



Newsletter

August 2026



Welcome to our August 2026 newsletter keeping you connected with the Swindon u3a community

Contents:

- Swindon u3a News
- Upcoming Meetings
- Group News
- Local News and Information
- Quiz Corner
- Life in a Poem
- Swindon u3a Contacts
- Quiz Answers

Swindon u3a News

Chair's Message

Stars

Recently I had the pleasure of camping at a friend's farm. We camp in a folding camper which "proper" campers probably see as wimpy - it's camping with a comfortable bed - great for people whose minds are willing, but backs are weak.

One of the things that I love about camping is a clear night in the middle of nowhere. When you can look up and see the stars. My interest in bird watching means that I can turn my spotting scope upwards and see the stars in all their glory. There are so many it makes you feel very small.

Life has a way of doing that - when you retire, or lose a partner, or even are no longer needed to provide babysitting services for grandchildren because they've gone to school, suddenly the "givens" change and you have to discover yourself anew.

It's at times like that we need something bigger than just ourselves, our beliefs, our family, or our friends. When I retired, I moved away from all the friends I'd made over 20 years, so making new circles of friends were really important. That's where u3a can come in.

Since I discovered it, I've made many new friends in unlikely places, places like the British History, Archaeology, and Family History groups (and of course on the u3a committee). But also, friends online, all over the country. I've learned and enjoyed so much from being together - but a membership of u3a is like a gym membership - many people have them, fewer actually make use of them in the way they could. Don't let yours go to waste.

Please come along to the Open Day on Saturday 29th August 10am - 1pm at the Deanery School, Wichelstowe, details below and find some new ideas.

Pete Cook



Swindon u3a Open Day!

Saturday 29th August 2026 at the Deanery School, Wichelstowe from 10am to 1pm

OK, so now I am repeating myself – some would call it *nagging*!

However, this is the August Newsletter and therefore the last opportunity I have to plead with those groups who have not signed up for Open Day to do so. I understand that you have your reasons: too busy, not interested, don't care, have waiting lists, away on holiday, no-one to 'man' the table etc. But can I ask you to look at it from another perspective. We have spent, and will continue to spend, a considerable amount of time and money (your money) advertising our Open Day.

Throughout August there will be Swindon u3a Exhibition stands in various places (Asda, the Coop, Swindon Hub etc), banners going up, posters and leaflets being distributed around the town - all telling people about our Open Day and inviting them to attend. On our stands and in our leaflets are an enticing list of all the activities we offer – an amazing list of over 130 interest and activity groups. Yours will be there on the list.

At and just before Open Day there is a marvellous group of our members giving up their time to help us get organised – lay out the furniture, set up the 'Office' area for payments, put up notices, signs, directions, meet and greet visitors.

When people arrive at our Open Day on August 29th they want to talk to our members about these groups - what's on offer? what do they do? When? Where? How often? They arrive not knowing that you're on holiday, or don't think it's important, or have a waiting list – they want to know more and if one of your team aren't present, there will be no-one to tell them, to give them the interesting details, to encourage them to come along and see what it's all about. If they have to go on a waiting list – all well and good.

At the end of Open Day let's look at all these waiting list and see if there's a possibility of forming new groups. As an example, 2 of the 3 groups for which I am a Group Organiser, I have formed from a previous waiting list. It's not rocket science! **But if people who are interested are turned away, we don't even get the opportunity to form a new group.**

So, please be there – on just this one morning of the year to support your u3a.

Book a table now at publicity@swindonu3a.org.uk or madelinegillianbrain@yahoo.com

Gill Brain

Monthly Meetings

Monthly Meeting Report – May 2026

Who knew there was a heatwave on the horizon when we met in May!

Our meeting began with a serving of ice cream from Ray's, to get us ready to hear from Ali Warren on the history of ice cream. Ice cream is so popular that in 2020 it was estimated 3.16 million people in Great Britain ate it 2-3 times a week with the favourite flavours being vanilla followed by chocolate and then strawberry.

