



Source: BBC Wildlife 2014

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Chair's Blog March 25

It's hard to believe that it's March already! But the good news is that this means Spring is just around the corner, and for those of us who participate in outdoor group activities, the improving weather is most welcome.

For those of you who attended our AGM at the end of 2024, you may remember that we (Swindon u3a Management Committee) promised to update you all when we got a reply back from the Third Age Trust to a question that was submitted to us regarding how the Third Age Trust spent their element of our subscriptions and questioned whether they were "value for money".

We recently received an answer from the Third Age Trust which pointed us to the information on their website and their annual report as published on the Charity Commission website. In addition to this, as a follow-up response, they did provide some more information regarding the number of full-time equivalent staff they employ, which was around 19 on average. These staff normally work from a room in a rented services building in London, but some also work from home.

Our Management Committee thought the overall response from the Third Age Trust was disappointing, lacked detail and did not address the specific question about value for money. But we decided to forward the response on to the originator (a Swindon u3a member) and they have informed us that, although the content of the reply lacks detail, they accept the answer, as it stands, fulfils the action placed upon us at our AGM. The Management Committee and I would like to take this opportunity to emphasise to all our members the u3a policy on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and the need to be aware of unconscious bias. In this day and age, this subject affects us all, so we are looking at providing some more helpful information on the subject at some of our upcoming events.

We still have some interesting vacancies on the Management Committee for any of our members who would be interested in volunteering some of their time and experience to help us out with things. We are all busy people and want our Swindon u3a to succeed for the sake of all of us, so please get in touch if you can help share the load. We are all volunteers on the committee, and we are more than happy to chat about any vacant roles that we have and need help with.

Vince Williams

chair@swindonu3a.org.uk

Current Vacancies

As Chair Vince has said above, we have three Management Committee vacancies.

Membership Secretary (trustee)

Liaise with and support New Members and Volunteers.
Focus on the impact of MC decisions on the general membership.
Promote the self-managing culture of u3a.
Membership of the Management Committee

PUBLICITY LEAD (Trustee)

Plan and coordinate local publicity events calendar.
Lead a small team of core volunteers to
Produce publicity materials and articles in local publications, Facebook and other social media
Attend Management Committee meetings
Work with Management Committee members on the Swindon u3a IT strategy
Liaise with the Newsletter Editor as appropriate
Raise awareness of the u3a central and regional activities and events in conjunction with the Newsletter Editor
Manage the publicity budget.

Treasury Team Member: supporting trips and other costs

Briefly, the job involves:

- Assisting other team members in supporting the bank account for trips
- Payments and Simple Membership entries for trip payments and non-venue payments on main account

I would be happy to have informal discussions with anyone who would like to know more. This role is part of the Treasury team. On-the-job training will be provided by a current member who shares this role.

For further information, please contact: Eric Hewitt treasurer@swindonu3a.org.uk

HOW TO APPLY

If you are interested in these roles, send an expression of interest as soon as possible to committee@swindonu3a.org.uk

NB: There is a short Induction and mentoring process for new Trustees

Monthly Meetings

Monday 10 March 2025 at 2.00 pm at Ellendune Community Centre Secrets and Spies - and we might discover the real James Bond

Stewart Smith will help us discover the history and secrets surrounding the village of Coleshill and the important role it played during the second World War.



Coleshill House was the underground headquarters of Winston Churchill's British Resistance Organisation - a band of men from all over the country trained and ready to lead the fightback if Germany invaded Great Britain. Known as the Auxiliars, they were sworn to secrecy and led double lives revealed not even to their closest family.

Monthly Meeting Report – February 2025 – ‘Sniff for Life’

Our programme of Monthly Meetings continued in February with over 140 members listening to Danielle Mills, ably supported by husband Tim, describing the work of Medical Detection Dogs.

For over 15 years the charity has been training dogs to save lives through their amazing sense of smell (a dog's nose has up to 300 million sensors), either as Bio Detection dogs or Medical Alert Assistance dogs.

It takes 18 months to 2 years to train from a puppy, at a cost of £29,000. They are usually gun-dog types such as spaniels, labradors and retrievers but currently include a Cockapoo and Yorkipoo. The charity has a no-kennel policy meaning the dogs live in a loving home environment before either being partnered with a client or 'going into the office' in Milton Keynes as a Bio Detection dog to work on samples provided by international clinicians, universities and NHS Trusts.

