



UNIVERSITY OF THE THIRD AGE  
[www.u3awelhat.org.uk](http://www.u3awelhat.org.uk)  
NEWSLETTER May 2013 Issue 43

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

## Meet the Groups



A hundred and forty members attended the 2013 Meet the Groups exhibition, held at Ludwick Hall on 20 March. As usual, the entry hall was full of visual glory, with products of the Watercolours, Multimedia and Photography Groups displayed. In the main lecture hall,





the Gardening Group and Wild Life Watch made a splendid scene at the platform end.

The stalls round both rooms were very varied. The Art Appreciation and Architecture Groups showed enticing records of the places they had visited. The Walkers showed maps beside a pair of stout boots. Books were laid out to indicate the operation of some groups: London History, Play Reading, German, and the biographies discussed by the History in the Making Groups. Equipment for games of Bridge and Mah Jong were invitingly laid out. There were screen displays, constantly changing for the digital photography displays, and a video showing Tai Chi.

It was more than a display: much activity was taking place. As well as demonstrations of Tai Chi and by eight of the Line Dancers, who were then joined by several members of the audience after issuing a challenge, Canasta and Scrabble were being demonstratively played, Greeting cards being made, and some of the Multimedia Group were busily knitting.

All a most impressive show — how could new members decide which, to join?

*Photographs of the Gardening Group, Wildlife Watch, and Photography Groups' displays, Scrabble playing and Line Dancing by Ron Benfield.*

---

## Notes from the Chair

I hope that you all had a good Easter break and that when you read this, the snow will have departed and it will really be Spring!

We had a successful AGM in March followed by readings of some interesting pieces from the Creative Writing group; thank you very much to them. We were able to thank Jean Davis for her three-year stint as Secretary and Mike Dorrington for his two years as Treasurer. The contributions of both these committee members have been very



much appreciated. Jack Wood has agreed to be our new Vice Chair, following in Stuart Barker's footsteps. It was also good to welcome Sheila Wilder as our new Secretary, Arseven Gumush as our new Treasurer and Jean Mackie as a new committee member. I hope that these new members enjoy their time on the committee and I would like to thank the present members who are continuing to work hard to ensure that our U3A runs smoothly.

If you are a New Member I would like to welcome you and hope that you will enjoy joining some groups, attending the Wednesday talks, making new friends and having fun. There will be a New Members' Coffee Morning on 10 June at Verulam.

Details will be posted nearer the time.

You will have noticed the improvement in the sound quality at our Wednesday meetings. A new system has been purchased by Bruce Piggott with input from John Middleton. Richard Griffiths is organising the rota for this and I would like to thank all those involved. We could do with one or two more people on the rota so please see Richard – or me – if you feel inspired to help in this way.

Spring is a wonderful time to start a new endeavour, so do consider forming a new group. Marjorie Gladwin would be pleased to advise and help you in this.

Best wishes to you all

*Judy Grant*

---

### The Christmas lunch

The 2012 Christmas lunch, held at Beale's Hotel in Hatfield on 12 December, was the third and final event in our 25th anniversary year celebrations. It was launched by Myrtle Pitt-Keathly, one of our most long-standing members. She said she had seen Welwyn-Hatfield U3A grow from the start, and wished it, "Onwards and upwards for another 25 years!".

Judy Grant presented Gwen Clarke with a

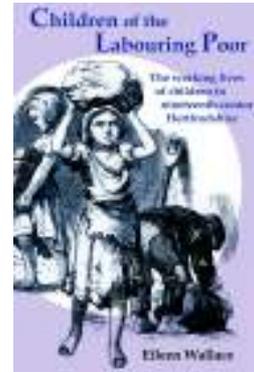
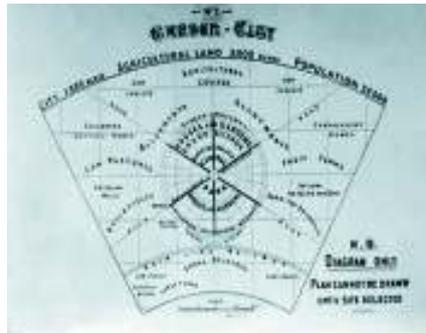
badge as an Honorary Member, Gwen having reached her 90th birthday.

