

SOMERTON u3a

Newsletter 71 March 2026



Chairman's message

One of my other volunteer roles within u3a is that of Lead, for the Avalon Network. I took this position on a year ago this month, when members of neighbouring u3a's decided to get it up and running again, following problems caused by the pandemic and the previous Network Lead needing to stand down. Since that first meeting, we met again in September and will be meeting again this month.

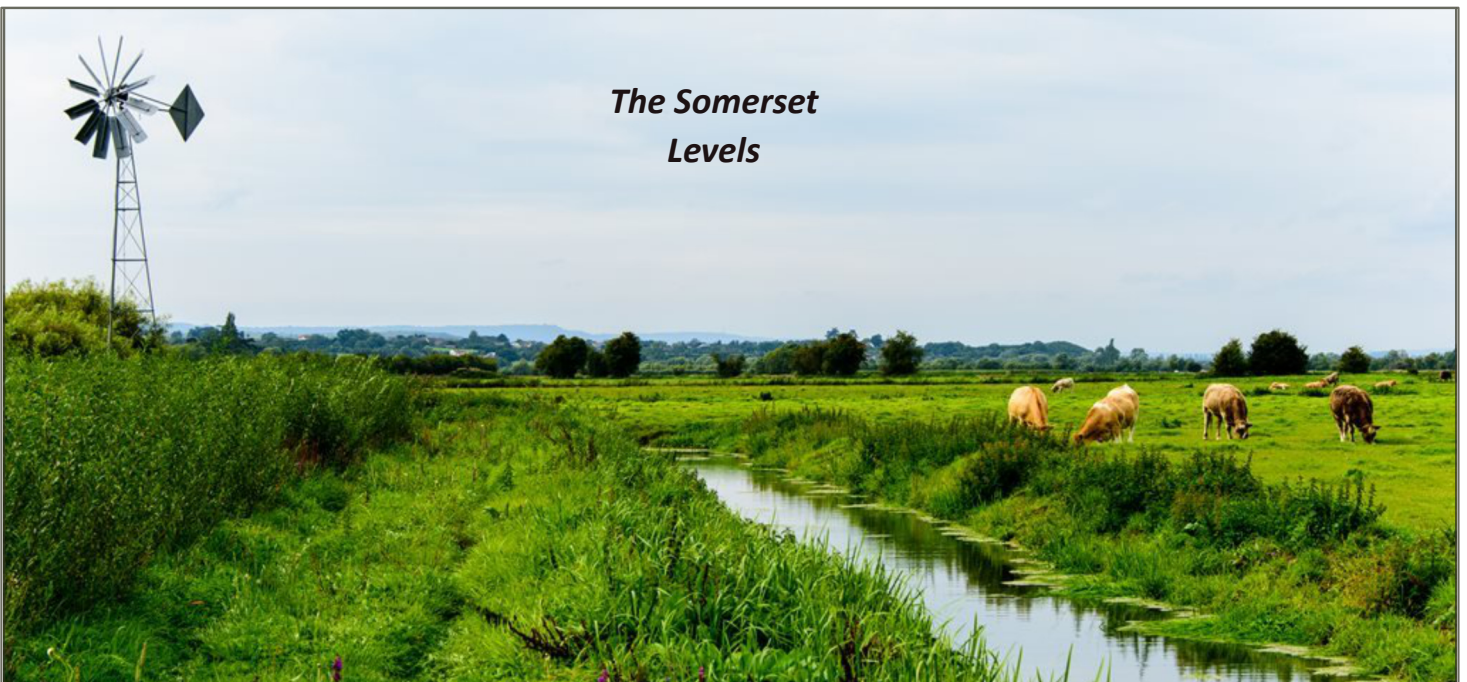
Networks are made up of groups of local u3a's who meet to share knowledge, help solve problems, swap ideas and sometimes, like our own Network, have reciprocal arrangements for joining each other's Groups and Meetings. The u3a's in our Network are Castle Cary, Chard & Ilminster, Crewkerne & District, Martock, Somerton and Yeovil.

