



From the Chair

Hello everyone, and welcome to our final newsletter for 2025. The year seems to have passed by so quickly. It has certainly been a busy and successful year for the Thorley u3a. As you will be aware there is no monthly meeting in December. Our next meeting is on Monday 5th January 2026 !!!! This is our AGM, an important event in the life of the organisation. This will be an opportunity to highlight some of the activities and events that have happened during 2025 and to publicly thank numerous people for their contributions to Thorley u3a.

I would like to take this last opportunity to call for Committee volunteers, especially a Membership Secretary, Assistant Treasurer, and Communications Officer. Please give this some careful consideration. The whole organisation could grind to a halt if we are unable to fill these vital roles.

Now, I expect some of you listen to Podcasts, and some members will possibly have no idea what a Podcast is. Our younger daughter has just released a Podcast which has been reviewed both in the Sunday Times and the Sunday Observer – called 'The Coldest Shift'. It was recorded during the pandemic in 2020. It follows Dr Rachel Varnam's work as the Doctor with the British Antarctic Survey and her efforts to keep Antarctica free from Covid as she and her colleagues sailed to the survey's base on the Royal Research Ship James Clarke Ross to continue their scientific work. The Podcast is produced by Hat Trick productions who make a number of well-known BBC programmes and co-produced by our other daughter, Laura. So far three 30 minute episodes have been released. My front door knocker even features in the first episode!! An interesting, informative and often amusing podcast that is well worth listening to ... although I may be slightly biased!! To repeat ... it's called 'The Coldest Shift'.

Now to take a moment to wish you all a very Happy Christmas and a peaceful and healthy New Year. To finish with a quote from the Princess of Wales "We all have something we can offer one another: Gentle words or a receptive ear, an arm around an exhausted shoulder, or silently being by someone's side.

Very best wishes

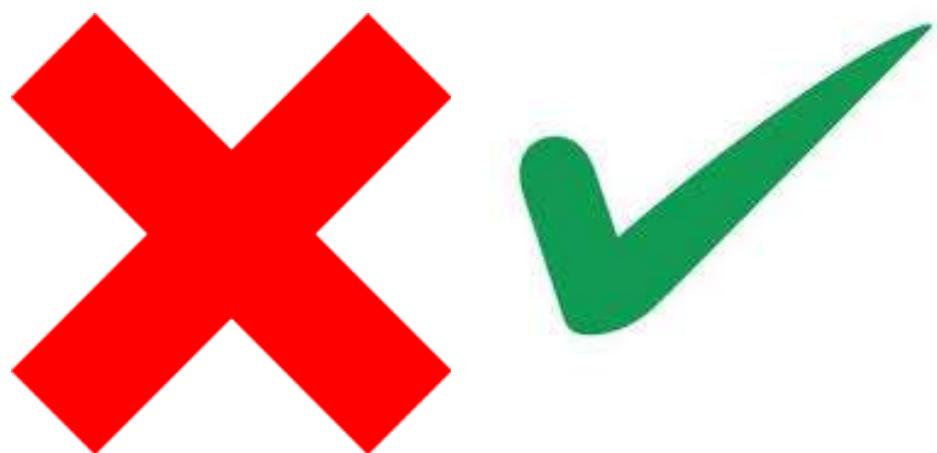
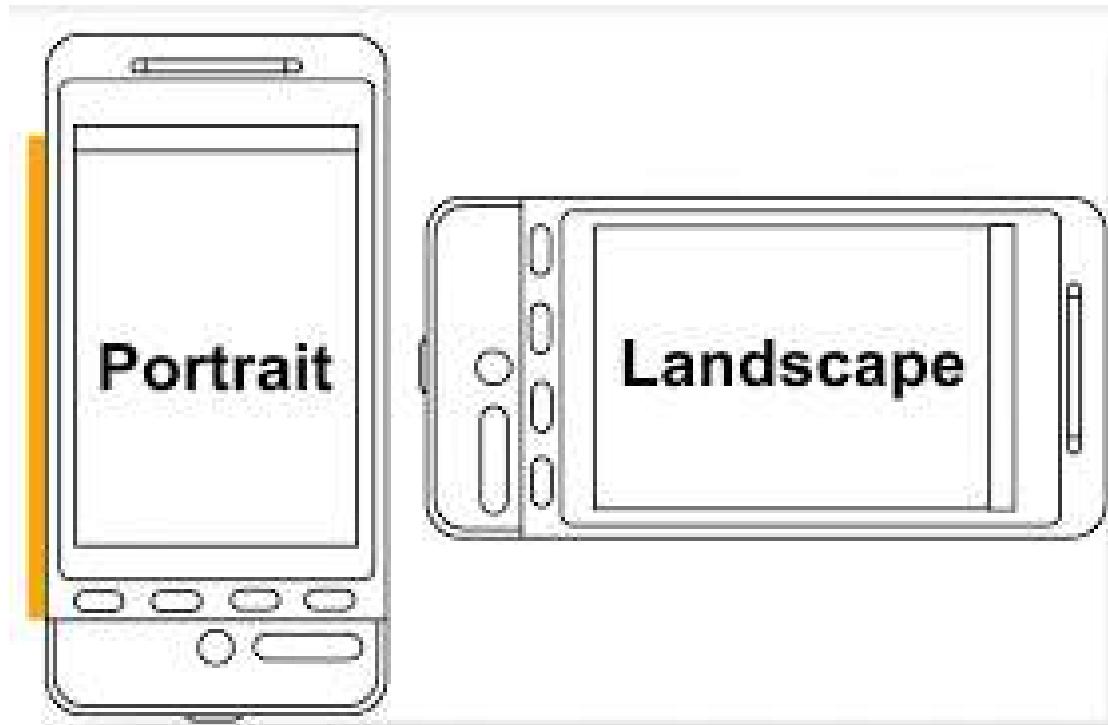
Nigel

