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**NEWSLETTER Summer 2020 Issue 64**



**Ramblers gathering at the Royse Stone for the first day of the walk**

## **Walking the Hertfordshire Way**

The Hertfordshire Way is one of the many long distance paths that can be found all over the UK. Volunteers had been working hard to establish a route around the county since 1994, and it was finally opened in 1998 with all the waymarks in position. A guidebook was also published with route descriptions, maps for each leg and notes of places of interest. The book is now in its third edition, as a number of paths have required modification due to housing developments and some potential safety hazards at road crossings. For further

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information The Friends of the Hertfordshire Way have a website:

[www.fhw.org.uk](http://www.fhw.org.uk)

Having greatly enjoyed walking with Charles Morris (Potters Bar U3A) around the London Orbital path some years ago, we were all very keen to join him again to complete the Hertfordshire Way. The 'we' was myself, my husband Clive, Susan Marsh and Robin Waters.

Taking time to look back on our walk around the Hertfordshire Way

### U3A Welwyn-Hatfield NEWSLETTER

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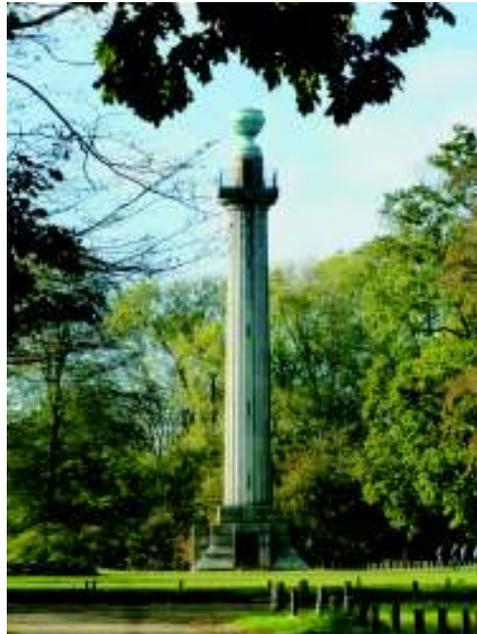


provides a wonderful opportunity to reflect on the calm and relaxation provided by the great outdoors during these extraordinary times.

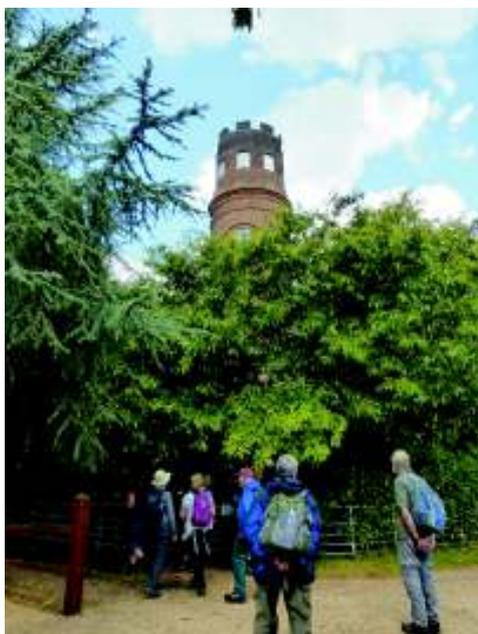
The route starts at Royston, is 195 miles long and is divided into 14 legs of between 9 and 15 miles. It was set up in 1998 and is maintained by a hard-working and enthusiastic group of volunteers 'The Friends of the Hertfordshire Way'. Some of you may remember Joyce Faldo,

a stalwart of our U3A, who was one of the founder members of the Friends. The trail covers a large area of the county with wide open views over low hills and farmland in the north, the steep wooded escarpments of the Chilterns to the south west and some of the larger industrial areas around Watford and Hemel Hempstead to the south. The route passes several ancient market towns and, of course, the Cathedral city of St Albans. It crosses the Roman roads of Ermine and Watling Street along with the modern thoroughfares emanating from London – the A1(M), A405, and M25, plus several major railway lines.

Our adventure started in April 2018 when a group of about 60 walkers gathered eagerly at the Royse Stone – the base of a medieval cross marking the junction of Ermine Street and the Icknield way, in Royston. This first leg gave us spectacular views north from the top of Therfield Heath and we were fortunate enough to see the early shoots of the rare and beautiful purple pasque flower. The next few legs took us south west through numerous small villages, including St Paul's Walden, the birthplace of the Queen



**Bridgewater Monument**



**Stratton's Folly**

Mother, and eventually to St Albans. By this time of course, we were in the height of the very hot summer (remember that?!) and Charles actually cancelled the July session as it was going to be over 30 degrees C. When we walked that postponed section from Codicote to St Albans in August, the temperature was still as high and we were all extremely grateful when the 13-mile trek finally ended at St Michael's museum in Verulamium. I can't imagine how many gallons of water were consumed that day!

From St Albans we headed out west to our furthest town, Tring, passing through the magnificent Ashridge Estate, including Ashridge House (now a conference

centre) and stopping at the Bridgewater monument (National Trust). Charles had arranged special access for us so we were treated to some fantastic views from the top. Dropping down into Ashridge village our guide book told us to stop at the pretty pond to admire the ducks and surroundings, however it was bone dry! A combination of the weather and maintenance work – we were so disappointed!

Leg 7 was the big one – Tring to Kings Langley, a total of 15 miles. Were we going to survive? Yes we did and, for the first time, we had a drop of rain. Our route took us past some restored WWI practice trenches, the 11th-century motte and bailey castle at Berkhamsted, and a section of the Grand Union canal – a real variety. Coming round to the south of the county we crossed many of the thoroughfares previously mentioned. We had good views of the Art Deco Ovaltine factory, which is now apartments, as indeed, is Wall Hall mansion, previously a teacher training college.

