

the northern line

the newsletter of north london university of the third age

issue 74

september 2020



Editorial

Lockdown: what an opportunity to declutter! I would weed through drawers and cupboards and collect things to recycle when charity shops reopened. I would go through my filing cabinet and chuck away, shred or reuse old papers. I would mend torn upholstery. I would clear out my computer files, unclog my inbox.

But NLU3A was not to be locked down. Many of my groups carried on via Zoom, or emails, or WhatsApp, and I was almost as busy as I'd been before. The main difference was that I didn't have to travel, and with platforms such as Bridgebase, where we saw the cards but not each other, I didn't even have to get dressed. Of course we are not all online, but the telephone still functions and so, amazingly, does the post.

Needless to say, not a lot of

my good intentions have come to fruition.

We don't know what the situation will be in September, when you read this (I'm writing in July). Will face-to-face group sessions have resumed? Will we be able to visit cinemas, theatres and museums, or will we still have to watch plays and operas on YouTube? Or will we have decided that it's nice not having to take public transport or fight for parking spaces and carry on meeting on Zoom?

In this issue we reveal how several groups have coped with lockdown. We inaugurate a new series, Books by Members, with a biography by Francis Beckett of the Labour prime minister Clement Attlee. And Patricia Isaacs suggests books to keep our minds active.

Happy reading, and stay safe.

And ... the sofa remains torn. ☹️



Leni Green

Editor

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Shape of London Zoom (*See page 5*)

Our publications

The Northern Line (TNL) is published three times a year. It is edited by Leni Green, with assistance from Judith Abbs and Myrna

Lazarus, and designed by Barry Davies. Please send contributions for the next issue to editor@nlu3a.org.uk by 20 November.

- The editors may shorten or otherwise amend articles to fit spacing and style requirements.

Locked down – but not out

Lockdown may have stopped groups from meeting physically, but that has not deterred them from getting together in other ways. At the last count about 30 groups have been having sessions on Zoom and other online platforms. Here a few group coordinators describe how their groups have been keeping in touch.



Climate Change, Science and Society: celestial reflections in the Covid-19 lockdown *(Photos © Jeff Duckett)*

When we stopped our sessions a week before lockdown, I pondered on ways in which we might stay in touch. I came up with the idea of sending daily sunrise and sunset images taken from the roof of the block of flats (Holmeley Lodge) where I live in Highgate, which affords nearly 360 degree views of London. These have been warmly received and promoted a lot of dialogue, ranging from learning that the smoke, apparently coming from the new Tottenham Hotspur Stadium, actually emanates from London's largest recycling and incineration plant located over a mile away in the Lea Valley, to understanding the differences between crescent and gibbous phases of the moon. As to the bearing of the images on climate change, the absence



of any smogs and only even thin mists throughout lockdown is a

strong visual reinforcement of cleaner air in London with its



dual benefits to human health and lowering the rate of global warming.

Here is a distillation of comments clearly showing the beneficial effect of the pictures on general wellbeing. Some people said that the photos reminded them of WM Turner's London paintings, so I checked on these to find that they all appear to be sunsets. When travel becomes easier one of my tasks will be to take photographs from where Turner painted his pictures. ☺

JEFF DUCKETT



Group members say:

Many thanks for sharing these beautiful works of art and helping me prepare each morning to deal with another day in lockdown

Lost for words at the beauty of these; your extraordinary images seem extremely expressive of the current situation.

Thank you so very much for allowing us to take part in all the amazing sunrises and sets over the lockdown period. It has been something to look forward to every morning. Getting up early certainly has advantages.



Poetry Aloud: A poem a day keeps the megrims away

Before lockdown, the Poetry Aloud group met once a month. For an hour and a half we read poems to each other, sometimes about a given theme, sometimes free choice.

When lockdown arrived, we decided we could not do without our regular poetry fix. There were nine of us, and we took it in turns to choose a poem of the day and email it to other members. One of us was not on email, so another member who lived nearby printed the poems out and dropped them in on her; she in return provided poems to circulate.

