

Usk U3A Christmas Newsletter

December 2020

See you all for real in 2021!

A Christmas message from our Chair, Maggie Corke

Season's greetings Usk U3A members. I hope this finds you all safe and well.

When I was asked to write a Christmas message, I had no idea I would be writing it on the brightest day of 2020. Not the weather, of course, but the news of an approved Covid vaccine, ready to roll out within a week. It won't be instant but at last we can see light at the end of the tunnel.

As we look back over this difficult year it's been quite grim but there are some positives to balance the hardships. Not only the amazing front line workers but the small acts of kindness - shopping for a neighbour, the phone call "just to see if you're OK". And what about Zoom? Who'd heard of it this time last year? It can't replace a hug but seeing and chatting to my family and friends whenever we want to certainly cheers me up!

So we can head into next year with some optimism that life should slowly return to normal and I look forward to being able to see you at a "real" U3A meeting before 2021 is over.

With very best wishes for a Safe and Happy Christmas and a Merry 2021.

Maggie

What are our groups doing?

You may think that all U3A activity has been at a standstill since March. Far from it. Here's a quick round-up of some of our groups' sometimes behind-the-scenes activities:

Gardening Group: An email every two weeks with exchanges of news and photos has kept members in touch, and the feedback has been positive. Most members do not want to Zoom.

Reading Groups: One group has continued to read an agreed book list and exchange views by email and has had a meeting outdoors, socially distanced. The other group decided that they did not want to pursue a reading list but agreed in November that each member would write a synopsis of a book they had enjoyed during the summer lockdown. Neither group has chosen to Zoom, mainly because not everyone has access to a computer or tablet.

Craft Group: Regular monthly meetings take place by Zoom (see article on page 3)

Gentle Walking Group: Socially distanced walks are under way (see article on page 2).

Monthly Meetings: A programme of regular talks and entertainments on the last Friday of each month is well established on Zoom (see article on page 3).



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U3A Gentle Walking Group officially back on its feet

We have been very lucky with the weather during these difficult times. To start with we walked as a group of friends, social distancing, not sharing cars or refreshments. It has proved challenging but all the walkers have been very obliging and have enjoyed seeing one another and engaging in conversation, and sharing stories.

We are now under the official umbrella of the U3A again, and still keeping to the rules.

The walks we have managed have been to Wentwood where we enjoyed the lovely Autumn colours, Cefn Ila for the colours and birdsong, and Llangybi Castle, having been given permission to enter the ruins by the owner, Mr David Addams-Williams. On the last walk we had two prospective members who want to join our organization.

Many walkers have also met on their usual walks around their own areas, as part of their fitness regime, and enjoy the fresh air and exercise.

Unfortunately our annual Christmas Picnic cannot be held this year, but we are hoping for a Summer one next year, as well as Christmas 2021. If anyone else would like to join this friendly group, you will be warmly welcomed.

Myra France,
Walking Group Convenor



LET'S DO SOMETHING NEW!

Margaret Hatfield continues her inspiring series of suggestions for activity groups which members might like to help get started



In the last newsletter the suggestion was made for a **play reading group**. In this newsletter there are two more ideas to think about.

Suggestion 1: Vinyl records

A member has commented that we are of an age when we all might have a vinyl collection. Vinyl records are becoming more popular in this retro age. Is there any way we could create a group to enjoy and learn from other people's collections?

We would need someone who has access to a turntable and is capable of setting it up. Collections might well cover a wide range of musical tastes from jazz and blues through musical shows, and pop to classical. You would not need a record collection yourself but could come and listen to people's stories and learn about different types of music.

It could be fun. So is there anyone out there with ideas about how we can get this group started?

Suggestion 2: Poetry

The next idea is a poetry reading and writing group. This was a popular meeting when the Culture Group was active. It is an idea I would like to work on. I'll include more details in the next newsletter.

If anyone is interested in any of these ideas or has any views on whether they will work please let us know.

Have you any other ideas for a group? Send us your suggestions and we will do some investigation.

