



January 2025 Newsletter

Chairman's report

1. Member News

We are pleased to welcome two new Members this month to our u3a:

- Annette Duensing
- Susan Wetherly

Both are very welcome, and I hope they enjoy some of the groups, talks and Facilities that the u3a is able to offer.

2. Harpenden u3a Christmas party.

On 19th December we celebrated our Christmas party, below are a couple of photos of the event.



3. Talks in January.

A list of all talks to be given in 2025 was circulated in last month's newsletter. I now outline the two talks to be given in January. Both will be held at the Abbeyfield Hall starting at 2.15pm:

- On January 2nd the talk will be given by Phil Marsh, and the title will be 'The Future of Humanity'.
- The second talk will be on 16th January, when Philip McKinder will present, with the title of his talk being 'Guilty or not Guilty'.

Finally, both myself and the Committee wish to send to all our members our very good wishes for a Happy and Prosperous New Year in 2025.

Roger Thompson roger.c.thompson1940@gmail.com

4. Article written by Diana Brimblecombe: Harpenden's Heroes and Heroines.

PHILANTHROPISTS and LOCAL ORGANISATIONS.

In this Article, there is mention of a few of Harpenden's wonderful and generous philanthropic people who have contributed to local organisations.

First comes to mind, **SIR JOHN LAWES**, who founded what is now Rothamsted Research, which has made a huge and worldwide difference to agricultural research, and given generous support to the community, such as the 1850 British School, in the building which is now the Town Hall and other Harpenden good causes.

Then **LORD HILL**, the Radio Doctor, gave health advice on the wireless during the war, and in 1948 set up the Harpenden Trust, a local charity which today supports all those living in AL5. Read their latest newsletter online and be amazed by so many projects, or have a coffee at the Well Bean Cafe and make your donation to the Christmas Appeal. Charles Hill in his later years could be found having a lunchtime beer or two in the Three Horseshoes, and his daughter Susan, taught at St George's School and, in retirement, was a volunteer at the Citizens Advice Bureau, which now have an office in the Harpenden Trust halls in Southdown Road.

Then, **HENRY TYLER HODGSON**, director of the Midland Railway in the 19th century, who lived at Welcome (previously the hotel) and built a row of workmen's cottages in Southdown Road (see his initials on a plaque on the

cottages). He also built the Institute, for the working man to study at night, now the Friends Meeting House. He ensured that Harpenden had a station from which he could walk home!

Many young people have benefitted from the generosity of **JAMES MARSHALL** who in 18th Century set up a charity to help with the costs of education, school trips, and training, and still busy today.

Another forgotten benefactor for local people was **SIR HALLEY STEWART**. He gave the Red House to local people, where over time it was a convalescent home for the elderly, a health centre and a maternity home. There are still many older people who remember having their baby at the Red House where they stayed afterwards for a fortnight. Still used by the NHS!

Then **GEORGE HOGG** was a St George's old boy, a journalist, who during the Chinese Civil War led 70 children 600 miles over the mountains to safety. A film called The Children of Huang Shi depicts his sacrifice.

And just too numerous to mention are the many Harpenden volunteers who freely give their time to work in Local and National charities. Whether they volunteer in the charity shop, drive the Harpenden Hopper, assist Helping Hand, run the Scouts Guides and Brownies, PTAs, and more, they are all generous and philanthropic people from Harpenden.

Next time, we will remember some more Philanthropists who have made a difference by setting up and supporting some National organisations.

Diana Brimblecombe

5. Group Reports

This newsletter contains a selection of contributions from different groups. Not all groups are included in the newsletter. We try to vary what is included each month.

If you need more information about a specific group, please go to the Group section on the Harpenden u3a website, where you will find group contact details:

Family History Group

The Family History group meets on the 4th Tuesday of each month from 2.30-4pm in the Randall Room at the Harpenden Trust Halls in Southdown, opposite the Plough and Harrow. The dates for the first three months of 2025 are: 28th January, 25th February and 25th March.

If you've ever considered delving into your family history or wondered about the DNA testing ads you see on TV, this is the perfect opportunity to join us.

