



UNIVERSITY OF THE THIRD AGE  
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NEWSLETTER Spring 2020 Issue 63

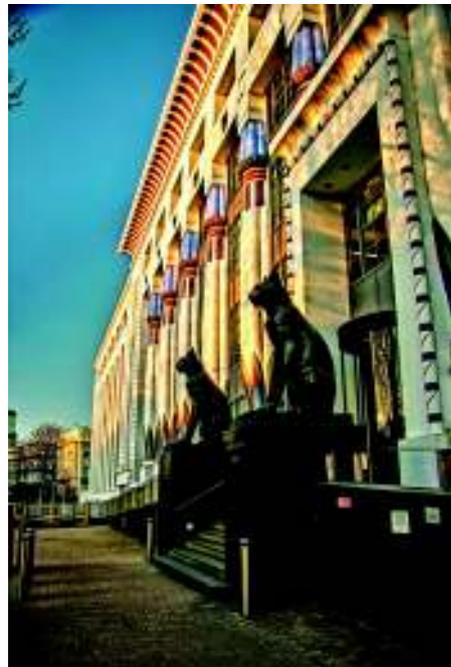
## Art & Photography Exhibition

This year's event, held on 20 November, proved, once again, that our talented members can put on a very impressive show for the rest of us to enjoy.

Displays by our **Watercolour, Painting, Oil Painting** and **Multi-Media Art** groups, as well as our **Photography** group, all provided much to admire. I was impressed by the way that all these varying approaches are used to create strikingly different works, even though the subject matter returned to is basically the same.

Favourite views had been depicted, some local and others as reminders of travels. Portraits and studies of faces and figures held memories of loved ones, or portrayed the conviviality of a social occasion. Other works caught aspects of the natural world and held them for our inspection.

In some cases the artist sought to capture the scene exactly as it was, showing it at its best, while others conveyed an overall impression by creative use of colour and juxtaposition of different elements. All made me feel that there was more to see in the world when looking through the eyes of an artist.



Displayed at the Exhibition – "Carreras' Black Cat Cigarette Factory", in Camden, Northwest London, by *Henry Brzeski*  
Two more of the photos displayed are on pages 18 and 19

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And we certainly have some real artists among us!  
Creative talent was also on show in the wonderful display of crafts and needlework by the **Craftea** group. As ever, there were beautiful quilts and cushions, bags and bunting, dolls and decorative items. Those already in the mood for Christmas could buy handmade tree decorations and also cards made by our **Greetings Cards** group.

### U3A Welwyn-Hatfield NEWSLETTER

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**Paintings by the Multimedia Group**

Alongside the displays at each table, members of the groups were on hand to talk and answer questions from those who might be considering joining them. Some were even demonstrating their skills before our very eyes – so impressive!

On behalf of all of us who enjoyed the exhibition, Ann Davies, who organized the event in her role as Groups' Co-ordinator, thanked all the group leaders and members who took part.

*Jill Longman; Photos by Peter Fox*



**Examples of the work of the Craftea group on display**

## Supper with the Beaucrees

On the evening of Saturday 23 November 130 of us enjoyed another superb supper dance with fish and chips. The music, courtesy of our own Tony Tutton and his band the Beaucrees, was as brilliant and heart/memory lifting as ever! Afterwards I noticed lots of flushed-faced 'groupies' gathered around Tony asking all kinds of questions – so subsequently I caught up with him and asked the following 20 questions on everyone's behalf:

1. How did you spend last Saturday evening?

*My band and I did a supper dance for Welwyn Hatfield U3A – it was great fun.*

2. Why do you do it?

*Because I love entertaining people and seeing them enjoy what we do.*

3. When did the Group first get together? *June 1963 at a church fête.*

4. So you've been together for 56 years? – *Yep, and still loving it!*

5. How did you form the group?

*Three of us went to the same school in Walthamstow and I was asked to join when the lead singer's voice broke! It's an ill wind...*

6. Everyone wants to know about the name!

*Tell me about it! In 1963 our roadie gave us the name temporarily until we could think of a better one ...*



7. Have you had other names?

*Yes – The Scorpions and the Drifters (!) but other groups had those names. One more famous than the other – where are the Scorpions now?*

8. Do you have a favourite group?

*Yes – the Rolling Stones. They are the best live act, I believe.*

9. What are they doing now?

*Still performing like us of course but possibly a few more gigs and maybe more money!*

10. What about a favourite singer?

*Yes – no doubt about it – Buddy Holly. I've been listening to him since I was eleven and never tire of hearing his voice.*

12. And a favourite song?

*Lots of them – but an outstanding one is a Beatles song – 'If I fell' with John and Paul's harmonies.*

13. Is there a song you hate performing?

*One or two — but if the audience loves it then so do I !*

14. Where do you get your super sparkly jackets?

*Usually the internet but I did have one made in Thailand and nearer home have occasionally bought one from the Galleria.*

