



Pewsey Vale u3a

NEWSLETTER

Issue 69

October 2025

Message from the Chair

Dear Friends,

I can hardly believe I have been your Chairman for almost three years. It has been a busy and certainly interesting time, both personally and as part of such thriving and friendly u3a.

Please read all the reports in this newsletter to see what is going on - maybe they will inspire you to join another group or to start a new one.

Our constitution says the chairman can only serve for three years, so very soon the mantle must be passed on! Meanwhile I must thank all those who have worked with me over these three years on the committee and alongside us, not only for their dedication but also their friendship.

So what do we get up to you may ask, apart from eating cake and drinking tea or coffee?

Well, we organise the Social Meetings, and any extra events like the Cheese and Wine, Quiz Night and Cream Tea. We ensure the finances, membership details and legal aspects are kept up to date and above board. The latter have been a big focus for all of us on the committee, as laws and regulations have been tightened up since Covid - I thought I had finished tangling with polices when I retired!!

There are vacancies on the committee and we would love to have you join us. We need help in the organisation of social events, with our web site and other jobs. But even if these don't interest you, please come and share your ideas of how to improve your u3a.

A little bit of help would be really useful....

Please remember - the u3a is run by members for members. WE NEED YOU.

Personally, I intended visiting as many groups as I could during my tenure but life and injuries like my broken ankle and wrist have restricted me a bit! So, many apologies. I hope to be more active again soon.

Many thanks for your support. 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

October 2025	Tuesday 21 st	Social Meeting with Dr Gale Pettifer on Heart of the Oaks: The 18th Century Naval timber crisis and the New Forest. True or False?
November 2025	Tuesday 18 th	AGM and Alex Leger returns. Cruise Ship Speaker and ex BBC Producer Alex will entertain us with his talk, ' I bet this never happened to you - Extraordinary life Stories '.
December 2025	Friday 5 th	Quiz 6.30-8.30
January 2026	Tuesday 20 th	Social Meeting with Alan Benson, local photographer
March 2026	Tuesday 17 th	Social Meeting with David Dawson from Wiltshire Museum who will talk to us about the artist John Piper (1903-92) who specialised in landscapes of Wiltshire and Dorset.
May 2026	Tuesday 19 th	Social Meeting with a member of the Wiltshire Air Ambulance Service who will talk to us about their work.
July 2026	Tuesday 21 st	Social Meeting with David Clensey - Walking The Standing Stones: Wiltshire's Sarsen Way & Cranborne Drovers Way , about his experiences with his son Charlie walking from Swindon to Salisbury based on his recent book.
October 2026	Tuesday 20 th	Social Meeting with Marcus Ward of New Forest Tours - A Year in the Life of Lymington and Keyhaven Marshes .
November 2026	Tuesday 17 th	AGM and One Gun, Two Dead, the Hastings Murder of 1911 . Miranda Pender will provide an entertaining insight into her Great Grandfather Joseph James.

WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBERS

Hello and welcome to those of you who have joined Pewsey Vale u3a in the last three months. 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.

U3A IN KENNET GLOBAL TIPPING POINTS STUDY DAY

Our Kennet colleagues are to be congratulated on another meticulously organised study day at Marlborough College (their third), which took place on September 15th. Among torrential cloudbursts, some 120 or so members (4 of us from Pewsey Vale) and students sat down to a day of talks and discussions which covered:

- The Middle East and Global Security
- What do Ice-Ages Tell Us about Climate Tipping Points?
- Super Aging
- Some of the Benefits and Risks of AI in Healthcare

In addition, students from Marlborough College and Swindon Academy presented short TED (Technology, Entertainment and Design) talks, also on tipping points. They had all clearly done their research, were very enthusiastic about their subjects and fielded some very challenging questions/rants from the audience. We were much impressed. *Ed*



DARTS GROUP

Since the Darts Group started in March we have been playing on the 1st and 3rd Mondays of the month, from 2.00 - about 4.00 pm upstairs in the Royal Oak. They have made us most welcome which is greatly appreciated. We had about 20 members express an interest, but of course not all could come on Mondays. This was chosen as it was the day of the week that more members could attend.



We have many laughs at our meetings, but we have not recruited more members. Even if you have never played, why not come and have a couple of hours of fun? If you are expert, this also applies to you, perhaps you could help to raise our rather poor standard! (some of us, excluding myself, are getting much better.)

It would be a shame if numbers were to dwindle and the group fail.

SHORT MAT BOWLS

Short mat bowls started again on September 8th in Pewsey leisure centre at 2.15pm and in Upavon village hall on Friday 12th at 10am, then most Mondays and Fridays until next May.

567 WALKING GROUP

We have had a variety of different environments to enjoy during the walks in the last few months. Savernake Forest provided shade and humidity while we walked amongst the ancient trees. There was



rural farmland between Urchfont and Stert. Then wetlands at Coate Water, Swindon, crossing the M4 to stroll through open countryside before returning to the lakeside at Coate. Recently we travelled to Ashdown Park near Lambourne and enjoyed a 6 mile walk taking in Waylands Smithy at Ashbury. On our return stretch back to the car park we saw a large herd of deer ahead of us. They did not move until we were quite close and as they ran across in front of us we counted 80 plus!

We have plenty of room for more walkers in our group. Our next walk, 6.5 miles, will be on 16th October and will start at Wilton. Contact me if you would like to come along.

COUNTRY DANCE MUSIC

We only missed one session during the summer break and our grasp of the tunes we are learning continues to improve. We were joined by two new fiddlers at the September meeting in Wilcot which added some real breadth to the group. We are up to ten musicians in total now, which is a good number, but still room for a few more if you fancy joining a fun group.

We are soon getting to the point where we are ready to play in public, background music rather than a formal performance. We are talking to Kennet U3a about playing at one of their meetings, so if you have something where you need some background music, please do let us know. Unfortunately we don't do pop music, so some of the tunes may not be familiar to you, but they are reasonably lively, the sort of thing you would hear at a barn dance.

