

2021

January 2021 Political

Much debate as to whether schools should open or not. Primaries are meant to return as usual. However, Primary Schools in London, Essex and Kent are told to remain closed except for a few where it is deemed to be 'safe'. So some children attend school on the first day of term but by the evening, Prime Minister Boris Johnson, has announced another National Lockdown. People are only permitted to leave home for the following reasons: essential shopping and medical treatment, work and daily exercise. Vulnerable children and those of key workers are still able to go to school. University students are to have on-line lectures only and are not to return to campuses. Only elite sport is permitted. The Oxford/Astra Zeneca vaccine is given for the first time.

5 – 12 January: New infections now hit 60,000 per day. GCSEs and A-Levels are cancelled. Grades will be based on teacher assessments.

The emphasis now is on rolling out the vaccination programme. Seven new vaccination hubs are to be set up in London, Newcastle, Manchester, Birmingham, Bristol, Surrey and Stevenage. There are calls for these to operate 24 hours a day. The army is called in to help. The Moderna vaccine is now approved in the UK.

Community

My Tenterden

Opens the New Year reporting that nearly 1,000 Ivy Court Surgery patients over 80 had, by Christmas, received their first vaccination at Charing Surgery. Then, under lockdown again, lists of shop

“Vaccinations for the over 75s at the new Ivy Court Surgery”.

opening hours, takeaways and home deliveries are given. On 11 January work starts on the new Beacon Oak Road/Ashford Road roundabout, with road closures and a temporary one way system. By the end of the month bookings are made for vaccinations for the over 75s at the new Ivy Court Surgery

Personal Snapshots

Jenny Stevens

How glad we are to see the end of 2020. A year that had been so full of promise and so much to look forward to – only to be bitterly disappointed so many times!

We are still trying to come to terms with the death of Chris Goodall (husband of our past-chair, Jenny) due to COVID-19. He died just before Christmas and it has certainly brought home the horrendous effects that the pandemic is having.

2021 – Hopes? Thoughts? We are now so used to being in 'lockdown' and being restricted in our activities.

However, we accept the situation we're in and try hard to make the best of it.

Tenterden u3a

January 2021

u3a is taking a lot of time, which is good in some ways. Several of us are going through the extensive list of Kent u3a Speakers. This involves emailing them and checking whether they are still speaking and using Zoom. Easy??? No! Several emails bounce back, phone numbers don't work, Google a guessing game! However, we're getting there and it is very worthwhile. What we can find to do in lockdown!

Committee meeting on 20th January. We have 276 members. Two new groups have been suggested. We decide we need to amend the Constitution, so a date is booked for an Extraordinary General Meeting. Facebook group is set up and 28 members joined very quickly.

End of January – Barbara organises a successful Zoom coffee morning for about 8 new members. They all seem pleased to have the opportunity to 'meet' others, but are anxious about getting involved until they feel safe to meet face-to-face.

Publicity – We are looking at the various areas of publicity for Tenterden u3a. So what has been achieved so far?

8 January: Mayor of London, declares a 'major incident' as hospitals are now having to send patients out of London to other ITU departments. The daily death rate is over 1000 with total deaths from Covid reaching 80,868. There are concerns about the new South African variant. Travellers from affected countries are banned from entering the UK unless they are Irish or British nationals.

From 18 January all travellers to the UK will have to have a negative COVID-19 test result. There are now concerns about a new Brazilian strain.

The death rate continues to rise with 1,820 deaths on 20 January. Meanwhile the number of daily cases is beginning to drop and over 4 million people have had their first vaccination.

“The emphasis now is on rolling out the vaccination programme”

21 – 29 January: The new Kent variant may be more fatal. On the plus side, the vaccinations are expected to work. There are over 4000 patients on ventilators – slightly higher numbers than in the first peak.

