

July 2020 Political

5 July: We clap in honour of the NHS's 72nd Anniversary.



Finally the Arts get some government support- grants and loans of £1.57 billion are made to theatres, galleries, museums and other cultural venues. Boris Johnson has to apologise for suggesting that Care Homes "didn't really follow procedures". Quarantine rules are relaxed for people arriving in UK from 75 countries and overseas territories. Face masks now mandatory in Scotland. Outdoor swimming pools and water parks can now open but very little

"Face masks in shops compulsory"

Community

Blooming Marvellous

Throughout June and July, the St Mildred's intrepid team of Lindsay Hammond and Jeanette Kennet have been filming some of the gardens belonging to members of Tenterden Horticultural Society. Each gardener has spoken about what their garden means to them. Several of the gardens belong to people who are also u3a members. It has been uplifting for all to enjoy these films through the Church website during the summer. Our gardens have meant so much during this year when we have had to make the most of our own space.

BLOOMING MARVELLOUS 4

JUNE 27, 2020



On a wider stage, the BBC Proms will take place in the form of two months of archive concerts, broadcast on BBC Radio 3 and BBC Four. In the final fortnight there will be live concerts but with no audience.

Tenterden u3a

Kent Network meeting 2nd July – Risk assessments from N.O. are mentioned – a new category has been created in the Advice area of the N.O.

Website, called 'Running your U3A during COVID-19'.

This includes advice on how to run AGMs, insurance and risk assessments for outside and remote activities. This is particularly relevant because groups of six are now allowed to meet outside. At the meeting, it is obvious that Tenterden U3A is far more proactive and has far more groups running, with fewer members leaving than most other local U3As.

Committee meeting 10th July – only 10% loss of members. Roughly 24 groups meeting in some form or other. New ones – Stained Glass, Image and Well-being, Spanish Conversation, Golf.

Jenny and Lindy send 'thank you' cards to Group Leaders as we can't hold a G.L.'s lunch.

There follows a great deal of discussion regarding the format of the risk assessment forms.

"Our first Zoom AGM"

time is available to benefit from the move as preparations still need to be made.

“Up to 30 people can now meet outdoors”

13 July: Nail bars and salons etc are now open.

England now has made the wearing of face masks in shops compulsory.

Sir Patrick Vallance estimates that a second COVID-19 wave could result in between 24,500 and 251,000 hospital deaths with a peak in January and February.

Boris Johnson plans for a “significant return to normality by Christmas”.

Meantime, a pilot scheme is announced for reintroducing spectator sports and indoor performances.

The Government has signed a deal for vaccines from BioNtech and Pfizer and Valneva in addition to 100 million doses being developed by University of Oxford and Astra Zeneca.

25 July: Following a rise of COVID-19 cases in Spain travellers from Spain will have to quarantine for 14 days with immediate effect.

Personal Snapshots

Lindy Bates: An opportunity arises to go away – a few days in our grandsons’ empty student house in Bath. We plan to remain isolated as much as possible: we take most of our own food with us and plan to explore the countryside on foot. Our spirits rise as we leave Tenterden and begin seeing different sights as we make our way across Salisbury Plain and on to the rolling hills around Bath. We begin our days at the local Co-op which is empty at 8am and is stocked with a range of croissants, pain au chocolate and pain au raisin and stocks the Guardian! Well-fed and informed, we set out on foot to explore the hills, valleys and tiny villages on the outskirts of the city. One day we venture further to the canal at Bradford-on-Avon. Donning our masks we risk a coffee and later some lunch at



outside venues. There are so many social distancing signs, well-spaced tables, hand gel and considerate welcoming staff that we feel quite safe. Life along the canal aboard narrow boats transports one into a different world. There is no need to go any further afield, to airports or hotels. We return home feeling revived and ready to face the next few months.

It is important to follow Government Guidelines and to make sure these are followed by group leaders. Informative and comprehensive notes are to be sent out to group leaders.

July 16th: Our first Zoom AGM. Imogen Corrigan spoke about Thomas Becket – very well attended. Linda Matthews officially stands down and Barbara Sillett takes over as Membership Secretary. Lindy becomes Vice-Chair and Tom remains on the committee.

22nd July: Lindy sends advice to Group Leaders regarding Risk Assessments. Following this there ensues much discussion amongst some of the committee as to how much responsibility the committee should take over making sure Group Leaders and their members follow COVID-19 safety regulations.



August 2020 Political

Signs of a second COVID-19 wave in Europe.

The isolation period for patients with COVID-19 has been extended from 7 to 10 days.

Restrictions are placed on Greater Manchester and parts of E. Lancs and Yorkshire where there is an increasing rate of transmission.

Trials of spectator sporting events are paused, bowling alleys and casinos will not open as planned. ONS survey indicates COVID-19 cases in England are rising again.

Great Manchester has declared a major incident with rising rates of infection. The launch of *Eat Out to Help Out* – a 50% discount on meals at indoor venues funded by the Government.



Warning that the Test and Trace provisions will not cope when the schools reopen in September. The daily figure of confirmed cases exceeds 1000 for the first time since June.

Community

High Street Shopping: in late August five members (Richard Wheeler, Lindy and Alan Bates, Ian and Anna Toombs) took part in the National u3a High Street Shopping Survey. Every one of Tenterden's shops from Ashford Road to West Cross were photographed and recorded, classified by size and activity. Empty shops were included. Around the country more than 550 u3a's took part and over 20,000 businesses were included. There will be an initial analysis early in 2021 but, most important, there will be a repeat survey in 18 months and a report on High Streets pre- and post-COVID-19 will be published in 2022.

Findings of Tenterden's first survey show we have 190 units in total. As might be expected the number of empty shops is 10% of the total, 19, but most of these are not the fault of Tenterden: they are either national chains that have collapsed, Laura Ashley, Oasis, Monsoon, or on the edge of the shopping area, Orvis or Merchant Chandler, which have been empty for some time and are being converted to residential. Cafes, pubs and restaurants together come to 28, or almost 15% of the total (all those places for coffee!). Charity shops are 6% and estate agents 4% - both lower than many would expect. The remainder, 65% of the total, are very varied – not at all a bad mix for a town the size of Tenterden.

Of course, the normal funfair and circus, Tentertainment and the Folk Festival have not happened, but in the lockdown-loosened period in August there were two events that attracted crowds, socially distanced of course. The Rockits singers put on a showing of the video version of 'Grease' on a huge screen, and later there was a late summer market of food stalls from around the world – both were very popular and a reminder of normal life.

Tenterden u3a

August: Pub Walks Group meet for first time – no pub! Several groups still continue to meet on Zoom as many members are not ready to meet in person.

Government changes re COVID-19 advice keep us on our toes and we make sure our members are fully informed.

Jenny invites all committee members for coffee and cake in 2 groups so that we keep to 6. Good to chat face-to-face and meet socially. We've all missed this interaction.

**“Pub walks but,
No Pub!”**

The A Level debacle. 36% results in England are lower than teacher predictions while 3% are two grades lower. Confusion abounds.

