the COVID-19, a Solidarity Response Fund for the World Health Organisation (WHO). Its focus is to support health care workers doing lifesaving work during the coronavirus pandemic.

By the end of the month the increase in road traffic is evident on the High Street in Tenterden. There is an intangible undercurrent of restlessness in this the sixth week of Lockdown. What dreadful timing for COVID-19 to hit us here in Tenterden when Ivy Court Surgery is being completely rebuilt. Currently the old NHS Clinic building and a string of porta-cabins are being used.

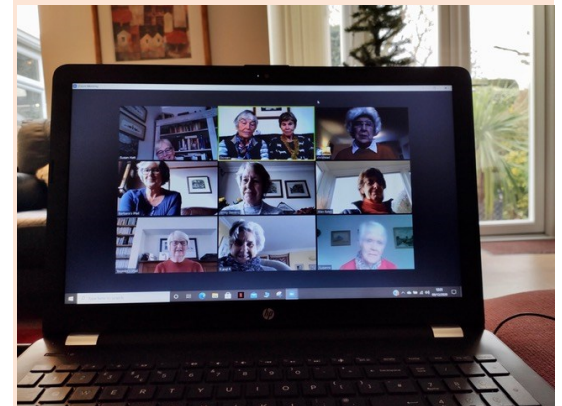
Patients have to wait outside the brick building for a member of staff to ask them why they are there. They then may queue for the pharmacy or be sent across the road to a porta-cabin. It is very difficult to actually see a doctor. Patients need to telephone and ask for a call to be made back to them for a phone consultation.

Symptoms have to be photographed, if suitable, the photo sent by mobile phone. Challenging for the less IT literate. All COVID-19 enquiries have to go through the 111 service and this can result in long delays and inexperienced staff at the other end of the phone.



Jenny emails Carole Dickenson from Kent U3A Network about the advice received from National Office both on means of communication and setting up an AGM.

28th April: Sub committee meeting via zoom.



We discuss the way forward. We propose that the yearly subs, which we are currently collecting, will cover 2021/22 also. Monthly meetings obviously have to be cancelled, but some speakers could present online. Tom will investigate using Zoom for this. Good to hear that many of the groups are now using Zoom, Skype and Whats App. The Wine Group have apparently learnt how to share in the drinking of one bottle of wine over Zoom! In all fifteen groups have found ways to continue their programmes and one new group has been launched: Corona Walks. The members are writing up their routes and including photos of key points.

infrastructure of the mechanisms of society. There is a serious shortage of PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) for all NHS staff and care homes. Questions are being asked and intensive investigative journalism being undertaken.

19 April: The Education Minister speaks at the four o'clock Sunday Briefing. The Minister announces that no date has been set for children to return to schooling. Children are to remain at home.

The daily political briefing reports that the deaths from COVID-19 are rising but not accelerating. There is an indication that whilst Lockdown and Social Distancing are still a necessity, varying scenarios of the lessening of Lockdown are being planned. It has been identified that the most vulnerable group, the over seventies and those with underlying health problems, is to be the final wave out of Lockdown. It was suggested that this situation could last until 2021.

29 April: Today's briefing presents the daily death data from COVID-19 that now includes all deaths, not just hospital deaths from Covid 19. The alarming figure now totals twenty-six thousand.

Personal Snapshots

Tom Evans: *8 April:* Today is strange and disturbing, with the Prime Minister still in intensive care and talk about possibly letting different groups out of lockdown at different times. A little after mid-day a white, glass-sided horse-drawn hearse, pulled by four grey horses with red cockades, driven by two grooms in silk top-hats, passed eastwards down the High Street toward the cemetery. There was, though, no following cortège. An hour later, the hearse returned empty, without the coffin. It is a beautiful afternoon, warm and sunny as if it were early summer. We take tea with hot-cross-buns in the garden. Birds sing, a pigeon is sitting on the nest in the bay tree and the white weatherboard of the house shines brightly against the blue sky. A handful of jackdaws chatter lazily in the budding branches of the plane trees beyond. Altogether, Tenterden is idyllically peaceful. Journalists and broadcasters are beginning to interview recovering patients about their experience of intensive care. Everyone who has experienced it comments on the extreme unpleasantness of the illness, the terrifying feeling of suffocation, and the fear of death.

