

NEWSLETTER

Future Plans from the Chair

We now have an updated committee and are ready to plan the next few months. I'd like to welcome Carolyn as our new treasurer and Jan and Lindsay to the Committee. And thank all the Committee for their work and support. I also wish to express my thanks to the committee members who stood down: Alisa, Dennis and Margaret Hughes. They served u3a well over many years.

It is with regret that we have decided to postpone the Treasure Hunt as petrol prices are going up and up and are not yet stable and it seems that to spend a morning driving around the countryside just for fun is a bit irresponsible. However, we will try to re-instate it as soon as possible.

Over the next three months, we have a total of five speakers coming. The next one is on Mental Health Awareness, followed by Hiring Servants, Helicopters, and the Rev Henry Small. There is also one by North Herts Museum but as yet they haven't decided on the topic. I am also hoping that St John's Ambulance workers will be with us for CPR training on 5th May but this is yet to be confirmed but please think whether you want to take part. It will be free for participants.

There are also two days out to Windsor and Ely with the travel group and others with the Bus Pass group who are going to Leighton Buzzard in April and other places in May and June.

It's going to be a busy and interesting time so do join in whenever you can.

Margery Bedingfield, Chair

AGM

The AGM took place on Monday 23rd March. We had a good turnout.

The agenda included reports from the Chair, Treasurer and Membership leaders and we elected three new committee members.

During 2025/6 we have been busy with holidays, numerous new groups (more below) and new activities like the Treasure hunt. U3a thrives when our members volunteer to lead groups and activities. So, if you have ideas for a new group please do share them. Current group leaders and the Committee member for Groups, June are happy to help with advice on setting up and running a group.



A Little Help Needed for Monday Afternoon Meetings

Could you spare a little time to help give our Monday meetings a warm and friendly welcome?

Diana, our ever-organised Membership Secretary, is looking for a few volunteers to help at the reception desk when we have guest speakers on Monday afternoons. It's not onerous—just arriving at 1:30pm, greeting members as they come in, ticking them off the register, and keeping a note of who's attending. It's a lovely, sociable way to get involved, meet people as they arrive, and play a small but important part in keeping our meetings running smoothly.

If you're able to lend a hand on a regular bases, Diana would be delighted to hear from you. A friendly face at the door makes all the difference!

If you can help contact Diana Lowe kendi.lowe@btinternet.com or chat to her at Christchurch on a Monday speakers meeting.



WHAT HAVE OUR GROUPS BEEN UP TO?

Healthy at 100

The new Healthy at 100 group has got off to a thoughtful—and rather inspiring—start. As the name suggests, we're not just aiming to add years to life, but life to years, exploring all the ways we can stay active, engaged, and well for as long as possible.

We've begun by looking at the different "pillars" of longevity—everything from physical health and activity to social connection, mindset, and purpose. One of the most interesting parts has been the chance for each of us to assess ourselves across these areas. It's not about judgement (thank goodness!), but about gently taking stock and perhaps spotting one or two areas where we might like to make small, positive changes.

Our first couple of meetings set the tone beautifully. We talked about what longevity really means—not just living longer, but living better—and, importantly, how we can support each other along the way. There's something very encouraging about sharing ideas, experiences, and even the odd wobble with a friendly group who are all on a similar journey.

Our second meeting focused on mindset, which proved to be a real eye-opener. We explored how powerful our own thinking can be in shaping how we age, and how easy it is to slip into unhelpful stereotypes about getting older. The group was keen to challenge those assumptions and replace them with something much more positive—and realistic.

It's already clear that Healthy at 100 is as much about connection and conversation as it is about health. There's plenty of laughter alongside the thoughtful discussion, and a real sense that we're all in this together. If the first few meetings are anything to go by, it promises to be a rewarding—and uplifting—journey.

Play Reading

The latest venture for the Play Reading Group was to read George Orwell's classic - "Animal Farm".

"It was done in English and not in Animal", by the way.

Many of our group were reliving a book they read at school, "some time ago".

As we read the play, it brought out thoughts, that not much has really changed. The few dominating the many. The arrogance and entitlement of the few and the sometimes surprise of the many about the antics of the few.

The Orwell classic was written as a study of the Soviet Union just after the revolution.

We were able to easily pick out "Stalin, Lenin and Trotsky", from the Animals portrayed.

Next – the group plan a complete change; they intend to do Pygmalion.



Art Appreciation Group

An interesting entry to the newsletter from this group.

An extract from the past comedy series 'Alas Smith and Jones':

Mel Smith, stridently: I don't know much about art, but I know what I like!

Chris Langham, hesitantly with a worried frown: Actually, I know a lot about art ... but I don't know what I like!?

Photography

The u3a Photography Group continues to go from strength to strength, producing some truly wonderful images—just a few of which you'll see featured in this newsletter. From striking landscapes to quirky close-ups and those perfectly timed “you couldn't plan it” moments, the creativity on display is always impressive (and occasionally makes the rest of us wonder if we've ever really looked at anything properly before!).

