



u3a
Learn, laugh, live

July 2026
Issue 329

Chairman's Report

Gosh – very hot in May and cool, wet & windy in June – it's all a bit topsy-turvy.

I had to miss the monthly meeting in June because I was at the u3a Cotswold Link Special Interest Day, 'From Pen to Reader: the journey of a book', in Cheltenham but I gather that the return visit by Alexandra Stanbrook, with a further collection of anecdotes and hats, was just as interesting and amusing as her previous visit a couple of years ago.

The Special Interest Day was quite well attended with about 80 members from the 28 u3a groups that make up Cotswold Link. We had a presentation from Sue Ablet, the organiser of the Evesham Festival of Words, and from Jacquie Rogers who has written a number of books about the Roman period in which the special investigator Quintus Valerius has to solve cases of fraud and rebellion. The afternoon started with a presentation by Colin Wade about the trials and tribulations of becoming an author, very much the same presentation as we had a couple of years ago. He was followed by Gareth Swain from The History Press, publishers of specialist non-fiction books about events or things providing a fascinating insight to the process. Finally, we had a short presentation from our very own Maureen Partington. Maureen did a sterling job of saying 'you have heard what it's all about – now I will tell you how we, in Fairford u3a, went about it'. She described how our Creative Writing Group had put together and published a short series of books and was very well received.

Finally, we had a lucky break in the weather on Sunday 7th June when Geoff and the team from the Petanque group represented our u3a at the Fairford Festival, even challenging the Cricket Club to a match.

John Lang

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

SPEAKER FOR TUESDAY 7th JULY



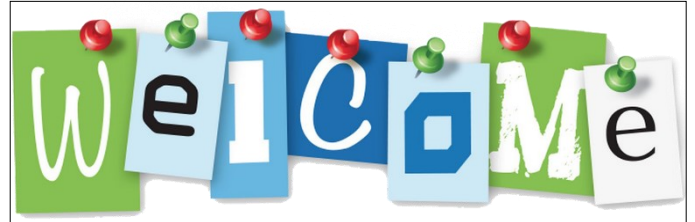
Our speaker for June is John Kinory who will tell us all about his Life and Times as a Film Extra.

His talk will describe the daily experiences of a supporting artist on a film shoot, from the usual early morning call time through wardrobe and makeup, waiting to be called to set, even having lunch. There is great excitement and satisfaction in being part of an incredibly complex production in which dozens or even hundreds of people all contribute to the final film – in which you hope to see yourself eventually on screen, even if only for a second.



**Teas at
General
Meetings**

- | | |
|-----------|------------------|
| July | - Table Tennis 3 |
| August | - No meeting |
| September | - Yoga |



A warm welcome to our new members:

Alan Bradley, Angela Ashton,
David Hardman, Donna Cosham,
Gillian Hardman, Ian Bailey,
Campbell Campbell, Jon Marsh-Phillips,
Shellard Campbell, Stephen Bell.

Please send items for the
SEPTEMBER Issue
by **17th AUGUST**
to
editor@fairfordu3a.org.uk

Editor this month — Jocelyn Wishart
NB There's no newsletter in August

September — Sarah Bottomley

Fairford and District u3a Meeting Report June 2025

Our speaker at our monthly meeting on the 2nd June was Alexandra Stanbrook.

Alexandra was our speaker a couple of years ago when she gave us a fascinating talk on Hilarious Hats. This time she told us all about the history of hats.

Evidently the use of hats can be traced back to 5000 BC and, initially, they would indicate a person's status in society. The Egyptian Pharaohs wore the Nemes, a striped linen head cloth which covered the crown of the head and was tied at the nape of the neck with two long flaps draped over their shoulders. In Tudor times, it was the men who displayed the most elaborate headgear and women just wore cloths to match them.

Wigs later became the height of fashion for men. Women soon adopted them too and they became more and more elaborate and were often stitched to a hat. They were only cleaned by brushing them with flour and would even be worn in bed and, as they were rarely removed, vermin were soon attracted to them. Alexandra explained how she had seen a tiny mousetrap which had been embedded in a wig!

She told us how, in Victorian times, women started to wear bonnets, that Luton was the centre for Hat Making; that mercury was only banned from being used in their production in 1968; that the Suffragettes wore hats in the colours of green, white and violet and much, much more.

A very interesting talk.