Sometimes we followed a theme set by our group leader, Jeannette Kriwaczek. We had a few weeks of animal poems (which led to photos being circulated as well, such as baby coots photographed on a member's daily exercise walk) and a few weeks of poems about food (which led to recipes and foodie reminiscences).

Many of the poems led into email discussions – sometimes about poetry (what is the difference between a villanelle



Picture by Matsuo Basho

and a pantoum?), sometimes about the themes of the poems or memories evoked by them.

Some poems were serious and deeply moving; some were very funny. Some were simple; some were so obscure we exchanged emails about what the poet meant.

While it is a poetry reading group, not a poetry writing group, one member shared one of her own poems and this led on to a haiku writing exchange. We were in the middle of the foodie theme, so the challenge

was to write a 17-syllable poem with allusions to food and/or lockdown.

There are a few below.

As a result of all this activity, we got to know each other a lot better. And we all found it a great solace to have something new to look forward to every day, whether a moment of calm reflection or gales of laughter at a witty verse. ☺☺

MICHAEL JOHNS

Roast chicken dinner
On a Friday night with friends –
Oh how I miss it.

Seated on my lawn
Eating strawberries alone
Strange, silent summer.

Saw an old woman
Wearing white at a window,
Smiling so sadly.

Baking cheese biscuits
On lockdown Friday mornings
For a weekend treat.

It's strange this hot day
to drive in my car again.
Last time it was cold.

Shape of London

Before lockdown the group met every Tuesday morning at Lauderdale House in Highgate. We have maintained this frequency of contact but are now alternating between a Zoom meeting, with a presentation by one of our members, and a fortnightly newsletter. Because most members will be confined

to home during the summer months, we plan to continue with this arrangement throughout the period instead of having our usual break.

The fourth edition of our newsletter contains regular features – a member profile, a building of the week and answers to a Muswell Hill quiz set in the

previous issue, together with the programme for the month ahead including the subjects for the Zoom meetings. There are around 35 group members, and we have been able to assemble about 20 people for the Zoom meetings (see page 1 for a picture of the group on Zoom). ☺

MICHAEL LEWIN

Women living wisely in Covid-19 times

Women and Wisdom, a group of 15 women which has been together for almost 10 years, has increased its fortnightly face-to-face meetings at the Finchley Bowling Club to weekly sessions by Zoom. Given the age range of our group – from late 60s to late 90s – it is remarkable how well everyone has taken to new technologies: in addition to Zoom, we have a WhatsApp group for chats, information and humour between meetings.

We started these virtual sessions to make sure that everyone was feeling supported: nine of us are women living on our own. We have had some difficulties and sadness – our eldest was in the Whittington hospital because of a fall when lockdown began, and one of our members tragically lost her husband to another illness early on. So the group has become a much needed support network and information exchange.

For the most part we have all managed to make sure that we are staying well, with lots of shared laughter and jokes, although we are also aware of how melancholy it can get at times – living alone with endless cooking and enforced

domesticity. At a recent meeting we all expressed wishes for what we most missed in lockdown. Apart from the ache of not seeing and touching family, our longings ranged from shopping, to swimming, to having an eyebrow wax, to the ordinariness of going out for a coffee or meal and a chat with friends. More exotic yearnings were for cinema, theatre or art galleries; and the missing of a quilt class or a cruise.

As the lockdown eases we

still have many anxieties about social distancing and the malign effects of the virus itself and so we will go on ... and on ... and keep caring for each other. For me, it is a key point in my week, to see and hear from my lovely wise women, who are all my dear friends, and are actually like family – the one beneficial effect perhaps of lockdown has been a new form of sociability. ☺

MIRIAM DAVID



Photography

The lockdown allowed people time to experiment with indoor and novel methods that they may not have had enough undisturbed time for in the past. For example, some years ago, I bought a pack of infra-red filters, but I had never had time to play with them.

So I experimented with a 760 nanometre lens and a long

exposure in my back garden. The exposure had to be long because the infra-red blocks out most of the light. But it gave me time – a 30-second delay – which meant that I could walk in front of the lens and become a ghostly part of the image (see image below).

