

u3a Newsletter Swindon

June 2026



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

Contents:

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

• Message from our Chair

- I was watching a beautiful sunset with friends by a lake near Ashton Keynes, watching the different birds having their final feeding forays of the day. We paraded out our (limited) identification knowledge – Brent Goose, Great Crested Grebe, Canada Goose, Oyster Catcher, some type of black headed Tern (they all seem to have black heads), Suddenly a new arrival soaring across the sky stole the scene – a B52 bomber from Fairford! I remember watching them flying off to Iraq when I was a student in Oxford, which seems a very long time ago.
- I feel a great empathy for that plane (not something I'd often say of a plane). They first flew in 1952, and one might have thought that by now they'd have relaxed into restful retirement, but just when they reach their "best by date", they replace the engines, check out the fuselage, and off they go again - it looks like it could be the first aircraft of its type to fly for 100 years!
- There are times when I feel like that (No, I'm nowhere near 100 yet). I thought retirement was about rest and relaxation, but something seems to have gone wrong there. Life is different, and there are big benefits, but there are still demands on my time, still the same issues to face. It turns out I retired from "paid work", but not from work itself (always read the small print).
- But thinking about it I find sitting back in the sun wonderful, but a holiday sat by a pool reading a book, would bore me to death! I do have skills, I do have experience and knowledge, I do want to do things, and I do still have plenty to offer. I may not be able to bolt on new improved engines (the hip was tricky enough) but there is some life in the "old dog" yet.
- Look around you, where might you be able to contribute, make a difference. U3A is always looking for people to make things happen. Accountancy is a mystery to me, the lines of numbers on a spreadsheet dance and blur, but we badly need people to whom the numbers are beautiful – we may not notice them, but without them all the other things we do (the Ukelele groups and the bird watchers I could have done with by the lake) all grind to a halt.
- I look up at the planes flying over and wonder where they're going, what they're doing, and just maybe they look back and ask me the same thing.

Swindon u3a News

OPEN DAY

2026

Date: 29th August

Time: 10am – 1.00pm

Place: Deanery School, Peglars Way, Swindon SN17DA

Many thanks to those who have already responded and booked a table at our upcoming Open Day. I know it is early days yet but it does help forward planning to know who will

be there. P.S. It is worth thinking carefully about one or two reasons you might have for NOT booking a table.

1. *The Group Organiser is not available on that day.* However, it does *not have* to be the GO who is ‘manning’ the table. Any enthusiastic group member who can answer visitors’ questions about the group: what topics/approaches it covers, how it operates, when and where it meets, how many members etc. can be there.
2. *There is a waiting list so no point in recruiting any more members.* Yet waiting lists are the core of another group forming! The main reason we have a number of similar groups (Book Clubs, French, Bowling, Petanque etc) is because more people are interested than can fit into one group! I have personally started two groups with ‘waiting list’ people – it’s a great way of meeting demand.

It is very dispiriting for visitors to our Open Day to come along hoping to find out more and maybe join a group, only to find out there is no one there to chat to in any detail about the group. It is also dispiriting for our Publicity Team to work hard at publicising Swindon u3a and then find visitors to Open Day being turned away dissatisfied. So, I do hope your group will book a table and be part of showing our local community the amazing spread of what Swindon u3a has to offer. There are so many people who still don’t know about us and there are so many people who could benefit tremendously from being part of our u3a family – just like you and I do!

Contact me on: publicity@swindonu3a.org or madelinegillianbrain@yahoo.com

Current Vacancies

Treasurer

Our current Treasurer writes - After much thought, I wanted to let you know that I will be stepping down as Treasurer at the end of the charity year in August 2026. I will continue in post until the AGM in November 2026 to ensure everything runs smoothly, and I’m committed to supporting a thorough and well-organised handover to whoever takes on the role next.

If anyone would like to discuss the transition or has any questions in the meantime, please feel free to contact me via the Treasury email address.: treasuryteam@swindonu3a.org.uk

Swindon u3a at the Highworth May Fair



We took our Exhibition stand to the annual Highworth Fair on May 2nd. It was a lovely sunny, very 'buzzy' day with a lot of stands, a lot of people and a lot of smiley faces! A number of folk stopped to chat – some were already members, some were interested in what we did and as always were amazed by the number of interest groups we run. Many thanks to those members who volunteered to be on the rota to look after the stall and give out leaflets and information: Robin Clegg, Rosemary Stanbury, Sylvia Alexander, Jo Bridge, Monica King, Sue-Wigmore-Bond, Rose Clarke, Ian Hartley.

Our next big stand is **Asda Orbital on Friday 21st August** to promote our Open Day. If you would be able to help on our rota do get in touch. You would be 'manning' the stand for about 1 hour and would be paired with someone else so you can share the task and have someone to talk to! Contact me on publicity@swindonu3a.org.uk or madelinegillianbrain@yahoo.com

Gill Brain



Monthly Meetings

**Morris Minors in the Media - Monday 8 June at 2.00 pm at Ellendune Community Centre
- John and Ann Ford**

It is NOT about engines and gearboxes and is suitable for mixed audiences!