**PLEASE NOTE – THERE IS NO MEETING THIS MONTH AS
WE HAVE OUR CHRISTMAS LUNCH THIS WEEK**

FROM THE EDITOR

Many of us now have smartphones. We use these for just about everything these days. Some members have told us that it can be difficult to read the Newsletter which is in two columns. It means scrolling to the left and right as well as up and down when you look at it in PORTRAIT mode.

A simple solution to this is to set out the Newsletter in one column. If you then turn your phone sideways, and look at it in LANDSCAPE mode, it is easier to read and a lot less fiddly to read on your phone. I hope this helps everybody.



COMMITTEE NEWS

RECRUITMENT OF THREE NEW COMMITTEE MEMBERS FOR 2026

URGENT

We are approaching the end of 2025, and we still need three new Committee members to join us next year. U3a has a 'Three Year Rule' where ideally, members serve on the Committee for this length of time. It enables all u3a's to have a regular turnover of new faces to keep everything going. We need –

Somebody who had expressed an interest in becoming Assistant Treasurer is now unable to do so.



Assistant Treasurer

Main role is to liaise with our Treasurer, handle our general account where subs are paid into, and prepare a monthly statement for our committee members, to keep them up to date with our finances.



Membership Secretary

Main role is to maintain the list of members on Beacon, keep the list up to date and add new members throughout the year. Publicise new subs renewals each August, print and distribute new cards to members at the monthly meetings. Send out a welcome letter to new members.



Communications

Main role is to prepare and send out to members the monthly Newsletter, liaise with Committee members, Groups Co-ordinator, and with our Neighbourhood u3a groups.

What do you need to join our successful Committee? Basic IT skills like spreadsheets, and use of Word. There will be unlimited help, lots of support and training guaranteed.

We still need three new Committee members. If we cannot fill these roles, the future of our u3a is at risk. Please do think about this, and talk to others who may need a little encouragement to volunteer.

COMMITTEE NEWS

Update Your Membership Details Online

Have you moved house or changed your telephone number or email address since joining Thorley u3a? Would you like to add your emergency contact details to your membership record?

You can now do this via the Thorley u3a website.

<https://thorley.u3asite.uk/>

At the bottom of the Home Page there is a link to the Membership Page where you can send us your updates by clicking on the button –

Update Your Details

COMMITTEE NEWS

ELECTION OF NEW COMMITTEE MEMBERS FOR 2026

Our AGM is on Monday 5th January before our usual meeting at the Charis Centre.

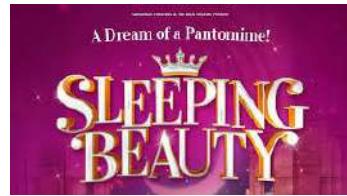
We have notified all members that nominations for the vacant positions are now open. Nomination forms are on our website and can be printed.

The deadline for nominations is Monday 22nd December. In the event that there are two or more members interested in any position, there will be a vote. Details will follow if this is needed.