It was first made for medicinal purposes during the Tang Dynasty (618-907) from cow, goat or buffalo milk, enclosed in a metal container and lowered into frozen lakes. Although Marco Polo is often credited with bringing it to Europe, it was in fact not until 1589 that something resembling ice cream appeared. By 1603 it was appearing regularly in records.

Anne Fanshaw took her 'icy cream' recipe to the Court of Charles I and when she later accompanied her Courtier husband to Portugal, she was able to learn the recipe for Pastel de Nata. At a royal banquet in 1671, ice cream flavoured with pineapple was served only to King Charles II, not the guests, and pineapples were so expensive that wealthy people could hire them to impress their visitors. It was around this time that Ice Houses began to be constructed but the ice was not eaten. It was only used for cooling, including controlling fevers or helping with mental illness, as in the case of George III.

Gunter's Tea Shop, established in Berkeley Square in 1757, was London's premier 18th and 19th-century destination for elite ice cream. Renowned for exotic, moulded ices it served high-society patrons and carriage trade directly in the square. 'Having an ice at Gunter's' also enabled women to walk around in a public space without a chaperone.

Agnes Marshall is a largely unknown culinary entrepreneur, food writer, inventor, and celebrity chef dubbed the "Queen of Ices" for popularizing ice cream in Victorian times. She founded Marshall's School of Cookery, running courses for cooks employed in aspirational households, and experimented with liquid nitrogen – a century before Heston Blumenthal!

By the mid-1800s, ice cream was served in a glass vessel, known as a 'penny lick'. After a quick, not very hygienic wash, the vendor would then re-use the glass. This practice had to be banned in 1899 as it was leading to an increase in TB.

The first ice cream van appeared in America in 1925 and by 1939 Mr Walls had 8500 'Stop Me and Buy One' tricycles' on UK streets. But it was not until 1956 that the first ice cream van with an electric freezer appeared in Philadelphia, selling under the name of Mr Softee. The idea was brought to the UK in 1958 with the name Mr Whippy.

The ingredients of ice cream were quite costly, so to bring the cost down and make it more readily available, food emulsifiers and methods to increase the amount of air

whipped into it were developed during the 1950s – leading to the soft-serve ice cream we know today.

Please note that there is no Monthly Meeting in August.

The programme will recommence on **Monday 14th September** at 2pm when we will be hearing from **Paul Mumford, a Director of the Wilts & Berks Canal Trust**, on the history of the canal and the current work being undertaken with regard to its restoration. He will also be sharing the Trust's plans for the future.

Book your place

If you plan to attend, please be sure to book a place by either:

1. Going onto the website **swindonu3a.org.uk** (just log in, click on u3a-wide events and under Swindon u3a events find the event you want to attend), or
2. Telephoning the office on **07345 162117** or **07823 722812** and leaving a message. When leaving a message, please remember to state your name and membership number and, if possible, not to leave it until Monday morning as the office team cannot always pick up all the messages in time and sometimes names get missed.

If you're a new member of Swindon u3a and you're coming along to your first Monthly meeting, please let the people on the welcome desk know, so that you can be introduced to the u3a Volunteers Team.

Group News

Film and Video (FAV) Group

Do you know anyone who wants to sit down and look through your photographs while you explain what they are all about? Probably not.

How about using them to make an entertaining video with an explanatory voice over and perhaps some music as well? Now surely that's a lot more interesting.

Perhaps you're thinking that you need a lot of equipment. Well, the good news is that all you need is a smart phone and a computer. Nowadays, video editing software is free, music is free and if you join the FAV group, tuition and advice on how to do it all is free too!

We meet monthly in a member's home on the first Monday of each month. If you would be interested in coming along for a meeting to see what it is all about, please contact: **David Bason** davidbason@outlook.com or **Pete Dore** dorepeter96@gmail.com. Alternatively come and meet us at the U3A open day at the Deanery.