We meet on the 1st Friday of the month at 10.30am at Wilcot Village Hall, and the 3rd Thursday of the month at 7pm at the Crown pub in Pewsey. You can always come along to the Crown for a drink and a listen sometime.

BADMINTON

The Badminton group has attracted four new members since the last newsletter. (*Well done, Ed.*) We meet every Wednesday at 1pm at the Pewsey Campus.

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. By the time you read this, we will have each attempted to write a piece in which the letter R does not appear. Oooh ahh!

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

Uranomania: the delusion that one is of divine origin.

"If a fruiterer sells fruit, does a caterer sell cats? And a chatterer, French cats? And what about a wanderer or an adulterer? It's not clear why two -er suffixes were added to fruit. If you're in the habit of looking for logic in a language, this would be a good time to give up. "

BOARD GAMES GROUP

The Board Games group has moved to a new venue recently. We now meet at The Vale Leisure Centre in the cafe area. It is free so there is no charge to come along to the group.

The usual popular games are available; Scrabble and Rummikub but we have tried a few new games with varying satisfaction amongst the players!

Members are encouraged to bring different games to play so if you have a favourite game please come along to share it with us.

We meet on the second Monday afternoon of the month at 2.30pm, finishing at 4 o'clock.

CARD GROUP

We are a friendly lot at the Card Group: we enjoy making cards, sharing ideas and techniques.

If you are experienced in this hobby and have card making equipment at home and want to get more out of it, in a relaxed atmosphere, then why not email Julie as there is one empty chair to fill.

QUIZ GROUP

- ❖ 2nd Monday of the month 4:30-6pm
- ❖ Pewsey Heritage Centre Whatley 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



ART GROUP



This has been a quieter three months for the art group following our exhibition in the railway waiting rooms at Pewsey Railway Station. After two sessions in quick succession where we had artists visiting, we have devoted our sessions to our own work.

We are lucky to have a large number of active artists in our area - evidenced by the number of people taking part in Open Studios in the Marlborough, Devizes, West Berkshire and Swindon area. We do try to arrange visits from artists in various mediums and encourage our group members to attend other art classes, groups and courses and share their experiences with other members of the group.

Members of the group continue to work in their chosen medium and broaden their experience. The group meets on the 2nd and 4th Thursday of each month throughout the year from 2-4pm in Manningford Village Hall.

A reminder to drop into the MADE Gallery in Pewsey to view the constantly changing exhibitions.



(Art Group submitted so many wonderful pictures that I have taken the liberty of including them on various pages throughout this newsletter. Ed)



TRAVEL GROUP

Members from Kennet and Pewsey Travel Group went on their second trip of the year. This was a five day one, based in the 4 star Hydro Hotel, Eastbourne.

As always there were lots of outings including Brighton Pavilion, Sissinghurst Castle Garden, Weald and Downland Museum, Rye, Battle, free time in Eastbourne and a steam railway trip, where we indulged in a luxurious afternoon tea. We even viewed the Repair Shop to see if we could be transformed!



WHAT ARE YOU READING ABOUT?

Canals! Jo Bell's book *Boater* about how she moved from archaeology to travelling on England's canals in a narrowboat, while also being a poet (she became the first Canal Laureate). And of local interest to us, her first long journey took her to Honeystreet. Jo's writing is lyrical, informative and often very entertaining. "You never quite see a kingfisher; you just miss seeing one as it zips across the surface, low as a tiny Dambuster."



Then there are Terry Darlington's *Narrow Dog* books - *Narrow Dog to Carcasonne*, *Narrow Dog to Indian River* and *Narrow Dog to Wigan Pier*. Terry and Monica, along with their long and narrow whippet Jim, also travelled by narrow boat. Terry's writing is quirky and amusing: much recommended. His friend tells him "You are old, you've only got one eye, you are a coward and you can't jump. Monica ran your business while you wandered around being nasty to your customers."

NEW LET'S TALK GARDENING GROUP

This group starts on the Wednesday 15th October 2025.

I shall be getting in touch, again, with those lucky enough to have a place in this group nearer the time, and thanking those that are interested in joining should a place become vacant. This will be a relaxed group, talking about the joys and woes of gardening.

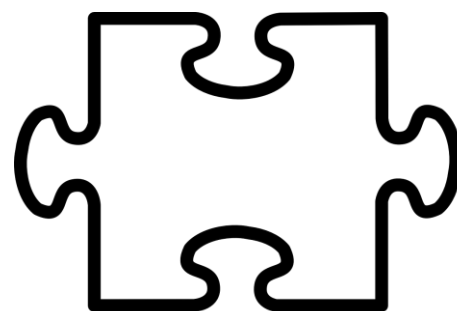
Happy Gardening, to all gardeners in U3A

FREE JIGSAW PUZZLE SWAP

This is free for any u3a members.

Jigsaw Swap will be available at the Bouverie Hall between 2pm and 4 on the following dates:

- October 14th, 21st
- November 11th, 18th,
- December 9th, 23rd
- January 13th, 20th, 27th



When returning or donating a jigsaw please ensure that the pieces are in a bag inside the box. Thank you.

CREATIVE WRITING 1

Alone in the great outdoors

One Wiltshire man is in a quandary. He wants more people to enjoy the incredible landscape around us - but he also wants to have it to himself.



I'm on the ridge above the Pewsey White Horse, gazing one way across the lush flatness of the Vale itself to Martinsell Hill and hints of the Marlborough Downs beyond. Turning, I can see deep into the vast bleakness of Salisbury Plain, barely inhabited up to the horizon and for many miles onward.

It's the very definition of a big sky. And, at the meeting point of these two environments, I feel totally alone - alone on the planet almost.