As it was the final celebration of our 25th anniversary year, we had an after-dinner speaker: Keith Baldwin, telling us humorously of his time in the Army.

*Photographs of the Book Discussion Group at their lunch table, and Gwen with her badge, by Marion Sklar.*



## Our Wednesday meetings



Wel-Hat U3A, with its regular Wednesday morning meetings with a speaker, has more than most U3As in the country: the norm is monthly speaker meetings. We also have a record of booking really interesting and entertaining speakers: but this does not happen by magic. We have a team of four who diligently troll through lists of speakers trying to find a variety of topics.

The role of the speaker-finder is fascinating. We have the privilege of selecting a speaker and being the first to contact them. Setting up a suitable date can be challenging. Once it has been confirmed we need to elicit an appropriate profile to tempt you to come along to the meeting. We must check the facilities the speaker will require and make sure that they are available.

Meeting and greeting the speaker is the responsibility of the person who has booked them. This may become worrying if the speaker is late arriving; we have a back-up plan in the event of a speaker's not arriving at all! The treasurer will supply the cheque at the end of the meeting.

When it is over we must see the speaker back to their car, assisting with carrying any extra equipment necessary. Finally we write a letter of thanks to the speaker.

We find it very interesting to listen for feedback, to find which were the most or least popular of our speakers, and any particular reaction they provoked among the audience. We are always glad to know your verdicts!

Jon Westoby, for example, who spoke to us on the Animal Charity, Blue Cross, in October 2012, told us, "I got many comments afterwards about how interesting (and how novel) people found the history. The speaker's fee and private contributions on the day totalled about £120, all of which went to the Blue Cross. They wrote a letter of thanks to the U3A".

*Jean Hughes*

*Our pictures above show: the painting commissioned by Blue Cross, 'Goodbye Old Man', which became an iconic image of WWI, epitomising the love between men and the horses they cared for. It was sold as thousands of postcards to raise fund for the charity's veterinary work; Sir Ebenezer Howard's original plan for a Garden City, one of the Treasures of the Hertfordshire Archives of which Llinos Thomas spoke in February 2012; and the book illustrating Eileen Wallace's talk on Children of the Labouring Poor in 19c. Herts in November 2012.*

## Group News

### **The Creative writing group**

At 10am sharp every Wednesday fortnight, our motley group of seniors arrive at the Free Church, Welwyn Garden City, armed with A4 notebooks and pencils, ready to share any inspirational thoughts we have written down since last we met. The writings we bring to the meetings must, albeit loosely, relate to the homework set by one of our members.

In turn we read our masterpiece to the group, some boldly, some tongue in cheek, some more hesitantly. We then wait for constructive criticism from our fellow writers which may help us improve. This is rarely forthcoming, as faced with the undeniable talents of the other members, we sit pondering 'Why didn't I think of that?'

I am constantly amazed by the diverse strains of imagination a simple subject like 'The Power of Words' or 'The Blue Hat' can evoke. I'm sure that, no matter how many different writers tried the same task, there would never be two renditions remotely similar. Each person's imagination takes them down a different path.

Some lean toward humour, some are autobiographical, some serious and some downright scary! We have one member who disposes of at least one character in the most macabre fashion each session.

Discussion on the various pieces usually takes place over a welcome coffee (or ovaltine), followed by the announcement of the next session's homework.

We then part company, scratching our heads as to what on earth we can make of the latest subject, hoping by breakfast time on the day of the next meeting we will have had an idea.

The group, led brilliantly by Jean Hughes, is a source of interest and joy to all of us who take part, and is especially rewarding when we get the chance to share our love of writing

with residents of care homes and local community groups, reading our items aloud to them. We have been fortunate to have been invited on several occasions to go along to read and have always been made very welcome.

