



CHAIR'S MESSAGE May 2024

Our **u3a** continues to grow and thrive as we near an impressive double of **400 members and 40 groups**. **Juliet Hancox (Groups Liaison Officer)** and I recently attended the **Parish Assembly at the Village Hall** and we were pleased to have the opportunity to promote **u3a** and network with others in attendance. It was good to catch up with several of our members present in their different capacities. The Parish Councillors present recognised the considerable voluntary work undertaken by **u3a** and other community groups.

At the forthcoming AGM, **Vivienne Waterer** will, after 5 years' service, be standing down from our Committee and also as our Speaker Secretary. **Judy Hornigold**, after 2

years, will also be leaving our Committee and her role as Publicity Officer. I would like to thank both of them for their unstinting support and hard work.

Following a proliferation of attempted scams, **Peter Calver**, who (along with our **Webmaster, Robert Zhilmor**) regularly provides our **u3a** with IT support recently contacted all members advising us on the issues of:

- **Email Scams and how to spot them**
- **How do you identify if an email is from who you expect it be from**
- **Emails apparently from legitimate companies**

PLEASE TAKE NOTE AND DON'T GET CAUGHT OUT!

Future Events – Save The Dates!:

1. **Picnic in the Park** – the Village Festivals Committee are holding this occasion on **Saturday 22 June from 3.00 to 8.00 p.m.** 27 **u3a** volunteers have now been sent rotas for stewarding the Picnic and Car Park areas. If you are in or around Balsall Common on the day please support this event and come and say "hello" to **your u3a and our volunteer members!** There may also be an opportunity to be interviewed on **Balsall Common Radio** who will be sited adjacent to our **u3a** gazebo! *In passing, I was recently told that **Balsall Common (BC) Radio attracts an audience of 20,000 in Canada – I suggested that this may just involve some confusion with British Columbia (BC).***
2. **The Fish & Chips Supper and Dance** returns on **Saturday, 6 July at 7.30 p.m.** Once again, live music will be provided by the brilliant band, **Prime Numbers**. **Tickets £15.00.**
 - Doors open at 7.00 p.m. and 10.30 p.m. finish.
 - Venue St Peter's Church Hall Balsall Common
 - Interval entertainment – quiz, game and free raffle

Please email your request for tickets to David Thomas **u3a** Treasurer at – **bcu3a18@gmail.com**

If successful you will be notified by email with payment details.

Please do not apply prior to the 5th May, as your application will not be accepted.

3. As some of you will have read in **u3a** publications, there is a **u3a Festival at the University of York from 18 to 20 July**. Several **u3a Regions** run Summer Schools – this is a national Festival where members will be offered all kinds of activities from talks to sport, music and workshops **including some that our own u3a provide e.g. Walking Football and Cricket, and Petanque**. Join for all or part of the event: **it's £35pp for three days, excluding accommodation** – which you can book now, at **£61.80 B&B on-site at the University of York**. Details are on the **u3a website: u3a – Festival 2024**.

Gardening Group

Until a couple of years ago we ran a successful **Gardening Group**. Subsequently we were invited to trips out with the equivalent u3a group in Olton – however, we would much prefer to establish our own local group. It doesn't need to be a "trips-out" based group and we would be delighted to hear from anyone prepared to take this on – please contact Juliet Hancox, our Groups Liaison Officer via groups@balsallcommonu3a.org

Do remember to keep an eye on **u3a** nationally via the on-line newsletters and the quarterly (and recently rebranded) **u3a Matters** magazine.

Our **AGM** precedes our **Core Meeting** on **Thursday May 9** – we hope to complete it in record time!

At our Core Meeting the **Guest Speaker** is **Steve Price** who will be speaking on the subject of **Advanced Motorists** – which should prove to be instructive!

In the meantime, enjoy **u3a** and do continue to support our Interest Groups and please check the **website, balsallcommonu3a.org** for details of what's on and group activities.

With very best wishes and, as always,

.....**LEARN, LAUGH AND LIVE!**

Matthew Stephens – Chair chairman@balsallcommonu3a.org

DO YOU HAVE DIFFICULTY IN READING THE SENTINEL

There are several ways you can magnify the computer screen, depending on your operating system.

- 1 **In windows if you have a wheel on your mouse then hold down the CTRL key and rotate the wheel to increase or decrease magnification (otherwise find the magnification option in "Settings").**

- 2 **If you are viewing a PDF document through a PDF reader there are "+" and "-" icons at the top of the screen to increase or decrease magnification.**

- 3 **Sometimes a magnifying glass may suffice.**

- 4 **With smartphones simply turn the phone to landscape and then increase or decrease the size on the screen by finger touch**

u3a Committee Members and their Roles

There follows a list of the current Committee members, officers and their roles within Balsall Common u3a.

