

Newsletter No.50 – Spring/Summer 2020

We hope you are all coping and keeping yourselves occupied during our period of enforced lockdown. Most people seem to be busying themselves catching up on the 'to do list' jobs; gardening; keeping in touch with friends and family or simply just enjoying the unexpected spell of good weather. We hope many of you have been able to keep in touch with other U3A members and maybe join in one the many groups that have been holding some very successful remote Zoom meetings.



On May 8th we commemorated the 75th Anniversary of VE Day which marked the end of World War II in Europe. Not maybe the celebrations we had planned but some of you may have joined in a remote street party or watched the coverage on TV. It is hoped that our period of isolation will come to an end soon and we can all get back to meeting up with our loved ones and enjoying socialising once more. In the meantime the main thing is that we all take care and hopefully come through this unprecedented difficult time, safe and well.

A Poem For The Times...
 Writer Kathleen O'Meara's 'And People Stayed Home,' written in 1869, after the famine.

And people stayed home
 and read books and listened
 and rested and exercised
 and made art and played
 and learned new ways of being
 and stopped
 and listened deeper
 someone meditated
 someone prayed
 someone danced
 someone met their shadow
 and people began to think differently
 and people healed
 and in the absence of people who lived in ignorant ways,
 dangerous, meaningless and heartless,
 even the earth began to heal
 and when the danger ended
 and people found each other
 grieved for the dead people
 and they made new choices
 and dreamed of new visions
 and created new ways of life
 and healed the earth completely
 just as they were healed themselves.



Round the groups

A full list of all interest groups appears on our website <https://u3asites.org.uk/wolverhampton> and a printed list is available on request

Jazz

The monthly meetings of the group seem a long way away now, but before the shut-down we did manage 11 of them since the last report. They included the usual international selection of musicians and groups – Stan Tracey, Don Cherry, Herbie Hancock and Steps Ahead; and programmes which gave an opportunity to play a variety of styles and musicians – the trombone in jazz, contemporary women players, jazzing the classics and soloists through the alphabet (the second of which was H2O).



But now, in the words of some song titles, we don't get around much anymore and in our solitude we

certainly ain't misbehavin'. It's just one of those things, but hopefully when you read this, as well as asking how long this has been going on, we'll know that we're beginning to see the light.

John Sheard

German -Deutsche Gruppe

We are an intermediary standard group who meet most Tuesdays.



During our meetings we translate, write, review magazine and newspaper items, discuss and generally use a variety of approaches to improve our standards. We are a dedicated group who are led by our tutor Christine Smith and we meet at each other's houses on a rotational basis. It is because of these arrangements that we are naturally a small group due to confines of space in our homes. It may be possible, if enough members are interested, to have a second German Group.

Keith Briscoe

Local History

During the last 12 months our sessions have included an Outing to Lichfield, talks on Staffordshire Flatback Figures, Wolverhampton Churches, Don Everall's businesses, the Korean War and Wolverhampton connections, and A History of Canals, as well



as a look at Old Photographs of Wolverhampton, and the research which members carried out into the background of the men whose names appear on the Boer War Memorial in St Peter's. On Monday March 13th our group heard a well attended and very informative talk about the Sunbeam Company, given by Alison, one of our

members. Shortly afterwards all further meetings were put into abeyance because of the lockdown.

There are plans for our future meetings, and I am looking forward to seeing everyone again; meantime I try to phone members for a chat. This is taking quite some time, as there are 30 plus names on the list now. I am being distracted by baking, toiling at a jigsaw puzzle, gardening as the weather is marvellous, and doing some on line research for Archives, where I am a volunteer .

In September & October, all being well, we should be able to meet again, which makes me think about Vera Lynn, and the Queen's recent speech to the Nation. The plan is to talk about VE Day and VJ Day, as 2020 is the 75th Anniversary. War time memories and celebrations will be included and members are invited to bring along any ration books, identity cards, or photographs they have that they would like to share with the group, and memories, especially any war time ones they may have.

Ann Eales

Playreading

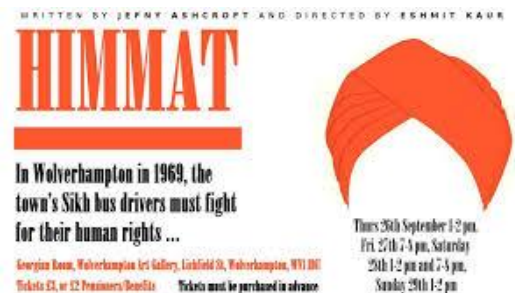
We have three groups meeting each month. Group 1 meeting on a Friday afternoon has room for two members. If interested contact Sheila Moore.

We have enjoyed a variety of plays again. They included two 'bedroom farces': *Rookery Nook* by B Travers (1926) and *Old actors never die* by L Brittney (2009). They certainly showed how times have changed. Seasonal choices include *The Ghost Train* by A Ridley and Alan Ayckbourne's take on a family Christmas, *Season's Greetings*.