*Ann Higgs*

*Five members of the Creative Writing group read extracts from their work – poems, stories and essays – after the AGM on 6 March; they met with much appreciation.*

The **Opera** group was started way back in 1995/6 by Vicki Drain, with a small group of opera lovers. As now, it met in members' houses, and over the years we have shown videos of a large number of different operas, from the well known to the lesser known. In November 2005 we arranged a backstage visit to Covent Garden Opera House which we all enjoyed, especially as we saw some artists in rehearsal.

With the growing number of operas now recorded on DVD our choices have increased, especially since the Third Age Trust has obtained a larger variety and we are able to borrow them free of cost (apart from postage).

Because we meet at each other's houses the group has remained small, just eight members, some of whom were in from the beginning. Details of the opera to be shown are typed out, giving the cast, synopsis, the production and orchestra details, and before we start some time is spent giving further information and answering questions. During the tea break further discussions take place.

Because of the functioning of the group our knowledge of opera and its artistes has grown considerably and we recognise what a lovely medium it is for bringing together singers, orchestra, stage acting and stagecraft.

*Dorothy Doll*



**History in the Making** has proved so popular that it has split into two Study Groups, meeting on alternate Thursday mornings. It was originally just “History”, but since the general preference was to read biographies of famous people, and how they affected the course of history, we decided to change the title. Currently our original group is reading *Bluestockings* by Jane Robinson, the remarkable story of the first women to fight for education. Did you know that, although women could study and take the exams at Cambridge University, they weren’t allowed to graduate until 1948!

“I hope your daughter wears woollen combinations in winter. That is of more importance to her than passing Matriculation,” said Miss Buss, Headmistress of North London Collegiate School for Girls.

We have a small second group, hoping to expand, reading *A Commonwealth of Thieves* by Thomas Keneally. It’s a fascinating account of the first settlement of convicts in Botany Bay. The hardships on board ship and ashore suffered by the convicts, crew, and those responsible for them seem insupportable.

We take turns to read our books aloud, stopping to comment as we go along.

*Betty Guinery*

The **Photography** Group closed the Winter term with presentation of flowers and a cake, made and suitably decorated by David Banks (photograph shown above by Pat Ellis) to the amazingly vigorous nonagenarian Gwen Clarke. (Gwen’s picture appears on page 3.)

For the Spring term they took the theme, “Landscape”, watching a DVD on the subject, considering the rules of composition, displaying their own examples, learning how to create panoramas, and travelling to London “Out and About” to study the urban landscape from the London Eye (picture above by Anita Hoyle). Geoff Bowers also showed how old prints could be scanned and converted to the digital format. The picture shown below of The Cherry Tree, Welwyn Garden City, was scanned from a print taken by Tony Hoyle in 1972-73.

A competition for The Best Prints of the Year was won by Jean Tookey, with the picture shown below, “Walking with the U3A”. This was taken in February on a Walkers’ outing, near Bocket Hall golf course and Sherrards Wood. Jean won second place in the competition too, with a picture of “A Winter Scene”. Third place went to Pam Barrett.

The Photography Group’s theme for the Summer Term will be Nature.



An enthusiastic **Roman History** study group meets on alternate Monday afternoons at Peartree Lane to read and discuss “The Roman World”. We have, over the years, covered the Roman Republic, then the Roman Empire. This year we have been giving Roman Britain a long look, considering the Roman invasion and the romanisation of Britain and looking at all aspects of life under the Romans, from Julius Caesar’s exploratory invasion to the withdrawal of the legions in the 4th century AD.

There is often more discussion than reading in the group because we are fascinated by the similarities between the Roman times and our own.

The second hour of our class is usually given over to a video presentation chosen from the many TV programmes dealing with subjects ranging from Pompei to the Emperor Constantine – even to “What the Romans Did For Us”. Frequently we take another look at the BBC TV production of *I Claudius*, that follows the fate of the Caesars and their families from Augustus to Claudius.

The last meeting of the Summer Term is held in St Albans. After a Waffle Lunch we visit the Roman Museum or the site of Verulamium; last July we also visited the Hypocaust in the park.

