



Hitchin u3a Newsletter December 2025



Chairman's thoughts

Welcome to our new Newsletter. It's been a busy three months. We have 15 new members and 5 visitors to the speaker meetings. To all of you, I hope that you have been warmly welcomed and that you've found some interesting groups to join. We have had 6 speakers, varying from "musical greats" to life in the 50's. Not to forget how the Fire of London started and how "News" was gathered and broadcast.

Four new groups have started; Wine Tasting, Nordic Walking, Fine Dining and the Bus Pass Group, all of which are proving different and popular. The Wine Tasters have looked at several different wine regions and thoroughly enjoyed themselves. The Bus Group has been to St Albans, Stockwood, Bedford and Cambridge and are looking for destinations for next year.

We have also had the first u3a Treasure Hunt. When 25 brave and intrepid members trusted their satnavs (and our organisation) to take them to less well-known villages to answer questions, which eventually brought them to a pub for lunch in unexpectedly warm sunshine. We plan to do another in a different area in the spring.

I would like to thank all our wonderful volunteers, who keep us going and without you we wouldn't be able to continue. New groups and ideas are always welcome, so just let any member of the Committee know.

Although it is still a little early, I would like to wish you all a very Happy Christmas and a Great New Year.

Maggie

Your Committee

- Chairman – Maggie Bedingfield
 - Vice Chair – Heidi Ebrahim
 - Treasurer – Margaret Hughes
 - Business Sec – Anne Rapley
 - Membership Sec – Diana Lowe
 - Group Sec – June Parker
- Other members of the committee are:
Alisa Eider-Vass; Maggie Killingbeck; Barbara Allison; June Young
- Co-opted members are: Lindsay Freeston; Dennis Sexton
- Friends of Committee: Carol Mascarenhas; Steve Pullinger

Merry Christmas

Ever wondered where the phrase "Merry Christmas" comes from? With December 25 inching up on us fast, you've probably been sending "Merry Christmas Wishes to everyone in your life, including friends and family. You've possibly even sprinkled it in an Instagram caption or two and on the face of your Christmas Cards this year. After all, in a country where "Happy Easter" and "Happy Birthday" are the norm, that "merry" part of "Merry Christmas" is pretty unique. No one is entirely certain where the "merry" originated, but there are several interesting theories.

Wait. Does anyone say, "Happy Christmas"?

Yes! For starters, it's important to note that "Happy Christmas" hasn't faded completely—it's still widely used in England. This is believed to be because "happy" took on a higher-class connotation than "merry," which was associated with the rowdiness of the lower classes. The royal family adopted "Happy Christmas" as their preferred greeting, and others took note. (In fact, each year, Queen Elizabeth continued to wish her citizens a "Happy Christmas," rather than a merry one.)

But "Merry Christmas" has been used since at least 1534. A dated letter from bishop John Fisher to Henry VIII's chief minister Thomas Cromwell reveals as much. The English carol, "We Wish You a Merry Christmas," which was introduced in the 1500s, also uses the popular phrase.

So, when did "Happy Christmas" become "Merry Christmas" in the U.S.?

Historians believe it might boil down to a simple grammatical lesson. "Happy" is a word that describes an inner emotional condition, while "merry" is more of a behavior descriptor—something active and maybe even raucous. Consider, for example, the free-spirited act of "merry-making" versus the state of simply "being happy." As both words evolved and changed meanings over time, people slowly stopped using "merry" as its own individual word during the 18th and 19th centuries. It stuck around in common phrases like "the more, the merrier," as well as in things like Christmas songs and stories, largely due to the influence of Charles Dickens. The Victorian Christmas went on to define many of today's Christmas traditions. It's no wonder that now when we hear "Merry Christmas" we hear something sentimental. Even the word "merry" on its own now makes us think of December 25.

Quiz on Hertfordshire

1. Which Hertfordshire town was designated the first UK New Town in 1946?
2. Which is the biggest town in Hertfordshire?
3. Which Jane Austen novel is set in a fictional town in Hertfordshire?
4. Which was the world's first "Garden City"?
5. How many London Underground stations are there in Hertfordshire?
6. The villages of Elstree and Leavesden are famous for which industry?
7. Which award-winning movie director was born in Hertfordshire?
8. What animal features on the Hertfordshire flag?
9. Which book did George Orwell base in the village of Wallington, where he live between 1936 and 1940?
10. What was the population of Hertfordshire (2019)
 - a. 659,020
 - b. 801,583
 - c. 1,194,634
 - d. 1,720,546

Answers at the end of the Newsletter

Did you know?

1. Pop star Jason Timberlake's half-eaten French Toast sold for over £3,000 on Ebay
2. Queen Elizabeth I named a man as the "Official Uncorker of Bottles" and passed a law that stated all bottles found washed up on beaches had to be opened by him and no one else, in case they contained sensitive military messages. The penalty for anyone else opening a bottle was the death sentence!
3. All pilots on international flights identify themselves in English regardless of their country of origin.
4. Iraqi terrorist Khay Rahnajet, didn't pay enough postage on a letter bomb. It came back with "return to sender" stamped on it. Forgetting it was a bomb, he opened it and was blown to bits!
5. In 1979, David Booth had a series of recurring nightmares about a plane crashing, and on 25th May 1979 his premonitions came true, Departing Chicago's O'Hare airport, a DC-10 flew half a mile then turned on its side and slammed into the ground, exploding on impact. All 272 on board died. Booth's dreams started on 16th May and continued for 7 nights. Having seen the name of the airline in his dreams, Booth told people in authority at the airport. They made notes of what he told the, but claimed they couldn't just ground a whole airline, so planes went on as usual – and Booth's nightmares came true!

Some foreign words and phrases you should know to sound smart

1. Mauvais quart d'heure (French) A bad 15 minutes, that is, a difficult but short-lived experience
2. Graviora manent (Latin) A cheery little phrase meaning "the worst is yet to come"
3. Glaube dem Leben (German) Have faith in life
4. Cojones (Spanish) The testicles and all the courage that possessing them metaphorically implies
5. Coup de foudre (French) Literally a "bolt of lightning", but metaphorically it is "Love at First Sight."
6. Omnia vincit amor (Latin) Love conquers all.

Janina



News from the Groups



2 mile walking Group

Two-Mile Walkers: Autumn Amblings



The Two-Mile Walkers have been out in force this autumn, taking full advantage of the glorious weather and the golden glow of Fairfield's Valley. As the photos show, the scenery has been putting on quite a show for us—crisp leaves, big skies, and that mellow sunshine that makes you feel you ought to be in a postcard.

We're a friendly, talkative bunch, more than happy to amble rather than march, but we still get the miles in... eventually. There's always plenty to chat about along the way—everything from the wildlife we think we've seen to gentle debates about which pub does the best chips.

And, of course, our lunches have been a highlight in themselves. After a leisurely wander, there's nothing quite like settling down together for something delicious and well-earned. Good food, good company, and good views—it's a winning combination.

