

# Stratford-upon-avon u3a Newsletter

March 2025

[Stratford-upon-Avon u3a: Home \(u3asites.org.uk\)](http://Stratford-upon-Avon u3a: Home (u3asites.org.uk))

Founded 2000

Deadline for copy for this newsletter is 17th of the month, it never varies, except December when we don't publish a newsletter. Please send items to me at this address: [newsed@stratfordu3a.org.uk](mailto:newsed@stratfordu3a.org.uk)

**26th March 2025**

## **Annual General Meeting 2 p.m.**

The Methodist Church

A résumé of activities and finance for the last year.

Members of the committee and officers will be up for re-election. If you would like to join the committee, please do

let us know [newsed@stratfordu3a.org.uk](mailto:newsed@stratfordu3a.org.uk)

To be followed by Marie Claire Baker, talking about the RNIB, in her role as Community Connection Co-ordinator for the West Midlands.

**R N I B**

See differently

**I know you were expecting see details of next month's meeting here, however:**

We need new committee members. Our Chair, Maureen after 3 years of determined support for our u3a has finished her term of office. Our constitution does not allow her to continue. We do not have a secretary and our speaker secretary wishes to resign.

As you are all aware, we are all volunteers. I for one enjoy editing your newsletter and seeing all the things you do in our u3a. None of these activities could continue without a firm infrastructure in the background.

To join the committee it is best if you have been a member for a while so that you have a feeling for how things work. Please do consider joining your committee. It is not onerous and mostly enjoyable. To find out more, talk to any committee member and do come to the AGM. See next page for details of the April meeting

Next meeting

Wednesday 30th April 2025

At the Methodist Church at 2 p.m.

Elizabeth Rose will talk about life in Two Cultures and the place of African textiles.

Intrigued? Why not come along and listen? All members and guests welcome.



### STRATFORD-UPON-AVON u3a - SPEAKERS FOR 2025

**We have an interesting and varied programme of talks and entertainment for you. Please come along, and tell your friends!**

DATE	NAME/ ORGANISATION	SUBJECT
30 April 2025	Elizabeth Rose – In 2 Cultures	African textiles
28 May 2025	Rebecca Finney	Cats Protection and its work
25 June 2025	David Wornham	“Tuneful Tubes” – demonstrated history of wind instruments
30 July 2025	Mike Luck– TWAM	Tools with a Mission – tools refurbishment charity project
24 August 2025	Sarais Crawshaw	Life as a Wildlife Artist and demonstration
25 September 2025	Jo Worthy-Jones	Gardening with Wildlife in Mind
29 October 2025	David Fry	Early Photographers in Warwickshire
26 November 2025	Richard Churchley	English Countryside in Poetry and Song
10 December 2025	Entertainment to be confirmed	No outside speaker

**U3a Stratford-upon-Avon meeting report – Hearing Dogs for Deaf People – Merleen Watson.** A report from last month's meeting

Merleen is profoundly deaf in both ears and currently uses AI-assisted hearing aids. She has been wearing hearing aids for over 40 years and has witnessed the development of aids first-hand.

She has received assistance from two hearing dogs from the charity since 2013: the first, Grace, died a year ago, and she now has Zyla, who is five years old. Zyla is a Cocker Spaniel and was one of a litter of nine, all of whom were given names that began with Z by the charity as they name the litters alphabetically! Zyla has a different personality from Grace and is very friendly! She is very clever and often anticipates what Merleen needs, e.g., bringing her slippers as soon as she takes her shoes off – without any instructions!

Deafness is a hidden disability – it is difficult to detect if a person has hearing loss. Hearing aids can be minute and not visible. Some people use sign language (BSL); may have a BAHA (Bone Anchored Hearing Aid) or a cochlear implant (CI) or a Hearing Dogs for Deaf People. Although hearing may deteriorate over time, some people can experience sudden onset hearing loss. Hearing loss will affect our health over time if not supported. It often takes **ten years** for a person to seek help and guidance, often because of constant comments from friends and family. In the meantime, a person may experience lack of concentration and listening becomes very challenging, this can lead to isolation and loneliness, which impinges on their mental health and general well-being. Before Merleen got Grace, she had stopped going out and mixing, losing confidence and a lack of purpose, despite wearing the most sophisticated aids available at the time. A Hearing Dog helps hearing impaired people (and children over the age of seven) to regain lost confidence to socialise and helps them reconnect with life.