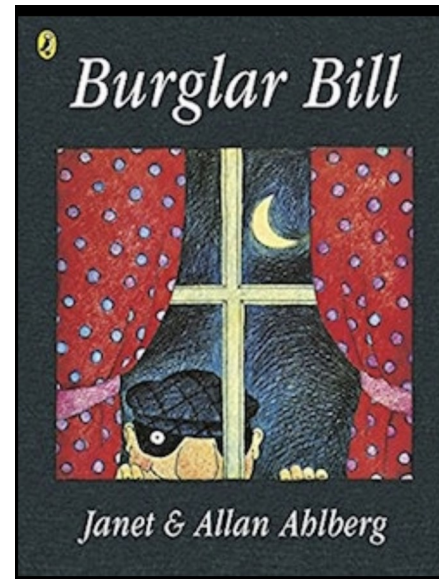
The South African variant has been found in 77 cases in the UK.

Kate Manning:

The chilling control from the Government has continued into 2021..... no longer do we enjoy our freedoms. We must not go out but once a day, only for exercise or need. We cannot go on holiday; nor meet friends; nor visit family. Town centres are deserted; shops, restaurants and pubs all closed. Patients in hospital left to die alone. Our personal fear is that our family may be infected with this deadly virus. I fear whether our freedoms, our normal life will ever be restored.

Anna Toombs:

After just one day back at school we are in lockdown and a return to home schooling. For my two elder grandchildren at secondary school this is not too bad – the schools are well organised, there are daily assignments marked quickly by teachers with lots of constructive comments and plenty of chances to ask questions, then phone or texts with friends and, for these children, lots of music practice. For the other family, with three younger grandchildren, all boys, home schooling is not so easy. They all need adult attention, help and encouragement and Erik, in the middle, hates Zoom and often refuses to look at it. What can grandparents, at a distance, do to help? Sharing books, of course! We have regular reading sessions, mostly the boys reading to me, but often with the youngest I read to him. I'm listening to *White Fang*, *The Wizard of Earthsea*, then Skulduggery stories, lots of Ronald Dahl and Dick King-Smith, *Mrs Wobble the Waitress* and *Burglar Bill* – they give us masses to talk about and to laugh at!



An article in *Connect Up!*, daily online news from St Mildred's Church; an article in March Parish News. Updated the u3a entry and wrote an article for **My Tenterden**, the on-line community newsletter and entered an updated entry on Town Council website. These both had the new logo. We are up-to-date and making our active presence felt in this strange time!

F ebruary 2021

The Isle of Man has had ten days with no infections and lifts lockdown restrictions!

Meanwhile, on the mainland, 80,000 residents in areas of Kent, Surrey, London, Hertfordshire, Southport and Walsall are to be asked to take a COVID-19 test to see if they have the South African variant after cases have been found which have no link to travel.

2 Feb: Capt Sir Tom Moore has died from COVID-19 at the age of 100 after raising almost £39,000,000 for the NHS by walking around his garden – his advice will live on: *if you are feeling sad remember tomorrow is a good day. Tomorrow you will maybe find everything will be much better than today.*

Scientists now have evidence, yet to be published, that the AstraZeneca vaccine reduces transmission and is 76% effective in the three months before the second dose. Infection rates throughout this period have been below 20,000 each day. The death rate, however, is still over 1000 on most days.

More than 10 million people have now been vaccinated in UK.

C ommunity

My Tenterden: Ivy Court Surgery has moved into the lovely new building and is running all services. There is a report on the Tenterden Community Land Trust, giving the results of the Housing Needs Survey, it's policy development, AGM, membership plans and now the search for a site for affordable housing. The winners of the "TenterTed" competition are Elizabeth Rose and Pure Connection Pets. Tenterden High Street has been ranked the third most vibrant in the country showing how COVID-19 has changed shopping habits with large centres losing out to smaller market towns. And the crocuses are out all along the High Street – thank you Tenterden Lions Club!

The Beast from the East Mark 2



T enterden u3a

List of speakers complete. Very impressive – Lindy, Anna, Richard and myself are thanked by Kent Network Chairman.

