

Reminder u3a Christmas Party 2.00 pm 9 December
Ellendune Centre Wroughton. Details see Page 5

u3a
Swindon

Newsletter

December 2024



Adoration of the Child' by Gerard van Honthorst
Source: <https://blog.christmasnightinc.com/art-nativity/>

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Chairs Blog



First, it was great to see so many of you at our AGM last month; but for those of you who could not be there in person then my blog this month is a summary of my Chair's Annual Report that I delivered to the attendees:

Over the last few years, the organisation has been through a very busy and turbulent time, we've had to cope with all sorts of challenges like Covid and big changes in the way we manage our membership and subscriptions, but now we're in a quieter phase with Covid well behind us and the new systems are up and running smoothly.

A big thank you to our previous Chair, Gill Brain, and the Management Team that got us through those difficult times. They did all the hard work to lay the foundations for our future success and it's now up to the current team and me to keep things on track and running smoothly.

New members continue to join us in large numbers. We currently have 1548 fully paid-up members with access to approximately 130 Activity Groups to choose from. These are very impressive statistics and something we should all be very proud of.

Each of our Groups requires one or more Group Organisers to run their activities, and without these very important volunteers, we just wouldn't be able to run our organisation so a big thanks goes out to all of them.

Our transition over to the new Simple Membership system is now complete and has been fully operational for several months. Online payments seem to be working well and is the preferred method of payment by most members. However, we still have a few members who prefer to visit the office to make payments in person. We will always support those who wish to continue to do this. When renewal payments are due our Payments Team always have extra work to do chasing a small number of missed, overdue, or incorrect payments, but hope this will reduce over time.

Earlier this year we reviewed our Policies, Procedures and Risks to bring them all up to date with our current situation, stripping out things like COVID-related risks and reviewing financial matters to make sure they better reflected our current situation and needs.

In **July** we held our Volunteers Event. Swindon u3a is a member-led, member-focused, and member-run organisation that relies entirely on volunteers at every level. We really do appreciate all the hard work and time our volunteers put in to get things done. At the meeting, we received a lot of good feedback and suggestions. We plan to incorporate a number of those into our future operations.

At the end of **August**, we had our annual Open Day. This was my first, and I was very impressed with everything, from the number of Group Organisers and leaders manning the numerous individual desks to all the volunteers helping out on the day. I took the opportunity to visit as many desks as I could and chat with our members throughout the day.

In **October** we had our New Members event, sadly I couldn't be there this year to do my bit due to family commitments. 43 new members and 11 volunteers attended in what was a very positive event.

Finance: we review our financial position every month at our Management Committee meetings, and then, leading up to the AGM we have our Annual Financial Review. We are in a good place financially with healthy reserves and as a result we have been able to keep our Membership Fee at £10 again for this year.

Over the year, and very recently too, we have had to say goodbye to a few of our Trustees and Committee members including:

- Gill Brain, our previous Chair up to end of December last Year,
- Sonia Meadue, who was our vice chair up to April,
- Chris Firth, who was our publicity lead up to September.
- Chris Ockwell, who was our Venues member.
- Jill Kelly, who was our Membership Liaison Secretary.
- Sylvia Alexander, who was our Office manager.
- Brenda Lammin, who was our Minutes secretary up to April.

I know we will miss all of them and their experience at our Management meetings going forward and I'd like to say a big thank you to all of them for their hard work and time.

Swindon u3a could not function without a strong **Management Committee**. You will see that 7 members have moved on in the last year. We have filled many of these posts but currently have 2 vacancies that we need to fill: Liaison Secretary and Publicity Lead. If you are interested in filling one of these roles, then contact us directly at committee@swindonu3a.org.uk and one of us will get in touch.

My final thank you goes to all of you, our members. Swindon u3a is one of the largest and most successful u3a groups in the Country. That is all down to the commitment and engagement we get from all of our members.

Thank you
Vince Williams
chair@swindonu3a.org.uk

Current Vacancies

As Chair Vince has said above, we have two Management Committee vacancies and an assistant to the Treasurer to be filled.

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.

HOW TO APPLY

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

A Committee member will contact you and give you more details of the scope of the role. Alternatively, you could talk to a member of the Management Committee at the **Christmas Party on 9 December**.

NB: There is an Induction process for new Trustees, a period of mentoring by an established Trustee.

