

Hitchin u3a Newsletter August 2025



Chairmans Thoughts

Dear Friends,

It is hard to believe that I've been your chairman for four months.

As many of you know, I haven't been very well, with two stays in the Lister Hospital, but I am glad to say that I'm now well on the way to recovery .

We have 20 new members this quarter and several visitors, so welcome to you all and hopefully you will enjoy getting involved with the groups and speaker meetings. We will be having a "New Members" coffee morning shortly to help you familiarise yourself with the groups. We have some new groups starting. The first "Bus Pass" group is going to St Albans on 26th August and other trips are being planned. The local theatre group is hoping for its first outing very soon. The "Wine Tasting" group has also started. We also have a "Dog Walking" group and a "Nordic Walking" group planned to start as soon as members wish to join.

To sum up: "Bus Pass

Days out by bus, helping to make the most of our transport network and our bus passes. The first trip has 23 participants and another 21 on the list.

"Local Theatre Group"

We are very lucky to have access to a wonderful variety of local theatres and cinemas, showing a very diverse programme. Angela Cooke has kindly agreed to sort out a programme and will email it to anyone interested.

"Wine Tasting"

Take your taste buds for a dip into world wines. They are meeting monthly on the second Tuesday of the month from 9th September starting at 5.30 pm Please contact Jan Hills for more details.

"Nordic Walking"

If you have any interest, Dennis Sexton will be able to help you.

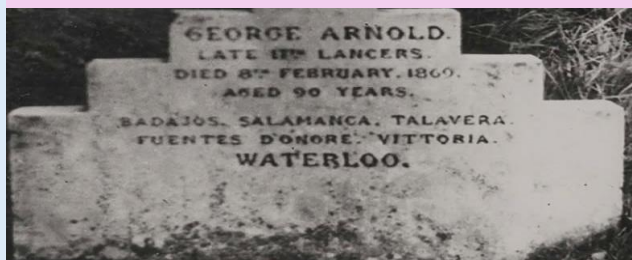
As with all groups, if you want to join or have more details, please contact either the group coordinator, June Parker or me.

Our Summer Social went well and we look forward to seeing you at the Christmas Social on 8th December, at a venue yet to be decided. Before that we have the "fish and chip" lunch with a Quiz on Friday 26th September, and speakers on "Tripe and Trotters" on 8th September and being a Film Extra on 22nd September, and more!!

We are considering having a car treasure hunt in early autumn. So, get a group together and test your navigational skills. Any other suggestions, please let me or a member of the committee know

Maggie Bedingfield

Some Local History to Ponder



This photo featured in the Hitchin Gazette in 1962. Though slightly out of focus, it captures an image of the gravestone of George Arnold in the churchyard at Pirton. George remains a notable local figure who continues to be a source of fascination, long after his death at the age of 90, back in 1869. George's story begins and eventually ends in two quiet local villages, he was born in Shillington and lived his last days in Pirton. Between these two quiet bookends of his life, his world was shaped by the roar of battle. The Vicar of Pirton, concerned for this old veteran's welfare in the months before his death, wrote to The Times to talk about his life and seek some financial assistance. George had been surviving on his military pension of a shilling a day, which after paying rent, did not leave much for food or clothing. Vicar Loughborough of Pirton tells Times readers that he "enlisted early in life in the 16th Light Dragoons, and after a brief sojourn in Ireland embarked for the Peninsula in 1809, and, with the exception of about six months, was abroad until he entered Paris with his regiment in 1815. He was at the taking of Badajoz, and in the thick of Salamanca, Talavera, Fuentes d'Onore, Vittoria and at the crowning fight of Waterloo".

The old man is in fair health considering his age, and still shows a soldierly bearing, with some sparks of the ancient fire when fighting his battles over again. I have known him for several years and have never heard him complain, but always express himself in terms of thankfulness for any little act of kindness". The Vicar's appeal bore fruit, and the old soldier's remaining days were spent in comfort. With funds then used to pay for this gravestone upon his death. This gravestone though contains an error. Mistakenly listing George as being part of the wrong regiment, Lancers rather than Light Dragoons. This mistake having been pinpointed by local historians, was rectified in 2015, with a new and correct inscription added on the back of the stone, by local firm Neville Funeral Service.

How we gather our news is changing

Across two centuries, our Papers have been a first-hand witness to the events that have shaped modern life. We've witnessed a world changed by war, technology and political upheaval, and seen the hope of the late 20th century give way to the uncertainty of the 21st. Throughout this history, journalism has been a complex and expensive endeavour. But now, in 2025, we face new kinds of challenges, of a type largely unimaginable in the past.

The economic model of the news industry has been ripped up by the technology giants and thousands of newspapers around the world have closed or dramatically shrunk over the past two decades. Their absence leaves a hole filled by social media networks and accompanying tides of misinformation.

Politically too, journalists are under increasing pressure. In 2024, 124 journalists were killed doing their jobs, while Donald Trump is using his office to punish media organisations that won't follow his orders or who report critically on his policies. Figures such as the US president and other authoritarian and autocratic leaders around the world want to crush the independent press through exclusion and influence. It's vital we don't let them.



Quiz Time

Entertainment

1. Emperor Ming the Merciless was the arch enemy of which sci- fi hero?
2. How in the world of rock n roll is Richard Penniman better known?
3. Which place in Georgia, USA is the birthplace of Kim Basinger and is also the name of a European Capital City?
4. Which 1973 Woody Allen film was set in the year 2173?
5. Which American singer, famous for his relaxed style, died on 12th May 2001, just days short of his 89th birthday?
6. The singers Neil Young, Joni Mitchell and Alanis Morissette were born in which country?
7. What famous announcement was made by concert hosts to signify to fans that an Elvis concert was over?
8. In which city is the famous "Oktoberfest" beer festival held?
9. What was the Academy Award winning song in the 1948 Disney movie "Pinocchio"?
10. If Batman is Bruce Wayne and Robin is Dick Grayson, who is Batwoman?



