

u3a
learn, laugh, live

WELWYN HATFIELD

Summer 2026 ISSUE 82



TABLE OF CONTENTS

3	Chair's Report	14	Exploring London 3
6	News	16	¡Viva el Español!
7	A very special Birthday	18	Music Appreciation
8	Exploring London 1	20	Garden Group
9	WE NEED YOU!	21	Book Review
10	Art and Photography Exhibition	22	Summer Term Speakers

Front and back page pictures by David Geary
a member of the Photography Group.

From the Editor

As I write the Summer Term is less than two weeks away. The world may be going to pot but WelHat u3a is in good shape. At the end of March I attended the induction meeting for new members, and the mood was buoyant. Our membership is increasing and the new members to whom I spoke were looking forward to the new Term.

A disclaimer: neither contributor bears any responsibility for the cartoons on pages 17 & 19. I fed the text and specification to Google's AI tool Gemini which produced them in under 20 seconds each. Impressively it inserted the Spanish flags and personalised number plate which I had not asked for.

The talks for the Summer Term, described at the back of this issue, look varied and interesting.



I was surprised and pleased to see that a friend, Nick Jones, is giving a talk on May 6th. He was industrial correspondent for the BBC for many years and has written several entertaining books, of which I am proud to own signed copies. I am sure you will enjoy his talk.

The week before I will be reflecting on the Festival of Britain 75 years on. If you attended any of its many events, or have some memorabilia, do come and share your memories with us.

Geoffrey Hollis

NOTES FROM THE CHAIR

When we return after the Christmas break the prospect of Spring seems a long way off and we know we have to face the prospects of bad weather and many other challenges. However, as so often happens when we get caught up in our u3a activities, before no time we are welcoming the bulbs and joyously appreciating the blossom and the warmer weather and sunshine. Such has been the case this term. We quite literally weathered the storms and avoided the floods and the 'flu and, as long as we could navigate round the potholes, we were able to get out to enjoy ourselves.

So what delights did we have to enjoy? In the second week of term we ventured to a new restaurant venue for a lunch date organised by Tony Tutton at **GRAS restaurant** in Welwyn Garden City. This restaurant was able to accommodate our large party and a good time was had by all.

In the same week the Theatre Visits Group visited Sadler's

Wells for a production of ***The Red Shoes*** by Matthew Bourne's group.

We even spotted Matthew Bourne in the foyer and Adam Cooper was playing the lead. This was a real treat with the coach taking us from door to door.

During this time of year, I enjoy catching up with all the new films aiming for award success. This has prompted me to consider forming a cinema club as one of our groups – so watch this space.

The middle of the month was the time when we celebrate the work of our arts, crafts and photography groups in a special **Exhibition** (page 10). The standard is very high and affords the opportunity for members to share their work and for other members to appreciate their talents and efforts.

Toward the end of February we had another lunch date at one of our favourite venues, **Terranova**, at Stanborough Lakes, where the



food was of its usual high standard and good value. Then we were into March and Roger and Mike Dorrington had organised a splendid **Exploring London** visit to the Excel Centre to see the immersive POMPEII exhibition (page 8). This was impressive and enjoyed by all. The journey by public transport was easy and I appreciated the opportunity to take my first ride on the Elizabeth Line.



The weather was good too with sun gradually breaking through the mist. But the mist around the tower blocks of the city was very atmospheric and it was good to explore this area of docklands.

In this week the Theatre Visits group ventured into the West

End again to see a revival of the musical ***The Producers***. Although not entirely my taste, it was very funny and well performed and most people enjoyed it.

This same week featured the **Annual General Meeting**, where, once we had achieved our quorum, we were able to conduct the business of the meeting. Adrienne retired as Secretary and was replaced by Marie Scales. Three new members were appointed to the committee (Jill and John McKinnon, and Wendy Shorter-Blake). Fortunately, the remainder of the committee were happy to continue in their posts. I tried to resign but no volunteers came forward this year – so maybe next year?? Details of the meeting can be found on the website.

We finished with a sing-a-long led by the **Ukulele group**, which left us feeling relieved that we had accomplished the necessary business satisfactorily.

