

Jan/Feb 2026 Issue No 258

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Chair's New Year Greeting

Here we are at the start of the new year and my first priority is to try to encourage new members. As one of the participants at the recent Group Leaders Meeting said, "If everyone introduced one new member, we'd double our membership." Not rocket science but a fact. If you are enjoying your mdu3a experience, get a friend to come along with you. If you're not enjoying it, please get in touch and tell us what we're missing. Guests can attend three separate events before having to join, so there's nothing to lose. I'm doing my bit, and I'd love others to do theirs.

Apologies for those who came to the December meeting when there was a bit of an administrative error, totally my fault, so I've learnt a valuable lesson in confirming venues. This is one of the tasks I'd love to hand over to someone else, so if you've got any organisational expertise, please get in touch and I'll talk things through. Despite the hiccups, all went well in the end and we were heartily entertained by the Community Choir who led us in singing some Christmas songs.

The AGM has been arranged for Thursday 21st May at the Methodist Church Hall, at 10.30 a.m. We are also using the Methodist Hall on Saturday 21st March for an Open Day. Hopefully your group leaders will be talking this over with you in the next month as we would like as much input from everyone as possible. We want the Town and District to know we're here and understand what we're about. We'd also like to encourage some new members, so it's over to you.

On behalf of the Committee I'd like to wish you all a happy and healthy 2026, and I'm looking forward to meeting more of you over the coming months.

Nancy Harman

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Editorial

I'm currently trying to write an Editorial in between sneezing and coughing! I do hope all of you out there are keeping well, especially those of you who already have health problems. Hard enough to cope with these winter ailments for those of us who are in general good health but far worse for those of you who are not.

At least at this time of the year we can look forward to longer hours of daylight, warmer weather and the Spring. Once I shed this cold I'll be thinking about getting seeds in and planning gardening jobs.

I'm also in the process of 'de-cluttering' and clearing out those things I have had for 40 years or more that have been shifted from loft to loft or cupboard to cupboard each time I've moved house. You know – those things that you ***might*** use one day. I recently finished scanning from all 98 editions of a long extinct embroidery magazine those projects I ***might*** actually do one day. (Why is it I still don't have any space in the house?)

This edition of the Newsletter is usually a little thin as many of our groups don't meet in December but thank you to all those who have contributed. Please keep those items coming for future editions. It doesn't matter if you don't want to write an item every time – even an occasional one is welcome.



Please send your submissions, or let us know your thoughts on the Newsletter by emailing:
newsletter.mdu3a@gmail.com

**Deadline for contributions to the next edition of the Newsletter:
Saturday 28th February 2026.**

Please send your photos and news as soon as possible **BEFORE** this date to
newsletter.mdu3a@gmail.com

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

Welcome to our new members!

Janet Chadwick, Helen Miller, Pete Collard, Sheila Conrad,
Josephine Parsons, Ann Gilbert, David Sherman

DIARY DATES 2026

Coffee Morning

Thursday 15th January

Venue: Salvation Army Hall, 1 Brendon Rd, Watchet. TA23 0AU



Afternoon Get-together

Thursday 19th February

Venue: Quaker Hall, 9 Bancks Street, Minehead, TA24 5DJ

14.30 to 16.00 - Talk starts 15.00

Creative Photography

John Hallstone



Coffee Morning

Thursday 19th March

Venue: Recreation Rooms, A39, Carhampton, TA24 6NH

10.30 to 12.00



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.

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** if you are keen to join a group or if you have any ideas for groups.

News from the Groups

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

Classical Music 2

Jean gave the presentation for November - based on patriotic music. This ranged from Dvorak's New World Symphony through Copland, and Smetana's 'Vltava' - the river which runs through Prague - to pieces by Glinka which were new to me (and several of us, I think) and were very attractive. It was good to be together again after recent health troubles.

For our December meeting, we all chose short pieces, so we had a variety of music, ranging from Handel to Vaughan Williams, and finishing off with Mozart - always very relaxing.



River Vltava

To celebrate Christmas we also had nice cakes, and there was plenty of cheerful chat.

