



Around and About

January 2021

Newsletter of the Witham and District (Essex) U3A

2021

The year ahead must be better than the one we have just left!

Let's resolve to talk to each other more

FEW of us really enjoyed the past year.

Only those who enjoy being hermits, get lost in their own interests or are anti social can really get enjoyment from two total lockdowns and now tier 4.

Things have not worked out as we all hoped.

We never expected to have our lives controlled in January 2021 in the ways they are being.

Back in the summer the world and what was happening in it looked so much brighter.

And most of us waited for the return of the much spoken about normality.

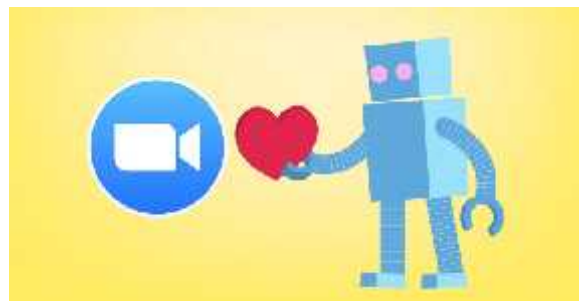
But the dreaded virus has put paid to that.

It has recreated itself into an even more scary mutation than is even more virulent and, seemingly, hazardous to those who end up in hospital.

So it is time that all of us in Witham and District U3A had a positive think about how we can get together and talk more in the coming year.

Our chairman, in her chat, is asking for us all to think more creatively about ways we can get our groups that are currently on hold up and running again.

They maybe cannot run the same way or do the same things but getting together will ensure



we all get together in some format and boost our health and wellbeing.

Just some of the possibilities are Zoom, Skype, What's App or group phone conversations.

Training and assistance for those who are unsure is available both locally and nationally so there is no need to feel left out.

And those who have still not been brave enough to try have the safety net of trying things out with friends.

Under the current restrictive cloud, something must be better than nothing

The long promised vaccines will not be a saviour until some way down the road because vaccinations take time, Let's talk.

Getting social in any way we can



Judith Biddle
chairman's
update



HAPPY new year!!

I say it to you all with delight because it means 2020 is finally over.

The past nine months have held so many negative things that simply shutting the door on the past year is a relief.

Everything is now crossed in the hopes that the coming year must be better than the last.

We have vaccines and I put it in the plural because I read everywhere that the Oxford vaccine should be with us by the first week of January.

Not only that, but it is easy to store and use and an incredible number of doses have already been produced.

After our jabs it will be a case of looking at the infection rates and hoping they start coming down, and fast.

To me, that is the key to us being allowed to meet socially again, meaning our group activities can get up and running again.

We are living with the restrictions of tier four at the moment and, if our newspapers are to be believed, the threat of a third lockdown which tier four virtually is any way.

Any relaxation must be better than what we currently have.

Apparently the Queen was hailed for being upbeat and positive in her Christmas speech but after saying farewell to 2020 and looking forward to the vaccine, I am stuck.

Maybe you should all join me by taking up things we have been wary of so far in this pandemic.

Firstly, there is social media.

Very few members are taking the opportunity of meeting at the weekly Witham U3A Drop-In on Zoom.

The chat is friendly, the company geared to U3A members and talking raises the spirits.

Linking via the internet is easy and anyone having any problems can contact host Ray Hardisty and he'll find someone to help.

I would also like to see more of our groups up and running on social media.

Maybe the groups cannot do what they would normally do but surely something is better than nothing.

Let's all have a think about it and maybe, as a start, group leaders could contact their members and see what ideas they offer.

With only exercise getting us out of our homes, it really is a time to grasp the nettle and make use of what we can do.

And if that means more central organisation then let me know and I will encourage the committee.

Talking of them, we have a new member looking after the u3a's accounts from this month.

All being well, a new Groups' Co-ordinator will be co-opted early in January.

One volunteer is worth ten pressed people in my book so I am looking forward to her joining us.

Judith Biddle 01376 333633

judith.biddle1946@gmail.com

Sunday afternoon drop-ins are great for a chat

OUR up and running Sunday afternoon chats could be a very good place start talking more.