Normally we go out for a photo shoot once a month and then select a few photos to share

with the group in a show-and-tell session. Though we couldn't go on group shoots during lockdown, we were well able to show each other themed photos, first by email and later on Zoom. Here is a selection from one of the themes: photos taken outside or from inside the home. ☺

MARTIN GOLDMAN





Photo © Martin Goldman

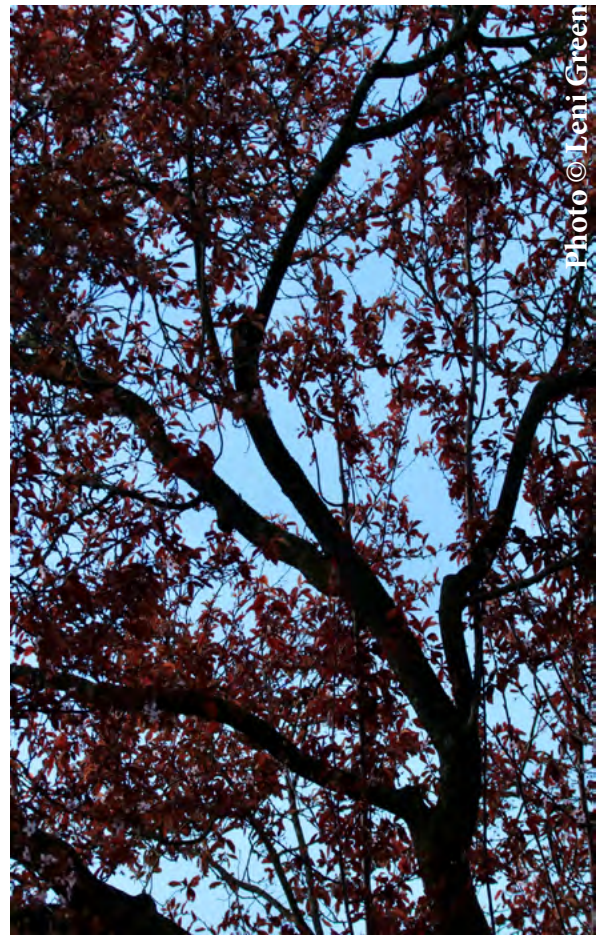


Photo © Leni Green



Photo © Caroline Goodman



Photo © Joan Swann



Photo © Richard Litherland



Photo © David Ramsey

As I see it

Bored? Go through your bookshelves and read, read, read, as **Patricia Isaacs** has done

Writing this in late July during some easing of lockdown, I have been trying to think of something to say that is unconnected to coronavirus. With no physical U3A groups, limited contact with people, and our repetitive lives, only one subject has emerged.

I have spent a great deal of time reading over the past several months, so I'm going to share a few of the authors and books which have delighted me during that time. With libraries closed, I started at one end of my bookshelves and picked out a book here, a book there, largely at random. For once, some memory loss is useful as I remember little of books I read years ago; they are almost new to me now! Here are a

few of the best.

- *A Manual for Cleaning Women* by Lucia Berlin: a wonderful variety of short stories
- *The Balkan Trilogy* by Olivia Manning: a vast, informative and entertaining novel of civilian life in wartime Europe
- *Commonwealth* by Ann Patchett: complex, engrossing, a tale of siblings in mid-20th century America
- *England Made Me* by Graham Greene: an irresponsible man recovers his natural honesty when he is ordered to do something unacceptable
- *American Wife* by Curtis Sittenfeld: an extraordinary novel about a First Lady in the US covering race, class and wealth
- *A Serious Man* by David



Storey: a once-famous man, almost forgotten at 65, reflects on his life

- *Duet, Dropped Threads, The Stone Diaries*, and *Jane Austen* by the incomparable Carol Shields; and many more brilliant authors and titles

• And if you haven't read these Scandinavian crime writers, you are in for a treat – Nesser, Nesbo, Mankell, Indridason, Sjöwall & Wahloo and others

• *The Siege* by Helen Dunmore: A visceral and timely depiction of starvation, privation, sickness and death during the Siege of Leningrad in the severe winter of 1941

• Finally, another book for our times: *Station Eleven* written in 2014 by Emily St. John Mandel. There are several back stories but the thread tying them together is the 20-year history set in Canada and the US following a global pandemic, a virus that rapidly decimated entire populations, that caused the end of almost everything, almost everyone.