Post	Post Holder	Email
Chair	Matthew Stephens	Chairman@balsallcommonu3a.org
Vice Chair	Mike Fairbrother	Michael.fairbrother1@btinternet.com
Secretary	John Bolt	secretary@balsallcommonu3a.org
Treasurer	David Thomas	treasurer@balsallcommonu3a.org
Membership Secretary	Sandra Heard	membership@balsallcommonu3a.org
Room Bookings Secretary	June Slatter	bookings@balsallcommonu3a.org
Speakers Secretary	Vivienne Waterer	speakers@balsallcommonu3a.org
Publicity Officer	Judy Hornigold	publicity@balsallcommonu3a.org
Groups Liaison & Accessibility Officer	Juliet Hancox	groups@balsallcommonu3a.org
Risk Management & Assets Trustee	Mick Gill	mick.gill1951@outlook.com
Core Meetings Refreshment Organiser	Jayne Taylor	Coretearota@balsallcommonu3a.org
Sentinel Editor **	Will Heard	editor@balsallcommonu3a.org
Webmaster **	Robert Zhilmor	webmaster@balsallcommonu3a.org

** Not a Committee Member

NEWS

1 u3a SWING DIVISION 8 YEARS ON – *Nick Carter reflects*



A month ago I had a message from Facebook, quoting a post that I had made eight years ago: 'We had ten people at the rehearsal yesterday, so we have gone from MY project to OUR band.' This was cause for some reflection as how we did it and the big band that we have now. What has amazed, and delighted me, is the quality of people who have joined, and usually stayed in both personal and musical points of view.

We had several people come along, gave it a try, and did not stay, which is fair enough. We very quickly stabilised as a very big band and it was obvious to me that we needed a structure. From the very early days I was doing the treasurer function as well as the librarian and overall organiser.

Our original Musical Director (MD) was the first person I approached after having the idea of the band – a semi-professional sax player, Bob Jones, who after a couple of years decided that we had attained a high standard and we were to go solo. The other member of the trio in setting up was Paul Morris, our lead trumpet player so I asked him to make this permanent, and he is doing a magnificent job and has led us to a very high standard.

Very soon after that another trumpet player, Roy Taysum offered to do the treasurer and liaison

(with the local u3a) function.

When we set the band up I was the librarian to another big band (The Birmingham Basement Band) so I had access to many charts which got us underway, and we have built up the library from many other sources since then. We started with five tunes and now have 115 tunes in the library. A couple of years ago Roy retired for medical reasons, and Colin Scoins (our lead Trombonist) has taken over the Treasurer function.

The triad functions very well with constant chatter.

With any u3a group we have the 'problems' of our generation and we have had quite a few people have dropped out - we lost three people during lockdown, a couple have retired, and one has moved home. As it happens we have replaced them with other very good people.

With this in mind we have usually accepted extra people - at one stage, before lockdown we had eight saxophones, two Bass players, and the geographical extent went from Malvern to Rugby, Coventry, Nuneaton, Sutton Coldfield Solihull as well as Warwick, Coventry, Kenilworth, and as I write four from Balsall Common.

When we started the big problem was where to base, I got a map and plotted where people came from and as it happens the epicentre was very close to Balsall Common. We started in the Jubilee Centre but that did not work out as car parking and traffic made it very difficult, and we then ended up in our present 'home', the Catholic Church in Meeting House Lane, Balsall Common which has proved very successful.

We have played gigs in a variety places including u3a groups in Balsall Common, Solihull and the Watermill in Sutton Coldfield, the Windmill in Balsall Common, the care home in Balsall Common (the Queen's Jubilee, the Coronation, and a small band within the big band another concert). We have also played for a charity fundraiser in Olton each June, with the next one coming up shortly. The range of music is very wide, from Billy Joel, to Glenn Miller and Count Basie, Films, Musicals to Bop, as well as several Latin tunes and Dixieland jazz.

What has really delighted me is that not only the very high standard of music and of the people. I have often been asked what our major problem is. Actually, it is a delightful 'problem' in that of getting people to stop chatting and sit down after the tea breaks.

Well, we have been going for eight years, and have attained a very good standard or that is what

I'm told. Sitting in my section I can't really tell how we are getting on as I concentrate on not messing up my playing, so the comments after the recent concert at Balsall Common u3a have been a real delight.

So, here is to the future, and profound thanks to our band members for all the hard work, as

well as the support we have had from the Balsall Common u3a, particularly during the set up stage.



2 HEDGEHOG AWARENESS WEEK 5TH – 11TH MAY 2024 – *Sue Green*

Did you know that the State of Britain's Hedgehogs 2022 report published by the British Hedgehog Preservation Society (BHPS) and the People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTSE) revealed that rural hedgehog populations have declined by between 30 – 75% across different areas of the British countryside since 2000. In 2020, the hedgehog was put on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List as vulnerable to extinction in Great Britain. An article published in the Daily Mail newspaper on 19th May 2015 stated that British hedgehogs are dying out at the same rate as tigers. Do you really want your grandchildren and great grandchildren to never see a hedgehog? Whilst there are no tigers in Balsall Common, you can do hands on conservation work to help save our hedgehogs. Every year in May, the BHPS organise Hedgehog Awareness Week. This annual event highlights the plight of this beloved and iconic native species and how you can help them. So why not encourage a hedgehog into your garden and make it a welcoming and safe place for them :-

- Link your garden. Every night a hedgehog roams between 1 – 2 kilometres. Hedgehog Highways allow access, a small square gap of 13cm x 13cm at the bottom of boundary walls and fences allows an easy way in and out ;
- Make your pond safe. Ensure ponds and pools have wildlife escape routes (a sloping edge, ramp or part submerged rock) for hedgehogs to scabble out ;
- Create a wildlife corner. Log piles, leaf piles and wild corners offer shelter ;
- Deal with netting and litter. Keep netting 30 cm off the ground to prevent hedgehog spines becoming entangled ;
- Put out food and water. Water is vital for life especially during hot summer months. Hedgehogs benefit from extra food such as specialist hedgehog food or alternatively meaty cat or dog food as a supplement to their natural diet. No bread and milk because hedgehogs are lactose intolerant and they will become very ill ;
- Stop using chemicals. Pesticides, insecticides and slug pellets are toxic and reduce hedgehogs creepy crawly prey ;
- Check before strimming or mowing long grass or lighting a bonfire pile ;
- Make a hedgehog house ;
- Become a Hedgehog Champion by registering on www.hedgehogstreet.org.



