

Dates for your Diary

- 14th November - 2 Night stay in Thursford
for Christmas Show
- 17th November - Monthly Meeting
In Search of Elgar - Richard Wigram
- 3rd December - Christmas Lunch
- Year 2022**
- 19th January - Monthly Meeting
The story of The British Forces
Broadcasting Service - Alan Grace

Chat from the chair

This is my last newsletter article as Chair of Fleet U3A. I have had a fantastic time as your chair for the last four years. It is a privilege to head up such a lively and forward thinking U3A. I have enjoyed meeting as many members as possible at Monthly Meetings, AGMs, open days and many other events, even via Zoom in the dark days of the pandemic.

One thing I have occasionally bemoaned in my role as chair is commencing to write these 'chats' with you through the newsletter. It seemed such a good idea at the time but there has been many a month when I have sought inspiration from the ether. I am grateful to Sandy, and Fiona before her, (editors of the newsletter) for reminding me of my self-imposed obligation and then nagging me to meet the deadline. It is only that I have received such positive feedback from members over the last four years that has kept me going. My aim was to keep you all informed about new developments and the latest trustee decisions in our U3A. I couldn't guarantee that everyone would read the newsletter but if enough did, word would spread.

During the various lockdowns our news-

letter and its sister publication 'Between Times' not only kept us all informed but kept us amused and in touch with each other. Grateful thanks must go to all the contributors for their stories, jokes, puzzles, pictures and up to date information. We couldn't have kept the newsletters going without you.

During the last month I attended a Hart Voluntary Action meeting and discovered that there were 160 volunteer organisations in Hart pre-Covid-19. Only ten have ceased to exist during the lockdowns. The ones that survived, like Fleet U3A, adapted at speed to the new conditions and continued to support their members in as many ways as they could. We should be rightly proud of our achievement. Yes, we have lost members in the last 18 months but we are gaining brand new members at an unprecedented rate and it won't be many months before we are as strong as ever. Keep spreading the word, please.

Anyway, enough of the past; I am delighted to tell you that John Gawthorpe, Group Leader, Monthly Meeting Sec and Vice-chair is taking over from me at the AGM in November, as long as you vote him in, of course! In his wisdom, John has asked me to remain on the committee as Vice-chair and to take over the Monthly Meetings Sec role from him, only fair I suppose.

John will be a super chair of our excellent U3A and, I know, will continue to lead our recovery as we all emerge from the restrictions of the pandemic. In addition to this John is a talented writer, as you will all know from his many newsletter articles, so I have great pleasure in passing the 'Chat from the Chair' baton to him.

So, it's goodbye and thank you from me,

Paddy

From All in Fleet U3A -Thank you Paddy

Creative Writing

Both Creative Writing groups are back to face-to-face and enjoying hearing each others' writing "live", so to speak!! This month's story comes from Andrew Robinson from Creative Writing group 2 - poignant!

Beverley Carpenter

HIGH SPIRITS by Andrew Robinson

After a grim winter and cold spring, this was the first decent flying day of the year, with warm temperatures, gin-clear air and light winds. Ben had driven to the airfield on the edge of town in high spirits, keenly anticipating his first flight for months in his new plane. Another pilot helped him pull his aircraft out of the hangar, where he admired its sleek lines and brilliant red and white paintwork sparkling in the sun.

It had been a good move, he reflected, to swap his old two seat aircraft for this single seater with its open cockpit. Angela had often accompanied him on his trips but, after she had cruelly been taken from him by that obscene disease, the empty space beside him became too much to bear. He was sure his wife would have approved of his new machine and, in her memory, had painted her name, 'Angela' across the engine cowling.

Fuelling and pre-flight checks completed, Ben climbed into the cockpit, started the engine and taxied towards the runway. The airfield was an oasis of green, with every newly unfurled leaf, every blade of grass keen to participate in the spring festival. This was in stark contrast to the drab greyness of the urban development that was gradually surrounding the airfield, which led many pilots to wonder how long flying would be permitted.

Ben opened the throttle and began the take-off run towards the west. The little plane leapt into the air, impatient to exploit its natural habitat. This slightly caught Ben out but he steadied things as he climbed away, before turning south. As he banked to the left, he could look down to where a new commercial centre was taking shape and couldn't help but feel resentful of it. As he stared, Ben allowed the turn to continue a little too far, such that he was heading into the sun.