Conversation is on whatever topic you want.

And you can stay for as long as is reasonable.

Access is very easy and you will be online with other members of our u3a.

They get you away from the humdrum of finding things to do and let you meet other people face to face.

At the moment they run on Sunday afternoons from 2pm but if that is not suitable for the majority the day and time can easily change.

Make a New Year resolution to join in and start coming along from Sunday, January 3.

Click on this link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86087221674?pwd=dnRNeGhWRisxNHV1OFVZdG1MVVhQT09>

Join with Zoom app:

Meeting ID: 860 8722 1674

Passcode: 888999

Dial by phone

02030 512874

Meeting ID: 860 8722 1674

Passcode: 888999



What do we do and how? Plans for June's big day need re-thinking.

U3a Day 2021 online

IT'S a re-think on our local activities to support the first national u3a Day planned for June 2. National office has decided the event First planned for June last year will not be delayed again.

Instead, it will go ahead whatever the state of coronavirus and any associated restrictions.

Which means we have to look a lot more at what can be done locally on social media ... or from any outlets operating at the time.

It may mean we come back to concentrating hard on June 2 itself for the core event and keep any other outdoor sideline activities either to a minimum or save the ideas for a more localised publicity drive if, and when, normality returns.

But one thing is very certain and that is the



team planning the event needs an injection of social media users to assist.

So if you are on Facebook, You Tube or Skype, please contact Publicity Officer Ray Hardisty so Witham U3A can make use of your expertise. Ring him on **07434 309261**.

Take a trip through the Underground

OUR 2021 speaker meetings are launched by am who knows London better than most.

Indeed, he is known by some of our members as the guide for walks in the capital under the title London Footsteps.

But on Thursday, January 28, from 1.45pm he treats us to his knowledge of the London Underground system.

Under the title Mind the Gap, he will guide us through this unique transport system that has been loyally serving travellers since 1863.

From steam to electrification, engineering triumphs and wartime tragedies this story is about how London was transformed by 'the tube'. A remarkable feat of engineering created to ease a fast expanding city choked by carts and horse-drawn carriages.

The speaker meeting will be on Zoom, so please look out for the joining details sent to you by our Membership Secretaries nearer the time.



Trying to answer December's query

Why is this spot named the Doctors' Pond ?



AT the heart of Great Dunmow sits the Doctors' Pond.

Alan Stevens asked last month, how did it get its name?

Our Publicity Officer **Ray Hardisty** is a former reporter on the Dunmow and District Observer and it sent him looking back to past stories.

Here is what he unearthed:

"Peter Street is the Chairman of the History Society and he says it could be to do with two of the local doctors.

"One theory is that Doctor Rayner who lived in the town in the 18th Century used to care for the pond and keep it stocked with fish.

"Another is that opposite the pond there is a house called Brick House and two other doctors also lived there.

"This was known as the doctors' house.

"In those days leeches were used in medicine to treat all sorts of problems.

"It's thought that the doctors used to keep their supply of leeches in the doctors' pond and so the local name was adopted."



Blood sucking creatures helping keep us healthy

LEECHES have been used in medicine from ancient times until the 19th century to draw blood from patients.

In modern times, leeches find medical use in treatment of joint diseases such as osteoarthritis.

Take part plea

**Big
Garden
Birdwatch**
29-31 January 2021



WITH all this time on our hands the RSPB, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, has asked if members will assist this year's Big Garden Birdwatch.

Taking part will mean counting the species that appear in your garden during an hour on one of three days at the end of the month.

Thanks to volunteers the RSPB now has over

40 years of data and this has helped increase understanding of the challenges faced by wildlife.

It was one of the first surveys to identify the decline of song thrushes in gardens.

And so the first step towards putting things right.

Surf to the link below for details.

<https://www.rspb.org.uk/get-involved/activities/birdwatch/everything-you-need-to-know-about-big-garden-birdwatch/>



U3A Communities Online

Developed and hosted by Runnymede Area U3A



FREE activity extension to your Witham membership

U3A Communities Online is a free to use site is run by a group of volunteers who share an interest in the use of technology to enhance the u3a experience.

