



Newsletter December 2021

Dear All

I hope you all had a good Christmas whether it was spent with family or friends or maybe just by yourself. Whichever way you celebrated, I hope that you over-indulged or found other ways to enjoy the festive season.

Unfortunately, it seems that the Omicron variant of the Covid virus may push us back into some form of lockdown in the New Year, just as we were starting to get our u3a back up and running again.

The Prime Minister has stated that there will be no further restrictions this year, which implies that there may well be further restrictions in the New Year, but of course we cannot know what they might be or how they will affect the running of our u3a.

I was looking back 12 months to see what our then chairman, Colin Ellis, had to say about the end of 2020 and it was far blacker than this year. We had already been through about 10 months of Covid infections and because of lockdown restrictions we could then only meet up with one person from outside our household, and then only outdoors. Vaccinations had just started, with 91 year old Margaret Keenan getting the first jab on 8th Dec 2020. The NHS have now administered over 132 million vaccinations! Who would have thought that it would be possible to organise that so quickly pre-Covid.

We can now hope that, whilst Covid is still rife, the symptoms are much less worse than a year ago but that doesn't mean that we can carry on regardless.

Listed below are the planned meetings of the various groups next year, but of course these could all change at the drop of a hat. Some groups have already cancelled meetings in January, some may yet make changes. Our Monthly Meetings and the Burns Supper may also be affected but we are planning to go ahead with them at this moment.

I suggest you all keep an eye on the website for all the latest news of which groups are holding meetings, or just call the group leader/co-ordinator to see what is happening on any month. I shall nonetheless do my best to keep everyone informed. Let's hope that we are able to get together safely as soon as possible.

So, regardless of what may happen next year, I and the Committee wish you all a happy and healthy New Year.

Best regards

Mike Stow

Interest Groups Timetable for January 2022

Please note that this timetable could be subject to change at any time due to the ongoing pandemic.

Group	Date	Time	Venue
Monthly Meeting	Tue 25th Jan	2 pm	Congregational Church, Ashby Kath Reynolds "Goose grease and Brown paper (old cures and remedies)"
Arts and Crafts	Thu 13th Jan	10:00 am	2 Marlborough Way
Bridge	Mon 3rd Jan		CANCELLED
	Mon 10th Jan		CANCELLED
	Tue 17th Jan	2 pm	Hood Park Leisure Centre
	Tue 24th Jan	7 pm	Ivanhoe Club
Calligraphy	Tue 11th Jan	10:00 am	At Sue's. Modern calligraphy
Computer	Wed 5th Jan		CANCELLED
	Mon 17th Jan		CANCELLED
Digital Photography	Thu 6th Jan		CANCELLED
Drawing and painting	Wed 19th Jan	10:00 am	Venue and topic TBC
Family History	Wed 12th Jan	2:00 pm	2 Marlborough Way
Gardening	Thu 20th Jan	2.15 pm	Packington Village Hall Garden Design with Francesca Sinclair who writes in the Ashby Life. £4 entry
History	Thu 27th Jan	2:15 pm	Packington Village Hall. Julie Edes - 'Edith Piaf'
Industrial Heritage	Wed 26th Jan	9.30 am	National Space Museum, Leicester
Italian			TBA
Literature	Tue 11th Jan	1:30 pm	Meeting at Sandra's house
Lunch	Thu 13th Jan	12 for 12.30 pm	Copt Oak Inn, Whitwick Rd, Copt Oak, Markfield LE67 9QB
Medium Walks	Mon 10th Jan	9.45 for 10am start	Meet at Bradgate Park Hunts Hill CP (off Sharpley Hill) LE6 0AH
Music Appreciation	Wed 5th Jan	10:00 am	Nev's at 26 Homecroft Drive, Packington
Recorder	Thu 6th Jan	10:00 am	St Matthew's Community Hall, Overseal
	Thu 20th Jan	10:00 am	St Matthew's Community Hall, Overseal
Science & Technology			TBA
Short Walks	Fri 21st Jan	10:00 am	Meet at the Hood Park Gates for a walk around Ashby
Supper Club	Thu 24th Feb	7 for 7.30 pm	The George Inn, Loughborough Rd, Coleorton, LE67 8HF

Group	Date	Time	Venue
Walking	Tue 4th Jan	9.45 for 10 am start	The Globe, Snarestone DE12 7DB
	Tue 18th Jan	9.45 for 10 am start	The Staff of Life, Ticknall DE73 7JH
Wine Appreciation	Wed 19th Jan	7:00 pm	Annie's house