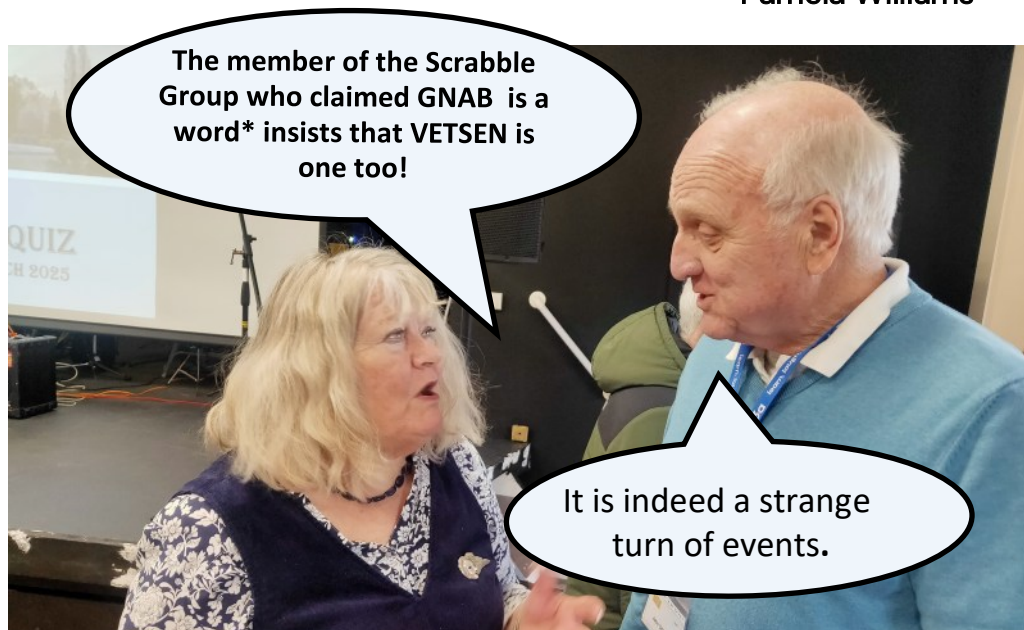
Towards the end of the month, we had another restaurant visit to the **Turkish MISYA** in Welwyn Garden City – most enjoyable.

I have to conclude by mentioning the terrific variety of the talks presented on Wednesday mornings. They have been of a very high standard, so interesting and well-presented. Many thanks to Jill Longman and her team for their research and organisation. It's a challenge to pick a favourite but I really liked the first one of the year "**Lighting the Fuse**" by the first woman bomb disposal

officer; "**My Tutu Went AWOL**" was hilarious, tender and surprising; the talk on **London Colney Airfield in WW1** was fascinating and Gary Fisher did another really informative talk – this time on **The Life of Elizabeth I**. So, to me, there's no better way to spend a Wednesday morning – interesting talks, great chat and free coffee!!

So – here comes Summer!

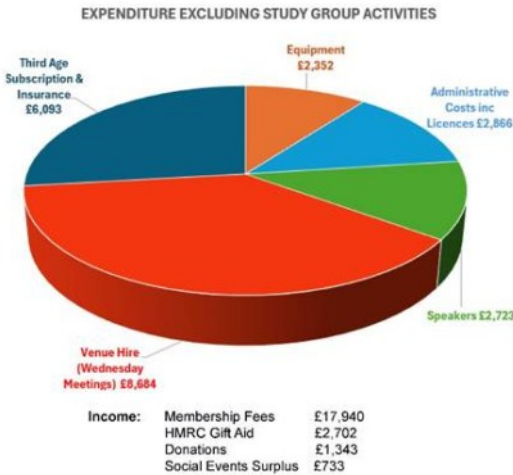
Pamela Williams



**See last issue.* It would appear that this innovative player has spelt trouble for the Group, which is now in abeyance. If any member would like to resurrect it please contact Joan Scales.

NEWS

At the AGM **Beryl Whyatt** our Treasurer produced a pie chart showing how the annual subscription was spent this year, which readers might find interesting.



The company that collects from Boots, MYGroup, separates the foil and plastic using a specialised machine and converts all the waste into something new.

The separated metal foil is recycled conventionally (aluminium is infinitely recyclable!) while the plastic is processed into a usable form such as window frames or piping, or made into a material called MYBoardTM.