As long as you are a member of any other u3a the activities come at no extra cost.

It is currently focused on sharing activities via Zoom technology and seeing where that takes the idea.

Efforts work closely with World U3A which has pioneered the use of video technology through its regular International Forum.

Current 'groups' are:

-)] Dickens Forum
-)] Science Online
-)] Generation Linkers

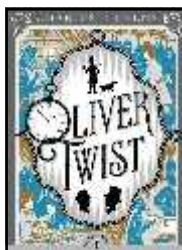
Other interests are more static but you are invited to take a look at all on offer.

There is no need to register to use the site but regular participants might find it convenient to do so.

Surf to it at:

<https://u3acommunitiesonline.org/2020/11/13/science-online/>

Dickens Forum is looking at Oliver Twist



DICKENS Forum is informal group who share an interest in the life and work of Charles Dickens.

It meets next on Monday, January 4, at 11am when the topic for discussion is "Oliver Twist or the parish boys progress"

The story appeared in book form in 1838 and there are a number of film versions.

There's an open invitation to join in.



Generation Linkers breaks age boundaries

GENERATION Linkers sets out to do what is says in the title Foster communication between all ages.

The idea is to study what links are already taking place, re-research what really works and what does not and then promote what brings the best results.

The first meeting is set for Thursday, February 4, at 1.30pm with first Thursday meetings monthly after that.



Science online boosts inter-u3a friendships



SCIENCE Online is aiming for regular meetings with contributions on themes from members of all participating u3as.

The first meeting has already been held with five presentations including one from Miall James of our u3a.

Read his topic on pages 10 and 11 of this newsletter.

It's second meeting is on Wednesday, February 10 from 11am.

Around the groups. Who are doing what, when and where?



Fueling festive spirit

HOPEFULLY you all had a good Christmas and I am sure we all fervently hope for a better year to come.

Looking back on Christmas I am sure that some have uttered the phrase: "We have lost the true meaning of Christmas".

With reference to the birth of Jesus this is probably true, the emphasis being on feasting etc.

If we look closer at the origins of celebrations at this time of year we will find similar feasting going on from the earliest times.

The Romans held Saturnalia in mid December with partying that would make today's get-togethers look rather pale.



Our present day Christmas owes more to the Germanic and Nordic festival of Yule (hence Yule

Log), held about this time of year by our Anglo-Saxon ancestors and also by the Viking visitors/settlers to this island.



These were pagan rites of course, elements still survive from these celebrations, the "decking the halls" with ever-green foliage, mistletoe was held to be a sacred plant by the Druidic religion of the Celtic people, wreathes probably

came from the Roman tradition.

The reason behind all of this was, I suppose, to celebrate surviving one year and to evoke a season of plenty for the coming year or just to cheer themselves up during the miserable winter days.



Singing of Carols is believed to come from the Germanic Norse tradition of "wassailing" when folk would go from home to home singing to their neighbours wishing them "wassail" (good health) fortified by hot mulled cider to keep out the cold.

Some of the Christmas traditions started in the 19th and early 20th centuries, Christmas cards and of course and the Christmas tree attributed to the German influence of Prince Albert in the

HISTORY GROUP

Victorian household, and the modern image of father Christmas or Santa has an American influence.



What has this to do with the Christian story of the birth of Jesus you may ask?

You can imagine the difficulties faced by the early missionaries when converting the pagan folk to Christianity, so to help the conversion of the people, the Christ story was woven into the old pagan feast of Yule, also it is believed that many of the original Christian churches were sited on old pagan places of worship.

The exact date of the birth of Christ has long been the subject of debate amongst scholars but it is what you chose to believe that is important surely, so I think that Christmas is what you wish it to be, we all have our own vision of what it should be, largely formed by memories of our childhood I should imagine.

So let us look forward to a better New Year and can I wish you all a belated Happy Christmas as the early Christian Anglo-Saxons might have greeted each other (the G would be pronounced as a Y)

"Blithe Geo" or Happy Yule.