General Knowledge

1. Before the Euro what was the currency of the Netherlands?
2. What type of flower includes the varieties of "ball" and "collarett"?
3. Memphis was the ancient capital of which country?
4. In which year of the 20th Century did America celebrate its Bicentennial?
5. The name of which North African city literally means "white house"?
6. Who died after being shot whilst watching a performance of the play "Our American Cousin" in 1865?
7. DKNY is a well-known designer fashion label. What does DNKY stand for?
8. What are first names of Elvis Presley' daughter?
9. In the world of computing and the world wide web, what does ISP stand for?
10. Shades of which colour can be described as "cobalt and "Prussian"?



What came first?

1. Moon Boots or Moon River?
2. Amazon Kindle or Apple Ipod?
3. Rolling Stones or Beatles?
4. French Revolution or American Revolution?
5. Titanic sinking or the Hindenburg disaster?

All Answers at the end of Newsletter

News from the Groups

Two-Mile Walking Group Steps Out Again

In July, our two-mile walking group enjoyed a scenic and sociable stroll from the Plume and Feather pub in Upper Green, Ickleford, taking in the charming route along the old railway line and beside the river.

We were incredibly lucky with the weather.

Despite a forecast threatening rain, we were treated to a warm, blustery day with bursts of sunshine. Rain macs came off early, and spirits stayed high throughout the walk.

The route was perfect for relaxed walking and easy conversation, with plenty to see and share along the way. The familiar mix of fresh air, gentle exercise, and good company made for another enjoyable outing.

The walk was well led by Jennifer who is very knowledgeable about the area and planned an interesting, pleasant walk avoiding too much rough ground and mud!

After the walk, we gathered for a well-earned lunch back at the Plume and Feather. Seated around a long table, we were treated to excellent service and a delicious meal—topped off with plenty of laughter and lively conversation.

As always, it was a reminder of the simple joys of walking together. New faces are always welcome—come along and join us next time!

Music Appreciation

After so many years of Janet Surry sharing her musical knowledge and enthusiasm with us group members - not to mention the copious cups of tea and lovely biscuits and cake - and nobody stepping forward to replace her, this group is now dormant.

Janet must be one of our longest serving group coordinators and we owe her a huge debt of gratitude for her tireless efforts to increase our knowledge and appreciation of classical music.

We wish her well in her 'retirement'.

If there is anybody amongst our membership who would be interested in restarting this group, listening to music together and going to concerts or other musical events, please let June, our Groups Secretary, or me know. It does not have to be about just one specific music genre. Any new ideas will be welcome.

Heidi

THEATRE TRIP – THE LION THE WITCH AND THE WARDROBE

On Wednesday 23 July a group of us met in St Mary's car park to catch the coach to Milton Keynes. Arriving about 12.45. We broke into groups and set off to have lunch.

Just before 2pm we arrived at the theatre and took our seats in the circle.

From the moment the cast arrived on stage the performance by all those involved was superb.

The underlying message of the play gradually unfolded and then Aslan made an appearance!

The model of Aslan was amazing and reminded me of how Warhorse was portrayed on the London stage.

Father Christmas made a surprising appearance to give the gifts to Susan, Peter, Edmund and Lucy and the children in the audience seemed to enjoy this.

The costumes, the singing, the production and staging were so professional definitely equal to anything that could be seen at a London performance.

Everyone said they really enjoyed the show and said how impressed they were with the whole presentation.

Sue Zacharias

More from the Groups

Creative Writing Group

An Interesting Personality

A gentleman stands on the corner
When I go for my morning walk
I nod a 'Good Day' as I pass him
But he's rather reluctant to talk
I see him with sideboards, and curly
moustache,
A dress coat, a cane and top hat
I can tell from his shape that he's fond of his
food,
But portly, rather than fat.
It's William Wilberforce Whitney
He's very well known about town
Upright, dependable, someone to trust
Would never let anyone down
I think his home life is quite different
Where all must respond to his word
His wife answers "Yes dear" or "No dear",
His children are seen, never heard.
Is he full of Victorian virtues
A gentleman quite without sin?
But his shiny red nose simply tells me
That his favourite tippie is gin.
On William Wilberforce Whitney
I really have nothing to say
As all this is just speculation
And his gravestone gives nothing away.

Just a Chap I Knew

Everyone knew him, yet no-one seem to know
his name. He took exceptional pride in the
menial task of keeping the streets clean and
free of litter. It didn't matter if the sun was
blazing hot, a north wind blowing or the rain
tippling down, it never affected his obvious joy
at doing his job well, and those that greeted
him were always met with a smile and a
cheery "hello" He was interested in others,
and loved to talk about his two little girls and
their progress at school. In the summer he
found a way to hang a folding chair on his
wheelie cart which supported a large sun
shade. How he fixed it one never knew. At
lunchtimes, with his garden chair and parasol
he could always be seen on an open green
space enjoying his packed lunch.
His head and body bore scars and dents from
a serious motorcycle accident that had
happened years ago, which had also left him
with mental scars, but I never heard him
complain. There must have been painful days,
low days, days when he didn't enjoy clearing
up other peoples rubbish, but he never
allowed it to show. I always hoped his children
where proud of their daddy who showed such
courage and a willingness to serve others
every day, and make the world brighter for
having spoken to him.



From the Groups

History Group

The Viking History Blog – Final entry

This is my final entry and while I lay here I think about the life I have had. I can hear the sounds of my comrades and also my two sons as they leave this land to travel across this time to Ireland and I envy them.

Although my injuries have brought me to this point it seems I will not achieve Valhalla I fought valiantly but did not die on the battlefield with my sword in my hand but I will die here in my bed and know I will not be called by Odin and see my comrades in Valhalla, this saddens me as many of my comrades have been called by Odin. I may be called by Freya to Folkvangr and feast in her hall or I may go to Hel.

My mind strays as I recall my travels to the British Isles and Ireland and I smile as I recall how we fought and conquered many civilisations. Some of my comrades liked the land so much they settled there. I wonder if my sons will settle there, but I do know I will not see them again.

I close my eyes and as the sights and sounds of all around me begin to fade I hear my wife quietly sob and I leave my fate in the hands of the Gods maybe Odin will call me. I hope he does.



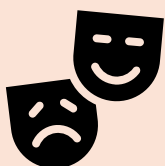
Next up for the History is a study of the history of USA
Looking, at first instance “The Colonies and the Settlements

Play Reading Group

The play reading group, has had to skip it's August reading due to very high temperatures.

