Newsletter - November 2026



Welcome to our November newsletter keeping you connected with the Swindon u3a community

Contents:

- Swindon u3a News
- Chair's Message
- Monthly Speakers' Meeting Report
- Upcoming Meetings
  - Swindon u3a AGM
  - Christmas Party
- Group News
  - Travel Group J visit to Oakham Treasures and Portishead
  - Orienteering Group
  - Climate Change Group
  - Swindon u3a Chat Group
  - **New** - Absolute Beginners Line Dancing
  - **New** - Walking Tennis
- Local News and Information
- Quiz Corner
- Life in a Poem
- Swindon u3a Contacts
- Quiz Answers

Swindon u3a News

Chair's Message



I really don't like this time of year. The evenings close in, it gets cold, and we flip from longing for it to rain, to wishing it would stop. Everything seems a little bit harder to do and even going out to those exciting u3a meetings can feel like a bit more of a chore.

Isn't that a depressing thought? Maybe, but there are ways to get around this.

In Swindon u3a we have over 120 different interest groups, offering so many opportunities. Wouldn't it be great if you could attend meetings without ever leaving your home, maybe even on those dark winter evenings?

Nothing beats making new friends face-to-face, but if you want to maximise your membership then there is a whole new world of groups available from national u3a.

For an **additional annual membership fee of £12** you can have **access to over 200 online groups**. It is a sign of our age that I felt a certain nostalgia using Zoom again (remember all those meetings and quizzes during the covid lockdown?) but I have learned so much – in just one group I learned how they can tell the colour of dinosaurs (from the scientist who did much of the groundbreaking work on this) and how they found a dinosaur pathway in a quarry outside Banbury (from the lead palaeontologist on the project). I've sat and listened to progressive rock, discussed films and visited museums all over the world and all from the comfort of my own computer screen.

You can learn a language (national or computer versions available), indulge your passion for Jane Austen, or discuss current affairs. I want to say that the sky is the limit, but Astronomy is on the list too.

I really do believe that discovering u3a and all that it offers has been one of the most unexpected sides of retirement. In my experience, when it comes to u3a the best guidance is – **go for it and prepare to be surprised.**

Peter Cook (Chair)

Monthly Speakers' Meetings



These are held from **2pm on the 2nd Monday of the month, at the Ellendune Community Centre, Barrett Way, Wroughton, Swindon SN4 9LW**

Monthly Speakers' Meeting Report – October – Going to Blazes!

At our October Monthly Speakers' meeting, John Craig, former Chief Fire Officer of Wiltshire, entertained us with anecdotes from his career.

It was surprising John's career even began. As a young recruit he covered the first lady Lord Mayor of Nottingham and the VIP inspection party in ash when he misunderstood an instruction to "fill the tray" with magnesium instead of the very small quantity actually required for the demonstration.

Then there was a road traffic collision when the driver was fully conscious but needed extricating from his car. One of the fire crew called for 'the Hurst gear' – a piece of kit known as the Jaws of Life, manufactured by Hurst. After admission to hospital the driver was asked for his views on the rescue and admitted to feeling very scared when he thought he heard a fire fighter say, "we're going to need the hearse here"!

Rescue kit was very primitive when John joined the fire service, but better equipment and techniques were developed over the years, together with improved working relationships with the other services.

During the hot Summer of 1976, a close working relationship with an American Air Base in Suffolk was tested to its limits. With the whole of the country in drought, the local US and RAF bases were assisting the fire service with the numerous callouts they were receiving. John updated the procedures for tackling forest fires and decided to test these out one night, with the Americans insisting on bringing their huge brand-new fire truck worth a quarter of a million dollars (almost a fire station on wheels). Unfortunately, it poured with rain the whole day of the exercise and once on the muddy tracks in the forest, John tried to stop them heading towards a swamp, but they carried on with full confidence in their new vehicle. The truck began to sink … and despite all the cranes and kit brought in, John watched the swamp slowly swallow it up. As far as he knows, a quarter of a million dollars' worth of truck is still there. When John telephoned the base the next day, the operator announced that the Commander was now State side!

