



# Pewsey Vale u3a

## NEWSLETTER

Extracts from **Issue 67** **April 2025**

### Message from the Chair

Dear All,

As I was driving to Marlborough this morning I thought how lovely all the hedgerows are looking with the wild flowers beginning to come out and the trees wearing a tinge of green. Let's hope it's a sign of a fine summer to come.

Yesterday I met with most of the Chairs from Bath and Wiltshire u3a's, via Zoom, we exchange ideas and learn what others are up to. It was very noticeable that we have more groups per head of membership than most. A big thank you to our group leaders and their assistants for this. However let's not be complacent, there is room for more, so if you have an interest you would like to share with others, please talk to Lynne or any of the committee and we will help set up a group. One of our local u3a's has a new Ham Radio Group, and a Motorcycle group, another a Family History Group and a 94 year old member from one further away has just set up a beginners Italian Group! Amazing. Just shows you are never too old to learn new things.

Your committee continues to work hard behind the scenes, ensuring everything is kept legal and safe amongst other things. But most important is to ensure our u3a is active and enjoyable. I believe it is and am sure you would agree.

Jill keeps our membership up to date, books you into Social Meetings and is the first contact new members have. Lynne has been working hard supporting our newest groups, Martin keeps an eye on our funds, he's very good at spotting things if problems might occur when we discuss issues. Haydn is studying the dreaded risk assessments, and I am sure those of you who attend the socials would agree Ian continues to find some very interesting speakers. Liz and I have been working on various other issues, and Robin continues to ensure the Beacon system is working and our web site is up to date.

We have been looking at what to plan for as extra social events for the year. Check the calendar in this newsletter for dates of these and please put them in your diaries, they won't happen if we do not get the support we need to run without a loss. Equally important though, is, if you have an idea of something you feel our members would enjoy, please suggest it and even better come and help us organise it. We are not magicians, help is much needed and always appreciated.

Many thanks to all those who have contributed to this newsletter and of course to Joanna for putting it together. I am always so impressed with the range of skills we have and share with each other. Though the tea and cakes and natter are good too!

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.**

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## Your diary page

The committee is working on other events: we'll keep you posted

May 2025	Tuesday 20 <sup>th</sup>	Social Meeting with Lucy Maynard on the work of <b>The Dogs Trust</b>
July 2025	Tuesday 15 <sup>th</sup>	Social Meeting with Marcus Ward, Director Wild New Forest Guided Tours, <b>Pine Martens in the New Forest</b>
August 2025	Friday 1 <sup>st</sup> Thursday 14 <sup>th</sup>	Cheese and Wine evening 7-9pm Afternoon Tea 3.30-5.30
October 2025	Tuesday 21 <sup>st</sup>	Social Meeting with Dr Gale Pettifer on <b>Heart of the Oaks: The 18th Century Naval timber crisis and the New Forest. True or False?</b>
November 2025	Tuesday 18 <sup>th</sup>	AGM and Alex Leger returns. Cruise Ship Speaker and ex BBC Producer Alex will entertain us with his talk, ' <b>I bet this never happened to you - Extraordinary life Stories</b> '. 
December 2025	Friday 5 <sup>th</sup>	Quiz 6.30-8.30

### WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBERS

Hello and welcome to those of you who have joined Pewsey Vale u3a in the last three months. We hope we haven't missed anyone out - if we have, please accept our apologies and claim your free grovel from the editor.

If you're a new member at a Social Meeting or outing, do come and say hello to one of the committee - we're all labelled and easy to find - so that we can introduce you to some friendly faces. At individual groups, this will happen anyway, so you won't feel left out.

## NEW: DARTS GROUP



I'm delighted to report that the new Darts Group is up and running. Twenty + members expressed an interest, and on Monday 10<sup>th</sup> March the group started. The Royal Oak in Pewsey is our venue and they have made us very welcome. Following a brief meeting we came to the decision that 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Mondays would be best for most who were interested. As happens all the time with our successful u3a it was impossible to have a day and time that suited everyone.

Our next booking is Monday 7<sup>th</sup> April at 2.00 pm. Why not come and join in the fun? The u3a kindly allowed me to buy some darts, so don't think you need to spend anything to come along - apart from buying a drink to bring up to the large room we have to ourselves. None of us is expert so there are many laughs. I think the highest score so far is 76 so come along and try to beat this. We divide into teams for an extremely friendly contest to make it more interesting - and to challenge our maths.

