



GILWERN u3a NEWSLETTER

THE UNSOCIAL TIMES

Issue 16: March 2021

Hello All

I hope this newsletter finds you well. I imagine that by the time you read this many of our members will have had their first vaccinations: a welcome step on the road to a more normal life which we are all missing so much.

Like many people during the long days of lockdown I have rediscovered former crafts: knitting, sewing and pottery and attempted some new activities including painting, all with limited success. Whilst looking for inspiration for pottery I came across an article on the Japanese art of kintsugi. This involves repairing broken pottery using lacquer dusted or mixed with powdered gold which is applied to the areas of breakage. The newly repaired pots became treasured items and embrace the value of even flawed or imperfect objects.

As we reflect on the past year with all its flaws and imperfections I hope we are able to find treasures to value in the year ahead.

Our monthly Zoom meetings are progressing well and we have been fortunate to have had some excellent speakers with highly entertaining and informative talks. It was wonderful to see more members join us at the last meeting and we are hopeful that even more will make our meeting on March 17th at 2pm when we will be treated to a musical presentation of a strange event which happened in 1900 "Dark Light, -The Flannan Island Mystery- Fools Gold". Please come along and join us, don't forget we can always talk you through how to join Zoom.

Some of our groups are now running online - art and creative writing, both doing well. If you have any thoughts on groups which might lend themselves to online working or those which might work well when we can meet up in the future please let us know.

Best wishes

Karen

Chair, Gilwern u3a

How are we doing?

It has been a strange year for all u3as where opportunities to carry out our normal activities have been restricted for much of the time. This situation is likely to continue for a while yet but may slowly improve as vaccination roll out proceeds. Gilwern u3a, where practicable, have taken to the internet to continue some of our group activities and here at "Unsocial Times" we hope we have kept you entertained and informed. The future - we would welcome any suggestions on how we may continue with, and indeed improve on, our current offerings while restrictions remain. For instance, any improvements we can make to our monthly Zoom Talks, Newsletter and web site? Either contact webmaster@gilwernu3a.org.uk or any member of the Committee.

Then - what would you like to see as restrictions are relaxed? There has, for example, been a new group formed, the Created Writing Group. Any thoughts you may have would be most welcome.

Learning a new skill during the pandemic

Hilary L

I have always envied those people who can identify and distinguish between birds purely by their call. Whilst I know many by sight, to be able to name them by their song alone seems magical.

In the beautiful Spring of 2020, when there were so many birds around yet we were in the grips of the first lockdown, I set about trying to learn this new skill. The first thing that I discovered was that Spring is not the best time to try and differentiate birds by their song because there are so many in chorus. I could tell different songs apart but, except for a few obvious ones, could not always tell which belonged to which bird?

I found a wonderful book 'birdwatching with your eyes closed: an introduction to birdsong' by Simon Barnes that comes with a free podcast of bird calls which you can download onto your computer and phone. He encourages you to start your studies during the winter, so that before the influx of migrants you are already fully familiar with the locals!

In fact in an encouraging way, he reminds us we can already almost certainly identify the songs of at least 10 birds. The list is below. What is your list?

So now as we look forward to Spring 2021 I am testing out my new skill of 'bird listening' on our 'locals' and what a noisy lot they are. My favourites are a wonderful flock of long tailed tits that 'ce' 'ce' at me from the hedgerow. But I can't wait till mid March for the sound of the chiff chaff (apparently siff-saff in Welsh!), the first migrant to arrive and start singing. The herald of Spring.

List – Duck, Crow, Owl, Seagull, Pigeon, Cuckoo, Woodpecker, Skylark, Blackbird, Robin

I'm fine, thank you

-

Kay B

There is nothing the matter with me, I'm as healthy as can be.
I have arthritis in both my knees, and when I talk, I talk with a sneeze.
My pulse is weak, and my blood is thin but I'm awfully well for the shape I'm in.

Arch supports I have for my feet, or I would not be able to be on the street.
Sleep is denied me night after night, but every morning I find I'm alright.
My memory is failing, my head's in a spin, but I'm awfully well for the shape I'm in.

The moral is this as my tale I unfold, that for you and me, who are growing old,
It's better to say "I'm fine" with a grin, than to let folks know the shape we are in.

How do I know that my youth is all spent? Well, my 'get up and go' has got up and went,
But I really don't mind, when I think with a grin, of all the grand places my 'get up' has bin.

Old age is golden, I've heard it said, but sometimes I wonder as I get into bed,
With 'ears' in a drawer, my teeth in a cup, my 'eyes' on the table until I wake up.
'Ere sleep overtakes me, I say to myself, is there anything else I could leave on the shelf?