The Merribells Group

The Merribells are Swindon U3A's very own Handbell Choir. The group in Swindon has been in existence for many years- at least 25.

Bell ringing originally began in church towers, especially in the 1600s after the Reformation. Ringers in church towers play on a set of very large, tuned bells in ever changing mathematical patterns.

However, church towers are cold and draughty. The first handbells were apparently developed locally in Aldbourne and were created as a training tool. Ringers could practice safely indoors, often in pubs or homes without disturbing a whole village.

Simple tunes and harmonies began to be developed in the 18th and 19th centuries, many would have been hymn and folk tunes, so beginning the development of handbell music that we recognise today.

It is possible to play many different styles of music using hand bells:
Jazz standards, Pop, Folk, Classical, Show Tunes.

It is a very sociable activity, with a strong sense of community. We work together as a team.



A hand bell choir can be anything from 2 to 8 octaves. However, it is also possible to play tunes with just 8 bells, **as you will hear if you come to the Open Day on 29th August at the Deanery School!**

So how does it work?

A set of hand bells is viewed as one instrument, spread across the players.

- Each bell = one note
- Each ringer is usually responsible for one bell in each hand but it can become more complex with experience.
- The music only works if everyone plays at exactly the right moment.

Counting and keeping time are important skills but the ability to read music less so, as we play from “marked music.”

Red (pink) indicates using your Right hand. Green indicates your Left hand.

The highlighted ‘tie’ mark indicates you don’t play the repeated note.



The pictures show us engaging with the Swindon Parkinson’s Group. They are holding Bell Plates which are much lighter than bells. We obtained some adjusted folk songs with the words highlighted in red and green to show where they should play.



Come and meet some of us at the Open Day, on the 29th August.

We are a friendly bunch.

Perhaps you would like to join us and become a bell ringer?

It's excellent for your brain health and coordination.

We meet at Gorse Hill Community Centre on Thursday Mornings from 10 -12 and we have lovely new Air Conditioning too!

We look forward to meeting you soon.

Marion Andrews

marionaa@btinternet.com

Group Organiser - Merribells

Climate Change Group

We plan to run this informal discussion group again from September 2026. **See below for the programme.**

Recent extreme weather events include the wild fires in Gironde in France, close to Madrid and Valencia in Spain, Canada and even the Cairngorms in Scotland and other parts of the world. Also, the extensive flooding in the spring and winter must leave no one in any doubt that climate change is real and is getting worse year on year.

Unfortunately, our rulers and media influencers are still trying to deny or downplay the gravity of the situation. Despite world-wide protests inspired by people like Greta Thunberg and direct action by groups such as Extinction Rebellion and Just Stop oil, the climate crisis has now fallen down the agenda. In the UK climate protest has become criminalised and many climate protesters face severe prison sentences, prevented by judges to even mention climate as the reason for their protest or allow juries to vote with their conscience – entirely against the democratic rights built up over decades and centuries.

Some good news is that the UK National Emergency Briefing organisation is pursuing an education programme to inform everyone about the situation. An initial meeting was held in Westminster on 27 November 2025 attended by 1200 leading scientists, business and civil society leaders including 150 MPs. A 50-minute film has been produced in which expert scientists in Health and Climate, Food Security, National Security, Wildlife and Economic Security explain in simple terms their subjects. This film is to be shown throughout the country.

On a more sombre note, the Institute and Faculty of Actuaries – the UK's only chartered professional body dedicated to “educating, developing and regulating actuaries” based in the UK and abroad produced a report – Planetary Insolvency Report. Hidden away in Appendix 1 is the statement: at a temperature rise of 3 degrees C above pre-industrial levels there will be an estimated 4 billion deaths due to climate by the end of the century! A rise of 2 degrees C by 2050 2 billion deaths!

By not highlighting this they certainly don't want to frighten the horses!

The following meetings for the Autumn term, open to all members of Swindon u3a are as follows:

Tuesday September 15 th	CLIMATE & HEALTH
Tuesday October 13 th	ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) – implications for the climate
Tuesday November 10 th	NUCLEAR POWER – a solution for fossil fuel free electricity?
Tuesday December 8 th	POPULATION/ECONOMIC GROWTH – is this a problem?