If we get more members interested who for any reason cannot come on a Monday we might be able to have another day / time as well as Mondays.

## FRENCH CONVERSATION GROUP 2

Our little group has continued to meet on the second Tuesday of each month. We always spend the first part of the meeting catching up on 'Quoi de neuf' (what everyone has been doing since our last meeting, always my favourite bit as our u3a members have such interesting lives) and then move on to something more structured. That may be reading through an article or a poem, translating as we go and then discussing the topic, or doing a crossword (who knew that a 'mégot' is a cigarette stub - Chris did!).

I rather hijacked our December meeting by asking those who had come along to have a go at making a fabric star (an activity I was due to lead at another group) but we made sure we watched a video in French showing us how to do it, and June had brought along three lovely wintry poems for us to read. More recently we read an article on the re-opening of the Notre Dame, from which we learnt a bit more about this ambitious restoration project. Perhaps we need a trip to Paris to see it??

Here's a little tongue-twister to test your French pronunciation:

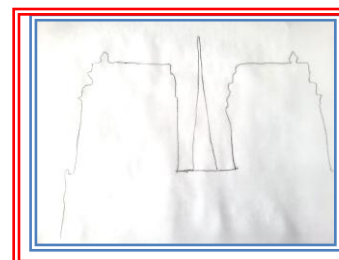
Où niche la pie? La pie niche haut.

Où niche l'oie? L'oie niche bas.

Où niche l'hibou?

L'hibou niche ni haut ni pas: l'hibou niche au chaud ou niche pas.

(pie - magpie; oie - goose; hibou - owl, nicher - to nest)



## DOES A CATCHY SONG SET YOUR TOES A-TAPPING?



If so, read on...

We'd love to see you at our Disco Group. Let's see if we can persuade you if you're a bit unsure.

*(If you're more of a classical or orchestral buff, skip to the next report. We have something for everyone!)*

### **I can't dance**

Who can? (Yes, OK, you few talented ones, but not most of us.) Our interpretation of "dancing" is to stomp or shuffle our feet while waving our arms around and grinning inanely - or pouting prettily, as we prefer.



### **I've got nobody to dance with**

Oh yes you do - all the rest of us. Some members come in pairs and stay together, but mainly it's a free for all with everyone happily dancing in the middle of the floor.

### **I can't afford it**

It costs less than a cup of most takeaway coffees, and that's to pay for the hire of the hall.

### **Do I have to pay for refreshments?**

No, you bring your own. From a magnum of champagne to a bottle of water, and a full buffet to a packet of crisps. It's up to you.

### **I've got nothing to wear**

Well, we don't recommend wearing nothing, but it's not dressy - unless you want to wear your bling. Wear whatever you like and make sure you wear shoes you can dance in. You won't be in the spotlight: the hall is darkened and with coloured disco lights, so you needn't feel self conscious.

### **I'm not sure I can come regularly**

Of course there are times when you go away or are otherwise engaged, but we only meet a few times a year. If this is your kind of thing, let's hope you're free when the next one comes up.

### **What do I do to register my interest?**

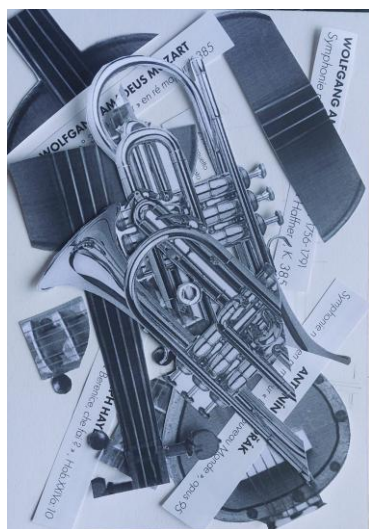
We hope you'll join us on the dance floor of our pop-up nightclub!

## INTERESTED IN MUSIC? THIS COULD BE FOR YOU

The cunningly named "Music Appreciation Group" is a small group that meets one morning a month for 2 hours in the Pewsey library meeting room to listen to and discuss interesting, good music.

We are limited by space but do currently have room for up to 3 or 4 new members so feel free to contact me about possibly coming along.

It's very important to note that although, in the past, this had been almost exclusively classical music we now make a point of encouraging the inclusion of all interesting music be it classical, jazz, folk or popular (After all, I do help run the disco group and play along in the new folk music group).



Each month one group member presents on a theme or topic of their choice with a selection of music played either directly from CDs or from a device holding mp3 music files (phone, laptop or tablet) that they have prepared in advance. The sound system is provided by the group.

