

# February Newsletter

## CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

Greetings fellow U3A members.

February can be a very interesting month as, for us; it makes that vital bridge between winter and spring. Candlemas, at the very beginning, brings the Christmas period to an end but before Christianity superimposed this festival on the second day of the month, it was celebrated as Imbolc by the Celts. It was the start of the lambing season. Usually, by the middle of the month, the more adventurous can begin to spend more time out of doors and begin to shake off some of the constraints and restrictions of winter. But of course it is too soon to take too many liberties with the weather.

In general it is a good time to shake off old restrictions. Monica and I have been doing this on grand scale as at the time of writing we will be moving house in one days' time. It felt at times as though my whole life was destined for the skip or the charity shop; a bit of a shock, even though we have been trying to make it happen for fifteen months. Actually, part of me would be happy to move with nothing more than an electric kettle and a bed.

I have been connecting emotionally and mentally with nomadic cultures who, twice a year pack up everything that they have and move to lower or higher ground. I would wager that they do not take a single item that they do not absolutely need.

It is not just belongings that weigh us down of course. The way we live in general can so easily add to the weight we carry around psychologically. There are items and emotional habits that I could well afford to do without, though locating them is not always easy, as with the prospect of becoming skip-fodder, they go into hiding. Even so, regeneration is a fact of life and in February the signs of new growth begin to reassure us that, whatever the weather, spring is on the way. We can hold to that. Perhaps too, the virus is part of the passing winter.

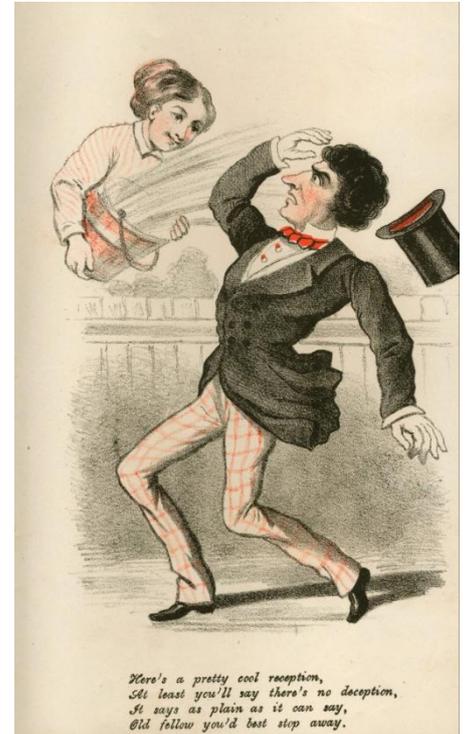
**Brian Gill – Chairman**

\*\*\*\*\*

## ST. VALENTINE'S DAY - FEBRUARY 14TH



Many stories around the origins of St. Valentine's Day exist, some relate to the pagan celebration of Lupercalia which celebrated fertility on February 15<sup>th</sup>, (the ides of February) and was dedicated to Faunus the Roman god of agriculture as well as to Romulus and Remus. Lupercalia survived the initial rise of Christianity but was outlawed at the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> Century by Pope Gelasius, who declared February 14<sup>th</sup> St. Valentine's day.



The Catholic Church has three saints named Valentine or Valentinus – all martyred and there are several stories with different possibilities as to how the connection to the Day came about. One of these was a priest in 3<sup>rd</sup> Century Rome, who continued to perform marriages in secret after the emperor Claudius 11 had outlawed them, thinking that young single men made better soldiers. Valentine thought this to be unfair and Claudius had him executed! A bishop, St. Valentine of Terni was also beheaded by Claudius 11, outside Rome.

Valentine may have been killed for trying to help Christians escape from Roman prisons where they were beaten and tortured. His appeal was as a sympathetic and romantic figure and by the Middle Ages he was one of the most popular saints in France and England where it was thought that February 14<sup>th</sup> was the start of the birds' mating season, adding to the romantic association of Valentine's Day. Geoffrey Chaucer was the first to record St. Valentine's Day as a romantic celebration in his poem, "Parliament of Fowles" writing, "For this was sent on Seynt Valentyne's day/ Whan every foul cometh ther to choose his mate."

Valentine greetings went back to the Middle Ages and written ones began to appear around 1415 when Charles, Duke of Orleans imprisoned in the Tower of London following the Battle of Agincourt, wrote a poem to his wife. King Henry V hired a writer to compose a Valentine note to Catherine of Valois at around the same time.

