



# Pewsey Vale u3a

## NEWSLETTER

Issue 62

January 2024

### Message from the Chair

Dear Members

A very Happy New Year to you all. I hope that you managed to keep safe and dry this week during the floods.

A little while ago, when I was wondering when I ought to retire, I was concerned that I would struggle to fill in my days - like many of us my job had just about taken over my life. I need not have worried! Now I don't have enough time to do all that I would like, especially with all the activities currently available within our u3a.

You need only look at all the reports in this newsletter to see how busy we keep ourselves, whether it is learning a new skill or exploring an interest further. We have so many talented and gifted members. If you have an interest, or something new you would like to explore, please talk to one of the committee, there is plenty of help available to set up new groups.

2023 was a momentous year in which we celebrated the Coronation of King Charles as well as our 15<sup>th</sup> Birthday. And just before Christmas, we had our popular Quiz Night and our re-arranged Cheese and Wine, without as much cheese this year!

So what have we got planned for 2024?

In January we will have our first social of the year, 2pm Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> January, Bouverie Hall, Pewsey, when Morton Burdick will be speaking about "Our Noisy Neighbours on Salisbury Plain"

Jean is planning some more trips out, including visits to The Great Bustard project, which we learnt about at another one of our socials; a trip to The Tank museum and another Mystery Dinner amongst other things. And I understand some new groups will be coming on stream too, so lots to look forward to.

Meanwhile I hope to meet with more of you either at our socials and events, or maybe at one of the groups you attend.

Take care and keep smiling.

Fiona

**This newsletter is distributed electronically to Pewsey Vale u3a members every quarter. If you are one of the few members who have been getting it by post and can now receive it by e-mail, please let us know.**

## REPORT FROM AGM NOVEMBER 2023



It was lovely to see so many of you attending our recent AGM, over a quarter of the membership! For those who couldn't make it I have summarised my report here.

I know that we all enjoyed listening to, David Dawson the director of Wiltshire Museum in Devizes who told us all about " Gold from the Time of Stonehenge". It was most interesting; I had not realised how important, nationally, their collections are, and will certainly be visiting soon.

We were also able to admire some wonderful photographs taken by our Practical Photography group.

Taking over the Chair's position from Lynne was an honour but also rather scary - she led us through four years of world disruption with Covid so excellently and left Pewsey Vale u3a in a strong position to move forward.

Once again our membership is growing and we have over 400 members, obviously we are doing something's right! Jill Woodhams continues to work tirelessly as our membership secretary, answering queries, directing new members to groups and sorting out renewals: it is very much appreciated.

Martin Cook took over from Julian last year as our treasurer and he has taken this task on at a fast pace, ensuring we have an up to-date record of all our assets as well as keeping the accounts in order. A huge thank you must also go to him for this; we found items we didn't know belonged to us!

And my right hand person, or should I say our u3a secretary extraordinaire, Liz Whitebread has been my rock throughout this last year as we have worked our way through various business matters that u3a centrally have suddenly felt we need. I am pleased to say that I believe it is now done; many thanks Liz and the committee for all your hard work

I could go on detailing each and every one of the committee, Joanna who keeps all of our group leaders informed, and produces the fantastic newsletter; Jean who has organised such a variety of social events; and the whole committee who pull together behind the scenes, meeting bi-monthly to ensure your u3a is prospering. My sincere thanks to them for their support and friendship and hard work.

Sadly Julian Monkford has decided it is time to hang up his badge of office this year, but he has been on your committee for many more years than I, preceding Martin as treasurer amongst other roles. Thanks Julian, you will be missed.

I urge you all to consider joining the committee. New blood and ideas are always welcome; we meet at our homes and share coffee/ tea and cake as well as a laugh or two whilst going through the business.

This year we celebrated King Charles's Coronation with another fabulous Hog Roast, and some wonderful outfits. We had a delicious cream tea, went on mystery dinner trips amongst other events, and of course our bi-monthly socials continue, including the amazing interactive talk about Victorian Etiquette, and the very local Salisbury Plain Great Bustard Project. Thanks must go to Lynne Batsford for discovering all these interesting speakers to inspire and educate us, and to those members not on the committee who support us by helping at these events, including Sue Rhodes who organises the refreshments for our socials and everyone else who helps us with tables chairs and all the other jobs.

Meanwhile our groups continue to flourish: that's 56 groups in total! Sincere thanks to all those of you who are group leaders, without you our u3a would just be an empty shell. It was lovely to be able to meet and thank most of you at our group leaders' event this summer, you deserved it.

So as we move forward, I urge you all to be as active as you can within our u3a. Fresh blood and new ideas are always welcomed by your committee, as is help behind the scenes. And if you have a subject you feel you can talk about to us, or an idea for a talk, please let us know.

Thank you everyone for being part of our amazing welcoming u3a. Let us continue to evolve and support each other.

*Fiona Cook , Chair Pewsey Vale u3a*

## ART GROUP

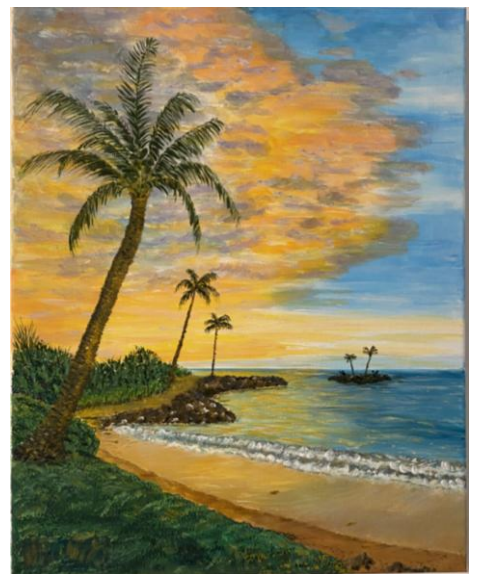
The Art Group continues to meet twice a month in Manningford Village Hall, which is perfect for the group.