Recent themes have included - Early string quartets, Great jazz trumpeters, Guitar music, World music for the New Year, "The Universe", "The Sea", "Travellers Tales", Hammer Dulcimer music.... etc. So it's all been pretty varied.

The main thing is to introduce group members to music they previously may not have known well and to encourage discussion about it.

Upcoming possible topics will include the Music of Erick Corngold, Jazz Big Bands and the History of Brass Bands.

So, please feel free to contact me if you'd like to know more or just think you'd like to come along and try us out. It's £2.50 a head for each session to cover meeting room hire and refreshments.

I look forward to hearing from you.

## 567 WALKING GROUP

A little bit of rain has not deterred some members of the 567 walking group! (Others have stayed at home!)

We have altered our routes to avoid flooded fields and put on our waterproof clothing to face the rain, wind and occasional sunshine. Usually the pub lunch has been the highlight because we are warm and dry at that point.



The picture shows us near Salisbury. We had ridden the X5 bus to the new village of Longhedge before Old Sarum where we disembarked and then slipped and slithered our way into Salisbury. At Cote Brasserie restaurant we left our outerwear creating a small pond in a corner and ate a delicious lunch before catching the bus back home.

Our fingers are crossed for some lovely spring sunshine now.

## 789 WALKING GROUP

I admit it, in January for our inaugural walk, I drowned us all. It started only damp, a gentle walk along the canal from Pewsey, across to Wilcot and then on to Sharcott, roughly 7 miles. But it turned into an hour plus of consistent heavy rain, a good kit test, and test of fortitude and humour. But surprisingly we made it to the Royal Oak in Pewsey for a pie and a pint and we have been back walking since!



Our second walk in February was much better organised by Lynne with bright sunny weather (pic) and a meal in the Pelican at Froxfield. Another 7 miler.

As I write, Sue has a walk planned around Barbury Castle and back to the Silks for lunch. Fingers crossed for good weather.

## NEW: COUNTRY DANCE MUSIC

A great start to the new Country Dance Music Group, we had eight musicians at our March session. With a variety of instruments, Guitars, Piano Accordions, Mandolin, Irish Whistle, Hammered Dulcimer and Drums we played some simple but fun tunes together.



At the moment we have seven tunes in our repertoire and will add more each month as we go along. The aim is to learn about 20 tunes and play at the level we can accompany dancing, but that may be a way off yet!

We meet on the first Friday of the month at Wilcot Village Hall. We welcome all levels of players and instruments

## WORDSMITHS

Ws

Our light-hearted group meets in Upavon on the morning of the third Wednesday of the month (with friendly dog(s), coffee and biscuits present). We talk about - around - over - a different theme every month, looking at usage, etymology or all or none of the above. We recently set ourselves to writing a piece not using the first letter of the \*lph\*bet. It was instructing and entertaining: try it sometime.

Here are also some examples of unusual words from the Wordsmith.org site:

Canophilist - a person who loves dogs

Onolatry - Worship of the donkey or ass (Titania?) or devotion to foolishness (what fun)

Abulia - an inability to make decisions (no comment, or maybe....?)

## BOARD GAMES GROUP



We have space for a few more members at the Board Games group.

If you would like to play Scrabble, Rummikub or to bring your favourite game along you are most welcome. We meet once a month on a Monday afternoon and we are a friendly, chatty group. Not too competitive!

Please get in touch if you are interested.

Second Monday afternoon each month, 2.30 to 4pm at the Heritage Centre room.

## CARD GROUP



Sadly we were unable to meet in January due to illness, so we were raring to go by our February meeting. Julie our host, kindly spent time with us trying different techniques with parchment paper or vellum. It's receptive to so many mediums - water colours, stamping, embossing, pens. Being translucent means effects created on it can be layered on top of other paper or card to produce different results again which makes it extremely versatile.

In March, well all I can say about today's demonstration is "Men watch out for your shaving cream - it may go missing"! Today we were shown by Julie how to using shaving foam and stencils on a card. What next? Well, if you use talcum powder that may going missing as well. She gave us a recipe using talc to make a structure paste to use with stencils on cards. Along with a laugh, fun was had by all.

Next week we are off to "Busy Hands" to explore more ideas with new techniques. Gosh! What will we use on our cards next?

## FRENCH CONVERSATION GROUP 1



Où peut-on acheter un Gallic shrug?

