NEWSLETTER Q3

Welcome to the Hitchin u3a Q3 2026 newsletter. This quarter we have articles on becoming a group co-ordinator, the first meeting of a new group, how knitting can protect your brain, what some members have been up to over the summer, and the Treasure Hunt. We also have a request for help by our Welcome Group. The recipe and health tips and a request for new Group Co-ordinators.

The Benefits of Being a Group Co-ordinator

Our recent u3a Hitchin Group Fest was a wonderful opportunity to discover just how much is going on. With so many groups to choose from, it was a chance to meet Group Coordinators, find out what different groups get up to, and perhaps even discover a new interest.

But there was another important message from Group Fest: we need new groups – and new Group Coordinators! Perhaps you've been thinking, "I'd love to start a group about…" but haven't quite had the confidence to take the plunge. Maybe you have an unusual hobby, a favourite subject, or simply an idea for something you think other members would enjoy. Well, now is the time to step forward!

And don't worry – becoming a Group Coordinator doesn't mean you have to do everything yourself. There is plenty of help available, from getting your group started and finding members to keeping the group going. You'll also have the support of a ready-made audience of enthusiastic u3a members who are always keen to try something new. Some of our most popular groups started with one person having an idea and thinking, "I wonder if anyone else would be interested?"

And there are benefits! Quite a lot actually! As a Group Coordinator, you get to meet lots of new and interesting people, make new friends and help create something that other members can enjoy. You'll have plenty of support and help from the u3a team, so you're definitely not left to fend for yourself. And, as if that wasn't enough, there's the very important perk of being invited to the Volunteers' Lunch! Free lunch, friendly company and the warm glow of knowing you're doing your bit for u3a – what's not to like? Go on, you know you want to!

Contact June Parker on the Committee juneyparker1@me.com

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Welcome Group Volunteers Needed

u3a thrives because of the work of our members who volunteer and nowhere is this more important than with the Welcome Group. Welcome Group volunteers make new members feel wanted, informed and at ease in what may be the daunting experience of walking into a strange place. They buddy new members for the first meeting, give them the information, show them the facilities and introduce them to committee and other members, although not all at the same time.

Volunteers share the role at Monday meetings and coffee mornings. Each member will do approximately three Monday afternoon meetings throughout the year. However, with sickness, holidays etc. it would be better if we had a few additional members to ensure at least two group members are at each meeting.

So, if you like to help people, are friendly and able to chat to new people we would like you to join our group.

Please contact me either at a meeting or email me and I will give you more details.

Barbara

allison890@btinternet.com



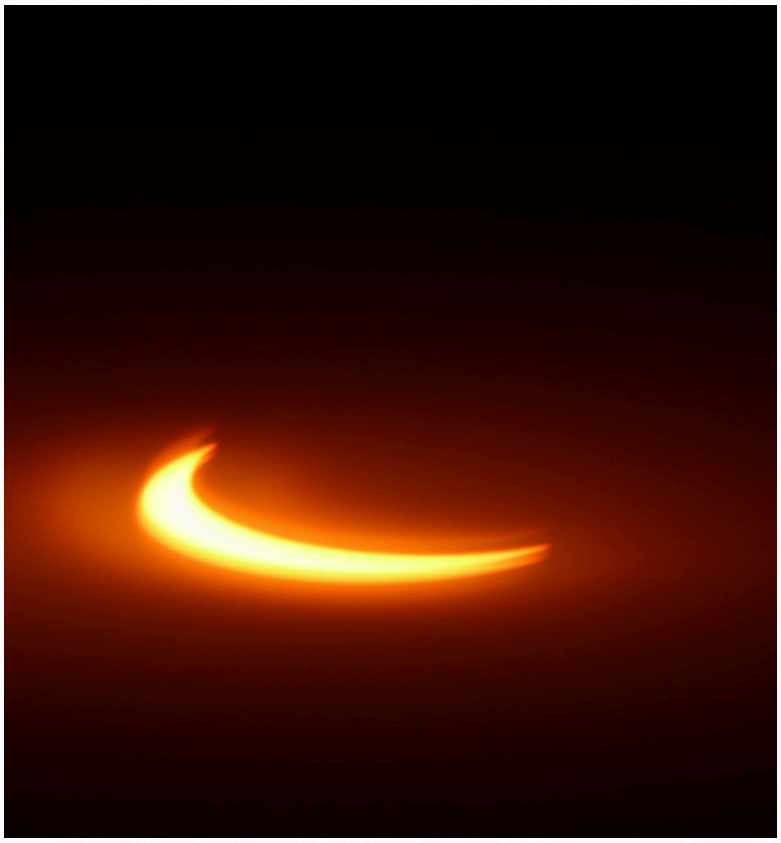
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An Extraordinary Summer

What a summer 2026 has been! It is hard to remember another British summer when the weather has dominated conversation quite so completely. We have sweltered through heatwave after heatwave, with temperatures soaring into the high 30s. On 13 August, the mercury reached a remarkable 38.2°C, and the summer as a whole has provisionally been declared the hottest on record, with an average temperature of 16.5°C.