France enters the quarantine list and extra ferries are needed to help returning holidaymakers.

17 – 23 August: A Level and GCSE results are to be based on teacher assessments.

We will not follow France in making masks compulsory in the workplace. Booking a driving test is now possible but the website crashes due to the heavy demand. There are concerns over opening schools but Dr Chris Whitty says children are more likely to be harmed by not returning to school in September.

Tesco creates 16,000 new jobs following exceptional growth in its on-line business. The *Eat Out to Help Out* scheme has been used 64 million times during the first three weeks of August.

Number of COVID-19 cases on 27 August was the highest since mid-June: 1,522.

Despite many businesses enabling their employees to work from home the Government announces another drive to encourage people to return to offices as all the local eateries/sandwich shops are suffering.

Student Unions urge the use of on-line lectures until after Christmas.

Eat Out to Help Out Scheme ends.

Personal Snapshots

Tony Richer: As Spring gave way to Summer, the threat from Coronavirus receded with the warmer weather. Business began to pick up and the easing of travel restrictions, primarily within the UK, brought with it hotly awaited summer vacations. The term “staycation” became familiar to us all. In our case, we finally managed our trip to see family in North Wales. Whilst there, we noted all the camp sites and caravan parks were full to overflowing. Despite clear regulations put in place by the Welsh Government, the practice of social distancing seemed little in evidence.

We also sensed that mental health and wellbeing, which had surfaced in the first lockdown, seemed to abate somewhat as family and friends were able to come together again and the need for schooling children at home supervised by working parents gave way to summer holidays during July and August.

Nevertheless, for children taking public exams i.e. the 16 and 18 year olds, there was an additional stress of not knowing how they would be graded. The initial governmental approach of applying an algorithm to teacher assessed grades apparently for a level playing field failed and was eventually replaced by teacher assessed grades only. These last-minute changes only added to the tension.

Tom Evans: *Saturday 1 August:*

Shielding is suspended, and I have moved back into our bedroom and bathroom! “Oh frabjous day! Callooh! Callay! He chortled in his joy.”

After walking the dogs in the fields and a first pot of coffee, we put on face masks and set off up the High Street to see the town and buy the Saturday newspaper. It felt very peculiar to see the familiar shops and throng of people, while carefully keeping our distance, separated from our surroundings and other people emotionally as well as physically.

We really don't have a lot to complain about. Our physical health remains much the same, with just a few more aches and pains, and financially we look to be secure. We have settled into the routine of a weekly on-line shop and delivery from Waitrose and eat well and healthily, although comfort eating and reduced exercise have added a few pounds. But the physical and emotional isolation of the past two months have been increasingly hard as day followed day, cut off from social interaction, the town and favourite haunts - the sea, Rye, Hastings - and a hiatus in our projects. And we miss our annual holiday in France. There have been a few real pleasures – reading, watching and listening – but keeping busy with routine tasks and supporting the u3a, without the leaven of contact with the outside world, has come increasingly to feel like drudgery.

Friday 7 August: We drive to Rye to buy fish from the stall. This is our first outing in the car since lockdown started in March. The route through Wittersham and Iden, which I have known since boyhood, now feels peculiar, at the same time familiar and strange, almost unknown. Memo to self: keep a supply of face masks in the glove compartment.

Pam Wait: - The Role of Grandparents

I am fortunate to live only 9 miles from my son and family and have been caring for my grandchildren, Sam, now aged 6 and Bethany, rising 4, on two days a week over the last few years. So, when we had the first lockdown from March till the end of May and I was unable to meet them, it was disappointing. I can't imagine how it feels for those who rarely see their family.

My son and his wife worked full time from home, so caring for and occupying the children was quite a task. Once my son was furloughed it made the childcare more manageable. Sam in Year 1 at school was given daily on-line worksheets for numbers, writing and spelling and PE. Both children missed contact with friends and wider family. Beth was occasionally frightened about the virus and exhibited anxious behaviour at bedtime.

All preschools and schools were closed during April and May. Once they restarted in June, I resumed my care role as before – initially I met them outside and watched them play.

FaceTime with the children during lockdown was immensely satisfying for me and seemed enjoyable for the children, who stayed online often for an hour at a time. Bethany, with a shorter attention span, would exit when bored, but was always back for musical statues – Yes, we *all shook up* when I played my Elvis CD. 'Hound Dog' and 'Jailhouse Rock' were hits.



We devised various FaceTime versions of Beetle, Battleships, Bingo and Hangman (apparently a name no longer used in schools, ousted by the more benign terms Penguin or Spaceman). Scavenger Hunts were the overall winners.

Once we were allowed to meet outside, their favourite occupation was Arts and Crafts (or junk modelling as we thought of it!) and so I have a garage full of colourful and various sized boxes and tubes and jar tops and an empty recycle bin. This, plus scissors, felt tips, paper, glue sticks, glitter and stickers kept them busy for hours.

Outdoor games such as Obstacle Races, Hot Rice and Freeze Tag used lots of energy- then we took turns doing 'Shows', reciting, singing and acting out stories like Jack and the Bean Stalk or Three Little Pigs. We taught them to clap and encourage each performer.

Early bedtime for the Grown Ups on those nights!

Overall, the children seemed to cope well because they have loving parents, an involved wider family, familiar routines and local friends at preschool and school.

For me, being a grandparent is all about having a second chance for renewal and joy.

September 2020 Political

Majority of schools reopen. Dido Harding apologises after it transpires that UK labs are struggling to keep up with testing and people are being asked to travel several hundred miles for tests.

Confusions over returning from Portugal – quarantine required in Scotland and Wales but not in England.

Cases are rising amongst younger people and there are concerns about students returning to University – 2988 new cases recorded on 6 September.

7 – 13 September: Long Covid becomes more of a concern and clinics specifically supporting the long-term ill are called for. A SAGE scientist says that the infection rate is increasing exponentially.

The Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, announces new rules: We must follow The Rule of Six: people can only meet in socially distanced groups of six inside and out; venues have to gather data from those attending; social distancing martial arts are to be introduced and the Moonshot plan for mass rapid testing is floated. The Moonshot quick test produces many false positives which could lead to large numbers self-isolating unnecessarily.

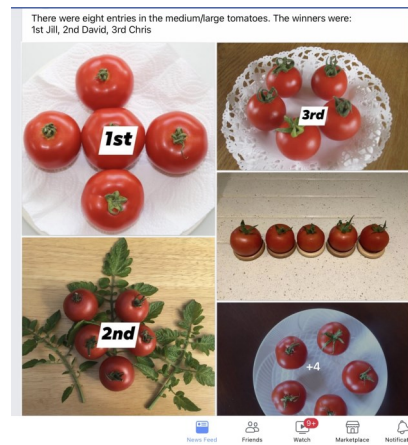
Some good news on vaccine development: the AstraZeneca–Oxford University vaccine has resumed trial

Community

The flower beds in town, in the garden by The Fairings, at East Cross and West Cross and the Millennium Garden, and the large tubs and baskets have all given much pleasure – colourful, seasonal and wonderfully tidy, cared for by the hardworking ‘Bloom and Prune’. In the lockdown-loosened period of August and September when cafes could serve outside, Tenterden filled the pavement tables – Amy’s Pantry, Savannah, Sayers Lane and the Chocolate Shop were especially popular – the continent came to Kent!

