

NEWSLETTER

Introductory Note

Welcome to the Hitchin u3a Q2 2026 newsletter. This quarter we have articles on a new group, the health benefits of dance, the activities of the theatre group, reviews from one of our book groups and one of our walking groups. Plus important pieces on emergency contact details, including how to add your emergency contact details, ICE, to your phone.

In Case of Emergency (ICE) Contacts

You may be aware of requests for ICE contacts, so we would like to explain the Hitchin u3a policy and how we will collect and use data.

Why are we doing this?

We are asking u3a members for the details of a person we can contact in an emergency. By providing this information you are also giving your permission to use the information in case of an emergency. This means that if something unexpected happens, we can quickly let a family member or friend know what has happened, where you are, and whether any assistance may be needed.

What do we need?

We would like to record the following information:

- Name
- Telephone Number
- Relationship to you

ICE Contact Continued

For example:

John Smith - 07012345678 - Friend

Who sees my information?

These details will be held securely and will only be accessible to group co-ordinators and members of the Hitchin u3a committee. They will only ever be used if an emergency arises, for example if you were taken ill or injured while attending a u3a activity.

This is particularly important for members who take part in walks, holidays, outings and other physical activities.

Providing an ICE contact is entirely voluntary.

If you belong to several groups there is no need to provide your details to each one. Simply give your ICE contact information **once** to any group co-ordinator or committee member. It will then be added to our central list and made available, if needed, to the relevant group co-ordinator.

We hope you will support this safety measure. If you would like to provide an ICE contact please give the details in the format above to your group co-ordinator or to any member of the committee.

Some of you may not be aware that you can set up this information on your phone in case it is needed when you are NOT at a u3a event. At the end of the newsletter are step by step instructions for different types of phone.

New Group – Classic Book Club

What do you consider to be a “classic” book in English literature?

Perhaps you think of the Victorian era with Dickens, the Brontes, Wilde, Trollope or Eliot? No surely, you’d include the Romantic period with Austen, Shelley, Poe or Hugo (in translation, of course)? But what about the modernism of the early 20th century such as Conrad, Forster, Woolf, Lawrence and Joyce? Surely Orwell, Waugh, Greene, Lessing, Morrison, Hemingway and Fitzgerald have written “modern classics”? Well I don’t know but it might be fun to find out. If you’re interested in joining a new book group where we read classics rather than more recent fiction, then please contact me. If there are enough people our first task will be to identify suitable authors and generate a reading list. And yes, decide on a day to meet to discuss our book choices.

Anne

Email: anne.rapley@me.com



Hitchin u3a policy on trying an interest group

A number of u3a members have asked to bring non-members along to try a group, sometimes they are friends who you feel will enjoy the group, sometimes a partner who is not a member of u3a.

One of the great things about u3a Hitchin is the range of interest groups on offer, from walking and book groups to crafts, languages and much more. We know that before joining, and paying their membership, many people would like to "try before they buy" and see whether a group is right for them.

To help with this, prospective members are very welcome to attend up to two meetings of any particular interest group before deciding whether to join u3a. This gives them a chance to meet the group, experience the activities and see if it's something they'd enjoy.

After attending two sessions with a group, we ask that they become a u3a member to continue participating. Membership helps support the running of u3a Hitchin and enables us to provide the wide range of groups and activities that members enjoy.

We hope they will find a group that sparks interest and look forward to welcoming them as a member!



The hottest day of the year!

Write about the above said our writing group. What can I say I thought, we never cope with strong heat in this country; it hits us and we just don't like it. 'Look at the weather forecast for next Friday,' I said to my wife 'they're saying it will be 32C, that's 90 degrees F in old money, means more to us oldies.' We were both not looking forward to this, lack of sleep and general discomfort, no fun at all.

On the eve of this onslaught of heat, I sat in my deckchair enjoying the comfort of being outside and reading the latest edition of u3amatters. I came to page 50 and looked with interest at the health notes and the headline 'Feeling hot'

'Amazing, look at these darling, tips for us, and ideas I'd never heard of.'

'What's that then, tell me.'

'Here we go.'