15. You're retired now (phew!) but what was your day job?

*Running companies in the Fire and Security industry.*

16. How many gigs do you do each year?

*30-40 now but in our heyday 15-20 per month!*

17. When on earth do you get the time to rehearse?

*I'm working with three different bands so my rehearsal schedule is quite demanding. I use daytime with one band and evening rehearsals for the others.*

18. Where do you get your energy? *Boots the chemist!*

19. How do you remember the lyrics?

*I don't always – but the audience doesn't know that!*

20. And finally, which is your favourite audience?

*Well, what can I say – Welwyn Hatfield, of course!*

Thank you, Tony – I'm already looking forward to the next one!

*Ann Davies; photo by Peter Fox*

## Christmas party

It's that time of year again when the Christmas decorations are up and everyone is enjoying mince pies. Our usual festive celebrations started on Wednesday 4 December with the Christmas quiz and party. Once again, Tony Tutton, our quizmaster did us proud with a lively set of 6 rounds with 10 questions each. Tony always manages to judge the level of difficulty to perfection, with just enough to keep everyone engaged mixed in with a number to really test 'those little grey cells'. Festive jumpers and Christmas tree earrings reflected the holiday spirit and Tony himself looked very dapper in his pink jacket with matching pocket handkerchief.

Of course, given all that brain activity, we were certainly looking forward to the buffet afterwards. As ever, folk had brought in a wonderful range of goodies, both sweet and savoury, which provided a magnificent spread for us all to tuck into. Freshly cooked pizza and sausages straight from the oven were among the delights we had to choose from. We had a good selection of vegetarian options as well, which was much appreciated. Unfortunately we don't have a photo of the star of the show, which was David Banks' rich fruit cake. David said that he was a bit disappointed with it but, to coin a phrase, 'it went like hot cakes' with only a few crumbs left at the end of the morning. Everyone enjoyed the opportunity to sit around chatting with plates full of tasty morsels along with, of course, a glass of wine/cordial.

Once again, it was a very successful event, with over 80 members present. Many thanks go to Tony for the quiz and all those who helped to organise the food and drink, including clearing up at the end of the morning.

*Jean Mackie*



**Quizmaster Tony Tutton (centre) with Nick Mason of the winning team and Ann Davies of the runners-up. Photo by Peter Fox**

## Christmas Lunch

Christmas seemed to creep up on us very quickly this year and our U3A events were rounded off with the annual celebration at Homestead Court Hotel, on Wednesday 11 December. Once again the Hotel was most welcoming and looked very festive in the Winter sunshine. And so did we! There was more than a hint of sparkle and the gentlemen looked especially smart for the occasion.

After drinks and a lot of chatting in the bar, we made our way to the large dining room, which looked resplendent with decorations. There were about eighty members attending in all. Crackers were pulled, jokes shared, streamers streamed and balloons showed no restraint as they whizzed noisily around the room with no respect for persons! Amid great hilarity, paper hats were donned and the feast began.

The first course was a choice between soup, prawn cocktail or melon and the dishes were served speedily. The main course offered the traditional turkey with all the trimmings, salmon or vegetarian risotto. The dishes were accompanied by a plentiful supply of vegetables. All agreed that the food was very good. Desserts followed and here we were offered a choice of Christmas Pudding, chocolate log or meringue. And, as if that wasn't enough, we were served mince pies with our coffee.



After a leisurely meal in pleasant surroundings, enjoying convivial company and conversation, it was time to round off proceedings. Our chairman, Richard Griffiths, gave a vote of thanks to the hotel staff and presented them with our gratuity. Then Richard gave thanks to Marie Scales, who organised the event, together with everyone's choices. Huge thanks to Marie and Sandra Williams who assisted in the task.

So another successful U3A event was concluded. Now time to look forward to 2020!

*Pamela Williams.*

## **Herts Network Quiz**

The Herts Network is to be congratulated on running a very enjoyable quiz this year for the first time. In previous years different U3As have taken on this tricky task. Twenty local U3As attended but several, including Welwyn Hatfield, fielded two teams so there were 26 tables. This made for a busy afternoon for the quizmaster, who had set all the questions himself which must have taken many hours.

The quiz was held on Friday 25 October at Woolmer Green village hall. It started at 1pm and it was suggested that people come earlier bringing their own lunch which made for a very sociable start.



**Working on the quiz at Woolmer Green - Welhatonian Teams 1 and 2 nearest to the camera. Photo by Ann Davies**

Barbara Cordina, chairman of the Network, welcomed us and we were offered tea, coffee and biscuits. The quiz was good fun but rather over-ambitious! There were six table rounds, three extra sheets with Dingbats, Name the Year and pictures of famous British sports-women, and six actual quiz rounds.