Temporarily blinded, he chided himself for not applying sufficient concentration, before setting course for open countryside. As he climbed, the aircraft responded crisply to Ben's control inputs, as he made sweeping turns to the left and right. There then followed a series of loops and wingovers, Ben's confidence building all the time. As he swooped and looped across the sky, revelling in the celestial emptiness, the airframe effectively became an extension of himself, so that he only had to think about a manoeuvre and the aircraft obediently executed it, the engine singing in mechanical ecstasy.

He laughed out loud, enjoying the sensation of having, in the words of the poem; '...slipped the surly bonds of Earth and danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings'. The merging of man and machine infused an exhilaration so intoxicating that Ben realised that he'd lost his sense of time. Worried he might have climbed too high, he glanced down to check the altimeter, only to find his vision was blurred. He blinked, but there was no improvement.

Puzzled, he concluded he had climbed too high and was suffering from hypoxia, - a lack of oxygen in the thin air. This being so, he would almost certainly have blundered into controlled airspace, the preserve of commercial traffic, thereby committing a serious regulatory offence. He realised he should descend, but let the aircraft continue climbing into the shining sky while he pondered. Suddenly, he knew it didn't matter, and immediately relaxed. The slipstream buffeting the cockpit felt warm and soft as a summer breeze and a wave of contentment washed over him. "Angela, my love," he whispered. "Not long now". A group of men in hard hats walked towards the tower crane that hugged the carcass of the tall office block taking shape on the construction site south of the airfield. The jib of the crane, atop the tower, reared upwards at 60°, resembling a talon poised to pluck prey from the sky. Clearly, it had scored a kill, as what appeared to be entrails were clinging to the damaged tip of the jib hundreds of feet up.

As the men stared, something detached and fluttered gently to the ground, landing among piles of building materials and equipment, recently joined by crushed and splintered pieces of red-and-white painted metal and fibreglass. Ashen faced, one of the men picked up the piece of debris. It was a metal panel, crumpled and with a piece torn off. Painted letters were clearly legible on one side, which spelled out the word; A-N-G-E-L.....

Monthly Meeting 20 October 2021

A talk commencing at 11am by Dr Ann Bauer, Ed.D, an assessor and expert witness at Special Educational Needs (SEN) Tribunals. "An insight into Special Needs and changing school practices"

This is the heading for the talk which I received via e-mail. I have made a point of attending the Monthly Meetings since I first joined Fleet U3A, so the subject matter is neither here nor there. However, I did think the topic would be dry and frankly depressing.

How wrong could I be.

Ann spoke with enthusiasm, energy and passion about the many different facets of special educational needs. Autism, dyslexia, disability and many more conditions are among reasons why children may be prevented from being considered "normal". She spoke about her experiences with various children she had taught. She had managed to cure one young man of his constant bad language; she had reminded another pupil how to count using coloured blocks. She cited David Blunkett, former blind Education Secretary, who had been sent to a school for the blind. He would rather have been educated in a mainstream school. He spent his years in the post changing the system.

She taught us all how to count to five in Japanese; she had us doing mental arithmetic and then checked on methods used to obtain the answer by two members of the audience. (I used yet a third method to do the addition). I know she was keeping the interest of the audience because I heard noises of approval and laughter from time to time.

It is clear that everyone is different, but we all need the same opportunities in life. With the Educational Health and Care Plans now in place and accessible by parents and grandparents all children will/should be provided with whatever helps them achieve success and their dreams.

Caroline Noad

Advice, from personal experience, for new members of Fleet U3A

Congratulations, you are a brand-new member of Fleet and District U3A, or perhaps you joined in the last couple of months.

However, you may find that you have joined a group where you are aware that the other members know each other very well. You may want to call those other people "cliquey". You may feel excluded and you may be wondering what on earth persuaded you to join this group. Please remember that the group members didn't always know each other well but that they have got to know each other over the weeks and months the group has been running. But what can you do to 'fit in'?

