

May/June 2026 Issue No 260

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Editorial

Apologies for the absence of a Chair Note and proper Editorial but with so much emphasis recently on the AGM anything to be said would just be repetition!

Normal service will be resumed in the next Newsletter.

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:
Friday 26th June 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!

Stephen McCarthy, Sharon Trown, Andrew Thomas, Denise Thomas,
Peter Fuller, Stephen Minnitt, Michael Sullivan, Wendy Sullivan,
Paul Gliddon, Judith Wrench, Elizabeth Pickering

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DIARY DATES 2026



Thursday 21st May
Coffee Morning & AGM
Venue: Methodist Church Hall,
The Avenue, Minehead TA24 5AY
Coffee served 10.15-10.30.
AGM starts at 10.30. Talk starts 11.00

Man in the Shed
Doug Human

Thursday 18th June
Afternoon Social Gathering
Venue: Watchet Methodist Hall, 3 Harbour Rd, Watchet, TA23 0AQ
14.30 to 16.00



Thursday 16th July
Afternoon Social Gathering
Venue: Baptist Hall, Parks Lane, Minehead, TA24 8BS
14.30 to 16.00



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

In March, Barry played Chopin's first Piano Concerto in two versions, one the standard one played by Martha Argerich, and one arranged as a piano quintet, with Turkish pianist Lara Melda and the Carducci Quartet. Very interesting to compare them.

The group decided to meet on Easter Monday, and Jan did the presentation. It was a varied selection, ranging from the last movement of Mahler's Song of the Earth to Krommer's Clarinet Concerto, played by Emma Johnson, one of the first winners of Young Musician of the Year.



She also played music from Holst's Planets Suite, and chose Venus, the Bringer of Peace, and finished with Grieg's Hall of the Mountain King, to leave us in a good mood!



Our next meeting will be on Monday 4th May, another Bank Holiday, when Alison will give the presentation

Jan Lowy

French Conversation 1



At our March meeting we searched out our inner artists - maybe Degas, Van Gogh, Turner - or perhaps it was just Pollocks! We were invited to draw two scenes described to us by two group members.

The first was a couple strolling down a country lane. At various points they saw a mansion in the distance, with a group of pine-trees on the opposite side of the lane. We also encountered a children's playground with a roundabout, a slide and swings - and a pond with ducks floating on it.

Our second scene was a farmyard complete with a cow in a pond, chickens, geese, a pig and a piglet. I have to say that many of these creatures looked very much alike! We also had a farmer carrying a saddle, a farmhouse, a tractor (rather tricky that!) and a scarecrow. There was lots of new vocabulary to learn and finished pictures to admire. Thank you to our two "describers". April's theme will be to talk about "Someone I wish I had met".

At our April meeting we were low on numbers (holidays and sickness) but high on interest. In the "A person you would like to meet - or meet again" section we heard about an eccentric cousin who had lived a wide, interesting and fulfilling life. Courtesy of her RAF father she had been brought up in several Middle East countries then, on her return to the UK, got involved (as a journalist and writer) in the early days of women's rights and justice. R remembered fondly attending with her a 7 hour dubbed version of "War and Peace" - not the film they had meant to see at all!

Barak Obama was another offering. He was born in Hawaii and later attended prestigious law schools on the US mainland. He eventually became a well-respected lawyer and later served 2 terms as President of the USA. He is remembered for his intelligence and dignity, and for the many important reforms he introduced eg in health care and gun control.

Another offering was Boudicca- a feisty queen of the Icenii tribe. She fought (and died) for justice from the Romans, but was eventually defeated and she and her daughters killed themselves rather than be taken in shame to Rome.

Next month we will be really up- to- date with offerings involving AI!



Di Martin

Photography Group Report

Our March 6 meeting followed a different format to usual. Rather than show images on a set theme, we each briefly described our own camera (or the camera on our phone), and how we used it. This enabled members to gain an insight into the pros and cons of different pieces of kit and the techniques used. For many people, phone cameras were clearly more convenient and now produce impressive results with good built-in software. Others enjoyed the feel and the ultimate quality of a modern digital camera, however, these were often heavier and care was needed when changing the lens. We had some more detailed discussion on using viewfinders or screens, focusing options, and sensors – a topic we may return to later!

We returned to the themed approach at our second March meeting, with "Work" being our topic. As might be anticipated, nearly all the images included people, but thereafter the subject range was very wide. There were familiar roles: those in high-vis jackets at roadworks, postmen, scaffolders, waitresses & painters (precariously leaning sideways on a ladder!). The less obvious were also well represented: an artist and a potter at work, volunteer workers at the railway station, paramedics and drink makers, plus several doing the gardening! Some were delightfully posed portraits but most captured the real effort working. A very original exception was from Martin Fisk whose images showed Metalwork, Plasterwork, Needlework, Clockwork etc!