Treasury Team Member: Trips and other costs from January 2025

The job involves:

Assisting other team members in supporting the bank account for trips

Managing payments and Simple Membership entries for trip payments and non-venue payments on the main account

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

Monthly meetings: December 2024 and January 2025

u3a Christmas Party

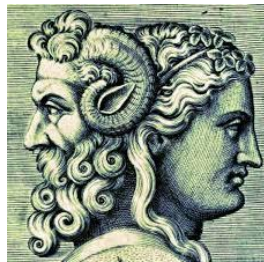
Monday 9th December 2.00-4.30 pm at the Ellendune Centre.



Is this date in your diary? Get the season going with a u3a swing.

There will be all the things you love to enjoy: a Christmas Quiz by our very own Quizmaster Chris Brooks, music by our Merribells group, a Christmas singsong, fun and games galore -oh, and cake by our master baker Ian Hartley, with tea by our fabulous Monica and the 'Tea Gang'.

Come and join the fun. Christmas jumper optional: fun essential



The New Year starts with Agatha Christie

Monday 13 January at 2.00 pm at Ellendune Community Centre

Judith Cranswick will be speaking about Agatha Christie - The Queen of Crime. Discover how the highs and lows of Agatha's often turbulent life and times influenced the novels of the world's best-selling fiction writer of all time.

Judith is a prolific crime writer who writes cosy travel mysteries. Her proudest achievement is to have had her novels compared to those of her great mentor and inspiration, Agatha Christie.

The first of her Mystery at Sea series - Passage to Greenland - reached No 1 in Amazon's best-seller charts.

The usual refreshments plus jigsaw and book swaps will be available too.

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

- 1. Going onto the website www.swindonu3a.org.uk (just log in and click on u3a-wide events), or*
- 2. Telephoning the office on 01793 614629*

Group News

1 Jazz Appreciation Group (JAG)

The Jazz Appreciation Group continues to thrive. In **September** we had a great presentation on the clarinet and sax player Sammy Rimington. Ken, the presenter, has posted his presentation on YouTube (search 'Sammy Rimington Film').

In **October**, we learned about the Big Band leaders (Benny Goodman and others).



This month (**November**) is 'Lady Instrumentalists' followed by a tribute to the great woodwind musician David Sanborn.

December is a 'Bring Your Own' event, where members can bring along a jazz or blues track, maybe a favourite or something quirky, fun, or Christmassy to share with the group.

In **2025** we will have presentations on Dave Brubeck, John Coltrane, 60s to 80s musicians from other genres who have crossed over to jazz (e.g. Joni Mitchell, Charlie Watts, Nora Jones...), plus presentations on other less well-known jazz and blues artists.



All members are welcome to present, it's a great way to learn, but it is not obligatory, there are a core group of members happy to take on a suggested topic. Following a survey undertaken earlier in the year we have a good programme of topics for the future.

JAG meets at Liden between 2 and 4 p.m. every fourth Friday each month except December and July, when we meet earlier to avoid holidays, and August, when we take a holiday. We can still accommodate new members.

Ed Sexton on behalf of 'the JAG leadership team'.



Swindon u3a Friday Walking Group B

On Friday Nov 8th a group of us set off from Ashbury Folly for a 6-mile walk. It was a dry but slightly misty day. We were ably led by Sue and James Reade who stopped at various points to explain farming techniques, the history of the places we passed and some myths and legends! Who knew that planting fenugreek mixed in with oil seed rape deters animals from feasting on the main crop?

James recalled the history of how Ashdown House came to be built as a hunting lodge by a member of the very wealthy Craven family Lord William Craven for Elizabeth Stuart - the woman known as the Winter Queen - Ashdown House marks the culmination of a story of royalty and war, love and devotion.

Sue talked about the hill fort that is not a hill fort! Why? It's a fort but not on top of a hill. Originally thought to be named Ashbury Fort but then renamed Alfred's Castle, we trooped round the perimeter in the mist! Alfred's Castle is a small Iron Age hill fort, behind Ashdown Park It lies 2-3 km south of the Ridgeway and is protected as a Scheduled Ancient Monument. Later on, from our vantage point on the hilltop Sue pointed out the sheep and Greyweather stones looking very similar, Merlin turned sheep into Greyweather Stones!

Our final stop was Waylands Smithy, always atmospheric. It is a neolithic chambered long barrow, once believed to be the home of Wayland, the Saxon God of metalworking.

Some of us standing at the front of the burial chamber entrance.

New Groups information for 2025

This is a new feature.

If you are thinking of starting a new group or extending an existing group then canvas for interest by posting here. The new Afternoon Social/Discussion Group started with a flyer from John Turner. I'm pleased to say this group is now active and currently full. Advertising does work!!