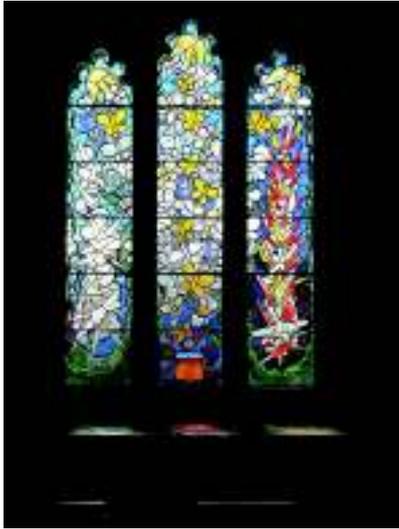
One of the villages we passed through, Letchmore Heath, had a lovely pond (with water this time!) and houses with plaques to commemorate the young soldiers who never returned from the Great War. Leg 8 finished at Shenley Park (Nicholas Hawksmoor was a resident at one time) at a delightful cafe called the Cafe in the Orchard. What a fabulous spot, with hot drinks and homemade cakes – one I certainly would recommend.



**Thundridge Church**

The route continued east and then northerly again, passing through Northaw, a village with a wealth of history, through Cuffley on to Essendon and Little Berkhamsted. The latter is particularly interesting for the tower, known as Stratton's Folly (named after its first owner) which is a local landmark. Unfortunately we couldn't go in as it's now privately owned. On to the historic county town of Hertford and then along a delightful meadow walk beside the River Beane. Thundridge, on the old A10, has a plaque to Thomas Clarkson who worked tirelessly to abolish slavery and it also boasts a very fine ruin of a Norman church. This area of Hertfordshire is quite remote and we finished the leg climbing up a steep hill into Widford village where we finally rested on a bench outside the Green Man pub. Imagine our devastation when we discovered that it had closed down!

Further east into areas I really didn't know very well, apart from Henry Moore's estate at Perry Green – a wonderful lunch stop giving us time to admire his magnificent sculptures. Again, a must visit during the summer months (but not this year, I'm afraid!). The route around Bishop Stortford has been altered quite a bit given the housing developments going on in the area, and we also had to do a major detour to avoid the new Little Hadham bypass, currently under construction. However, on to the SSSI, Patmore Heath – an acid heath land which is maintained by sheep who are free to graze on it, and into



**Anstey Church window**

Hare Street – a name and place new to me, but a significant and interesting village.

The final leg was full of interest – beautiful countryside and the fascinating remains of a WWII US airfield at Nuthampstead. The path follows the old perimeter road and leads onto a well-kept and informative museum, full of artefacts, photos and clothing from the time the American Air Force was based there. There is also a poignant memorial to commemorate the 10 US air crew killed when a bomber, with its full complement of bombs, crashed in the nearby village of Anstey. The fact that the bombs didn't explode meant that the lives of many others were fortunately spared. There is a stained glass window



**Happy faces having finally completed the full 195miles!**

in Anstey Church in honour of the 10 lost airmen. From this spot, on through the villages of Reed and Barclay and then over and down the scarp to Royston and a well-earned pint in Wetherspoons – we'd made it! I have missed out so much about the wealth of churches we passed, Devil's Dyke, site of a battle between the Romans and the Britons, near Wheathampstead, with John Bunyan's old house nearby too, the model village for farm workers built at Childwickbury, just outside St Albans and the picturesque village of Much Hadham. We encountered references to a number of famous people who lived or spent time in Hertfordshire, such as Shaw's Corner at Ayot St Lawrence; George Orwell in Wallington; E M Forster's residence, Rooks Nest House, north of Stevenage (the setting for *Howards End*); Charles Lamb, the essayist, who spent time in Widford; and the cricket ground in Shenley designed by WG Grace.

Writing this brings back wonderful memories of the days out walking in this lovely county and the lively conversations with all the like-minded fellow U3A walkers. Many thanks to Charles for organising it and a special thanks to Ian, Susan's husband, who kindly drove us both to and from the start and end of each section. I think you can tell that we really enjoyed ourselves!

*Jean Mackie*

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### Notes from the Chair

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The new year found us full of enthusiasm and plans for the weeks ahead. I was only Deputy Chair then but who was to anticipate what lay ahead for us? It's difficult to comprehend how our lives have changed in a few short weeks. Plans by the Travel Group to visit Prague; theatre visits planned to see *The Prince of Egypt*, *The Doctor* and *The Watsons*; the summer dance; a variety of visits by the Arts Appreciation Group and the Gardening Group; Exploring London and many more have all had to be put on hold or cancelled. And all this is on top of the regular Wednesday meetings and range of study groups which we all enjoy. But all these are an indication of the energy and resourcefulness of U3A members and I hope that you are all able to enjoy some of your activities or are just keeping in touch at home.



**Pamela Williams**

So to consider what we did enjoy at the beginning of the year. We had some very good speakers at the Wednesday meetings and we had nine of these before “lockdown”. I particularly enjoyed the talks on “The Art of Underground Travel”, about the posters and artwork employed by London Transport, and “Prime Ministers’ Extra-Marital Affairs” – most revealing! The Underground talk inspired a proposal to visit the Museum/Gallery which housed some of the posters. The historical maps talk, the career of Agatha Christie and others were all entertaining and informative. So, well done to Bharati Chauhan and her team who organise the speakers. Unfortunately, Bharati is unable to continue in this role but the team will carry on the good work.

