



Chairman's message

Writing my last Newsletter report for the year and looking back at what has happened within our u3a in the past twelve months, I dealt with very mixed emotions. As far as u3a has been, it is continuing to be hugely successful both in Somerton and Nationally.

The National movement continues to grow, with over 1000 independent u3a's under the umbrella of The Third Age Trust (TAT), and over 420,000 members! The services that are provided on-line, for all members to take advantage of, have increased and over 1300 members join in with these various Interest Groups – all free to Members! As mentioned at the TAT AGM in October, u3a continues to have a positive impact on people's lives.

In Somerton we continue to grow, and we presently have over 520 Members who have signed on – including over 80 since our Enrolment Day! This is amazing news and I hope that each and every one of you continue to enjoy the fun, friendship, support, and continued learning opportunities that

u3a offers. (See p12) We are a 'self-help' organisation, and we could not survive without the exceptional talents of those who step forward to take on necessary roles. The Group Leaders, the helpers at meetings, all those 'behind the scenes' who take on tasks and, of course, the Committee. We are all grateful for what you do because, without you, we wouldn't be a u3a.

At the beginning of this I mentioned 'mixed emotions' and the reason is, while celebrating the highs of the past year I am reminded of the sad times as well. During this year I have sent out many messages announcing the death of members. In my 21 years at Su3a I have made very good friends and enjoyed the company of many who, sadly, are no longer with us. Can I ask, that at this time of Christmas celebration, we remember them and that we give support to those who are bereaved.

Finally, may I take this opportunity to wish you all a very Happy Christmas.

Steve

Monthly meetings are held on the fourth Friday of the month at the Edgar Community Hall, Somerton.

We are open from 9.30am for refreshments and the chance for members to meet and chat.

The refreshments will finish at 10.20 in order to clear away before the meeting.

The meeting starts at 10.30 with notices, announcements and any other business and will be followed by our guest speaker.

The meeting closes at 12 noon.

Please join us. Visitors are always welcome at our meetings for a small charge of £2 so please come along and see who we are and what we are about. If you are visiting for the first time then please just make yourself known to one of our Committee members or 'Welcomers' who will be happy to tell you a little bit about us and help you feel at home.

Friday 23rd January 2026

Captain Robert FitzRoy, Charles Darwin the Voyages of HMS Beagle



*A presentation by
Dr James Taylor*

2026 marks the 200th anniversary of the first voyage of HMS Beagle when Robert FitzRoy became captain. This led to the second global voyage in 1831 with Charles Darwin as the shipboard naturalist and the collection of evidence for his publication *On the Origin of Species*.

FitzRoy paid for two artists, Augustus Earle and Conrad Martens, to paint the people and places encountered, and these images underpin the seafaring stories. This talk also focuses on the family and influences on FitzRoy and Darwin

Group News

Amblers Group

A most enjoyable walk along the River Parrett by 14 members of the Amblers group. We were lucky to have a sunny morning before Storm Benjamin struck. We finished with a nice drink at the Kitchen on the Wharf.

Tony Sparks



Art Appreciation Group

.....met to look at Mannerism. This is the period that sits between Renaissance art and Baroque art and is often recognised by elongated figures and bright colours.

We mostly didn't know about it although we knew some of the painters and their works. We had many different overviews of the subject - which even experts can't agree on. Nothing unusual about that. The artists discussed were Bronzino, his tutor Pontormo, Michelangelo, El Greco and Vasari, who was also an architect (the Uffizi Loggia and the passage over the Ponte Vecchia) and author (Lives of the Artists).

One of our group looked into the influence of Mannerism on gardens and introduced us to the Sacra Bosco (Sacred Grove), the Villa Lante and the Boboli Gardens. She also reported on the influence of northern Mannerism on house building in England, citing Wollaton Hall, Hardwick House and Bolsover Castle.

One other member has discovered that Mannerism had spread through Europe due to the dreadful invasion of Rome by the Holy Roman Emperor which had caused the artists to flee to safer parts.

Next month Art Deco ...see p9 for report.

Enid Thresher



Group News

Bird-watching Group?

We were actually out on a Fungi Forage with Steve, a volunteer with RoAM - Recorders of Avalon Marshes, at Coombe Woods.