All in all, it's been a lovely season for our gentle autumn rambles. Long may the sunshine hold, and long may our two-mile adventures continue! New walkers always welcome.

Contact jan@jan-hills.com



Wine tasting Group



The u3a recently formed Wine Tasting Group has been swirling, sniffing, and sipping its way through a wonderfully varied autumn. We've now had three meetings, each one as lively as the last—and sometimes so popular we've had to squeeze in chairs like grapes in a press! We began our oenological travels in Italy, gliding from crisp northern whites to rich southern reds. Then it was off to Greece, where we bravely tackled those tongue-twisting grape names (Assyrtiko, anyone?) and discovered that Greek wine is far more than a holiday fling. Most recently, Portugal welcomed us with open arms—and full glasses—showcasing everything from bright whites to the deeper, bolder red styles that left many of us pleasantly surprised.

If attendance is any measure of enthusiasm, then we're thriving. Every session has been full to bursting, and the pleasure the group takes from these gatherings is easy to quantify, simply listen for the roar of laughter and the constant hum of cheerful chatter. It's fair to say that our wine tastings are as much about friendship and fun as they are about the finer points of fermentation.

Next up is our festive finale: on 16th December we'll be clinking glasses of Christmas fizz. Expect bubbles, brightness, and quite possibly the highest decibel level yet. Join us in 2026, no previous knowledge required just an open mind! Contact jan@jan-hills.com



U3A Fine Dining Group



First Outing!

The brand new U3A Fine Dining Group got off to a delightful start with its first meal. We gathered at The Cock in Hitchin, an elegant and welcoming spot that turned out to be the perfect setting for an evening of good food and even better company.

From the moment everyone arrived, the conversation was flowing as easily as the wine (of which there were just a few glasses enjoyed!). Laughter drifted around the table as members got to know one another, swapped stories, and discovered shared tastes—not only in food, but in travel, books, and life in general.

The food did not disappoint either: plates cleared, compliments given, and a little menu envy spotted across the table as dishes arrived— all looking very tempting. Whether people chose something adventurous or stuck to a favourite classic, there were plenty of happy faces and satisfied diners by the end of the evening.

The atmosphere was warm, friendly, and full of that lovely “we're starting something good here” feeling. If this first outing is anything to go by, the Fine Dining Group is set for many more enjoyable evenings of conversation, culinary treats, and camaraderie.

We will meet again in January, venue to be decided.

Architecture and the Built Environment

We continue to range far and wide, in time as well as place, as the fancy takes us. Our 'Progress' over the past year started with the Arts and Crafts Movement, which led us through Garden Cities and New Towns, then via Rennie Macintosh, Portmeirion, Gaudi, Bauhaus and Brutalism to a series of personal favourites among modern buildings. More of us are now capable of transferring images from our own devices to the television screen, so we enjoy lots of visuals. Then in September we picked up our local strand with a visit to St Mary's church in Hitchin. This turned out to be a surprise, since rather than an architectural overview of its various styles, we were plunged into the range of maintenance and development issues being addressed in this ancient structure – our first encounter with this level of our subject! In October we spring-boarded from the Hitchin church tower back into Gothic, with a member taking us on a 'tour' round the exquisite King's College Chapel in Cambridge, followed by another surprise, - Architectural Angels – but I'll leave Ann to tell you about that. Please see Ann's piece on the next page. Our next question is – 'What came after Gothic?' So, in December, we're edging into Classical Style buildings in Britain via a visit to Ancient Greece!

Bren Timson

Art Appreciation

This group is full at present for reasons of space. There have been about half a dozen recent enquiries about joining. So, anyone interested could send a message for advice about getting together to form a second Art Appreciation group to June Parker, Groups Secretary, via the Hitchin u3a website. Click on the Committee button and then on the Group Secretary link to send the message with your contact details. If vacancies arise in the current group, I can liaise with June about who's still waiting to join it if the second group hasn't yet formed.

Phil Abbott

Psychology

The Psychology Group have explored a range of topics this year including self deception, risk, fear and addiction. The significance of our mental processes for how we interact and engage with life cannot be underestimated. In addition to the monthly sessions several members of the group have participated in a research project organised by a PhD student at the University of Hertfordshire. The project concerned the effects of cue words on autobiographical memory retrieval in aging. It aimed to explore how healthy adults recall autobiographical memories in response to different types of cue words. The cue words were of three types; concrete words (tangible concepts with a physical form e.g. grass, sofa), abstract words (intangible concepts without a physical form e.g. chance, idea) and a mix of both.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of the three and the time taken to respond to each type of cue was compared along with the recall strategies deployed. Thus far participants have received an update; the outcome is yet to be shared.

Maggie Killingbeck

The Health and Happiness Group

The purpose of the group is to sieve through and understand all the data on longevity - living a longer, healthier life. There is loads of data and research, but it can be confusing. I envisage that the group would run a little like Art appreciation, Current Affairs or the Science or Architecture groups.

One member would suggest a topic and provide some materials others could study (or not, their choice). In a meeting we would discuss the findings and what it means personally. Anyone who committed to adopting a new habit or behaviour would be supported by one or a collection of the group members.

The scope would be around understanding the 4 pillars of longevity:

The food we eat and the impact on the body

Exercise, how much and what type

Sleep

Mental fitness

Hopefully, group members would adopt some of the practices they learn about by changing 'just one thing' (to borrow from the late Michael Mosley). If people are interested, please let Jan Hills know, or email jan@jan-hills.com

Play Reading Group

As ever the Group has been active and continues to be well supported.

Amongst the latest plays we have recently read, have been the BBC Radio Comedy Clare in the Community and over two sessions The Importance of Being Earnest. Amazing how bright, funny and significant Oscar Wilde still is. The line "A Handbag"! was given wonderful character and timing by Adrienne Nakamura, who indeed gave a second rendition, on request from the group at the end of the play.

Adrienne also put the poor hapless director to rights for interfering with her dialogue it won't happen again!

Angels are not just at Christmas – A brief look at Roof Angels



One of the reasons I was keen to visit the Houses of Parliament was to see the roof angels in Westminster Hall. Angels appear in several religions - in Christianity, their role has been characterised as to protect and guide people's souls plus acting as intermediaries between Heaven and human beings. Through the centuries, angels have been portrayed in art - bearing feathered wings to symbolise their function as spiritual messengers with their messages often depicted by actions or the objects carried. The earliest documented roof angels are those built between 1393 – 99 into the roof structure during Richard II's refurbishment of Westminster Hall. During the 13th and 14th Centuries, English carpentry was unrivalled in Europe - on completion, the Hall became the largest unsupported medieval timber roof in northern Europe. The roof angels are carved horizontally into the 26 heavy solid protruding hammerbeams with separate wings attached vertically high on their shoulders, so they appear to be flying, the angels' message of Richard's kingship displayed on shields bearing his royal coat of arms.

