



GILWERN u3a NEWSLETTER

THE UNSOCIAL TIMES

Issue 15: February 2021

Hello Everyone and welcome to the February edition of our newsletter. We are now on number 15, a number we never anticipated reaching. Please continue to send in your contributions, jokes, poems or anything that might be of interest to our members.

Unsurprisingly we won't be meeting in person for a while yet, however our monthly meetings are continuing via Zoom. If you haven't tried it yet, give it a go. Instructions for joining are on our website or feel free to contact me via email; chair@gilwernu3a.org.uk for help in getting started. Our next monthly Zoom meeting is on Wednesday February 24th when Prof. Averil MacDonald will be hosting a talk on "Are we ready for electric cars?"

We can already witness the drawing out of the nights and, as Shelley wrote two centuries ago, "If winter comes can spring be far behind?" As we look forward to the coming of the spring and a time when hopefully we are closer to life without severe restrictions, keep safe and keep well.

Best wishes

Karen

Chair, Gilwern u3a

START A NEW GROUP

A New u3a Group?

This pandemic has brought a halt to u3a groups such as Bridge, but through the wonders of Zoom, people are now talking and seeing each other at the monthly presentations.

It occurred to Kay Blackwell that a Creative Writing Group would give opportunities for like-minded people to Zoom and discuss future projects and past 'masterpieces' without leaving their homes. Kay admits that she has never organized a group like this before, but is willing to give it a go.

Whether your interest is writing poetry, short stories or just putting words down on paper, please contact Kay on newkaybee1806@aol.com or give her a ring on 01873 831566, and perhaps this can be the start of a new Interest Group in Gilwern u3a.

u3a rebrands!

The u3a Trust has had a large rebrand, dropping the words 'University' and 'Third Age', and putting U3A into lower case: u3a. This change is seen on all our web site pages. The web site has already adopted the changes, and headings for writing paper etc have been agreed by the Committee. For simplicity the font is Arial. An example is shown below.

GILWERN
Live, laugh, enjoy

u3a

Twinkle Twinkle BIG Star

Hilary L

Were you lucky enough to catch a glimpse of 'The Christmas Star' on December 21st 2020?

This astronomical phenomenon, first described by Johannes Kepler, the 17th century astronomer, is the great conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn as viewed from Earth. It actually happens every 20 years but this year it was the closest observable conjunction since 1623 with the previous closest (but non observable) said to have been in 1226. However, that is only one astronomical theory put forward to explain the story of the star that the magi followed, as written in St Matthew's Gospel.

There is another conjunction, even brighter, of Jupiter, Regulus and Venus but it seems to occur too often (every 10-11 years) to be of significance.

Kepler also suggested a nova or supernova explosion as an explanation, but there are no Western records of such an event and no supernova remnants from that period have been found.

China does have a contemporary record of an event and also of a comet which, of course, has an advantage as a theory as they do move across the sky.

Jupiter, the largest of the planets in our solar system, is implicated again due to its 'stationary point', when due to the relative movements of Earth the planet (like others) seems to slow and then stop before resuming its course. However, this happens twice every year? And planets don't twinkle!

So the 'Star of Bethlehem', stories which have been re-interpreted and embellished over the centuries still remain a mystery and perhaps that is the way it should be?

Art Group

The group is one that is continuing during lockdown, thanks in part to Zoom. We meet every other



Tuesday to discuss our paintings and also a good deal else! Furthermore there is the monthly challenge. No, it's not a 'competition' though the best painting is shown on the News page of the web site and, of course, in the newsletter. All of them are shown on Facebook. The paintings are being judged by Sarah Hoddy, Chair of the Abergavenny Art Group. She gives helpful comments to all.

Photo: Attending the Christmas meeting. Do you recognise any?!

It must have shrunk in the wash

Lynda O'K

Every newspaper, magazine and supplement now seem to assume we need to lose weight and be encouraging us to "cut down", "give up snacks," and "rethink what we eat". I suppose it is human nature to overindulge over the festive season, and this year more than most some of us have been rewarding ourselves with an extra glass of wine here or a chocolate there to alleviate the depressing news of rocketing Covid cases and deaths.

Guilty as charged of the above offence, I now feel that it is time to rethink the diet. I avoid weighing scales at all costs and can tell by my clothes if it's time to cut down on the calories. That time has arrived!

Humans are not alone in this problem – while out walking this morning, I came across a lady walking her dog. As there was sleety snow falling, he was dressed in a doggy onesie to keep him warm. She told me that the dog was having trouble walking in the onesie as he had put on so much weight that he could hardly move his legs. I know how he feels, now where's that stick of celery?

HOUSEBOUND HUGS No 15
New words and phrases

-

Kay B



The English language has always developed new words and phrases, but occasionally, one comes along and you say “What is that!” Such a one is *yarn bombing* which I came across recently and didn’t understand what it was.