**“Rule of six
to be
re-introduced”**

The Horticultural Society



Other societies in Tenterden have worked hard to keep in touch with members: Zoom has been used for committee meetings. Now, as we are able to mix in groups of six outside, all the members have been invited for tea or coffee in the committee’s gardens. It has been a pleasure to see each other but also to ask members

for their views on how we should move forward and the activities they would like to see introduced in the year ahead. Our triumph has been holding three Shows virtually! Members have photographed their show entries and e-mailed them. The photos have been sorted into classes and sent on to the judges. Everyone has been able to join in by looking at the posts of entries on Facebook or in the Newsletter.

Tenterden u3a

1st September: Special Committee meeting to discuss Risk Assessment form. Three resolutions are approved and we have a clear way forward.

16th September: Zoom committee meeting – COVID-19 advice!!!

There was more COVID-19 advice from N.O. incorporating the latest Government instructions. Jenny has spoken to Jane Bailey at N.O. to get advice.

Many groups still meeting, and two new groups have been set up – Photography and Cookery.

Lindy sends out another letter to group leaders. It emphasises the need for 2m distancing, groups of 6 mustn’t merge, and vulnerable people over 70 should take special care.

The need to find new committee members is reiterated. Should we investigate using Facebook?

18th September: Kent Network Meeting. It is apparent that Tenterden U3A is doing well regarding holding AGM and monthly meetings using Zoom. We are congratulated for using the new ‘branding’ so soon.

after being stopped when one participant fell ill.

14 – 20 September: The Rule of Six comes into force again: social gatherings of more than 6 are banned in England. Hospitality venues must keep a record of who has attended for Track and Trace purposes. Kit Malthouse, Minister for Crime and Policing, suggests that people should report their neighbours for breaking the rules....

A new COVID-19 antibody treatment based on monoclonal antibodies is to be tested on patients. The ONS reports that deaths have fallen below 100 for the first time since March.

Unemployment is growing, The R number is going up – possibly because both schools are now open and students are going up to University with a greater opportunity for spreading the virus. A sense of unease is growing.

Dido Harding states that the demand for daily COVID-19 testing is 'outstripping the capacity'.

Boris Johnson refuses to contemplate a lockdown, as advised by the scientists, as it would have 'disastrous' economic consequences.

Backbenchers are becoming increasingly frustrated by the way in which Government is handling the pandemic without referring to Parliament.

Personal Snapshots

Tom Evans: *Saturday 19 September:* It is a beautiful autumn day, with an almost cloudless blue sky, so to Great Dixter for a walk round the gardens. No free rambling, though: there is a one-way system with many of the paths closed with string, and cardboard signs to direct us all in the same direction; the tea-room is, of course, closed.

Richard Parsons: We took advantage of the change in restrictions by visiting several National Trust properties, where plenty of space was made available, a real tonic, especially in glorious, golden autumn weather. We were able to take advantage of the relaxation by taking a three week trip in our motorhome to Scotland.

A week of constant, ferocious weather in Scotland sent us south to East Anglia where we enjoyed brilliant weather and this was a great tonic to us.

Doreen Healey: - Cycling in COVID-19

One of the things we were allowed to do during lockdown was exercise, which included cycling. I did own a bike, but cycling was not something I especially enjoyed. This all began to change when I discovered the freedom it gives you to whizz past people in seconds, hopefully escaping any virus they might be spreading! In the first lockdown there was very little traffic on the roads and cycling became a pleasure, and now I'm hooked! We heard nightingales and cuckoos and saw all the spring plants coming into flower. After a month Pam and I both bought new lightweight bikes, having been told rather rudely that our old bikes were terrible to ride, and I quote 'just like Boris Bikes'.

u3a Groups – Roy Arnold:

Strictly Singles! By definition, perhaps the hardest hit by isolation. So how to cope?

Globe trotting was a real part of my past life, and I'm still in touch with a number of well scattered old friends, all of whom already had the habit of emailing me occasional bits of amusement. So why not marshal this lot for 'the common good'?

It has really worked rather well. Best of all perhaps, because it was so mutual. Friends from Mexico to Manila, and several in between and beyond, were all suffering the same sort of incarceration, so we simply agreed to pool all we had, scour the internet endlessly for diversions and between us, found quite a fund of reasonable quality.

Our target here was to post a good one every day, which, with the invaluable help of my good friend Linda Matthews on the techie side (!), we managed to do for 150 consecutive days, with a readership of about seventy.

21 – 27 September: Patrick Vallance, the Chief Scientific Adviser, warns that there could be as many as 50,000 COVID-19 cases each day by mid-October if no action is taken. The Prime Minister announces new restrictions: all shop staff are to wear face coverings and weddings are limited to 15 people only. Pubs and bars are to close at 10pm. A second version of the NHS Contact-Tracing App is available for download. The Chancellor, Rishi Sunak, announces that the furlough scheme will be replaced by the Job Support Scheme from 1 November. Parliament seeks to control the government with an amendment which requires the Government to seek a parliamentary vote for any further lockdown restrictions. The R number rises again from 1.1 – 1.4 to 1.2 – 1.5. By now as many as 3000 students are locked down in their Halls of Residence. The news is full of film footage of students with signs up asking for supplies as they are completely confined to their flats. Protestors gather in Parliament Square to demand that people can retain their freedom. The only light on the horizon is that Boris Johnson has pledged £500m to a global vaccine sharing scheme enabling poorer countries to access the vaccines that are developed.

The new bikes arrived at the beginning of June, and our range has increased so we now do round trips of about 26 miles, and go out every day, weather permitting. Sitting on a bike for 20 miles can get a bit uncomfortable so we had to invest in the right kind of padding! I'm not sure we invested quite enough!

It's not all plain sailing (cycling?) though, we have had about six punctures between us. Most weren't discovered until the following morning. But I have had to push my bike home from High Halden and on one occasion Pam had to be rescued by her son after a puncture in Appledore, where fortunately we had arranged to meet for a picnic lunch.



On our journeys we have travelled as far as the churches on the Marsh, the windmill in Cranbrook, into Ashford for lunch at the Curious Brewery and even cycled to Headcorn and back for a spot of childminding. And, as an added bonus, we have both lost a stone in weight. We have just bought a bike carrier for the car so we can go even further afield. Cycling has been an exhilarating experience as an antidote to the boredom of COVID-19 restrictions.

Lindy Bates: We watch the Last Night of the Proms on BBC Four. It's live in an empty Albert Hall. Strange but uplifting – Richard Rodger's *You'll Never Walk Alone* has particular poignancy in this year of COVID-19.