With the benefit of hindsight (always a wonderful thing!) for next time we could suggest having fewer table rounds and a less detailed scoring system. We had time only for five quiz rounds as we had to vacate the hall later that afternoon to allow some aspiring ballerinas to practise their dances. This meant that we knew only the winners before we left: Chorleywood 1, with 233 points – congratulations to them; and to Lea Valley who came second with 228.

We learned on the following day that one of the Welwyn Hatfield teams scored 212 and the other 193. The lowest score was 153.

Thanks to Hazel Bell for organising the teams, emailing instructions, reminders and sorting out transport. Many thanks must go to Herts Network of U3As for organising the quiz. Grateful thanks also to the refreshment team with their essential pick me ups! It was a fun afternoon and it's a great idea to unite so many groups in this gentle competitive way. We look forward to next year!

*Gillian Simpson*

*As usual, the Network Quiz offered each team a Joker, a card which doubled the number of points they won in the round of questions in which they chose to play it. The subject rounds were: History, General Knowledge, Literature, Film & TV, and Food & Drink.*

*Of the 26 teams playing, nine chose to play their Joker on the Literature round; another nine on Food & Drink; seven on General Knowledge; one on History; none on Film & TV.*

*Does this tiny sample survey tell us anything of the predominant interests of U3A members in general?*

*Herts Network's next event is:*

Study Day – Wednesday 22 April 2020 in Woolmer Green Village Hall, SG3 6XA. In the morning, *Diversity* – described as a compelling and fascinating film on immigration to London since the early 1900s and its impact on our society. In the afternoon, a relevant speaker. Buffet lunch. Booking form can be accessed on Herts Network's website:

<https://u3asites.org.uk/hertsnetworkofu3as/events>

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## Notes from the Chair

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It's hard to believe that this time last year my being appointed as chairperson for the Welwyn Hatfield U3A was not in my mind. I am now well into my first year, which has been a learning curve for me in many ways.

The most important thing that I have learnt is the dedication and willingness of those on the Committee. They go about their tasks efficiently – with the organisation that goes into setting up the various events and catering, for example.

Each member of the Committee has made a positive impact, ensuring that all our members (presently in excess of 870) have plenty of opportunities to participate in the numerous groups we run and the available external activities.

At Meetings of other U3As that I have attended, most are astonished that we hold weekly Meetings and cover such a wide range of activities – even that we have waiting lists to join some of our Groups. Most other U3As hold only monthly Meetings.

We have more than 60 interest groups now and are always keen to start new ones – so if anyone would like to share their expertise on any topic, please speak to the Groups Coordinator. It would also be wonderful to set up a singing group or another musical one. Our Ukulele group, set up only last year, has made huge strides in that short time. You would not be alone and would be supported all through the setting-up process.

Once again our team for organising speakers for Wednesday mornings has done an excellent job in finding people to address us on a wide range of interesting subjects. We regularly have attendances between about 125 and 170, with many members visiting both our venues, Ludwick and The Breaks. These produce good opportunities for members to mix with each other and discuss cross-Group events.

As our AGM is in March, we shall once again be looking for new members to join the committee. If you are unsure about being a committee member why not join us as an observer at our January or February meeting? The dates are on the website.

We must ensure that people with disabilities continue to join us. If you have a disability and need extra support so that you can attend the



weekly meetings or any of the study groups, please bring your supporter who can attend free of charge. If you wish to attend one of the outings to a place of interest, it is worth your ringing the venue to discuss your needs and to enquire whether your supporter (carer) does not have to pay the entrance fee. This is the case with many places of interest.

If you have visual problems you may need to have any paperwork in a larger font, for example the U3A membership application form. If so, please contact the Membership Secretary.

If you have hearing difficulties, please ask a committee member where it is best to sit at the Wednesday Meetings.

At our members' request we have removed the ramps at Ludwick Family Club, but if you require the ramp please ask the welcomer who is on duty and they will arrange for the ramp to be reinstalled.

The start of the Spring Term for 2020 is now upon us. I hope you all look forward to enjoying your Welwyn Hatfield U3A as much as I do.

*Richard Griffiths*

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## Group News

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### **Book Group (2)**

Recommends – *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* by Arundhati Roy (Penguin, 2018)

In Kashmir nightmares were promiscuous – they cartwheeled wantonly into other people's dreams.

This is a sprawling novel, colourfully populated by a wide range of people whom the author describes as living on the borders of society in India. It is a tale of a transgender woman (a hijra), Anjum, who leaves home as a child to live in a community of hijras in the old city of Delhi. She adopts Zainab, a little girl who has been abandoned. In her forties Anjum accompanies an old friend on a pilgrimage to Gujarat. He is killed in a Muslim massacre but, as a hijra (outcast), she is considered to be bad luck so is spared execution. Traumatized by this event Anjum quits the community and ends up living in a graveyard among the tombs, where her parents are buried. She gradually builds up a guest house around the tombs which becomes home to untouchables, Muslim converts, and hijras amongst others.