Like the BBC's 'Who Do You Think You Are', you never know what you might discover. You will be very welcome whether you are new to family history research or whether you are an experienced researcher.

For more information, please feel free to contact me, **Viv Chandler**.

History Group

First 6 Months Meetings and Presentations in 2025.

I attach below, the first 6 months presentations for the History Group in 2025.

- **January 14th** Presentation by Sharon Torres. 'Napoleon: Glorious Leader or Little Dictator'
- **February 11th** Presentation by Gerald Cuff. 'The Hungarian Revolution'
- **March 11th** Presentation by Malcolm Rainbow, 'The War of Austrian Succession'.
- **April 8th** Presentation by Suheil Sharyar, 'The Global Arms Trade'.
- **May 13th** Presentation by Gerald Cuff. 'A History of the Western Alphabet'.
- **June 10th** Presentation by Roger Thompson. 'The Decision as to who was the Greatest Person in British History'.

As usual, all meetings will take place in the Randall Room, at the Harpenden Trust Hall and will commence at 2.30. The room will be available from 2.00 onwards, but members are requested not to use the room before that time. As usual, there will be a £1 entrance charge to cover the costs of the room hire. New members are welcome.

Roger Thompson

Hot Issues Seminar Group

The Hot Issues Seminar group continued its imaginary role as the UK Government Cabinet in its November meeting with a debate on the Chancellor of the Exchequer's budget proposals.

Following on from The Chief Secretary to the Treasury's presentation in September on the need for more borrowing in order to fund public investment projects, The Chancellor of the Exchequer outlined his budget to his Cabinet colleagues. The main objective was to strike a balance between, on the one hand, achieving a moderate amount of economic growth over a ten year period in order to maintain and raise living standards, whilst on the other, aiming to pursue environmental sustainable development goals which will enable a target of net zero and carbon neutral emissions by 2040.

The Chancellor set out his economic priorities in terms of a number of commitments to invest more funding for the NHS, Education, Housing, Social Care Reform, Transport Infrastructure, Policing, Prisons and not least climate

action projects to achieve net zero targets. Although this met with some heated debate, the Chancellor proposed meeting the current government's defence spending target of 2.5% GDP until 2030.

There was also robust debate as to the definition and purpose of economic growth as measured by traditional methods of valuing paid for inputs and outputs. Economic growth measured simply as a rise in GDP ignores both externalities and non-economic contributions to people's wellbeing.

Alternative measures of growth involving the valuation of unpriced economic and social costs and benefits e.g. air pollution, water contamination and community solidarity were needed, especially if environmental goals were to be met.

There was broad agreement that the current disparity of income and wealth was excessive and undermining social cohesion. Higher taxation both on wealth and income was proposed, for instance a wealth tax for all those with assets of more than £5m and higher rates of income tax for those earning more than £100,000. The threshold before income tax is paid should be raised correspondingly.

The Chancellor will keenly await the discussion of his plans in more detail by Cabinet colleagues who will be setting out themselves their respective visions and priorities.

Next up the Foreign Secretary in January followed by the Environment Secretary in February.

Keeping Fit Group

Have you made a new year's resolution?

Is it to 'Keep Fit'?

We already have some members (and non-members) who want to Keep Fit, but we need more numbers.

If you want to add your name to the list please send an email to **Brian Ball**
Group coordinator

Reading for pleasure Group 1

We have recently read "Homecoming" by Kate Morton.

Set largely in summertime, it makes an enjoyable contrast to our dark winter days. A mother and her children have had a Christmas picnic in the grounds of their large house on the hills above Adelaide. The mother and three of her children are found lying peacefully dead by a neighbour riding by on his

horse. It is the start of a complicated story that moves between a small rural settlement, the dynamic coastal city of Sydney, and London.

Jean Rapier.

Reading for Pleasure Group 2

In December we discussed 'A far cry from Kensington' by Muriel Spark. Not one of her better-known books and written relatively recently in 1988. It is set in the 1950s and gives a fascinating and enjoyable insight into that period.

