

# Stratford-upon-avon u3a Newsletter

January 2026 [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)

This month

Wednesday 28th January 2026

2 p.m. at the Methodist Church

**Poppy Jones** from **Silvertime Legal** will talk about Tax Care and the New Guy, wills, care fees, estate planning and more



Next Month

Wednesday 25th February 2026

2 p.m. at the Methodist Church

**Abby Watson** will talk about the Dogs Trust and what they do.

***Please note: the February meeting will begin with a Special Meeting to approve our new accounts checkers. It is important that the meeting is quorate before the vote is taken. It would be lovely to see you and we very much hope that you can support your u3a and attend this meeting. We cannot make this decision without you.***

Stratford u3a monthly meeting report 26 November 2025

– **Richard Churchley – English Countryside in Poetry and Song.**

Richard is a historian and musician, and he has visited us before to inform and entertain. The poems were mainly about landscape and the songs mainly about people.

The first song was “Buy Broom Besoms”. The broom here is the plant. Besoms (brooms) were made of twiggy plants like broom and heather. The song is from the north of England and also called “Buy Broom Buzzems” to reflect the local dialect. Richard played a “Cittern”, a copy of a mediaeval instrument, similar to a guitar. See photo.

Richard then recited some poems. He started with Shakespeare – “Winter” from Love’s Labour’s Lost. It mentions roasted crabs. However, the crabs were probably not sea creatures but Crab Apples.

This was followed by “Home Thoughts from Abroad” by Robert Browning. It was written in Italy in warm weather, but it is nostalgic for Spring in England.

A recitation of “Loveliest of Trees” by E. A. Housman evokes the falling of petals, like snow, of cherry blossom at Easter time.

The second song was a Warwickshire folk song “The Keeper”. This comes from a collection by Cecil Sharp, “English Folk Songs for Schools”. The song is not about shooting deer, as it implies, but is actually about men chasing women!

Richard played the accordion (see photo) and also sang the “Lincolnshire Poacher”. Audience participation was encouraged.

More poems – Well known William Wordsworth’s “Daffodils” epitomises Spring. Richard pointed out that these Daffodils would have been the small, uncultivated type.

Way back in time, “Piers Plowman”, attributed to William Langland of Malvern Priory, dates back to 1370. It was written in Cleobury Mortimer and evokes early summer in the Malvern Hills. Richard recited it in modern English and then in the original Middle English.

Next Richard sang about the month of May, a Cornish song from Helston, “Sumer is icumin in” or “Summer is a-coming in”. Apparently, Welford claims to have the tallest permanent Maypole in the country. This is a well-known song made popular by a number of folk groups.

This was followed by a song about Summer, from Oxfordshire, “I wandered by a Brookside”, accompanied by the guitar. It was written by Alfred Wright and Barbara Berry and others set it to music.

The next poem was “Aldlestrop”, by Edward Thomas, a poem about an unexpected train stop, in June 1914, at this railway station in the Cotswolds on the Malvern to Paddington line.

The next song was “The Nutting Girl” about a girl collecting nuts in harvest time. It is a tune used by Morris dancers.

Next was a poem, written by Richard in 1969 when he was 16. It called “Straw Carting”, about collecting small bales of corn onto a trailer on a summer’s day.

Richard finished with a song – “John Barleycorn”, again set in Summer. This song is Barley personified – clothed in green when young, with whiskers, then cut down at harvest time, for beer making mainly.

The audience joined in with the songs and thoroughly enjoyed the performance. We also learned some history of rural traditions.

(Helen Elliott, Speaker Secretary, November 2025.)



Richard Churchley entertaining us at the November meeting.

## Stratford u3a 25<sup>th</sup>. Anniversary party – Silver Christmas, 10 December 2025.

The u3a held a special Silver Xmas party, as we were celebrating 25 years since it was founded. About 60 members came, including 4 original members, notably Jackie Checketts, who founded the u3a in 2000. They were presented with rosettes to mark the occasion.

