



February 2025 Newsletter

Message from the Chairman

I am pleased to introduce our February Newsletter. In particular, I would express a welcome to the 9 new members who have joined our u3a this month. This means that we have a record number of members, which is a very pleasant achievement to acknowledge.

1. Talks in February

February 6th - At 2.15 there will be a Presentation by Steve Gledhill on the subject of 'The History of Wireless from Concept to the Present'.

Alteration to February Speaker: advised by Jan Warr

Unfortunately Helen Fry was due to speak on 20th February but has had to cancel. She has had a period of chest infections/ pneumonia and has had to reduce her workload. Hopefully, she will be able to be re-booked in 2026 and in the meantime Jan has sent best wishes to her.

Luckily, Anne Lawrence 'Life as a terrorist detective' has agreed to change her rostered October slot and take the February one. We are grateful to her as it is difficult to get new speakers at short notice.

Both the talks by Steve and Anne Lawrence will be held at the usual venue of the Abbeyfield Hall.

2. New Members.

I very much want to welcome new members who have joined Harpenden u3a in January:

- Elizabeth Bradley
- Jon Carr
- Susanne Hollingsworth
- Annette Duensing
- Theresa Doolan
- John Lawrence
- Anna Wanless
- Pauline Wilson
- Paul Spinks

All are welcome and we trust they will enjoy their membership of our u3a.

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

MORE PHILANTHROPISTS

Last time, we learnt about Harpenden citizens who set up wonderful local charities, such as the Harpenden Trust and James Marshall.

This time, let's learn more about local people who set up national charities.

JUDY FRYD, the founder of MENCAP. When Judy and John Fryd's eldest child Felicity started school, she was rejected on the first day, as being impossible to teach. In 1949, Judy gathered a group of more than 1000 parents whose children had learning difficulties and who had no access to suitable education. That started the National charity MENCAP which today campaigns for the rights of those people. Judy was honoured by the Queen to mark her great contribution in founding the charity.

Another wonderful philanthropist was **MAUREEN POUPARD**, the founder of the Ataxia-Telangiectasia society. A.T. is a rare genetic disease, and Maureen had two children who suffered from it. She campaigned for research into the disease and funded the search for the cure. She became unpaid Director for many years.

SIR JOHN LAWES, founder of Rothamstead, was a generous benefactor to our town, helping such groups as the British School. But most notably, he was the father of agricultural research, founding Lawes Agricultural Trust, known and admired worldwide.

Then there's our own **ERIC MIDWINTER** who was the joint founder of the u3a movement in 1982, which now has 1000+ societies. Eric is still a member of our club. Thanks, Eric! With grateful thanks to the Harpenden Local History Society www.harpenden-history.org.uk

4. A thank you from Janet Warr

Thank you so much for your generosity on the sale of raffle tickets at the Christmas party. It made a profit of £92 which has been donated to the Harpenden Trust Xmas Appeal. They were delighted and sent many thanks to all.

Janet – Committee Member

5. List of Talks for 2025.

Below is the list of talks, of Confirmed Member and Speaker Meetings arranged for 2025 – All to be held at 2.15 in the Abbeyfield Hall.

Date	Member/ Speaker	Speaker	Topic
January 2 nd	Member	Phil Marsh	Talk on 'The Future of Humanity'.
January 16 th	Speaker	Philip McKinder	'Guilty or not Guilty'.
February 6 th	Member	Steve Gledhill	'The History of Wireless from Concept to the Present'.
February 20 th	Speaker	Anne Lawrence	'Life of a Terrorist Detective'.
March 6 th	Member	Sharon Torres	'Mohammed: His life and Legacy'.
March 20 th	Speaker	Ann Ledger	'All about Ashridge'.
April 3 rd	Member	Dishan Singh	'The History of Surgery'.
April 17 th	Speaker	Rob Preece	'Howard League for Penal Reform'.
May 1 st	Member	Brian Legg	The Woodland Trust and the Wildlife at Heartwood Forest.
May 15 th	Speaker	David Keen	'The Story of Amy Johnson'.
June 5 th	Member	Simon Smith	'The Almshouse Trust' with Examples from Hertfordshire.
June 19 th	Speaker	Annie Brewster	'Life as The High Sheriff of Hertfordshire'.
July 3 rd	Member	Nigel Denchfield	'Digging Up Dad's Spitfire'.
July 17 th	Speaker	Tom Way.	'Exciting Wildlife from Around the World'.
August 21 st	Summer Party	2.30	The Summer Party at the Plough and Harrow.
September 4 th	Member	Art Appreciation Group	Presentation by the Art Appreciation Group.
September 18 th	Speaker	Paul Barwick	'Double Agent Zigzag'.
October 2 nd	Member	Sharon Torres	'The Royals of Monaco'.
October 16 th	Speaker		To be confirmed.
November 6 th	Member	Phil Marsh	'The Use and Abuse of Power'.
November 20 th	Speaker	Mary Smith	'A School Girl's War'.
December 4 th			Christmas Event.
December 18 th			Christmas Party.