It so often strikes me that here I am, in perhaps the most densely populated third of one of the world's most densely populated countries, seeing not a person. And, apart from some of the roofs of Pewsey itself, scarcely a dwelling in all the massive landscape around me.

For the 100th time, I ask myself just why so few people seem to come up here. Why the Vale and the Plain seem to receive little in the way of visitors, as travellers determinedly rush past us, heading further westward on the M4 and the railway.

It's not just outsiders who are missing out. Nearly 4,000 people live in Pewsey itself: but bar the occasional walking group, I seldom if ever see more than three or four fellow walkers when I go up the hill - and they're usually the same people, over and over again, throughout all the seasons.

But that's definitely my gain, I think, as I watch one recent settler - a gigantic Red Kite - somehow holding position in mid air despite the gusting breeze, with just the tiniest adjustments of its feathers revealing its unbelievable co-ordination.

Its downwards focus is relentless. And then, without warning, it stoops. And however much I feel for whatever tiny creature couldn't escape its eyes or talons, I can only admire the brilliance of its attack.

Back from the brink

Today, seeing this particular instance of nature in the raw is far from rare. The kite's a beneficiary of a highly successful reintroduction effort that's brought the species from the brink of extinction over the last 30 years to be flourishing across many English counties.

Our part of the world is also leading other successful programmes, including the hen harrier and the stone curlew. But maybe the most dramatic case is that of the world's heaviest flying bird, the Great Bustard, of which the largest males reportedly weigh in at over 40lb.

Hunted to extinction in the UK in the 1830s, for the last 20 years it's been the subject of a reintroduction programme focused on the Plain, reflecting the strong links to Wiltshire that give the bird a starring role on the county's flag. Progress has been slow but steady, and it was reported in 2021 that a sustainable breeding population of more than 100 birds had been established.

It's not all about birds. Rare plants, too, flourish in our special part of the world, as do multiple insect species - including the very rare Adonis blue butterfly - and mammals like roe deer and brown hares.

Contrasting neighbours

Pewsey Vale and Salisbury Plain are very different - indeed almost opposite - types of rural environment. The fact that they just happen to exist side by side gives us a uniquely contrasting landscape with very different features.

The Vale is known for the exceptional quality of its land, thanks in no small part to one of Europe's richest deposits of Greensand, a highly fertile fine sand made from ancient ocean sediments. As a result it's been rigorously farmed for many centuries. And it continues to set farming standards. In recent years, farmers of all types - arable, dairy, beef, sheep and pigs, organic and conventional - have come together as the Pewsey Downs Farmers Group to encourage practices to protect soils and water and address climate change.

The Plain has had a very different past. Today, it's acknowledged to be one of the continent's largest remaining areas of semi-natural chalk grassland. And there's a reason for this: its use as a training ground by the British Army has meant for generations that vast swathes have been scarcely farmed, making it one of Europe's richest and most diverse remaining ecosystems.

And that in turn makes it somewhere that we should cherish. Sure, it can be a little disconcerting to see parachutists tumbling overhead, to hear guns rumbling in the distance, to feel the ground shake as a column of tanks trundles by.

But these are ironically what continues to make the Plain the haven it is today. There have been none of the fertilisers, herbicides, pesticides and ploughing that elsewhere continue to disrupt habitats. The disruption caused by tank tracks even creates environments that are very attractive to a wide range of rare plants, which in turn provide a home for pollinating insects and create the base of a self-supporting eco-system.

A conflict of interests

Now, to be honest, I am not especially interested in the minutiae of what makes nature tick. I am more of a big picture kind of person: it is the whole that interests me, starting with the sky, the light, the landscapes and the weather that come together to overwhelm the senses.

And you might have gathered that I'm only too happy to be alone in such an environment, maybe sharing it with just my wife and our dog.

So when I try to persuade more people to get out into the open and experience this amazing world we're so fortunate to have right on our doorsteps, I do so in the hope that no one's listening too hard.

Obviously, I'd be pleased if sharing my experience results in more people getting the joy from the great outdoors that I do.

But I'd be utterly thrilled if I could continue to enjoy it pretty much on my own.



BIRDWATCHING



It's been a 'funny' few months weatherwise and I have cancelled a couple of events due to extreme hot weather 30 plus degrees C in July and wet and blustery conditions in September. Not all of the venues have hides, or cafes and I for one like a little comfort these days.



But we did get to Langford Lakes in August. The lakes are currently dominated by Canada Geese but they do settle down at lunchtime. Of note were both Great White and Little Egret and Juvenile Grey Heron with the crazy haircut. Plus some waders and ducks. Those of us that stayed on in the afternoon were treated to a flying display by a Hobby. And I even managed to get a few Hobby pictures for a change, I'm still working on a really good one. Sorry to those that missed the Hobby, next time. And we did also spot a few more interesting insects, the picture is a Musk Beetle apparently.



I have found out about a few more local birdwatching spots, and will be organising some visits soon. Let me know if you would like to join us.



GARDENING

We have variously cancelled, postponed and re-scheduled visits over the last few months to avoid the extreme weather and work around holidays, but...

A few hardy members braved the sun to visit Penwood Nursery, Penwood, Newbury and Yew Tree Garden



centre, East Woodhay, Newbury As you can see in the picture, Penwood is a traditional nursery with a wide range of good quality and some more unusual plants. Worth a visit if you haven't been.

We were on holiday in September, but I'm sure those that were able to visit Lynn's garden had a good visit.

This gardening group has a large number of members at present, but if you are interested in

gardening and visits please get in touch. With the visits to large gardens and nurseries there are opportunities to accommodate more people.