A ridiculous amount of time is being taken trying to get the amended constitution approved by u3a office. Many phone calls are being made, emails sent and it is agreed only hours before the deadline to notify our members of the Special General Meeting.

Three new groups have been successfully launched this month! Members have come forward with suggestions: Sally White wanted an Art Group; John Lindsey suggested a Street Names Research group and new member, John Jewsbury expressed an interest in Philosophy. After just two weeks *The Dabblers*, *Street Names* and *Introducing Philosophy* have had set-up ZOOM meetings and have booked their first full meetings enabled by Ian Smith and Richard Parsons' willingness to host.

Looking back at the Strictly Singles – Linda Matthews

I have taken out last year's diary from the bottom drawer and thumbed through it again!

6 February – 13 February: All focus is on the number of people being vaccinated while numbers of infections continue to fall, albeit slowly. The R number is now between 0.7 and 0.9 with numbers falling across the UK. The majority of people in the top four groups (over 80s and care workers, over 75s, over 70's and the most vulnerable) have received at least one injection. However up to 30% of care staff in some settings have not yet had the vaccine and members of minority groups have yet to come forward. Elton John and Michael Caine have taken part in an advertising campaign to encourage people.

The average rate of daily cases this week has been 15,144.

As a distraction this week, Donald Trump's impeachment trial is live on-line.

14 February – 21 February:

15 million people have now been vaccinated. Finally quarantine begins – British and Irish citizens arriving in the UK from a list of 33 countries have to spend 10 days in a quarantine hotel. A new strain of COVID-19 is discovered, similar to the South African variant.



The Beast from the East Mark 2

Snow and freezing temperatures have dominated the weather all down the eastern coastline and into the south east. It may be cold and windy but it is a relief to have something different happening and something different to look at. Children have been out tobogganing, ski poles have been in evidence and everyone is wrapped up as much as they can be. Face masks have another function – keeping one's face warmer. It has been striking how people are still exercising despite the cold – one of the favourite routes has been along Chennel Park Road outside St Michaels and along the old railway line. By Saturday, after overnight temperatures of -3C and -4C, even the fields have frozen sufficiently to avoid sinking into the mud. And what a cheering sign was displayed by one of the stiles: Keep Your Dog on a Lead – Expectant Ewes in Field – Spring is around the corner!

Yes, we did have to cancel a few outings, like the Jazz Rye Festival and Curling in Tunbridge Wells, but the thing that stands, out on every page, is how busy we all were. COVID-19 certainly did not stop the SS! In accordance with Government Guidelines, we met outside, socially distancing, with no more than 6 people. We had coffee mornings, picnics, lunches, cream teas, and evening drinks. When we could no longer have our monthly meetings at The Hub, Ian Smith amazingly stepped in and arranged weekly Zoom meetings on a Friday evening. We are still enjoying these weekly chats.



Shielding advice is sent out to another 1.7 million people and together with those previously shielding, extending the time to the end of March.

A human challenge study is to begin – healthy, young volunteers will be infected with COVID-19 to test vaccines and treatments.

With new strains, the list of symptoms have expanded to include: diarrhoea, fatigue, sore throat and headache. The numbers of infections are reducing – by two thirds since January.

At a G7 meeting, chaired by Boris Johnson, more funds to help the distribution of vaccines to poorer countries are agreed.

It is aimed to vaccinate all adults in the UK by 31st July!