Next term we are returning to Suetonius and studying the Twelve Caesars. We may

finish by viewing again the recent TV programmes on Life and Death in Pompei and Herculaneum. I hope many of the group will be able to visit the exhibition on Pompei at the British Museum.

*Maryam Rodway*

The **World Affairs** group, as its name implies, has weekly, lively discussions on topics both world-wide and domestic. We like to look at current topics, and with a little forward planning, members of the group may prepare a talk and then lead the discussion. We are fortunate to have members with varied backgrounds: finance, tax, experience of living abroad, etc., and many take



**The World Affairs group’s display at Meet the Groups; photograph by Ron Benfield**

interesting holidays which they tell us about on their return. It keeps them alert for facts whilst they are away! We use the internet, books and newspapers for information gathering; this is interesting, comparing all the diverse opinions.

Recently we have followed the “Arab Spring” uprisings across North Africa. We look, sometimes in despair, at their

continuing problems and the problems throughout the Middle East. The European Union also often comes within our orbit – we have many different opinions expressed with vigour but with good humour about that too. To live up to our title, we hold our New Year celebrations at an excellent local Chinese restaurant!

*Rosemary Humphreys*

---

*The fifth in our series of profiles of distinguished members features –*

## John Middleton

John was born in 1932 in East London. He remembers his father installing an Anderson Shelter, to the mockery of neighbours, before the outbreak of World War II, and the first sounding of air raid sirens. When, at the start of the London Blitz, most of the children were evacuated, John’s mother insisted on keeping him with her. The local schools closed down, so John received no education for eighteen months. He spent the time watching the movements of a Barrage Balloon, and picking up shrapnel for Wardens after the bombing raids.

When the schools returned, no arrangements were made for children who had stayed in London. Consequently, John failed the 11+ exam and went to a former Elementary School, leaving it aged 15 with no qualifications.

John’s first job was at the Selwyn Press in East Ham, where he learned about the production of offset lithographic plates and the printing process for embossed letter headings. He became a Letterer. After three years there he was called up to National Service, and – because his trade was erroneously typed on his record card as Commercial Typist instead of Commercial Artist – was trained as a Teleprinter Mechanic, and sent to the Radio Engineering

Unit at Henlow. Eventually he was more appropriately attached to the Education Block as a Letterer.

Following National Service, in 1952, John found work as a Commercial Artist at Pulford Publicity in Fleet Street, dealing with cinema advertising. He decided he must upgrade his educational qualifications, took personal tuition in maths, and succeeded in passing O levels in English, Pure Maths and Applied Maths. He moved to Ferguson Radio at Enfield as an assistant in the Technical Publications Department, where his tasks included checking that output sockets in the Design Laboratories were correctly placed. This triggered an interest in Design Engineering, and he studied for the Ordinary National Certificate in Electrical Engineering at Northampton Polytechnic.

John then worked at Ultra Radio on the Great Western Road, Cossor Radio at Highbury, and Regentone near Romford, combining the last position with studying for the HNC in Electrical Engineering at West Ham Polytechnic. His job title was Design Engineer, and he began to design products himself in the evenings, beginning with a Valve Voltmeter. He sold this product to Marconi Instruments in St. Albans, who also offered him employment. Thus John came to

Hertfordshire in 1958, living in St Albans, and attending some technical evening courses at Hatfield Polytechnic.

John met and married his first wife, Beryl, in Southgate in 1959. They lived in Cuffley, then moved to Welwyn in 1968. They had two children, but the marriage ended after 23 years, and John married Mary in 1982.

In John's 39 years at Marconi he progressed from Junior Engineer to Chief Engineer Spectrum Analyzers. His file among their Personnel Records notes: "Mr Middleton is a man of ideas, a dynamic personality, and has a particular flair for practical circuit design."

Retirement came in January 1997. John then spent much time at home on d-i-y projects, working on his computer and on video-editing software, investigating dowsing, and giving technical lectures to such bodies as the local IEE Institution and Herts Engineers Lunch Club. Then, in 2007, Mary and John together joined Wel-Hat U3A. Within fourteen months, John was Vice Chairman, then Chairman 2009-10. He has also coordinated the Science & Technology group, running engineering workshops; designed and fitted our original sound



**John at home with his computer  
— in both senses**

reinforcement system; put our accounts on an Excel Spreadsheet; and been responsible for our receiving Gift Aid. Mary coordinated the Gardening Group, and has been our New Members Secretary. Now they are regular attenders at the Wednesday meetings.

