



## May 2025 Newsletter

### 1. Chairman's Welcome

Welcome to our May newsletter which contains lots of useful information, including an updated list of member and speaker talks for the remainder of the year. We also have news updates from several of our groups and another interesting article from Diana Brimblecombe about more Harpenden residents of note. We always welcome contributions from members to include in our newsletters. If you would like to contribute, do please get in touch.

Roger Thompson [roger.c.thompson1940@gmail.com](mailto:roger.c.thompson1940@gmail.com)

### 2. New Members who have joined in April 2025

I am pleased to give a very warm welcome to some new members, who have joined the Harpenden u3a in April.

I am delighted to say that the following have joined as members:

- Karen Hannay.
- Ian MacDougall.
- Maureen Walsh.

### 3. Member and Speaker talks

New talks in May are as follows:

- Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> May. A Presentation by Brian Legg, entitled 'The Woodland Trust and the Wildlife of Heartwood Forest'.

We look forward to this talk. Brian accompanied the u3a Walking Group, on a walk around the Heartwood Forest in 2014, so we are pleased to be meeting him again at this event.

- On May 15<sup>th</sup> the presentation will be given by David Keen, and the talk will be entitled 'The Story of Amy Johnson'. Many members will know David who has given talks previously to the u3a.

Both talks will be given at the Abbeyfield Hall starting at 2.15. The Hall is above the Cooperative Premises in Southdown, and there is parking in the Coop car park.

Below is the completed list of talks for 2025. All to be held at 2.15 in the Abbeyfield Hall.

In the next Newsletter in June, there will be a list of the talks which have already been approved for the year 2026.

Date	Member/ Speaker	Speaker	Topic
May 1 <sup>st</sup>	Member	Brian Legg	The Woodland Trust and the Wildlife of Heartwood Forest
May 15 <sup>th</sup>	Speaker	David Keen	The Story of Amy Johnson.
June 5 <sup>th</sup>	Member	Simon Smith	The Almshouse Trust.
June 19 <sup>th</sup>	Speaker	Annie Brewster	Life as The High Sheriff of Hertfordshire.
July 3 <sup>rd</sup>	Member	Nigel Denchfield	Digging Up Dad's Spitfire.
July 17 <sup>th</sup>	Speaker	Tom Way	Exciting Wildlife from Around the World.
August 21 <sup>st</sup>	Summer Party	2.30	The Summer Party at the Plough and Harrow
September 4 <sup>th</sup>	Member	Art Appreciation Group	Presentation by the Art Appreciation Group.
September 18 <sup>th</sup>	Speaker	Paul Barwick	Double Agent Zigzag.
October 2 <sup>nd</sup>	Member	Sharon Torres	The Royals of Monaco.
October 16 <sup>th</sup>	Speaker	Fiona Lukas	Exploring London's Underground—including Art, Architecture and Design.
November 6 <sup>th</sup>	Member	Phil Marsh	The Use and Abuse of Power.
November 20 <sup>th</sup>	Speaker	Mary Smith	A Schoolgirls War.
December 4 <sup>th</sup>			Christmas Event.
December 18 <sup>th</sup>			Christmas Party.

#### 4. Obituary: Chris Marshall.

It is with great sadness that I have to inform you that u3a member Chris Marshall very suddenly and recently passed away. His helpful advice on a range of matters was outstanding and reliable and appreciated by so many members of the u3a. He will be greatly missed.

Chris was an outstanding contributor to the work of The Harpenden u3a though he was not known by many. For many years he was responsible for a range of services that enabled the u3a to function effectively and efficiently. We all relied on him to give advice and help and his responses were always so sound and enabling. Chris joined Harpenden u3a about 10 years ago and, before the pandemic, was a regular member of the MahJong group and a founding member of the Climate Change group. Soon after he joined his valuable IT expertise was recognised and appreciated. Sadly, due to family illness, he has been unable to attend our regular meetings since the pandemic but he remained active behind the scenes, among other things, managing the Beacon system.

He was a quiet and unassuming man but our former Chairman, Viv, says that he played a crucial role in keeping Harpenden u3a afloat during the challenging times of the pandemic. She couldn't have managed without his advice, support, and contributions, which helped bring us up to date and, albeit belatedly, into the 21st century. For a time, he also took on the responsibility of producing the monthly newsletters.