I enjoyed a memorable trip with Exploring London 4 to the British Museum in January. Once again Sonja Park’s granddaughter was our guide and she provided an expert commentary on the ten objects she chose to enhance our visit. All my favourites were there and we had time to continue to explore individually after lunch. The theatre visits group began the year by planning a trip a month. Our first visit was to see, *The Girl from the North Country* at the Playhouse Theatre and in February to see the revival of *A Taste of Honey* at the Trafalgar Studios. Both visits were enjoyable and well-attended. While groups and visits were going ahead, we were planning the celebrations to mark the national U3A day on 3<sup>rd</sup> June and the celebrations to mark the centenary of Welwyn Garden City.

Then on 11 March we held the AGM and, by this time, the future of meetings was beginning to look doubtful. Fortunately, we had

sufficient members present to be quorate and so important decisions could be made. We had to say farewell to Ann Davies, stepping down from the committee after serving several years and making a huge contribution to committee and groups as co-ordinator. Tony Tutton was also leaving the committee but continues in his various roles as “Minister of Fun” as I like



**Ann Davies**



**Tony Tutton**

to think of him. I was elected as Chairperson, Penny Barratt as Deputy Chair and five other members to the Committee: Dave Charlwood, Dianne Coxon, Steve Hall, Ann Higgs and Roy Madell. ALL the members of the Committee contribute hugely to the successful running of our U3A but I would like to mention especially, as I did at the AGM, Sue Talbot (Treasurer), Marie Scales (Secretary), Roger Swaine (Webmaster), Hazel Bell (Newsletter Editor) and Peter Fox (Membership Secretary). I welcome those taking on new roles and know they will be successful: Jill Longman and Joan Scales. Colin Slade and Sandra Williams also play a full part in their role as committee members. Our thanks are due to all.

Here's hoping we'll meet again soon. If you haven't discovered it yet I have been writing a weekly blog about the lockdown. You can find it on the website just after the announcement of the closure of our activities. Stay safe, everyone, stay well, and we'll meet again on the other side of this.

*Pamela Williams*

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## Notes from the Secretary

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As secretary I should like to share with you a few items which I have received from U3A Trust.

**National Newsletter** The U3A Trust produces a newsletter on a monthly basis, for those of us with Internet access. It is free - all we have to do is to register. I did it so it must be really easy because I hate tech!! The Trust is using the National Newsletter to keep members informed on the latest government advice concerning Coronavirus Covid-19 but it is also filled with information, stories and advice from across the U3A movement on how to keep safe and occupied during this difficult time. To register, just go to the Trust's website – [U3A.org.uk](http://U3A.org.uk) – click on “Newsletter” and fill in your details.



**Marie Scales**

**Online Discussion Forums** During these unprecedented times, the Third Age Trust has been looking at different ways to support the U3A community, to enable members and Interest Group leaders to stay active and connected with each other, sharing ideas and supporting each other. There are three separate discussion areas, under the headings “Learning” (on all subjects and interests), “Our U3A Community” (on how we support each other) and “Beacon” (about the U3A management system, so probably not of general interest to our members). To join in, go to the forum website – [forum.u3abeacon.org.uk](http://forum.u3abeacon.org.uk) – click the ‘register’ button and fill in your details.

**Diary Project 2020** U3A members are being asked to help craft a shared learning project where they create living history of this extraordinary time. Jo Livingstone and Jennifer Simpson are leading the project which will look for personal thoughts, ideas and reflections on what this time is like for you and how it is affecting you, both on a practical and on a psychological level. You may wish to write something each day for example, or once a week or simply when something of note happens. If you want take part you can find out more on the Trust website or you can contact the team at [diary@u3a.org.uk](mailto:diary@u3a.org.uk).

**Keeping in Touch** Behind the scenes, work is continuing with the Committee keeping in contact by phone, email and WhatsApp. You will read elsewhere in this newsletter about how various study groups are finding ways to continue at the moment. For more general contact, those members without Internet access might consider setting up a “phone tree” so each person is responsible for calling one or two others, or perhaps setting up a telephone conference with a group of friends. For those of us with internet access, the method of keeping in touch which I have found most interesting is the U3A’s UK Facebook group, where individuals from across the country are writing about what they are now doing. Replying to one of these messages reminds me of when I was a child and had a couple of pen pals, who initially knew very little about each other but gradually became real friends.

To you all, take care! And I look forward, hopefully, to seeing you all at the beginning of the autumn term.

*Marie Scales*

## Getting in Touch Online

In the difficult times we are facing at the moment it is hugely helpful to be able to communicate with others (family and friends) via the Internet. Instead of just hearing one person's voice on the phone, you could perhaps see the whole family, and they could see you, if you wish. You might even be able to "virtually" share a meal, or a stroll round your garden, or do a quiz together. If you have not yet got to grips with these methods, this might be just the time to give it a really good try.

Our own ever-helpful Tony Tutton has put together some advice for those who have yet to take the plunge into such things as Facebook, Skype, etc. Over to you, Tony!

To do this you would need to use a website "browser" ( i.e. Microsoft Edge, Chrome, Firefox etc) on your device – Computer, Tablet or phone – and use this to download software which would allow you to hear and to see the person that you are calling.

Below are links to three of the most popular sites. You can type these into your browser which will take you to video tutorials which you can watch, stop, start & replay to help you learn how to use them.

Facebook: <https://youtu.be/hjbRBd-HbYY>

Skype: <https://youtu.be/NRcb3uB3Jac>

Zoom: <https://youtu.be/arIDQBALrEw>

There are many other different types of social media that can be accessed also by "smart phones" – for example WhatsApp, and FaceTime for using video and audio communication between iPhone users. Tutorial links for these are below.

WhatsApp: <https://youtu.be/y3EdIJeTXk>

Facetime: <https://youtu.be/NyfaJR7BilQ>

This is only a flavour of what can be done. If one of these possibilities takes your fancy then I would suggest you practise with it and/or speak with a family member who may be able to talk you through more of the detail. – *Tony Tutton*

Deciding to take the plunge and begin to make more use of the benefits of technology might seem frightening. There are many scare-stories of what can go wrong, but if you proceed cautiously, seeking advice if something bothers you, you could find that there is much more to gain than to lose.

