

Newsletter



Cherry Blossom in Town Gardens

Photograph by Gill Brain

July 2021

Hello from the Chair

Hello to all our u3a 'family'. I hope you are enjoying the warmer summer weather. I don't know if you agree, but I especially love the weeks around the summer equinox when dawn starts so early and the evenings are so light. There is something magical and Midsummer Night's Dream-like in the air. So, while still being extra Covid careful, I hope you are enjoying the warmth, the great outdoors and the blossom whether you have a sumptuous garden or a small window box.

Your Management Committee have been extra busy as we work to facilitate the re-starting of groups in both a safe and financially sustainable way. This has presented a number of challenges. We now have the extra support of two new members of the Management Team – Jim Sinclair, our new Groups Co-ordinator, and Bryan Neaves, our new Health and Safety Officer. We thank them both for stepping up to help in these testing times. Jim, supported by our Vice-Chair, Linda, is meeting with Group Organisers to help map out their plans for the future. Meanwhile, Bryan has been working on risk assessment and health and safety guidelines for groups as they re-start. Nearly 20 of our groups, many of them the sports/outdoor groups, have re-started which is great news and we hope to support more activity over the coming months. I know that many of us are longing to meet up again with the friends we have made in our various u3a groups and enjoy our shared interests once again.

The Management Committee continue to grapple with some difficult financial matters, especially around the issue of high and rising venue costs. To facilitate groups re-opening, we have agreed to try to cover these costs from reserves until September when there will be a clearer picture of the way ahead. Hopefully, this will give those groups in high-cost venues a breathing space to try to find cheaper alternative venues. After much detailed analysis, a decision will be made very soon about the subscription model which we will adopt to stabilise our financial situation. Once this is decided and shared with members, we will begin to process membership subscriptions between July and September for the 2021-22 year. We hope you will all join us in working together towards a stronger and financially stable Swindon u3a in 2021-22. Being clear about the numbers of you re-joining will also help us in assessing our financial position in September. The Publicity Team, led by Chris Ockwell, will be working throughout the summer to remind everyone of the great benefits of joining u3a – and to hopefully attract some new members.

Come and visit our stall at the Wroughton Carnival on 3rd July. Meanwhile, the Office is preparing to re-open. safety screens are being installed and computer systems fired up and, hopefully, working properly. We may need to ask you to be a little patient over the processing of membership fees while we get organised during the summer.

The Management Committee are planning an Away Day on the 12th June. Amazingly, it will be the first time that many of us have actually met in real life (albeit socially distanced!). Of the 11 of us, 6 are relatively new to the team and have only interacted via email and zoom. We are looking forward to checking out that we really exist in the flesh and blood! More importantly, we will be laying the groundwork for our Strategic Plan which will guide us through the next two to three years.

At present we hold onto our hope that the coming weeks will see some sort of gradual return to what used to be 'normal life'. It may be that some things will never be the same again, holidays, going to the office, travel, public entertainment, but I remain optimistic that our u3a will recover, groups will restart, people will once again enjoy each other's company and the activities they love. Yes, I am optimistic and I hope you are too.

Warm regards to you all.

Gill

chair@swindonu3a.org.uk

Copy Dates

Items for the August Newsletter must be received by

11th July 2021

Items for the September Newsletter must be received by

8th August 2021

'What's On' has been suspended for the time being.

All contributions must be sent to the Editor using the Newsletter contributions e-mail address newsletter@swindonu3a.org.uk.

Geoff Bryan

Newsletters and TAM

You will have noticed that we have a slightly new style Swindon u3a Newsletter. We hope to publish it monthly over the next few months to keep you up to date during these ever-changing and challenging times. It is now a single publication, which will save on printing and postage, taking the place of the 'On the Bright Side' which kept us in touch throughout last year when little u3a activity was taking place. The new style Newsletter will also incorporate the previously separate publication of Chair's 'Hello' and of the 'What's On'. Hopefully in one regular publication we can keep you in touch with what's happening, give you information about re-starting, open days and membership issues. It would be good to incorporate some lighter, interesting and entertaining material.