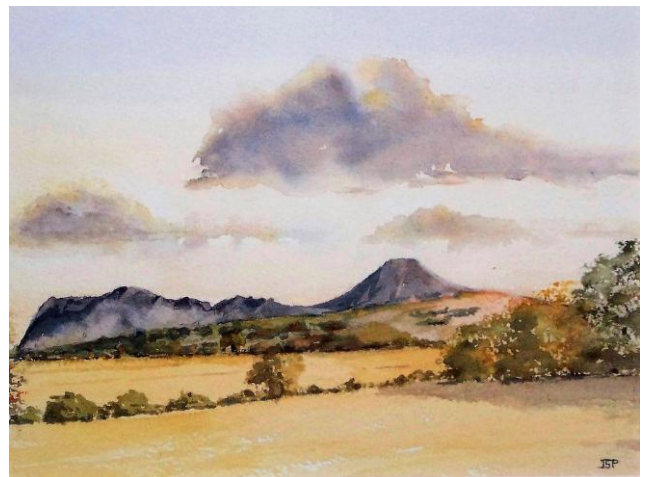
WALKING 789

I have been wanting to do a longer walk along Wansdyke for some time and settled for a 4.5 mile out and return along the same path, 9 miles in all. The views look different when you turn around. But it was a rather sticky, dry sunny July day.



In August Lynne showed us around Upper Woodford, Salisbury which tied in nicely with some of the tangential paths we had previously taken on the Pewsey Avon Trail, PAT.

We do have room for more walkers, but the walks do require fitness and usually take around three hours.



WALKING 9+



Okay I have my moments: we decided to brave a long walk despite the July heat. But we did go for an early start to reduce our time in the sun. We did a 10 mile circuit of the Pewsey Vale, walking up Oare Hill and then south to Giant's Grave on Pewsey Hill. The pictures are of the climb up to the Giant's Grave and the view back across the Vale to Martinsell Hill. Well done all.



In September I thought we would start with a bus ride to Marlborough and walk back to Pewsey. Not a bad walk via West Woods and Huish. Shame I forgot to take my phone for pictures.....

There is plenty of room in this group for more walkers if you would like to join us, but it does require good fitness and usually takes us around four hours.



Hadrian's Wall



Ardelve, Scotland



Ardvreck Castle, Loch Assynt, Scotland

WALKING4EXERCISE

The Walking4exercise group has made the most of the fabulous weather during the summer. Walks from: Bulford along the River Avon, Devizes enjoying the views from Oliver's Castle (see the picture), Upavon over the hill behind the golf course, Everleigh across the Plain needing to divert by order of the



army and a couple of bus rides with walks on Marlborough Downs and Pewsey Vale.

We have seen beautiful wildlife, learnt some historical, geographical, botanical and agricultural facts. But best of all, we have had fun. There's always plenty to talk about and laughter to be had wherever we go.

If you would like to come along please get in touch.

WINE TASTING AND APPRECIATION



The group runs in two consecutive evening sessions in Pewsey on the evening of the third Thursday of each month. We (generally) taste three white wines followed by three red, with the topic chosen and presented by one of the members.

Recently Martin pleased and surprised us by following the trail of female wine makers from Australia, New Zealand and France. We've also looked at (well, more than looked!) English wines: delicious but expensive, and what we can pick up locally and affordably if we're suddenly asked out to dinner - yes please. And where can you get both baklava and wine? We found out and tasted both - yummy.

We do have a few vacancies in the group so if you'd like to come and try it, do let me know. You don't have to be an expert in any way, just enjoy tasting a variety of wines in good company.

COUNTRY DANCING

After a break for the summer the Country Dancing group is back in action again. We were surprised that we hadn't forgotten everything we had learnt!

Dancing (and laughing) is great exercise and very good for you so why not come along and give it a try? It is two hours of fun. It's NOT difficult and is very sociable. No previous experience is necessary.

The cost is £2 which includes tea or coffee and a biscuit.

Tuesday afternoons at the Bouverie Hall, the second and fourth Tuesdays, 2 until 4pm.

Please get in touch if you would like further information.

DOG WALKING

Since we last wrote about the dog walking group we've all enjoyed or had to endure four heatwaves when our group was not able to meet because it was too hot for our dogs (and ourselves) which was a shame! Yes there are areas of our walks that are shady but, getting to them still requires walking along warm/hot pavements (no-one wants paws) so un-cool! Difficult when they are all together looking forward to meeting up with friends (even if they take no notice of each other unless they all share the same excellent sniff and leave their reply)!

Two of us however did manage a walk on a damp and humid afternoon with persistent drizzle!. Between us we had three dogs, one being a puppy which needed to learn about being sociable . It was too wet to take any pictures but it went well.

On our latest walk the weather was showery but we all enjoyed meeting and sharing a 'nail filing' walk that is mostly along roads and pathways rather than muddy overgrown tracks across the fields.

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

CREATIVE WRITING GROUP 2

We continue to meet in Pewsey on the 3rd Wednesday of the month, 2.00 - 4.00 pm. We write short stories or poems and discuss these at the meetings, which leads us to interesting discussions of the various topics raised. We also try to explore ways to improve our efforts and to do a short impromptu writing task.

We have one or two places available, so do contact me if you would like to know more about the group.

(See The Return and Bedroom Frolics below)

THE RETURN



The rain runs down the windowpane and mingles with my tears,
How could you do what you have done after all these years?
I've cared for you and nurtured too; I've even changed your bed.
I've spent cash for you and washed up too, made sure that you're well fed.
How foolishly, I could not see, your thoughts were for yourself,
So off you went, no thought of rent, leaving me all by myself.
You left our home, went off to roam, was it to find another mate?
Where did you go? I don't want to know, you're an absolute ingrate!
And now I gaze, through misty haze, to where you always stood.
I feel so glum, I've lost my chum, you must think I'm made of wood.
I ponder on your ways, and count the days, from when I last saw you.
Do you think of me? No, that couldn't be, it's not something you would do.
Now the sun's come out, and I give a shout as you saunter through the gate,
With such nonchalance, you've led me a dance, I'll get even just you wait!
You come in the door, step on the floor and stand upon the mat,
In relief I sigh, then let out a cry 'You rotten, selfish Cat!'