Alan Stevens 07516 911439



Who are doing what, when and where?



Golden Caps for Jacinda Ardern, Jonathan Van Tam, Marcus Rashford, community volunteers and the NHS.

Talking Shop awards

TALKING Shop members decided that for our December meeting we would each nominate three people, or groups of people who we considered to have been beacons of brightness and hope during horrible 2020.

We each had only one nomination as to who should receive the Muddy Boot of shame.

In the end, we thought all the Golden Cap nominations should be honoured.

The groups put forward were, unsurprisingly all NHS workers who despite being often exhausted and fearful, carried on throughout. And now, of course, they have to regroup and do it all over again.

Another group to receive the Golden Cap were all those individuals and community groups who volunteered support both material and emotional through shopping, picking up prescriptions, checking on neighbours and helping in a myriad other ways often while continuing to do their own paid work.

Much of this help and support has now been taken on through the system, but it took these individuals and groups to kick start it.

Other front-line workers were also mentioned – the teachers, bin men, supermarket staff and of course care workers.

And we don't want to forget the scientists – the ones who have worked on the vaccines and the ones who carried out the reviews of the

trials so that the final approval could be made more quickly than is normal.

Jacinda Ardern, premier of New Zealand was nominated for her proactive and timely response to the pandemic – shutting down New Zealand early which minimised the impact of the virus there.

She did it with humanity and was so trusted by the electorate that she was returned with a greater majority at their recent elections.

We thought Jonathan Van Tam should also be awarded because of his clear, no nonsense and comprehensible way that he presented the issues.

We also awarded a Golden Cap to Marcus Rashford.

He has been able to galvanise public opinion and force the government into a huge u turn in ensuring the children do not go hungry during the school holidays.

He has not rested on that success but is continuing to work with food poverty programmes.

And who gets the Muddy Boot? There was no contest – it had to be Donald Trump. Why? – because he deserves it – nuff said!

We've managed to keep going during this past year though like most people, I don't think we were expecting that we'd still be meeting on Zoom in 2021.

But it works and we'll keep on talking in 2021.

If you would like to join us then do please contact me.

Anne Charles 07990 663338



Muddy Boots for Donald Trump



Talking Shop meets on the second Thursday of every month from 10am and discusses a current topic of general interest.

Who are doing what, when and where?

Mixed views of post war tale

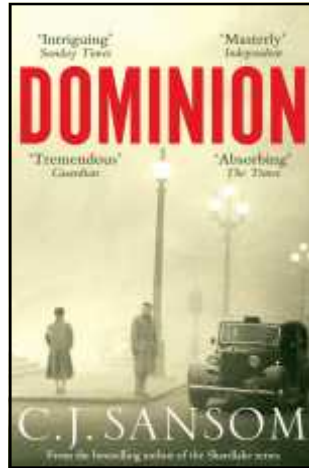
READING Group members took extra time to tackle 'Dominion' by C J Sansom as it was a very long book.

It was read during November and the first week of December.

This is very different from the medieval history-based, Shardlake series, Sansom usually writes, being a counter-factual account of an early 1950s Britain which resulted from Lord Halifax having become Prime Minister and effectively surrendering to Hitler and the Nazis just before Dunkirk.

It described the journey a half-Irish, half-Jewish (although he concealed the latter from everyone, including his wife) ex-Army officer now civil servant, made from keeping his head down and getting on with the job to assisting a scientist with knowledge of the atom bomb to escape to the US.

The Americans had the knowledge and wherewithal to build the bomb; the Germans



had most, but not all of the information.

It wasn't a good world; there were some very dark scenes, although things ended better than they might have done.

There were some unexpected characters; the extremely unpleasant British policeman, who was quite happy to go along with the Nazis and the Gestapo man, who, in contrast, had some more sympathetic moments.

Some of us liked it, some found it depressing.

Several were impressed with the amount of research Sansom had, clearly, done, in particular around the treatment of people in 'mental hospital'.

The treatment of the Scottish Nationalists was also somewhat surprising.