The reason this is in my mind is that, at the time of writing, I have just finished a 'Zoom' meeting, hosted by our two Regional Representatives for the South West, Susan Parker and Marian Luck. We presented verbal reports on what has been happening in our Networks but the main purpose was the chance to talk and ask questions of the 2 u3a members who had put themselves up for election for the vacancy that will be created when Susan Parker steps down in May. As it turned out, one of the nominees withdrew his application as the meeting started, and so we know that our new Regional Rep will be Mr Paul Ward from Tavy u3a.

Paul told us a little bit about his (very impressive) work background, his involvement with his u3a and the roles he has performed within it. He answered questions about his vision for the future of the organisation, and particularly the importance of Networks and the need to encourage u3a's to come together, share, and be aware of the bigger national picture. He talked about volunteering, getting involved and taking on responsibilities and, personally, I think we are lucky that he has stepped up and I look forward to working with him in the future. Let us all wish him well.

Steve Davis

The Somerset Levels



Monthly meetings/talks

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.

27th March

Child Gambler Wins Life Back



A presentation by Paul Isherwood

Paul Isherwood is a speaker who shares his personal journey in his talk, "**Child Gambler Wins Life Back**". He recounts his experience as a young boy who struggled with gambling addiction but had a turning point that led him to seek help. Now, well into his fifties, he hasn't gambled since.

His talk is described as **inspiring, entertaining, and a story of overcoming adversity.**

24th April

Working with the Military

Presenters Under Stress

A presentation by Alex Leger, Television Producer, Director and Cameraman

Alex found many ways to test the presenters whilst filming with the military. Household names like John Leslie, Tim Vincent and Matt Baker found humour in their discomfort while surviving in a snow hole on top of a Norwegian mountain in the dead of Winter - and taking part in the fabled tests that the Paras must pass to get their 'wings'. Lifting landmines in Angola caused surprise and alarm and free falling parachuting exploits nearly broke the will of one presenter and the pelvis of another, leading to gripping stories of courage and determination.

Alex last came and spoke to us in July 2024 when he talked about, and showed films about, his time working on the children's programme, 'Blue Peter'. His talk was very well received and we look forward to welcoming Alex back with us.

26th June

Guide Dogs Puppy

Raiser

A talk by Iris

Chapple -

accompanied by

her puppy



Iris Chapple is a Puppy Raiser for Guide Dogs, and has worked with puppies for many years. She has spent over half her life encouraging young dogs, introducing them to the 'big wide world,' helping them to take everyday situations in their stride -- anything from noisy schoolchildren to even noisier tractors, from buses to brass bands, from smoke alarms to steam engines... In fact anything that the dog is likely to encounter in its adult working life.

When the pups leave her, they go on to be trained in the skills of guiding a blind person safely and confidently through life., whatever it brings.

Iris is a Speaker and fundraiser for Guide Dogs, shaking a bucket at collection days, wearing a silly costume, or even abseiling down tall buildings ... it's all part of putting the "fun" into fundraising.

So get ready to ask some questions: about pups, puddles, people or parachutes, and she'll be glad to talk about them.

24th July

Dracula...more information next month.....or see web site.

Don't forget to bring your stamps and coins for the Dorset and Somerset Air Ambulance to Friday meetings

New Members Coffee Morning *Group News*

The Coffee Morning for New Members (anyone who joined at and after the August Open Day) was a great success. It may be the home-made cakes that attracted about 50 new members. Steve gave a brief history of the u3a and emphasised that we are run by the members for the members.

Thank you to everyone who contributed and welcome to all our New Members!

Sarah



Roasties

Sunday Roasties outing for January took us on our first visit to Red Lion Inn at Babcary.

We enjoyed a superb meal, with excellent service by staff there I reckon we will be returning there soon!

Many thanks

John Day



Group News

Shibashi Group

Happy first session of Shibashi, with the majority of people signing up for the future classes. There will be 2nd group of classes starting in September for those who did not get a place this time round.

