



(<https://notesoflife.uk/2021/03/spring-lambs>)

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## Chair's Blog March 25

Here we are heading into April and with Easter just around the corner the weather is getting warmer, so there's no excuse now for not getting out there and enjoying some of our outdoor activity groups. Just check on our website to see the full list of Group activities on offer.

Did you know that across the UK there are more than 1000 local u3a's covering 12 regions spanning the whole of the UK. Our local Swindon u3a is one of the largest u3a's in the country with a membership that is still growing month on month. Our current membership total has just passed the 1700 mark, which is an amazing achievement!

As you will have seen from the message I sent to you at the end of March, we still have vacancies on the Management Committee that we need to fill. I'm not going to repeat the content of that email here. If any of you might be interested in volunteering some of your time to help us out, then please just get in touch. We can't run Swindon u3a without volunteers in key positions.

Vacancies currently exist on the Management Committee for a Publicity Lead and **Membership Secretary**; plus new vacancies are forecast to be available soon for other roles such as **Newsletter Editor** and **Groups Co-ordinator**.

In addition to the Management Committee vacancies, we also have some opportunities for volunteers to help on our finance team, publicity team and office team. More info is available for any of these vacancies on request, so if you think you may be able to help then please do get in touch for a chat.

Vince Williams

[chair@swindonu3a.org.uk](mailto:chair@swindonu3a.org.uk)

## Current Vacancies

As Chair Vince has said above, we have two 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.

In addition, we are looking for a Newsletter Editor (non-Trustee post) and a group coordinator for the new u3a year.

### **HOW TO APPLY**

If you are interested in these roles, send an expression of interest as soon as possible to [committee@swindonu3a.org.uk](mailto:committee@swindonu3a.org.uk)

NB: There is a short Induction and mentoring process for Trustee posts.

## Monthly Meetings

### Monthly Meeting Report – March 2025 – Secrets and Spies

At our Monthly Meeting in March, Stewart Smith provided a fascinating insight into the secret world of Coleshill during the second World War, ably assisted by Edwina Turk and Gordon Wilson.

Stewart took us back to the world of secrets and spies - even his own father had kept it secret for 80 years that he had been 'the boy on a bicycle' delivering messages. Most never told their stories.

In 1940, General Gubbins was ordered to form a British resistance organisation (Churchill's secret army) in advance of a pending German invasion, with isolated Coleshill House being chosen as the headquarters and training base for the Auxiliary units. The two Pleydell-Bouverie sisters remained in residence and always maintained they had no idea what was happening on their estate. The Auxiliary Units comprised civilians (known as Auxiliars) who were usually in reserved occupations eg farmers, police officers, teachers, but also game keepers, poachers and even lighthouse keepers, who signed the Official Secrets Act and in the event of an invasion were expected to engage in guerrilla warfare, with a life expectancy of just 10 days to 2 weeks. Some 3,500 joined and Peter Fleming, brother of Ian, was recruited to assist with the unit.

The official address of this secret unit was c/o the Post Office in Highworth and Mabel Stranks, the Postmistress, played a key role by screening personnel and calling 'with a parcel for the big house' to summon a lorry to collect the visitor. So important was her role that she was on Hitler's hit list.

There's a link to James Bond too. The Special Duties Organisation, formed after the Auxiliars by General Gubbins and Fleming, was involved in disguise and deceit. Gubbins used the codeword M (taken from his middle name), Ian Fleming as second in command was Q, the secret agents were given the 0 prefix (although not 00) and coined the phrase 'licenced to kill'. In addition, Churchill had a secret 'toy shop' with four scientists working on a catalogue of secret items. How very James Bond!  
If you are interested in learning more about Coleshill, a wartime history walk is available once a month - please see the National Trust events page to book a place.

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## **This month's meeting**

**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.



## **A teaser about our May meeting Monday: 12 May 2025**

### **Pop on the Box: A History of Pop Music on British Television**

Following the success of his talk last year on the history of children's television, Jeff Evans is back!

Freelance journalist and television historian Jeff Evans, author of *Rock & Pop on British TV*, tells the intriguing story of 60 years of music on television in this fully illustrated talk, beginning with 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.

### **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](http://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**

### **Travel Group J**

#### **Visit to Gosport & Hovercraft Museum**

**Thursday 8th May 2025**

Gosport, a port town has a history rooted in its location on a peninsula between Portsmouth Harbour and The Solent, with its importance growing alongside the Royal Navy from the 16th century. It served as a victualing station and a major embarkation area for the D-Day invasion, also suffering German air bombardment. Until the last quarter of the 20th century, Gosport was a major naval town associated with the defence and supply infrastructure of His Majesty's Naval Base (HMNB) Portsmouth. Our day trip will include a guided tour by coach of this historic town in the morning and a visit to the Hovercraft Museum at Lee on Solent after lunch. The Hovercraft Museum is the world's only hovercraft museum and through its iconic exhibits tells the story of the hovercraft in a way that educates and provides enjoyment for all the family.