Margaret Hatfield, Groups Co-ordinator



Monthly challenge produces pumpkins, robins and reindeers



Pumpkin, Sue Punnett

As Covid-19 restrictions continue to prevent indoor meetings, Craft Group members have turned to meeting via Zoom. Whilst not the same as face to face meetings, it has provided a means of keeping in touch with each other in these difficult times.

Back in September, members agreed to set themselves a Monthly Challenge, deciding at each meeting what the subject would be. October produced a fine crop of pumpkins with creations made from fabric, felt, knitwear, and "bits and pieces". There was a flower vase made from a hollowed out pumpkin complete with floral display and, believe it or not, a grey pumpkin Jack O' Lantern, to name a few.

November's meeting wasn't to be outdone with a collection of Christmas decorations. We had robins and reindeers, Father Christmas and bells, Christmas trees and angels, Christmas puddings and various shapes and sizes of wreaths all ready for the Festive Season.

We are a friendly bunch, so why not come along and join in the fun!

Please note that as from January 2021 the meeting will change to the second Tuesday of each month, our first meeting being on Tuesday 12th January.

Ann Jones, Craft Group Convenor



Reindeer, Joan Bennett

New technical skills (and courage) bring back Monthly Meetings

So, how have Usk and District U3A members managed to function and to keep learning, laughing and living since March 2020 while getting together has been such a major issue? Well, we are living through it by learning new ways and laughing at it, together.

We have used email as a way of talking to each other, and WhatsApp calls have enabled one-to-one and small group video calls. Ever resourceful, we have been learning to use Zoom too as a way of getting together online. Many members have been learning and fine-tuning their skills to get these electronic communication methods to work for us.



So in September Usk U3A nervously held the first of what turned out to be a well-attended series of "Monthly Meetings by Zoom". Stephen Wells, an experienced speaker, ran the meeting for us and intrigued us with accounts of the life of Agatha Christie and her fictional characters. It was a great success.

In October, we took our courage in both hands and ran the meeting ourselves, which allowed us to go back to the usual pattern of our Monthly Meetings with opportunities for introductions, reports, notices etc. That presentation was on "The Sumptuous World of Precious Jewels" by freelance artist, jeweller and silversmith, Mark Lewis. Mark told us about the history of jewellery up to the 20th century.

By November we felt quite the experts at running Zoom Meetings. "A Christmas Entertainment" by Sun Jester gave us the background to different seasonal traditions. Interspersed throughout the session was a number of Christmas songs, mostly from the last century. Unfortunately, though they tried to compensate, this did not work well on Zoom as there was a lot of freeze frame. Many of the members were already getting into the Christmas spirit with hats and antlers.

At the time of writing the December Zoom meeting awaits us – another "Christmas Fun Talk" with a quiz. And everyone has been urged to "dress appropriately" for this one! The coming attractions for 2021 are:

January 29th	John Vigar	Bedrooms, Banquets & Balls
February 26th	Francis Burroughes	Wonderful World of Glass
March 26th	Margaret Mills	Jane Austen and the Austen Family

Many thanks to everyone who has attended for your support and enthusiasm.

Joan Bennett and Ann Jones.



Sun Jester

Small, welcoming and plenty to offer

New member Sue Punnett describes how Usk U3A has helped her settle in the area



Geoff and I moved to Usk almost three years ago. Geoff knew and loved the area as he had worked at Glascoed in the 1970's. However, it was fairly new to me.

I soon loved the town and its surroundings. Settling in was easy. It echoed Mid-Devon where I was born and brought up: big oak trees, winding up and down roads and lanes with long views studded with old farmhouses and hamlets. The neighbours are friendly, shops and facilities just a walk away.

We joined Usk U3A, small and welcoming. The groups I have joined echo my main hobbies. First came the Walking Group to get to know people and places. The Gardening Group with its plant swops and knowledge has spurred me on to develop a new-to-me garden.

The recently formed Craft Group continues with a monthly Zoom meeting when a monthly show-and-tell challenge encourages ideas. Last, but not least, I am looking forward to my first month of email exchanges of reviews of the chosen book.

Thank you Usk U3A. Learn - laugh - live.

