

Jul/Aug 2026 Issue No 261

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Editorial

Some slight changes to our Newsletter this time. We've decided that as Nancy sends out a monthly report to everyone it would just be repetition to include a Chair Note in the Newsletter unless it is something new not previously shared with members.

I needed to shuffle things around somewhat so the 'General Information' section is now on Page 2, Diary Dates on page 3 and Group News start on page 4. This may get changed again

It's good to see a new group – see page 4 for details.

I hope to include a Special Feature from time to time, if space allows. This may be something I will write – or it could be something from one of you.

Over To You

Is there something you would like to share with the membership as a Special Feature? As long as it has some relevance to our u3a groups it could cover a number of topics. It could be about a local project you've taken part in, a place of historical or cultural interest you've visited. Maybe you like a particular author you'd like to talk about but can't fit one of our Book Groups into your schedule. Even just musing on something you're interested in.

Obviously the Editor reserves the right to decline anything not considered suitable. Definitely no politics or religion please!

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

Newsletter contents:

Page 1-2: Editorial; General Information
Page 3: Diary Dates
Page 4-12: News From The Groups

**Deadline for contributions to the next edition of the Newsletter:
Friday 28th August 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**

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

Welcome to our new members!

Diane Renton, Karen Weldon, Nicola Lindup

DIARY DATES 2026

Thursday 16th July Afternoon Social Gathering

Venue: Baptist Hall, Parks Lane, Minehead, TA24 8BS

14.30 to 16.00



**No meeting in August
Enjoy the summer - see you in September!**



Thursday 17th 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

News from the Groups

Our website has additional information and photos and is regularly updated.

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

New Group - French Language and Culture

This is a new group formed for the purpose of enjoying practising the French language and talking about all things French. It is not suitable for beginners but anyone with a knowledge of French, even if rusty, is very welcome.

Times: Fortnightly on Mondays 10am- 12am

Venue: Luttrell Gardens, Community Room

To find out more, contact: Kathy Barnes ktdbarnes@aol.com or

Elinor Harbridge elinorharbridge@btinternet.com

Classical Music 2

Alison presented the music at our May meeting, on Bank Holiday Monday, and we had our usual pleasant afternoon. The music ranged from a Handel Organ Concerto, which was played by Peter Hurford. He was a Minehead boy, who became a very successful organist. She also played a Dvorak symphony, and ended with the Blue Danube Waltz, which rounded things off nicely.

Our Classical Music 2 group met at the beginning of June, and Sandra presented a lovely selection of music, ranging from a Mozart piece for 2 pianos and also his Piano Concerto No 9 to Bach, and to the Beethoven Piano Concerto No 3. We enjoyed spending the afternoon listening to such tuneful music. Our next meeting will be at the beginning of July, and Jean will present a programme

Jan Lowy

French Conversation 1

At this month's meeting we continued with the interesting theme of "Someone I would have liked to have met". The first presentation was on Carl Jung. Since I knew very little about Jung (apart from his disagreements with Freud) we had lots to learn. One of Jung's themes - we learned - was synchronicity. This was then spectacularly demonstrated by one of the group wanting to get rid of her personal collection of Jung's writings and offering them to someone else in the group who was keen to acquire them! Result - two happy people! David Attenborough was a popular choice - someone we could all admire and relate to. Katherine, the wife of Charles Dickens, was an unexpected choice, but it rapidly became obvious that she had been very shabbily treated by her husband and had an interesting story to tell, and several misconceptions to correct. Billy Butlin was our last presentation - particularly apt in view of his continuing influence in Minehead. For July's meeting we will all translate a newspaper article entitled "Dreaming Big".

Di Martin

Photography Group Report

We met on May 1 st , displaying images on the theme of "Doors & Windows". As usual, members rose to the challenge in many creative ways. Some doors were shown open, producing an attractive frame for the view on the far side, whilst a popular option were those in rather poor



Bristol Temple Meads Roof - Steve Trelfa

condition! Images came from abroad, for instance from the Mediterranean, Italy (the famous Florence Baptistry doors) & Canada, whilst others were very local including doors on Bancks Street and a set from around Porlock.

The stained glass windows from churches were quite stunning as was the accompanying shot of the glass roof of Bristol Temple Meads station, taken by Steve Trelfa. Other window shots were almost abstract, such as that with the rows of windows and their shadows on the side of a large modern building, and that of a close up of the doors Minehead fire station!

