

WELWYN & HATFIELD



UNIVERSITY OF THE THIRD AGE

www.u3awelhat.org.uk

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NEWSLETTER September 2015 Issue 50

The full colour version of the newsletter is on our website at
<http://www.u3awelhat.org.uk/newsletters.html>

Garden Party 2015



Our third garden party held at Breaks Manor, on Wednesday 15 July, showed again how perfect those grounds are for parties, allowing several separate groups to sit together in the shade enjoying the splendid picnic fare.

Picture above by Tony Lammiman; those below by John Brown.



Notes from the Chairman

You may remember that my notes in the last issue went on for several pages, as it was a fairly detailed report of the Annual General Meeting. Let me assure you that you are not being given a marathon reading this time, because since then, nothing much has happened.

That's a nonsense, of course – lots of things have been happening. But that's the nature of my job as Chairman: a lot goes on without my being aware of it. I know I keep banging on about the wonderful teams we have. But it's true, and because of them, everything goes very smoothly. The only reason anyone has a need to involve me is if there is a problem, the sort that any of the teams couldn't resolve on their own. It might be a matter of procedure, where a phone call by me to the appropriate person at National Office needs to be made. Or it might be a local domestic problem, like a damaged screen, or a loss of a venue. These sometimes need a bit more work, but so far, the few we have had seem to have been sorted satisfactorily.



Talking of venues, we have recently been forewarned that Ludwick Community Hall will be putting up its rental charges soon. We don't know yet exactly when, or by how much, but it's something we've been expecting. However, as we learned from our Treasurer at the AGM, we are well-equipped to withstand a sensible rise; we shall just have to wait and see.

On a brighter note, we had the annual Garden Party at Breaks Manor in July. The weather was not as fantastic as last year, but that was exceptional: this year it was a bit overcast, with not a great many appearances of the sun, but it was warm and sociable and the sixty or seventy or so members who attended all seemed to have a good time. Not as many as last time (perhaps the weather was to blame) and really quite a small number, when you think that we have over 800 members. The food was varied and plentiful – all brought in by the attending members, of course – tables were erected, cloths laid and the food arranged in an attractive and tempting way. This preparation was carried out by a small band of volunteer helpers, organized by Phyl Grainge. You remember Phyl don't you? She's the lady who has managed the supply of food for our social events for years, the one who announced at the AGM that she wanted to step down from the job, but would continue to help out until someone suitable could take over. Well, no one suitable has appeared; in 19 weeks, and after numerous appeals, we have had two ladies who tentatively put toes in the water, but although they were prepared to help, they didn't want to manage, so they withdrew. And they were the only two who have come forward.



I am frankly amazed that there should be such apathy from so many people who are prepared to come to, and enjoy themselves at, the few events we have which require a small amount of organisation and time spent, yet are not prepared to give us a little of their time and a small commitment to take over this task. And this amazement now turns my tone a little more sombre ...

Phyl has promised to look after the Christmas Quiz/Party, and to organize the tickets for the Christmas Luncheon, which she has already set up and booked for us, so they will happen as they always have. I am extremely grateful for the way Phyl has carried on in a job from which she wants a rest, and I promise you that I shall use my authority as Chairman to forbid this hard-working, loyal woman to continue “helping us out” when these two events are over. If we have had no eager and committed person – of either sex – come on, chaps, you can manage these events (and a number of female helpers!) can’t you? – unless someone comes forward to become Catering Manager by the end of the year, I shall formally announce that there will be no Garden Party next Summer, no Christmas Party next December, and no refreshments provided at any other social event that may be planned, and I believe I shall have the full support of our Committee in following this course

Come on, you 800 members: it’s in your hands.

Jack Wood

Have you enjoyed a mug of coffee before the talks on Wednesday mornings? Here is the tale of how it is prepared for you!

The cups that cheer on Wednesday mornings

Margaret, Trish and I have been to the U3A Wednesday meetings in Welwyn Garden City for over a year, partaking in coffee every time, so when a request was made for people to put their names forward to make coffee and tea for the Wednesdays we thought we would give it a go. With much trepidation we signed on the dotted line.