Monday 13 April: After supper (cold beef, salad and the rest of the claret) we watch *Così fan Tutti* streamed from the Royal Opera House. Has more

beautiful music ever been written? Or a more bitter-sweet play? The performance is wonderful, with four young, athletic and good-looking singers who can act as well as sing. Despina and Don Alfonso match them.

Anna Toombs: I remember, during lockdown, I found it hard to concentrate and I could not resist looking at news bulletins on TV, and on-line. I only wanted to watch entertaining TV, and I could only read easy, escapist books – lots of crime fiction and sagas like the Cazalets. Walking: most important. We have been allowed an hour of exercise and we have used it! Tenterden walkers are very friendly – almost everybody says ‘Good morning’ or ‘Hello there’ with a smile (if not wearing masks!) and often goes on to briefly chat, reminding us that we are all in this together. Noticeably, when we have walked with a son near Tunbridge Wells it has been different, only an occasional greeting. The other change in walking is the large increase in the number of dogs. At times it seems that every family has a dog to be exercised. Understandably, of course, they are such excellent companions, and love to play with children. In the summer we saw lots of puppies and we now see lots of ‘teenage’ dogs- I just hope that the new owners can cope with doggy adolescence!

May 2020 Political

The daily political briefings state that the current Lockdown has had impact; evidenced by the data and the slowly decreasing rate of deaths that are recorded from COVID-19.

BAME, vulnerable and the higher risk vulnerable members of the population are exercising their voice not to be marginalised at this point. A powerful voting body, as there are twelve million over sixty-five year-old voters on register.

6 May: The daily briefing reports the planning on easing Lockdown. The Community Minister announces that building work can now resume.

Sunday 10 May: The Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, addresses the UK, with a major statement of the government's planned steps out of Lockdown. A generally confusing message that leaves both sides, government and public, unsure as to the understanding of the plans and proposals. Not a cohesive plan

Community

Tenterden has more footfall now with social distance queuing at the bank, post office and Webb's, the hardware store. More usage of takeaways from the local restaurants.

Some sections of society returning to work. Caution is tangible. There is an increase of cars on the roads.

13 May: More people are to be seen on Tenterden High Street. Builders are returning to work.

We are relieved to know that Dr Neil Pillai has survived COVID-19 and is recovering at home.

People cannot go to Church but the Church can come to them – Lindsay Hammond and Jeanette Kennet have been spotted around Tenterden filming daily prayers from all the hidden corners of the town. These are then put on the Church's website for all to enjoy and share. The Viral Times too has been put into a virtual form to bring a live voice into people's homes. The learning curve and the ingenuity with which the team tackle their filming exploits have endeared them to all!

Webbs hardware store has been a lifeline to many residents. As people have been stuck at home, there has been a surge in DIY activities. Graham Webb and his staff have served customers from behind a trestle table against the doorway walking backwards and forwards into the shop bringing goods out to customers. There has often been a socially distanced queue while people wait patiently.



Tenterden u3a

20th May: Tom sends out Zoom meeting guidance to all the committee – specifically about AGM and Monthly Meetings

21st May: Committee Zoom meeting.

It is agreed that we will hold our first Zoom Monthly meeting in June, followed by the AGM using Zoom on 16th July. Tom will organise trial meetings with speakers to ensure all will run smoothly.

Maddie resigns from the committee as Group Co-ordinator. Lindy takes on this post and Jenny will organise speakers with Pam Wait.

It was decided to hold the November Study Morning, free of charge, using Zoom.

Despite being increasingly aware that we are the over-70s and vulnerable and some of us are having to shield totally, as a committee we are pushing this aside and attempting to move forward positively and take the members with us.

covering England, Scotland, Northern Island and Wales. The statement differs from those given to the populations of Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland by their elected Governments. In essence, the public are encouraged to return to work if unable to work from home – encouraged to go to work by car, cycling or walking and avoiding public transport wherever possible. Sports and walking restrictions are to be expanded. The most vulnerable and the plus seventy-year-olds are advised to stay at home. Future plans are to be made for the reopening of shops.

Monday 11 May: The leader of the opposition Labour Party, Sir Keir Starmer, states that the nation requires clarity and reassurance that as yet are lacking from the PM.