So come on let's make Balsall Common a haven for hedgehogs. Look out for the Hedgehog Post Box Toppers outside the One Stop Shop in the village centre and the Poster in the Balsall Common library (see photographs). For more information about hedgehogs visit the BHPS website at www.britishhedgehogs.org.uk. To get involved with craftivism in and around Balsall Common contact solihullcraftivism@gmail.com

3 HIGHLY COMMENDED POEM – *Robert Zhilmor*

Robert's poem "Saving Hundred Acre Wood" was highly recommended by judges in the 2023 Positive Images – Looking after our Environment – poetry competition.

It can be found using this link <https://positiveimagesfestival.co.uk/lookingafterourenvironment>

Editor's Note: Whilst u3a Balsall Common has many groups, a **poetry writing/appreciation group** (or similar) is notable by its absence. However, Members may wish to contribute **original**

poems on virtually any subject to The Sentinel. If a member prefers anonymity he/she can use a nom de plume.

4 WHIFF WHAFF? PING PONG? What a load of table tennis! – *Lin White*

U3A Table tennis isn't all about members enjoying a game of ping pong on a Friday afternoon!!!! Yes, it's fun, it's competitive (well some of us are). It's a time to chat (in between games). It keeps the brain active (trying to remember the score and who served).

We have a welcome break for tea and biscuits and more chat. On special occasions (a birthday or anniversary) we have cake and if we are really lucky it's homemade!!!

How about these amazing 'table tennis brownies' celebrating **Grahams birthday (well done Elizabeth and Graham, you are both too talented).**

We are at capacity in this group at the moment but if you would like to join a waiting list (no one on there at the moment) then please let me know

linwhite100@gmail.com



Out and About Group – *Peter Calver*



45 members of Balsall Common u3a recently visited the Birmingham Museums Collection Centre. The centre, a warehouse, on an industrial estate in the Nechells area of Birmingham. The Museum Collection Centre is the main store for Birmingham Museums, holding around a million items. With only a small percentage of collections on display at Birmingham Museums, or on loan to other organisations, it is the only place to see collection items not normally on display.



A huge number of the objects are held on open storage in one very large warehouse which contains everything from aircraft engines to zoological specimens. Among the hundreds of thousands of objects stored here are steam engines, sculptures, cars, a giant spider crab, a retro chip fryer, and many more. Smaller objects, and objects that need more stable temperature and relative humidity, are stored in purpose-built spaces.



Members arrived and whilst enjoying refreshments were given a short introductory talk about the centre. Following this we were taken to the first of three sections and allowed to walk around and see the exhibits.



ACTIVITY GROUPS

Swimming Group – *Kim Hathrell*

Owing to the early bank holidays on Monday 5th, there will only be one swimming session in May, on 12th at 3pm. The Xcel leisure centre now charges £3.80 for our members at our sessions.

Craft Group – *Jane Cooper*

In April the Craft Group learnt the technique of puff patchwork instead of Suffolk puffs (see attached photo). In May, the Craft Group will be doing paper-craft, we will be making paper flower gift tags.

But firstly "What is paper?" Papyrus was developed by the ancient Egyptians as one of the earliest forms of paper. As the centuries passed, paper making progressed throughout

the world and different techniques were developed. In China, raw materials were pulped and drawn through a mesh to form sheets of paper. In the eighteenth century machinery brought about the mass

production of paper in which the fibres lie in one direction giving it a grain. This manufacturing process made paper available to everyone in the form of newspapers and books and for crafts such as decoupage and scrap booking, which boomed in the Victorian era.

Today paper-crafting is an extremely popular and pleasurable pastime. You may ask "Why?" The answer is



simple because it is an easy to do and cheap hobby. Paper is everywhere – newspapers, magazines, napkins, sheet music, etc., which are all ideal for crafting. The essential tools are basic – pencil, scissors and glue. The necessary techniques are simple skills – folding, tearing, cutting and sticking together. So why not join us on Wednesday 8th May and try your hand at paper-crafting. You'll leave Haigs Hotel with a pretty paper flower tag to adorn and personalise any gift you give (see attached photo). For more details and information about the Craft Group please look at the website and / or contact Jane Cooper.

Folk Dancing Group – *Sue Green and Richard Hancox*

The re-launched Folk Dancing Group met for the first time on Wednesday 10th April with seventeen Members in attendance. We welcomed everyone to the session with a lively circle dance called Lucky Seven. Then we began to learn three Longways Sets – Cotswold Jig, Ups & Downs, and Cheltenham Flyer and one Square Set – Sheehan's Reel. At the end of two hours, by which time our brains were a little frazzled, we finished with a simple circle dance called Circassian Circle. There was much laughter and chatting. It was good to be dancing again. We



went home a little tired but very pleased with ourselves and our achievement of dancing six new dances. However the big unanswered question is "Will we remember all the moves in three weeks' time?" The next meeting is at 2 – 4 pm on Wednesday 1st May at the Methodist Hall, when we will be continuing to practise our dancing prowess. Everyone is

welcome so please come along and join us. No previous dance experience or partner necessary. For Health and Safety please wear sensible flat shoes, no high heels. Any questions please look at the website or contact Sue Green.

