

Mar/Apr 2026 Issue No 259

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Chair Report

We are moving rapidly through the year, why are the months so short nowadays? Our main focus is the Open Day on Saturday 21st March at the Methodist Hall from 10.30 to 3.00. We are trying to get the word out to as many people as possible so that we can raise the awareness of the association in the town and district. Quite a few groups have come forward at this time to promote their activities and we are hoping for more by the time this goes out. There will still be time for you to participate if you let Group Secretary Ann Strik or Vice-Chair Linda Marilton know so that we can allocate space and get the information printed for you. Hopefully the rain will have stopped by March, although I'm not holding my breath.

If you don't tend to come to the Monthly meetings, please think about it. We put quite a bit of time and effort into them and have tried to move them around the area as we were asked, plus a mixture of social and talks, again as we were asked. It is a welcome chance to meet up with others and have a chat over a coffee, and either listen to something of interest or test your knowledge in the Tabletop quizzes. If we aren't supported, we may have to consider whether to continue to run them. I personally think they are an integral part of our membership but would be interested to hear members' views.

We are still awaiting volunteers to come forward to discuss assisting our Membership Secretary, Alan is finding it harder to manage with his health issues and would like to 'train' someone up. The Secretary post is also vital to the running of the association and Pam will happily support anyone who would consider coming on board. At the risk of repeating myself, we cannot continue to exist without a committee. We are already running on almost empty and there are lots of jobs that aren't being done at all or not as well as we'd like, simply because there are only six of us trying to do them all. This is YOUR association, if you read the latest magazine it again points out that we are a volunteer led group and we need volunteers to run it.

Whatever you do with your membership, I hope you are enjoying it and that you will encourage others to come along and join in.

Nancy Harman

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Editorial

Committee Matters

Unfortunately we have not yet had anyone come forward to take over the role of Secretary. As mentioned by our Chair – we also need someone to work alongside the Membership Secretary as well as having others willing to take on various duties. With this Newsletter we are sending out the Nomination Form for the Committee so please give some thought to what you could do.

Below is a very brief summary about some of the requirements within some of the different job roles. (There are more detailed 'official' descriptions of job roles – although what people actually do will vary from u3a to u3a.) Good office skills and computer know-how are essential 'these days'!

Secretary

Much of what the Secretary does is concerned with Committee Meetings: setting the dates for the year ahead and informing everyone on the Committee; booking the venues; drawing up an Agenda, in collaboration with the Chair and other Committee members; taking Minutes at the meetings, writing them up and distributing them to the Committee. The Secretary is also responsible for drawing up the Agenda for the AGM and sending it out to all our u3a members, along with any other required paperwork. The Secretary is responsible for checking annually for updates on u3a Policies and Procedures and drawing up any amendments. Importantly, the Secretary needs to have an efficient system for storing all this information. In the past this role has been split between two people – this could be considered again.

Membership

Main duties of the Membership Secretary are: to respond to enquiries from prospective members and providing them information about our u3a; to be responsible for the paperwork and administration regarding u3a membership; to maintain accurate membership records in a required form.

Social Secretary

Ideally we need one person to arrange social events, with help and support, of course, from the rest of the Committee. This would involve setting dates for the year ahead; booking agreed venues; booking agreed Speakers and making sure everyone knows dates/venues etc; making sure the refreshment team know dates etc.

Press & Publicity

A role that, in the days of some twelve Committee Members, someone was able to take on. This could involve taking photos at talks and other events, writing a piece about them and submitting them to the local Press and also TAM.

Networking

Another role from earlier days. In the past it has meant, for example, keeping in contact with other U3As in the region and with National Office, sometimes attending events. It could also include liaising with other local groups such as the WI, Magna or YMCA.

I.C.E.

No – not that one! What we mean here is '**In Case Of Emergency**', such as you see in a mobile phone. It has been suggested that group leaders have I.C.E. contact details for all members – and all members have the same for the group leader. Then if, for example, someone is taken ill, or has an accident then whoever needs to be advised can be contacted quickly.

Some of our groups may already do this but it's worth everyone thinking about it and discussing it within your groups.

