

Welcome to our Newsletter No. 114 for December 2025/January/February 2026

**Copy deadline for
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Dinghy Sailing - Judith Young, Chess Valley Group

Chairmans' Notes December 2025

Dear All

I have no idea how time passes so quickly and we now find ourselves coming up to another Christmas and New Year.

Like so many community interest groups, we rely on volunteers to function. We are looking for new committee members in particular a replacement treasurer for Pam Bushell to hand over to before she leaves in May next year. The Chairman is only allowed to hold his/her position for two years so we are also looking for a new person who is prepared to take this on in the future. We are already seeing groups elsewhere close when they are unable to get enough members to join their committee to enable them to function properly.

We welcome people who are interested in finding out about us with a view to possibly joining to come along to monthly meetings as a guest. We will re-open the membership in January next year.

I would just like to remind you all that our committee members and interest

group leaders are volunteers and you must accept that occasionally things do not go according to plan, so please do not have a go at the organiser as they do their best to resolve any problems.

If you hear talks on interesting subjects somewhere else please make a note of the speaker and let Janet Taylor know. It is always good if we have speakers that come recommended.

On your behalf I would like to thank everybody who gives up their time to help run your u3a. That includes group leaders, committee members, refreshment volunteers and the audio visual technical crew. They all work hard to ensure a smooth operation which also makes my job easier.

Whatever activity you take part in I hope you get enjoyment from it and make a new friends.

Take care, stay safe have a good Christmas and a healthy and happy New Year.

Roger Kemp
Chairman

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

see also sarratt.u3asite.uk for updates on meetings and events

Monthly meetings are in the Village Hall - Doors open from 10am.

- Remember to wear your u3a badge and to register when you arrive.
- Coffee from 10.10 to 10.30, then notices, then the talk from about 10.45 am.
- Note that we do our best but timings are not always exact!
- Please return empty cups/holders before the meeting starts.
- Sign out in the book if you leave early
(in case we should need an emergency headcount).

December 3rd • *A Georgian Christmas* - Rob Smith

January 14th • *The Glory and Mystery of Machu Pichu* - Gloria Camino

February 11th • *Namibia, Land of Wonder* - Pam Litton

March 11th • *The Life and Legacy of Anne Frank* - Gillian Perry

(The programme may be subject to last minute change due to circumstances beyond our control).

You are invited to bring your own mug to the monthly meetings as it helps to save on cups but disposable cups will be available if you forget or do not wish to bring one.

Also bring your used stamps (separated into British/foreign) to put into the RNIB collection box (not printer ink cartridges as we have no means of recycling them)

FORTHCOMING TALKS

Christmas was banned by Oliver Cromwell in 1644 but after the Restoration Christmas was gradually re-instated and by the Georgian period (1714 to 1830), it was once again a popular celebration. In December Rob Smith will talk about a Georgian Christmas in London - from masked Christmas Balls to pantomime at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane; from concerns about the cost of Christmas to the highwayman who covered the cost of Christmas his own way!

In January we'll be transported to the marvel that is Machu Pichu when Gloria Camino will tell us about the great Citadel of the Inca, its origin, urban planning and design, its connection with astronomy and Inca religion systems, and hypothesis as to its purpose after its discovery.

In February we will hear from u3a member Pam Litton about Namibia - her journey through Namibia's geological wonders, from its spectacular mountain ranges to the Namib desert, the wild South Atlantic coast and vast red sand dunes, and north to the wildlife bonanza of the Etosha National Reserve; stopping on the way to spot the wealth of birds and animals Namibia has to offer.

In March the subject will be *The Life and Legacy of Anne Frank*. Speaker Gillian Perry is a lecturer, educator, author, Co-founder and Honorary Vice President Anne Frank Trust UK.

EARLY REMINDER

Annual membership subscriptions are due in January 2026. I will be sending out details of how to pay with the annual membership renewal email/letter in early January.

New members are welcome so tell your friends to come in and join us - the yearly subscription is still only £15 !

Please do not send any money yet.

Penny Bulgin
Membership Secretary

Main meeting dates 2026

January 14th
February 11th
March 11th
April 8th
May 6th
June 3rd
July 1st
August 12th
September 9th
October 7th
November 4th
December 2nd

CRAFT GROUP

The Craft Group has had another successful year. Our numbers have remained stable and our meetings in the village hall are always enjoyable and creative. We have tried our hand at quilling and ribbon weaving and made tea cup cards, mug bags, and felt pictures. Our Christmas project will be making air dry clay ornaments. We are beginning to arrange projects for 2026 but before then we have our Christmas lunch at The Boot to look forward to.

