

u3a Newsletter

Swindon

February 2026



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

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Swindon u3a News – A message from our Vice Chair

I am very pleased to confirm that we have the full complement of trustees following Pete Cook and Sue Wigmore-Bond volunteering to take on the Chair and Vice Chair roles in December. Our full trustee list is as follows:

Chair:	Pete Cook
Vice Chair:	Sue Wigmore-Bond
Treasurer:	Eric Hewitt
General Secretary:	Monica King
Groups & Payments:	Linda Young
IT:	Dave Todd
Membership Liaison:	Rose Clarke
Publicity:	Gill Brain.

We will be adding more information about our trustees and their specific responsibilities to the website in due course but you can find their contact details at the end of the newsletter should you need to contact them.

Current Vacancies

Volunteer Vacancy

The Groups team is looking for a new group buddy to join their team. The group buddies work with the Group Coordinator and a set of group organisers to provide system and payment support and to be a first point of contact for group organisers on day-to-day matters. We are looking for a buddy to support the active and lifestyle groups, as the Group Coordinator is currently filling this vacancy. For more information please contact Linda Young via group.coord@swindonu3a.org.uk

At the end of March 2026 there will be 1 vacancy for the South West Region on the Council, as Susan Parker's term of office has come to an end.

The dates for the election process will be as follows for the vacancy, and the elected candidate will become Council Representatives from the 1 April 2026 and join us for their first meeting on the 23 April 2026.

- 8 January 2026 - Nominations open
- 3 February 2026 - Nominations Closing
- 17 February - Elections Open
- w/c 2 March (TBC) - Hustings
- 24 March - Elections Closing
- 1 April - Newly elected Council Representatives start in post
- 23 April - First in person Council Meeting in London

In the new year there will be a link on the u3a website to where the information will be available.

Monthly Meetings

Pop on the Box - A History of Pop Music on British Television Jeff Evans Monday 9 February 2026, 2.00 pm at Ellendune Community Centre. Following Jeff's entertaining talk on the history of children's TV, he will be making a return visit. Freelance journalist and television historian Jeff Evans, author of Rock & Pop on British TV (Omnibus Press), tells the intriguing story of 60 years of music on television in this fully illustrated talk, beginning in the 1950s with shows such as Six-Five Special and Oh Boy! and continuing through the decades with programmes including Juke Box Jury, Thank Your Lucky Stars, Ready, Steady, Go!, Top of the Pops and The Old Grey Whistle Test, as well as a number of programmes that you may just have forgotten. Expect lots of warm memories and more than a few surprises. And if you have any questions, just fire away!

Moonies, Movers and Shakers - Monday 9 March at 2.00 pm at Ellendune Community Centre

With Graham Carter and Noel Ponting.

An illustrated talk about *Moonies, Movers and Shakers*, a book that tells some remarkable (but previously untold) stories of leading Wiltshiremen (aka 'Moonies'). When local historians Noel Ponting and Graham Carter looked into the association for Moonies in London, they made some surprising discoveries, revealing a fresh insight into social life in the early 20th century.

January 2026 Monthly Meeting Report

Light in the Darkest Hour – Dunkirk's Little Ships

Our first speaker of 2026 was Maritime Historian and former Royal Marine, Paul Barnett. Growing up in Gloucestershire, his interest in maritime history began when he first saw the beached vessels at Purton on the River Severn.

The period 28 May to 4 June 1940 is claimed to be the country's Darkest Hour, with British troops needing to be evacuated from mainland Europe. Winston Churchill's target was to get around 45,000 troops home, but by the 'miracle of Dunkirk', 338,226 were evacuated successfully. This included 139,997 French, Polish, Belgian and a small number of Dutch soldiers, yet within 2 weeks, the free French had managed to return to Europe to continue their fight.

In Flemish, Dunkirk means 'church in the dunes' and it was the sand dune system that helped shield troops against intense German aerial bombing and artillery fire, allowing soldiers to wait for rescue.

Paul dispelled many myths surrounding the evacuation. One was that the halt order came directly from Hitler due to his admiration of the British, whereas it was more likely a question of logistics with Panzer divisions needing fuel, ammunition and infantry to catch up.

Another myth surrounds the 851 boats that sailed from Ramsgate to Dunkirk for the evacuation. Whilst some were undoubtedly small private boats manned by civilians, the majority were much larger, eg steam and cargo ships, paddle steamers, fireboats and lifeboats.

Another myth questions where the RAF were in all of this. They were doing sterling work but many RAF ground crew were turned on by their Army comrades and were forced to take uniforms from dead soldiers in order to be accepted for evacuation.