I myself started very, very slowly on Facebook and I do not go in for having loads of “friends” there (in fact none at all outside my immediate family). What I have found absolutely invaluable is joining a few groups there, so that I see ideas, suggestions and comments from people who enjoy some of the same things I enjoy. I started by reading the sort of messages people were posting, to get an idea of what the group was like before I tried adding any comments of my own. The groups I have joined are “moderated” by the people who set them up, and they set simple rules about being polite to each other, etc., and maybe about not using the group to advertise, and they make sure that people stick to those rules. If they don’t, they’re barred from the group.

Quite a few individual U3As have their own Facebook groups, which is a great way to keep in touch. We in Welwyn Hatfield U3A have not tried this (yet?) but I’d like to personally endorse a fantastic group called “U3A: Keeping in Touch” which was started almost the moment this period of isolation began – at time of writing it has over 2,200 members and they seem to come from every corner of the UK and beyond. It is packed with interesting ideas, puzzles, useful suggestions and comments and I find it a real boon. Go on, give it a try!

*Jill Longman*

### **Things to do While Stuck at Home**

If you have time in between gardening, DIY-ing, cooking, reading, phoning friends and family, etc., you might try some of the following ideas.

**See top theatre productions free online:**

[nationaltheatre.org.uk/nt-at-home](http://nationaltheatre.org.uk/nt-at-home)

[filmedonstage.com/news](http://filmedonstage.com/news)

**Try free audio books:**

Stories.audible.com/discovery

*Scroll down the page for a selection of classics*

**Catalogue your books online:**

www.librarything.com/

*Catalogue the books you own, giving them any tags you choose, and join a community of book lovers and reviewers.*

**Take a virtual tour:**

Artsandculture.google.com/project/street-view

*Includes museums and landmarks from all over the world*

skylinewebcams.com

*Shows live webcams from all over the world*

**Get creative and win an award:**

[www.kinglearprizes.org.uk](http://www.kinglearprizes.org.uk)

*A national creative arts competition for over-70s*

**Get to know the trees of Welwyn Garden City:**

[www.wgc100.org/city-of-trees](http://www.wgc100.org/city-of-trees)

*Downloadable guides to several different areas of the town. If you can exercise outside, you might even be within walking distance of some of them!*

**Get to know YouTube:**

You can find just about anything! For example, in Google (or any search engine) search for “Joe Wicks youtube seniors” and try an exercise class, or “YouTube learn origami”, or “youtube fix door handle” – the possibilities are endless. Sometimes the video starts with an advert or two, but you are usually offered the option to “Skip Ads” after a few seconds.

Look on our website – [www.u3awelhat.org.uk](http://www.u3awelhat.org.uk) – for a longer list of suggestions, growing all the time.

*Jill Longman*

## Disjointed Groups



Joan Scales

This is my first article as Groups Coordinator for the Newsletter, having taken over from Ann Davies, who had carried out the role for six years. What a strange time for us all! I had been anticipating finding out how groups were getting on in their regular meetings, and reporting on the Meet the Groups session which should have been held on 1<sup>st</sup> April – but instead I am having to report on how the groups are coping during “lockdown”. I find that our Group Leaders are certainly a very resourceful bunch!

Many Groups appear to have set up **WhatsApp** groups, either to continue discussion around their chosen subject, such

as *Book Group (2)*, led by Marian Sklar:

WhatsApp group set up which is active and providing some much needed support – and laughter! Last Thursday when it should have been our meeting we all had a chat about the book we’d read. It was very successful. The only thing we missed was the tea and cake after!

While others are using WhatsApp just to keep up social interaction, which is very important as so many members are in the over-70s category.

Some are using **email**.

Andrea Steverson writes:

My main aim during this lockdown is to encourage and enable my Consciousness Studies and Spiritual Exploration Groups to feel connected during this period of isolation. I adapted our existing Mailshot group information system to facilitate group interaction/communication. I have encouraged group members to share online comments, videos, poems, cartoons of an uplifting or humorous nature to lift our spirits. Group members are also free to share fears/frustrations if they need to ... though so far no one

has. I will occasionally intersperse video material, newspaper articles, etc. of a more informative nature, connected to our field of study ... and at times involving relevant research opportunities.

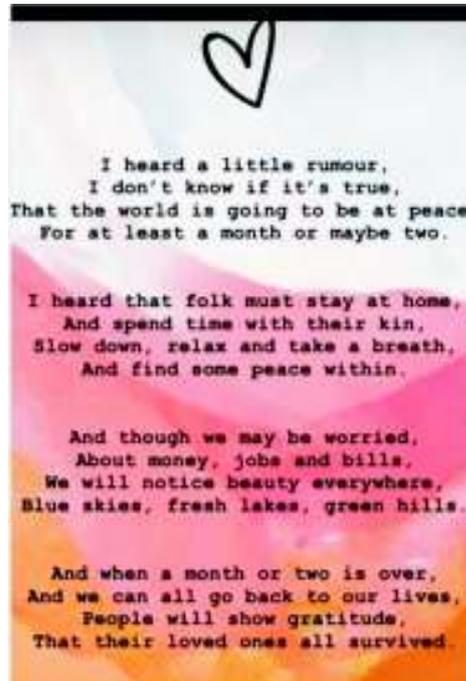
The *Creative Writing Group* meets on the first Monday of every month. Jenny Roden says:

We're going to share our writing via our group e-mail. We'll feedback our comments and perhaps start a discussion through this method. We're planning to continue to write and share on a monthly basis and keep our group active and in touch with each other.

