



**Learn, laugh, live**

**Fairford & District  
Newsletter**

**Issue 271  
April  
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### **From the Chairman**

For the first time in our U3A's history, the Committee and I have decided to postpone our AGM and forthcoming Monthly General Meetings until the coronavirus pandemic has passed. You will all know this by now anyway from the e-mail or letter sent to all members recently.

Group Leaders have been advised to canvass opinion from the members of their groups as to whether they wish to carry on or not; however I suspect there may come a time when we will have no choice in the matter.

The Newsletter, in some shape or form, will be online monthly. No paper copies will be available. We recognise that probably the biggest challenge of all will be how to manage the inevitable boredom when we are prevented from meeting up with friends or going out eating and shopping! I suppose that if there is one positive from all of this we might end up with more money in the bank at the end of the month!

We can all get through this enforced restriction on our freedom together by being creative. The three editors of the newsletter, Sarah, Heather and I will be putting together a bulletin each month in place of the Newsletter to keep us all thinking about how we can keep busy and in touch. Group Leaders - have a think about how you can keep your group together even if you don't physically meet. Skype and Facetime are two examples of how you can 'meet up' online; easy to set up or ask a computer-literate family member. Those of you who don't have a computer or smartphone have the good old fashioned telephone! Everyone can have a hand in this; whether it's a general observation, new recipes or even a funny joke (Michael Johnson?!) which will be greatly appreciated! You can send your thoughts as to how we might amuse ourselves to [editor@fairfordu3a.org.uk](mailto:editor@fairfordu3a.org.uk). Don't forget if you do have something from your group to report, send it in in the usual way.

I do not feel it appropriate to have a 'Chairman's Review of the Year' in these more sombre times so you will all have to hold your breath and wait for that exciting piece (!) until we are all back to normal; sooner rather than later we hope.

In the meantime everyone on the Committee and I pass on their good wishes to all our members and hope you stay safe until we all meet again.

Marilyn Gibbon

Chairman  
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## Boats and Bravery

On 3 March, one day short of the 196th anniversary of the registering of what was then the National Institution for the Preservation of Life from Shipwreck (now the RNLI), Frank Austin, with his long, varied experience of the RNLI, spoke about the major changes in its history. When Sir William Hilary moved to the Isle of Man in 1808, he saw the treacherous nature of the Irish Sea, which led to him establish the first-ever sea rescue station in 1824. Nothing was mechanised. Heavy boats were pushed into the sea or pulled by horses and then rowed by crews of 8 or 16 men wearing cork belts as lifejackets. There was virtually no room for accommodating survivors.

Nowadays the latest technology is in use. Superbly designed boats with styles designated by river names, Shannon, Tamar, Severn, Trent and Mersey, plus smaller craft for inshore work, must all be capable of righting themselves in 6 seconds after capsizing. Communications have improved beyond all imagination. What has not changed is the strength of the waves, the bravery of the lifeboat men and women and the need for all this volunteer work to continue.

The talk concluded with a visual tour of the RNLI's central establishment in Poole harbour, which has not only administrative accommodation but boatbuilding and training facilities because crews must have strict credentials even though they are volunteers. Currently it costs approximately £164 million per year to maintain the service.

Sylvia Jones



## Obituary

We are sad to report the death of Geoff Bishop, founder member of Fairford U3A and its second Chairman. His genial nature and enthusiasm brought an influx of new members to what were then the small beginnings of our new U3A.

Geoff, together with Margaret, established two groups - Walking with a Pub Lunch and Bridge. The walks took place twice monthly and clearly involved a huge commitment of time and energy, much appreciated by an ever-increasing number of walkers. The 200th walk, not surprisingly drew the biggest crowd ever. The Bridge group enabled those new to the game, as well as more experienced players, to update their skills and to share with other enthusiasts their enjoyment of the game.

Geoff's own competitive nature was always in evidence here, and during games at the, sadly short lived, Croquet group. As a member of the Music Listening group Geoff was renowned for his devotion to Mahler and, some years ago, ran 2 or 3 short courses, one of course on Mahler!

Ever innovative, as Chairman Geoff was very keen to set up a website for our U3A at a time when the Internet was only just beginning to feature in our lives. It is significant that many members today will be reading this tribute online.

We have missed Geoff's cheery company during the period of his illness. We extend our deepest sympathy to Margaret and her family.

Rosemary Westlake



## GROUP REPORTS

### Book Circle 1

The 'Jacaranda Tree' by H E Bates, written in 1949. This is the story of a small English community in Burma being forced to flee from invading Japanese troops during WW11. Paterson, the manager of a rice mill, organises the evacuation and takes with him his Burmese mistress and her young brother, cook and general factotum, and who are both utterly loyal to Paterson. The rest of the party take with them their prejudices, arguments and squabbles as they move north through Burma. Inevitably as the journey progresses bitterness, tensions and conflict unfold. As one of our readers said, it is a good old-fashioned story, demonstrating human behaviour both good and bad and isn't it interesting that those who are considered inferior by the Europeans are in fact the stronger characters?