Then there was the water. Or lack of.. With reservoirs and rivers running low, hosepipe bans spread across the country, including Hertfordshire, leaving many of us eyeing the garden with guilt every time we reached for the watering can. By early August, more than 25 million people were living under water restrictions.
And just when we thought the summer couldn't produce another spectacle, along came the partial solar eclipse on 12 August. With more than 90% of the Sun hidden by the Moon in much of the UK, it was an extraordinary sight — the sky darkening in the middle of a summer evening and, briefly, the world seeming to pause.
Some of our u3a members took to Windmill Hill to view the spectical and sent some pictures.

Add endless blue skies, parched lawns, a ban on barbecues, fans whirring through the night and everyone asking, "When will it rain?" — and 2026 is certainly a summer we won't forget.





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u3a Podcast

Did you know u3a has a podcast?
Written and produced with u3a members, the monthly u3a podcast can be accessed on all podcast platforms. Coming up in September is an interview with the Editor of u3a Matters magazine, discussing why gardening is so popular and going behind the scenes of the annual Jane Austen festival in Bath. More information about the podcast and how to listen is available on the u3a website.

I Know That Face

Some of our longer serving members may remember this couple who did a lot for u3a. Who are they? Answers at the end of the newsletter.



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Learning about AI

There have been some scary headlines about AI recently. But we also hear it can help us in all sorts of way. If you want to learn more u3a run educational sessions you can link into.
AI News Events are 90 min Zoom based updates on what is happening in the world of AI. Go to https://www.u3a.org.uk/events/educational-events#Events and scroll down to find the next AI news event and book a place. Unless otherwise stated they take place at 10am on a Friday. Each event is chaired by a member of the AI team

- October 23rd. TBA
- November 27th. External Speaker: Ethical considerations of AI in Public Services – the need for a code of conduct.
- December 18th. External Speaker: Ethical considerations in choosing and using AI Chatbots, Search Engines and Social Media.
- January 15th 2027 External Speaker: AI and the Creative Arts
- February 26th 2027
- March 26th 2027



The picture goes with the piece below

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Knit and Natter for Brain Health

We all know that keeping our bodies active as we get older is a good idea, but what about keeping our brains in shape? The good news is that u3a seems to have rather cleverly worked this one out already!

Take knitting. Dr Sarah McKay, a neuroscientist who writes about brain health, and particularly the female brain has explored the fascinating relationship between knitting, creativity and the brain. She points out that knitting involves concentration, memory, hand-eye coordination, problem-solving and learning – and, importantly, it can be a wonderfully social activity too. Her Neural Knitworks project even brought neuroscience and knitting together, encouraging people to knit their own woolly neurons!

So our Crafts Group may be doing rather more for us than producing the beautiful things we admired at the GroupFest. They are giving their brains a workout at the same time.

And it doesn't stop there. Writing is another excellent brain exercise. Finding the right word, remembering an experience, creating a story or simply putting our thoughts onto paper involves memory, language, imagination and concentration. Our writing group are, quite literally, giving the little grey cells a workout .

Then there is art. Looking at paintings, discussing them, visiting galleries or trying our hand at creating something ourselves gives the brain something new to think about. Research involving older adults has found associations between arts engagement and better cognitive function, while a large English study found that people who regularly engaged with the arts had lower mortality over a 14-year follow-up – although, importantly, this was an observational study and doesn't prove that art itself caused longer life.

Perhaps this is one of the secrets of u3a. We don't come along thinking, "I'm going to improve my cognitive reserve today." We come to learn something, meet people, make things, argue about books, admire a painting, write a story or simply have a good laugh.
And while we're enjoying ourselves, we're giving our brains exactly what they like: novelty, challenge, creativity, conversation and connection.

So keep knitting, writing, painting, singing, discussing, learning – and, above all, keep being curious. Your brain will thank you for it!

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Treasure Hunt

On a happily sunny Thursday six cars gathered in Hitchin, with assorted drivers and passengers, for a "treasure hunt" on the highways and byways in the Royston/Buntingford area.

For each clue there was a post code and something to spot: an unusual piece of thatching; the punishment stocks outside the church; a vintage windmill. The cars left at different times and with different sequences of clues, so there were no parades down the narrow lanes.