BEDROOM FROLICS

The fitted sheet and pillowcases were on. Now for the duvet. I braced myself, then paused. John did always say he was happy to help, bound to be easier with two.



"John!"

John confidently grabbed two corners of the flimsy summer duvet and began to thrust them into the cover.

"Oh no, wait a minute," I began nervously, "it's the other way round."

"No, surely not, it's wider this way than that way."

"No, no, the wavy lines, I know the wavy lines go horizontally, like the waves on the sea."

"Have you measured it?"

"No, I don't need to, I just know it's this way. I do this every time you know."

"I do always ask if you want help!"

"I know, I know, but I'm just in the routine."

John sighed.

"Well, if you're sure, let's turn it around."

Silently, we dived into the duvet cover and pulled out the slithering mass.

"You take this corner."

"No, that's what we did before."

"No, no it's not. Oh wait, yes you're right."

"Well, I did say."

"Now, you hold those two corners and I'll hold these. Now shake. And again. Not that hard!!"

The whole thing took off, as if alive, and landed on the floor like a giant squid.

"Hold on tight! Now we'll have to start again."

"No, it's OK, the corners are still in I think."

"Oh, so they are, that's lucky. Wait.....".

I stared at it, puzzled.

"I don't understand, it doesn't fit this way either, the duvet edges are longer than the cover edges."

"I told you it was the other way!"

"But it didn't fit that way either."

"Well, that doesn't make sense, it's got to fit one way or the other."

Then I remembered.

"I think this duvet is a queen size, and the cover is only a double."

"What?"

"I think it's always been a bit big, but I don't usually notice when I'm struggling to do it by myself."

"So it's still my fault, even when it isn't."

I smiled. "Oh well, we'll just cope with baggy bits."

BOOK GROUP 1

April's read was **Miss Benson's Beetle** by Rachel Joyce.

This is a fictional story of a woman in the 1950s, who sets out to find a yet undiscovered golden beetle. She leaves her dead end job to travel the world with an unlikely companion. It is a fascinating, interesting and humorous read. The two females form an unlikely friendship which leads them to break rules and risk lives. With a macabre twist at the end one is left with many questions.

(See also Book Group 3 - great minds read alike! Ed)

May gave us **The Romantic** by William Boyd.

The main character Castel Greville Ross was born in 1788. He experiences many lives. Some are happy, others are devastating. He moves from Ireland to London, then seeking his fortune as a soldier finds himself at Waterloo followed by Zanzibar. Romance stars amidst a turbulent life. This is a thoroughly good read.

June and July were holiday reads. We met in July to discuss our book swaps for the summer.

August was **Restless Dolly Maunder** by Kate Grenville

This book was shortlisted for the 2024 Women's Prize for fiction.

Dolly is an ambitious young woman born in the nineteenth century where women began to shake off male domination. The novel reflects what Dolly knew of her grandmother.

Born on a sheep farm in Australia, Dolly was one of a large family who expected her to leave school at 14 to help with household chores. In order to escape she marries. Her husband can be manipulated to fall in with her desire for betterment.

They start with a shop advancing to a small hotel. Eventually they make it to the best hotel in the state. With a family herself she works hard to provide. She has a strained relationship with her mother and her father, who is a bully. This is a book of history, memoir and biography.



BOOK GROUP 2



Our reading experiences over the past months.

In the Spring, we read a couple of autobiographies, to take a break from our usual fiction choices.

Both were written by female writers, one British and the other American. Similar stories of hardship, abuse and challenging childhoods. "**Lowborn**" by **Kerry Hudson** and "**Uneducated**" by **Tara Westover**. These true stories didn't score highly with the members due to their difficult and negative tones

(though the resulting outcomes for both women were positive).

We returned to fiction and read the 7th in the line of detective murder mystery stories from Tim Sullivan. His writing style and book titles are quite specific, each title the name of a profession, so our book was entitled "**The Bookseller**" by **Tim Sullivan**. Tim Sullivan has created a fictional male detective who has autism, Detective Sergeant George Cross. DS Cross has different qualities to his colleagues and has a dogged determination to use his logic to ensure that the correct murder suspect is brought to justice and he always succeeds.

In the summer we read two novels with World War 2 backdrops. "**Transcription**" by **Kate Atkinson**, the story of a young woman who finds her job within the civil service becoming much more than secretarial administration, as she is reluctantly recruited into MI5's espionage circle and develops her skills in spying, which she is quite ambivalent about.

The 2nd novel, "**Guardian of Lies**" by **Kate Furnivall** was less well enjoyed by our members, as we felt that this similarly espionage-related storyline, based in France after WW2, lacked strong definition of the characters.

A success has been **Sally Magnusson's** book "**The Seal Woman's Gift**". Most of the group enjoyed the unusual story of a woman, Asta, wife to a pastor. Her family and community were invaded by Barbary pirates in 1627 and removed from their remote Icelandic island to serve as slaves in North Africa. The story had strong characters, plenty of intrigue concerning their safety and future in captivity. Asta underpinned the storyline, her relationship with her husband, her children and the chief of the captors, provided a very interesting and in-depth description of her challenges and decisions. A worthy read, by the daughter of Magnus Magnusson (their Icelandic generational history and stories to draw from).

We have just started reading **Robert Harris**, "**Precipice**" for September.

TABLE TENNIS AND PICKLE BALL

Table Tennis follows on from Badminton every Wednesday, it regularly has 12 to 15 participants and all abilities are welcome.

After Table Tennis we have Pickle Ball, from 3.15 to 4.15pm, which is enjoyed by a smaller but enthusiastic group many of whom also play TT and Badminton.

The cost of the Table Tennis is £1.00 and the Pickle Ball £2.00 per week, as with Badminton if more turn up then extra courts can be booked.