The carving of roof angels soon became quite widely adopted, particularly in East Anglia. Hammerbeams were used for angels' bodies; but also, as vantage points for angel heads, busts and steepled hands; as well as for upright angels with outstretched wings. In at least one church, false hammerbeams were inserted and carved into angels. Roof angels show a wide variation in facial features, clothing and wings. It is clear that they are not just the work of one or two itinerant master carvers, but that great freedom was allowed to local woodworkers who carved roof angels for their own churches. Roof angels can be seen with many different hairstyles, some wear hats, other crowns; clothing may take the form of draped robes or feathered garments including trousers (which seem to be based on costumes worn in Mystery Plays); the angels' messages may be depicted by images on shields, holy symbols (churches, books, even a tiny soul); and, being associated with music, many carry instruments. When roof angels were originally carved, they would have been painted in bright colours and often gilded. Today many are darkened with age, but in some places vestiges of the original colouring has remained and been restored. For example, at St Mary's Church in Hitchin some of the angels' wings in the south chapel (beyond the very fine Angel Screen) have been regilded, whereas elsewhere through the Church the roof angels remain as darkened wood. During the Puritan purges of church altars, pictures and images many roof angels would have been destroyed, however, a significant number remain – perhaps due to the difficulty of actually reaching them.

Although hammerbeams were the favoured position for roof angels, sometimes additional vantage points were used creating different perspectives. The double hammerbeam roof (built between 1470 – 1530) at St Wendreda's, March, has 118 Angels. This Church has just been added to the Heritage at Risk Register due to the severe structural issues that threaten its survival – one of the ways they have been trying to raise funds is by a 'Sponsor an Angel' campaign.

For centuries, carved roof angels have hovered over men and women below and undoubtedly many have derived comfort from their local angels. Today, the majority of roof angels are to be found in Norfolk, Suffolk, Lincolnshire and Cambridgeshire – although, as well as those in Hitchin, I have seen several examples in Bedfordshire and as far afield as York, Nantwich and Salisbury. These days, despite 'Guardian Angels' oft being referred to, perhaps many people are unaware of these medieval architectural features?

From Ann Cullen

Friday Social Boules Group



The Friday Social Boules Group (Pétanque) has been active during this glorious summer. It has been great to see so many new players enjoying a relaxing game, indeed learning many of the skills and intricacies of the game. Aply encouraged and guided by Ian and Martin, with assistance from myself.

It was great to see an equal compliment of the sexes.

We have closed the regular Friday sessions, now as the cooler wetter weather approaches, however when we do have some nice Friday's, some of our members have said they may well wander up to the piste at Ickleford Sports Club to throw some practice boule, or even start a game if others arrive.

Last year we stopped early November and recommenced in April of this year. Let's hope we can continue with this formula next year 2026

Graham Harris



Dance Choreography



Currently the Group is working on the Fall of Lucifer (more fun than you might imagine). In January we are planning to film a movement event in the outdoors for an environmental project organised by Angela Ruskin University. The more bodies we have available for this event the better.

I will share the details as soon as plans are confirmed. In addition, we have another project, based on "The Elements".

Hitchin Dance Choreography Group will be exploring the movement if the Earth (tectonic plates, earthquakes, volcanoes, mountain ranges and Mother Nature).

Other groups will be working on Air, Fire and Water. On Sunday 19th April 2026 all groups involved will be meet at Trinity Laban Conservatoire. We will work on the transitions in the morning and share the whole choreography with others in the afternoon. If you enjoy moving, working creatively with others and being part of a performance event please consider joining us. Once again Angela Rippon is leading the annual Let's Dance event.

The initiative resulted from a report on the social value of movement and dance (due to fewer mental and physical health issues evidence indicates that dancing 'generates 3,5 billion of social value per year – Executive Summary). This year dancing events will be taking place on Sunday 8th March. More details will be available in the New Year, Do look out for local opportunities; **dance enhances health and well being**

Maggie Killingbek

MOOG (Members On Own Group)



Members meet for a chat, coffee, lunch on the second and fourth Friday of the month at Dimples Café, Par3 Golf Course, Willian Way, Letchworth, SG6 2HJ.

On the second Friday we meet from 10.30 – 12.30 p.m. for coffee

On the fourth Friday we meet from 11.30 - 1.30 p.m. for brunch

You don't have to be on your own, just want to do different things than your partner sometimes.

Besides meeting twice a month, this group has no particular programme. It is a group of friends happy to go somewhere, with two or more, to the theatre or cinema, a walk, a meal, etc. without trying to fit in with a monthly group.

If you are interested in attending please let me know.

I send a reminder email to attendees a week before the date of our fortnightly meetings.

Carol Mascarenhas
07950486975

Current Affairs Group

The Current Affairs group is very popular and over subscribed and we're now unfortunately having to start a waiting list. The other option of course is to start a second group which will need a group leader. If anybody is interested, please get in touch.

Recent topics we have discussed at the group have been:-

Would you like to live to 150 if there was a dna test to say you would or would you not want to know? People in some countries are living longer but there are implications. A very interesting discussion and I think most of us present decided we didn't want to know.

AI - what are the advantages and disadvantages? Again, a very interesting discussion and the consensus seemed to be it needs regulation but how/who? Another topic! The topics are chosen by members. You have a certain amount of time to do your research before the meeting.

Margaret Bracey

Join Our u3a Hospitality Team

Everyone Welcome!

Your chance to help at U3A meetings and meet new friends

Are you interested in lending a hand with refreshments at our U3A fortnightly meetings? We are looking for new helpers to join our friendly Hospitality Team. Whether you are new or have been with us for a while, everyone is welcome – we are a very friendly bunch, and its a great way to get to know more members!

How to Join – Step-by-Step

1. Express your interest: Simply text or email your name and let us know you'd like to join.
2. Get started: You'll receive details of your first meeting and be introduced to your team.
3. Try it out: Join us for a session to see how you feel – there is no obligation to commit straight away!

To contact Jan, text or call 07714 217447, or email jan.stearn@sky.com.

How the Teams Work

- We have four teams, each with four members, working on a rota system.
- New helpers join an existing team, and after trying a session, can decide if they want to continue.
- If enough new members join, we can create another team – meaning you'll only be on duty every two months or so.

Hospitality Duties

1. Between 13:30 and 14:00, switch on the two kitchen boilers (one for hot drinks, one for washing up).
2. Set out mugs, milk jugs, sugar bowl, spoons, and biscuits before the meeting.
3. Take a glass of water to the Speaker and politely ask what drink and biscuits they would like after their talk. Write down the Speaker's preferences on a notepad to ensure you remember their choice when serving.
4. After 15:00, serve tea and coffee at the hatch.
5. Take the Speaker's requested hot drink and biscuits to them in the church hall.
6. Collect, wash, dry, and put away all cups.
7. Place rubbish in the external appropriate bins located outside the kitchen door.
8. Between 16:00 and 16:15, check the kitchen for any remaining items before leaving, and ensure the space is tidy by 16:15.
9. Switch off water boilers and kitchen lights.