Each month, the group takes on a new theme—sometimes simple, sometimes a bit more challenging—and members head off with cameras or phones in hand to see what they can capture. The real joy comes when everyone gets together to share their photographs, swap stories behind the shots, and gently compare notes. There's no pressure, no competition—just plenty of encouragement, curiosity, and the odd “how on earth did you do that?”

Along the way, the group explores all aspects of photography—artistic, technical and creative. There's plenty of opportunity to pick up tips on composition, lighting and camera settings, as well as to share and learn simple photo editing techniques that can really bring an image to life.

Meetings are relaxed and friendly, usually held at one of the members' homes, where discussion flows easily over a cup of tea and a biscuit (or two). It's as much about enjoying each other's company as it is about photography.

The group is currently looking to welcome a few new members, so if you've ever fancied taking more photos, learning a few tips, or simply seeing the world a little differently, you'd be very warmly received. No fancy equipment required—just a bit of enthusiasm and a willingness to have a go.

Contact Margaret Hughes for information about joining the group
hughesmargaret200@gmail.com



Bus Pass Group

Four brave members joined me on a trip to Peterborough week. Although we are the Bus Pass Group we took the train to Peterborough as the bus would have taken all day. On arrival we headed for the main central square and enjoyed some very good coffee before visiting the Cathedral. We spent some time there, as it is ancient and full of interesting sculptures, pictures, windows and history. The wood work and mosaics were well worth the visit and the Hedda stone of 897 reminded us how old some of these things are. Then it was off to lunch and there is quite a variety of restaurants around the square and it was almost warm enough to sit outside but unfortunately other people had had the same idea and there were no seats so, inside we went. After that we headed off to the town museum where we saw exhibits from the first ever purpose- built as a prison for the Napoleonic prisoners of war. Parts were made out of straw and bone and were exquisite and quite remarkable as their living quarters were grim. We also saw a Victorian operating theatre and were very thankful that we live in the 21st century. There were also sections on the history and expansion of Peterborough, graffiti and street art. After a refreshing cup of tea we headed back to the station for the train home having had an interesting and stimulating day.

Our next trip is going to Leighton Buzzard at the end of April, do join us if you can.

Maggie Bedingfield



u3a lunch group

If there's one thing we do well in our u3a it's combining good company with good food—and the Weekday Lunch Group is a shining example of both. What started as a simple idea—meeting for lunch and a chat—has quietly grown into one of the friendliest and most sociable groups. We've enjoyed some lovely outings recently, including meals at the ever-reliable Hermitage and the always-popular Cock in Hitchin, where conversation flows just as easily as the coffee (and occasionally something a little stronger!).

In a spirit of culinary adventure, the group has begun to flex its usual meeting day. While Tuesdays have been our traditional slot, we're now occasionally venturing out on other weekdays so we can try venues that don't open on a Tuesday. It turns out a little flexibility goes a long way when there are new menus to explore!

The group has also welcomed several new members in recent weeks, which has added even more warmth and laughter to our gatherings. It's proving to be a particularly good way for those new to u3a to meet people in a relaxed and informal setting—no pressure, just friendly faces and a shared appreciation of a good lunch.

So if you enjoy good food, easy conversation, and discovering local gems, do come along. Pull up a chair—we'll make room at the table. Contact Jan Hills jan@jan-hills if you wish to be added to the group.



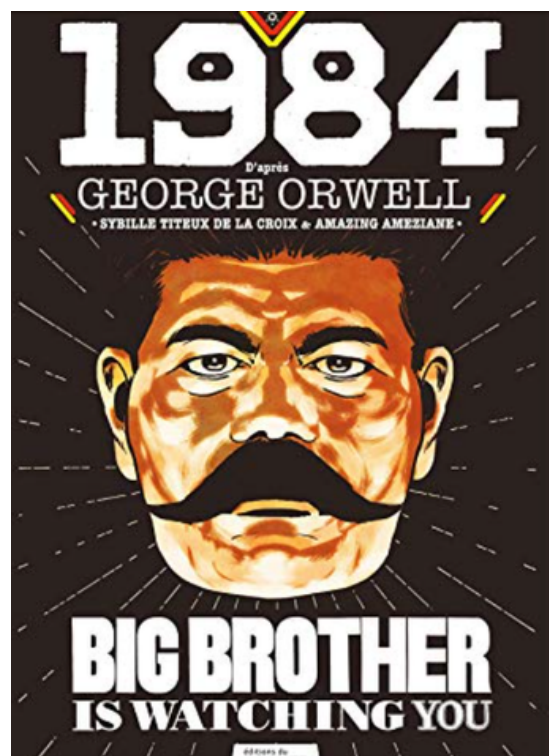
News from the Bookshelf of Book Group 1- Spring 2026

So every year the group members have the opportunity to select a book for the group to read and discuss. We use the Herts Library service who provide a long list of current titles for book groups. This is augmented by the county library catalogue. Our choices are emailed to our librarian, who then organises the schedule. So the email announcing which book is next is received with a certain frisson of excitement. This month we are reading George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four.