The tradition started to become popular in England in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and by the 18<sup>th</sup> century, notes and cards started to be exchanged by lovers and friends of all social classes. In Victorian times these became more ornate, often decorated by lace and as printing became more common, printed cards replaced letters. There was often a humorous slant to them as well as romantic.

My late husband's birthday fell on St Valentine's Day so we had double cause to remember it. It occurred to me that although many of us no longer have a spouse or sweetheart to celebrate the day with us, love takes many forms and it would be lovely if we remembered special friends, especially those who are spending the Covid lock down alone this year.

Eliane Davie

(With more than a little help from the internet!!)



\*\*\*\*\*

## Update – News re. The Williamson Gallery

The Williamson Art Gallery is one of our most loved local amenities and is under threat of closure in the possible Wirral Council budget cuts. The Williamson and Priory Friends have contacted all their members urging them to write to their local councillors, to complete the "Have your say" consultation on the council website ( closing date 22nd January 2021 ) and to sign the Change.org petition in support of the gallery started by Corinne Whitham ( at time of writing there were nearly 8,000 signatures!)

Our members have made use of the gallery over the years and it would leave a huge gap in many of our lives if it were to close - no more Sunday Serenades, no more artists talks, no more coffee and cake, no more interesting little shops, no more Art workshops.... the list is endless!!

So please if you haven't yet been able to show your support - do it now!

Thank you!



Corinne Whitham

\*\*\*\*\*

## ACTIVITIES AT THE WILLIAMSON ART GALLERY





\*\*\*\*\*

### BRIDGE GROUPS

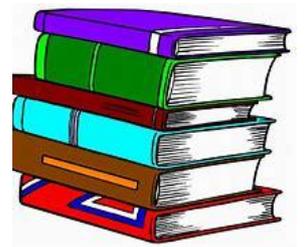
Tony Swarbrick would like anyone interested in joining on-line Zoom groups for Bridge during this time to e-mail him at: [groupcoordinator@oxtonu3a.co.uk](mailto:groupcoordinator@oxtonu3a.co.uk) this works quite well and started up during lockdown; Tony will explain and advise on how to go about it.



\*\*\*\*\*

### BOOK GROUP

Monica Price is still running her book group on line



### ART APPRECIATION GROUP

Bernadette has recommended checking out the National Gallery where there is a choice of virtual programmes and some interesting talks about a selection of paintings and painters to be found on line.

[nationalgallery.org.uk/events/courses](http://nationalgallery.org.uk/events/courses)



\*\*\*\*\*



## Val Edwards and Corinne Whitham greeted 2021 with an early morning walk in the Birkenhead Park



### Sketch by Corinne



\*\*\*\*\*

## Park news from Corinne

Despite a healthy looking clutch of six eggs last March, the swan family in Birkenhead Park is down to just the two adults and one juvenile. Sadly Park life has not been kind to them and the park rangers reported the death of the fifth cygnet just before Christmas.

Corinne

\*\*\*\*\*





May 1982—This guy was seriously boring. On and on he droned. His monotone delivery could, in other circumstances have sent her to sleep but on this occasion she knew that it was important that she try to concentrate because his influence was hugely important to the success of her company in breaking into the Paris market. Sally blinked hard in an effort to rouse herself to alertness; he was asking her a question. “Would *you* be able to *personally* supervise the choice of lines for our evening wear range?”

Sally realised with dismay that his eyes were fixed on her cleavage and knew with sudden certainty that she was going to have problems with him if, or when, they had to work together in business. Her face impenetrable she smiled up at him drawing herself up to her full height “I don't think there would be any problem with that if the size of the order warranted it. Of course the terms would have to be accepted by our shareholders. Could we speak later, there's someone I really have to catch before they leave? I'll be back shortly.” She turned and fled to the other side of the large foyer leaving M. Paul standing, mouth open, staring after her.

Gratefully Sally reached for a glass of the proffered champagne and swept her eyes around the room as she sipped. There must have been at least fifty people, mainly French she guessed, in the room. The men were all attired in dinner suits, the women in glamorous cocktail wear. Many of them were familiar to her at least by sight; the fashion trade attracted a fairly close knit fraternity. Aware that she presented a striking figure with her naturally auburn shoulder length hair set off by a deep green sheaf dress and emerald earrings, she smiled flirtatiously at a rather handsome guy who was regarding her with undisguised interest. “Hell”, she told herself, “I'm single again and *he* was certainly no angel – why shouldn't I have a little fun.”

