



Chairman's musings

Freedom at last! What a joyful reunion as you met old friends at the first u3a monthly meeting for 18 months! It was certainly different: meeting at the United Reformed Church hall off Parkgate Road, and no speaker, but this was a monthly meeting with a difference, a recruiting event to prepare us all for the restart of the monthly meetings in September. I hope all those who attended enjoyed it.

The above paragraph was written on July 7th so I was, optimistically, looking into the future. Because of our long copy deadlines, I had to assume that the Government's promise to lift almost all Covid restrictions on July 19th would take place and that some sort of normal life would begin again. Even in September, our monthly meetings will not be back to normal as we're having to hold them in Neston Town Hall instead of the Civic Hall, which is still closed at the time of writing, with no information forthcoming as to when it will reopen. Faced with this problem, the committee decided that we could not wait to see if it would reopen in time so went ahead and booked the Town Hall which, in some ways, is more accessible and a better venue than the Civic Hall. As I write, the u3a property in the Civic Hall is not accessible but it may be after July 19th.

I hope you will all continue to support our u3a, whatever restrictions continue. Several group activities have started up again but the experience of the Singing Group suggests there was still a reluctance to join in. At the group's social event on June 18th only 15 out of 33 members took part. The first singing session only attracted 12 members. However, our survey of the whole membership, asking when members wanted monthly meetings to restart showed an overwhelming response for a July 29th meeting. Out of 117 responses, 72 were for July, 8 for August, 28 for September and 9 for next year. As August was the least popular month, we decided to give that month a miss this year. Immediately prior to the September monthly meeting we plan to have a stall in the market to promote the u3a and remind people that we are back in business at the Town Hall.

Finally, I want to thank all those who have stayed with us during this horrible time, attending the monthly Zoom meetings, starting up their groups again, sending out emails, editing this newsletter and particularly my committee, all of whom I have finally met, face to face, and without whom I wouldn't have known what I was doing!

Michael Grumett

Singing for Fun Group



Members of the Singing for Fun Group met for their first post-lockdown event, a non-singing social held at the URC Hall. Everyone who attended really enjoyed meeting up again. A musical quiz, set by Group Leader Celia, helped to start our brains working again! Regular singing meetings started again on Friday, July 2nd. Now that restrictions have finally been lifted, it is to be hoped that many more members will return for our Friday afternoon singing sessions. We've missed you!



The Walking Group Back in Action

On Tuesday, 13th April, the Walking Group met for the first time since December, separated into three groups, socially distanced but grateful for the opportunity to meet up in lovely weather with friends we had not seen for such a long time. There were others on a waiting list unable to join us as we were limited to three groups, but it indicates that members are keen to resume normal activities.

The walk took place on Thurstaston Common and Royden Park, almost entirely in pleasant woodlands with dappled sunlight and plenty of birdsong (if we had been able to hear it over the chatter as we caught up with each other's news). It's a walk we have done before and it's always popular but we shortened it to about 3¼ miles on this occasion as some of the participants had been lacking exercise during lockdown. Unfortunately the outdoor café at Royden Park had not yet reopened but in any case there were too many of us to be served under the social distancing rules.

The accompanying photo (by Rob Marrs) shows us being briefed on the current regulations before we started, appropriately distanced of course – oh - for the return to normality! But it was a very enjoyable morning, nevertheless, and our thanks are due to Rosemary and Hilary for being on the ball and getting us out again so quickly after the first relaxation of the lockdown restrictions.



Geoff Gibson

raining in the night
garden refreshed and grateful
weeds and slugs abound

haiku from the ed.

Departing Friends

Two Neston u3a stalwarts, Ken Sumner and Marion Holland, both left the area in the Spring after many years. Chairman Michael Grumett grabbed them for interviews before they departed.

Ken Sumner -

Ken, a former bank manager, held down the joint roles of secretary and treasurer for Neston u3a 13 years ago and had been a founder member of the Singing for Fun Group when the group was launched at his local church in Parkgate. He was an active member of that group and attended the monthly meetings in the Civic Hall with his wife right up until the lockdown last year. He would always turn up for concerts and events with his drum kit. He was a drummer with the Neston Entertainers and also sang with his golf club choir.

But at 89 and in view of his wife's health issues, he has decided to call it a day and move to a two-bedroom bungalow 50 miles away in Standish near Wigan, near to his daughter. At least selling his Parkgate house has not been a problem. Such was the interest, nine potential buyers trooped through the house in one day which led to three firm offers over the asking price. But Ken's parting words to me at the door of the house he'd lived in for nearly 40 years were nevertheless tinged with sadness: 'I don't want to leave but I have no option. I can't manage this house and garden now.'

