

BULLETIN JANUARY 2021

HAPPY NEW YEAR

The excellent news that vaccines have been approved and indeed that some of our members have already received their vaccination gives us cause for optimism as we enter 2021. 2020 was a difficult year for everyone and we are immensely grateful for the support and encouragement which you gave to Towcesteru3a. We look forward to seeing you all in person before too long. Won't it be just wonderful when we can meet again!! Something to really look forward to! Meanwhile the committee and I wish you all a Happy and Healthy New Year.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

At this time last year none of us could have predicted what lie ahead and what a difficult year it would be. However there are now positive signs that life will return to something near to normal in the future although we don't know when that will be. Even during these difficult times Towcester u3a members have found interesting and innovative ways to keep going and keep in touch using social media and the internet.

I am sure you all realise the financial situation for Towcester u3a has been completely different to previous years. Although we have not been able to hold our usual activities we still carry expenses. These include payments to the Third Age Trust for the Third Age Matters magazine and Third Age subscriptions, our fees for Simple Membership, which is the tool we use for managing our administration, as well as our copyright licences and auditor's fees. Obviously, we have made no payments to Towcestrians for room hire but a proportion of our payment to them has continued as we store u3a equipment there. We have also funded a Zoom licence so that our groups who use this can have meetings longer than the free 40 minutes. At the next AGM in May our accounts will be laid before our members.

After discussion of our financial situation at the January meeting, the trustees decided to set the subscription level for 2021-22 at £10 for all current members. New members or returning members who didn't renew in 20/21 will pay £16. At the end of March we will send out a membership renewal reminder email. You'll be able to renew your membership either by cheque or online from April onwards with a cut off for renewal around the end of June.

We have to be mindful of the fact that some expenses may rise and that membership levels may change, and by Charity Commission rules we are obliged to keep a minimum cash reserve. We believe the new subscription rate will enable us to function effectively.

Although the reduction level of a third is not a huge saving we are keen to recognise the continuing support of so many members even when we have not been able to enjoy our usual level of activities because of the pandemic and lockdowns.

COMMITTEE

The committee are meeting regularly via Zoom. At the present time there are 9 of us which means we do have 3 vacancies. We would welcome some new committee members. In the past when we were meeting face to face it was easy to chat to people about joining the committee and possibly "persuade" somebody to join us. We no longer have that luxury of face to face meetings. I am sure there are people amongst the membership who have ideas about how to support us taking the u3a forward. We meet on the first Monday of the month currently via Zoom. We are well aware that members joining the u3a bring with them a wealth of life skills and experiences. Perhaps you have expertise in marketing, IT, Website development/operation or administration which could be invaluable to us. I would be delighted to hear from you.

We have an exciting time ahead planning our return to being a fully functioning u3a, with the challenge of attracting new members and opening new groups to continue our long tradition of growth.

HELPING HANDS

Even if you don't wish to join the committee it may be that you can still offer help in some way. You may have skills in areas we need but don't wish to be full blown committee members. The late John Firth was never on the committee but contributed so much to our website development.

Jo Hart attends all our committee meetings to take the minutes I have to say we are amazed at how quickly she has adapted to watching the screen, identifying who is talking listening to what they are saying and producing concise accurate minutes.

VACCINATIONS

I have recently received this message from the National Office

There has been some discussion amongst members about the impact of a vaccination on members attending activities in a u3a.

On this matter, the policy guidance for the movement from the Trust will follow UK-wide government advice as well as the expert public health guidance of each of the nation's governments (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales and the Crown dependencies). Currently all nations are in lockdown so no face to face activity is permitted.

SCAM NEWS UPDATE

Fraudsters are taking advantage of the COVID-19 vaccine rollout with cruel but convincing texts and phone calls. One text asks people to follow a link to apply for the vaccine. The link takes you to a very convincing NHS website where you are asked for personal details including bank card details to check your identity. **THE NHS will not ask for bank card details.**

Cold calls regarding the vaccine are starting to take place with people being asked to pay over the phone

Remember the vaccine is **FREE!** If you ever think you have handed over your card details to scammers let your bank know what has happened immediately.

NEWS FROM THE GROUPS

Food and Wine

So how did the Food & Wine Group go about meeting up to celebrate the festive season? With Wine, Food and plenty of bonhomie of course! But how can you do that when social distancing? Hmm.... by implementing a cunning plan and making excellent use of the Towcester U3A Zoom account which is rarely used in the evenings (that's when we usually hold our meetings at the Chantry House).