Personal Snapshots

Lindy Bates: *Vaccinations – Early February*

Suddenly there is a feeling of hope – whilst many of the over 80s were vaccinated in January and have even had their second doses, the bulk of our U3A membership has recently received its invitation from the NHS to make an appointment to receive the first shot. ZOOM group meetings have been opening with animated conversation about appointments and reactions. There seem to be several different routes: through the NHS on-line booking system, people have been sent to Folkestone, South London, Flimwell and New Romney. In this system the appointment for the follow-up shot is made before leaving the vaccination centre. Meantime, Ivy Court Surgery patients have received texts or phone calls advising them to go to Charing or to attend Ivy Court. The follow-up booster shots have not been booked but everyone is assured that they are in the system. Whilst some have preferred to opt for shorter queues and no travelling (and the excuse to see inside the new surgery) others have welcomed going further afield – it's the chance for an outing, to dress up and put on the make-up! Newspaper articles have been suggesting that the Oxford vaccine is not very effective against the new South African strain but the researchers in Oxford say they are sure there will be an effective booster by the autumn if necessary. The Pfizer vaccine is said to be effective against all variants at present. Most people have experienced nothing worse than a sore arm but a few have had to take to their beds for a day or two but the benefits FAR outweigh any possible reaction.

It does seem as if the Government has triumphed with the vaccination programme – achieving its aim of vaccinating all the over 70's, the Care Workers and the most vulnerable by mid-February.

The success of the SS has steadily grown over the years, to the point where our membership is now approaching 50 and we wanted to make sure that everyone was in good spirits and coping. To this end, we set up a "buddies" team of 7 people who would each telephone roughly 7 other members each week to make sure everyone was happy and had everything they needed. With the arrival of the vaccination programme, we are looking forward to more freedom this year, in the capable hands of Jo.

March 2021

The way out of lockdown is announced:

9 March: Schools reopen with all pupils returning. The wearing of masks is advised for all pupils in Year 7 and upwards unless social distancing can be observed. Adults in Primary Schools and Early Years settings are advised to wear masks where social distancing between adults is not possible.

Rishi Sunak, the Chancellor, gives his budget – there is nothing for the NHS other than a 1% pay rise but the furlough scheme is extended until September and Universal Credit top-up of £20 is to be extended for a further six months.

The lockdown and the vaccination programme are achieving results: the death rate is below 100 for the first time since 9 October 2020. 22 million people have now received their first COVID-19 vaccination.

10 – 17 March: There is a large outbreak at the DVLA offices in Swansea comprising more than 500 cases. The staff vote to take industrial action over working conditions.

The way out of Lockdown

8 March – Step 1

Schools in England reopen for primary and secondary school students.

Recreation in outdoor public space will be allowed between two people.

'Stay at home' order remains in place.

29 March

Outdoor gatherings of either six people or two households will be allowed, including in private gardens. Outdoor sports facilities also reopen.

'Stay at home' order ends but people encouraged to stay local.

12 April – Step 2

Non-essential retail, hairdressers, public buildings (e.g. libraries and museums) re-open. (*Instituteforgovernment.org.uk*)

Outdoor venues, including pubs and restaurants, zoos and theme parks also open, as well as indoor leisure (e.g. gyms).

17 May – Step 3

Limit of 30 people allowed to mix outdoors.

'Rule of six' or two households allowed for indoor social gatherings.

Indoor venues will re-open, including pubs, restaurants, cinemas.

Up to 10,000 spectators can attend the very largest outdoor-seated venues like football stadiums.

21 June – Step 4

Most legal limits on social contact removed in England and the final closed sectors of the economy reopened (e.g. nightclubs).

Community

There are concerns that the AstraZeneca vaccine is linked to the development of rare blood clots in the brain leading to a number of deaths. Some countries are suspending use of the vaccine.

A sign of the times – hand sanitiser, loungewear and dumbbells are added to the list of items upon which the cost of living is assessed by the Office of National Statistics.

WHO and the European Medicines Agency both state that the benefits of the AstraZeneca vaccine far outweigh the risks.

24 million have now received their first vaccine in the UK.

18 – 24 March: The predicted pandemic baby boom has not happened!

The number of people vaccinated continues to rise. However, scientific advisers warn against taking summer holidays abroad because of the danger of importing new variants. There are also warnings that masks and social distancing will be needed for several years, until the whole world is vaccinated.

My Tenterden gives news of Ivy Court Surgery and how it is working alongside the large, mass vaccination centres like Folkestone.

