



**u3a**  
Learn, laugh, live

**April 2026**  
**Issue 326**

## Chairman's Report

Spring is in the air and Easter is just around the corner. It's amazing how much better we feel when we start to break out of the dreary winter weather.

The next AGM is in a few days time on 7th April when the committee members are due to be elected. We have only one new nomination for Joanna Petty who has been a co-opted member for the last few months. Sadly, we haven't had enough nominations to replace those who are standing down so your committee will be at reduced strength as we go into our next year.

If you were toying with the idea of joining the committee but not quite brave enough to stand for election, don't worry. All committee meetings are open to any members, just let Steph know you are interested, come along and see what goes on and who knows, you might find it interesting and decide to stay. We can co-opt members at any time during the year and it would be really good to have some fresh thinking joining the team.

We have a steady trickle of new members joining which is encouraging. However, our total membership has been declining over the last few years so it would be very helpful if you could encourage your friends and acquaintances to come along. We don't make any charge for potential members coming to see what we are all about.

Finally, may I wish you all a very happy Easter.

*John Lang*



[www.fairfordu3a.uk](http://www.fairfordu3a.uk)

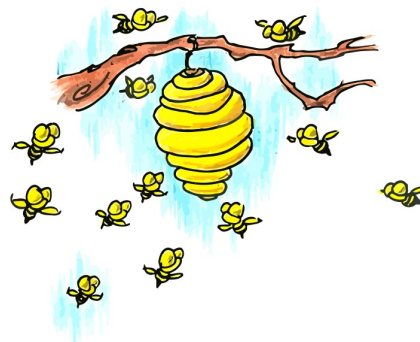
Registered Charity No 1072658

## Palmer Hall, London Road, Fairford at 2.30pm

### SPEAKER FOR TUESDAY 7 APRIL 2026

Our speaker for April is Richard Rickitt, one of the UK's best known beekeepers and co-editor of Beecraft, Britain's best selling bee-keeping magazine.

Richard will give a fascinating and entertaining talk about bees and beekeeping. Find out about the extraordinary lifecycle of honey bees, how they live, breed, communicate and make honey.



Sue Martin



Welcome to our new members:

Claire Mulvany	Lucinda Ash
Katie Blake	Rosie Hawkes
Fiona Cartmell	Yvonne Lewis
John Burley	

### Teas at General Meetings



- April - Cycling
- May - Creative Writing
- June - Five Rhythms Dance
- July - French Conversation 1

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

## AGM

of the Fairford and District u3a  
 Tuesday 7th April  
 2:30 pm  
 The Palmer Hall

Editor this month — Jocelyn Wishart  
 Editor next month — Maureen Partington

**Would you like to join our u3a?**  
 Full details of how to join can be found on the website at <https://fairfordu3a.uk/join-us/>

## Fairford and District u3a March Meeting Report

### How to 'Read' the English Country Church

Reverend Dr Nicholas Henderson gave an entertaining and amusing whistle-stop tour on how to recognise signs of earlier worship in the religious buildings of the country from the pre-Christian era to the Tudors. (Another talk covers from the Tudors to the Modern.) The PowerPoint presentation was beautifully illustrated with examples of churches throughout the country and with the addition of appropriate music. The audience especially enjoyed the 'intermission' when an amusing version of a Pearl and Dean advert was shown. The following are some of the key points of a talk packed full of information.



Picture credit: <https://nicholashenderson.org/>

Pagan worship focused on natural features like trees and rivers etc. and can be seen from the symbols that continued to be used in later buildings of worship. They were extremely concerned about fertility. Dr Henderson showed explicit stone carvings of men and women and the Green Man. The foliate Green Man motif with leaves emerging from his mouth symbolises nature, fertility and rebirth. They can often be seen as architectural features outside and inside churches, as on the font at Daglingworth.

The Romans worshipped their own gods, but Christianity was infiltrating England during this time. The earliest Romano-British Church was found at Colchester. St Augustine came to England in the 5th Century AD; he was a Christian monk who became the first Archbishop of Canterbury in the year 597. The Anglo-Saxons were not skilled builders, so their places of worship were not very elaborate.