Training:

Hearing dogs are mostly smaller than other Assistance Dogs, as strength is less crucial for the sound work that they do. Hearing dogs can be Spaniels, Poodles, and Cockerpoos, the latter two of which do not shed hair, which is beneficial to someone with an allergy. These dogs are also very intelligent and quick to learn. Labradors are used to work as a 'dual purpose' Hearing Dog, working with other charities, e.g., Canine Partners, Medical Detection Dogs, to support people with two disabilities.

Training begins with puppies. They spend eight weeks with their mothers and are looked after by highly skilled volunteers. During that time, they are visited by trainers to assess their suitability for the first stage of their training. At nine weeks, the puppies pass on to their highly trained Volunteer Puppy Trainers for approximately 18 months. During that time, they will attend fortnightly puppy classes run by the charity's specialist trainers, usually at a central venue near other hearing dog puppies. As they progress with new experiences and situations, they have four 'Puppy Stars' to pass – all learning is fun and full of treats! Once the puppies have all their stars they advance to one of the two centres – The Grange (Head Office) near High Wycombe or The Beatrice Wright Centre, just outside York. Here they receive 1:1 attention from the charity's trainers working towards their final accreditation as a fully-fledged Hearing Dog, able to support their 'partner' with life-transforming work. It costs £40,000 to train and support a hearing dog through its working time until retirement at 10 years old.

What can we do to support the charity? We can raise money, for example, through Great British Dog Walks, often held near National Trust or similar properties; fundraise, such as with Paws for Cake parties; support the Paws Appeal at Pets at Home, and volunteer. We can help to spread awareness of hearing impairment; sponsor a Hearing Dog Puppy, invite Merleen to an event, and utilise Gift Aid. We could consider visiting The Grange to learn more about the puppies and observe their training. Visits are available (maximum of 20 people in a group) for £9 per person on Tuesday afternoons. The tour lasts for two hours and includes observing training in progress. We could combine this with lunch or tea in their excellent restaurant.



An adult or child with severe and profound deafness may be assessed to be partnered with a hearing dog. Support is available for those people with less extensive and less severe hearing loss and information/advice is available for friends and loved ones. **Hearing Link Services** (a part of Hearing Dogs for Deaf People) offers a comprehensive range of free help and advice to hearing impaired people and their loved ones.

Some vital statistics: Until relatively recently it was reported that 1 in 5 UK adults experienced some detectable degree of hearing loss. In August 2024, research (including the recent censuses in England and Scotland) reported by the Universities of Manchester and Nottingham found that 1 in 4 people aged 18-80 in the UK had detectable hearing loss in both ears, and 1 in 3 had loss in one ear. One of the greatest areas of hearing loss growth is in young people aged 15 – 35 who are acquiring environmental hearing loss. Many individuals tend to ignore any loss despite its detrimental effects on overall health, with links to dementia and strokes. It is vital that hearing loss, however mild and only if it is in one ear, should be professionally followed up. Rest assured people would not be offered an aid if they do not need it!

People often resist wearing hearing aids (with discomfort and appearance being the primary reasons), and men tend to be worse than women! Approximately 90% of individuals with hearing aids do not use them regularly. It is crucial to keep the aids in place to train the brain to listen. Furthermore, talking to young babies helps them learn to recognise voices. Many young people today spend time on tablets and wear headphones to listen to music, which can damage their hearing if used for prolonged time and at high volume.

We watched a further clip of Anne and her Hearing Dog, Tilly. Anne lost her hearing following an operation, her story was very moving, as were the contributions from her husband

The audience appreciated the talk, and we gained a great deal of knowledge. Thanks were extended to Merleen and her husband Paul, as well as to Zyla, for their time and effort. Many of us also purchased little doggy souvenirs and made donations.

P.S. Note from Merleen.

You have some very generous members - they made individual donations amounting to £94.52! That is £5.48 short of being able to sponsor a Hearing Dog puppy which they may like to do. I have attached the details of the puppies that are currently available, together with some information about how it all works, should you all decide to follow this through. I can set it all up for you if that is what you wish. If you do not wish to follow the sponsorship, I will allocate the £94.52 into the general fund. Your members also made donations for the lovely little (toy) puppies amounting to £45.00.

Helen Elliott (Speaker Secretary)

## REPORTS FROM OUR INTEREST GROUPS

### Brush up your German

We consumed cake and Sekt to celebrate a birthday while learning about Vogelbeachtung, counting bird varieties especially in Cornwall and Slimbridge. Other topics included piano lessons, musical influences and computer terms from aufrüsten to übertragen. We also discussed the recent German election results. Rosel, born in the east, tried to explain the 'Wut' which those living there still feel. She expressed admiration for Angela Merkel, whose memoir 'Freiheit' she had just finished reading.

