



April 2025 Newsletter

1. Message from the Chairman

I am pleased to introduce our April monthly newsletter, and hope members find the articles it contains to be of interest. If any member wishes to make a contribution to future Newsletters, I would be very pleased to hear from them.

2. New Members who have joined in March 2025

I am so pleased to welcome 7 new members joining our u3a in March 2025.

Their names are;

- Jill Deas
- Gail Hazel
- Christine Puckey
- Angela Watkinson
- Elizabeth Firmin
- Del Mistala
- Peter Revel

All are very welcome, and I very much hope that they enjoy the facilities that the Harpenden u3a offers.

I am very pleased to say that the number of members in the Harpenden u3a has now reached 280, the largest number of members we have had.

3. Harpenden Child Contact Centre

Article by Roger Thompson

Some time ago, I was contacted by the Harpenden Child Contact Centre, about them wanting to make a contribution in our Newsletter on the subject of their work in Harpenden.

Because of my interest in this service, owing to my employment for many years in Social Services, I was asked if I would like to visit the Centre to

understand and see the work that is being done. I visited one Saturday to get an understanding of the Centre's work.

I am therefore putting a short item in our current Newsletter, mentioning the work that is done by the Harpenden Child Contact Centre, but also to make the point that grandparents, many of whom may be members of u3as, often may have an important role in assisting their children's family, when things go wrong, or are difficult.

A Child Contact Centre aims to offer a safe and friendly environment, where children from separated families can spend time with one or both parents. It is a child centred environment that puts the needs of children first.

The most important people in the Child Contact Centre are the children, and the aim is to have a warm and sociable atmosphere, where both parents and children can relax and enjoy themselves. The Child Contact Centre is run by fully trained volunteers and I was grateful to be able to meet and talk to them about the important work they are doing.

My thanks again to the Centre staff who made me feel so welcome on my visit.

If anyone would wish to know more about the Centre, please visit their website www.harpendenchildcontactcentre.org.uk

4. Talks in April, both Starting at 2.15 in the Abbeyfield Hall

April 3rd Dishan Singh Presentation: 'History of Surgery'.

Dishan has provided a short precis of his talk; Barber Surgeons in the Middle Ages performed blood - letting and other minor procedures. Anatomical knowledge led to speed gladiators performing more major operations, such as amputations in a public arena.

The introduction of anaesthesia and antiseptic surgery in the latter part of the Nineteenth Century, led to successful surgery to deeper structures. Nowadays, technological advances are enabling more rapid recovery by mini-invasive techniques.

Our second talk in April is on the 17th of the month.

Again, a very interesting and important topic about the work of The Howard League for Penal Reform. The presentation will be made by Rob Preece.

5. Article by Judith Moseley, Secretary to the Committee, on her work for the u3a

Someone, recently, had reason to ask me, "What do you do then, as secretary on the committee?". Let me tell you a story.

When I came to Harpenden five years ago it was going to be a quiet retirement looking after my little grandson. However, thinking I needed something to keep my brain ticking over, I found the local u3a website and I was impressed by the courses that were being run and, naively it turns out, I thought I might fill an afternoon once a month or so.

Covid was keeping us all at home at that time and so I was slightly surprised to receive a very welcoming phone call from the Chairman thanking me for joining u3a and explaining how things worked. We then chatted on for quite a time about what I had done in my working life and I innocently told her that for a number of years I had worked in education, so far so good.....and then, I said I had come from a family who were heavily involved in politics, although I was only involved in the administrative roles. My fate was sealed.

A couple of years later when my predecessor on the committee had finished her stint as secretary, I was asked if I could take Minutes at a meeting. Had someone remembered that conversation? So Minutes became liaising with the Harpenden Trust, making certain that we follow the rules laid down by the u3a National office, the local area u3a groups and the Charity Commission. Also, learning to use the websites which help with our ever growing membership, generally making sure we fill in annual returns, keeping up with all the latest policies from the National u3a and of course, taking those Minutes!

