

NEWSLETTER



u3a
Wells Somerset

Registered Charity No:
1023275

<https://wells.u3asite.uk>

WELLS u3a Registered Charity No. 1023275

The u3a is a learning co-operative of older people, enabling members to share educational, creative and leisure activities. We are a Registered Charity.

Our Trustees form the Committee, elected annually by the membership.

Committee Members		Retires
Chairman	Donald Branch	2026
Administration Secretary	Beverley Andree	2028
Minutes Secretary	Viv Kelly	2028
Treasurer	John Laycock	2030
Membership Secretary	Alan Sanderson	2026
Groups Coordinator	Sue Revell	2026
Holidays/Newsletter Editor	Jeanne Evans	2028
Events Coordinator	Marian Harding	2028
Talks Organiser	Caroline Lowndes-Northcott	2028
Publicity Coordinator	Ann Brown	2028
Beacon Coordinator/Trips	Mike Lee	2027
Member	Ingrid Sofrin	2028

The Retires column refers to the year the postholder must retire from their current post.. The Treasurer has a longer potential term of office.

All Committee members have to stand for re-election each year.

Newsletter: Next issue deadline - 1 April 2026

Please send items for inclusion in the next Newsletter by email to [**news.wellsu3a@gmail.com**](mailto:news.wellsu3a@gmail.com)

NB: It is very helpful if all copy can be sent in Word format, with any pictures etc sent as separate attachments.

Website: <https://wells.u3asite.uk/>

Current information about Wells u3a and our activities can be found on our Website, which we endeavour to keep updated.

Please send any items for inclusion on the Website to: **webmaster.wellsu3a@gmail.com**

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The recent AGM was a great chance for me to thank everyone on the committee, as well as all the other members who help to make our u3a run so well. We are wholly dependent on the voluntary efforts of members. From group leaders, to those who make the tea and coffee, organise trips, look after the website, and keep everything working smoothly – your efforts don't go unnoticed, even if they're sometimes behind the scenes. You all deserve a big thank you.

After the AGM, I'm happy to welcome Beverley Andree and Ingrid Sofrin to the committee, co-opted into vacant places. I look forward to working with them over the coming year. We're saying goodbye to Babs Jones, who has given time and energy to the Talks Coordinator role and to the committee generally. We're grateful for everything she's done, and we'll miss having her around.

Looking ahead, I hope the new year brings fresh ideas and maybe some new groups. I'm excited for more events, holidays, speakers, and trips coming up.

I couldn't write this newsletter without reminding everyone that there's always an opportunity to join the committee or volunteer – getting involved really does make a difference to Wells u3a. If you're even a little bit interested, please let me know! We can meet up for a chat about what's involved. The team is really friendly and supportive, and committee meetings are interesting and often a good laugh. If you want to see what it's like, I can arrange for you to sit in as a visitor at one of our meetings.

Finally, I should like to express my hope that you had a Very Merry Christmas and that you'll enjoy a Very Happy New Year!

Donald Branch



GROUPS CO-ORDINATOR REPORT

Greetings and a Happy New Year! By the time you read this, Christmas and New Year will have passed, weight increased and resolutions made – maybe... Whatever the changes, Wells u3a is a constant and will continue to enhance, brighten, and enrich our lives – and by enticing you to take part in our many group activities, found in the Centre Pages of this our 94th Newsletter, you can continue to **learn, laugh and live** into 2026 and beyond.



Our new members' welcome took place in October at Wells Museum. It was well worth arranging: the room was buzzing, with lots of interest and some groups acquiring more members. Sometimes it just takes a few words of encouragement to inspire people to try a group they may have been considering.

To those new members out there, thanks for coming along, and next time we hope more of you will be tempted to give it a go. It was lovely to greet new faces and hear your stories.

In the New Year Jean Mantle, who has been running the **Bird Watching Group** for a very long time, will be retiring. Our thanks to Jean, whose knowledge and dedication will be much missed. Would anyone like to rekindle this valuable pastime? If so, please contact me.

A new **Petanque 3 Group**, and **TWO Knit and Natter Groups**, are starting, thanks to three of our members volunteering to run them. This is truly great and our thanks go to all three new leaders. Details are in the Centre Pages.

A gentle reminder – if you cannot make a group meeting, do inform the group leader, as it's important for them to know if you will be turning up or not.

Thinking of starting a new group??
Something not listed??
Get in touch with me to enquire how easy it is.



Sue Revell

MEMBERSHIP REPORT

We now have 725 members, with an additional 40 reciprocal members. Since January 1st 2025, 118 people have joined, including six reciprocal members.

New members often tell us this is due to friend's recommendations and our wide range of interest groups, providing intellectual and physical stimulation in welcoming, supportive environments. The committee recognises the importance of integrating new members and ensuring they feel welcomed at our groups, social events, trips and holidays. To support this, we recently organised a special **Group Leaders Event** which was well attended.

Regarding membership renewals, please wait until 2026 to make your payment to help our Treasurer avoid accounting issues. As in previous years, there is no need to complete a renewal form. If I do not receive a stamped, addressed envelope (see my address details in the box below), your new membership card will be sent to your email address. Alternatively, you will have the option to collect your membership card at selected coffee mornings or museum talks in the new year.

Dr Alan Sanderson

This is a reminder that your membership is due for renewal on the 1st February 2026, at a cost of £15.00 per person.

To Pay by BACS: Wells u3a Main Account: 29734860 Sort Code 30-99-29

Include your postcode and/or membership number as a reference and your membership card will be emailed to you.

To Pay by Cheque: Cheques payable to Wells u3a – Main Acc.

Write your postcode and membership number on the back of the cheque.

We no longer require a completed Membership Renewal Form each year but please inform me of any changes to your personal details.

Email: **Alan Sanderson, Membership Secretary**, at asande05@gmail.com or write to me at: 24, Penleigh Road, Wells, BA5 2FA.

NB – if you do **not** include an SAE your membership card will be emailed to you. All members can obtain a cardboard membership card by arrangement with the Membership Secretary.

EVENTS REPORT



On the 2nd October 45 members came to our Harvest Celebration Lunch, which was a great success. Lindsay Davies again did us proud, with a marvellous buffet and as always, our members' response to the request for a piece of fruit or vegetables to be brought along was tremendous: fruit and vegetables in abundance: it was quite overwhelming.

Maggie Charlesworth, Manager of The Lawrence Centre, came later in the afternoon to accept the baskets of fruit and vegetables and sent a thank you e-mail, which was sent out to those who attended.