Once we're able to meet again, we plan for a meeting plus a social time – out to lunch together probably!!



Inside the Thames Tunnel in the mid-19th century



I heard a little rumour,  
I don't know if it's true,  
That the world is going to be at peace  
For at least a month or maybe two.

I heard that folk must stay at home,  
And spend time with their kin,  
Slow down, relax and take a breath,  
And find some peace within.

And though we may be worried,  
About money, jobs and bills,  
We will notice beauty everywhere,  
Blue skies, fresh lakes, green hills.

And when a month or two is over,  
And we can all go back to our lives,  
People will show gratitude,  
That their loved ones all survived.

Stephen Brown, leader of *London History* says:

I generally prepare a standard presentation on some aspects of London history for each meeting, looking at new English Heritage blue plaques, with a look back on events in London history in that month. I'm now

preparing this as usual and just circulating it on the date when the meeting would happen. I did this for the March meeting and will continue to do so.

Marie Scales, leader of the *Sunday Solo Lunch Club*, reports:

Last Sunday should have been our Sunday Solo lunch, so as group leader I sent everyone an email telling them how I missed everyone and what I have been doing to keep busy; the email also said that if anyone wished to have a chat they should give me a ring. The response has been amazing – I have received many very long emails and several phone calls. One of the calls lasted about half an hour, the best part was hearing laughter.

Ann Davies:

I've been sending my Spanish and French groups video clips, audio clips, stories and readings to do. I'm doing this on the Mondays when we normally meet. For the French group this week I recorded a YouTube video of me explaining the work I was sending and emailed that to them with the transcript of the French version of Puss in Boots. In a second email I sent the audio of the story and some questions about it. I decided not to forward anything about Covid19 in French as I feel we are



saturated enough with it in English! I asked permission to send this in an open format so everyone could see any replies or comments anyone made. I've asked the groups if they'd like to try a Zoom session next time – you can have up to 40 minutes free.



**Apple On line Discussion Group**

Tony Tutton is using **Skype**:

I ran my normal scheduled Microsoft Computer Discussion Group on Thursday 2 April. We had eight members on line via Skype and had a very successful one-hour meeting with all members participating, posing, answering and discussing a full range of computer/IT related questions.

Everyone seemed to think that it was worthwhile and worked well so we have scheduled another one for two weeks' time when we shall be dealing with the use of GIMP photo editing software in addition to providing answers to everyone's computer questions. I also ran the Apple Users Group meeting on 9 April with nine members which also went very well. It is keeping me occupied and giving the computer groups dates for their diaries which I think is quite important at the moment.

Several Groups have taken to **Zoom**. This is from Raul Curiel, leader of the *Philosophy Group*:

This was a technology that I was unfamiliar with until ten days ago, although I do use other videoconferencing software in other contexts. We are fortunate in that two of our members are very tech-savvy and they have set up and host the Zoom sessions. Last Friday we had our very successful first session with almost everyone participating.

The software is user-friendly with minimal training; all one needs is a computer or even a tablet. An invitation is sent by the Host, and Guests merely need to accept it and proceed from there at the allocated time. What has become clear is that the only cogent way to run the discussion is if there is a Chairperson that uses a kind of traffic-light system, so that people do not all

speak over each other. When you wish to speak you raise your hand, then the Chair will take note and ask you to speak. Otherwise it worked very well; it is no substitute to the real thing, of course, but as this nightmare is likely to last for a wee while, then it's certainly a palliative.



**The Poetry Group's Zoom session**

The *Poetry Group* held its first Zoom meeting on 9 April, with only four members managing to participate, but hopes for a higher virtual attendance next time.

Linda Curiel has followed the information from the most recent U3A national newsletter at – <https://u3a.org.uk/how-to-guidance> and has set up a weekly private Zoom meeting (to avoid infiltration by trolls) for *Spanish conversation* at the time of the usual meeting.

*World Affairs*, led by Graeme Manson, are also using Zoom:

There has been a fantastic response from the members of the World Affairs group. We are today nine days into the lockdown declared by Boris Johnson on the evening of 24 March. We have resumed our normal speaker schedule in World Affairs but now we operate entirely on Zoom. On Monday we had 13 people on Zoom screens which I chaired remotely from my house, and we talked for over two hours, each person talking as they wished just as in a face-to-face meeting. It was very enjoyable and lively. The number on Zoom in our group grows daily. We are 19 today though we had a Zoom tutorial session this morning so we may be in the twenties by now. Many of our members are in their late eighties and we have two in their nineties, but the younger members coax them onto Zoom and they can use it and join in. It's been a wonderful and fast response so I am very proud of the group.

Not all Groups can continue in anything like their usual way, of course. In response to my email sent to all Group Leaders asking for information for this article, I heard back from Hilary Sepahy:

The table tennis group members all have each other's email addresses and many belong to other groups too so until we are able to play again there's not much we can/need to do together.

Elaine Evans, leader of the *Architecture Group*, replied:

As I'm not an IT person so live in the dark ages except for being able to email people, we in the Architecture Group are not doing clever things on line, but I SO miss the group and Michael's excellent presentations. All I can say is that we will really appreciate U3A all the more once things return to normal.

Rest assured, Elaine, I'm sure a lot of the members of the group are watching *Homes Under the Hammer*, *Escape to the Country* and *Belgravia* and studying the architecture more intently than other viewers!

We all certainly have more time for our solo hobbies at the moment, including tracing our family history, gardening, art and reading.

*Joan Scales, Groups Coordinator*

## The New Members' Meeting that Wasn't

On 23 March, there was to have been one of our regular New Members' Meetings, aimed at giving a bit of background information to those who have recently joined U3A. In common with everything else in all our diaries at the moment it was cancelled, but here's what *might* have happened (and undoubtedly will happen at some time in the future).