Group Reports

Currently, Harpenden u3a has over 30 active groups.

The maximum size of each group is determined by the group subject (Do the members listen and learn or participate?) and the size of the accommodation (Is the meeting held in members' homes or in hired meeting rooms or are they held outdoors? Does the group need space for equipment?).

If you are interested in joining a particular group, contact the group leader as listed on the Harpenden u3a website. (Group Contact Details). If the group is already full, don't despair. Contact the group coordinator who will review the possibility of starting a second group on the same subject. He has done this several times before.

Bus Pass Group

Since the sad loss of the former Group Leader, Pat Jackson, there have been no organised bus pass trips.

We have a lot of information about bus times, bus routes and what to do when we get there, but we do not have someone to organise the trips.

We desperately need someone to volunteer to take on the role of group leader (or shared group leader?). For further information please contact group coordinator

Climate Change Group

At the January meeting Paul Spinks gave the following talk on Nuclear Power;

The Climate Change Group considered the question of whether nuclear energy could, or should, play a part in meeting the UK's Net Zero commitments. It is zero carbon, but is it 'green'? The arguments for and against often boil down to concerns about energy security versus concerns for the environment.

Currently the UK has nuclear power plants at 5 sites, which are scheduled to close in 2027 (2), 2030 (2) and 2035, although extensions to operating lifetimes are possible in each case. Only one new plant (Hinkley C) is being built (expected to go online by 2030), two more plants are in the planning process, and two further proposals are being restructured to remove Chinese involvement. EDF is involved in all current and proposed nuclear power plants. Rolls-Royce has proposed Small Modular Reactors (SMRs) as an alternative.

Current government plans call for increasing nuclear power to provide ~25% of national electricity requirements (it's currently ~16%). For comparison, France gets ~70% of its electricity from 57 nuclear reactors, while Germany is now at 0% (abruptly down from 25%) which is why Germany is woefully behind the curve in terms of

phasing out coal-fired power stations). However, it is arguable whether the planned expansion can be achieved given the lengthy planning processes, the lead times for construction and the risks associated with novel designs (e.g. Rolls-Royce SMRs, or thorium reactors).

If nuclear power is expanded in line with government plans, concerns will remain regarding safe operations and waste disposal and the strike price will be much higher than for renewable energy. However, if the government concludes that nuclear energy cannot or should not be expanded in line with current plans, then concerns will remain about the intermittency of renewable energy sources, as well as the security of off-shore assets (cables and pipelines) if 'Cool War' tensions rise. To address the former, there is an urgent need to find more cheap, widely-deployable, utility-scale energy storage solutions.

If you want to discuss Nuclear Power or other climate change issues, the next Climate Change group meeting will be held on 19th February 2025.

For further information contact the group leader.

Cryptic Crossword Group

With Christmas knocking out our Tuesday meeting we gathered both crossword groups together for Christmas lunch, although sadly two members were not able to join us.

After lunch we did a group-think and solved that day's FT crossword in just over half an hour, which is very good going.

At the Christmas party we were intrigued by the puzzle asking how many words could be made from the word "celebrations". Several wild guesses were made, but it was taken away for "Christmas homework". In the end, we all gave up, some after finding over 1,000 words!

In January, we held our usual group meetings at 2pm on the second Friday and fourth Tuesday of the month. If you are interested in joining us please call me.

History Group

The next meeting of the History Group will be held as usual in the Randall Room at the Harpenden Trust Hall.

A Presentation will be given by Gerald Cuff and the title will be 'The Hungarian Revolution'. The talk will start at 2.30 on February 11th, although the room will be available from 2.00 please would members who are attending, not use the room before the time of 2.00.

All members are welcome to attend.

Roger roger.c.thompson1940@gmail.com

Needlecraft Group 1

Our group have been meeting regularly and getting on with their projects which do take a long time to complete. One of our members has completed 2 circular pictures (Below) with a winter theme, for presents to two of her grandchildren which I thought would be of interest to other u3a members.