I grumble frequently about how much time it takes up now, but then I remember the friendships I have made and am so grateful for, and the amazing things I have learnt from the groups I am involved in. I also remember the advice I was given many years ago by an MEP who once told me that "the best committee is when the Chairman is present and the rest of the committee is stuck in traffic, as you get more done."

Would anyone like to take the minutes?

Judith Moseley.

6. The Seniors Fayre 2025.

The Harpenden Trust are holding the Seniors Fayre at The EMC on April 9th between 10.30 and 1.30. Once again they have given us the opportunity to show all that the u3a in Harpenden has to offer and so although we are looking forward to meeting

prospective new members, we would love to see any of our members who are visiting. Please do look out for our group.

Group Reports

Ballroom and Latin Dance Group

Do you enjoy gliding across the floor with your dance partner sharing a waltz or a foxtrot? Or do you prefer a Cha Cha or a Jive?

Are you an experienced dancer or a beginner?

Experienced dance instructors have asked Harpenden u3a if we would like to start a Dancing group. Before we have further discussions with the instructors, we need to know how many members would be interested in joining the group. If you would consider joining such a group, please contact the Group coordinator Brian Ball.

Church and Pub Group

Visit to St Michael's Church, St Albans

7 members of the u3a visited the church on a bright but cold day, the churchyard was filled with snowdrops. Ann Dean, our guide, met us in the church and told us about the long history going back to the 10th century. There are Roman Basilica remains underneath as foundations and some Roman brickwork incorporated into the walls. The church has been extended over time with addition of a lady chapel and side chapels. Victorian 'improvements' were made by George Gilbert Scott.



The most interesting memorial is to Francis Bacon, philosopher, diplomat and writer, and owner of Gorhambury in the 16th Century. The location of his tomb is not known as it was replaced by a later owner of the Estate. Some of the Grimston family are also buried there. Another memorial is to the soldiers of the First World War who were mainly workers on the Gorhambury Estate. American visitors are frequent here due to the fame of Francis

Bacon and there is an active congregation at the church. Lunch was a jolly affair at the Six Bells pub nearby and we discovered that there are now eight bells at the church, so maybe the pub should be renamed in the future!

Pauline Waddilove

Family History Group

The Family History Group meets on the fourth Tuesday of each month from 2:30 to 4:00pm in the Randall Room at the Harpenden Trust Halls in Southdown, opposite the Plough and Harrow. The upcoming meeting dates are 22nd April, 27th May, and 24th June.

In recent months, we have enjoyed a delightful New Year lunch and heard fascinating presentations from some members about their own family history research. In April, we will return to a more inclusive format where everyone is encouraged to bring and discuss a document, artefact or photograph related to their family history.

If you've ever considered exploring your family history or have been intrigued by DNA testing ads on TV, this is the perfect opportunity to join us. As in BBC's "Who Do You Think You Are?", you may uncover surprising discoveries about your past. Whether you are new to family history research or an experienced researcher, you are very welcome to attend.

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

German Conversation Group

The topic for our next meeting on 25th March is: 'Your favourite German-speaking town or city.' We will be looking forward to hearing why each chosen place is so special: historical interest; great cuisine; fascinating customs or perhaps about a memorable experience in a town no one has ever heard of... one never knows quite what to expect but it'll be fun.

Sadly, we will miss Peter Buck at our next get-together due to him having had a nasty fall at his home. He is now recovering in hospital after surgery.

Wir wünschen Ihnen eine schnelle Genesung, Herr Peter!

If you are interested in joining us to practise your German, please contact Sharon Torres.

History Group

The next meeting of the History Group is to be on 8th April, when there will be a talk given by Suheil Shahryar.

The title of the talk is 'How the United States Weaponised the World Economy'.

