



# Fairford and District u3a



**May 2026**  
**Issue 327**

## Chairman's Report

Well, my comments last month about Spring weather were a bit premature, weren't they?! However, it really does feel that things are picking up in the garden at long last.

We held the AGM on 7<sup>th</sup> April – so you have got me for another year, and I am pleased to note that much of our team is also continuing for another year. However, I am also sorry to lose Jo Stichbury and Sue Snell as both have exceeded their period of membership. We all offer them our thanks for sterling service. We formally welcome Joanna Petty who is now a fully elected committee member. Martin Snell is also keen to step down as Beacon coordinator so, if there is anyone who would be at all interested in dealing with the IT side of our committee work, please have a chat with Martin.

Christine Blackwell and I had the pleasure of listening to Iain Cassidy, the CEO of the Third Age Trust, at a recent Cotswold Link meeting. We were surprised and concerned to learn that the awareness of the u3a movement amongst the general public is surprisingly low and I'm sure we can expect to see some action aimed at changing this in the near future. The u3a organisation is a great way of supporting both the physical and mental wellbeing of people as we progress into the senior years so we need to grow the organisation.

Finally, one further plea for committee members, so if you know someone who is good at such things give them a nudge.

**John Lang**

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

### SPEAKER FOR TUESDAY 5 MAY 2026

The speaker for 5th May is Francis Burroughes who will tell us all about the Wonderful World of Glass.

From his own collection, Francis brings historic and valuable items of glass for members to examine for themselves to illustrate the history of glass making from 3,000 BC to the present day.

Sue Martin



No new members notified this month.

#### Teas at General Meetings



May - Creative Writing

June - Five Rhythms Dance

July - French Conversation 1

August - no meeting

Please send items for the

**June Issue**

by **17 May**

to

editor@fairfordu3a.org.uk



Editor this month — Maureen Partington

Editor next month — Sarah Bottomley

#### 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 April Meeting Report

After a very short AGM we were treated to a wonderful talk about bees and beekeeping. Richard Rickitt is an expert on the subject of bees. He is co-author of the magazine *Beecraft* and has written a book "Beekeeping for Gardeners" and he travels the world giving talks about them. He gave us a detailed account of these extraordinary creatures. It is amazing how such small creatures are so intricate, for example, the way they see and recognize colours. *Leave your garden full of dandelions for them as they train their eyes to see the colour yellow at this time of year!*

There are over 25 species of bees from the large bumblebees, solitary bees, honey bees to some which are smaller than fleas and they have been in existence for millions of years. Cave paintings of them have been found in Spain. The Egyptians cultivated them, as did the Church for their production of wax for candles and of course for the honey to make mead.

Richard gave us a detailed description of how they fly and communicate to other members of the hive to find flowers and collect nectar, their lifecycle and the exciting life of the Queen Bee and her many suitors (drones). We learnt how they keep the heart of the hive at a constant 32.5 degrees, how they feed the baby bees royal jelly and produce propolis which they use to disinfect and seal their hives. Despite all that is known about bees there are still many things we do not know about them, for instance how they build their honeycombs.

We need bees to enable us to live. If they did not pollinate our crops, we would have no agriculture. Sadly, some years ago bees were seriously impacted by disease and owners in the UK must destroy a hive if it is infected, but this is not the case in some countries who export cheap honey. Happily, Richard had some of his own pure honey there for us to buy.



I could go on and on about what Richard told us, which those at the meeting were able to experience for themselves. Sue puts a great deal of effort into finding interesting speakers so it would be lovely to see more of you at the meetings, which you are entitled to do as part of your u3a membership as well as your participation in group activities.

Christine Blackwell



## Group Reports

### AI Explorers

In April, we held two AI Explorers sessions at Fairford Community Centre—our Group 1 Workshop and Group 2 Session 2—bringing together 19 curious minds.

Group 1 enjoyed a hands-on workshop creating images using ChatGPT and Gemini, and we also began exploring important topics like privacy and confidentiality, which we'll continue next time.

