

NEWSLETTER EXTRA - JUNE 2020



www.readingu3a.org.uk

This is an edited version of our usual newsletter, produced to give prospective members an idea of our activities

CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

Hello to all our members – I do hope this Newsletter finds you well and busy with a book, a garden, a TV series, a project, an outing or some pleasing music. Anything to keep mentally and physically alert is what is needed. Our use of Zoom virtual meetings is now going very well with over a dozen groups meeting at their usual times. Even if it is just to say hello to your group it can be rewarding for members. We now have a Reading U3A Zoom account so have no time limit. As convenor of the Science & Technology Group I have visited (virtually) Didcot, High Wycombe and Abingdon. These new contacts have benefitted our members with different topics of interest. I hope this will continue and expand.

The latest Third Age Matters magazine has just arrived and contained contributions from some very old friends from long ago which brought back nice memories. Perhaps you also started the day with the Green Goddess? For those of you with access to the internet, the national U3A newsletter has some interesting activities from U3As around the country.

Personally, I have taken the chance to walk with a companion recently – I enjoyed the solitary outings but company is a welcome change. Now I have a new social bubble to look forward to; it just needs some careful planning! I think the birds and hedgehog in my garden would miss me if I was away.

My best wishes to you all – we all hope that the U3A can provide support and interest and entertainment as this challenging time continues. Thanks to all Newsletter contributors and editors.

Members Meeting – by Zoom!

It has been many weeks since it has been possible to hold a Members Meeting, so we are very pleased to say that we will have a talk on Thursday 9 July at 14.00 – the subject will be "**Henri de Toulouse Lautrec, Master Painter and Master of Self Destruction, an illustrated Zoom presentation of the life and work of the artist.**"

All members who supplied an email address on their membership forms will receive details on how to join this Zoom event in an email to be sent out a few days before the meeting.

Something to Say?

We are of course always grateful to our Convenors for sending us such interesting information about their group activities, but we would like to hear from the rest of our membership too. This means you!

So if you have anything to contribute – about the way you have been coping with lockdown, funny things that have happened, how you have managed without something you previously took for granted, anything at all – then do put pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard) and send it, to our Editor

Bird Watching

Earlier in the week whilst staring at the sky from my garden once the sun had disappeared over the terraced houses, I could make out far more swallows than reported two weeks ago. The speed at which they fly is

amazing and that screeching too! So...I'm probably wrong, apparently it's swifts that have the piercing screaming call. It's a contact thing and lets territorial rivals know that the 'turf' is taken.

I love the sound of 'my' goldfinches – quite distinctive, a mewling. The three that come regularly seem to be getting on better now. A very sad thing occurred over the weekend though – at breakfast I found that a young goldfinch (red head marking but no yellow tail) had got its head stuck in the fork of one of my metal feeder stands, having slipped off the top I suspect. He was alive and flapping but, as I rescued him and put him on the ground, he went very quiet as if to regain his energy. I placed water and sunflower hearts near and left him to recuperate. At my first check he hadn't moved at all but 30 minutes later he was gone. I like to think the parents saw him and somehow took him off but equally a cat could have come across him. I have a leopard (spotted) cat who spends hours being a Twitcher.

This last week, in between trains going by on the embankment, a blackbird with enormous singing volume has been auditioning (for X-Factor or Gareth Malone's choir?). I'm easily distracted by him and didn't get much reading done - even though the book I was reading was largely pictorial!

Sparrows are supposed to be relatively rare but certainly not in my road! They get up early and start singing straight away. They most certainly wouldn't get through any audition and would be told that 'sparrows can't really sing – maybe more akin to rap?'

Books

At our next meeting we will be using Zoom. Our book will be 'Lark Rise to Candleford' by Flora Thompson. Hopefully we can continue to hold a monthly meeting /discussion while the pandemic prevents us from meeting in the church.

(Coffee Morning and) Quiz

We are continuing with our monthly quiz by email, and I have received requests for a Quiz to be held using Zoom. We always welcome new members to our Quizzes.

Collectables

I email the group weekly with a quiz question and any other relevant news that Members have provided. From mid-June we started using Zoom for a monthly meeting but continue one or two round-up emails per month as well.

Here's an excerpt from week ending 6 June...

'First, the answer to last week's mystery object - it's a film strip projector for 35mm strips, dating from the early 1930s and was more or less a children's toy. Looks in remarkable condition. I wonder if it was the precursor of the Viewmaster? – do you remember those? I chiefly remember them turning up at Jumble Sales years later.

Our Zoom Meeting last week: We all contributed to the inaugural/experimental meeting with discussion and viewing/showing oldish objects of a culinary nature. Some of the objects brought back memories: a Hovis baking tin (with indentations to produce a loaf with 'Hovis' on its side) and a soda siphon (where did one insert the small gas canister, or were they refilled/pressurised professionally? We also saw a 30 year old Magimix which was described as 'almost working'!