THE NOVEMBER SPEAKER AT THE CHARIS CENTRE



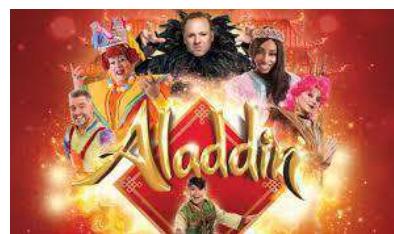
A History of Pantomime - Jim Stebbings



To cries of “he is behind you” “Oh no he is not”, our Chairman exited the stage right to be replaced by Jim Stebbings who told a packed Charis Centre about the origins and development of what is now the Christmas entertainment for children of all ages (including those in the U3A) – the Pantomime.

The early Greeks are credited with the origins of the word – pan means all or every and mime was added to that to get the full meaning. The Romans developed it further and later the Italians called it Commedia Erudita or Learned Comedy. Slapstick was introduced later and was originally a hinged stick making a slapping noise i.e. in the way that later Punch admonished Judy in the traditional beach show for children. Romance was started between characters when Harlequin courted his beloved Columbine. He was a very colourfully dressed character and Columbine must have been wooed by his huge nose and equally proportioned cod piece.

The first recorded English theatre dedicated to pantomime was in 1660 when Lincoln Inn Fields was the stage. The French got in on the act in a big way when a beautiful chateau in the Loire became the setting for what is now Sleeping Beauty and they developed other stories such as Mother Goose (obviously before pate became their national obsession). The French clown Joseph Grimaldi created the character Joey and he gradually replaced the previous hero, Harlequin.



As the stories developed, so did the settings. The Drury Lane Theatre in London became the first to have a trap door effect on the stage so that characters could rise or fall as the befit the plot. Lighting was used to good effect and limes were traditionally used to add colour to lights – hence being in the limelight. Cannon balls were rolled above the stage when thunder was needed. Such ingenuity.

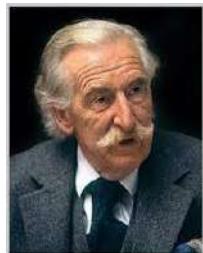
Dan Leno was thought of as the first cross dresser. The word “drag” that we use today literally means “dress to resemble a girl”. It was not gender specific, if that is not a contradiction in terms, as women started to dress as men. Vesta Tilley became well known as a principal boy in panto and later for the poshness of her character “Burlington Bertie from Bow”. Animals were introduced but being the rear end of a cow or horse was called, for obvious reasons, starting at the bottom in panto.

The Palladium theatre in London became established in the early 1900s as the prime location for pantomime and remains so to this day. Jim took us through some of the posters that depict the very famous stars who still see panto at the Palladium as the place to be on stage at Christmas. Panto is an English tradition that has appeal across generations, and it was a fitting end to our speaker year at the Charis Centre as we approach Christmas.



SPEAKERS FOR 2026

JANUARY 2026



Monday 5th January

Cherith Lowry

Sir Frederick Gibberd - His life , work and garden

FEBRUARY 2026



Monday 2nd February

Mary and Graham Brace

Wildlife in Zambia

Future speakers for 2026 to include talks on -

- ✚ Ant & Dec – the WI and me as seen on TV

Lindsey Barrell - who gave the burlesque talk, and who gave the BSL talk later in November.



- ✚ Fraud and Scam awareness



- ✚ Dad's Army – the nation's favourite comedy

- ✚ Old Movies saved my life



- ✚ My adventures in helicopters

- ✚ The National Garden Scheme and the Mount Garden in Roydon



- ✚ Adventures of a ghost hunter

- ✚ Churchill's intervention in the Russian Civil War

- ✚ Sing a song of Christmas

All the details of these speakers are now on our website.

Please do come along to our monthly meetings. We always try to get a variety of speakers that will interest many of our members. Some of the speakers have been recommended to us by our own members. Attendance at our monthly meetings during 2025 has been very good. This is very positive, and we hope to see this continue in 2026.

Discounts in 'Stortford – All offer 15% Just show your Membership Card

We are very grateful to the following traders in Bishops Stortford for their generous offers of discounts for our u3a members. [All these offer a discount of 15%](#)



Coopers – Bridge Street



Garden Terrace café



CaffelInn (Florence Walk)



GROUP NEWS FROM ANNIE COMPTON



I have a table in the Charis Centre at the back of the hall for our monthly meetings. New members are welcome to have a chat with me about any group in which they may be interested. Equally, if anyone is interested in becoming a group leader, would like to assist in running an existing group, forming a new group entirely, or joining our Committee, I will be more than happy to talk through what would be involved.