A second story in tandem to this is based in Kashmir. It features another independently-minded woman, Tilottama, and the three men who love her. The four met as students many years previously. Naga is now a Kashmir correspondent, full of self confidence, Mesu is a Kashmiri activist and Biplab Dasgupta is in the Intelligence Service. The Kashmir story starts in Chapter 8, entitled The Landlord. It is one of only two chapters written in the first person, by Biplab. Once again there is an abandoned child, called Miss Jebeen the 2nd. We discover why 'the 2nd' as the story unfolds.

The book brings the two strands together at Jantar Mantar, an old observatory in North Delhi where many protesters gather, including those still suffering from the effects of Bhopal. Here Miss Jebeen the 2nd is found by Tilo, who is tracked down by one of Anjum's protégés, 'Saddam Hussain' (his adopted name), an untouchable. He is a lively character – full of mischief but quite the entrepreneur.

The book is beautifully written and covers many of the themes close to the author's heart: religious intolerance, sexual identity, motherhood, living on the borders, freedom and happiness. Violence is ever present but described as a matter-of-fact aspect of Indian life.

Some book group members found the plethora of names and places, plus the lack of chronology, a challenge. I certainly had to set up a glossary! However, those that persevered found it an enthralling read, and a real insight into Indian cultural and political life. We had a great discussion, with lots of views and opinions. However, I didn't manage to persuade those that didn't finish the book to give it another go!

*Jean Mackie*

## **Exploring London (4)**

On 27 September, Exploring London 4 gathered for yet another fascinating insight into London past and present, planned and lead by Sonja Park. This time we were heading for the East End, for a glimpse of the 18th and 19th- century lives of working-class and immigrant populations.

Once off the train, our first stop fulfilled the basic requirement for coffee and a trip to the loo, and did so in very picturesque surroundings. The steps in front of The Dickens Inn, with its bright floral decorations, provided a perfect location for a group photo.



Exploring London (4) on the steps before  
The Dickens Inn

Our route took us on a short walk through the pleasant area of St Katharine Docks, where impressive pleasure-boats (including the royal barge *Gloriana*) rest amid restaurants, shops and offices, and the skyline boasts both the Shard and Tower Bridge.

Reaching our “main attraction”, we found ourselves in a narrow alley of mostly new buildings, but proudly still home to the oldest Grand Music Hall in the world – Wilton’s. This Grade II listed building dates back to the 1690s and is now preserved (as opposed to restored) and run by a charitable trust.

A lively and interesting guide took us around the building, talking us through its history, from a working men’s pub with a small space for entertainment, through its development in the 19th century by John Wilton, who created the Victorian Music

Hall much as it is seen today. The guide’s descriptions of the heyday of this fascinating place helped us to picture it as it was then; a touch of West End glamour and entertainment for East End working folk.

In the late 19th century, the poverty and squalor of the East End overtook the music hall and for more than 70 years the building was a Methodist mission. Later, it was used as a rag-sorting warehouse before the whole area was scheduled for



**Wilton's Grand Music Hall**

redevelopment in the early 1960s. A campaign supported by John Betjeman eventually saved Wilton's from demolition, but it remained empty and decaying for some years before a charitable trust was formed to enable urgent repairs to be undertaken. Gradually, the building was made more secure and it was more frequently used, often for film and video shoots, and in the past 20 years it has been increasingly used for public performances. It is now a thriving arts and heritage venue.

From there we walked through the beautifully redeveloped area now called Goodman's Fields, where striking sculptures of horses galloping through water reminded us, with a significant amount of poetic licence, of the working horses that used to graze there.

Here we had lunch before setting off on another short walk to take us to the oldest surviving German Lutheran church. St George's is owned by the Historic Chapels Trust and dates from 1762. Nowadays, from the outside, its backdrop of modern, glass and metal tower blocks seems rather to overwhelm it, but inside it is a peaceful, historical haven. We heard how it was founded to serve as a religious centre for generations of German immigrants working in the sugar refineries and other businesses in the area, until the horrors and upheavals of the First World War drove them out.

The interior of the chapel retains most of the original furnishings and now hosts concerts, lectures and meetings, as well as occasional church services for the German community of London and beyond.

All in all, a very informative and enjoyable trip, as ever!

*Jill Longman*

## **French Beginners Plus**

“You know that red-haired woman from *Spiral*, the one who plays the lawyer, Maitre Karlsson? It says here that she is a comedian.”

My husband laughed: “It’s French for actor; no comedy intended,” he said.