- Stay indoors during the hottest part of the day 11-3
- Drape a damp flannel in front of a fan or place a bowl of ice directly in front.
- Soak a cloth in cold water chill in the fridge and drape it round your neck
- Rub ice cubes on your pulse points
- Eat watermelon---contains 92% water and cucumber 96%
- Hot tea can cool you down
- Fill a hot water bottle and put it in the freezer for a couple of hours before bedtime
- Take a tepid shower before bed

'That's us sorted then do all of this and we can enjoy our day' she said

'Yes', I replied, 'good old u3a always there for us.'

The Benefits of Dancing

Training to be a Live Longer Better Champion for Hertfordshire the importance of physical activity was stressed. Indeed the first core principle of the programme is the need for an active lifestyle. Physical activity is said to be crucial for maintaining independence, strength, and cognitive function. The overall concern of the initiative is promoting strategies that result in a healthy rather than a longer lifespan!

The Benefits of Dancing – continued

For me it is not any form of exercise but the exercise of dancing that reigns supreme with regard to health benefits in later life. I am not alone in this view. Many of you may have listened to Dr Michael Mosley's (a sad loss) 'Just One Thing' broadcasts. One of his 15 minute programmes focussed on the value to health of dancing. I include a link to a precis of that episode here.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/1Hpr6R1f4M7f8Qc6fPGH2hg/why-dancing-is-the-best-way-to-enhance-your-brain-and-fitness>

In essence he provided evidence to demonstrate that dancing has the potential to reduce stroke and heart attack, enhance mental health, improve memory and reduce the risk of dementia.

As holistic beings our physical, mental and feeling capacities influence each other. As such our bodies impact how we feel and how others feel about us. (Social psychologist Amy Cuddy in her TED talk suggests that body language can shape who you are – fake it until you become it!) Dance addresses posture. Attention to posture is beneficial physically and in terms of our sense of ourselves and the impact we make on those around us. Bio mechanically sound alignment ensures that joints are not under stress and that internal organs have space to function. Use of the core to achieve good posture supports the back thereby reducing back issues and contributing to balance. Dropping the shoulder blades down and together opens the torso and avoids upper back problems. These features of good posture in addition to maintaining good physical health contribute to how we feel and how we look. Typically an erect posture communicates assertion both internally and externally. Physically dancing contributes to greater leg strength. Should we trip, strong leg muscles arrest our decent such that the consequences of falling do not materialise. Hip and torso flexibility result in a greater range of movement. Learning phrases of movement keep the brain's synapses busy contributing positively to memory. Creative dance, by merging artistic expression with physical activity is said to lower stress, increase cognitive flexibility, foster strong social connections and elevate mood (AI) For many dancing is a challenging activity. Where we rise to the challenge we realise that we can achieve, further boosting our confidence. Respond to the challenge of dancing and boost your physical, mental and emotional life!!

Review from Book Group 4

We started up in March 2025 with a full complement of 10 enthusiastic members; at the first/welcome meeting we all had a chat about what we wanted from the group which was mostly motivation to read, finish books and to discover a variety of authors that we may otherwise not have considered, as well as hearing what others thought (it's amazing to find that one book can create so many different views).

Together we agreed a structure for our meetings which allows everyone to have time to give their views (and just for fun we mark each book out of 10); we generally have time to further jointly discuss the author from that month's book which often leads us on to share other authors or themes of interest. We record each meeting by Minutes which means if you were unable to make that particular meeting you can still get an overview of what everyone else thought about the book; anyone who is unable to make the meeting is asked to email their precis to the leaders so that their view can also be shared at the meeting.

The library has a huge list of about 100 books which they recommend for Book Groups and at the start of the year, from that list, we each choose a couple of titles; it's then left to the library to pick the book, so mostly it's a welcome surprise to learn what delights we're going to be reading next month.

In our 15 months, so far, we've covered everything from Espionage, Family Sagas, Mysteries, Murder, Fun Fiction, Sad Fiction, Psychological Thrillers, Personal Motivation, and War (some of the books based on true facts).

Possibly one of the strangest books was Piranesi by Susanna Clark (see below)

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Existentialism and Radical Freedom

Self-Definition in Isolation: The novel is an existential investigation into how one finds meaning in a vacuum. Despite being trapped, Piranesi experiences profound freedom because he is not compelled to act by society, but by his own values and direct connection to his environment.

Mindfulness and Being: Piranesi lives in a state of pure, grounded existence. He is not "constantly thinking" but simply "being," a state that contrasts with modern anxiety and the constant need for productivity.

The Power of Care: Piranesi's choice to treat the inanimate statues as companions and to care for the dead shows that morality can exist without social contracts.