Marion Holland -

The estate agent's sign outside her bungalow indicated it was 'Under Offer'. Marion was at the door to greet me and usher me into her lounge where I perched on a garden chair among piles of packing cases. 'I'm hoping to sign contracts tomorrow,' she said. After having lived on the Wirral for 30 years, Marion is going back down south to live near her son in Dorchester. 'The first thing I'll do is contact the local u3a,' she added briskly.

She will certainly be missed. During her 10 years with Neston u3a she was a leading light: as joint chair with Pat Dix; as founder of the Singing for Fun group and as an active member of the Poetry and Gardening groups as well as going on Doreen Higgins' trips – she recalled the one in particular to the hydro electric system in the Welsh 'electric mountain' - and attending Brenda Blythe's lunch clubs, not to mention organising and compèring the famous Christmas parties in the Civic Hall.

It all started when she spotted a poster for Neston u3a in the Civic Hall. She soon immersed herself in the activities, from making teas to joining the committee, becoming Speaker Secretary and sharing the joint chair with Pat Dix for two years. She also helped to organise a Groups Day in the Civic Hall to publicise u3a activities to the general public. She helped start the Singing for Fun group in a church in Parkgate. It proved to be so successful they had to move to the United Reformed Church on Parkgate Road where they were accompanied by Pat Walter who could play anything by ear, without music. She was succeeded by Kathy Powell, the Neston church organist, and the Singing Group has gone on to become one of the best-attended group activities with over 30 members attending the Friday afternoon sessions under Celia's baton.

Dear Friend

Full many a glorious morning have we shared
Dear friend, making beautiful old rhyme with you,
Our inspiration, thoughtful, you always cared,
Gentle and considerate, fair, kind and true.
Devouring time will never blunt your love
Of truth, beauty, eternal Summer's song.
Like the lark at break of day rising above,
You soar beyond black nights of worry and wrong.
How like Winter then will your absence be
When we summon up remembrance of things past,
Your calm and your wisdom, your serenity,
Sad that the golden hours, dear friend, did not last.
Yet your sweet self remembered such wealth will bring.

Written for Marion by Pauline in March 2021. Pauline used words suggested by the members of Poetry and Prose Group 3 and interspersed with lines from Shakespeare's Sonnets

The week before my visit, Marion had attended her last Poetry Group session on Zoom which turned into something of a virtual party with champagne toasts drunk and a poem, written for the occasion by group member Pauline Sallis, with words suggested by other group members, entitled 'Dear Friend'. I doubt there was a dry eye in the house. Marion said: 'The Poetry Group was a lifeline for me during the lockdown.' Living on her

own as she was, it gave her social contact and somebody to talk to. Of course, Marion is a poet herself. Her poem 'The Sky at Night' was published in the last newsletter.

Why are you leaving us? I wanted to know. The original plan had been to move to Cornwall to be near her son and his family but this turned out to be impossible. It seems that it's hopeless nowadays to rent or buy any property in Cornwall unless you're a millionaire with cash on the table. So her other son suggested she came to live near him in Dorchester where it's still possible to buy a property. So that is what she has done, initially renting a flat to give her time to look round for a suitable bungalow. But first she'll be paying the Dorchester u3a a visit. They won't know what's hit them!

The Medium Walking Group

An intrepid group of 7 set off from Neston in early May. The walk, led by Gill and John Miles, took us along the Wirral Way to Cuckoo Lane and then over the Chester High Road and along Hanns Hall Road to Quarry Road. From there we took the footpath through to the Bluebell Woods (not its official name but there were a lot of bluebells) and then found our way Raby Road and into School Lane. Arriving back at the Chester High Road we crossed over and took the footpath to Breezehill Road and back to our starting point.

It was a lovely walk of just under 5 miles, despite the rain and wind.

Regards, Hilary hjeaude@gmail.com

The medium walk is 3 – 4 miles and takes place on the first Tuesday of the month.



Quilt Competition

Quilt competition on the theme of Positive Ageing through our strapline Learn Laugh Live. We see the finished quilt as a *Moment in History* for future generations of u3as.

The project will highlight the first 40 successful years of the Movement and publicise our future plans. It will raise our profile as **the** organisation for the promotion of lifelong learning for older adults and the benefits that can bring.

Any u3a member, group of members or Interest group can enter. All you have to do is to create a square which, in your view, represents the joy of belonging, learning in a friendly, social environment and having fun.

Use the following link to get access to the form you need to register your entry <https://u3a.org.uk/events/40th-anniversary/1147-40-anniversary-quilt-competition> as well as giving you further details about the competition and its rules.