We send our heartfelt condolences to his wife Josie and their children.

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

##### Artists and Architects

Harpenden has many active art groups, including two Arts Society groups, marquetry group, Photographic Society, Art Club and more.

**FRANK SALISBURY** is Harpenden's Artist Laureate, born into a Harpenden family who had a bicycle shop in Leyton Road. His speciality was portraits of famous people and paintings of large historical ceremonial events. He painted several portraits of Churchill, six US presidents and other historic figures such as Montgomery and Mussolini. He lived at Red Gables in West Common and his paintings and stained glass can be seen all over Harpenden, and the world.

**BASIL KASSANIS** was known locally for his artistic woodcarvings.

**RORY BROWN** taught art at St George's School and exhibits his landscape paintings regularly.

Our Harpenden town sign was designed by artist **ERNEST HESSELDINE**, who also designed the War Memorial. He was a versatile artist and illustrator .

A St Albans architect with an office in Harpenden **PERCIVAL BLOW** designed many houses in Harpenden, including St Andrews Lodge on the corner of Arden Grove, built 1910 in Moderne style and known as The Sunburst House and many houses in The Avenues, and the (then) Barclays Bank on the High St.

Celebrated architect **JACK BONNINGTON** designed a home for his family in the '60s and lived there till his death. Ferrum House in Grange Court Road is a steel framed house and Grade 2 listed. Many of his neighbours (I am one) remember him with his cigar and a glass of whisky in his hand. Jack designed buildings all over the world and is remembered for his collaborations with Sir Basil Spence, notably Coventry Cathedral.

If you'd like to know more about the people and history of Harpenden, why not join a walking tour of Harpenden by St Albans & District tour guides?

Next walk is on 8<sup>th</sup> June. Booking details on [www.stalbanstourguides.co.uk](http://www.stalbanstourguides.co.uk)

And grateful thanks to Harpenden Local History Society for much information. See their website for their next talk and visit the new museum at the EMC.

[www.harpenden-history.org.uk](http://www.harpenden-history.org.uk)

## Group Reports

The list of groups this month include two new groups: **Music Appreciation** and **Pickleball**.

### History Group

I now attach for Members my report, concerning the next meeting of the History Group. This will be on 13<sup>th</sup> May at 2.30 at the Randall room in the Harpenden Trust Hall. As usual, the room will be open from 2.00.

The presentation will be given by Gerald Cuff and the title will be 'A History of the Western Alphabet'.

As usual, there will be a £1 contribution from members, to cover the cost of the room hire.

**Roger Thompson**

### Music Appreciation Group

Harpenden u3a is alive to the sound of music!

It is our intention to start a Music Appreciation group.

You do not need to play an instrument to join, you just need to enjoy music, whether your taste is classical music or jazz or folk music or other types of music you would like to introduce to us. Or, perhaps your taste is influenced by the instrument that is being played: a saxophone or piano, a violin or cello, a trumpet or double bass.

Most Music Appreciation groups run by other u3as encourage members to suggest a playlist for each meeting. We shall probably encourage this as the group meetings develop.

If you are at all interested in joining this group please email **Brian Ball**, Group coordinator. We cannot arrange group meetings dates and times and facilities without knowing who is interested in joining the group.

(P.S. If you do play a musical instrument please include that information in your email. It may be useful in the future).

**Brian Ball** – Group coordinator

## Pickleball Group

Pickleball is a racket or paddle sport in which players use a smooth-faced paddle to hit a perforated, hollow plastic ball over a net until one side is unable to return the ball or commits a rule infraction. Pickleball is played in singles or doubles. It is played indoors and outdoors

We have been asked whether we could form a Pickleball group (Apparently Wheathampstead u3a has a Pickleball group – but it is full)

If you would be interested in joining a Pickleball group, please contact **Brian Ball**, group coordinator and we shall consider starting a Pickleball group.

## Reading for pleasure Group 1

We have just read "Lessons" by Ian McEwan. This is a long story which starts in the Cold War and ends during the Covid Pandemic.

At the centre is Roland, born in the post-war era to a father scarred by his wartime experiences and a mother who is cowed by her husband. The realities of a peripatetic army life are well written, and Roland ends up at a state boarding school where he is given piano lessons by Miss Miriam Cornell with unexpected consequences! We then move swiftly on to Roland's adult life, through his unsuccessful marriage to a German wife, right up to the Pandemic. Roland "mothers" his baby son rather well.