It was a happy mixture of exploring new by-ways and hamlets, only to realise where you were when you met a main road, and then to dive off again into the unknown. The frequent exclamations of my passenger were for the joys of the country views, not in response to my driving!

Our prat-navs (named because we stop using our brain when using them) led us unerringly round the locations, only to be thwarted at the last ditch by a literal ditch across the road leading to the welcome lunch-time pub. So an old-fashioned map had to be consulted and a way round found, thus proving the continued value of well-established methods of navigation.

The clues were fun and not too hard, even though we missed the first and came up with a wrong answer from half a mile away.

The sun shone; there was animated conversation over lunch.

What could be better?

Warm thanks are due to Anne and Margery for organising the day.

Clifton Hughes



Chiswell Windmill SG8 8SD (Photograph reproduced the with permission of the Windmill Trust) One of the destinations for the Treasure Hunt

Well it started

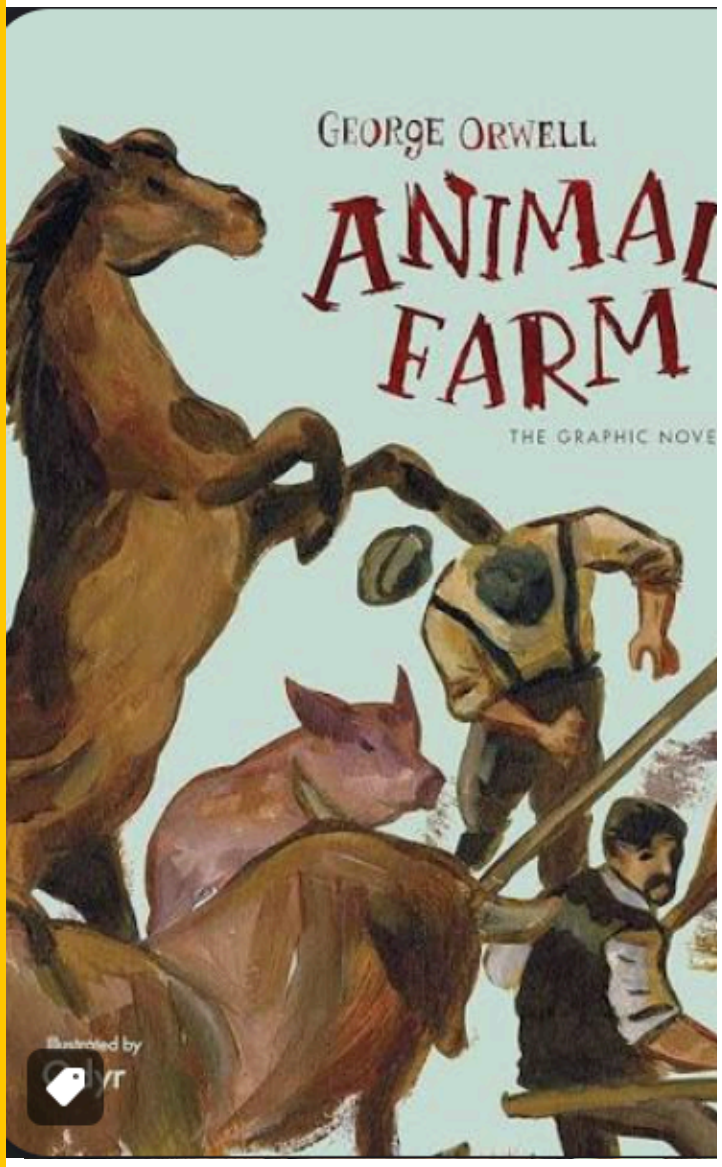
Some of you might remember the kite I flew in an earlier newsletter about starting a book group where we read 'the classics'. Yes, the kite didn't crash: it landed softly and was carried and preserved by the members of a new book group for Hitchin u3a. We have met twice, first to discuss how we might operate and second to discuss our first book.; more of that later.

At our initial meeting the hardest decision was the timing of our monthly meetings. The potential group members were also contributors to a wide range of u3a activities, and of course they have lives outside u3a. The best fit meeting slot meant that two people had to drop out. Whilst we didn't come up with a definition of "classics" it was clear that this would evolve and, in many ways, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. Group members were tasked with naming three books they'd like to read. I can report the authors we'll be reading include Henry James, George Eliot, John Steinbeck, Miguel de Cervantes, Jane Austen, Graham Greene, Winifred Holtby, Joseph Conrad, Elizabeth Gaskell, Thomas Hardy, Maya Angelou, Margaret Atwood, F Scott Fitzgerald, Elizabeth von Arnim, James Joyce, Alexandra Dumas, Zadie Smith, Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Barbara Kingsolver. From this we have a reading list for the next few months.

