



**u3a** learn,  
laugh,  
live



## **Newsletter No: 6**

**December 2020**

### **Northamptonshire Network of u3as**

[www.u3anorthamptonshirenetwork.org.uk](http://www.u3anorthamptonshirenetwork.org.uk)

email: [u3anorthantsnetwork@hotmail.com](mailto:u3anorthantsnetwork@hotmail.com)

Well, here we are in December and just over a week until Christmas. It has been the most peculiar of times, but I am assured that as we go further into the Age of Aquarius, the planet will settle down!!

Our u3as seem to be really getting to grips with technology and more and more groups are embracing Zoom or Skype. I run a Chinwaggers group which is a coffee and natter group for existing members and new members and since the weather is now getting rather bleak, have resurrected it on Zoom for the winter months. 'Tis the season to be generous as Zoom didn't restrict our time to 40 minutes. Hopefully by the summer we will all have had our jobs and will be able to meet up again face to face rather than virtually.

National Office have had some very interesting talks and I attended the four week course on Mayans which was absolutely fascinating and well worth it. You do have to check what's available every day, as the more interesting ones get booked up very quickly as they seem to have a limit of 100 attendees.

I hope you enjoy our Newsletter, and my thanks to those u3as who have contributed. There have been some very interesting articles and ideas. However, do let me know if you still would like to do one for February. *Stephne*

#### **An Afternoon with Gervase Phinn**

We are still hoping that this event will take place on Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2021, same time and same place. Tickets that have already been issued will still be valid.

**News from Wellingborough and Brixworth u3as** is that they both now have new Chairs, so welcome to Sally Muldowney of Wellingborough and Belinda Collett of Brixworth and we look forward to meeting you over Zoom at the next Network meeting which is in March.

## Gill Potts of Oundle & District u3a writes:

It was good to see some of you at the Network Meeting in October and to compare notes on how our u3as are coping. I think many of you also attended the Regional Meeting a few days later and I felt that the four excellent presentations gave us much food for thought about the future of our u3as.

It is such a shame that we cannot have our usual Christmas festivities this year. Normally at our December meeting we would have mulled wine, mince pies, seasonal entertainment and the chance to chat with friends. We would also present prizes to the winners of our Annual competition, but because of the second lockdown and now our Tier 2 restrictions, we have postponed the closing date for entries until January.

We have now had three virtual talks, both from Mirthy, with an estimated attendance of 65 households each time, so probably a total of 100 members – more than we got at our 'real' monthly meetings! We have decided to branch out with some independent speakers for the start of 2021, giving the opportunity for Questions and Answers at the end.

I am pleased to report that Beacon is now 'live' so in future all of our communications with Members will be via Beacon. We now only have 24 Members with no internet access, dramatically reducing our postage/delivery.

Our annual subscriptions are due on 1<sup>st</sup> January and are already starting to trickle in. We are aware that we will lose some Members who possibly feel we have nothing to offer them at present if their Groups cannot meet, but we hope that they will return to the fold once the vaccine takes hold and we return to a more normal way of life.

We have decided to postpone our AGM, normally held in February. We hope to hold it in May. However, we are pleased to announce that we have a new Membership Secretary, Barbara Bett, who will take over from Gloria and Brian Pearson in the New Year.

We have established a u3a link with Port Fairy, a small fishing village, four hours from Melbourne in Australia! Their u3a only started in 2019 and to date has 175 Members but, as is the case here, many of their activities are on hold at the moment. I wrote about the Port Fairy link in our November Newsletter, so imagine my surprise when I opened our December Newsletter to find that two of our own Members had actually visited in 2016 – what a small world! Here is a photo taken by them to prove it!



Our Newsletters continue to be bumper issues, with lots of contributions from our Members, the usual information from u3a Office and from our Committee, plus the chance to share interesting websites, all designed to keep us entertained and active. Special thanks to the Quiz and Puzzles Group for keeping our brains in gear each month with their excellent questions.



