



Fairford and District u3a



**February 2026
Issue 324**



Chairman's Report

Firstly, may I apologise for the cancellation of our January meeting when Andrew Butler was going to demonstrate his sausage machine. The roadworks along London Street meant that the machine would have to be manoeuvred across two kerbs, which was out of the question. To overcome this, we had planned to move the meeting to the Community Centre, only to be frustrated by the weather. The decision was made as late as possible on Tuesday morning but, by mid-morning, the pavements and path were still too icy for Andrew to be able to safely manoeuvre into the building. We will hopefully have Andrew back another day.

Now it is February and time to think about Spring, which means that next month we will need to prepare for the AGM. Once again we have a couple of the committee who will be standing down having reached the end of their term. Come on, step up and join us, it's quite good fun really. One of those standing down from the committee is Martin Snell who has also been our webmaster for the last few years. The webmaster doesn't have to be a member of the committee, but it does help so that you are closer to what's going on. Martin would like to relinquish this role and would be happy to talk to anyone who is interested in finding out what it involves. He will be available to assist and support the person who takes over.

February is also the month to renew our subscriptions. Unfortunately we have run into a processing issue with PayPal so, just at the moment, we are unable to process renewals other than by bank transfer or cheque. We are hoping to resolve this soon and will let you know when it is resolved.

Finally, may I finish with another apology, this time concerning AbilityNet. I thought that this service funded by BT sounded really helpful for those of us struggling with any digital devices. Unfortunately, although the website indicated that this was a national service, we discovered that it isn't yet available in Gloucestershire until after BT have upgraded their systems.

John Lang

Palmer Hall, London Road, Fairford at 2.30pm

SPEAKER FOR TUESDAY 3 FEBRUARY 2026

Our speaker for February will be Jeff Evans who will tell us about "The Questionable History of the TV Quiz Show".

One of television's most successful creations is the quiz show - the programme where everyone can show how clever they are and possibly earn a small fortune in the process. But where did it all begin? Which shows have been the most successful and who, along the way, have been the winners, losers and - perhaps most intriguingly - the cheaters?

This fully illustrated, entertaining talk covers the whole fascinating history of the TV quiz show from the earliest days in the 1930s to today, showing how the format developed, celebrating the good, the bad and the ugly and unearthing some very dodgy dealing along the way.



Teas at General Meetings

February
March
April

- Bridge Improvers
- Computer
- Creative Writing



New members this month:

Marilyn Gardner
Naomi Benari

Please send items for the
March Issue
by **17 February**
to
editor@fairfordu3a.org.uk

Please note that Meeting Notices must be for the month of issue, not the deadline month

Editor this month —Maureen Partington
Editor next month — Sarah Bottomley



Fairford and District u3a January Meeting Report

Unfortunately the meeting had to be cancelled so there is no report for this month.

Membership Renewal Reminder

You are reminded that, if you have not already renewed, your membership renewal for 2026 to 2027 is due on 1 February 2026. Full details of how to renew can be found in reminder emails sent to you by the membership secretary and also on the website at <https://fairfordu3a.uk/membership-renewal/>

As usual we will also be holding a membership renewal session in Fairford Library. This will take place on Wednesday 28 January 2026 from 2pm to 3.30pm when you will be able to bring your completed forms and cheques in person.

We have a processing issue with PayPal so, just at the moment, we are unable to process renewals using that payment method. We will let you know when it has been resolved.

What's IGO?

One of the best parts of any local u3a is its range of special interest groups. That's why I co-lead Fairford u3a's recorder group and enjoy being part of Cirencester u3a's railbuffers group. In addition, the u3a also provides a range of on-line groups under the "Interest Groups Online" (IGO) banner. I lead or co-lead three IGO groups, namely a book club, a recorder group and a railway group.

Why does IGO exist? One important reason is that it provides interest groups for folk who can no longer get out and about. It does more than that. IGO can bring together people from all over Britain and that brings a wider range of views, outlook and knowledge. IGO groups can provide support for specialist groups which would be unlikely from a single u3a.

IGO currently has about 2000 members and 150 groups. Membership costs £10 a year

There will be an IGO Fair on 11-13 February 2026. This will provide a general introduction to IGO plus one-hour 'taster' sessions for nine groups (including the recorder players' group).

