

**Sep/Oct 2026 Issue No 262**

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**Editorial**

Hopefully all of you coped with, and were not made unwell by, all that excessive heat we've been having. It certainly kept me indoors more often than I would have liked and prevented me doing things and seeing people.

One of the good things about technology and social media (sadly there are a number of bad things) is that you can keep in touch with people who are at a distance. This can either be people you know, or people you don't but with whom you share common interests.

The main u3a website has a wealth of information about what is on offer for members. There is a wide range of free online talks, workshops and courses, some led by u3a members and some from other organisations. There are also many online interest groups covering topics as diverse as *Exploring Prog Rock* (run by our own Paul Vickery), *Canal Boating* and *Fish School* (as in keeping fish not catching and/or eating them!). These are very useful for anyone who is interested in a particular topic but for which we have no group of our own. To join these online groups you do have to subscribe in addition to your local membership.

Facebook also has a variety of u3a groups which may be of interest, including the main u3a UK page, Craft u3a, u3a Gardening Group and u3a Keeping in Touch. We have our own (little used!) facebook page which is for any of our groups to post about what they will be, or have been, doing. We are also happy for anyone to post about events which may be of interest to our members, as long as they open to the general public. Anything connected to a private group – or other u3a - can only be shared if it is a direct invitation.

If you haven't already done so, have a look at the following:

**<https://www.facebook.com/groups/340467546573129>** (Minehead & District's fb page)

**<https://www.facebook.com/u3auk>**

**<https://www.u3a.org.uk/what-we-do/learning/learning-activities>**

**<https://www.u3a.org.uk/what-we-do/learning/interest-groups-online>**

**<https://www.u3a.org.uk/what-we-do/events/educational-events>**

**<https://www.u3a.org.uk/members-area/subject-networks>**

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## **Minehead and District u3a General Information**

### **Minehead and District u3a Interest Groups**

Were you aware that there are currently 23 open and 7 'full' Interest Groups covering a wide range of topics? These are all run by Group Leaders who kindly volunteer their time to arrange and support the groups. Details of our groups can be found on our website:

**<https://www.minehead-district-u3a.org/interest-groups>**

The committee are aware that some of our interest groups are not currently able to take any new members and this is frustrating for those of you who are keen to join groups. Please bear with us as we look at ways to increase the groups available. The good news is that some of our existing groups are still able to take new members.

We are keen to find ways to support the setting up of new groups and welcome your ideas for expanding existing groups, requests for new topics and any issues you have experienced in relation to joining groups. Please contact Ann Strik on **[groupsec.mdu3a@gmail.com](mailto:groupsec.mdu3a@gmail.com)** if you are keen to join a group or if you have any ideas for groups.

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If anyone you know is interested in joining our u3a then please ask them to contact the Membership Secretary on: **[membership.mdu3a@gmail.com](mailto:membership.mdu3a@gmail.com)**

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#### **Welcome to our new members!**

Jonathan Pearman, Patricia Beere, John Harman, Gillian Griffiths, Julie Thompson, Elinor Harbridge, Linda Heathcock

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Please send your submissions, or let us know your thoughts on the Newsletter by emailing: **[newsletter.mdu3a@gmail.com](mailto:newsletter.mdu3a@gmail.com)**

#### **Deadline for contributions to the next edition of the Newsletter: Friday 30th October 2026**

Please send your photos and news as soon as possible **BEFORE** this date to **[newsletter.mdu3a@gmail.com](mailto:newsletter.mdu3a@gmail.com)**

# DIARY DATES 2026

## Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> September

Porlock Village Hall, Toll Road (New Rd), Porlock TA24 8QD  
10.30 to 12.00

Local author and harpist Hazel  
Prior will talk about her books and  
play her Celtic harp



## Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> October Coffee Morning

Venue: Methodist Church Hall, The Avenue, Minehead TA24 5AY  
Coffee served 10.15-10.30. Talk starts 11.00



Speaker to be  
confirmed

## Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> November Coffee Morning

Venue: Methodist Church Hall, The Avenue, Minehead TA24 5AY  
Coffee served 10.15-10.30. Talk starts 11.00

Speaker to be  
confirmed



## News from the Groups

Our website has additional information and photos and is regularly updated.  
See: <https://www.minehead-district-u3a.org/>

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### New Group - Daytime Disco



Come along and enjoy an afternoon of music, dancing and good company. Our Daytime Disco is the perfect opportunity to dance freely to classic hits, mainly from the 1960s and 1970s, in a relaxed and welcoming atmosphere.