Suggestion Box. You can put your suggestions in the box about Groups, and for the Committee. If you prefer to email a suggestion, Here are the email addresses –

Annie Compton - groups.thorleyu3a@gmail.com

Dave Willett at - comms.thorleyu3a@gmail.com

NEW GROUPS

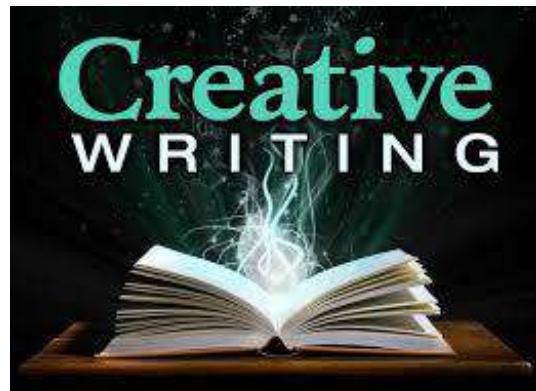
I'm really delighted to say that several members have been in touch with me with their ideas for new groups. What I would like to do is to ask you to get in touch with me if you think you would like to join any of these. If there is sufficient interest we can set up new Groups and ask for one of you to volunteer to lead them.



Wine Tasting



Film Club



Creative Writing

I look forward to hearing from you.

Annie

Pickleball update 4 Thorley members now in the group



The Sawbridgeworth u3a Pickleball Group has now got 4 of our members. Pickleball is one of the fastest growing sports in the world for all ages. It is a bat and ball game played as doubles on a smaller tennis court. All very informal and friendly.

The group meets at Sawbridgeworth Tennis and Pickleball Club, Springhall Road, CM21 9ET, FREE parking, every Monday from 10am – midday.

It is outdoors so weather permitting. First session is FREE, thereafter £5 per session.

If you would like to try your hand at Pickleball (like Taylor Swift) then come along and have a go, or express an interest by emailing
info@sawbridgeworthtennis.org.uk



Christmas Quiz [Answers further on](#)

1. How many ghosts are there in 'A Christmas Carol' and what are their names?
2. What is Scrooge's first name ?
3. Which American State has a town called 'Santa Claus' ?
4. Which country has the most number of reindeer ?
5. What is the title of the famous Christmas ballet ?
6. Christmas crackers were invented by a London sweetmaker called Tom Smith.
7. What beverage company has been using Santa Claus for its advertising since the 1930s ?
8. What is the origin of the word WINTER ?
9. What colour are mistletoe berries ?
10. What is the traditional Christmas meal eaten in Japan ?

U3A Singers Christmas Concert



Tickets now on sale for our u3a Singers Christmas Concert

Tickets are now available for the u3a Singers Christmas Concert on **Saturday December 6th**. It's the perfect start to the Christmas celebrations!

The concert will again be held at the Hub in Apton Road, Bishop's Stortford, starting at 7.30pm.

This favourite annual event is both entertaining and great fun. This year's programme includes popular music by the likes of the Beatles and Eric Clapton, as well as classics from Mozart and Schubert. And of course lots of Christmas favourites, such as John Rutter and traditional carols.

There will be opportunities for the audience to join in with the singing... and we can also promise a few really memorable showstoppers!

Home-made mince pies and wine, plus our popular raffle, will add to the festivities.

Tickets will be on sale at our November U3A meeting, or you can contact Carmen Konopka using the email link or phone number below. Tickets are just £10 per person and £5 for children.