Our duty day arrived and as we live in “foreign climes” – according to Tony Lammiman – we left our home town of Stevenage at 5 am, to allow for the traffic on the A1M. We had bought the milk the previous



*Left to right: Brenda Cook, Margaret Endersby and Trish Rowden at the hatch.
Photograph by Tony Lammerman*

day to save time. We arrived at Ludwick Hall by 9.15, and were grateful to find that the caretaker had put the water on and it was nearly boiling. While Margaret and I got the the boxes out of the cupboard Trish put kettles on and sorted out the table for the milk jug and sugar.

At first it was fairly quiet but soon it got very busy and Trish was kept on the go refilling the milk jug and kettles. We used these to keep the urn topped up. We put everything away before the talk began.

We thoroughly enjoyed the experience although we were apprehensive at first. We met and spoke to people who had only been faces in the hall in the past. All we had to do after the meeting was to put the rubbish out at the back. In fact we surprised ourselves by putting our names down to do coffees again. This time we will put the carafe of water and glass out for the speaker. We say to anyone thinking about giving it a go — just do it ! !

Brenda Cook

Group News

A full list of groups, their leaders, and times and venue of meetings is in the Wednesday Programme leaflet, and on our website at <http://www.u3awelhat.org.uk/groups.html> where details of groups' activities and plans can also be found.

Consciousness Studies

Andrea Steverson's colourful garden at her home in Codicote makes a superb setting for our group's annual tea party, held this year on Saturday 18 July.

The menu, as one would expect, included cucumber sandwiches, cake and scones with clotted cream and fresh strawberries. Delicious! Unfortunately not many members were free to attend this year so we were a select group of six. The photograph shows, left to right: Dorothy Banks, Ann Davies, Sue Dorrington, Tricia Morris and our group leader, Andrea Steverson. As Kum Kum Banerjee was taking the photos she does not appear. We're not too sure how to take 'selfies'!! This was an oversight on our part.

We're already looking forward to next year and hope more members will be able to join us.

Ann Davies



Creative Writing

The Creative Writing Group supplies this example of their work, by Ann Higgs:

What is life on washday?

What is this life? If so full of care,
We don't have the time to stand and to stare,
So we give thanks in silent prayer,
When we see the clean washing blowing out there.
Been up since 6, four loads to do,
Looks good today, the sky is blue,
No time to stop until job is done,
Till Monday morning's battles are won
So sorry kids, no time to play,
Just hope the clouds will stay away.
No time to waste as the shirts fill with air,
As they blow on the breeze as if dancing out there.
The whites from the coloureds kept strictly away.
Never do for his boxers to turn pink from grey.
No time to wonder, you'll get me I'm sure,
Why there's only three socks when I started with four!
There's time for a cuppa and a biscuit or three,
A five minute sit down, time just for me.
But what's that I hear now on my window pane?
Oh damn blast and bother, it's started to rain!
No time now for worrying, I really don't care,
I'll start over again – who said life was fair?

Mah Jong

The game of Mah Jong is not to be confused with the computer game of Mahjong Titans, any more than the game of snap can be compared to bridge. But it may well be a good introduction to the game, in that the player will become familiar with the different designs of the tiles, of which there are 144.

Mah Jong is believed to have originated in China in the province around Shanghai in the 1880s (although there are legends that it goes

back to the time of Confucius). In the early 20th century the game spread beyond China, to the US, Japan, Britain and SE Asia. In less than forty years, it went from being a local craze to creating a worldwide shortage of ivory and bone for tiles during the 1920s.

As Mahjong increased in popularity around the world, its practice was discouraged in China. Chinese government officials wanted only elite citizens to play the game, because they feared that peasants might develop their mental capacities through playing it. After the Communist Revolution of the late 1940s, Chairman Mao outlawed Mahjong, claiming it was a capitalist game, because players would often gamble on the outcome. Prohibition of the game in China was lifted in 1985, and it has since rebounded in popularity.