Old Minutes

All the AGM Minutes from 1999 to 2022 and all the Committee Meeting Minutes that we have from 2005 to 2022 have now been scanned as PDFs. They are now all stored in an Archive Folder. From 2023 we already had electronic copies and these will be PDFd annually and stored within the Archive Folder. We are supposed to keep Minutes for the life of our u3a but unfortunately the early years of Committee Minutes are lost in the mists of time!

It has been suggested that the paper copies of the Minutes could be taken to the Somerset Heritage Centre in Taunton.

In addition to Minutes, all our documents will be held as electronic copies. This means that the documents can be more easily passed on and also can be easily shared between several Committee members.

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:
Thursday 30th April 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!

Sandy Purcell, Cheryl Thomasgood, Vivien Reed, Susan Cockett,
Elwin Cockett, Annie Flynn, Ginny Dundas, Thelma Hiron,
Julia Meaden, Dawne Floyd-Green, Stephen Floyd, Priscilla Fennessy,
Anita Winter, Lewis Winter, Malcolm Burt

DIARY DATES 2026

Coffee Morning

Thursday 19th March

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

10.30 to 12.00



Afternoon Get-together

Thursday 16th April

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

14.30 to 16.00 - Talk starts 15.00

Creative Photography

John Hallstone



Coffee Morning & AGM Thursday 21st May

Venue: Quaker Hall 10.00 to 12.00

Coffee served 10.00-10.30.

AGM starts at 10.30.

Talk starts 11.00



Man in the Shed
Doug Human

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/>**

French Conversation 1

For our first meeting in 2026 we returned to the adventures of Candide, Pangloss, Cunegonde and the rest of the amazing cast of Voltaire's "Candide". Their escapades certainly brighten a dreary morning. Many thanks to P.L. for the organising and photocopying. For our February meeting we will all prepare a 5 minute talk on any aspect of "Cinema".

February's group was somewhat smaller than usual due to a combination of illnesses and clashing commitments. However there were still enough of us to have an interesting session under the general heading "Cinema". We heard about the early influence of the French film "Un homme et une femme". When we were played the film's signature tune it immediately registered as very French, very 1960's and very innovative e.g. the film switched between black and white and colour. We also heard about the history of cinema here in Minehead- from the Queen's Hall - in the era of silent movies- up to today's very comfortable and state-of -the - art Avenue Cinema.

The architecture of cinema buildings was also talked about, especially the lush Art Deco cinemas. Most big towns seemed to have at least one example. We heard about the job of playing the piano to accompany silent films and the memory of queuing right around the cinema in order to see popular films such as "Ben Hur". One of us remembered that in 1956 when "Rock Around the Clock " came out, the school said they should not see it! An order that was ignored of course! Several of us had fond memories of the chaotic and noisy ABC Minors - with the very politically incorrect attitude to cowboys and Indians! All in all these stories made us realise just how big a part cinema and films had played on our teenage and young adult lives.

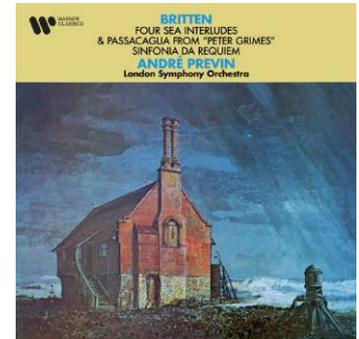
Di Martin

Classical Music 2



Patrick made the presentation at our January meeting, and played transcriptions of pieces composed for different instruments. The most amazing was Vivaldi played on the trumpet by Alison Balsam - her virtuosity was amazing in a piece full of runs. After piano music played by Julian Bream on the guitar, Patrick finished off with Ravel's Bolero for four hands on the organ. An extraordinary afternoon.

Janeen gave us a presentation of some of her favourite music at our February meeting. This ranged from a movement of a Tchaikovsky symphony, through Britten's Four Sea Interludes from Peter Grimes, reminding us what a magnificent opera that is, to music of Debussy and Delius. And we enjoyed our usual chat over a cup of tea half way through the afternoon



Jan Lowy

Shakespeare Group

The Shakespeare group are now reading Henry VIII, probably the least known of his works and also the last one he wrote. He collaborated with John Fletcher which may be why it is so seldom performed. It concentrates on the period when Katherine of Aragon is put aside to allow him to marry Anne Boleyn and although it isn't strictly accurate as to dates and who died when, the general feel appears to be authentic. We have only just started so are looking forward to seeing how it progresses.