I called into the Lawrence Centre and Maggie showed me the quantities of soup that had been made and told me that there had been a fruit tasting session that morning. It was good to feel that we had done something positive to celebrate

Harvest.

Christmas Meal

This sold-out event was catered by Lindsay Davies from the Cheese Yard and held at Henton Village Hall. The original allocation of 50 was soon reached, and Lindsay was prevailed upon to allow another 10 places – which again sold out straight away!

The food was excellent and the entertainment was provided by our Rock Group – so quite a start to our Christmas celebrations!

Marian Harding

TALKS REPORT

10th Sept: From Gout to Heart Disease

Dorian Haskard presented the surprising story of a secret medicine. The front page of 18th century newspapers usually advertised a wide range of propriety panaceas. One such medicine turned out to be an almost miraculous treatment for gout, a painful arthritis that was a scourge of the Georgian era, which most doctors considered untreatable. The talk traced this medicine's long chequered career – from treating gout to genetically modifying plants, to attempting to cure cancer and preventing heart attacks.

8th October: The Women Who Went Round the World

Sally Smith, a journalist and author, presented the extraordinary stories of true pioneers in global circumnavigation. Appropriately, 2025 was the 250th anniversary of the very first women to go round the world.

12th November: A Long-distance Walk from Florence to Rome

Paul James likes to walk; very long walks! The retired headteacher told us how he tramped 162 miles to raise money for Winston's Wish, a charity supporting children after the death of a parent or sibling.

10th December: Falling with Style

Lottie Dale gave a fascinating talk on her career as a skydiver. She has been on many adventures, and entertained us with her amusing stories.

Babs Jones



TRIPS REPORT

On 15th October we went to Killerton, a National Trust property, near Broadclyst in Devon. It was one of the most beautiful autumn days, when the estate trees were looking their finest, especially the acers in reds and golds.



The house used to belong to the Acland family whose roots in Devon date back to the 12th century. Sir John Acland, 1st Baronet, first acquired the estate in the 17th century, when the Aclands were prominent social and



political figures in Devon, with several members serving as Members of Parliament. The family transformed the house and its grounds from its late Tudor antecedents into a grand Georgian, and then Victorian estate.

Killerton is now the home of the National Trust's largest fashion collection. This latest exhibition: Unflappable, features the exciting, modern 1920s – and all that jazz!

Liz Lee

COFFEE MORNINGS

These are held weekly at **10.30 until 11.30 every Thursday morning** in the Chamberlain Room at Portway Annexe, Portway Ave, Wells, BA5 2QF.

And it's now only £2.00 for coffee and biscuits!

Why not come along, meet your friends – or make new ones - and put the world to rights!

Donald Branch



DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

MONTHLY TALKS

Talks are held in the Lecture Room at Wells Museum on the second Wednesday of the month. They open at 10.15 for coffee, notices from the Chair at 10.45, and the speaker begins at 11.00, followed by questions from the floor. Numbers are limited so please arrive promptly to avoid disappointment. £3.00 per head, coffee making teams attend free of charge.

14th January: Philip Welch – The Blue Plaque Trail in Wells

Philip was Mayor of Wells during Covid, is a Trustee of Heads Up, a director of Wells Civic Society and a founder and Board member of Wells Community Network. He will be known to most people as the longstanding editor of the Wells Journal. Philip's talk will be illustrated by slides and photographs. This interesting initiative was set up by the Wells Civic Society and sheds a light on some of the city's forgotten corners.

11th February: Annie Maw – A Modern Pilgrimage

Annie is a well-known Somerset resident, who had the misfortune to break her back in a riding accident over 20 years ago. Since then, she has been a charity fundraiser extraordinaire; her 2025 challenge was a pilgrimage from Bath Abbey to Wells Cathedral in a specially adapted wheelchair. Her charity, Humanity and Inclusion, helps elderly victims of Russia's war on Ukraine and Wells Almshouses.

11th March: John Hussey

Born in 1933, John was awarded an OBE in 1971 for his services to British Interests abroad. He is a Fellow of the Historical Society, the author of *Waterloo, the Campaign of 1815* and is an expert on the period from the Boer War to WW1. He will speak on his personal experience, coping in a Pan Am Boeing 747 Hijack during a visit to Karachi in 1986, when 400 passengers and crew were involved in a terrorist incident in which 21 were killed and 100 injured.

Caroline Lowndes-Northcott



HOLIDAY 2026 - Save the date!

Delights of Cambridgeshire – 14th to 18th September 2026

Staying at the Cambridge Bar Hill Hotel, set in 200 acres of grounds and considered to be one of the finest hotels in the region. And it definitely has a lift!



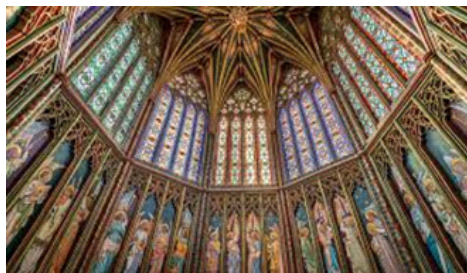
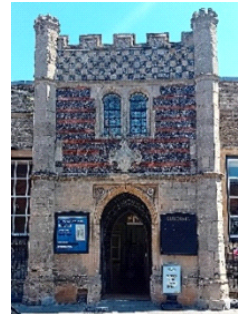
**4 nights, dinner, bed and breakfast Leaving Monday 14th September
Returning Friday 18th September Depart/return via Wells Coach Station**

Cost and final itinerary to be confirmed at a later date – but will include...



A punt on the River Cam past the colleges with strawberries & cream.

Historic Bury St Edmonds on market day.



Ely Cathedral



The Newmarket Racing Centre

And the National Trust Properties of Angelsey House



Hughenden Manor



and Nuffield Place.



So be sure to put the date in next year's diary!

Further information regarding final itinerary, cost and the Booking Form itself will be included in future Newsletters.

Jeanne Evans and Dinah Beaton

TRIPS 2026

Following our enquiries regarding a visit to Portsmouth to see the Mary Rose (too expensive), I thought I'd let you know about some of the ideas that Val, Carri and I have had for 2026 and let you choose!