Let me reassure you. Joining Fleet U3A has been the best decision you have made recently. It is now up to you to make as much of it as you can. The whole U3A movement is based on self-help and volunteering so there are always plenty of opportunities to join in and be useful. When I joined (last century!), I quickly realised that one early method of meeting new friends was to smile and talk to them, initiate conversations; people can't help but respond to a smiley face and a question about themselves! One thing I did was to offer to help make the teas and coffees – people are so grateful that "somebody" has volunteered. Tell them your name and ask theirs. Next time you see them say hello. If there is a register to be taken, volunteer to do it – that is the quickest way of learning the names of others in the group.

The best place to meet a lot of new friends is at the regular Monthly Speaker Meetings in the Harlington. Coffee is served from 9.45 and it gives folk an opportunity to sit together at the tables, talk with new friends and go into the main hall for the talk, as a group.

If all else fails, tell the group leader how you feel. Remember, also that our committee is there to help if you need advice or support. But, if you decide that the group you have joined is not for you after all then look around to see which other group/s you could join, there are over a hundred to choose from!

Try not to leave it to other people to get to know you, make the first move however hard that might be. Fleet U3A is full of supportive people and you will come to appreciate that when life is bleak.

Name Supplied

This is an excellent observation and provides really good advice and insight. If you really are having problems please speak to your Group Leader or any one on the Committee. We are all human, I think, and don't bite or belittle, we want you to enjoy your life as part of this Fleet U3A **Ed.**

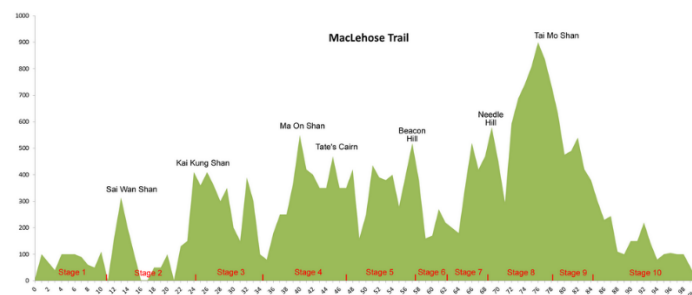
4 People / 100kms / 30 hours = Trailwalker

Chris Green, an ex-Gurkha from Fleet U3A, previously wrote about the Doko Challenge that took place in June. Here he tells a tale of greater endurance in aid of Gurkha Veterans that took place in September 2021.

In 1981, in Hong Kong, the Governor, Sir Murray Maclehoze, opened a 100km walking trail that traversed the widest part of the Kowloon Peninsula as it climbed and descended steep and rocky hillsides above the teeming city. Chris was in Kowloon at the time serving with the Gurkha Transport Regiment, although he never walked the Maclehoze Trail.



Sir Murray with Gurkhas in Hong Kong



The brutal elevations on the Maclehoze Trail!

Unsurprisingly, the military decided to make the trail a training exercise, organised by the Queen's Gurkha Signals, involving unit teams competing against each other. In 1986, Trailwalker was opened to civilian participation for the first time and, following the move of the Queen's Gurkha Signals to the UK, the 100km event takes place across the South Downs, with hundreds of civilians setting off alongside the Gurkhas and other military teams. The event has become such an important fundraiser for Oxfam that Trailwalker events take place around the world, including Hong Kong.

Chris and another ex-Gurkha chum decided to enter a team in the 2015 event to celebrate 200 years of Gurkha service to the British Crown, whilst raising money for the Gurkha Welfare Trust. They called themselves The Pukka Burhos (meaning old men), and had an average age of 75! They lost one due to ill health but three completed the course in 29:05. Maintaining this theme, Chris and his Pukka Burhos have taken part in 2017 (three finished in 28:59), (2018 was cancelled at the last minute due to the extreme heat in July), and 2019 when the finish time for all four was 26:13. Getting better, but while the average age of the team was steadily reducing, Chris was getting older!

Undaunted, he put in his youngest team so far (average age only 51) for the 2021 event on 25th to 26th September. Each team has to have a support crew to meet them at the nine checkpoints with food and encouragement, which are vital to success. Training is also essential, and many teams – as they struggle through a long 11.5 hour night with blisters and sore everything – just don't realise how tough the challenge is. It may not be Hong Kong but ...



Thoroughbreds all!

This year the weather was excellent – hardly any rain to speak of, not too hot, and not too cold at night.