Blue Anchor Cliffs - Cherrie Temple

Our summer season of outdoor field visits started on May 15th when the group visited Blue Anchor, showing the images taken on June 5th . The weather was kind with early showers clearing away but leaving behind attractive clouds. The challenge here might be thought of as trying to capture something new in a familiar locality, or alternatively, as producing a better picture of something photographed before.

Falling into the first category were several images of the patterning in the stones on the beach and the quirky reflections in the mirror at the level crossing. There were then the fine

images of the more familiar themes of the beach, cliffs and sea wall, such as the accompanying photo by Cherrie Temple, taken later in the day and beautifully picking out the bedding planes in the rock face. Other images made great use of lines of rock on the beach or the railway lines taking the eye to the distance horizon. There were also several novel views of the familiar seawall railings, such as being photographed in deep shadow against white clouds.

For our second meeting in June the Group visited Lynmouth, many travelling by the open-topped bus. The weather was beautiful but we won't see the results until our first meeting in July!



Stewart Lane

Local History Group

Blake Museum.



We spent a lovely morning in The Blake Museum in Bridgwater for our May visit. This had been the family home of Robert Blake (27th Sept 1598 – 7th Aug 1657). Robert was one of 13 children born to Humphrey Blake, a Bridgwater merchant. His military career commenced during the English Civil War on the side of the Parliamentarians. He distinguished himself in Cromwell's New Model Army at the Siege of Bristol (July 1643) and was subsequently promoted to Colonel. He fought at the Siege of Lyme Regis and then Taunton before going on to win the Siege of Dunster (November 1645).

In 1649 he was appointed General at Sea (nowadays this would be Admiral) and is often referred to as the 'Father of the Sea'. He was largely responsible for building the largest navy the country had then ever known, was the first to maintain a fleet at sea through the winter and produced the navy's first set of rules and regulations. He developed new techniques for conducting blockades and landings. He

is recognised as being the chief founder of England's naval supremacy, a dominance subsequently inherited by the British Royal Navy into the early 20th century.

In 1656 the year before his death he was appointed Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports. While this was an enlightening experience, the rest of the museum was a delight with a wide array of memorabilia and all those present found something of particular personal interest. We enjoyed a welcome cup of tea in the museum garden before returning home.

Unfortunately, our visit around Minehead Higher Town had to be cancelled due to the extreme heat we have experienced this week. We are hoping to reschedule this later in the autumn. The next meeting will be on Thursday 23rd July when we will have a guided walk around 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

Allotment Group



We have enjoyed excellent crops of rhubarb, strawberries and gooseberries, thanks to plentiful sunshine with occasional showers. The blackcurrants and french beans are also looking promising. The weeds have thrived too and we really need some new members to help us control them and share the harvests.

If you are interested in joining us contact Alex 01643 709320

Alex Rowe

Economics in Society

May 2026 meeting

Lord David Frost's recent Telegraph article warns that the Labour Government's plans to have closer ties to Europe will wreck Britain. We disagreed. A youth mobility scheme and alignment of food standards to make trade easier are reasonable short-term targets. The post Brexit trade deals that UK has achieved are considerably less than those achieved by the EU. Joint defence with Europe is also appropriate in the changed world we face.

We heard a critical review of the changing relationship of university education and the public good. Compared to the 1990s universities are now expected to provide an "experience" for the fees they charge. The general "aim to please the customer" is leading to dumbing down of standards to the detriment of future employers. We lamented the loss of Further Education Colleges.

General worldwide inflation, boosted by the US/Israel Iran war, is leading to an increase in yields on medium term government debt. Bond investors have plenty alternatives in funding high tech build-out so they are taking a critical view of the sheer scale of some countries' debt. Will it all gently inflate away or will there be an economic crisis? We shall see.

June 2026 meeting

We discussed an intriguing essay on what Marx might make of AI. This could be a case of capital does away with the need for workers, so who earns wages and buys the goods? As long as they are given "bread and circuses" the workers will not rise up and Thatcher's declaration "no such thing as society" might become a reality.