Whether you want to get up and strut your stuff, sing along to your favourite tunes, or simply sit back and enjoy the music, the choice is entirely yours. There is absolutely no obligation to dance – just come along and have fun. After all, you're never too old to dance! Dancing is one of the best ways to stay active as we get older. It can help maintain muscle strength, improve balance and coordination, reduce the risk of falls, and contribute to overall fitness and weight management. It also releases endorphins, helping to boost mood, improve mental wellbeing, and reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation. For those who prefer a quieter afternoon, there is plenty of space to sit, chat and socialise.

We also have access to the kitchen, so you are welcome to make yourself a cup of tea or coffee while catching up with friends. No partner is required, and you can dance as much or as little as you like. Most importantly, come along, enjoy the music, meet new people and have a great time. Members' music requests are always welcome!

If interested, send an email to: [daytimedisco.mdu3a@gmail.com](mailto:daytimedisco.mdu3a@gmail.com)

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### Crime Book Club – New Group Leader Needed!

Can you help? The Crime Book Club based in Watchet is in danger of closing down and are looking for a new leader. They meet monthly on the 1st Thursday of each month at the Phoenix Centre from 1.00 to 2.30pm. Members choose books between them annually, and these are ordered from the library. The leader would be responsible for collecting and paying for them, keeping notes of who gets which book and returning them in due course. Members currently pay £1 towards the books and 50p towards refreshments that the leader brings to the meetings.

Please think about this if you are a reader of crime fiction, as it would be a shame to lose a group at this point while we are starting to add new ones and if you are interested in joining the group, why not consider running it? If you'd like more details, please contact Lori Lee [lorileart001@gmail.com](mailto:lorileart001@gmail.com) or Nancy Harman (who has most of the necessary information) and whoever takes it on would have support from the committee if required.

## **Economics in Society July 2026 meeting**

Everyone should pay their taxes in the UK and the wealthy in particular should shoulder their fair share. A tax on wealth might result in some of them departing with their investments, but a land tax would lead to a redistribution of council tax and stamp duty for all and the rich cannot simply depart taking the land with them. The property values used to allocate council taxes are well outdated and do not reflect regional variations. An update is needed. This is no small undertaking so it might be the time to change.

Prime minister in waiting Burnham is promoting the move of some aspects of government to Manchester. There have already been very significant numbers moved out of London, for example the 'Treasury North' campus is in Darlington. Presumably Burnham is concerned about the location of the decision-making activities of ministers. This might bring jobs for graduates to the north but risks leaving behind experienced staff who would not want to move. There will be no short-term cost savings. Can this symbolism be translated into political change with more public interest if not engagement?

The European Union's discomfort about the US dominance in technology and finance seems to have become more urgent since Trump came to power. Tariffs, economic sanctions, reliance on US banking systems, doubts about sincerity of NATO obligations and disagreements about digital and AI regulations are set to continue. Europe's pursuit of strategic autonomy reflects a genuine desire to shape its own destiny, and the formation of an ECB based credit card system may reduce reliance on Visa and Mastercard, but in most areas it will remain structurally dependant on the US for many years.

NICE seemingly changed its value assessment (QALY) policies to avoid punitive US tariffs in the December 2025 US-UK trade agreement. A recent BMJ revue suggests it will effectively move £44.7million to the research and development budgets of US owned companies operating in the UK. This would be at the expense of pharmaceuticals currently supplied by NHS. A complex picture now further obscured by the questioned legitimacy of Trump's tariffs. Many countries have bodies similar to NICE, and some explicitly use NICE evaluations as reference points.

*Chris Smith*

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## **Classical Music**



Jean presented the music at our July meeting, and the works she played ranged from Mozart to Finzi. She played several pieces by Mozart, the first movement of the Brahms' Cello Concerto, and some Faure, so we had a good selection.

At our meeting in August Patrick chose a programme consisting of music written in the 1890s, which gave us a very interesting afternoon. He included Satie, Peer Gynt, a Tchaikovsky symphony in a recording conducted by John Barbirolli, and the second and third movements of the Dvorak Cello Concerto. And we had our usual pleasant chat over a cup of tea

*Jan Lowy*

## Nature Amblers

In July, a small group of us went to Steart Marches for a guided tour. While waiting for our guide, we were amazed at the display of wildflowers beside the carpark, particularly the show of brilliant blue chicory.