We have occasional visits from local artists and in October we spent an afternoon attempting Chinese brush painting with Ria Rys-Reuten - that turned out to be much more complicated than we thought! - and gave rise to some amusing quotes from the day - notably " don't tickle it, go for it!." We are a very relaxed group and don't take ourselves too seriously - despite being keen on our art. Art is there to be enjoyed - both viewing it and giving it a try.

We have a session planned for February on portraits with another local artist and are looking at ideas for other sessions whilst group members continue to work on their own projects. We are looking forward to displaying some of our work at the u3a social meeting in January.

Our numbers have swelled and at the moment we are full, and we have a waiting list, but **if anyone would like to start another art group.....**we can give you a list of prospective members and help you to set the group up. As we don't do formal teaching it just requires someone who enjoys art and is prepared to book the hall.

If you would like to be added to our waiting list - or even better **if you'd like to start a new art group, please get in touch**, we'd be happy to tell you how we run our group.



Pictures by Marie-Jose Milnes, Linda Towers and Ian Burch



## WORDSMITHS

To quote from the Wordsmith.org daily emailings (no relation):

### NOODGY

PRONUNCIATION: (NOO-jee)

MEANING: *adjective*: Nagging, pestering, annoying, or complaining.

ETYMOLOGY: From noodge (to pester; one who pesters), from Yiddish nudyen (to pester, bore), from Polish nudzic. A cousin of this word is [nudnik](#) (a boring pest). Earliest documented use: 1969.

USAGE: "What we had most in common were noodgy, hard-driving parents, the type of people who'd push their children to attend supplemental schooling for a year and a half." Vinson Cunningham; Test Case; *The New Yorker*; Mar 9, 2020.

Do you like that? Perhaps, like me, you're familiar with this word through another language. If this kind of discussion appeals to you, our Wordsmiths Group might be for you.

We meet in Upavon on the third Wednesday of the month, with friendly dog(s) present.



## MAHJONG FOR BEGINNERS

*This came in just too late for our last edition - sorry, Ginny - so here is the group news from the autumn.*

I'm pleased to report that as a result of a recent surge of new members joining the group, it has now nearly doubled its participants in the last two months. As a result there are now 8 registered players.



With the ability to teach a maximum of 3 or 4 members at a time, I'm introducing an additional session on the 2nd Monday of the month. I am dividing participants across the 2nd & 4th Monday so there will, wherever possible, be 4 attending each session. We shall wait to see how this works out. Members say they enjoy learning the game and very much want to continue.

I'm in the process of completing the last of my information leaflets which explain the game with illustrations. There will be 8 in total.

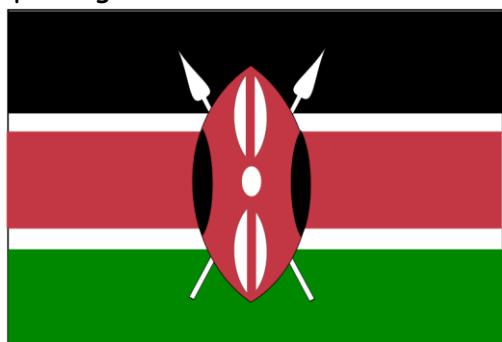
As a result of this recent interest, the group has reached full capacity. However, if you are interested in joining, please contact me and I will put you on my waiting list.

It is envisaged that as members become more proficient players, they may advance to the u3a MahJong group which plays on a Thursday afternoon.

## TRAVELLERS TALES

The end of 2023 saw this popular Group go off on travels to very different parts of the world, by different modes of transport, starting in October with a visit from our good friend Bill King walking part 4 of the Thames Path near Runnymede - he always diverges off the main route and visits other places of significance, and you always come away from one of his talks feeling you have learned yet more historical and geographical facts. We shall catch up with a further leg of his perambulations in the spring of this year.

We took a delightful Hurtigruten cruise with Keith and Kathleen in November, with of course some of Keith's superb photos. It was quite a leisurely activity and the scenery and sea scenes much enjoyed by us all, but in December we experienced something more energetic with James Stythe and "Trekking in Northern Kenya", sleeping under the stars in tents and travelling in less comfort than we Europeans are used to! This was followed by our now customary Christmas lunch - a celebration we all enjoy and help to put together.



We have quite a lot of different destinations lined up for 2024, the first one however returning to Kenya when Mort Burdick will show us his take on "Gardening on the Equator", which features few aspects of gardening but plenty of views of that country. This will be on Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> January at 10.30am at Easton Royal Village Hall.

## MILITARY HISTORY

This particular Group, meeting on the first Monday of the month at Easton Royal Village Hall, continues to attract a lot of attention, and at our October meeting we had a really bumper turnout to hear Major General Sir Mike Jackson, a former extremely well known military figure, giving us his current assessment on the global situation (as it was then, in October). We came away from his talk feeling very thoughtful and somewhat despondent, but it was good to listen to someone like him who is aware of how things truly are in the world, however unpleasant they are.

Also in October there was a small group visit to the REME Museum at Lyneham which was much enjoyed. Sadly another Military History Group visit to Brize Norton, kindly arranged by Tim Wells, had to be postponed, but is now scheduled for April.

In November Peter Wilson, who spent several years of his military career in Oman, gave us a fascinating presentation of his role in that country including a brief historical background and views of the countryside from his excursions on a bicycle! To conclude the year, in December we all enjoyed another talk by Major General Chris Elliott, all about fortifications over the years, for example, from Hadrian's Wall to Fort Nelson.