Everyone who had indicated that they were coming arrived in good time (but not so early that the committee members hadn't had time to prepare the room and refreshments). No one had parked where they shouldn't, and everyone remembered to sign in as they arrived. A contented buzz of conversation filled the room as members seated themselves at the tables scattered around the hall, each table graced by the presence of one or two committee members, identified by name cards on the tables, as well as by their name badges, which everyone without exception remembered to wear.

The meeting commenced at 10 am with Tony Tutton welcoming everyone with his usual wit and warmth. He introduced each member of the committee; every single one was there, as no one was on holiday/unwell/at the dentist.

Pam Williams, our Chair, gave a brief overview of the history of U3A, its structure nationally and internationally, and the role of the Third Age Trust, as well as specific insights into the beginnings of Welwyn Hatfield U3A and how it runs today. In spite of the potential for dry detail, Pam's presentation was, as always, lively and entertaining.



**Sue Talbot**

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Sue Talbot, our Treasurer, explained her role in managing the finances of the group, from petty cash and coffee money through to standing orders and getting the accounts audited. She smiled throughout and was even able to say the words "gift aid forms" without the audience noticing her gritted teeth.

Marie Scales, our Secretary, explained that her role covers not just taking minutes at committee meetings and dealing with correspondence, but also ensuring that we have up-to-date policies in place for all manner of areas. She was able to list these

U3A W-H Newsletter No. 64, Summer 2020



**Jill Longman**

calmly and without breaking down and sobbing.

Jill Longman, our New Members' Secretary, explained at length her vastly complicated job of responding to enquiries by sending out application packs, for which she was given a standing ovation.

Peter Fox, our Membership Secretary, gave current figures for our membership and explained his role in keeping the secure database updated with

members' details. All were delighted to hear that members never forget to let him know when they move home or change their email address.

Joan Scales, who has recently taken on the role of Groups Coordinator, spoke confidently and calmly about stepping into the shoes of Ann Davies, who had been doing the job for years and knows the leaders of every one of the 64 groups and how to hold everything together.

A 20-minute coffee break was then taken, during which the new members took the opportunity to chat to each other and to committee members. All managed to speak to everyone they wanted to catch, while at the same time getting a hot drink and a biscuit, consuming them while standing up, talking, referring to programmes and newsletters and making notes. All cups were returned to the kitchen in time for committee volunteers to wash up and tidy away without missing any of the second part of the meeting.

Presentations continued with Colin Slade, representing the Speakers Team, explaining a little about how the team work together to ensure that each week at our Wednesday meetings we have a speaker who is interesting, informative, entertaining, often funny, and never ever disappointing. Ever.



**Peter Fox**



**Colin Slade**

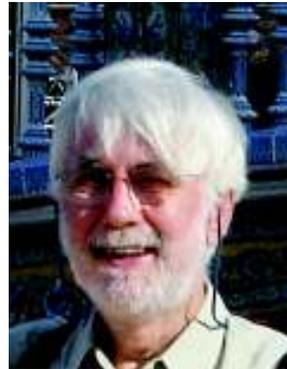
Hazel Bell, our Newsletter editor, went through the various publications that members receive, mentioning the five issues per year of the magazine *Third Age Matters* that are sent directly to members from the Third Age Trust, as well as our own group's printed programmes produced each term. She showed



**Hazel Bell**

examples of the newsletters that come out in Spring, Summer and Autumn and are available at Wednesday meetings and, for those who don't often attend on Wednesdays, are distributed, without fail, by group leaders.

Roger Swain, our Webmaster, gave a brief live demonstration of our website, describing how to use it and just how much information is available there. Everyone agreed that they already refer to it regularly and will, in future, consult it even more frequently.



**Roger Swaine**

A Q & A session followed, with relevant and interesting questions answered fluently and comprehensively by whichever committee member present was best placed to do so.

By the time the meeting finished at around 12 noon, all the new members present felt energised and ready to make the most of the wonderful world of U3A.

This is a wholly accurate depiction of a regular New Members' Meeting. If you don't believe it, you'd better come along and see next time we get to hold one!

*Jill Longman*

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## Group News

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### Book Group (2)

Recommends – *The Binding* by Bridget Collins

When we read *The Binding*, Bridget Collins' first adult novel, published in 2019, we thought the world contained in its beautifully bound pages fantastical, but just about believable. Now, just four weeks later, we peer out from a world that's just as fantastical – and totally unbelievable!

A *Sunday Times* best-seller, it tells a tale half magical, half grittily unpleasant, that enchanted some of us but left one or two, me included, unmoved and irritated.

Emmett is working on his family farm at a time and place unspecified, partly Victorian gothic, partly medieval perhaps? The book is so beautifully drawn though that even I, not a fan, wasn't put out by the lack of specifics. Emmett, is given to bouts of mysterious illness and an awareness of something spiritual and other-worldly that his parents try to ignore, then have to give in and act on.

Turns out he's a born Bookbinder, someone who can relieve you of your memories and deposit them within a beautifully bound book, thus leaving you free of them, but diminished. It was at this point that this reader became distracted by the idea of the book as an allegory for psychotherapy, and remained distracted throughout,

When he's sent away, reluctantly, to serve his Binding apprenticeship with Seredith, an artisan, it's the combination of detail of the binding process, and the total plausibility of 'that's how we started reading fiction' that helps us to buy into this fantasy.

Emmett learns that his unwelcome gift can be used both for good and evil. You could sell your memories to unscrupulous Binders – there's a starving mother who doesn't recognise her children because all she had to sell were her memories of them. If you're rich you have choices and can pay to have painful memories removed safely, with integrity. But would you choose that, even if you could? Plenty to discuss with this one!