Recently we have had four plays based around murder plots, all completely different. They included F Durrenmat's *The Visit*, coinciding with a National Theatre production of the play.

According to the reviews theirs took 4 hours and dragged. Ours (by a different translator) was quicker and gripping!

Jefny Ashcroft is a local playwright known to some Playreading group 3 members. Her play *Himmat* (*Courage, or Being Strong*) was recently



performed at the Art Gallery and it felt like a good subject for us to tackle reading. *Himmat* is about discrimination and racism encountered by the Sikh bus drivers in Wolverhampton who wanted to wear beards and turbans. In 1969 (it was written for the 50 year anniversary) one of them went on strike, but it took the threat of immolation, and support from the Punjab and a government minister, to make the town council see sense.

At our normal meetings, we read from books sourced from the library, but this new venture involved most of us downloading and using our devices to read from. This went surprisingly smoothly! But what made the occasion even more special was the presence of Jefny, the author, who listened most politely to our efforts and afterwards stimulated plenty of discussion about all sorts of prejudice. Recently the Holmcroft Library were getting rid of some sets of plays so Margaret Barr and I went there to rescue some sets and came back with several.

Sheila Moore

Sheila Moore

Opera

What strange times we live in! I hardly recognise Britain as the country I grew up in!

As I write this during a period of government-imposed lockdown, the activities of this group, as of other U3A groups, have had to be suspended until further notice. Unfortunately this has meant that we

have not been able to embark on our study of Richard Strauss' *Electra*, the last opera of our season and due to be relayed into cinemas from the Royal Opera House.

The other works studied have been much enjoyed, starting with Bizet's *Carmen* (seen in Birmingham in a new Welsh Opera production in the Autumn) . Handel's *Agrippina* followed,



preparing us for a magnificent production from the New York Met – one of several superb relays at the Lighthouse season. 2020 marks

the 250th anniversary of the birth of Beethoven. Not surprisingly we looked at *Fidelio* and had expected to see a live relay from Covent Garden. However, the closure of theatres prevented this!

Welsh National Opera's new production for the Spring was the rarely-performed *Les Vêpres Siciliennes* by Verdi. This was the last opera we were able to study; sadly it may well be that by the time it is due to be seen in Birmingham the theatres will still be closed!

Planning the 2020-2021 season has had to be suspended for the time being. Only WNO has announced its 2020-2021 season, marking the company's 75th anniversary. It includes a new production of Gounod's *Faust*, a work included in its first season in 1046. There will also be a revival of Richard Strauss' *Der Rosenkavalier*.

Interest has already been expressed in studying these works. We await the announcement of which operas both the Royal Opera and the Met will be screening in cinemas. Meanwhile we can only hope that theatres and cinemas will be re-opened before long and that the cultural life of the country resumes.

Andrew Milligan

Folk and Country

We started the group on January 13th 2020. We meet on Mondays every two weeks in the Tettenhall Institute from 13.30 to 15.30 hours to sing, play and enjoy Folk and Country music. There are currently approximately 21 members, but attendance varies each meeting, because of holidays, illness etc.

There are many people in this group who enjoy music in other U3A groups, so the skills and talents they bring to the Folk and Country Group are a huge asset as we attempt to build and form this group.

So far it has only been possible to meet on five occasions, because "Lockdown" requires that we disband for the present, until this horrendous virus decides to leave us in peace and we can safely re-assemble! We all hope this will be sooner rather than later and that we will all come out unscathed to celebrate in song together. Until then we must comply with valuable advice to stay home and be safe.....and if members are well and feel inclined, this might be a golden opportunity to practise some of the songs we have already introduced in the group.....Happy practising everyone and stay safe.

Mary McCoy

Poetry 2 – Contemporary

Poetry, Contemporary,
Aims to increase our literary
Vocabulary.

Our topics each month vary,
(The choice of poems is not arbitrary).

All poems are by definition visionary,

Some are extraordinary,
Rhyme scheme and metre seeming arbitrary.
Their interpretation often we may query.

Although at present we must be solitary,
We continue via Zoom, hoping our lockdown will be
temporary.

Louise Henly

Poetry group 3

From the safety of our lockdown, we circulate poems amongst the group members.

I have been trying to select a poem to send to the group but I found the choice too difficult, so I have settled for recommending "Du Fu, China's Greatest Poet". Du Fu's poetry combines a sharp sociological glimpse into Chinese society and his personal account of love, nature, fame and poverty.

There are a number of sites which make his poems available:

www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/tu-fu

www.britannica.com/biography/Du-Fu

www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/3pVz6Cg5Jw3d9SIfN6791/chi-na-s-shakespeare-du-fu-and-his-poetry

Mercedes Fonfria

Poetry Appreciation

When I started thinking about this newsletter contribution it was still 2019. I had the idea of a poetry quiz. Little did I know how pertinent and hopefully diverting that might be in April 2020.