All supplies are kept in the U3A blue and white striped bag on top of the grey steel cupboard in the Christchurch hall kitchen.

Rota and Cover Arrangements

- If you can't do your turn, please try to swap dates with someone else and let Jan know.
- If swapping isn't possible, contact Jan as soon as possible to arrange cover.
- You can access the Christchurch hall kitchen from 13:30 to set up.

Support and Guidance

Jan will continue to provide clear, step-by-step instructions for all setup and cleanup duties, so you'll always know what to do and when. Support is always available if you have any questions.

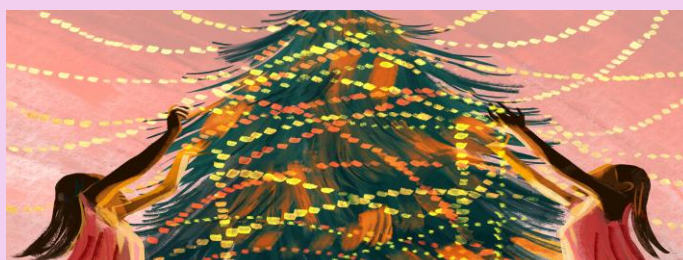
Everyone Is Welcome! Please come and give it a try – everyone is welcome, and we are a very friendly bunch. By joining us, you'll quickly get to know more members and be part of a supportive team.

Contact Details

To join or find out more, please text or call Jan Stearn on 07714 217447, or email jan.stearn@sky.com.

Thank you very much for considering helping out – we look forward to welcoming you!

Jan Stearn – U3A Hospitality Group Leader





From The Creative Writing Group



Art

“Now listen carefully, boys and girls” said their teacher, young Miss Brown. “ We are visiting the art gallery that’s opened in the town. And as we wander through the rooms you must stay close to me and tell me what you think about the paintings we will see.”

“Look Miss, that man there’s got three eyes and his nose is on his knee. Those funny shapes have eyes as well, whatever can they be?”

“That artist’s call Picasso, he paints strange, unusual things”

“Miss, them babies got no clothes and look, they’ve all got wings. Can they fly up to heaven Miss or nest up in the trees? I bet they’ll have the “social” round if they let those babies freeze.”

“Like Giants and Faries, they’re not real. The picture artists draw are often just imaginary things, not seen before.”

“Miss, Miss, that lady on the bed, she must have lost her knickers.” “I think she lost her bra and all” says Tommy as he snickers. “Just look at all those women Miss, they’re showing off their tits. Good job my Gran’s not here, ‘cos she’d be having forty fits. She won’t go out without her hat....”

“Now Tommy, that will do, let’s all enjoy the paintings just like I told you to.”

“That lady there that’s staring Miss, she’s got a creepy smile. If I met her in the street at night, I think I’d run a mile.” “That’s a very well-known painting, the most famous you might see, by a man named Leonardo who once in lived in Italy.”

“D’you think that man’s been in a fight, he has a bandage round his head. D’you think he’s been done over Miss, or p’raps fell out of bed?”

“It’s said he cut his ear off himself as he was going mad. Now I don’t know if that is true but the story’s very sad.”

“Well, now I think we’ve seen enough, you must be feeling tired. I hope this visit’s been worthwhile and you have felt inspired by the very famous paintings that we have seen today. It’s time now to go back to school, so let’s be on our way.”



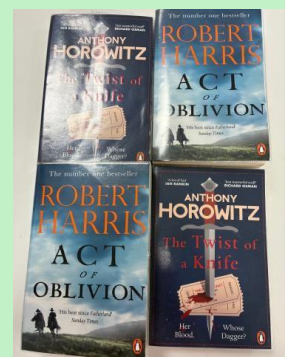
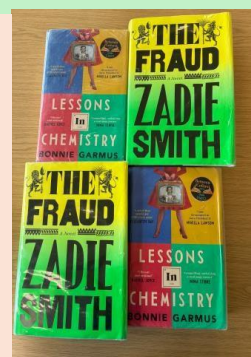
News from the Bookshelf of Book Group 1

I’ve only been in the Monday afternoon Book Group for a year, but I really enjoy it. Meeting at the library Seems very appropriate and convenient as they supply our books, it’s a brilliant service and of course it boosts their book issues!

The selections are very eclectic from best seller murders to Booker winners. We have a good discussion, sometimes we are unanimous in likes of dislikes, for example we all enjoyed Amor Towles ‘The Lincoln Highway’ and Jo Callaghan’s ‘In the Blink of an Eye’ – and introduction to AI, a first for me. We do include some classics; we have 1984 coming up and will apply for some inclusion to the library next time, maybe Jane Austen as it’s the 250th anniversary of her birth this year,

If you are a reader, or not, to be recommended. ➔

Jo Golby



- | | |
|--------------------------|------------------|
| The Lincoln Highway – | Amor Towles |
| The Confession- | Jessie Burton |
| The Marriage Portrait – | Maggie O’Farrell |
| Beautiful World - | |
| Where Are You – | Sally Rooney |
| Act of Oblivion – | Robert Harris |
| The Twist of the Knife – | Anthony Horowitz |
| Murder before Evensong – | Richard Coles |
| The Secret Hours – | Mick Herron |
| The Figurine – | Victoria Hislop |
| The Fraud – | Zadie Smith |
| Lessons in Chemistry – | Bonnie Garmus |
| In the Blink of an Eye – | Jo Callaghan |



HOW'S YOUR POSTURE?

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✉ martin.lansbury@btinternet.com

☎ 07860864478

Theatre Group

Death on the Nile

We were all looking forward to an afternoon watching the new play in Milton Keynes - Death on the Nile adapted by Ken Ludwig and directed by Lucy Bailey. We were not disappointed. A thoroughly enjoyable afternoon. The actors played their roles brilliantly and the set design looked very realistic. Added to which the atmospheric oriental music brought the classic tale to life. An entertaining afternoon enjoyed by all



In Death on the Nile, a glamorous but wealthy heiress, Linnet Ridgeway, is murdered during a Nile river cruise, with the primary suspect being her new husband's vengeful ex-fiancée, Jacqueline de Bellefort. However, the plot unfolds as Hercule Poirot investigates the other passengers, many of whom have secrets, leading him to uncover a conspiracy involving duplicity and multiple murders

Photography Group - Markets



Hitchin Market from Above



Alas Empty Stalls in Hitchin Market



Cows Hoof Market Marrakesh Morocco



Masai Market Kenya



Market day in Peru



History Group



NORTH AMERICA

In our history group we are beginning to look at the history of North America. This is a diverse topic covering many areas of interest.

The first Americans are believed to have migrated from Asia across the Bering Land Bridge arriving in North America between 20,000 and 15,000 years ago although there have been suggestions of human presence 21,000 – 23,000 years ago. The early peoples were known as Paleo Indians and there are genetic studies which lead us to believe this early group were from an ancestral group of Ancient north Siberians and East Asians.