Nothing goes to landfill and nothing is incinerated. MYBoardTM is used to make a variety of things including tables, children's playgrounds, chairs, garden planters, shop fittings and lots more. **Keep up the good work!**

She also congratulated everyone who brought in their **blister packs for recycling**.

Travel Group dates for 2026

Beautiful Jersey 1st – 6th May Tailored Travel 'Welu262'.

Industrial heritage of the Black Country 6th – 10th July

Tailored Travel 'Welu261'

Historic houses & Heritage of Northumbria 7th – 11th September.

Are you are looking to book a holiday with **Riviera Travel**? If so, do remember to **book directly** with Riviera rather than via a travel agent, and **mention u3a Welwyn Hatfield** at the time of booking. They will donate 10% of the holiday cost to us.

A very special Birthday

This happy photo shows our long-term member **Belinda Putley**, who celebrated her **100th** birthday on 21st January.

In her slightly younger days Belinda was very active in amateur dramatics, being a keen participant at the Barn Theatre; their archive states that she was involved in 91 productions!

On joining our u3a she was naturally drawn to the Play Reading group but at the time it was full and she had to join a waiting list. Also waiting was **Hazel Bell**, who

of course decided to start a second group, of which Belinda was a founder member. That was around 2010 and Belinda remained a stalwart group member for more than 10 years – even through lockdown when we continued to read together as best we could via Zoom – until her failing eyesight and hearing made it impossible to participate.

She remains bright and cheerful though, as this photo confirms, and enjoyed her birthday celebrations surrounded by family and friends.



Exploring London 1

On Monday 9th March Roger Swaine led us on a journey into the past, to the momentous day in AD79 when Mount Vesuvius erupted and destroyed Pompeii.

Twenty of us, unfortunately without co-leader Mike Dorrington, who was unwell, travelled to the Excel Centre in Docklands for an immersive experience of the city's demise.

We were guided through a series of rooms adorned by large pictures and maps surrounded by a booming soundtrack of everyday life to give a feel of Roman life.

There were very few physical exhibits from the time, but the aim of the exhibition was to transport us virtually.

Firstly, donned with headphones and Virtual Reality headsets, sitting on swivel chairs, we experienced gladiatorial combat in the arena, diving under water; flying above the countryside; and riding a chariot through the town. It was magical, if a little vertigo inducing.

Next, in an enormous hall, like a

school gym, we sat, while all around us was projected a 3D film giving the sensation of riding in a carriage

through Pompeii before and during the eruption. We were entombed. Quite terrifying but we survived.

The final experience involved VR headsets again. This time we walked through a room and experienced life in a Pompeiian house from food, clothes, the bathhouse, the dining room, gardens to the sights and sounds of the kitchen.

Through the sights, sounds, noise and time lapse projections the horrors of the day were brought to life. It was truly an immersive, realistic and enlightening experience.

Fortunately, of the 20,000 inhabitants of Pompeii only 1,000 perished, the rest escaped in time.

But our experience was of those who did not. Wonderful and moving. Thank you Roger.



Helen Fulton

Volunteering within our u3a

WE NEED YOU!

Could you help at our Wednesday morning meetings There are vacancies on: ?

The **Coffee Rota** – contact Christine Savage 01707 274585.

The **Sound System Rota**– the Sound System setup is now very straightforward, and training would be given. We would welcome extra volunteers to do this two to three times per term. Joan Scales – 07956 518073.

The **Welcomers Rota** ensuring that our new members feel welcomed and know how our meetings work

Sue Dorrington – 07740 854374.

The **Front of House** helping with set up on the day to ensure everything is ready when we arrive Colin Slade – 07910 222251.

Importantly, Ann Davies is still looking for a technically minded member to help with the **Zoom transmission**.



Joan Scales



The meeting to welcome New Members, held at the WGC Cricket Club on Monday March 30th, went well. 39 people attended, including nine visitors. Our Membership now stands at 884.

Art and Photography Exhibition 18th February 2026

I would like to say a Big Thank You to everyone who exhibited their crafts, paintings and photos, and to all who came to support our Artists and Photographers at the Ludwick Centre.



There was a vast amount of great art and photography on display and we had an exceptionally good turnout of members who visited despite it being such a cold morning.

Nicola Beynon and her **Craftea** team displayed their innovative and beautifully made creations. They are a lovely team of ladies

who enjoy knitting and sewing plus tea and cakes. A splendid way to pass the time!