Ramblers Group – *Matthew Stephens*

On a rare sunny morning (note the sunglasses below!) in early April, Matthew Stephens led 20 members on an urban walk around Leamington Spa taking in the tranquillity of Jephson Gardens, Victoria Park, the River Leam and two stretches of the Grand Union Canal. 9 members stayed for a well-earned lunch (with 4 more just for a drink) in the Newbold Comyn Arms. On Wednesday April 17, Leslie and Carolyn de Chernatony led a group of 16 around Hillfield Park Solihull and also enjoyed fine weather. The Shorter Walks group is positively thriving and, at the time of

writing, Barbara and Phil Hammonds are due to lead a group around Elmdon Park.

Birdwatching Group – *Juliet Hancox*

The birdwatching group visited Ladywalk Nature Reserve, near Coleshill this month. Signs of spring were in the air, with orange tip butterflies and the first damselflies of the year being seen as we walked in some welcome sunshine! There was plenty of bird life around too, with the arrival of summer visitors such as willow warbler, blackcap, whitethroat, and reed warbler.

We watched migrating sand martins swooping low over the river and were pleased to see

them making use of the nest boxes provided for them. In previous years, their natural nestling holes in the riverbank have been destroyed by heavy summer rain.

We finished the day with a fabulous view of a pair of peregrine falcons, just above the car park.

We also broke our record for the number of species observed, with a massive 51 species of bird in 3 hours! The list is long but worth reporting here.

Well done record breakers!

black headed gull, blackbird, blackcap, blue tit, buzzard, Canada goose, carrion crow, Cetti's warbler, chiffchaff, common sandpiper, coot, cormorant, dunnock, gadwall, goldfinch, goosander, great crested grebe, great tit, grey heron, grey wagtail, jackdaw, kingfisher, lapwing, lesser black backed gull, little egret, little grebe, little ringed plover, long tailed tit, magpie, mallard,



moorhen, mute swan, oystercatcher, peregrine, pheasant, pied wagtail, redshank, reed bunting, reed warbler, robin, sand martin, shelduck, shoveler, stock dove, swallow, teal, tufted duck, whitethroat, willow warbler, woodpigeon, wren. 51 species

Our next trip will be to the Wolseley Centre near Cannock Chase on May 23rd. If you would like to join us, please contact me at birdwatching@balsallcommonu3a.org

Photography Group – Jim Melville



**Balsall Common u3a
Photography Group
200th meeting**



Thursday 25th April 2024



This group first met on Thursday 30 November 2006 with Nigel Briggs as its coordinator. The members originally met in each other's houses, then moved to the Blessed Robert Grissold Church Hall. Ten years ago, it sought a larger venue and moved to the Balsall Common Village Hall in January 2015.

In April the members celebrated their 200th meeting. It was a pleasure to see two of the founder members at the meeting: Roy Hands and Nigel Briggs together with David Venables who was a regular visiting judge until recently. Cliff Armstrong from the Stratford Photographic Group had a difficult task to judge the 36 prints submitted by 20 members for an "Open" competition. However he provided many constructive comments and, faced with a difficult choice, he awarded prizes to these members:

- First** **Salford Shapes** by **Bob Bracher**
Second **Wreck in Pin Mill** by **Susan Badger**
Third **Short Eared Owl** by **Karen Coates**
Highly Commended **The Dales in Winter** by **Bob Bracher**
Commended **Yellow Umbrella** by **Derek Robbins**

The meeting terminated with a celebratory Buck's Fizz and some nibbles instead of the usual tea, coffee & biscuits with this group photograph taken to mark this occasion.



Salford Shapes by **Bob Bracher**



Wreck in Pin Mill by **Susan Badger**



The Dales in Winter by **Bob Bracher**



Short Eared owl by Karen Coates



Yellow Umbrella by Derek Robbins



Here are u3a Balsall Common Photography Group's four winning images from the most recent u3a Eye

The Linen Basket

by John Bolt



Threadbare Bear, Old, Worn, Treasured by Sue Badger



Weathered Wood

by Karen Coates

What time is the next collection?