It will be a pro-active, informative, light-hearted and often amusing presentation covering a period of 25 years when they hired their collection of Morris Minors to film, TV and publishing companies, plus charity work involving MPs and pop stars, and also some unusual weddings. Their comprehensive photographic and memorabilia display will be available to view. They even dress in the period - and are decidedly different!

There will be no Monthly Meetings in July and August.

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.

Monthly Meeting Report – April

Graham Biggs and Debbie Robson from the Prospect Hospice were our speakers in April.

Prospect covers an area of 200 square miles, stretching from Lechlade and Cricklade in the north to villages south of Pewsey – a large area that costs around £1083 a month in travel for the Prospect at Home team.

Debbie emphasised how important it is for them to get to know the families and the wishes of their patients. Some of the services they can offer include:

- The Inpatient Unit - currently funded for just 6 beds to cover that 200 square miles, yet they could provide 14 beds. It costs £18,922 a week to staff.
- A single point of contact for referrals - anyone can refer, not just GPs.
- Prospect at Home provides a 24-hour service in the community with a team of 8 Palliative Care Assistants. Currently there is insufficient funding to expand the team.

- There is a pre and post bereavement service for families.
- A range of therapies is available, from Physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy through to complementary therapies and massage and relaxation sessions.
- In-house staff training is provided to support placements for nurses and doctors.

Every year it costs £10 million to provide care and support to patients, with just 18% being covered by the NHS. Fundraising is therefore vital to meeting that remaining 82%.

Graham explained how volunteering plays a key role in enhancing services. He currently has 650 volunteers throughout the organisation, covering areas such as retail, reception, the café, inpatient unit, gardening and bereavement counselling. All he asks is for a regular weekly commitment of 3-4 hours and there are some 30 volunteer roles to choose from. To assist fundraising, the café is open to the public and serves Sunday lunches once a month. It can also supply buffets for events.

£2.5 million a year is raised through retail alone and Graham gave us an example of just how important it is and what it would cost without volunteers. With 497 volunteers, each working 45 weeks of the year on a 4-hour shift = 89,460 hours x £12.71 per hour minimum wage = £1,137,036.

The Q&A session raised a number of concerns about the lack of funding nationally for hospice care. Further information is on the Prospect Hospice website, together with a link to Hospice UK which includes a sample letter to MPs to help put hospice funding on their agenda.

The collection buckets, together with a donation in lieu of a speaker's fee, raised a total of £234.41, which Prospect was delighted to receive

Group News

Merribells

MERRIBELLS NEWS On Thursday 14th May The Merribells played for the Parkinson's UK Support Group. We played on our "home turf" of Gorse Hill. We had a lovely time and our audience really seemed to enjoy our playing. They especially enjoyed the interactive session we provided where they joined in singing and playing with what are called bell plates. These are a lighter and easier to manipulate option rather than ringing an actual bell.

Farewell It was also the last ringing day for one of our longest serving members of the Merribells. Anne Worsnip has been ringing with the Merribells for at least 20 years, possibly even 25 years. Anne is moving to Surrey to be nearer to her sister. We shall miss her enthusiasm and commitment enormously. After our successful performance some of us enjoyed a very pleasant lunch together at the Plough on the Hill. We gave Anne a farewell gift and treated her to her lunch.

Could you become a Bell Ringer? We currently have 16 members within our two groups, but are actively seeking some new members. It is a fun and social activity. We work as a team to make our music. It is an advantage to have some musical knowledge, but there is plenty of support from within the group if your knowledge is a bit rusty! We can teach you the handbell skills and techniques necessary in order to make music with handbells. Each group generally meets on alternate Thursday mornings 10-12 am at Gorse Hill Community Centre. Between now and our end of term - 16th July, we are merging the groups. Perhaps you would like to visit us this term and see what it is all about? If you would be interested in learning how to ring handbells do please contact me. Marion Andrews Group Organiser Merribells marionaa@btinternet.com

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 in the next few weeks:

3 rd June	Wuthering Heights
10 th June	Mother's Pride
17 th June	Song Sung Blue
24 th June	Reminders of Him

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

156	÷3	+12	Square root of it	×7	+14	-7	÷9	×13	=
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Anagrams

Find the ice-cream flavours:

- Cool cheap itch
- Llamas reacted
- Is it a chop
- Fall An Inch Rev

Bonus anagram:

- Refine zebra (what may happen after eating any of the above flavours!)

Quick fire questions

Which comedian said "Start every day with a smile... get it over with!"

Les Dawson	Bob Newhart	W.C. Fields
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Which Sci-Fi novel featured the fictional material called "Cavorite"?