So, please send any articles, photos, interesting bits and pieces to our Newsletter editor Geoff Bryan (newsletter@swindonu3a.org.uk) We will be sharing with you news of our re-starting groups and, as you all start to go out and about more during the summer months, we hope you will send us some stories of what you are up to.

We would also like to say a big thank you to the 'On the Bright Side' Team – Bob and Sue Carvey and John Turner, who kept us in touch with the brighter side of 2020-21.

Meanwhile, due to the pressures on our finances we are having to ask you to pay for your Third Age Matters magazine (TAM) which up to now has been paid for by Swindon u3a out of your annual subscription. TAM costs £3.10 per member annually which we have been paying to the Third Age Trust on your behalf. When you renew your subscription this year there will be box to tick if you want to take TAM. Ticking the box means you *opt in* to taking TAM and you will be charged the extra amount to cover the cost. You can, of course, opt out by not ticking the box. I know many of you enjoy reading the magazine, which keeps us aware of things happening in the wider u3a nationally. I hope you will understand why we need to make this change.

Don't forget also that there will continue to be up to date information on our web-site: swindonu3a.org.uk. If you open up the site you will find on the front page links to any events/talks organised by our Events Team, the Third Age Trust Newsletter (not the TAM), National u3a events, and interesting events (by zoom) organised by the Thames Valley Network of local u3as. We hope that with all this at your fingertips you will continue to be informed and entertained.

National u3a Open Day – 2nd June

Under the capable management of our Publicity Officer, Chris Ockwell, a team of us set up our stall in the Brunel Centre, met with members of the public and answered questions about Swindon u3a on Tuesday 2nd June. It might not have been the day we would have chosen but it was a national day with u3as across the entire country showing off some of the benefits of our organisation.

Of course, we emphasised the terrific Learn, Laugh, Live mission and the joys of being a member of u3a and, hopefully, our friendly chats, colourful banners and informative leaflets will result in some new members. If nothing else, some people now know we exist. It always surprises me that such a large organisation is so little known – in comparison, say, with the WI or Rotary. Hopefully, we've spread the word a bit further.

Gill Brain



Swindon u3a Groups which have Re-Started June 2021

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|---------------------------|----------------------|
| Birders | Hands on Gardening |
| Walking | Iyengar Yoga |
| Wednesday Wayfarers | Line Dancing |
| WOW Walking on Wednesdays | Pétanque |
| Air Pistols and Rifles | Sociable Short Walks |
| Easy Art | Sunday Strollers |
| Fair Weather Short Walks | Table Tennis |
| Field Archery | Thursday Trekkers |

Walking on Wednesdays (WOW) Group back in action!

Nineteen enthusiastic members of the group met in the Manor Farm Pub car-park on 26th May for our first walk since the lockdowns. As this was the first day for about a fortnight when heavy rain was not forecast I had already had to change the planned route to avoid some extremely muddy stretches. Keeping to cycle paths and footpaths we followed a circular route of 3.5 miles over Groundwell Ridge, skirting Abbey Meads and Sevenfields Nature Reserve before returning to Manor Farm via Pond St. Twelve walkers stayed for lunch and I was very impressed with the way the staff gave us our own area of the pub with spare seating to allow extra social distancing. Everyone enjoyed being able to meet again and catch up on each other's news – all agreed that social interaction was what they had missed most and were soon chatting away and putting the world to rights as usual!

When planning the walk I added Covid 19 precautions to my Risk Assessment, checking paths were wide enough to allow members of the public to safely pass walkers, avoiding stiles and gates which walkers would need to touch and ensuring all walkers were familiar with u3a Individual Risk Assessment Form and current hospitality rules.

Although a few have chosen not to re-join the group, the WOW group still has thirty-one members. In the past we have usually had about two-thirds of members on any walk, which I feel allows social distancing without becoming a "crocodile". I therefore do not plan to increase membership of the group at present.

Hilda Cooper



u3a Birders

Our birding group has restarted. Last Monday (24th May) we made our first site visit in over fourteen months and we have just two more visits planned for June before we cease activities until our autumn-winter programme of outings begins in September, we hope.