To find out more, try <https://www.u3a.org.uk/what-we-do/learning/interest-groups-online> or just put u3a igo into your internet search engine.

Peter Stephenson

Group Reports

AI Explorers Group

We were delighted that our first session of AI Explorers on Thursday 8th January was well-attended and those present were so supportive. We demonstrated AI in action and used 3 random words from the audience, history, flower and love to prompt ChatGPT to write us a 2-verse poem - here it is!

We meet to probe great history, with laptops at the ready,
 Asking, "Can a robot think?" (The answer's "maybe... steady.")
 We click and tap and sometimes sigh when screens refuse to play,
 Proving wisdom grows with age — though passwords fade away.

Like a flower fed by curiosity (and tea at half past ten),
 Our love of learning blooms anew — again, and then again.
 If AI plans to take the world, it's clear from what we see,
 It'll first need help from us... just to find the letter "G."

Ray and I enjoyed talking to the appreciative and interested crowd. They asked great questions and took on board our attempt to 'set homework' for the next session on 5th February.

Ray and Joanna Petty

NB The Creative Writing leader takes issue with the punctuation of the 'poem'!

Birds, Botany and Bugs

December 12th WWT Slimbridge. Early rain, nice later.

It rained all the way to Slimbridge, and we went through some dense hill fog! Not a great start! So, on arrival, we all grabbed a hot drink and waited in the Rushy Pen for a few minutes until the sun came out. We had great views of Bewick's swans, pochard, shelduck, tufted ducks and several pintail who kept us entertained. Moving towards the Tower Hide, it became apparent that there were thousands of wildfowl and waders on site today: golden plover, lapwing and dunlin in their thousands, hundreds of curlew, a few ruff, redshank and snipe and, from the Tower, large flocks of feral greylag, Canada and barnacle geese, plus singles of Ross's, brent and Egyptian geese, a thousand starling, and great black-backed gulls.

After lunch, we quickly birded South Lake and the Zeiss Hide, adding cormorant, gadwall and reed bunting, but we decided to return to the Tower Hide to witness the constant swirling masses of waders, all panicked by a peregrine falcon and a sparrowhawk. By this time fourteen common crane and twenty white-fronted geese had also dropped in, as well as four great egret. Skylarks, meadow pipits, linnets, pied and grey wagtails, great spotted woodpecker, chiffchaffs, goldcrest and long-tailed tits were all added to make a great days birding!

Mick Jones



Group Reports

Book Circle 2

There are Rivers in the Sky by Elif Shafak

This is an amazing book about a lost, ancient poem, 2 great rivers, and the lives of three main characters from the Assyrian King Ashurbanipal (669-631 BC) to the modern day. Turkey, the Middle East, and London are connected by a single drop of water, over the centuries.

The first character, Arthur, is based on George Smith (1840-1876), a Victorian pioneer and Assyriologist, who first discovered and translated the Epic of Gilgamesh, one of the oldest known written works of literature (this is the Biblical story of the great Flood).

Zaleekhah, a hydrologist trying to recover from a broken marriage, is living on a house boat on the Thames in 2014. As the story unfolds both these people end up at Ninevah, at very different times, on the banks of the other great river, the Tigris, meeting Narin, the third character and her family. Narin's family are Yassidis, an ancient religious sect, feared as witches and much persecuted.

One of our group found the book a bit depressing, but most enjoyed it and found it very enlightening.

Ann Duckney

Creative Writing

People often ask us where we get our ideas from when we set out to write.

Well, at the moment, we are discussing and sketching out possible characters for a long story. By thinking about the characters before the plot we are hoping to embed real people into our writing. We need to know (roughly) their age, how they style their hair, what they wear to work or to party in, whether they're generous, mean, casual or nitpicking and what is their preferred drink. Once you have your characters you'd be amazed at what they get up to and how the story will often write itself.

Jocelyn Wishart

Last Solos report after 14 years

It is with great sadness that I have decided to close down our group. We have 5 people over 90 and most of the others are in their late 80's including myself, so the responsibility was too great to carry on. Over the years we have all become friends, so I am sure the friendships will carry on into the future.

Our last meeting and outing was to the George Inn at Kempsford, which we all enjoyed (see pictures on next page).

It has been a privilege to try and organise this group, so it's good-bye from me and all of us.

