



**UNIVERSITY OF THE THIRD AGE**

**NEWSLETTER September 2014 Issue 47**

*The full colour version of the newsletter is on our website at  
<http://www.u3awelhat.org.uk/newsletters.html>*

## **Partying at Breaks Manor in the sun**

John Brown has provided this splendid array of photographs taken at our annual Garden Party, held this year on 16 July 2014 at Breaks Manor. The weather was wonderful, some eighty-four members attended, and a good time was had by all, as described below by our Chairman.





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## FROM THE CHAIRMAN

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I'm writing this a few weeks after our Garden Party, and the warm feeling of friendship and of hard work well done and well appreciated is still in my mind. The Garden Party is one of the major events of our year, and this year's was another big success, with many thanks and a lot of congratulations to Phyl Grainge and her team. It's their hard work (and a bit of luck) which made it so enjoyable. The luck includes our good fortune with the venue, which is ideal for us, consisting as it does of little separate sections which provide bases for separate groups, but none so isolated that contact with other groups is lost. There is plenty of shade, should the weather be warm (which it was) and that was the other major piece of luck: a gorgeous day.

You may say that it's easy to prepare a party when everyone brings the food. Well yes, that eases the preparation a bit, but the various pots, plates, bags and so on have to be emptied and arranged attractively, on tables which have to be collected from elsewhere in the building and put up in a sensible pattern. And of course, afterwards, there's the clearing-up. The Catering Team are willing and many other members pitch in; but always remember that some people have to be there first and leave last!



I heard the complaint from a few people: “Where’s the tombola?” Well, if you were expecting a Tombola (and some even brought items to become prizes), I can only apologise for its absence. To be fair, no Tombola was ever advertised in the announcements about the party, and just because there was one last year does not guarantee there’ll be one this year. Perhaps it was considered and rejected on account of the amount of extra work which a Tombola requires: sorting, numbering and displaying the prizes; arranging that all the right tickets are in the drum (acquiring the drum!), and of course there has to be someone “on duty” all the time to sell tickets and hand out prizes. A simple raffle would be much easier, but nobody thought of that either. It would please a lot of

people to have one, I’m sure, so my suggestion to those people who felt deprived by the absence of a Tombola or Raffle is to get in touch with Phyl and offer your services next year to prepare and run one; I’m sure she would be delighted to have your help.

The Garden Party is the culmination of the first half of the year, which features the AGM as its most important event. The changes to the Committee emanating from that event seem to have worked well; the newcomers to office have settled down and are industriously proceeding with their duties. One or two procedural changes have been, or will be, made, and the number of problems that have arisen in these last four months is minimal. (As I write, we are engaged in a battle with our bank to get our new signatories recognised; the problems we have encountered simply to get new signatures accepted for the many financial needs we have is quite amazing. But, with the leadership of our redoubtable treasurer Arseven Gumush we battle on and, by the time you read this, I can only hope that it will be old news!)

In a couple of weeks I’m off to tutor a course at the Summer School; I’ll tell you all about it next time. Keep well, keep happy!

*Jack Wood*

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### **FREE HOME VISIT to discuss your fire plans, smoke alarms etc**

We had an excellent talk on Wednesday, 9 July, by Green Watch, Herts Fire and Rescue Service, based in Welwyn Garden City, when Laurence Smith came along with three of his colleagues, including a firewoman. They told us about the different aspects of their job, how the job has evolved over the years and how their equipment has also moved with the times and has become much more efficient. Apart from their regular fire and rescue service they also talk to many groups and school children and offer a free home visit to discuss your fire plans, including smoke alarms etc. FOR THIS FREE SERVICE – contact 01707 343500.

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## GROUP NEWS

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*Details of all groups' activities and plans can be found on our website at  
<http://www.u3awelhat.org.uk/groups.html>*

### **Consciousness studies**

What on earth is Consciousness studies?

When people ask me which Study groups I go to and I answer Consciousness Studies as one of them I am always asked (after a look of puzzlement crosses the face) 'What do you do there?' or 'What's that all about then?' I'm then expected to work out what it is we do on Wednesday afternoons and explain!

I know that we spend very informative and thought-provoking afternoons discussing topics as varied as ESP, bio-centrism, singing plants (yes really – there's a video to prove it!), reincarnation, poltergeists, remote viewing, near-death experiences, precognitive dreams ...

We have even discussed whether rocks have a kind of consciousness – I have to add that this was a step too far for some of us. Quantum Physics makes its presence felt at times too. It's a mind-blowing set of ideas/research which is really fascinating; but also unfathomable for some of us who tend to get a moment's insight which then promptly disappears. Trying to formulate an explanation for the Universe and where we all fit in is a never-ending quest for the scientists. Could there be another dimension or more that we don't know about? The possibilities are boundless.