Lawrence develops well and goes on to have a happy marriage. The German wife refuses to have contact with her son and becomes a successful writer.

We decided the story was about role reversals. Roland behaves more like a woman and his German wife more like a man! Our group roundly condemned the woman!

## Saturday Strollers

### Strolling to the church in a field.

Spring is, by definition, welcome by everyone, not least by u3a members whose group activities are necessarily, to some extent, weather dependent. However, it should be made clear that though the winter months are now hopefully behind us, the dedicated Saturday Strollers are not easily daunted by the sky 'looking black over Bill's Mother's' as the saying goes, threatening rain or even snow.

Our recent winter season strolling itineraries have taken in a number of established favourites as well as one or two less familiar routes around the Hertfordshire countryside, in every case however, carefully planned to wind up thirstily at around 12.30 for a sustaining pub lunch.

Of all the hostelrys we have in consequence come to know, those that are rather off the beaten track have a particular attraction. When, in the case of the 14<sup>th</sup> Century Bocket Arms at Ayot St Lawrence, they are steeped in history, there is an added appeal – further enhanced by its own small menagerie in the grounds, which includes most unusually, outside an actual zoo, a number of meerkats.

Though perhaps best known in guide books as the location of Shaw's Corner, where GBS generated much of his literary output, Ayot St Lawrence is also noteworthy for its two village churches. The more ancient one is now a fenced-off precarious ruin. Meanwhile its marginally less venerable counterpart, visited by our exploratory Strollers, is most distinctive in its siting – in a field!



Saturday Strollers pose on the entrance steps of Ayot St Lawrences' "church in the field".

Built in 1778, it was designed by architect Nicholas Revett who was clearly passionate about the classical buildings of ancient Greece. It is said to be loosely modelled on the columns found in the temple to Apollo on the island of Delos, in the Cyclades – an early example of the Greek Revival style and not 'Palladian', even though the Ayot church is quite commonly described in guide books and elsewhere as 'The Palladian Church in a Field'.

**Alan Bunting**

## Singing for Pleasure Group

The Singing for Pleasure group now has over 30 members and we sing a wide variety of music, although music from the shows seems to be the most popular. We have just started on 'Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat' and we will continue with that this term along with other music in our repertoire. We always welcome suggestions for new music.

The dates for next term are:

- 8<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> May
- 12<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> June
- 10<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> July

Please note sessions are not always a fortnight apart so please write these dates in your diaries to avoid missing a session. We meet from 2pm to 3pm in the Abbeyfield Hall above the Co-op in Southdown, which allows plenty of time for tea or coffee afterwards.

Please do come along and try us out – 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

We meet every first and third week of the month to chat on various topics from around the Hispanic world.

At a recent session we were delighted to welcome Cristina from Mexico. She gave us an interesting insight into Mexican migrants living in the US and how they have been impacted by the Trump administration. It was surprising to hear that many immigrants, who had made their life in the USA, had voted in multiple elections, paid taxes over decades and in some cases had businesses or had been in the military, have found out that they were never officially American citizens so were still able to be deported.

If you are looking to practice your spoken Spanish, please contact **Bridget French**.

## Walking Group

The fine dry weather has done us proud this month, with sunshine and good conditions underfoot for both our walks. The first took us from Batford Springs up through Sauncey Wood to Old Raisins Farm, then across to Bower Heath and back via Coldharbour. The second was a delightful circuit from Preston via Ley Green and King's Walden: rolling Hertfordshire countryside at its very best.

**Hugh Fricker**



## Weekday Strollers Group

The Weekday Strollers group restarted on 28<sup>th</sup> March.

We met at the car park behind the Rothamsted Conference centre and completed a circular stroll that took us past the Manor House. It was a bright sunny day and afterwards we sat outside the café and enjoyed tea and coffee and cake (and lunches).

We met again on 25<sup>th</sup> April. The weather was, once more, kind to us and we completed a pleasant walk that took us alongside the golf course and back across the common followed, once more, by refreshments at the café.

We are now looking forward to future strolls that will take us further afield.

For more information contact **Brian Ball** Group Coordinator.