



Welford Park February 2020 Editors own collection

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Chair's Blog February 2025

I'd like to extend a very warm welcome to all our Swindon u3a members who've joined us for 2025, and for any of you out there that haven't renewed yet then why not do it now so you don't forget. Term 2 payments are also open now if you haven't already done them.

I hope you've all got through the storms we've had of late without any issues or damage, I think we here in Swindon have got off light though compared with the likes of Ireland and Scotland.

Third Age Trust Board Trustee Elections 2025

Following a vote at the Third Age Trust AGM to change their constitution, each u3a in the country is invited to submit their u3a vote to elect 4 new members to join the Board of Trustees of the Third Age Trust. I will submit our Swindon u3a vote to the Third Age Trust on Thursday 20th February, so if you have any preferences from the list of 9 candidates below then feel free to drop me an email with your choice of up to 4. You can't vote yourself directly, only I can do that, but please be assured that I will compile your votes into a single overall Swindon u3a vote.

The 9 candidates put forward are:

- John Bent,
- David Blanchflower,
- Nick David,
- Pauline Green,
- Jean Jackson,
- Alan Russell,
- Elaine Toms,
- Laurence Wale,
- Jill Whitehead.

All candidate profiles can be viewed at:

<https://www.u3a.org.uk/events/board-trustee-council-rep-elections/trustee-candidates>

In addition to the above, we at Swindon u3a still have some vacancies as Trustees on the Management Committee. As I said last month don't be put off by the term "Trustee", it sounds a lot more daunting than it really is.

As I write this blog our Swindon u3a Trustee vacancies are currently for:

- Publicity Lead.
- Membership Secretary.
- Vice Chair.

If you want more information on any of these roles or just want to talk about what it means to be a trustee then please don't hesitate to get in touch.

I'm off to the USA for 2 weeks in early February so please forgive me if I don't get around to answering your emails or calls until I get back. In the meantime, please feel free to contact a member of our management committee with your query if it's urgent.

Vince Williams

chair@swindonu3a.org.uk

committee@swindonu3a.org.uk

Current Vacancies

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

LIAISON OFFICER (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.

Vice Chair

Please contact Vince direct.

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

January 2025 Monthly Meeting Report –

The 2025 programme of Monthly Meetings got off to a great start with over 140 members listening to Judith Cranswick's talk on Agatha Christie – The Queen of Crime. The facts about Agatha Christie are astonishing: she sold some 300 million books in her lifetime, holds the record as the best-selling fiction writer of all time (her novels having sold between 2-3 billion copies), and is the third most widely published author of all time, outsold only by the Bible and Shakespeare. With her books being translated into at least 110 languages, she is the most translated author in the world.

Her books reflected the world in which she lived. Working as a nurse in Torquay Hospital, she acquired a good knowledge of poisons, and inspiration for a certain Belgian detective (Hercule Poirot) came from the many Belgian refugees living in the town.

In 1926 Agatha disappeared for 10 days. In the midst of a divorce from her first husband, Archie Christie, her car was found abandoned, sparking a massive manhunt. She was eventually found at the Harrogate Spa Hotel in York and diagnosed with loss of memory, but the mystery of her disappearance has never been fully explained.

The 1930's were her most productive years and the character of Miss Marple was developed in complete contrast to Poirot. By accompanying her second husband, the archaeologist Max Mallowan, on his expeditions, Agatha gained inspiration for books such as Murder on the Orient Express and Death on the Nile.

During WWII, Agatha lived in London and worked in the pharmacy at University College Hospital London. Death by poisoning became increasingly more common in her novels after the war, due no doubt to her time spent in the pharmacy.

Whilst not necessarily great literature, Agatha Christie produced entertaining novels with numerous red herrings and clever endings that everyone can enjoy. Her murder mystery play The Mousetrap is still going strong in London's West End and has kept millions entertained for over 70 years!

Monday 10 February 2025 at 2.00 pm at Ellendune Community Centre Medical Detection Dogs

Our February speaker will be **Danielle Mills from Medical Detection Dogs**. This charity is at the forefront of innovative research into dogs' ability to detect the smell of human diseases and save lives. It trains dogs as Alert Assistance and Bio Detection Dogs.

Alert Assistance dogs are trained to support individuals with complex health conditions who have limited awareness of an impending life-threatening medical event, such as blood glucose conditions, Addison's disease, neurological problems and severe allergies. Using their amazing sense of smell, dogs can be trained to identify minute odour changes emitted before an emergency and alert the person to take preventative action.



Bio Detection dogs assist scientists through the charity's research into the development of electronic noses. The cancer dogs can provide additional screening for cancers that are currently difficult to diagnose, e.g. prostate cancer. Trials are also being conducted into Parkinson's and bacterial infections.

Early warnings for March and April

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.

14 April 2025 at 2.00 pm at Ellendune Community Centre Swindon Community 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 this 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 meters off the ground pointing between North and East to provide the most sheltered and protected position.

They will often look quite weather-worn as the materials used are all natural using FSC sourced wood, no glue (there is a dot on the back to hold a peg which protects the base from water running down the tree), initially when new they have water-based paint but that does not last long, and the boxes merge into the environment and from time to time need replacing as they naturally weather.

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.

Booking your place

As always, please be sure to book a place by:

1. Going on 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 614629

Bookings can be taken up to 11.30 am on the morning of the meeting.

Group News

RWB Scrabble. New year, new venue.

We had our first meeting in the Community Room at the newly refurbished Manor House Royal Wootton Bassett, Lime Kiln, SN4 7GJ on Monday 6th January.