Jan Lowy

Photography Group Report

Our first meeting in November comprised two presentations. The first was by Steve Trelfa on the Victorian photographer Clementine, Viscountess Hawarden, who took many artful images of her adolescent daughters, cleverly using natural light and often with mirrors as props. A fascinating story emerged as to how her original prints came to the V&A Museum through the gift (& vigorous representations!) of her granddaughter. In complete contrast, Steve Presnell showed his own wonderfully observed pictures of "Streetlife". The images that included people at work particularly fascinated members, so much so that it is now a theme for one of our meetings in 2026.

For our second meeting in November, the topic was "Brocante" (ie second-hand). This brought forth many images of goods such as pottery, glassware & toys, but also garden items (eg rhubarb forcers) plus views of antique shops, some with their managers. On December 3rd the rather enigmatic topic was "Thereby hangs a tale", so it was hardly surprising there were few similarities between members' stories and photographs! Some presentations dealt with a single theme such as the narrative behind a 1940s weekend or a train journey in the snow. Other members offered a separate tale for each image, like a specific incident on a holiday, a visit to a location used in a famous film or the first use of a new camera.



We used the final meeting of 2025 to show just a few specially chosen images from the year (taking the extra time for some seasonal fare with our coffee). Martin Fisk's offering included one of beautiful reflections on the Regent's Canal by Kings Cross.

Regent's Canal Martin Fisk

Many other photos with water, landscape and nature were featured and yet maintained a remarkable standard, as the other two accompanying images show. The pony on Exmoor (so aptly titled "Cold Feet") by Greta Gardner epitomises the outdoors just now, whilst the Teasel seedheads back-lit by the sun by Sue Bovington reminds us that the richness of summer is not too far away!

Stewart Lane



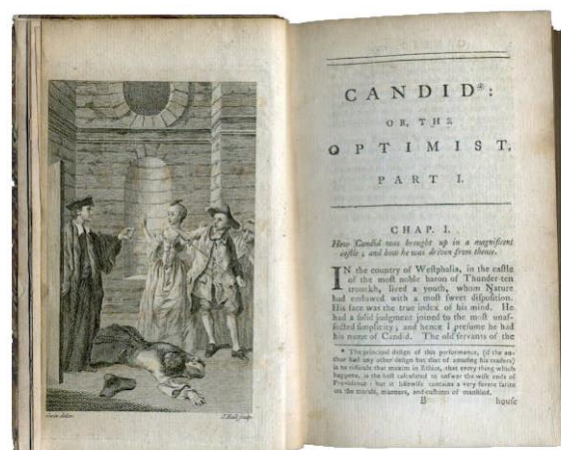
Cold Feet Greta Gardner



Teasel heads Sue Bovington

French Conversation 1

At November's meeting we re-visited Voltaire's poem "Candide". It was written in the 18th century so, of course, the language is archaic but the grammatical structures and vocabulary give us much to discuss. We even discovered a term for a "reckless driver" - surely still applicable today! We don't meet in December but, since we are enjoying "Candide" so much, we will continue with his adventures in January. Many thanks to P.L. for all the photocopying.



Di Martin

Local History Group

For our first indoor meeting of the winter, Catherine talked about the online mapping system "Know Your Place" and how it can be used to help with Local History research. First, Catherine told us a little of the history of Know Your Place and how it now covers most of the Southwest. Catherine then went on to give us two demonstrations. She started by showing us how to use Know Your Place to find when a pair of houses in Watchet were built. She then went on to look at changes in the townscape in Minehead, how buildings and even street names have changed over the centuries, and how to use the Information Layers on the system to investigate things like Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas. There were lively discussions throughout with people wanting answers to their own questions, which Catherine ably demonstrated. It seems a very easy system to use with many uses for Local History research.

There was no meeting in December, and our indoor meetings will continue on the 4th Thursday afternoon each month, starting on Thursday 22nd January, at the Quaker Meeting House in Minehead.

If you would like more information about or are interested joining our small, lively group, please contact Ann Strik, groupsec.mdu3a@gmail.com or 07712932481.

Ann Strik

Allotment Group



The little Christmas tree has been lifted from the allotment and brought indoors and decorated once again this year. It has a good root system so it will be replanted in January ready to grow again for next year.

If you are making New Year Resolutions:-

- to take more exercise in the open air,
- or eat more healthily,
- or do your bit to help the ecosystem,
- or care for birds and butterflies etc

The solution is here - we would love to welcome new members to join the group.