- **Buckler's Hard** - A historic 18th century shipbuilding village in the New Forest. Used by Henry VIII.
- **Beer Quarry Caves** - Vast quarries known for stone since Roman times. Used for major buildings like St Paul's Cathedral and Windsor Castle.
- **Powderham Castle** - On the banks of the River Exe. Home of the Earls of Devon.
- **Berkeley Castle** - For nine centuries, the castle and contents, the Berkeley family, the archives (which go back to the 12th century), the estate and the town, have all survived together.
- **Shillingstone Steam & Vintage Rally** - 16-17th May.
- **Fairfield Airshow** - Friday 17th July.
- **Yeovilton Fleet Air Arm Museum** - Europe's largest collection of naval aircraft, the first British Concorde prototype and an immersive Aircraft Carrier Experience.
- **Boat trip from Totnes to Dartmouth** - and time in Dartmouth.
- **Slimbridge Wildfowl and Wetlands Centre** - The reserve, set up by the artist and naturalist Sir Peter Scott, opened in November 1946.



It's over to you! Let us know what appeals to you - or if you would like to visit any other attraction by coach for the day. I've had two requests for Slimbridge already! Please reply by email.

Liz Lee

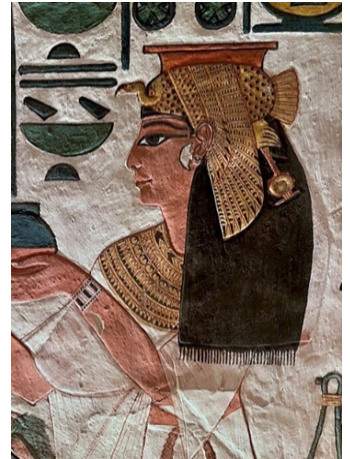
NEWS FROM THE GROUPS

Art Appreciation

We meet on the first Monday in the month at 2.30 in the Seager Hall, Union Street, when we watch videos on art history. We then have a break for refreshments when we informally discuss our viewing.

We are currently watching a **Great Courses DVD: Masterpieces of the Ancient World**, which offers a comprehensive survey of art in the ancient world; taking us around the globe, from Europe and the Middle East to Asia and the Americas. The lecturer *"gives an overview of the cultural context of these works and explains what makes each piece important, outstanding and beautiful... She also delves into the techniques employed by some of the greatest artists of all time to help you understand the art's creation and to enhance your appreciation."* If you are interested in art history, and in joining us, please contact me.

Queen Nefertari, wife of Pharaoh Rameses II



Jenny Wallis

Badminton

We meet throughout the year, on Wednesdays and Fridays from 5.00 to 6.00 in the Blue School Sports Centre. We play doubles, mostly mixed, though this varies according to the turn out. No prior booking is required, just join the group and come along as often as you can. We have a pay on the day system, currently £2 per session, so participating is made as easy as possible.

We are a friendly group, catering for varying levels of skill and athleticism, so no matter how long it is since you last played, don't think you won't fit in.

We have welcomed some new members recently, but there is still space for more, so if you wish to resurrect your badminton-playing, or increase your current playing time, just get in touch. We can arrange a free session, to see whether you would like to join.

Finally, here is another example of badminton in art, this time a pointillist painting by John Gilluly; you can guess the title!



Paul Somers

Book Group 2

Last year we asked Rugantino's if we could have a room for our meeting, followed by their Christmas lunch - which was very successful. The cost of the (initially private venue) being coffee all round! We are doing the same this year, fortified by discussion of this month's choice; **George Orwell's Animal Farm!**



Several of this year's book choices are among those we might have missed in childhood, or when they were new; **A Month in the Country, The Wind in the Willows, Cold Comfort Farm and The Silver Sword.**

Our members always provide us with a varied and interesting list.

Last year, instead of a whole book to read over the Christmas period, we perused a poetry anthology, **The Nation's Favourite Poems**. The following meeting, to which we each brought our choice of poem, was so

lively and successful that we have another anthology, **Wavell's Other Mens' Flowers**, to investigate this December. Report by Alison Cholmondeley

Eve Loring

Conversational French

We are a small, friendly group which meets twice a month for a chat – but strictly in French. It is surprising how two hours of 'français' can bring back to life one's rusty knowledge of the language.

We have members who have lived in France and are well qualified to 'corriger nos erreurs,' but at the same time trying not to interrupt the flow of the speaker. We have recently lost two of our members and we would welcome you to the group, if you would like to give it a try.

John Wheat

Creative Writing

We are a group of friends who really enjoy writing! There are six of us at present, but we are hoping there will be more recruits in the spring. Our creative interests are varied, poetry, stories, memoirs and plays, so we won't get stuck in a rut. We have introduced a five minute 'game', using cards with names of objects and situations, which we use to inspire us – and produce a paragraph from it! Our two-hour meeting often has a break half way through for tea, coffee, biscuits and cake, which is free, but there is a charity box on the table for voluntary donations. Creative Writing sounds dull – far from it! We discuss what our literary interests are, what triggered the piece of work brought to the meeting that day, and finish with laughter – looking forward to the next subject in two weeks' time.

Elizabeth Balkwill

Current Affairs 2

The rise of social media platforms has, at times, led to the spread of misinformation. However, peer discussions can help correct inaccuracies and expose participants to a range of legitimate viewpoints, thereby increasing group awareness. Over the past few months, we have discussed:

- British culture and its evolving trends
- The gap between highly paid CEOs and frontline workers
- The Conservative Party's effectiveness as the opposition
- Keir Starmer's performance at the Labour Party Conference
- The Gaza "peace" treaty and the continued influence of colonialism
- The subdued response from British Jews regarding Israeli genocide in Gaza
- The British far right inventing new phrases to sidestep accusations of racism

Each meeting takes place from 2.00 to 4.00 on the first Tuesday of the month at Wells Library, where various topics are presented for discussion. Although subjects are circulated in advance, members are always encouraged to suggest their own topics to the meeting. This approach allows everyone to contribute to an in-depth analysis, making each session a valuable learning experience for all attendees.

Our Group is now full, however, we have a waiting list and encourage interested members to start a new Current Affairs 3. We extend our thanks to all our members for making this group such an enjoyable and worthwhile experience.

Alan Sanderson

Cycling

This summer has generally been kind to us: the sun has shone for at least three months, only one ride was cancelled at the end of October, making up for the appalling weather in the winter and spring.



However, we made up for it from March onwards with some splendid rides, taking in most of the 20 miles surrounding Wells, managed by the group's members, who came up trumps with a variety of routes that took us through interesting and picturesque countryside.

Middlewick Farm Café

We have been using this system for several years now and it's very successful. In addition, the newly introduced (late last year) Cafe Rides, which meet at designated cafes in the area at 10.30 each Thursday, which doesn't have a scheduled ride, are popular – you may meet others or you might drink coffee alone, you take pot luck – but from my experience that is quite rare.