When I selected this book just over a year ago, I thought it might be interesting to revisit a book I first read as a schoolgirl. 2024 was the 75th anniversary of the book being published and Radio 4 had broadcast a season of readings and plays commemorating Orwell's work. Little did I know that world events we are currently witnessing could be so easily mapped onto Orwell's dystopian tale. There are three superstates known as Oceania, Eastasia and Eurasia. Britain is part of Oceania but is known as Airstrip One. Orwell introduces us to Room 101. In the book, Room 101 is in the Ministry of Love and is the most feared place, as it is where individuals who are dissenters meet their greatest nightmares. What would you find in your Room 101? As the news broadcasts tell us about "progress in the Gulf" and relay the thoughts of the "White House" I am easily persuaded that Orwell has access to a crystal ball!

On a different note.

If you're interested in (re)reading some of the classics, I might be persuaded in leading a new book group looking at older literature. If you'd like to join, then email me at anne.rapley@me.com



NEW GROUPS

New Groups – Something for everyone!

It's always exciting when new groups spring to life in our u3a, and we've had a particularly lively burst recently – proof, if it were needed, that curiosity and enthusiasm don't diminish with age... they just find new outlets!

First up, we now have a Ukulele Group – and yes, it's every bit as cheerful as you'd imagine. Whether you're a complete beginner or can already strum a tune or two, it's all about having fun, making a bit of noise, and perhaps even becoming the musical highlight of future gatherings.

Just as interesting is our newly formed Scrabble group. a fun activity thsta also good for your brain!

Then there's Healthy at 100, a group with a wonderfully ambitious title and a refreshingly down-to-earth approach. It's about sharing ideas, small changes, and practical ways to stay well, active and engaged for as long as possible. Expect good conversation, a few laughs, and the occasional "why didn't I think of that before?"

And for those who enjoy a touch of drama (the theatrical kind!), the new London Theatre Group is already planning some fabulous outings to plays and musicals in the West End. The programme includes The Producers, Six (about the six wives of Henry VIII), and Jesus Christ Superstar—so something for every taste. It's a fun, sociable group and we're always looking for new members to join us.

And Susan has organised a number of interesting day trips, where you can learn and socialise with like minded people. Full details are on the web site or contact Susan Downie on susandownie14@gmail.com.

As always, these groups are as much about the people as the activities. New faces are warmly welcomed, so if something catches your eye, why not give it a go, full details on the web site? You never know where it might lead – a new skill, a new interest, or simply a very enjoyable afternoon.

And we always welcome ideas for new groups. So don't be shy if you have an idea.

DISH OF THE DAY

One-Pan Baked White Beans with Tomato & Cream Cheese

Serves: 2–3

Time: 35–40 minutes

Ingredients

- 1 tin white beans (butter beans or cannellini), drained
- 1 small onion, finely chopped
- 1 clove garlic, crushed
- 1 tin chopped tomatoes
- 3 tbsp cream cheese (a little extra works well here)
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tsp dried oregano or thyme
- Salt and black pepper
- Optional: handful of spinach or kale
- Optional topping: a sprinkle of grated parmesan or breadcrumbs

Method

1. Preheat the oven to 190°C (170°C fan).
2. Start on the hob (same pan if ovenproof):
3. Heat olive oil, soften the onion for 5–7 minutes, then add the garlic for 1 minute.
4. Build the base:
5. Stir in the tomatoes, herbs, salt, and pepper. Simmer for 5 minutes to thicken slightly.
6. Add the beans:
7. Stir them through, then dot the cream cheese over the top (don't fully mix – it melts into lovely creamy pockets).
8. Add greens (optional) and gently fold in.

Finish in the oven:

Sprinkle parmesan or breadcrumbs if using, then bake for 20–25 minutes until bubbling and lightly golden on top (continued below)

DISH OF THE DAY

One-Pan Baked White Beans with Tomato & Cream Cheese

To Serve

Let it sit for 5 minutes, then serve straight from the dish with:

- crusty bread
- a simple green salad
- or even a poached egg on top for extra protein

A couple of nice upgrades

- Add a pinch of chilli flakes for warmth
- A squeeze of lemon at the end lifts everything
- A drizzle of good olive oil before serving makes it feel very “restauranty”
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This is brilliant for sharing—and even better the next day if you have leftovers.

New Look Newsletter

You might have noticed the newsletter has a new look, and a new editor. I've tried to make it shorter but just as informative. If you have suggestions for topics or would like to contribute, please contact jan@jan-hills.com