But after five months, it has to be said, good material was running a bit thin, so while we declared an interregnum at that time, more latterly, phoenix like, we've been very happy to resume the same sort of postings, although on alternate days rather than every day. It all seems to have generated quite good fun amongst fellow singletons – with even a sneaky peep allowed for some folk less well qualified!



And so, deo volente, we hope to keep the aspidistra flying for quite a while yet, and to beat the virus to the finishing post!

October 2020 Political

Increased fines are introduced for those who do not isolate – up to £10,000. 40 Universities are now reporting confirmed COVID-19 cases. There are reports that as many as a million women have missed their Breast Screening appointments leaving a possible 8,600 with untreated cancer. Cineworld announces that it is going to close its UK cinemas since the big budget films are not being released yet.

The delayed 2020 London Marathon is



held on a closed loop course just for the professional runners. Everyone else can complete the marathon within their own vicinity.

5 – 11 October: Boris Johnson urges people to go to the cinema! The following day it is announced that 14,542 cases are confirmed.

The ONS say that about 1 in 240 people in England now have the virus.

Community

Students have gone back to University or gone up to start their first terms. There are news reports showing so many students quarantining in their Halls of residence. There are pleas for food and beer to be delivered and stories of how unsuitable – and expensive - the supplies are from the University itself. Lectures are all on line – the contact between students severely limited. Many choose to stay at home and continue studying in isolation.

As the year has advanced more and more people have been walking on footpaths, exploring the fields and walking further away from the town centre. The wonderful weather of spring, summer and autumn has made this possible and has given the most beautiful natural sights, from early daffodils lasting much longer than usual, then hedgerows and fruit trees weighed down with blossom through to the thousands of acorns fallen to the ground in October, and now stark winter tree silhouettes against a cold sky.



Tenterden u3a

23rd October: Monthly Meeting for our charity – Safe Anaesthesia Worldwide. Dr. Roger Eltringham gave a fascinating talk on Zoom explaining how he has enabled many patients in developing countries to access safe anaesthesia.

Bookings are coming in for our first Zoom Study Morning and we now open up to our neighbouring u3as. Photography and Culinary Challenges have been launched and held their first meetings. The photographers were on Zoom as they numbered more than six. The members of Culinary Challenges have been lucky enough to find a professional, award winning chef amongst their number, Graham White. Their first session saw four members in Graham's kitchen whilst the rest of the group joined in on Zoom.

We are very close to the levels last seen in March. The BMA recommends that face coverings should be worn in all work settings and outside when 2m distancing is not possible.

Students in isolation are up in arms over the quality and cost of the food parcels being provided.

12 – 18 October

The Prime Minister announces the new 3 Tier system: Medium, High and Very High. Liverpool is the only area to be placed in the top tier.

Medium: the Rule of Six and the 10pm curfew.

High: No indoor meetings but groups of six can continue to meet outside.

Very High: As for the High Tier but in addition, pubs and casinos to close but not restaurants.

We now know that the Scientists advised a short sharp circuit breaker in September but the Prime Minister decided to ignore their advice.

The number of COVID-19 cases are now such that hospitals are scaling back surgery in certain areas.

Daily cases are now rising to an estimated 27,900 a day – a 60% increase over the previous week.

19 – 25 October

Cases of COVID-19 are continuing to rise with the highest numbers in the North of England. Cancer UK has reported that some 350,000 referrals

Personal Snapshots

Tom Evans: *Sunday 11 October:* Yesterday Terry Hulf and I did mini-launch of our photo book *Steel-Oil-Steam* at Tenterden Town Station, with a little pop-up exhibition. Publishing, launching and selling a book in the lulls of a pandemic is... challenging. I am reading (in small bursts, it is intense) Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year*, which seems more present as well as a hundred times more horrible than what is happening now. All the street names and districts are disconcertingly familiar from when we lived in London. It is also remarkable how consistent the human actions and reactions remain across the centuries.

“Silcocks has proved to be a major attraction”

Jean Fagg: We live in St Michaels: Silcocks Farm Shop and the Post Office Stores have been our shopping lifelines throughout the year from first lockdown. But Silcocks has proved to be a major attraction for large numbers of other people, and their dogs. The footpaths from Tenterden to St Michaels

have seemed at times like a rural M1. And, along with the old railway track, have provided varied walks and walking to the farm itself, with footpaths and lanes then pushing off in other directions. Shop and café have drawn people in for take-away during lockdowns and for teas/coffee/lunch under the farm-yard sun-shades when we could do that. Herefords and their calves, sheep and lambs, and pigs and piglets, have given endless pleasure throughout the year. The views of and from the fields are lovely and have been so restorative: clouds of bluebells, bright grass and trees in spring and frosted bare-branched trees to come. Seasons have come and gone, and we have been so fortunate to be here, but we miss our family.



have been missed since March with thousands of patients not receiving treatment. Warnings from the Sage scientists suggest that Christmas, far from being back to normal, will be difficult and we are unlikely to enjoy normal family get-togethers.

An optimistic note – the Oxford University COVID-19 vaccine shows a *strong response among elderly volunteers*.

The death rate is rising – 367 deaths on 27 October, the highest rate since May. Imperial College study suggests there are 100,000 new cases in England each day with cases doubling every ninth day. It is known that the 11 – 16 year old age group has the fastest rate of increase in infections of any age range. Some businesses have done well during the pandemic – Hornby reports a 33% rise in profits and Channel 4 is able to repay £1.5m in furlough payments.

A second lockdown is finally announced, to take effect from Thursday 5 November to Wednesday 2 December.

The furlough scheme is extended once more until December. Mortgage payment holidays are also extended.

Daily new confirmed COVID-19 cases

The number of confirmed cases is lower than the number of actual cases; the main reason for that is limited testing.



Source: European CDC – Situation Update Worldwide – Last updated 8 November, 10:06 (London time)

CC BY

November 2020 Political

There is much unrest over the second lockdown with suggestions that the estimates for potential fatalities have been overestimated.

MPs vote 516–39 to support the four week lockdown – 34 Conservative MPs voted against and 19 abstained.

A very scaled back Remembrance Sunday is held with Whitehall closed to the public.

The Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine is said to protect 90% of those vaccinated.

A new group has formed: the COVID-19 Recovery Group which wants to *enable society to live with the virus*.

Michael Gove has been meeting with Welsh and Scottish leaders to work out how to get students home for Christmas.

**“Pfizer/ BioNTech
COVID-19 vaccine said
to be 94% effective”**

The R number is dropping nationwide although not in Kent.

Community

In the second lockdown, as the temperatures dropped Tenterden went on using the park – at almost all times of day almost all the benches are occupied and even in the rain people sit on the sheltered seats. And always there are people walking their dogs! Now in the top Tier many of the seats are occupied.

This year, the Remembrance Day celebrations were severely curtailed. There was a small, restricted ceremony at Whitehall and in Tenterden those who were placing wreaths at the War Memorial



were asked to do so over a few days to ensure social distancing. There was no parade and a small service in St Mildred's to which invited persons attended. Jenny is placing the wreath on behalf of Tenterden U3A on Sunday 8th November.

