



Lawn Lakes, April 2025 Editor's photograph

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## **Chair's Blog May 2025**

I want to apologise to all our members this month because I'm unable to produce a full Chairman's blog as normal due to family issues and the time taken for me to get things sorted.

I'll be fully up and running again next month.

Vince  
Swindon u3a Chair

1 May 2025

## Monthly Meetings

### 1 Monthly Meeting Report – March 2025 – Secrets and Spies

More feedback from the March meeting

Dear Swindon u3a Newsletter Team,

*My Grandfather Christened Moses Stevens but known to the family as Dick Stevens was during World War 2 a commissioned officer a captain in the home guard, Having Trained as Morse Code Operator between the wars in India with the Royal Corps of Signals he too would have to report regularly to Mabel Stranks the Post Mistress in Highworth. He would leave his home in 57 Perry's Lane Wroughton without telling my grandmother Nellie Stevens where he was going or what he was actually doing but the family believes that in the event of invasion it was his job to cut lines of communication to hinder the progress of the enemy. He was not a gamekeeper or poacher but he was a GPO Engineer and an officer captain in the home guard. He never spoke of his war experiences but he did tell me the little that he could. I think different from the Coleshill Men but nevertheless part of the secret army of saboteurs.*

,  
Terry Williams  
U3a Member 1022

### 2 Monthly Meeting Report – April 2025 – Bird Boxes in the Community

At our April Monthly Meeting, Jeremy Smith and Colin Cook spoke about the Community Bird Box scheme, which Colin set up over 25 years ago and which is unique to Swindon.

During that time he has not only managed the scheme but designed and made the bird boxes, maintained them, and kept extensive records.

The boxes are located across all the green spaces in Swindon, including Coate Water, the Town Gardens, The Lawns, GWR Park, Bruddel Wood, Stanton Park, and many other sites. There are currently approximately 600 boxes which are mainly used by blue tits, great tits and nuthatches.

Colin has changed the box design many times over the years. The three current versions are made from larch wood with some plastic tubing protection against squirrels, cats and other pests. They come with hole sizes of 25, 28 and 32 (painted green, grey and brown respectively) and are angled away from the trees to allow rainwater to run down the bark. The latest design works very well and even the King has requested some of Colin's boxes!

To prevent vandalism, the boxes are placed 4m off the ground. Every Autumn the boxes are taken down, cleaned, and details recorded as to use, depth of nest and materials used, and if there were any dead chicks or unhatched eggs. Boxes in the Town Gardens near the tennis courts frequently contain tennis balls! The aim is to transfer all these

records into a database which would be available publicly, providing another source of information on our changing climate.

Given Colin's advancing years, the long-term viability of the project is now at risk and discussions are taking place with wildlife groups and park wardens to ensure its continuation.

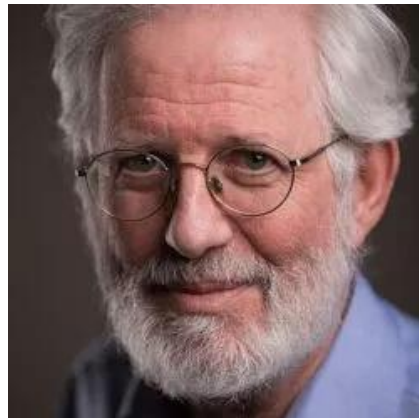
If you know of anyone who might be interested in helping maintain these boxes (and physically able to carry/climb ladders) please ask them to go to the Park Wardens office at Coate Water, who are responsible for the whole Swindon area and can put them in touch with Colin.

## 4 Our May meeting: Monday, 12 May 2025

### STOP PRESS!! CHANGE OF SPEAKER FOR 12 MAY MONTHLY MEETING

Unfortunately, Jeff Evans is unable to join us at our next Monthly Meeting due to a medical emergency.

Instead, at very short notice, John Kinory will be speaking about **'My Life and Times as a Film Extra'**.



A former College lecturer, John will illustrate various aspects of being an extra, both informative and amusing.

What is an extra? The various roles and chain of command when filming. What happens when you arrive in the morning, often at 5 am? Wardrobe, hair and makeup. What is life in front of the cameras like? How do you become a film or TV extra? Do you get paid? Do they feed you? Do you meet famous film stars? (yes, sometimes). Is it glamorous? (yes, sometimes). Do you get treated well? (yes, usually).