BOOK GROUP 3

Book Group 3 meets on the second Tuesday of each month at our leader's home. We have time for a cuppa, a biscuit or two and a chat as well as discussing our selected book.

In July we discussed **Miss Benson's Beetle**, recommended by book group 1. We found plenty to discuss on this unusual story. Miss Benson, a teacher of maturing years, rather awkward socially, had always kept the book of rare beetles shown to her and explained by her beloved father illuminated in her mind since childhood. When her opportunity comes to travel she makes a perilous journey across the world with a most unlikely companion to search for the gold beetle. Their relationship as well as the search make a fascinating narrative.

In September we discussed **The Paris Wife** by **Paula McLain**. A novel based on the life of Ernest Hemingway and his first wife Hadley. The author writes from the perspective of Hadley who is captivated by his energy and ambition of their lives together, their travels to support his writing, their friends and her unflinching support for Ernest through the ups and downs of his creative life and their relationship.

We agreed that Hemingway needed constant praise, Hadley we felt was relied on for that and chose to forgo her own preferences to support her husband in his world of artists and writers, a world often fuelled with alcohol and fluctuating moods. A compelling read.

MILITARY HISTORY

As usual we have had big audiences for our recent Military History Group presentations - fortunately the car park at Easton Royal is quite spacious if everyone parks neatly! July was no exception when we had a talk by Mike Morison about the Seven Years War. This was a vast global conflict in the middle of the 18th century which could be said to be the precursor to the world wars as it began with frontier disputes in North America and expanded to include fighting in Europe, India and the Caribbean. It fundamentally shifted the global balance of power, establishing Great Britain as the then world's leading imperial power. However, it was a topic many of us knew very little about and so it was something of an eye-opener and extremely interesting.

We do not meet in August, so we began our "new term" at the beginning of September with a talk by Rick Peacock-Edwards about his late father's career as a World War II fighter pilot and life after the RAF. Again, it made for fascinating listening and took us behind the scenes of a period which impacted on all our lives.

We are very fortunate to be able to call upon such excellent speakers and do thank them for the time they spend preparing their talks and coming to give them to us. The regular size of the audience is proof of the variety of speakers we can attract. This is reflected in the programme lined up for this autumn, and we kick off on October 6th with a return visit by Bill King who will be giving us a rather more light hearted talk about the legendary band leader Glen Miller and his wartime story.

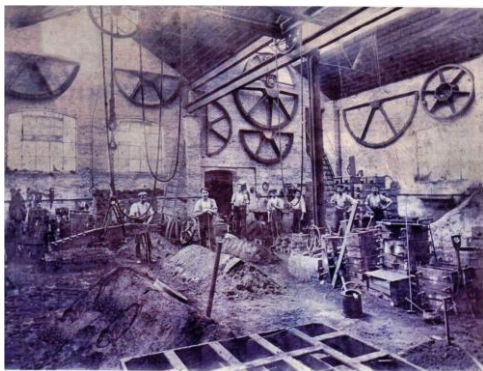
If you would like to join us on the first Monday of each month at Easton Royal Village Hall, we would be pleased to see you. We start arriving around 10.00 am for a coffee, biscuit and chat, getting started promptly at 10.30 am.

LOCAL HISTORY GROUP



We returned from our summer break on 18th September with a talk presented by Paul Cowan that attracted another full house. This much reduced report gives an idea of what we learnt.

'Paul's talk on the history of the Heritage Centre and the Whatley family could not have been more engaging and entertaining. The building housed the Whatley and Hosier Foundry business originally set up by George Whatley at Wootton Rivers, its primary business being deep well and borehole engineering later expanding into heavy and agricultural engineering.



Built from limestone blocks left over from canal and railway construction the building dates from 1873 when George's son Uriah Whatley inherited the business. He and his wife Sarah had 10 children and after her death Sarah's sister Eva helped Uriah raise the family, later marrying him and having 5 children.

Further local enterprises and businesses emerged over time including Whatley's Ironmongery and the Pewsey Electric Light Company which had originally been set up by Uriah himself.

In 1948 the running of the business was transferred to Ernie Caldwell and Bob Thompson, the latter being our presenter's father-in-law. Bob's wife inherited the business and Paul set up his own accident repair works behind the foundry building.



By the 1970's Whatley & Co. had moved to their new Salisbury Road premises. The original foundry had become redundant but eventually Whatley's got planning permission to develop the land behind the foundry building and 56 houses were built in the area.

Finally, the building was sold to Pewsey Parish Council for the grand sum of £1.00 with the condition that it would be used as a Heritage Centre in perpetuity as long as is viable.

After the talk members joined Paul in the museum where he was happy to explain a little more about the extensive collection of interesting items that relate to the social, industrial, and agricultural history of the Pewsey Vale.'

The Heritage Centre is a great resource for local and family history research and has an online catalogue of items and photographs.

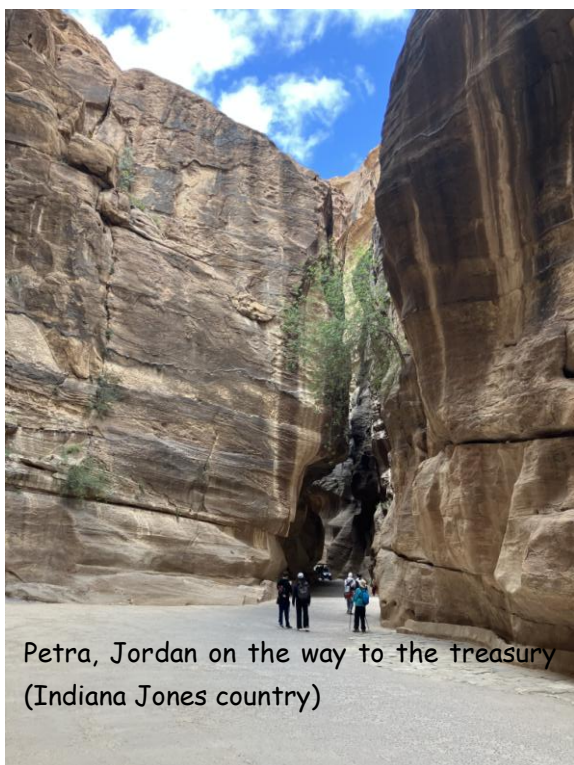
Our group meets on the third Thursday morning of the month at the Whatley Building adjacent to the Pewsey Heritage Centre.