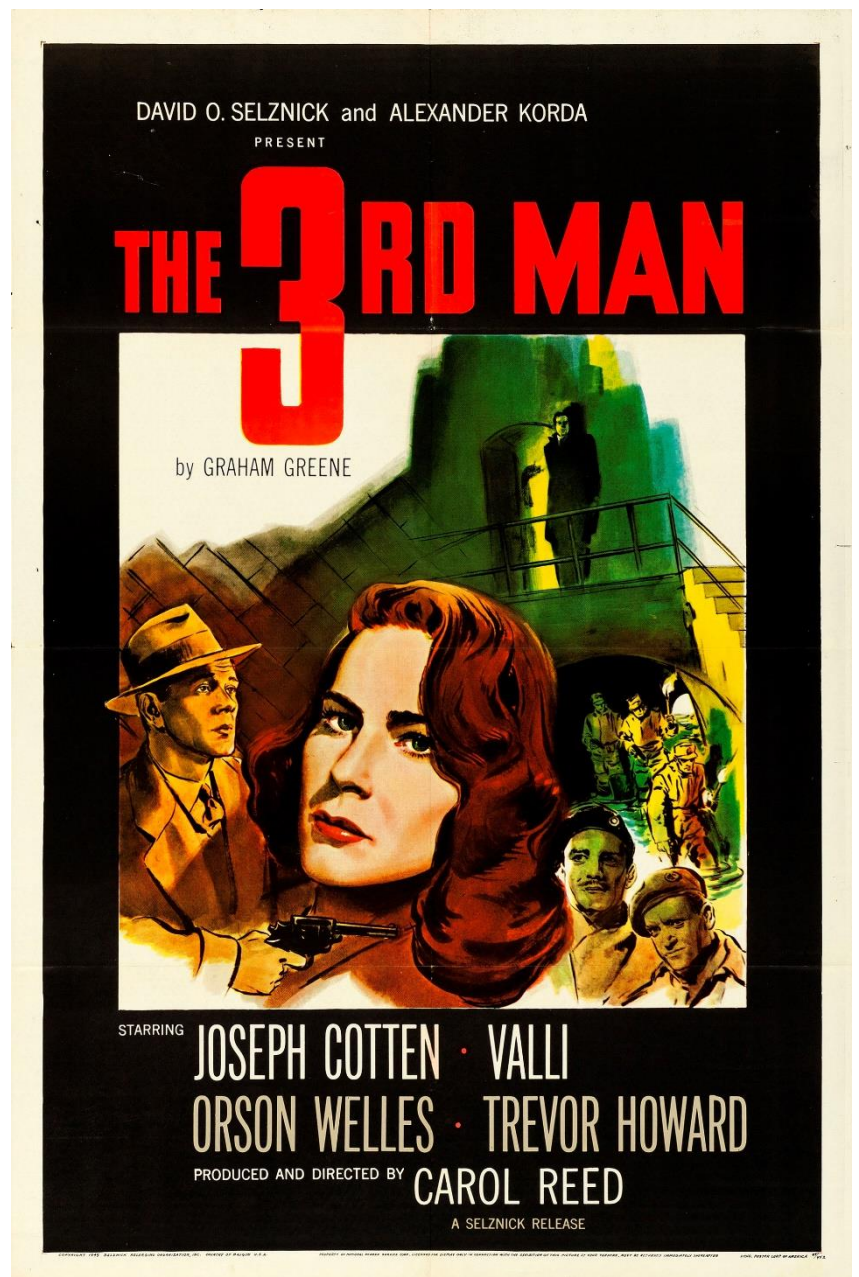
by Carolyn de Chernatony

Film Appreciation Group – *Kim Hathrell*

The next Film Appreciation Group screening will be the British classic, *The Third Man*.

Holly Martens (Joseph Cotten), a naive writer of pulp westerns, arrives in Vienna to meet his old friend Harry Lime (Orson Welles) but finds that Lime has apparently been killed in a suspicious accident. Martens, too curious for his own good, hears contradictory stories about the circumstances of Lime's death and as witnesses disappear he finds himself chased by unknown assailants. Complicating matters are the sardonic Major Calloway (Trevor Howard), head of the British forces, and Lime's stage actress mistress, Anna (Alida Valli). Will Martin's curiosity lead him to discover things about his old friend that he'd rather not know?

Brilliantly scripted by Graham Greene and set to Anton Karas' evocative zither score, this justly celebrated classic is further enhanced by Robert Krasker's Academy Award winning cinematography and Welles in one of his most iconic screen roles.



The film will be screened at 2pm in the Westlake Room on Wednesday 8th May. A small charge of £2.50 per member is to cover the hire of the room.

If you want to attend, please let Kim Hathrell know, by email on films@balsallcommonu3a.org, or text/call on 07510 725607 (although there is usually room for walk-ins).

Sentinel Editor – *Will Heard*



Great thanks to all those who have contributed to *The Sentinel* this month. The memories of your parents' work in the war were of particular note and taught me a thing or two about those times which weren't so familiar to me. Most of us know that 6th June 1944 was D Day so members might wish to mark this 80th anniversary by submitting further thoughts about parents and relatives for the June edition of *The Sentinel*.

As an experiment would members like to submit poetry to *The Sentinel*? It must be original, by the contributor, but you may do so under a nom de plume if you wish. In any case members' contributions on almost any subject are welcome so why not send yours to editor@balsallcommonu3a.org

MEMBERS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Chaos and Heroism in War – *John Bolt*



My father served with 5th Battalion the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry (DCLI). They were part of 43rd Wessex Infantry

Division which played an important role in clearing the enemy from the outskirts of Caen in the month or so

after D Day. This was known as Operation Jupiter. Part of this operation was to clear Hill 112 (112 metres

high) overlooking the valleys of the rivers Odon and Orne. This proved to be a most bloody battle in which many DCLI infantrymen were killed. Later on DCLI were involved in the capture of Mont Pincon and surrounding villages including Le Plessis-Grimoult where my father had luck on his side when he captured 45 German soldiers single handedly.



Bit Awkward

"I thought it was a whole German Regiment when they started pouring out of the barn" said Sergt. Bolt. "If some of them hadn't started screaming I think I hit them when I fired my Sten—they hid— it was now a bit awkward! I started shouting for my comrades to come and lend me a hand with my prisoners. They didn't come. They thought I was shouting them to get on. Then I shouted out for another section. It seemed hours while I was there alone with the Germans all round me! I couldn't have run away if I had wanted to. I'd got my foot tangled up in some wire!"