**U3A SINGERS
CHRISTMAS CONCERT**

Saturday December 6th, 7.30pm

Musical Director: Sue Hickman Pianist: Michael Smith

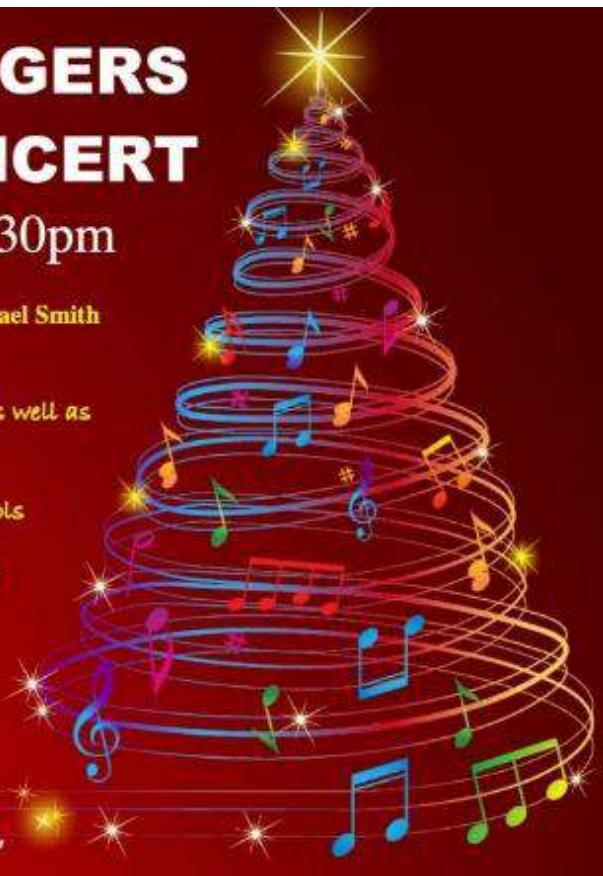
Programme of popular music by the likes of the Beatles, Joni Mitchell and Eric Clapton, as well as classics from Mozart and Schubert, plus lots of Christmas favourites - among them John Rutter compositions and traditional carols

The Hub, Apton Road, Bishop's Stortford

Tickets £10.00 (Children £5.00)
including drink & nibbles

Contact: 01279 653091

u3a learn, laugh, live



What the Papers Say



December's month's theme will be –

Where do you recommend for your holiday(s) next year ?



Venue - Emmaus Centre

Date - Monday 15th December

Time - 10:30 am - £2 at the door.

If this will be your first visit, Welcome!

And maybe drop a text to Tom on 07977 574 454, so I bring enough biscuits.

Tom McNeeney

**NEW MEMBERS WELCOME TO 'SOUND OFF'
AND EXPRESS YOUR OPINIONS.**



2026 DIARY

Next year will be another busy year for our u3a.

There will be holidays, theatre trips, garden groups visits, History group trips, Customs & Cultures group trips, and a lot more besides.



So read the Newsletter, and look at our website regularly for all the details.

Keep up to date so that you don't miss out





REPORTS FROM OUR GROUPS



Walking Group enjoying the good weather, and the autumn leaves, for the first November walk in Great Hallingbury.





Family History Group - meeting 31st October

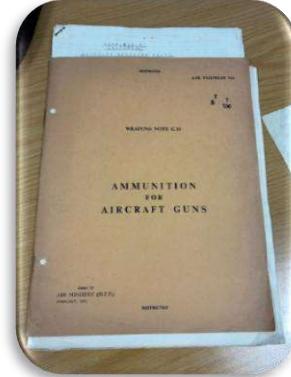
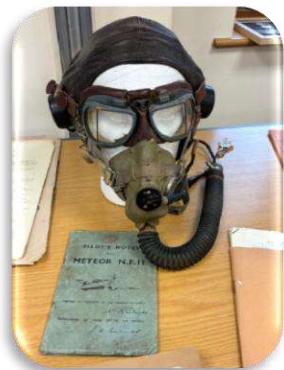
From Schoolboy to Fighter Pilot

One of our members, Mark Ratcliff gave a fascinating talk about his father's National Service. National Service was introduced after the Second World War to address manpower shortages in the military. Mark's father had won a scholarship to study at Cambridge University but deferred that to complete his time in the RAF. After being issued with kit and boots, which didn't fit so gave him blisters after the endless marching drill, he signed up for pilot training. This interest followed him all his life and Mark showed several photos of his later years when he visited airshows and air museums for birthday treats. Even in his 90s he was still convinced he could fly a Chipmunk!

Many servicemen served overseas during National Service and Mark's dad was thrilled when it was rumoured, he was going to Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). However, this was not to be, and he was posted to the Isle of Man instead. Following that he seemed to undertake a tour of the British Isles, serving at several of the RAF bases in this country.

