

May/Jun 2025 Issue No 254

If you need this information in a different format, such as large print, or if you use a screen reader that cannot read certain sections, or if your device has problems opening a PDF then please contact the newsletter editor on **newsletter.mdu3a@gmail.com**

Editorial

Apologies for no 'Chair Note' this month – instead there will just be an Editorial.

Committee Matters

One of our members complained to me that we no longer put 'Committee Jottings' in the Newsletter so they don't know what we do these days (!). Much of what we do is rather dull stuff and some is confidential so can't be shared. In addition, much of what we talk about is mentioned in the Chair Notes or Editorial.

We do prefer to have the Newsletter as much as possible centred around the activities of our groups, but for those who want to know a little more about Committee activities, here is a taster.

We've spent a lot of time going over all our Policies and Procedures to give them a much-needed update – and in some cases to create new ones that have never existed. The requirements of the modern u3a are much more complex and formal than perhaps they were even a few years ago. The new model Constitution, for example, is about three times as long as our current one.

There are now detailed requirements for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. It's often thought that these are about matters such as ethnicity and modern gender issues but it is much more than that. It can be about things as simple as:

- Making sure, as much as possible, that venues we use provide for people with disabilities with ramp or lift access and disabled toilets.
- Making sure that, in this time of increasing technology use, we still provide paper copies of the Newsletter to those who need it, even to the point of producing an A3 copy in an extra large font.
- Making sure that everyone can contribute in groups where individuals are expected to be actively involved. One example here is from a group where members are expected to give presentations. One member likes to do research but doesn't like to speak. One member doesn't like doing research but is happy to speak. Separately they make for two passive members but put them together and you have an active team!
- Making sure that we provide for the 'District' part of our u3a rather than just 'Minehead' by arranging Coffee Mornings and Socials in places such as Watchet, Carhampton and Porlock.

We have also tried to involve our members in some aspects of decision-making – for example the Questionnaires regarding trips and the format for Coffee Mornings. We also welcome any suggestions from members, within reason of course! Ask a hundred people what they think might be a good idea and you will likely get anything up to a hundred different responses. As the saying goes '*You can't please all of the people all of the time*'.

If anyone is ever interested in knowing more about what the Committee discusses feel free to ask – or better still, come and join us!

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 27th June 2025.**

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!

Maggie Pollard, Tina Pyman, John Collins, Danny Lynch

Newsletter contents:

Page 3: Diary Dates
Pages 4-9: General Information: News from the Groups
Page 10: Poet's Corner

DIARY DATES 2025

Coffee Morning & AGM Thursday 15th May

Venue: Minehead Eye,
10.00 to 12.00
Coffee served 10.00-10.30.
AGM starts at 10.30.
Talk starts 11.00

Life Afloat on a Narrow Boat Nancy Harman



Morning Social

Thursday 19th June
Venue: Minehead Baptist Church, Parks Lane, Minehead, TA24 8BS
10.15 to 12.00



This is a social event to give members the chance to mingle, meet and chat.

Thursday 17th July



Minehead and District u3a General Information

Minehead and District u3a Interest Groups

Were you aware that there are currently some 40+ different u3a 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/>**

U3A Writing group

We are a small group of writers striving to improve our writing by composing a short story, of up to 1200 words, each month. These stories are collated and distributed to the group members for their perusal and comment at a monthly meeting, held at one of the members' houses.

Each month a new theme is selected by one of the members in turn. For example, for April we had **"living with a famous person"** and for May, **"Colour,"** selected at random in a lucky dip fashion. (I had Orange!). This process is designed to stimulate the creativity necessary to come up with an original work of fiction. Some topics are harder than others, but it is a good way of thinking of new ideas and having the discipline to construct an entire story within word count constraint and topic. I find an approach that looks for an offbeat angle and or an edge that helps me to brainstorm ideas.

From time to time, we have a vacancy for new writers. Potential new members must be committed to wanting to improve their writing skills and to focusing on imaginative fiction. The group is very welcoming and feedback accentuates the positive, to encourage writers to get better at their craft. Please contact Janet Jones at **jem.27@outlook.com** for more information.

Steve Bratt

Classical Music 2

In March Janeen presented music by composers from Scandinavia and Russia, which made an interesting mixture. They ranged from Sibelius (Finland) and Grieg (Norway) to Borodin, Rachmaninov and Shostakovich (Russia). We had an afternoon full of tuneful music, which I'm sure we all enjoyed



For our April meeting, Patrick played discs of Russian music from his collection. These included pieces by two composers unknown to me, and, I think, to most of the others - Miaskovsky and Kastalsky. I was not surprised that I didn't know the music!

But Patrick also included works by several better known Russians, including Tchaikovsky, and Borodin, where he played music from his String Quartet No 2. which was later used as the song 'This is my beloved' in Kismet.

He finished with the last movement of Shostakovich's Symphony No 5, which made a rousing finale to the afternoon.