Tenterden Swords Club during the lockdown



Tenterden Swords has a long history of going down to the pub after fencing, so with both St. Michael's hall and the White Lion out of bounds, it taxed our ingenuity to keep going during lockdown.

We continued to meet every Thursday evening for Zoom chat and distanced drinking, but it just wasn't the same.

Tenterden u3a

4th November: U3A South East Network Autumn Gathering. So much easier to attend on Zoom than facing the M25! Shared Learning Projects are explained including the High Street Project which will record the effects of COVID-19 and possibly Brexit.

5th November: Kent Network meeting – ongoing work re u3a re-branding. AGM's might be held on line in future, in which case the constitution will need to be amended. N.O. has advice re this process.

Zoom committee meeting 6th November – we now have 276 members. We discuss the advisability of amending the constitution to enable the Chair and Vice Chair to extend their terms of office for one year as it's so difficult to get new committee members due to Covid. 14th November 2020 – Study Morning on the theme *Ready to Go to Sea* has nearly 100 registrations comprising seventy of our own member and thirty from neighbouring u3as. Imogen Corrigan speaks amusingly on *The Siren Sea* and Sheila Sweetinburgh shares her research on *The Cinque Ports in the Middle Ages*. It seems to be very successful.

A Sage scientist calls for a long term plan for balancing the epidemic and the economy. He criticised the way in which people have been encouraged to go to bars and restaurants and then closing the hospitality sector when cases rise dramatically.

16 – 22 November: More hope on the vaccine front as the UK secures a deal for 5m doses of an American vaccine developed by Moderna. It is said to be 95% effective.

Scientists at Cardiff University claim that mouthwash can destroy COVID-19 under lab conditions – is this another way forward?

British and Dutch researchers have found that Tocilizumab, used to treat rheumatoid arthritis, can be effective with critically ill COVID-19 patients. The Pfizer/ BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine is said to be 94% effective in the over 65 age-group.

Discussions within all four nations about the Christmas period: some household mixing with the opportunity to form bubbles for a limited number of days over the festive period is proposed.

Chumocracy? The National Audit Office has declared that companies with 'political connections' who were supplying PPE were ten times more likely to win a contract than those with no such connections.

The end of lockdown was a great relief, but we still had to find a way of keeping to the rule of 6. Our governing body said we could have more than one group of 6 in the hall at the same time, which was useful as it meant that we could have two groups of 6, and then change them round after the first period. As it was summer, fencers waiting for their fight could sit out in the car park. It all worked rather well and we had no cases of infection. By the time the second lockdown came round, our spirits had sunk a bit, and even Zoom meetings had lost their appeal. At the time of writing, we are hoping it won't be long before we can get going again, and the limited opportunity for the children but not the adults to fence is not terribly appealing. We normally run a big international competition in late March. We had to cancel this year and it is going to be touch and go whether we will have to cancel again next year. The end of the second lockdown beckons but the country is to be put into different tiers. There are debates in Parliament. The whole of Kent is to go into Tier 3 despite the fact that currently the SE has much lower numbers of infections than Sheppey.

Christmas decorations are going up already – people are determined to spread a bit of cheer in the gloom that surrounds us. There is a Christmas tree on the green in Church View and the residents in both Church View and Three Fields are stringing lights around – a great community effort in this new community area.

Personal Snapshots

Richard Parsons: Lockdown 2 was a more depressing period, though we still found plenty to keep us busy. Parkinson's Law came into effect here as the time on jobs expended was stretched to fit the time available! We are fortunate in belonging to organisations which are able to continue to function, albeit in a limited way and this occupied time. We did, however, become more insular, fearing the increase in infection, and stayed at home for much of the time. Except for the occasional country walks which have been a joy, particularly, being able to meet and chat to people who have more time to be sociable. This came at a time when we would have been booking holidays for next year, so this was put on hold, which was depressing.

Tom Evans:

Thursday 4 November, Here we go again, heading back into lockdown until December (heaven knows what will happen then) with another dreary email in the name of of Matt Hancock and Robert Jenrick. "Stay at home as much as



possible, except to go outdoors for some exercise or to attend essential health appointments” and “avoid busy areas”; “keep all contact with others to a minimum” will not be a problem; “try to stay 2 metres away from other people within your household” is not going to work. Silcocks delivers an order of their free-range organic meat, milk and farmhouse cheese, and three pots of delicious yoghurt flavoured with real vanilla. This evening’s wine appreciation Zoom is tasting what should be a decent right-bank Bordeaux. These are small, real - if self-indulgent – comforts, and blessings to count.

Bob Coulson: Reflections on 2020

At Broad Oak during the COVID-19 year and just before the first peak we set out to do the many DIY maintenance jobs around the house garden and classic car. We have no relatives so it is all a home focus.

At first we repaired the fences, then the near out of control garden, then painted the five bar antique front gate which resembles one of those theme exhibits you see at the Chelsea Horticulture show. Next repainted the garage door, then repaired the garden shed roof and repainted the exterior boards under the gutters - and upgraded the loos!

Then those items which are so difficult to get at the shops at the best of times we bought on line from all over: Hong Kong, China, Russia, Bulgaria, France, Germany. If you have a technical hobby then mostly the components are no longer sold in the UK as the fully manufactured items are often bought already made to various qualities. We improved our home theatre by making a good quality thing called a “Sub Woofer” so the bass is as good as a theatre. Well you did ask and I expect this enterprise would simply bore others.

Finally we hit on the idea of a total clear out of things in the attic, hobbies chest, cupboards, and out with old clothes, printers, TV’s radios and hi-fi’s. This bit is on-going and makes your house larger.

Many more telephone calls, use of Zoom, many more apps for the mobile phone and if anyone is interested we bought a ROKU unit to make a TV smart or an existing smart TV smarter. This is but one way to obtain hundreds of cultural and not so cultural recordings in the archives of the BBC iPlayer, YouTube, and other data banks. Just in the colour era we found a few performances of Victor Borge [Who?] for example.

We thought of following an entertainment celebrity who started distance learning from the “Open University”. However one way and another we have too many things to do. We would expect to strike a chord with others who have tackled those tasks that had been “put off” in the past. We found out why. These itsy bitsy tasks are so very awkward.

In the outside world, it became clear that older people, who rebuilt this country since the 50’s and 60’s were now almost disposable. The lack of politicians with any non fiscal technical qualifications gave coronavirus a free run. The idea some had of trying to balance the COVID-19 as across the Atlantic!

Anyway an unenviable task as governing the country in such difficulties maybe does not have an ideal solution. So onwards to the Spring when hopefully science and technology will come to the rescue.