There's a story of forbidden love, sensitively portrayed, but oh, they took so long to get it on! Not everyone was irritated by the slow burn, though. As one reader put it:



on the surface of the Earth. Each individual lives in isolation in a 'cell', with all bodily and spiritual needs met by the omnipotent, global Machine. "She knew several thousand people", we are told of our heroine, but she never meets any of them face-to-face.

It's included in Forster's collection, *The Eternal Moment*, published 1928, and the full text is available online at:

[www.ele.uri.edu/faculty/vetter/Other-stuff/The-Machine-Stops.pdf](http://www.ele.uri.edu/faculty/vetter/Other-stuff/The-Machine-Stops.pdf)

*A Journal of the Plague Year* (1665) by Daniel Defoe, published in 1722. Here's self-isolation, 17th-century:

When the physicians assured us that the danger was as well from the sound, that is, the seemingly sound, as the sick ... then they began to be jealous of everybody, and a vast number of people locked themselves up, so as not to come abroad into any company at all, nor suffer any that had been abroad in promiscuous company to come into their houses, or near them, at least not so near them as to be within the reach of their breath or of any smell from them."

Samuel Pepys wrote currently of the plague in his Diary of 1665. This extract seems highly appropriate today:

On hearing ill rumour that Londoners may soon be urged into their lodgings by Her Majesty's men, I looked upon the street to see a gaggle of striplings making fair merry, and no doubt spreading the plague well about. Not a care had these rogues for the health of their elders!

## **Computer discussion**

During this period of self-isolation one of the activities of U3A that I will miss is Tony Tutton's computer class. He is an excellent teacher and the classes are instructive and fun. He reminds us "No question is a stupid one" although he receives plenty, including mine, but they are always dealt with in a helpful manner.

So I am sitting in my garden in the sunshine with my computer practising everything that Tony has taught us.

*Gillian Simpson*

*Don't worry, Gillian: Tony is running online computer discussion groups for Microsoft and Apple users, so if you want to join in the fun just let Tony know.*

## Creative Writing

After the business part of the AGM on 11 March we heard some readings by our Creative Writing group – this has become a regular component of our AGM. This year we heard four pieces of work – three in prose and one poem.

“My Latest Novel” was written and read by Martyn McCarthy. This was a really amusing anecdote of mistaken identity! On holiday in Antigua (when the world was ‘normal’), the author had just read a book by Lee Childs, and as the sun was setting on a beautiful evening he went to the beach bar for a cocktail, putting the book down on the bar counter. A glamorous, flirtatious lady joined him, and enquired about the book. He told her it was his latest novel – without explaining that he’d bought it at the airport. She misunderstood and thought he was actually Lee Childs! She asked if she could read it, then asked him to sign the copy. He tried to tell her he wasn’t the author, but to no avail. He wished her a pleasant evening and went back to his hotel, grinning all the way. This piece evoked the situation very well with excellent descriptions of the people and the atmosphere.

“You can’t teach an old dog new tricks” was a good-hearted and appropriate piece by Sue Ould which reminded most of us of the condescending air of our grandchildren when trying to explain to us some of the mysteries of ‘the net’ or ‘the web’ or ‘on line’. The grandparents in question played an amusing trick on their grandson, feigning ignorance about modern technology while secretly taking a computer literacy course at their local library and emailing young David a photo of them brandishing their certificate!

“The changing room” was written and read by Ann (Higgs) Madell. As the title suggests, this piece reflected the very situation that the majority of our members experience when out to buy new clothing. I’m sure we have all felt exactly the same way about sizing, cut, material, and oh, the shock of looking in changing-room mirrors! Ann expressed all too well our sense of irritation and frustration, in another amusing, insightful article about something we all experience.

“Time” is a poem written and read by Jenny Roden. The White Rabbit in the opening lines is saying “I’m late, I’m late,” and so leads us into an interesting musing on what time is, how it works: night and day, watches, clocks, seconds, hours, time never standing still. The Past, Present and Future are all part of this existence. She mentions rooms in historic buildings allowed to be left as a time capsule – so we

can imagine the owner actually being there. Her example is of Rudyard Kipling whose works have transcended the passage of time. Time is part of our lives: we are constrained by it, yet hopefully we will learn from it. We are all so busy nowadays that we don't often actually stop and think about time – so this poem might well make us reflect a little on that topic.

The AGM proved to be our last general meeting before we were all put in 'lockdown' so, especially at this very moment of our lives during these weird and uncertain days where we are never sure what will happen next, this poem is a timely reminder that eventually this present situation will be in the past and that this time will pass.

*Ann Davies*

### **Exploring London (3)**

#### *Thoughts on being group leaders*

As we have been unable to complete any trips in this term (our trip to the ITV studios was cancelled by the company) we thought we would share some of our thoughts and joys on running a U3A Exploring London Group.

Firstly, finding an available date and suitable attraction is not as easy as it may sound. Selecting a date that doesn't clash with any other U3A group outing or holiday is important as many of our group members are very active members of other groups. Also, venues aren't always open or have availability when we want to go. You then have to co-ordinate the venue, the people wanting to go, the travel arrangements, the eating possibilities and the cost. Very early on, we realized that a prior visit by us to the site was a necessity to discover the pitfalls, the coffee and comfort stop facilities and the best eating places – catering for a variety of tastes. Mind you, it is a good day out!!

There are lots of other things to fret about before the day:

· Will enough people want to join us, or, more challenging, do we have more people than places?

· So, we increase the places, have two Reserve lists (our group members and others) and all signed up.

· We have a quick holiday to recover, then come home to a cancellation, with five days to go.

· We raid the waiting lists, check with the venue that's its still okay: (they confirm).