Christine Blackwell

Maureen's Notes from the Cotswold Link u3a Special Interest Day June 2nd 2026

There were five presentations.

Bums on Seats by Sue Ablett: Sue is the founder and Chair of Evesham Festival of Words, which is smaller than those at Hay and Cheltenham but still attracts some big names. The main festival is a 3-day weekend but there are lots of other events throughout the year, beginning in March when their programme for the year comes out.

Researching Roman Britain by Jacqui Rogers: In retirement Jacqui began to indulge her love of Roman history by writing crime novels set in 2nd Century Britain. She is incredibly knowledgeable about the period, her sources being books, podcasts, lectures and archaeological forums. The setting for her stories is based on the latest discoveries at Roman sites, some of which have not even been excavated yet.

The Joys and Perils of Being an Author by Colin Wade: Colin worked as a civilian with the Thames Valley Police. With time on his hands after retirement he began writing a crime novel, using his knowledge of police procedures and attitudes. He expected to be able to find a publisher quite easily but countless rejections from publishers and agents convinced him to try self-publishing. For an up-front fee a publisher will provide an editor and a cover designer but no assistance with selling the books. Chain bookstores were not interested, but independent booksellers were more helpful. He also promotes his books through local craft fairs.

Cont on next page

Maureen's notes (cont)

A Publisher's Perspective by Gareth Swain: As co-owner and Managing Director of The History Press, Gareth gave a detailed explanation of the publication process. Commissioning is primarily by invitation with an advance fee being paid and a set timescale for completion of the manuscript given. Their website also invites non-commissioned manuscripts which are occasionally selected for publication. Interestingly he suggested some positive uses of AI in the publishing process, including creation of indexes. He was unequivocally against the use of AI for creative purposes but suggested that it could be used to detect AI creations. Now there's an interesting idea, AI policing the use of AI!

Bonus Session by the Fairford Creative Writing Group: Maureen Partington gave a light-hearted talk about how a small group of people with no ambition to be authors could nevertheless publish their work through Amazon Kindle. The creation of a book provides purpose to what would otherwise be writing exercises. It produces something concrete out of doing what we enjoy. In the true spirit of u3a, we learn as we go along. And if we can do it, anyone can do it.

Maureen Partington

Group Reports

Wondering why there isn't a report from your Group?

At the risk of stating the obvious, it's because we (eds) weren't sent one. We're very grateful for all and any content - why not write one yourself or send us an article. We're happy to publicise local events and charities.

Ed.

AI Explorers Workshop

On Thursday, 4th June, twelve intrepid members gathered for our third AI Explorers workshop. Splitting into groups to tackle different challenges, we put the technology to the test with some very practical, real-world problems.

Working collaboratively, our teams discovered that AI is surprisingly handy at:

- * Trip Planning: Organising a detailed getaway to York.
- * Writing: Drafting a strongly worded letter to the Council about our local potholes (we expect perfectly smooth roads by Tuesday!).
- * Socialising: Plotting a scenic hiking itinerary for a day out with friends.
- * Coding: Writing actual computer programs from scratch, much to our collective amazement.

It was another highly entertaining and interesting session. We are happy to report that the computers have not taken over Fairford just yet, so come and see what the fuss is about at our next meeting on 9th July. Absolutely no computer science degree required!

Joanna and Ray Petty

Group Reports

Birds, Botany and Bugs

May 15th RSPB Otmoor and Farmoor reservoir, very cold start, warmer later. It felt more like March than May!

So, wrapped up against the unseasonal weather, we slowly walked the entire reserve with birdsong ringing in our ears. Cetti's, sedge, reed and garden warblers, blackcaps and chiffchaff for the warblers, reed buntings (not that melodious!), cuckoos calling (including the bubbling song of the female). Plus, at least five seen, marsh harriers, red kites, sparrowhawk and hobbies, all hunting over the reserve. A flock of over one hundred swift was very impressive! Barnacle geese, gadwall, garganey, shoveler, common pochard, tufted duck, a dozen little and a great egret, grey heron, three glossy ibis (really impressed some of the group!) with oystercatchers, lapwings, curlews and redshanks that all breed here! Several common terns, recently fledged long-tailed tits, a brief grasshopper warbler, several basking common lizards, hairy dragonfly, orange-tip butterflies. A small herd of 14 roe deer, and some delightful field mice completed a long but very good visit.