Avoiding tax seems to be a habit of the ultra-wealthy. Taxing land might be a way to ensure they pay their way – it is difficult to hide land and ownership is well documented. Land Value Tax would replace council tax and stamp duty. However, if applied to the whole population, even though most households would benefit, there will be such an outcry and claim of "garden tax" from the press that there can never be a political consensus to push this reform through. Welfare is the largest part of the government's spending, so it is always in the spotlight when budgets tighten. Generally, we thought that benefits are not generous. Will the government ever have the nerve to reassess the triple lock?

Post Brexit net immigration was expected to fall but immigration from Ukraine, Hong Kong, foreign students and changed government policies led to a marked increase. Further policies have now had an effect, and net immigration is falling substantially but the general population seems to believe that it is still a major problem. They are likely responding to the visuals of illegal immigrants and small boat crossings. The press doesn't seem keen to disabuse them.

Chris Smith

General History

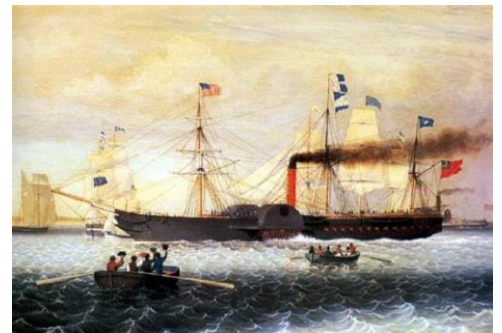


In April Keith opened the programme with an Illustrated talk on the Cottingley Fairies, an early 20th century hoax of 2 photographs of Fairies by two girls. There was no evidence of trick photography despite tests by experts and even Kodak and Ilford. The photographs' apparent authenticity later led to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle writing a book 'The Coming of the Fairies'. Not until 1983 did the girls admit to the hoax.

Two short presentations then followed. The first was on last month's challenge 'Mistresses and notable women of 15th and 16th century'. David talked about Jane Shore mistress of Edward IV. An interesting character who had to penance as a Harlot.

Then Helen took up this month's challenge 'A leader you admire' with a talk on Ann Connell. Ann was a social pioneer in Manchester in the late 19th century. At that time large groups of men roamed the streets fighting other groups on any pretext this was known as Scuttling. She introduced sports teams as a diversion. Cricket was the first team she started but football soon followed. Football was extremely successful and it was this team, after a couple of name changes, which today is Manchester City Football Club. She is now recognised and credited as being the founder of this world famous football club. During refreshments there was a long discussion about women in society and their place in history.

John then presented an illustrated talk on the History of the Cunard Line following his recent trip on Queen Mary 2. Samuel Cunard began the line in 1840. Over the next 180 years the company operated 240 ships. The Britannia was first to cross the Atlantic. During the next one and half centuries Cunard was the iconic way of crossing to and from America. Between 1860 and 1900 2.5 million immigrants travelled to America on a Cunard ship. During WWII Winston Churchill credited both the Queen Mary and the Queen Elisabeth with shortening the war by a year given the number of American troops they carried. Queen Mary's lifeboats could take 3000. In 1943 she carried a total of 16,683 on one voyage. QE2 was also used as a troop carrier during the Falklands War. She was in service for 39 years sailing over 5 million miles. Despite long haul flights Cunard still operates a service from Southampton to New York. Today Cunard is part of the Carnival Cruise Company with the four Queens operating as a distinct British luxury brand.



The main talk at the May meeting was about Shepton Mallet Prison. It dates from 1625 and at its closure in 2013 it was Britain's oldest serving prison. It had a chequered history from its roots as a House of Correction to a gaol in the Victorian era, then a USA and Uk military prison in the war years, and finally reverting to a civilian prison for category C lifers.

Some of the most harrowing treatment meted out came in the Victorian era. During the 19th century, prisoners sentenced to hard labour worked on the prison's treadwheel (a giant wheel similar to a stair-climber) for many hours. Oakum picking where prisoners were required to unravel old tarred ropes into fibres, was a repetitive and unpleasant punishment. During Asquith's time, the Suffragettes were force fed after going on hunger strike. Between 1889 and 1926, seven convicted murderers were executed by hanging within the prison. During the Second World War, the prison was used by American military authorities, and sixteen U.S. servicemen were hanged there after court-martial convictions.

After reverting to British civilian use, it housed a variety of inmates, including the infamous Kray twins in the 1950s. Today, the prison is operated as a popular heritage tourism attraction where you can pay to spend the night in a cell.