Filming in the studio in huge sets on a sound stage, and on location in strange places. Feature films, TV series and TV commercials. The huge complexity and cost of the film production effort, involving hundreds of people. Eventually the great excitement and satisfaction of contributing to the final film, in which you hope to see yourself on screen, even if only for a second!

## Monday 9 June at 2.00 pm at Ellendune Community Centre

### Summer Party

Come along and enjoy the last monthly get together before the Summer break. There will be a Summer Quiz, some games and picture puzzles, entertainment, and of course tea and cake!

### Booking your place

As always, please be sure to book a place by 11.30 am on the morning of the meeting:

1. Go to the website [www.swindonu3a.org.uk](http://www.swindonu3a.org.uk) (just login, click on Swindon u3a events, then on the event), or
2. Telephoning the office on 01793 61462

There are no Monthly meetings during July and August.

The first meeting of the 2025/26 academic year will be on **Monday 8 September** when **BBC wildlife photographer David Bailey** will be making a return visit.

## Group News

### **Aviation Group Visit to Midland Aviation Museum 30th May 2025**

The Midland Aviation Museum is situated just outside the village of Baginton in Warwickshire and adjacent to Coventry Airport. The museum has a large collection of aircraft on display, including the famous Avro Vulcan, English Electric Lightning and many more Cold War aircraft.

The museum also included the Sir Frank Whittle Jet Heritage Centre, named after the local aviation pioneer and inventor of the jet engine.

Departure times and pick-up points:

8.00 am Ellendune Centre Wroughton  
8.15 am Downs View / Marlborough Rd  
8.30 am Coate Water  
4.00 pm Depart for Swindon

Cost £32.00 person which includes Coach, drivers gratuity and entry to museum.

All members and friends welcome

Contact

Ken Ivie on 01793 845483 or email [kenivie@uwclub.net](mailto:kenivie@uwclub.net).

## Life in a Poem - submitted by Lesley Basu

*This month's poem is one of the most well-loved by Irish poet and Nobel Prize-winning poet Seamus Heaney. The poem examines the loss of childhood innocence and wonder. Heaney depicts a young boy's fascination with frogspawn, which transforms into disillusionment when he is confronted with the harsh realities of nature.*

### Death of a Naturalist



Source: The Natural History Museum

All year the flax-dam festered in the heart  
Of the townland; green and heavy headed  
Flax had rotted there, weighted down by huge sods.  
Daily it sweltered in the punishing sun.  
Bubbles gargled delicately, bluebottles  
Wove a strong gauze of sound around the smell.  
There were dragonflies, spotted butterflies,  
But best of all was the warm thick slobber  
Of frogspawn that grew like clotted water  
In the shade of the banks. Here, every spring  
I would fill jam-potfuls of the jellied  
Specks to range on window sills at home,  
On shelves at school, and wait and watch until  
The fattening dots burst, into nimble  
Swimming tadpoles. Miss Walls would tell us how  
The daddy frog was called a bullfrog  
And how he croaked and how the mammy frog  
Laid hundreds of little eggs and this was  
Frogspawn. You could tell the weather by frogs too  
For they were yellow in the sun and brown  
In rain.

Then one hot day when fields were rank  
With cowdung in the grass the angry frogs  
Invaded the flax-dam; I ducked through hedges  
To a coarse croaking that I had not heard  
Before. The air was thick with a bass chorus.  
Right down the dam gross bellied frogs were cocked  
On sods; their loose necks pulsed like sails. Some hopped:  
The slap and plop were obscene threats. Some sat  
Poised like mud grenades, their blunt heads farting.  
I sickened, turned, and ran. The great slime kings  
Were gathered there for vengeance and I knew  
That if I dipped my hand the spawn would clutch it.



Source The Natural History Museum



## Swindon u3a Contacts

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### Office

Swindon u3a Office, Gorse Hill Community Centre, Chapel Street, Swindon, SN2 8DA  
(entry is by the middle door on the right-hand side of the building)

Hours: Monday, Wednesday and Friday, 10 am until 12 noon

**Telephone:** 01793 614629 (Answerphone operates when the office is closed)

**Email:** [office@swindonu3a.org.uk](mailto:office@swindonu3a.org.uk)

**Web:** [www.swindonu3a.org.uk](http://www.swindonu3a.org.uk)

Swindon u3a Charity Number 298853

## **Last Word**

Thank you for reading the newsletter over the last year.

I've enjoyed compiling it and seeing the range of activities and interests of our members.

There is a place for a traditional newsletter in this time of blogs, social media and of which are instant, and I hope I've been able to fill it.

Chris Firth