We are not, it has to be said, finding Zoom an ideal solution for not being able to physically meet, but we are keeping going, exchanging opinions by phone and by email.

Those of us who can will 'meet' again on January 15 to discuss 'The Wife Between Us', co-operatively written thriller, and note the comments of those who cannot, for whatever reason, be with us.

Finally, congratulations to Janette on the arrival of a granddaughter.

Miall James

Creative writing with a capital C!

DECEMBER was yet another meeting where we Zoomed together!

Only three stories this month, and a computer glitch, but we had an interesting discussion.

Our subject had been a plane flying over a windmill; two of us used the angle of the windmill's sails as pegs for our story, and two of us used The Windmill, the famous theatre in London as pegs.

That's right, one of us had both!

Out of the discussion came the memory that the London Windmill was named after the Moulin Rouse, the Red Windmill, in Paris, of questionable repute.

However, we also worked in Women's Rights and Witchcraft!

We did wonder whether the newsletter editor would like to show other U3A members some of our work; it could though take up quite a lot of space in the edition

We also had a ten minute write based on 'Across the river a light flickered'.

It's a good idea to challenge one's writing thought processes.

We have decided to stop using a picture as inspiration.

It was generally felt to be too limiting, and next month's subject is 'the train'; not The (specific) Train, any train, or any meaning of 'train'.

Wonder what that will produce?

As usual, if anyone fancies having a go, please do so, and email it to me.

I'll send you an invite to the Zoom on January 19, where we'll discuss it and all the others

I promise we'll be kind to a newcomer, and if any former members want to come back, they'll be very welcome.

Miall James

Who are doing what, when and where?



Landscape views

HAPPY New Year to you all with hopefully much better times to come in 2021.

Having just experienced a Tier 4 Christmas it will come as no surprise that there's not much to report from the Photography Group this month.

Our lockdown project theme for December was 'Essex Landscapes'.

The results have been posted in two parts on the 'Photography – Lockdown' web page.

The first set of images can be found on the

main page itself and the second part by following the appropriate (sub-page) link.

The attached images are 'Kelvedon River Walk (River Blackwater)' by John Bassett and 'Afternoon shadows at Stoney Flats, Kelvedon' by Peter Burt.

Our January theme is 'Wheels' and results should be published on our web pages by the middle of the month. Keep safe and well.

Ian Weatherley



Who are doing what, when and where?

Terling's very own



Strutt in 1917.

WITHAM and District (Essex) U3a's presentation to the first meeting of the Communities Online Science Forum. Research and presentation by Miall James.

JOHN William Strutt, Lord Rayleigh, 1842-1919, Nobel Prize winner for physics in 1904, and a distinguished researcher in physics, optics and acoustics came from an old Essex family.

The family home, and his for much of his life was in Terling.

The Strutts can trace their ancestry to a Essex miller who died in 1694.

They moved from yeoman status to the shire gentry, interested themselves in politics and John Strutt, Lord Rayleigh's (1727-1816) became Tory MP for Maldon in 1774.

His son Joseph (1758-1845) first went into the Army, then, in 1760 succeeded his father as Maldon's MP. He married the second daughter of the Duke of Leinster.

In the coronation honours of George IV though Joseph managed, as a result of his consistent support for the Tories, to obtain a peerage, although not for himself but for his wife.

However he later wrote that he'd later since repented of this decision: "I wished honour to my family, but I find it should have been in my own person."

His wife pre-deceased him, so it meant that his son, with whom he'd quarrelled, outranked him as the second holder of the barony!

Apparently he picked the name Rayleigh because the name was "euphonious," and possibly because of its historical associations, the castle, about 20 miles away, originally Saxon, one of the oldest in England.

So the first Baron Rayleigh was a woman! Something very unusual.

And it was her grandson, the 3rd Baron, who was the Lord Rayleigh of scientific fame.

John Strutt, 3rd Baron, who succeeded to the Barony in 1873, was apparently a sickly child, and only went to school for short periods. He went to both Eton, where he was always in the sanatorium, and Harrow.