Coming Events

Event	Date	Time	Venue
Burns Supper	Thu 27th Jan	7 for 7:30 pm	Willesley Park Golf Club. Tickets still on sale

Interest Groups Timetable for early February

Group	Date	Time	Venue
Walking	Tue 1st	9.45 for 10 am start	TBA
Computer	Wed 2nd	2:00 pm	16 Winchester Way. Please check before coming
Digital Photography	Thu 3rd	10:00 am	16 Winchester Way. Please check before coming
Bridge	Mon 7th	2-4 pm	Hood Park Leisure Centre
Literature	Tue 8th	1:30 pm	Meeting at Sandra's house

HELP & WELFARE

Covid

We remind you that we cannot guarantee that all members or other participants at u3a meetings or gatherings will have been vaccinated nor that they are virus-free and that it is up to individuals to decide whether or not they are comfortable with the risks of mixing in groups when the virus is still very much at large. Especially as the new variant seems to be much more transmissible.

Group leaders may also wish to remind participants that they may wish to wear face masks in crowded spaces including homes, although it isn't compulsory nor is it a legal requirement. (This may of course change in the near future)

It is a legal requirement to wear face masks in places of worship which includes the Congregational Church where we hold our monthly meetings and also the Ashby Alliance Evangelical Church where the Science Group meets, even though we are not meeting at either place for worship.

Welfare

Our Welfare person is Sharon Woodland. Sharon can be contacted at welfare@ashbyu3a.co.uk

If you know of any member who is unwell or isolating or has a family member who is unwell, please contact Sharon or any other committee member and we can see if there is anything we can do to help, whether it is collecting shopping or prescriptions, having a chat or just sending a card.

NHS Covid-19 Test and Trace

If you have a smartphone, we would encourage you to download the NHS Covid App. It tracks whether you have been in close proximity to someone who subsequently tests positive for Covid-19 and allows Test and Trace to contact you and ask you to isolate for a number of days. Remember this app only works if you carry your phone with you when you go out! It can also be used to check-in to pubs, restaurants and other premises for Test and Trace to save having to give your details at the door.

LAST MONTH'S MEETING

December 21st - Concordia Choir

As you doubtless know, December's meeting was cancelled by the committee at short notice as reports suggested that the transmissibility of Omicron was very high. In November we had 95 members and guests in the church. The possibility of a similar turnout in December combined with approximately 20 members of the choir seemed to be rather too many for comfort. That combined with the new requirement that everyone would have to wear masks in the church (ironically except when singing or eating) meant that the committee felt that it was inappropriate to go ahead with the meeting.

We have yet to decide about future meetings but this will undoubtedly depend on Government decisions. We will let you all know what is happening as soon as possible.

CHRISTMAS LUNCH

The Christmas Lunch went ahead as planned on the 9th Dec at Willesley Golf Club. Lynne and her staff did an excellent job, as in previous years, to serve wonderful food to all 76 members who attended. I hope you all had a good time if you were there.

BURNS SUPPER 27th JAN

The Burns Supper is still planned to go ahead. Tickets are still available at £28.50 from Bill Wilson 01530 413182. If anyone has bought a ticket but doesn't wish to attend, then we are offering a full refund. The closing date for buying or refunding tickets is 10th Jan as we have to confirm numbers to the Golf Club on that date.

GROUP REPORTS

Bridge

The Bridge Group had only just restarted in November and had held 6 meeting by mid-December but decided to cancel the last 2 meetings in Dec and the first 2 meetings in Jan. Further meetings are under review. Whilst Neil is away, Alison and Gary are looking after the group.

Craft

I understand that the Craft group didn't meet in Dec. Please note that the date for the January meeting has been moved to Thursday 13th at 2 Marlborough Way

Calligraphy

14th December

Five of us met over mince pies and coffee to complete our projects and experiment on tree formats that Jenny had designed on hand made paper. A bit difficult as the ink kept 'bleeding! However we were pleased with the results. You can see the results for yourselves in the Gallery below.

The next meeting is at Sue's on Jan 11th.

Computer Group

The Computer Group is still able to help people with their computer, tablet or smartphone problems. Obviously we can't do repairs, but if you have software problems or other difficulties email help.computer@ashbyu3a.co.uk or phone John Howlett on 01530 461774 and someone will have a look at your problem and get back to you. Subject to the social distancing regulations in force at the time, we may even be able to do house calls.

1st December

Seven of us met and there was some serious work for us.