Finally, those of you at this end of the county may be aware of the recent 'murmuration of starlings' at Titchmarsh Wildlife Trust Reserve, when thousands of these birds have been putting on an amazing show at sunset. Richard Chandler, our Birding Group Leader, wrote about this spectacle in the December Newsletter, accompanied by this wonderful photo, and he is happy for me to share it with you.

I wish you all a Happy Christmas.

## Carol Lucas, Chairman of Towcester u3a writes:

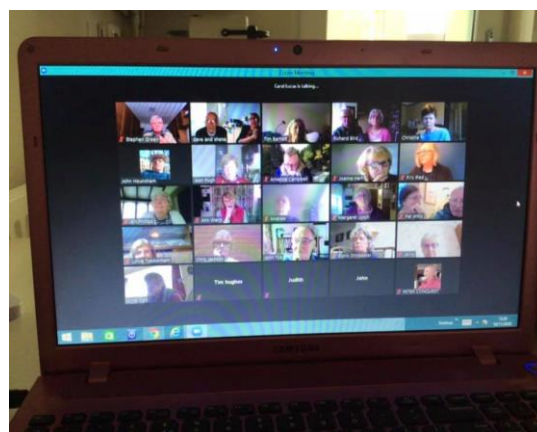
How optimistic we were and how hard did Kate Bartlett and the Group Leaders work to get the Interest Groups going again! Unfortunately the second lockdown came and curtailed our activities once again. However we remain positive and we are working hard to maintain the spirit of the u3a as we start our journey through winter

### AGM

Meanwhile we have not hibernated during this lockdown. On November 18<sup>th</sup> we had our first ever virtual AGM.



We are very grateful to all members who participated in the AGM and attended the



virtual meeting. Here are some of the members who attended in their small rectangles.

### Website and Re-Branding

If you go on our website today you are sure of a big surprise! In September the u3a released news of a more relevant branding of the entire u3a.

There have been interesting discussions on line, amongst our members about the rebranding and the committee had lively discussions about it. However at our October committee meeting we decided to move forward using the extra fluidity it allows in presentation to show our u3a at its best. Ray Paice immediately took this on board together with Ben Morrell a website designer from Wingnuts Websites. This proved to be an excellent partnership and together they have updated the website to the new branding, new layout and better loading speeds.

### NEWS FROM OUR GROUPS

#### London Explorers 2

London Explorers 2 has, of necessity, had all of its trips to London cancelled since our February visit to Kensington Palace. Our October visit was to have been a 'London Walk' hosted by Blue Badge Guide, Caroline Piper. We had chosen the 'Food and Drink' tour, encompassing London's brewing and food processing and including a visit to a bustling food market and one of the oldest pubs in the capital. Sadly, this was not to be but Caroline and U3A member Christine Russell got together and proposed a virtual trip to London via Zoom. Our stir-crazy members jumped (virtually) at the opportunity and we have had two highly successful visits to London without leaving our own homes. In August we 'Zoomed' off to visit the Secret Gardens of London, exploring some of the unique gardens in the City, including church gardens, historic graveyards, water gardens

and perfumed medicinal gardens. This proved so successful that a second virtual visit took place in October around the East End. Here we saw the area of London where immigrants have traditionally settled and made their homes, including the Huguenot (French Protestant) refugees in the 17th century, Irish labourers in the 18th century, Jewish refugees in the 19th century and the Bengali and Bangladeshi community in the 1960s and 1970s.

### **Mixed Crafts**

Our Christmas theme prompted some absolutely fantastic crafts, and I am sure that Christmas will continue to be something the members work on.



### **The German Language and Culture Group**

The u3a German Language and Culture Group are still meeting weekly on Friday mornings at 10:30 over Zoom and has been well attended with people joining from other u3as as well as local members. We are always glad to welcome new members to our group.

### **A Report on Art Appreciation 1 from Richard Bird**

Art Appreciation 1 welcomed new members to the group at our November meeting. We all got so interested in Andy Warhol that we ran out of Zoom time before our new members could give us their prepared contribution, which wasn't very polite of us! So in December we shall give priority to Di and Tony, as well as Lynne whose Warhol homework also went unrecognised, and then look at other mid-century Americans. We can welcome more new members if anyone out there is still short of lockdown activities.