Jennifer & Ruth (co-leaders)

Theatre Group

If you enjoy the magic of live entertainment nothing beats the energy and excitement of watching stage performance. The local theatre productions are excellent and often come from the West End.

The theatre trips, usually for the matinee show, are organised to Milton Keynes Theatre from Hitchin, by coach from St Mary's Church bus stop.

It is very good value with the cost including transport, theatre ticket and driver's tip!

The programme for 2026 is:

April – Fawlty Towers, May – To Kill a Mockingbird, June – Operation Mincemeat, July – The Car Man and The Spy who Came in from the Cold and Dirty Dancing in August.

Shows booked for 2027 are:

Singing in the Rain – 24th March and Jersey Boys – 8th July, more shows will be added.

Details are available on the U3A website and from the Theatre desk at Speaker meetings.

New members always welcome.

Carol Mascarenhas.



MOOG (Members On Own Group)

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

Coffee on the second Friday from 10.30 – 12.30 p.m.

Brunch on the fourth Friday from 11.30 – 1.30 p.m.

You don't have to be on your own, perhaps just want to do different things than your partner. 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. Interested? Check the website or contact Carol Mascarenhas

4- mile walking group

Our four-mile walking group continues to go from strength to strength, with around 20 hardy walkers regularly turning up to enjoy the views, test their fitness, connect and put the world to rights.

Recent outings have taken us through the lovely countryside around Purwell, Henlow and Ashwell, where we've enjoyed everything from rolling fields and quiet lanes to picturesque villages and some rather impressive views.

Fortunately, the weather has generally remembered whose side it's on.

Of course, the walks are only partly about exercise. They're also about conversation, companionship and the occasional debate on subjects ranging from local history to whether that cloud looks suspiciously like a sheep. By the end of four miles, most problems have been solved, several new ones have been invented, and everyone has had a good chat.

The formula is simple: good company, beautiful countryside and just enough walking to earn a lovely lunch and a glass of beer afterwards.

Long may it continue!



National Emergency Film and Practical Research

Many of you attended the National Emergency Briefing at Christchurch on 16 June. The briefing is part of a research project led by Bath University that explores how communities might respond to a future climate emergency. Through a film and discussion, participants are invited to consider the difficult choices that governments, organisations and individuals could face if climate change accelerates and more urgent action becomes necessary. The project aims to gather public views and encourage thoughtful debate about possible future scenarios.

National Emergency Film and Practical Research cont.

The briefing itself was fascinating and thought-provoking, but it also highlighted some of the remarkable work taking place at Bath University to tackle climate change and nature loss.

One particularly interesting project starts with something very familiar – grass. As researchers point out, cows are quite inefficient at converting grass protein into meat. However, grass itself is incredibly resilient: it tolerates floods, copes well with changing climates and grows almost everywhere. Chemical engineers at Bath have developed a process to extract protein directly from grass and turn it into food products. The technology is now being assessed by the European Food Standards Agency, while the basic protein has already been approved for human consumption in the United States.

Another innovation focuses on palm oil, which is found in almost half the products on our supermarket shelves. Bath researchers have developed a special yeast strain that converts food waste into a sustainable alternative to palm oil. Through the Clean Food Group, production could eventually reach 5,000 tonnes per year.

Growing food closer to home is another challenge. Because the UK's growing season is relatively short, we import much of our fruit and vegetables from Europe. Researchers at Bath, working with partner organisations, have created a greenhouse coating that converts blue light into red light, boosting photosynthesis by up to 90%. Early trials have shown crop yields increasing by around 9%.

The university is also investigating hydrogen as a greener fuel for transport, particularly aviation, tackling the challenges of producing, storing and using it safely and efficiently.

Finally, with buildings responsible for up to 31% of global carbon emissions, Bath's engineers and architects are working on a range of projects designed to make the buildings of the future far more sustainable.

It's encouraging to see so much practical and innovative research taking place – and reassuring to know that bright minds are working hard on solutions to some of our biggest environmental challenges.

Recipe – Energy Balls

Makes about 12 balls

Ingredients

- 5 pitted dates –roughly quartered
- 4 tablespoons of almond butter
- 1 dessertspoon chia seeds
- 4 tablespoons chopped nuts (hazelnuts work well)
- Sesame seeds to coat
- Pinch of salt

Method

- 1.Put all ingredients, (except the sesame seeds) into a food processor. It is best to put the larger dates in last-nearest the blades.
- 2.Blend until the mixture sticks together when pressed.
- 3.Roll into walnut-sized balls.
- 4.Coat balls in sesame seeds.
- 5.Chill in the fridge for 30 minutes or overnight.

