HARBORNE & EDGBASTON U3A GROUP COORDINATORS REPORTS

ANCIENT ROME

Our group meets on the 3rd Wednesday of each month at Harborne Baptist church at 1.45 for a 2pm start. We usually have about 8 or 10 members attending.

We have been studying the lives and reigns of later Emperors of the 2nd century. Emperor Hadrian was followed by Antoninus Pius whose reign of 23 years was stable and benign, and then by his protégé, emperor Marcus Aurelius. He is known as the Philosopher Emperor and his 'Meditations' (written while on military campaign on the Danube) are still read today.

Alongside the emperors, we've had talks on Roman writers - Pliny the Elder, Pliny the Younger, Plutarch- and an entertaining session hearing about the satirical manuscript The Satyrion. Recently we've been learning about Judaism and Christianity in the Roman Empire. Our latest sessions have been presentations based on Mary Beard's new book 'Talking Classics' which makes a persuasive case for learning about Ancient Greece and Rome and studying their literature.

Our plan is to continue learning about the later emperors, interspersed with the odd poet and philosopher and other aspects of Roman life throughout the Empire.
New members are welcome.

Janette Hunter

ART APPRECIATION

The group currently has 18 members and since we meet at the Harborne Baptist Church, we have the capacity to welcome more u3a members to join us. Most members take their turn in giving a talk on any subject of their choosing that is related to art.

We meet on the 3rd Monday of the month at the HBC.

Talks that our members have given during the past year have been about John Singer Sargent, Eric Tucker, Hans Holbein, Carl Faberge, Tirzah Garwood, Georges Seurat, Hendrik N Werkman the printer, photomontage, Artemesia Gentileschi and Paul Klee. At one session we had a watercolour painting demonstration by a local painter who is a member of our group.

New members are always welcome if they enjoy art of any kind and are willing to give, or share with giving, an occasional talk (not more often than once a year!)

Jake Howard

BRIDGE

The Harborne and Edgbaston u3a Bridge Club continues to meet on the 2nd and 4th Tuesday afternoons at Quinborne Community Centre. The Bus number 24 comes through Harborne from Birmingham City Centre and stops by the Centre so driving is not essential if you can catch the bus.

It is a friendly group and new members who are beginners or experienced players would be most welcome. However, we are not in a position to run "teach and play" sessions. There are teaching sessions run by Northfield Bridge Club as well as by other Clubs.

I am grateful to those of our players who help set up and clear the tables every session and who fill in for me when I cannot attend. We can order tea or coffee for those who wish to have a drink and it arrives mid-session.

The Quinborne staff are friendly and helpful and they set up the tables and chairs and put the equipment in our room where we now store all our equipment.

Alison Oswald

CHANCE TO DANCE

Remarkable things do happen: over 40 members responded to initial enquiries about forming a dance group. 'What kind of dance?' was, as always, the first question. When asked about dance experience and future hopes, some thought of ballet and tap; others of circle, line or folk dance; more of ballroom and Latin. A discernible group was for 'modern' 'contemporary', 'any' or 'fun'.

When the survey responses were presented at a meeting, enough people were sufficiently trusting to see what could be done under the umbrella term 'modern' following the broad creative framework of Rudolph Laban. The group called itself 'Chance to Dance'.

This is rare for a u3a group: in a trawl of groups nationally, you are unlikely to find 'modern' or 'Laban'. At our inaugural meeting no other Harborne and Edgbaston group was set up specifically for the other dance styles, although the survey indicates that

kindred dancers are out there and may well form groups - or join local existing ones.

We currently have 26 on our list and 24 dancers have come to at least one session. Attendance waxes and wanes with holidays, family ties and health but has settled at about 7 to 8.

What have we been doing? After a warm-up we usually have a two part session with varied music. An interesting offshoot is finding out about the music and can extend understanding of the style of the dance. We have investigated typical ways of moving, from courtly dance to folk dance and the isolated gestures of Bob Fosse.

There is both structure and challenge. By trying various approaches to modern dance we are each building a movement vocabulary and developing our individual creativity. Dance is not mysterious after all: for example, opening and closing, floor and air pattern and shape are easy ideas to explore in everyday life with a dance appreciation.

The idea is to turn up in comfortable clothes and dance as much as age and fitness will permit: to enjoy the creative challenge of a dance session. It can be quite engrossing and expressive, but we also enjoy the fun of attempting things together, without mirrors, performances or photographic record. Success is when you go home feeling that you have shared in that moment with that music and simply had a chance to dance.