The French Group 1 has very regular attendees, apart of course, from holidays. We have enjoyable sessions between 10am and 12 noon on the third Thursday of the Month which start with French conversation. After coffee, "c'est les devoirs" when we take it in turns to read and translate a passage in French, such as the history and restoration of Notre Dame. This introduces a lot of new words as well as the "tournure de phrases". The French way of speaking is so different to our attempts to think in English and translate into French! Doing mots croisés is popular too.

## ART GROUP



We have had a quiet couple of months working on our own projects but currently have work from some members of the group on display in both Waiting Rooms at Pewsey Railway Station. This is part of a project to display work from local people - we followed on from displays of pictures from Pewsey Primary School and Pewsey Vale School. Please do go along and have a look if you haven't already seen them.



At the end of this month we will be working with local watercolour artist Frankie Cummins in our session and look forward to seeing the results of the afternoon. Frankie lives in Great Bedwyn and has been painting and teaching watercolour for many years.

At the end of April we will be welcoming David Cox a digital artist to demonstrate his form of art for us - a very different experience for the group.



We have also made good use of the continually changing exhibitions in the MADE gallery in the High Street in Pewsey, and would encourage you all to drop in and see the work on display



## WALKING4EXERCISE

This year so far the Walking4exercise group has walked on West Everleigh Down, Salisbury Plain near Netheravon and from Upavon, been briefly lost in Savernake Forest and on familiar ground near Pewsey, Milton Lilbourne and Eastern Royal. The group members have chosen routes that avoided too much mud but this has been inevitable with all the wet weather.

Everybody is hopeful that the ground will dry up so that our walking options increase!

We have a couple of walks planned for the spring involving a bus journey; one to the north and another towards the south.

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



## COUNTRY DANCING

The dancers have been learning a few new dances this year as well as enjoying old favourites.

We have become quite adept at Strip The Willow and Clopton Bridge after a few sessions. Recently we tried Bluebell Polka and should become competent by the time bluebells appear in the local area. Redwing is still proving to be a challenge for some of us!



The photo shows the perfection we have achieved when dancing Alabama Jubilee. This has surprised us all and we feel very proud of ourselves!

You are welcome to come along and join us on the 2nd and 4th Tuesday afternoons. It is good fun and very enjoyable exercise.

## DOG WALKING



Our group numbers have built up again which makes it all the more fun - there are about nine of us and nine dogs of various shapes and sizes who all enjoy each other's company. Occasionally one will become too bumptious in which case it will be told by the other to go away! It is lovely to see the dogs playing together and enjoying a good run, though we also have to keep an eye open so they don't trip anyone up!

Our walks are usually round the village foot paths but are always weather dependent - if it is very wet under foot then we have a nail filing walk along the various tarmac'd paths on leads but we always try to incorporate some off the lead time.

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

## FREE JIGSAW PUZZLE SWAP



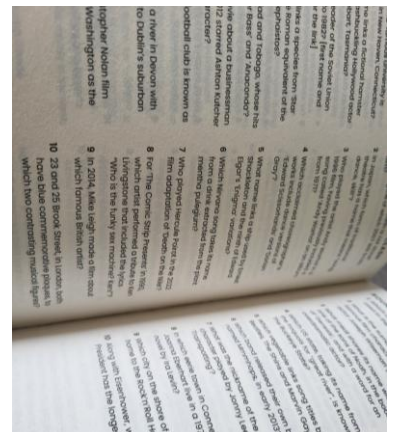
Jigsaws will be available to borrow from the Bouverie Hall foyer between 2pm and 4pm on:

8th and 22nd April  
13th, 20th and 27th May  
10th and 24th June

When returning a puzzle please ensure that all pieces are in a sealed bag inside the box. Thank you.

## 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



## MAHJONG FOR BEGINNERS

The group still has space available to accept new members.

There are currently 5 members in the group and since January they have been learning the first selection of "special (advanced) hands".

It's encouraging to see how well group members are progressing, as they continue to pick up new techniques and strategies.



Here are three examples of "special hands".

If you are intrigued and want to know more, please come along and join in the fun of learning the game.

We play on the 2nd and 4th Monday of the month at 10.30-12.30 at my home in Burbage.

This group offers a friendly, social atmosphere to welcome beginners and no prior knowledge is expected or required.

Please contact me via the link on our website.

## BOOK GROUP 3

A member of the group writes:

I joined Book Group 3 a few months ago as I have always loved reading. I am really enjoying trying new authors as recommended by others in the group. It has helped me to explore new writers that I'd never considered.