Andrea Steverson, our intrepid guide through all these adventures, finds fascinating videos which we watch open-mouthed as a parrot reads its owner's mind or plants react to a lie detector (!), or a child takes you back to where he once lived in another life. The majority of these videos are presented by cutting-edge scientists who follow strict scientific protocols. Maybe if they were fronted by flaky psychics or mystics we might not be so prepared to accept what we are shown.

These visual aids lead into lively discussions in which we all share our views and ideas – and for some, our scepticism.

I hope this gives some idea of what we do in our sessions. The course is fascinating and poses endless questions which we look forward to addressing next year. Just one last question: if anyone knows how to define consciousness, would they let me know, please?

*Ann Davies*

## **Inner Peace**

The Inner Peace Group was set up last year to learn about ways of relaxing and letting go of problems. Led by an experienced therapist, each session is different. The aim is to find out about ways of calming ourselves and creating a state of inner silence and deep peace. In each session simple techniques are explained and tried out. Usually there is a relaxation technique, a meditation method and a guided visualisation to try. Then members of the group discuss to what extent they found the methods helpful. This is followed by a discussion on a topic about some aspect of life, with members sharing their views or beliefs with the group. Sometimes other approaches are introduced, such as affirmations, or the science behind a method is explained.

Essentially, members of the Group are exploring life itself and their place in the universe by using a wide variety of approaches and discussion topics. The atmosphere is one of quiet peace and deep understanding of self, although there are lighter moments too.

There are no religious overtones, only a desire to probe the meaning of life and to experience it as fully as possible. By operating in a group individual members have the opportunity to share their ideas and deeper feelings about life in a way that is rare in our frantic world of today.

Meetings occur in Hatfield once a fortnight, from 7.30 to 9.00pm. If you would like to find out more, or just want to join, then contact Don on 01707 258686.

*Don Busolini*

## **Photography Group**

After the sad death of Ron Benfield, production of the group's fortnightly newsletter was taken over by Jean Tookey, then by Anita Hoyle. The latest issue of their newsletter is always shown on our U3A website: you can see it by clicking on Photography in the Study Groups page on the site.

Last term they made "Out and About" visits, cameras in hand, to Lemsford Springs, Whipsnade Zoo, the sculpture exhibition at Hatfield House, Myddelton House, Paradise Wildlife Park and Cromer Windmill. They had talks on colour popping, plug-ins and abstract photographs,





and were faced with challenges to make changes to members' photographs.

The group is now planning to have a calendar printed for 2015, with their own local seasonal photographs. These may be available for sale at the Wednesday meetings from mid-October onwards.

Their open competition on any subject was won by Marianne Lindsay's picture of a Lavender bicycle, and on architecture by Anita Hoyle's of Somerset House. We show these two pictures, and two by Pat Ellis, of Poppies in the gardens of Myddelton House, and the Pavilion at Bexhill.

### **Spiritual Exploration**

This new discussion group will start in September.

My objective in starting up this new group is to give people living within a secular society a forum in which to share and air their spiritual views and questions. We are fortunate to live within a society which tolerates and encourages free religious expression and we have a huge choice of religious institutions to support the needs of those people who wish to express their spirituality within the structure of a faith system. However, faith, dogmas, creeds and set forms of worship are not for everyone. So is it possible to be 'spiritual' without being 'religious', and what is the difference? Is

spirituality the prerogative of the church or is it possible to experience and express our spirituality in different ways ... perhaps outside a faith system? In what ways could we do this? Do we perhaps do this already... without realising it? How about discussing these issues with others facing the same dilemma.

Are you more than just your body?

Religious traditions across time and across the world have always claimed this to be true but have asked us to believe it as a matter of faith. Mainstream science dismisses the idea ... but some highly qualified, cutting-edge scientists are committing scientific heresy by seriously exploring this as a real possibility. Would you like to find out more?

Are telepathy, telekinesis, precognition and remote viewing possible? Is there evidence to support spontaneous remission of cancer and spiritual healing? Do we survive death regardless of our faith or lack of it?

Do you believe in life after death? Do you believe in reincarnation? Are these two possibilities incompatible with each other? Would you like the chance to explore the latest evidence for both and to discuss the issue of death, which appears to be a taboo in our society?

My Spiritual Exploration group will discuss these issues and more in the light of the findings of some contemporary scientific research, knowledge from ancient mystical and religious traditions – and of course your own personal experience.