14 May: The Government wishes children in certain age categories: Reception, Year One and Year Six to return to school on 1 June. Teachers, supported by their unions, do not feel safe to do so.

Personal Snapshots

Tom Evans:

*“One lives in the moment,
and with memories”*

Saturday 9 May: Dragging on, through an exceptionally fine spring, confinement becomes monotonous. Our Prime Minister has survived and is back at work. News is largely replaced by anxious vox pop and speculation about how we will emerge from lock-down, and how badly wrecked the economy will remain, for how long. In the circumstances, daily events hardly seem worth noting and personal feelings simply self-indulgent.

There is no sign that the ‘extremely vulnerable’ are likely to be let out any time soon, perhaps not even until there is a vaccine and the pandemic is officially over, which could be a year. This prospect is too depressing to contemplate. So one lives in the moment, and with memories. But the moment itself is shrunken and confined, to the house and the garden, to the desktop - and at two metres from each other in this peculiar form of imprisonment. Confinement therefore encourages a backward look and reflection which, in older age, threatens regret and melancholy. Underneath it all is a constant swell of anxiety about our daughter in Berlin.

Wednesday 13 May: The delivery of milk, bread and yoghurt has sometimes been late, but today there was nothing. Apparently it had been stolen from the doorstep in the night.

We have decided to cancel the order: our lovely neighbours at the Chocolate Shop will supply us milk from their twice-weekly Silcock’s delivery (which is nicer too, richer and creamier).

Sunday 17 May: As the ninth week of confinement comes to an end, traffic on the main road is noticeably busier with cars and motorbikes buzzing to and from Rye and the beaches, but the pavements remain empty. I am told that the High Street is looking sad and some of the closed-up shops are beginning to show signs of dereliction, previously unthinkable in this comfortable little town.

Regeneration of the High Street is going to be an important and difficult issue when this is over and we see how many businesses have closed for good. Presenting the feasibility study results to the Council on Monday (by Zoom of course), I suggested that a cinema on the High Street would be a much-needed centre of sociability and motor for regeneration, although we are frankly not at all clear how the capital could be raised at the moment.

Keeping everything together becomes more of an effort the longer lock-down continues. People are more fragile and less focussed; organising u3a groups has become more difficult and some members have difficulty with video-conference good manners. But the effort must be made. We will start holding monthly u3a meetings on-line by Zoom in June, following a successful test with a potential speaker, and plan to hold a Zoom AGM in either July or August.

May 18: The Prime Minister's senior adviser, Dominic Cummings, made a lockdown busting trip to Durham and Barnard Castle earlier in the year which now hits the headlines – clearly one rule for the general population and one rule for Johnson's advisers. Cummings evidently left London, knowing that his wife had COVID-19 and they might have child care problems. He drove 300 miles to Durham to stay on his parents' property. A few days later, Cummings was seen at Barnard Castle which, apparently, he drove to prior to returning to London, to test his eyesight which had suffered due to contracting COVID-19. He appears in the Rose Garden at Downing Street to explain to the country.

A track and trace system is supposedly going to be in place from 1 June. Travellers to the UK should self-isolate for 14 days. NHS staff and care workers from overseas will be exempt from the immigration health surcharge. Government spending on Coronavirus rises to £62 billion.

Jenny Stevens: VE DAY

8 May. Many streets celebrated VE Day as we did in Beacon Oak Walk. We contacted several neighbours and suggested we celebrate with some bubbly. Some put up flags, brought their own glasses and we really enjoyed a couple of hours chatting at a distance outside our house. A great way to remember and celebrate the end of WW2 – and to re-establish social communications.



Tony Richter:

THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH

As regular church goes, the way we worshiped radically had to change. During one of our zoomed services, Bishop Rose asked us to consider three questions, which are worthy of noting for this journal together with some personal reflections about them.

The questions were:

What are we noticing?

What have we learnt?

What can we let go of and allow to die?

What are we noticing?