Contact Alex 01643 709320

Alex Rowe

Economics in Society **Our November 2025 meeting**

The OFGEM proposal to write off up to £500 million of debt owed to the energy suppliers seems incredibly generous as the money would come from a levy on regular bill payers. We recognised the difference between the retail energy suppliers and the major oil companies who already pay windfall taxes on excess profits. Managing unpaid bills is a normal risk in business and OFGEM should ensure the retailers manage this properly, probably by use of prepayment meters and social tariffs.

We were amazed to find that the monetisation of "sports" has led to a £39 billion industry employing 400,000. Construction of new stadia has led to urban regeneration and community improvements.

Whilst many aspects of our lives can already be monitored through use of credit cards and loyalty schemes, the government seems to think that Digital ID will lead to unimagined benefits. As a DI will be needed to work the scheme can hardly be considered as voluntary. We look forward to a new major government computer system.

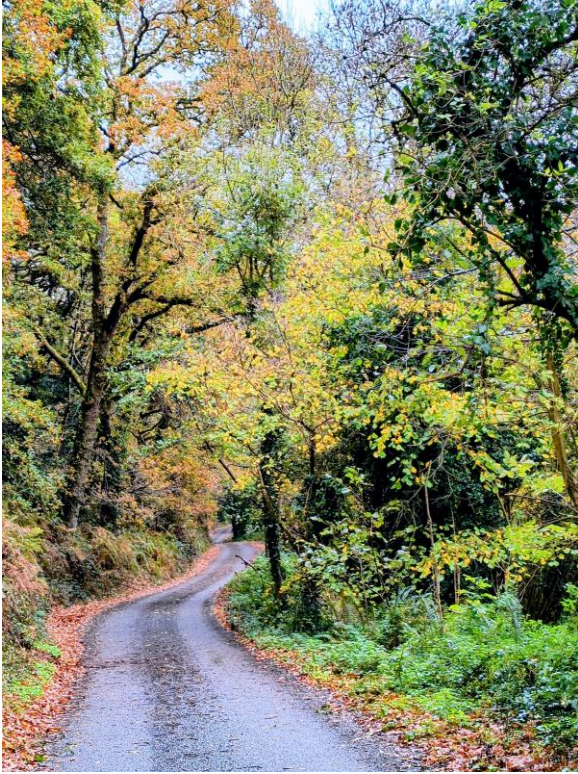
The government has the ambition to see 1.5 million new homes built by the end of the parliamentary term, 2029. Coincidentally this is the same number as homes currently regarded as empty or low use. Some councils have tried to limit the spread of second homes and Airbnbs through registration and increased council tax, but the real problem is matching housing to where there are jobs, especially for young people.

We could not imagine new sources of income for the Chancellor that we have not already considered. The currently leaked information about "two up, two down" will not be good for pensioners. Perhaps she will have some other scheme that does not "break the mandate" before the Budget at the end of the month.

Some 4% of the UK population earn over £100,000. For some individuals the associated tax benefit tapers and pension obligations can lead to a disincentive to work. Will consultants come out on strike with resident doctors?