*Andrea Steverson*

## **Travel Group**

Our five-day coach trip to the Winchester area on the 29<sup>th</sup> September, is well advanced despite being planned at short notice. Tailored Travel, well known to our U3A, has agreed to run it with reduced numbers, which should ensure we all get to know one another during the week!

We are now actively planning two holidays for 2015, looking at May and September. A UK coach trip in May and a foreign holiday in September, by plane and coach, will probably be to Northern Spain. There will be more news at the 10<sup>th</sup> September meeting in Welwyn Garden City.

The Travel Team has produced a questionnaire with the aim of finding out the means of travel preferred by interested U3A members. These survey forms can be picked up at the signing-in desk and, when completed, posted in the box at the desk or given to one of the team below.

If members have any questions please ask one of the team and we will do our best to answer and help you. We are – Jean Davis, 01707 331810; Kathy Dugan, 01707 321889; and Tony Bristow, 01707 896196.

*The ninth in our series of profiles of distinguished Welwyn Hatfield U3A members features ...*

### **Ann Smith**

Ann MacKenzie was born in 1934 in Forres (where that? See *Macbeth* Act I Scene 3!), and grew up in a remote farm-workers' cottage in North Scotland. It was a childhood in poverty; since then, she says, it has been upward all the way.

Because of extraordinary misdemeanors and misunderstanding by her scholastic authorities, she remained virtually uneducated after the age of 11, and left school aged 15 with no qualifications. She proceeded to a Technical College to study domestic science, then to a college in Aberdeen to study catering. She worked as a cook in a Highland Hotel until a friend obtained a job as a cook in one of the Oxford colleges, and suggested that Ann join her; so she made the journey south at the age of 21. In Oxford she met Alan Smith, an accountancy student, and they married in 1958.

Alan worked as a chartered accountant at various locations in the south of England, until in 1973 he came to Stevenage as Finance Director of British Aerospace. The Smiths settled in Welwyn Garden City. Ann took a Business Studies course at what is now de Havilland College – the first step in a massive project to compensate for her early lack of education. After completing the course she took a job at Nabisco, running the Consumer Relations Department, until taking early retirement at the age of 55, when she joined U3A as one of our earliest members. Then, she says, “life just blossomed”. Ann found it exactly what she needed for her later-life learning ambitions.

In those early days in 1985, U3A Welwyn Hatfield meetings were held in a small





room in the Campus. Ann attended the Wednesday morning talks, and joined the committee that finds and books the speakers. She was a Committee member for several years. She joined, over the years, 13 of our groups: Architecture, Art, Book Discussion, Greeting Cards, Playreading, Roman History, Science and Shakespeare, and has been coordinator for Creative Writing, Latin, Philosophy, Poetry and Psychology. For some years she had U3A meetings nearly every day of the week – on some days, two!

Along with it all Ann pursued her quest for education with a series of courses with the Open University – which first necessitated her learning from scratch to operate a computer. She has completed O. U. courses in Creative Writing, Geotechnics, Moons, Psychology and Social Science; and is about to start on Forensic Psychology. She is indeed, as she says, “a great advocate of life-long learning”.

Meanwhile, Ann has created a large, beautiful garden, backing on to Sherrards Woods, and finds needlework a pleasure, having embroidered cross-stitch portraits of her grandchildren (see picture above), amongst many other projects. She has a son who lives in Spain and a daughter in Staffordshire, and two adult grandchildren. She and Alan enjoy cruises – about two a year, Ann taking her current Open University work with her.

Ann says of U3A, “It is the most wonderful organisation, formed especially for people like me who missed out on education earlier, allowing us to catch up”. With the mottoes on the Home Page of National U3A’s website, “It’s never too late to learn”, “Learning is for Life”, “Life is for learning”, our Ann, so eagerly making the most of all the opportunities U3A offers, could be taken as a model member of the University of the Third Age.

*Hazel Bell*



#### **U3A Welwyn-Hatfield NEWSLETTER**

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Send copy and photographs to [hkb@aidanbell.com](mailto:hkb@aidanbell.com)

## **“Never too old to Learn!”**

Do you ever sit down and wish you had something to hold your interest, something to get your teeth into that exercises the old grey matter and fills in some of the knowledge that has passed you by?

I was feeling like that a few months ago. I was tired of doing crosswords, playing Sudoku and puzzles – trying to exercise my brain in an attempt to delay the unmentionable!

Then I was introduced to FutureLearn, ([www.futurelearn.com](http://www.futurelearn.com)). This is a fantastic free website, which has a treasure chest full of subjects of all manner of interests: history, medical, business studies, the arts – I could go on, but please give it a look for yourselves. The courses are broken into weekly chunks, delivered by experts from universities, with videos, the transcripts of which can be downloaded and printed. There are links to other sites, for background information.