Jan Lowy

Economics in Society

Thoughts on April 2025 meeting

We planned to have this meeting without mentioning Trump and his tariffs but the sudden loss of confidence in international trade and European defence is influencing attitudes towards British Steel. In normal times investing public money in an aging obsolete blast furnace would be a laughing matter. Present fears that we may not be able to import steel suitable for railway lines and gun barrels are leading politicians away from supporting investment in new, climate friendly electric-arc furnaces.

Considering the murky waters of our rivers we decided that more transparency is needed around financing of our water companies.

In an effectively cashless society how can children learn about relative values and the role of money, and who should teach them? We found that members know all about influencers on TikTok and how to link pocket money to Go Henry child-oriented payment cards. Families and schools are both responsible for equipping children to deal with future debt.

The global insurance industry won't go bust because of climate change but its attitude to giving coverage in fire and flood prone areas will accelerate societies response. The transition to a carbon free future will lead to a revaluation of sources of wealth.

Investing £1BN to get a return of £12BN of unpaid taxes seems a no-brainer but are the current late penalties too low?

We are pleased that the government is to review the "cliff edge" effect in Carer's Allowance. It is unlikely that unpaid work will be included in GDP. Caring for families is included in the statistics for "economically inactive".

Chris Smith

French Conversation 1

For March our homework had been to translate a (long!) article from The Week on the history of the plastics industry, and the effect that this material has had, and is having, on the world. It is hard to believe that it was only in the 1960s that plastic, in all its many forms, became so ubiquitous and, subsequently, is doing causing so much harm. The article was far from straightforward to translate and gave rise to much lively discussion. No definitive translation was decided on as, as we discovered, so many variations were possible and acceptable. It proved a very useful grammar exercise.

In April we remembered St George - patron saint of England - and Shakespeare, our much-loved and respected writer. Much of George's life is a mystery - especially how he came to be our patron saint. He was born in modern-day Turkey and died in modern-day Israel. He never visited England, and certainly never encountered a dragon - that was added to his story much, much later! He was born in 275 AD and died in 303 AD - martyred aged 28 for refusing to acknowledge pagan gods. He was canonized in 494 AD and was probably not a chevalier but a foot-soldier in the Roman army. Today he is invoked as protection against many ills and, of course, as a patriotic symbol - especially at football matches! The George Cross honour was introduced by King George VIth.

Dragons - how and when a dragon became linked to St George is not known, but dragons have featured in the folk-lore of many civilizations. They are certainly known in Ancient China and the stories were probably spread via the Silk Road routes. The dragon was adopted by the early church as a symbol of menace and evil.

What we know about Shakespeare's life is equally patchy. We know his christening date and his death date, but his actual birth-date is an educated guess. We have a rough outline of his life, both in Stratford and in London. We know he was survived by two daughters and that his son - Hamnet - died aged 11. We are not even sure of his total output - we know of 38 plays, but there may have been more. Scholars have done remarkably detailed research, for instance we know he mentions love over 2000 times, but hate only 183 times! We were also introduced to a book on Shakespeare written and illustrated by the father of one of our group.



It was a busy and instructive morning.

Di Martin

Crime Fiction Book Club

We have moved to the Phoenix Centre on the esplanade in Watchet. Timing 1.00-2.30pm 1st Thursday of the month. The move is working well and we now have 15 members. We have room for a few more but you will need to get our monthly book on kindle or second hand. Cost is £2.50 inc. hot/cold drink. Parking is free in Phoenix parking. Contact Lori on 07935318022 for more info.

Lori Lee

Nature Amblers

In April one of our members kindly arranged for us to have a tour of the Exmoor Natural History Society property near Horner. It was lovely to see so many different trees, many with nesting boxes, and we have now added wych elm, pear and whitebeam to our list. The flowers included violets, lots of primroses and quite a lot of spotted leaves of Early Purple Orchid which will look a picture when they come out in flower. Fascinating to see tiny tadpoles in the pond! We were very grateful to finish off with refreshments. It was quite a damp morning but that did not dampen our spirits. We also watched videos of wildlife in the gardens and the group asked our host lots of questions.

On a sunny morning in March which was deceptively cold due to a biting wind, 12 of us met at the Cemetery car park in Watchet. We ambled towards the church, through the churchyard and down the footpath towards the town. We admired the swelling "sticky buds" on the horse chestnut trees and were amazed that one tree was already in leaf with the "candles" just beginning to show. The highlight for most of us was seeing the "primrose" bank in all its glory – the green bank liberally covered with clumps of yellow primroses, the dark purple of violets, one little clump of white violets, the brilliant yellow of celandines and the green spikes of crow garlic, all glowing in the spring sunshine. We looked at how the tree cover changed the flora that grew beneath. As usual at this time of year, not many flowers were in bloom but we still managed to identify 40 flowers, many from their leaves. We also identified 13 trees and were serenaded by a number of birds. Some of us remembered Catherine's Covid lockdown diary about the "Nature amble that never happened" and were delighted to be able to amble along part of her route.



Photo of beautiful primroses and lichen

Our next ambles will be to Nutcombe Bottom on 13 May, Carhampton on 10 June and Dunster Beach on 8 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**. We are a relatively small friendly group making the most of everyone's experience and knowledge and using small reference books to help us.