So we now look forward to a full year in 2024, starting on Monday 8<sup>th</sup> January at 10.30 am with a talk by Sq. Ldr. Mike Morison entitled "The Warsaw Pact - My Part in its Downfall!).



## DISCO GROUP

We have booked the Bouverie Hall for our next Disco Group meeting on the evening of **Friday, February 16th, starting at 7.30** as usual. Despite the date this will not be a Valentine's Day themed event!



So.....we hope to see you all there. Please put the date and time in your diaries and on your calendars now. And please tell us if you know in advance that you will not be able to attend; those already signed up need not re-apply.

We are toying with the idea of extending future meetings by half an hour to 10.00pm rather than just going to 9.30pm as before, and we would be interested in your thoughts on that. Is it a good idea or not?!

*These disco evenings involve a small payment towards to the hire of the hall, comprise BYO refreshments and lots of bopping about! As you probably know, the discos are only run every few months, so if you'd like to arrange another evening event or two, do get in touch with a member of the committee.*



National Memorial Arboretum



Lincoln Cathedral



Steep Hill



Lincolnshire Imp



Louth

### Travel Group - October 2023 5 day trip to Lincolnshire

National Aviation Heritage Centre



Sampling the local ale



Bletchley Park

Private boat trip



Gunby Hall



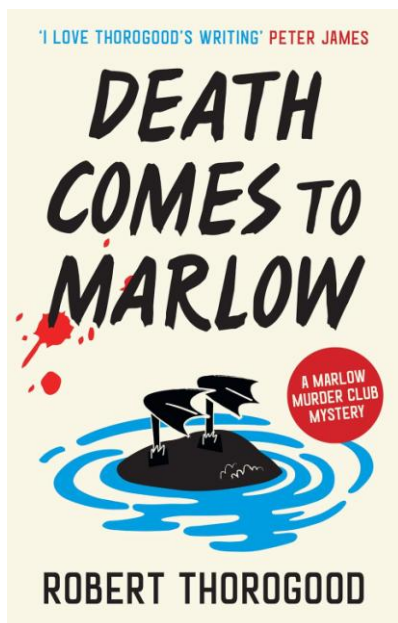
Maplethorpe



## WHAT ARE YOU READING?

In response to my last column, asking you for which whodunits you do and don't like, Sue Chillcott writes:

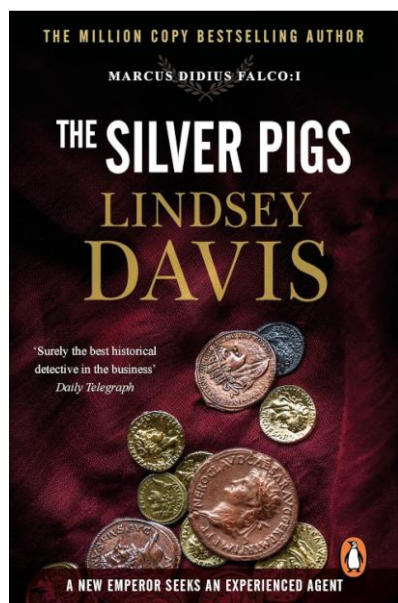
By coincidence, as I read the last U3A newsletter and Joanna's suggested topic of whodunits, I had just started to read 'Death comes to Marlow'.



This is book two of a series by the English screenwriter and novelist, Robert Thorogood, the creator of the BBC murder series 'Death in Paradise'.

I discovered book one after reading that the creator of 'Death in Paradise' had written a whodunit. During the dark and dismal start of every year, I wallow in murder mysteries set on a sunny Caribbean Island. Hence, I couldn't resist looking for book one and was delighted to find that it was available as an e book with Wiltshire libraries.

'The Marlow Murder Club' introduces a quirky trio of ladies, each with totally different backgrounds and lifestyles, who are drawn together by a series of murders. Being quirky, there are comical moments, but they and the other characters are believable, albeit somewhat larger than life. I don't try to work out whodunit but just enjoy 'a ripping good yarn' and am unable to comment on how hard it was to guess the identity of the murderer.



If you enjoy Richard Osman's series starting with 'The Thursday Murder Club', you will enjoy the Marlow series. There is no subtlety in targeting the same readership. However, why not? I for one am happy to find more of the same.

On the topic of whodunits generally, I will happily re-read any Agatha Christie or Dorothy L. Sayers. I also enjoy re-reading any by Dick Francis. I love the detail; in the early books mainly about aspects of horse racing but later books often have a main character without a direct link to the horse racing world, but circumstances draw them in.

Another favourite is the Falco series by Lindsey Davis set in ancient Rome - Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe but with a Roman twist. The 20 novels can be read individually but to follow the background plot, I read them and re-read them in the order they were written.

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And a couple of PSs from me: I reread **Poirot's Christmas** and didn't think much of it. Have also read:

Penelope Lively's **How It All Began**; **Tigerlily's Orchids** by Ruth Rendell; **Terry Pratchett's biography** by Rob Wilkins, all of which I enjoyed.

**Cook For Me** by Alexander McCall Smith (more of a novella and I would expect it to be the start of a new series) and JK Rowling's **The Ickabog**, a children's book that I found far too gory!

Also **A Memoir of My Former Self: A Life In Writing** by Hilary Mantel - this is a book of excellently written essays but I'm afraid my lazy brain rather struggles with it.

What books are you going to tell us about in our next newsletter? You have nearly three months to do it, but you can send in any individual reviews in the meantime, if you like.