We are a friendly group so if you would like to join us or for more information contact me on 01923 443171

Sue Sutton



ART GROUP

25th October saw five of us from the Art Group make our way to The Wallace Collection to view The Grayson Perry *Delusions of Grandeur* Exhibition. It was not without issues as no trains! Fortunately Jennifer came up trumps and drove us there instead and we parked right outside.

We had an excellent day, Graysons pictures and artefacts were as weird and typical as expected, we had a delicious lunch beforehand and tea and cake afterwards. What a lovely way to spend a wet Saturday!

Carol Maddison

BRIDGE

We never get tired of playing bridge so we look forward to meeting up every Tuesday morning and playing Duplicate.

Recently we revived an old custom of having a lucky dip for partners once a month, to provide a bit of fun and variety. As always everyone does their bit to help things run smoothly which is greatly appreciated.

And of course we have our twice a year pub lunch!

We meet in the Village Hall (small hall at the rear) and our members come from Bovington, Croxley Green, Rickmansworth and Chorleywood.

We play Duplicate at an Intermediate level and would welcome more players, especially from Sarratt!

Val MacDonald



We Bridge players take the game seriously but have some fun too!

Bridge: What's It All About? A Third Age Trust Online event, Dec 4 from 10am to 11:15am GMT Discover the joy of playing Bridge in this introduction to the game, and find out how to play online, with u3a Bridge Adviser, Steve Carter. You have to book in advance www.u3a.org.uk/events/educational-events

WINE APPRECIATION GROUP ONE

We've experienced a very eventful time over the last year or so. Very sadly we lost our dear friend and founder member, Benny Michel, who loved wine and had great knowledge of it. He was inventive, exploring different countries and wine varieties and always with good humour. A lovely man.

Last year we visited Woodfine vineyard in Seer Green. This is a truly organic operation with no chemicals or additives used in the vines or wines and with fertilisation of the vines done by roaming groups of chickens. Our visit was eventful in more ways than one. We borrowed the old village bus which only reached halfway up North Hill before it broke down amid clouds of smoke. A friendly passerby helped some of us back to Sarratt where cars were collected for onward journey to the vineyard. Interesting vineyard and tasting experience (joined by a welcome friend from Wine Group no. 2!) and a laudable operation with fine food, but the wines were not to everyone's taste!



We have 12 members in our group which is a good size as our monthly meetings can fit into all of our members' homes.

Our monthly tastings this year have been very interesting, as always. We experienced many different types of wine, including; from the Wine Society; from the Definition Range of Majestic; from Bordeaux; from Alsace and Burgundy; French wines from Croxley Green Co-op; from M&S 'Found' range which offers less well known grape varieties and from different countries; and a selection from Waitrose.

In September we had a terrific evening at Dallings wine shop and café in Kings Langley. Dallings works with small vineyards from across the world and introduced us to seven less well known wines beautifully presented and described by Nat, their very knowledgeable expert, with delicious food accompaniment.

The world of wine is vast, endlessly fascinating and enjoyable and although our group is now in its 14th year we still have much to learn. Happy drinking!

Jeff Baker

RAMBLES

This year has been one of mixed fortunes for the group with nearly half the monthly rambles being cancelled due to various reasons such as weather, both wet, snow and extreme heat together with holidays. There have only been 4 or 5 members who have been able to join on most of the rambles.

In September I led a walk from Rickmansworth Aquadrome from Peter Wakeling's booklet 'Walk out from the Aquadrome - Ten Walks,' as a tribute to Peter, following the sad news of his death a few weeks previously. We had 19 members from both the Rambles and Walking Groups on that occasion which was a fitting way to remember all he had done as group contact for many years.

The proposed programme for the next three months will be:-

Wednesday December 17th.

Meet at 10.00am at King George V Recreation Ground Car Park, Sarratt for a 4 mile walk via Church End and Sarratt Bottom.

Wednesday January 14th.

Meet at 10.00am in Rickmansworth Aquadrome car park for a 4 mile walk along The Ebury Way before returning on the canal towpath.

Wednesday February 18th.