It was well attended despite the adverse weather conditions at the time. Council Staff were very friendly, and the room was laid out exactly the way we wanted. It was warm - a bonus and the lighting was good, especially helpful for us oldens. We meet on the first Monday of the month in the afternoon between 2 pm – 4 pm.



Source: RWEB Scrabble Group

Now that we have moved into a bigger room, I have **five spaces** available for anyone interested in joining, you can attend a taster session to see how you get on. We are a friendly/social group.

Getting to us.

We are on the **number 55** bus route with stops on either side of the road, right by the venue.

Some parking is available at the venue, but street parking is nearby.

Postcode SN4 7GJ

if you are interested in joining us, contact me. **John Turner**, eastleaze@aol.com.

Craft without rules Highworth

Members spent a lot of time during last term and the preceding months making angels. These were for the angel festival held in Highworth Methodist church where we meet on alternate Fridays. Lots of local organisations and two schools took part.



Source: group's own photograph

Although not a money raising event a substantial amount was raised via donations, refreshments and sale of some angels.

It was a lovely weekend event, with a vast array of differently crafted angels, such varied talents on display.

Diana Bores

Travel Group J. Visit to Bristol Museum & Art Gallery 6th March 2025

Departure times and pick up points:

9.00am Angel 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

Climate Change Group

The newly formed Climate Change group has had its first meeting of 6 monthly meetings. We examined the basic science and the fact that emissions of CO₂ and methane are increasing and that average temperatures worldwide are also increasing at an alarming rate as a result of this.



Source: Bangor University

In the following meetings, we will be looking at and discussing;

- the effects of climate change/global warming.
- the efforts of the United Nations IPCC and COP conferences such as the 2015 Paris Agreement to deal with what is now an emergency.
- what climate breakdown is and what measures of mitigation and adaptation can or could be made, such as various technological developments - non-fossil fuel energy, EVs, carbon capture, hydrogen technology, etc.
- whether it is possible to halt or even reverse the present trajectory, which if not halted, could lead to ecological, economic and social collapse and how we face up to this with “deep adaptation”.

New members are welcome.

If you are interested, contact **Bill Hughes** at bill.hughes1@btinternet.com

ENJOY READING?

Then why not join the u3a **BOOKSHELF Group.**

We meet on the last Friday of each month to discuss a book we've all read that month. It doesn't matter if we agree or disagree – the fun is in exchanging views and ideas. It can be surprising what can be

learned by sharing ideas. We read modern fiction, classics, biography/autobiography and in the last year we have read a great variety of books such as:

The Secret River; Frankenstein; The Essex Serpent; H is for Hawk; All the Light We Cannot See; Demon Copperhead; Unreliable Memoirs; The Gathering; Piranesi; Horse

Books are a uniquely portable magic (Stephen King)

Interested in joining us? Contact: Gill Brain: madelinegillianbrain@yahoo.com

Life in a poem: submitted by Lesley Basu

Another wry observation by Brain Bilston for you this month, I am sure his words ring true for many of us and hopefully, raise a smile!



Source: ilovewindsor.co.uk

This was the year that was not the year

This was the year that was not the year
I repaired the bathroom tap
and emptied out the kitchen drawer
of a lifetime's worth of crap.

This was the year that was not the year
in which I launched a new career.
A West End hit eluded me
as did "Time Person of the Year".

This was the year that was not the year
I became a household name.
Action figures were not sold of me.
I wasn't made a dame.

This was the year that was not the year
I spent less time on my phone.
Nights of passion did not happen
in boutique hotels in Rome.

This was the year that was the year
I didn't get that much done –
much the same as the year before,
much like the one to come.

By Brian Bilston

If you would like to know more about Brian Bilston, or even listen to him, go to <https://brianbilston.com> (Editor's comment)

Swindon u3a Contacts

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All committee members		committee@swindonu3a.org.uk

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

Web: www.swindonu3a.org.uk

Swindon u3a Charity Number 298853

Last Word

Firstly, thank you all for the group news updates. This shows the widespread of interests within our groups and membership, and I'm sure there are even more subjects and themes coming up. If you have a specific interest or knowledge that is not yet part of the Swindon u3a portfolio, like Bill Hughes and the Climate Change Group, post it in the Newsletter to gain the support of members and within a month or two, we could have another active group. Given that the population over 85 is going to grow so fast in the next ten years our is even more important.

I read the other day that 75 is the new 65 as our age group lives longer and is more active than our parents. This is certainly true of Swindon u3a. Swindon does have a wide and varied culture in spite of its media reputation. We are part of the glue that can and does shout loudly about our town

For example, I was part of a group that had a private visit to the Bodleian Bookstore late last year. It was fascinating to see how logistics and literature merged so smoothly. A book order by a student in Oxford in the morning will be picked from millions of books in-store and delivered later the same day. Part of Swindon's culture.

It's also good news that the Science Museum in Wroughton is offering tours again. Like many of us, I went to Wroughton when they had open days and Festivals of Transport where thousands of people came from all over the UK showing classic cars, buses and commercial vehicles. A good day out.

I was part of the team presenting the Gloucestershire Older Driver Forum last Saturday, where the guest speaker was a Tai Chi instructor saying how important it is to remain supple and flexible as we age and wish to continue being active. Our Tai Chi groups have both a physical and mental purpose and I guess they will prosper and grow in popularity in our search for remaining fit and active.

So, we have lots to be proud of in Swindon. Our u3a is one of the largest and most wide-ranging in the activities we offer, and we reflect the diversity and history of our town.

A reminder: the submission date for the March edition is 25th February.

Chris Firth

Swindon u3a newsletter editor

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