Our guide was an expert in dragonflies and damselflies and told us many interesting facts about these fascinating insects. We learned the difference between a dragonfly and a damselfly, their life cycle and that these beautiful insects live for at most 8 to 10 weeks. We saw male Emperor Dragonflies patrolling their territory and having acrobatic aerial "battles" as they chased off any other male Emperor that strayed into their patch. Our guide showed us Brown Hawker (*see photo*) and Common Darter Dragonflies as well as Common Blue and Blue Tailed Damselflies skimming the surface of the water.



We visited a pond-dipping site and were lucky enough to see the larva of Emperor and Brown Hawker dragonflies as well as a water scorpion and a newt. In total we recorded 20 different insects. As the weather was fine and sunny, we saw butterflies and one of our group looked at the wildflowers, rushes and shrubs and recorded 46 different plants.

In August we went to what would seem to be an unlikely destination for a Nature Amble –



Tivington Farm School. None of us knew about it until recently and it proved to be well worth a visit. There was plenty to see in the hedges, amongst the garden flowers and in the pumpkin patch. It was interesting to compare the plants growing in long established hedges with those in a newly planted hedge. There is a wildflower meadow which unfortunately had lost most of its colour due to the heatwaves but it was a good challenge for us to try and identify the flowers from their dried leaves and seedheads.

In total we identified over 60 wildflowers, grasses and trees as well as a number of insects and birds. The school grows a field of many different shapes and sizes of dahlias which made a magnificent show of colour, as shown in the picture. Some of us came away with glorious bunches of the dahlias and other flowers which the school sells as well as eggs from the hens we saw foraging. We would highly recommend a visit to the Farm School when they are open to the public. For further information do find them on Facebook which is regularly updated. On occasions they also have a stall at Minehead Market; again, this will be shown on Facebook.

Our next amble will be on 22<sup>nd</sup> September when we are going to amble along part of the Mineral Line at Washford. On 27<sup>th</sup> October we hope to go to Bossington Beach with an amble to Kings Hedge Coppice on 24<sup>th</sup> November.

For more details about the group and where we meet, please contact Sarah Stringer on 07548 513978 or email her on **[natureamblers@gmail.com](mailto:natureamblers@gmail.com)**.

*Sarah Stringer*

## Photography Group Report

As mentioned in the last Newsletter, for our second June meeting the Group visited Lynmouth, many travelling by the open-topped bus. Consequently, at our first meeting in July we showed the results of that outing, which was on a beautiful day with the tide fully in. That combination produced many images of boats and the harbour, some from higher up the path to Lynton. The river and its bridges were also popular choices – the attached by John Batt shows an interesting & unusual perspective – along with views along the beach to Foreland Point. Some members also found interesting details in the buildings, the Lynmouth town sign and the “Walker” steel sculpture on the front.



*River and bridge at Lynmouth. John Batt*

*Aboard the open-top bus. Maggie Buchanan*

The visit finished with members returning via the open-topped bus, the mood being nicely captured in the accompanying picture of two passengers by Maggie Buchanan.

Our later meeting in July was a visit to Taunton where we had a guided tour around the town centre on a very hot day! Although many members knew Taunton well, we all learned much that was new to us. The tour started at the Museum in Taunton Castle and finished at the Minster, looking at the Castle Hotel & Bow, the “Tudor Tavern” on Fore Street and Bath Place along the way. The majority of pictures from this tour were naturally of these places, and were shown at our only meeting in August. Particular favourites were the glass doors on the Minster and the stems of the Wisteria on the hotel wall.



Some members were unable to join the tour & made a separate visit. The images from those visits were of rather different places, such as the car parks, the old Canal Pump House and the Innovation Centre opposite the station, captured in the accompanying photo by Steve Presnell.

*Innovation Centre. Steve Presnell*

*Stewart Lane*

## General History

In June the main talk involved an extensive collection of **Historical Coincidences** which uncovered some astounding facts. Here is a taster:

**The First and Last Casualty:** The first British soldier killed in World War I (John Parr) and the last British soldier killed (George Ellison) are buried in the St. Symphorien Military Cemetery. By pure chance, their graves face each other, separated by just 7 metres of grass.