For some months the group has been keeping in touch by email with members taking it in turns weekly to tell the other members about a wine that they tried over the weekend and sometimes the food that they ate with the wine. As Christmas approached it was suggested we needed to do more and so it was agreed to arrange a zoom meeting where we were all together tasting some wine. Recognising that some members of the group may not have used zoom before we arranged a trial for a week before the main event so all could test the technology for themselves. This was invaluable as one couple found they had technical problems taking part which after the trial meet they were able to resolve through talking to their internet service provider. At our meeting on 8 December we had no technical problems to mar the evening.

But what to do when we met up virtually? Run the meeting as close as possible to normal so we needed wine and food shared around. As Group leader I spoke with the manager of Majestic Wines in Northampton, who we have worked with before, and he recommended to us a selection of 3 bottles of wine all with a common theme. This was being Italian and produced using the ripasso approach (this involves passing the developing wine across the dried skins of grapes of a different variety as this enhances the nuanced flavours in the wine). Having confirmed the selection with the rest of the group I then collected enough bottles of each wine to ensure every household taking part could have a full set of the 3 bottles. Val made some excellent mince pies to her own recipe and we added Christmas crackers for everyone. Then, on the day before our zoom get together Val and I took a parcel to each household with their wine, mince pies and crackers so we could all be ready for the big night and have the pleasure of a socially distanced chat over the threshold.

Carol having passed me all the details to manage the zoom meeting, I was able to admit everyone to the meeting and we could all see each other as a group for the first time since lock down last March. That was great. In turn we all tasted the 3 bottles of wine and discussed their qualities and our preferences much as in a normal meeting but with a slight variation - now we all had crackers to pull apart, jokes to read out, riddles to answer (and cheat on if your cracker contained the very same riddle) and mince pies to nibble. In addition we were admitting 2 new members to the group and so we each took in turn to say a little bit about ourselves and then to hear from our new arrivals. Perhaps unsurprising but the 2 hours of the meeting went very quickly.

Everyone enjoyed themselves and after all the social distancing enforced upon us by lockdown it was great to meet up and laugh with so many U3A friends at one go. It's great to spot a friend in Waitrose and pass a few words of greeting through a mask but hardly the same experience as a full meeting. Will we do it again? The evening was great fun but took a lot of organising so if the grip of COVID has not been relaxed by then so we can return to the Chantry House we may well repeat the event in the summer - being able to meet up as a group was great fun and, I'm sure, excellent for all our wellbeings

Andrew

Virtual Mixed Crafts

Our mixed crafters have been busy working on their 'door' themed challenge throughout January. There are door garlands, key tassels and cards to name but a few items. It's not possible to show them all here in the Bulletin but hope you get a flavour of the talented people in the U3A. Our theme for February is hearts, what else would be appropriate. ♥



Jeanette

FB Photo-sharing

Thank you all for continuing to meet the challenges set on the photo-sharing page. I've been blown away by all the wonderful photos. Hopefully even in these times of lockdown you can fill the odd moment by looking through your archives and reliving moments from the past, and also popping outside and snapping something to remind you of 2021. I've been reacquainting myself with photo editing as it's been too dull to be outside (and wet and cold!)

Happy snapping - Jeannie

The Genealogy Groups

The two groups joined forces last July and used the U3A Zoom licence so that members could remain in contact and continue to exchange ideas, problems and findings. We had a 'summer challenge' to prove the details of a marriage and the immediate descendants by finding and, most important, correlating records. Then lockdown-1 became lockdown-2 and we discussed individual members' particular problems hunting ancestors; we pooled our collective experiences to offer advice. One unforeseen benefit was that the National Archives offered digital downloads free of charge up to a generous monthly limit. This proved beneficial seeking army-unit war-diaries that can be very large files.

Some members gave presentations on their ancestors or on broader aspects of genealogy including: *'An Everyday Story of Kentish Folk'*, *'The Strange Tale of Arthur Elwood – The Life and Times of a Serial Rogue'* and *'Maps & Trees – turning Genealogy into Family History'*. The members also enjoyed a contrasting approach by looking at one particular house and the folk who lived there together with the social history context over four centuries. The historian David Olusoga and his BBC TV series *'History of a House'* gave one member the idea.