### French for the Terrified

We press on steadily, reading Grammaire en Dialogues - and (thanks to Caroline) we now know how to listen to these conversations at 75% speed on YouTube, which greatly helps comprehension. We have been revising and practising perfect tenses too.

### Improve your French

Steve told us an amazing, surreal tale using every word in the latest vocabulary list; quite a feat! We also practised perfect tenses and read a poem by Prévert which is full of them. More Prévert promised for next time.

### Latin

We are still being entertained by Vergil's explanations of weather activity and natural phenomena. He has told us what days are lucky and unlucky, and what jobs should be done on the land in winter and when the weather is bad, at night and in the heat of the day. Invaluable.

### Piano

We are now such a large group that we are not accepting more members for the present. Composers this month included Bach, Beethoven, Debussy, Edward Gregson and Michel le Grand, plus an unexpected piano arrangement of Allegri's Miserere. Diabelli duets continue to prove very successful and popular.

### Stratford History Group

We were treated to an excellent presentation from Martin Green, chairman of Warwickshire Industrial Archaeology Society, and Brian Joseph, a descendant of the founders of NC Joseph Ltd. When the Joseph brothers in Birmingham proposed setting up a factory here in 1921 to produce aluminium housewares, there was an outcry! But concerns proved unfounded, as there was no smelting involved. Many were employed in attractive buildings set in grounds bedecked with floral displays. Soon **Sona** teapots, kettles and the like were to be found in homes all over the land.



Problem: the quality of Sona goods was such that they rarely needed replacing! So diversification was essential. In 1932 tin was bought in to make into cans for fruit and vegetables, sourced from nearby Evesham: Stratford Produce Cannery was set up in a new building next door, giving employment to hundreds of women. By 1936 over a million cans were being produced and during the war 41 million cans of food were supplied to British troops. The tin was also used to make bomb cases, mess tins, aircraft parts and so on.

The business remained in the family for decades, for some years with the support of General Electric of America. It was a sad day when in 2005 Covpress of Coventry took over and the Birmingham Road site was closed and then flattened. Brian and Martin have published a history of both companies with numerous photos, thanks to support from the Town Trust and WIAS: copies are available for a limited time @ £10 (RRP £21). Contact WIAS for details.

## Do You Love to Dance?

Have you always wanted to learn or revive your ballroom dancing?

We have been approached by a couple of talented ballroom dancers, Thomas and Harley, who are offering us a two hour session of Ballroom and Latin American dancing at the cost of £5.00 per person an hour on Wednesday mornings.

Initially we're looking for an expression of interest for a free taster session to take place in mid May. We would need at least 12 people but you do not have to bring a partner.

If we get the group off the ground we will be asking members to commit to paying for 6 sessions in advance so that we can cover out costs.

### BALLROOM & LATIN LESSONS



Step Into the World of Ballroom & Latin Dance!

Join us for a 2-hour dance class where you'll learn:

- ✦ 5 Ballroom Dances ~ waltz, foxtrot, tango, quickstep and Viennese waltz
- ✦ 5 Latin Dances ~ cha cha cha, rumba, samba, paso and jive

Unlike other groups that just teach steps, we focus on helping you dance independently—giving you the confidence to attend tea dances and social events across the UK! 🇬🇧

We're passionate about good dancing and quality teaching, and we can't wait to share that with you.

Come dance with us! Bring a friend, come individually or with a partner everyone is welcome and all abilities.



# TEA ROTA

Please make sure you know what to do when it is your turn. The task is not onerous. Put out the mugs and biscuits, pour the tea and coffee. Oh and of course wash up. Everything is provided.

You are always welcome to join us after meetings for a drink and a natter. We value your voluntary contributions, towards the cost of the refreshments. Thanks.

## **MONTH**

March

April

May

June

July

August

September

## **GROUP**

AGM, Diane

Rummikub Club

Sunday morning walkers

Keep Fit

Current Affairs 2

French for the Terrified

Friendly French conversation

And finally.....

The person who sent the jokes wishes to remain anonymous (I can't think why)

Why don't we start a volley-ball group? It's like tennis but without the racket. I did try the sketching group, but gave up when my pencil got blunt - there was no point. I'd really like a group where we look at interesting alcoves, but that's probably too much of a niche interest. So maybe I'll promote a cycling group instead... I'd be the spokesperson. Or a techno music group? My printer's always jamming. Any other ideas?

It's always good to hear from, even if it's only to send me corny jokes. Please do consider becoming a committee member, we'd love to have you join us.

Anne Foster (your editor)

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