### **Three Titanic Survivors**

Violet Jessop, Arthur John Priest, and Archie Jewell were all aboard both the RMS *Titanic* and the HMHS *Britannic* when they sank. All three crew members miraculously survived both disasters, cementing their names in maritime history as some of the luckiest (and unluckiest) individuals at sea.

**The Unlucky Hoover Dam:** The first worker to die during the construction of the Hoover Dam was J.G. Tierney on December 20, 1922. Exactly 14 years later, on December 20, 1935, the very last worker to die on the project was his son, Patrick Tierney. A further unsettling coincidence is that Patrick Tierney fell and died from almost the exact same location at the dam site where his father had been killed over a decade prior.

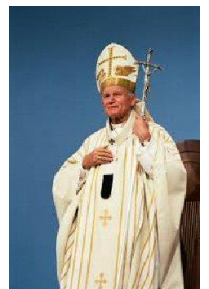
### **Founding Fathers' Demise**

Both **John Adams** and **Thomas Jefferson**, who were key architects of the United States, political rivals, and later close friends, died on the exact same day: July 4, 1826. This was no ordinary day; it was the 50th anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration of Independence.

### **The three mini talks were on:**

#### **Pope John Paul II (1920 to 2005)**

Karol Józef Wojtyła was born in the Polish town of Wadowice. Appointed Archbishop of Kraków in 1964 and Cardinal in 1967, he used his powerful communication skills to defend religious freedom against Poland's oppressive communist regime. Pope John Paul II was the first pope to visit the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp, making a historic pilgrimage on June 7, 1979. His funeral on April 8, 2005, drew an estimated four million mourners to Rome.



#### **Spencer Perceval (1762 to 1812)**



Perceval became Prime Minister of the United Kingdom on October 4th, 1809 following the resignation of the Duke of Portland. On 11 May 1812, while entering the lobby of the House of Commons, Perceval was shot through the heart at close range by John Bellingham, a disgruntled British merchant who acted entirely out of a personal grievance. Perceval holds the historic distinction of being the only British Prime Minister ever assassinated.

### **The Chatterton Massacre**

The Chatterton Massacre occurred during a widespread uprising sparked by starvation, extreme poverty, and the loss of livelihoods caused by the introduction of industrial power looms. Between April 24 and 27, 1826, thousands of handloom weavers marched across East Lancashire's moors to peacefully dismantle these machines. On the third day, after the crowd ignored the reading of the Riot Act, Colonel Kearney ordered twenty riflemen to fire into the crowd. At least six people were shot dead and many others were seriously wounded.

In July the main talk was on the History of Aviation. Early aviation relied on mimicking birds. In the 11th century, English Benedictine monk Eilmer of Malmesbury leapt from an abbey with artificial wings, gliding a furlong but breaking his legs due to a missing tail. By the 17th century, focus shifted to lighter-than-air physics. Italian Jesuit priest Francesco Lana de Terzi proposed a vacuum-sphere ship in 1670, and Brazilian-Portuguese priest Bartolomeu de Gusmão flew a Passarola (Great Bird), an early 18th-century conceptual flying machine shaped like a bird in 1709. Mathematical validation followed with Swiss mathematician Daniel Bernoulli's 1738 *Hydrodynamica*, defining the pressure-velocity relationship of wing lift before the first manned balloon flights in 1783.

The 19th century established heavier-than-air aerodynamics. British engineer Sir George Cayley separated lift from propulsion to launch the first manned glider in 1853. Alternative concepts emerged, including Swiss-Austrian clockmaker Jakob Degen's 1807 ornithopter and British inventor William Samuel Henson's 1842 Aerial Steam Carriage. Late-century progress accelerated via German engineer Otto Lilienthal's hang glider trials and Australian inventor Lawrence Hargrave's 1893 cellular box kite, which provided structural framing for early biplanes.

In December 1903, American brothers Wilbur and Orville Wright achieved the first sustained, controlled flight by combining fixed wings, a petrol engine, and three-axis control in their Kitty Hawk Flyer 1. Innovation quickly spread to Europe. Brazilian pioneer Alberto Santos-Dumont made the first public European flight in 1906 with his wheel-launched 14-bis which flew for 700 feet. French aviator Henri Farman soon added wingtip ailerons for lateral control. By 1910, Great Britain mass-produced the Bristol Boxkite, transitioning flight into a commercial reality.