Now we are faced with lockdown-3; but we have made plans for 2021. They already include presentations called *'Oddities I found on the trail'*, *'Lost Cousins'*, *'Registers, Records and Rules – what happened in 1538 and where it led?'*, *'Troopships'* and the intriguingly titled *'Curious too Late'*.

The Recorder Group

Members of the Recorder group have been keeping in touch by email and Zoom. Three members also signed up for the National u3a Recorder Winter School. It has motivated us to practice some new pieces. When we meet on Zoom we all have to mute and play along to backing music, which does have the advantage that nobody else hears any wrong notes you play! Hopefully our Towcester group will be able to meet up and play the pieces at some point in the future...

The Music for Pleasure Group

Members continue to meet regularly on Zoom and discuss suggested Youtube choices which we have all listened to before the meeting. We started the year with a bang listening to the finale of the 1812 Overture with flashing lights and cannon fire!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ko5Bz6h55us&feature=youtu.be>

Uplifting in a different way was Handel's Hallelujah Chorus sung (remotely) by 350 voices with some amazing effects and set in the Barcelona Church of Santa Maria del Mar.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NXFhkmyVRgM>

We have another very welcome contribution from Peter Warden "Learning about Wildlife"

Bat Detectors and Their Uses for Recording Other Animal Groups.

You will all be aware that bat recorders can be used to detect the presence of bats (I have used one at our moth recording sessions.) and to identify the species being recorded. The best of these can be used to create spectrograms of the sounds so that identification made on location can be verified by inputting the data to a computer.

In 1983 the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) set up a project in Norfolk to involve members of the public in surveying bats. During this survey it was clear that there was a large amount of "bycatch" (I don't like this word as it reminds me of pictures of cetaceans, sharks and other fish unintentionally trapped in fishing gear but that is the word chosen.) It was noticed that large numbers of crickets were being recorded.

Advances in autonomous recording devices are [transforming our understanding of bats](#), but the large-scale deployment of such devices has the potential to improve our understanding of other species groups that produce loud and characteristic sounds too. The original objective of BTO's [Norfolk Bat Survey](#), led by Stuart Newson, was to trial the recording of bat activity using passive real-time detectors, to gauge the willingness of members of the public to engage in bat monitoring at a large scale, and to determine the suitability of automated identification routines for processing large volumes of citizen-science collected bat recordings. However, it soon became clear that bush-crickets were also being recorded in large numbers. Records of this group of animals are comparatively few so the ability to detect them using bat recorders offered an opportunity to better understand these creatures.

The daily activity patterns of different species of bush-cricket were examined to determine where different species live. The Speckled Bush-cricket, for example, would normally be easy to overlook because it occurs in vegetation and stridulates at a frequency too high for humans to hear. With over 260,000 recordings of this species collected through the Norfolk Bat Survey, this study found this species to be common and widespread, with a distribution that extends into the city of Norwich. At the other extreme, Great Green Bush-cricket, previously known from only a few locations in Norfolk, was recorded at two locations, of which one was a new site for this species.

So far so good but the next development is in to the recording of terrestrial mammals.¹ All such animals are difficult to observe in the wild and it is usually necessary to perform invasive capture techniques in order to confirm their presence. The presence of small mammals can, however, be detected by their vocalisations. The vocalisation of small mammals serve a variety of purposes including communication between parent and offspring, aggressive and non-aggressive encounters with conspecifics and use in courtship.

Stuart Newson and partners created a call library using calls captured from captive animals and wild individuals caught by live-trapping in Longworth traps and held overnight in mammal terrariums (including shrews for which a licence was granted by Natural England

Species	No. of Recordings	No. of Calls
Hazel Dormouse	858	11,406
Bank Vole	228	1,295
Field Vole	586	10,584
Water Vole	1,185	8,130
Harvest Mouse	1,572	25,255
Wood Mouse	1,091	8,577
Yellow-necked Mouse	2,412	14,087
House Mouse	101	5,183
Brown Rat	1,663	50,143
Black Rat	1,562	26,347
Common Shrew	1,247	75,342
Pygmy Shrew	1,145	28,901
Water Shrew	217	8,130

For each species a spectrogram² was compiled in order to illustrate the range of call variation. For some species identification can be assessed purely by looking at a spectrogram while for others it is necessary to take specific call measurements and/or listen

to the recording. In the latter case it is helpful to play the recording ten times slower than real time. It is generally simple to separate the calls of rodents and shrews. A further useful consideration for rodents is whether the calls are above or below 30kHz: while most species can produce calls across a broad frequency range the smaller rodents (e.g. mice and Bank Vole) tend to emit calls at higher frequencies than those of larger species (i.e. rats, Hazel Dormouse and Water Vole).