TRAVELLERS TALES

Following the Group's very jolly "end of term" lunch in July, we took a summer holiday ourselves and so only re-convened at the beginning of September (we meet on the first Tuesday of the month). A good friend of mine, Scott, took himself off on his first ever cruise to find some well-deserved sunshine earlier this year, departing from Fort Lauderdale and heading for the newly named "Gulf of America". Travelling on his own he was much impressed with the warm and social ambience of his fellow travellers, and really exposed to us the whole experience of day to day life on board quite a big vessel. There was plenty to enjoy and a great deal of variety, both organised and to suit individual choice and I think many of us who have never taken a cruise were quite surprised by the variety and quality of the entertainment.

The route included the Panama Canal, an experience in itself, and the photos of that alone were quite a revelation. All in all he enjoyed it very much, but was the first to point out that it might not appeal to everyone! However, he is booked on another venture for next year, so maybe we shall be welcoming Scott back again before long.

Due to a family funeral the planned presentation for October has been postponed and we shall meet again on November 4th when Simon Ellis, who is known to many in Pewsey for his expeditions to Ukraine helping to transport medical and welfare requirements to the war-torn areas will tell us something about his adventures. I know this will be of much interest to many non-TT members, but if you would like to come and hear his "Travellers Tales" you would be most welcome. We meet at Easton Royal Village Hall on the second Tuesday of the month at just after 10.00 am for a 10.30 am start with a cup of coffee, biscuit and natter before we get going.



Petra, Jordan on the way to the treasury
(Indiana Jones country)



Wadi Rum. Lawrence of Arabia
country.

PHOTOGRAPHY GROUP 2 (PG2)



We took the group to Chisenbury Priory for a special open garden day while I was swanning round Scotland!

And talking of priories, we have just been to Edington Priory Church, an unexpectedly large and well-maintained church in a tiny village. You can see some of our photographs on

WALKING FOR LEISURE GROUP

We are a friendly group, and the walks are generally easy, flat, without stiles and are not overly strenuous. We walk at a leisurely moderate pace for approximately 2 hours, with most walks around 3-3.5 miles long. We take regular breaks along the way for refreshments. If it's possible we end the walk with lunch at a local establishment.



Recent locations have included Burbage, Easton Royal to Milton Lilbourne & Great Bedwyn. Our future walks for the remainder of 2025 will be Manningford, Pewsey & Wilcot.

There are currently 8 active members but ideally we need a few more members to keep this group going.

If you are interested in joining us on the 2nd Thursday of each month, please get in touch.

The photo was taken in September on the canal towpath near Great Bedwyn.

(Nothing to do with the u3a and no, I'm not advertising, but I recently attended a Graffiti Tour in Salisbury Cathedral. Fabulous, much recommended. Ed.)



MUSIC APPRECIATION GROUP

The Music Appreciation Group was formed some years ago and concentrated mainly on classical music with members meeting in the leader's home.

Since the leadership changed the field of interest has expanded considerably and now includes any musical genre. Members choose, research and present their own selection of tracks which produces a varied and interesting programme throughout the year.

Tempted by an email announcing that the talk in May would be about 'Jazz Big Bands' I decided to go along to the meeting. This was music with which I was very familiar so I joined immediately.

The group took a break in June but the following month I was tested when '1970s Folk Revival' was on the agenda. This had definitely never been on my play list but the whole idea of joining is to listen to and appreciate the music that other members enjoy. I was surprised by the standard of knowledge within the group who appeared to be 'folkies' at heart. I had to admit that I enjoyed many of the tunes and especially one about Imber.



Chinatown-Eshop

In August we were invited before the meeting to guess what 'Pizz' stood for in the title of the upcoming talk 'Pizz...and Pluckers'. Sadly my hope that we would be listening to stringed instruments while we each ate a slice of pizza was not met. I was though fascinated by a Chinese instrument called a Guzheng, an example of which can be seen in the photo alongside one of the presenter.

And so to September which brought us 'Brass Bands'. Formed in the UK as early as the eighteenth century by 1860 there were seventy five of them. I was amused by the fact that the programme started, not deliberately I understand, with Percy Fletcher's 'Labour & Love' and ended with 'Death or Glory' composed by Robert B Hall in the nineteenth century.

With a choice of over fifty musical genres listed on the Internet the group should never run out of ideas!



Photo of Guzheng - copyright owner not known. Happy to credit them if and when known.
Photo of Phillip taken by Wendy with his permission.

PATCHWORK GROUP



The quilts have all been made specially for Project Linus UK, and we have handed over seven to their local representative. They also accept crocheted and knitted baby blankets for babies born and given up at birth or just left: it's so heart rending to hear some of the stories she was sharing. I'm so pleased that Ruth encouraged me to find a new avenue to encourage the group to come together, helping each other to produce beautiful quilts for an agency that needs an endless supply to give a big warm hug to those who feel unloved.



The first quilt all in shades of blue designed for a boy, has been made by machine at home and backed with a royal blue cuddle fleece with white stars on.

These next two pictures are showing first two rectangular placemats made specifically for a good friend.

The tumbling blocks cushion is the from the second project that we all make when we first join the patchwork group, all boxes but made up of triangles, something that can take time to understand!