Later that evening Sgt. Bolt was told to take all the prisoners—then about a hundred—back to the rear. With an escort of five men, he started off and then lost the way in the dark. As a result they got two more prisoners after an extraordinary incident! Preceding one a half miles down the wrong road they first bumped into five Germans. Sgt. Bolt grabbed the nearest and pushed him in among his prisoners. He shot another and the rest fled. It was then that he suspected that they were



Sgt. Bolt

Incomplete cutting

In 1994 the DCLI arranged a pilgrimage to Normandy and I took him to the barn where the capture took

place. He did not receive his war medals until many years later and they were awarded to him at a regular reunion in 1997. In the visit in 1994, 50 years after, a ceremony took place on Hill 112. Hundreds of people were there, mostly French. I took my father in the car because he was too frail to travel in the coach. A few months before that he had visited the regimental museum in Bodmin and was thrilled to see a picture of newspaper cutting displayed and met the most of the old soldiers from the regiment.

In 2019, I attended the 75th anniversary of the battle at Hill 112. I was pleased that one of my dad's friends was still alive aged 94 and was there though he didn't remember me. The guest of honour there was Prince Edward. There was a ceremony at Hill 112 and then a reception in the local village hall. I had my photo taken with Prince Edward.

Bristol Evening World Sept 22 1944

Amazing Adventures in France

Bristol Sergeant Took 45 Nazis Single-Handed

DURING a very successful attack through a French village by a company of the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry. Lance-Serjt. F. Bolt: of 26. Tewkesbury

Rd., Bristol 2, captured 45 Germans, including one officer, after a daring lone entry into a large barn where they were hiding.

Serjt. Bolt's platoon, which is commanded by Lieut. B. M. Williams, of 18, Glenwood-rd., Westbury-on-Trym, was attacking through the village in the half-light late one evening. The enemy were holding the place in considerable strength. Going in with great dash, the platoon worked its way down the main street, shooting up every dark corner and throwing hand grenades through house windows as it went.

Half way through the village was a large barn which Serjt. Bolt decided to search. He proceeded to do so. Sending one man forward to his Platoon Commander to explain what he was about to do, Serjt. Bolt sent the remaining three men of his section round in rear of the barn while he himself went to the front entrance. There he kicked open the door and fired his Sten gun into the darkness inside.

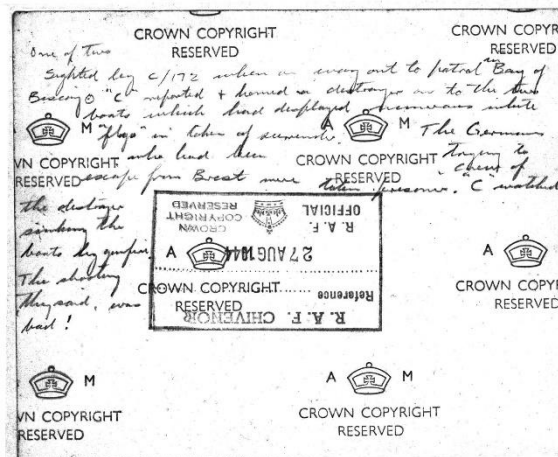
Immediately the complete quiet was broken by screams and Serjt. Bolt found himself amongst a large body of Germans, all of whom were armed. In spite of the extreme danger of being overwhelmed, Serjt. Bolt succeeded, entirely single handed, in capturing every German hiding in the barn. Last to come out was an officer.

Blimps, Bombers and U Boats – *David Bell*

In 1939, RAF Wythall was opened as the Headquarters of No.6 Barrage Balloon Centre with responsibility for the balloon defence of the southern part of Birmingham and Coventry. The territory eventually covered about 600 square miles and employed both RAF and WAAF personnel.



My father, Graham Bell, a Scot, was a Birmingham business man. In 1939 along with teachers, estate agents and surveyor he joined 916 squadron and was in charge of a six man squad putting up barrage balloons in Wythall. These Blimps weighed 600 pounds and were 64 ft. long and 31 ft. high. They were operated with a winch. Their effectiveness was debatable but maybe they deterred some enemy aircraft and at least one of RAF Wythall's barrage balloons did actually disable an enemy aircraft. On Wednesday 9 April 1941, a Heinkel He111P bomber flown from an airfield in northern France hit a balloon cable and part of its wing fell off onto houses in Balden Road, Harborne; it was shot down by a Boulton Paul Defiant and crashed in Hales Lane, Warley. By 1942, following this honourable, but land locked career in the leafy glades of Wythall, Graham got married to Audrey Nicol, herself a Glaswegian, but instead of a honeymoon he was called down to London to receive a commission in the RAF as an Intelligence Officer with Coastal Command based at RAF Chivenor near Barnstable. Audrey had to be content with a honeymoon with her mother in Scotland! Coastal Command was a different kettle of fish (sorry) to sleepy Wythall. RAF Chivenor played a highly strategic role as guardian of the Atlantic approaches to the North Sea and the Bristol Channel, carrying out routine patrols and hunting U Boats and Italian



submarines, mainly utilising Wellington bombers capable of destroying enemy boats but also equipped with cameras for reconnaissance so producing thousands of photographs for analysis.

My mother remained in Glasgow where she broadcast keep fit for the BBC. Not surprisingly I therefore appeared after the War!