Sue Punnett



Your emergency contacts go on the database and those rarely used membership cards are off the agenda

A new computerised membership system could help to get a message to your family in the event of an emergency. It's one of the benefits of our new online database of members.



The Beacon database, which we brought into operation in November, can store the contact details of a member's relation or friend, and can easily generate lists which convenors could refer to if one of their group has a minor accident or is taken ill. Our previous system was too cumbersome for this to be practical.

Convenors who use the database may be able to share information more efficiently with their group members or with other activity groups in Usk U3A. Our new Groups Co-ordinator Margaret Hatfield is working with convenors to see what can be achieved using the database – though we realise that not all of them will need or be able to become users.

Security arrangements mean convenors won't have access to the personal information unless they have a legitimate need for it.

Another innovation, thanks to the database, is scrapping the elaborate job every year of printing and manually distributing membership cards – which were then almost never used. A standard receipt can be produced automatically when a member renews. So your receipt is your proof that you are a bona fide paid-up member of Usk U3A.

An updated Membership Renewal Form is now in use to collect additional information for the database on interests and preferences. Many members are able to complete and send back these forms on line.

Membership Secretary, Mel Witherden is urging everyone to *always* complete and return the form when they renew their subscriptions – whether by cheque or by bank transfer. "The form is invaluable for keeping track of payments and ensuring members' contact details and preferences on issues such as privacy and receiving the Third Age Matters magazine are up to date at least once a year," he says

"Inaccurate email addresses are the biggest obstacle to us keeping in touch with members with our newsletters and notices about meetings and new activities. so some members are always missing out. Communicating everything by post isn't viable because it's time consuming and expensive."

Getting to know each other

Our Usk Diary Reporter Judith Lindwall invites us to find out about our U3A colleagues

How many U3A members do you know? Perhaps only those in your group and a handful of others? In this space, in future newsletters we will be finding out more about each other. To do this, for each issue, we will be chatting to a member who has agreed for us to present his or her 'story'.

We will not only be finding out something about their background history and what U3A means to them but also some fun and light hearted things – favourite food, fashion, song, word, book, film, favourite place on earth and so on. Maybe we'll find out about the best things ever to have happened to them or the best decision taken or the funniest thing.

If it's not too personal we may find out what is the strangest thing in their refrigerator or what is their most treasured possession. Who from history would they like to invite for dinner? Who are their heroes? Which period would be their 'go to' time-travel destination? In keeping with the spirit of U3A we would like to know if there is anything new they would like to learn or something they want to improve on? Maybe sow the seeds for a new U3A group!

People are endlessly interesting and surprising, and certainly U3A members will have some stories to tell. We welcome suggestions for questions and even volunteers and nominations for members to take part. Let's enjoy. Let's learn, laugh and live together.

Do watch this space.

Delaying membership renewal could cost you more

Delaying your 2021 membership payment could cost you more, warns the Membership Secretary. Subscriptions for the next year are due by 31st December, and it will cost 33% more if you pay after January.

Nearly half of members have responded promptly to the initial renewal reminder in early November. But there are concerns that, without the opportunity we've had in the past to bring cheques to the annual Christmas Lunch, other members may forget to renew their membership. The U3A Committee is also worried that we may lose members permanently as an indirect result of Covid-19.

"We realise that Usk U3A hasn't been able to offer as much this year as we would have liked. But some groups are still active, and we have resumed regular Monthly Meetings, so there are good reasons for staying with us while we shake off the pandemic" says Membership Secretary Mel Witherden.

There are firm expectations that U3A activities will get back to something more like normal during 2021, and there are hopes that new groups might be established to meet members interest's.

As a way of recognising the disruption this year, the Committee has reduced 2021 membership subscriptions from £12 to £9 for existing paid-up members, provided they are paid by 31st January.

"We would like to have gone further with this gesture, but we still have substantial costs to meet for speakers and Zoom fees, our membership of the national U3A organisation, the Third Age Matters magazine and administration," explains the Chair Maggie Corke.