Sue Cook

Swindon u3a AGM

Please register as we need to be quorate and know numbers attending.



Notice is hereby given of the **Swindon u3a AGM** which will be held on **Monday, 9th November 2026 at Ellendune Community Centre, Wroughton, Swindon SN4 9LW at 2.15pm**.

Entry to the centre will be **from 1.30pm to enable a prompt start.**

Documents relating to the AGM can be found by logging on to the Swindon u3a website, and then clicking on Documents, followed by AGM 2026.

These documents include the minutes from last year's AGM, the Agenda for this year's AGM and a nomination form.

If you wish to nominate a member for a role on the committee, please use the nomination form for this purpose.

Any fully completed forms should be returned to the Secretary at:

secretary@swindonu3a.org.uk

or to the Office, marked for the attention of the Secretary.

Upcoming events

- **Mon 14th December 2026 - Christmas Party!**



Come along and celebrate! There will be Christmas-themed quizzes, entertainment plus of course tea and cake!

- **Mon 11th January 2027 - Titanic Effort**

Paul Barnett, Marine Historian, will be making a return visit to tell us about a Titanic Effort - RMS Carpathia's dash to save the stricken liner.

To book your place...

If you plan to attend a Monthly Meeting, please be sure to book a place by either:

1. Going onto the website swindonu3a.org.uk (just log in, click on u3a-wide events and under Swindon u3a events find the event you want to attend)

OR

2. Telephone the office on **07345 162117 or 07823 722812** and leaving a message.

When leaving a message, please remember to state your name and membership number and, if possible, not to leave it until Monday morning as the office team cannot always pick up all the messages in time and sometimes names get missed.

If you're a new member of Swindon u3a and you're coming along to your first Monthly Meeting, please do let the people on the welcome desk know, so that you can be introduced to the u3a Volunteers Team.

Group News

❖ Travel Group J

Thursday 26th November - Visit to Oakham Treasures & Portishead

Departing at 9.00am and travel to Portishead where on arrival there will be free time to explore the Marina and the many independent shops in the town. Following lunch at one of the many pubs and restaurants we depart for Oakham Treasures.

In the event of wet weather, a visit to the Cadbury Garden Centre in Congresbury will replace the visit to Portishead.

Oakham Treasures is one of the largest privately owned museums of retail and farming history in the UK. Opened to the public for the very first time in July 2008, it has already become an award-winning major attraction and guarantees to give you an amazing and uplifting trip down memory lane.

Whether you are 8 or 80, you'll be fascinated by this vast and unique collection of memorabilia from the last century. There really is something for everybody, from the thousands of items in the historic stores to the impressive display of vintage tractors and farm equipment.

Departure times and pick up points:

8.30am	Crown Hotel Royal Wootton Bassett
8.45am	Ellendune Centre Wroughton
9.00am	Coate Water Swindon
4.00pm	Leave for return journey to Swindon

Cost: £29 per person which includes coach, entry to the museum and gratuities.

All members and friends' welcome.

Contact: **Ken Ivie** on **01793 845483** or email - kenivie@uwclub.net

❖ Orienteering Group

Smiling Runners and Keeping Active

Our Chair (October Newsletter) seems to have difficulty in seeing smiling runners. Well, here's my spotters' guide for u3a members. Go to any local open space and look at the joy on the faces of very young children as they run about exercising their legs.

Go to Seven Fields or Lydiard Park on a Saturday morning and watch 700+ Park Runners, including u3a members, smiling at the completion of their 5km run. Spot children and family groups on a Sunday doing Junior Park Run at Lydiard Park, GWR Park or Moredon Hub – a very enjoyable occasion.

You can get involved yourself by volunteering as a marshal at any of these events. Take your grandchildren to Junior Park Run. Start running yourself (mobility and GP permitting). You can start by walking short distances and gradually increase the length and then try a 5km walk which is also on offer at Park Runs. Find "Couch to 5km" on the web to guide you.

OK, running may not be your thing. However, **our u3a has nearly 40 groups for keeping us active** – badminton, dancing, walking, archery, gardening, yoga, orienteering, pétanque, bowls, stretch/balance, table tennis and Tai Chi. There is some really useful information on NHS – How to be More Active . Keeping active will definitely put a smile on our faces.