Paul gave us some amazing statistics. Amongst the equipment left behind were 20,000 motorcycles and 65,000 motor cars and lorries!

The evacuation was indeed 'the miracle of Dunkirk'.

Upcoming events

Future Programme of Monthly Meetings

If you have heard any good speakers who you think u3a members would enjoy hearing, please do let me know. I am always on the lookout!

Also, please let me have your thoughts about whether we should hold another Summer Party this June. Have you attended one in the past? What aspects did you enjoy, or not? Do you have any ideas on what we could do instead? Or would you prefer the programme of speakers to be extended for an additional month? It would be great to hear your views.

I can be contacted by email on speaker.organiser@swindonu3a.org.uk or you can leave me a message via the office (07823 722812 or 07345 162117). Sue Cook.

Book your place

1. Go to the website www.swindonu3a.org.uk (just log in and click on u3a-wide events).
or
2. Telephone the office on 07345 162117 or 07823 722812.

Group News

Travel Group J

Travel Group J Visit To Bletchley Park - Thursday 19th Feb 2026



It was at this very site during World War Two where British Codebreakers, including Alan Turing, worked to uncover the secrets of the Enigma machine and break enemy codes, providing vital intelligence that had a direct impact on the war.

See one of the largest collections of Enigma machines on public display anywhere in the world. Discover more about the amazing people who worked here and their captivating stories, and marvel at their feats of ingenuity.

Movie-buffs out there may recognise the story of Turing from the 2014 film, *The Imitation Game*, starring Benedict Cumberbatch.

It's a profound and eye-opening tale that Bletchley Park does the ultimate justice towards by preserving it to this day.

Departure times and pick up points:

08.15h The Crown Hotel Royal Wootton Bassett

08.30h Wroughton

08.40h Bus Stop Coate Water

Return at 4.00pm from Bletchley Park

Cost £43 per person which includes entry to museum, coach and driver's gratuity. Depending on uptake for the trip there may be a slight reduction in overall cost.

All members and friends are welcome. Contact: Ken Ivie on 01793 845483 or email, kenivie@uwclub.net

Life, the Universe and Everything

In January the Life, the Universe and Everything group hosted Ben Bell from Plastic Free Swindon (<https://plasticfreeswindon.org/>).

Ben's presentation generated a lot of questions and comments, and was very well received. It was heartening that so many of our group were willing to accept that we can all do more to reduce the harm to our planet.

There are a lot of greener alternatives that we can adopt, and Ben shocked many of us with the facts and statistics surrounding the vast production of plastic bottles, and the fact that most plastic recycling is actually plastic disposal in a harmful way.

For instance, I was unaware that modern vehicle tyres contain a lot of plastics, that wool is rarely wool because it contains other synthetic materials, and that when a large corporation claims to be helping the planet, they are usually paying lip-service to the green lobby and actually doing nothing of value.

If you're interested in doing a little more for the planet and our children's futures, Plastic Free Swindon have a wealth of knowledge and experience that can help us all to make small (or large) changes to our lifestyles that can make a difference.

Please visit their website (above), and have a look at
<https://plasticfreeswindon.org/campaigns/sas/> and
https://plasticfreeswindon.org/campaigns/sas/#sign_up_individuals

Making small changes can ripple out and have world-changing, long-term effects.

Climate Change Group

Storm Goretti has reminded us that extreme weather events are continuing. Cornwall experienced gales battering the county of up to 99 miles per hour. Heavy rains have affected many parts of the UK since with some flooding where the ground has been saturated.

Our first session in January we studied Food Security, looking at the vulnerability of food supplies due to drought, floods and storms in this country and globally. The complicated and often long-distance food supply chains can be disrupted leading to food shortages, especially if no strategic stocks have been built up.

We also looked at Energy/Power supply which is at the heart of our industrial society and essential for our very survival. The over dependence upon fossil fuels, the transition to renewables and the pros and cons of different forms of electricity generation and other technologies being developed.

In February we are having sessions on Transport, Housing and Economics/Finance and the implications of climate change on these sectors.

New members are welcome.

Contact: Bill Hughes Coordinator email bill.hughes1@btinternet.com

New group on 3D Printing

Over the last few years the world of 3D printing has exploded, with domestic printers now being within reach of almost anyone's pocket.

A few of us are planning to begin a new group devoted to 3D Printing. We would love to hear from anyone who might be interested in the subject, whether they already have knowledge or are just starting out, or even just considering the idea! Members will pick each other's brains, discuss successes and problems and generally advance and share our collective knowledge. We will also discuss techniques, software including CAD (Computer Aided Design), and watch relevant tutorials from YouTube.