Mick Jones

Book Circle 1

This month our book group read 'The Women' by Kristin Hannah which tells the story of Frances 'Frankie' McGrath, a young nurse who served in the U.S Army Nurse Corps during the Vietnam War. Their service was largely ignored. The group all declared it a good read, highlighting the emotional storyline, the intense realism of the battlefield and the struggles of female veterans, many suffering from PTSD, returning home to a divided America.

Sue Jonson

Book Circle 2

'Gilead' by Marilynne Robinson comes as a series of letters written by the father to his very young son. 'Incredibly intense' 'Introspective and Philosophical' were comments offered by the meeting - although the language is simple the thoughts are not. There are many gems of description hidden in the story and it was suggested that the reader delve in and seek out these treasures. One or two of us could not finish the book, others continued to the final page.

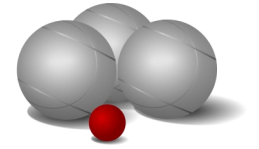
So definitely not a plus overall for us - but we note that it is a favourite of Barack Obama.

Jane Pugh 9.6.26

Group Reports

Petanque

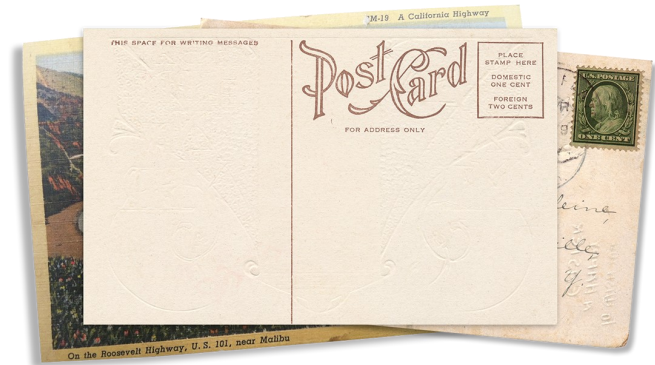
The groups ran an extended (5 hour) demonstration session at the Fairford Festival. A number of visitors played games of Petanque, ranging from 7 to 70 in age. This was all in aid of advertising the u3a and Petanque in particular. So far, one new member has joined the Tuesday group, and we await the two more who expressed interest in joining on Wednesdays. Thank you to the 12 members who manned the piste on that Sunday, and for their enthusiasm in doing so.



Geoff Dennis

Postcards Group

At the May postcards meeting the task was postcards with a connection to the letter H plus 'G's from the previous meeting. We also discussed the definition of a postcard; it used to be a specific size but nowadays they come in all shapes and sizes. Having been shown examples of postcards that are only really adverts, we decided a postcard had to have a space for writing a message and the address and a place for the stamp, but not necessarily to have a divided back.



Having sorted that out we set off on our journey round the world: to the USA - Hot Springs National Park, Arkansas, Hershey Amusement Park, Pennsylvania and, do you remember, the eruption of Mount St Helens in 1980? From the USA to Hong Kong and down to Hobart, Tasmania. Other topics were the Book of Hours, helicopters and a Heinkel bomber, homes, and humble houses and some not so humble! e.g. Highgrove and Highclere. Mostly we travelled round the UK, in the north to Haworth, Howden, Housesteads Roman fort, Hull and the lovely Holy Island and Arden House in Scotland (do you remember Dr Finlay's casebook?) Down south to Helford, Hastings, Herne, Kent. Locally we went to Cirencester - the remains of Norman Hospital, and Abbey Grounds gate, the VWH hunt by Cirencester Church then in Stratford, Ann Hathaway's cottage and Hall's Croft, Shakespeare's daughter's house, and Kelmscott. These lovely and interesting post card views always bring back memories, and reminders of events and introductions to unfamiliar places.

Alison Hobson

Group Reports

Creative Writing

With AI being so much in the news, we thought we'd write some Cautionary Verse (with apologies to Hilaire Belloc).

Heinz Stein, one day, lying in bed,
thought about his future ahead.
A gypsy's crystal was no fun at all,
With Marty's DeLorean he'd have a ball.
"Please AI. What should we do?
Build a copy with Doctor Who?
The future only I want to see,
no looking back." He said with glee.
The years flew round on the screen,
Now age wrinkled skin, eyes unseen.
"AI! Stop the car, where's reverse gear?"
"There's none, you're stuck in this year,
future only was programmed for you.
It's extra fees if backwards you do."