I was disappointed. I had rather liked the notion of the startlingly beautiful actress Audrey Fleurot from Parisian crime drama *Spiral* being able to making people writhe with laughter.

We were in France, at our tiny Cap d’Agde apartment, and I was reading a preview in the TV magazine, of a new Netflix/Canal+ series, *Le Bazar de la Charité*, starring Mme Fleurot.

That word “comédienne” is another of Ann’s *faux amis*, I thought, Ann being Ann Davies, my WGC U3A French tutor. These *faux amis*, or false friends, are French words which sound as if they could be a literal translation from English, but are not: consequences of misusing these can be interesting. For a few years now, Ann has spent alternate Monday afternoons gently guiding a group of up to a dozen students of widely varying ability through a BBC French course, Talk French. She has made it both stimulating and fun, as she gently prods us into attempting to make conversation, whether asking for train tickets, introducing ourselves to strangers or requesting tourist information.

“Don’t worry about getting details wrong, just make the attempt,” she reiterates every lesson. “The French will understand you if you use *la* when it should be *le*.” While most of the group had done French at school, and so had a foundation to build on, a few – including me – had not. So I struggled with the basics. Initially, faced with the *Midi Libre*, our local newspaper at Cap d’Agde, I struggled to identify whether words were nouns, verbs, or adjectives. Pronouns were a major challenge: there are so many, and anyone who has done a little French knows them. I didn’t. But gradually I realised

that my understanding was getting better. Knowing the pronouns seemed to make a big difference. I could follow bits of real French conversation, understand more of what people said to me in shops and restaurants, pick up a little more of the dialogue on TV dramas.

The class includes other people with French property, people who holiday in France regularly, and those who are simply keen to keep their brains sharp. We all benefit from Ann's expert knowledge, and her use of internet videos, audio and other tools such as articles from French magazines or newspapers, songs and poems really enhances the experience.

I am never going to be fluent in French, but Ann's good guidance has really helped me to get more out of my visits, as I am sure others have found.

Finally, I am so glad we are doing only reading and spoken French. Writing it correctly is so hard. All those accents, the weird spelling, the words running together: *qu'est-ce que c'est?* I rest my case.

Going back to the *faux amis*, there are cases where the opposite (sort of) applies. Once, in our local bar in Cap d'Agde, a cat sat on my husband's lap: "Aha, you are stroking the *chatte* of my wife," bar owner Denis giggled, indicating the French slang meaning of the expression. We of course giggled right back, explaining that *chatte* in French and "pussy" in English have exactly the same double meaning.

*Liz White*

## **Multi-Media**

For many years I had a great desire to try to paint, but time did not allow me to venture into such a hobby. However, once I retired it was a very different story, and for the first few weeks I was at a loss as to what I was to do. Then U3A came into my life: an immediate turnaround occurred. I joined the Tuesday Multi-Media Art Group and the Photography Group.

Much as I had always wanted to have a go at painting, there was nothing in my past to suggest that I would be able to produce anything recognisable. I have never been able to draw a straight line – not even with a ruler! Anyway, nothing ventured, nothing gained, as they say.



**Mountain Lake by Gail Reed**

I called Mary, the group leader, to ask if there would be a space for me. Such a lovely, positive phone call it was too, welcoming me to join the group and to come along the next Tuesday morning just to see what everybody got up to. I just could not wait to get there – and once there I so wanted to get started. I was offered some paper and paints to have a go, which I declined, but asked for advice on what I should purchase to get me started and generally chatted to all who were there. Some were using Watercolours, some Pastels, others Acrylic and Oils. Hence, a Multi-Media group, I was informed. I said my goodbyes assuring them I would be back the next week. Tentatively I put brush to paper and started my first picture – Mountain Lake. After a couple of weeks and much taking things off and putting back on (a procedure I had no idea about, but everybody was so helpful and told me ways of putting things right when they went wrong, and wrong they certainly did go!) it was finished. I was so so proud of it!!!

Time has gone on and things have progressed with the help of all at the group. Photography and Painting have a lot in common. A number of the things I have painted I have taken photographs of on my mobile and used them as reference for some of my paintings.

The Multi-Media Group meets every Tuesday morning 10-12 and every other week continues into the afternoon, 2.00 - 4.00, when the Oil painters stay on and others come and join in.

Thank you so much to all at the Photography Group and Multi-Media Art Group for helping me enrich my retirement and fulfilling a couple of things I had wanted to do for a very long time.

*Gail Reed*

## **Photography**

These two photos were displayed at the Art & Photography exhibition:

"Babies Through Daddy's Legs" by Chrissie Holford (*below*)



"Trentham Fairies Dancing with Dandelions" by Muriel Montgomery (*opposite*).