Next up we are going to read a script from the BBC Comedy Series “Clare in the Community” called “Basic Attraction” As always, the members of the Group, after options for plays have been discussed choose the next venture.

Another “Clare” is a possibility or an Oscar Wilde – let's see.



Wanderers



We enjoyed a rather chilly ramble around Norton Common in mid-May, we missed the best of the bluebells but the Red Horse Chestnut trees were beautiful

Pétanque

Pétanque continues to be much enjoyed on a Friday afternoon at Ickleford Sports and Social Club. At first it seems a leisurely exercise, but then no one else is going to pick up your Boule. So, it's a case of a lot of bending to retrieve those heavy metal balls, after every end. Of course, some have found a piece of string with a magnet attached does the trick. Everything considered it is great fun. If you are interested, please contact Grahame Harris our Group Coordinator.



More New Group News

We have a new group starting. This will be a Bridge Group for those wanting a relaxed game, but with no beginner teaching. It will be run by Christine Challans and will start very soon. Please let Maggie, June Parker or Christine know if you would like to join this new venture.



u3a Holiday to Bournemouth

On the hottest day of the year, we set off on our five-day holiday to Bournemouth.

Many of the people on the coach have been on the holidays before and so I knew I would be having an enjoyable time.

Our first stop was Mottisfont, near Romsey, a beautiful 18th Century home with a medieval priory at its heart. We had lunch in one of the many eateries and then spent a lovely afternoon in the fantastic gardens, then on to our hotel.

I knew the hotel, The Marsham Court, was good because the group had used it last year and everyone wanted to return. The staff were excellent, friendly, and helpful; the food was delicious and the best I have ever had on a coach trip. We had music on two evenings and plenty of laughs in the bar.

The next day we visited Sandworld, Weymouth and Lyme Regis. Unfortunately, I found the steep walk down to Lyme Regis too much but found a lovely restaurant where I had a marvellous view. Most of our group were fine and said it was well worth the climb.

On Wednesday we had a free morning in Bournemouth and then there was a 70-minute Harbour and Island cruise from nearby Poole. The beauty of this holiday is that you do not have to do all the trips, so I missed seeing the most expensive yacht owned by a billionaire.

My favourite day was next when we visited Bucklers Yard where the wooden ships for Nelson's fleet were built. We had a tour guide around the museum where I was delighted to see two of my family names on the board, one running the pub and one for logistics it was only doing my family history that I discovered my links to Romsey. We then had a cruise on the River Beaulieu before we headed to Exbury Gardens a 100- hectare site famous for rhododendrons, azaleas and rare trees and shrubs. There we had a 20-minute steam train journey tour of the gardens.

Our last day was visiting the 800-year-old Salisbury Cathedral which houses the oldest working mechanical clock, but more importantly the original 1215 Magna Carta, one of only four in the world, which laid the groundwork for constitutional government.

We arrived back in Hitchin after having had a wonderful holiday. My thanks go to Angela Cooke for arranging the holiday and to Heidi Ebrahim for organising everything so well on the holiday. I look forward to our next holiday.

Barbara Allison



Another observation of the trip



The visit to Sandworld near Weymouth was not to everyone's liking. Apparently, the driver of the coach had already indicated his lack of enthusiasm for the venue. An improvised sandcastle building competition took place, the prize was a year's supply of sand. Which the winner generously donated the prize to the driver (he did enjoy the joke). By the way I gleaned that the sand sculptures are stabilized with PVA glue.

On the Wednesday I was able to spend some free time in Bournemouth at the Russell-Cotes gallery. They were hosting an exhibition on loan from the William Morris Society: "May Morris: Art and Advocacy. If you don't go check out the website,

I was much relieved to note that the Zipline from pier to shore was closed for safety reasons!

Our last full day included a journey to the New Forrest, with a guided tour of Butlers Hard. There was boat trip along the River Beaulieu, followed by a welcome afternoon tea and sandwiches at Exbury Gardens and 12 1/4in gauge steam railway. On Friday we had a visit to Salisbury Cathedral, making use of the café. A big thanks to Heidi for her shepherding skills and to Angela for the arrangements.

Anonymous Contributor

FAMILY HISTORY

Researching your Family History is a fascinating subject and it's surprising what you can discover. The following is an account of my maternal ancestors the Rumbelow Family who came from the Fens in Cambridgeshire and Suffolk. The family were Agricultural labourers who found work increasingly difficult to find as farming became more mechanised.

Malen Rumbelow, my 6 times great uncle was born in 1812 and married Alice Pitches in 1831. They had 9 children before deciding to emigrate to Australia in 1854. We don't know how he learnt about Australia, but his oldest sister Mary had 2 sons who left England for Australia in 1851 and may have sent reports back from the colony. It was a huge undertaking for the family as they had probably never been further than their local town before. They left Southampton on the 13th June 1854 on the barque Pestonjee Bomanjee with 344 people aboard including 1 Captain, 1 Doctor, 1 seaman, 20 lascars, 1 Carpenter, 73 married couples, 53 single women, 14 single men, 93 children. The journey took 112 days and had to travel round the tip of Africa as it was before the days of the Suez and Panama Canals and we think 24 hours in a plane is long! A journal was kept of the voyage and was attributed to Malen but as he signed his marriage Certificate with a cross was thought to be illiterate and it may have been written by another passenger, but the Rumbelow Family still have the original. It records some very rough weather at times, sickness, 6 births and 10 deaths before arriving in Adelaide on October 8th, 1854, 112 days later.

They stayed in Adelaide for a short time before setting off in a bullock dray for the whaling settlement of Encounter Bay. The trip took a fortnight and was not without danger from the local aborigines and the rough bush track. At Encounter Bay Malen worked in the Whaling industry, also as a farmer, contractor and fisherman. He and his wife also had another 3 children. Today there are many descendants throughout Australia and worldwide and they have a reunion every 5 years. There is also a Rumbelow Street in Encounter Bay and that area unofficially is known as Rumbelow Town.

If you are interested in exploring your own Family Tree and would like to join our group please speak to me at a meeting or contact me on 01462 452173 or angelac@uwclub.net

TRAVEL GROUP

As I'm sure you are aware we have not run any day trips this year partly due to lack of support over the last 2 years and my own health problems.