John regards U3A as "a very good thing, especially if you are on your own", and says, "it rules your life after a time"!

*Hazel Bell*

---

Val Fieth asks, 'If anyone feels like writing a story of "Being Eight", I would love to read it. I would like to collect such stories from

different countries and backgrounds, and perhaps publish them'. Send to [Valwgc@hotmail.com](mailto:Valwgc@hotmail.com)

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

Published three times yearly, in January, May and September. Edited by Hazel K. Bell  
Available on the Website, in full colour, plus cumulative index to issues 1-42, at [www.u3awelhat.org.uk](http://www.u3awelhat.org.uk)

© U3A Welwyn-Hatfield 2013

Printed by Triographics Printers Ltd, 121 London Road, Knebworth, SG3 6EX

Copydate for September 2013 issue is 6 August 2013.

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

## Obituary

### Stuart Barker

We are sad to announce the sudden death of Stuart Barker, our Vice Chair, in January. He was featured in the last Newsletter so you will have read the details of his involvement in our U3A. He was a real stalwart who made a tremendous contribution, both on the committee, as Chair, in groups and in welcoming new members. His funeral and celebration were attended by more than a hundred people, many of them U3A members. He is greatly missed.

*Judy Grant*

It was a cruel irony that Stuart Barker died at the same time as this magazine was carrying a tribute to his many contributions to our U3A.

I served on the Committee for two years with Stuart, one when he was Chairman and one when I was Chairman. Over this period I got to know him well. I soon learned that he was a broadly educated man with an in-depth knowledge of the Arts as well as of Science, the subject of his formal training. I always had respect for his views and his academic rigour.

I didn't know just how impressive his



academic achievements were until I attended his funeral service when I learned more of his life's achievements from the recollection of people at his Service.

Stuart was a truly remarkable man and I would personally like to record my appreciation for his contributions to our local U3A.

*John Middleton.*

---

## Our National and County Colleagues

### **The Herts Network of U3As – [www.hertsnetwork.org.uk](http://www.hertsnetwork.org.uk)**

is a group of 30 U3As in Hertfordshire (including Welwyn-Hatfield) offering support and encouragement to one another. They have termly Network Meetings and organise Study Days, Walks, an Annual Bridge Tournament and an Annual Quiz.

*Coming events* currently announced are:

Wednesday 29 May 2013 **Study Day on Growth and Communication** at Woolmer Green Village Hall.

Friday 14 June **Herts Network meeting** at Woolmer Green Village Hall

Wednesday 16 October – **Music Study Day** led by Dr John Winter

Wednesday 30 October – **Herts Network Quiz** at Marlborough School, St Albans

The site also includes a 15-minute videoshowing the U3A **Walkathon** along the length of the River Lea between January and June 2012.

# U3A National

## Summer Schools

The 15th U3A Summer School will be held at Harper Adams University College, Newport, nr Telford, Monday 15 July to Thursday 18 July 2013.

Subjects will be: From Fauvism to Post-Modernism in 20thc. art; Exploring the element of colour in art; Film directors in Focus; Political and Social Studies; *Regards sur la France actuelle*; The Legacy of the Ice Age on the Cheshire/Shropshire Plain; The Golden Age of Rome: From Augustus to Hadrian; Poetry of Henry Vaughan and Thomas Traherne; Recorder Ensemble Playing.

The second 2013 Summer School will be at the Royal Agricultural College, Cirencester, Monday 19 August to Thursday 22 August.

Subjects will be: Palladian Architecture in 17th and 18th century Britain; Artistic re-creation in digital photography; Argumentative and passionate drama; Fiction & Reality in *A passage to India*; Jane Austen and the English Landscape; Shakespeare and music; The art of the short story; Singing for Pleasure; Theatre History.