### **Felting**

Fabulous items from the felting group this month below. We had intended a meeting but lockdown II has meant just sharing items via email.



### **Co-ordinator Christmas Zoom**

A reminder that although we cannot be together for a Christmas lunch this year Kate Bartlett invited all Group Leaders to join her via Zoom at noon next Monday December 7<sup>th</sup> for a festive meeting They wore festive clothing and enjoyed a mince pie and drink together Kate also provided a Christmas quiz

### **Creative Writing**

Every month, the Creative Writers come up with a different title or inspiration to compose a shortish piece of about 500 to 1000 words. Last month, the title to write about was *'The Silence'*. This provoked a great many different takes on a theme, from a child being given a pioneering operation to restore his hearing to a murder investigation set in a convent whose nuns had taken a vow of silence, among others. Very varied indeed and one of our widest ranging 'takes' on a theme that I think we've had to date.

The following is one of the pieces in full written by Anne Webb. It has been so well received by our members I am sharing it with the network

#### ***The Silence***

Cerys stepped out of the car, gathered the shopping from the boot and locked it.

"They haven't emptied the bloody bins again!!"

Cerys turned to where the shout had come from and as she'd expected Old Tom, from two doors down was starting to march towards her.

She stood and waited for the onslaught.

"Those bloody bin men, they've forgotten us again! I'm going to bloody report them this time. It's bloody ridiculous! They can't get away with it." He looked at Cerys.

"You've got the into net, haven't you? Send them one of those he-males!" He instructed her. "It's a bloody health and safety risk...happens all the bloody time, every bloody week..."

"Tom. ...Tom!..." Cerys shouted. But Tom didn't hear her.

"TOM! She yelled. "They collect the bins on Thursdays. Today is TUESDAY! I'll pop round tomorrow evening to remind you to put them out, is that ok?"

"Yes! And do you know what that bloody man who calls himself Prime- bloody-Minister has gone and bloody well done now...?"

Cerys patiently allowed Old Tom's monologue to carry on for several more minutes.

"It's starting to spit with rain, Tom." Cerys said in a raised voice and holding out her cupped hand in true ballet-mime style. "Best not get wet".

And so the diatribe came to an abrupt end as Old Tom, turned on this heels and marched off with the same determination that he'd entered the theatre, back down his path and into his house, without so much as a by-your-leave.

Cerys made her own way down her garden path, pushed the front door key into the lock and pushed open the door, pulling it to behind her.

"I'm baaaack!" she called out. "I don't think Old Tom would have anything to say if the word bloody didn't exist" she continued.

David didn't emerge from the study as she'd expected. He failed to greet her with a familiar quip like, "let's be grateful for small mercies that bloody is his swear word of choice!"

Placing the bags of shopping on the floor, Cerys slipped off her coat and angled her head towards the study door. "He wants me to send a 'he-male'".

"Dear Council," she began "my irritating neighbour, Mr Thomas-bloody-Jenkins, wanted you to know that his bins weren't emptied today. Yes, I know our bins are emptied on

Thursdays and today is Tuesday but there you are; it's what I have to put up with, so now you do too!...."

The humour suddenly drained from her voice.

Then it hit her. David wasn't ever going to make her laugh by something he said. He was never going to greet her in any way whatsoever, ever again.

The wave of emotion followed milli-seconds later, the realisation hitting her with almost the same force as it had the first time she'd arrived home from the hospital: the nurses' and doctors' expressions of sympathy still stinging her heart. Back then it had almost knocked her off her feet.

Cerys steadied herself against the front door for some sort of support, the door that was all that separated her from a normal world and this horrible, silent one. She felt as though the air she was trying to breathe was being physically sucked out of the house. In a rush of adrenalin she ran from empty, silent room to empty, silent room. Despite her panic, or maybe because of it, Cerys recognised that she was rapidly reaching some sort of breaking point.