So far we have read **'The Figurine'** by Victoria Hislop, **'Conclave'** by Robert Harris, **Olive Kitteridge** by Elizabeth Strout. Our last book was **'Still Life'** by Sarah Winman.

We have a discussion about the books and it's always interesting to hear others' points of view and how we perceive the story!

We have now decided to choose our books 2 months in advance in order to give plenty of time to obtain the next book.

The afternoon ends with lovely refreshments.



## LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

### Vernacular buildings in Wiltshire with Helen

*Sandra's report covers our February talk.*

Dorothy Treasure, Wiltshire's Principal Buildings Historian, gave a fascinating talk about *Vernacular Buildings in Wiltshire*. These are the traditional homes and workplaces of a locality and are unique to that environment.

Wiltshire has a variety of different building materials which subdivide the County. Characteristic of the Northwest is oolitic limestone and Malmesbury and Cricklade are good examples. We have stone fireplaces and hollow mullioned windows, with the width of the chamfer on the stone telling the period of the building.

Central and Eastern Wilts is characterised by chalk and clay and a cottage, constructed from chalk blocks with napped flint courses with part of the upper storey in the roof was called a one and a half storey building. In the South and Southwest stone is back in evidence with Chilmark Stone, Limestone and Greensand.

Vernacular buildings before 1500 were from timber. The New Barn in Kingston Deverall 1407/8, used 44 oak trees in its construction.

The 1500's were a transitional period of change, when the colder winters (Thames freezing) led to homes gaining upper storeys and generally smaller sized rooms in order to keep them warm.

**"When we ran out of trees we turned to masonry".**

Bricks weren't seen in Wiltshire until the end of the 17th century. Size was standardised fairly swiftly and a brick tax was levied on the householder. Brick bonds and mortar lines help the dating of a building. The 1750 North Front of Wolf Hall contains some timber framing from the Tudor Wolf Hall, and below ground is a "man high" old brick lined sewer system, constructed with Savernake Brick.

Old Drover's lanes were a favourite spot for Squatter's Cottages and appear on old maps as tiny habitations at the side of the lane. In Manningford Bruce, Dragon Lane had a wide verge that attracted several such opportunistic squatters. The photo shows the original tiny cottage to the right of a later addition.

Dorothy left us with the thought that "What you see isn't what you get". Hidden mysteries still remain!



## Going postal with Nick

In March we again welcomed Nick who, with his usual enthusiasm and wealth of knowledge, presented *Masters of the Post: Marlborough's postal history revealed*. Faced with so much information Helen has listed a few key characters and important dates below:

Nick gave an entertaining talk on postal history and some colourful Marlborough postmasters.

Onesiphorous Tapp. He ran a coach and horses hire company when the London/Bath coach service began in 1657 carrying mail as well as passengers.

1804 John Eyres, sentenced to 7 years in Australia for fraud and felony.

William Wootton Lucy, held the position 1829-1869 as well as being Mayor and Alderman. His wife received none of his pension despite Lord Ernest Bruce appealing on her behalf. She had worked for William but never been employed by the Post Office.

After his death William's daughter Emma ran the Post Office, which was located in a Georgian building to the right of the entrance to Hillier's Yard. This was destroyed by fire along with adjacent dwellings on Easter Monday, 14th April 1879. The Post Office moved to the other side of the High Street in the premises to the left of what is now the Merchant's House, which was then Lucy's shop, printers, and stationers

## Postal History

- Royal Mail launched 1516 to support royal communications.
- Cardinal Wolsey (ordained 1488 St. Peters, Marlborough) establishes position of Master of the Post.
- 1635 Royal mail opened up to a postal service for the public.
- 1660 General Post Office established.
- 1661 First Postmaster General, Henry Bishop and first date stamp used.
- 1665 John Ogilvy Strip Maps published (route maps).
- The mounted posties were unreliable and an easy target for robbers as they carried money as well as mail.
- 1784 first mail coach was trialed from Bristol to London. It took 16 hours, down from 38 hours on horseback. Coaches had a uniformed guard armed with 2 pistols and a blunderbuss.
- 1840 Penny Black. Post now paid at source instead of by recipient.
- 1861 authorisation of Marlborough Railway. Marlborough had two stations, Savernake to Marlborough line and Swindon to Andover line.
- 1879 plea for public to post early on 24 and 31 December for Christmas Day and New Years Day deliveries!