Bates served in Burma during the war. He was a prolific writer and his greatest success was posthumous, being the adaptations of 'The Darling Buds of May' for television. He wrote 24 novels, Pop Larkin books, 40 short stories and books for children.

When I first read this story in the 1950s it made a great impression. Although the book may be considered racist now, I found the descriptions of the abundant flowers and fruits and beautiful countryside quite enthralling, especially as I had never ventured abroad by then, let alone to the exotic Far East.

Sheila Morgan

### Poetry Circle One

Our theme for March, Comfort, produced an interesting choice of poems. Some were new to us; others were comforting because they were old favourites, such as 'Ducks' by F. Harvey and 'Adlestrop' by Edward Thomas. The joys of a cosy home were praised in 'Comfort' by Walter de la Mare whilst the pleasures of the Canadian countryside were extolled in 'The Comfort of the Fields' by Archibald Lampman. Shakespeare's sonnet, 'When in disgrace with fortune, and men's eyes found comfort in support from a loved one, whilst sonnet 144, new to us all wrote of a life divided by both comfort and despair, with the fear that despair might be the winner in the end, no doubt a low point in his life. 'Not Adlestrop' by Danny Abse, a gentle parody of its more famous predecessor, told how the smile of a pretty girl could lighten up a dull station platform. 'The Honeymoon is Over' by Judith Viorst was rather different in that comfort was, perhaps, settling down to a humdrum life after the romance of courtship. Benjamin Zephaniah in 'Comments About the British' wrote of the different people who make up our country and ends with these wise and comforting words:

As they mix and blend, allow their languages to flourish  
Binding them together with English,  
Allow time to cool  
Add some unity understanding and respect for the future  
Serve with justice  
And enjoy.

Barbara Cottam

## Book Circle 2

We met on 10 March to discuss and review Margaret Drabble's latest novel, published in 2016, 'The Dark Flood Rises'. The title is taken from a poem by D H Lawrence 'The Ship of Death'. (*"Piecemeal the body dies, and the timid soul has her footing washed away as the dark flood rises"*)

Although one member of the group found parts of the novel irritating (such as what a cat thought - how does anyone know what a cat is thinking?) and not a book he would have chosen to read, the rest of us found it well written, resonant and topically current.

Drabble is now 80 and this is her 30<sup>th</sup> book published since 1963. She was born in Sheffield and came from a highly educated background. Her mother was a teacher and her sister is A S. Byatt. Drabble won a scholarship to Newnham College, Cambridge and started off as a thespian with the RSC in Stratford before dedicating herself to writing.

This novel does not have a plot nor any real beginning or end - it is more a slice of the lives of intertwined characters, describing their lives as lived now in their third age, a glimpse into their pasts and basically what it means to live a good life when getting older and before death overtakes us. Only two of us found it depressing - the rest of us were not depressed by it and found it realistic, at times light-hearted and humorous. One could not call it in anyway a sentimental work. There are good character studies and Drabble has taken the opportunity *en passant* to address topical issues such as floods and the global refugee crisis. On the other hand, she cannot resist showing off her literary heritage through the more intellectual of her characters - which one of us very much disliked.

The lead character, Fran Stubbs, rushes around the country in her car, engaged in social housing and staying at Premier Inns, but finds the time to cook meals for her ex-husband, a retired surgeon and an invalid. As one member of our group remarked "thank goodness for people like Fran who go out of their way to help others". Fran probably does not even realise she is one of those people we come across in life.

Overall, the novel was a pleasant and interesting read - something one could pick up, put down and pick up again without difficulty.

Judith Vann

## Solos

On Sunday 16 February eleven Solos visited the Bathurst Arms at North Cerney for lunch. It was a terrible day of rain and wind, but the thought of a Sunday Roast was the expectation of a great meal. We were not disappointed, enjoying Roast beef and Yorkshire puds. plus, pork and chicken roast which were very tasty and followed by excellent desserts. Bathurst Arms is an old building but very cosy and warm inside. Dogs are welcome and there is plenty of parking. We all enjoyed our outing with plenty of chatter. Roll on for another Sunday Roast.

Elaine Tucker

On the evening of February 26, a group of 9 Solos made another visit to the Thai Emerald restaurant in Cirencester. Once again, we were thoroughly impressed, with delicious food, a welcoming atmosphere and excellent service. Those who had not ventured for a Thai meal before had a very enjoyable experience. We will definitely return again.

Gill Compton

## **Pétanque**

The Pétanque pre-season meeting was held on Friday 6 March. Copies of the balance sheet were available to members and it was decided that this year's annual subscriptions will be £5.00. A résumé of the meeting has been emailed to the members who were unable to attend the meeting.

Dave and Heather Baber

## **New Members**

We hope to meet and greet you at a General Meeting once the pandemic crisis is over.

Shirley Naylor

Jill Leach

Derek Portman

Marie and Dennis Buttery

Sheila and Thomas Cuthell

Jane Kidd

Dawne Wirth

## **GROUP MEETINGS**

There are no group meetings unless you hear otherwise from your group leader due to the coronavirus pandemic

Editor this month - Heather Holwell