## Travel/Holidays

The Historic Houses and Heritage of Shropshire and Ironbridge  
8-12 September 2019

*“What are those blue remembered hills?” ...*

*“That is the land of lost content,*

*I see it shining plain,*

*The happy highways where I went*

*And cannot come again.”*

*A.E. Housman*

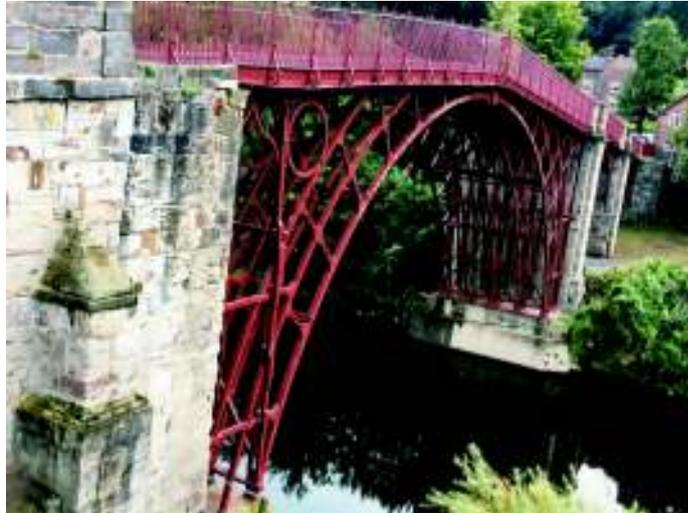
**Day 1:** We set off for our late summer break to a part of the country with which many of us were unfamiliar but we were to discover many of its delights and treasures. The weather forecast was not good but on our first day we had glorious sunshine. We stopped en route at Hanbury Hall, Worcestershire, completed in 1701 in the William and Mary style. Because of its associations with Queen Anne and the recent success of the film, *The Favourite*, many links to this era were featured in the displays and information in the house. James Thornhill was the painter responsible for the ceilings and staircase. He also had commissions from Queen Anne for Hampton Court, Greenwich and Windsor. George London was the garden designer, at the forefront of the English Landscape Movement. He also designed for Queen Anne at Hampton Court.

We continued on our journey to our hotel, Allbrighton Hall Hotel, built in 1630, situated just outside Shrewsbury, near to the area of the Battle of Shrewsbury in 1403. Over time the Hall had many changes of owner and in 1953 it was converted into The Royal National College for the Blind. One of its most famous residents was the Rt Hon David Blunkett MP who boarded there in the 1960s.

**Day 2:** First we visited the Jackfield Tile Museum, which presents the history of the British decorative tile industry between 1840 and 1960. This was one of the oldest ceramic production centres in Shropshire, dating back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. We could not have predicted at the outset that this would be so interesting but it reflected most of the artistic movements between the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The collection included some work by William de Morgan. It also reflected the many uses of tiles in our interiors: the ecclesiastical (inside churches), the hygienic (inside food shops), the pub trade (hence “a night on the tiles”) and even banks. Many of these were represented by little areas of the museum recreating the ambience of these places. But perhaps the most impact was in the recreation of a tube station complete with sound effects!

But the morning was not over yet and next we visited the Coalport China Museum, which represents the history of the manufacture of fine English chinaware based on this site between 1795 and 1926. This too was an exciting experience because, as well as all the exhibits, there were demonstrations of traditional ceramic techniques and the experience of visiting the inside of the bottle kilns, where they simulated a firing. The demonstrators were extremely informative and much was learnt, including the meaning of the term “a bottom knocker”. Both of these museums were part of the Ironbridge World Heritage Site, the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution.

So in the afternoon we arrived at Blists Hill Victorian Village in time to get some lunch and wander freely around this recreation of life in a Victorian community. It was quite quiet here, being the end of the season, but we all found our favourite sites of interest. Some of the shops were most interesting: the post office, the haberdasher’s, the sweet shop, the baker’s and the chemist shop were all fascinating with helpful assistants in role and in period dress. The most fascinating demonstration for me was in the candlemaker’s, where we witnessed rows of candles being dripped and a very enthusiastic young man willing to share his knowledge of the craft. After this the highlight of the afternoon was the visit to the Ironbridge itself, on the River Severn



**Ironbridge**

in Telford and Wrekin. The bridge was built by Abraham Darby and opened in 1781. The location provided all that was necessary to build the bridge – the river and the right geological requirements – coal, limestone and iron ore. We walked over the bridge, where we took photos and admired the view.

**Day 3:** This day was to start with a guided tour of Shrewsbury by our Blue Badge guide, who was a font of knowledge on the area and a real enthusiast for the history of the region. I learnt that Shakespeare was “economical with the truth” about the Battle of Shrewsbury, putting his own Tudor spin on events, as Prince Hal and Harry Hotspur did not in fact meet at this battle. I guess it’s dramatic licence!