Happy reading! ☺

Patricia Isaacs, a member of Poetry Aloud, wrote this poem to reflect the mood of the times:

Poem in the time of corona virus

Distanced, new habits quickly form
Apart, day follows silent day
Separate, the world through windows hazily seen
Alone, quiet hours become the only way
Of life

*Stitching and sketching the hours go by
Reading and writing the time saunters on
Birdsong and blossom delight ear and eye
And oh! how I yearn for aloneness to pass!*

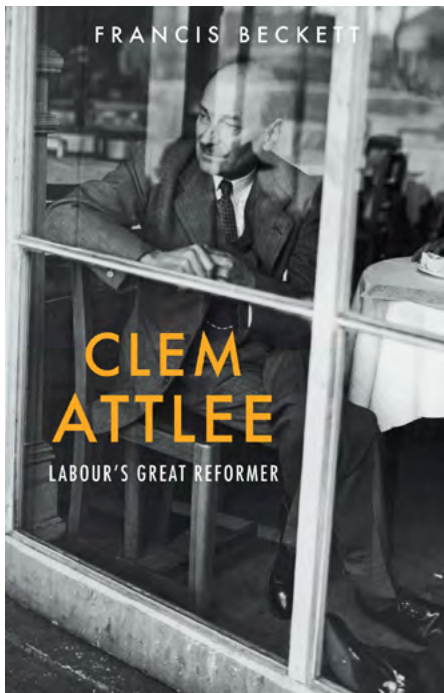
Spring sunshine is calling me out of my home
And socially distant, I walk in the park
Smiling a greeting two arms' length away
To other dawn strollers, exchange a remark
About life

© Patricia Isaacs

PATRICIA ISAACS
IS A PAST CHAIR OF NLU3A

1945: Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive

Wordsworth wrote those words about the French Revolution 146 years earlier, but for many people it was bliss to be alive in the dawn of 1945 – for the end of the war, of course, but also for the beginning of a new way of life under a remarkable government. In the first of our new series, Books by Members, **Francis Beckett** introduces his biography of **Clem Attlee – Labour's Great Reformer**



Sunday 6 July was the 75th anniversary of Labour's stunning 1945 general election victory, which ushered in a revolution in the way British people live. Labour's bold manifesto that year was written by a man who, nearly 40 years later, was to become one of the three founders of the U3A: Michael Young, later Lord Young of Dartington (1915–2002). In 1945, Young was Labour's director of research.

There was something special about the 1945 general election.

The newly created constituency of Barnet returned a Labour MP, Stephen Taylor, with a wafer-thin majority, beating the Conservative candidate by just 682 votes. Barnet was natural Conservative territory and it was the only time it ever returned a Labour MP. Five

years later Taylor lost by more than 10,000 votes to Reginald Maudling, who later became a Conservative chancellor of the exchequer and held the seat until it was abolished in 1974.

The pattern was repeated all over north London. Labour took St Pancras North, which the Conservatives had held since 1931. Even in true blue Hampstead the sitting Conservative MP came within a whisker of losing, eventually scraping home with a majority of 1,268. At the previous general election in 1935 the Tories had beaten Labour by a majority of 21,347.

In the country as a whole, Labour won a stunning and completely unexpected 135-seat majority, and was able and willing to put Young's extensive manifesto into action.

Young's manifesto may have been the most radical ever put before Britain by a mainstream party. It was certainly the most radical manifesto ever to be implemented – for Attlee's government took its promises very seriously, and fulfilled almost all of them.

The document, 'Let Us Face the Future', was very short as these things go – about 5,000 words – and very hard-hitting. It said that after winning the first world war, the people lost the peace. Power and wealth returned to the 'hard faced men who did well out of the war'.