As Group Leader I am delighted to have received such support from these three ladies and hope we might bring more members' reports to you in future newsletters.

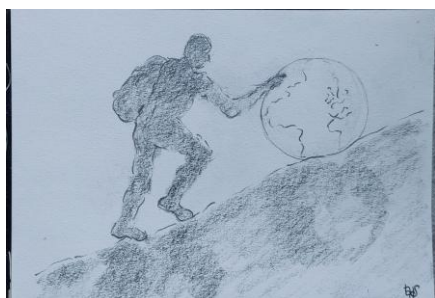
## TRAVELLERS TALES

The first trip for the Travellers Tales Group in 2025 was appropriately to the United States of America! It was also something of a family affair as Sue's brother and sister gave us a super presentation of a trip they undertook in May last year, starting off with a visit to Niagara Falls where they got thoroughly drenched in true tourist fashion and took some quite amazing photos. They then progressed by Amtrak (not a journey they would recommend by the way, too long and boring) to New York where they had a three day whistle stop tour of all that the Big Apple has to offer, again a once only experience, they would not rush back! However, the highlight of the trip was the week long sea journey back to the UK, with lots of smart clothes and sumptuous food. They tried to work off all the extra calories by walking up and down all the many stairs between decks and were fantastically entertained by many shows, lectures and films on board.



Our February presentation was something entirely different - a talk by our good friend Sony about his career in the oil and gas industry and the places worldwide it took him to. We learned lots about an industry of which most of us know little, and it was altogether a fascinating listen, with many of Sony's excellent photography to bring his words to life.

And March was again altogether a far cry from the earlier months' talks and even had a military theme as Peter, an ex REME officer and cycling enthusiast to boot, recalled for us his posting to Oman at the end of his military career. He gave us an extremely interesting synopsis of the history of the country and its geography, its past and present ruler and some of the duties he and his colleagues undertook on this posting. The second part of his talk however featured a week-long cycle ride he and seven other friends did, which was quite a feat! They did have a little back-up help for erecting the tents etc they needed each night and to be on hand if anyone had a mechanical problem with their bike (and of course they did!). His photos gave us a splendid idea of the arid conditions and excellent road surface they used, and there were plenty of smiley faces, so they obviously enjoyed their memorable trek, as did we all.



Thanks go to all those good folks who give us talks about their holidays and exploits, and if you would like to come and listen to them on the first Tuesday morning in the month, we would be delighted to welcome you. We meet at Easton Royal Village Hall and start with a coffee and chat from 10.00 am, getting underway at 10.30 am.

## SHORT MAT BOWLS



Short mat bowls continues Mondays and Fridays until May, then we will start again early in September.

## MILITARY HISTORY

Since this year celebrates the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of World War II it was quite appropriate that the first meeting of the Military History Group should feature a talk by Simon on the lead-up to and the actual outcome and aftermath of D-Day in 1944. As usual, there was an excellent turnout of members for this extremely interesting presentation which showed us also some fascinating footage of the build-up in this part of the country prior to the landings.

We're nothing if not a varied bunch of Military Historians, and our February meeting featured life as a submariner. The need for team work and co-ordination was very evident, and getting on with your fellow man also, to say the least! It gave us a fascinating insight into what it must be like - not something we could all easily adapt to.

In March we moved on to something else completely different, the military preparations for and actual day of the Coronation of King Charles III. Rehearsals were carried out ad infinitum in the weeks prior to



the actual ceremony, involving thousands of men, women and horses, and the precision and timing of all the arrangements were unbelievable. The uniforms were superb and Simon gave us graphic detail of some of the "behind the scenes" cleaning and polishing required. Those taking part were involved for hours on the actual day and of course inevitable questions about "what happens if they want to go to the loo?" came up! There was a photo of a young soldier sitting in the very early hours of the morning on the railway station bench waiting for the trains to

take them from barracks to London, and you could just imagine him thinking "I wonder what time I'll be catching the train back again?" It was really a fascinating insight into the military preparations and made you feel grateful you only had to watch on TV. I just hope the soldiers were allowed a lie-in the following day!

## PHOTOGRAPHY GROUP 2 (PG2)



We are a small group of friends who like to visit interesting places, take photographs (several of us just use phones or automatic cameras) and have lunch. Let me know if you're interested in joining us.



Our first outing for the year was to Boscombe Down Aviation Museum near Old Sarum where we saw many fascinating planes, parts thereof and information - not to mention an original pilot.