Ken Stimson - Group Organiser Orienteering Group

❖ Climate Change Group

In October we discussed the very topical subject of (AI) artificial intelligence and the implications for the climate of this growing technology. This included the vast amount of energy required for the increasing number of data centres that are necessary and the huge amounts of water for cooling that are needed for these large- scale developments. We also discussed the pros and cons of the uses it is put to, the wider economic and political effects for the future as such large resources are devoted to AI rather than coping with the climate crisis.

At the next meeting, we will examine the pros and cons of nuclear power.

We still have vacancies.
If you are interested, **contact Bill Hughes** at bill.hughes1@btinternet.com

❖ Swindon u3a Chat Group

Have you joined our u3a chat group yet? It's so easy to do. Just go onto Swindon u3a website, scroll down the home page and you will be able to click on the link.

Anyone can post on the chat about anything you think would be of interest to u3a members. Some news about group you belong to, nostalgia, jokes, anything! Hope to see you on the chat!

Kerrie Stone

❖ New Group - Absolute Beginners Line Dancing

Are you looking for a fun, uplifting way to stay active and challenge your brain? A brand-new Absolute Beginner Line Dance Class is planning to launch in early January 2027 at the Gorse Hill Community Centre.

The weekly class will run for one hour on Monday afternoon between 2pm – 3pm.

Why Not Join Us?
I am not a professional dance teacher; I also do not have a dancing background. What I do have is bags of enthusiasm and a true passion for Line Dancing.

If you are completely new to dancing or haven't danced in years and want to try it out in a relaxed, friendly environment, this group is for you!

- No partner needed — just bring yourself and some comfortable shoes
- Learn at your own pace with basic steps and easy-to-follow routines
- Enjoy a great mix of music styles

Did you know? Line dancing is one of the best activities as we age. It beautifully combines physical movement, balance, and coordination with memory and social connection. Learning and repeating steps keeps the mind sharp, boosts confidence, and can be easily adapted to all individual ability levels. Once you build your confidence, you can even progress to the established U3A Beginners class!

Try Our Free Taster Session!

If you are unsure whether line dancing is right for you, come along to our initial taster session in early January (Date to be Confirmed). You can try out a few basic steps and meet the group before committing.

How to Register:

To book your place for the taster session or to express your interest in the class, please email Rupal at ruppat1967@gmail.com.

❖ New Group – Walking Tennis

Would you like to try Walking Tennis?

Wanborough Tennis Club are offering a trial session to Swindon u3a members.

Walking tennis is a gentler, slower version of tennis with special racquets and balls which the club can supply.





If we get sufficient interest after the trial, we can set up a weekly group.
Interested? Please mail group.coord@swindonu3a.org.uk

Local News and Information

Cine Seniors



Sometimes there is nothing like seeing a film on the big screen. Cineworld at Shaw Ridge show regular films for 'Seniors' on Wednesday mornings.
Tickets - only £4.50 and **free tea/coffee and biscuits** are available just beforehand in the foyer.
Performances begin at about 11.30am.

Here's what's coming in **NOVEMBER:**

4th Nov	**Tony**
11th Nov	**Pressure includes a cake sale for Children in Need**
18th Nov	**Practical Magic 2**
25th Nov	**Sense and Sensibility**

❖ National U3A Essay Writing Competition

I was delighted to be shortlisted for the U3A Essay Writing Competition and although I didn't win, I was equally delighted to be one of three essays selected by the judges to be included in an on-line learning pack on theU3A website.

The competition theme was "The Most Incredible Journey" and whilst researching females who had undertaken a journey, I came across Margery Kempe, and I must confess I had never heard of her, a medieval laywoman who felt driven to pursue several pilgrimages and then dictated her experiences to a scribe; her book is acknowledged as the first English autobiography.

I found her journey, which was both spiritual and physical, captivating, as it appears she was driven by what today would have almost certainly been diagnosed as a postpartum breakdown. She believed she was in direct communication with God and obligated to go on several religious pilgrimages.