We are looking at the possibility of having a trip up to see a play at the Globe in London, depending on costs and availability, we may be able to open this up to other members who may just like a few hours in London if they don't wish to see the play. More details when we've worked out how feasible it is.

Medieval History group

The Medieval History group is proving very popular although the January meeting was beset with illness and people away, however overall it is a most enjoyable experience. We have had various talks and the one this month is going to be on Food and Drink in the Middle Ages, after the horrors of the Plagues and Illnesses last month we are wondering what further awful tales might be revealed! Future talks haven't been decided as yet, but there have been mentions of the History of Wool and the Development of the City of London, so we shall see.

Acclaimed Authors group

The Acclaimed Authors group are looking for members who enjoy getting into a good book. After two rather heavy reads Ulysses and Doctor Zhivago, we are bringing the bar down a bit and going for books that have won or been shortlisted for awards in the past, Costa, Booker etc. hoping that they offer a challenge without causing pain.

If you are interested in any of the above three groups please contact Nancy Harman on perfectharmony52@yahoo.com. All of them meet at Flat 2 Hanover Court, TA24 5QY at 10.30am. Acclaimed Authors on the 2nd Monday, Medieval History on the 2nd Friday and Shakespeare on the last Tuesday of the month.

Nancy Harman

Photography Group Report

The group took a short break at New Year, not meeting until the third Friday of the month, January 16th. Our theme for that meeting was "The Character of Exmoor", a subject close to the hearts of many members. Most chose to focus on its wonderful and varied landscapes, offering both familiar and unfamiliar views under various weather conditions: snow, mist, valley cloud and even sunshine (as in Peter Leather's view of Porlock Bay). There were also plenty of images of settlements, old buildings and historic structures like Tarr Steps. Both visitors and local crafters made appearances as did ponies & goats, but many members thought that strands of sheep's wool on barbed wire really did catch the character of the place.



Jackie Fleming: Bridgwater Docks

On February 6th our topic was "Reflections" – a subject regularly called upon when addressing other topics. As might be expected, the majority of images were of small and large bodies of water, both within England and abroad. The difference created between totally calm waters, where the reflection is sharp (as with Jackie Fleming's view of Bridgwater Docks), and those with gentle ripples, creating a softer gentler image, promoted some interesting discussion. The waves in some images created a quite fascinating abstract, worthy of reproduction as modern wall-art. Other types of reflections included that in puddles, glass doors and windows, and even car wing-mirrors!

Our second February meeting had a particularly challenging task: "Fill the Frame or Just Edge the Frame". The aim was to produce some pictures that filled the image frame with a single theme, and others that showed a subject entering or leaving the frame. Everyone found the first option more straightforward, with photos of both the organic (flowers, insects, sheep) and inorganic (buildings, tyres and the puzzling combination of ladders and shadows by Barbara Robinson) totally occupying the frame. "Edging the frame" had people at the periphery on rafts, on a quayside and on the beach. There was a police officer looking out of the frame (and away from the penitentiary) and even a flag that "photobombed" from the edge. Altogether a great achievement for such a tricky topic and one which made us think a little differently about composition.



Peter Leather: Porlock Bay



Barbara Robinson: Ladders And Shadows

Stewart Lane

Local History Group

For our first meeting of the year in January, we had 2 excellent talks:-

'The history of Bicknoller from iron age forts to present day'. - We heard about the 2 iron age forts and puzzled over their positions in the landscape. We were surprised that Bicknoller was not in the Domesday book unlike Halsway. We found out that the area has been owned by various people through the years, including the church. We then heard about the gradual changes the 1750 Enclosures Act had on the village with the land becoming pasture for grazing sheep and cows, leading to employment in the area becoming linked to wool and leather. Many other interesting facts were discussed about ownership of the area, especially in the more recent past....