What I need to know is if there is any interest in running further trips and holidays and if so destinations you would like to visit. If you enjoyed the recent talk on Music Halls you might be interested in a trip to Brick Lane Music Hall in the East End of London. We have made several trips there in the past and it's well worth a visit.

I also need help with possibly leading the trips on the day as Heidi and Pam are no longer able to do this. I have 1 person willing to help but need more. It is not too arduous a job as I would do most of the organisation.

I have led the Travel Group for over 20 years and have visited some marvelous places including abroad and do not want to stop it but I can't do it all on my own. If you are willing to help or have suggestions for outings please speak to me at teatime after the speaker meetings or contact me on 01462 452173 or angelac@uwclub.net

A look back in time



This photograph shows members of the “Singing for Pleasure Group in 2015. on this occasion we had been entertaining the Luncheon Club at Christchurch. Prior to Covid we did entertain regularly to various groups.

The “Singing for Pleasure Group” was started in 2008, when a group of us at the “Jazz Listening Group” decided it would be fun to sing our way through the winter. Hence Mavis Bell organized the new group, asking me to accompany it on the piano.

Mavis left Hitchin in 2013 and as no one else wanted to lead, I continued to lead in much the same way until recently.

We were fortunate to have Martin Loomes join us accompanying on his guitar, and more recently June Edwards accompanying on her piano accordion. This means we have a varied program of songs and styles to enjoy.

If anyone wishes to join us, and bring in any new ideas, I would love to hear from you. At present we meet every two months, usually the 1st Thursday of the month . The next meeting should be scheduled for 2nd October at Christchurch. Plenty of notice is given prior to us meeting

Ruby Thrussell – Singing for Pleasure Co-ordinator



u3a Theatre Trip



On Thursday 7th August, fifteen members of the theatre group met in St Marys Square ready to board a minibus and head to Milton Keynes to enjoy a performance of “Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat”, Andrew Lloyd Webbers stage musical based on the Old Testament story. Our efficient, friendly driver delivered us to the theatre in plenty of time, enabling the merry band to invade the restaurant in John Lewis for lunch. We reassembled at the theatre and joined the packed auditorium to be treated to a spectacular enactment, incredible scenery, costumes and superb singing (although I swear my eardrums are still ringing!) The finale was greeted by a standing ovation from the appreciative audience who were still on their feet joining in a sing-a-long with the cast as they lead them through the show’s songs. It was our cue to leave and find the minibus, which was parked conveniently near the theatre exit. We were home in Hitchin by 6pm after an amazing technicolour day out. Brenda Easton

Photographs



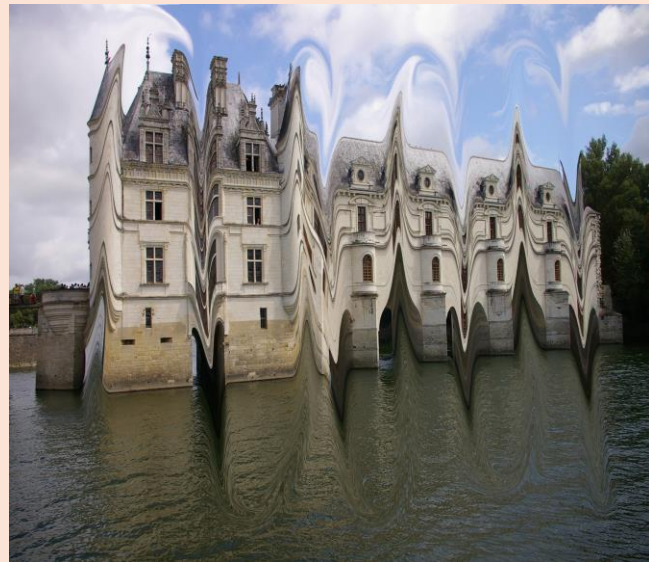
2 mile Walking Group
Oughton Head
Common



2 mile walking group
enjoying a walk by the
river and the old railway

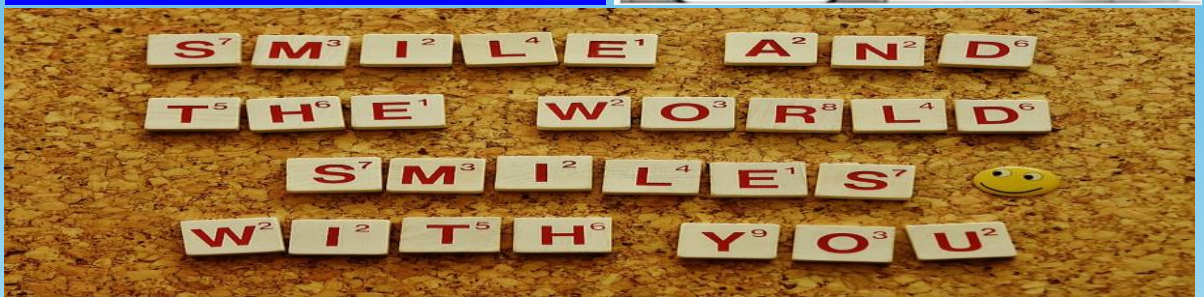
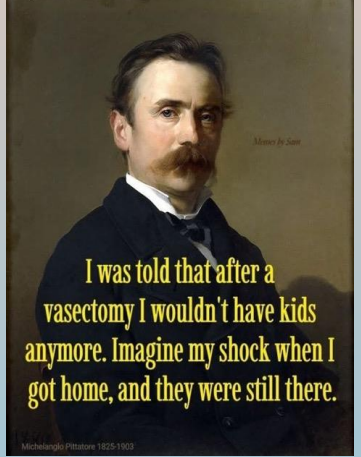
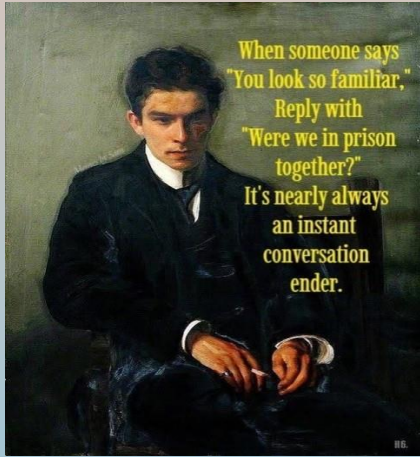
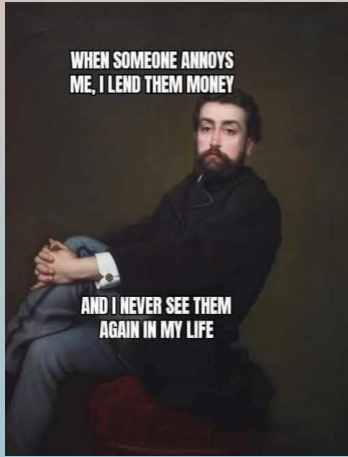
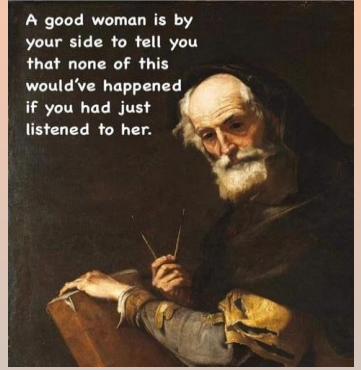
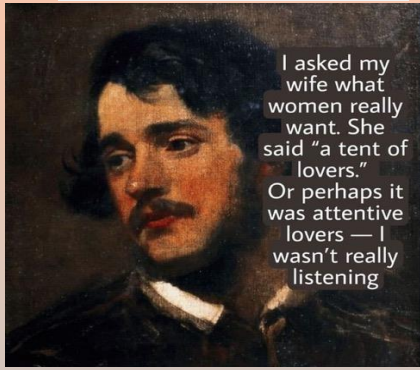