Industrial aviation began in 1910 at Filton Aerospace in England, standardising mass production from military biplanes to supersonic transports. International showcases like the 1910 Nice meeting turned flight into a global sport. Rapid innovation followed: Russian designer Igor Sikorsky built the first multi-engine commercial aircraft in 1914, early inventors engineered flying cars, and mid-century trials produced American company Goodyear's inflatable rubber Inflatoplane.

Late 20th-century design focused on hyper-efficiency. American engineer Paul MacCready's carbon-fibre Gossamer Albatross conquered human-powered flight, crossing the English Channel in 1979 using only leg power. Today, aviation spans individual freedom and automation, ranging from Swiss pilot Yves Rossi's personal carbon-fibre jet wing to completely pilotless, autonomous cargo plane freight networks.

#### **Four Mini Talks**

**Caroline Norton** (1808–1877) was a pioneering British author and social reformer. She married George Norton, an abusive, jealous husband who abducted their children after Caroline left him in 1836. Under the laws of the era, Caroline was denied legal representation or a voice in her own trial, effectively treating her as the passive property of her husband. Rather than submitting to these injustices, she launched a fierce campaign for legal equality. Her relentless advocacy was instrumental in passing the Custody of Infants Act 1839, which granted mothers the right to custody of young children and also laid the groundwork for the Matrimonial Causes Act 1857 and the Married Women's Property Act 1870.



**John Tradescant the Elder** (1570-1638) is recorded as a 'gardener' on his marriage certificate. In 1630 King Charles 1 appointed him Keeper of His Majesty's Gardens, Vines and Silkworms at Oatlands Palace in Surrey. His various contacts afforded him a number of opportunities to travel abroad and he collected botanic specimens such as Lilac, white Hellebore and Gladiolus. His son also introduced plants such as Tradescantia Spiderwort, Horse Chestnut and Phlox.

He purchased a house at Lambeth where he installed his family and the 'rarities' he had acquired and planted his garden of exotic plants. He wrote letters to the sea captains, ambassadors and merchants asking them to acquire natural and man-made rarities from the places they travelled to. These were to be added to his own collections to form the basis for his 'museum', The Ark.

**Carlo Collodi** (1826 to 1890) (the pen name of **Carlo Lorenzini**) was an Italian author and journalist, born in Florence in 1826. His legacy, *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, fundamentally transformed children's literature by introducing a deeply flawed, rebellious protagonist into a genre that had previously been dominated by perfect, obedient characters.

**Henrietta "Hetty" Green**, (1834 to 1916) famously dubbed the "**Witch of Wall Street**," was an extraordinarily successful American financier during the Gilded Age who became one of the wealthiest women in the world. Despite her massive fortune, Hetty practised an extreme, obsessive frugality. She famously wore a singular, tattered black mourning dress—which inspired her eerie nickname—lived in cheap apartments, and routinely chose cheap meals like oatmeal to save pennies. She died in New York City on July 3, 1916, at age 81. She left behind a vast empire worth roughly \$200 million, equivalent to \$6 billion today.



If you would like to dip your toes into the past for 2 hours a month, come along and join us to discover history. If you want to join the Group or for more information contact:

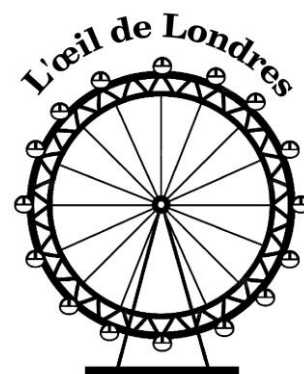
**susanhutchings@fastmail.fm.**

*Susan Hutchings*

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### **French Conversation 1**

For our last meeting of the academic year (!) we had two activities. The first was to each translate a newspaper article on the importance of a country "Dreaming Big". Examples were given of the Eden Project in Cornwall, the (eventual) success of the Millennium Project that became the O2 Arena, the London Eye and Anthony Gormley's statue "The Angel of the North". It was argued that such projects are good for the mental health and well-being of a nation. We re-translated together comparing and refining our own translations and discussing different approaches, vocabulary and grammar problems and solutions.



Our second activity was a new one for us; Collaborative Drawing. We had a character introduced e.g. Julie a middle-aged lady, then we took it in turns to suggest and draw features and attributes she might have - the more interesting and bizarre the better! When we had run out of ideas we then displayed all the drawings, with predictably hilarious reactions. We don't meet in August, so September will be our next session.