Michael Johnson

Information for Upcoming Meetings

Please contact the group leaders if you are interested in joining any of the groups, or visit www.fairfordu3a.uk for further information.

Birds, Botany and Bugs

Friday 20th February, a trip to the Forest of Dean.

Targets include marsh tit, nuthatch, crossbill, hawfinch, siskin and many other woodland species, and any wildfowl around the ponds.

Please bring good footwear and waterproofs! Lunch will be at Kaplans Cafe in Coleford or the Dean Heritage Centre.

Meet in the car park for 08:10. In the event of poor weather, I will contact you on the Tuesday for any changes.

Mick Jones

Solos2

Saturday February 7th

The next meeting will be 11.00am at The Bull Hotel, Fairford.

Jennie Sandford

Solos Group final gathering (January 2026)



Walking Groups

Walk leaders- please specify the length of the walk in your description.

Striders Walk Thursday 19th February

This is a walk of 6 miles on a canal towpath and a mix of woodland and fields trails. The terrain is not too challenging with no stiles but has some inclines and may be muddy so gaiters are advised.

We start at The Three Tuns, Great Bedwyn (car park W3W trunk.captions.menswear) and join the Kennet and Avon towpath passing many locks and the Crofton Pumping Station, home to the famous Beam Engines. We return through woods and field trails to The Three Tuns for lunch.

Meet at the Fairford car park at 8:50 for a 9:00 departure or at The Three Tuns car park at 10:00. Suggested travel contribution is £2.00.

Please let me know where you will be meeting and if you will be staying for lunch. I will be requesting your menu choices in February from the latest menu.

Paul Gardner

Straddlers Walk Tuesday 24th February

Miserden Circular Walk.

This 6.2-mile circular walk, starting from the village shop in Miserden, near Duntisbourne Abbots and Winstone, offers a varied mix of classic Cotswold terrain. It combines village lanes, gently undulating farmland and a number of steady climbs and descents, with several long stretches across open fields. Walkers will pass along farm tracks, quiet roads, and concrete or tarmac drives, as well as woodland paths where the ground can feel enclosed and shaded before opening out again to wide views. Some sections are uphill and sustained, particularly when leaving Duntisbourne and again on the return towards Miserden, making the walk moderately energetic despite its manageable distance. There are some stiles, including a few wooden or concrete ones. Overall, this is a rewarding countryside walk for those comfortable with stiles and mixed underfoot conditions, ranging from grassy fields to firmer tracks and short road sections.

Meet at Fairford car park at 9.15 or Miserden at 10.00. (car park W3W ///bristle.obstruct.sprays)

Please let us know you would like to join us and where you wish to meet. Suggested travel contribution £2.00.

Ray & Jo Petty



GROUP MEETINGS

Here you will find some information about the Interest Groups available to our members. If you are a potential new member, and are interested in joining any of our groups, please contact our committee members on the emails below:

Group-coordinator@fairfordu3a.org.uk

MembershipSec@fairfordu3a.org.uk

or see our website at www.fairfordu3a.uk

Activity	Leader	Information
AI Explorers	Joanna and Ray Petty	Monthly Thursday mornings in Fairford Community Centre. Group currently full.
Ancient Greek 	Peter Hewes 01285 712200	Weekly Wednesdays from 2.30pm. Meet in leader's home. Need some prior knowledge. Contact leader if a beginner.
Art Appreciation	Brian Etheridge	Towards the end of each month; as advised on email.
Birds, Botany and Bugs 	Mick Jones	Third Friday of the month.
Boccia 	Ann Wightman Jackie Ephgrave	Weekly Thursdays 1.30pm to 3pm in Fairford Community Centre. Winter Group only.
Book Circle 1	Jo Stichbury	Second Tuesday 2pm to 4pm. Meet in members' homes.
Book Circle 2	Jane Pugh	Second Tuesday 2pm to 4pm. Meet in members' homes.
Bridge Improvers 	Margaret Bishop	Mondays 2pm to 4pm (except Bank Holidays and August) - at Fairford Community Centre. Cost £2 per session including refreshments: Anyone who plays bridge and would like to improve is welcome, partners provided.
Classical Civilisations	Peter Hewes 01285 712200	We meet at 3.30 pm on the second Friday of each month to discuss pieces written by Ancient Greek or Classical Latin authors. All extracts in English, no ancient language knowledge required. We welcome new members but please first contact Peter to find out more.
Computer	Nick Humphris	Weekly on a Tuesday from 10am. Meet in leader's home.
Creative Writing	Jocelyn Wishart	Weekly on a Wednesday 10am to 11.30am on Zoom for 3 weeks then in members' homes once a month. New members welcome.