Quite often all that remains of Anglo-Saxon architecture are arches, sometimes on porches and windows, and herringbone-style brickwork. The Celtic influence is shown in this period by remains of Celtic crosses with beautiful carvings. The Synod of Whitby was a Christian administrative gathering held in Northumbria in 664, when it was decided that the English Church should follow the customs of Rome rather than the customs practised by Irish monks at Iona and its satellite institutions. The Norman influence on architecture was profound; they brought with them the skills to be able to insert beautifully arched stained glass windows and elaborate ceiling decoration, as shown at Beverley Minster and Gloucester Cathedral. Cirencester parish church has good examples of flying buttresses.

In the interior of the church rood screens, ornate partitions, were in place to keep the clergy from the laity, separating the nave from the chancel. Worshippers had no pews but milled around in the Nave noisily, except when the Host was raised. The Protestant Edward VI ordered that rood screens should be removed. While some screens disappeared, many simply had the rood loft (the gallery on top) and the accompanying crucifix removed. Signs of pre-existing rood screens can still be spotted, quite often there are stairs now leading to nowhere. Medieval churches would not have been dark and dingy, but the stonework would have been painted in vibrant colours. The speaker concluded with a short film from St Albans Abbey on what it might have looked like during the Tudor era.

Alison Hobson

## Group Reports

### Birds, Botany & Bugs

JANUARY 16TH WWT SLIMBRIDGE, COOL, PLENTY OF SUN!

Well, if the rest of the year is like today, we are in for a treat! We saw six cattle egrets in the approaching fields. Huge flocks of wild geese, swans, wildfowl and waders were present throughout the day, often all in flight from the attention of buzzards, marsh harrier and peregrine! Lapwings, curlew, golden plover, dunlin, black-tailed godwit, avocet, redshank, ruff, three little stint and ten common crane. The Bewick's swans had now increased to eighty adult birds and six juveniles. As for geese, sixteen tundra bean (very scarce visitors), many white-fronted, the Ross's and barnacle geese were all seen, plus hundreds of shelduck, wigeon, teal, pintail, shoveler, pochard and tufted duck. But today we also scored highly on the smaller birds, meadow pipits, stonechats, fieldfares, song thrushes, redwings, blackcaps, goldcrest, two firecrests, long-tailed tits, goldfinches, siskins and redpolls, a truly outstanding day!

Mick Jones

### Birds, Botany & Bugs

FRIDAY 23 JANUARY 2026



Although the forecast wasn't brilliant and it rained on the way to Slimbridge we had a great day birding. Mick stated he had never seen so many birds there. Starting in the Penn Hide, we saw hundreds if not thousands of Lapwings and Golden Plover, 92 Bewick's swans including 8 juveniles, Pintail, Shelduck, Shoveler duck, flocks of Dunlin, Teal and Wigeon. On the way to the Tower hide we saw Redshank, Ruff and Little Stint, more Golden Plover, then 15 Tundra Bean Geese, many White Fronted and Barnacle Geese, Tufted Duck, 1 Sanderling, 5 Common Crane, a distant view of a Goshawk, before going to the Kingfisher hide where we got a better view of it sitting in a tree. We saw the normal Greylag and Canada Geese, Cormorants, a Great Egret, 4 Cattle Egrets, 6 Little Egrets and 60/70 Avocets.

A little short on smaller birds today, only redwings and siskins, but a brilliant day overall.

Beth

### Birds, Botany & Bugs

FEBRUARY 20TH WWT SLIMBRIDGE, WET AND WINDY

Yet, despite the weather, we once again had a brilliant day at the Trust. Twenty cattle egrets were seen on the approach roads. Two Whooper swans were greatly appreciated amongst the Bewick's swans on the Rushy, with pochard, shelduck, pintail, shoveler and tufted ducks. Then, on the Tack Piece and the Dumbles, huge flocks of golden plover, lapwing, dunlin, wigeon and teal, all in the sky at once, trying to avoid the attentions of the local peregrine. A merlin and a marsh harrier were also in attendance! Some huge great black-backed gulls, a large flock of white-fronted, the Ross's and barnacle geese, a spoonbill, little egret, curlew and redshank in good numbers. Plus, a ringed plover, a snipe, four oystercatchers, two little stint, two sanderling, a few ruff and pied wagtails, and an early migrant male garganey which was totally unexpected! On South Lake, flocks of avocet and black-tailed godwits, a dozen common gulls and a few gadwall.