Betty needed help to deal with YouTube, and then to find a channel run by her Tai Chi instructor so that she can exercise at home. We also showed her how to access and use the App Store on her iPad, and choose a map app. The exercise reinforced the need for helpers to keep in mind the level of the prior knowledge of terminology and search techniques of beginners. Betty also has issues to do with storage on her phone: this was discussed, and she will think about what she wants to do with her photos, as she is very close to the limit on her phone.

As the session progressed there were a series of micro power cuts, which didn't seem to cause too many problems. Although at first we suggested it might have been John's kettle, it was actually Virgin Media's fault.

Unknown at the time was the fact that it caused the Virgin Media Broadband TV service to drop out and appear to be unobtainable even when all power came back and the routers re-booted. John D found later that the only cure was to switch off all power to his TV and associated kit, and then reboot it. That cured the problem.

Peter, John H, Richard and Bic worked on removing the annoying and tenacious browser, Bing. It is difficult to 'kill' but there is a procedure that does this effectively. It was replaced with Google Chrome.

20th December This meeting was cancelled due to Covid, as will be both January meetings.

Digital Photography

2nd December

Four of us attended today and although it was a very bright and calm day we decided to stay in, it being very cold outdoors.

The four of us looked over the photos that JD had been unable to show last time, commenting on some of the settings he'd experimented with. We also discussed some curious monoliths he found in the woods close to the Lime Kilns but were unable to identify them.

We then experimented with different EV settings on mobile phone cameras, and some of the more advanced settings available on the SLR cameras present.

We were able to capture a pleasant photo of a local robin highlighted by the sunshine in one of John's trees.

The meeting on Jan 6 has been cancelled.

Drawing and painting

15th December

The December drawing and painting session followed the health advice and "worked from home".

The January meeting is scheduled for Wednesday 19th. Venue and topic to be confirmed.

Family History

8th December

Despite some really disagreeable weather we had five at the table, and two contributing remotely

John D thought he had made considerable progress pushing back the story of Christine's father's family into the 18th century. Unfortunately, it turns out to be the wrong family. The error arose from the entry in the 1841 Census which asks, 'Whether born in this county'. The answer was "yes" so he had assumed it was Surrey, where the family was then living. But a confirmatory check of the following Censuses (which he should have done first) showed quite clearly that the Head was born in Chippenham. It just shows that even the experienced can fall into the trap of not double checking! Back to the drawing board.

John H has located his uncle's wedding, which will give him a much-needed boost onwards.

Carolyn has now finally identified her great grandparents, which is a relief, as they are the gateway to solid progress.

Keith is researching his grandfather's military service but is having difficulty deciding which of the many names that comes up on his search is the right one to pursue. He doesn't want to apply (at some expense and considerable time delay) to the MOD for a Service record, only to find that it is the wrong chap.

Sylvia struggled to get online with her old tablet, so we used a spare Windows 10 laptop. It may be her tablet is now too old to run Ancestry or any modern search engine. She wanted to get to grips with FindMyPast and how to navigate its functions. We had a quick run through of some of the most common ones, including altering the vital statistics of an entry. More work needed here.

Dora (by Whatsapp) reported good progress with research into her father's antecedents in the Scottish Borders in the mid to late 17th century. She has found several people, noted in documents as witnesses, who could well be 'persons of interest' so is hot on their trail. She notes that documents from this era are hard on the eyes!

Ana (by WhatsApp) reported that she has found on 'Find a Grave' a photo of her grandmother's headstone. On it is an inscription 'MBATD' which she thinks stands for 'Member of the British Association of Teachers of Dance'. We've never had a Terpsichorean Maestra before!

The mince pies went round twice: sorry ladies and Frank, you missed your chance. Never mind we shall see what we can do next time! See you all in the New Year on Wednesday 12th January 2022

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to you all.

And my personal thanks for being so loyal and supportive during these difficult times.

John D

Gardening

16th December

Our December meeting including our Secret Santa was very enjoyable. We all bought our own food, with all drink supplied from our funds. Before we had our draw, Tina came and gave craft demonstrations on various things we can create to decorate the house and Christmas table.

Our January meeting will be on garden design, with Francesca Sinclair.

Industrial History

The group didn't meet in December as the date inconveniently coincided with Christmas! Much of our program for next year is looking a little doubtful as museums and factory visits are likely to be the first things to close if we have another lockdown or restrictions on going out.

Lunch

There was no lunch meeting in December as it is traditionally replaced with the Christmas lunch organised by Avril and Bill. See above for the report on that.

Literature Group

The group are now meeting at Sandra's house each month so that they can discuss the books they are reading. The discussions are lively, one hears.

History

The History group didn't meet in December as, like the Industrial Heritage group, the date rather inconveniently clashed with Christmas!