Henry Brzeski and his **Photography Group** showed stunning and varied photos with a broad depth of amazing subjects and styles. There was a constant buzz around the tables as visitors discussed the photographs with members of the Group

The two **Watercolour Groups**, at Panshanger in Welwyn, led by myself, and at Friendship House, in Hatfield, led by Richard Griffiths, completely filled their tables with masses of incredible



artwork in varying styles and compositions. As at the photography tables there were many admirers and lots of intent discussions with artists. It was very exciting and fulfilling to see how much skill the Watercolour members have and how much pleasure they take in talking to the visitor members about their work.



On the opposite side of the Hall we welcomed, for the first time, the **Mixed Media Group** led by Sue Cooper. This group was new last year and Sue has done a terrific job in setting it up in Woolmer Green Hall. Sue's group benefits from her experience and knowledge in a wide range of media.

Joining her on adjacent tables we had Muriel Montgomery's group, **Oil Painting**, based at Digswell Village Hall. Muriel is a highly talented oil painter who sells her own work. Her group like Sue's has 'members challenges' where the leaders ask them to paint a specific scene, still life, etc. in their own style. The results showed a fascinating diversity of interpretation.

We are very glad so many members came along to admire the huge amount of creativity on display. We have a vast amount of talent within our U3A group and it is always a pleasure to meet the artists and see their work.

Alison Wingfield

Pictures by **Peter Fox**.

Overleaf are four paintings by **Barbara Hanak**, a member of the Oil and Mixed Media groups. Her subjects are all local, at different times of year. They show what can be achieved within our u3a.





Exploring London 3



On 5th February, we visited the Museum of the Home in Hoxton, north east London. Travel was easy –local train to Highbury and up on to the Windrush line for four stops.

The buildings were originally almshouses built for Sir Robert Geffrye, a merchant who served as the Lord Mayor of London in the 17th Century and was a Master of the Ironmongers Society. In 1714 he provided the funds to build 14 four-roomed almshouses for up to 56 pensioners with a large communal garden.

In 1911 the Ironmongers decided the area was too dangerous for pensioners, moved them to the country and sold the site to the old London County Council

which in 1914 reopened the buildings as the Geffrye Museum. It was refurbished in 1998 and closed for an £18million refurbishment in 2018 reopening in June 2021 as the Museum of the Home.

Our tour was in two parts, a guided tour of one of the Alms-houses, which has been preserved in its original four roomed form, with an open fire, uncomfortable bed, table and set of drawers all in the one room. Our guide described the daily routines of the tenants, the relatively harsh conditions they lived in and lack of modern facilities, which was considered normal for its time.

We next visited the two floors of the museum which pictured home life at various times from the 1600s to the present day, in several multicultural settings.





The museum has a well stocked gift shop with books, vinyl albums and posters of the era. Outside there were various landscaped gardens, including a large herb section and a Victorian lean-to wooden Greenhouse which is still in use.

One of the highlights was a montage of life in a London tower block in the 1970's with several pictures of very varied and unusually decorated rooms.



As the museum café is currently closed several of us then retired to Mel's café around the corner, where we enjoyed a good and varied lunch, prepared and served by very friendly staff.

A highly recommended place to visit.

Sue McLellen & Tony Dodd

Most of us could identify with lots of the exhibits, including a solid fuel cooking range, VHS recorder, Radiograms, 9 inch black and white televisions and a copper hot water boiler! There was also a section depicting predicted life in the 2050's, some of which is already happening.



¡Viva el Español!

Or more precisely viva Spanish beginners! Plus. This is a smallish self-help group which I started in 2014 because the then Groups Coordinator asked me if I knew any Spanish (having already started a Beginners French group –a veritable piece of gâteau as I’d been a French teacher until retirement). I thought about it for a while, but I had an O-level and visited Spain frequently so I decided to give it a go. Enough people were interested so off we went. Little did I realise I’d still be doing it in 2026 and still enjoying it mostly!

We meet twice a month on Monday afternoons. We use the BBC *Talk Spanish* book as a guide. It comes with listening exercises CD and a DVD—all rather outdated now as the course originally came out in 2007! However, the basics are there and I supplement it with up to date stuff from the internet. How invaluable has YouTube been! I find songs or poems or tongue twisters or word searches or fairy tales or crosswords or

nursery rhymes or the day’s weather forecast or TV series in Spanishthe list is endless.