Directly flouting the law at the time, successfully defending herself several times over, and by her own admission disliked by fellow pilgrims, my research into her journey, led me into the wider areas of what the expectations of women were at the time, what undertaking a pilgrimage actually entailed and also into the other religious figures she had encountered, including the anchoress Julian of Norwich and the Bishop of York.

I realised I would have to squeeze my newly acquired knowledge into the required word count and my completed first draft was hundreds of words longer than was allowed in the competition. The amount of severe pruning I had to do to edit the essay so that it was acceptable for submission meant that I was not completely happy with the finished product, but it was a good exercise in discipline. It has even inspired a journey of my own, a future visit to St Julian's church in Norwich to visit the place Margery met the anchoress.

I hope I have helped shine a light on a fascinating woman, who achieved so much and who deserves not to be forgotten.

The essay, Margery Kempe - The Autobiography of the Crying Pilgrim and associated learning pack, along with the other competition winners can be found here:

u3a - Essay Competition Winners 2026

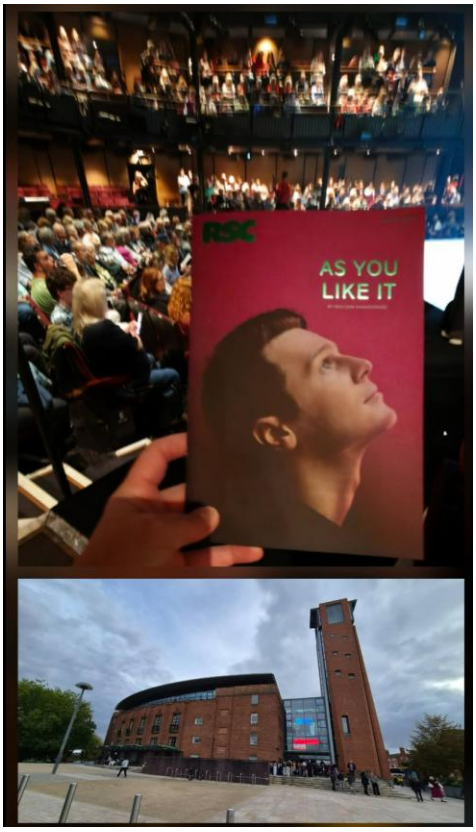
Amanda Lever

❖ U3a Getaway breaks – Stratford on Avon

A couple of weeks ago Mike & I went on our very first u3a Getaway mini break to Stratford on Avon for their *"Appreciating Shakespeare"* trip. Here are a few photos of gorgeous Stratford ❤️ including the Bard's birthplace, Ann Hathaway's cottage and the wonderful Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) 🎭 We were also very lucky to get to see *"As you like it"* It was absolutely brilliant! Stratford has such a fascinating, rich history and amazing buildings. We'll be back! 👍







Why don't you have a go?

Exclusive holidays for u3a members

We have launched **u3a getaways** - an exclusive holiday programme for u3a members. These bespoke trips have been designed to create opportunities for members to come together from across the UK to learn, discover and explore.

Every getaway blends relaxed, well-organised travel with enriching and immersive experiences. Beyond traditional sightseeing, you can expect talks, workshops and shared adventures that build lasting friendships.

We have teamed up with The UK Holiday Group, a highly respected name in travel with over 40 years' expertise in creating exceptional excursions.

A range of short stay trips are now available to book. See link below:
https://www.justforgroups.com/u3a-getaways

Rose Clarke

Let's get quizzical



Take a moment with our quiz.
Answers at the end of the newsletter.
NO CHEATING!

Mental Maths
Follow the instructions to find the answer

92	+72	25% of it	+20	-29	+20	¾ of it	÷3	+12	square root of it	=

Anagrams
Unscramble the words to find famous TV comedy duos:

- Major Trendy - (famous cartoon duo)
- Herald Lunar Day – (male double act 1927 - 1955)
- Scanned Rash Refund – (female double act 1980s onwards)

Remember, remember the fifth of November!
In which of the following years did the Gunpowder plot take place?

1615	1595	1605

How many barrels of gunpowder were placed under parliament?