So the message from the Committee is: "Please help us and save a little cash by renewing your subscription now if you haven't done so already"





Reg's Fabulous Christmas Quiz

- 1 Which one of Santa's reindeer is a mythical archer?
- 2 In the movie, *It's A Wonderful Life*, what happened every time a bell rang?
- 3 Who was the Hollywood actor who played six different roles in *The Polar Express*?
- 4 In which country did eggnog originate?
- 5 Which Christmas song contains the lyric *Everyone dancing merrily in the new old-fashioned way*?
- 6 In the song *Winter Wonderland*, what is the name of the snowman?
- 7 In the song *The Twelve days of Christmas*, what did my true love give to me on the eighth day?
- 8 What is a female turkey called?
- 9 In which country did the popular Christmas Yule log dessert originate?
- 10 What is the name of traditional Swedish mulled wine?
- 11 What is the commonly used name for the period from December 24th to January 1st and the name of a Christmas hit single by Cliff Richard in 1988 (clue - the answers rhyme).
- 12 Using the letters in 'FATHER CHRISTMAS' can you find the answers to the following:
 - a person who works in a fish and chip shop;
 - something Steve Davis has won lots of;
 - another name for a mechanic;
 - what Snow White was claimed to be; and
 - an authoritarian political ideology?

AND A FINAL TEASER:

Can you decipher my simple coded message to you all?

FZNNW AFGQTKYQ RM WMS QRYW QYDC

Answers on back page

***Quiz compiled by our annual
Quiz-master Reg Darge***



HOW WE BECAME “THE GROUP FORMERLY KNOWN AS ..”



Mel Witherden on the dire implications of losing the name University of the Third Age

You may think 2020 has been strange for Usk U3A. But it's going to get a whole lot weirder in 2021 when we start trying to recruit new members but aren't allowed to tell anyone what our name means.

We aren't deliberately becoming a secret society, though this could be an unintended consequence. In fact we are being rebranded by our parent organisation in a major exercise which has disturbing echoes of the Royal Mail spending £1.5m in 2003 pointlessly renaming itself “Consignia”, only to blow another £1m a year later converting itself back to “Royal Mail”.



Local U3A groups everywhere have received guidance from the Third Age Trust that our name no longer means “University of the Third Age” – because that creates the wrong impression among the public. We will continue to use the same three characters to identify ourselves to the world. But “u” and “3” and “a” can't stand for anything. In case you think they should, they may henceforth be displayed in lower case. (That alone is going to be tough for some of us ageing pedants to get used to.)

Sadly, like rock singer Prince who changed his name to an unpronounceable mystic symbol in 1993 during a protest against his record company, our organisation has apparently ceased to be a thing and has become an abstraction. We can only hope it doesn't also become insubstantial.

I'm the first to agree that using the imposing term “university” is elitist and exclusive today when we're trying to reach out from our firmly middle-class base to make our activities more widely accessible. “third age”, if it means anything for a body with members aged 50 to 100, is perhaps a little patronising. So change is overdue. Yet it should, ideally, say more about who we are than our crisp new logo (now available in three old colours) which is generating all the excitement of a change of socks.



The especially mind-bending feature of the current rebranding is that we have abandoned a hard-to-explain, inappropriate and out-of-date identity in favour of one which is as deliberately obscure as a password for accessing an online bank account. So what are we supposed to do when people ask, “Now seriously, what do the characters ‘U3A’ actually **mean**?” Should we communicate the essence of our organisation in some creative way – on a Scrabble board, with bridge hands? in topiary? perhaps through the medium of dance, or in mime using charades conventions?

No, we are urged by our Head Office to bite our tongues and – honestly this is true – tell the public it equates to “Learn Laugh Live”. This jolly new official slogan for our movement seems quite popular in some quarters. **But we're not x3L, we're U3A!** So why not *Unconvincing Three-character Acronym* or *Unfortunate Tertiary Alternative*? Not great titles, but surely better than “we couldn't think of anything”.

Making a virtue of necessity, perhaps we could engage the scientifically minded with the promise that “U³a” is a rare isotope of uranium. For members of Generation X, who we should be recruiting soon, “U3(A)” could be made to look like an upgrade to the overblown Irish band U2 which they unaccountably liked so much. Other potential members may resist joining without further bespoke alphanumeric stunts.