Last session this term, for example, I found Seville’s arrangements for their 2026 iconic Easter processions. We read it in Spanish and watched the short videos. We had started off by some singing and exercise: Cabeza, hombros, rodillas y pies (head shoulders knees and toes to be precise). We hadn’t done it for ages so it began the session with a wake-up call!

We had finished book 1 and had started book 2 and I’d renamed the group as Beginners Spanish Plus when, as you probably recall, in 2020 life changed as coronavirus reared its ugly head. Not wishing to give up we learned how to Zoom and we carried on. Not doing our usual things but we looked at Spanish and South American geography, history, cities, customs and all sorts. People took it in turns to



research cities and areas. It wasn't ideal but so much better than stopping and was so interesting.

After Covid, everyone came back and we resumed as before, but started on Book 1 again and are retackling Book 2, which is a real step up from the grammar point of view.

I asked two new members for their thoughts; Here they are:

'Friendly faces, welcoming, interesting topic was Holy Week in Spain, efficient leader, explained unusual words, very enjoyable, didn't feel overwhelmed as I'd not done Spanish since 1968'.

'Group is very supportive of each

other, leader is very patient and makes the learning interesting, very informative, always something new to learn'.

I suppose the aim of doing this is to be able to have the confidence to ask for things in shops, to understand notices and road signs and to communicate in a basic way whenever you're in a Spanish speaking country.

It's imperative to learn how to say 'please speak more slowly', 'can you repeat that', or 'I don't understand' and say it with a smile! The drawback is that usually they're keen to practise their English too.

Ann Davies



Music Appreciation

Music, mainly classical, has always been a big part of my life. I took piano lessons as a child but eventually my parents could no longer afford them. After getting into some very bad habits by playing in a pub and being paid in pints, I took more lessons as an adult and got to the stage where I could play well enough to entertain myself but not well enough to entertain anybody else, so my main interest has always been as a listener. I find some music so powerful that, even when I have heard it several times before, I can be moved to tears.

On joining the u3a, I searched in vain for a group where people enjoyed listening to music, so in September 2024, I asked Joan, our u3a committee member for Groups, to advertise a "New Music Appreciation Group. I had a meeting with two of the first who called, then the three of us shared our ideas with two further interested members and we had our first "live" session of music in December 2024.

None of us listens exclusively to classical music; I also enjoy some

jazz and believe that Lennon and McCartney were among the most talented musicians ever. But as a group, we listen to at least 90% classical music (in its broadest sense). Usually members take turns to select and present a programme, but the group welcomes anyone who wants only to listen or who are unfamiliar with classical music and would like to learn more."



We meet at 2.30pm for two hours on the second Tuesday of every month, including u3a holidays. Typically, we will play between four and twelve pieces: about an hour of music, and spend almost as much time talking about it and consuming refreshment.

Sometimes there will be a theme for a session which is announced in advance.. Previous themes have included Partnerships, Czech music, Music of Love and Historic Music.

Members comment on a piece after it has been played, perhaps on performances they have heard.

The presenter may speak about the music, the composer, the performer(s), where and when they first heard it or how it fits in with the theme, if any.