However, there is a dark spot in our groups' activities this year: one of our ladies, Linda, who you met in the last edition of the Newsletter, had her bike stolen from her flat in Weston. She bravely replaced it, but that has also disappeared, probably stolen to order by the same thieves. The police were notified, but so far no luck in locating it: both were locked to the stairwell railings! She is now reduced to her 'not so suitable' old bike.

We had our AGM on Thursday 13th November at the Quickshifter Cafe on the Premier Inn estate, to discuss our past, present and future plans. Afterwards we enjoyed a ride to the Cranmore Station Café, via a new link which follows the old Somerset and Dorset railway line through the Windsor Hill tunnel to Shepton. Our return journey through Evercreech and Pilton was very muddy in places.

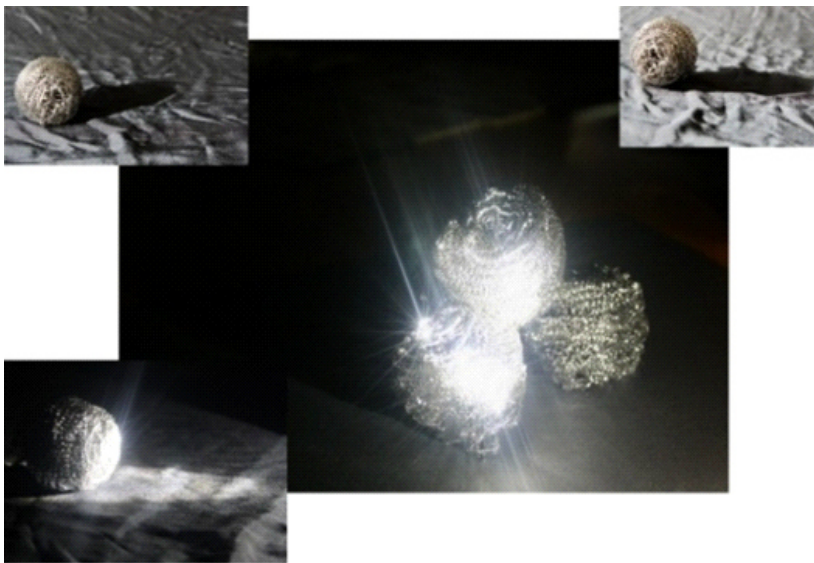
Come and join us if you like cycling, using electric or normal bikes, with a group, often six or seven, sometimes larger. We're very sociable, stopping for coffee and lunch – and DO NOT travel at fast speeds (except maybe down hills). You're all welcome, both men and women.

Arthur Spain

Digital Photography

We meet monthly at the Portway Annexe, dividing our time between monthly projects and photography outings. Each month, the group chooses a simple theme for its project, most recently we have tried:

- **Bare Trees**
- **Movement & Texture**
- **5 Things from Around the House**
- **100 metres – pictures taken along a 100-metre walk**



Members select relevant photos taken during the month and share them at the next meeting.

The group also organizes outings to various locations to take pictures. During autumn and winter there are fewer visits, but some members visited the **Mendip Ploughing Match**. Photos taken on outings are also shared at the monthly meetings.

Mendip Ploughing Match



Pan Scrubs/Scourers

We are always open to recruiting new members. You don't need an expensive camera or extensive knowledge to join – several of our members capture excellent images using their phones! Our main aim is to encourage each other to get out and take photos.

We pride ourselves on being friendly and supportive. Members are encouraged to share their work and receive constructive feedback. There is no competition within the group; the emphasis is on learning and enjoyment.

Please contact me if you are interested.

Donald Branch



Easy Cycle Rides

We are a friendly group who enjoy pottering along the Somerset lanes on routes which are especially selected to avoid any serious hills and most of the traffic. We usually travel with car assistance to a starting point a little way from Wells, in order to avoid too much repetition of local roads.

As an example of what we do, I will describe October's ride, which started at Langport and followed the lanes beside the River Parrett to Stathe and on to the pretty village of Stoke St Gregory. Here we were ready for our usual coffee and cake stop and made a small diversion to the Lemon Tree café in the Willow Centre. Then we continued to North Curry, skirting the edge of West Sedgemoor to Fivehead, Isle Brewers and Hambridge to lunch at Brown and Forrest's Smokery. Just like at our coffee stop, we were able to sit outside in glorious sunshine.

The return leg took us through Drayton and back to Langport along a mile long cycleway, which was formally a railway track, having covered just over 20 miles of mostly flat lanes.

If this appeals to you, come and join us – you will be most welcome.

John Wheat



Environment Studies

We meet on the first Tuesday of the month, usually in the Town Hall, where we discuss a wide range of topics chosen by group members.

Currently the group is full, but if you are interested please contact me and I will put you on the waiting list.

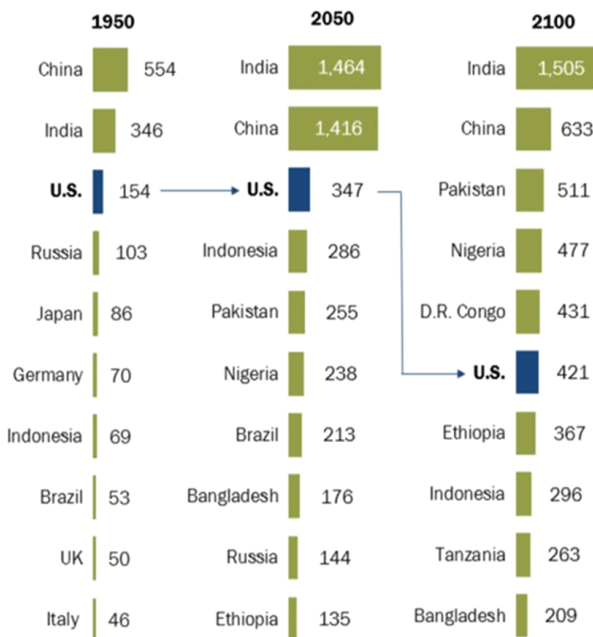
Recently, members have given us talks on:

- **PFAs** (aka Forever Chemicals)
- **Phenology** – the study of the timing and cyclical patterns of events in the natural world
- **Rewilding** – why it is so important
- **Sand Dams** (see the 2024 Radio 4 charity appeal: <https://www.sanddamsworldwide.org.uk/>). Underpinning all our topics is the effect, negative, positive or neutral, that the dominant global species (i.e. us) has on the planet, and the ever-increasing activity to provide the resources we require.

Salient to this are the major geographical changes in global population forecast by the UN and how resources will meet need in the future. You may be interested in the forecast below.

