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Newsletter 175

News and Views

LETTER FROM THE CHAIR – CHRISTMAS 2020

Last year we wrote Christmas letters and cards, sending all good wishes for the coming New Year. We little knew what 2020 would bring. As well as trying not to catch Covid-19 and supporting the NHS, plans and holidays have been cancelled, schooling and exams disrupted, and some businesses have gone to the wall. I may have looked forward to three weddings in 2020, yet just one funeral would have been an improvement on the five so far, with two simply restricted to paying roadside respects.

To say this is a year one would rather forget is an understatement, though it will no doubt, like Spanish Flu, go down in history. It is therefore important not to minimise the effects of this pandemic, whilst also acknowledging it is not all bad news: my son didn't lose his job in a redundancy process and those who did have found new work. My step-granddaughter-to-be got into her University of choice and my niece had a surprise wedding with 2 witnesses. Family members recovered from their Covid-19 infections in both waves, though my daughter-in-law-to-be was very badly affected.



Saint Lucy's Day 1848 by Fritz von Dardel.

Some light in the darkness of these times is needed, and with the prospect of a vaccine now so much nearer we can have the hope of an eventual return to some sort of normality. In the meantime, the days may be short but any bright sunny days make for enjoyable walks with even sunshine and showers producing wonderful rainbows as I witnessed over Ullswater on the day news broke that a first vaccine had been approved for use.

Light helping to brighten the darkness of this season has long been a feature of festivals at this time of year. We saw our Chancellor light candles on the steps of No11 to mark Divali, and though in Hinduism this would mark the beginning of a financial year, light also symbolises a divine quality together with illumination of the mind, Divali thus representing the victory of light over darkness.

Buddhism also conceives light as being both divine while also representing wisdom that dispels the darkness of ignorance.

The Winter Solstice has long been celebrated here in Britain, the Celts believing the sun stood still for 12 days in mid-winter. Mistletoe was cut from sacred oak trees, its fruit representing life in the dark months of winter. The Yule log may have originated then though the name is associated with Norse, perhaps originating from youl, a wheel, the sun being a wheel that changed the seasons. The Romans celebrated Saturnalia, characterised by role reversal, gift-giving, banqueting & drinking, the latter not unknown to the later Norse! Scandinavian countries as well as Italy today celebrate St Lucy's Day or Lucia Day and though this used to coincide with the shortest day on 21 December, due to calendar changes is now celebrated on the 13th. St Lucy or Santa Lucia, according to legend, brought food and aid to Christians hiding in Rome's catacombs, wearing a wreath of candles on her head to light the way in the darkness. Young girls still wear a similar headdress on that day.

Christians celebrate the birth of the Light of the World and that "Love came down at Christmas". Whatever our beliefs, please enjoy the light decorations, and be thankful for those, who, like the moon, have reflected the light of the sun to lighten our darkness during these times.

**Josie Dunlop
Chair**

Diaries

We have ordered some U3A diaries for 2021 sale to members, price £3 each. Usually, these are sold at monthly meetings but we are unable to hold any ordinary monthly meetings at the moment so instead, they can be collected from our Treasurer's home, or if this is not possible she will post them out. If you would like to order a diary please contact the Treasurer, Denise Walker, on pnl3atreasurer@outlook.com or 01768 865096.

Open Day

We usually have an Open Day in November at the Rugby Club, which is an opportunity to join the U3A, find out about our activities and be entertained and socialise. Unfortunately, due to the coronavirus situation we have had to cancel the event this year. We will hold another Open Day as soon as circumstances allow.

NOTICEBOARD

Friends of Penrith and Eden Museum

Our meetings and talks for the Spring 2021 have been cancelled. However, we are hoping we might be able to meet on 27th April. This would be for a combined AGM 2019/20 and 2020/2021 and followed by a talk. Further details nearer the time when C-19 restrictions are known. We look forward to meeting again.

MONTHLY MEETINGS FOR 2021 TO 2022 PROGRAMME

Planning has challenges at the moment as everyone sorely knows. Please be reassured that I am working on a programme of monthly speakers for the first part of 2021 and for the U3A year beginning in April 2021. For the next few months, we have the following speakers, the first few of whom will probably give their presentation via Zoom.

U3A SPEAKERS, 2020-21

- 17 Dec. Christmas music: Eden Baroque**
- 21 Jan. Theo Weston: Rescue services**
- 18 Feb. Emily Atherton: Cumberland and Westmorland Herald**
- 18 Mar. David Sargent: 'Times and Seasons, People and Places': poems and pictures**

My plan for at least the first part of the U3A year (from April 2021) is to choose those who could use Zoom, then I'm looking for locals who can talk in person or by Zoom, and my last category, for later in 2021 or early in 2022, could include those who were on last year's programme and would rather speak in person than use Zoom. Suggestions for good new speakers are always welcome so do, please, send in your recommendations. Ideally, we would, as usual, draw up a definitive programme and send out the printed list on your membership card. This may not be the best plan given the uncertainties of the current COVID-19 situation and it might be more helpful to give out information about monthly meetings via the newsletter. Please bear with us as we determine the best way forward.