The July meeting will be about 'Blue and White China/Pottery', e.g. Willow Pattern? Delft?

Current Affairs

The Dominic Cummings affair – from the press coverage at the time what did we learn about his behaviour, the relationship between Prime Minister and Special Adviser, the role of loyalty and how to manage bad news? Protests against racism in the US and the UK – how do we react to violence and anger and where do slavery and statues fit into this? These have been the issues we have looked at, based on news articles at the time, in our last two Current Affairs Zoom meetings. Some 20-25 members have been joining in and getting some fortnightly brain exercise, and the news articles we base the discussion on go out to all group members so those who can't participate can still read and comment on them. Our next meeting will be on 25 June and will look at key issues in the news this month.

Family History

On Friday 12 June the Family History group embarked on its first Zoom meeting. I was making my debut as a Zoom speaker and, being utterly dependent on unfamiliar technology, I was nervous about things going horribly wrong. Luckily, our Zoom Organiser was on hand to give moral and practical support, and once I had got going it seemed almost like speaking to a live audience. Of course, it helped that people were patient when I couldn't find all the right buttons (and not necessarily in the right order either); it certainly helps when your audience is as anxious for you to succeed as you are. At the end people certainly seemed to have enjoyed my efforts talking about 'The Colin Spickett Experiment', and I don't think they were just being kind. Mind you, anything makes a welcome change when you have been starved of talks for three months. Next month we shall be enjoying a presentation about "British Place Names". This will be given by the former directors of the Reading Family History Centre.

German Improver

We are now meeting via Zoom. Our current reading material is about the dark aspect of folk tales, influenced by the darkness of the European Forest, but in a story format.

Italian Levels 1 and 2

For the last three months we have been meeting by Zoom. This has been quite successful, because almost all our members have been able to sign in and participate. At our last Zoom meeting each participant brought along a favourite photo to present to the group. At the previous one, each wore an unusual hat and spoke about it to the group.

Madrigals

Following the success of the Singing for Pleasure group holding singing sessions on Zoom, the Madrigals group tentatively stepped into this Brave New World of Online Music. Singing in this way is quite different from a live rehearsal. To begin with, everyone must have their microphone switched off, otherwise each voice is subject to a different transmission delay, resulting in a sound more like a cat's choir! Then again, the conductor can't conduct, for the same reason – his/her conducting is out of step with the music. Despite these problems, by the time this newsletter goes to press, the Madrigals group will have already held four rehearsals, each being more successful than the last. So far, we've attempted madrigals that we already knew and found easy, then those we knew, but found more tricky. The next step is to tackle something we have never sung before. Heaven only knows what it will sound like when we finally get together again in the flesh. Like a cat's choir?

Meditation

I missed last month's deadline but this has given me reflection time. Some might say that it's something we are not short of in these unprecedented times.

I was so impressed by the number of convenors who are conducting their meetings via Zoom. I fully admit to being a 'techno dunce'. However an enterprising member of our group set up a Zoom session for us, initially just to meet up. As the convenor for Meditation, I have had reservations about holding Meditation meetings on-line. The point of meeting together, and IN PERSON, is the shared energy this generates, which is not detectable on Zoom. An interesting and satisfying outcome, however, has been consensus that the techniques we have explored and learnt have been beneficial in this time of crisis.

We are a small but diverse group, continually learning from each other, but always keeping in mind that we are a U3A Meditation group.

May I recommend a short exercise to all.....

Fully commit to sitting quietly for a short time (set your limit).

Close your eyes, think of yourself as surrounded by pure white light, asking that only good will come of this time.

Breathe in and out slowly 3 times:

Breath 1 - breathe in healing energy, breathe out all niggles.

Breath 2 - breathe in joy and peace, breathe out all anxieties.

Breath 3 - breathe in letting go of the day, breathe out knowing this is YOUR time.

Think of yourself in your special place, for example a beautiful garden.

When you finish, acknowledge with thanks, have peace.

Long live U3A - Live Laugh Learn Amen.

Poetry and Philosophy move to Zoom

Good News! Two more of our groups have starting Zooming – Poetry and Philosophy

Photography

In May we had a successful Zoom meeting during which members shared their photographs and exchanged hints and ideas - especially helpful now when we have more time to try out new ideas.

Each month we tackle a project and this month it is 'Photograph your food' which can be interpreted any way you wish.

Science & Technology

At our next meeting there will be a presentation about 'Global animal disease threats to our Food Security' using the African Swine Fever outbreak in Europe as an example, and in July the subject will be radioactivity and its uses past and present.