The next quilt in shades of red is a Japanese patchwork pattern which is already lined by the way the fabric is folded, changing it from a circle to a rounded square with a wadding and fabric square in the middle then all joined together and being stitched by hand.

The last is a quilt which will be lined with the lavender cuddle fleece. This quilt of squares is all hand stitched.

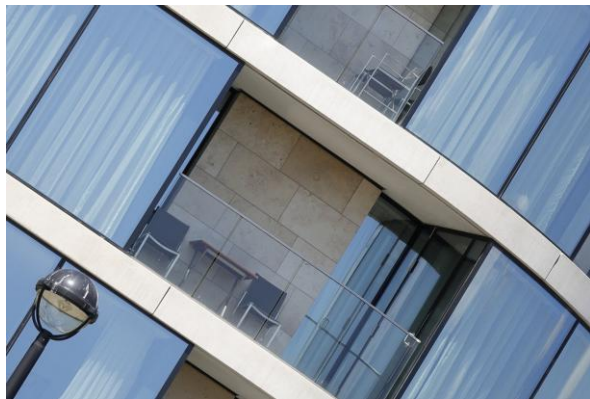


Recently we have said goodbye to one of the original members but we are about to welcome a new member.



PRACTICAL PHOTOGRAPHY GROUP (PPG)

ABSTRACT was a topic everyone enjoyed resulting in sixty-four photographs being uploaded to our album on the u3a website. Nature inspired many of the images ranging from flowers, tree bark, water and sky; dozens of patterns found on wooden, glass, brick and concrete surfaces; some images blurred for effect or taken at an oblique angle (aka a Dutch Tilt). Brilliant colours filled the album and were a pleasure to review.



The date of this meeting coincided with a u3a Chinese trip organised by one of our group so they and another member gave their apologies. Never without their cameras the two of them were instead busy walking and taking photos outdoors on probably the hottest day the year!

There was much discussion about some of images with various attempts during the review at cropping them which failed to improve any bar one or two that benefitted from the exercise. So we can happily say we had achieved both quantity *and* quality.

LANDSCAPES had been a popular choice to include in our annual programme of topics. Living in such a beautiful area of Wiltshire we should be spoilt for choice but, as is often the case, this was not as easy as we first thought. However six members submitted an excellent mix of scenes taken at nearly 30 different locations!



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Whether we achieved our goal would soon become clear when we reviewed the collection of sixty-two photographs at our meeting on 12th September. Many did and others were disputed but we aim to give only constructive criticism.

DERELICT BUILDINGS - you see them everywhere but can you actually remember where that was or whether you can gain access to them? That was the difficulty we experienced when searching for suitable material for the August topic.



Again our intrepid photographers travelled miles in all directions, crossing county boundaries with one image of the derelict remains of a prison bakery oven in Tasmania!!

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We were very sorry this month to say goodbye to Robin who has been our technical wizard for the past ten years, his expertise and sense of fun will be sorely missed. Thank you Robin for all you have contributed to the group, we hope you will enjoy your new home in Dorset. At least there will be more biscuits for the rest of us now.

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CHINES



Our CH(urches), IN(ns) and ES(tates) going out group has had another excellent year of adventures, which will come to an end in October when we'll be revisiting Malmesbury.

In the New Year (I shudder to say that already) we will be getting together to plan our 2026 season, which is expected to include Wells and Bath.

If you know of anywhere we could go that's out of the ordinary, do please let me know.



FRENCH GROUP 1



In August the Group brought a bottle of Cava, already chilled, and cheese biscuits with which to celebrate my 90th Birthday.

They had also had delivered a huge box containing lilies which came into flower as soon as they were unpacked. The wonders of floristry! One could just watch them opening.

We were all gathered except one, whose membership of the Group extends for longer than any of us and who was on holiday in France.

Two members who have joined more recently enjoyed taking it in turns to read the clues for a crossword which we managed to complete after general conversation and coffee. Then we finished up with a degustation to celebrate.

It was a great morning.

For our September meeting we were down to three as more members were enjoying holidays. Nevertheless it was valuable time for the three of us to talk and read in French.

FRENCH GROUP 2

Our little group continues to meet on the second Tuesday of the month to spend a couple of hours chatting in French. Our members have such a range of interests that there's always something interesting to share with the rest of the group, and we enjoy hearing what everyone has been up to since we last met. We usually manage to read a topical article and if there's time we have been known to attempt a crossword or some grammar exercises.

In July four of us went to see the French film 'Holy Cow' at the Corn Exchange in Newbury. Called 'Vingt Dieux' in French, it was an entertaining coming-of-age film about an 18-year-old from a family of cheesemakers whose carefree teenage life of drinking and dancing takes a turn when he has to provide for his 7-year-old sister, so he decides to channel his energy into producing an award-winning comté cheese to claim a competition prize. (Spoiler alert - he didn't win). We struggled initially to understand the regional accent of the actors but once we'd got our 'ears-in' we relaxed and enjoyed the film. The subtitles helped of course!



Our resident artist

Unfortunately one of the group has been unable to attend recently and has decided to relinquish her place, which does mean that there is one space available should anyone wish to join us.

And finally, to raise a smile:

Two cats are having a swimming race. One is called "One Two Three", the other "Un Deux Trois". Which cat won?

"One Two Three" because "Un Deux Trois" cat sank.

What do you call a sad Thursday? *A tra-jeudi.*

Boum boum!!

SINGING FOR PLEASURE

Our pianist is now firmly back on the piano stool and we are getting into our stride again. Our progress with Book2 is underway, but, by popular demand for Book1, we now have both books at each session.

We are working through Book2, singing each song, in numerical order. However, we ask for a request every other song, and most requests seem to be in Book1. I don't know how long it will be before we are as familiar with Book2, but we will get there.

In the meantime, membership is very healthy. There is no limit on numbers as we meet in the Bouverie Hall and we have plenty of books. I am always recruiting.