The most immediate change to worship we noticed was that churches were closed except for private prayer. As stated, regular services in our benefice of Smarden and Biddenden were still continued thanks to technology as an enabler. Having never heard of Zoom before the pandemic, congregations of all ages rapidly became adept at handling this new technology. In this way, church was brought into our homes and we witnessed not only the joining of the congregations of Smarden and Biddenden (which rarely happened in normal times!), but also the joining by members from other parishes, which were either in interregnum (like Bethersden, High Halden and Woodchurch) or where zoomed services were not offered. This greater reach meant that attendance was much higher than in normal times and that services could be broadcast from different locations. For example, the service celebrating Rogation Sunday one beautifully sunny May morning was zoomed to our homes from the top of Biddenden Church tower with stunning views across the Kent countryside!

However, these benefits had to be weighed up against a number of less welcome changes. For example, for some congregation members, meeting physically in church was valued not only for worship but also social interaction. Loneliness generally became a major issue for many, especially those living alone, in care homes and the vulnerable.

28 May: The last Clap for Carers. Rishi Sunak, the Chancellor, says that the Job Retention Scheme will finish at the end of October – 8.4 million people are currently covered by the scheme.

While government scientific officers are warning that lockdown has been eased too soon, competitive sport is to be allowed behind closed doors and Conservative MPs urge the PM to reduce the 2 metre distancing rule amid concerns for the hospitality industry.

COVID-19 Testing capability now hitting 200,000 tests a day.

Even though more people were attending services, the amount of money coming in from congregations fell off dramatically. Indeed, significantly reduced income was a common problem faced by many charities, including religious groups. Church officials quickly devised ways in which donations could be made electronically, but for some this was a real stretch and the absence of the ability to collect cash during a service as in pre-coronavirus days has hit church finances hard.

“Loneliness generally became a major issue”

What have we learnt?

The most important lesson many of us learnt was that less traffic on the roads and scaled back industry during lockdown brought immediate benefits for the environment. Levels of CO2 plummeted. Our slower pace of life meant we were able to notice nature much more. We were blessed with beautiful weather in May, which encouraged us to spend time exercising outdoors, where we could appreciate the huge variety of bird song and take note of the coming springtide much more than in previous years.

We have had to learn to be much more flexible with our religion. For many, this is seen as a positive

development and may be the catalyst for change that the Church so badly needs, in order to flourish and be sustainable for the future. For example, we have become accustomed to taking communion at home by serving ourselves. And due to the severe restrictions on numbers permitted to attend in person, even weddings and funerals are now regularly broadcast live via Zoom, which would have been unthinkable before. Some like me also now regularly attend daily morning or evening prayers on Zoom, which has led to a greater study, appreciation and understanding of the Bible.

What can we let go of and allow to die?

The Church is facing a real struggle even without the impact of coronavirus. With a little over 3% of the population attending church, far reaching changes were anyway on the horizon. An increasingly secular society with smaller numbers attending Church services has been a worrying trend for several decades. But all issues associated with this worrying trend have been brought into sharp focus by the pandemic, not least the dire state of finances. That said, during this time of national emergency, resistance to change will hopefully be less than before the pandemic. I hope to play my part in bringing about much needed changes for a flourishing and sustainable future. Nevertheless, allowing some practices to die is not going to be easy!

June 2020 Political

1 June: Schools reopen for Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 pupils.

The Rule of Six for meeting people outdoors comes into effect – but without prior parliamentary scrutiny. The death rate for week ending 22 May was 2,872, the lowest since March. The total death toll thus far is reckoned to be 50,032 by the Guardian. Jacob Rees-Mogg decides that MPs will no longer be able to vote from home. BMA (British Medical Association) urges the wearing of face masks in all situations where the 2m rule cannot be observed. The R rate is said to be between 0.7 and 1. The rate of new infections for the last week in May is around 39,000 per week, down from 53,000 the previous week. Black Lives Matter demonstrations are held over the weekend following the killing of George Floyd in the US.

8 June: Quarantine rules for travellers come into force and those coming into the country will have to isolate for 14 days. The death rate on 8 June is lowest since lockdown began – 55 fatalities in England.

Community

18 June – St Mildred’s opens its doors once more: “inside cleaning, hoovering and dusting have been done, hand sanitisers duly dispatched for use, appropriate signage installed and areas for prayer set up”. The Viral Times, issued by St Mildred’s every morning since lockdown began, reaches its 100th issue on 25 June. On Saturday 27 June, it is replaced by Connect-Up. As it becomes clear that not everyone will be able, or indeed feel safe, to attend Church Services, Lindsay and his team propose live-streaming. This seems a natural way forward, especially since theatre and musical events have been accessed on-line during the Lockdown period.

