



UNIVERSITY OF THE THIRD AGE
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NEWSLETTER May 2016 Issue 52

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MEET THE GROUPS 2016



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U3A Welwyn-Hatfield NEWSLETTER

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Ludwick Hall was crowded for “Meet the Groups” on 16 March, drawing well over a hundred members to see displays set up by 23 groups. The Photography Group showed photographs mounted on twelve sides of display boards – altogether sixty A4 prints: 36 landscape and 24 portrait; as well as albums. The expeditionary groups – Architecture, Arts Appreciation, Explore London, Travel – showed records of their trips in albums, computer slide shows and videos. Products of the Greetings cards, Multimedia and Watercolours



groups were on display, with water-colours being painted in situ. The Canasta and Scrabble groups were enjoying their pastimes in demonstration games. The Garden Group's display, as ever, made a most attractive scene (shown in our cover photograph). The Poetry Group offered volumes open at short, attractively printed poems for passers-by to read.

Then there were performances: the T'ai Chi group showed us first a peaceful routine, then moves with broadswords; and the Line Dancing Group, again, first gave a performance by six members, then challenged audience members to join them, and indeed some energetic members took the stage with them. Dancers and the audience alike enjoyed the display: and indeed the whole, well organised morning.

Photographs by Tony Lammiman.

Notes from the Chair



It's a real privilege to be writing to you as the new Chair of Welwyn Hatfield U3A. Firstly, I would like to thank Jack for the excellent work he has done in the post over the last two years. He has led us well, both being professional in his approach and forever keeping us amused, whether introducing Wednesday morning meetings, as one of our guest speakers, or, indeed, as our quizmaster at Christmas. Jack has said that he will still be a regular attendee at

meetings, so we will still be able to catch up with him and his jokes!

I would also like to reiterate my thanks from the AGM to all of those who support the smooth running of our U3A – the committee, front of house, receptionists, those with responsibility for refreshments whether it be tea and coffee or larger functions, and, of course, our group leaders. The active involvement of all of these individuals ensures that our U3A continues to thrive and grow. As

mentioned at the AGM, we now have 886 members and 66 study groups in operation. Our weekly Wednesday meetings, covering a wide range of interesting topics, continue to attract well over a hundred members. There have been times when it's standing room only! We also had a good attendance at the New Members' meeting in February, which bodes well for the future. In addition, I welcome Tony Tutton as our new committee member. Tony leads two thriving groups and we look forward to his contributions to our meetings.

This is all very positive – but we are living in difficult times. As you no doubt will have heard or read, the Local Council is now introducing fees for the use of their residential facilities, which will affect all organisations, not just our U3A. This move has implications for our current funding arrangements, which were discussed at length at the AGM, with written comments from colleagues left at the end for the committee to consider. In addition, a good number of you have also contacted us with your views. Many thanks for all of your ideas and suggestions – they have all been noted. We are still waiting to hear from the council about their final proposals, and will keep you posted as soon as we do so. As was agreed at the AGM, the committee will make a final decision about the next steps, after weighing up all pros and cons.

Despite the uncertainties of the future, I'm sure the enthusiasm and resilience of members will ensure that we continue to be a lively and exciting U3A. I am looking forward to the year ahead.

Jean Mackie

Prevarication and Persuasion

On Saturday 20 February a team of U3A members pitted their wits against a team from WGC United Reform Church in a battle of words. The team consisted of Jenny Roden, Ann Higgs and Roy Madell, who held the lead all through the contest and finally won with an 8 to 6 victory.

It was an evening of fun and laughter. The audience were given an opportunity to have a guess at the correct definitions before the true ones were disclosed. From Prickmedainty to Uzzle Pie we were led on a merry dance with all the prevarication and persuasion the teams



could muster. We were offered 14 different, unusual words over a two-hour period – and I think the team could have gone on for much longer. They certainly gave of their best and amused the audience. We all went home with a smile on our faces.

Thank you Jenny, Ann and Roy; you put a lot of work into the evening.

Jean Hughes

Group News

Creative Writing

Following the AGM 2016, as usual, examples of the work of members of the Creative Writing Group were read. This year we heard two poems by Ann Higgs, a reminiscent soliloquy, “The Baker”, by Caroline Welch, and an acrostic poem by Jennifer Roden, “Rehabilitation”, reproduced here.