Group Leader, Prue Furse Roberts

*PS I didn't know what Shibashi was so looked it up! ..
. Shibashi (Taiji Qigong Shibashi) is a popular, gentle, and easy-to-learn system of 18 qigong movements developed in 1979 to improve overall health, reduce stress, and enhance energy flow.*

Combining Tai Chi movements with deep breathing, it is practiced by millions worldwide to improve cardiovascular health, boost the immune system, and relieve chronic pain.

Every day is a school day!

Sarah



What did AI say? (MS Copilot)

What birds you can expect to see in March.

March is a transitional month, so species variety is high. Typical sightings include:

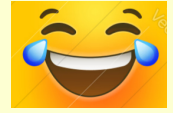
- Great White Egret & Bittern — now well-established breeders on the Somerset Levels, especially around Ham Wall and Shapwick Heath.
- Starling murmurations — usually tailing off by early March but sometimes still visible in the first week at Ham Wall.
- Marsh Harrier — active over reedbeds as territories form.
- Bearded Tit — best in calm weather around Westhay and Shapwick.
- Waders — Snipe, Lapwing, Redshank, and early returning migrants on wet meadows.
- Wildfowl — Wigeon, Teal, Shoveler and the last wintering ducks before they head north.
- Early migrants — Chiffchaff, Sand Martin, and the first Garganey often appear mid-month.
- Woodland species — Nuthatch, Treecreeper, Great Spotted Woodpecker drumming in places like Swell Wood.

Best places in South Somerset to view birds in March.

These reserves consistently produce excellent early-spring birding:

- RSPB Ham Wall — prime for bitterns, egrets, marsh harriers, and lingering winter ducks.
- RSPB Greylake — superb for waders and raptors over wet grassland.
- Westhay Moor NNR — great for bearded tits and reedbed species.
- Avalon Marshes Centre area — a good base linking Shapwick Heath and Ham Wall.
- RSPB Swell Wood — ideal for woodland birds and heronry activity.

Oh no.... not more jokes!



- "I'm not old. I'm chronologically gifted."
- "I don't need an alarm clock. My bladder wakes me up just fine."
- "I'm at the age where my back goes out more than I do."
- "I finally got my head together... and now my body is falling apart."
- "I don't mind getting older, but my body is taking it a bit personally."
- "I used to run marathons. Now I just run out of energy."
- "I'm not slowing down. I'm just switching to energy-saving mode."
- "I don't call them wrinkles. I call them laugh lines... too many laughs, apparently."

Standout places to visit in March

These locations offer a mix of nature, history, and family-friendly activities.

- Cheddar Gorge & Caves — Britain's largest gorge, with dramatic cliffs and cave systems containing 9,000 years of human history. Ideal for a crisp spring walk and cave tours.
- Wookey Hole Caves — A huge cave network with family attractions including animatronics, 4D cinema, and a historic paper mill. Great if the weather turns.
- Glastonbury Abbey — Atmospheric ruins linked to Arthurian legend, set in peaceful grounds that start blooming in early spring.
- The Bishop's Palace & Gardens (Wells) — A medieval palace with beautiful gardens and well pools; March is perfect for early flowers and quieter visits.
- Ebbor Gorge National Nature Reserve — A limestone gorge with trails and prehistoric remains; a great alternative to Cheddar for a quieter walk.
- Dunster Castle & Watermill — A thousand years of history on a wooded hillside overlooking a medieval village.

March by Kamran Mofid

March many-weathers can be both spring and winter. I hope March for us will be the beginning of the vernal season of love, hope, beauty, light and wormth. (sic)

Spring will come, and flowers will bloom!

Yearning in Hope

The burst of daffodils in March summons us to a new beginning, encouraging us to move away from what has hurt us or haunted us in the past, and inviting us to dream again



“ Everyone in u3a should be an involved member, not a customer being served ”

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/>

Please send articles for the Newsletter to the editor

mike.davis@silchester.org

Deadline for the April edition....20th March

Pictures welcome, but keep the script brief

Minimum formatting please