## JIGSAW SWAP

Jigsaws will be available to borrow and swap on

- ❖ January 9th, 16th, 23rd,
- ❖ February 13th and 27th and
- ❖ March 12th, 19th and 26th.



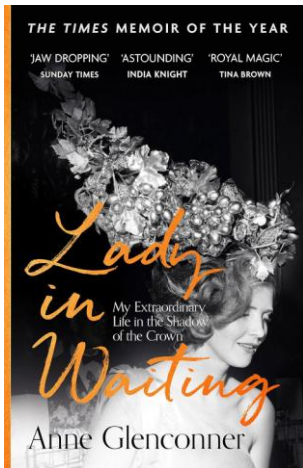
Come to the entrance of the Bouverie Hall between 2pm and 4pm.

There is no charge. Donations are gratefully received.

Please make sure all the pieces are securely in the box; preferably in a bag in the box. Thank you.

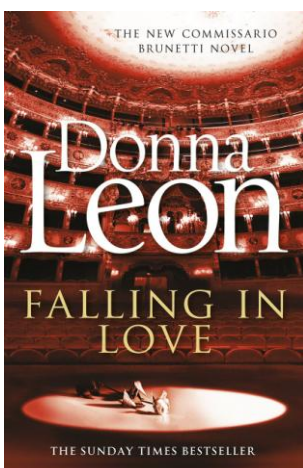
## BOOK GROUP 1

In October we discussed **Lady in Waiting: My Extraordinary Life in the Shadow of the Crown** by



Anne Glenconner. Lady Glenconner was born Lady Anne Coke in 1932, the eldest daughter of the 5th Earl of Leicester, and growing up in their ancestral estate at Holkham Hall in Norfolk. A Maid of Honour at the Queen's Coronation, she married Lord Glenconner in 1956. They had 5 children together of whom 3 survive. In 1958 she and her husband began to transform the island of Mustique into a paradise for the rich and famous. They granted a plot of land to Princess Margaret who built her favourite home there. She was appointed Lady in Waiting to Princess Margaret in 1971 and kept this role - accompanying her on many state occasions and foreign tours - until her death in 2002. Lord Glenconner died in 2010, leaving everything in his will to his former employee.

Our November book read was **Falling In Love** by Donna Leon, an odd and sinister novel, cleverly put



together and with a clever if odd plot. Flavia is a well acclaimed opera singer who is puzzled when her dressing room is filled with yellow roses, and then she finds hundreds more of them outside her own flat also. She is greatly alarmed and hates the prospect of some "admirer" stalking her in this bizarre way. She enlists the help of an old friend, Brunetti, who conveniently happens to be a policeman and who is equally alarmed by this odd predator. The stalker always seems to be one jump ahead of him and his attempts to apprehend him. It's a very strange novel, its denouement equally so, but the graphic descriptions of Venice are very atmospheric and appealing, and it is all together a well written book which is hard to put down! Give it a go!

*(I'm rereading Falling In Love now and enjoying it. Ed)*



## WINE TASTING AND APPRECIATION

Our usual format is to have one or two members present six wines, generally three white and three red. However, in December each wine was chosen by a different member and was accompanied by nibbles specially chosen to pair with that wine.



Just to tease your palates, here's what we tasted:

1. Joanna - Valdobbiadene Prosecco 2022 11%, Veneto region of Italy, from Lidl £6.99 + prosciutto
2. Jill - Queen Bee Viognier 2022 13%, Western Cape South Africa, from Avery's £8.99 + smoked salmon and cheese sticks from Kathleen
3. Caroline - Clefs du Pontif Marsanne Viognier 2022 12.5%, Pays d'Oc, from Avery's £10.35 + smoked salmon and fish sticks
4. Lizann - Yellow Tail Shiraz 13.5%, New South Wales, from Co-op £7.75 + pigs in blankets from Fiona
5. Anne - Patrick Chodot Fleurie 2022 13% Beaujolais, from Tesco £8.65 + cheese from Lindsay
6. Liz and Libby - Beames de Venise white sweet wine from Southern Rhone Valley, from Waitrose £8.49/35cl and Mavrodaphne of Patras Cameo red sweet wine from Northern Peloponnese, Waitrose £7.99 + meringues and dark chocolate

(Note prices as paid, including discounts etc)

Our two consecutive evening sessions are usually very well attended, but we may be able to squeeze one or two more members in if you don't mind being on standby for last minute places. We meet in Pewsey on the evening of the third Thursday of each month.

## BOARD GAMES GROUP



The Board Games Group has continued to meet on the second Monday of each month. (2.30pm at The Heritage Centre room, Pewsey).

We have stretched our brains with our usual favourites of Rummikub and Scrabble plus a complex triangular dominoes game brought along by someone clever!



There has been a request to introduce cribbage which will happen at our January meeting now that I have found my score board and printed off the rules. A couple of members know how to play and others would like to learn. So we have more challenges to look forward to in 2024.

You are most welcome to join us if you would like to play some games and have a chat with a cuppa.

## WALKING4EXERCISE

The Walking4exercise group has headed off in various directions over the last few months. We even took advantage of bus passes or £2 bus fare (we don't all have bus passes yet!) to travel on the bus for four miles and then walk back to Pewsey.



Of course our walks have been wet and muddy with the amount of rain we have endured but we have enjoyed them all and the company is always friendly and jolly. Our boots, sticks and waterproof trousers have been put to the test with some of us managing to stay drier than others. Fortunately nobody slipped into the canal although it was very close on one occasion!

We are anticipating more of the same in the next couple of months. Would you like to come along?