Lindsay Hammond says the redecoration of St Mildred's Church is finished, the pews are out and the new chairs are here. Next comes fundraising to install a new floor and a new heating system. Buy a chair, anyone?

The Golf Club has a new captain, Mark Williams, who is planning for post-Covid activities. The K& ESR plan to open again in late May.



21st March is Census Day. In previous decades the census has been a major event, a significant recording of the state and composition of the population. We have filled in bulky forms, sealed the envelope and dropped them into postboxes. This year the census is overshadowed by COVID-19; it seems there is less publicity and less discussion, and filling in yet another on-line form does not have the weighty significance of past occasions. But the data is essential – what a shame processing the results takes so long!

Tenterden u3a

4th March: Have a useful Kent Network Meeting. u3a Day is going ahead on 2nd June. Tenterden u3a should do something – we need more people to get involved. However, there are still huge difficulties as there will still be restrictions on how people can mix. Also, our members are mostly in the vulnerable category and, although will hopefully have had both vaccines, are cautious about meeting in groups.

Lindy suggests asking members to 'shadow' committee and for a few small work parties to be set up; relating to publicity, publication of our Journal, questionnaire re zoom. A letter is to be sent out.

Lots of help is available from either u3a office, Kent Network or SE Network regarding publicity and u3a Day, but it is very apparent that all u3a's are experiencing the same difficulties with attracting members onto the committee.

Committee meeting on 16th March. Committee are very busy – there are 36 groups either running in some format at present, or ready to resume once we can meet in person again.

Personal Snapshots

Anna Toombs:

This month we are permitted to meet one friend, not in our household or bubble, outside for a walk – it doesn't sound much, does it? But the sense of release is enormous – to be with somebody different, to share experiences and feelings and to see facial expressions and hear tone of voice changes – it is all a colossal difference and a tremendous boost to morale. However, the weather is cold and fairly wet, so we walk pretty quickly!

Lindy Bates:

I look at our calendar for March – the marked in dates are almost all Zoom meetings and talks. Alan joins his Wine Tasting group to share comments on the individual wines everyone is drinking. There is a talk on orchids with the Horticultural Society and then a flower arranging session with all of us making our arrangements in our kitchens, chatting and trying to find the right camera angle to show what we have created. There is a committee meeting and a monthly meeting. And then, come 29th March, we are once more allowed to meet with another household or with six people outside. There is a distinct sense of déjà-vu but it is still such pleasure to chat with friends and the weather is kind enough to allow us to enjoy two coffee mornings before the end of the month.

“We are once more allowed to meet with another household”

23 March: The anniversary of the day the first lockdown was announced. A minute's silence was held to remember all those who have lost their lives to COVID-19.

The UK and the EU agree to work together *“to create a win-win situation and expand vaccine supply for all.”*

By the end of March there has been a large rise in the number of coronavirus cases in Europe. However, Boris Johnson sees no need to slow down the easing of restrictions. From 30th March, six people or two households can meet up outside in a public space or in a private garden.

Weddings with six attendees are allowed. Warm weather coincides with the easing of restrictions. 60 million doses of Novovax vaccine are to be manufactured at..... Barnard Castle!

There are positive responses of help for all our three proposed work parties. Good news is that new members are trickling in still. Difficulty with membership renewal, despite all of Barbara and Ian's efforts, is that members are not paying anything this year but still need to confirm their wish to remain members. We are not seeing people so endless phone calls are having to be made.

We are making plans for the future and are actively planning a Study Morning in November. After much discussion and investigating various themes, two speakers have been booked on the broad theme of Sustainability and Environmental Change. The choice of a Zoom meeting is fully justified as our main speaker is in Geneva!

As Zoom meetings have become part of our lives, and will no doubt continue to be to be for some time, we are renewing two Zoom licences.

18th March: The Special General Meeting is held on Zoom to approve changes to the constitution: the holding of General Meetings and Committee meetings by electronic means; the term of office of the Chair and Vice-Chair to be extended by up to twelve months in exceptional circumstances.