Meet at the Car Park in Rickmansworth Road, Chorleywood (just past the cricket ground if coming from Rickmansworth) at 10.00am. This 4 mile ramble will take us through the grounds of Chorleywood House, down to the River Chess towards Chenies. There are no stiles, just a few gates and mostly flat with one decline near the start and a corresponding incline near the end.

Don Sutton

JAUNTERS

On Friday 21st November, a very cold day, a coachful of warmly wrapped up u3a members left Sarratt Village Hall for a Jaunt to the Knebworth Christmas Fair. As well as outdoor food stalls selling welcome hot food and drinks there were large marquees to explore, even if they were so busy it was like a rugby scrum at times!

We organised a trip there last year and again it proved to be very popular with happy shoppers bringing lots of parcels on board for the return journey!

We look forward to planning our activities for next year.

Ian West

GARDENING GROUP

December 8th - Gardening Group Christmas party - if you have been on one of our trips out this year and/or attended Garden Group meetings you are welcome to join us for some festive fun! There won't be a speaker but there will be the usual hilarious parcel game and we hope some of you will feel able to contribute a short item of poetry or prose on the theme of Christmas and/or gardening. Further information will be sent out via Beacon soon.

January 12th - Natural Signals, John Tyler will talk about how plants and animals communicate - and what they are saying!

Feb 9th - The Teabreak Gardener, subject tbc

March 9th - Pam Litton talk *American Wild Flowers - and How They Came to be in my Back Garden!*

April 13th- visit to Church Gardens by car share. Spring bulbs, tea and home made cakes - what's not to like!

May 11th tbc

June 15th coach trip to Barnsdale Gardens Details tbc

July 13th tbc

Aug 10th tbc

Sept - coach trip date and venue tbc

Oct 12th talk - Speaker Gwenda Kyd, Medieval Medicinal Plants: Miasmas, Monks and Mandrake

Nov 9th talk - Speaker Dr David T Jones, the Ecology of British Earthworms and their vital role in the health of our soil.

Dec 14th tbc

The Gardening Group met on Nov 10th and enjoyed a very pretty display of members' garden posies with autumn foliage and late flowers, and a wonderful flower arrangement of roses and autumn colours created by Maureen Toppin, whilst catching up over coffee and biscuits.

The group were then enthralled and amazed by a presentation from Kay McHugh, ably assisted by her daughter Aideen, charting the 30-year history of their family's restoration of Church Gardens, Harefield. Kay described, with a fine collection of photos, the state of the old lodge house and walled gardens when she and her architect husband Patrick first saw the property in the early 1990s. They were at the time living in, and modernising, a terraced house but decided that taking on a derelict property such as Church Gardens was the only way to realise their dream of a bigger place. Kay described her husband Patrick as a practical architect - meaning that both of them get stuck into their projects doing whatever is needed to realise their dreams.

But what a project! Kay took us through the story of their epic restoration, beginning with making the house habitable and safe by installing or replacing beams, floors, stairs, roof and utilities; mostly done themselves whilst also holding down full-time jobs, completing the terraced house so they could sell it to raise funds, and bringing up three young children! Work on the house, including building extensions and outbuildings, continued throughout the next 20 years but was then supplemented by the restoration of the huge 17th century walled kitchen garden, which our group has been fortunate to visit on several occasions. Constructing over 50 raised beds, laying paths and filling beds with tons of material (all moved by wheelbarrow), demolishing ruined greenhouses, building new greenhouses and polytunnels, installing rainwater and solar power systems, was followed by planting fruit trees, perennial and herb beds, and raising annual veg from seeds; and all alongside gradual restoration of the garden walls themselves, which required specialist bricklayers but lots of donkey work by the family too.

Kay's matter of fact account of their lifelong project, her wry humour showing through at times with anecdotes of things that didn't quite go to plan, was truly inspirational and at times jaw-dropping! Today, it is a family business, with a café and regular openings for visitors to admire the gardens and grounds.

We are planning a Spring visit in 2026, on April 13th, so keep the date free if you would like to join us and see it for yourself – it is a wondrous place that would have been lost were it not for the dedication of this remarkable family.

Pam Litton

The Moth Wonderful Time of the Year!

Butterfly Conservation Free Online event Dec 4 from 7pm to 8pm GMT

Did you know not all moths fly at night? Join Dr Richard Fox to learn everything you need to know about our UK moths at this free webinar!