## QUIZ GROUP

- ❖ 2<sup>nd</sup> Monday of the month 4:30-6pm
- ❖ Pewsey Heritage Centre education room
- ❖ About £3 per person (includes a cuppa and a biscuit)
- ❖ Bring 10 questions and answers to share with the group
- ❖ Bring pen/cil, paper, some general knowledge, brain and a sense of humour
- ❖ Humiliation not included - we don't compare scores



## DOG WALKING GROUP

After a rather longer than expected gap, the walkies group has enjoyed two 40min walks, keeping to pathways round the backstreets of Pewsey rather than the fields because of the weather conditions and the shortening days. Our next walkies will be on the third Monday in January.

I am asking my group members about dividing the group as we have some young dogs who need a good run, and older ones who may be arthritic who still enjoy a walk but prefer to trot along rather than rush about. We would still meet at the same time and people/dogs could still have the choice of walk.

I shall let you know the answer and as ever the majority will rule!

We meet on the 1st and 3rd Monday of the month at 2pm outside the dentists in the High Street Pewsey. We welcome new members.



## 567 WALKING GROUP



If you love to walk in all kinds of weather and across various different terrains you might like to join the 567 Walking group.

We have started walks at Netheravon, Ramsbury, Savernake Forest, Enford and Pewsey recently. The weather has been varied; warm, bitterly freezing cold, windy, wet, misty or sunny, so layers have been added or taken off as required. The conversations have always been entertaining, there has been knowledge and information shared and the scenery has been gorgeous on every walk.

The group concludes after every outing that we are very lucky to experience such a wonderful morning.

Many thanks to all the group members who have organised our walks in 2023. We are anticipating more of the same in 2024.

Please get in touch if you would like to join us.



## CREATIVE WRITING GROUP 2 (aka WRITING FOR FUN)

This month - January - we will be celebrating our first anniversary of the start of this group. Over the last year we have tackled various 'challenges'. We choose a subject and it's been wonderful how very varied and imaginative the pieces submitted have been. Titles have included: The Visit, an animal's point of view, a 500 words piece on any subject (I wrote about my Writer's Block!), Change, Proverbs, an Old Photo, an Overheard Conversation, a Natural Disaster, Museum, a Holiday.



For our short piece with a Festive theme for our December meeting one of our members - just back from a sunny climes break - didn't have time to circulate the piece before the meeting so it was read to us. We were all convinced it was a nativity story, with a heavily pregnant wife having to leave her home with her husband - on a donkey. But the twist was bombs falling, concrete cracking and people fleeing for their lives in the Middle East.

We meet on the third Wednesday afternoon of the month at my home and we do have a space, so contact me if you would be interested in knowing more about this very friendly and supportive group.

## COUNTRY DANCING



Country Dancing is enjoyable fun and good exercise. Some dances are more strenuous than others and dancers are permitted to sit out and have a rest when necessary!

The numbers in the country dancing group are growing with several new members joining recently. Women outnumber the men but everyone is very versatile and can change gender from dance to dance without too much trouble!

More dancers, especially men, are very welcome to join us.

Thank you to some of our members who have had a go at calling a dance or two and to others who provide refreshments and help with setting up the hall and helping to clear away.

It is a great team effort to provide an enjoyable afternoon for us all every fortnight.

We meet on the second and fourth Tuesdays at The Bouverie Hall, Pewsey, 2pm until 4.



## PATCHWORK GROUP



The Patchwork Group's big news this Autumn has been our move to our new home in the Wootton room at Pewsey Library.

Although this is a slightly smaller room it is warm and the library staff have been so welcoming and helpful allowing us to keep our tea things on site which is great and saves me carrying it all to and fro.

The pictures are of our group's first afternoon in our new home at teatime.

## FRENCH CONVERSATION



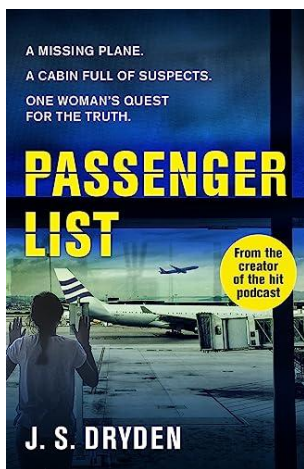
We had full attendance in Group 1 for our Christmas 23 December gathering. After some general conversation, we read a passage about the trouble the French are taking to draw up carefully chosen menus for the athletes from many different countries who will be visiting for the Olympics. The produce will need to be sourced locally and to have a larger vegetarian content.

Coffee and mince pies and a little mulled wine helped us to finish a crossword with the clues in French.

We look forward to meeting with Group 2 in the summer when it is warm enough to be outside.

## BOOK GROUP 2

September: **Passenger List** by John Scott Dryden. A mystery thriller...One member said:

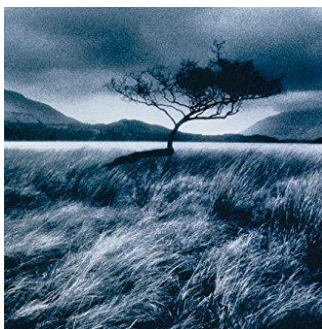


I had mixed views on this book. It felt like a book with a story that started off well and with some promise of suspense and intrigue, but as I read through, it slowly deteriorated into a story of lots of chance and luck - especially Kait's ability to engage with so many "dangerous" spies and Government people with such ease of engagement and detachment. It became a story which felt very unreal and more like a sensationalised film/TV programme. I had felt the mystery of who was responsible for Connor's "death" and those also on a mission to seek or stop the truth were numerous and confusing as they came and went and re-appeared. The characters weren't fully developed, they existed either as a complement or an opposition to the main character's storyline. I didn't warm to the character of Kait.