By 2100, the U.S. is projected to fall out of the rankings of the world's 5 most populous countries

Countries with the largest populations, in millions



Paul Somers

German Conversation

After conversing informally, and enjoying refreshments, our meetings eventually focus on a prepared study piece. Among the most recent six articles, which can be found at https://wells.u3asite.uk/u3a_groups/german-conversation/ two help to illustrate the wide variety of topics that we cover.

As the central cultural figure of his era, Goethe had merited some previous attention, but we looked in more detail recently, examining this polymath from a wider perspective. Several group members spoke feelingly about his poetry, which is probably Goethe's most durable legacy. Our study piece challenged us to consider how relevant he is in modern Germany. His *Faust* masterpiece is studied less in German classrooms, and is seldom performed in the theatre. The latter is less surprising. Goethe was never exceptionally successful as a dramatist and *Faust* survives as a verse drama that's read more often than it's performed. *Faust Part 2* is particularly challenging on the stage, and defies a conclusive interpretation (traditional or cinematic).



Goethe's pioneering contributions as a Scientist have, unsurprisingly, been overtaken. His novels were sensationally popular originally, but only attract a small audience now. Goethe's literary works have also been less successful in translation than novels by Russian and French authors. A sculptural installation at Frankfurt Airport seems to encapsulate Goethe's current role: a revered icon mounted on a pedestal, but incongruously detached from contemporary reality?



An autumnal piece about the Munich Oktoberfest reminds us that millions attend every year to experience this traditional Bavarian mixture of beer, lederhosen and dirndl costumes. The prospect of Prussians arriving in Lederhosen is about as popular as kilted Englishmen turning up at an event in Scotland! Conversely, the wish to celebrate a distinctive identity remains at least as popular in Bavaria as it was 200 years ago.

Richard Hathway

History (India)

We enjoy finding out about various historical developments world- wide; most of our members have no specific background in history and anyone can join. We watch DVDs presented by an academic and then engage in a group discussion on aspects we found most interesting.



Taj Mahal, Agra © Yann Forget/Wikimedia Commons

The current topic is A History of India, in 36 half-hour lectures on DVD. "India is home to some of the world's oldest, greatest, and most successful civilizations. Today the South Asian subcontinent contains 20 percent of the world's population and is a thriving centre for global business. Over the past 5,000 years, the subcontinent has been home to a rich tapestry of peoples and cultures. With its strategic location and unique geography, the lands east of the Indus River have long been a central hub for trade, migration, and cultural exchange."

In our progress through Indian history, we are coming up to the rule of Shah Jahan (reigned 1628-1658) who commissioned the Taj Mahal. After the Mughal Emperors we will be moving on to the era of the British East India Company.

So, if you have an interest in history, and would like to find out more about our group, please get in touch.

Tim Wallis

Italian Conversation

Our lively group of mixed ability Italian speakers meets at the Pumphouse, Rowden's Road on the first and third Thursday of each month. We have good attendance at most sessions and everyone has something useful to contribute.



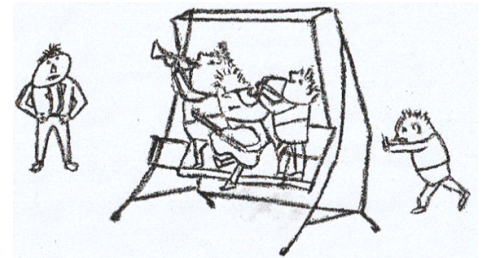
We usually start with a catchup of what members have been doing during the previous two weeks. Who knew how busy people could be? There is always something of interest and David invariably makes us laugh. A pause for tea/coffee, cake/biscuits allows for a break in the intellectual rigour of thinking and speaking in Italian. Each of us then speaks on a topic, based on a letter in the alphabet. Last session was 'D', which took us on a tour of December, Durham, Dragons, Diaries and Dolcelatte. Buon Anno!

Report by Paul James

Denise Denis

Jazz, Swing and Crooners

Our autumn season went well and by the time you read this, we will be halfway through our 25/26 season. Hardly seems to start when it's time to end! As usual we will continue until March - still the third Thursday of each month, in the Museum, 2.00 to 4.00.



Our earlier sessions were pretty well attended, but we would still like to see a few more each time - at present we are just about breaking even and I don't want to have to increase the monthly sub. But we will carry on covering jazz from its earliest days up until now, since that seems to go down well with you.

In theory, we are almost full, but since only about half of our members turn up for any given session, I'm sure we can find space to fit a few more. Check with me if you would like to join, or to just come along and see if this is for you...

Nick Nichols

Knit and Natter

The response to the new Knit and Natter Group was exceptional - just 90 minutes after it was advertised, all eight available places were filled. Then, over the next couple of days, nine more people joined the waiting list!

I believe the interest stemmed from the combination of a hobby growing in popularity, the chance to exchange ideas, and the event's social nature.

I am looking forward to holding our first meeting in the New Year, where we can connect with like-minded friends and develop new projects. Regarding members on the waiting list, I suggest that we now have enough people to start at least one additional group.

Helen Sanderson



Knit and Natter 2

Due to the popularity of the initial Knit and Natter group, I am planning to start a second group. This will begin on Thursday 15th January and be held from 2.00 to 4.00 once a month at my home. See Centre Pages for details.

Members will bring their own knitting and we can share ideas and tips on how to develop our skills – and I'm sure we won't be lost for words when it comes to the chatting side of the activity! Refreshments will be available.

Corinna Thompson



Making Music

This group continues to meet on the 2nd and 4th Monday of each month in Coxley Memorial Hall at 10.00, stopping mid-morning for refreshments.

We play mainly folk music from many countries, also some extracts by well-known composers and carols. Our instruments include guitars, fiddles/violins, banjo, recorders and concertinas. Maggie and Colin lead the music.

Recently we played at the Lawrence Day Centre, where people joined in with tambourines – some singing and even a little dancing! We also played at a u3a meeting in Wells Museum and at St. Cuthberts Church on Saturday 6th December during the crib festival.

Colin Bowen



LOCAL HISTORY

This group started in 2018, and over the years we have enjoyed many interesting speakers and visits. However, we now need extra people on our small committee, to help with the group. We have over 100 members, so there must be someone out there who is prepared to give a little of their time to help?

If you have an interest in local history and would like to join us, please contact Jane King..



MOTO

In October we extended a special invitation to the u3a **History of India** group and were pleased to welcome them to a presentation by three of our members, who shared photos and anecdotes of their and their families' experiences of living in India prior to partition. The context was set with reference to the historical links between India, Europe and Britain from the 15th Century, which led to the births of our presenters there between 1935-1940. Apart from Curry becoming a regular on the British menu, we also came up with 24 Hindi words which have been adopted into the English language, such as chutney and punch (a drink with five ingredients - from the Hindi word for five).