They 'controlled the banks, the mines, the big industries, largely the press and the cinema. They controlled the means by which the people got their living. They controlled the ways by which most of the people learned about the world outside.' That must not be allowed to happen again.

It promised nationalisation of coal, railways and steel; the formation of a National Health Service; a nationwide extensive housing programme; and full implementation of the 1944 Education Act, which provided for free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of 15.

And all of these the Attlee government achieved – despite a wrecked economy, despite financial crises narrowly averted, despite taunts of totalitarianism. Clem Attlee, the least charismatic prime minister of the twentieth century, proved easily the boldest and most transformative. 🔄

• Francis Beckett's *Clem Attlee – Labour's Great Reformer* is published by Haus Publishing. It is also available as an ebook on Amazon Kindle and Epub.

Have you had a book published and would like us to include it? If so, please send a summary and a photo of the cover to editor@nlu3a.org.uk

Meet...

Christine Stammers, who exchanged primary school teaching for U3A learning and never looked back



My friend Kathy and I had just retired from teaching in primary schools. After years spent persuading moody youngsters to turn their energies away from making big trouble and towards doing some real learning, we needed some excitement in our lives. We considered Formula One, too dangerous; writing the great novel, not enough time left; researching a cure for leprosy, oops too late; joining the Royal Family, too dysfunctional;

becoming film stars, little talent and no glamour. One day we had a rational moment and joined NLU3A.

We went to a new members' meeting in the outer reaches of North Finchley. There were tea, biscuits and a woman with a very nice accent leading it. We quailed, ate biscuits, listened and made friends with a woman sitting next to us. Then we left and ran down the hill giggling like schoolgirls and went home to Holloway. Next day I remembered who the 'leading lady' was: my son's primary school teacher!!

For several years we dived into lots of groups: country dancing, Friday walks, embroidery, crafts, feminists, bowling and so on. We also helped with tea parties and festive lunches. We organised an open day and ran the summer programme. We had a wonderful time with some wonderful people.

Then came LOCKDOWN.

Everything stopped – no gossip, no laughs, no excitement. Things were looking grim. Then the indomitable spirit of the U3A

slowly woke up and we discovered Zoom.

Getting to grips with Zoom was interesting; we saw empty compartments on screen, several foreheads only, inexplicable fuzzy shapes; and heard strange private telephone conversations, builders discussing toilets and leaders wailing, 'Can anyone hear me?' Slowly we learned to apply order and discipline, agreed on topics such as who would you invite to lunch and why, your favourite book and so on.

We also discovered WhatsApp and members' ingenuity blossomed. Life is full of news, sympathy, emotional support, cartoons, comic strips, YouTube and jokes.

Don't forget email. My poetry group has flourished: have a look at page 4 for a description of the lovely things we're doing.

It seems the indomitable spirit of older people survives and thrives with NLU3A.

Alleluia! 🙌



Both sides now

Two views of the NLU3A subscriptions question

The committee has proposed reducing subscriptions in order to share the cost of paid venues among only those members who belong to groups that use them. Edmond Cohen, NLU3A's chair, has sent all members three letters explaining the background and the rationale. If there is a change, it will not take place until 2021 and there will be a vote before then on the proposal.

Here are two views on the proposals from members

The committee needs to balance the books while retaining the ethos of the U3A. The current treasurer of the Third Age Trust prefers that all groups be self-financing. On our present system, 30 per cent of NLU3A members use 70 per cent of the total subscription income. They benefit about four times as much from that income as the other 70 per cent of the members.

Groups which do not meet in members' homes often have to pay for the use of premises (such as pubs) in other ways, such as purchasing refreshments (as opposed to taking their own). This adds further to the inequality in benefits received.

We should, if practical, establish the cost of venues available. We should ask each member which groups they wish to join and identify the cost of all venues needed, and ask everyone whether they wish to share the cost of all venues equally (even if they do not use them) or whether only members who use a particular venue should pay for it.

ANDREW BOKOR, BEN MARSHALL

The NLU3A committee is wrong to seek to make groups pay for the venues they use. Members should be able to attend as many groups as they wish, with no further payment than the agreed subscription.