Mick Jones

## Group Reports

### Book Circle 1

A successful read! We all liked 'James' by Percival Everett.

It was about the runaway slave, James, based on the well known Tale of Huckleberry Finn and telling the same story but from James' point of view. We so enjoyed, oops wrong word, appreciated it so much that we decided we want to read Huckleberry Finn when we are deciding on our books for 2027.

It was horrendous in parts, where the treatment of slaves was depicted for example, then amusing and entertaining in others. We want to know how closely it follows the path that Huckleberry and James used in the original story. We did feel the end was too short. It mentions that James and his family escaped and travelled north. On the way, they were stopped and questioned in Iowa by a suspicious local Sheriff.

'Runaways?' he asked.

'We are', said James.

'Any of you named Nigger Jim?'

I pointed to each of us. 'Sadie, Lizzie, Morris, Buck.'

'And who are you?'

'I am James'

'James what?'

'Just James.'

We look forward to reading Huckleberry Finn next year.

Jo Stichbury



### Book Circle 2

THE MUSEUM of ORDINARY PEOPLE by Mike Gayle

Gran's then Mum's much used sewing machine?

The kitchen table where all the family meals were taken?

What do you do with them?

You put them in the museum of ordinary things.

A story of finding friendship, family and love.

Jean Moulden



## Group Reports

### Creative Writing group

The weather has been so miserable for so long that we were delighted to see the first signs of spring and, in our enthusiasm, have created a number of 'feel good' stories and poems to share.

#### Things that Make Me Feel Good Judith Vann

Spring in the air. Snowdrops quivering  
 Green grass growing. Daffodils shivering  
 An oil scented bath for a long hot soak.  
 A convivial meal with like minded folk.  
 Peeling the apples from a bumper yield.  
 Watching the dogs running the field.  
 Meeting friends for a game of bridge.  
 Midnight raiding of stuff in the fridge.  
 Not having to get up at the crack of dawn.  
 Smelling the grass from a newly mown lawn.  
 Not having to work or pursue a career.  
 Pavarotti singing the Ave Maria.  
 Warmth of the fire and burning wood.  
 These are the things that make me feel good.



#### Simple Gifts – the Joy of Friendship Meg Ralph

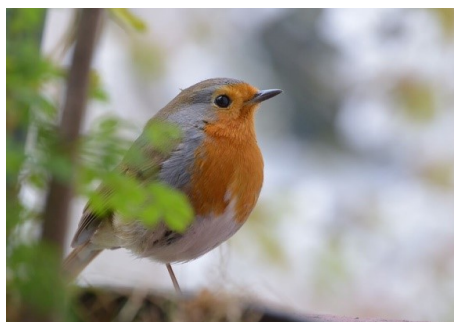
Rain streaming down the windscreen, oncoming halogen headlights making it almost impossible to see the road ahead, made the long journey home both tedious and exhausting. When she finally opened her front door she was greeted with her cat yowling for food and demanding attention. No post, but a note on the doormat.

'You'll be shattered! Hope your day went well and the long drive was worth it. Stew ready to eat plus a jacket potato keeping warm in the oven, salad/dessert in the fridge. Enjoy! Get an early night. Catch up tomorrow. V xx'

Greeted by delicious aromas in the kitchen, she cuddled the cat, fed her, turned the oven up and went into the dining room. Wow! The table was set, a bottle of wine ready corked, and best of all, her Delft vase brimming with early daffodils, primroses, catkins and pussy willow - a foretaste of spring, bringing both beauty and joy.

The perfect end to a long and stressful day. What a wonderful friend

#### An Acrostic for Spring Maureen Partington



**R**usty-breasted garden friend,  
**O**rdinary, common sight, yet  
**B**anishes dull winter's ills.  
**I**nquiring tilt of head at me –  
**N**o threat am I, so he can stay.