In the days of the TV western *Rawhide*, branding used to mean holding down a helpless animal and forcibly burning an identifying symbol into its flesh using a red hot iron. I have a feeling that something similarly brutal has happened in the course of rebranding the U3A.

Meet our members Mair & Jack Harris who commute on Zoom between Bermuda and Usk

Notes from a Smaller Island

My husband and I returned to Bermuda in January, after eight months in Usk spent enjoying church services, WI, Rotary, Scrabble and much more. Returning here we caught up with our three small grandchildren and got back into “Bermuda winter life”. From January to March, we get stormy weather but almost always the sun is shining. From April onwards the island seems to come alive. Though our temperatures rarely go above 30 C, the humidity can be tiring and from July to September we long for cooler weather, admittedly I do love swimming in the early morning.

Although Jack broke his right wrist while jogging and had a cast on it, he enjoyed his surprise Leap Year 80th birthday dinner with the family. I got back into attending Senior Learning Centre classes (like U3A) doing exercise and mini-golf and we soon adapted to “Bermuda Life” again.

But then came March and the virus hit. Suddenly we had cases, care home residents poorly, people in hospital and deaths. Generally life changed overnight. People were panicking, not knowing what to do, scared to go anywhere.

The Government declared lockdown and cancelled all flights and cruise ships. The volunteer army was engaged to ensure people stuck to the rules, stay home and only walk up to 1 mile from home for exercise. Twice a week we were allowed to go out on specific days – according to your last name – to the grocery store. The elderly, disabled and front-line staff shopped on a Sunday or a named day. Luckily I had stocked up previously. Parks and beaches were closed, the army had stops on roads, we had to show an ID to prove where we were going, we could really only go to the store.

So life was like that for about a month, then we had a tier system to come out of lockdown, with various services and shops re-opening. The Government had to source testing items, PPE and ventilators which being an island it was not easy to get nor to ship in, although freight flights were allowed. The Government paid compensation to those who were out of work for 6 weeks.

In August flights resumed. The Government started a strict testing regime. Everyone not a returning resident has to have proof of a negative test before they board a plane, all passengers take a test on arrival and must self quarantine until they have the results. They are tested again on days, 4, 8 and 14. This has been going quite well but recently some have tested positive on day 4 or 8 having previously tested negative. Having had no cases for weeks we now have 23 and we are concerned that as winter comes and people mix more the virus may spread. From May until late June, we had our six year old grandson with us and I did online classes with him. Then we had him all week, with weekends at home, through the summer. That certainly kept me busy.



Could you fill this space ?

Calling all members: we would like to invite you to contribute articles to this newsletter.

We want to keep the newsletter fresh, interesting and relevant to you. So, could you write an article as a new member telling others about your experiences? Or, as a long serving member, tell us what you have enjoyed about taking part in group activities?

You may also like to submit articles that have a relevance to Usk U3A, on topical and local issues for instance. If you would like to know more about contributing an article, please contact Maggie at chair@usku3a.org.uk



Relaxing in Bermuda sunshine but still coping with coronavirus: Mair (third from left) and Jack Harris (front) with their grandson and friends

Through the Senior Learning Centre I do exercise classes four times a week, we do two church prayer nights on Zoom, I join a woman's Bible study group once a week, yesterday I joined the Usk WI Zoom meeting and Jack does Zoom with Usk Rotary, he attends a Rotary dinner once a week though they are socially distanced and we all wear masks in public places.

So we have had a few pretty free months, but the Government warns us not to be complacent with numbers rising. We will have to take care.

Mair Harris

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Answers to the Christmas Quiz 1: Cupid; 2: An angel got his wings; 3: Tom Hanks; 4: England; 5: Rocking around the Christmas tree; 6: Parson Brown; 7: Eight maids a milking; 8: Hen; 9: France; 10: Glogg; 11: Christmas Time and Mistletoe and Wine; 12: Frier/frame/fitter/fairest/fascism;
FINAL CODED TEASER: Happy Christmas to you, stay safe.



Merry Christmas