Our January book, 'Pereira Maintains' by Antonio Tabucchi is translated from the original Italian. It has been selected by our Chairman Roger Thompson who is an active member of the group. Book groups are of especial value when books are chosen which many will never have known.

Last year the Book Group voted for the 'Book of the Year' from those we had read during 2023. We did it again this year from the books read in 2024, the favourite was 'All Quiet on the Western Front' which is a semi-autobiographical novel by Erich Maria Remarque translated from the original German. It highlights experiences from World War I.

The group held its customary monthly meeting in December followed immediately by Christmas lunch in The Engineer's remodelled dining area.



Above photo shows the meeting in progress prior to the table being cleared for the seasonal meal.

Reading for Pleasure Group 3

Meetings of this group take place once a month on Tuesdays from 10am to 12 noon (currently on the third Tuesday of the month) but please note this can vary from month to month. Places are now limited. Anyone interested in joining should contact me for further details.

Jane Leek

Science & Technology Group

In November we had a guest speaker, Tony Berk. He gave his talk entitled 'The Physics of Absolutely Nothing'. Tony has a degree in pure and applied mathematics and a PhD in theoretical physics. One of his interests is explaining complex and abstruse scientific principles and phenomena to a lay audience. He achieved that!

His illuminating talk embraced fundamental physics including atoms, molecules, protons, electrons, elements, quantum mechanics, particles, waves, etc. The title 'The Physics of Absolutely Nothing' was designed to introduce the character and extent of empty space in the material world, along with some of the history of the subject, describing the empty space within the atoms of all material objects. Fascinating stuff!

In December we had Christmas lunch instead of a formal meeting. This was at The Plough and Harrow in Southdown where we usually meet. A very successful event.

On 15th January a group member, Bob Fletcher will give a talk 'History of telecommunications – from the telegraph to the internet.' As usual our talks are illustrated with PowerPoint slides.

Any u3a member is welcome to any meeting. Just turn up on the day. Meetings are normally held on the third Wednesday of the month at the Plough and Harrow in Southdown but check for future meetings in case the date has changed.

Meetings start at 10:30 am. Entrance to the meeting room is via the rear door from the garden.

Attendees are invited to stay for lunch from 12 noon.



Seventeen members of the Science & Technology group met at our usual venue, The Plough and Harrow in Southdown, for our first ever Christmas lunch celebration. It was a convivial occasion with excellent food. This was purely a social event with no speaker this time but more speakers are being lined up for 2025 meetings.

Singing For Pleasure Group

Since November we have been practicing Christmas carols for the Christmas party but no doubt, we will learn some new music next term or polish up some old favourites.

We have settled into our new venue, the Abbeyfield Hall above the Co-op and it is good to have a fully working piano again.

The dates for next term are: 30th Jan, 13th and 27th Feb, 13th and 27th Mar, and 10th April.

We meet from 2pm to 3pm, so plenty of time for tea or coffee afterwards.

Please do come along and give it a try – I'm sure you'll enjoy yourself. All voices – especially men! – are welcome and although we sing in two parts, there is no need to be able to read music.

For further information, and especially for the code to access the Abbeyfield Hall, please contact **Viv Chandler**

Spanish Conversation Group

The Spanish Conversation Group meets on the first and third Tuesday of the month. The next session will be 7th January. We are a mixed ability group and the aim is simply to practice and help each other to improve. New members are welcome.

Bridget French

Walking Group

You need some luck with winter walks, and we've been lucky twice this month, enjoying dry, and ultimately bright Mondays following weekends of heavy rain.

Our first walk, south from Rothamsted towards Redbourn, was on familiar territory, but with ingenious variations new to most of us.

The second, from Hixberry Lane through Sleapshyde, Smallford and the Oaklands estate, was a route we did in September, but in the other direction. It's remarkable how a walk done in reverse feels like a new one altogether. We look forward to starting again on 6th January after the Christmas break.



The walking group out and about, and enjoying their Christmas Lunch.

If you would like to join us, please contact me for further details.

Hugh Fricker