He continued to develop his flying skills and eventually flew a Gloster Meteor, which was the only Allied Fighter jet developed during the second World War. Along with many others he was encouraged to sign up for regular service, but he was keen to get back to his studies. Before he left though he was posted to Biggin Hill where he organised the first Battle of Britain pilot reunion, at which a Spitfire and Hurricane were dedicated to their memory.

Mark illustrated his talk with photos and quotes from the diaries that his father kept. Members were interested to see the vast number of items that were on display and which Mark now treasures, which included his dad's pilot's helmet and great coat.



Garden Group 2

Five members had their last Garden Visit of the Year in October when they went to Cressing Temple Barns and Tudor Gardens. On arrival we had a very interesting Talk on the History of the site before going out to explore the Tudor Gardens and outbuildings. There are two very large timber Framed Barns which were built in the 13th Century to Store Barley and Wheat The site is now owned by Essex County Council to preserve its heritage. We ended a most enjoyable visit in their Tea Rooms.

Roger Thear



October Meeting of “What do the Papers - and We - Say”.



Slightly low on numbers but 8 to 12 members present has proved to be a good foundation for an enjoyable session, with everyone getting a chance to have their say.

The theme on offer was about whether to advise their younger family members and acquaintances, in whichever circles they moved in, to go to University. This provoked a morning of reminiscence. Some of us had been to university, more than once in two or three cases. Some had never been to university and prospered despite (or perhaps because).

My impression overall was that those present, graduates or not, had taken their life chances when they could. Surely, we could all do that, a whatever age.

There were a couple of diversions to do with AI. Firstly, there are interesting lists of the overlaps between what AI can do and various jobs and professions. By implication, don't expect to make a living these days as a translator.. Or a mathematician? (I put this to a maths teacher I ran into later on and he was VERY sceptical of that suggestion. Maths often involves a lot of thinking outside the box, which is not what AI does.)

The other AI thing was that I asked for permission to record the sessions. No one objected. And my phone, unasked, gave me a transcript! But it was mostly gobbledegook at the potentially more useful sections.

Next meeting - Monday November 17th at the Emmaus at 10:30 as usual. I have switched the topic to ... Do you watch Strictly Come Dancing? Why? Why not? You can read this report on page 23.

All Good Wishes



Tom McNeeney

Walking Group.....and a few guests - Hayters Lawnmower factory Wednesday 12th November

A group of 26 of us, mainly from the walking Group, enjoyed a visit to Hayters lawnmower factory in Spellbrook Lane. The factory has been there for almost 80 years on this site, and since 2005, has been owned by Toro, an American company.



We toured the production line, and saw the famous Harrier lawnmower being assembled. It comes in three different sizes and up to 12 different specs depending on the size of your lawn or grass. We saw large mowers used by golf courses and sports organisations, costing anything from £30,000 to £60,000. You can even have a cab fitted with air conditioning as well.

100 employees work here, less than in the past. The company works hard to keep up with the technological developments which are part of modern production in any factory. The Senior Operations Manager said to me optimistically, that as long as there is grass to cut, we'll be ok. The hospitality was great as well, and we all got a free coffee mug and coaster.



Overall, a really interesting visit.

New Members Coffee morning – 13th November

Another 22 new members attended our regular New Members Coffee Morning at the Thorley Community Centre. We have had almost 50 new members since March. Several members of the Committee were there to tell them all about our u3a, what groups we have, and many of the events and trips organised each year. As usual, there was a great atmosphere, and our new members were pleased at our efforts and commitment to get them involved.

It was good to hear that several of them have used the online Membership Form. This is much easier and more efficient. We hope this continues throughout 2026 when we see even more new members.