First Men in the Moon (H.G. Wells)	Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea (Jules Verne)	The Kraken Awakes (John Wyndham)
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Which horror film featured Tubular Bells by Mike Oldfield?

Alien	The Exorcist	The Ring
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Missing Vowels

Each line contains a classic movie and its leading actor, Can you name them - the vowels have been removed to help you!

Example: RRW NDW NDJMSS TWRT = REAR WINDOW AND JAMES STEWART

- NTN LVLV TNDL ZBT HTYLR
- WT HRN GHGH TSNDL RNC LVR
- THG DFT HR NDMR LNBR ND

Who said it?

Looking forward to Wimbledon - find the players who said the following:

"Of course I am disappointed, but I didn't lose a war. There is no one dead. It was just a tennis match."

Boris Becker	Ivan Lendl	Stefan Edberg
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"I could have thrown the kitchen sink at this kid today and he would have hit it past me for a winner."

Takuya Miki	Heath Davidson	Alfie Hewett
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"I'm like good wine. In France, good wine always ages well."

Alize Cornet	Iga Świątek	Serena Williams
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One Hit Wonders!

Match the one hit wonder artists to their songs:

Fern Kinney	Spirit in the sky
Nena	I love rock 'n' roll
Toni Basil	Together we are beautiful
Norman Greenbaum	Mickey
Joan Jett & the Blackhearts	Axel F
Harold Faltermeyer	99 Red balloons

Word of the Month

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

Apronym : a personal name particularly suited to the owner e.g. Michael Ball (footballer); Graham Bell (inventor of the telephone); Sara Blizzard (weather forecaster); Bob Flowerdew (gardener); William Wordsworth (poet). This one?



Life in a poem

Submitted by Lesley Basu

Growing up on the edge of Epping Forest, we often used to go "blackberrying". At that time, almost everybody made jam of some sort or another. I remember setting off with my canvas school satchel slung over my shoulder. My friend and I would brave the scratches from the briars and pile the biggest berries we could reach into my satchel. They were, of course, the juiciest and I couldn't understand my mother's fury that I hadn't noticed the dark juice seeping out the base of the bag on to my school dress!! Seamus Heaney must have spent time among the briars plucking delicious black fruits as well, as

he ends his poem: "Once off the bush the fruit fermented, the sweet flesh would turn sour." Blackberries don't keep; you have to get that jam made in a hurry!



Blackberry-Picking

by Seamus Heaney

Late August, given heavy rain and sun
For a full week, the blackberries would ripen.
At first, just one, a glossy purple clot
Among others, red, green, hard as a knot.
You ate that first one and its flesh was sweet
Like thickened wine: summer's blood was in it
Leaving stains upon the tongue and lust for
Picking. Then red ones inked up and that hunger
Sent us out with milk cans, pea tins, jam-pots
Where briars scratched and wet grass bleached our boots.
Round hayfields, cornfields and potato-drills
We trekked and picked until the cans were full
Until the tinkling bottom had been covered
With green ones, and on top big dark blobs burned
Like a plate of eyes. Our hands were peppered
With thorn pricks, our palms sticky as Bluebeard's.
We hoarded the fresh berries in the byre.
But when the bath was filled we found a fur,
A rat-grey fungus, glutting on our cache.
The juice was stinking too. Once off the bush
The fruit fermented, the sweet flesh would turn sour.
I always felt like crying. It wasn't fair
That all the lovely canfuls smelt of rot.
Each year I hoped they'd keep, knew they would not.

Swindon u3a Contacts

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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 July 2026 newsletter is 19 June 2026.**

Quiz Answers

Mental maths

91

Anagrams:

- Chocolate chip
- Salted caramel
- Pistachio
- French vanilla
- Bonus anagram: brain freeze

Quick quiz

- W.C Fields said "Start every day with a smile... get it over with!"

- First Men in the Moon (H.G. Wells) featured the fictional material called "Cavorite"?
- The Exorcist featured Tubular Bells by Mike Oldfield?

Missing Vowels

- NATIONAL VELVET AND ELIZABETH TAYLOR
- WUTHERING HEIGHTS AND LAURENCE OLIVIER
- THE GODFATHER AND MARLON BRANDO

Who Said It?

- After losing in 1987 Boris Becker said: "Of course I am disappointed, but I didn't lose a war. There is no one dead. It was just a tennis match."
- In 2023 Heath Davidson said: "I could have thrown the kitchen sink at this kid today and he would have hit it past me for a winner."
- In 2022 Alize Cornet said: "I'm like good wine. In France, good wine always ages well."

One hit wonders!

Fern Kinney	Together we are beautiful
Nena	99 Red balloons
Toni Basil	Mickey
Norman Greenbaum	Spirit in the sky
Joan Jett & the Blackhearts	I love rock 'n' roll
Harold Faltermeyer	Axel F