A terrific morning with many different types found and recorded. The photos are only a sample of what we found!

Steve Davis



Amblers Group

3rd Tuesday monthly

Amblers Canal Walk

On a cold dry sunny morning we set off from the Maunsel Lock car park along the canal towards Taunton. We were lucky to spot an elusive kingfisher and Karen was able to photograph it. The Maunsel Lock tea rooms finished off an enjoyable morning.

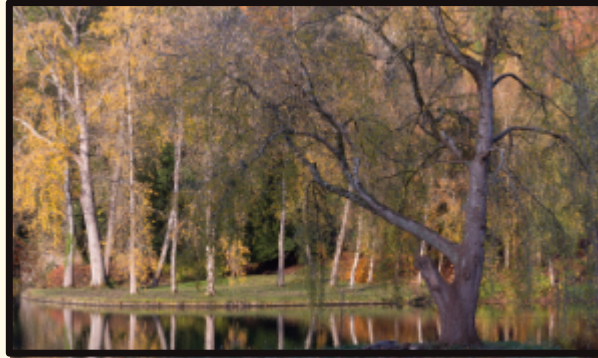
Tony Sparks



Group News

Photography Group *Paul Redman*

Members from both the Photography Group and the new Practical Photography Group attended the First Light Photography morning at National Trust Stourhead. It was worth getting up for. If you would like to join the Practical Photography Group on a future photography meet up then just get in touch. We support each other, help each other, learn from each other and have a good laugh! And then enjoy a coffee and a good chat.



Skittles



2nd Tuesday afternoons

Annette Sparks

Skittles was successful again. twelve members attended at Somerton Sports Club to hone their skittles skills and have some fun. It's a great way to maintain your balance and hand eye coordination!

Tony and Jane had the best scores. After tea and lemon drizzle cake we enjoyed a game of killer. There was fierce competition until the last two standing were Tony and Annette. Of course Tony won with three lives still on the board.

Thank you to all the players who took turns at sticking up.



HOME TEAM		TOTAL	AWAY TEAM	
NAME			NAME	
Edwina	8	16	Jane	11
Annette	6	13	Alison	8
Tony	9	20	Dru	9
Sally	5	15	Dave	8
Chris	8	14		
Paul	8	20		
Harry	8	19		
Sarah	1	12		

Group News

The Practical Photography Group

had its first meet up on 5th November at Wells Market. 6 members wandered around the market taking photos and/or chatting to stall holders. It was a great morning followed by a coffee and photography chat afterwards.

Paul Redman



Music Appreciation 1st Friday monthly

Enid Thresher

The Music Appreciation group had a fairly restful November meeting.

We heard ten pieces:

- Warsaw Concerto by Addinsell,
- Judex by Gounod, an Eclogue by Finzi,
- Vocalist played in a flute by Rachmaninov,
- Dives and Lazarus by Vaughan Williams (tune to hymn "I heard the voice of Jesus say"),
- Le Onde by Einaudi,
- Spiegel im Spiegel (Mirror in Mmirror) by Arvo Part (which we decided was too long!),
- Part of The Piano Concerto by Nyman taken from his music for the film The Piano (which we didn't like - the music, not the film)

- The Ashokan Farewell by Ungar,
- I come let us worship from All Night Vigil by Rachmanino
- John Rutter's Sanctus.

Next month, of course, it will be a Christmas selection.



Group News

Choral Music Appreciation

4th Friday monthly

Enid Thresher

This month Choral Music Appreciation listened to The Mass of Life by Frederick Delius. (Born in Bradford of a German family).

Not a piece we knew, except for one of our number, who sings with the Choir of the Earth, which had joined with professionals to record this - the record came out last October. It was

not this version we heard though. The title is a misnomer: there's nothing of a Mass about it. The words are taken from Thus Spoke Zarathustra by Friedrich Nietzsche.

The Music as a whole was somewhat restful but didn't vary much. If the words referenced maidens dancing and singing there didn't seem to be much of it about! I think we prefer Delius's orchestral works to his vocal ones.

Next month will be a Christmas selection as we don't meet in December.