Liz Price

CHURCH ARCHITECTURE

The group currently has 27 members all of whom use email.

We meet on the second Monday of the month in the afternoon from 2 pm to 4pm at Harborne Baptist Church for a talk from a member followed by refreshments in the front café area or we visit a church or cathedral for a guided tour. We take a break from meetings and trips in August.

In 2026 there were 5 trips and by the end of the year, 6 meetings.

Numbers attending meetings with talks average: 14 members. Numbers attending trips with guided tours average: 12 members.

The programme was as follows:
January: a talk on Chester's cathedrals past & present.
February: a talk on pulpits.
March: a trip with guided tour to St Mary's Convent, Handsworth, Birmingham.
April: a talk on St Chad's Church in Stafford.

May: a trip with guided tour to St Augustine of Hippo Church, Edgbaston, Birmingham.
June: a talk on church plate.
July: a trip with guided tour to Aston Parish Church of St Peter & St Paul.
August: break.
September: a trip to Shrewsbury for a guided tour of St Mary the Virgin Church.
October: A trip with guided tour to Worcester Cathedral.
November: a talk on Modern Art in Churches.
December: a recap of the year presented in the form of a slide show quiz and a short talk – topic to be confirmed.

Fiona Lewis

FERMENTATION

The group is for members who want to explore and improve their skills/knowledge of all aspects of fermentation. We will be exploring and improving your skills/knowledge around all aspects of fermentation i.e. Kombucha, Kefir, Fermented Vegetables, Sourdough Bread, All Grain Beer, and Country Fruit Wines.

We meet on the third Friday of the month at my home at 2pm, although we've missed several meetings over the summer due to clashes with other events and groups. The membership has remained fairly steady at about 6 members with some losses and some gains, so we still have room for more.

Over the year we have had members following up individual projects and bringing the results to the meeting for discussion and, often, tasting, whilst others are getting to grips with some basic techniques with help from the group.

We have had the pleasure of sampling the results of several of the members' efforts. These have included:

Sourdough pancakes and muffins, blackberry and apple breakfast bircher, miso and kefir scones, sourdough Japanese milk bread, pumpernickel variations, apple and cabbage sauerkraut comparisons, traditional and fermented mince pie comparisons.

Hopefully we can continue the voyage of exploration and experimentation in the new year.

Howard Price

GAMES

Our group meets twice a month on a Monday.

We have had a good year and have introduce Mahjong after a request from our

group, and this has proved popular.

The group usually split into two groups with around four playing scrabble which is very popular, while the rest of the group will do a card or board game.
Although we have 13 members, we get around 7 – 10 players at each session which lasts from 10 to 12 noon.

This year one of our members celebrated being 90 years young and a few of us went with her for a celebratory meal. This is a person that many times is the winner at scrabble.

We are a friendly group, now looking forward to the end of year when we celebrate a successful year with refreshments and some sweet treats.

Looking to the New Year, If anyone hates the thought of grey wet Monday mornings do come a long and have two hours of Uno, scrabble or other games on offer, and an enjoyable company.

Sue Worwood

GARDEN GROUP

The Garden group was set up in April 2011 and we usually meet on the third or fourth Tuesday of every month at 10:30 am. or sometimes on a Friday morning. This depends on the availability of the garden.

The purpose of the Garden Group is to explore and learn about gardens and plants through visiting gardens and nurseries, often with a private tour and through talks from experts. Venues are occasionally reached by local transport but more often by car sharing and an annual coach visit.

Our garden year started as usual with a meal in January, this time at The Physician for a lunch. It was well attended and enjoyed by all.

In February we had a talk titled Awareness of Bees given by Alison Wakeman, a very experienced bee keeper.

In March we commenced our monthly visits with a guided tour of John's Garden at Ashwood Nursery, always a delight at any time of year.

In the following 4 months we visited gardens from the NGS booklet, in Solihull, Bodymoor Heath, Malvern and Morton Hall Garden near Redditch. In August we had booked a visit to Simon Gulliver's garden in Stirchley – the private garden of a well-known local professional gardener. Unfortunately, due to the very hot weather and drought that the whole country had experienced this vis t was cancelled. Instead, a group of us met at and walked round the local Winterbourne Garden.

Despite the difficult weather over the summer, we were invited to Chris and Mike's garden, which was still looking colourful, for our annual planning meeting to suggest

visits for 2027. We had good attendance and plenty of suggestions for the steering group to consider. Many thanks, Chris and Mike for hosting this.