Ten of us visited Shorncote, a wetland reserve near South Cerney on a day of mixed (heavy showers and warm sunshine) weather and we identified a respectable total of 52 different species of bird.

Highlights included a pair of Mute Swans with five very new cygnets, a Cuckoo, now increasingly rare in the south of England, and a number of other summer migrants: Swifts, House and Sand Martins, Swallows and a variety of Warblers. Although we are primarily a birdwatching group, we actively look for and revel in all aspects of nature, so spotting a number of butterflies plus newly emerged damselflies and demoiselles added further interest and joy; in fact, just being out together (suitably distanced) in the spring countryside with its sights, scents and sounds was universally agreed as being good for the soul.

Martin Savage



Archery Group

Following the easing of lockdown restrictions and advice from u3a HQ, the Swindon u3a Archery Group recommenced their twice weekly shoots at Blackcats archery Range in Sevenhampton.

We currently have around 60 group members, many of whom were “chomping at the bit” to restart this very popular and sociable activity.

Each session is currently attended by 20/25 members who split into Groups of no more than 6. The size of the range within the woodland and field allow us to easily maintain social distancing following the Archery GB Guidelines.

The one thing that we are restricted to is not having our tea/coffee and biscuits break halfway through our shoot; this was always a popular 15 minutes and we will restart this once restrictions are eased further.

We will be taking new members in the very near future and can give instruction on safety and archery technique for absolute beginners.... nearly all of our members became hooked within a couple of weeks and were asking advice on where to purchase their own equipment.

Anyone considering joining this Group can pop along to see what we get up to and to enjoy the fresh air and a steady stroll around the woods and field participating in a “different” sport that is naturally in our genes from ancient times.

Terry Horton



Pétanque in a time of Covid

As with all outdoor sporting activities, pétanque could only restart as long as all players adhered to the guidance of their national sporting body, in our case Pétanque England. When we were able to restart last year, rather than playing with as many as 36 people on the pistes at Broome Manor, we were restricted to a total of 12 players a session. Luckily, longstanding pétanque group organisers got together to form new smaller groups, complete risk assessments and contact pétanque players asking who would like to play. I was not among the pétanque pioneers and thought long and hard before deciding to inquire if there were any spaces left. Luckily there were and it was with some trepidation that I turned up for my first Covid safe session. I needn't have worried. No equipment was shared and social distancing was strictly observed. I felt safe enough to abandon my mask after 10 minutes. As there were so few of us, it was a different experience to playing with the usual friendly rowdy rabble but meeting and getting to know Swindon u3a members from different pétanque groups was a definite bonus.

Sue Carvey



Hands on Gardening

We are a small group who meet to look at and discuss each other's gardens. We restrict the numbers to 12 because some of us have smaller gardens and inside spaces than others and could not cope with more people attending.

This year I set up some zoom calls for those who could access, not everyone was able. In April we met up in the Town Gardens going round in small groups to comply with the Covid regulations set out by u3a, it was so lovely to see everyone.

In May we were able to meet in one of our member's garden. This was even more wonderful because we felt as if life was getting a bit more normal.

Monica Brian



Asparagus Caprese

This is a super, quick and delicious recipe. As the English Asparagus season now extends well into July, you should still be able to find home grown asparagus. To avoid the climate effects of air miles, I try to avoid buying out of season asparagus (it's usually from Peru) but this recipe would probably work just as well with other vegetables: courgettes, leeks, green beans? I'll be trying out those later in the year. Try this as a starter, light lunch or supper.

Ingredients: 450g asparagus stalks (hard ends trimmed off), olive oil, salt, 200g grated mozzarella, 400g cherry tomatoes halved, 120 ml balsamic vinegar, 60g honey, basil to garnish.

Method: preheat oven to 220°C (200°C fan); on a baking tray toss the asparagus with olive oil and season with salt and pepper; lay asparagus along one side of the tray and sprinkle with the mozzarella. On the other side toss the cherry tomatoes in olive oil, season with salt and pepper.