Recorder Group

.....are having a small Xmas Concert on Monday 15th December in The Parish Rooms, Somerton and would love to see anyone interested in coming to listen to us and joining in with the Carols which we will be playing

Coffee and Mince pies will be available from approximately 11.30 am with playing starting about 11.45am.

Look forward to seeing you.

Myfanwy Ashton



Opera Appreciation Group 1

1st Monday monthly

Opera Group 1 met to watch Hansel and Gretel by the original Englebert Humperdinck.

The libretto was written by his sister Adelheid Wette. This was a 1981 film based on the performance being staged in Vienna at the time and was filmed in front of an audience of children. The two children are always sung by a soprano and a mezzo soprano, and the two in this performance, German Brigitte Fassbaender and Slovakian Edita Gruberova, captured the two characters very well - acting as children would, even though they were 42 and 35 respectively.

Next month something a bit different: a film following the putting together of the NY Met's Ring Cycle by Wagner. We will see how the intricate staging is built and put together, follow some of the singers as they rehearse and witness the panic when the tenor falls ill days before opening and the anxiety of the stand in.

Enid Thresher



Group News

Sunday Roasties

1st Sunday monthly

Sunday Roasties met at the Black Swan, Langport where, with one exception of a scampi, we all enjoyed roast beef or turkey. The meat portions were very generous!

This was followed by an assortment of naughty puddings – yummy!

December we are in the White Hart, Somerton.

Thank you to John for organising us.



History Group

The current format is that all members choose a subject together for the following meeting. Each chooses one aspect of the subject to research.

- At the meeting each takes part by sharing their understanding:
- Informal open discussion follows, involving everyone.
- Five to ten minutes each is the current suggested contribution.
- New members welcome.
- Everyone helps with setting up, making coffee etc.

- We share the cost of hiring the Pinney Room for meetings.
- Annual cost currently £15 spread across the year.

John Emerson. Leader



Group News

Local History

1st & 3rd Wednesdays



Our outing in November was to Coates English Willow Visitor Centre at Stoke St Gregory.

So many of the Group participated that Judi and Kay organised us into two groups that met at the Lemon Tree café.

We had a guided tour, visited the museum, watched the film and visited the shops, followed by lunch.

It was amazing to learn the history of, not only Coates, but the processing of the willow. The planting, management and harvesting of the willows was explained – in our lifetime that has gone from back-breaking planting one piece at a time to a more automated process. But it still involves 4 men chilling their fingers off on the back of a tractor!



Likewise, the stripping of the willow was totally manual until Coates invented a machine to do it. NB The dance name "stripping the willow" comes from the dance's movement pattern, which resembles the action of stripping the bark from a willow rod.



When modern plastics and mass-production almost killed the basket-making industry, Coates turned to producing what is now some of the world's finest artist's charcoal. That has allowed Coates to continue the manufacture of baskets, furniture from their home-produced willow.

There was so much interesting information that it can't all be written here. I really recommend going on the 1-hour tour.



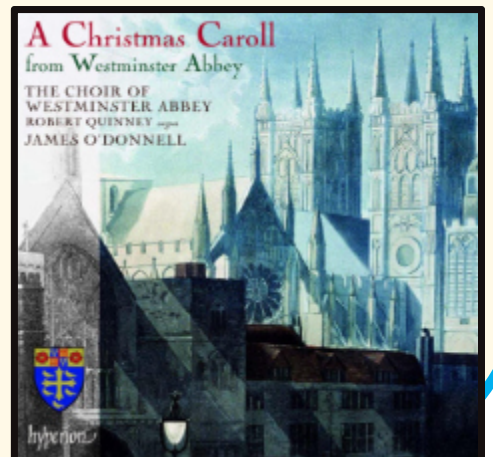
Thank you to Judi and Kay

Choral Music Appreciation

4th Monday afternoon

Enid Thresher

The Choral Music Appreciation group met this month and enjoyed the CD "A Christmas Caroll" featuring the Choir of Westminster Abbey



Group News

Art Appreciation

Every 3rd Monday afternoon

Art Appreciation this month looked at Art Deco.