We have already looked at the Thirteen Colonies which joined to form the United States of America and as the colonial population grew, they largely displaced the region's Native Americans. We will go on to look at USA and Mexico, Immigration, Civil War, Slavery and Politics – Democrats and Republicans among other areas of interest,

However, before we do, how did this affect the Native Americans, this is the view of one Chieftain Sitting Bull. Today I sit with my tribe, it is Waniyeta I think the white man would say June and we have fought the cowboy, the foreigner Custer, who threatened our sacred lands and culture. Today we won this battle, but I know in my heart that this is the beginning of the end for our peoples. My fellow chieftains have said that the Earth itself would remember the injustices done, Chief Joseph explained the exhaustion and sorrow of our people forced from our homeland. I know the government is coming for me and I say to them "I wish it to be remembered that I was the last man of my tribe to surrender my rifle".

I sit quietly with my pipe and as I dream I hope for a land of unity, peace and respect for nature but all I can see are tall buildings many people rushing everywhere, nature is nowhere. I put my pipe down and move forward to my future, my heart is heavy for my peoples, for my children.

Sue Zacharias

Members Photographs



Pelicans by Sarojini Ellis



Perfect weather for Pétanque
Graham Harris

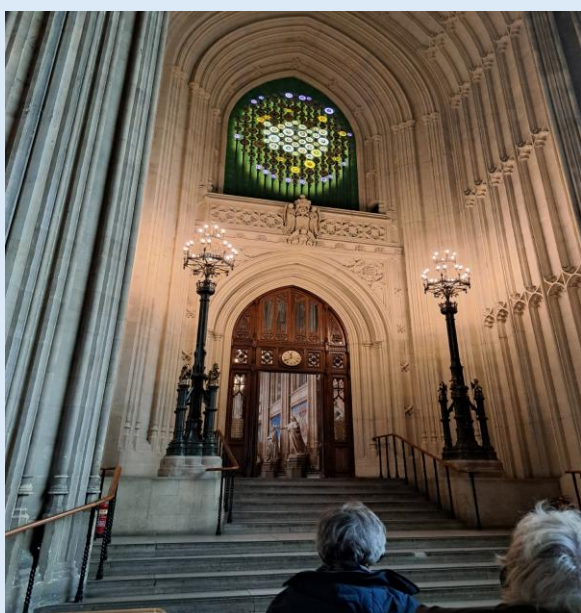
More Photographs



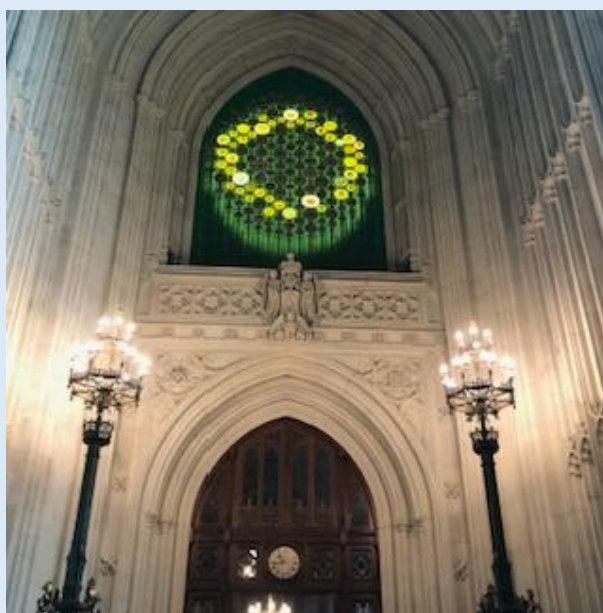
Some of our members on the November trip enjoying a restful break on the hallowed red seat in the Lords



In the Great Hall during the trip round the Palace of Westminster.



Paul Gatwood



John and Anne Nelson

The Photographs of the New Dawn. Here is some background

On June 7th 1866 John Stuart Mill presented a petition to the House of Commons requesting an extension of the franchise to women. This was the first mass petition to Parliament on the subject and, although many followed subsequently, it wasn't until 1918 that women over the age of 30 were granted the right to vote.

On June 7th 2016, 150 years later, a new art installation was unveiled in Westminster Hall over the door that leads into the House of Commons chamber to commemorate the men and women who fought for so long for the rights of women.

Mary Somerville had signed the 1866 petition but in 1868 when a further petition was presented to Parliament, this time with 21,000 signatures, her name headed the list at Mill's request. Somerville College is the proud possessor of these letters from Mill to Mary Somerville making the request and celebrates the suffrage campaign alongside the House of Commons Art Committee who commissioned the new art work by Mary Branson entitled 'New Dawn'. The design of the metal and illuminated glass sculpture draws on concepts and imagery connected with Parliament and campaign for women's suffrage. Permanently sited on the public route through the Palace of Westminster, it is designed to be seen by the hundreds of thousands of people who visit Parliament each year. New Dawn is made up of back-lit glass 'scrolls' representing the many people and groups involved in the votes for women movement. Visually inspired by rolled Acts of Parliament, the scrolls incorporate the colours used by women's suffrage organisations. The scrolls also represent the Acts which have given rights to women after centuries of inequality. The overall shape of New Dawn suggests the rising sun. This mirrors a common image in women's suffrage campaigning, which represented gaining the vote as a 'new dawn' for gender equality. The votes for women movement was also often represented as a 'tide of change' sweeping the nation. To reflect this, New Dawn's lighting is linked to the tidal River Thames. It builds from low tide, where only one disc is lit, to high tide, where the whole sculpture is illuminated. New Dawn's dynamic lighting also brings the contemporary world into Parliament, signifying that campaigns for equality continue today.

First Treasure Hunt



Hitchin U3A Car Treasure Hunt 2025

We met at St Mary's car park in Hitchin on a sunny autumnal Monday morning. How lucky we were with the weather - glorious blue skies.

Each car was given a list of 7 postcodes to put into the satnav, with a clue to a location at each destination. There were helpful hints too, phone numbers in case we needed help and a sealed envelope containing details of our final destination in case there was a problem solving the final puzzle.

Cars were dispatched at intervals and given different routes so that we didn't all end up in a convoy, although we did meet other participants along the way.

Soon we were out in the countryside, finding the answers either in a village, on a chapel, outside a pub or inside a church. It was good fun hopping out of the car at each location and searching for the answer.

The route took us out into the Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire countryside, through lots of beautiful villages with thatched cottages, churches and old pubs.