When I was young my slippers were red; I could kick my heels right over my head.
When I was older, my slippers were blue; but still I could dance the whole night through.
Now I am old, my slippers are black, I walk to the store, and puff my way back.

I get up each morning and dust off my wits, and pick up the paper and read the 'Obits'.
If my name is still missing, I know I'm not dead, so I have a good breakfast and go back to bed.

ANON

Aldi Wine School. For those who might take an interest in wines.

<https://www.aldi.co.uk/aldi-wine-school>

The worm turns

Lynda O'K

Investigators are now in Wuhan trying to discover exactly how the COVID pandemic originated, with a strong indication that it is thought to have originated at a market selling wild animals in China. The coronavirus is a zoonotic disease, meaning it jumped from animals to humans. In the wake of this virus, and in order to prevent future pandemics, there are growing calls for a ban on "wet markets" which sell live and dead animals for human consumption.

How the worm has turned. The animal losers become the winners. With humans now in isolating and lockdown, wild animals have been emboldened and can be seen venturing into towns and cities without fear. We have seen images on news programmes where goats and sheep have wandering freely, and in the UK, hedgehogs are enjoying relatively car free roads.

The Russian physiologist Ivan Pavlov conditioned his hungry dogs to salivate. Humans have been conditioned by over a year of COVID restrictions. Rather than dogs getting excited about going out for "walkies", now humans can't wait, and are out of the door before them.



The image shows wild goats that normally spend their time living on the heights of the Great Orme, a headland on the north coast of Wales. Credit: Andrew Stuart (photo)

The Walking Group' memory.

This moving picture was taken by Glyn Davies many months ago, reminding walkers of their many excursions.

With Spring upon us, they will be champing at the bit to get out into scenery like this as a part of the Gilwern u3a Walking Group.

They will be out directly the word is given!



Vaccinations with a difference

David H

The Army keeps one bang up to date with vaccinations and jabs generally. I was confidently travelling from Ghana to Nigeria and from there up into the Sahara for a three month expedition in search of rock carvings, also giving me a chance to see something of the southern side of the Sahara and its people. On one coastal border I was stopped and asked for my certificate of vaccination, which, of course, I never carried. They said they would vaccinate me. On the table out *en plain air* was the table with the instrument: a needle resting in a rusty tin of water open to flies etc. I fiercely argued, and was eventually sent on my way. It would be a very different approach to hygiene, and, above all, vaccinations there now.

March sayings

"If March comes in like a lion it will go out like a lamb". This derives from weather folklore, and relates to the transition between winter and spring, and the changeable nature of the weather across the month of March. Beware the Ides of March – this relates to the assassination of Julius Caesar on 15th March 44BC by up to sixty members of the Senate who resented Caesar's popularity and arrogance. The group killed Caesar by stabbing him 23 times.

In Latin, the "Idus" were the fifteenth day of March, May, July and October and the thirteenth day of other months. After Caesar's death the 15th March was considered unlucky and the saying "Beware the Ides of March" was coined, after a soothsayer shouted the words from the crowd in order to warn Caesar of his impending doom.

Mad as a march hare – refers to a person's eccentric and quarrelsome manner, and believed to refer to a hare's behaviour during the March rutting season when they leap about and spar with each other.

-

Lynda O'K



HOUSEBOUND HUGS No 16 – by Kay

Missed Opportunities

-

Kay B

I'm trying to impress on our 11-year-old grandson the fact that he's living through a unique moment in history. When he's our age he'll be able to tell his grandchildren of the time when there were no schools open to attend, no shops open, no restaurants and pubs, no fans allowed at football and rugby matches, and no going-out for weeks!

But I guess it won't really mean that much until he looks back in years to come, and wishes he'd kept a diary of events like his old Gran suggested. He'll regret that missed opportunity.

And talking of missed opportunities, when I was at school, anyone studying English Lit for 'O' or 'A' Levels was allowed to go on the annual visit to Stratford-upon-Avon to see top actors perform there, and I particularly recall watching entranced as Dorothy Tutin played Juliet. But the highlight was the production of 'Othello' with Paul Robeson in the title role and Sam Wannamaker as Iago.

What a pity, then, that I didn't really concentrate on their superb acting skills, as our row of High School girls were flirting outrageously with the boys from Warwick Grammar on the row behind! What a missed opportunity, and how I wish that I could go back and watch it again, but at least I can say "I was there".

Puns for educated minds

-

Maurice G

1. The roundest knight at King Arthur's round table was Sir Cumference. He acquired his size from too much pi.
2. I thought I saw an eye doctor on an Alaskan Island, but it turned out to be an optical Aleutian.
3. She was only a whiskey maker, but he loved her still.
4. A rubber band pistol was confiscated from algebra class, because it was a weapon of math disruption.