In September there was a coach visit to Waterperry Gardens near Oxford. This was very well supported by our wider u3a membership and a few members from our two nearest u3as.

Our last visit of the year was to Hill Close Gardens, Warwick. We had an excellent guided tour of these restored Grade 2 Victorian Leisure Gardens.

The garden group year ended with a talk from Samantha Hopes about Winter in Bloom. An informative talk accompanied by wonderful photos to illustrate the plants.

Many thanks to all those who came on the visits and especially to those who drove and gave lifts to others. Also, thanks to the volunteers who help with the refreshments at our talks.

The Garden Group is always pleased to welcome new members – we have no upper limit on numbers, but visits are on a first come basis for lifts. Let's hope for good gardening weather in 2027.

Sue Hendry

LITERARY GROUP 1

This is a lively and growing group who meet on the second Thursday of the month at Harborne Baptist Church from 10 am to 11.30am.

We are a friendly group who are avid readers that love to chat about what we have read and share our thoughts. This often leads to discussions on a whole range of topics. We don't have a prescribed text each month but instead we each bring a book we have enjoyed recently to tell others about.

We have read a wide variety of fiction and non-fiction. Genres have ranged from historical and contemporary fiction, family relationships, crime and thrillers to magical realism. We are always happy to receive new members who love a good book.

Ruth Campbell

LOCAL HISTORY

The Local History Group averaged 14 members per meeting this year, although we have many more members on our mailing list.

We meet at the Quinborne Centre for talks every other month, starting in January. The talks begin at 10.30am and we're usually finished by 11.45am. This year, our speakers have covered a wide variety of subjects including brutalism in Birmingham, the history of Harborne library and the geology of the green space around Harborne and Edgbaston.

On alternate months, we head out for visits, although sometimes these will not be on a Monday due to opening times. This year we have visited Dr Johnson's house in Lichfield, Hartlebury Castle, and the Glass Museum in Stourbridge.

I have been running the group for the past year ably assisted by Beverley, Janet and Alison and we always welcome suggestions for future speakers and visits.

Gerri Draysey

SCIENCE

The Science Group meets on the first Thursday of each month. We have vacancies in our group for any members to join us for interesting, stimulating activities concerned with nature, space, our health, new discoveries and anything of interest in the news.

Since Science affects all aspects of our lives we try and cover all aspects of the natural world.

We now meet at the Quinborne Centre on the 1st Thursday of the month at 1.30 - 3.30. The group agreed to continue with inviting guest speakers, reviewing current science news stories, giving short presentations ourselves on a variety of topics, reviewing science books that members have read, and visiting places of scientific interest.

In 2025/26 our meeting continued to be a mixture of members input and external speakers from Birmingham University, who gave us presentations based on their PHD studies. Three members attended the Birmingham University Post graduate poster session seeking speakers.

Over the year we have had talks on a range of subjects ranging from the impact of microbes in Antarctica, Urban Forest Citizen Science to Neurodivergency, some five talks in total.

Members have presented on a range of subject area's with the October talk being on the English chemist and X-ray crystallographer Rosalind Franklin.

You are very welcome to come along and see if you'd like to join us.

Ray Le Gallais

STROLLERS

We continue to be a popular Group and have had a successful year. We currently have over 30 members. and are able to admit one or two more. Numbers on walks have usually been in the mid to late teens e.g, 12 up to 18, although occasionally we get less, or more.

Generally, details remain unchanged. Our walks take place weekly on Wednesdays from September until the end of July (except for the first Wednesday of the month, when there is a u3a General Meeting, and at Christmas and Easter there is usually a short break). Around Christmas or New Year, we often have a meal out together. 'Informal' walks are sometimes arranged during the Easter or summer breaks..

We always endeavour to use public transport, most members have Centro passes. Although our walks can be anywhere between 3 and 4 miles the pace is fairly gentle. We often see historical, botanical or architectural landmarks along the way.

We regard the ideal number on a walk to be about 15; and about 20 to be the usual acceptable maximum, unless there is a good reason for it to be more or less e.g cafe accommodation. The walk leader will have the final say.

On the walks, usually towards the end, we stop at a suitable venue for a drink, toilet stop, and lunch or refreshments and there is plenty of opportunity to get to know each other. Members find the walks help them to maintain a good level of fitness and the social interaction is an important and enjoyable part of the activity.

The walks are chosen and voted for at our democratic Planning Meetings held thrice yearly; Leaders and Backups are also chosen. We aim to have a mix of local walks and some further afield; some old favourites and some new or modified walks. We are lucky to have some enthusiastic walkers who help with investigating new walks and/or leading or backing up walks which spreads the load.