Belinda Bailey: I am having a daily conversation with myself regarding Christmas. I am on the Clinically Extremely Vulnerable list and I really don’t know whether to take up my son and family’s kind invitation to join them for lunch. I so miss u3a and hope we can all reunite sometime in 2021. It has been difficult living such a solitary life however I think it has made a lot of us extremely grateful for what we have in life in such a beautiful town. Whoever thought that we could be so excited to receive a vaccine.

December 2020 Political

We emerge from Lockdown on 2 December and are to be allowed five days over Christmas during which 3 households can bubble together to celebrate but the advice from the medics is to have a different Christmas and stick to the outside world as much as possible.

What happens after Lockdown – the Tier system is announced and Kent is in the top Tier 3. We are not allowed to have anyone in our houses or gardens. The rule of 6 applies to public outside spaces.



All shops are open but hospitality venues can only do take away.

Parliament is not totally in favour of the new Tier

system: MPs vote 291-78 in favour with 55 backbench conservatives voting against and 16, together with Labour, abstaining.

The Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine is approved for use in UK. Some dubious claims are made by politicians that the UK has superior medical experts

Community

St Mildred's Community Advent Calendar gets under way – a daily video of a representative of the various organisations in the town telling us about their COVID-19 Year. Jeanette, our assistant vicar, led the way, explaining what she and Lindsay (the man in charge) have been doing. On another night, the Head of St Michaels speaks very movingly of how they decided as a school to focus on the Christian values of love, joy, self-control and wisdom. Such values have helped their school community to get through 2020 and will equip the children for life.

The Social Hub had to close on 19 March which was very hard but essential. It had a huge impact as 175 members still needed support but it all had to be given within the restrictions of two lockdowns and social distancing. Amazingly the Hub, under Spencer Goddard's leadership, provided over 11,000 meals between March and December. Through the efforts of the 34 staff and 40 volunteers: meals, phone calls, shopping trips, prescription deliveries, dementia pack deliveries were all provided to the members and those in need.

The Town Council have supported Helping in Tenterden, which is made up of six different groups, attracting 200 volunteers to help the community. The greatest demand was for the collection of prescriptions followed by shopping for groceries and essentials, befriending phone calls and signposting sources of financial help.

There are many discussions as to what people are doing for Christmas. A split between those being cautious and only planning outdoor meetings and those planning to have three different households in on the three days of Christmas. Some are even planning to fly somewhere different. There is quite a bit of confusion over what is, or is not, allowed.

Tenterden u3a

10th December: Our booked speaker is unable to do Zoom at the last minute. Panic almost breaks out but then we have a brainwave and invite the vicar, Lindsay Hammond and his assistant, Jeanette Kennett, to share their Desert Island Discs. Jenny Stevens finds herself a new role as a presenter! A very popular Christmas meeting as Lindsay and Jeanette have been and continue to be such key personalities in the community.

13th December: Jenny speaks on behalf of Tenterden U3A on the daily streamed Community Advent Calendar, organised by St Mildred's Church, stressing the positives in 2020.

15th December: The committee had planned a Christmas celebration/get together. In the end, due to the rapid spread of COVID-19, it is decided that we meet on Zoom and chat for an hour. Certainly not the same, but good to talk

about things other than u3a.



and Brexit helped to speed up the approval process.

Students begin getting tested and travelling home for Christmas.

The R number is reported to be falling to between 0.8 and 1.0

7 – 13 December: Ninety year old Margaret Keenan becomes the first person to receive the Pfizer vaccine amidst much publicity. Problems arose almost immediately with two people suffering from anaphylactic shock. Those with severe allergies are advised not to have this particular vaccine.

This second wave of COVID-19 is attributed to people travelling abroad over the summer.

Self-isolation for travellers and COVID-19 contacts is to be reduced from 14 to 10 days. Cases in London and the South East are rising, whilst the rest of the country has a falling case load. Scientists and NHS bosses urge people to rethink their Christmas plans, citing the number of cases following Thanksgiving in the States.

14 – 20 December: Matt Hancock, Health Secretary, announces that a new strain of COVID-19, the Kent Variant, has been identified which is spreading quickly in some parts of the country. 1108 cases have been identified so far.

Many of the Kent towns are now in the top ten worst hit places in the country.

Lockdown 2 finally ends on a grey and chilly 2 December. Lots of Christmas decorations are up in the High Street. The Old Dairy has filled one of the empty shops. One empty shop is covered in Rotary posters asking for help to feed desperate families in Tenterden. The Big Wrap go-fund-me poster for presents for needy families is also in evidence. Signs on The Vine announce temporary closure. The new Hoof & Hook restaurant are advertising Christmas Day bookings. Charity Christmas Cards are on sale at the museum with the extra addition of a credit card machine (never before known) and a Perspex screen. A few more people are around but it is not overly busy on this first 'free' day. Lots of face masks are in evidence.

My Tenterden reports that the K&ESR Santa Specials have to be cancelled at short notice when Tier 4 is announced, but the Town Council has rescued the hundreds of mince pies and chocolates which would have been given out on the trains – they will now be given to the food bank to add to food parcels. This year's carol service from St Mildred's will be on-line – light the fire, pour yourself a festive drink and join the Christmas singing from your home. Come to your front door at 6pm on Christmas Eve and ring a bell for 2 minutes to spread a little Christmas cheer!

An additional impact of the new Coronavirus strain in the UK manifested itself in a blockade imposed by the French on lorries entering from Dover and other ports along the south coast. Within just a few days several thousand lorries were parked up along the M20 leading to Dover, on the hard standing at Manston Airport and in every lay-by on roads around the south coast causing huge traffic congestion. Many poor drivers primarily from Eastern European countries, had to spend Christmas in their cabs with no food or provisions, nowhere to wash and no sanitation. There were many instances of good natured local people getting together to provide food and drinks to the stranded lorry drivers. Several days later, after testing of drivers for the virus had taken place with the support of thousands of army personnel drafted in at short notice, the blockade was lifted.

Reflections on Group Activities Through 2020

Art of the Image by Zoom- Tom Evans

After an early test, on day two of the first lockdown, we decided to go ahead and run Art of the Image on-line, using the screen-share to look at images together with our usual format of presentations and discussions. It was immediately obvious that a Zoom meeting has a different dynamic and etiquette from a physical meeting, and members need time and practice to adjust. For our second Zoom session, in April, we modified the format (cutting out the thematic introductory essay by one of us) and began to get into our stride. Instead of stopping the season at that point, which would have been our normal practice, we decided to keep going without a break and have done so ever since – interrupted only by Christmas.

French Conversation by Zoom

French Conversation is not easy for anglophones at the best of times and is made much harder by less-than-perfect computer or tablet audio over the internet. Not all of our members have been technically able to participate, but those that could were early adopters of Zoom, holding their first on-line meeting in April and

Two health journals: the BMJ and the Health Service Journal have issued a joint editorial condemning the relaxation of the rules over Christmas.

16 December: the four nations meet – the rules essentially stay the same but everyone is urged to ‘think carefully and remain local if they can’.

Test and Trace is now said to be reaching 92.7% of contacts which is the highest thus far. Repeat calls to the same household are reduced and the website has been improved. The furlough scheme is extended to the end of April.