Editor's Note: During a night-time training exercise [at RAF Chivenor] on the 26th November 1941 new pilots were practicing their take-off, landing procedures when it became apparent that an extra aircraft had joined their group in the air.

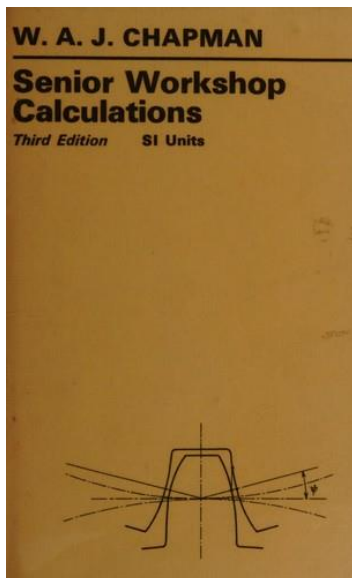
The duty Flying Control officer had noticed there was an extra set of lights amongst the group and was unable to identify it. Despite the risk it was an enemy aircraft as it had not yet fired upon the other aircraft on manoeuvres he ordered it should be allowed to land.

On landing it became clear that it was a German Junkers 88 aircraft. The Operations Room was quickly alerted and the perimeter guns put on standby to act. The pilot and crew of the enemy aircraft realised their mistake too late and after a quick burst of machine gun fire they were dissuaded from trying to escape.

The crew were taken prisoner and on interrogation it was learned the Ju88 had been on a bombing raid in the Midlands and was returning to base. They became disoriented when they strayed over Wales and seeing the Bristol Channel mistook it for the English Channel. Having assumed they had crossed the English Channel they landed at the first airfield they saw thinking it was part of Occupied France. By the time they realised their mistake they had handed the RAF an intact aircraft and crew!

<https://talesfromthearchives.wordpress.com/2016/11/26/an-unusual-landing-at-chivenor/>

The Back Room was just as important in winning the war – *Susan Fuller*



My father's surname was Chapman (William Arthur James). He was born in 1900 and was a mechanical engineer. Having served his apprenticeship at the Daimler in Coventry, he worked there for 9 years before moving on to the Coventry Chain Co. He was always involved in technical education and we moved about quite a bit during the war as he went onwards and upwards! In 1940, he wrote a handbook on Workshop Calculations which was taken up by The Ministry of War. A copy was given to every recruit to war-time industry. He also wrote textbooks on Workshop Technology which I think are still selling. He got his PhD in 1939 for a research on



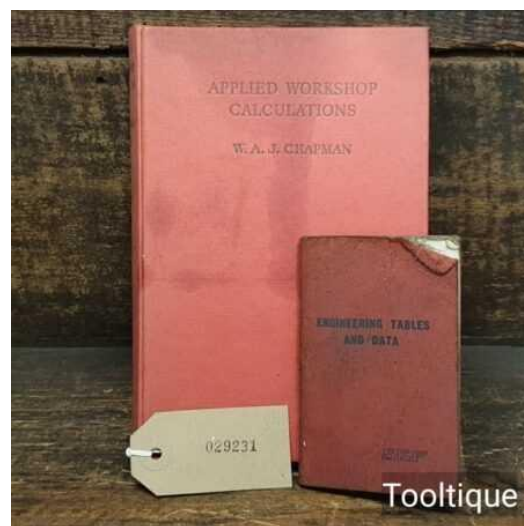
cold working**.

**Cold work is any metalworking process that plastically deforms the alloy below its recrystallization temperature. Each alloy has a unique recrystallization temperature. It's often found around halfway to the metal's melting point.

I vaguely remember him doing fire watching when we lived in Sedgley, near Dudley, at the beginning of the war and coming home one morning saying that 'they' got the paint factory last night - i.e. Manders paints in Wolverhampton. There is now, of course, a Mander Shopping Centre there.

My mother was a housewife - looking after me! - but also an excellent cook and talented seamstress. We lived in a couple of places in Shropshire during the war and so were always fortunate to have space to keep hens, a pig and grow veg - one was allowed to keep 2 pigs a year and, of course, come to a suitable arrangement with the local butcher! I first went to school in a village called Trench, near Wrockadine Wood (near Oakengates, now Telford) which was next door to the Donington camp and my parents were frequently invited round to the Officers' Mess for drinks! Gin and orange was the 'in' drink in those days!

I don't remember VE day particularly but can remember celebrating VJ day. I think we were staying in Swanage at a Holiday Fellowship centre - (anyone else remember HF!?) - and we celebrated with a bonfire on Chesil Beach.



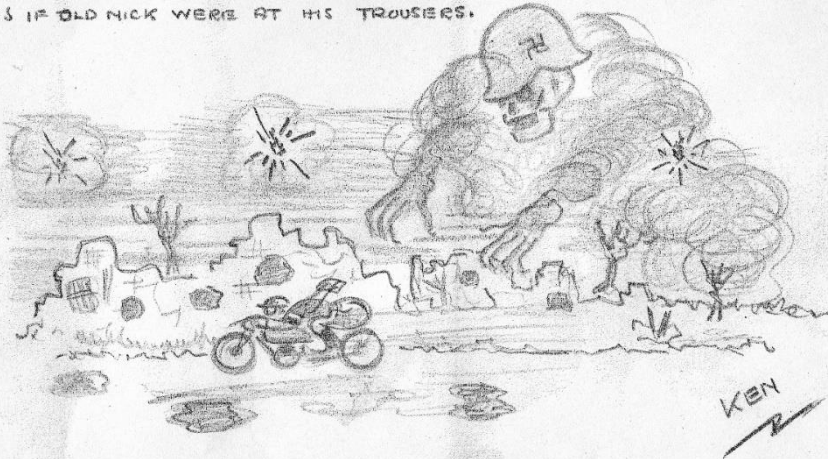
A Despatch Rider's day never ends – *Will Heard*