The meetings will be held at the Friends Meeting House, 79 Eastcott Hill, SN1 3JF

Meetings are from 10.30am to 12pm. Brief notes on each session are given out.

If you are interested, please contact **Bill Hughes** Coordinator Swindon u3a Climate Change Group. Email: bill.hughes1@btinternet.com

I look forward to hearing from you

Local News and Information

Cine Seniors



Sometimes there is nothing like seeing a film on the big screen. **Cineworld at Shaw Ridge show regular films for 'Seniors' on Wednesday mornings. Tickets are only £4.50**, free tea and coffee is available just before hand in the foyer. **Performances begin at about 11.30am.**

Unfortunately, there are no showings in August, so the next film is on **September 9th** of **"The Christophers"**. It's a black comedy starring Ian McKellen.

Let's get quizzical

Take a moment with our quiz. **Answers at the end of the newsletter – no cheating!**

Mental Maths

Follow the instructions to find the answer

9	×8	2/3 of it	-29	+31	÷5	×12	5/8 of it	-39	Square root of it	=
---	----	-----------	-----	-----	----	-----	-----------	-----	-------------------	---

Anagrams

Unscramble the words to find the items associated with packing for holidays:

- Sauciest
- Mr Scarce Unseen
- Mrs Mu Knits Wing
- Land Ass
- Since Dime

Quick quiz time

Which comedian said: "I'm playing all the right notes, but not necessarily in the right order."

Lesley Dawson	Eric Morecombe	Harry Secombe
---------------	----------------	---------------

Bonus question: To which of the following conductors did he say it?

Sir Colin Davies	Sir Simon Rattle	André Previn
------------------	------------------	--------------

Who wrote "The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy"?

Arthur Dent	Douglas Adams	Ford Prefect
-------------	---------------	--------------

Bonus question: Which of the following is the theme song to "The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy" which aired on Radio 4 in 1978?

Fire on High ELO	The Journey of the Sorcerer The Eagles	The Chain Fleetwood Mac
---------------------	--	----------------------------

Which of the following is the name for a word which has two opposite meanings?

Contronym	Homonym	Synonym
-----------	---------	---------

Bonus question: What is the name for a word, sentence or phrase that is the same backwards and forwards, e.g. madam.

Semordnilap	Anagram	Palindrome
-------------	---------	------------

Missing Vowels

Find the missing vowels to reveal holiday themed songs and their performers:

Example: HL DYN DMD NN = HOLIDAY AND MADONNA

- SM MRHL DYN DCLF FRC HRD
- LV SH LD YNDRT HWN DNDFR
- HL DY SNT HSN NDT HS XPS TLS

Who said it?

Which of the following comedians said: "The best cure for sea-sickness is to sit under a tree."

Eric Sykes	Spike Milligan	Peter Sellers
------------	----------------	---------------

Word of the Month

Abstemiously: doing something with self-control, restraint or moderation especially when related to eating, drinking alcohol or enjoying physical pleasures. *This word is famous for being the only English word that contains all 5 vowels in the alphabetical order- a,e,i,o,u, with y on the end if you want to consider that a vowel.*

Life in a poem

Submitted by Lesley Basu



John Drinkwater was born in Leytonstone, London, (round the corner from where I grew up myself!!). However, he moved to Birmingham as a young man. From 1903, he published poetry regularly over twenty years, culminating in his ***Selected Poems*** of 1922.

Drinkwater also wrote a series of popular plays based on historical figures, the first was ***Abraham Lincoln*** in 1918. He was a member of an amateur theatrical group called the **Pilgrim Players**.

He is one of the 'Dymock Poets', a group who lived in the village of Dymock in Gloucestershire between 1911 and 1914. It included ***Robert Frost, Edward Thomas, Rupert Brooke and Wilfrid Wilson Gibson***: all inspired by nature and the beauty of their surroundings.