Photography Group



The Theme was computer edited photographs

Humour or Not



Why I Joined u3a

When I first heard about the University of the Third Age I'll admit, I was a bit sceptical. I'm not really a 'joiner'. But after a little gentle encouragement (okay, persistent nudging) from a friend who'd already joined a different branch, I decided to see what it was all about. And honestly? It was all she said it would be, except there was no wine tasting group! I'd recently moved to Hitchin, following my daughter who had relocated here with her partner. It was a big change—new town, new house, new routines—and although I loved being closer to her, I knew I needed something for *me*. So, when I had finished sorting out my new home, I found myself thinking, *Now what?*

As someone who had just retired from training leaders using social neuroscience research, I knew I needed to meet a group of people I could connect with.

Throughout our life social connection is key to health, both mental and physical.

That's when I remembered the recommendation for u3a.

It promised a network of people who enjoy learning, sharing knowledge, and connecting with others who are active and engaged in this next chapter of life.

In Hitchin, the local u3a group is very active. I started with the twice monthly talks and the monthly lunches. I've also joined the Art Appreciation group as I know very little about art.

As a keen reader and observer of politics a book group and the current affairs group were also, a must.

It takes a few sessions to meet like-minded people and to relax. I volunteered to do the admin for a couple of groups which has been useful in integrating quickly.

What I really love is the warmth and sense of community. The groups are led by other members, so it feels more like equals sharing knowledge rather than experts teaching lessons. There's always time for a laugh, a cuppa, and a chat too.

Since joining, I've started to make friends, gained new knowledge, and truly embraced my new life in Hitchin. It gave me the structure I needed and reminded me that learning—and connecting with people is so important.

My only disappointment is there is no wine tasting group! So, if you are into wine or would like to know more and would be interested in joining a group, please let me know.

If you've just moved somewhere new, or you're looking for a way to extend your connections, I can't recommend u3a enough. It's been the perfect way to meet new people.

Jan Hills



Kathy's Story

I felt sick and dizzy during and after having lunch with a friend on Friday 3rd October 2024, but I pushed myself to get to the library and the Post Office. I was coming back from the library along York Rd, when it was like something took hold of me, bounced me along the street and into Bearton Road.

A young man was passing on a bike and he called out "are you OK? I answered "no, please dial 999" He described the situation and gave the phone to me where upon I described my Symptoms. There followed 3 hours lying on the grass verge.

People brought blankets and space blankets, and hot drinks, which I refused Eventually someone brought an off-duty GP who had just started testing my grip when the ambulance arrived. I was blue-lighted into Lister A & E where I was put to bed, and I mostly remember. They told me I had Atrial Fibrillation, plus, a regurgitating Mitral valve. I asked why hadn't I noticed considering I'd walked 4 or 5 miles that day?

They said it was only borderline symptomatic, and I remembered that I'd felt breathless. It puzzled the Consultants for a minute, then they realised my symptoms were not due to advance warning of a stroke. They said I should get back to being able to walk 4-5 miles, which cheered me up no end.

Then the physios arrived. I learnt later that "NOBODY EXPECTS THE PHYSIOTHERAPISTS". Like Monty Python's Spanish Inquisition, they came when I least expected them, and I dropped everything and practiced their latest exercise – which I went on practicing day and night until it was time for a new one. it made me the physios' favourite!

(For some reason people don't generally, do physio exercises consistently) I went to a group physio session to music (Ralph McTell) and it was coming back from this that I was introduced to one of the more bizarre manifestations of stroke. This is, that you remember things which aren't true. You see a coat as being a person sitting there. A lot of my delusions were of nice friendly animals like the Scottie dog who lived under my sofa for a while. Everybody working on a stroke ward (even the cleaners) know about this phenomenon, but it seems crazy in the outside world.

I was then moved to Stroke Rehab at Old Welwyn. A couple of days after admission I was given a test for dementia – and as I passed it, I was given "Agency" which means a person is of sound mind and can make her own decisions however foolish. The food was excellent. I used to joke that we were living in a restaurant specialising in old-fashioned English food. However, the other inmates of my ward were about 80 and past finding anything funny. I did physio exercises for most of the day every day, partly to calm my anxieties and partly in order to be able to look after myself without home helps or anybody else having to come to the house.

Stroke is one of the few diseases where the patient's actions affect recovery time. The more repeats of the physio exercises one does, the faster one will recover. Therefore, I whizzed through the stages of recovery. It is the physios' job to cure the patients and the nurses' job to keep them alive while they are doing it. One lunchtime the physios wrote on my whiteboard that I could walk with a quad stick alone.