It felt very flat for me in the last few chapters and the ending was rushed and left unsatisfactory. Another story where it starts off well and slowly declines into a rapid wrap up, leaving me wondering about the lack of consistent flow and tempo to the story. The whole story and build up seemed to just "drop off the cliff" at the end.

Others agreed in the main with the above.

October: **Wuthering Heights** by Emily Brontë. A Classic - and not everyone's cup of tea. One member opined:

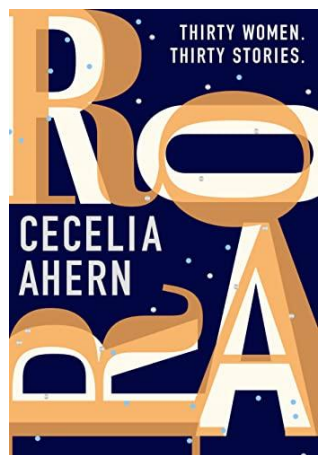


I struggled with this quite early on. The style of writing, the detail, the different characters and the changes in the timelines - from flashbacks (analepsis) and flashforwards (prolepsis) confused me and I felt demotivated to focus... so I speed read it, which in hindsight wasn't worthwhile. I felt quite deflated at not being able to tackle this iconic book. So I looked at YouTube to help me and have been listening to some very interesting discussions/analysis of Wuthering Heights. I'm now motivated to re-visit the book and try again. Apparently, it's not unusual to read the book several times in order to understand and appreciate its values.

Another member of the group felt it had been a silly and melodramatic book but could be convinced to change her mind. Another loved it, having revisited it umpteen times.

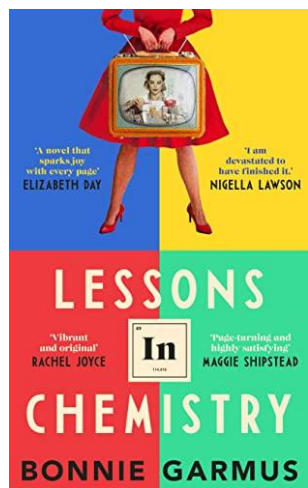
November: **Roar** by Cecelia Ahern

A book for feminists? Thirty stories... each story is a weird, sometimes too-literal, take on a common phrase, some of them quite general in nature, but all applied to a woman's life and her perceptions of the world. Like being *kept on the shelf* or *eaten by guilt*, *the world is your oyster*, having a *strong suit* and being *pigeonholed*.



It's a mix of normal life and mysticality, which is probably why some enjoyed it so much, because it is still very speculative in its own way. I mean, people don't ACTUALLY get swallowed up by the floor when they do something embarrassing, but one just opened up for *The Woman Who Was Swallowed Up by the Floor and Who Met Lots of Other Women Down There Too*, neither do they get actual literal bite marks when they're eaten by guilt in *The Woman Who Found Bite Marks on Her Skin*. Interesting

December: **Lessons in Chemistry** by Bonnie Garmus



Most of us enjoyed the story, the strong characters, the humour, the many layers that the book gave us to think about, i.e. feminism, misogyny, motherhood, humour, using a dog to convey thoughts and feelings, the relationships with the neighbours and work colleagues.

Some of us thought it was good to have something light-hearted (mostly) and rather liked the main character and her fight for equality, although she didn't come over as totally believable. Two of us thought it a nice holiday read for the Christmas period.

It seems like a book which can be re-read and enjoyed again just as much. So a big "thumbs up".

## MUSIC APPRECIATION GROUP

We are a small, informal friendly group, looking for a few new members, that meets monthly (first Wednesday morning of each month) to listen to and discuss music, presented by one of the group members, in illustration of a pre-agreed theme or topic such as Russian composers, guitar music, early string quartets, cello music, jazz trumpet, how one composer influences another etc..... to give a few recent examples.



The music has mainly, but not wholly, been "classical" in the past but need not always be so, as you can see from the examples above. Good music is good music.

We have had our numbers constrained in the past by the need to accommodate the group comfortably in one of our members' private home, but we recently moved to holding our meetings in the library at Pewsey and we now have room for one or two new members who will swell our ranks a bit but also introduce some new blood into the group.

Might you be interested? I hope so. Why not give it a go?

## PHOTOGRAPHY GROUP 2 (PG2)

Since we last reported, we have been to three Christmas-themed venues, ie St Thomas's Church in Salisbury, Avebury Manor and Lacock Abbey. You can find all our photographs on the web site and here are just a few of them.

Broadly speaking, we're a group of friends who go somewhere picturesque every month (weather permitting) to take photographs. Oh, and did I mention the pub lunch? Would you like to join us?



## PRACTICAL PHOTOGRAPHY GROUP (PPG)



There were some very interesting '**Rear Views**' at our October meeting - on the screen that is!

Lots of buildings, animals, vehicles were on display and even humans were captured from that rather unflattering angle. One member surprised us all this time by taking his shots in colour rather than in black & white, as a result of this they received much praise.

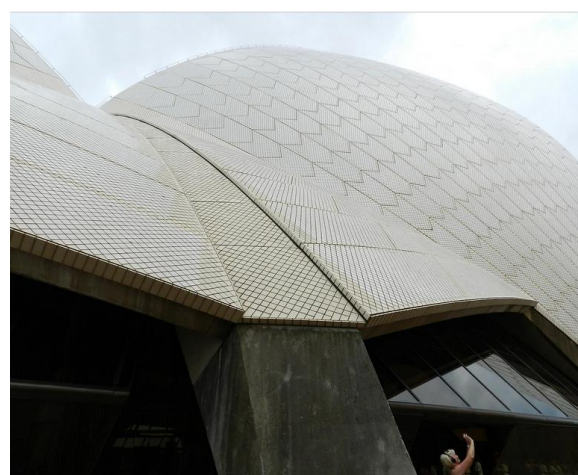
'**Fill the Frame**' in November proved to be more challenging than anyone expected. Numerous images failed to meet the brief and by cropping some during the meeting it was clear that, had this been done initially, they would easily have met the criteria. We live and learn, but that is the whole idea isn't it?