As usual, the talk will be held at The Harpenden Trust Halls in The Randall Room and will commence at 2.30 although the room will be available from 2.00.

Roger Thompson roger.c.thompson1940@gmail.com

Hot Issues Seminars Group

The HIS group has reorganised itself into an imaginary Cabinet of the British Government. On February 25th our Minister for the Environment presented a starter paper on what we should be doing about Global warming.

There was general agreement that we as a nation and as a local community and indeed individually are sleepwalking into an existential crisis due to climate change. Our discussion began with listing a number of measures which our government should undertake in order to protect its citizens from the worst effects of climate change, i.e. drought, flood and fire. However, we soon tried to answer the more fundamental question of what we as one country could do to try to keep global warming as low as possible. At current rates of world governments' lack of serious action the climate will be at least 2.5° warmer by 2050, possibly 3°, either of which imply catastrophic flooding, fire danger and droughts in many parts of the world. We felt that this level of existential threat could only be dealt with at international government level.

We decided that our government should use all its considerable soft power to try to build an international policy consensus. To be credible we would have to lead the way in our own domestic measures. This would require a huge public information campaign explaining the urgency of the crisis and why economic growth should be redefined as strictly sustainable growth. This would mean the government over the next few years raising taxes relentlessly on all fossil fuels, use of carbon, unsustainable farm products, etc. such that consumers are weaned off them as they were with tobacco. Similarly, sustainable products and activities, such as solar and wind energy, home insulation and public transport, should be subsidised so that they are affordable to everyone. With this credibility behind us the government should first seek like-minded allies, as with the COP process, and then try to bring the less convinced and current deniers on board. Joint Government action at world level is the only way to mitigate the worst effects of climate change.

The HIS group would welcome any feedback from U3A readers on this vital issue.

Chris Marsden - Prime Minister

Italian Conversation Group

È arrivato il nuovo gruppo di conversazione italiano!

(The new Italian Conversation Group is here!)

Ciao a tutti! As of Monday, 5th May 2025 our new Italian Conversation Group will get together for the first time. To begin with, we plan to meet on the first Monday afternoon of each month at my house in Peters Green.

Whether your knowledge of this beautiful language is fluent or rusty, you are sure to enjoy the interaction: we'll choose a topic each month for each member to share with the group. (This is not compulsory but it can be prepared in advance and read out).

Afterwards, we'll listen to a podcast in Italian, discuss it then attempt to translate it. Tea and biscuits (or espresso and biscotti) will be provided, naturalmente!

The afternoon will be relaxed and fun so if you would like further information, please contact **Sharon Torres**

Needlecraft Group 1



Our group has been stitching and knitting away with various projects in progress.

The latest one is a patchwork table runner which has been lovingly stitched by one of our members.

Anne Stephens

Poetry Appreciation Group

The Poetry Group meets on the last Friday of the month. The format has been developed over time and now four or five poems of a well-known poet are chosen and discussed in depth. Shakespeare, W B Yates, Keats and T.S. Eliot are among the poets who have been discussed.

The Group is currently full (March 2025).

If anyone is interested in a second group, please email Brian Ball

Reading for pleasure Group 1

The group has just read and discussed "Old Babes in the Wood", written by the veteran Canadian author Margaret Atwood, who wrote *The Handmaid's Tale*. The book is a collection of short stories, many of which centre around the lives of Tig and Nell, children of World War 2 veterans – they are the "The Old Babes", we came to realise.

The book drew a very mixed reaction, with some of us being greatly moved by some of the stories, and others giving up in irritation.

Reading for pleasure Group 2

It might be a bit frustrating reading about book groups which have a limited membership number, and you cannot join until a vacancy possibly arises. I hope, however, that you enjoy reading about what we get up to!

Our membership is twelve. This optimum size of membership gives a good range of opinions in discussions. Any more would limit participation and debate.