So immediately after lunch I grabbed the quad stick and started walking. I then slowly became aware of voices behind me – "don't startle her or she will fall" "What is she up to now?" "Go gently" etc., I did all the stages by the 7 weeks allotted to rehab, by which time I had been taught how to get up if I fell, how to manage stairs and other advanced topics. So, I went home by hospital transport alone to my own house.

(Kathy is extremely resilient and doing well)



A little more than a day trip to La Belle France



Foreign places have always beckoned us. Especially travelling independently. Most recently, coinciding with local temperatures of over 38 degrees, we upped and went to France. Long sitting on our tick list was a visit to Monet's garden and home.

Dozens of offers of organised tours sprung up online, but we opted to have a three day stay with just the entry ticket to both, rather than a guided tour. Good move.

You look into flights to Paris. You look into train to Paris. Hassle either way. We choose the car. Channel Tunnel known as 'le shuttle', early in the morning, and stops en route in places of interest to us: charming, clean towns and villages: Desvres, Montreuil, Lyons-la Foret. All characterful and inviting for a mooch about, a coffee stop, a bite to eat. The last of these known as 'une des plus belles villes de la France': it lived up to its name for beauty.

We had booked accommodation through booking.com at nearby Vernon which lies on the river Seine, halfway between Paris.

The proprietors had not answered my phone calls or emails relating to arrival time and key pick up. Should have smelt a rat. Anyway, parked in the car outside this inaccessible apartment, we found another through the same organisation, (I am at genius level, according to them, I'll have you know), I got reimbursed for the failed booking, plus £90 compensation.

Our alternative flatlet was on Place Charles de Gaulle right in the heart of the attractive town. Nicky was delighted that our three nights there was to span market day when the car had to be parked the other side of the Seine, ten minutes walk away.

Our booking for the house and garden, some three or four miles away, was for 11 am. but apparently with a million other tourists. You had to queue to get your own photo shoot of the lily pond, from a little belvedere. The house interested us more. And the village of Giverny with its little church where the Monet family is buried.

The Seine is picturesque on much of its course between the two cities of Rouen and Paris, forming Large loops (known as boucles) with limestone escarpments at times perched with fine homes, chateaux, and the historic ruin of Chateau Gaillard at Les Andelys. No shortage of bijou museums too, to keep out of the searing heat. And just freewheeling through the French countryside, no traffic, amid sunflowers and timeless villages is just our thing.

Evenings were spent in the bar next door, sipping a local liqueur of this region La Nouvelle Normandie, with the barman even keen to reopen after hours when he saw us coming back from a walk.

Our way back home took us on a seaside route with stops at Mers les Bains, St Valery on the Baie de Somme and Le Touquet which has the biggest expanse of sandy beach you will see anywhere. The unmissable stocking up in Cite Europe in Calais with all sorts of goodies, a meal out there, and 'Le Shuttle' back.

Easy peasy till we get to the Dartford Crossing where gantries repeatedly tell us there is an hour and a half delay. This already well after nine pm. Dear old England!

A snap decision to take the only moving lane and make for Blackwall Tunnel paid off and we were back in Hitchin a few minutes after midnight wondering when we might next enjoy la Belle France

Bob Lynn

U3A Visit to the Houses of Parliament



On Tuesday, 22nd July, a group of 25 U3A members boarded a coach at St Mary's Church, Hitchin, to travel to London. For some this would be the first visit to The Palace of Westminster, the Home of the UK Parliament. The coach dropped us off at Victoria Gardens from where we had a short walk to the Cromwell Green Visitor entrance. We underwent strict security checks before we were allowed to enter the building and given our orange Visitor lanyards.

Dennis had arranged for Alistair Strathern, the Labour MP for Hitchin, to meet with us briefly before the 75-minute tour commenced at 10.40 a.m. Gill, our tour guide, introduced herself and helped us connect to the sound system so we could follow her commentary clearly.

Gill was an excellent guide and extremely knowledgeable. The statistics and information she gave us were awesome, for example, the entire building comprised 1,000 rooms with 3 miles of corridors! This unique opportunity allowed us to see inside these incredible rooms and get up close to some of the magnificent artworks, statues and portraits of Royalty and Speakers through the years, a role which has existed since 1377.

Unfortunately, as the House of Commons was sitting in the morning, we were unable to enter. However, we spent precious time in the House of Lords which was extremely grand. We saw the thrones which the Monarchs use when in attendance, the dispatch boxes and the cushioned seats while Gill explained how the working spaces are used, highlighting some of the dramatic history of the Palace of Westminster. We even managed to get to sit on the hallowed red seats!

After the tour we had time to enjoy the copious facilities, browse in the Gift shop and have refreshments in the Jubilee Café before boarding the coach for our return journey to Hitchin.

Some of our party did manage to get into the "Visitor's Gallery" at the House of Commons to watch the proceedings, before we set off back to Hitchin. As you can see from the group photograph, many smiling faces.

Carol Mascarenhas.



From Hitchin MP Alistair Strathern

What a whirlwind the past 12 months have been. Serving as our MP for Hitchin has been unlike anything I could have imagined – a job quite unlike any other.

When I was first elected, it was through a by-election in the old Mid Bedfordshire seat. Unlike MPs who arrive as part of a big intake after a general election, I started completely on my own. There's no real handbook for Parliament, and it can be a daunting place to step into.

I still remember my induction tour on my first day. I was being whisked around – at great speed – the vast network of corridors, shown rooms I had never known existed, even the cloakroom where, in days gone by, MPs would literally hang up their swords. The ribbon remains; in case I too ever find myself needing to hang up my sword(!). It was both humbling and surreal.

Then came my first day on the green benches. No sooner had I been sworn in than Rishi Sunak, then PM, rose to make a statement on Gaza. I think it was in that moment that it became instinctively incredibly real. You're no longer an observer; you are a participant in what's happening.