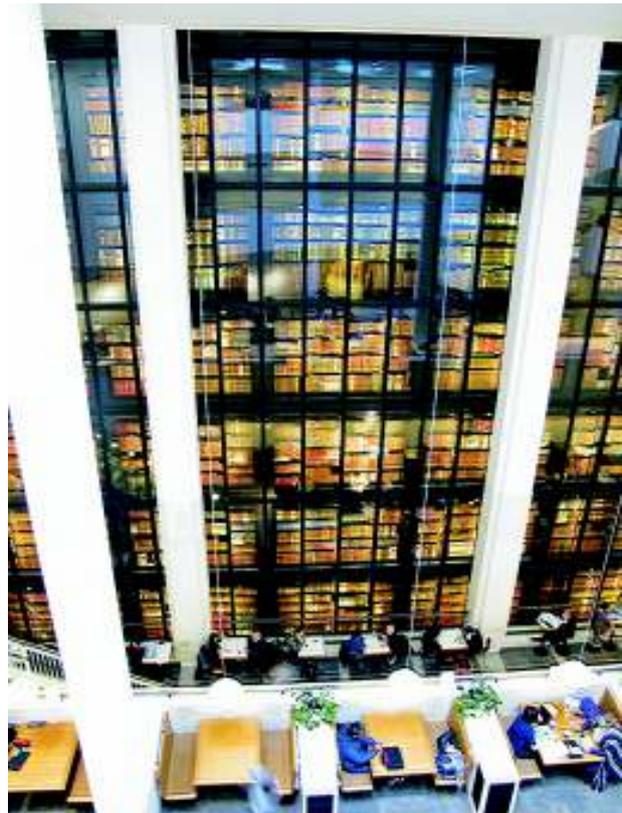
Rebellion, release from a familiar world and adolescence
Emotionally drowning, suffocated by northern village life.
Horizons beyond this claustrophobia beckoned
A rosy dream of adulthood, adventures and pastures new.
Boldly stepping into the unknown, a life ready to flourish
In wedded bliss all obstacles to conquer.
Life-changing decisions, the tumble into an unfriendly, alien world.
Isolation – the lack of warmth and friendly inclusion
The north-south divide weighted the days in misery

A house its own prison, employment a temporary relief.
The deep despair, the tears shed, the reaching out for
acceptance and a life set free to grow.
Incensed and brave, a determined effort to force a change.
One step at a time the pain subsided, life blossomed richly, the
years passed by
North and south merged, rebellion and escapism a passing
phase – peace at last with the familiar.

The creative writing group has a couple of vacancies; if anyone would like to come along for a taster they would be very welcome. They meet at the Free Church in WGC on the first Monday in the month.

Exploring London Group 3

For our group's fourth outing on Tuesday 3 February we travelled to the British Library where we were treated to a behind-the-scenes guided tour. As there were thirty of us we were divided into two groups of fifteen and escorted separately around the many floors of the unusual and very different building by two members of staff. We saw how you can register, electronically request and then look at any stored book, all for free, and how the internal transportation system moves the books from one part to another almost without any human inter-



vention. We learned about the underground waterproofed vault which stores millions of books and magazines, and marvelled at some of the unique and priceless items on display in the galleries and museum.

The photograph, taken by Bob White, shows the King George III book collection that was presented to the library in 1757.

Afterwards some of us even managed to enjoy a good lunch in the restaurant.

Sue McLellen and Tony Dodd

MultiMedia A

The Tuesday morning MultiMedia Art Group displayed an exhibition of their paintings all through January at the Dutch Nursery in Bell Bar. Forty paintings were submitted by eight members of the group, depicted in a variety of mediums and subjects. They all made a comprehensive showpiece of diverse talents by this small group of amateur artists within our Welwyn/Hatfield U3A.

The planning and execution of this venture was inspired by a group member, Linda Collins, who undertook the huge task of coordinating



and cajoling our artists to present their works of art. Anthony Brown, another member of the group, designed and painted the superb, eye-catching poster to advertise our presence. We give our grateful thanks to both for giving their time and effort on behalf of this group, to produce such a memorable exhibition.