## Group Reports

### Creative Writing group's stories (cont)

#### Helping Hands    Ipek Williamson

Recently, at a meeting of the Art Society, Lesley came up to me.

'I must tell you something, Ipek,' she began. 'I bought some of your hand painted cards at your exhibition. They were so simple and yet so lovely that I decided to pluck up courage and paint some cards like yours. I have been wanting to do some painting and yet I just didn't think I could. So, having started with cards, I am now attempting watercolours.'

'I am delighted,' I replied. 'You certainly have chosen the most difficult medium: watercolours are so unpredictable. The master of the art is water, not the artist! But, if you would like to call on me, I could lend you some books which would help you.'

Some time later, Lesley told me that, inspired and instructed by the books I lent her, she is now a keen artist and paints regularly. Imagine my surprise when she called one day and said, 'Ipek, you won't believe this, but I am putting several paintings in our Art Society exhibition'. I was so happy for her.

#### How do I know it is Spring?    John Coomber

How can I tell it's spring? Can I see spring flowers coming out, or that it's getting lighter during the day?

No. How can I know it's any of those things when I'm stuck in a cardboard box in the garage?

Well, I will tell you. Spring has arrived when my owners free me from my prison, and I see daylight. I have been captive for the last five months and today, I'm free.

Now I'm out and being fussed over, weighed, my shell covered in oil that smells like GT X, and my eyes cleaned. Now they are talking about me. I might be Mutton and Jeff but I am not Bacon Rind and can see better than through a glass darkly, and I can lip-read. They want to put me out already!

Ah! Outside it is, sun is out, the smell of the garden is great and the lawn has just been mown for me. I can start exploring, looking for an escape route. No way is this tortoise going back in that cardboard slammer.

### Petanque

Numbers are recovering towards last years, now that the sun has made an appearance. It does seem that the piste catches all the wind which might be going. In order to improve the playing surface, more bags of topping have been obtained, and a work party will spread these in the next few weeks. As well as this, two new benches have been obtained from a sale at Lechlade Garden Centre.

Play continues on Tuesdays and Wednesdays from 10am to midday. Come and try it out!

Geoff Dennis 01285 712195

## Group Reports

### Postcards

At the March postcards meeting the choice was postcards with G and, because it was St Patrick's Day, links with Ireland.

There was a comical series of postcards entitled 'Visitors Impressions of the Irish Jaunting Car' one of these was postmarked 1917, it did not make one want to travel in a jaunting car! Pictures from the Guinness Brewery in Dublin, probably in the 1930s, which has since changed its site. We had never seen so many barrels stacked so high before. Another Irish connection was a picture of Dick Mack's Pub at Dingle with a fiddler outside and someone with a glass full of what looked like Guinness!

We then returned across the Irish Sea with a series of postcards of lovely views of Gloucester Cathedral and town, up to Glasgow and back south to Guernsey via the St George's Chapel, Windsor, and the Gower Peninsula. Off to Italy and Lake Garda and then further afield for a few stray 'F's from the last meeting, the stunning Arkaroola in the Flinders Ranges in South Australia and some lovely Florida beaches in the USA.

Alison Hobson

### Recorder Group

We are a fairly small group and we run jointly with Cirencester u3a. Our aim is to share the joy of playing the recorder in a group of like-minded players.

Our music ranges through the ages from early to relatively modern and, although the emphasis is on the Renaissance and Baroque periods which sound so good on recorders, we have a variety of more recent compositions which also lend themselves well to the instrument. It is, generally, a non-performing group which means there's no pressure.

New members will be made very welcome and will soon gain confidence with the help and support of other players. You will need to be able to read simple music. Music will be provided but please bring your recorders and a music stand.

If you are interested in joining us, please contact Sue Snell

### Solos 2

Just finished a very nice day at Westonbirt, a small but select group finally got there on Tuesday 17th March. Had a little bit of trouble with the roadworks en route. Sent us on a roundabout way from Tetbury but our brilliant driver, Jackie, got us there without any mishaps.

And wasn't it a beautiful day? Could have easily been the middle of summer. The trees, as always, were beautiful. Not a lot of colour until we got round to the Camellias, Rhododendron etc. They were magnificent, though there are still a lot more to come out.