Play Reading Group

The Play Reading Group has been looking back on the year since our inauguration. We started off really well but illness, unavoidable appointments or clash of duties sometimes reduced our numbers. At first finding suitable works proved a problem. A full length play could take too long to read in one session, so on two occasions we needed another date to finish.

Last month we agreed to try one act plays. This would give us more time for relaxed discussion afterwards of the work, the author and the historic setting.

As a result, at our January meeting we read a one-act play by Anthony Booth (no - not the Tony Booth of Till Death us do Part fame and father of Cherie Blair). Here is a note by Keryna Booth, the daughter of the playwright:

ANTHONY BOOTH (1913 - 1985) was born in Sale in Manchester. After leaving Oxford University he became an actor and portrayed many roles in the West End. He was called up for military service during WW2 and was a Captain under the command of Lord Mountbatten. After the war he turned his hand

to writing plays. The majority of his plays were written with strong female characters (which was fairly unusual in the 1960's and 1970's) as he recognised the lack of challenging roles for women. He also tried to create plays which could be produced by both professional and amateur groups by keeping the scenery and staging at a minimum and letting the characters keep your attention rather than the set. He received numerous awards for his work.

We chose 'Ladies, this is War!'. This was exactly the sort of play we'd been looking for. With dialogue naturally expressing the personality of each performer, a cast of conflicting characters, a somewhat silly plot generating lots of laughs and an unforeseen ending, it was pretty well perfect, and it wasn't overlong! A thoroughly enjoyable morning for everyone. We hope to find more plays like this in future.

Reading for pleasure Group 1

Reading Group 1 continues to meet in members' houses where we enjoy a cup of tea and a chat before moving on to discuss the book.

Last month, we read "The House of Doors" by Tan Twang Eng, which took us to Penang Island, off the west coast of the Malaysian Peninsular, by the Malacca Straits.

Some research revealed that the Island had once been leased to the British East India Company, who found it a very useful trading post, which is why the main characters are of British heritage. We found ourselves between the two World Wars, when British influence is still very strong within a vibrant multi-cultural setting. Our main character is Lesley, who at the age of 22 married wealthy Robert aged 40. Somerset Maughan and his "secretary" visit, and we are given a fascinating but rather chilling insight into the lives lived by these wealthy people.

Reading for Pleasure Group 2

In January we discussed the book 'Pereira Maintains' by Antonio Tabucchi. It was set in Portugal and was translated from Italian. A novel experience – no pun intended.

For February we have 'Human Traces' by Sebastian Faulks who is best known as the author of 'Birdsong'. It is a challenging book for many reasons not least the fact that it is 600 pages long. The two protagonists are psychiatrists who endeavour to understand the human mind.

Our March selection is 'The Great Gatsby' by F. Scott Fitzgerald published 100 years ago in 1925. It is widely regarded as one of the greatest American novels.

Science & Technology Group

In January group member Bob Fletcher gave a talk 'History of telecommunications – from the telegraph to the internet.' It was fascinating to review the evolution of the phone from the 1870s, around the time when many of our grandparents would have been born, to the present day.

Topics at the Science and Technology group cover a very wide range – our guest speaker for 19th February illustrates this. He will give a talk 'Infrastructure & Technology makes or breaks an Olympics'. He has personal experience of the technical side of two Olympics. He was Technical Director for a major project on the London Underground for the 2012 Olympics. His talk is entitled 'Infrastructure & Technology makes or breaks an Olympics'.

Note in your diary two future talks by group members:

- 19th March, 'The Evolution of Human Walking', Dishan Singh
- 16th April, 'Decoding Life: The Technology of DNA Sequencing', Andy Phillips

All u3a members are welcome to attend any of our meetings. 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 10:30am. Plenty of parking in the pub car park. Entrance to the meeting room is via the French doors from the garden. Attendees are invited to stay on for a pub lunch. Group members cover a wide range of backgrounds, not all are technical – just curious. There is a healthy mix of ladies and gentlemen!

Walking Group

It's always satisfying to defeat the elements in winter, and we've done it twice this month. The heavy rain following weekend snow subsided just in time for a chilly but fine walk from The Oval via Cooters End Lane and the Lea Valley Way: a useful route on firm surfaces that happily avoids any mud.



More recently we've enjoyed an excellent outing from Rothamsted across the Common and on to the edge of Heartwood Forest. We are so lucky in Harpenden to have this green artery running all the way out from the middle of town into the countryside. Turnout was good on both walks, and we've been pleased to welcome two new members.