Group 2, building on their March session, focused on the importance of good prompting. Here are two poems—both created entirely by ChatGPT:

### The Art of Prompting

*Fairford AI Explorers showed the way,  
How clever prompts make AI obey.  
With context and care,  
No muddles to share,  
And chaos kept firmly at bay!*

### Group 2 - using three random words selected by the Group – *Daffodils, Chocolate, Spring*

*There once was a group out in Fairford one spring,  
Where daffodils danced in a bright golden ring.  
With chocolate to share,  
And warm sunny air,  
They laughed as the birds started happily to sing.*

We're looking forward to more AI Explorers fun in May—11th May for Group 2 and 14th May for the Workshop.

Joanna and Ray Petty



## Group Reports

### Birds, Botany & Bugs

**March 20<sup>th</sup> The Forest of Dean.** Warm and sunny.

Well, today was going to be tough! March is our quietest month and today was no exception. An early start to find hawfinch was unsuccessful, due to many cyclists meeting in the same area! A trip to the Parkend church area was also quiet! Our next stop was the Cannop Ponds, where we then started to see birds - buzzard, mandarin duck, goosander, nuthatch, coal tit, song thrush, greenfinch and goldfinches, but a pair of raven tumbling in their upside down display stole the show. We then moved to the upper ponds, seeing more goosander and some little grebes, more ravens, but a few minutes watching a bird feeding area was a great success, with great spotted woodpecker, nuthatches, many chaffinches, great, blue, coal and a pair of the declining marsh tits being greatly appreciated. (We then returned to the ponds because some wally was convinced he had seen a merganser - he's still a wally!)

*Merganser—the one they didn't see!*



A very hearty lunch was taken at Kaplan's Cafe in Coleford so, full of food, we went to the new fancy watch point to look for goshawk. I found a pair displaying high above the car park immediately on leaving our vehicles, so after a good start we took the easier path to the watch point. (We have never visited this site in such warm conditions, we normally freeze to death!). Many buzzards were displaying above the forest, but after a few minutes I found another goshawk. This one came extremely close and gave us prolonged views. Its size and power was very impressive! Some fallow deer and tortoiseshell butterflies were also seen. A quick but late walk around Sudley Ponds completed the day, seeing only a close pair of little grebe.

Mick Jones

### Birds, Botany & Bugs

**April 17<sup>th</sup> WWT Slimbridge.** Dull, rain later.

I thought today was going to be a little disappointing, the cool Spring and poor weather across Europe is making migration a bit patchy! But we need not have worried, finding several new birds for the year - little ringed plover, whimbrel, spotted redshank, common sandpiper, reed warbler, and many of the group had not yet seen sand martins, swallows and house martins this year. There was a supporting cast of barnacle geese, shelduck, wigeon, gadwall, teal, pintail, shoveler, pochard, tufted duck, little grebe, cormorant, grey heron, spoonbill, and a peregrine on a kill! Also nesting common cranes, oystercatchers, avocets (around one hundred!), ringed plover, lapwing, sanderling, sixty back-tailed godwits, curlew, great black-backed gulls, skylarks, pied wagtail, Cetti's and sedge warblers (heard only!), chiffchaff, willow warbler, goldfinches. Two brown hares (unusual here), a fox, a short-tailed field vole and some orange-tip butterflies completed a cool and wet day at the Trust.

Mick Jones

## Group Reports

### Book Circle 1

THE BOLTER by Frances Osborne.

The author presents the life story of her great-grandmother, the notorious Idina Sackville, five times married and divorced besides having countless lovers. Thoroughly researched and well illustrated with family photographs, the book reveals a telling snapshot of wealthy society life in the first half of the twentieth century. Idina seems to have been a complex woman, adventurous, with a flair for designing houses. She was kind to her African staff in Kenya yet, like many of her era, she was distant from her children. She readily adopted the colonial lifestyle, socialising with other expats and keeping English times and meals. At home or abroad her sexual freedom was a constant source of scandal, though it may have stemmed from a fear of being hurt and reluctance to commit to any one relationship.