A walks programme is produced for each session of walks and distributed to members, and also posted on the web-site, and weekly reminders are also sent out confirming the meeting place, details of the walk etc. A further e-mail is also sent out just before the walk confirming the names of the attendees, and whether the walk is now 'full' (they sometimes are!).

There is a log book maintained by Fiona Lewis, our 'Archivist' – this is where we keep descriptions and photographs of each walk prepared by that week's leader. The current folder is normally available for people to see at the Planning Meetings.

To conclude, we continue to be a very friendly group; new Strollers are all made welcome.

David Hidson

TABLE TENNIS

We play at in the Harborne Health and Fitness Centre on Lordswood Road on the second and fourth Fridays in the month (2pm to 3.30pm). Two tables are pre-booked, but the Committee have kindly given us permission to hire a third table when numbers require it. During the week before a relevant Friday, the coordinator generally asks members to let him know, a couple of days before, if they plan to play.

We currently have 30 members, However, not everyone is active at the same time, so to date we haven't often had such a number of people attending at any session that players have had to sit out too many times. Consequently, we are currently able to welcome new members, including those with only a modest level of skill.

Because we play for fun we try to arrange that players have a mix of partners and opponents during the afternoon. Most players at a session like to take a break occasionally, but we try to ensure that no one sits out more often than is fair.

Table tennis is great fun, and good for health both physical and mental, and new players will find us a friendly group.

Jake Howard

TAI CHI

I am pleased to report that this year has seen the Tai Chi group grow in size and popularity with several new members joining us along the way thanks to events such as the annual Open Day. We now have 25 members most of whom have progressed from the "24 Form" to the "88 Form" which is challenging us all – so much to remember!

We begin every session with some warmup exercises and a refresh of the stances and finish with some gentle Qigong which is proving very popular with members, so much so that I may extend these next year.

We meet every Tuesday afternoon at St Faith and St Laurence, Court Oak which has proved to be an ideal venue both in terms of space and location.

Clare Sandercock

USA

The USA history, politics and culture group, (the USA group for short), have had another successful year – despite what is happening in the country we focus upon!

We meet on the fourth Thursday of the month at Harborne Baptist Church where we can make use of the excellent IT facilities.

Our group currently has over twenty members and we welcome new members. Indeed, several new people have joined us this year – including new recruits from the U3A Open Afternoon.

We usually have three talks per session, (depending on their length), on a wide range of subjects. These are researched and presented by our members with help offered when needed.

Subjects this year have included talks on several US presidents – including the present incumbent! – as well as diverse topics such as the San Francisco Earthquake of 1906, Washington DC, the repeal of Prohibition, Berry Gordy and Emmett Till. In July we had a special talk to celebrate two hundred and fifty years of American Independence.

We hope something here sparks your interest and that you will consider joining us in the future.

Steve Smith and Rob Bromley (joint co-ordinators)

VISITING THE ARTS

Visiting the Arts group had lots of members interested in joining and attending the the initial meeting. It would be lovely to have more ticket information from members for visits.

This is how the group works - for example I emailed the group that I had a ticket for a lunchtime organ concert at the Town Hall with all the details of the date, the seat information etc. and invited others to join me - 6 of us met up for a coffee first and enjoyed the hour long concert.

Other events have included Sleeping Beauty ballet at Symphony Hall, an outdoor performance of Romeo and Juliet at the Botanical Gardens, a Brahms Piano Quintet at the CBSO centre, an outdoor performance of Pickwick Papers at Warley Woods, and a Live Screening of Les Liaisons Dangereuse that unfortunately the cinema cancelled.

A second visit to the Town Hall was for Ex Cathedra's performance of Spem in Alium by Tallis, a new work premier of The Wilderness and Alec Roth's Earthrise. A lovely moving choral concert.

Nine of us are going to the Town Hall for a "Britten at Christmas Concert” in early December - another Ex Cathedra choral concert.

Many thanks to those who organised these events - Kirsteen, Sarah, Joanne, and Keith.

I apologise to the one or two others who sent an invitation to join them at an event - I forgot to make a note.

Next year we must ask for feedback so that we can see how many of the group attend and which venues and events are popular.

Several people told me about interesting events BUT Eileen and I only need to know all the information about the ticket you have bought or are planning to buy.

Here's to more regular theatre, museum, cinema, concert, etc. planned visits for 2027.

Sue Hendry and Eileen Waddington