That sense of duty has never left. I have tried to be as accessible as possible to the people I am lucky enough to represent. I've been holding weekly surgeries right across the constituency, hosting Q&A sessions on my work and on big national issues like the Assisted Dying Bill and knocking on plenty of doors. Throughout, getting out and about has always been one of the best parts of my role. As an MP you have to cover a huge range of issues, so having the chance to be challenged and debated on the topics of the day by those you represent is always an education!

And there are a huge number of issues locally to be working on. Whether it's securing more funding for local GP surgeries after residents have raised challenges with local provision or setting up a cross-party accountability forum to challenge the county council after hearing from families suffering from failing special educational needs provision, it's important that as our MP I'm responsive and effective in acting on the issues you bring to me.

As someone who's previously worked in education and protecting the environment, I of course bring my own passions to the role too. But one of the great parts of being our MP is getting to see these matched in the fantastic teachers, school leaders and local environmental groups I get to meet with as our MP. Whether it's a teacher going above and beyond for their students, or a local conservation group putting in hours of thankless work behind the scenes to protect a fantastic part of our local natural heritage, it is always energising to work with people who care so much about doing right by our community.

I'm proud too to represent an area with such a strong connection, past and present, to our armed forces and those who serve on our behalf. That's why I've launched a campaign to keep the Hawker Hunter in Henlow, preserving a vital piece of our proud aviation history locally. And after spending time with RAF personnel through the Armed Forces Parliamentary Scheme, I raised with major insurance firms the unfair way service personnel were being penalised when posted abroad. I'm proud that Aviva, Admiral and Hastings have now changed their policies, as a direct result, so our service personnel won't face those injustices anymore.

More than any issue, national or local, though, what stays with me most in the job is the individual stories shared with me by constituents. From heartbreaking issues accessing housing to shocking failings from government agencies or private actors, over the last year we've thrown ourselves into advocating on behalf of thousands of constituents' individual issues. There is no better feeling than being able to turn things around for people, and from securing new housing to getting £1000s in overcharged bills waived, we've had some real wins to celebrate. But the stories that stay with me most are those we haven't been able to help with yet. Those stuck on hospital waiting lists that are still far too long. The families struggling to cover bills that are still too high. It's their stories which drive my working day in, day out as our MP.

We were pleased that Alistair met with the House of Commons Group Visit on Wednesday 22nd July and that he fulfilled his promise to write up aspects to being an MP. His last comment was as follows:

That's why I'll keep working hard to be your voice in Parliament and your advocate here in Hitchin. If you ever want to speak to me about any issue, concern or idea you might have, please do drop me an email at alistair.strathern.mp@parliament.uk or come along to one of my upcoming surgeries which are advertised on my website – www.alistairstrathern.com, I'm a better MP for your input and challenge so really appreciate hearing from you.

We will look to invite Alistair to one of our Monday Meetings.



A Thank You to our Members



At our meeting on 11th August, we had a talk by Paul Gillions who is a Water Safety specialist member of the RNLI. Paul gave us a fascinating talk which was very informative and enjoyable. Judging by the audience reactions of ooohs; aaaahs; and laughter, Paul was able to entertain us, as well as explain What the RNLI does, How we do it and Why we do it. As a Governor of the RNLI, it therefore gives me enormous pleasure to say a very big 'Thank You' to all those who were able to attend the session for the very generous donation of £254.15 which has been banked by the Hitchin branch of the RNLI. That donation could buy a thermal suit for an inshore lifeboat crew member and some lifeguard kit for use on a beach. Thank you all for your generosity. Derek Davies



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New Group “News”

Wine Tasting

A Message from Jan:

The first tasting will be on 9th September at 5.30 pm at the Wee Vinoteca, The Arcade, Hitchin.

We will be tasting Italian wines, nibbles (olives, crisps etc) will be included.

The price is £20 per head. Please confirm your attendance to me via email : www.jan-hills.co.uk

Going forward we will meet monthly on the second Tuesday of the month. I realise that is on the same day as some other groups, but it is difficult to. completely avoid that.

I am keen the format evolves as we get to know each other, so your ideas are welcome.

Fancy an Evening of Fine Dining?



There is interest in starting up a “Fine Dining Group.

The Group would meet monthly at a “Fine Dining Restaurant” in the early evening.

Ideally it would include carriages with horses with coachmen and postillions in attendance.

Alternatively, transport of a more modest style would be the more sensible mode.

The idea is that the cost of the evening would be all inclusive, including transport to and from the venue. The estimated cost would be in the region of £100 to £150 per head.

The first venture would probably be in October.

Jan Hills is the focal point for this group, and she is anxious to establish the level of interest.

So, if you do want to join this Group then please contact Jan. email: www.jan-hills.co.uk

Nordic Walking Group

If you want to shed a few pounds – weight wise how about trying Nordic Walking? We are fortunate to have an expert within our group who is willing to lead such a group.

The gentleman concerned is Martin Lansbury and he says that there are many benefits from this activity. Firstly, Martin says the walks do not need to be too long or fast. Walks can be morning or afternoon to suit participants. Walks would initially be 1.5 hours covering approx. 3 miles, finishing off with tea or coffee.

Nordic poles would be provided at a “taster session” at a cost of £3.00, going forward participants would need to purchase their own poles.

Please contact Martin if you are interested and he will furnish more information to you by email, and he can cover any questions you might have. Obviously, the success would depend on the interest shown. So please let Martin know as soon as possible.



North Herts Recommended Restaurants



Lavish Bar and Grill Stevenage
128 High Street, Old Stevenage
SG1 3DB 01438 222215
A mediterranean inspired grill in the Heart of Stevenage Old Town. Our Steaks are their signature dish.



The Farmhouse at Redcoats
Redcoats Green, Hitchin
SG4 7JR 01438 729500
Whether you're here to savour our farm-to-fork dining experience they pride themselves on delivering warm, friendly service.

If you have a restaurant which is a favourite and you would like to recommend to colleagues. Please let me know, especially with Christmas on the Horizon

A fantastic initiative is the "Bus Pass Group"

Maggie is pleased to say that this new group is starting.

It will be the "Bus Pass" group. Most members have a free bus pass and the idea is, a day out in a group on the local buses.

The first one will go on Tuesday 26th August and will go to St Albans. We will start from Hitchin town centre and go together. When you are there you are free to do anything you like and then to meet up for the return journey. The bus times will come later.