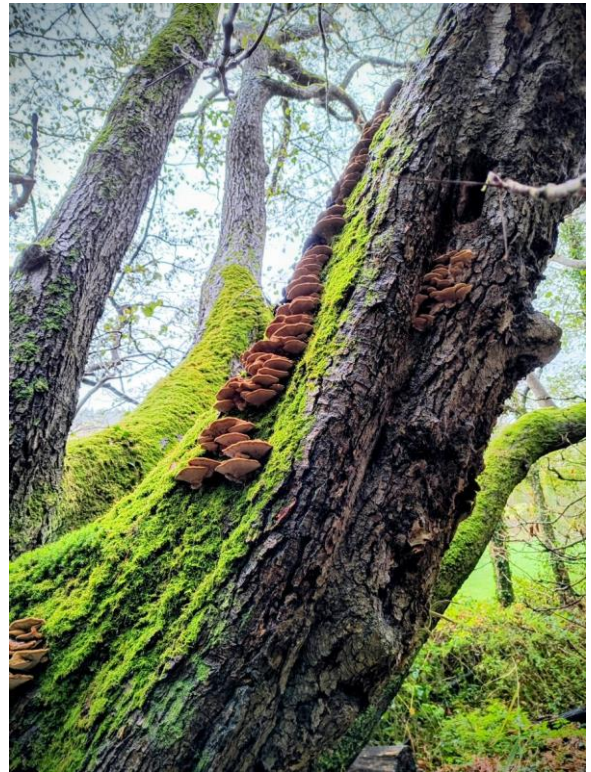
Chris Smith

Nature Amblers



For our November amble, we made a first visit to Knowle Lane and walked under Grabbists Hill. The walking was easy, as long as we looked out for traffic, and the trees that arched over the lane were beautiful shades of green, yellow, orange and bronze due to the variety of trees. Flowers were few and far between, not surprising at this time of year, but there was an abundance of fungi in all shapes, sizes and colours. A robin serenaded us for much of the time. In total, we saw about 70 different things.

Unfortunately, our December meeting was cancelled due to illness.



Our first meeting of 2026 will be on 13th January when we will have our indoor review of 2025 and planning for 2026 meeting. Our ambles will then be on 10th February and 10th March, venues yet to be decided.

For more details about the group and where we meet, please contact Sarah Stringer on 07548 513978 or email her on natureamblers@gmail.com. Anyone who is interested in nature and a stroll in the countryside is welcome to join us. No great knowledge of flora and fauna is necessary, just an interest.

Sarah Stringer

General History

Recently we have heard about the Gordon Riots of 1780 which were named after George Gordon about whom we learnt some interesting facts. We also heard about George Newnes who started Titbits in 1881 - a magazine that ran until 1967. Circulation in 1955 was 1,150,00 copies. Each issue presented a large range of titbits of information in an easy to read format. John talked about newspapers in general, David on John Jameson and Keiran on Iolo Morganwy, a Welsh author born in 1747.



In November we heard about how the Zulu wars were really started by just three ambitious men and the government didn't support it until the massive defeat of the British army at Isandlwana.

Jane talked about Mary Somerville born in 1780, a friend of Ada Lovelace and a great scientist who has a crater on the moon named after her.

Jane Sperring

*Mary Somerville and the
crater named for her*

General History members express their thanks to Jane Sperring after her many years of convening this Group. The Group Leader is now Susan Hutchings and we will continue to meet on the third Monday of the month at 2pm in the Quaker Hall, 9 Bancks Street, Minehead.

The Group's title means that we can cover any topic or aspect of the past. We pick random years, events e.g. The Great Exhibition or topics e.g. Statues and do short presentations but also members offer talks on any aspect of history that interests them. Such themes have been Maps, Flags, Christmas Carols, Gordon Riots, Victorian weird inventions, the Heart and many more. This year's 19th January meeting begins with the main presentation on Cardinal Wolsey and his mistress Joan Larke. For members the choices of 10 minute talks can be from one of the following: 15th and 16th Century Mistresses; the year 1490 or 1530; famous women of the 15th and 16th centuries or any topic (worldwide) that interests members. Topics for future months are History of Punishment, Vikings in Lindisfarne with others in the pipeline.

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

Poet's Corner

(Just for fun, a poem by Philip Sydney, used by Elizabeth Goudge in her novel set in Oxford, with a typical bringing-things-back-to-earth Goudge comment at the end.)

With how sad steps, O Moon, thou climb'st the skies!
How silently, and with how wan a face!
What! May it be that even in heavenly place
That busy archer his sharp arrows tries?
Sure, if that long-with-love-acquainted eyes
Can judge of love, thou feel'st a lover's case;
I read it in thy looks; thy languished grace
To me, that feel the like, thy state describes.
Then, even of fellowship, O Moon, tell me,
Is constant love deemed there but want of wit?
Are beauties there as proud as here they be ?
Do they above love to be loved, and yet
Those lovers scorn whom that love doth possess?
Do they call virtue there ungratefulness?

"It's wonderful," breathed Faithful. . . . It was a marvel to him that Philip, who to his certain knowledge had no ladylove and who at this stage of his career had a profound contempt for the opposite sex, could be so eloquent on the subject of love. He was not aware that experience is unnecessary to your true poet, who can feel any and every emotion simply by sighing, sticking his tongue out at the side of his mouth and dipping his pen in the ink.

Towers In The Mist Elizabeth Goudge 1938