Suddenly, just as Sally was about to move towards her new admirer, something caught her eye and her heart seemed to stop. A few yards behind him a man was talking animatedly with a woman Sally judged to be around forty. Something about the back of him felt instantly familiar and was so unexpected in her present circumstances that she felt quite faint. Memories from years ago came flooding back like yesterday. He turned slightly and she saw his face; different in a way but it was definitely Mark. He was arguing with the woman and as he made to turn away he spotted Sally. Everything seemed to stop, even time which went into slow motion and acquired a dreamlike quality.

“Good God – it can't be! Sally, is it really you?” His face had paled; *his* shock was as great as hers, “Its *years*, how many, 25 at least? What are you doing here? Last time I heard you had just got married to a photographer – you look very

glamorous?" then to his companion, "This is a very old friend of mine Olive. I haven't seen her for years, would you excuse me for a few minutes please."

Olive glanced at Sally with curiosity then turned on her heel, "As you wish; you're not much company at the moment anyway. I'll get a lift home, don't wait for me!" this with a toss of her hair, thrown over her shoulder.

Mark turned back to Sally. "Can we talk? You broke my heart all those years ago and you never really told me why?"

The room was spinning; time froze as she remembered that summer of 1958 when it began.....

School holidays had just started; the *end* of her schooldays. Her future lay ahead, an exciting prospect but just now she was meeting friends at the KontiKi, a newly opened coffee bar just off Richmond Green. As she walked in she saw that Barbara, Pam and her brother Noel were already there with a friend, whom Noel introduced as Mark. He reminded her that Mark had stayed with his family last year after they became friends on holiday. He had just completed his first year at the London School of Economics and had given Noel some useful tips for his fresher year. Only Jill and Ann had still to arrive and the friends, who had shared most of their schooldays, chatted happily realising that this would probably be the last time they would all be together before splitting up to start the next part of their education.

An hour and a half later with all the friends now assembled, they decided to go skating at Richmond Rink, after which someone suggested going to see "Some Enchanted Evening" which was showing at the local cinema. As the girls outnumbered the boys they had their way with this idea. It was a highly romantic and somewhat emotional story with some beautiful lyrics and later as they emerged into the summer evening Sally wondered if *she* would one day fall in love.

Mark fell into step and they chatted as they walked towards the tube station. "What are your plans now?" he asked, "Do you know yet what sort of work you hope to end up doing?"

Sally laughed, "I'm going to study dress design and tailoring and one day set up my own fashion house. Don't mock me - I am really ambitious. It might take a while," she added. Her friends smiled, having heard her voice the same ambition over many years.

That halcyon summer ended and the friends went their separate ways to a new life of colleges and study. Occasionally they met during vacation time and compared notes. Life was fun and full of hopes. Gradually they drew nearer their goals and gained the knowledge they would need to follow their chosen paths. One day out

of the blue the phone rang at the flat Sally shared with another student and when she picked up the receiver, “Is that Sally? This is Mark, Noel's friend. We met a couple of summers ago if you remember. Noel gave me your number. I hope you don't mind me ringing you out of the blue but I have been living in Manchester since qualifying and have lost touch with the old gang. Would you come out for a meal with me and maybe a show – I would really appreciate your company? London is very lonely. I'd love to hear how you are getting on.”

There followed a short silence while Sally caught her breath. She was in shock not having *thought* about him since that far away summer afternoon. He had seemed a pleasant guy, a bit on the skinny side and rather quiet but she supposed it might be interesting to hear how he was getting on – also Noel, whom she hadn't seen for almost as long. “Goodness, this is a surprise!”, she managed eventually. “It's very kind of you to think of me and yes, I would enjoy that. When were you thinking of?”

A few days later dressed in her favourite aquamarine dress she walked into the foyer of the Dorchester Hotel, nervously wondering if this had been a wise arrangement. Suppose they could find nothing to talk about, suppose he turned out to be awful. Mark had been a rather gangly youth when she had last seen him and she wondered whether now, three years later he would have changed. When he approached her he did indeed look different; much more confident, broader shoulders – this was no longer a boy, it was a *rather* attractive man who, before she could say anything had taken her hand and lifting it to his face, kissed it. All the breath seemed to have left her body; speechless she stared back at him noting how piercing his blue eyes seemed to be, how her stomach was fluttering and finally how much she wished the kiss had been on her mouth. “Wow, you look a million dollars,” was all that he said before taking her arm in a masterful way and leading her towards the dining room.

They talked without pause right through the meal, easily, as if they had been friends all their lives. Sally told him about college where she had almost completed her course and was finding that she had a real flair for design. Mark explained that he was engaged in arranging contracts for a mega business deal but was finding the constant travel quite tiring and lonely. He had booked tickets for “Irma La Douce” in the West End and held her hand throughout the performance.