I have recently finished a 10-week course on ‘Shakespeare and his World’, as my knowledge of the bard was woeful. It was a most interesting course, covering several of his plays, and giving a wonderful insight into that era. There were also links to many of the plays on Youtube.

I am now studying ‘The Life and Times of Richard III.’

FutureLearn is a wonderful site: there is no obligation after you have joined, and if it does not suit you it can easily be removed.

Give it a try; you will be spoilt for choice!

*Jill Higgs*

*Hertbeats Cardiac Support Group, St. Albans*

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## **Autumn 2014 - Wednesday meetings**

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*Doors open at 9.45; tea and coffee are served from 10.00 to 10.30 a.m.; the talks start promptly at 10.45 a.m.*

### **SEPTEMBER**

*10, Ludwick Family Centre, Welwyn Garden City*

**John Walton: ‘What is Rotary?’**

John is a member of The Welwyn Garden City Rotary Club which was founded in 1926. This non-political, non-religious organization is open to men and women and can be found nationally and internationally.

17, *Breaks Manor, Hatfield*

Jon Westoby: 'Poetry: one man's choice'

A fairly undemanding entertainment for lovers of poetry (and the undecided). Mostly a recital of a mixture of well-known and less familiar poems with some discussion of content and commentary on a poet or two. Themes include war, love, pastoral, comic and other poems. Jon is a member of Welwyn-Hatfield U3A and co-hosts the Poetry group.

24, *WGC*

Philip Littlejohn: '*The Titanic* – my grandfather's memories'

Philip Littlejohn is the grandson of Titanic survivor Alexander James Littlejohn. Philip has brought together the artifacts that Alexander kept of his career as a 1<sup>st</sup> class steward on board RMS *Titanic*.

## OCTOBER

1, *Hatfield*

Nina Clarke: 'Population Matters'

Population – 80 million more on Earth every year. What will life be like for our grandchildren? What is the impact on our planet of this rate of growth? How does it affect us here in England? Can we cope with it? What is being done about population growth? What are the ethical questions raised? What can we do individually?

8, *WGC*

Ann Wise: 'The Regency Ball – Fashion and Etiquette'

Ann is a dress and social historian.

15, *Hatfield*

Bob Johnson: 'Wildlife of Tanzania'

Bob Johnson is a semi-professional wildlife photographer from Essex whose favourite subjects are birds and mammals. He leads a photography group each year to the Serengeti in Tanzania.

22, *WGC*

Mike Beech: 'China – from Confucius to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century'

Mike worked for Kodak as an internal Management Consultant and as a result worked for short periods throughout Europe and the UK. He then took a teaching qualification and taught management subjects within the NHS and Stanmore College, Harrow. He has an interest in antiques, particularly in glass, and has a collection of Whitefriars glass.

29, *Hatfield*

Sheila Wilder and David Portwain: 'Images of Burma'

Sheila is a member of Welwyn Hatfield U3A and David is a retired physics teacher. They share an interest in photography and took part in a trip to Burma with the Royal Photographic Society.

### NOVEMBER

5, *WGC*

Ian McCannah: 'The Royal Parks of London'

Ian is a member of Potters Bar U3A and also set up Barnet U3A which he Co-Chaired. He is the U3A National Subject Adviser for British History and organizes walks in London.

12, *Hatfield*

Len Little: 'The Training and Use of Special Search Dogs'

Len was an operational Police Dog Handler in Hertfordshire Constabulary for seventeen years and a Police Dog Trainer for nine years. He is a Fellow of the Winston Churchill Trust awarded to him after studying with the German Police and Customs Service.

19, *WGC*

### Art and Photo Exhibition and Demonstration

26, *Hatfield*

Rob Day (Herts Fire & Rescue): 'The Buncefield Explosion'

Rob is the Fire Station Commander for Hertsmere and Welwyn-Hatfield. He will tell us how, at 6 am on Sunday, 11 December 2005, a series of explosions took place at the Hertfordshire Oil Storage Terminal at Buncefield, Hemel Hempstead, which could be heard up to 125 miles away.

### DECEMBER

3, *WGC*

**Christmas Party** – Quiz at 10.30 am. Please bring finger food – drinks provided

**10 Christmas Lunch** again at Homestead Court Hotel, Welwyn Garden City, where we so much enjoyed it last year. 12 noon for 12.45 sit down. Menu and Tickets available Wednesday 8 October. Tickets: £25 per person

**Next term starts on 7 January at Hatfield**