New Line Dance Group

Beginner Level Line Dance Friday 3-4 pm Gorse Hill Community Centre January 2025

There are still some places left for this new Beginner Line Dancing group. All dances are beginner-level, some are still quite challenging and provide a perfect workout for your hearts and minds. The music is pretty good too!

If you fancy giving it a go, please email me at linda3.marriott@gmail.com for further details.

Please note that the identical 2-3 pm Friday group is fully booked, and the waiting list is closed for the time being.

The Afternoon Social/Discussion Group

The Group met for the first time on **19 November**.

John Turner, the Group Lead, has confirmed that both the size of the group and the content of the discussion were successful So, for the time being, the group is full. However, it may be worth being put on a waiting list. If demand is high enough, there may be scope for a second group with a new leader.

Contact John Turner at eastleaze@aol.com



Source Adobe stock

New Yoga Group: Yoga to Maintain Flexibility and Strength.

Duration: 1 hr 15 mins/1 hr 30 mins. *Start time:* 10:30 *Day:* Friday

Venue: Haydon Wick Parish Council Offices, Thames Avenue, Haydon Wick, SN25 1QQ

Group Organiser Ann Fletcher: annfletcheryoga@gmail.com

Bio and introduction

I originally trained through the British Wheel of Yoga which included anatomy, physiology and yoga practice. I then took several years of training through the Iyengar Yoga Institute. I have taught for more than 30 years in both England and France, in health clubs, and schools. I also ran my own private lessons.

I prefer to limit the numbers in a group to a maximum of around ten because this means students get the proper attention.

I aim to help people keep and improve their flexibility and find some calmness through relaxation at the end of the lesson. This is especially relevant for older people as yoga helps maintain strength and movement.

What do you need? Students need comfortable clothing, an exercise mat, blocks and a belt. Amazon sell mats from £12 and two blocks and a belt from £10. This equipment is necessary for safety and to aid the student's flexibility.

Life in a Poem

From Lesley Basu

A new "punny" poem by the wonderful Brian Bilston this month to cheer you up now the gloomy weather is fast approaching! Here, he reminds us of the endless possibilities for invention (and misunderstanding..!) with the English language. Some of you, like me, will remember with fondness his performance at the Arts Centre in Old Town.

To be Pacific

Why do you always go off on a tandem,
say goodbye without further adieu ?
It's time you climbed down from your pedal stool-
this is not a phrase you're going through,

when antidotal evidence suggests
you've been freewheeling right from the start.
Or rather, *from the gecko*, as you might say.
You're always upsetting the apple tart.



I can't be asked to correct you these days:
it takes two to tangle, I won't deny it.
But when push comes to shovel and all's set and done,
I just want a little piece of quiet,

to curl myself up in a feeble position
so I can give my poor ears some rest bite
from these sayings that do not pass mustard,
the flaws in the ointment you cite.

You're no escape goat or social leopard;
I don't regard you as a hapless case.
But be aware there are reaper cushions
when you cut off your nose despite your face.

Brian Bilston -2024

Swindon u3a Contacts

Chair	Vince Williams	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)

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

You will notice a change in the typeface used in this edition. I am trying out Baskerville, a personal favourite and one I think is clear and concise. This was designed by John Baskerville in the 1750s in Birmingham. Give me your thoughts and preferences.

It's good to see new groups being publicised in the newsletter. This shows the growing interest and increases in numbers that Vince referred to in his blog. We are a large branch? Group? What is the collective name for a local u3a? I'm not sure. Perhaps we could create one.

I've been reading about other u3a clusters and am astonished by the range of themes and topics and the growing high profile in their locality. More on this in future months.

Vince has asked me to promote the Swindon u3a Annual Report, which the Charity has just received. We should be delighted that we have recovered from the hiatus of COVID and are looking forward.

<https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/en/charity-search/-/charity-details/298853/accounts-and-annual-returns>

This newsletter promotes existing and new groups. The more reports I receive, the more we all know. The Walking Group report is full of relevant information and shows what a treasure trove we have in our locality. A six-mile walk encompassing Iron Age, Roman and Stuart artefacts. Ashdown House (now National Trust owned) is being restored by Pete Townshend of the Who. Perhaps our misspent youth had a purpose.

May I wish you all a very Happy Christmas season and a new year full of promises.

Chris Firth
Newsletter Editor

newsletter@swindonu3a.org.uk

November 2024

PS Don't forget the Christmas Party on 9th December,

at Ellendune Centre 2.00 pm.

Seasonal fun for all.

Photos in the next Newsletter?