Our first book was Animal Farm by George Orwell. Although Orwell clearly wrote the novel as a criticism, even a satire, of Stalinism and the betrayal of the Russian Revolution, its broader message concerns the corruption of political ideals, the use of propaganda and misinformation, the effect of controlling information, class inequality, and the dangers of unchecked power. Do you see any echoes in 2026?

Our next book is The Moonstone by Wilkie Collins.

Anne Rapley



Musical Monday Magic

There is something magical about Musical Mondays: the lights dim, the band strikes up a familiar tune from the 1960s, 70s and 80s and invites people to sing along, tap their feet and soon enough some dancing and jigging takes over. It's not just music — it's a time machine, whisking you back to jukebox nights, vinyl records spinning, and the joy of moving to a beat that never grows old. These joyful events bring people together, revive treasured memories and create new ones, proving that great music, good company and a little carefree fun are the perfect way to brighten any dreary Monday. And the bar will be open

Having enjoyed 60s and 70s pop, sea shanties, classic music, Country& Western and trad/popular jazz, we are back on **Monday, 16 November at 7pm** at Hitchin Town Hall to an evening of early chart toppers and popular singalongs performed by the hugely popular band 'Not Tonight Josephine' who have entertained us before. The cost is **£10 payable in advance** – at speaker meetings or coffee mornings – or at the door on the night. Bring along family, friends or neighbours as this event is not limited to Hitchin u3a members but let Heidi know that you are coming so that we get enough chairs and tables out. Her contact details are email heidi_ebrahim@msn.com or phone 07974 374106



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Spinach and Feta Frittata

Ingredients
Servesa 4-6

- 500g frozen whole-leaf spinach
- 6 large eggs, lightly beaten
- 4 salad onions, finely chopped
- 1 garlic clove, crushed or grated
- 150g feta, crumbled
- 1 tbsp chopped dill (or 2 tsp dried)
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tbsp pine nuts
- 6 wholemeal pittas, toasted
- 1 (140g) bag mixed salad
- ½ lemon

Method
3 steps

- **Step 1**
- Preheat the oven to 200°C/180°C fan/gas 6. Cook the spinach to pack instructions, then drain and leave to cool. Squeeze out any excess water from the spinach and put in a bowl with the beaten egg, salad onions, garlic, feta, dill and a good grind of black pepper.
- **Step 2**
- Place a 20 cm ovenproof frying pan over a medium-high heat. Add the oil, swirl it round, then pour in the egg mixture. Scatter the pine nuts over the top. Cook for 5 mins or until the edges start to lift away from the pan; transfer to the oven and bake for 10-15 mins or until set.
- **Step 3**
- Serve warm with the pitta, salad leaves and a squeeze of lemon.



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Optimal Sleep Tips

Many of you have asked for tips from our Healthy at 100 group.
Recently we have talked about UPF (Ultra Processed Foods), Supplements and Purpose verse living for today. We also discussed the research on Optimal sleep. It has become increasingly clear that sleep is a super power in ageing yet many of us struggle to either get off to sleep or to get back to sleep if we wake at night. Hopefully some of these ideas will help you if one of these is an issue for you.

Getting to sleep

- Keep a regular sleep and wake time, even at weekends.
- Get natural daylight early in the day to help reset your body clock.
- Exercise regularly, but avoid vigorous exercise immediately before bed.
- Avoid caffeine after midday if you are sensitive to it.
- Keep the bedroom cool, dark and quiet.
- Try not to go to bed overly full—or hungry.

A good bedtime routine

- Start winding down 30–60 minutes before bed.
- Dim the lights and reduce phones, tablets and TV.
- Do something calming: read, listen to quiet music, stretch or have a warm bath.
- Keep the bedroom associated with sleep rather than work or worrying.
- Have a simple ritual you repeat each night—your brain learns that it means time for sleep.

If you wake in the night

- Don't immediately look at the clock—you don't need to know how many hours you have left!
- If you feel relaxed, stay in bed and let sleep return naturally.
- If you're becoming frustrated or wide awake, get up and go somewhere dimly lit. Do something quiet and boring, such as reading a few pages of a book. Return to bed when you feel sleepy.
- Avoid checking your phone, turning on bright lights or starting to plan tomorrow.

Don't worry about one bad night. Resting quietly is still better than battling with sleep.
One useful rule: Don't try too hard to sleep. The more we tell ourselves “I must get to sleep now”, the more alert we can become.

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The answer to the “I know that face” is Mavis and David Bell who were past chairmen of the Hitchin u3a and have now moved to the Isle of Man.

This newsletter is designed using u3a colours and text. if you want to print it do so in black and white.

If you would like to contribute to the newsletter or have any feedback please contact jan@jan-hills.com