Feedback from families and friends has been very positive and has inspired us all to continue, with renewed vigour, the pastime we so thoroughly enjoy each week. The real social benefit that occurs as a consequence of our group meetings provides an extra bonus.

Mary Price

Photography



Two swans a-swimming by Anita Hoyle

weather is kind. The two photographs shown were taken on Out and About trips.

With a number of experienced and enthusiastic new members, the photography group goes from strength to strength.

We began this term with a practical portrait session. Derek Dewey-Leader, a well known local photographer, gave us a talk on lighting and settings. We followed up with Photoshop demonstrations on enhancing portraits, removing wrinkles and blemishes, whitening eyes and teeth, and slimming noses and faces. Our models need never grow old!! We continued with composing landscapes and straightening and cropping the results, stitching panoramas and showing how the newest models take panoramas in camera.

We continue to go out on local photography trips when the

Anita Hoyle



Hartham Park Lock by Pat Ellis

Travel

HOMAGE TO CANTABRIA

After a smooth journey, travelling at a very civilised hour, we arrived at our destination a little before dinner. We were pleasantly surprised by the location of our hotel, overlooking a rocky promontory and surrounded by sandy beaches in the quiet resort of Isla. The hotel was most comfortable and catered for us very well.

Far from the more familiar Southern Spain or the Balearic Islands, this region afforded large sandy beaches, pretty towns and mountains, and overall was much greener than we anticipated. We were introduced to the delights of this area by our tour manager, Paul, who was both knowledgeable and entertaining.

On the first day we visited Santillana del Mar, described as “one of the prettiest towns in Spain”. Some of us took the option of coffee in the local Parador before exploring the town at leisure. This included a Romanesque church with beautiful cloister, a museum of torture (not for me!), an agricultural museum, or just wandering the cobbled streets among 15th to 17th c. stone houses bathed in sunlight. Then we

headed off to the Altamira Cave, UNESCO-listed for its Upper Paleolithic cave paintings. What we saw was actually a replica of the original – too fragile to be on permanent exhibition. But the cave paintings had been faithfully reproduced and the atmosphere was quite awe-inspiring considering that these paintings dated back some 14,000 years. They contained images of bison, horses and deer as well as handprints. The urge for men to make depictions of their world so long ago is impressive and indicates that it was not all about hunting and gathering.

Day 2 was a complete contrast in that it took us back to Basque country, to Bilbao and the world-renowned Guggenheim Museum, designed by the architect Frank O. Gehry. The architecture was truly amazing, with its curved lines and titanium plating and its proximity to water. We had very informative guides who led us through the permanent exhibition of the work of Richard Serra, with its huge steel structures, designed to walk through and shift perceptions. Then a comprehensive tour of the temporary exhibition of the artist Jeff Koons. This was entertaining, challenging, provocative and even erotic. Our perceptions were challenged again as what appeared to be plastic was often made of steel; familiar objects became art in unfamiliar surroundings. I think I liked the puppy made of flowers outside the museum best! There were plenty of talking points. One could not help but reflect on the differences between the cave painters



**The
Guggenheim
Museum,
Bilbao**

*photograph
by
Helen
Bristow*

at Altamira and the contemporary art at the Guggenheim and how the artists reflected the worlds in which they lived.

On Day 3 we visited the capital of Cantabria, Santander, where some people opted for the delights of the town but most of us chose the option of a boat tour of the harbour. It was a gloriously sunny day; we were able to view the bay with its extensive sandy beaches from the sea. In the afternoon there were further surprises when we visited the El Soplao Cave, discovered at the beginning of the 20th century. We began with a mine train trip down to the caves where spectacular sights awaited us. The various caves had names such as Los Fantasma and Opera, and contained examples of every type of formation; stalactites, stalagmites, pillars, stacks and horizontal formations. Now it was the turn of Nature to astonish.

Day 4 was the turn of Nature to impress again. We ventured to the Picos de Europa mountains and climbed high to the small ancient and picturesque town of Potes. From there we ascended to the cable car and, if wished, took the 900-metre near vertical ascent in the Fuente



The Travel Group members outside the Guggenheim Museum

Photograph by Tony Bristow



Cable car in Picos mountains
Photograph by Helen Bristow

De Cable Car. Unfortunately there was a thick mist at the top of the mountain which afforded only occasional glimpses of the spectacular panorama. It did not, however, deter the wildlife and goats; various species of birds were in evidence. There was even an old St Bernard dog asleep by the hut. Some of us sought refuge in the warm and welcoming café until time for our return. On our descent we returned to the town of Potes where we wandered the cobbled streets while the town was having a fiesta. Revellers and music filled the streets. Plenty of photo opportunities here!