The first game produced in the UK was by Chad Valley in 1923. It varies in each country, but the basic rules are the same. We play according to the British Mahjong Association, and U3A has an excellent publication explaining the rules and scoring.

The game is very similar to the card game of Rummy. For what appears initially to be a very complicated game, it is really remarkably simple when reduced to its basics, and it is only the accompanying rituals and complex scoring that change this.

The sets of Mah Jong can be works of art in themselves. Our group plays with a variety of sets; some are quite old and belong to members of the group who kindly let us play with them. Others are modern,





bought from John Lewis or eBay. All sets differ slightly in their designs, which is an added attraction to the game.

There is a Mah Jong Museum in the US! It has an interesting website which shows many Mah Jong sets made of a range of materials, including bamboo, wood, Bakelite, and ivory. There is even a pink and gold one made for Breast Cancer Awareness.

http://www.charli.org/Mah_Jong/Museum/welcome.htm

This website also has a “picture index” showing over 200 vintage mahjong boxes and their beautifully carved tiles. It’s a wonderful collection.

We meet on the 2nd and 4th Mondays of the month at 9.45 in the Guessons Community Hall in Welwyn Garden City. New members are welcome, so if you would like to join or just observe for a morning, do please come along.

Carolyn Furukawa

Theatre outings

My first enjoyable outing with the Theatre group, newly led by Tina Jolly, was to the Watermill theatre last year to see *But first this*, a musical homage to radio 4.

The second was on 23 May this year, to the Cambridge Arts theatre to see David Suchet as Lady Bracknell in Oscar Wilde’s *The Importance of being Earnest*.

Poirot in drag – what’s not to like? Well, the whole performance was so much more than that. He was magnificent! He acted with such grace that you completely forgot that this Lady Bracknell was a he. I

had heard David Suchet himself say that he thought long and hard about taking on such an iconic role but felt that he would have a go as, in his opinion, the play is one of the greatest comedies/satires ever written. He isn't the first man to play her – Geoffrey Rush and Brian Bedford have done so fairly recently.

Adrian Noble directed this wonderful production. The sets were realistic, depicting a high-ceilinged London home in Act 1, a beautifully lit English country garden in Act 2, and a country mansion in the third act. The costume, lighting and acting were excellent. All of the actors played their parts so well. They used the language and their bodies to bring out the comedy and the wittiness in the play. Their diction was excellent and the delivery of the lines so clear that I laughed all the way through! Even the most famous line about being found in a handbag was still amusing, but David Suchet stressed the 'found' instead of the 'handbag' which made it funnier for me.

The play manages to mix comedy, farce and satire to great effect. It pricked the bubble of Victorian pomposity with lines such as:

"In matters of grave importance, style not sincerity is the critical thing", or, "I hope you haven't been leading a double life – pretending to be wicked and being really good all the time. That would be hypocrisy." Marriage was also a target as Lady Bracknell states: "I am not in favour of long engagements. They give people the opportunity of finding out about each other's characters before marriage which I think is never advisable". I won't go on as there are so many memorable quotes – indeed, almost the whole play!

The production is moving to London's Vaudeville theatre from late June until November. If you get the opportunity to see it I would thoroughly recommend it. We had a wonderful afternoon appreciating a well known play all over again. Thank you, Tina, for making such an inspired choice!

Ann Davies

The coach arrived in Cambridge on that day allowing members time for shopping and lunch. One member's enjoyment of the trip was enhanced by her lunch experience –

To my delight I spotted the Eagle Inn on the way to the theatre. In this pub on 28 February 1953 two Cambridge scientists, James Watson and Francis Crick, first announced they had "discovered the secret of life" which was that the molecular structure of DNA [deoxyribonucleic acid] was a double Helix.



The boys used to have lunch there most days at table 14, where now there are black and white photos of them, articles and two gold plaques commemorating their discovery. I was particularly pleased to see Rosalind Franklin mentioned on the plaque. She was a crystallographer who worked with Maurice Wilkins at King's College London, using X-ray diffraction techniques to study DNA structure.