Bio Detection dogs are trained to detect even the tiniest smells associated with diseases such as cancer, Parkinson's and bacterial infections. A recent trial showed they can accurately detect the most aggressive forms of prostate cancer and in the USA a doctor is trying to identify exactly what the dogs are smelling. Through the use of AI it is hoped to incorporate this into a machine which in the longer term will be in GP surgeries all over the world and ultimately embedded in smartphones, providing a major advance in prostate cancer diagnosis.

Medical Alert Assistance dogs support people with complex health conditions, alerting them when they are in danger of having a potentially life-threatening medical event. The

dogs give their partners and their families greater confidence, independence and quality of life, allowing them to lead full and happy lives. Danielle showed us a very moving video of the impact this has had, in one case enabling a student with severe epilepsy to obtain her science degree after the lab had been deemed too dangerous a place for her, and in another example the dog attended school with a young girl with diabetes (the other pupils were allowed to pet the dog for a few minutes each morning!). Over 200 dogs are doing this type of work.

All this comes at a cost - £5 per minute needs to be raised and as a charity they receive no Government funding. Michelle has sent Swindon u3a a 'very big thank you' for the £537.46 raised from our meeting. In addition, other people have sent donations direct or sponsored a puppy. For further information please check out their website www.medicaldetectiondogs.org.uk

Early warning for April and May meetings

Monday 14 April 2025 at 2.00 pm at Ellendune Community Centre

Swindon Bird Boxes: Jeremy Smith

For more than 25 years there has been a community bird box project in Swindon with over 600 bird boxes located across all of the parks and green spaces associated with the town. We are not aware of any such project anywhere else. If you walk around any of the parks and look up into the trees you will almost certainly see one of these boxes located 4 metres off the ground, often looking quite weather-worn and merging into the environment.



Without question, these boxes have boosted the population of Tits and Nuthatches in the area and as you walk through the parks the joy of birdsong in spring is everywhere.

Monday 12 May 2025

Jeff Evans will be back. Last time he entertained us with the history of children's TV programmes, but this time he'll be talking about '**Pop on the Box**' - remember Oh Boy!, Juke Box Jury, or Six-Five Special?

Booking your place

As always, please be sure to book a place by 11.30 am on the morning of the meeting:

1. Go to the website www.swindonu3a.org.uk (just login, click on Swindon u3a events, then on the event), or
2. Telephoning the office on 01793 61462

Group News

Correction and update: Travel Group J. Visit to Bristol Museum & Art Gallery 20th March 2025

There has been a bit of a mix-up over the date of our visit to the Bristol Museum & Art Gallery and the error is entirely my fault. The trip is actually on the 20th March and not the 6th as I indicated in my original email and also the pick-up in RWB is the Crown Hotel not the Angel.

Departure times and pick-up points:

9.00am Crown Hotel, Wootton Bassett. **9.15am** Ellendune Centre, Wroughton
9.30 am Coate Water **4.00pm** Depart for Swindon

Bristol Museum & Art Gallery tells stories about the world from the beginning of time to the present day. Nineteen galleries over three floors reveal fascinating cultures, ancient civilisations and human invention.

With thousands of amazing objects on display including world-class collections of art, archaeology and natural history inside the beautiful Edwardian building.



Cost: £19 per person which includes coach and driver's gratuity, entry to the museum is free. All members and friends are welcome.

Contact: **Ken Ivie on 01793 845483 or email kenivie@uwclub.net**

Reading Shakespeare Group

We are now in our third year, meeting on alternate Tuesdays at the Western Community Centre, Somerset Road, Rodbourne, SN2 1NF from 10.30 – 12.00, where we use the lounge.

So far, we have covered 22 of The Bard's 39 plays, each of which we find we can read in full in 2-3 sessions, allowing time for discussion, and we have also tackled nearly 100 of his 154 Sonnets!