Finding some deep-seated strength to summons reality, she railed against the grief that was incapacitating her and in that short moment of coming to her senses she moved to the kitchen and switched on the radio. She needed noise, any noise Cerys thought, to counter the absence of it that threatened to overwhelm her.

It was a brief respite and the *bonhomie* of Steve Wright was too much of a mismatch to how she was feeling so she snapped it off and once again she fell into the silence.

Cerys found herself pressing the answerphone message button, despite promising herself she'd never do it again and she listened to the recorded outgoing message...

*"Cerys and David can't get to the phone at the moment but if you'd like to leave your name and number and any message, one of us will get back to you..."*

As every time before, hearing David's voice didn't give Cerys the comfort she craved but instead turned her into a sobbing mess.

How she made it upstairs Cerys couldn't recall, but she stirred into consciousness and found herself lying on their bed. The rugby shirt wrapped around her in its mock embrace was *his* rugby shirt, the empty flaccid arms, slung over her shoulders in a futile attempt to feel hugged. Could she really still smell his smell after all these months or was she just imagining it?

Still coming to from her half-sleep, half-dreaming state she could just make out a noise coming from downstairs, rising and falling in volume as if people were in conversation. It took only a few seconds of full consciousness to explain the unexpected chatter. Now, more fully awake, she worked out that it had begun to rain heavily and a gusting wind was hurling the rain against the window panes. That friendly banter that had so excited her was nothing more than a squall, just the wind and rain conspiring to play hurtful tricks.

Then Cerys became aware of another noise that could barely be heard in between the lulls. Now, after all that she'd experienced over the last few hours, when silence had been her enemy, the unidentified noise slightly unnerved her. Cerys, however, felt compelled to discover where it was coming from and what was making it.

The ill-fitting French windows drummed and shivered in the wind as she approached them. But Cerys knew she was nearing the source of the unexplained percussion. The curtains weren't closed, although night had arrived hours ago, she could just make out a small dark form at the base of the patio doors.

Finding the key as quickly as she could, Cerys slowly opened one of the doors to find that the form was a very wet, very cold, sad looking kitten.



On seeing the door open, the kitten tried to stand up but couldn't, managing only to lift its head towards Cerys and mewed. She bent down and with soothing words, gathered up the sodden, icy cat.

Cerys fetched a warm towel from the airing cupboard and rolled it around the pathetic creature. She persuaded the kitten to take some warm water that she offered from a plastic ice-cream spoon, it seemed the only thing she could find that was gentle enough to do the job.

Having achieved this, she rested the kitten 'sausage' on the work surface and opened a tin of John West Wild Pacific Red Salmon. She dipped the tip of her finger in to the tin and offered it to the small mouth. The kitten seemed instinctively to know it was good for her and so licked the dripping juice. Cerys ventured some more, this time with a flake of the meat as well. This too disappeared with aplomb.

"Looks like it's only the best for you little thing" Cerys sighed, but smiled inwardly.

No one responded to the 'kitten found' posters and neither the local vets nor the RSPCA had had reports of any missing kitten matching the description of Cerys' visitor.

How the kitten, that was barely a couple of months old, had made its way to Cerys' back step was to remain a mystery.

"So, who have we got here then?" the young vet consulted the computer screen. "Oh? How do you pronounce **that**? H-E-D-D-W-C-H" She turned to Cerys with a quizzical look.

"*Heather* at the beginning," Cerys explained, "with an 'oo' and ch as in *loch*". It's Welsh. She's Heddi for short".

"How lovely! What does it mean?"

Cerys stroked the kitten's head and body.

"It means Peace."

### **Happenings on a Patio in Towcester by Peter Warden**

Like many people we feed the birds on our patio. Usually we have live meal worms, sunflower hearts and water put out for the birds.

However because of the small size of the patio (its only 27 m<sup>2</sup>) it can get a bit messy and we have to wash it down regularly, using a vinegar dilution as the disinfectant. Of course, the feeders also have to be washed and then again soaked in a vinegar dilution. So we feel that we and our patio need a rest later in the summer when the year's young have probably nearly all fledged. A sparrow hawk occasionally sits on the gate into the patio or nearby in the hope of catching a small bird but we have not seen this happen yet.