Watson and Crick shared the Nobel prize for Medicine in 1962. Franklin had died in 1958 and despite her key experimental work, the prize could not be received posthumously.

So a bonus for me on a happy day out at the theatre in Cambridge.

Gillian Simpson

Photography Group



On their Out and About Trip in May the Photography Group visited Hitch Wood near St Paul's Warden, where Anita Hoyle took this picture, "The bluebell girls", of Pat Ellis and Carol Payne.

Travel Group

The Houses and History of Northumberland 11–15 May 2015

Making good time, after a smooth journey, we arrived at Harewood House, near Leeds. We enjoyed the grounds and several exhibitions: Below Stairs, Turner Art and Princess Mary memorabilia. It was gratifying to see Red Kites flying in the grounds, when not so long ago these birds were scarce.

We continued to Wickham for our four-night stay at the Gibside hotel. The hotel was warm and friendly, the rooms comfortable and the food plentiful. The pre-arranged layout of several round tables allowed our group to socialize at meal times.

From days 2 to 4, we were joined by our Blue Badge Guide, Jan, and she did us proud. She was an excellent historian and story-teller, and her enthusiasm was infectious. As we first passed The Angel of the North, on day 2, Jan explained about its being situated on the site of a coal mine and how Sir Anthony Gormley used his own body shape for the sculpture.

We continued on to Beamish, established in the 1970s. This was the brainchild of Frank Atkinson, who made sure it was successful as a 'living' museum to show the lives of ordinary, working-class people. The starting-date was 1913, the year of the biggest output of coal.

Others of the group went first to Durham with Jan, visiting Durham Cathedral before visiting Beamish in the afternoon.

Wednesday saw a choice of a Farne Island boat trip or a visit to Bamburgh. Members choosing the boat trip were rewarded with fine views of the nesting birds and habitats. They reported seeing Kittiwakes, Arctic Terns, Common Terns, Shags, Razor Bills, Cormorants and the locally named Tommy Noddies (puffins), together with Seals.

In Bamburgh, the castle was the first one to fall to artillery fire in 1464, during the War of the Roses. The RNLi Grace Darling museum commemorates with both pictures and film the life of the Victorian lifeboat heroine.

Lindisfarne was our stop in the afternoon, crossing the causeway to Holy Island. The castle is 16th century with spectacular views. It's



Farne Islands

quite a steep walk, but an enterprising person has set up a shuttle bus.

In St Aidan's Church stands a rather splendid wooden sculpture by Fenwick Lawson, called *The Journey*, which relates to Cuthbert. There is also a signed letter from the King of Norway apologising for the attacks and ransacking by the Vikings on Lindisfarne; which is why St Cuthbert's remains were removed and finally laid to rest in Durham Cathedral.

Day 4 saw a visit to the site of Hadrian's Wall. Started in 122 AD by the Emperor Hadrian, a serving soldier, this was 80 Roman miles / 73 English miles in length, from Newcastle (East) across to the West, with a spur to Wallsend. We stopped at Chester's Roman Fort, one of the gateways built along the route and here Jan 'brought to life' this period of history, before we had a chance to explore the site and visit the museum. We continued to Cawfields, a dramatic section of Hadrian's Wall, where Jan led a short walk.

We had an afternoon visit to Hexham and some free time before Jan took us on a coach tour of Newcastle and Gateshead, identifying for us



Lindisfarne

many places/points of interest.

Friday came and our journey home. We stopped at Belton House, near Grantham, and after visiting this National Trust Property, took advantage of the warm sunshine to explore or just sit and chat before continuing home. We said our goodbyes to our driver, John, who couldn't have been more helpful and considerate, giving us a very comfortable journey each day.

Kathy Dugan

Photographs by Celia Boccacci

Our plans for 2016 are underway. In May we're going to Montenegro and we're pleased to say there has been an enthusiastic take-up of places. In September it will be The Historic Houses and Heritage of North Wales. Application forms will be available in January.