Other visits on the drawing board include bluebells in bloom in May, the gardens at Chisenbury Priory and the reclamation yard in Devizes.

## WINE TASTING AND APPRECIATION



How is your nose? Your palate? Your taste in wine? We put these and more to the test in our lighthearted meetings. The group runs in two consecutive evening sessions in Pewsey on the evening of the third Thursday of each month. We have quite a full list but can accommodate a couple more members if you're prepared to attend regularly. Interested?

## BOOK GROUP 1

Our monthly meetings begin with a chat over a cup of coffee and biscuits.

We discuss books we have read and books we think would be suitable for our group. Often the choice depends on whether the library can access enough copies.

November's read was **The Seventh Son by Sebastian Faulks**. This was a recommendation from BBC's *Between the Covers*. One review says that it is a work of nonfiction masquerading as fiction. As one character in the novel puts it, "It was only molecular chance that had led to the existence of modern humans. Faulks' body of work shows an "interest in the nature of consciousness". We were unanimous in voting this book as one of our best best reads.

In December we read a book of short stories: **The Snow Garden by Rachel Joyce**. These stories were interlinked by a woman in a red coat appearing unobtrusively in all. Much enjoyed and perfect for a Christmas read.

**Danielle Steele** is a well read author but her book **Challenge** was not considered well written by some of the group. Whilst it had moments of high drama and suspense it was rather predictable. An easy read. Dare I say a pot boiler!

## CREATIVE WRITING GROUP 1

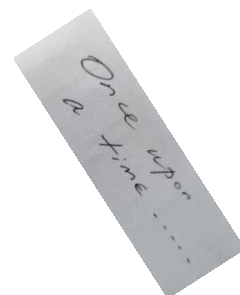
We are so sorry to hear that group leader Wendy Argent is unwell and wish her a speedy recovery.

Member Ann writes: Since the last u3a account we have looked at the differences in monologues and soliloquies. The seven stages of writing a monologue led to exploring a character thoroughly, then communicating, using storytelling.

Discussing creating characters led to a fun project whereby we were given a set of characters on a strip of paper, blank side up. From that each created their character from a set of criteria. The stories were discussed at the following session. Assassin, murder, semi psychotic, were among some of the traits. Bristol Airport was a common meeting place. Who knows what is to come. As I write this we have not had the next meeting.

Another interesting topic was proverbs. Taking a proverb we wrote about 500 words to portray a proverb. One clever member wrote a proverbial poem using over 20 proverbs.

We meet twice a month to drink tea and eat cake. What could beat that?



## CREATIVE WRITING GROUP 2



We continue to meet monthly (3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday afternoon) and try to find ways to improve our writing and our feedback. This month, along with our usual challenge (A Statue) members brought along a short piece for inclusion in the Newsletter. They printed them, folded them, and placed them in a bag (a Pewsey bag!) as they came in. We then each took out a story, and read them in turn to the group. Only one member had their own story to read. We voted unanimously for the following:

### **WALKING STICK**

He was our uncle; a kindly man who held strong opinions, one of which was the difference between usefulness and adornment. A favourite example concerned the use of walking sticks.

"Walking Sticks" he would assert, "are designed to help one along the way; not like the city gent's umbrella, rarely used against the rain but as a badge of superiority, nor the Chaplin's Little Tramp's use of a cane to make him feel like a dandy. I do not need a stick to suggest that I might be a farmer or landowner when talking to a stranger in the lane; nor do I brandish one at your scallywags scrumping apples from my tree, for that an angry shout will do. But on a journey a stick can be a friend and help indeed!"

We had often heard this rant, but always managed a friendly smile which seemed to please him. So, today, as he was slowly lowered in the ground, I carefully laid a stick atop his box.

## GARDENING GROUP



Well, in January we stayed in Pewsey (winter picture), indoors with a log fire, viewing the frost and snow from the warm, plus home baking (I didn't poison anyone) and planned the year.

For February we were hoping for snowdrops and duly found them at Welford Park, Newbury. (A few pics). Venturing into the cold we were greeted by carpets of snowdrops among the trees. Well worth a visit if you want to see a carpet of white in spring.



Heale Gardens near Salisbury entertained us for March with an early show of daffodils plus the odd peacock. They also have a well stocked and sensibly priced garden centre for more plants if required.

Next month we plan to visit Stourhead NT



## BOOK GROUP 2

Herewith a few words on the last three books....