- More cancellations, more emails to diminishing waiting lists.
- Two days to go, confirmed with everyone going and reminded them of meeting times and place.
- One day (actually half a day) I receive a phone call – “Sorry, but all tours are cancelled”.
- Hearts sink, quickly recover, send emails and follow up with phone calls. Everyone understands – so good, these U3A folk!
- Now all we need to do is get the money back and refund everyone! (at time of writing, only one to go).

As we both like travel and exploring new places and are unlikely to go to these London attractions on our own, being group leaders provides the perfect opportunity to allow us to indulge one of our passions, with the very best companions and friends. As a group we get to see the parts that many tourists don't and we just take the rough with the smooth – it's worth it.

*Tony Dodd and Sue McLellen*

## **Exploring London (4)**

### *East End history*

We are all having to adapt our “exploring” at the moment, concentrating on the various resources we can access from home. Some of us will be turning to books, films and photos, of course, plus almost endless possibilities online (see page 13 for ideas!). But one thing we can all do is explore our memories of past trips and recall their highlights, while sitting at home and not having to worry about where the nearest loo is, or how long until we stop for coffee!

Back in November 2019, Exploring London 4, led by Sonja Park, travelled to the East End to gain an insight into how waves of immigrants have shaped the character and even the buildings of that area.

We began with a visit to the church of St Botolph without Aldgate. Built in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it is surrounded by modern London, but there has been a church on this site since medieval times and the name derives from its location just outside the former city walls. Several rebuilds and restorations have

resulted in a light, pleasant building which is Grade I listed. The organ is particularly interesting, dating from the early 18th century, and is described as the oldest church organ in the UK.

From there we moved on to the Bevis Marks Synagogue, the oldest synagogue in Britain and the only one in Europe that has held regular services continuously for over 300 years. A guide gave us an interesting talk on this splendid building and some notable members of past congregations, including boxer Daniel Mendoza and Isaac D'Israeli (father of Benjamin Disraeli) who resigned from the congregation after an argument over synagogue fees.



**Organ of the church of St Botolph without Aldgate**

Personally, I was particularly interested to learn that the name Bevis Marks, which is a short section of street, was earlier “Buries Marks” as it formed the boundary (marks) of land owned by the abbey of Bury St Edmunds – my home town! What surprising things one learns while exploring London!

Next, we were joined by Sonja’s granddaughter, Amber, who was at the time training as a Blue Badge guide and is now fully qualified. Amber led us on a fascinating walk through the East End, during which we saw the extraordinary Charnel House (a store for human bones) discovered in 1999 and now preserved behind glass. This archaeological find offers an unimagined window into the area’s past.



**The church of St Botolph without Aldgate**



**Bevis Marks Synagogue**

In Roman times it was used as a burial ground and then later it was home to a large hospital and a huge cemetery. Some of the walls are thought to date back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century but the Charnel House itself was built in the 14<sup>th</sup> century to house bones disturbed when digging graves.



**Charnel House**



Spitalfields Market

These ruins, along with recently added sculptures to aid our understanding, offer such a contrast with what now surrounds them as they lay beside and beneath office blocks designed by Norman Foster.

We ended our tour at Spitalfields Market. There has been a market here since the time of Charles I, but the frontage shown here dates from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The wholesale fruit and veg market moved out to a new location in 1991 and the old market now houses arts and crafts stalls and vintage fairs, and teems with people, both locals and tourists. How strangely quiet it must be at the moment.

*Jill Longman*

*The twenty-third in our series of profiles of distinguished Welwyn Hatfield U3A members features ...*

***Dick Grainge***

Dick Grainge was born during World War II, in a Nissen hut in Ashridge, to which Hertfordshire town a London Hospital had been evacuated. Discharged, his mother took him by taxi to their home in Amersham, where he grew up.

On leaving school he became an apprentice at Modern Wheel Drive, progressing through all the factory departments and the drawing office to the design office, where he designed ships' gear-boxes.

In 1986 he achieved a Higher National Diploma in Mechanical Engineering, and in 1984 a BA from the Open University in maths, science and technology subjects.



**Dick Grainge with his 3D printer**  
*photo by Peter Fox*

In 1967 he moved to Hawker Siddeley Dynamics in Hatfield. He married Philomena Cantwell that same year, and they moved to their first home, in Harpenden.

Dick had not expected to stay long at Hawker Siddeley – but working on guided missiles, infra-red imaging, air conditioning in aircraft, propellers, under-carriages and turbine generators kept him occupied for full forty-two years (during which time the Company name changed to British Aerospace, then MBDA, moving to Stevenage) until he retired, in 2009.

Meanwhile Dick and Phyl had moved to live in Hatfield, and brought up three children. Phyl retired from a career in IT and financial services in 2008, and joined U3A. Dick became a fellow member a year later, joining the Bridge Club, Walking Group and Science & Technology Group. Together he and Phyl went on trips with the Architecture Group, and enjoyed the monthly gatherings of the Lunch Club.

When Stuart Barker, leader of the Science & Technology Group for several years, decided to stand down in 2011, Dick took it over. He organised – and still does – talks for the Group, videos to watch, and visits to the Royal Society and Royal Institution in London, and the Medical Research Council in Mill Hill to hear lectures. He bought a 3-D printer and with it made a series of intricate models. These have often been displayed, together with the software for their production process, at our annual Meet The Groups event. In 2017 he showed a device he had designed to prevent birds roosting on his sailing lake's course, marking bouys and fouling them, being produced from the 3-D printer – as in the photograph above.

As well as his involvement with U3A, Dick now continues to race radio-controlled yachts at the aquadrome at Rickmansworth, and, with Phyl, enters local quizzes – with much time involved too with their grandson and granddaughter.

*Hazel Bell*