We also enjoyed a talk and demonstration of **Lip Reading** by a visiting speaker, which was valuable in raising awareness in all of us, whether with full hearing or not. Another talk, by one of our own members, was the personal story of being **Evacuated to Wells during the War**, and then staying for good! Our pre-Christmas festivities consisted of poetry reading, mince pies and lunch out at a local hostelry.

Next year we look forward (two weeks before Burns Night) to a talk from Robert Burns, retired local baker, who will be telling us his story.

Christine Hardless

Music Appreciation

We meet at 2.00 on the first and third Wednesday each month, at Wellfield Barn during the cooler months, from September to May.

We are a relaxed and friendly group of like-minded people, with an eclectic programme, suggested and later presented by some of the members of the group. The subject may be a composer, an instrument or a musical theme. On occasions we



have an afternoon of members' choices. This is all done with the help of CDs, websites and books. (By the way, you do not need to have any IT/you tube expertise or a collection of CDs: it is all done by the volunteer team of presenters). But you do need an appreciation of good music!

We listen to the music extracts for a couple of hours, appreciative comments welcomed, followed by tea and chat (not always about the music!)

Since September we have explored, music associated with birthdays (to celebrate the birthday of one of our members); photosynthesis (a tribute to the varied music associated with gardens); heard extracts from Mozart operas from early to more mature works; appreciated a Desert Island Discs from one member, and recently some extracts of notable music associated with films (and a cryptic quiz for the names of the films). December was taken up with Advent music and members' suggestions with a Christmas theme.

This year we will look forward to music to inspire joy, more about overtures, a theme of dreams and the answer to the question, 'is music the food of love?' and music for Passiontide, nearer Easter.

The music is usually classical though as the themes may be suggested by the members, you never know - we have a varied diet! If you like and appreciate classical music, please get in touch with Virginia. New members are very welcome.

Virginia Nasmyth & Jane Burman

Opera

As we progress from one annually chosen playlist to the next, we've watched operas composed in four different centuries. This sequence began with Prokofiev's *Love for Three Oranges* (which surprisingly was premièred in Chicago in 1921). This work was new to everybody, and the music was as enjoyably lyrical as his better-known ballet scores. The libretto is a radical reinterpretation of a 1761 fairy story. Although the original stage work was conceived in the Italian Punch and Judy tradition, we were surprised to discover that Prokofiev's libretto comes closer to a Post WW2 *Theatre of the Absurd* piece. Some performers appear as members of the audience, and make partisan interventions!

The contrast with Monteverdi's *Orfeo* could hardly have been greater. His 1607 opera is the earliest that's remained in the modern repertoire. Our four recent operas indicate how much the dramatic pace could vary in different centuries. This pioneering opera unfolds very gradually, giving us plenty of time to savour his gently mellifluous music.



Haydn's *Il Mondo Della Luna* (The World on the Moon) gave us the chance to watch an unfamiliar comedy. In an extraordinary 1777 plot, a garden is disguised so that a gullible victim can be convinced that he's reached the Moon!

We watched a modern production, which nevertheless featured performers being transported up and down (to mimic the use of 18th century stage machinery). Although Haydn's operas have become less fashionable, it was fascinating to learn that he directed an extremely ambitious repertoire at the aristocratic court in Esterháza (Hungary) that was attended by Empress Maria Theresa, and which rivalled anything available in London or St. Petersburg.

Puccini's *La Bohème*, our most recent choice, is easily the best-known opera that we've watched recently. We planned to show portions from two different productions, so that we could focus on their similarities and differences. This prompted a stimulating and wide-ranging discussion. Participants agreed that it would be good to decide how we could successfully repeat this fresh approach from time to time.

Details of each performance are sent out in advance.

Please see: https://wells.u3asite.uk/u3a_groups/opera-group/

And we now have plenty of room for new members to join our Town Hall meetings!



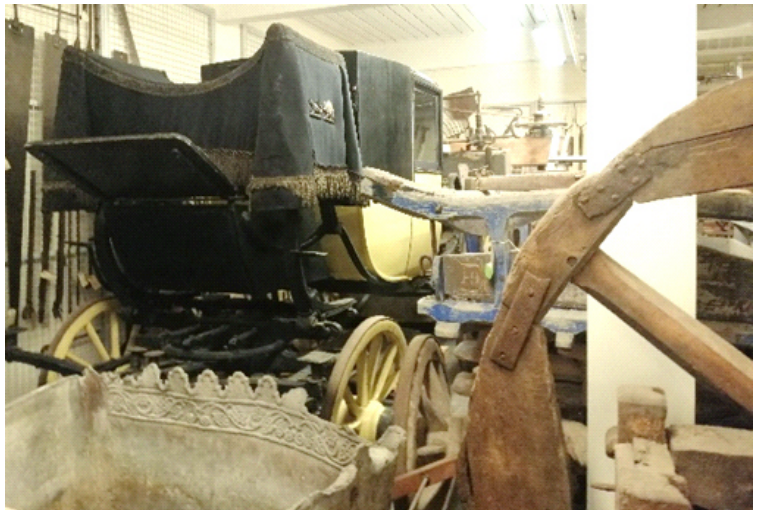
Richard Hathway

Out & About

We are a very social group, which anyone can join and hopefully find an outing or event to suit them within an hour's drive of Wells. We encourage members to suggest places to visit and then to help organise it. If they make contact with the venue, get details and possible dates for the visit, our small committee will help with the administration and give lots of advice. We like to go to places where we can have an individual tour, or talk, that you would not get if you went to the venue as an individual. We always offer lifts and encourage car sharing when possible.

In January we hold a meeting at the Portway Annexe for all our members, with tea, coffee and biscuits. We make a small, annual charge to cover expenses incurred over the year – and this is also a good opportunity to come up with suggestions for a visit. We try and have at least one visit a month, which always offers food before, during, or after the event.

Following our visit to **The Museum of Somerset** at Taunton earlier last year, in September we went to **The Somerset Heritage Centre** and discovered how you can research your family history, if they originated from Somerset. We also saw the storage of artifacts that are loaned out to museums over the county and sometimes further afield.



At the end of November several members enjoyed a skittles match and a buffet lunch at The Crossways Inn – putting us in the mood for Christmas.

In February we are going to **East Lambrook Manor Gardens** for a tour (and hope that the snowdrops will be in full bloom.) In March we have an opportunity to get together for a **Spring Lunch at The Swan Hotel** and hopefully make new friends. Other visits are in the planning for 2026.