GDPR requirement: To protect personal identity, members' contact details may have been omitted. Members can contact their Group Leaders by logging in and accessing details from the u3a website at <https://www.fairfordu3a.uk>

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Cycling	Pete McHugh	Thursdays. Meeting as pre-arranged. Distance varies from 25 to 40 miles.
Five Rhythms Dance	Jane Davies Meriel McHugh	Third Tuesday of the month, at 10.30am to 11.30am in the Palmer Hall. New members welcome.
French Conversation 1	Sandra Cannock	First (or second if it's a Bank Holiday) and third Monday from 11am to 12noon in the Barker Room at the Community Centre. Group full.
French Conversation 2	Julie Whittering	Weekly on a Monday, 11am to 12noon. Meeting in members' homes.
French Conversation 3	Alison Wilson	Weekly on a Monday, 11am to 12noon. Meeting in members' homes.
Garden Group	Beth Dennis	Fourth Thursday in the month. Meet in Fairford Car park. Time variable (see notices).
Geology	Clive Watson	First Wednesday from 2.30pm in the Chapel, Milton Street.
Italian	Zehra Ipek Williamson	Weekly on a Monday at 2pm in the leaders home. Will move to the Community Centre if numbers increase. New members welcome.
Italian for Beginners	Bea Bostock	Weekly on Monday at 2.15pm at the leaders house. Currently has free spaces.
Latin 1, 2 &3	Peter Hewes 01285 712200	There are three groups studying Latin: Beginners, Intermediate and Advanced. We welcome new members but please contact Peter to work out which group would suit you best.
Listening to Music	Sylvia Jones	Meets in a member's home on the third Friday of the month at 2pm during winter and at 2.30pm during summer.
Mah Jong	Paul Saddington	Second and fourth Thursdays from 10am to 12noon in Fairford Community Centre.
Model Club	Graham Hall	Weekly Thursday 10am at Horcott Lake.

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Pétanque 1 and 2	Geoff Dennis	10.00—12.00 Tuesdays and Wednesdays at the Cricket Club in Park Street.
PopDance	Mervyn Cully	Monthly - 2nd Tuesday at 2.30 pm. Party room at the back of Plough PH.
Postcards	Alison Hobson	Third Tuesday at 2.30pm every two months in members' homes.
Recorders	Sue Snell and Peter Stephenson	Second and fourth Friday from 2pm. Fairford Community Centre, Heritage Room.
Rummikub	Sally White	Held in the Heritage room on the third Thursday in the month from 2pm to 4pm. The cost is £2 per session. We would welcome a few new members, no experience necessary.
Scottish Reels	Carol Thompson	Wednesdays 8pm to 10pm in Poulton Village Hall during Winter. New members welcome but must contact group leader in advance.
Short Tennis	Mike Middleton	Weekly. Monday from 3pm to 5pm in the Palmer Hall
Solos2	Jennie Sanford	Various outings each month i.e. visits, shops, theatre/cinema or places of interest. Monthly Sunday lunch, or just somewhere for coffee, all months variable
Stitching and Knitting	Jan Mills	First Wednesday from 12.45pm to 2.15pm in Fairford Community Centre, Heritage Room.
Straddlers	Pete and Meriel McHugh	Fourth Tuesday. See the Walking Groups page for more information
Striders	Pete and Meriel McHugh	Third Thursday. See the Walking Groups page for more information
Strollers	Geoff and Beth Dennis	Fourth Friday. See the Walking Groups page for more information
Table Tennis 1 and 2	Alan Topham 01285713928	Weekly Wednesday 2.30pm to 3.30pm. Weekly Friday 10.30am to 11.30am. In Fairford Community Centre. Groups currently full.
Table Tennis 3	Jo Stichbury	Weekly Friday 11.45am to 12.45pm in the Community Centre
Yoga	Liz Stuart	1st, 2nd and 4th Thursdays in Fairford Community Centre. 10.30am to 11.30am.

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