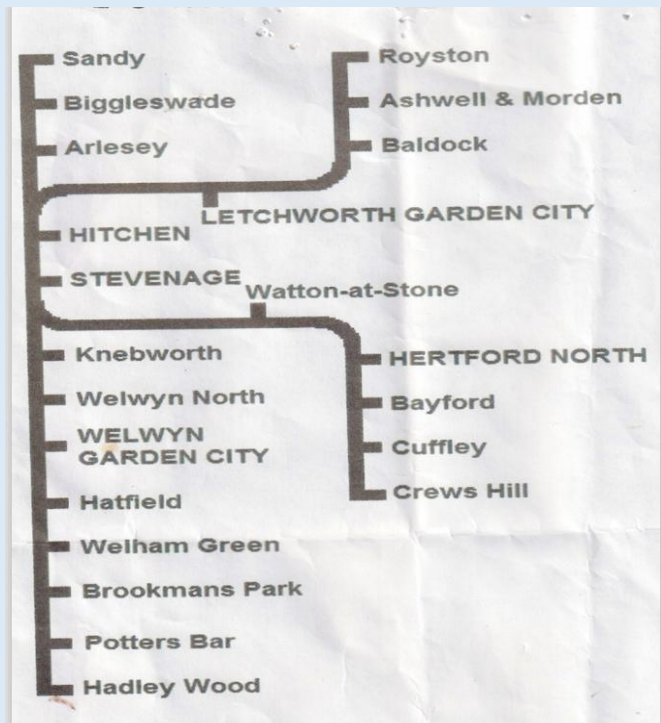
Inserting our answers into a crossword type puzzle revealed the postcode of our final destination. This was a country pub where, after much laughter, concentration and discussion, we sat outside in the hot sunshine, enjoying drinks and a meal.

Our grateful thanks go to the organisers, Anne, Maggie and families, for all their hard work putting this together and we look forward to more treasure hunts in the future.

A future event definitely not to be missed!

Review by the Inglebys and the Thomases

Bits and pieces



Train journey discount for bus pass holders From Peter Kearns

I've discovered that not everyone knows you can have a discount on train journeys within Hertfordshire using your bus pass.

Attached is the plan of the stations involved where a bus pass will give better discount than other rail travel cards (Senior Railcards, 2 together, etc). I suggest it's easier to buy at the ticket office in the station, I haven't tried using the machines

It applies on Mondays to Fridays after 10am and anytime at weekends and bank holidays

Definition of Wokeism

Here is a definition of Wokeism: There are people just sitting there, who are deliberately waiting, for the thrill of being offended

John Cleese

Too much memory
Too many people and things
Each move we make drags

A whole wagon of consequences in it's wake
Opening old wounds

We should try to live
out of one suitcase and try to tread
the grass barefoot, not
treading on wasps' nests.

Street Poet

The beat of the drum
The cry of the horn
And man's anguished scream
"Death to the Infidel"
The blood on the ground
The sound of withering men
There is no victory in war
A soldier

A woman visits her husband in prison. Before leaving, she tells a correction officer: "You shouldn't make my husband work like that. He's exhausted!" The officer laughs and says, "Are you kidding? He just eats and sleeps and stays in his cell!" The wife replies: "He just told me he's been digging a tunnel

HUMOR ON AGING

"To get back to my youth I would do anything in the world, except exercise, get up early, or be respectable." Oscar Wilde

"The older I get, the more clearly, I remember things that never happened" Mark Twain

"Old age isn't so bad when you consider the alternative" Maurice Chevalier

"The idea is to die young as late as possible" Ashley Montague.

So let me get this straight. I go to the grocery store and buy a lb. of sliced ham wrapped in plastic, a loaf of bread in a plastic bag, a gallon of milk in a plastic jug, a pack of napkins wrapped in plastic, a Greek salad in a plastic container, a plastic bottle of mustard and a plastic bottle of ketchup, and they won't give me a plastic bag to carry it home because the plastic bag is bad for the environment?




Husband: "Why do you keep buying plants when you just end up killing them?"

Wife: "Just to remind you what I'm capable of."


A PESSIMIST sees a dark tunnel
An OPTIMIST sees light at the end of the tunnel
A REALIST sees a freight train
The TRAIN driver sees 3 idiots standing on the tracks.

Mr. and Mrs. Brown had two sons. One was named Mind Your Own Business & the other was named Trouble. One day the two boys decided to play hide and seek. Trouble hid while Mind Your Own Business counted to one hundred. Mind Your Own Business began looking for his brother behind garbage cans and bushes. Then he started looking in and under cars until a police man approached him and asked, "What are you doing?" "Playing a game," the boy replied. "What is your name?" the officer questioned. "Mind Your Own Business." Furious the policeman inquired, "Are you looking for trouble?!" The boy replied, "Why, yes."





Poetry Corner



We went to Christchurch on a Monday
And both joined Hitchin u3a
Warmly welcomed and that's not all
An interesting speaker in the hall

A group for me that's alright
At Margaret's flat we love to write
Lesley has loved the chance
To go and line dance

At the quiz our team a lovely bunch
We scored poor but loved the lunch
Meeting with members at Wetherspoons
nice

The drink at such an amazing price
Our experience has begun
And it has been so much fun
We're pleased we made the trip
To u3a membership

Lesley and Alan Doggett

AUTUMN JOY

Can you see what I see,
Golden leaves upon the Tree

Autumn sun peeping through,
Shining bright for me and you

Cobwebs glistening like a Star,
Often found upon my car.

Bright red berries...fallen fruit,
Robins appearing....OH so cute.!!!

Birds on the feeder...Pigeons go first,
Blue tit's drinking with such thirst.

Seasons come and Seasons go,
But lots to enjoy in the Autumn Glow

Mary Hollingdale

REFLECTIONS

In solitude I contemplate the years my life has spanned
Achievements and accomplishments and things that were unplanned.

Successes and the failures that shaped the way I thought,
Were lessons learned, remembered, they were not bought or taught.

I reminisce on many days of laughter, joy and fun,
Of tough times that my parents had when we were very young.

I can recall the siren as the air raids raged above,
I never felt the danger, just my mothers' arms of love.

The memories of the world I've trekked, so fortunate to see.
The beauty on our doorstep that is given to us free.

Treasured too, the memory of friends along the way.
Some still here, some are gone, but in my mind they stay.

It is a countless number, but I recall them, every name.
So tried and true and loyal, I hope I am the same.

And last not least my family, I cannot be without,
They're all so very different, but that's what life's about.

They're all now independent, I can't turn back the clock.
But I do recall the times gone by when I hope I was their rock.

So, I glance at my reflection, though it's worn, I realise
These endless memories hand to me life's priceless, richest prize.

Brenda Easton



Barn Dance



As many of you know Garden House Hospice is over a million pounds short of its target for this year.

As a result, it is having to close beds and cut services. I have offered to organise a Barn Dance to make a small contribution to support this amazing local facility. The event is on Friday 16th January 2026 at the Priory School 7.30pm - 1030pm. Tickets are £15.00 from Brian Rex

Email brianrex007@gmail.com

Please support this event

Maggie Killinbeck

HITCHIN u3a

Your membership fee

Each of us has recently been asked to renew our membership for Hitchin u3a for 2026. Our current annual membership fee is £20. Sometimes I'm asked what you get for your annual subscription, so for the curious I hope you find this helpful.