The work highlights the huge potential for sound identification as a non-invasive survey method for small mammals in Britain. Large volumes of data are already being collected incidentally across Britain by bat workers using static bat detectors but there is also potential to target small mammals by placing recorders closer to the ground. The BTO intends to make all the results available on its "BTO Acoustic Pipeline" and to allow users to upload recordings to the cloud.

Where next?

1. Reference

A **spectrogram** is a visual representation of the spectrum of frequencies of an acoustic signal as it varies with time. The usual format is a graph with two geometric dimensions: one axis represents

NEW GROUPS

Possible New Cycling Group

Cycling is one of the relatively few activities we don't have on our u3a list at the moment, even though it is an increasingly popular sport.

We have the possibility of developing a group when circumstances permit, and it would be good to know how many people might be interested.

The details have not been finalised as yet, and there is room for discussion about how the group will operate, but initial thoughts are that it might cover approximately 15 miles a session.

There are bound to be a good number of people out there who have cycled in the past, or currently cycle alone, who might like to try a group experience. Letting me know your name does not commit you to anything - you are expressing an interest in pursuing the idea, that's all - so don't be shy!

There are far too few females in the cycling world, so here's your opportunity, ladies! I look forward to hearing from you!. email me on katebartlett@btinternet.com.

MIRTHY TALKS

Several members have brought to my attention the fact that Mirthy broadcasts educational and entertaining online talks by the best public speakers. Several of our members have registered and have found the talks very interesting. A free talk is broadcast every Thursday. Anyone interested can register for these free talks at www.mirthy.co.uk /talks.

CHARTERED INSTITUTE OF HORTICULTURE SPRING WEBINAR SERIES

Jill Stewart has made me aware of this series of webinars. The CIH are celebrating the arrival of Spring and a new growing season with their popular webinar series bringing the latest research development and expert insights The series commences on Feb 25th February and full details can be found on their website

The above talks and webinars may be of interest to many members I am so grateful when people take the time to email me so details can be passed on to other members.

WEBSITE

We always recommend prospective new members to visit our website but it is an excellent place for existing members to find information about our groups, read newsletters and get up to date information about restrictions and guidelines.

Our website was recently updated and this is very much work in progress. We hope you will find what you are looking for and you will let us know if you do not!!

TOWCESTER FOODBANK

Several of our members are already trustees/volunteers at the Foodbank and have asked me to share this piece with all members.



Towcester Foodbank – can you help us implement change?

Towcester Foodbank, established 8 years ago, is run as part of the Trussell Trust network and works to combat food poverty and hunger in NN12 and the surrounding community. The foodbank is managed by a dedicated team of trustees and volunteers who, during this difficult year, have responded to the many challenges the Covid 19 pandemic has thrown at us, in order to maintain our valuable service.

We are now looking to appoint 3 new volunteer trustees willing to help us work on a strategic plan in line with the Trussell Trust's aim to change communities, policies and minds. So, if during your working life you gained experience in managing change, public relations or grant application and feel you could help us, we'd love to hear from you.

To find out more about the Towcester Foodbank , click here (<https://towcester.foodbank.org.uk/>) and if you'd like to discuss the roles of the trustees please ring the Rev Lulu Pelly on 07723 604316. Applications enclosing a brief biography or CV and a resume of what you can bring to the post should be sent to info@towcester.foodnak.org.uk by 19th February 2021.

SAD NEWS

I am so sorry to tell members of the death of Mary Brown. Mary died suddenly and unexpectedly on New Year's Eve. She remained an active member of the u3a during lockdown. We send our heartfelt sympathy to all her family and friends.

FINALLY

Thank you so much for your positive comments about the bulletins. Contact with each other is so important during this time probably more so now we are into winter. Any publication is only as good as its contributors and I am always grateful to those people who send quality articles to our bulletin. If you have an idea for an article or there is anything interesting you would like to see in the bulletin please let me know!

During these dark days I am always on the lookout for positive signs and several members tell me that they have snowdrops in their garden A sign hopefully that Spring and better times are on their way



Please continue to take care and stay safe

Missing you lots

Carol x

4 Meadow Bank Towcester NN12 6FJ 01327 605713 Lucascrl@aol.com

Towcester U3A is a registered charity number 1155428