Anyone wishing to try this, please let Maggie know so that we have some idea of numbers. Lots of destinations can be considered so anyone with ideas please speak up!!



Lunchtime Quiz



Our next lunchtime quiz will be held on Friday 26th September at **Church House in Hitchin** from 1pm to 3pm.

PLEASE DON'T ARRIVE TOO EARLY AS ANOTHER GROUP WILL BE IN THE HALL AND WE CANNOT GET IN UNTIL 12.45 TO SET UP TABLES AND CHAIRS. WE WOULD WELCOME HELP TO DO THIS OF COURSE.

Food will be served first, followed by a quiz. The cost is £10, and food choices are fish & chips or chicken & chips, or you are welcome to bring your own food if you don't want either of those choices. Soft drinks will be provided with food orders, and tea and coffee will also be available. Teams of up to six people, and we can group people together if you're not in a team.

I will have a table in the hall after our speaker meetings on Mondays in August & September to take names and food choices. Payment can be made by cash or **bank transfer to the u3a account (preferred): -**

HITCHIN u3a sort code: 20-41-12 a/c: 10913898 Ref: QUIZ

You can also contact me on youngspurrs2@gmail.com to book a place.

The last date for booking for the quiz is **FRIDAY 12th SEPTEMBER.**

best wishes, June Young

U3a committee



At the Country & Western Evening in June a number of you expressed an interest in joining us line dancers at the weekly beginners' class on Thursdays 10.30-11.30am at St Pauls Church in Letchworth.

At the time I did not take any names. I was too busy dancing! So, this is just to let you know that a new session starts on 4 September. If you want to join us in getting fit and having a lot of fun at the same time, please contact me for more information -

heidi_brahim@msn.com or phone 07974 374106.

Alternatively, get in touch with our instructor Nigel Price on 07713 577413 or email nigel@footstepsschoolofdancing.co.uk

Cheers

Heidi Ebrahim

Poetry Corner

Our days are very special
A gift for you and Me
Each moment is a treasure,
Like a morning mug of Tea.

Let's not forget.
Puppies, kittens and a new baby
So cute and cuddles galore
I could go on

It's simple things to cheer us
A sunrise or sun set
A flower, butterfly,
Birdsong

There is so much more
Let's embrace today.
For tomorrow is not here
Let's make more memories
With gladness, full of cheer

Mary Hollingdale



The Marrow from Harrow



Mick the local milkman
Made his way home in Harrow
Growing in his garden
Was a giant Marrow.

Mick and Charlie agreed
That it was an enormous size
Saying "It really is a Biggen"
And should win at least a prize

On the stand it looked so nice
With it's shiny skin,
Whilst all the other Marrows
Looked so rough and thin.

So Mick and Charlie went to the Pub
To spend Mick's winning prize.
But when they went back to Mick's milk float
They couldn't believe their eyes

"Cor Blimey"
Why don't you enter that Marrow
At the Garden Fete.

So Mick and Charlie dug it up,
And wrapped it in a coat.
And drove it to the Garden Fete,
In Mick's Dairy Float.

Well low and behold Mick the Milk
man from Harrow
Won his first prize ever with that
Giant Marrow

Someone had pinched Mick's Float
But left the giant Marrow
In the carpark space outside the
Pub in Harrow



Mary Hollingdale



u3a Board Games

There is a group meeting once a month on a Tuesday afternoon that plays board games. Anything you like, (not scrabble,) rummikub, upwords, quirkle, trionimoes, knockout whist etc. Obviously, there is a limit to the people that I can have in my apartment at Park House Hitchin but often some members cannot come. I know there was interest at the group fest last year - is anyone interested now in joining our group. It is not competitive in anyway, in fact we don't usually even score it is the fun of learning a new game and playing it together. Please let Magaret Hughes know if you interested.



Memories from the Dorset Trip

Book Group 3



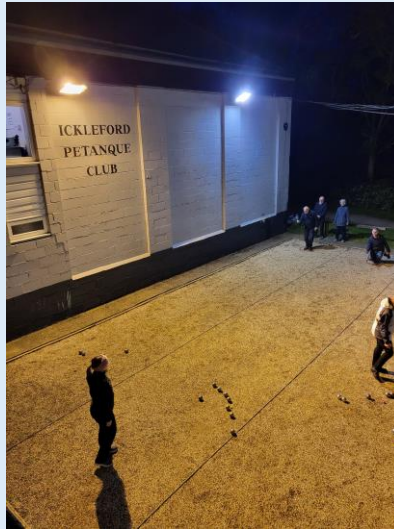
Book Group 3 started over 6 years ago, and still has 4 of the original 6 members. During this time, we've read and talked about over 60 books with a wide range of both genres and themes. We definitely don't always agree on their merits or interest, but we can always find quite a bit to talk about. There are times however, when we all agree that the current book is a great read, and on rare occasions when we all dislike that month's book. For example, we all agreed that Beth O'Leary's 'The Flat Share' was a book we loved, and that we all heartily disliked Miriam Margolyes' 'This Much is True' (although this was the book that provoked the most discussion throughout our time together!).

We've become friends as well as book sharers, and recently when one of the group had a special birthday we celebrated by sharing lunch together before the meeting.

Selection of Photographs



Houses of Parliament



Nighttime Boules



Friday afternoon Boules



Happy holliday makers



Dar es salaam harbour Tanzania
Where Jeet grew up

Entertainment Quiz answers

1. Flash Gordon
2. Little Richard
3. Athens
4. Sleeper
5. Perry Como
6. Canada
7. "Elvis has left the Building"
8. Munich
9. "When you wish upon a star"
10. Kathy Kane.

General Knowledge Answers

1. The Guilder
2. Dahlia
3. Egypt
4. 1976
5. Casablanca
6. Lincoln
7. Donna Karan New York
8. LisaMarie
9. Internet Service Provider
10. Blue

What came first

1. Moon river.
2. Amazon Kindle
3. Beatles
4. American Revolution
5. Titanic sinking

A note for the committee: If we continue to use Christchurch then better facilities have to be made available for the presenters. Let's not spoil good presentations – this is a general comment from members .

And from me – just a **BIG/BIG** thank you to all who contributed. Comments are most welcome