Mini talks on admired figures or innovators and the year 1826 included:

The Youth Movement

A history of the British youth movement uncovered several people who were admired for the respective movements and organisations they pioneered.

The Boys' Brigade is an international interdenominational Christian youth organisation, conceived by the Scottish businessman Sir William Alexander Smith. Although the national Boys' Brigade movement was founded in Glasgow in 1883, Yeovil was one of the earliest adopters in the South West, establishing a prominent company in 1891.

The UK Boy Scouts movement began in August 1907 when Robert Baden-Powell held an experimental camp on Brownsea Island. In 1909 Baden-Powell founded the Girl Guides as a separate organisation for girls, which remains limited to girls to this day. This youth movement established a foothold in Axbridge remarkably early, with both the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides forming local units almost immediately after the national movements were founded.

The Duke of Edinburgh's Award is a youth awards programme founded in the UK in 1956 by the late Prince Philip. A youth programme, he believed, would improve their skills and equip them to make valuable contributions to their communities and society.

From its UK origins, it has spread to more than 130 countries and territories worldwide. It challenges anyone aged 14–24 to build life skills through volunteering, physical recreation, skills, and adventurous journeys. The award functions across mainstream education, community youth sectors, and the justice system.



A comparison between 1826 and 2026

In 1826, life in the United Kingdom was very different from that in 2026. Working hours were much longer, with many people employed in factories, mines, or agriculture for up to 12–16 hours a day, six days a week. Working conditions were often dangerous, with little protection from accidents, and child labour was common. By contrast, most workers in 2026 have legal rights, health and safety regulations, paid holidays, and a typical working week of around 35–40 hours and employment of children is strictly regulated.

Housing conditions have also improved greatly. In 1826, many working-class families lived in overcrowded, poorly built homes with limited sanitation and no running water. Diseases spread easily in these conditions. By 2026, most homes have clean water, electricity, heating, and modern sanitation, although housing affordability remains a challenge for some people.

Healthcare in 1826 was limited and often ineffective. There was little understanding of germs, few effective treatments, and medical care was expensive. In 2026, people benefit from advanced medical technology, vaccinations, antibiotics, and access to healthcare through the National Health Service. Life expectancy in 1826 was about 40 years and today it is about 83 years.

Access to information has changed dramatically. In 1826, information spread through books, newspapers, and word of mouth. In 2026, the internet allows instant access to news, education, and communication from anywhere in the world; however there is much disinformation too.

Most people in the meeting considered that electricity was the biggest factor in improving and bringing about changes in society over the 200 year period.



Sir George Cayley, (1773–1857) is not a household name but he was an English engineer, inventor, widely recognised as the "father of aviation." He was the first person to define the fundamental principles and forces of heavier-than-air flight—weight, lift, drag, and thrust—laying the physical blueprint that the Wright brothers eventually used to achieve powered flight. Cayley's aerodynamic research involved cambered wings. He discovered that curved wings generate more lift than flat ones, a principle still used in aircraft design today. He flew the world's first recorded unmanned fixed-wing glider in 1804. Cayley also invented the light-tension wheel (forerunner of the bicycle wheel), the expansion-air, or hot-air, engine (1805), prosthetics and the caterpillar track. Considering his achievements it is surprising that he is not more well known.

Steve Biko (1946 to 1977)

He was a South African anti-apartheid activist and a leading figure in the fight against racial discrimination. Born in King William's Town, he grew up under apartheid, a system that enforced racial segregation and inequality. While studying at the University of Natal, Biko became involved in student politics and helped found the South African Students' Organisation (SASO) in 1968.

Biko is best known for creating the Black Consciousness Movement, which encouraged Black South Africans to take pride in their identity and reject the idea of racial inferiority. Through his leadership, writings, and community initiatives, he inspired many people to oppose apartheid.

Because of his influence, the South African government restricted his activities and closely monitored him. In 1977, Biko was arrested and severely beaten while in police custody. He died on 12 September 1977 from his injuries, causing international condemnation of the apartheid regime.

Despite his short life, Steve Biko became a symbol of courage and resistance. His ideas played an important role in the struggle against apartheid and continue to inspire movements for equality and human rights 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

Editor's Note: The singer Peter Gabriel, who has long been interested in Human Rights, wrote a song about Biko to raise awareness of South Africa's apartheid regime. It's now become something of a human rights anthem around the world.