Ron Blundell: volunteering at the railway station

We held one meeting in April as we didn't meet on Good Friday. Several members were away, so we were a small group of twelve. However, that didn't prevent us from seeing a wide and varied set of images of 'West Country Landmarks'. The Eden Project in Cornwall was a popular choice, as were views of cathedrals and abbeys. Dorset was represented by Chesil Beach and Wiltshire by Stourhead.



Steve Presnell: lighthouse on Burnham beach



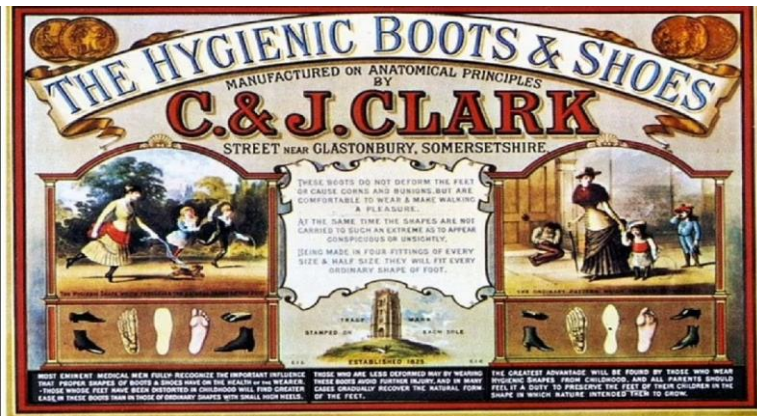
Derek Webb: Beryl Cook art work, Plymouth

Amongst the Somerset offerings were the iconic lighthouse on Burnham beach and, nearer to home, the centre of Bridgwater. All classic views of our wonderful buildings and landscape. Illustrated is one of several art works, displayed around Plymouth, produced by Beryl Cook.

Stewart Lane

Local History Group

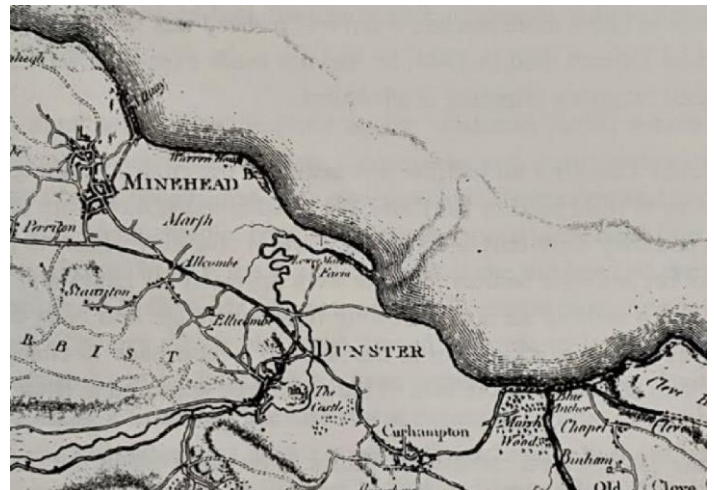
March



The first presentation was on Clark's Shoes which had operated a factory in Minehead, from 1953 until 1982, the 15th operation in Somerset. Moreover, Clarks in Vennland Way was the largest employer in Minehead with up to 300 people (until Butlins expanded some years later). And shoemaking doesn't require tall polluting chimneys or toxic waste in our rivers. The Clark brothers, who launched this business in 1825, were Quakers and so were all their descendants - there being

400 family shareholders by 1970. Their Quaker roots promoted good welfare, community support and local investments. Almost all of us have bought, either for ourselves or our children, Clark shoes, renowned for their innovation, craftsmanship and iconic designs. Now 200 years later, whilst most of Clark's shoes are made overseas, Clark's designs and specifications remain.

The second talk of the month focused on the history of Dunster Beach, which was once an important port on the West Somerset coast. However, as trade redirected to Minehead and as part of a defence against flooding, the River Avill was redirected to the sea and the old port entrance was filled in. The talk also covered the development of beach huts and their use by several regiments for training purposes during the war.