Yarn Bombing is street art or graffiti using colourful displays of knitted or crocheted yarn. Originating in Texas in 2005, it has now expanded worldwide and displays can be seen on trees, buildings, railings and anything that someone deems worthy of being artfully decorated with wool. It has been called “inoffensive graffiti” or even “knitiffi” but strictly speaking, as graffiti it is illegal. Permission must be sought for public places such as lamp posts or railings.

But it is now so widespread, that there is even a Yarn Bombing Day on June 11th each year. So watch out, there may be some yarn bombing near you in the future!

Raven, Raven

-

Harriet H

We hear that a Queen Raven is missing from the Tower of London and we have suspicions as to her whereabouts. A pair of substantial crows live in the wood overlooking our garden. One of them, known unoriginally, as Peggy on account of a malformed leg, graciously accepts delicious morsels of food thrown onto the lawn for her. She nearly always takes these and flies away from nest and mate, in the direction of a large tree behind the house. We suspect that she is harbouring the Queen Raven, keeping her there by feeding her our leftovers. Perhaps like many people disliking lock-downed town life, the raven decided to seek out her Welsh relations and got waylaid. I would not put it past Peggy to demand a ransom. Here she comes demanding yet more food!

Flip Flop

-

Lynda O’K

With Internet information at our fingertips, how easy it seems to have been to adopt traditions from other countries, in particular the USA e.g., “trick or treat” in October and “proms nights” in schools, “black Friday” sales frenzies, “candy canes” at Christmas.

With Shrove Tuesday, or pancake day “creping” up on us (excuse the pun) on Tuesday 16th February, I wondered what excess of celebration the Americans follow, as every day is a pancake day for them, and sure enough, most celebrate the carnival of “Mardi Gras” meaning “Fat Tuesday”. Consisting of parades, costumes, masks, live entertainment and bead throwing, they really let their hair down for this celebration.

A far cry from my memories of pancake day which was the run up to Lent and a time when we would be encouraged to “give up” something like sweets and chocolate for the forty days before Easter. On Shrove Tuesday, we would mix and cook our own pancakes, with every family member taking turns to flip them in the pan while battling with the family dog, who was under the impression that any food floating in mid-air was fair game for him. Any that didn’t make it into the dog were sprinkled with simple sugar and squeezey lemon juice and devoured before the next one could even be cooked. We would all then go outside and have pancake races where everyone would have to run and flip the pancakes at the same time, to the delight of our dog who picked up all the stray pancakes!



Photo by Lynda O'K

The photographer, clearly in search of good exercise, climbed Church Road to take this fabulous photograph of a view familiar to many Local residents.

The soft, cold colours might appeal to some members of the Art Group, who, as this is being put together, are, or have been, busy completing their entries for the monthly art challenge. The challenge is open to all our u3a members.

Stranger than Fiction.....

-

Kay B

I've never believed in ghosts, spirits or things that go bump in the night, but a couple of events a few years ago made me think twice.

My husband was sole executor to his late Aunt, and during weekly visits to her home in Leicestershire, we had successfully managed to empty almost all of the contents. He had keys to all doors and cupboards, but one was missing – the key to the front door of the garage where her Toyota Camri was parked. This car was in mint condition, never having been driven more than 15 miles a week to Asda since its purchase, and a neighbour wanted to buy it. But we couldn't open the garage door! We had searched every nook and cranny in the bungalow without success. And then I had THE DREAM.

I dreamt that a hand opened the back door, went into the kitchen and pointed upwards to a cupboard on the left, one we had already searched. It was so real, that I mentioned the dream to my husband and when we visited the next weekend, my first action was to go to the cupboard the hand had indicated and found – the key. Creepy or what? But that was not all. The day came when house clearance people arrived to totally empty the house of all remaining bits and pieces. In the main bedroom, two large wardrobes remained, but just before being removed, a collar stud appeared from nowhere, and rolled around the floor before disappearing under the larger wardrobe.

I knelt down and searched for it, but then, right at the back, my fingers found a metal box which I pulled out. When we opened it, it contained rolls of five- and ten-pound notes. Would the house clearance people have given us the box?

I forgot to say that Aunt was a noted Medium in Leicestershire and an active member of the Spiritualist Church.....

What are Mike's mice doing today?



Snow drops

-

Lynda O'K

As we hope for any sign that winter is coming to an end, the first glimmer that spring is round the corner is, for me, the sight of a snowdrop poking its way through frosty or snow-covered hard ground bringing with it a ray of white light.