Jean Davis

The twelfth in our series of profiles of distinguished Welwyn Hatfield U3A members features ...

Mollie Luther-Smith

Mollie Bannister was born in Streatham in 1924, and grew up there until the outbreak of World War II. Then her school was evacuated to Chichester in Sussex; she remembers being taught in the school's air-raid shelters. In 1941, leaving school aged 17, she returned to London and worked as a filing clerk for Shell. When she reached the age of 18, in 1943, she joined the WRNS. She trained as a radio mechanic with the Fleet Air Arm and was sent to the Orkneys where she worked on the planes. She installed radios and checked with the control tower that the radio was working.



After six months she was transferred to Yeovilton for a further two years' service.

After the war Mollie returned to work for Shell for two years, then married Robert Luther-Smith, a photographer working in Enfield. Thus she came to live in Potters Bar. She gave up professional work to bring up her three children, but was also active during those housewifely years with the Inner Wheel of the Rotary Club, serving three times as its President.

After 27 years the marriage ended in divorce. Mollie returned to secretarial work for a solicitor, helped look after two grandchildren, travelled to many distant places with a friend, retired at 70 – and joined U3A.

She joined the Scrabble, Opera and Wildlife Watch groups, and for seven years did the typing for the Committee (pre-computers!). Later she also joined the Architecture and Science groups, and went on all the theatre trips organised by Margaret Hakanssen. She joined the Margaret's Travelling group too, going on four of the holidays in England and five overseas. She has also been with the new Travel group to Northumberland.

Estelle Shaw, a women's fitness guru of the '80s, retired from her Eileen Fowler Fitness Group and joined U3A, where she was an obvious Leader for the Keep Fit group. Mollie joined it, and when

Estelle retired from that, Mollie took the group over – and has continued to run it to this year, her 91st!

Now still “sprightly and jolly”, as the poem in one of the birthday cards given to her at the celebration tea-party arranged for her by the Keep Fit group put it, and vigorous with it, Mollie is partially-sighted and unable to drive. Still keen to attend U3A, she walks from her Potters Bar home for half an hour to the railway station to take a train to Hatfield, where friends collect her and drive her to Hatfield venues for the Wednesday talks, Keep Fit and Opera groups. (There is a U3A in Potters Bar now, but Mollie’s friendships and loyalties are all with Welwyn-Hatfield.)

Mollie regards U3A as a wonderful organisation, particularly for people on their own. “So many activities, interesting groups, people so friendly – there are not enough days!”

Hazel Bell

Book reviews

Where Do You Think We Worked? A timeline of WGC Industries 1920-1960. Welwyn Garden City Heritage Trust, 2015. 96 pages. Includes photographs. ISBN 978-0-9927636. £5.00

I read the book from cover to cover without stopping and quite enjoyed it. I liked the colour code and timeline, followed by details of each company/respondent in alphabetical order. It showed that “workers” also appreciated the socialising aspects of the places where they worked, with the opportunity for sports and parties. I wonder if “modern day” companies in the town do so much for their employees?

Apart from Welwyn Film Studios, all the respondents were manufacturing companies, or were concerned with the building up of the town. The commercial sector is missing: Welwyn Stores, banks, retail – good job the Cherry Tree pub was well established! They were just as important. as they were providing services to the manufacturing workers moving into the town.

What must have been quite exciting for all workers of that time was to see and be a part of the gradual development of “their” town.

In the Foreword I would have liked to see a couple of paragraphs giving more detail of how the town's facilities were marketed to home



Shredded Wheat factory interior showing the packing line with a panner (on the right) feeding a pan of "Biscuits" onto the conveyor, 1926. From *Where Do You Think We Worked?* Image courtesy Cereal Partners UK.

and abroad. The efforts of these people gave the town a good kick-start: "Come and live and work in the countryside!"

The ladies from the WGC Heritage Trust gave us a talk at one of our Wednesday meetings. I think they have done a splendid job to get this publication to Press for our enjoyment.