Get in touch if this appeals to you – especially if you have any good ideas!

Ann Brown

Painting for Pleasure

We are currently looking for new members. No special skills required, just an interest in any form of art – sketching, watercolour, acrylic, oil or collage – and a desire to put it into practice. We are a very friendly group and help each other to improve without judging.

We are currently thinking of Autumn and the amazing colours we see around Wells, and of Christmas, with the chance to make our own cards. But we all follow our own inspiration.



We meet the first and third Tuesday afternoon each month at St Thomas's Church Hall.

Please come and join us – I can promise a warm welcome among like-minded people.

Chris Morley

Petanque 1 & 2

As Winter approaches, lawn bowlers store away their bowls and croquet players hibernate, but our intrepid petanque groups march onwards. Donning woolly hats, gloves and mufflers, they arrive at the football ground ready to defy the cold and enjoy their games with fun and laughter.

Groups 1 and 2 are full just now, but do still get in touch if you'd like to join. Spaces come up for patient folk. And listen up! I've heard **Group 3** is hoping to start in January - so watch this space!

Group 1 meets every Monday afternoon. **Peter Boon**

Group 2 meets fortnightly on Thursday. **Mike Avery**

Play Reading

We continue to read plays with enthusiasm and interest, our latest presentation being a Francis Durbridge play concerning a child kidnapping, reminiscent of the Paul Getty kidnapping of the 70s. Our next offering is a who-dunnit, set within a dramatic society's production. Plenty of scope here for type-casting!

There are a few places available, so please contact me if you think you could release your inner Maggie Smith, or Ralph Fiennes. Remember we don't have to learn anything, just read with conviction.

Jenny Cameron

Poetry Appreciation

Who wrote..?

*"In my youth," said his father, "I took to the law,
And argued each case with my wife;
And the muscular strength, which it gave to my jaw,
Has lasted the rest of my life." **



We meet every other Monday afternoon to read and discuss poetry, not just humorous poems, but some very serious ones too.

Every other meeting is devoted to the work of a particular poet, chosen by a member of the group, while the rest of us search books, or the internet to find examples of their work. Some choose well known poets, while others try to find poets few of us have heard of – whoever is chosen we all read and try to appreciate them. Of course, some choices can inspire comments such as 'that's not poetry!' then there's a discussion about how do you define it. Alternate meetings are devoted to a subject, also chosen by one of the group.

Each year we have a day out in the summer; a visit which has a poetic or literary connection. And our year always ends with the celebration of Christmas and seasonal poems, a meal, crackers and mince pies to follow.

If you think we sound interesting and would like to join give me a call.

Norman Hodgton (*The poet was Lewis Carroll, from *Alice in Wonderland*

)

Saturday Lunch Group

Our group continues to function well, going out for lunch on the third Saturday of each month. We enjoy the food, but also the company and meeting up with old friends. Since my last report we have been to **Sadlers Wine Bar** in the Heritage Courtyard, the **Swan Hotel** and the **Olive Tree**, both on Sadler Street in Wells. By the time you read this, we will also have been to the **Pheasant** at Wookey, recently re-opened under new management - and had our annual December pilgrimage to **Hartley's Kitchen** at Rookery Farm, Binegar - because Paul's December menu is so good!

So, if you fancy lunch out once a month with friends, contact me. We don't have a maximum number of group members, but do limit any lunch to 12 - and they do fill up quickly (often within two hours) so when I send out notifications it is important to contact me quickly. (And I phone members who are not on e-mail.)

Liz Jeanmaire

Sunday Lunch Group

This year has very much been a group effort, with others organising lunches and providing lifts for those who have needed transport. Over the past four years, keeping up with new openings and closures, changing ownership and chefs at the many pubs and restaurants in our area, has been quite a challenge.

This year we have been to some new venues and some we have visited before. The return visits we really enjoyed were **The Sheep and Penguin** in Wells. As so many people ordered the fruit crumble, it came in a family size dish for people to help themselves and was accompanied by a very large jug of custard! The other recent return visit was **The Crown** at Pilton, again service and food was enjoyed by all and the décor gives lots to talk about. Who knew a skittle alley could be turned into wall decoration.

We started and ended the year with pubs new to the group. The **Bath Arms** in Cheddar. I think I can say it surprised many of us with good food and excellent service. We ended the year at **The Pheasant** at Wookey. It has changed hands recently and we had good service and we liked vegetables served separately and being served with extra jugs of gravy without asking.

In 2026 there are plans for visits to a newly updated pub, with a growing reputation for good food and one of those places tucked away down lanes that you need very clear instructions to find. We welcome new members. If you want to know more, please do contact me.

Carole Hounsell

Table Tennis

Despite the early flurries of snow and the badly named storms – Claudia, I ask you! – the weather has not put a stop to our playing at The Methodist Hall on Monday afternoons, or at The Blue School on Monday evenings.

The afternoons start at 2.00 with a break for refreshments. The discourse during this interlude is now an added attraction. Many topics have been discussed, but there is never enough time to resolve them. Of course, all of the usual subjects that are too controversial are avoided, but a heated discussion regarding the colour of the recycling bins had to quickly be brought to a finish, a sinister twirling of bats was a worrying factor. So, any new members perhaps could widen the area of discussion.

To sum up, the afternoon session is on Mondays at the Methodist Church, Southover from 2.00 to 3.30. The evening session at the Blue School on Tuesdays starts at 5.00 for one hour without a break.

Austin Little or Terry Brook,

Theatre Group

There's not much to report since my last contribution. Sadly, two of our longstanding members died recently – Peter Evans and Barbara Dickinson – and we shall miss them on our trips.

The second play in the Ralph Fiennes season at the Theatre Royal, ***Small Hotel*** was somewhat of a disappointment, especially after his huge success with *Grace Pervades*. In November we saw a terrific production of ***To Kill A Mockingbird*** – the play lasts three hours, but the time flew by and the audience gave the cast a standing ovation at the end.

Pantomime season is now filling all the theatres, so we shall not have another theatre group outing until we go to the Tobacco Factory to see ***Macbeth*** in March. Their Shakespeare productions are always very innovative.

Once again, I am having to book further and further ahead – we go to The ***Beekeeper of Aleppo*** and ***The Constant Wife***, both at the Theatre Royal, in April and May next year – and I am about to reserve seats for ***Murder in the Cathedral*** with David Suchet next November!!

My thanks to all our stalwart members who turn out in all weathers.