Join us for all things moth on Thursday, December 4th at 7pm to celebrate the Christmas Big Give, Butterfly Conservation's annual festive fundraising appeal. Join Head of Science, Dr Richard Fox as he sheds light on our most underappreciated pollinators, busting common myths, explaining the challenges species are facing and most importantly, what we can do at home to help.

With a special presentation from our Nature Recovery team on the Dark Bordered Beauty moth; who without our help could soon be lost from England forever, it's an event not to be missed.

(This item is from Butterfly Conservation website)

DINGHY SAILING

As we come to the end of our sailing season, we would like to thank everyone who has contributed to the running of the group, from the competent helms who teach and encourage newbies, the volunteers who man the safety boat, the tea and cake makers and all the members from various u3a organisations who have recently turned up to scrub down the dinghies. We welcome anyone from any u3a

Our season runs from the end of April to the end of October and we normally sail on the second Tuesday and fourth Wednesday of the month at Troy Lake, between Maple Cross and Denham. This is a joint venture with other local u3as and is run by the Chess Valley u3a at Rickmansworth Sailing Club. For more information, please visit our page on the Chess Valley u3a website.

Judith Young
Chess Valley group.



PICKLEBALL

Pickleball is a joint venture with Chorleywood u3a. A new term starts on 9th January for 11 weeks. We play mixed ability doubles on four courts at William Penn on Friday afternoons. The group is full at the moment but there is always some player movement on each new term. If you not a member at present, but would like to play please let me know at gordon.pell@gmail.com. A trial visit with tuition and equipment can be arranged during this current term which ends on December 12th.

Gordon Pell, Chorleywood u3a

Many u3a members enjoy holidays with Riviera Travel (who often advertise in the national u3a magazine) so if you are thinking about a river cruise or another type of holiday with Riviera next year do remember to mention Sarratt and District u3a when you book. Then after your holiday Riviera will match 10% of the costs and donate it to our u3a. Might be worth asking other companies if they can do the same or perhaps offer a discount to u3a members - if you don't ask you don't get!



Speaking of moths gives me an opportunity to include this pic of a brightly coloured caterpillar found during August on a linaria (toadflax) plant in my garden - turned out to be the Toadflax Brocade Moth. I was about to cut the plant back to promote more flowers for the bees but stopped when I found this creature. Apparently it is quite common but not seen previously in my garden [Ed]

ENGINEERING HERITAGE

Our October visit took us to the Theatre Royal Drury Lane. This theatre, first erected in 1613, was only the size of the present stage (as is the current Fortune Theatre opposite) but lasted only until it burnt down in 1672. The current and fourth theatre built on this site has been going strong since 1812. You can still see many of the original features there today but a major renovation several years ago has improved facilities enormously. The auditorium has been adapted so that all seats now have an unimpeded view of the stage and the seating is luxurious with wider seats and far more leg room. The Sub-Stage machinery has been updated. The bar and restaurant area where you can book Afternoon Teas is a particularly glamorous area.

We heard some fascinating stories from our excellent guide.

- The two sides of the theatre were given the names King's side and Prince's side with 2 Royal boxes. This to prevent any further fracas between King George III and his son the future George IV.
- It is alleged to be one of the world's most haunted theatres. The most famous ghost is the Man in Grey who appears during matinees in a long grey coat and tricorne hat. During restoration in the 1840s a skeleton in grey rags with a knife through his heart was discovered on the spot where the ghost disappears through a wall.
- Drury Lane is also famous for visually staggering set pieces. This began in the late 19th Century. Scenic effects included real horses racing on the stage, sinking ships, a train crash and an earthquake (not all at the same time I hasten to add!).
- The first version of the National Anthem was sung here in 1745 and Rule Britannia played for the first time in 1750.
- We discovered the origin of theatrical terms such as CREW, PROPS and BOX OFFICE

All in all, it was enjoyable and memorable visit.

Sheila Malin

WALKING GROUP

We meet on the 2nd and 4th Tuesday of each month, at 10 o'clock for the start of the morning's route, always sure of an enjoyable walk of about 5 – 7 miles in length, passing through lovely countryside in pleasant company. Nothing too arduous. Perhaps one or two stiles, although gates are much more common these days, and, once in a while, an incline that seems a bit steeper now than before, providing an excuse to stop and admire the view – not that one's needed.

On Armistice Day, our walk took us from Rickmansworth Aquadrome, past Stockers House (built in 1861/62 for the collector of the coal dues on the canal), over the canal bridge and up through fields and woods to Batchworth Heath, then down through Moor Park golf course and along the canal towpath back to our cars. At 11 o'clock, we stopped in fields near Harefield to observe the two-minutes' silence, a stillness interrupted only by peaceful sounds of birdsong.