That night he dropped her off at her flat in Hammersmith and held both her hands looking into her eyes and telling her earnestly that she was the most beautiful girl he'd ever met and that he was going to marry her one day when *she* had left college and *he* was established. For her part Sally felt she was walking on air and when he asked her to meet him the following day before he had to return to Manchester her “Oh yes!” was immediate and heartfelt. After that they had met intermittently whenever their lives allowed until Mark's work brought him back to London. Sally had been taken on by a well know fashion house and was gaining valuable

experience but was now thinking of taking a business qualification to gain some idea of what was involved with the buying end of the fashion market. It was the swinging sixties and London was humming with all sorts of new openings. Sally was still desperately in love with Mark and he with her; they had become passionate lovers and talked of marriage as Mark's income moved upwards. He was ready to commit to a life together but Sally still had hankering ambitions and feared that marriage might cause her to lose her dream.

One day they had the most awful quarrel. Mark simply couldn't understand that she needed further time to develop her burgeoning career and was jealous of the time she spent with photographers and the fashion occasions that required her presence. He foolishly made an ultimatum; he now earned plenty to support a wife and buy a house and she should *shelve* her business ideas and keep to design which she was really *good* at. Sally flounced out in tears hoping that he would stop her and recant but he didn't and so the romance that had seemed perfect went sour and she went on to marry a photographer who lived on her earnings and treated her abominably until she finally had enough and divorced him.

Mark and Sally had never seen each other again-----until now!

“Can we talk?” Mark was saying something. Sally brought herself back to the ballroom in Paris where lots of glamorous people were talking animatedly about the fashion market. It seemed so inconsequential with Mark there looking at her anxiously. So many regrets, so many wrong decisions; with all her heart she wished they'd done things differently and worked a compromise between them. He still had the same effect on her – “Could we go somewhere quiet where we can talk?” he was saying.

Sally thought; it was pretty important for the company that she speak to some of these people – the deal was a huge one and they were close to agreement. “Mark I am so sorry. I would really love to, but tonight I owe it to a lot of people to be here to try and close the deal. Let's go out into a corner of the Foyer for ten minutes and chat. I *could* meet you tomorrow if you like and maybe have lunch?”

Mark touched her cheek gently, he seemed sad, “We missed our chance years ago my darling Sally and I have often regretted not calling you back. We had a very precious love and I will always remember our time together. Olive is my wife now and although we don't always get on, she cares for me and I for her. I'm glad though that we have met for one last time so that we can say our goodbye properly without rancour.” He took both her hands and kissed the palms then folded them over, “Take my love and good wishes with you. I'm so glad to see that your dream came true.”

He turned and walked swiftly out of the room. Sally stood quite still tears welling in her eyes; it had been an experience that would for always make her wonder – what if?

“Sally,” someone was calling, “can you come over and speak to M. Paul now? He's anxious to run over the figures with you.” Picking up her glass and putting on her brightest smile, she moved in the direction of the voice.”

Eliane Davie

\*\*\*\*\*

Some of you will know Father Hovington, parish priest at Holy Name Church; I thought you might like these quotes he included with the Parish newsletter, which I quite enjoyed! ED.

“Life is like a hill that gets steeper the more you climb.” *John Updike*

“Don't judge each day by the harvest you reap but by the seeds you plant.” *Robert Louis Stevenson*

“You must not lose faith in humanity. Humanity is an ocean; if a few drops of the ocean are dirty, the ocean does not become dirty.” *Mahatma Gandhi*

“Just remember there is someone out there that is more than happy with less than what you have.” *Anon*

“Life is partly what we make it, and partly what it is made by the friends we choose.” *Tennessee Williams*

Stay safe and stay well,  
Fr Hov

\*\*\*\*\*

[www.u3asites.org.uk/north-west/events](http://www.u3asites.org.uk/north-west/events) **Regional Web site:**



Registered Charity number 1159094

## ***AND FINALLY.....***

By now many of you will, like me, have already received your Covid vaccine, so that although there is still very little news to be had, the end of our lockdown days are at least in sight. I must say that I was very impressed at the smooth organisation of such a huge task and very thankful to all those who are making it possible. Hopefully by March we may have the beginnings of an easing of the limitations we have been living under for most of the last year and a respite for our hard pressed NHS.

For now though we must continue to take care to be prepared for the huge rebuilding job ahead. I really am looking forward to seeing friends again and especially to the reopening of our U3A when it becomes possible.

Please don't forget to send any bits of news that might be of interest to our members!

**Eliane Davie - Editor**