19 December: Boris Johnson announces that London, the South East and East of England are to be put into a new Tier 4 from midnight. Christmas plans are scrapped. Through the rest of the country households can get together only on Christmas Day.

21 December: UK is isolated – borders have closed against us – more than 40 countries have suspended flights to and from the UK. Scotland has closed its border with England. We are warned that there will be delays to deliveries of fresh food as 3000 lorries are stuck in queues waiting to cross the channel.

Infections are rising everywhere.

Personal Snapshots

Tom Evans: *Tuesday 1 December:*

November’s ‘lockdown light’ has been weird. There has been no obvious reduction in traffic on the High Street and the Chocolate Shop next door has been doing a roaring trade in take-away hot drinks. The pavement outside our sitting room is often crowded with a merry throng, chattering and drinking the best coffee in town. Some of them even wear masks and observe social distancing. Most days, two regulars bring chairs to sit on the grass for hours.

The Kent and East Sussex Railway has announced the last-minute cancellation of its ‘Santa Specials’ since Kent will exit lockdown into Tier 3 from tomorrow. This will be a huge blow, not only for the railway but also for the town’s wider economy. On a small, personal level it puts an end to our Christmas marketing plans for the Steel-Oil-Steam book. K&ESR suggests another pop-up exhibition on 1 January instead, ‘if trains are running’ – a very big if.

Tuesday 15 December:

Despite lockdown and Tier 3, the local infection rate has skyrocketed and the u3a Committee holds its annual celebration on-line by Zoom. It has been a tough week, with personal and family health concerns, and while the Zoom is hardly convivial, it is comforting to see the familiar friendly faces on screen, to chat and wish each other well.

‘Lockdown 2’ has, although looser, been harder than the first: the continuing lack of social contact is debilitating; the sense of drama, novelty, togetherness and (admit it) fear has been replaced by a deep weariness and a wish just to get through until the vaccines kick in some time next year. Meanwhile the world feels shrunken and reduced.

continuing monthly without a pause. We operate a similar format to our normal meetings, but without the tea and cake: each month there is a set topic, with a French text, sometimes from Le Monde, sometimes from a literary author, and occasionally to launch the conversation. Occasionally, a recording helps to get the sound of authentic French into our ears.

Wine Appreciation members go on-line to discuss **What I’m Drinking This Evening.**

In normal times, a dozen or so members meet every month to taste, compare and discuss five or six wines chosen by one of us. We couldn’t do anything like this on line, and not everyone wanted to Zoom, but on 16 April we gave it a go with each member sharing notes and talking about one of his or her favourite wines. After two months of this, we switched to thematic meetings in which we all bought and tasted the same wine, and discussed topics around it. This proved to be a winning formula: we have made new friends and discovered new wines. Our subjects so far have included Chapel Down and local vineyards; German red wine (tasting a Baden Spätburgunder); St Nicolas de Bourgueil and, on two successive months, comparison between a left- and a right-bank Bordeaux.

22 December: there were 36,804 new cases across the country. At the same time, the Brexit talks go on with the Government saying that if no deal is reached by the end of December, UK will leave the EU on 'Australia Terms', turning down the offer of continuing talks. Rumours swirl of a possible way through the fishing impasse. We are reminded that *nothing is agreed until everything is agreed*.

23 December: France reopens its borders to allow the freight traffic to move once more but all the drivers have to have a negative test result. Chaos ensues and the army are called in to help out. People living along the M20 drop food to drivers who are stuck in their cabs for several days.

25 Dec: Christmas Rules: Tier 4 – Christmas can only be celebrated with members of the same household or support bubble.
Tier 1 – 3 Christmas can be celebrated with three households getting together for Christmas Day only.

26 Dec: Many more areas of the country are moved up to Tier 4 whilst Wales and Northern Ireland locked down completely again.

Astra Zeneca say that they have discovered a 'winning formula' for their vaccine.

29 December: The number of cases is rising rapidly with daily cases now over 50,000 each day. Everyone is warned not to mix over the New Year period.

Lindy Bates: Christmas

Like so many people, we remained at home –it must be the first time we have been on our own at this time of year. We did get a tree, sent Christmas cards and hung up all the ones we received. There had been enough shopping time between 2nd and 19th December to get presents and stocking fillers. Silcocks Farm Shop provided the Christmas dinner! Fortunately everything was bought and collected by the time lockdown resumed. We had a rapid wrapping session and managed to deliver everything to the family in Bethersden before midnight on 19th. On Christmas Eve we watched socially distanced carols from Kings College and that helped to create some festive spirit. On Christmas Day we had many phone calls and Zoom sessions with the family – we even opened presents on Zoom!



In October, in a determined effort to lift our spirits, we raised our price-limit (strictly for one month only) and explored Crozes-Hermitage while drinking Jaboulet's lovely Domaine de Thalabert. We will continue to share What I'm Drinking This Evening by Zoom until we can meet again for what will surely be a most convivial celebration.

The World Through Maps – Lindy Bates.

During the first months of lockdown, the Maps Group kept going with a monthly quiz. I am not sure how many people actually did the quizzes but there were a few who sent in their answers for 'marking' or sent a comment. As summer moved towards autumn and it was clear that we were going to be reliant on Zoom for quite some time, we restarted meetings. In September, with thanks to Richard Parsons for hosting the Zoom sessions, we had a quiz on-line and discussed what talks people were willing to offer. An excellent programme was drawn up and it was wonderful to see that we hadn't lost members during the spring and summer. In October 2020, Richard Parsons spoke on *Canalmania*; November saw Richard Wheeler taking us on a walk from Sixfields Path back to his home in Woodchurch Road with all the history that could be packed into such a short distance.

Reflections on group activities continued
Barbara Sillett transported us to tropical climes in her talk on *The Emergence of the Hawaiian Islands*.

Robert Taylor took us on a trip across America with the early settlers in *Go West Young Man, Go West*. In March 2021 Alan and Lindy filled in *The Ghastly Blank* in the red centre of Australia.

Science

With only one month's break, the scientists have kept their programme of talks going throughout 2020 and into 2021. Ian Smith has masterminded the Zoom sessions and given invaluable help to those who have needed to sort out how to do a presentation through screen sharing. We began, appropriately with a discussion, chaired by Roger Martin, on COVID-19. Later in the year, Roger taught us all about T Cells as it became clear that a successful vaccine was likely to be developed. In the summer we moved away from COVID-19 and learnt about *Climate Change and the Environment* and then *Misdirection – the art of the Magician*. As social life partly returned during August, we had a short break before resuming with a full programme in 2021. It is particularly difficult to give a talk to a blank screen with no ability to 'read the audience' and we are hugely indebted to those who are prepared to give talks under these circumstances.