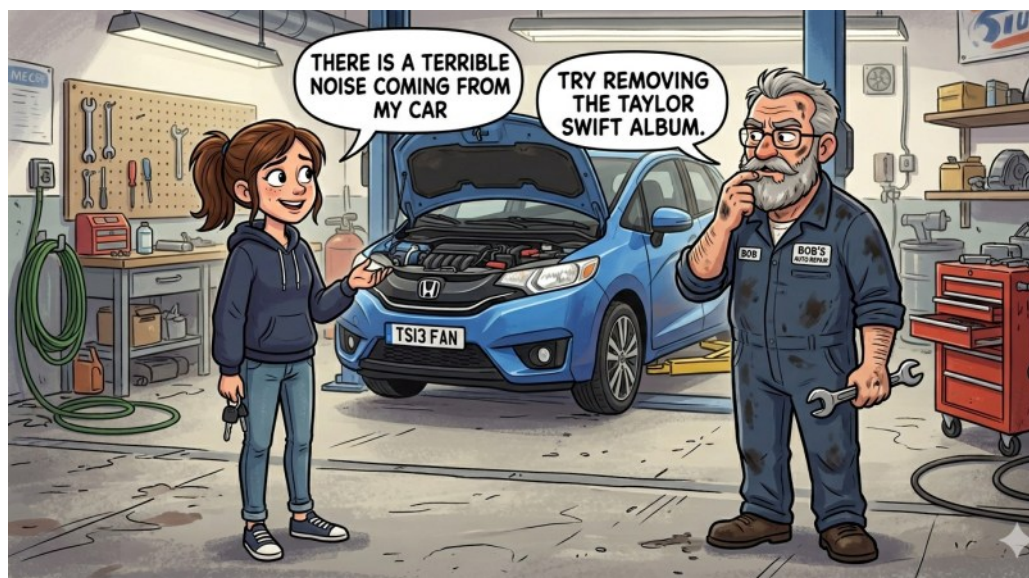
We need to hear music in a comfortable location of a suitable size, with good-quality audio equipment and satisfactory acoustics, where we will neither be disturbed nor disturb others. Early on we realised that we were unlikely to find a venue for hire which satisfied these conditions, in particular because any sound-reproduction system was likely to be more suitable for speech than for good quality music reproduction.

Fortunately four of us have living rooms which satisfy the required conditions; we four take it in turns to host our sessions.

Sometimes the host will also be the person who has prepared and presents the music and sometimes another member who cannot host will present the music.

The only downside of this arrangement is that it limits the number of people who could attend in comfort. However, we have not yet reached that number and would welcome one or two more.

Denis Smith



Garden Group

The Group meets on the second Monday morning of the month during October, November, December, February and March .



We meet at the Cricket Club in Knightsfield with refreshments at 10.00 am, followed by a speaker at 10.30. Recent talks have included Providing for wildlife in your garden, All you need to know about roses, Plants for early summer, Flower arranging and Plants for problem places.

During the summer months of May, June, July, August and September we go on coach outings to Gardens near and far. These are organised by members of the

Group. Our enjoyable trips last summer were to The Savill Gardens, Anglesey Abbey, Kew Gardens, Beth Chatto's Garden and Elton Hall. We also had a local private visit to Waterend House through the National Garden Scheme Charity.



This year's trips are to Myddleton House and Capel Manor, Coton Manor, Lullingstone Castle and World Garden, RHS Wisley and Waterperry Gardens. We also had an enjoyable trip to Anglesey Abbey in January to see the Winter Garden.

We are an enthusiastic Group who enjoy gardening, learning about gardening and visiting gardens for ideas to use at home. For more information visit the u3a website or contact me, **Anna Cumbers** on 01707 372 566

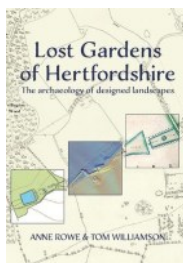


Book Review

Lost Gardens of Hertfordshire, The archaeology of designed landscapes;

Anne Rowe & Tom

Williamson, HERTFORDSHIRE PUBLICATIONS, ISBN 978 1 912260-75-1



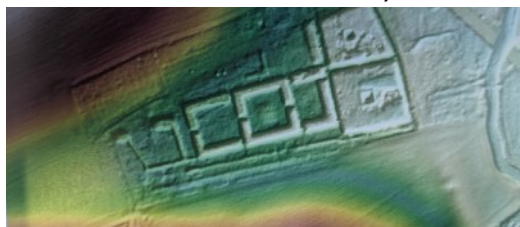
Hertfordshire, being largely rural yet close to London, has for centuries been chosen by rich men for their palatial country residences. To show off their wealth and good taste they added large gardens and parks, often using expensive landscape gardeners such as Capability Brown or Humphrey Repton. However, as the economic tide turned against landowners in favour of industrialists many of these estates decayed and vanished.



They have not been forgotten though, at least not by Dr Rowe and Prof Williamson, who have written up

the fruits of 25 years' research in this substantial well-illustrated volume. They have meticulously gathered historical and archaeological research on 24 Lost Gardens to show how they evolved over the centuries since their creation.

After an illuminating Introduction of more than 50 pages, each one, from Benington Park to Weston Park, gets its own Chapter with detailed analysis, maps, diagrams, and old prints. The archaeological research often used laser scanning (*lidar*, light detection and ranging) to reveal hidden features, such as fish ponds at Francis Bacon's Gorhambury.