Optional extras

- Roll in desiccated coconut.
- Roll in mixed seeds
- Add a teaspoon of cinnamon.

They keep well in an airtight container in the fridge for about a week. Perfect for a quick energy boost with a cup of tea or coffee.



Mental Fitness Tips

Many of you have asked for tips from our Healthy at 100 group. Recently we had a talk with practical exercises from Brain Gym 4 work. Here are some tips from their booklet on Mental Fitness.

Living Well with a Calm and Positive Mind:

When we think about living well and staying healthy, we often think about looking after our bodies through physical exercise. But how we look after our minds matters too.

Mental Fitness is our ability to respond to life's challenges with greater calm, resilience and positivity. Like physical fitness, it can be strengthened through practice.

During our recent session with Healthy to 100, we explored how training a few simple mental muscles can help us feel calmer, more present and better able to manage life's ups and downs.

Here are three quick mind resets you might like to try:

Finger Focus

Gently press your fingertips together and place your full attention on the sensation. Notice the texture, pressure and temperature for 10 seconds.

The Physiological Sigh

Take a deep breath in through your nose, followed by a second short sip of air. Then slowly breathe out through your mouth until your lungs feel empty. Repeat once or twice.

Listen Carefully

Pause for a moment and notice the sounds around you. How many different sounds can you hear? Listen with curiosity for 10 seconds.

These simple practices help bring your attention out of your thoughts and back into the present moment.

To learn more about Mental Fitness, visit www.braingym4work.com

What do I do to set up ICE on my mobile phone?

ICE stands for "In Case of Emergency." As you may know we have had a couple of emergencies in recent months where it has been necessary to call the Emergency Services to help one of our members. As a result, the Hitchin u3a is asking your permission to store emergency contact information on Beacon, the u3a membership information system. You can also set up ICE on your mobile phone. This helps first responders or bystanders contact the right person if you're unable to communicate. If you want to set up ICE, then read on to find out what to do on different types of mobile phone. Its easy!

On iPhone

1. Open the Health app.
2. Tap your profile picture (top right).
3. Select Medical ID.
4. Tap Edit.
5. Add:
 - Emergency contacts
 - Medical conditions
 - Allergies
 - Medications
 - Blood type (optional)
6. Turn on Show When Locked.
7. Tap Done.

Emergency responders can access this information from the lock screen by tapping Emergency → Medical ID.

To check that it works

Lock your iPhone, then:

1. Wake the screen.
2. Tap Emergency on the passcode screen.
3. Tap Medical ID.

You should see the information and emergency contacts you entered.

On Android

The exact steps vary by manufacturer, but generally:

1. Open Settings.
2. Search for Emergency Information, Safety & Emergency, or Medical Info.
3. Add:
 - Emergency contacts
 - Medical information (allergies, medications, conditions, etc.)
4. Enable access from the lock screen if available.

What do I do to set up ICE on my mobile phone?

On many Android phones, emergency information can be viewed from the lock screen by tapping Emergency.

For example setting up ICE on a Samsung Galaxy S24:

Add Emergency Contacts

- Open Settings.
- Tap Safety and emergency.
- Tap Emergency contacts.
- Tap Add emergency contact.
- Select one or more people from your contacts and tap Done.

Add Medical Information

- Go to Settings → Safety and emergency.
- Tap Medical info.
- Enter any relevant details such as:
 - Medical conditions
 - Allergies
 - Medications
 - Blood type
 - Other important notes
- Tap Save.

Set Up Emergency SOS (Recommended)

This lets you quickly call for help if you're in danger.

- Go to Settings → Safety and emergency → Emergency SOS.
- Turn it on.
- Choose what happens when activated (call emergency services, notify contacts, etc.).
- On many S24 models, pressing the Side button five times will trigger Emergency SOS.

To Check That It Works From the Lock Screen

Lock your phone and wake the screen:

- Tap Emergency call.
- Your emergency contacts and medical information should be available without unlocking the phone.

If you wish to contribute to the newsletter please send pieces to jan@jan-hills.com Please keep pieces to around 300 words and provide photos where relevant.