Literature Town Group

Our book group was definitely not to be put off by COVID-19 – with Doreen Healey's help with

hosting Zoom for the first meeting and Sue Hatt who took over with her own licence thereafter, we haven't missed a beat! We have learnt to take turns to speak which is fairly novel! Our choice of books has been really interesting and challenging at times and discussions have been lively. We have mastered the art of sending out readings in advance and everyone sorting out their extracts from kindle or book. Zoom has even allowed one member, Fran, to join us from Exeter.

Corona Walking Maps

During the first lockdown, a small group formed to record the local walks. Springtime was so sunny, the wild flowers abundant and the ground dry – perfect for walking and we wanted to share the best walks with other members. We were to a large extent reinventing the wheel as there are walking maps available from the Town Hall – but our versions included photos of key points, up-to-date descriptions and hand drawn maps by water colourist, Sally White. The group lasted for as long as its members felt the need for the activity and as life opened up in June, we called a mutually agreed halt but it was an activity that was right at the time and the completed maps have been shared with a number of members and non-members. A worthwhile short-term activity.

Culinary Challenges

How to keep ourselves busy during the winter? That was the *raison d'être* behind the launching of this new group in September. Its success is entirely due to the willingness of new member, Graham White, to own up to being an award

winning chef and to take on doing monthly cooking demonstrations, At the first proper meeting Graham and Sally (the indispensable sous-chef and washer-up) had a small, socially distanced group in his kitchen and the rest of the group on Zoom. There was some excitement as the camera connection didn't work and a couple of members had to run round to Graham's house and proffer help! All was resolved and the group has never looked back.



By November everyone was attending on Zoom. Although this meant that we couldn't smell the aromas, tasting was made possible by collecting tinfoil packs from Graham and Sally's carport after the session. The group is now in the capable hands of Graham and Sally.

Photography

Another new group that was launched in September. Again, its success is down to finding an expert. Recently retired Science teacher, Don Clarke, who leads the Tenterden Camera Club and taught 'A' Level

photography, has been willing to instruct and lead the group together with his wife, Ruth. It has been frustrating not to be able to look at members' cameras and give hands-on advice, but everyone has shared their photos through the Facebook page.

Twilight Golf – Ina Smith

Our group has been very lucky as the game is played outside and there is no problem in keeping the appropriate distance. After the first lockdown we were able to start up again, initially only with two people from the same family in each group but soon we were allowed to play with four again all through the summer and early autumn. This allowed us to play a competition for the player of the year trophy. Flags, water fountains, ball cleaners and other cleaning equipment were all covered up, locker rooms closed.

The clubhouse served drinks and limited food at the tables outside. All measures were taken to keep us safe. During the second lockdown the club had to close but after 2 December we could play again. The clubhouse remains closed.

Psychology – Ina Smith

Our group decided to use Zoom to meet on screen. We always prepare the month's subject in advance before discussing it on Zoom. The Zoom sessions have allowed us to continue but it lacks the normal flow of conversation. Not everybody has enjoyed this set up and thus have suspended their involvement until we can meet again in person.

Classic Theatre – Elizabeth Breen

The Classic Theatre group has continued to meet regularly via Zoom. We have all kept in remarkably good spirits, given the current restrictions, and not to mention the few problems we have encountered maintaining a steady internet connection during the sessions! We have enjoyed reading the works of Sophocles and discovering how the ancient



Greeks produced their dramatic entertainments. We look forward to watching a screen version of Oedipus next time.

Pottery – Cathy Dalton

With the first lockdown in March pottery workshops came to a halt. Because I was deemed to be clinically most vulnerable, I was unable to hold any workshops even after lockdown ended as my studio cannot accommodate members given the COVID-19 restrictions and the need for social distancing. I gave the members topics to research, so that we could eventually continue with pottery sessions after COVID-19. Of course,

I didn't expect COVID-19 to go on forever or even as long as it has. After some consideration I decided that I would try to lead a pottery project for the group using Zoom.

I put together a Powerpoint presentation and set about inviting members to a Zoom meeting. It went well and each member was able to print the instructions, collect the materials and tools from the studio and make their items. They made 3D standing Christmas trees and Snowmen. After making their trees or snowmen, they left them at the studio for firing and then returned individually to sit on their own in the studio to glaze them. This first session went so well that I organised a Zoom demonstration from my kitchen. We will make candle holders. These sessions have kept the potters active and interested. I can but hope that COVID-19 restrictions will end with the arrival of the vaccine. In the meantime I will continue with monthly sessions on Zoom.

Let's Improve our French – Activity during COVID pandemic to date – Peter Sutherland

We haven't missed a beat. We started using Skype in April and haven't missed a meeting since. We had no summer break as I felt it important to keep contacts alive. I used Skype because I was vaguely familiar with it because I was at the time helping a u3a group in Ledbury who used to Skype for conversation with a French lady in France. It has not been without its connection problems but now seems pretty robust so long as I set up a group call and the members are patient while it establishes itself.

The disappointing thing is that only half the group wanted to participate in the virtual meetings, but I send them emails letting them know what we have been up to and what contributions I am asking for for the next meeting. There is one member who sends his contributions by email. With fewer members I have eventually felt less motivated to keep to the pattern of language improvement points which I had developed. Frankly it didn't seem worth the effort, but if and when the group is re-established at full strength, I will probably revert to them.

Those who have stayed with the group have been hugely committed to making it work despite the occasional technical troubles. On one occasion someone dropped out and couldn't re-establish connection and so we had a session the next day.

The meetings have therefore changed in format, but we have so far never had any trouble filling the allotted 2hr slot – much to my surprise.

A virtual meeting lacks the spontaneity of a face to face encounter and people have to learn not to talk all at once, but there are a number of technical advantages. It is much easier to play songs, show videos or pages from the internet and indeed illustrate a language point on screen than in the White Lion. I don't miss traipsing my bag full of iPod player, dictionary etc.. to the pub, but I do miss the conviviality of the coffee break.

With fewer participants those present have a greater opportunity to speak and it has been a lot of fun with each session based on what

has happened since last time and a theme to prepare. In November we talked about a place that has stuck in our memory and this month we will be, inter alia, listening to an amusing song based on avoir/être verbs (I trust you remember them fondly!) Being a member now of Tom's group has enable me to "borrow" some good ideas which has helped.

Birding Group – Richard Parsons



With lockdown, it was clear to us that we were unable to meet as a group, so, very quickly, the members were encouraged to continue their hobby by reporting bird sightings while on their own walks and this prompted a great deal of correspondence which kept our interest alive. I introduced quizzes and the occasional Zoom talk by experts and, while this was not the same as our walks, it was a good way to stay in touch. We were able to observe the Rule of Six, introduced later, by restricting our numbers and increasing the outings.

The second lockdown brought a temporary halt to outings and we reverted to keeping in touch through birding reports. The phase of tiered restrictions, towards the end of the year, advised against unnecessary travel and moving outside our Tier 3 area so the decision was made not to continue our outings. But members were still encouraged to take their walks on the many local footpaths. Some extended them to exploring behind the High Street buildings, with some interesting discoveries! The normal exchange of news and sightings and occasional Zoom talks continue.