On arrival in Shrewsbury we were directed to St Mary’s Church, dating from 960 AD. The town has many interesting features, especially the “magpie” houses typical of the Welsh Marches. We had time to explore and have coffee and lunch. Several of us visited the Museum in the Market Square where there were some notable Roman remains. We learned from our guide that Wroxeter, or the Roman city of Viroconium Cornoviorum, the fourth largest city in Roman Britain, was situated just outside Shrewsbury and we saw it from the road.

In the afternoon we visited the 17<sup>th</sup> century Shugborough Estate on the edge of Cannock Chase, Staffordshire. The interior of the house was displayed as having a somewhat split personality. In one part it represented the travels of Admiral George Anson who amassed a great fortune during his naval career. His travels were represented by large



**Shugborough Hall**

wooden packing cases in several empty rooms containing some of his treasures. It was his elder brother, Thomas, who extended the building in the Italianate style, and attempted to create “an earthly paradise” outside and inside some opulent and highly decorated interiors. The private apartments housed an exhibition of the work of Patrick Lichfield. The grounds offered extensive walks with several follies, which probably merited more time than we had available. One room contained a huge table-top raised relief map charting the voyages of Admiral George Anson, complete

with miniature ships. In the cabinets surrounding was displayed a 208-piece porcelain dinner service to commemorate his circumnavigation of the globe.

**Day 4:** This morning we headed off to Bridgnorth to catch the steam train excursion on the Severn Valley Railway to Kidderminster. This afforded good views of the River Severn. From there we made our way to Ludlow for lunch. Ludlow is a very attractive town with a busy market square at its centre, the same “magpie” buildings, 500 listed buildings and described by Sir John Betjeman as “probably the loveliest town in England”. The church of St Laurence was recommended by our guide for its misericords – they alone were worth the visit. It is also the burial place of the ashes of the poet A. E. Housman.

Our brief visit concluded with a drive around the town before heading off to Stokesay Castle. This is a perfectly preserved medieval fortified manor house dating back to the 11<sup>th</sup> century. It looked



Stokesay  
Castle  
gatehouse

beautiful in the sunshine and was a fascinating place to explore both inside and out.

One of the delights of this trip was the views from the coach. We drove over Wenlock Edge on a couple of occasions and the Wrekin was often in sight. This was very atmospheric and recalled the poetry of Housman and the earlier roman settlers. This left lasting impressions after the return home.

**Day 5:** All too soon our visit to Shropshire was at an end. But on the way home we were to visit Stratford upon Avon. After our lunch stop our guide led the way to the significant sites in the town. I was on familiar territory here so, determined to visit Holy Trinity Church where Shakespeare is buried, I set off to visit the one place I had never actually visited before. After viewing the inscription on his tomb, I rejoined the rest of the party to return to the coach after our flying visit.

So we returned after a very stimulating and enjoyable visit to a lovely part of the country with good company. Many thanks once again to our leaders, Jean, Kathy and Tony, for all their efforts, which made the trip run so smoothly and so convivially.

*Text and photos by Pamela Williams*

## Ukulele Group



What a difference a year makes! Our Ukulele group, formed last November and now known as WelHat Ukes, has begun performing!

The group provided entertainment for residents at St Andrew's care home in WGC on Wednesday 27 November, then on Friday 6 December they played to over 130 people at an afternoon tea party for the more mature neighbours of Nicholas Breakspeare School in St Albans, where this picture was taken.

*Jill Longman; photo by Sue McLellen*

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*The twenty-second in our series of profiles of distinguished Welwyn Hatfield U3A members features ...*

### **Mike Nicolas**

Mike was born in Cyprus, shortly before the movements among Greek Cypriots for self-rule and union with Greece erupted into violence and the EOKA bombing campaign. Growing up in these turbulent circumstances, on breaking curfew as a young boy he was actually shot at – a bullet passed his ear. He recalls it as a happy childhood, nonetheless.

The Nicolas family left Cyprus in 1962, and settled in the Greek community in London – with Mike knowing no English. He had to sit the eleven-plus exam to determine the school he should attend, but took only the Arithmetic paper. In that one he gained 98% marks – losing two only because the question included an English word he did not understand.



After obtaining nine ‘O’ levels (including English!) at a comprehensive secondary school, Mike undertook a nine-year part-time course studying architecture at East London Polytechnic (now the University of East London), while also working as a trainee in an architects’ office. He met Janet Dormer while they were both still at school; they married in 1974, moving to Hertford Heath. By 1979 he was fully qualified, practising as an architect, and the couple bought a house in Bengeo, where their two sons were born. As expenses increased and interest rates doubled, Mike became a building manager, in charge of a hundred workers, maintaining 21,000 council homes. He was promoted to Chief Building Surveyor until being made redundant – with all his staff – by the Local Authority. He then set up his own company for building maintenance, which he ran for ten years, until he was appointed Business Manager, then Director, of another Company.