Bake for approximately 20 minutes. Meanwhile make the balsamic glaze by combining the vinegar and honey in a saucepan and simmering, stirring occasionally for 15 minutes.

Serve the cheesy asparagus with the roasted tomatoes and drizzle with the balsamic glaze. Delicious with baguette!

Gill Brain



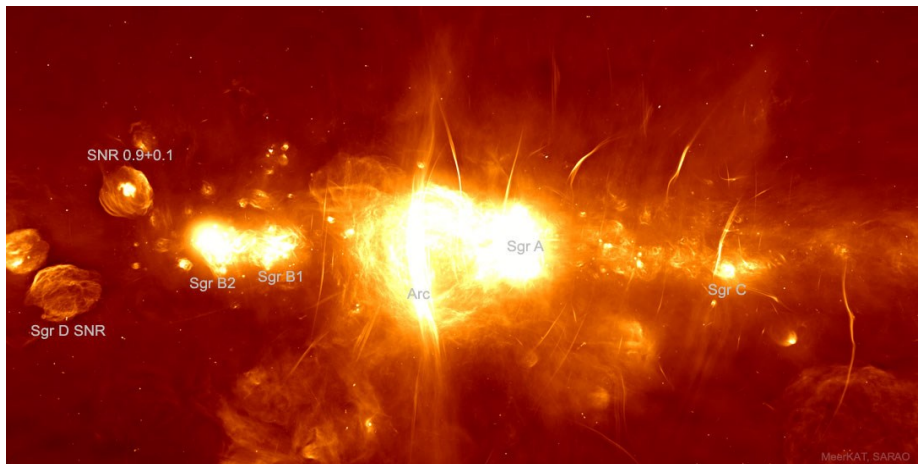
Black Holes and the Transient Universe

Tuesday, 29th June 2021 at 10:30 on Zoom

Prof. Phil Charles will touch on matters such as black holes, white dwarfs, X-ray binaries in our Galaxy, high energy gamma rays and other mysteries of the Universe.

You will not need a degree in physics to understand these mysteries, Phil will explain.

Phil Charles was based at Oxford University from 1980 - 2000 and worked as Head of Astronomy at the Anglo/Spanish/Dutch observatory on La Palma. He was Head of the Department of Physics & Astronomy at the University of Southampton. Phil also spent seven years in Cape Town as Director of the South African Astronomical Observatory.



Cost for the talk is £1 per device. Please book electronically by clicking on the 'TICKETSOURCE' icon immediately below the event on www.u3atvnetwork.org.uk This is by far the best and easiest option. You will receive an acknowledgement immediately and the Zoom link a few days before the event.

If you experience any difficulty, please email the organiser Jane Sellwood at janesellwood09@gmail.com giving your name and the u3a to which you belong.

Closing date for applications is Wednesday, 23rd June

If you have not received the Zoom link by midday on Monday, 28th June please email the organiser as above.

To receive notification of forthcoming TVN events as soon as they are published, please email events_info@u3atvnetwork.org.uk

List of Email Addresses

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The Editor reserves the right to amend or abbreviate any entries submitted.

We should also like to point out that any views expressed are not necessarily those of the organisation or of the Editor.

Management Committee

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Vice-chair	Linda Young	07557 519135
Treasurer	Graham Reeve	01793 637279
Assistant Treasurer	Viv Dipper	01793 322421
Secretary	Sue Carvey	01793 526746
Minutes Secretary	Patricia Scaplehorn	01793 823062
Office Manager	Sylvia Alexander	01793 614629
Accommodation	Chris Ockwell	07712 078942
Webmaster	Alex Cranswick	01793 539529
Groups Co-ordinator	Jim Sinclair	
Health and Safety	Bryan Neaves	07824 411733.

Key Tasks (Non committee)

Office manager (Assistant)	Glenys Bettley	01793 525523
Speakers organiser	Cheryll Yeowell	01793 812708

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**N.B The office will re-open to members on
2nd August 2021**

Charity Number 298853