As I expect you know, Hitchin u3a operates under the auspices of the Third Age Trust (TAT), which is the National representative body for our organisation in the UK, but like all of the u3as we are autonomous. We pay an annual per capita fee to TAT, currently £4 and this pays for access to the information systems that run our membership systems and the website, as well as providing public liability insurance for members at various events. In addition, for about £4.20, TAT gives you the Third Age Matters magazine sent out to you periodically. So, the question is "What do you get for your £11.80?"

As a branch, broadly we organise three types of events.

- Regular speaker meetings and socials,
- Special Interest groups, and
- Ad hoc events

Speaker meetings are usually on the second and fourth Mondays in the month, bar public holidays, and for these we have to pay the fees associated with hall hire, external presenters, as well as providing tea and biscuits after the talk. In addition, we have a Zoom licence to give the option of virtual attendance in your home via your computer tablet, phone or laptop computer. Special Interest groups are self-organising and group members pay the cost of room hire, for example. Ad hoc events include holidays, Musical Mondays, outings such as the visits to Parliament and the treasure hunt. For these the costs are paid by the participants and are not subsidised by the annual fees.

In essence £11.80 of your fee goes to provide the schedule of speaker meetings and socials. For 2026 we have planned 21 events where hall hire is required. In preparation for the AGM we send out the annual accounts, and, in those papers, you will be able to see the costs of external speakers and hall hire. It will probably come as little surprise to learn that both hall hire and the average cost of speakers has increased. But the real heroes in this are all the volunteers who provide a welcome, AV/media support, fire marshalling and hospitality, not forgetting the stoic work done by the leaders of the special interest groups.

So, I hope you agree with me that it's all value for money.

Anne Rapley

Swiss Garden at Shuttleworth



Most of you will have heard of the Shuttleworth aeroplane collection just outside Biggleswade, but do you know about Swiss Garden?

I volunteer at the garden doing children's activities, when we have school visits and also doing guided tours for groups.

I started volunteering in 2014 when it reopened after two years of restoration. I had previously been a visitor to the gardens many times as I enjoyed seeing all the interesting buildings, the landscaping, the trees, flowers etc.

The garden was built by Lord Ongley in 1824 and he had this vision of a picturesque regency garden in the 'alpine' style. He wanted you to have picturesque views from every part of the garden. We also have 3 resident peacocks.

The garden has interest in all seasons and from December to January there will be Shuttleworth in Lights when the garden is lit up as well as the hangers and is well worth a visit. Details on the Shuttleworth website.

Margaret Bracey

Sounds like a great place to visit - Dennis



The Alternative Monday Meet Up



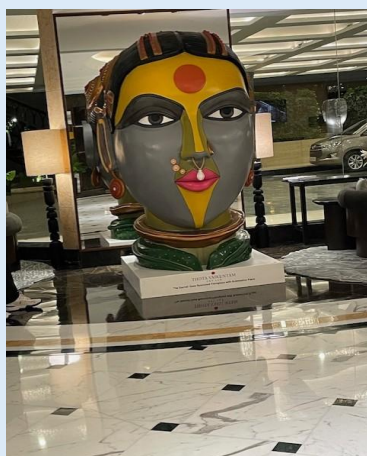
Spoons on a Monday Morning

Lots of good honest banter between members of Hitchin u3a. If you haven't tried it, do come along.

Look out for Anne's email advice.



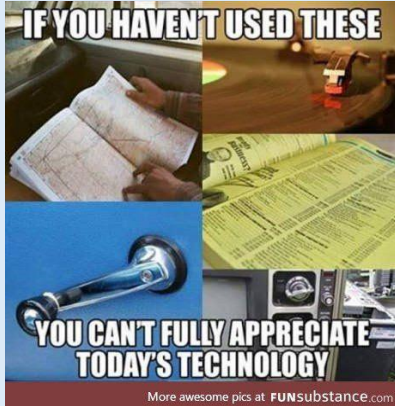
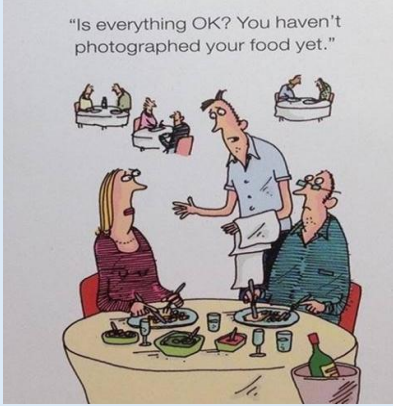
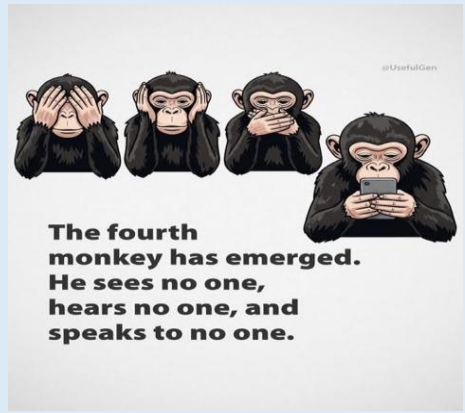
Street food



Preparing for Diwali
Jeet



Evening Traffic Jam



Fun and Laughter at the Barn Dance



New Groups

The success of Hitchin u3a is the strength of its Groups and their popularity. Some of the more popular Groups are becoming over subscribed. One way of dealing with this, is to split the Group and create a second group. That would ease the pressure, no doubt about that.

But..... What is needed to do this is to have members come forward who are prepared to co-ordinate and lead groups. So, we are looking for volunteers, to make the Group activities even more successful. Have a think about it and let June Parker (Group Secretary) know. You will already have seen that Jan is looking to bolster up the Hospitality Team, so don't be shy come on forward and volunteer.

New Games Ideas

Are there any members interested in playing Canasta or Rummikubs or indeed forming a group to play these games?

If so, can I ask that you contact Ian and Jacqui Rogerson
email: ianrogersonspain@gmail.com



All that Jazz

Following general discussions about the shortage of musical groups, I would like to know amongst the membership would there be worth in opening a group that would be looking at and listening to Jazz.

This wouldn't be a case of just plugging in Spotify or any other musical medium but really looking back at the start of "Jazz", who were those early performers, what were their backgrounds. Not to make it a dry subject, of course as we along we will want to enjoy the sounds that have had such an influence on music today.

I think the group could be fun and I would want to make it as free flowing as possible, So, if you are interested, then please contact me and deciding on how many takers there are, we can set up a meeting to decide how to proceed.