24	26	36

Which King were the plotters trying to kill?

Charles I	James I	James II

Which graphic novel features Guy Fawkes masks?

Watchmen	V for Vendetta	The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen

Missing Vowels
Find the missing vowels to reveal a movie plus its female and male lead actors. The films are among seven movies that have won the Academy Awards for Best Actor and Best Actress in a leading role, as of today.

Example: CMN GHM; JNVG HTNDJ NFND = COMING HOME; JON VOIGHT AND JANE FONDA

- NFL WVR TH C CKSN ST; JCKNC HLSNN DLSFL TCHR
- NGLD NPND; HN RYFN DND KT HR NHP BRN
- THSLN CFTHL MBS; NT HNYH PKN SND JDF STR
- NTWRK; PT RFN CHNDFY DNWY

Who Said It?
"One of the penalties for refusing to participate in politics is that you end up being governed by your inferiors."

Socrates	Plato	Aristotle

Did you know?...

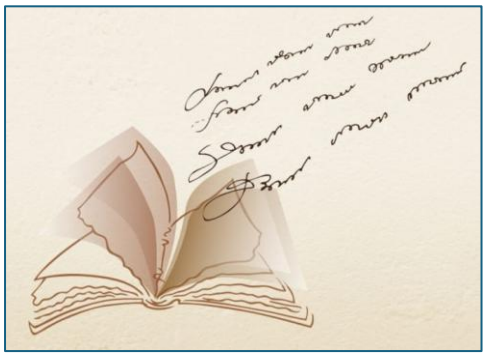


Perissology –
the use of far more words than is necessary

If you see an unusual word, please do share it and its meaning with us and we will feature it.

Life in a poem

Submitted by Lesley Basu



Simon Robert Armitage (born 26 May 1963) is an English poet, playwright, musician and novelist. Armitage was born in Huddersfield and grew up in the village of Marsden, where his family still live. He has an older sister, Hilary. He wrote his first poem aged 10 as a school assignment and is currently professor of poetry at the University of Leeds. Armitage has published over 20 collections of poetry, starting with ***Zoom!*** in 1989. On 10 May 2019. he was appointed Poet Laureate

Of all of Armitage's many wonderful poems, this simple verse transports me in the blink of an eye to happy, summertime memories. I hope it does the same for you!

The Catch *by Simon Armitage*



Forget the long, smouldering
afternoon. It is

this moment
when the ball scoots
off the edge

of the bat; upwards,
backwards, falling
seemingly

beyond him
yet he reaches
and picks it

out
of its loop
like
an apple
from a branch,
the first of the season.

Swindon u3a Contacts

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Office

Swindon u3a Office, Gorse Hill Community Centre, Chapel Street, Swindon, SN2 8DA.

The u3a office is open on the 1st and 3rd Mondays each month for payments and enquiries.

They have moved into the Library, in the main Gorse Hill Community Centre.

Payments can also be made at the Monthly Meetings, held at the Ellendune Centre, Wroughton on the 2nd Monday each month - **from 1.30pm to 2pm and then 3-3.30pm.**

Tel: 07823 722812 or 07345 162117 - *out of office hours there is an answering machine.*

Our Office Managers and volunteers will endeavour to answer your questions or point you in the direction of someone who can help.

Email: office@swindonu3a.org.uk
Web: www.swindonu3a.org.uk
Swindon u3a - Charity Number 298853

Send us your news and more:

We would love to hear from you.

Share your news and photos from your groups. Send submissions to: newsletter@swindonu3a.org.uk

Deadline for the **December** newsletter is **25th November.**

Quiz Answers

Mental maths

- 5

Anagrams:

- Tom and Jerry
- Laurel and Hardy
- French and Saunders

Remember, remember the fifth of November

- 1605
- 36
- James I
- V for Vendetta

Missing Vowels

- One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest; Jack Nicholson and Louise Fletcher
- On Golden Pond; Henry Fonda and Katharine Hepburn
- The Silence of the Lambs; Anthony Hopkins and Jodie Foster
- Network; Peter Finch and Faye Dunaway

Who Said It?

- Plato