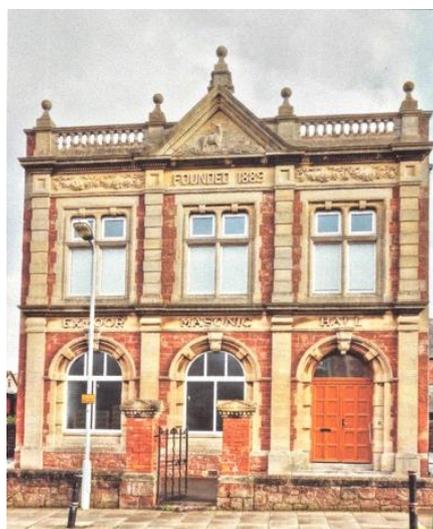
'The Parade in Minehead' looking at the 1911 Census and Kelly's Directories for 1914.'

Photographs of the **Parade in Minehead** in the past and present were used to illustrate the changes that have happened since the 1910s. The present-day photographs helped us place each business in the road and see the changes to the shop fronts and area. We learnt about the businesses, the proprietor's family and staff, how many people lived above the shop, and how many rooms there were. We wondered why many of the shopkeepers were born in other parts of the country. Amazingly there were 3 butcher's shops in the Market part of the Town Hall.

So, all in all, it was an interesting session about Minehead's development and Bicknoller's past.

In February, we heard two very different but related talks. Firstly, we heard about **John Burgess, Master Builder** - from one of his descendants. John was born in Porlock in 1859 and moved at the age of 19 to Bedminster, near Bristol, to become an apprentice builder. In 1882 he moved to Minehead with his wife and two sons to work in partnership with James Hughes

Hurford. They worked on many Minehead landmarks including Clanville House, Elgin Towers, Minehead Hospital (then the Town Hall) and Blair Hotel (now Minehead First School). In 1894, he set up in business on his own and built many prominent Minehead buildings including the Masonic Hall and what is now the Dentists in Bancks Street, the York Hotel (now Stones) and many of the houses in Tregonwell Road area.



Masonic Hall Minehead

As well as a builder, he was a prominent and influential person in Minehead serving on Minehead Urban District Council for 27 year, 17 years as Chairman, serving as a Justice of the Peace and becoming a Freemason. He died in 1933 with 600 people attending his funeral at Minehead Methodist Church.

Secondly, we heard the story of the **Luttrell family in Dunster and East Quantoxhead**. The family's history goes back 1,000 years as they came to Britain with William the Conqueror. The Luttrells came to Somerset in 1232 and have been here ever since. In 1376, Lady Elizabeth Luttrell bought Dunster Castle. In 1747, the name was preserved when marriage united the Luttrell and Fownes families and the surname became Fownes Luttrell. In 1867, George Fownes Luttrell inherited 15,000 acres of land and so owned most of Minehead as well as Dunster and surrounding areas. Some of the family were happy to live at Dunster Castle while others preferred the more rural life at East Quantoxhead. The Castle was given to the National Trust in 1976, 600 years after it was bought by the family.

The next meeting will be on Thursday 26th March. Details of the meetings on Thursday 22nd April and Thursday 28th May have yet to be confirmed.

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

Economics in Society

January 2026 meeting

Like many others we discussed at length and failed to reach a conclusion about America's foreign ambitions. If creating confusion and redirecting attention away from other matters is the ambition they have succeeded.

Thinking about the winners and losers in the redistribution of Venezuela's oil seemed easier. Big refiners on the US gulf coast will probably win, Venezuelans won't. Big Oil has no intention of losing.

The major accounting companies are proud to be using AI in their services. Jobs in the industry will evolve to embrace the technology. Hopefully experienced accountants will have oversight on recommendations to avoid mistakes from the machines hallucinating.

The collapse of Novo Nordisk's share price demonstrates that the market leader, in this case in obesity drugs, can always fail. They showed how to adapt a well-known diabetes drug to a new application. Once Eli Lilly saw that there is a major non-medical use for its similar pharmaceuticals, they quickly joined the bandwagon and became leader themselves. The interference of the Trust that oversees Novo Nordisk probably did not help. Who will be first to a pill that replaces the current injections?

Stock markets are riding high but there is an expectation that the AI sector is vastly overvalued – how widespread will the anticipated crash be when it inevitably comes?

Despite many existing government policies to help school leavers, there are nearly 1 million 16–24-year-old NEETS. There are a multitude of government initiatives to keep young people engaged, some of which have been successful. The increased numbers since COVID are worrying.