Our final full day was at leisure. Paul, our tour guide, offered an expedition to the local mill on foot, while some of us chose to explore the immediate vicinity and its beaches. It was a very relaxing day after our exertions and excursions and we were delighted to be offered a gala dinner at the close of our holiday. The hotel certainly did us proud once more.

Our return was smooth and, on reflection, it was good to have spent time in such convivial company and to have made new friends. It was certainly a most successful trip.

Pamela Williams

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

Jean Hughes

Jean Bennett was born and schooled in Stockport, Cheshire – she calls herself “a Cheshire Cat”. Her first job was there – fifteen years as a dispensing technician, after which she took a two-year course at Chester College to become a medical secretary. She left for Lincolnshire on marriage and the adoption of two children, and worked in a General Practice, becoming Practice Manager.



After a divorce, she married David Hughes, a quantity surveyor, in 1994, losing him to cancer just nine months later. She then took early retirement and moved back to Stockport to care for her nonagenarian mother.

The two sons of Jean’s daughter were both diagnosed as autistic, and the family, who had been living in Spain, came back to England in 2007. They settled in Welwyn Garden City, where Jean's son-in-law bought and ran Heartbeat Radio Station (now Bob FM). Jean moved to be near them and help with the boys, actually living in a caravan in their large garden.

A newcomer to the area, Jean joined Welwyn/Hatfield U3A. She was keen to join the Creative Writing Group: as that group was full, she started a second one (“led brilliantly by Jean Hughes”, as Ann Higgs commented in this Newsletter in 2013). The group not only wrote on topics set at each meeting and read its work to the group for discussion and constructive criticism, but also read their work to our U3A members following each AGM, and made trips to care homes and local community groups, reading their items aloud to the residents. It produced four anthologies of poems and stories by its members, raising more than £500 for various charities. The Creative Writing Group entered competitions at the Wharfedale Festival of Performing Arts: Jean won first prize in 2011 for her short story, ‘Just One Tiny Pill’, and again in 2012 in the traditional poetry class.

An offshoot from the Creative Writing Group was the Hertfordshire Festival of Words, launched in March 2012, now an annual event. It includes writing and speech competitions for children aged between seven and 17, workshops of story-telling and illustration, book-signings and entertainment. Welwyn/Hatfield U3A was among the initial sponsors, and its members act as adjudicators, scribes and stewards.

Jean was a member of the team of four who find, book and host the speakers for our Wednesday morning meetings, and also played her part in the tea rota.

Clearly, Jean's skills as a Practice Manager have been thoroughly utilised on behalf of our U3A. Now she is extending them further. She has become an Elder of the United Reform Church in Welwyn Garden City, much concerned with community work for the housebound and lonely. She is a Welcomer at their Breakfast Café, open to anyone, and runs the Community Knitting Project, producing knitwear for the needy, as well as happy social gatherings.

This leaves her little time for her U3A activities, and now she has resigned from her posts, and can attend only alternate Wednesday meetings. But she says she has had a tremendous lot of pleasure from U3A, made lots of friends, and had doors opened for her. She regards it as "an amazing association", ours being one of the few U3As with weekly meetings, so well run, and offering such a wide variety of speakers and topics – she says her friends in northern U3As are envious on hearing all she gains from Welwyn/Hatfield!

Hazel Bell

Reviews

The QEII: A hospital's story by Angela Eserin. 2015. 72 pages.