Music Appreciation

Wednesday 1st December

Just four of us at this month's session, but we managed to come up with a varied selection between us.

After Nev had done so last month, Neil had decided to play differing versions of the same songs. As Astro of UB40 had recently passed away, and they had made several songs that were very different to the original versions, he chose a couple of theirs. Firstly it was "I think it's going to rain today". UB40s Reggae version was vastly different to Randy Newman's slow and mournful original.

Nev decided to get us in the mood for Christmas and chose Maddy Prior & the Carnival Band's excellent version of "Coventry Carol" from their Carols at Christmas Album.

Sally decided not to play us more piano renditions this month, and treated us to some Mozart instead, her first choice being his "Clarinet Concerto in A Minor - 2nd Movement".

Brenda chose a couple of her favourite songstresses this month. Her first choice was Connie Francis with "Lipstick on my Collar", which she used to love to jive to, followed by "Who's Sorry Now?". We were all reminded of what a fabulous voice Connie had.

Neil's second UB40 song was "Can't Help Falling in Love", followed by Elvis's version.

After having seen the BBC4 programme about the making of the Bridge Over Troubled Water album, Nev then played Simon & Garfunkel's "The Boxer", which the programme had pointed out was recorded in a Cathedral.

Sally's second Mozart selection was his "Horn Concerto - Rondo", which we all recognised had been used in TV programmes, but weren't sure which.

Brenda's second female was Carol Kidd, a little known Scottish Jazz singer, who has been around for a long while and has been made an MBE. We heard "Dat Dere" and "Bidin' my Time".

With some time left we played the following bonus tracks to round off the session.

John Fogerty - "Garden Party".

Randy Newman - "Sail Away"

"Gabriel's Message" from the Carols from Kings album.

Elvis Presley - "American Trilogy"

Aimee Mann - "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas", which was a fine sentiment to finish on.

Science & Technology

Monday 13th December.

Eighteen people attended our 4th face to face meeting of 2021 to hear whether modern astronomy could explain the Star of Bethlehem. There is no agreed scientific explanation for the star or celestial object that guided the three Kings, Wise Men or Magi (the origin of our word 'magic') to Jesus in Bethlehem. There are various possibilities and the talk examined a few of these in detail comparing each with the biblical description given in the Gospel according to Matthew. Firstly, the depth of astronomical knowledge available 2000 years ago was reviewed, which highlighted the absence of any scientific basis. Knowledge of the stars at that time was used mostly for navigation across featureless desert landscapes. There is no doubt the Magi had good star knowledge but at the time nearly everything in the night sky that was bright and moved differently to the 'fixed' stars was called a 'star', including comets, planets and supernova (exploding stars). After assessing each of these candidate objects against the biblical evidence it was concluded that no single feature could account for the behaviour of the Star of Bethlehem, as it suddenly appeared, moved, stopped then disappeared. Perhaps, the event was unique and has never been repeated within modern times, we do not have the experience to explain it. Matthew's Gospel was written 80 years after the star appeared and there is no doubt they were re-told by word-of-mouth many times, and could have been exaggerated as time passed. But it is a story that has inspired the faithful for 2000 years and today still provides the imagery for many Christmas cards.

After the refreshment break there was another talk on Christmas Babies, scientists who were born on Christmas Day. The Cornishman William Gregor was the first to discover the metal Titanium, in 1790, named after the Greek Titans. He was a clergyman but with a wide range of interests especially Geology. A year later Martin Klaproth also discovered it, another example of discoveries being made in different countries very close together in time. The American Scientist Richard Shope made some interesting discoveries during the Spanish Flu Epidemic of 1918 that killed between 20-50 million people. He realised that pigs were suffering a very similar disease, thought to be caused by bacteria. By careful experiments he showed it was not a bacteria but a Virus. International teams conducted further studies, and in 1933 a British team found the human Flu virus, and this led to the flu vaccines we have today. A paleobiologist, the Russian lady, Irina Dobruskina became an expert of the Triassic era Flora, suffered with chauvinist male colleagues, but ended up writing the key work in Triassic Flora. Despite it being the time of the Cold War she managed to work with many overseas geologists, but also passed round illegal Samizdat literature, despite her communist family. Eventually she moved to Israel becoming a professor at the Hebrew University and died in Jerusalem in 2014.

The most famous Christmas baby is of course Sir Isaac Newton, 1642-26, however his dates now show him born after the new year! This was due to the Calendar being changed from the inaccurate Julian calendar, to the Gregorian calendar after his death, and it is the latter historians now use.