By the way I am not an expert on the subject, just someone who likes this style of music and would like to share that and at the same time find out more about *JAZZZZZZ*

Dennis Sexton

dtssexton@hotmail.com

A quick reminder

From Margaret Hughes

Subs are due any time now for next calendar year £20

BUSINESS ISSUES

Some of our members have mentioned that they never read the u3a magazine "Third Age Matters". If you do not want to receive this publication in future, can you please contact Alisa Elder- Vass by email: alisa.eldervass@googlemail.com

When you come to the Monday Speaker Meetings, please – please try to arrive at least 5 minutes before the start of the meeting. This is a major issue relating to Health and Safety. So, your valued assistance in this matter would be highly appreciated.

Thanks – The Committee

The Puppy with the Pearl Necklace

The Autumn winds had blown the leaves off the trees, and their branches were black and bare against the blue sky. The wind had carried the leaves away and piled them up in huge drifts. Stephen and Susan explored the park, running through the leaves, kicking them in all directions. Stephen liked to see how big a shower he could make. Susan admired the shine of the damp leaves beneath and savoured the peppery smell they gave off when she walked on them.

They decided to play hide and seek. Susan hid first. While Stephen counted up to twenty, she squeezed herself down behind a park bench, but it didn't take long to see her bright red boots beneath the seat. Then he hid behind a big bush. It had been a good hiding place in the summer, but now that the leaves had gone Susan quickly spotted him.

Poppy watched them, mystified. She thought this was an easy game-she could run so fast and cover so much ground that it never took her more than a few seconds to discover where Susan and Stephen were hidden. But she decided that she wouldn't mind joining in, so she stood in front of them wriggling her hind quarters and giving little barks.

"Oh, you want to hide, do you?" said Stephen. "Go on then."

Susan and Stephen covered their eyes, and they heard a scurry of paws fading into the distance. They waited for a few seconds then started to search. Try as they might, they couldn't find her anywhere. They looked for so long and so hard that they began to get worried that she might have run right out of the park. Stephen got frustrated and ran at a pile of leaves and kicked his way through them. There was a muffled complaint as his foot hit something soft, and suddenly the leaves tossed into the air as a small dog burst out of the pile. "Oh Poppy, I'm sorry!" Stephen started to say but stopped in astonishment. Round her neck Poppy had a beautiful necklace!

They looked at it in amazement. It was made of pearls. They were pale grey, shiny and glistening, and there was a handsome silver clasp.

"She must have picked it up in the leaves," said Susan. "It's lovely."

They rustled their feet and their fingers through the pile to see if there was anything else to discover but only found tiny snails and shiny pink worms. "Let's go home and see what Mum says," suggested Stephen.

As they went into the house Poppy caught sight of herself in the hall mirror and wriggled in Stephen's arms as she turned this way and that to admire herself. They had to agree that against her dark fur it made a very beautiful necklace indeed. Poppy twisted away when Stephen tried to take it off her, and he had to be quite firm with her to make her give it up. Mum looked at it carefully.

"This is a lovely bracelet," she said, "It could be quite valuable. I think we should take it to the police station."

"Can we go on our own?" asked Susan. "We often go past it when we're shopping."

"Ok," said Mum, a bit reluctantly. Reaching her purse, she gave them some money. "The bus drops you just outside. Stay together."

Susan put the bracelet safely in the zip pocket of her coat, and they ran off to the bus stop.

When they got to the police station, they said they had found some lost property, and Susan took it from her pocket and put it on the counter.

The Puppy with the Pearl Necklace (cont)

“I believe we’ve had a report of a lost bracelet,” said the policeman opening his book. “Yes, here it is: Mrs Marshall of Cherry Tree Court. She will be pleased to see it again.” He took Stephen and Susan’s details then held out his hand for the bracelet, Susan picked it up to give to him.

This was too much for Poppy, who had been sitting quietly in Stephen’s arms. Why should Susan give this man her necklace – the one she had found? Poppy launched herself on to the counter, grabbed the bracelet in her mouth, scrambled down and darted out of the open door of the police station.

Susan and Stephen threw themselves after her, and the policeman threw himself after them.

Down the street they ran, dodging prams and pedestrians, buggies and bollards, lamp-posts and litter, with the sound of the policeman’s feet getting ever more distant. Along the river, sending the ducks squawking and diving for cover. Through the market, where shoppers and stall – holders stared with open mouths as first a dog then a girl then a boy ran past, followed by a policeman, shouting “come back!”

Poppy was rather enjoying the chase and the fuss she was causing, but at the same time she knew she had done the wrong thing. So, in the end she reluctantly stopped and allowed Susan to take the bracelet. There were a few heavy steps and the policeman caught up with them. “What are you – what are you playing at?” he panted. “Why did you let her run off like that?”

“She did it before I could stop her,” said Stephen. “I think she liked shiny pearls.”

“Well, I’ll take care of it now, and we will get it back to its owner. I wouldn’t be surprised if the lady was in touch with you afterwards.” And he took the bracelet and walked off towards the police station, still puffing heavily.

And indeed, Mrs Marshall was soon in touch with them, first by telephone, to thank them, and then in person, to hand over to Susan and Stephen a crisp new £10 note as a reward.

“The bracelet was given to me by my husband for our pearl wedding anniversary, “ she said. “when we had been married for 30 years. I lost it two days ago when I threw a ball for my dog and it slipped off my wrist. I looked for a long time, but when it got dark, I had to give up.”

Stephen and Susan knew who really deserved the reward for finding the bracelet . At the first opportunity they went to the gift shop and bought Poppy a beautiful, sparkly bracelet as a replacement necklace. It had yellow and blue stones in a lovely gold – coloured setting. Poppy liked it even better than the pearls. As she stood admiring herself in front of the mirror, the stones sparkled and glinted in the light.

But she never quite forgot her first necklace – the touch of those smooth pearls on her neck, nor the way they glowed palely against her dark fur. Whenever she saw a pile of leaves, she would push her way through. But all she ever found was tiny snails and shiny pink worms!

Clifton Hughes



Travel Group

The Travel Group is no longer functioning. Angela, who has done such sterling work guiding the Group and launching some great travel days and holidays, is not able to continue. She had asked for help and volunteers to keep the Group going, to provide this valuable function for Hitchin u3a. Unfortunately, there were no takers.

Do we have anyone out there who would like to take on this Group.

Please contact any member of the committee, so that this tremendous asset is not lost to the Hitchin u3a.



Quiz answers

1. **Stevenage**
2. **Watford**
3. **Pride and Prejudice**
4. **Letchworth Garden City**
5. **5 – Watford, Croxley, Moor Park, Rickmansworth and Chesham**
6. **Film Industry**
7. **Guy Ritchie**
8. **Deer**
9. **Animal Farm**
10. **1,194,634**

To all of you who contribute to this Newsletter a big thank you, without you there would be no content.

As we move into 2026, it is ever more important that we recognise what u3a gives us a community.

It will only thrive and make a difference if we all do our bit.

We are hoping that we can see more volunteers come forward and please note the Hospitality Group (my special thanks to them) are looking for more members.

Let's not lose the experiences and happy times that the "Travel Group" afforded.

A very Merry Christmas to you all and a Happy New Year
Dennis