Sue Tomlinson

Keeping in touch

We are trying to get more people to give us their email address so that we can send out invites to the Zoom meetings etc. To this effect, it would be helpful if you would complete and return the Existing Members: Update of Contact Details form. Also check out our website: penrithandnorthlakesu3a.org.uk/, and the National, u3a.org.uk, and North West region websites.

MONTHLY MEETING REPORTS

ROCKS AND MINERALS - TALK BY ROGER LEECH VIA ZOOM

In October we had our first monthly meeting via Zoom with about 50 members taking part. This was an excellent, lively, and well-illustrated talk with an exploration of rocks and minerals both above and below ground. With a father who was an engineer, Roger Leech's early family experiences in Africa and elsewhere sparked his interest in rocks and minerals. His career was as a scientist, initially focusing on micro-biology, but he has always maintained a serious fascination for geology, and he has a most extensive collection and knowledge of a wide range of rocks, minerals and mining. Living in our local area has enabled Roger to develop his interest further, particularly as he is a keen fell walker able to explore our former mining areas.

Using Zoom enabled Roger to offer excellent illustrations of the rocks he described, drawing many of his examples from Cumbria, once the scene of a great variety of mines, from lead mines to the east beyond Dufton, copper mines to the west between Keswick and Coniston and mines extracting the more rare minerals such as wolfram, Carrock. He also showed examples of particularly useful rocks

such as haematite, essential for the production of iron, found at various Cumbrian sites and gypsum, the basic mineral in plasterboard, still mined at Kirkby Thore but also found at Long Meg. Intriguing names of the minerals, and even more spectacular illustrations, made this talk particularly special. The audience was treated to examples of sphalerite, chalcopyrite, linarite, brochantite, malachite, witherite, erythrite, pyromorphite and siderite, which, for many, stretched their vocabulary! The enormous variety of rocks was also demonstrated with the colourful purple and yellow forms of fluorite, green malachite and the many colours found in quartz veins.



sulphur



rainbow obsidian



rhodochrosite

Some wonderful examples of curious shapes found in rock were also shown. Manganese dendrites, as the Greek element of its name suggests, looks like trees; rainbow obsidian has beautiful swirling patterns of various hues within it; the dramatic red rhodochrosite is also quite stunning. Roger's excellent talk yielded many interesting questions and altogether the Zoom experiment was most successful.

Sue Tomlinson

GLACIATION AND ITS IMPACT ON THE LANDSCAPE

At our November Zoom meeting Dr Richard Waller, senior lecturer in Geography at Keele University, gave a fascinating and informative account of the formation, movement, and effects of glaciation. He explained that 10% of the world's land surface is covered by glaciers and ice sheets, showing illustrations of well-known examples including La Mer de Glace in France and Grosser Aletschgletscher in Switzerland.



Red Tarn, a glacial tarn below Helvellyn's summit

Seeing his first glacier at a young age, when on holiday with his parents, sparked an abiding interest which led to his career in researching the phenomenon of glaciation. Richard guided us through the stages of accumulation and subsequent ablation of glaciers explaining how quickly some of the world's glaciers are retreating, exemplifying this with a graph of the shrinking of the Grosser Aletsch glacier since 1940. We were shown the impact of recent and former glaciers on many landscapes, exemplified by striations on the surfaces of rocks passed over by glaciers, by the transport of large boulders, known as erratics, well away from their original places of formation, and by the deposition of sediment or moraine.

Previous periods of glaciation in Britain such as the Ice Age of about 20,000 years ago were considered. Much of Britain, apart from Southern England and South Wales, were covered by the British-Irish ice sheet. An amazing depiction of the advance and retreat of the ice sheet during this

last period of glaciation in Britain has been devised by 'Britice'. Signs of these earlier periods of glaciation are well illustrated in our local landscape.

Richard showed us many familiar examples of such features. Striding and Swirral Edges on Helvellyn are glacial arêtes, Red Tarn is a glacial tarn in a corrie; Langdale is a typical glacial valley; hummocky ridges of moraine can be seen at Greenup Gill near Rosthwaite; Bannerdale near Blencathra shows us an example of the brief reformation of the British-Irish ice sheet. Drumlins formed in the Howgills and the north Pennines as the ice retreated into the Irish Sea.