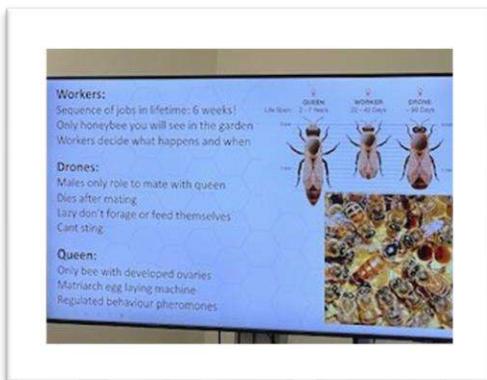


November – Strollers in Hatfield Forest



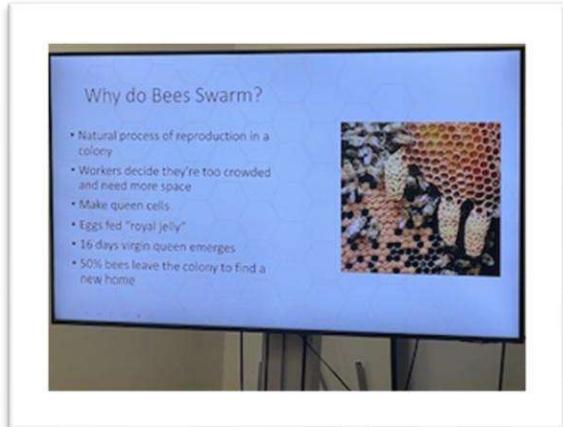
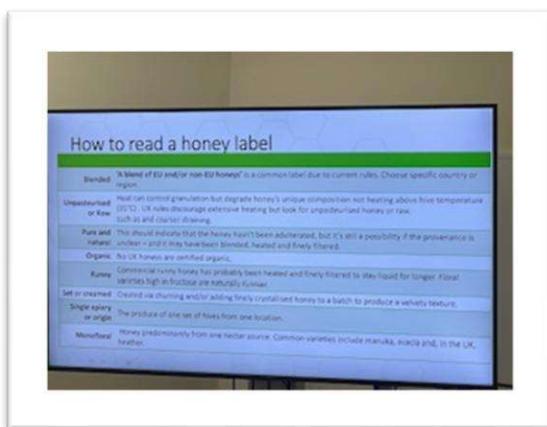
Garden Group 2 – Talk on Bee - keeping

25 members of Garden Group 2 were at the Library on Monday the 17th for a Talk on Bee Keeping Presented by Karen Davis (Daughter of Group Leader Beryl). It was a very interesting and detailed talk how she was given her first hive complete with bees 🐝 to where today she now has 13.



Karen was determined to make a success of this Venture by Studying all aspects of Bee Keeping from the different types of plants they Foraged for nectar looking after the Queen, storing Nectar covering it with wax, swarming, protecting their hive from predators and much more. They really are Busy Bees.

Karen is now taking her Exams and is well on her way to becoming a Master Bee 🐝 Keeper Many of the group purchased jars of her honey at the end of the talk. Bee. 🐝🐝



The Art Group – creative as always



Rita Foster





What the Papers - and You – Say - November 2025 Session

Who had seen “Judgement at Nuremberg”, a 1961 epic in black and white, currently available on BBC iPlayer? (It’s a courtroom drama, based on real events, where the accused were German judges and the case against them was that they facilitated the corruption of democracy in 1930’s Germany.)

I thought the film was relevant to what is happening in the West now. There were nods, yes indeed. And the obvious example immediately voiced was London and Sadiq Khan.

Well, I wasn’t expecting that. But interesting surprises are common during our monthly get together.

Our theme for November had been altered to canvassing reactions to “Strictly Come Dancing”. Per se, it didn’t really grab the group but it did get us into sharing feelings about television and whether there are too many black people, women, homosexuals in the media. Diversity is fine in principle but it was being overdone, some thought. Where are the white male role models these days??

Wow!

Well, other opinions were available. For starters, any actor/commentator/advertising star from a minority group could invite the rest of us to look at television output of 5 or 10 years ago and retort, “Welcome to what my world was like, back then”.

And, as usual, there were many other interesting diversions throughout the session. Game shows: One of us had been in Family Fortunes. She was shy about the result but I am pretty sure she was on the winning side. Diversity badges: are people being forced to wear them, and are rainbow badges for diversity dangerously similar to the bracelets signalling “Do Not Resuscitate”?

Near the end, we somehow got on to Menopausal women. Can’t remember all of that discussion but I had to admit, I’m a fan.

90 minutes is never enough.

By common demand, there will be a December meeting, morning of the 15th. The theme on offer will be “My Bucket List” which is a bit like the Holiday theme we’ve done already. But I invite us to take the opportunity to relish in the fact that we don’t have all that much time left and can be excused for thinking big. Or outrageous.

With warm regards

Tom McNeeney

PS. If you want to join this group contact me at: t.mcneeney@sky.com



BSL – 24th November at the Emmaus Centre

What a treat we had on Monday 24th November when we heard Lindsey Barrell deliver an introductory talk, with extreme gusto, on BSL (British Sign Language). Lindsey is like a breath of fresh air; she is feisty, quirky and funny, whilst being informative and interesting. She is a very confident and endearing speaker who holds the attention of her audience, whilst enthusing them at the same time. I've already had a few people ask if there might be a basic BSL workshop. All I can do is ask Lindsey and, in her own words "If I'm asked to do anything I'll put my hand up!!!! So watch this space!