The Recreation Ground: this park has been a major resource for the people of Tenterden, used intensively as never before. At the start of lockdown people seemed cautious in coming out, the playgrounds were closed, plastic tape sealing off the play equipment as though after motor accidents. As the weather turned sunny and very warm people came into the park – early morning exercise groups, many in lycra, practising yoga, Pilates or strenuous movements, then groups of young mums sitting two metres apart on rugs on the grass, family groups playing football, cricket, or having picnics (keeping our dog away has been difficult!), friends sharing a bottle of wine, sitting two metres apart, and even a weekly meeting of people from the Social Hub, sitting in a circle on deckchairs lustily singing.

Tenterden u3a

“Baby Boomers become Baby Zoomers”

Despite these life-changing events, in just two months we find that we are adapting to new way of being. The Baby Boomers have become Baby Zoomers!

Excited, although apprehensive, we hold our first monthly meeting on Zoom. It is very successful with about 70 members joining to hear and see Andrew Baker talking on Tsar Vladimir Putin. Everyone feels connected and Andrew gives a very informative and lively talk. Quite a triumph with no audience participation as everyone is muted!

Groups meeting this month – still on-line despite now being allowed six people outside:

Debating, Twilight Golf, Art Appreciation, Wine Appreciation, Pottery, Strictly Singles, French Conversation, Birding, Science, Town Literature, Current Affairs, Art of the Image, Let’s Improve Our French,

Personal Snapshots

Concerns raised over a Government review that found the BAME community are twice as likely to die from COVID-19 as the white community. Prof Neil Ferguson says that half of the lives lost could have been saved if lockdown had come a week earlier.

Support bubbles are launched – households with one adult can now be linked with one other household of any size, allowing them to even stay overnight together. Medical appointments and births can be accompanied and visits are allowed to people in hospitals, hospices and care homes.

15 June: There is a general re-opening of retail shops and 'public facing' businesses but not hospitality and entertainment venues. Churches are open for private prayer. Facemasks are mandatory on public transport. Dexamethasone is to be made available through the NHS – it has been found to significantly reduce the number of deaths when given to those who are hospitalised.

Apparently the contact tracing app is not a priority and may not be ready until winter.....

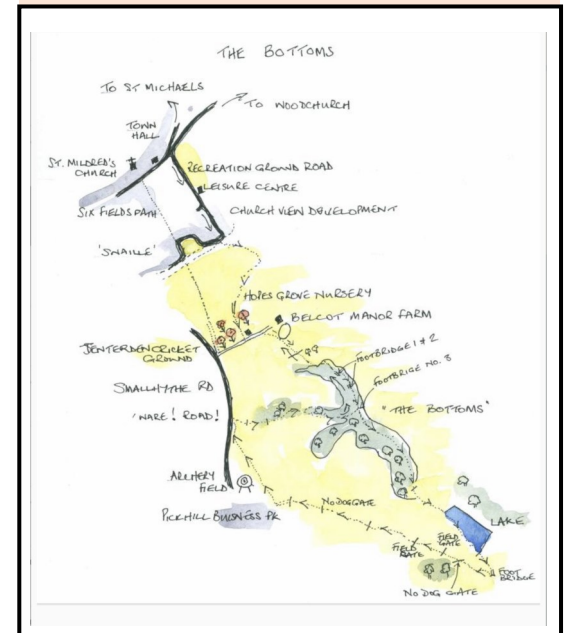
Tom Evans: *Monday 1 June:* Today the restrictions on the shielded were eased, very slightly, and for the first time in eleven weeks I was officially permitted to go for a walk with Francesca and the dogs. It was another glorious morning, with full sun, and the dogs were highly excited to be going out all together. Last time I went for a walk, it was early spring: now, with no apparent transition, it is high summer. The grass in the fields is tall, feathery and beginning to yellow; the leaves on the trees are darkening to their midsummer green, almost black in the heavy shadows. Kent is at its most luscious. A drift of elderflower gave off an intoxicatingly sweet scent, traffic was a distant hum, the birds were loud. Francesca and I dutifully maintained our



distance from each other (how strange) while Jack the terrier chased and fetched his ball, time and again, as Otto the dachshund trotted proudly behind—barking loudly to warn off any other dog-walkers.