April

The final indoor meeting was a viewing of a video on West Somerset discovered at the Local History Stack Day held recently at Minehead Library. The video featured rare archive images and enlightening interviews with a variety of contributors, including a visit to the remains of the Mineral Railway, some prehistoric monuments and castle ruins such as those at Nether Stowey. We learnt about the region's industrial history and how its beauty inspired some of our great works of nature.

For the summer, we will be going on outdoor visits. On 28 May we go to the Blake Museum in Bridgwater, 25 June will see us walking around Higher Town Minehead and on 23 July we are off to Bicknoller.

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

Economics in Society –March 2026 meeting

This meeting was held on the day that the war in the gulf forced the price of Brent crude oil over \$100 a barrel so our discussions left us apprehensive about the near-term global financial outlook. We do not expect the 'Purchasing Managers' Index', a measure of optimism among UK manufacturers, to remain above 50, and it may not return to this positive outlook level this year. The post war decision to trade all major world commodities in US dollars was decided because the dollar was tied to gold. Even when the US could no longer support this, because there were more dollars in circulation than matching stocks of gold, confidence in the US and familiarity with the systems allowed USD to be the preferred currency to trade crude oil and many minerals. The USD has been by far the world's largest reserve currency for some 80 years. The demand for the USD means that almost any amount can be printed and the rest of the world will buy it and the US can operate huge trade deficits. Prior to the current gulf war some countries were setting up direct purchases of oil in local currencies, but this move away from the dollar will probably reverse now. The Gulf War probably won't be remembered for the human suffering but for the inflation and economic downturn caused by Iran blocking the Straights of Hormuz. The only bright outcome we can envisage is that the need to prevent being held to ransom by oil and gas producers will give the switch to renewable energy a new lease of life.

We debated whether the NICE (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence) decision to raise spending by 25% on new drugs is a good one. On the face of it might be better to spend the money on improving existing NHS and Social services. However, it turns out that the pricing mechanism is very complicated and the promised increase is probably enough to prevent Trump applying tariffs to our pharmaceuticals industry.

Economics in Society – April 2026 meeting

HS2 was overspecified and is quite unique so trains cannot be tested before the full network is in place – ie trains cannot run at full speed. Proposal is to restrict speeds to known safety levels (320kph) until later. We don't think we will notice the few minutes saved on our unlikely trip to Birmingham. The real benefit of HS2 was always capacity but this less exciting than "fastest in world".

First past the post will lead to unlikely coalitions when applied to the election of 5 or more evenly supported political parties. We will eventually have to adopt a proportional representation approach. Since no sitting government is in favour, the legislation to have a referendum will be a while yet. Explaining a single transferable vote to the electorate will be a challenge.

We have frequently lamented youth unemployment and worried about motivation and work culture. The new minimum wage for 18-20 year olds may end up as an additional barrier. We would not want to be entering the workforce now!

The pamphlets accompanying the recent council tax demand give a summary of Somerset Council's budget. 66% is spent on vulnerable adults and children. These are legal requirements and their budgets cannot be easily cut so show up when central government support to councils is reduced. Discretionary services suffer.

Chris Smith

General History

In February we had the following mini talks:

The Inspection of Coal Mines Act 1850

This Act was a landmark piece of legislation in the United Kingdom that formally established a system of government oversight for coalmine safety. It addressed the frequent and "lamentable" accidents in the mining industry by creating an official inspectorate under the Home Office. Conditions were horrific and dangerous with explosions from gas, roof collapse, flooding and equipment accidents causing many injuries and death. The air was thick with coal dust, leading to chronic lung diseases. Coalmines with heights often of only 60–120 cm meant that workers (including children) were often forced to pull or push tubs of coal while on their hands and knees in cramped, wet and hot environments.

The Britannia Bridge over Menai Strait

The bridge was designed by the renowned engineer Robert Stephenson. It was initially a revolutionary tubular bridge of wrought iron rectangular box-sections. This design was chosen to support heavy rail traffic while maintaining a 105-foot clearance for sailing ships, a requirement of the Admiralty. At its completion in 1850, it boasted the world's longest continuous wrought iron span. In May 1970 a disastrous fire — accidentally started by local youths — critically damaged the iron tubes' structural integrity. The bridge was rebuilt reusing the original masonry piers but replacing the tubes with a two-tier steel truss arch design. It reopened to rail traffic in 1972, and in 1980, an upper deck was added to carry the A55 Expressway, transforming it into a combined road and single rail crossing.