With a start time of 9am, The Pukka Burhos were confident that a steady pace would see them do well, without setting an unrealistic target. There's no doubt that stage 9, the longest at a touch under 14km, just before dawn was the toughest mentally and physically and, at times, Chris found it difficult to keep walking in a straight line. However, a decent stop at CP9 to take on some food and a hot drink from their incredible support worked wonders, and the team came striding into the finish at Brighton racecourse in 24:12, with big smiles on their faces. They were greeted by cheering family and friends, some bubbly and a Gurkha curry!



With our fantastic support crew – we would not have made it without them!

It also turned out that Chris, at 75, was the oldest out on the trail so he is double-chuffed with the outcome, and will happily testify to the truth of the T-shirt that Trailwalker is: Life-changing; Blister-braving; High-fiving; Night-raving; Support-crewing; Group-hugging; Hill-breaking; History-making.

All being well, Chris and his Pukka Burhos will be at the start next year!

Incidentally, four soldiers from Chris's old Regiment, The Queen's Own Gurkha Logistic Regiment (formed in Malaya in 1958 and now based in Aldershot) hold the course record with a time of 9:50 set in 2004!

The 2021 Pukka Burhos raised over £2300, which will be split between Oxfam and the Gurkha Welfare Trust.

If you would like to know more about the work of the Gurkha Welfare Trust, please go to www.gwt.org.uk (Finish photos by Sussex Sport Photography)

U3A Quiz challenge - 29th October at Hartley Wintney

It was so good to see a full hall with 12 teams eagerly competing for the trophy and 6 bottles of wine for the team



members. After such a long break everyone seemed to be very competitive and enthusiastic and the quiz was keenly fought. It was difficult to guess who would be the winner as some teams kept their Jokers until the last round. Eventually the winners were Always Inquizitive with Odds and Sods and the Gentlemen's Debating Group a very close 2nd and 3rd. The quiz master was Brian Proctor and as usual he produced a good selection of questions and interesting table round. The team of scorers led by Jane were most efficient and the technology worked well, thankfully. Peter and his team produced a lovely cream tea which was enjoyed by all.

Thank you to everyone who helped to make it such an enjoyable return to normality. In March Always Inquizitive will represent Fleet in the Inter U3A quiz.

Leader for History Group Required Please

Nobody has stepped forward yet - I have however agreed to set up a "shadow" set of speakers for next Term and to "assist" my successor.

I have given plenty of notice of my desire to step down and agreed to see the Group through Covid and into this Term. We have a successful Group and I live in hope that somebody from the Group will step forward but I am beginning to despair.

Is there anyone anywhere in the Fleet U3A who could help to run this excellent group?

If you would be willing to step forward please contact me:

Frank Wall on
wall707@btinternet.com

STROLLERS Autumn

Well, it's almost clocks back, booster planned, flu jab done and batten down the hatches winter here we come.

I was just reminded at our Stroll last Monday that we continued throughout the last winter even strolling in the snow.

Such are our stoic band of hardy annuals.

We have strolled twice this month, once without me (bad shoulder) and once partially with me (had to miss coffee due to lost bank card!!) Sorted now. Members of Strollers are always changing as visitors, family members, husbands, dog walkers, half termers you name it are always made welcome.

We just enjoy being outside, with company and a coffee to chat over at the end.

This last stroll we enjoyed the Autumn colours as the leaves are now changing.

Families were out feeding the ducks.

We were all surprised to see two Egyptian geese resting on the "heron house" in the centre of the pond. Our heron was not in residence needless to say.

Coffee has now become a thing of wonder. How many machines are working? Is there hot chocolate? Is the machine filled up with coffee beans/milk? These issues provide ongoing conversation as the café is approached.

However, these little things will not put off our happy band of strollers.

I feel very privileged to lead the Strollers group, thank you all for your generosity of spirit and forever "seeing the bright side of life."

I am attaching two photos, Our Strollers early October continuing without me...naturally, and an Egyptian Goose at ease.... long way from Egypt!!!

Jenny Teagle



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**PLEASE AVOID TELEPHONING MEMBERS BEFORE 9 a.m.
OR AFTER 5 p.m.**

Find us on Facebook

Find us on Facebook - Fleet U3A has its own Facebook Members Group, our Facebook page can be found by entering "Fleet U3A" in the search box at the top of any Facebook page. You can then request to join our private Members only group, you will be asked for your Name and Membership number.