The group broke up when war began in 1914. Though not well known as a war poet, in 1915 Drinkwater published a collection called ***Swords and Ploughshares***. He continued to work in live performance and drama and became the first manager of Birmingham Repertory Theatre. He died in 1937.

In this month's poem, Drinkwater creates a vivid, atmospheric picture of something commonplace, by using the sound and shape of words.

We see apples all the time: in shops, in fruit bowls, but how often do we really **look** at something as familiar as an apple? If you read the poem out loud, you might just see things differently!!



Moonlit Apples (1917)

*At the top of the house the apples are laid in rows,
And the skylight lets the moonlight in, and those
Apples are deep-sea apples of green. There goes
A cloud on the moon in the autumn night.*

*A mouse in the wainscot scratches, and scratches, and then
There is no sound at the top of the house of men
Or mice; and the cloud is blown, and the moon again
Dapples the apples with deep-sea light.*

*They are lying in rows there, under the gloomy beams;
On the sagging floor; they gather the silver streams
Out of the moon, those moonlit apples of dreams,
And quiet is the steep stair under.*

*In the corridors under there is nothing but sleep.
And stiller than ever on orchard boughs they keep
Tryst with the moon, and deep is the silence, deep
On moon-washed apples of wonder.*

Swindon u3a Contacts

Chair	Pete Cook	chair@swindonu3a.org.uk
Vice Chair	Sue Wigmore-Bond	vice_chair@swindonu3a.org.uk
General Secretary	Jan Showler	secretary@swindonu3a.org.uk
Treasurer	Eric Hewitt	treasuryteam@swindonu3a.org.uk
Membership Liaison	Rose Clarke	membership@swindonu3a.org.uk
Group Coordinator	Linda Young	group.coord@swindonu3a.org.uk
Payment Manager	Linda Young	systems@swindonu3a.org.uk
Speaker organiser	Sue Cook	speaker.organiser@swindonu3a.org.uk
IT Support	Dave Todd	itsupport@swindonu3a.org.uk
Publicity Lead	Gill Brain	publicity@swindonu3a.org.uk
Asset Manager	Tom Cliffe	assets@swindonu3a.org.uk
Newsletter	Philip Baylay	newsletter@swindonu3a.org.uk
Venues	Mike Clarke	accommodation@swindonu3a.org.uk
Office General Enquiries		office@swindonu3a.org.uk

The Office

Swindon u3a Office, Gorse Hill Community Centre, Chapel Street, Swindon, SN2 8DA
(entry is by the middle door on the right-hand side of the building)

The u3a office will reopen on Mondays 10am to 12pm from mid-August, currently expected to be 17th but we will confirm once the renewals process is underway.

Tel: **07823 722812** or **07345 162117**. Out of office hours there is an answering machine. Our Office Managers and volunteers will endeavour to answer your questions or point you in the direction of someone who can help.

Email: office@swindonu3a.org.uk

Web: www.swindonu3a.org.uk

Swindon u3a Charity Number: 298853

Send us your news and more:

We would love to hear from you. Share your news and photos from your groups.

Send submissions to: newsletter@swindonu3a.org.uk.

Deadline for the September newsletter is 20th August.

QUIZ ANSWERS

Mental maths

6

Anagrams:

- Sauciest = Suitcase
- Mr Scarce Unseen = Sunscreen cream
- Mrs Mu Knits Wing = Swimming trunks
- Land Ass = Sandals
- Since Dime = Medicines

Quick quiz time:

- Eric Morecombe
- André Previn
- Douglas Adams
- The Journey of the Sorcerer by The Eagles
- Contronym
- Palindrome

Missing Vowels

- SUMMER HOLIDAY AND CLIFF RICHARD
- LOVE'S HOLIDAY AND EARTH WIND AND FIRE
- HOLIDAYS IN THE SUN AND THE SEX PISTOLS

Who Said it?

- Spike Milligan