I certainly did not know that Gobions Wood at Brookmans Park hides the remains of one of the most famous C17th gardens in England. Or that there once stood a mansion immediately to the NE of St Peter's Tewin which was so impressive that "under pretext of hunting King George 1st visited it twice".

This is an absorbing reference book, an ideal buy for anyone interested in the history of gardens and/or landscapes.

GH

SUMMER TERM SPEAKERS

Term starts **22nd April**. Doors open at 9.45; refreshments from 10–10.30 (bring your own cup for free tea or coffee). 10.30 start.

To watch from home on zoom, contact: zoom@u3awelhat.org.

To receive links to recordings, contact: video@u3awelhat.org.

WGC = AL7 4PH

HAT = AL10 8TP

**22 April WGC Robert Wilton – “Bad Boys & Gutsy Girls
– Two Centuries of British Travellers in the Balkans”.**

Robert was a Whitehall specialist on the Balkans, advisor to the Prime Minister of Kosovo and head of a human rights mission in Albania..

**29 Apr HAT Geoffrey Hollis –
“The Festival of Britain, 1951; A tonic to the Nation?”**

May 4th will be the 75th anniversary of the opening of the Festival of Britain in 1951. Geoffrey, who is a member of the Festival of Britain Society, and The Twentieth Century Society, will consider its impact.

**6 May WGC Nick Jones – “The Art of Class War:
Newspaper Cartoonists and the 1984–85 Miners’ Strike”**

Nick reported on the strike as a BBC labour and industrial correspondent and has written books on it. He was struck by the impact of newspaper cartoons, from left and right, and uses them to look back on the strike.

13 May HAT Tony Tutton – “The Words and Music of Bob Dylan”
Tony’s presentation is a visual & audio feast of the lyrics, music and stories of Bob Dylan, featuring artists that have covered Dylan’s songs

**20 May WGC Paul Gosbee – “The Commonwealth War Graves
Commission – its History and its Work Today”**

We will hear about the start of the Commission, its work during the First and Second World Wars and today in maintaining and preserving graves all over the world, including in our local area, and hear the stories of some of those commemorated.

**27 May HAT Philippa Parker –
“The Lives and Friends of George Bernard and Charlotte Shaw”**

The Shaws lived in our county for 46 years, from 1904. This illustrated talk will cover the history of Shaw’s Corner, the Shaws and women’s suffrage and the First World War, and their support for the two Garden Cities.

3 Jun WGC Nigel Crompton – “History of the Fire Service”

The development of firefighting from the earliest known forms to the modern day. Additionally the role of women in firefighting will be considered, especially during the Great War

10 Jun HAT Lynn Wilson – “Vicissitudes of the Recorder”

Over six hundred years of ups and downs for the Recorder will be illustrated by live musicians in consort, referencing royalty, rock bands and a railway platform, amongst much else.

17 Jun WGC Andy Gibbs –

“The Last Bolshevik: Nikolai Ivanovich Bukharin”

Bukharin was written out of history by his erstwhile ally, Stalin, but is now seen as a major figure, the “human face” of the Russian Revolution. This talk charts his rise and fall and reflects on his legacy.

24 Jun HAT David Keen – “The Dambusters Raid”

David will cover the development of bombers and bombing and the most famous raid by Bomber Command in WWII.

1 Jul WGC Simon Ardeman – “Cybercrime”

Simon is a Detective Constable in the City of London police, in the Cyber Crime unit. He will give us “non-technical” advice covering social engineering, phishing scams and account security (strong passwords etc).

8 Jul HAT Duncan Bickley – “Adventures in Helicopters”

Before retirement, Duncan ran his own helicopter company as a commercial pilot and trainer; he will tell us of his many adventures.

15 Jul WGC Dr Helen Fry – “A Very Secret War”

From 1942 captured German Generals were housed in luxurious conditions and tricked into revealing Hitler's most closely guarded secrets. Helen has written 25 books on the history of WWII.

22 Jul HAT GARDEN PARTY – 2 – 4 pm

Please bring a picnic and, if possible, a garden chair.

Welwyn Hatfield u3a does not endorse any products or services offered by speakers



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