Old meltwater streams running parallel to the fells rather than downwards are readily seen near Murton, Knock and on the western flank of Great Dun Fell. Many local examples of erratics can be found in our area: Richard showed us a large Shap granite boulder perched on a limestone base, for instance. Interestingly, we heard that as the ice melted from the Eden Valley, some found its way to the east coast and later it retreated into the Irish Sea.

Richard's talk prompted much interest and a range of questions took the subject in various further directions, including the reasons behind glacial formation; the possible impact of volcanic activity on the cooling of the earth was considered, and the ice-albedo effect whereby snow and ice contribute to the cooling of the earth by reflecting solar radiation was explored.

Josie Dunlop, our chair who has a particular interest in Geology, thanked Richard warmly for his talk which also prompted great applause from the members watching it at home.

Sue Tomlinson

REPORTS FROM GROUPS

KEEP GOING EVERYONE

We have now been through so many changes to rules and lockdown scenarios that each evolution is beginning to feel like a relatively normal event. That said, the latest vaccine news offers us all hope that we will return to our groups, but it could be a long winter!

In a less-than-ideal situation, the Zoom platform has become central to many people's everyday life. Who would have thought a year ago we would all be zooming and webinaring! However, it does provide a sense of connectivity among friends.

Some of our members are using Zoom or Google Meet to hold their winter meetings and included are a few entries from convenors regards online activities. Speaking to a U3A member the other day she told me of an event in her area that had proved highly successful, particularly for those like herself not used to using zoom. They had held a drop-in coffee morning for the 40-minute free session and arranged for those less savvy to have a phone buddy talk them through the process. They now hold it as a regular event. She said, "It was really nice to not just hear a voice on the phone but to also see a live person." I thought it was a great way to keep in contact.

We brainstormed at the last committee meeting thinking of different ways to continue with our groups whilst unable to meet face to face. Some were:
Listening individually to podcasts, lectures, films, concerts, etc, the list is endless and then discussing online.

If you felt a more structured way of meeting over a coffee 'drop-in' was needed you could select a light-hearted topic beforehand like the first job, best holiday, last concert you attended, etc.

You could take the bubble scenario to the ultimate level and two or three people could teach the rest of the group to make cocktails with pre-issued ingredients. Could lead to some interesting chats!

If you have used an online social activity successfully it would be great to share your ideas. If you have an idea for starting a new group let us know and we can advertise for members/leader. If you are unsure but would love to give zoom a try we can help by finding a buddy to get you started.

Jane Stables

BRIDGE GROUP

As soon as covid regulations took over in March the Bridge Group looked for ways of satisfying the addiction most of us have for the card table. Early on Jane Stables played online and recommended BridgeClubLive to the U3A group and to Penrith Bridge Club – a website that offered games at specified times throughout the week. Players, with or without a partner, could login and play against another pair or join a larger group for a session of two to three hours. This often involved players from around the globe and proved particularly attractive to those who were self-isolating at home. Zoom is used so that players can talk to each other at a table and see others by using an extra device.

About half the U3A group merged with PBC members to form a new online group who soon felt the need to play amongst themselves on Wednesday evenings and Friday afternoons, thus reinstating our regular meetings in normal times. Jon Begg negotiated this arrangement with BCL so that most of us have been playing twice a week within the Penrith online group. Some still indulge at other times. One keen couple who took off for Europe in their camper van in July still logged in regularly from the French Alps, the Italian Dolomites, and other exotic spots to play with friends.

Some were not inclined to join in at first. I was one, deciding after a trial online session that it was not for me. However, I have recanted recently and rejoined the madding crowd. Others with eyesight concerns or allergies to computers have also gradually reappeared. The recent good news is that we have found another website, RealBridge, which offers several advantages over BCL. Logging in is much simpler, the onscreen display is far better, and the end-of-session results are more comprehensive. When play is underway the screen not only displays your cards, bidding boxes and other info but shows four small videos of the players. You can see and talk to them - almost as good as normal - and even spot which biscuits they are munching with their tea. For the nerdier members, the detailed results are manna from heaven. Bidding sequences for every hand are revealed so you can delve into the thought processes of every other player – there is no hiding place. But this psychological inquiry takes time so the nerds are in for some late nights in the future.

When the pandemic does subside and we do return to Newbiggin Village Hall, sitting round tables with other humans, online bridge will still serve a purpose for some players. It is an ingenious substitute that has kept many players engaged for many months, but it lacks the sociability that all U3A members value. With every other U3A group we look forward to the day in 2021 when we can just be normal again.