March Meeting



The main talk was on **Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker** (1817-1911) a plant collector, botanist extraordinaire and much travelled man. He was responsible for introducing thousands of plants from far flung corners of the world into this country. He arranged for 1,000 Giant Redwood seeds to be brought to England from California. Hooker travelled extensively, notably surveying the Antarctic with HMS Erebus (1839–1843) and exploring the Himalayas (1847–1851), identifying numerous new species. He introduced over 25 new species of Rhododendron to Britain, sparking a horticultural craze. Hooker spent the year 1850 travelling with Thomas Thomson, an old friend from Glasgow University days. The two spent nine months in Assam where, with the help of numerous indigenous guides and collectors, they collected about 2,000 species of flowering plants, including many stunningly beautiful orchids. Hooker also collected over 3,000 species in Sikkim and Bengal and he visited Palestine, Syria, Japan and Morocco.

Born in Suffolk, Hooker followed his father's botanical path, becoming a close confidant of Charles Darwin and providing crucial scientific validation for the theory of evolution. In 1859, he was the first major scientist to publicly back Darwin's book *On the Origin of Species*. Hooker served as director of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew from 1865 to 1885, transforming it into a global scientific hub and the centre of imperial botany, while publishing monumental works such as *Flora of British India* and *Genera Plantarum*.

The March mini talks were:

Margery Kempe (c. 1373–1438) was a Christian mystic from King's Lynn, Norfolk. Born into a wealthy merchant family, her life took a dramatic turn following a difficult first pregnancy that led to a mental and spiritual crisis. She claimed to experience visions of Christ, which eventually compelled her to pursue a life of chastity and extreme religious devotion, despite being a wife and mother to fourteen children.

She was a highly controversial figure in medieval England. She was famous for her "boisterous" public weeping and loud sobbing during sermons, which she believed were a gift from God but which many of her contemporaries viewed as annoying or even heretical. Her spiritual journey led her on extensive pilgrimages to some of the world's most sacred sites, including Jerusalem, Rome, and Santiago de Compostela, often travelling alone or in the face of mockery from fellow pilgrims.

Because she was illiterate, she dictated her life story to two different scribes. The resulting book *The Book of Margery Kempe*, sometimes called the first autobiography in the English language, provides a rare, intimate look at the life of a medieval laywoman, blending her intense mystical conversations with Jesus alongside the practical struggles of navigating a male-dominated society.

and

Robert Pate (1819 -1895)

It was news to most members that there were eight attempted assassinations on Queen Victoria's life. Robert Pate's attempt in 1850 is notable because it was the only one that resulted in the Queen being physically injured. While most other attackers used pistols that misfired or were unloaded, Pate struck the Queen directly on her forehead with a metal-tipped cane as she was leaving Cambridge House in Piccadilly in her carriage. The blow was hard enough to crush her bonnet and cause a wound that left a visible scar for ten years.



Unlike many other attackers who were from the working class or unemployed, Robert Pate was a former Army officer (a retired lieutenant of the 10th Hussars) and the son of a wealthy corn merchant. Pate was well-known in London for his "eccentric" behaviour—such as a rigid, goose-stepping walk through Hyde Park—which led many to believe he was mentally ill.

Despite the physical harm caused to the monarch, Pate was not executed. At his trial, the defence team did not claim insanity, fearing that this would lock him away for the rest of his life, but instead asked for a lenient sentence on the grounds of a momentary lapse caused by a weak mind. He was sentenced to seven years of transportation to Tasmania, Australia. He married a rich heiress while there and they returned to England to live.

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

Nature Amblers



In March, eight of us set out to explore Culvercliffe in Minehead on an overcast day with a nasty cold wind. At the beginning, the leader challenged the group to identify 50 plants on the amble. That would take some careful searching but we nearly achieved the target before we even left the piece of grass near the Lifeboat Station and a walk around the car park edge. The total after two hours was nearly 70 plants, with a grand total of about 90 things of natural history interest identified. We were all fascinated by the large number of Oak Apple galls on the young oak trees. (*See photo taken by Sally Colah.*)

In April a small group of six of us braved a very chilly and extremely windy amble at Blue Anchor. Although we stayed less than an hour we did surprisingly find 39 flowers and various trees, grasses, insects and fungi which totalled 51. After such amazing weather both before and after Tuesday it was a real shame. We look forward to next time!

Our next ambles will be on 26th May in Watchet, on 23rd June at Holford, and 28th July.

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

Allotment Group



Spring is here and new growth is appearing. The rhubarb is delicious and the strawberry plants are looking healthy and promising future treats. We have planted some vegetables and flowers already and look forward to enjoying them and the crops from the fruit bushes.

We still need new members and would love to hear from anyone who is interested in joining us.
Contact Alex 01643 709320

Alex Rowe