This year was different because in June we spotted a hedgehog on the patio. We had some hedgehog food left over from a previous visitation so we put this out to see what would happen. Well what we expected didn't happen. Instead of one hedgehog we counted seven different animals. We were able to do this by the difference in size between the hogs. Some were big, some were medium and some were small. By the different combinations of size we were able to come up with the figure of seven. For example, one evening there were two large hogs and a small hog. Another evening there would be two small hogs and a medium sized hog. We are not sure that we are explaining that very well but perhaps you can see that it is possible to say how many hogs were visiting the patio by their size.

By early October we started to get worried about the two small hogs, so much so that we decided to weigh them. One was 300 grams and one was just under 400 grams. In order to survive the winter a hog needs to be between 500 and 700 grams. We contacted the local vets and they agreed to accept the two small hogs and pass them

on to a lady who would look after them through the winter. Preparations were made to house them overnight so that we could take them to the vets the next morning. It was not difficult to catch them and each hog had its own cardboard box provisioned with water and food. We put the boxes in to the garage and they were securely tied and weighted to prevent escape. Or so we thought.

In the morning one hog was still in its box but the Houdini of the pair had escaped from its box in spite of the heavy hammer used as a weight. The box had fallen from the work bench on to a high stool and the hammer was inside the box but the hedgehog was gone. Presumably after escaping from the box it just dropped to the floor. We knew it couldn't have escaped from the garage and fortunately a short search was all that was needed to find it and get it back in to the box. And so to the vets where they were quickly taken in after we agreed that they could be released back in to the grounds where we live.

The hedgehogs that remained with us are not visiting us any more (mid-October) and are presumably in hibernation.

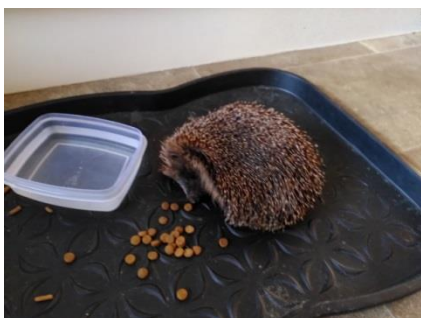
Apart from hedgehogs and birds we have other animals visiting our patio. We often see bank voles and field voles. These small mammals dash in and out of the pots eating small crumbs and apple cores we might put out. They run so fast they look like small clockwork toys. We of course get grey squirrels but not as many as we used to at Greens Norton when we had a garden. Our feeders are squirrel proof so they really just pass through. We have also detected a visit by a fox by the dropping that it left behind. We are still hoping to catch a glimpse of it. We have also seen the odd brown rat but they don't stay as we do not put food on the ground.

Finally we have found amphibians in our patio, the toad being the commonest. Usually skulking behind pots they get disturbed when we move the pots but we try to put them back in to a suitable situation. The biggest surprise was to find a young smooth newt under some cardboard that we had put on one of the small beds so that we could store potted wildflowers there until we could plant them out in to the wild area at the rear of the estate where we live. The nearest pond is some hundreds of metres away but presumably if they need to they can travel some distance from their birth pond.

So in spite of its small size our patio can play host to a surprising number of species and we haven't mentioned the insects.

**Postscript:** We thought all our hedgehogs had gone into hibernation but this one appeared on a neighbour's patio last Sunday morning. I collected it, put it in a box and left it in our dining room to see what happened. It went to sleep then woke up again. We decided it might be all right to put it into a nest box that we have out the back of where we live. So that is what we did.

But later in the afternoon it appeared on our patio and went to one of the water bowls from which we assumed that as it knew where the bowl was it had to be one of our hogs that we had been feeding. Not very logical as hogs have a good sense of smell and so it probably smelt the water. Anyway it had a job to reach the water and when it moved away it was somewhat unsteady on its "pins," so we decided to box it again.





It slept overnight in the dining room but in the morning we noticed that although it was of a good size it was extremely thin. The only thing to do was to phone the local vet and we took it there. They will assess and treat it and then pass it on to someone who will care for it until it is fit again.