For science fixes anytime try:

BBC News website, New Scientist.com, ScienceDaily.com, PNAS.com, livescience.com.

BBC radio: Inside Science, Life Scientific, More or Less, The curious cases of Rutherford & Fry.

Seated Exercise

I do hope that you have all been keeping fit and well and had all the help you needed with shopping and friendly phone calls, zoom sessions, and emails with family, friends and neighbours. I particularly enjoy my WhatsApp messages with all the lovely photos of our grandchildren and gardens.

For some of you living on your own and/or in flats this must have been a particularly lonely and difficult time and I have been thinking of you all. I am very fortunate to live in a spacious home in a small friendly close with a garden that has kept me busy all these weeks. My days pass quickly with gardening, sewing, reading and Zooming, but I so look forward to seeing all our family and friends again and to resuming U3A activities. I miss you all and send you my very best wishes.

Award for Reading's Progress Theatre

The Alternative Theatre Group has gone a few times to the Progress Theatre. I am sure you will be interested to know that they have just been given the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service. This is the highest award given to voluntary groups for outstanding work done in their own communities. A sort of group MBE. They are to be congratulated and thanked.

Town Study

Last week the Town Study group held its first Zoom meeting. Nearly 30 people attended, and we heard about various aspects of Witney. There were four PowerPoint presentations, including a virtual 'guided walk', courtesy of Google Street View.

We agreed to hold monthly Zoom meetings and at our July meeting we will hear talks and see presentations on Breweries, Blankets, and the Witney Feast. Future meetings will cover Fairford, Lechlade and Amersham.

Woodley, Shinfield & Earley Lunch

Several of us recently attended a Zoom lesson and are planning another meeting shortly. I have rung our lunch group regulars (or they have rung me) to exchange news. In the previous newsletter I mentioned two of our members and their 'lockdown hobbies' and I'm glad to report that they are keeping up their good work, ie, one touring the inside of her house to perform her seated exercises and another litter-picking. Regarding the 12 swan eggs on the University lake that some of us have been monitoring, I can report that incubation resulted in 10 cygnets, but regrettably only 2 survived, probably victims of predators.

Writing for Pleasure

Whilst we have been unable to meet, as we have a large proportion of members without computers or access to the internet, we are currently all safe and well.

If you are enjoying 'A Nice Cup of Tea' while reading this newsletter, these pieces may resonate?

<p>How about a nice cup of tea? What. A tea party did you say. Where? When? Who to invite? ... No. I said a nice cup of tea. Meant just for you and me. Oh!</p>	<p>Tea for two, Thee and me, Sitting in the garden Socially Distantly It was never thus, but we agree, It's all about the company.</p>
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Thames Valley Network (TVN)

The TVN committee continues to work hard on our behalf to try and re-arrange postponed Study Days where possible. This is definitely not an easy task in these uncertain times. Set out below is the **provisional** timetable for Study Days this year.

9 October - Quiz Day

29 October - Beginners Ukulele Day

6 November - Biodiversity and Climate Change – *postponed from 3 July*

20 November - Historic Buildings – *postponed from 23 April*

Please do remember we have **no idea** whether the above dates will work either, as opinions and advice continue to change day by day. If you were booked onto a cancelled Study Day, the event organiser has your details and will be in touch about rearranged dates.

The Network hopes to hold a number of the Study Days which could not take place this year, in 2021 – here is a **provisional** list

17 March 2021 – The Thames and its Boats (*postponed from March 2020*)

May 2021 – SE Region Spring Gathering (*postponed from May 2020*)

June 2021 – Repeat of The Thames and its Boats (*postponed from June 2020*)

June 2021 – Visit to RHS Wisley (*postponed from June 2020*)

Date TBA - Geology of the Thames Valley (*postponed from May 2020*)

Date TBA - Understanding Historic Buildings (*postponed from September 2020*)

Please do keep an eye for updates on our website at <http://u3atvnetwork.org.uk/> .

U3A National Conference and AGM

Not surprisingly in the circumstances, the U3A's conference, due to be held in Nottingham at the end of August, has been cancelled. The AGM will go ahead at a later date (possibly at the end of September), with delegates being able to vote on-line, and there may be talks and presentations too – details are very sketchy at the moment, but we will keep you informed.

Members Snippets

The U3A members of Reading
 Liked meeting for learning and singing
 Now they're stuck in their room
 But they've learnt how to zoom
 They're remarkably quick men and women!

*In the Good Old Days when we could attend a surgery in person.....!
 A man walked into the doctor's ,
 The Doctor says, "I haven't seen you in a long time."
 The man replies, "I know, I've been ill!"*

I have just read that "No word in the English language rhymes with Month, Orange, Silver or Purple."
 Do you agree???????