*Di Martin*

## **Local History Group**

Over the last two months, we have visited both of our destinations because of the winter talks where the group decided it would be interesting to see these places in person.

### **July– Bicknoller, A Village Full of Stories**

What made the walk around Bicknoller in July so enjoyable was the way in which its physical landscape seemed to reveal its history at every turn. The old farmhouses and thatched cottages, the quarry and the hillside, the church and its ancient churchyard, and the stories of the people who lived here all combine to create a remarkably vivid picture of the village.

Having Nigel Stock as our guide added another dimension. His local knowledge and personal connections provided the sort of stories that rarely appear in guidebooks—the anecdotes, traditions and characters that turn a pretty village into a place with a real sense of identity.

Perhaps one of the most celebrated Bicknoller names is Harold Gimblett, **(1914–1978)** born and baptised in Bicknoller, who became one of Somerset's greatest cricketers and an England player.

He remains Somerset's leading first-class run scorer, with over 21,000 runs. His debut in 1935 was legendary, scoring a century against Essex in 63 minutes. In May 2026, St George's Church dedicated a new memorial to him, featuring beautifully crafted oak doors with handles shaped like cricket bats. Former England and Somerset batsman Marcus Trescothick opened the doors, with the Gimblett family and Somerset cricket representatives present.



### **August - The Life and Work of John Burgess (1859–1933)**

John Burgess was one of the many builders, businessmen and civic figures whose work helped shape Minehead into the town we know today. Over the course of his career, he contributed not only to the town's buildings but also to its public life, serving as a councillor and Justice of the Peace. Our walk followed in his footsteps, taking us to several parts of Minehead where his work can still be seen. These buildings provide a fascinating record of changing architectural tastes and of Burgess's own development as a builder.

After completing his apprenticeship in Bristol, Burgess returned to Minehead, where he worked for several prominent local builders. He later established his business, initially in partnership with James Hurford before setting up his own as John BURGESS and SONS. Throughout his career, he worked closely with local architects, including William Tamlyn and Piers St Aubyn, combining their designs with his own practical skill and knowledge of traditional construction.

Our first stop was on Glenmore Road, where we saw a group of terraced houses believed to be among Burgess's earliest house buildings erected at the end of the 1890s. Constructed in traditional stone and brick, they include decorative plaster details that add character and individuality. We continued to Summerland Road and onto Tregonwell Road and where Burgess built what is now Stones Bar and Restaurant and the properties behind. These properties demonstrate the increasing scale and ambition of his work as his reputation grew. On Tregonwell Road we viewed all the properties on the entire east side of the road starting with the substantial and elegant family home that he built for himself. We continued to Queens Road, Ponsford Road and then back into Glenmore Road viewing numerous houses built by John Burgess through to 1921.



John Burgess is the man in the black bowler hat, his 2 sons are on his left with Molly his enterprising niece (the only women in the picture) sat between them.

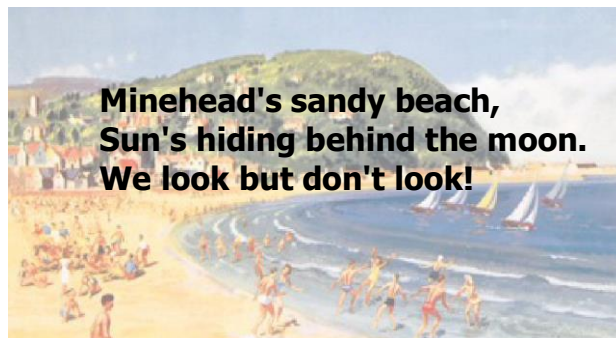
On Thursday afternoon 24 September we will be shown the Local reference section in Minehead Library led by one of the local librarians and on Thursday 22 October is a morning walk around Higher Town Minehead.

If you would like more information or are interested in joining our small lively group, please contact Ann Strik at **groupsec.mdu3a@gmail.com** or 07712 932481.

*Ann Strik*

### **Poet's Corner**

**U3a UK** recently posted on facebook for anyone to have a try at writing a Haiku and Ruth Conley bravely rose to the challenge:  
Always remember



For the uninitiated, a Haiku is a Japanese poem that captures a single fleeting moment in nature. It consists of three unrhyming lines: the first line containing five syllables, the second seven, the third five.

Feel free to have a go and send in your poems for inclusion in the next Newsletter.