Anyone interested can contact me or David at leholland888@gmail.com.

Travel Group G Visit to Amazon

U3a Travel group visit to Amazon Fulfilment Centre, Symmetry Park, Swindon

Utterly fascinating and mind-boggling tour of this huge facility with our u3a Travel group Monday January 5th. It's the size of 7 football pitches and covers the processes from delivery by suppliers to packing and labelling the final orders. We watched items arrive in the space, be stored and retrieved then moved to the packing area. Conveyor belts move items around the space at speed. We learned the meaning of the logo – the arrow goes from A to Z which is where they can deliver. The fastest delivery was in the USA delivered by drone in 30 minutes from order! They plan to trial drone delivery in some areas of the UK soon, sadly not Swindon! Why do the storage arrangements appear so chaotic? They are very logical when explained! Staff are offered various benefits such as education, health care, reduced price bus travel.

As new ways of doing things emerge, Amazon adapts. Various instances were explained to us e.g. more environmentally suitable collapsable packaging

Photography is not allowed inside the building except for the lounge area where we began and ended the tour.

The tour is free and easy to book in advance on line. Just need photo ID including bus pass!



Don't just take our word for it, search amazon tours online. Well worth a visit, we will never see our Amazon parcel in the same light again!



Jane Caudwell and Shirley Lewis

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.

Here's what's coming next month:

- 4th Feb Roofman
- 11th Feb The Choir
- 18th Feb HALF TERM
- 25th Feb Now You See Me: Now You Don't.

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

5	$\times 25$	$+13$	50% of it	2/3rds of it	$+125$	-53	$\div 2$	=
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Anagrams

Find the February celebrations:

- Madras Rig
- Innately Saved
- Overhasty Dues

Song lines

Name the singer/band of the song that includes the line:

"Moons and Junes and Ferris wheels, The dizzy dancing way that you feel, As every fairy tale comes real, I've looked at love that way..."

Joni Mitchell	Paul McCartney	Paul Simon
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"And if the band you're in starts playing different tunes."

The Beatles	Pink Floyd	The Beach Boys
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"There is a house in New Orleans..."

Cliff Richard	The Animals	Black Sabbath
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February events

- Who set a new world land speed record of 174 mph in Wales on 4 February 1926?
- What appeared in London's Mayfair district on 5 February 1958?
- Which band appeared on the Ed Sullivan Show on 9 February 1964?
- What major change took place in the UK on 15 February 1971?

Cartoon Capers

Match the cartoon hero to their sidekick

Hero	Sidekick
Danger Mouse	Patrick Star
SpongeBob Square Pants	Barney Rubble
Scooby Doo	Penfold
Fred Flintstone	Shaggy

Word of the Month

Opsimath – A person who learns or studies late in life

If you see an unusual word, please do share it and its meaning with us and we will feature it.

Life in a poem

submitted by Lesley Basu

Another poem by Brian Bilston for you that I hope you will enjoy. I think, like me, many of you will identify with the sentiments he expresses here!!

Serenity

Send me a slow news day,
a quiet, subdued day,
in which nothing much happens of note,
just the passing of time,
the consumption of wine,
and a re-run of *Murder, She Wrote*.
Grant me a no news day,
a spare-me-your-views day,
in which nothing much happens at all –
a few hours together,
some regional weather,
a day we can barely recall.

Written by Brian Bilston



Submitted by Lesley Basu

Swindon u3a Contacts

Chair	Pete Cook	chair@swindonu3a.org.uk
Vice Chair	Sue Wigmore-Bond	vice_chair@swindonu3a.org.uk
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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 is currently open on Monday 10am to 12pm until March 2026.

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 February newsletter is 19 February 2026.

Quiz Answers

Mental maths

59

Anagrams:

- Madras Rig = Mardi Gras
- Innately Saved = Valentines Day
- Overhasty Dues = Shrove Tuesday

Song Lines:

- "Moons and Junes and Ferris wheels, The dizzy dancing way that you feel, As every fairy tale comes real, I've looked at love that way..." Both Sides Now by Joni Mitchell
- "And if the band you're in starts playing different tunes." Brain Damage by Pink Floyd
- "There is a house in New Orleans..." House of the Rising Sun, The Animals.

February Events

- Malcolm Campbell
- Parking meters
- The Beatles
- Decimal coinage was introduced

Cartoon Capers

Hero	Sidekick
Danger Mouse	Penfold
SpongeBob Square Pants	Patrick Star
Scooby Doo	Shaggy
Fred Flintstone	Barney Rubble