Produced by a team of seven, funded by eight institutions, this short book reviews the conception, design, erection, opening, running and final closure of our Welwyn Garden City Hospital. Chapter 1 describes local health facilities in the pre-war, pre-NHS era; Chapter 2 the gradual drawing up and approving of plans for the new hospital; Chapter 3 the building work, and involvement of the county library service, the W.V.S. and the Church of England, with consideration of the nurses' uniforms and ward names, and provision of catering

services. Chapter 4 describes the building finally arisen; Chapter 5 its ceremonial opening by the Royal personage, Queen Elizabeth II; Chapter 6, the hospital's operation through its first ten years, adding nursing training and a psychiatric unit. The rigorously detailed daily and nightly programmes for patients and nurses are quoted. Chapter 7 covers the years 1973-93, with so much technological advance, the opening of an ophthalmology unit, a larger A&E unit, a hospice and a new special care baby unit, and the establishment of an annual fund-raising fete. The hospital's 21st anniversary was celebrated in 1984 with a banquet at Hatfield House. Princess Diana visited it in 1989 to launch its baby car-seat hiring scheme, and the Queen returned in 1993 to open the Queen's Wing. Chapter 8 considers the changes in the training and profession of nursing through the life of the QEII, and Chapter 9, sadly, "The Road to Closure 1994-2014", despite the opening of a new cardiac unit and the Princes Wing in 1995, the Cansearch Clinic in 2000, the splendid way the hospital coped with patients brought in from the Hatfield and Potters Bar rail crashes of 2000 and 2002, and a vigorous, well supported "Save the QEII" campaign. The trusts running the QEII and Lister Hospital in Stevenage merged; Tewin children's ward closed in 2002, and in 2011 QEII's maternity services were relocated to the Lister hospital, followed by others during the next three years. And the epilogue heralds the rise of the new hospital, on the site of the old, to be known, not as The Phoenix, but as The New Queen Elizabeth II Hospital.

Tribute is paid to the work of the League of Friends of the QEII, and the book is illustrated with many photographs

A nicely informative piece of local history, this, and for many of us local residents, nostalgic.

Hazel Bell

Welwyn Garden City – A Brave Vision. DVD issued by the Welwyn Garden Heritage Trust to mark the 90th anniversary of the founding of the town.

This accomplished DVD tells the story of the genesis, conception and development of Welwyn Garden City.

Starting with the oft-told narrative of clerk-turned-visionary Ebenezer Howard's notion of Garden Cities, casually dismissing his first (Letchworth Garden City) as imperfect and casting WGC as the consummation of his vision, this DVD highlights the foundational

uniqueness of this city. Through a mixture of well-selected archive film, talking heads and professional voiceover, the story is captivating.

Howard's concern was primarily a social one, triggered by the environmental and human degradation he witnessed in the East End of London. He believed that by building better, cleaner and greener environments people's lives would be immeasurably improved. This film relates how he and his collaborators set out to achieve this dream and convert it into physical reality.

Howard was not an urban planner or a designer (in fact, his only qualification was as a self-trained stenographer) but he must have been a very charismatic man who was able to persuade others to support – and fund – his radical ideas. To translate these ideas into reality he engaged some very able architects: Raymond Unwin and Barry Parker for Letchworth and Louis de Soissons for WGC. The former gave the city its picturesque Arts and Crafts appearance; the latter chose a neo-Georgian style for WGC. Yet de Soissons was not beyond breaking his own stylistic rules when designing buildings such as the steel-framed Welwyn Department Stores (now John Lewis) or the now sadly defunct Welwyn Film Studios. This remarkable building boasted the largest roof spans of any film studio in the world.

The DVD tells of the troubles, tribulations and jaw-dropping risk-taking of the early founders, first in securing the site, and then in funding the development of the city. There was an element of luck (the site came on the market just after Howard had eyed it), but also a great deal of grit and determination by Howard and his team. The fact that by then Howard had an excellent network of contacts was also a definite plus.

Newsreels record the physical evolution of the town throughout the years, and feature some of its now quaint aspects. Early entertainments in the new city were largely home-grown, and that seems to have generated a rather classless society. We see very young children casually taken for a quick spin in open cockpit biplanes to see the town from the air. We are shown how the initial bleakness of the almost bare site (no trees, the recently built houses standing forlorn and uninhabited, the roads empty) gives way to mature landscape we enjoy today.

There are some weaknesses: the voiceover, initially appealing, later

on takes a more ponderous tone, reminiscent of that used in commercial “advertorials”. It is also, at 55 minutes, probably rather too long for the story it has to tell. This is a pity, for had it been edited down to a more concise format (say half an hour), it would have a more universal appeal. However, the film is nicely put together and it will be of interest to residents of WGC or those who want to learn more about WGC’s fascinating history.