Eventually he was privately tutored in Torquay, and entered the University Of Cambridge in 1861, at 19, to read maths, although his tutor would have preferred him to read Theology.

He soon distinguished himself at Cambridge becoming Senior Wrangler (the top mathematics honour) in 1865 and was a Fellow of Trinity; until 1871 when he married the sister of Arthur Balfour, later a Conservative PM.

His first publication was on dynamic soaring, a flying technique used to gain energy by repeatedly crossing the boundary between air masses of different velocity.



Rayleigh coat of arms.

Birds use it, especially albatrosses, but it's also important for gliders and, nowadays, drones.

Rayleigh showed that it proved wind was not uniform at different levels.

Steve and Sally ... champion growers

DESPITE the ongoing problems Fruit 'n' Veg Growing Group have been able to keep in touch.

Our news this month is we now have a new champion or rather champions.

Since we started the group we have had a growing competition, not serious but certainly competitive.

Alan won in 2019 but this last year we have new winners, so it's congratulations to Sally and Steve for growing the prize winning Sweet Corn, they told us, I quote 'we now know why it's

called Sweet-corn, so much lovelier than shop bought'.

Our group enjoy learning from each other, everyone has ideas.

This coming year we are looking into 'Companion Growing', if you want to know what it is come and join our group.

We have yet to decide on next year's crop for our competition but hopefully we will make that decision in January.

Pete Booth

Who are doing what, when and where?

Nobel prize winner



Terling Place.

His most long-lasting book was the two volume 'Theory of Sound' published in 1894, which is still in use by sound engineers today, but he also published a large number of papers through the Cambridge University Press, averaging nine pretty well up to his death in 1919

In 1904 he received the Nobel Prize in Physics 'for his investigations of the densities of the most important gases and for his discovery of argon in connection with these studies'.

Rayleigh made a very considerable contribution to the understanding of physics, due very much to his powerful mathematical skills, which he exploited in characterising a wide range of scientific phenomena.

Examples include his work on acoustic waves and propagation, optical wave generation and propagation, and the propagation of disturbances in elastic solids.

He didn't do all his work at Cambridge; during his Fellowship period, he established a laboratory in the West wing at Terling Place.

On succeeding to the title and inheritance of Terling Place in 1873, when he was 31 Rayleigh immediately set about improving the laboratory and facilities for experimentation, hitherto comparatively crudely appointed.

Terling Place is there to this day; not open to the public.

For those interested in such things the development of the Strutts is interesting in itself.

They rose from yeoman status via the squirearchy on to the aristocracy and to the heights of scientific endeavour, but although his son, the 4th Baron, was also a noted physicist, becoming Professor at Imperial College, and a cousin was an MP, they are now landowners and part of the Strutt and Parker company, and, until recently, as many will remember, Lord Rayleigh's Dairies.

The current Baron, another John Strutt, is the 6th.

Nigel Strutt, a distant cousin and very successful farmer was High Sheriff of Essex in 1966 and was afterwards offered a peerage, but, like his great-great-grandfather declined it.



Well what a year 2020 has been.
Enough to make a sane woman scream!
Sorry for the awful rhyme.
Must do better next time!
So what will 2021 bring?
Some better things to make us sing?
We mustn't get ourselves downhearted,
This year has in fact just started.

Keep safe, keep well and wear your mask!
This is still a very big task!
Our vaccine soon we'll hope to get
Put out you arm and be braver yet.
We wish you all a better year.
One that's stuffed full of good cheer!

Diane Measom

Donation to charity

IT being Christmas and there being no prospect of Wine Appreciation Group meeting, we decided to make a donation to charity. We agreed on Crisis at Christmas, and £200 was donated.

Miall James

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Awaiting
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Co-option of
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The u3a is unique, exciting and joyful!



THE u3a is a unique and exciting organisation which provides, through its member U3As, life-enhancing and life-changing opportunities.

Retired and semi-retired people come together and learn together, not for qualifications but for its own reward: the sheer joy of discovery.

Individuals share their skills and life experiences: the learners teach and the teachers learn.

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