Also in November we displayed a selection of photographs from our 2022/23 albums which drew many people from the audience to look more closely before and after the u3a **Annual General Meeting** and social. Some expressed disappointment on seeing that the locations were not given - a lesson learned for the next exhibition?

The biggest challenge of the year was to create a village calendar for our local Post Office to sell. By some miracle two members managed to create one in a very few days. '**Pewsey Village Scenes**' sold very quickly and we hope to take photos this year for one of 'Pewsey Vale'. A further stock of ten was ordered for members who soon snapped them up (pun not intended).

In December yet another topic '**Sense of Scale**' proved to be more challenging than anyone expected. Quite a few images again failed to meet the brief due to all of us not having a true understanding of what was required.

Because it is such a busy month no topic had been set for December which gave us the opportunity to take some photos



for upcoming topics and to sort out our '**Seasons**' photos ready to review in January.

May the coming year produce many happy memories for you - don't forget to capture them on camera or your iPhone!

We meet on the second Friday morning of each month to review our photos and give constructive criticism. Although we are currently unable to welcome new members do please contact the Group Leader if you would like to know more about the PPG.

## BIRDWATCHING GROUP

During wet and windy November a group of seven keen and intrepid birdwatchers braved the inclement weather and set off for a five day holiday of gales, high tides and wet clothes. The aim was to visit Hampshire and Dorset coastal areas to spot waders, sea ducks and geese, including winter visitors. A tall order in such poor weather conditions.

On day one we visited the areas around Portsmouth and the Solent and were fortunate to see many Brent Geese, a lone Barnacle Goose, Shelduck, Pintail a juvenile Razorbill, Avocets and Turnstones.

On day two we moved our base from Eastleigh to Poole and visited Keyhaven Marshes and Christchurch on the way. Even stronger westerly winds today with incredible flying displays from firstly an Oystercatcher which we walked past while he was stationary flying against the wind, and eventually was forced to land on the sea wall. Secondly a small flock of Brent Geese flying in slow motion against the wind at probably no more than 3ft above the waves at about 5mph. Hundreds of Wigeon, Teal and Shelducks were sheltering in the marshes with occasional sightings of Corn Buntings and Water Pipits. Good sighting too of Roe Deer. At Christchurch we faced a high tide but at Stanpit we were fortunate to see Black-tailed Godwits and Little Egrets.

On day three we concentrated on Arne RSPB reserve and surrounding areas including Hartland Moor. Many woodland birds seen including Goldcrest and Nuthatch, and a group of Sika Deer. Out in Poole Harbour great shots of Curlews, Redshanks, Brent Geese, Avocets, Pochards and Wigeon in large numbers, and also a Red-crested Pochard.

Day four saw us moving base again and this time to Dorchester, via Durlston, Lodmoor, Radipole Lakes and Ferrybridge. We were most fortunate to see Gannets diving and feeding close to the cliffs at Durston, and Fulmars gliding overhead. Water levels at Lodmoor were extremely high which was good for us as visibility was improved and the thousands of birds which were there were very visible. Hundreds of Golden Plovers and perhaps three dozen Snipe, a Stonechat, Marsh Harrier, Mistle Thrush, and a lone Great Black-backed Gull stood out for us. At Ferrybridge a Rock Pipit and Red-breasted Merganser were spotted.



Photographs courtesy Keith Bew.

## LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

Occasionally members are encouraged to do a little research themselves and to share the results at a future meeting.

One such meeting was held in October for which members had been asked to prepare a short paper about a pre 21<sup>st</sup> century person or event that had a connection to 'November'.

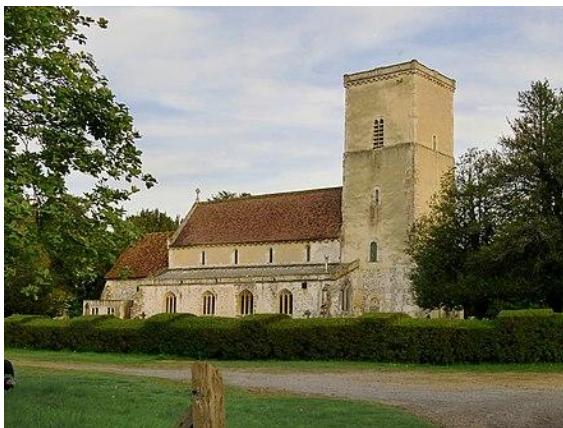
The conclusion readers will almost certainly have jumped to already is that we spent the morning discussing the Gunpowder Plot but this is far from what we did.

Six of our group, including two new members who were attending their very first meeting, presented some amazing results from their studies. In brief these included *Pewsey Rail Network*, *the Development of Prosthetics*, *Nancy Astor in Politics*, *the Crystal Palace and its Dinosaurs*, *the Building of the Suez Canal* and *Mellow Fruitfulness* accompanied by some tasty samples

There was much discussion following each informative talk, all of which filled two whole hours and could probably fill the rest of this Newsletter! I must also mention two other members, one of whom was a new member on her first visit, who came along to listen and learn, while a few others who were expected to be in the audience were perhaps put off by the earlier downpour.

What can anyone say about a talk by the amazing Nick Baxter? As always his presentation to our group in November was another huge success. Encouraged by the audience, not that he ever needs encouragement to talk, Nick entertained us for an extra half an hour much to everyone's delight.