We decided that in future our meetings at the Methodist Church Hall will be from 2pm until 3.50pm. This will remove the anxiety of overstaying the two-hour parking regulations.

Chris Smith

Nature Amblers

January

For January we had a social/review meeting where we discussed all of the ambles we have had during the last year plus we reviewed the previous year to help us plan ambles for 2026. We aim not to repeat the same place at the same time of year on two consecutive years. Of course tea, coffee and a few cakes also helped.

February



Twelve of us met at Horner Woods and thoroughly enjoyed an amazing sunny and surprisingly warm day for our Tuesday amble at the end of February! Such a relief after the rather wet spell! The highlights included violets, which were probably at their best, and fascinating polypody ferns on trees. The two photos include both of these, taken by John Hailstone and myself. We loved looking at snowdrops and enjoyed watching a flock of siskin in the wych elm tree. Also enjoying the sunshine we found Red Admiral, Peacock and Brimstone butterflies. Our sightings numbered over 75, which was very good for this time of the year.



The amble in March will be on Tuesday 24th and April will be on Tuesday 28th. For more details about the group and where we meet, please contact Sarah Stringer on 07548 513978 or email her on [**natureambblers@gmail.com**](mailto:natureambblers@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

Our rather salacious theme to start 2026 was Plantagenet and Tudor mistresses. We had a presentation on **Cardinal Wolsey and his mistress Joan Larke**. **Wolsey** kept Joan a well-kept secret during the early years of his career and they lived in Bridewell Palace in a non-canonical marriage which produced 2 children, Dorothy and Thomas. Clerical celibacy was not strictly enforced and it was often overlooked upon payment of a fine which of course increased the ecclesiastical coffers. However when Wolsey became cardinal and papal legate he arranged for Joan to marry George Leigh (whose father was Lord of Adlington in Cheshire) to avoid a scandal. This was followed by two mini talks.

Katherine Swynford

Katherine had a colourful life, firstly as the mistress of John de Gaunt and later as his third wife in 1396 bearing him four children. Katherine is the direct ancestress of the House of Tudor, through her great-granddaughter Margaret Beaufort, and the House of York. Consequently, every English monarch from Henry VII onward — including the current British royal family — is her descendant. Beyond the UK, her descendants include several US presidents, such as George Washington and Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Alice Perrers

Alice was the mistress of Edward III, notorious for her immense influence, wealth, and unpopularity during the final years of his reign. Widely despised as a "shameless, impudent harlot," she was accused of manipulating the aging, senile king to amass a fortune and intervene in political and legal affairs. She is believed to have inspired characters like the Wife of Bath in Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and Lady Mede in William Langland's *Piers Plowman*.



In February our theme was the **Year 1850**.

The main presentation was on **Lord Kitchener** born in 1850 who led a full and accomplished life. Horatio Herbert Kitchener (1850–1916) was a towering figure of the British Empire, renowned for his organisational genius and relentless dedication. Born in Ireland, he rose through the Royal Engineers to become a Field Marshal and Secretary of State for War. He gained national fame for his 1898 reconquest of Sudan at the battle of Omdurman and his leadership during the Boer War. Kitchener's character was often described as aloof and austere. He died on June 5, 1916, when the armoured cruiser HMS *Hampshire* struck a German mine and sank west of the Orkney Islands. He was on a secret mission to Russia. Only 14 of the 749 people on board survived. Kitchener's body was never recovered.

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

History of Technology Failure

Taking over as General History Group Leader
I feel the weight of History on my shoulders
I hasten in to the Quaker Hall ahead of time
weighed down with chromebook and folders.

Technology was never my strong point
Among leads, adapters and memory sticks
the chromebook stubbornly refused to play.
Slides of Wolsey hidden, despite many clicks.

Keith came to the rescue, laptop under his arm
He deftly pressed a few keys and like magic
Wolsey and his mistress, one lively Joan Larke
appeared boldly on screen, no need to panic.

Alice Perrers a greedy harlot to sickly Edward III
Katherine Swynford had an impressive family tree
truly an enigmatic woman with ancestral prowess.
What of the chromebook? Consigned to ancient history.

Susan Hutchings



But well done Sue for being brave enough to take it on!
Editor