John Coomber

AI can often tell such lies
It makes you gasp and stretch your eyes
But what you really need to know
Is how that truly can be so.
It's up to you, you see to tell
Your Chatbot partner what works well.
The detail needed for your story,
You must spell out in all its glory
Or if its art work you require
Then colour, shape you must inspire
With clear instructions line by line
And then your work will be just fine.
When you take charge, it will obey
The end result will be OK.

Meg Ralph

AI falls to Earth

Now I'll tell you about poor Ike.
He was a lazy, little tyke
who thought he'd simply ask AI
to make him wings so he could fly.
"No problem," said ChatGPT.
"There's a few designs I can see."
"Whoa! Way too complex," said Ike.
"I'm just learning to ride a bike."
"Well, this design's by Dee D. Lus.
Wax and feathers. Simple, no fuss."
"Sounds good," said Ike. "Yup, I'll try that."
You've guessed by now, poor Ike went splat!
He didn't ask about the sun.
Always rushing to get things done.
Ike was a silly, little twerp.
AI needs good data to work.

Jocelyn Wishart



Information for Upcoming Meetings

Birds, Botany and Bugs

Friday 10th July, a trip to Ravensroost wood, one of our most popular days out! In search of Dragonflies, Butterflies, Wild Flowers and Birds. Meet in the car park for 08:55, please bring a picnic lunch, if the weather is not suitable, we will try the following Friday. RSVP

August 15th will be a trip to Slimbridge for returning waders etc. Maybe Frampton Pools in the afternoon? Meet in the car park for 8:45, lunch up to the individual.

Mick Jones

Pétanque

Play continues at the piste on Tuesday and Wednesday mornings from 10am to midday. Now that the weather is more reliable, we shall be arranging matches with Ampney Crucis, Cirencester and Cricklade Petanque Clubs, both home and away.

Any and all new players will be welcome at the piste in Fairford Cricket Club grounds in Park Street.

Geoff Dennis
01285 712195

Postcards

The next meeting is on July 28th the topic is postcards beginning with 'I', but to make it more challenging not including any derivative of the word isle or island. We have had several donations of postcards recently for which we are grateful, and they go in our U3A postcard collection.

Please contact Alison Hobson for more information.





Walking Groups



Straddlers Walk Tuesday 28th July 2026

We plan to repeat the walk we did two years ago. The walk is about 7.5 miles around the mostly flat Minchinhampton and Rodborough Commons. There are sensational views of the Nailsworth and Golden Valleys and such picturesque villages of Woodchester and Amberley. Most of the walk is on dry grassy footpaths with short road sections. There are no stiles. As an added enticement we plan a lunch stop at Winstone's Ice Cream before finally heading towards Henry's Bakehouse Café in Minchinhampton at the end of the walk.

Meet at Fairford car park for 9:10 departure or 10am at start of walk - parking adjacent to 31 Dr Brown's Rd, Minchinhampton, GL6 9BT. Suggested travel contribution £3. Please let us know if you intend to join us and where you will be meeting us.

Frank and Bjoern

Striders Walk Thursday 16 July 2026

This is a walk of about 5.2 miles starting at The Frogmill, Shipton Oliffe. Our route takes us out in a clockwise direction past Shipton Golf Course and then on towards the village of Foxcote and the Kilkenny Viewing Point before returning to The Frogmill.

The terrain comprises a mix of country lanes, bridleways, tracks and fields. There are two uphill sections which result in an overall climb of circa 500 feet, but these are generally on fairly low gradients. There is only one stile on the route.

Meet in Fairford carpark to leave at 9.10 or at The Frogmill carpark (GL54 4HT or w3w///rocky.undertone.decency) for a 10.00am start. There is plenty of parking available but car sharing is normally available and the suggested travel contribution is £2.00. We have not been asked to pre-order our menu selections but we will need to confirm the final numbers for the table reservation in advance. Could you please therefore advise if you will be staying for lunch no later than Friday 10 July. Please let us know if you intend to come and where you will be meeting us.

Jerry and Tracey

Please Note




There are no walks scheduled for August. Next walks will be forwarded for the September Newsletter in mid-August.







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 & 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. Spaces available.
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. Note change of venue

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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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