### **Five Red Herrings by Dorothy L Sayers**

A Peter Wimsey book, set in Galloway in Scotland. It was rather annoying because of the characterisation of the six suspects, five of whom were red herrings. Mixed reaction from the group.

### **Sleepyhead by Mark Billingham**

Another detective story, with a troubled detective, and we again had a mixed set of views from the group. A rather disturbing storyline about a girl in a coma, but conscious.

### **Stop Them Dead by Peter James**

One of the Grace books (now a television series featuring John Simm) one member of the group said "I enjoyed the book as far as the plot was interesting. No real effort of characterisation but at least a detective without drink or domestic problems". However, it turns out from following books in the series, that he does have domestic problems!

## PRACTICAL PHOTOGRAPHY GROUP (PPG)

The Royal Standard at Buckingham Palace and US and UK flags marking graves at Brookwood Cemetery (the largest in the UK) formed part of a varied and interesting collection of 'Flags & Emblems' reviewed



at our first meeting of 2025. It was interesting to note that the latter outnumbered the former.

Our regular overseas travellers submitted



photos taken in Belgium, Spain, Norway, Iceland and on the not so distant Isle of Sark, while the rest of us settled for locations nearer to home which also produced some excellent images.

Some strong favourites emerged this month two of which have been selected for this report (above).



In February we immersed ourselves in 'Interiors' finding excellent sources for these in hotels, cafes, dwellings, museums, sheds, galleries, a bus, on board ship, and an empty courtroom. The contents of cupboards, handbags, tins, boxes and so on were most revealing!

Again some members benefitted from their trips abroad, others from local churches where some wonderful stained glass windows were photographed.



A Hotpod Yoga space and a column of changing coloured lights inside the Atomium in Belgium were two of the more unusual images submitted.

'A Tree or Trees' was the topic reviewed by the group at our meeting in March.



You may be forgiven for thinking this an extremely easy subject to tackle but it is rather like standing in a sweet shop wondering which ones to choose.

Forests were an obvious place to start and curious walkers asked 'what are you photographing?' - seemed a bit daft to say trees but it usually resulted in interesting conversations with dog owners and visitors who were keen not only to talk about trees but almost anything else as well.



It is always good to learn something new at our meetings and this month we saw a Kilmarnock Willow and Pedunculated Oaks as well as learning where Kerza Knoll is.

We now look forward to three new challenges on our list of topics which you can read about in the next Newsletter.

## BIRDWATCHING GROUP



Our first visit was to Langford Lakes, Salisbury a Wiltshire Wildlife Trust Site with hides. It was a frosty start and an excellent bright birding day. All of us saw Kingfishers, one particularly close to the hide. And we had a Grey Male Hen Harrier skim across the lake scaring the Ducks and Snipe. Quite a sight but I was too slow for a picture, sorry.

I did manage, with help, to spot three Snipe hiding in the margins - a photo you can view on the U3A SlickPicks site - link below.



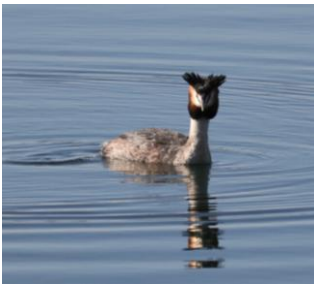
But we were treated to a few Ducks and Geese including one Egyptian Goose. But no otters for us.

Blashford Lakes, Ringwood was a good day out, even if no White Tailed Eagles were seen, and for some no Water Rail even... A nice bright winter's day. Lots of Kingfisher sightings, numerous ducks including some more unusual, Wigeon, Teal, Shoveler and Pintail.



The elusive Water Rail, which makes a noise like a pig, I did hear it at least!

For April we plan to go to Ham Wall, Somerset in search of Bittern. Hopefully not as elusive as Water Rail but we shall see.



*Pictures from top:*

*Kingfisher, Large White Egret, Mute Swan, Tufted Duck, Great Crested Grebe, Robin, Cormorant*



## PATCHWORK GROUP



Here are two pincushions made by my two newest members, beautifully finished. Next we have tumbling blocks which will be made into a table mat.

Here are a set of three table mats which were made specifically for the New Year and lastly a babies quilt which will be passed to the new local Project Linus representatives when they come to introduce themselves and talk about the

project and how it is helping provide comfort quilts for children and young people in hospital or in care.



This will be at our next meeting on 11th March. We are hoping that they will bring some cuddle fleece to back two quilts as well as some finished quilts to inspire all of us.