#### **Departure times and pick-up points:**

**8.00 am The Crown Hotel RWB**

**8.15 am Ellendune Centre Wroughton**

**8.30 am Coate Water bus stop**

**4.00 pm Depart for Swindon**

**Cost £32.50 per person, which includes Coach, driver's gratuity, entrance to the museum with tea/coffee & biscuits on arrival.**

**All members and Friends welcome.**

**Contact**

**Jackie Theobald 01793 815262 email [m.theobald1@sky.com](mailto:m.theobald1@sky.com)**

## **A plea from the U3A Chair Yoga class**

The Chair Yoga Class at the StoweAway Centre, Wichelstowe, is in danger of closing unless a new Instructor is found.

The last class under the current instructor took place on 2 April. The group are extremely saddened that this class will close as there is no Instructor in place to carry on after Julia leaves

We are looking for a new instructor as soon as possible.

Please contact **Pat Copestake at [pat@copestake.co.uk](mailto:pat@copestake.co.uk)**

## **Afternoon Social/Discussion group update.**

This new group has met three times and is held in a relaxed, friendly atmosphere. We have so far discussed: The Assisted Dying Bill and The Honours System. We have drawn up a Code of Practice for members, which everyone adheres to. At March's meeting we discussed 'Is Social Media Making Us Less Sociable'.

We meet on the third Tuesday of every month, at 2 pm – 4 pm at The Tawny Owl in North Swindon. The Landlord has allocated a room for us to use for free, as long as we buy drinks, which works well. The bonus is free parking.

## **RWB Scrabble Group Update.**

Since the move to the Community Rooms at The Council Offices in Royal Wootton Bassett, the group has really benefited from the extra space that The Cross Keys in RWB was not able to provide: light, airy, quiet for concentrating and warm. This has also enabled me to expand the group. My members have really appreciated the change of venue. We meet the first Monday of the month between 2pm - 4pm.

If anyone is interested in joining the above groups and wants more information, please email **John Turner at [eastleaze@aol.com](mailto:eastleaze@aol.com)**

## A Poem for Easter

A thoughtful poem for these troubled times.



### Easter Day by Oscar Wilde

The silver trumpets rang across the Dome:  
The people knelt upon the ground with awe:  
And borne upon the necks of men I saw,  
Like some great God, the Holy Lord of Rome.  
Priest-like, he wore a robe more white than foam,  
And, king-like, swathed himself in royal red,  
Three crowns of gold rose high upon his head:  
In splendour and in light the Pope passed home.  
My heart stole back across wide wastes of years  
To One who wandered by a lonely sea,  
And sought in vain for any place of rest:  
'Foxes have holes, and every bird its nest.  
I, only I, must wander wearily,  
And bruise my feet, and drink wine salt with tears.'

It's difficult to pigeonhole Oscar Wilde. A member of the Aesthetic movement of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century was a poet, playwright, writer (for adults and children), wit, and homosexual (at a time when this was illegal in the United Kingdom) playwright who is still read, written about and plays performed.

This poem is subtle and is about the contrast between the pomp of Easter celebrations and the reason why Easter exists.

Some notable quotes from Wilde

"We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars."

— **Oscar Wilde, Lady Windermere's Fan**

The truth is rarely pure and never simple."

— **Oscar Wilde, The Importance of Being Earnest**

"I am not young enough to know everything."

— **Oscar Wilde**

**Source of quotations: [www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/3565.Oscar\\_Wilde](http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/3565.Oscar_Wilde)**

## 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*)

Hours: Monday, Wednesday and Friday, 10 am until 12 noon

**Telephone:** 01793 614629 (Answerphone operates when the office is closed)

**Email:** [office@swindonu3a.org.uk](mailto:office@swindonu3a.org.uk)

**Web:** [www.swindonu3a.org.uk](http://www.swindonu3a.org.uk)

Swindon u3a Charity Number 298853

## **Last Word**

Next month will be my last Swindon U3A Newsletter.

I hope I have been able to add value to our communications, to keep you informed and interested, and show you the range of activities we are involved in and help in growing membership and the number of groups and activities in our area.

My reason for leaving is quite simple. I have been asked to take a senior position in our Rotary District and help clubs and Rotarians.

I'm proud to say that Swindon is one of the most community-spirited and generous communities in the UK right from the beginning of the GWR and Brunel.

Long may it continue. I wish you even more success in future.

Chris Firth

Swindon u3a newsletter editor

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