The **National Conference and AGM** of the Third Age Trust, "Learn, Laugh and Live" will be held at the East Midlands Conference Centre in Nottingham, 13-16 September 2013.

Speakers will include Professor Russell Foster, Sue Hennessy on 'Hidden Depths: Women of the RNLI', and Rt. Hon. John Bercow MP, Speaker of the House of Commons.

For further details see the website of The Third Age Trust, at [www.u3a.org.uk](http://www.u3a.org.uk)

U3A is now on **Twitter!** Follow  
@U3A\_UK

for regular updates, news and comment on current affairs and U3A matters. Also, add #U3A to any U3A-related tweets so that other members can find them.

Four **videos** are now available on the site:

*U3A Making friends and seeking roots*  
*U3A transforming lives by dancing*  
*U3A from French to DIY*  
*U3A from Ukeleles to Genealogy*

**Online courses** (untutored) are now available through the site in:

Digital imaging  
Garden history  
Creative writing: fiction  
Creative writing: poetry  
Write to good effect  
Writing for publication  
Italian art :1400-1600 (level 1, beginners)  
Artists of Spain  
(level 2, requiring some knowledge)  
Venice and her artists (level 2)  
Visiting artists in Rome (level 2)  
Great Northern European Artists



## Wednesday meetings – Spring Term 2013

### APRIL

17, *Breaks Manor, Hatfield*

Richard Selby: 'The History of Money'. This is Richard's second visit to Wel-Hat U3A. On the last occasion he told us of the women he had married.

24, *Ludwick Family Centre, WGC*

Agneta Burton: 'OPAL – Open Air Laboratories'. OPAL has been a five-year programme of Community Science projects across England recording information on earthworms, lichens and mosses, and their links with the local environment.

### MAY

1, *Hat*, Tony Earle: 'The London Underground'. An illustrated talk about the London Underground from its inception to the present day.

8, *WGC*. Vic Botterill: 'Body Language'. Vic's thirty-odd years in the police has given him insight into human behaviour.

15, *Hat*. Sue Jackson: 'The Art & Architecture of Docklands: past & present'. Sue is a Lecturer and London Blue Badge Guide. We will hear about the transformation of Docklands from great Georgian industrial warehouses and dock buildings to state-of-the-art offices and a sculpture park.

22, *WGC*: Len Little: 'The Training and Use of Police Dogs'. Len has served in the Metropolitan and Hertfordshire Police, as a Police Dog Handler for 17 years and a Police Dog Trainer for eight.

29, *Hat*. David Rolfe: 'Aviation Fellowship Mission'. AFM operates more than 135

aircraft in the developing world, often flying across hostile environments to reach the most isolated people.

### JUNE

5, *WGC*. Joan Lilwall-Smith: 'Japanese Encore'. We welcome Joan back to hear more about her experiences in Japan whilst accompanying her husband.

12, *Hat*. Alan Gilmore: 'The Training of Intelligence Officers'. Alan spent several years as an intelligence officer working in various parts of the world. We will hear about the wide, rigorous training of intelligence officers.

19, *WGC*. Colin Oakes: 'Daniel Defoe: Socks to Crusoe'. Colin is an archaeologist who takes walking tours. He will tell us of the 'first novelist' who was also a businessman, a journalist and a spy.

26, *Hat*. Nick Thomas: 'My Life as a Freelance Comedy Writer'. Nick is a radio comedy scriptwriter.

### JULY

3, *WGC*. Mary Godfrey: 'Growing up as a Barnardo's Child in the '50s and '60s'. Constant change was a feature of Mary's childhood in Dr Barnardo's Homes; it also brought great adventures, growing up with so many other children.

10, *Hat*. Chris Lund: 'Crusaders Ancient and Modern – St John Ambulance'. Chris is a retired GP from Welwyn Garden City.

17 **Garden Party**, 2pm - 4pm at Breaks Manor, Hatfield. Please bring garden chairs.

**Next Term starts on 11 September at WGC with an Art and Photo Exhibition and Demonstration**