To finish the Christmas Special meeting there was a practical activity, making Instant Snow in small groups. Mixing the powder with water made the hands cold and a tiny bit of powder fluffed up many times to make the 'snow', that is used in movies. This being a science group the explanation was given for these effects, and details of how to make this with grandchildren for some 'science magic'.

Supper club

The supper club does not normally meet in December (that pesky Christmas again!) nor in January when it is replaced by the Burns Supper on Jan 27th.

Wine Appreciation

As planned, we didn't meet in December, but hope to get together again on January 19th, Covid permitting.

Recorder Group

Thursday 16th December

We had our final meeting of the year this morning; 6 of us.

We played some trios, including music by Boccherini, Sellinger's Round, and "Wallace and Gromit" (quite a tricky rhythm). We then played a quintet: Royal Wind Music by Bassano.

We then played some Christmas music:

The Three Kings by Marg Hall

A few carols from a collection

Four spirituals.

And then we ran out of time.

We're hoping to be able to continue playing in the hall. There's plenty of space for us, it's well ventilated, convenient, and not expensive.

Our next meeting will be on 6th January, and we hope to be able to follow the pattern of first and third Thursdays.

Merry Christmas,

Joan.

Walking

Tuesday 7th December. Christmas walk led by Kevin

Our last walk of the year started a little differently with 24 of us gathering for pre-walk bacon baps and muffins at Kevin & Chris's house. Fortunately the weather stayed dry as we gathered outside for eating (if a little chilly!) and remained dry after we de-camped to Packington CP to start the walk. Unfortunately during our walk the wind picked up and the rain started! It was decided to offer a shorter walk for those who wanted to. However as the near-freezing rain and wind increased, we all opted for the short walk and got back to the pub for midday. Despite getting to the pub at opening time and an hour earlier than expected, they managed to feed and water us with no problems. The walk was measured at a rather short 3.2 miles.

Medium walks

Monday 13th December. Staunton Harold and Calke, led by Mike

With our planned leader, Carole, not feeling well, Mike took over leading our traditional Christmas walk. Not that it needing much leading as everyone knew the way!

From the Ferrers Arms across the fields to the driveway to Staunton Harold and then along the lake and up on to the hill overlooking the house where we took a group photo. On to Dimminsdale CP and up the road to Calke Abbey. From the dip in the driveway by the house we turned left along the valley to pick up the tramway trail back to the entrance to Staunton Harold. Up the driveway, past the house and then along the green lane back to the pub. Exactly 6 miles in 2h30.

7 of us sat down to eat lunch, as is now traditional in December, but unfortunately without the unwell Carole nor Alison and Gary who were away. Sorry you couldn't be with us and thank you for all the work you have done for the group this year.

Short Walks

Friday 17th December. Oakthorpe Picnic Site to Hick's Lodge, led by John

It was a very pleasant day when 10 walkers and Lily the dog went for a walk starting from Oakthorpe picnic site car park. We walked back up the entrance road and across Willesley Lane into Hick's Lodge. The gravel path which was so badly flooded last year seems to have been repaired and drainage ditches dug to hopefully stop it happening again. Certainly the track was much drier. We went clockwise around the lake, stopping to watch the wildlife on the water. The café beckoned and we all sat outside in relative warmth to drink coffee and eat cake. As we were outside Lily, and therefore Sandra, were able to join us this month. We finished off by walking back round the other side of the lake to return to the car park.

Thank you John for organising all the walks this year.

IF YOU WANT TO GET IN TOUCH, OUR COMMITTEE ARE:

Tony Smith	Chairman	chairman@ashbyu3a.co.uk	01530 831822
Anne Donegan	Business Secretary	secretary@ashbyu3a.co.uk	01283 760348
Val Reed	Treasurer	treasurer@ashbyu3a.co.uk	01530 564279
Iain Banns	Membership Secretary	members@ashbyu3a.co.uk	01530 416697
Colin Woodland	Groups Co-ordinator	interestg@ashbyu3a.co.uk	01530 413867
Peter Clement	Minutes Secretary	minutes@ashbyu3a.co.uk	01530 560894
Sharon Woodland	Welfare	welfare@ashbyu3a.co.uk	01530 413867
Bill Wilson	Speaker seeker	speakers@ashbyu3a.co.uk	01530 413182
Mike Stow	Communications	webmaster@ashbyu3a.co.uk	01530 469152
Avril Wilson	Social Secretary	socials@ashbyu3a.co.uk	01530 413182
Colin Ellis	Member	member_wo@ashbyu3a.co.uk	01530 272592