Sarah Stringer

Photography

Our first meeting in March comprised presentations by three members. Steve Trelfa gave a captivating account of the Herbert Ponting's early photographs from Japan, many delicately hand-coloured, and taken before he supported Captain Scott on his ill-fated South Pole expedition. Steve Presnell followed with a range of fascinating & often unexpected images of the streets & street-life of Taunton. John Batt rounded off the meeting with images of the Sydney Harbour area, a favourite place and recently visited.

For the second March meeting the theme was "Seats & Steps". Images from many foreign locations were offered – Asia, America, Scandinavia, & Spain – as well as Minehead, Lynton & Porlock! Many flights of steps had quite puzzling views, whilst seats were more often relaxing with attractive patterns like the accompanying image of patio chairs by Sue Myrick.



We met once in April (4th) when the perhaps more taxing challenge was to show images of "Moods". As ever, members rose splendidly to the task and presented quite individual interpretations of the theme. There were misty, almost threatening moods, happy moods (like bare feet beside a swimming pool!), aggression in the animal kingdom, plus plenty of quiet contemplative shots including the sombre reflective shot of remembrance crosses from Steve Presnell.

In May & June we will start our summer visits programme, with outings alternating with indoor sessions showing the results from those visits – the weather always being the first challenge to deal with!

Stewart Lane

Watchet Arts & Craft Club

We meet 2.30pm 1st Thursday of the month at Phoenix Centre. £3.00 inc. hot/cold drink. Non teaching event but we teach each other ranging from art, sewing, cards, knitting and all other types of craft. Parking free in Phoenix parking. Contact Lori on 07935318022 for more info

Lori Lee

Local History

Over the last 2 months the group has had various presentations by its members on local villages and towns.

Williton – We were told about the Wyndham estate, the loss of not just the Bakelite Museum, but various other shops and business over the years, how there was a preaching cross outside the Egremont Hotel, and that the signal box at the railway station is the only one remaining from the Bristol and Exeter Line.

Holford – We learnt that there had been a Huguenot silk factory here employing over 300 people. The waterwheel provided electricity and a shoeshining facility for the Hotel that replaced the Tannery. Alfoxton House is famous for housing William Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy. The local chapel was used for a video to promote the Film - Robin Hood Prince of Thieves and finally that the local Master of the Foxhounds was killed by his dogs because they didn't recognise him when he turned out in his pyjamas to quell the fight that had erupted in the local dog pound.... Who knew!

Alcombe – or the Valley with Alders, we were given a wonderful map with the notable houses of interest and their various dates which were shown and then discussed. It was interesting to see and hear how the village had grown from early beginnings in the 16th & 17th centuries to what we see today.

Minehead – Here we learnt about 4 properties at the extremes of the Parade.

No1 – Wm Priddy, a London Saddle Maker who not only supplied horse tack but surprisingly hockey sticks as well.

No 4 – Floyds, which became a large well known department store.

No 21 – Mrs Beckett, a Milliner and Costumier.

No 20 – Woods, a Furniture Warehouse which later became Tarr's, an Ironmonger

Clickett – The lost village. Largely abandoned by 1890 it had once had several farms and cottages, a working Mill, and a Lime Kiln. There are footpaths along the valley that takes one past the ruins. Using the Census lists we were able to see who lived here over the years, their families and occupations.

Blue Anchor – A much bigger and more important place than any of us realised! There were 30 fishing weirs in 1578. A Chapel dedicated to St Mary's which was destroyed in 1452 and replaced with another further inland. Seaweed was an important commodity and collected for fertiliser and then for burning and used in soap and glass making. Lava was collected, boiled and combined with butter for a local speciality which was even sold in Fortnum & Masons. Alabaster was collected from the cliffs, there are some fine examples in local churches. Bricks were made in an Upright kiln, the last example now being heavily disguised as a garage. The first sea wall was put up in 1817 but was quickly breached by storms, many others have followed with the latest being erected in 2007.

Our indoor meetings have now finished for the winter. In May we will be visiting the Somerset Heritage Centre, a visit to the Radio Museum in Watchet follows in June with a visit to the Sedgemoor Battlefields in July.

AnnStrik

Poet's Corner

Local History Group

In Kildare Lodge in the middle of the day
Whispers of local history never far away
Lessons in research from photos, maps, walking
To census, books, documents (primary are preferred).

From Holford's tanneries, silk mills, haunted pub, dog pound
To Williton's workhouse, Orchard Wyndham, artefacts abound
To Minehead's 1901 Parade; Floyds, Preddy's, Plume of Feathers
To Alcombe a quarrying past, 1861 cute cottages in Grove Place.

Roadwater United Methodist Chapel built in 1907
Red and white sandstone, slice of gothic heaven
St Peter's church Williton, once a private chapel
Of Saxon royal manor, restored in Victorian times.

A visit to Allerford Museum, former school, with agricultural tools
Mannequins in costumes in compliance with strict Victorian rules
At the Forge we learnt of worldwide desire for its wrought expertise
These historical delights are indeed local, on our doorstep. Go see.

Susan Hutchings



Floyd's, Minehead c.1901



*Carriage outside the
Plume of Feathers*