So that means that three of the seven hogs that had been visiting our patio have now ended up in care. Let's hope the rest of them are hunkered down for the winter and will appear on our patio in the spring.

### **Finally**

Christmas may be different this year but what is not different is the warmth of our greeting as we wish all our Network u3as a Happy Christmas. Take care and Stay safe

### **John Bugby of Gt Oakley u3a writes:**

Gt Oakley are now Looking Forward.

Here at Great Oakley we are starting to see the wood through the trees and not just as a result of the leaves falling this Autumn.

With the kind assistance of the National Office we are now in full contact with them having lost all of our accounts since the first lockdown. We have just adopted the Model Constitution as like many groups we had not made other than essential changes since we started.

As a result of adopting the latest Constitution we are proposing to hold an On-Line Annual General Meeting in February with the main aim being to consider how we can go forward.

Most of our groups have been keeping in contact with each other and some groups have been meeting within the latest guidance and have been making visits to Country Parks and large meal serving premises.

A considerable number of our members are I.T. compliant but like us all, lose the book containing the large number of Passwords that we seem to be collecting.

Like everyone we are hoping to meet socialize more in the new year like everyone are looking forward to better time in the New Year,

Happy Christmas."

### **Di Tebbutt of Kettering u3a writes:**

The Committee is meeting once a month via Zoom and publishing the Minutes on our website.

The Family History, French. Spanish and Singing groups are meeting regularly via Zoom. The Walking Group has restarted although their next walk is after Christmas.

Other groups have been meeting in private gardens when the weather allows and safe distancing can be maintained.

Group Leaders are keeping in constant touch with their members and I sent Christmas cards to all of our members asking them for their continued support and have been encouraged by their response.

Those without access to the internet are being kept informed by those who have.



# Christmas Quiz

## Part One General Knowledge quiz:

1. When do the 12 Days of Christmas start?
2. Which monarch delivered the first Royal Christmas Day Message?
3. What happened in the 1914 Christmas Day truce during the First World War?
4. In which year was the first Christmas card sent?
5. What indispensable item for the Christmas table did Tom Smith, a confectioner, invent?
6. Which ocean is Christmas Island to be found in?
7. What is your star sign if you are born on Christmas Day?
8. What gifts did The Three Wise Men give Jesus on his birthday?
9. Who was crowned King of England on Christmas Day in 1066?
10. Which country traditionally plays the Boxing Day Test Match every year?
11. Which plant has bright red and green leaves and is sometimes known as the Christmas Flower?
12. How many ghosts appear in A Christmas Carol?

## Part Two – all answers have a Christmas theme

1. 1994 Harrison Ford movie: Clear and \_\_\_\_\_ Danger.
2. Popular Scandinavian children's character: Pippi Long\_\_\_\_\_.
3. Frank Carson catchphrase: It's a \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Coastal city in California: \_\_\_\_\_ Barbara.
5. One of Grimm's Fairytales: The \_\_\_\_\_ and the Shoemaker.
6. Nickname for Hollywood: \_\_\_\_\_ Town.
7. 1987 U2 album: The Joshua \_\_\_\_\_.
8. First instalment in a Phillip Pullman trilogy: Northern \_\_\_\_\_.
9. Victoria Wood TV series: \_\_\_\_\_ Ladies.
10. Poet Laureate 2009-2019: \_\_\_\_\_ Ann Duffy

## Answers to October's Quiz:

1. Leg; 2. Lin-Manuel Miranda; 3. Ice/cold; 4. Renée Zellweger; 5. three; 6. Oliver; 7. The Kinks; 8. Call of Duty; 9. Tennessee; 10. Nine Inch Nails; 11. Ag; 12. Cricket; 13. Bern; 14. Al Pacino; 15. Mango; 16. Croatia; 17. Mercury; 18. Gillian Flynn; 19. 343; 20. Ole Gunnar Solskjær

*Happy Christmas to you all and I wish you health and happiness for 2021. Steph*