John Upson

GEOLOGY GROUPS

Up until lockdown back in March, the usual pattern was for meetings on the 2nd Wednesday of the month which consisted of a Beginners' Group following a 2-year course in Basics of Geology (which was just over halfway through) and then a second session catering mainly for the Advanced Group in which a presentation would be given on a topic of geological interest e.g. Geology of Colorado and Climate Change through Earth's History. To keep in contact with both groups during the following months a series of exercises was e-mailed every 2-3 weeks under the title MGM 1, MGM 2, etc. (MGM = Maintaining Geological Motivation). After several days, each exercise was followed up with answers and comments. It should be noted that all such MGMs were optional "homework" with members free to do as much as they wanted.



Members of the Geology group on lunch break at Bowscale Tarn. The day was spent investigating the varied rocks, structure and landscape development in and around the lovely Mosedale valley.

In the summer months, the emphasis shifted to fieldwork opportunities, and detailed instructions were sent out for visiting locations that continued the theme started with the Beginners last year, namely the Geological History of Cumbria. Sites suggested illustrated the geological environment of the Devonian (a long period of erosion of a vast mountain range), the Carboniferous (warm shallow seas followed by deltas and tropical forests) and the Permian (a return to hot dry desert conditions). Excellent examples of these varied environments exist locally. In addition to the DIY trips, we took advantage of a window of opportunity in late August/early September and an excursion to investigate the geology of the Mosedale valley in the NE Caldbeck Fells was offered on three separate days to spread the numbers to a manageable size on each occasion. A total of 30 members from both groups took advantage (and only one group got wet!)

With present restrictions, the aim now is to continue with MGM e-mails involving both practical and theoretical exercises, some of which will involve field trips to be taken when conditions are favourable. Members will also be directed to websites that cover a huge range of geological material, partly to aid in finishing off the Beginners' course remotely but also to provide topics of general interest that were aimed at everyone in both groups.

On 9 December, the Geology group will hold its first Zoom meeting for all members i.e. Advanced and Beginners. It is an experiment, but we hope it will go well because this is the only way we can keep going with such numbers until the situation returns to something like before. We will try and make it an informal affair, trying to capture the spirit of the social occasions we used to hold around

this time of year. In the New Year, it is hoped to use the same method for presentations that might cater to both groups.

**John Rodgers,
Convenor Geology groups**

GERMAN GROUP

A core of six keen members of the German group has been meeting fortnightly since the first lockdown using Zoom, with a short summer break. The pattern of meetings is much what it would have been in each other's houses, for example working through questions on short documentaries from the TV station *Deutsche Welle*. Translating together works well and members typically offer personal thoughts or experiences in German on an agreed topic. This has all worked better on Zoom than might have been anticipated, although conversation is inevitably a little stilted because of the sound quality and slight delay in transmission. Nevertheless, we all value the social contact and look forward to hearing each other's news. *Deutsche Welle* programmes at the moment regularly focus on aspects of *die Pandemie* and *die Impfung* (the vaccine) in Germany, which is interesting although we do like it when the odd lighter topic turns up.

Ian Forrest

MUSIC APPRECIATION GROUP

It was on a Monday morning in October that the Music Appreciation Group abandoned its normal routine for the first time in 23 years. Instead of meeting at the convenor's house for recorded music, coffee, and chat we travelled just a few miles for live music, coffee and chat. As our topic for exploration this year is Baroque music, we were most fortunate to have persuaded two talented musicians to entertain us for two civilized hours at their house near Great Salkeld.

Katharine May and Michael Sanderson moved to Cumbria in 2017 and have established themselves as Eden Baroque to perform seventeenth and eighteenth-century music, particularly pieces by less familiar composers. Katharine is a fine harpsichordist and Michael doubles as an excellent baritone and Baroque violinist. They have converted a barn into an attractive music room with its high ceiling, balcony and seating for about 40. There were 21 of us and we were one of the first audiences to admire this intimate venue.

The concert spanned nearly two centuries from Dowland to Arne, a happy mixture of songs, harpsichord solos, a violin sonata by Handel, and even violin interjections between song verses, all expertly performed. Three composers were new to most of us – Nicholas Lanier, Jean-Henri d'Anglebert and Giulio Caccini.

Monday morning music had just lifted spirits as we all wended our ways through rural Cumbria on a mellow autumn day, ready to start the week.

John Upson

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Editorial Team

Groups sheet, also the Monthly Meeting and Short-run/One-off
Programmes: Robin Acland, Chapelside, Mungrisdale,
Penrith CA11 0XR, 017687 79672 rtacland@googlemail.com

Remainder of News and Views: Chris Wilkinson, 10 Hall Grange, Bolton, Appleby CA16 6WA 01768361819,
07986003551 Cwilkins0n@aol.com Or Chriswilkinson48@gmail.com