We had a very nice lunch at a reasonable price followed by tea and cake, (we usually have tea and cake somehow). Then the drive home. A good day, and then some of us are out again tomorrow, to lunch with our Table Tennis friends.

Jo Stichbury

### Information for Upcoming Meetings

Please contact the group leaders if you are interested in joining any of the groups, or visit [www.fairfordu3a.uk](http://www.fairfordu3a.uk) for further information.

#### Birds, Botany and Bugs

##### Friday April 17th

A trip to Slimbridge for, hopefully, many summer visitors. Meet in the car park for 08:45, lunch up to the individual.

Mick Jones

#### Garden Group

##### Thursday 23 April

Beth is trying to arrange a private visit. Please contact her for details.

01285 712195

Beth Dennis



#### Pétanque

Play takes place at 10am to midday on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, and new members would be welcome. For beginners, there are sets of boules available for a try out. Come along and enjoy the open air.

Geoff Dennis 01285 712195

#### Postcards Group

The next meeting is on May 19th the topic is postcards beginning with 'H'.

Alison Hobson



## Walking Groups

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



### Straddlers Walk Tuesday 28th April 2026

This is a walk of about 7.5 miles starting in Rendcomb. Our route is a figure of eight taking us along the Macmillan Way to Chedworth and then along the Monarch's Way through Conigree Wood back to the start. Hopefully, we may see some bluebells in the wood.

The terrain is a mixture of footpaths, tracks, bridleways and some road walking in Chedworth. There are a couple of short uphill sections, but it is mostly typical Cotswold undulating countryside. There are 7 stiles en route, a couple of which are quite high. It may be muddy depending on the weather and walking poles are advised.

Meet at Fairford car park at 9:15 or 10 am in Rendcomb near the village hall (postcode GL7 7HB). Suggested passenger contribution £1.50. Bring drinks, a snack and a packed lunch for the walk.

For anyone wishing to have post walk coffee and cake, there is a small shop in Rendcomb or the Fire & Flow Coffee Roastery is also a short detour on the way back to Fairford. Please let us know if you intend to come, and where you will be meeting us.

**Derek and Robyn**



### Striders Walk Thursday 16th April 2026

A circular walk from Tetbury, around 5 miles, starting from the Royal Oak pub in Tetbury, near the Tetbury Old Goods Shed. We start on the old track bed towards Cirencester before moving on to country lanes and footpaths across farmland back towards Tetbury. The last part of the walk takes us through a woodland glade and around hidden parts of Tetbury that you may not have explored before, to bring us back to the Royal Oak. There are 2 stiles. Sticks would be advisable if conditions are wet. There is a short steep incline on the lane after we leave the old railway line, otherwise the route is fairly flat.

Meet at Fairford car park by 9:15am or go direct to the Royal Oak (GL8 8EY or w3w: workflow.tidal.familiar) for 10am. Parking either behind the pub or in the Old Goods shed car park.

Meal booked for 1pm. Suggest a travel contribution of £2 each. Please let us know by the 9th April if you plan to come on the walk and if you will be eating at the pub.

Keith & Jacqui Howlett

### Strollers Friday 24th April

The location for this month's walk is the Eliot Arms, South Cerney, where lunch will be taken. The walk will be 3¾ miles on roads, tracks and canal footpaths, so sturdy shoes should be worn.





As numbers have been dropping, please bring along any friends to boost the attendance.

Geoff Dennis 01285 712195





## 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](http://www.fairfordu3a.uk)

Activity	Leader	Information
AI Explorers	Joanna & Ray Petty	Monthly Thursday mornings in Fairford Community Centre. Some spaces available.
Ancient Greek	Peter Hewes	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) - Farmor Room 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 01285712200	We meet at 3.30pm 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>

Activity	Leader	Information
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 its a Bank Holiday) and third Monday from 11am to 12noon in the Barker Room at the Community Centre.
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 leader's 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 leader's 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.
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 in the Barker Room at the Community Centre. <b>(Note change</b>

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Activity	Leader	Information
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 01285 713928	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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