Last year's AGM accepted this, and unanimously voted to increase the subs to £50 a year to make it possible. The treasurer was confident that this would put the finances on a strong footing for some time to come.

Currently our finances are very healthy. Nothing has been paid since April 2020 for venues, monthly meetings, the summer programme or publications.

The committee says that it is concerned about lack of funds in the future. If a problem arises, the committee at the time will deal with it. We do not want NLU3A to become a money-led, pay-as-you-go organisation. That would undermine our ethos and cause a rift between members.

JUDITH ABBS, JENNY CLARK, MIRIAM DAVID,
BARRY DAVIES, JEFF DUCKETT, LENI GREEN,
ROSEMARY HELFER, PATRICIA ISAACS, FRANK
KELSALL, KATHY KYRIAKIDES, KEITH RICHARDS,
CHRISTINE STAMMERS

Art We Like

Our regular fortnightly Art We Like is attended by around a dozen of us at Angela Cox's home. We have delighted in our art, which is presented to the group by two members at every meeting. Under Angela's expert guidance we dissect and discuss a vast and different array of artwork.

Suddenly lockdown came, so we decided to continue weekly, in the same format but via email. Several members have commented that they actively and positively look forward to Thursday's email to see what is being offered that week!

Continued on page 12



Joaquin Sorolla, Mending the Sail, 1896, oil on canvas.
Museo d'Arte Moderna di Ca Pesaro, Venice.



Now that we have broken up for the summer, we have all decided to keep sending a picture each week. No presentation or analysis – just something nice to look at.

Attached are two very different pictures that we have seen. They are not ‘chocolate box’ views, but works by artists who are not the norm, such as this: nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/quinten-massys-an-old-woman-the-ugly-duchess. Have a look and do write in and let us know if you like the Art We Like. 🐞

**Left: Indian Roller on Sandalwood
Branch by Shaikh Zain Ud-din.**

HILARY SEGALL
r.segall@btinternet.com

Away days

The away day venues we had booked for March, May and June were cancelled, and they are not yet willing to fix new dates. For the autumn term, therefore, we shall take a couple of walks, staying outside.

In September we will walk through the Eton College Estate and the Earl of Southampton’s Chalcots Estate in Primrose Hill. We will start at Hampstead Theatre, Eton Avenue, by Swiss

Cottage station, where there are buses as well as the underground. Meet on 11 September at 10.30 outside the theatre entrance; postcode is NW3 3EU. We will end at Camden Town.

In October we will walk down Crooms Hill in Greenwich, beginning at Blackheath and ending at Greenwich DLR. This will also be on a Friday morning. Please check nlu3a.org.uk and NLU3A email updates for further information. 🐞

Monthly meetings

Physical meetings are currently suspended because of Covid-19. Until we are permitted to meet as large groups in the flesh, we will present these meetings using the members’ Zoom facility. This will permit up to 100 participants, but you will have to pre-book a place. We are setting up a programme of talks to follow those that took place in July and August.

Details will be posted on the monthly meetings page of the website (nlu3a.org.uk).

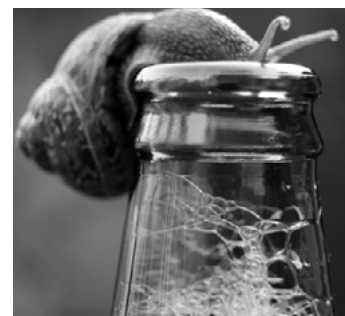
We recommend that you gain some experience in using Zoom before joining a meeting. The session will be recorded, so that members who cannot attend or wish to experience the lecture again will be able to do so online.

Monday 7 September: Stories of the law

Former practising solicitor Colin Davey will bring real cases to life, from a snail in a ginger beer bottle to outraged apartment dwellers being overlooked by a UK cultural institution.

Colin spoke to us in 2018 about the developers in the City of London. A City of Westminster guide, he took us on two guided walks, in Bloomsbury in 2019 and in the Jewish East End in 2018.

He writes and lectures, and continues to do guided walks in London.



Monday 12 October: Annual general meeting

Further details will be circulated soon. 🐞