You have until 15 November 2021 to create and photograph your entry. Entries will be judged in late November and the winners will then be asked to submit their completed squares. The results will be published in the February 2022 issue of TAM.

Best regards, Michaela Moody
Candidate for Vice Chair of the Third Age Trust

NB: If you haven't got access to a computer, you won't be able to read the rules or download an entry form but I expect someone in your group will be able to help with this (ed).

Extracts from the last Poetry and Prose group newsletter

Our last meeting, held on 27th May was all about CHILDHOOD – one of our favourite topics.

Liz's first choice was from Roger McGough writing about a child's first day at school which was also the title of the poem. We loved how children try to make sense of the world: "Tea-Cher – the one who makes the tea".

Val chose A. A. Milne's 'Now We Are Six' which made us all smile – children can't wait to grow up! She also discovered the origin of her mother's saying – "it's a beautiful blue but it hasn't a hood" which was in 'Vespers' also by A.A. Milne. Her other choice by Maya Angelou was very defiant in tone: 'Life Doesn't Frighten Me' which gave rise to some interesting discussion as to whether she was 'protesting too loudly' or, given what her life must have been like, perhaps it was true. The nice thing about that sort of discussion is that we can just think about the points raised – we don't have to give a definite answer.

Marion was next and talked about how teachers could be remembered by children so vividly years and years later. She talked of Miss Breacher, how Marion admired her very much and how Miss Breacher awarded her the prize for 'good behaviour'. Would you still get that prize today, Marion? A favourite book had been 'The Flower Fairy' book, especially 'The Song of the Heliotrope Fairy'. It made me want to go out and get some for my garden. Marion finished with an extract from a rather lovely poem by George Eliot: 'Brother and Sister'. Do read the whole poem if you can, it is quite lovely.

Jill read a hilarious poem by Michael Rosen: 'A Busy Day' which was a poem all about 'popping'. Do you use the word 'pop' very often? I do!

Diane talked to us about her collection of the 'Little Grey Rabbit' books and how it goes back to 1949. The book she showed us has obviously been much loved and well read. She was given them as a child to comfort her from the terrors of the dentist, among other things. We heard about 'Squirrel goes skating' and that Little Grey Rabbit looked after them all. Interestingly, the writer, Alison Uttley was far from loveable. She was a complex woman who was a trained scientist but also believed in fairies. Tinkerbell would be pleased!

Pauline followed with her choice of nostalgic poetry: 'Piano' by D H Lawrence. We could all identify with how certain sounds, tastes, smells, etc., can take us back down Memory Lane. We also enjoyed 'Martha' by Walter de la Mare – she was the one at school who always told the BEST stories.

Belinda linked the topic of childhood to nature with Seamus Heaney's 'Death of a Naturalist' which was all about Heaney looking back on his boyish enthusiasm for nature, which vanished when he was scared by the disgusting

frogs in the flax swamp. It made us think about how that childhood freedom of roaming the area outside of our homes is becoming a thing of the past.

I was going to read 'Fern Hill' by Dylan Thomas but my voice was far too croaky to do it justice, so I recommend you all read it for yourselves. To my mind it is one of the best poems about childhood.

Thank you all for another lovely poetry morning.

From Lesley x

The Long Walking Group

The Long Walking group resumed in May with a figure of eight walk in Cheshire starting with Maiden castle, up to Bulkeley and back via Raw Head. The weather was good and we had lovely views but we all agreed the hills were challenging after walking for so long on the Wirral.

If you would like to join us, we meet on the third Wednesday of the month: walks are usually 7-8 miles long in Cheshire or NE Wales. Contact Rosemary: rhollingsbee@gmail.com



The editor's bit

Well, it seems like we're seeing some action at last, especially from the walking groups. Thanks for the great photos. Well done to the poetry and prose group for keeping in touch via zoom, and the intrepid singing group for managing to meet up for a socially distanced social event (if that makes sense) despite current difficulties. Where there's a will there's a way!

Please keep the contributions coming. The more the merrier (although I may have to edit for space) and it's nice to have a variety of activities to read about. I think the walkers have come off best during the lockdown, for obvious reasons. Try not to be jealous!

Apologies to some of you who've sent poems for inclusion. I'm so sorry there hasn't been space for the longer ones. How about some haiku? Or if that's a step too short, please don't send poems exceeding 14 lines. (Scope for sonnets.)

Enjoy the rest of the summer and get out and about while you can because we never know what's coming next! Please look after yourselves and stay safe.

Best wishes from Shelagh