Members take it in turn to select a play, and then lead a reading, allocating parts as we go. Next time we shall be starting ***The Comedy of Errors***, followed in due course by ***Troilus and Cressida***. In our early days we tended to cut out certain scenes in order to

finish more quickly, but we now find it preferable to read the whole work, so in due course we shall return to some of the earlier ones we tackled, and look at them more fully.



We have had a changing membership, and currently have a very committed group, but would welcome new members at any time. We share DVDs that some of us have of stage or film productions, which adds to the interest. No prior knowledge is required, but members do bring along their own copies of the plays, often as part of a volume of the complete works.

If you are interested in joining us, please contact Charles Linfield at linfield245@btinternet.com or phone 01793 812464.

Swindon u3a Bridge Group

The Club started in September 2023, originally with lessons and guidance from Carol Smith a local Bridge teacher. Once Carol got us going we grew in number and confidence. There are now 26 of us enjoying the game and the experience of learning together. You don't need to be a Bridge whizz-kid to join us. Some of us have played before (often in the dim and distant past), but others have started learning the game for the first time. The main aim is that we enjoy ourselves. It's a fascinating and challenging game which makes it not only lots of fun but also good for our ageing brains!

We play on Tuesday afternoons at the Gorse Hill Community Centre. 2.00-4.00pm. Further information from Gill Brain (madelinegillianbrain@yahoo.com)



Using social media: Facebook u3a Chat Group

Kerrie Stone runs the Chat group and is looking for new members to join up. The benefits are that it is current and can provide more up-to-date information on group activities and complements this newsletter.

“Have you registered yet for our Facebook u3a chat group?”

If not, it is really easy to do. Just go on the website, log in and you will see an invitation to join.

You can post anything that you think will be of interest to u3a members.

This could be news or photos of your group activities, senior cinema showings, reminders of events, or anything else that you find interesting.

Help needed

Can you help for a few hours in our u3a Gorse Hill Office

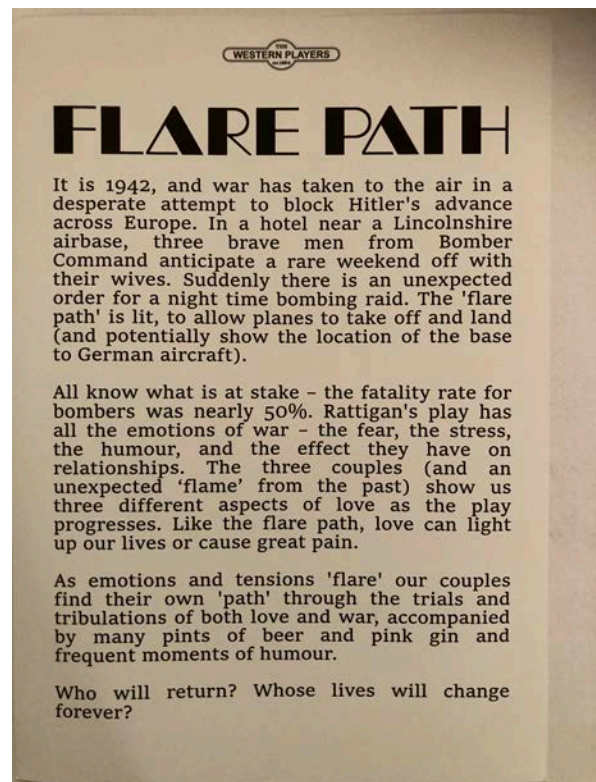
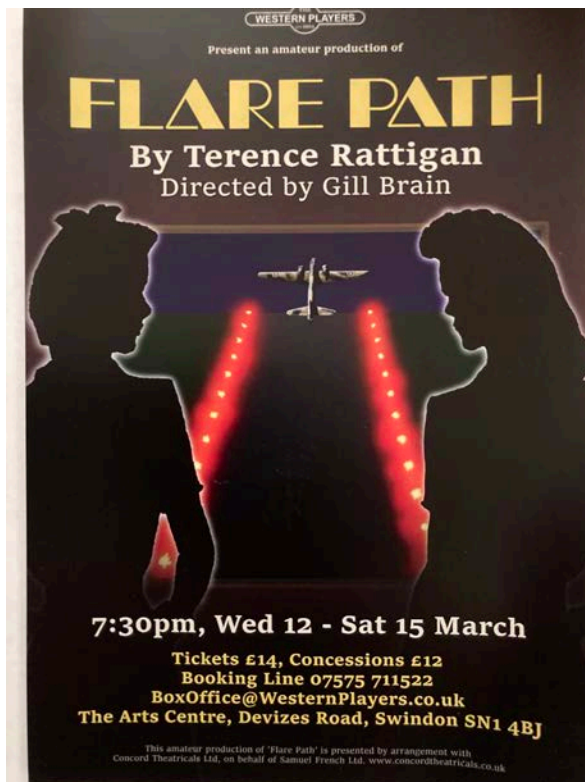
We're looking for volunteers at our Gorse Hill Office.