Nature Amblers

Unfortunately, we had to cancel our May amble because of the very high temperatures and the lack of shade on the amble. This was a great pity as the grasses in the area were at their best and the butterflies and other insects were out in great numbers enjoying the sunshine. It's ironic that we had to cut short the April amble because of the cold and biting wind and then cancel the May amble because of a heatwave. Typical English weather!

In June, we met in Holford on a very warm, sunny day. Our hostess had set two specialist moth traps overnight (no harm is done to any moth) and showed us what she had caught. The number of moths caught and the range of colours and sizes amazed us. They ranged from little, tiny micro moths to the large, beautifully coloured and patterned privet hawkmoth. There were white moths, fawn ones, brown ones, yellow ones, green ones, the pink elephant hawkmoth and the grey poplar hawkmoth which felt very much at home resting on the head of one of the group. To have such a knowledgeable expert made for a fascinating morning and she identified about 60 different moths and insects caught in the two traps. We all learned a great deal.



*Privet Hawkmoth.
This one sat on
Sally's hand for
ages.*

*Grey Poplar
Hawkmoth in Jill's
hair.*

*Both photos taken
by Paul Robbins*



One of our group then gave us a quick introduction to lichens, a subject that many of us know little about. We hope to study lichen more on one of the future ambles.

Our next amble will be on 28th July to Steart Marshes when a local guide will be taking us around. We hope to see dragonflies and damselflies if the weather is suitable. The location of the amble on 28th August has to be finalised and we go to Washford on 22nd September.

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

Medieval History Group – June Meeting

A fascinating talk from Helen Selling about Education in the Middle Ages. Who knew that Cambridge came into being because of disgruntled students fleeing Oxford, or that Grammar Schools were started as early as that? As usual there was much discussion and many questions afterwards and it was agreed that we'd all learnt something so a very 'educational' talk! Next Month (July 10th 10.30am – 12 noon) we will be hearing from Sharon Trown who will be telling us a bit about one of her heroines.

Shakespeare Group – May Meeting

We are continuing along our way with Henry VIII, Shakespeare's last play, written in collaboration with John Flemming. One of his lesser-known plays, rarely performed it is notorious for being the play on stage when the Globe burnt down. Apparently, it was felt that a real cannon should be fired, thus setting the thatch roof alight!

We're finding the play interesting because it shines a different light on the relationship between Henry and Anne Boelyn. She is portrayed as an innocent maid of honour to Katherine and he as reluctant to end his marriage after being convinced (by Cromwell) that it was against Church law. The play was written only a few years after Queen Elizabeth's death, and it could be seen to be an example of clever spinning to suit the politics of the time. There's also a lot of unrest in the play about the extravagance of Henry, again blamed on Cromwell with Henry being an innocent bystander. All in all, it's an interesting experience.

We meet on the last Tuesday of the month 10.30 – 12 noon in Minehead.

Acclaimed Authors Group – June Meeting

We were pleased to gain a member this month but sad to lose one. We meet on the second Monday of the month, our next meetings are 13th July and 10th August, from 10.30 – 12 noon, in Minehead, please contact Nancy 01643 818601 if you'd like to join us. We are picking books that have either won or been nominated for a Literary Prize or else that we think are good contenders!

Our current book is George Orwell's 'Road to Wigan Pier', a mix of his forays into the lives of the poor in the 1930s backed by frightening statistics of the poverty of the time and illustrated by shopping lists of real families. We will be discussing this in the July meeting.

Our next book is going to be 'How to be Both', by Ali Smith. A very different book from Orwell but an equally interesting read. We will be discussing this in the August meeting. We take turns to choose the books so it's always going to be a good mix of titles, authors and styles and we'd really welcome new members.

AI - May Meeting

At the May meeting, Mark suggested splitting the group by ability, but members preferred to stay together. Beginners were directed to the Thursday Digital Café at The Minehead Eye (1pm – 3pm) for extra support. After discussing various AI chatbots, Mark demonstrated Gemini – likening it to a hotel concierge to show how clear prompts yield the best results. Attendees then used Gemini to draft a letter and enhance a photo, although some phones lacked compatibility. Future sessions will include homework – to be sent to members before the meeting.

The next meeting is Friday 26th June 10am – 12 noon at the Community Centre, Minehead. £3 to cover rent and refreshments please.

Nancy Harman