A number of things made the book disappointing for us. The repetitive drinking and partying became tedious after a while, adding little to the picture. The copious research on background figures often confused the narrative and was one of the contributory factors towards making the book overlong. It is open to question whether this biography would have been published had the author not been the wife of an ex-Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Maureen Partington

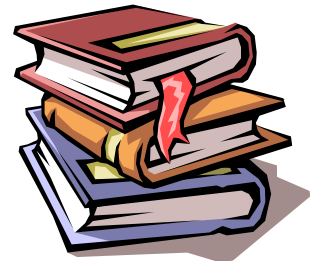


### Book Circle 2

Our book for this month was "The Fishing Fleet " by Anne de Courcey". It tells the story of the women who, having failed to marry in England, travelled to India in search of a husband. Men were plentiful there where The East India Company traded and England kept an army. Marriage to Indian women was forbidden so potential brides had to be imported. The book tells their story and also that of the India of the time.

Everyone had enjoyed the book and it led to a long and vigorous discussion. The only downside is that it is very long.

Barbara Cottam



## Group Reports

### Creative Writing

Our attempts to write a novel collaboratively continue to occupy us. It's even harder than we expected! Will it ever see the light of day? Who knows?! Still we are persevering.

So far we have 4 chapters under our belt and 3 more are at different stages of development.

Maureen Partington



illustrations of.com #1146779

### Table Tennis

Guess what, we had our 'Christmas Lunch' this month! For 2025 that is. We usually have it just after the mad rush of the actual season of Christmas. This year we booked the Robin to take most of us in and out, picking us up at the Community Centre and dropping us at the Forum bus stop.

We had booked a table at the refurbished Crown Inn in Cirencester. It was very nice. There were eight of us and we had a variety of food, all of which was excellent. We sat in the extension that comes into the arcade. It was beautifully laid out and decorated and the service was very good. Desserts of course, however we did not stay for a tea/coffee because the Robin was booked for three fifteen for our return trip. Unfortunately there was a wait for this. Apparently it had been held up by traffic when we phoned the office ten minutes after it was due. We were told it would be with us in four minutes, which it was.

The very friendly driver apologised but as the weather was so good we did not mind at all.

Jo Stichbury



## Information for Upcoming Meetings

Please contact the group leaders if you are interested in joining any of the groups,

### Birds, Botany and Bugs

#### Friday May 15th A trip to RSPB Otmoor.

This is a premier site, so expect marsh harrier, red kite, hobby, cuckoo, egret, common tern, wildfowl, redshank, curlew, sedge, reed and other warblers, reed bunting and an outside chance of bittern.

Meet in the car park for 08:10. Please bring a picnic lunch, waterproofs (just in case!) and good walking boots. We sometimes pop in to Farmoor reservoir for tea and cake on the way home!

Mick Jones

#### Straddlers Walk Tuesday 26th May 2026

This is a walk of 7.5 miles starting in Clanfield and using a mixture of road/lane, track & field. It's a very flat unchallenging walk with around 8 stiles. Our route takes in the secluded Little Clanfield and the pretty village of Grafton before heading towards Langford then Alvescot before returning to Clanfield where we will indulge ourselves in a cinnamon bun at Blakes!!

Meet at Fairford car park at 9:15 or 9.45 at Clanfield Village Car Park Main Street/ The Green/ Marsh Lane ///stamp.struts.regarding.

Suggested passenger contribution £1.00. Bring drinks, a snack and a packed lunch for the walk.

Pete & Meriel



#### Striders Walk Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> May 2026

A circular walk from the Postbox, School Lane, Chilson, OX7 3HT approx. 5.75 miles (9.2km). Parking is on the high street.

It's an easy to moderate walk, through field paths, quiet roads, woodland tracks, no stiles. Landscape, gently rolling hills of arable farmland and ancient woods. It passes through the edge of old woodland near a National Nature Reserve. The first section is relatively flat, then we start a steady but manageable rise in elevation. Just before we reach the half way point, there is a 1 mile section of winding road, which rises steeply. Once at the top we stop for coffee. Thereafter it's downwards towards the village of Chilson.

Lunch stop requires us to jump into our cars. Heading home, we stop for lunch at Carpenters Arms, Fulbrook, OX18 4BH (Off A361). Menu options will be requested nearer the time of our walk.



Meet at Fairford Car Park by 9:15am or go direct to Chilson OX7 3HT for 10am. Suggest a travel contribution of £1.50. Please let us know by Thursday 14 May if you plan to join us on this walk and if you will be eating at the Carpenters Arms.

Ray & Jo





## 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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