My dad, Harold Heard, was a despatch rider (DR- sometimes known as a Don R) attached to the HQ of 1 British Corps which had a major role in the organisation of the D Day landings but subsequently came under the control of First Canadian Army for most of 1944 into 1945, although by VE Day 1945 it had reverted to British control and then became the nucleus of BAOR (British Army of the Rhine) in post-war years.

At first sight a casual observer could be forgiven for thinking that a DR was a glorified postman. This was all very well when no action was taking place but military operational organisation – especially in wartime conditions as fast



ON ROADS THAT ARE TORN BY SHOT & SHELL
A 'DON R' RIDES, WITH SPEED OF HELL,
THROUGH ROWS & ROWS OF SHATTERED HOUSES
AS IF OLD NICK WERE AT HIS TROUSERS.



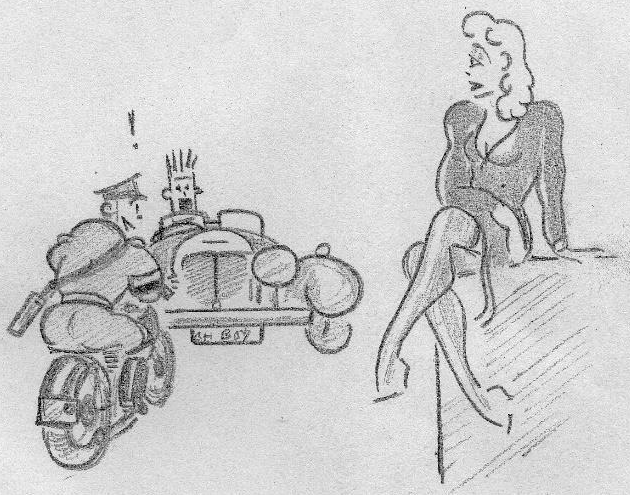
moving as in the months after D Day – required flexibility under fire when telephone and radio communications were either non-existent or prone to war damage (by friend as well as foe) and breakdown. Vital messages had to get through or lives could be lost. Imagine you are a military commander based on the northern outskirts of Caen. It is the middle of the night. Caen

is already in ruins and you need to get an urgent message to a tank squadron at a map reference deep in countryside somewhere near Villers-Bocage south west of Caen. The RAF have bombed the area which disrupted all telephone lines. Radio traffic is intermittent.

The only way to get the message through is by despatch rider – one man on a trusty BSA motorbike who has to traverse bomb craters, fallen trees and brick rubble in the dark with no headlights to guide him. When he gets out of Caen he then has to find his way down unfamiliar country roads



A D.R. MUST ALWAYS BE OBSERVANT.



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with no signposts and even when he gets somewhere near that map -reference he then has to ride cross country over open fields, getting his bike across ditches and dodging booby traps to deliver the message. That was the reality of war. Oh! I nearly forgot to mention that a torrential downpour had soaked him to the skin and he then had to get back to HQ by which time the Germans had cut off the exit route behind him! The photograph below, taken on VE Day, sums up the gratitude we must have for ordinary men leading ordinary lives who have to put their own lives on the line to protect us from tyranny. These are the squaddies of whom the Duke of Wellington once said "I don't know what effect these men will have upon the enemy, but, by God, they frighten me!"



Harold Heard No. 5 DR section 1 British Corps May 8th. 1945

Later in the war, Harold was equipped with an American Jeep so conditions were a lot better for him. By May 8th 1945 – VE Day- he had reached Iserlohn in Northern Germany but it was not until January 1946 that he was demobbed. I was born nine months after he got back to Beeston (Notts). He resumed his apprenticeship as a plumber. He rarely talked about his war experiences.

VE Day Memories – *John Bolt*

My father, Fred Bolt, served in World War II. He took part in the Normandy landings, travelling across a few weeks after D-Day in June 1944. He fought in France, Belgium and the Netherlands and was eventually wounded in November at Arnhem in a battle that was featured in the film, *A Bridge Too Far*.

He was brought back to England and spent time in a convalescent hospital in Surrey. In the spring of 1945, there was a small singing group of wounded soldiers there, and once a week they went to sing to a wealthy lady in a large country house. My father was their driver. On the way back to the hospital they called into a quiet roadside pub for a drink – this was strictly against the rules and they would have been in serious trouble if they had been caught.



One week, they stopped at the pub as usual and found it crowded. Someone said, "look, there's the major over there, and he's seen us, and he is calling us over. We are in big trouble, now". They slowly walked across to the major, fearing the worst.

The major said "Evening men. What are you drinking? The war is over." What a relief. As you may imagine, what an evening for a few drinks? It was after midnight by the time they returned to the hospital and immediately woke up the others in the ward. Someone produced a bottle of whisky and they must have been noisy. The nursing sister came in and said "Be quiet! You will wake the whole hospital". Within minutes the whole hospital was awake.

Some months later, my father returned home and I was born a year later.



u3a learn,
laugh,
live