Lindsey started by talking about her career background in education and well being, and how she became a BSL tutor by having to support those with disabilities, particularly hearing loss.

Lindsey advised us that there are around 300 to the British Isles. It is not speaking countries like New Zealand. Every world has developed its own sign language and different versions.

We learned that BSL is signing language; it's expressions, gesticulation and movements are also demonstrated how body communication and expressions in daily use that's good, that's reason "biscuit" sticks in my mind! We were then shown how to sign the alphabet and given a hand-out on this.

To conclude, a very entertaining and informative afternoon talk.

If anyone is interested in learning some very basic sign language, please email me. Thank you.

Annie Compton
Groups Co-ordinator



about her career and well being, and tutor by having to disabilities, particularly

BSL is confined purely used in other English America, Australia and country around the own sign language and different versions.

more than just a important that facial and some lip used. Lindsey language is used in showed us a few for "please, thank you, awful". For some

COMMUNICATION



To all our members

Remember that there are two easy ways for you to find out everything you need to know –

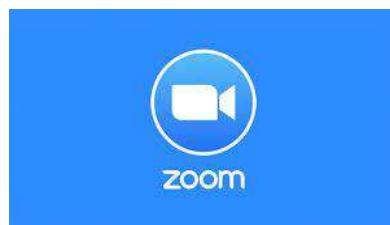
The monthly Newsletter

DECEMBER 2025 NEWSLETTER

and our website



NATIONAL U3A ZOOM LECTURES



These are to be found on our own website.

Open the website page.

Click on [u3a](#) at the top

Now click on [**Events and Workshops**](#)

Finally, click on [**On-line learning events**](#)

A drop down menu will appear. Just click on the one at the top - [**Online Learning Events**](#) and you will see lots of interesting Zoom talks. There are links to Radio podcasts and free Zoom lectures - [**DECEMBER**](#) talks include.

[**These are only some of the talks.**](#)
[**Check them all out and you may find something that interests you.**](#)

- Monday 1st – 10 am – Safes and Safebreaking**
- Wednesday 3rd – 10 am – Inflammation and cancer**
- Monday 8th – 2 pm – Secrets of the Human Brain talk 11**
- Tuesday 9th – 2 pm – Making your Apple smartphone easier to use**

Quiz Answers

1. 4 – Jacob Marley and the ghosts of Christmas Past, Present and Future
2. Ebenezer
3. Indiana
4. Russia (about 1 million) Sweden (250,000, Norway (25,000)
5. The Nutcracker by Tchaikovsky
6. True
7. Coca Cola
8. WINTER is an old Germanic word meaning 'time of water' – heavy rainfall and snow
9. White
10. KFC or fried chicken since the 1970s. Japan is not a Christian country.

Finally....something funny to end on



Learn - Commemoration dates for December



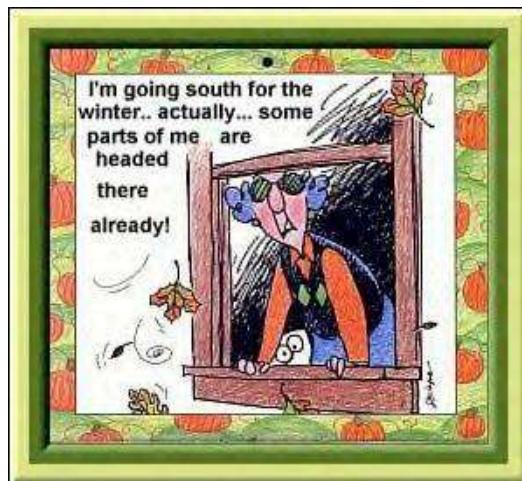
• 10th – Human Rights Day



• 17th – 1892 First Vogue magazine published



• 19th – 1843 – ‘A Christmas Carol’ by Charles Dickens published



Laugh

Live

- “Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at twenty or eighty. Anyone who keeps learning stays young. The greatest thing in life is to keep your mind young.” ~ Henry Ford
- “You can’t help getting older, but you don’t have to get old.” ~ George Burns
- “Getting old is like climbing a mountain; you get a little out of breath, but the view is much better!” ~ Ingrid Bergman