In our Poetry Group we cover all eras, nationalities, languages (translated) and styles. For example I have recently circulated a short poem to the group by Hildegard of Bingen from 11th Century (an interesting woman connecting with us across the years). I personally enjoy (as do others in the group) many up-to-date poems and poets who often write in 'free verse' styles where rhyming is not necessarily a major feature. However, other members favour more traditional rhyming formats and in these uncertain and un-nerving times I think there is comfort for us all in these well known, well loved or even only hazily remembered works. They form the basis of our quiz ↓ which has been mostly compiled by group member Margaret Richmond (thank you Margaret).

The answers can be found elsewhere in the newsletter. Whether you are able to answer correctly or not I hope you may go on to look up these references and refresh or extend your knowledge and/or enjoyment of poetry.

Quiz (answers somewhere below!...)

1. In a poem by Edward Lear which two got married and who performed the ceremony?
2. In Shakespeare's play 'The Tempest' Ariel sings, 'Full fathom five - - lies' . What are the two missing words?
3. What made the daffodils stir?
4. What was the name of the pub in Weathers by Thomas Hardy?
5. 'I come from haunts of coot and hern' What is this in a poem by Tennyson?
6. Who is the current poet laureate?
7. In 'To Autumn' by Keats who or what is 'they' in the line 'they think warm days will never cease....'?
8. What is like 'a singing bird' and 'a rainbow shell' according to Christina Rossetti?
9. Who wrote this and where is it? 'This city now doth like a garment wear'.
10. In 'Sea Fever' by John Masefield what does the poet ask for...? and all I ask is a....?'

Latin

There have been two developments in our group in recent months. Late last year a new member joined and, as from January, we have met at a new venue at Tettenhall Institute which has worked well. Our approach remains as before, with our new member settling in with ease.



Inevitably, the coronavirus pandemic restrictions have brought disruption involving the complete cancellation of one session in March. Fortunately, our physical presence is not vital to our activities and, thanks to the wonders of modern technology and the efforts of two of our more techie members we have successfully conducted one remote session using Zoom and intend to continue via that medium until the current restrictions have been lifted.

Mick Kelly

Philosophy

The group has had a few changes of members over the last year but we remain at about the same number, usually having around seven at each meeting. We have had a range of discussions over the year: The Nature of Time, Images of God, Beauty, The Ethics of Gene Editing, and Environmental Ethics. Recently we have been looking at Political Philosophy starting with John Locke (1632 – 1701) whose

writings had a considerable influence on the nature of democracy, especially in the foundation of the USA. His main concern was that a government should not become too powerful. John Mills (1806 - 1873) agreed and



emphasised the value of liberty. We looked at his book *The Subjection of Women*, where he argued for equality between the sexes and for a universal suffrage, and his book *Representational Government*. At our next meeting we will be looking at *The German Ideology* by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels and *On the Jewish Question* by Marx. It has been proposed that our next subject should be Metaphysics.

Tim McNamara

The Food Group's new coordinator, Pat Reeve, has asked all members of the group to check their inboxes to access and to contribute to her newsletter, which she hopes will keep everyone in touch during the present lockdown.

A llot a bno rter her py Westminster Bridge in London - py Wordsworth
 My heart
 Bees
 Simon Ammitage
 The brook
 The travellers rest
 March breeze loud and shrill - from 'Months'
 Thy father
 The owl and the pussycat - and the turkey.
 Poetry quiz answers

KIT

Near the start of lockdown all members were contacted either by email or phone to check that they were able to contact family and friends and obtain groceries, medication and other needs. At this time your U3A Committee set up KIT (Keeping In Touch) for any members who maybe feel they would like to be contacted by a member of the committee from time to time or be put in touch with other members for a friendly chat. This service is still available and is being coordinated by Committee Member Tess Fitzsimons. Please give her a ring on 01902262004 or email fitzytess@hotmail.com if anyone feels they would like to be included.

ZOOM

Zoom Meetings is a popular cloud-based video conferencing application, used to host meetings with remote or international colleagues and clients - the basic version is completely free of charge. A number of our groups have been successfully holding remote Zoom meetings over the past few weeks including; Art Appreciation; Contemporary History; Science and Technology; Jazz; Ukulele and also your own U3A Committee. Quite a few of our members have downloaded the application for this purpose but also find it useful to communicate with relatives and friends both in UK and abroad. It is a great platform to play games such as Scrabble, Yatze, Rummikub and Perudo with others or to spend an evening at the 'virtual pub', sharing drinks, snacks and banter with friends or even sharing a mealtime together. One to one meetings do not have a time constraint but those with three or more are restricted to 40mins for free but you can reconvene a second (or third) meeting of another 40mins straight after. If you haven't tried it yet why not give it a go? Please contact Chris Collins Tel 01902 420695/email monogramchris@gmail.com or any member of the committee who will be only too pleased to give you any advice or assistance you may need to get started. It is important to note that Zoom have recently increased their levels of security by making the use of passwords and waiting rooms compulsory for all meetings.

U3A DIARIES

Unfortunately U3A diaries will not be ordered in bulk this year but if members would still like one they should be available for purchase from the U3A website Shop www.u3a.org.uk later in the year.