Recorded in botanical records from as far back as the 16th century, the snowdrop was mainly found in gardens of the wealthy, but it became more and more popular, and by the 19th century it had become a symbol of hope and purity. Many bulbs were planted in Victorian graveyards resulting in blankets of snowdrops developing between gravestones. Over time, this resulted in the suspicion



that snowdrops were unlucky and a sign of death and mourning, and that if they were cut and brought into the house they would bring bad luck. This belief has dwindled over the centuries and now they are enjoyed both indoors and out. I'm fortunate enough to have several small clusters of these delightful flowers in my garden, and I prefer to see them there rather than in the house. Usually one of the earliest spring flowers to appear in the UK, I can't wait for the first one to burst through.

Lost our camels

-

David H

I had spent two Christmas breaks of ten days meeting up with my guide with a couple of camels to explore and roughly map the northern edge of the considerable desert plateau in Libya, the Homada el Hamra. We had just spent a night with a rough gang of workmen repairing a well, and a few nights later we were in a worrying situation.

We stopped early in an area where Ahamed bin Dau, my guide, said there was some pasture for the camels. I failed to see any, though on careful examination I detected some very short brownish growth. We took the risk and let the camels free, thinking they would remain in the area. We settled down to cook, frying chopped up onion, then adding a small tin of concentrated tomato. Once cooked we added water and macaroni with spices. It was a perfect evening with the last of the light and a large moon nearing the horizon as we squatted near the fire and enjoyed our meal in the peace and silence of the desert.

Having eaten well, we went to bring the camels in to hobble them for the night. There was no sign of them. We started a search, but the moon had disappeared. We followed their footprints by torchlight in the sand. After a while the sand gave way to gravel, and finding each footprint became increasingly challenging. Ahamed was clearly better at identifying them than me, but we soon lost them completely. So we retired to sleep and await daylight. We lay down our blankets, and had a fitful night. We normally slept with the camels near us, and it seemed strange being only ourselves.

Directly it became light we brewed and drank our three small glasses of tea in readiness to set out in search of our tiresome beasts. Looking at distant hills I suddenly detected two spots which actually moved. Ahamed at once said they were almost certainly our camels. A long walk, and we recovered our beasts of burden, enabling us to complete our traverse of the escarpment.

It had been a happy break. I had made many friends, had taken a lesson in English in the school in Mizda, and have many happy memories. On the full bus journey of about one hundred miles to Tripoli, the driver called for attention and pointed me out, telling everyone of my exploits with Ahamed bin Dau.

Have you zoomed in to our interesting talks yet? Do you want help? See next page.

How I became a Probation Officer Part One -

Harriet H

My parents did not believe in formal education for girls, their view being that my destiny was to marry. To that end, being widely read and with some knowledge of the arts was deemed enough. Hence, apart from my skill with horses, I embarked on adult life without a single qualification. My jobs in smart shops in London and New York were obtained through the old boy net though I will say, I was a most efficient saleswoman. Back in England after the death of my mother, I bowed to my destiny and married David.

Officer's wives were discouraged from taking jobs, so, some ten years later with three children and periods of fairly intense army 'welfare' experience behind me, I raised my head above the parapet and worked out that three 'O' levels were the minimum requirement for getting any sort of training. I achieved these by correspondence course with my considerate 3-year-old whispering when she needed to interrupt. Another demanding army posting followed, but I did find time to begin training as a marital counsellor with what is now Relate, but was then the Marriage Guidance Council. After a wonderfully constructive five years of counselling, life changed again. David was planning to leave the army and since the MGC did not pay, I had to look for lucrative employment. Some sort of social work seemed inevitable and deciding that probation would be the best option, I applied for a place at the Ipswich College of Further Education to train. The lecturer who interviewed me was convinced that as the wife of a Lieutenant Colonel, I would be shredded by my 'clients'. I pointed out that part of my experience as a counsellor had involved running groups for young offenders incarcerated in Rochester Borstal who mostly regarded a middle-class Marriage Guidance Counsellor as manna from heaven. She said patronisingly that I handled my anger well and I was accepted. The next two years were to be a challenge.

Have you zoomed in to our interesting talks yet? Do you want help?

Give a call to Lynda Somme-Dew on 0831181, and she will give you help. She makes it seem nice and simple.

Your February Challenge

The February Art Challenge is open to all members of Gilwern u3a. The subject given to us for the month is "Favourite things". Any media is open for this. Contributions should be emailed to Lynda by 22 February. The usual details of the month's Challenge for February are on the Newsletter page of the web site, providing ideas and some helpful videos.

The Winner of the January Art Challenge was Lynda with her wonderful painting of croci in the snow. Sarah Hoddy, who chairs the Abergavenny Art Group and who judged our Challenge, reported:



"I find this picture very evocative of hope and wonder!

The foreground shows some impasto work which just lifts the area of white snow. The diagonal sweep of flowers draws your eye down the page to the yellow-in-hiding! The drawing is delicate and empathic. This picture fits well with the theme of this months challenge."