Our next book is 'Never' by Ken Follett which beats the record for our longest book with 816 pages and the shortest title with just five letters! Published in 2021 it is a thriller novel, written by British author Ken Follett. It is about a potential nuclear war involving the United States, North Korea and China.

Later in the year we plan to beat another record – the longest book title with 66 letters, 'The Dean of Shandong: Confessions of a Minor Bureaucrat at a Chinese University' by Daniel A. Bell.

Steve Gledhill

Science and Technology Group

Our next meeting will be on Wednesday April 16th at 10:30am at our usual venue, the meeting room at the Plough and Harrow in Southdown. It will be presented by member Andy Phillips, title is "Decoding Life: The Technology of DNA Sequencing". Summary follows:

Deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) holds the blueprint for life, determining the form and function of all living organisms. Deciphering its code has been fundamental to breakthroughs in biology, medicine, and agriculture. Nearly 50 years have passed since scientists first developed methods to read the sequence of DNA's four bases – A, C, G, and T. The original methods were labour-intensive and very limited in throughput; since then, sequencing technologies have evolved dramatically, increasing in speed, accuracy, and scale. This talk will explore the cutting-edge advancements that have revolutionised DNA sequencing, driving innovation across a vast array of disciplines. Beyond medicine and genetics, the talk will also discuss how DNA technology is transforming fields as diverse as archaeology, environmental biology, and forensics.



It is very gratifying to see our group membership rising. Two years ago there were just half a dozen with the meeting held in a member's house. The photo shows the last meeting, now with around 20 members, in the pub meeting room. Most stay on for a pub lunch to allow further discussion and to foster friendships. All our meetings are open to any Harpenden u3a member. No need to book, just turn up.

The topic for the meeting in March was 'Evolution and human walking'.

Two excursions are planned in the summer. On 21st May we will meet at the museum at Rothamsted where retired employees of Rothamsted Research will give an informed guided tour.

On 16th July we will venture further afield to visit The de Havilland Aircraft Museum at London Colney. Knowledgeable guides will conduct our group on a tour of the Museum followed by lunch.

Here are the summaries for the next few meetings:

- 21st May Visit to Rothamsted museum
- 18th June Rocketry – is Elon Musk a genius?
- 16th July Guided tour of The de Havilland Aircraft Museum, London Colney
- 20th August Ham Radio Explained – It's not CB

**Normally held on the third Wednesday of the month. At the Plough and Harrow in Southdown.
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.**

If you want to know more please contact Steve Gledhill.

Walking Group

Very unusually, both our walks this month included church visits. The first, on a glorious spring day, started with a quick look in Kimpton church, where a relative of one of our members told us something about it, before a splendid loop round via the Kimpton Hoo estate – with its ornamental bridge – Kimpton Mill and Ayot St Lawrence.

The second walk included a return visit to Ayot St Peter.

Phil Cartwright who led this walk has given us a very interesting description of the walk as detailed below.

Hugh Fricker;

Yesterday's walk (17th March) began at the Sun Inn in Lemsford and took us over the two golf courses at Brocket Hall. Firstly the course North to Ayot Green, then via Ayot Greenway to Ayot St Peter (and church) before then returning via a further stretch of the Greenway, down to the River Lea and then across the second golf course back to Lemsford.

It was a cold and overcast day for the walkers, but things very much brightened up at the halfway point when greeted warmly by Valerie, the churchwarden at St Peter's, serving us tea/coffee – and biscuits! She proceeded to give us a most informative talk about the church, its history, and the many interesting aspects within. The attached photos of our group were very kindly taken by Valerie...



Members at the ornamental bridge, Kimpton Hoo ..and at Ayot St Peter

Apologies to everyone on the walk in that, by missing a turning off the Greenway (due to my lack of awareness), we took a longer route in getting to the church which ultimately resulted in going beyond the 6-mile planned distance and also missing the view of the churchyard daffodils (which would have extended the walk even further).

Perhaps next time!

Phil.