Raúl Curiel

Summer Term 2016 – Wednesday meetings

Doors open at 9.45; tea and coffee are served from 10.00 to 10.30 a.m.; the talks start promptly at 10.45 a.m.

APRIL

13, Ludwick Family Centre, Welwyn Garden City

Zena Dickinson: ‘Luton Hoo – past, present and future’

The Hoo family occupied this manor house and estate near Luton for four centuries until 1455. Since then it has passed through the hands of many notable families, had an important role in wartime operations and more recently was transformed into a luxury hotel.

20, Breaks Manor, Hatfield

Steve and Carol Robson: ‘More stories with folk music and songs’

We welcome back ‘Fool’s Gold’, a duo of husband and wife musicians from County Durham who are visiting this area and who play a wide variety of instruments. This is a musical presentation of folk songs with the story, history and characters that created the songs.

27, WGC

Charles Dace: ‘The Development of Wrotham Park Mansion’

This is one of the largest private country houses inside the M25 motorway, just seventeen miles from Hyde Park Corner, and has often been used as a filming location.

MAY

4, Hatfield

Helen Fry: 'World War Two Intelligence'

During WWII British Intelligence mounted the largest bugging operation ever in British military history by bugging conversations of prisoners of war. Historian Dr Helen Fry will speak about the secret listeners who changed the course of the war.

11, WGC

Mervyn Edwards: 'Policing Then and Now'

Mervyn returns to tell us about his police career and the differences between the Personal Protective Equipment he was given in 1971 when he joined the force and the equipment issued now.

18, Hatfield

Mike Beech: 'Lost Occupations'

Mike worked for Kodak as an internal Management Consultant and later took a teaching qualification and taught management studies. This talk looks at the forgotten, complex and frequently dangerous working world of Victorian Britain, including jobs such as 'Ankle Beaters' and 'Wonkey-Scoops'.

25, WGC

John Walters: 'Pearly Kings and Queens'

John is the Pearly King of Finsbury and is well known for his charitable activities. He has appeared on TV in 'Birds of a Feather' and adverts such as Tetley Tea. He will come with his son, Prince Darren, and the Pearly Queen of Welwyn Garden City, Nicola.

JUNE

1, Hatfield

David Callaghan: 'The Uncrowned Jewels (Wallis Simpson)'

David joined the West End firm of jewellers, Hancocks, as an apprentice, became their senior Director and retired in 1997. He is the current President of the Society of Jewellery Historians. We will hear the story of the jewellery that was given to Mrs Simpson by the then Prince of Wales, which included remarkable items which were of world-wide interest when sold in 1988.

8, WGC

Virginia Simpson: ‘Where do you think we played?’

Virginia is the Co-ordinator of this WGC Heritage Project (a follow-on from the ‘Where do you think we worked?’ project of 2014.) This time we hope to find out what residents of WGC did in their spare time during 1920–1970s, what clubs and societies they set up and what they collected.

15, Hatfield

Charles Bezzina: ‘Arctic Landscapes and the Northern Lights’

This illustrated talk will take us on an artistic journey from a childhood in Malta and an engineering profession, into the unknown of becoming an artist – a painter. We will journey into the Arctic Landscapes of Greenland and the Northern Lights of Norway.

22, WGC

Tim Seaton: ‘The Guide Dogs Association’

This non-profit organisation, founded in 1934, provides help to thousands of blind and partially sighted people across the UK. It has four guide dog training schools as well as a national breeding centre. It is estimated that nearly 5,000 guide dogs are now working in the UK.

29, Hatfield

David Langridge: ‘The Royal British Legion’

The Royal British Legion provides lifelong support for the Armed Forces Community – veterans, serving men and women, and their families.

JULY

6, WGC

Sheila Parker: ‘From Tiller Girl to Vernon Girl’

This amusing talk is about the famous Tiller Girls and The Vernon Girls where Sheila started her career. Do you remember the ‘Oh! Boy!’ show and the ‘6.5 Special’? We will hear about the stars of the time and see and hear some original video and audio clips.

13, Hatfield

Garden Party Breaks Manor, Hatfield, 2-4pm

Please bring finger food and garden chairs.