Are you familiar with computer systems and confident in talking to members of the public and can spare a few hours.

For more details, please contact Gill or Rhona at office@swindonu3a.org.uk

Supporting local dramatic groups

Gillian Brain writes:



Our local amateur dramatic society, **The Western Players** are commemorating 80 years since the end of World War II (1945 -2025) with this war play by Terence Rattigan.

On at the Arts Centre, Swindon 12-15 March.

Terence Rattigan was a British dramatist and screenwriter. He was one of England's most popular mid-20th-century dramatists. Flare Path, written in 1943, is based on his wartime experience as a tailgunner in the RAF. His most famous plays were The Winslow Boy (1946), The Browning Version (1948), The Deep Blue Sea (1952), and Separate Table (1954).

His plays became unfashionable in the 1950s, being overshadowed by Harold Pinter and John Osborne and the so-called kitchen sink dramas. More recently his plays have had a revival.

(Editor)

Life in a Poem - submitted by Lesley Basu

These days, amidst the seemingly uncontrollable buzz of sound bites and overload of information (some sought, some not !!) it is increasingly difficult to find a quiet oasis in which to still the mind. This month's poem reminds us of the vital role played by the natural world in maintaining our well-being.



John Drinkwater (1882-1937) was an English poet, playwright, and literary critic. He was a prominent figure in the **Georgian poetry movement**, which also included Rupert Brooke and John Masefield. The movement was characterised by its traditional forms, lyrical language, and focus on rural themes. Drinkwater's poetry often celebrated the beauty of the English countryside and explored themes of nature, love, and loss. His work is marked by a quiet elegance and a deep appreciation for the natural world.

Reciprocity

**I do not think that skies and meadows are
Moral, or that the fixture of a star
Comes of a quiet spirit, or that trees
Have wisdom in their windless silences.
Yet these are things invested in my mood
With constancy, and peace, and fortitude,
That in my troubled season I can cry
Upon the wide composure of the sky,
And envy fields, and wish that I might be
As little daunted as a star or tree.**

Editor's Note: the Georgian movement (1911-22 or 1933) is largely out of fashion, but many of us will have studied writers from this group while at school. So, some of these names may be familiar: Rupert Brooke, Siegfried Sassoon, Walter de la Mare, Robert Graves, A.E. Housman, D.H. Lawrence and others.

Swindon u3a Contacts

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(*entry is by the middle door on the right-hand side of the building*)

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Web: www.swindonu3a.org.uk

Swindon u3a Charity Number 298853

Last Word

This month, we've seen news that people are living longer, and the UK death rate has reached pre-pandemic rates. Government statistics suggest that men can now expect to live for a further 19 years at age 65, 12 years at 75, 6 years at 85 and 3 years at 95. Women can expect to live for a further 21 years at age 65, 13 years at 75, 7 years at 85, and 3 years at 95.

This has positive implications for organisations such as our own u3a. In general, we are healthier, more educated and more influential than our parents, and have the opportunity to play a more important part in our community.

So it's up to us to work out how we can do that. The Climate Change group is one example of soft influence, and no doubt others will emerge. It's worth reading the u3a magazine to find out what other areas and groups are doing.

You may have noticed that we are having difficulty in filling our trustee roles. From my experience, these roles are not onerous, make use of our skills and, more importantly, ensure the continuity of u3a Swindon as part of our social fabric. Organisations like ours will be needed even more given the news on longer lifespans. This is where I came in at the top of these thoughts.

I hope you can help us in whatever role suits you.

Chris Firth

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