We learned that it became known in France as Art Decoratif and spread through Europe finally journeying to the USA by way of the magazine Harper's Bazaar. It drew a lot of influence from the ancient cultures of Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, and the Aztecs among others. It also covered all elements - art, fashion, architecture, transport and music. We began with the art of Tamara de Lempicka. We moved to generalisations e.g. Art Deco covered everything from skyscrapers to earrings, with some examples being produced.

Our next contributor dived into architecture, giving us various examples such as the Chrysler building, the Central station in Helsinki and the Hoover building on the A40. We noted when looking at the Christ the Redeemed statue in Rio that the draperies were very reminiscent of Babylonian fashion. Our next member talked about fashion and the fashion designer Paul Poiret. Then came Leon Bakst designs for the Ballet Russe and we ended with the work of Clarice Cliff.

This was our last meeting this year. When we meet in January we'll be looking at Chinese art.

Enid Thresher



Craft Group First *Friday Monthly*

Ann Hunt

The Craft Group welcomed 4 new or returning members this month. Lots of fun making paperback angels



Group News

Walking Group

Mark and Theresa have been stopped by 30 plus degree heat and storm "Claudia" but this morning at the 3rd time of asking they had perfect weather for their Martock Walk.

With a blue sky and a hint of frost on the ground 11 of us enjoyed a leisurely and enjoyable walk.

Stopping to admire the views and trying not to slip in the mud! We finished with a coffee/tea and a chat at Yandles. Thanks Mark and Theresa for leading such a lovely walk.

Paul



Amateur Dramatics, Chard

.....invitation to Somerton u3a's members.



Simon Thomson Group Leader, Chard Amateur Dramatics Group

I run an Amateur Dramatics group in Chard. As we are part of the Avalon Network we would like to open our doors to any interested members to attend our fledgling group.

We meet at 2pm on alternate Sundays in the CommuniTEA Waffle House, Holyrood Street, Chard for 2 hours.

All are welcome.
cidu3aamdram@gmail.com
Phone: 07791597339

Community Am Dramatics

u3a Chard Ilminster and District

Lighting Actors Costume Set Design Back Stage

u3a Avalon

Open to people from this u3a
Register as an Avalon Member on
Chard Ilminster & District u3a for FREE and
come on over and join the group.

chardilminster.u3asite.uk/membership/
2 hours every 2 weeks on a Sunday afternoon in Chard

Next Month

- *Information how to avoid Scams.*
- *How to protect your mobile phone, Car Fob and Credit Cards.*
- *Prostate PSA reminder...all you Gentlemen out there.*
- *Lots of Group News with pictures...keep them coming in...directly or via Facebook!*
- *Friday meeting...speakers to look forward to.*
- *Do you have anything you would like included in the Newsletter?*

Don't forget to pay your membership renewal fees





u3a Learning Online



Dear Somerton Members,

Did you know that the u3a main website provides FREE courses for you in your own home on your own devices via Zoom? Ideal, if like me, **you no longer drive and/or have mobility issues**, or can't get a lift to your Branch Meetings! It keeps those brain cells active.

There is something for everyone, from Aviation, History, Science, Computing, Mindfulness, Writing, Poetry. Crafts to exercising, etc. etc. All presented by fellow u3a members and invited experts - I am following an excellent course on using Artificial Intelligence and staying safe on-line at the moment.

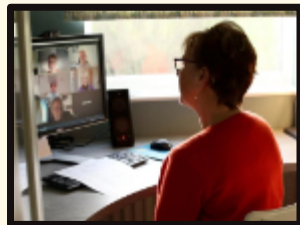
Sign in to the (national) **u3a website** and

click on **Events**, you will then be taken to a display of all the courses on offer for that month, click on the **course** you fancy, there you can book a place via Eventbrite. You will get a reminder by email with the relevant **link** to click to take you to your chosen course - Simple!

Best wishes, *Nina Ayres*

<https://www.u3a.org.uk/events/educational-events>

(Copy this link then paste into browser address window)



Please send articles for the Newsletter to the editor

mike.davis@silchester.org

Deadline for the January 2026 edition...20th December

Pictures welcome, but keep script brief

Minimum formatting please.

Somerton u3a website

If you require more information concerning entries in this newsletter or other points of interest, take a look at the Somerton u3a Website address below.

<https://www.somerton.u3asite.uk/>