Intending to retire at the age of 64, Mike deliberately “practised retirement”, buying a caravan on a fixed site a year beforehand, in which to rehearse the work-free life. Janet had already joined Welwyn Hatfield U3A, and in 2015, on retirement, Mike did so too. For a year he attended only the Wednesday talks; then Elaine Evans asked him to attend the Architecture Group, and to deliver its fortnightly lectures. Mike was happy to do this: not just to pass on to the group the expertise in the subject that he had acquired in a 40-year career, but selecting and researching new subjects, so that he, too, was learning. The lectures were (are!) a great success – the group doubled in size.

In 2017 Mike also joined the Photography Group. He had been interested in photography since the age of eight, and at one time had considered changing to photography as a career. On retirement, he took the opportunity to research various aspects of the subject. Many of his photographs have been displayed at our exhibitions and appeared in the newsletter; his favourite is shown overleaf.



*Me and my shadow by Mike Nicolas*

Now Mike remains busy both within and outside U3A. Since retiring he has attended meetings on local planning issues; overseen the building of extensions to both his sons' houses; retains and often lives in the caravan; and takes great pleasure in the company of his grandsons. He loves cooking, comparing the mixing of the ingredients to achieve a pleasant result to architecture, and may yet write a book on the subject.

He sees the U3A as offering a whole new life to those reluctant to face the shock of retirement, catering for so many different interests – but “You get out what you put in”.

*Hazel Bell*

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### Spring Term 2020 – Wednesday Meetings

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#### JANUARY

*8, Ludwick Family Centre, Welwyn Garden City*

**David Burnell – “The Art of Underground Travel”**

A fully illustrated view of the world-famous collection of the London Transport poster collection. The talk sets the posters in the context of the high design standards achieved by the Underground in the inter-war.

15, *Breaks Manor, Hatfield*

**Roger Mason – “Prime Ministers’ Extramarital Affairs, 1721-1945”**

Quite a few of Britain’s 54 Prime Ministers have enjoyed extramarital affairs; this talk tells the stories of some of them.

22, *WGC*

**James Higgs – “In The Footsteps of a Wedding Toastmaster”**

James has been a Toastmaster/Master of Ceremonies since 2005, attending weddings and working at numerous Hotels, Golf Clubs, Function Rooms, private marquees, and even farmers' barns! He describes some amusing moments and quirky situations that have arisen during wedding-day celebrations.

29, *Hatfield*

**Geoff Bowden – “Murder Most Profitable”**

The Life and Career of Agatha Christie. Geoff’s career was as a Chartered Librarian but his love was Musical Theatre. He formed a musical revue group and toured England & Wales. Since 2009 he has edited *The Call Boy*, the magazine of the British Music Hall Society.

**FEBRUARY**

5, *WGC*

**Stephen Brown – “A History of London in Ten Maps”**

Stephen leads our London History study group. He will look at some key developments in London through the way they have been depicted in maps.

12, *Hatfield*

**Mike Beech – “The Occupations of Victorian Britain”**

The Victorian era saw great strides in innovation. New industries emerged to meet consumer demand and new occupations were born, many of which no longer exist.

19, *WGC*

**Mervyn Edwards – “Walking The Beat to Nirvana”**

Mervyn retired in 2002 after over 30 years with Thames Valley Police. He was a police marksman in the Tactical Firearms team, also in charge of Special Operations.

26, Hatfield

**Mark Warwick – “Mystic, Mentalist & Psychological Magician”**

Mark offers an amusing, confusing and entertaining show with a mixture of mentalism, mind reading and close-up magic.

### MARCH

4, WGC

**Richard Furnival-Jones – “The Palace of Knightsbridge, aka Harrods”**

Richard worked for Harrods for 40 years. He will give us a glimpse of the fascinating history of this now famous store, together with an insight into what it was like to be a part of that world.

11, Hatfield **33rd AGM**

Followed by readings by the Creative Writing Group.

18, WGC

**Brian Freeland – “George Bernard Shaw Playing The Clown”**

After seeing a production of Shaw’s play *Man and Superman* Brian decided on the theatre as a career. He started work at the London Palladium, then spent much of the next twenty years touring abroad, usually for the British Council.

25, Hatfield

**Judy Anderson – “A Remarkable Story of Care & Hope by Great Ormond Street Children’s Charity”**

The history of GOSH – Great Ormond Street Hospital, from the founder, Dr Charles West, in 1852 to the present day at the hospital will include stories of how GOSH saves lives and the work needed to continue to support families when a child is admitted to GOSH.

### APRIL

1, WGC **Meet The Groups**

Some of our varied groups demonstrate their skills and display their products.

*Welwyn Hatfield U3A does not endorse any products or services offered by speakers.*

*Summer term starts on 22 April at Hatfield.*