Anthea Freemantle

Visiting Somerset Churches

We have visited three churches in the last few months, each very different but all lovely in their own ways.

The **Church of the Blessed Virgin** in **Westonzoyland** was distinguished as much by its history in the ill-fated Monmouth rebellion of 1685, as much as its medieval origins. The church stands on the site of a Saxon church and the current church was initially built about a hundred years after the Norman Conquest and re-built in the late 1400s by the then Abbott of Glastonbury, Richard Bere. The church interior was refurbished in the early 20th century but retains much of its former beauty, especially the ornately carved nave ceiling.

Its history is intertwined with that of the Monmouth rebellion, being close to the site of the Battle of Sedgemoor. In 1685 this led to the defeat of the Duke of Monmouth and to the deaths of well over 1000 men of the South West, who died in the battle, or of their wounds. Nearly 300 were executed as rebels in the 'Bloody Assizes' and 850 were transported to the West Indies. Our visit included the small battle site museum in a corner of the church and some of us visited the nearby battle site itself.

In October we visited **St Lawrence's Church** in **Westbury-Sub-Mendip**, another beautiful medieval church. The visit was enhanced by a wonderful tour of the bell tower by its Captain and by members of the group, taking it in turn to describe the various stages in the transformation of the church from its small medieval origins, through to its current status.

November's visit was to **Holcombe Old Church**. Maintained by volunteers from the Church Conservation Trust, after it was made redundant, it is a beautiful little time capsule of Georgian architecture, with original box pews and gallery. As in many Somerset churches, its history has defined its character, after it was left isolated when the original village re-located about a mile away after the plague.



We are tremendously privileged to have so many wonderful churches close to Wells and visiting them and learning something about them remains a continual delight.

Carolyn Adams

Walking 1

The Canterbury Tales did a great job of popularising walkers' stories. We have developed the genre to a new high level – amazing how all of us know many endless tales, so much about everything and everybody.

Moreover, any walker will tell you that walking is good for you. A respected local GP, a champion of exercise, who gives talks about it, will readily recite you a long list of benefits. Among these are bone and muscle strengthening, contentedness of mind and spirit, social gregariousness and sharpness of wit.



From all this, we walkers feel very well qualified to discuss anything, however little we know of the subject. Aneurin Bevan is quoted as stating in Parliament that “the Member opposite speaks with the authority of someone completely ignorant of the facts.” Well, perhaps we walkers do know a fact or two and could perform well as Members of Parliament!

This quarter has seen us tramp uphill and down, cross meadows and leas, battle ploughed fields – all the while enjoying the wondrous autumn colours of the countryside, with beech and sycamore, oaks and other trees stunningly resplendent in their finery. On top of all this we marvelled at the extraordinary abundance of nature's bounty – blackberries, hazel nuts, sloes and, in orchards and at 'help yourself' roadside stalls, apples and plums galore. All this on our doorstep to appreciate in diverse Somerset locations – including Pennard Hill, Chelynch and Wells.

Walks coming up, well planned and plotted, include ones at Binegar, Croscombe and Polsham. So, roll-up, roll-up. Walk the walk. Talk the talk. Heed the exercising GP – keep strong and healthy, put your boots on, join in, start exploring the big beautiful world hereabouts.

Stan Gibby

RIVIERA TRAVEL OFFER



Did you know that the Third Age Trust has an arrangement with Riviera Travel to make a donation to any u3a when holiday bookings are made directly through them?

Riviera Travel will donate up to 10% of the total basic cost of your holiday as a charitable donation to your designated u3a. Any holiday booked with Riviera Travel is eligible and the commission covers holidays, tours, cruises and packages sold through Riviera Travel.

How it works:

- Make a booking by contacting Riviera Travel directly, simply mention you want to claim Affinity Commission for Wells u3a.
- At the end of your holiday, Riviera Travel will pay the commission to the Third Age Trust.
- After deducting a handling fee, the Trust will pass the commission on to Wells u3a. It can take a couple of months for the donation to be processed and then transferred to the nominated u3a.

For information on holidays with Riviera Travel interested members should call 01283 248304 or visit www.u3ariviera.co.uk to find out more about holidays and offers available.

N.B. It is important to mention u3a at the time of booking and to provide the name of the u3a you wish to nominate to receive the donation.

AND FINALLY



Front-of-House volunteers needed

We are always keen to hear from enthusiastic volunteers. Our Front-of-House shifts are split into mornings and afternoons:

- **Mornings: 10.00 till 1.00**
- **Afternoons: 1.00 till 4.00**



Front-of-House volunteers coordinate the smooth running of the reception area in the museum by extending a warm and informative welcome to all our visitors.

This is a key role and you must be happy working in a varied customer-orientated environment. Tasks include running the museum shop and dealing with museum queries.

This role will suit someone who has an enthusiastic, friendly manner, enjoys meeting people and is computer literate.

If this sounds like you and you would like more information, please contact the

Museum Manager: admin@wellsmuseum.org.uk




Since the start of the u3a in Wells successive Chairmen have been:

1993/95	Rosie Lean
1995/96	Michael Bradley
1996/98	Peter Lean
1998/2001	David Nasmyth
2001/04	Fran Elkin
2004/07	Anne Walsh-Waring
2007/10	Tony Palmer
2010/12	Hazel Willmott
2012/15	Ray Bennett
2015	Roland Clark
2015/18	Bruce Bourquin
2018/19	Mike Lee
2019/23	Sue Revell
2023/25	Donald Branch

Life Members

Rosie Lean
Virginia Nasmyth
Maureen Lofthouse





We are non-religious and non-political - and have three main principles:

The Third Age Principle

- Membership of u3a is open to all in their third age, defined not by a particular age, but by a period in life in which full time employment has ceased.
- Members promote the values of lifelong learning and the positive attributes of belonging to u3a.
- Members should do all they can to ensure that people wanting to join u3a can do so.

The Self-help Learning Principle

- Members form interest groups covering a wide a range of topics and activities, by the members, for the members.
- No qualifications are sought or offered. The prime motive is learning for its own sake, for enjoyment, not qualifications.
- There is no distinction between the learners and the teachers, all are u3a members.

The Mutual Aid Principle

- Each u3a is a mutual aid organisation, operationally independent within The Third Age Trust, which requires adherence to the guiding principles of the movement.
- No payments are made to members for services rendered to any u3a, each is self-funded, with membership subscriptions and costs kept as low as possible.
- Outside financial assistance should only be sought if it does not imperil the integrity of the u3a movement.

- Front cover painting by Chris Morley of the Painting for Pleasure Group