John Guy



Afterwards, a few of us sitting in a cafe round the corner from the theatre were amused to see a real life 'Man in Grey' walk past the window, very elegantly turned out, from a large grey hat, and long grey coat, right down to the spats on his feet! Sue Bussey was even more amused when she went to the National Portrait Gallery and saw him there again, 'Was standing next to photo entitled 'All in Vogue' causing a bit of a stir!... Definitely a poser'.



A lovely leafy summer walk
Val MacDonald

If you would like to join us for a walk, or wish to receive further information about our group, do please contact Valerie MacDonald at maggie4ward@gmail.com

FREE Online Learning Events via Zoom. Just a few of the forthcoming events offered by the Third Age Trust, available to u3a members only, find more subjects at 3a.org.uk/events/educational-events. Free to members but you have to book on line.

Amazing Tunnels & Tunnelling Feats of Engineering, with u3a Let's Talk Tech

Online event Dec 3 from 1pm to 2:30pm GMT

John Butler of u3a Let's Talk Tech discusses tunnelling projects and the engineering required to overcome a multitude of challenges. In a video-enabled presentation, John will look at a variety of tunnelling projects, some you might be familiar with, and others that have been hidden from view by their very nature, and have not been highlighted in the media to any great extent. Tunnelling is an incredible feat of engineering that requires overcoming a multitude of amazing challenges, from navigating unpredictable and dangerous geology to managing water pressure and intense heat. The longer and deeper the tunnel, the more complex these risks become, with some projects encountering conditions so extreme that they require new technologies and innovative techniques.

The Importance of Fungi for the Environment and Humans

Online event Dec 9 from 2pm to 3pm GMT

Explore fungi, including their evolution, symbiotic relationship with plants, and value as a food and their medicinal uses. This event is hosted by the u3a Science Network with speaker Dr Alan Heyes OBE, Volunteer Botanist at Haysden Country Park near Tonbridge, Kent who has undertaken a detailed survey of both the flora and fungi there.

AI News: The Role of AI in our Social and Emotional Wellbeing

Online event Dec 19 from 10am to 11:30am GMT

Will Artificial Intelligence help us combat isolation and loneliness? In this world where social connection should be easier than ever why is it we have such high levels of isolation, loneliness and distress across all age groups in our population. What can we do about it and how can AI help? What potential significant benefits can AI offer? How can we watch for and manage any unintended consequences?

From Roman Britain to the Dark Ages

Online event Jan 15 from 2pm to 3:30pm GMT

After captivating audiences with his survey of England's 10,000-year journey since the last Ice Age, author Charles Boundy is back by popular demand with this talk, the second of the more detailed talks, based on his book 'Ice to Athelstan - The Emergence of England' (see www.charlesboundy.com). Here he picks up the story at the end of Iron Age with his summary of the period from the Roman invasion of Britain in 55 CE through to how the Romans controlled Britain, why and how their western empire started to crumble, and why - after 410 - Britain was left largely defenceless. This takes us into a radical new period of Anglo-Saxon settlement, where Charles will distinguish the different groups who came into Britain up to the period known as 'the Dark Ages' – and how far that title is still appropriate today.

Remember the website sarratt.u3asite.uk has the capacity to display more information and pictures about group activities as well as listing forthcoming events. Help to keep it up to date!

Beacon, the national database is used by many u3a branches, keeping the data secure and separate for each u3a. We maintain your data and send emails via Beacon in order to keep costs down. If the newsletter is not reaching you call Penny on 01923 776143 and she will be pleased to get your details updated. If you don't have access to email, arrangements can be made to post the newsletter to you in return for a small administrative charge to cover costs - speak to Penny.

Copy for newsletter no 115 March/April/May should be submitted to the Editor Janet by 23rd February 2026. It would be lovely to have input from some of the other groups, and it doesn't have to be from the group leader. If you have any comments about the newsletter or items you would like to see contact Janet at j.taylor0402@ntlworld.com

Please remember to take photos of your u3a activities which we might be able to use on the website or the rolling screen or in the newsletter. Some 'action' photos would be welcome and try different perspectives sometimes. If you take pictures of people please check that you have permission as it is assumed that any u3a members shown in photos submitted for the newsletter or the website are happy to be included.