Whitson Court Zoo

Hilary L

After getting married and moving to Wales the closest neighbours at our new home were Yogi and Boo Boo a pair of Himalayan black Bears!

On the Newport levels is Whitson Court (1795) a grand neoclassic house, parts of which are said to be designed and built in the Nash style. The owner Mrs Olive Maybury let out flats in the top of the house and in the stables (on right of photo) where we lived there for nearly 2 years.



She had also, almost accidentally, established a zoo, and during the 60's and 70's this was open to the public on weekends and in school holidays. We woke each morning to the calls of exotic animals and were roped in to help with their care when things went wrong which they inevitably did!

On a Sunday all of the tenants staying over the weekend, a motley crew, many of whom are still good friends, were invited to lunch in the main house. One day the baboon strolled in to join us but luckily left hand in hand with Mrs M, persuaded back to his cage with bananas.

Basil and Barbara the Malayan Sun Bears (honey bears) spent more time on top of the roof of their cage than in it and the sign in the monkey house 'beware your glasses' was no joke! Mrs M also rescued injured native animals so the zoo was a temporary home for foxes, badgers and various birds. One afternoon we heard footsteps on the stairway to our flat and in came a badger. I am not sure who was more frightened but they do have bigger teeth!

Fortunately, the lions arrived after we had left and eventually the zoo closed in 1980, with most remaining animals sent to Barry Zoo, as stricter regulations were rightly introduced.

Probation Part Two – Training

Harriet H

We were a motley crew aiming to obtain a Certificate in Social Work Training at the Ipswich College of Further Education. All 'mature' students of varying ages, experience and ability. A few excelled at the writing of essays, more were already good at the job, and a handful were good at both. I fell in the middle, finding that my counselling training gave me greater insight, but was inadequate for dealing with the more confrontational world of crime and courts. My essays were erratic and my practice on the ground variable, while writing court reports was a struggle.

Since I was doing a Probation 'option', I had to undertake two placements in a probation office, and one with a social work team. The latter was awful! My supervisor appeared to have little idea of what she should do with her clients, let alone a student, but she did like taking me along with her everywhere and announcing: 'this is my student'. I survived with difficulty and managed a rather dull term with Colchester Probation during which my supervisor, with whom I shared an office, cured me of smoking by sticking his head out of the window every time I lit up. He also further hampered my report writing by accusing me of using 'Harrietisms'.

I was saved by my final stint in a busy London Probation Office with a training unit, where I learnt to keep up with the speed of stipendiary as opposed to lay magistrates in court, and when struggling with a report, was told to 'write me a letter about this person'. After that helpful intervention, I began to find the right flow, eventually having reports commended by the very superior colleagues who worked at the Old Bailey. Two years and two repeated essays later, I emerged with my certificate to hunt for a job in London where David was now working, only there were no jobs. Too many of us had been trained and I languished for months before finding a place at the West End Office of the Inner London Probation Service. Next time: courts, drugs and the occasional proper crime.

More Gilwern u3a matters

Committee members: Secretary, Treasurer

Would you like to play a more active role in Gilwern u3a? We are looking to appoint new committee members to the roles of Secretary and treasurer. Both Lynda and Ursula have reached the end of their tenure and we need to replace them on the committee from April 1st.

If you would be interested in either of these roles or would like further information please contact me at chair@gilwernu3a.org.uk or via telephone on 01873831104. I look forward to hearing from you.

Membership 2021-2022

Membership will be renewed from April 1st 2021. As you are aware there was no fee for the current year. However, as a committee, we have decided that there will be a reduced fee of £10.00 for 2021-2022 in the hope that we will be able to meet as a group sometime later in the year. The fee will also cover insurance costs for all groups, fees payable to National U3A and subscription to Third Age matters magazine. A new membership form will be available on line or we can distribute them to members without internet access.



Mike Johnson's title is: "You are not my Romeo. Piss off!"
What version will you give? David H looks forward to hearing from you.

New Gilwern u3a Group – The Creative Writing Group.

They have set themselves a fascinating task – see their new page on our web site.

Art Group Challenge - February

Of the broad selection of pictures for the month of February, Sarah Hody said: "Again some very interesting pictures this month and an interesting challenge," she added "This month my personal choice is Marilyn Tranter's *Mother giraffe and baby*. I like the simplicity of the image that is crafted with sophistication. Well done!"



Art Challenge for March

The subject chosen by Lynda O'Keefe is "Wonders of Wales", so we all have an interesting challenge ahead of us. Deadline for entries: 25 March.