Lindy Bates: Starting to socialise! The Rule of Six changes everything! We get half way through the first day and suddenly realise that we can and indeed should do things differently. Who to phone and ask over for tea? We decide to have close friends – when I phone to ask them they too had been thinking about getting together. But, we both wonder, how does one do this? What do we talk about? We set out the chairs at a careful 2m distance. The hand gel sits on the table. I wash before preparing the tea. It is very strange but, oh, we did enjoy the talk and kept going without pause until the sun started to set.

Gardening, Maps, Psychology, Crime Fiction, Corona Walking Maps. Zoom guide meeting.



Astra-Zeneca and Oxford University have reached a deal to begin manufacture of a potential vaccine.

UK Alert Level is lowered from 4 to 3 with the agreement of the Chief Medical Officers.

23 June: After 92 daily briefings, the final Downing Street briefing is given! After-effects of COVID-19 are becoming apparent: some patients may be left with a permanent lung condition – pulmonary fibrosis.

The Government is urged by medics to launch an immediate review to see if the UK is prepared for the real risk of a second wave.

Efficacy of anti-body tests is being questioned.

People are flocking to the beaches – Boris Johnson urges us all to observe social distancing.

From 6 July, quarantine for those returning to the UK will not be necessary.

We are the worst hit nation in Europe and amongst the G7 countries. 12,000 job losses have been announced.

Richard Parsons: Looking back over the Summer - Day to day life during the COVID-19 Lockdown drastically changed. We were so looking forward to taking up our normal summer activities, which never got started and there seemed no end to the restrictions and difficulties. In order to overcome our disappointment we became more pro-active in domestic issues – the garden had a facelift and some investment in order to reduce labour in the future. This has occupied our energy, time and thoughts and been the salvation to our sanity in these potentially stressful times. The house had a well deserved early spring clean and decoration where needed. Webbs performed a very important role in continuing to supply the materials required for all these chores, as evidenced by the regular queues seen on the pavement! Jan increased her knitting for charities and I had my ukulele, so we kept ourselves busy!

Some activities opened on line fairly quickly and we became reasonably proficient on Zoom, both as host and participant and this enabled us to look outwards to help others who found this new communication tool a little challenging. Looking back on it, we had never heard of Zoom and now it is part of our lives!

Effort was put into keeping in touch with family, friends and neighbours, particularly being sensitive to the needs of elderly and vulnerable people.

Due to our health situation, we have been very cautious and even a walk along the High Street can be very irksome as so many people do not maintain the same vigilance as ourselves.

We have been very keen to look beyond the usual TV menu and searching for and finding series we have missed and concerts, etc. streamed by cultural sources, such as ballet have added to the variety of entertainment. YouTube has been a voyage of discovery as you can jump from one clip to another.

Once I spent three hours starting with Eric and Ernie and ended with Handel's Messiah! Listening to the media has become rather tedious as broadcasters have a tendency to look for the negatives and politicians tend to have unlimited hindsight. So much news, much of it sad that we are in danger of indulging ourselves in negativity! But despite the tide of news broadcasts, many people were confused by some vague, contradictory, rushed and quickly changing restrictions, much of the population were left confused and this continued throughout the rest of the year.

Richard Parsons: The Rule of Six enabled us to be more outward going and we were able to enjoy the company of others in our garden and elsewhere. Some activities were reactivated in a limited way. Fortunately, the good summer weather made life much more bearable. One highlight was being able to organise a street party to celebrate VE Day, which brought most of our neighbours together, but not too close, something we have not done for some time.

Belinda Bailey: I enjoyed the wonderful weather of Spring and Summer and spent much time outside, albeit alone most of the time. I enjoyed a daily walk until one June morning I took a fall in the High Street whilst trying to socially distance myself from a man and his dog. The upshot was a broken collarbone, damaged shoulder and ribs. This really added to my isolation as now I couldn't drive for six weeks. I was soon able to walk again. Collecting a daily newspaper, I often walked up to the High Street and crossed the road just to walk back again. I nearly always went early before there were many people around. I got chatting with a lovely man one day and he was telling me about his memories of Spitfires flying over Tenterden when he was a lad and the war was on. I found these short social exchanges a highlight of my day.