Mike Dorrington

Hatfield and its people. 2nd edition. Hatfield Local History Society, 2014. Includes photographs and indexes. £4.00 each book (30-56 pages), or £40.00 the set from Ms Jane Teather on 01707 271454 or jane@edwardsteather.plus.com

This series of thirteen booklets about the history of Hatfield from its earliest recorded years was first produced by Hatfield W.E.A. in the 1960s, and recognised as an authoritative and informative work. It has now been reissued by Hatfield Local History Society, adding comprehensive indexes. The topics covered are: Roe Green and South Hatfield, Pubs and Publicans, Newgate Street, Roads and Railways,



Law and Disorder, Churches, Schools, Farming, Houses, Families, Trades, and Twentieth Century development (up to 1964).

Autumn Term 2015 – Wednesday meetings

Doors open at 9.45; tea and coffee are served from 10.00 to 10.30 a.m.; the meeting starts at 10.30 with notices and then the talk.

SEPTEMBER

9, Ludwick Family Centre, Welwyn Garden City

Hugh Granger: ‘Can plants think?’

When you hear what plants are really capable of, you will begin to wonder.

16, Breaks Manor, Hatfield

Jason Middleton: ‘Introduction to Gemstones’

Jason has worked in the jewellery industry for ten years. He will tell us where gemstones are mined and the techniques used.

23, WGC

Edwina Robarts: ‘The National Gardens Scheme’

Edwina has been County Organiser of the Hertfordshire National Gardens Scheme Team and has opened her garden for it annually.

30, Hatfield

Ian Keable: ‘Satirist to Insanity: Life & Works of James Gillray (1756 – 1815)’

Ian will tell us of the life and works of political caricaturist James Gillray.

OCTOBER

7, WGC

Alan Davies: ‘Science in the Cinema’

Professor Alan Davies was Head of Department and Professor of Mathematics at the University of Hertfordshire. We will look at a variety of instances in films where science is involved. Is it correct? If not, why not?

14, Hatfield

The Royal Navy Presentation Team

This team is a collection of Royal Navy and Royal Marines personnel who give presentations to educate audiences about the work the Royal Navy does.

21, WGC

Stephen Barnard: ‘When Rodgers met Hammerstein’

Stephen is a local writer and lecturer and an expert in the subject of musical theatre.

28, Hatfield

Zena Skinner: ‘W.R.E.N.S.’

We will hear about Zena’s life in the Women’s Royal Naval Service during World War II and her subsequent career as a chef, writer and cookery expert on television and radio.

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NOVEMBER

4, *WGC*

David Pengelly: 'The River Thames Police'

David spent forty years in the Metropolitan Police, including in the Marine Policing Unit on the River Thames, and managing the 'Commissioners Launch' which involved Specialist Operations and VIP visits. Now retired he is a commercial skipper on the river, driving speed boat trips.

11, *Hatfield*

Graeme Bell: 'Welwyn Garden City Centenary Foundation'

Welwyn Garden City will be one hundred years old in 2020. The Welwyn Garden City Centenary Foundation has been established to help devise and co-ordinate a programme to commemorate this striking achievement. We will hear about the plan to bring together residents and businesses, old and new, past and present, to help make Welwyn Garden City 2020 a success.

18, *WGC*

Art and Photo Exhibition and Demonstration

Members of our Art and Photography groups will display their work.

25, *Hatfield*

Colin Oakes: 'Nine Years in a Grotto: Santa Speaks'

We welcome Colin back to speak to us again. He is an archeologist who has been taking walking tours around London and the south east since 1982. Today we will hear about Santa and his grotto.

DECEMBER

2, *WGC*

Christmas Party - Quiz (by Chairman Jack Wood) at 10.30 am

Please bring finger food. Drinks will be provided.

9 Christmas Lunch (at Homestead Court Hotel)

Tickets will be on sale nearer the event.

Spring term starts on 6 January at Welwyn Garden City