Titled '*Wiltshire Churches: from Anglo-Saxon Romanesque to Victorian Gothic Revival*', we were taken by words and pictures on a whirlwind tour of more than thirty places of worship, learning about their outstanding features both inside and out.



This left many of us with a desire to visit ones we had not previously known about and in some cases to revisit familiar ones if only to see what we had missed the previous time. The Grade I Listed All Saints Church in Netheravon with its Saxon origins (pictured here) is one I plan to visit.

Did you know that the top of Salisbury Cathedral spire is the same height above sea level as the first step of the Market Cross in Devizes? Who would have thought it.

Our December meeting gave members the opportunity to hear three of their colleagues present festive talks based on their own research.

'*A Merrie Feast*' started with the custom for Royalty in the Middle Ages to invite themselves, at any time, to stay at one of the many castles or manor houses on one of their journeys round their kingdom. The speaker described the vast preparations undertaken and extensive and varied menus required to feed over 100 members of the Court. A feast could last for five hours and the hosts might also have to organise the next day's food and entertainment.

Local examples included Henry III's visit to Ludgershall Castle in 1251 and his grandmother, Eleanor of Aquitaine, would probably have hosted similar festivities at Old Sarum during her imprisonment.

This was followed by a brief history of UK Poet Laureates and their surprisingly few Christmas poems. The origins of the laureateship date back to 1616 when James I granted a pension to writer Ben Jonson, but the first official holder of the position was John Dryden (below), appointed in 1668 by Charles II.

From 1660 Poet Laureates were given a small stipend by the monarch plus a butt or barrel of sack (sherry) and equivalent to 720 bottles! This tradition continued until 1800 but was revived in 1984 by the Sherry producers who now present a butt to the Poet Laureate.



With the help of a couple of members of the audience three poems were read out: *Ring Out Wild Bells* by Tennyson, *Christmas* by John Betjeman and *White Christmas* by the current Poet Laureate Simon Armitage.

Here we took a break to taste *Bletted Meddlars* which received a mixed reception. Much more tasty was the Membrillo Quince Paste and Manchego cheese on cocktail sticks and even more so a drop (just a tiny one) of Quince Vodka.

Then the raffle - if there had been a couple of extra prizes everyone would have won one!!

An illustrated talk on *The History of Christmas Traditions* took us from Neolithic times and covered Decorations, Yule log, Feasting, Father Christmas and the Giving of Gifts bringing us through the ages to Victorian times, when we were able to see the similarities to today's festivities.

The end of an extremely enjoyable morning came all too soon.

I applaud everyone who attended meetings; made numerous cups of tea or coffee, and especially the talented speakers who have presented some brilliant talks for us all to enjoy this year. A shining example of what the u3a is all about.

We meet in Pewsey on the third Thursday of each month but now cover areas in and beyond the Vale of Pewsey enabling us to learn more about their economic, cultural, social and occasionally political history. I am now actively seeking speakers for 2025!!

NB. Last quarter's history report contained a minor misprint - the Labyrinth at Chartres is a meditative 'walk' not 'work'.

## KNITTING AND CROCHET GROUP

The group has been knitting for the Home Start program. This past year we have made hats, gloves scarves, jumpers, shawls and a baby blanket. We sold them at the Mediaeval Fair and the proceeds will go to Home Start which benefits families in the area.



## CREATIVE WRITING GROUP 1

It's all lies, you know!



Our group, under the benign but firm leadership of Wendy Argent, has had yet another excellent year. A year in which we have had affairs, committed murder most foul, travelled to foreign countries-including the past (they do things differently there) - not to mention Paris for a spookily romantic interlude - robbed, lied, and cheated, faked our own deaths, and even completely reinvented ourselves, reminisced about our childhoods and looked forward to the future, while at the same time producing some lovely poetry and prose, all accompanied by tea and delicious cakes. What more could anyone want?

So roll on 2024 for more mischief, mayhem, and make-believe!

## GARDENING GROUP

The gardening group continues to flourish. This is a note from one of our members, Ian:



I have been a member of the U3A gardening group for nearly a year now, and was made most welcome by the group. The group aims to share what's happening in each others' gardens each month, the good, the bad plus future plans, rotating between different members' gardens. I've found it particularly helpful to gain tips on what will and won't grow in the area, swap plants and cuttings to replace the failures and add new plants for free! It's also reassuring to know you're not the only one fighting the drought (remember summer?), wet weather, frosts, insect pests, slugs and snails, and weeds. Thank you, Lizzie.

## **And finally.....**

We thanked Julian Mumford for his work on the committee, making reference to his time as the previous treasurer. But after Julian and before Martin, the role was filled very cheerfully and ably by Lynn Mumford. Sorry, Lynn, a slip of the mouse so to speak, but still very much valued!

As we have added some extra copy to our January Newsletter (yes, we made a few errors, but we are only human), the cat is out of the bag so to say: Joanna is taking a back seat. She not only retiring from Group Leader Co-ordinator but also from our committee.



She has served on the u3a committee for enough years to be awarded a long service medal if we had such things and has decided now is the time to take things a little easier. Though as she has already said she is not leaving us in the lurch as she will still be doing the amazing job of editing and publishing our Newsletters and organising the raffles for each social. I do hope I will be able to persuade her to help with quiz nights though and sorting the wine out for events. (Ouch my arm, yes OK! J)

So on behalf of us all and all previous Pewsey Vale u3a Chairs I would like to thank you Joanna for all your hard work, friendship, valuable thoughts and ideas, and assistance. From the few years we have worked together, I know only too well how much work you have been doing behind the scenes as well as what everyone sees. You will be missed by us all.

Fiona