Thanks go to all involved in the planning and organisation of the event, and to the many valuable helpers on the day who set out the room, served the refreshments and cleared up! I would like to thank those who helped me with the tricky business of blowing up helium balloons. We only lost one to the rafters! Thanks also to the Craft Group for the Angel table decorations.

Maureen devised a very tricky quiz about the year 2000 (the sports and popular culture questions flummoxed a lot of us) but we all had fun trying. (For those on my table, the Formula 1 person whose name eluded us was Murray Walker, who was **not** the answer to any of the questions!).

Maureen also recited a humorous poetic version of “The 12 Days of Christmas”. Further comic relief was provided by a sketch organised by Margaret Dews in which 5 of us presented a very confused radio broadcast. Margaret also gave us some recollections of 20 years as u3a member, starting when she formed the Latin group. She showed us a map of the London Underground, which the group had enjoyed translating entirely into Latin! *You will find Margaret’s poem on the next page.*

Colin Rose also entertained us with his amazingly dextrous prestidigitation skills.

The highlight of the day was the cutting of the cakes – a plain sponge and a chocolate one – by Jackie Checketts. This finished off the food consumption. Once again, there was an abundance of a huge variety of different dishes. Thanks to everyone for their contributions. Our Chairman, Bryan, led the toasting of the occasion with “Nosecco” with a few words.



Jackie Checketts and our Chairman Bryan Riddleston cut the cake.



**The more you put in, the more you get out!**

I came to retire here in 2006 -

What was out there? I did a quick trawl.

I was looking for something rewarding to do,

So I joined u3a - and then out of the blue

Came the call loud and clear: ' **Your committee needs you!**'

Not what I expected at all!



When I joined I knew no-one, so started a group

Offering Latin; **fourteen** signed the list!

We did verb conjugations, learned how to decline,

Read Caesar and Vergil, which went down just fine,

And we're still going strong 19 years down the line!

It's something I wouldn't have missed.



Our **tube map** in Latin: now that was a first!

Magazines featured what we had done.

Well, we gave every station a good Latin name,

And though copyright laws put a cap on our fame

We made over a thousand (that's pounds!) all the same

For the hospice, and it was great fun!



As a group we had visited Chedworth and Wroxeter,

Sites from our great Roman past.

Then when others expressed a desire to come too,

We imagined our trips might appeal to a few,

But we filled every coach - and the numbers just grew!

So then **outings** took off, thick and fast.



Our visits expanded - north, south, east and west.

How many? It's hard now to say...

Well, Gloucester and Cheltenham and Oxford were three,

The Bell Foundry, Space Centre, 'Our' BBC,

Museums and castles - then back home for tea!

And everyone had a great day.



As the decades went by, faces came, faces went...

The pandemic, of course, took its toll.

Then a great celebration just three years ago,

When our groups and activities all went on show,

Attracted new members and helped us to grow:

Now we're over two hundred on roll.



I've loved all these years; I've loved being involved;

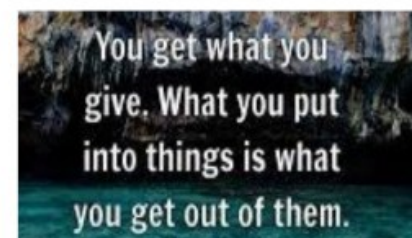
Friends made here shape the life I now live.

So don't take a back seat! If you've time or you're new

Come to meetings, take part - there's so much you can do!

Make a difference and reap the rewards, 'cos it's true:

You will gain so much more when you give !



### Brush up your German

Our pre-Christmas meeting was made all the more enjoyable by Stollen, Lebkuchen and other delicacies, with quantities of Gluhwein in special blue Weihnachtsmarkt mugs. Gesundheit! We heard about a grand birthday celebration, Christmas markets in stately homes in Derbyshire and holidays in Corsica, with and without bandits. Reminiscences of happy doggy days, with a German canine version of the Creation, made us all smile. And we had two musical tales: the fascinating story of the invention of tonic solfa and a touching account of a 40+ year friendship with members of Rebelcanto, a wonderful Czech choir which we listened to on CD, singing a German carol. Frohe Weihnachten!



### French for the Terrified

We have been practising phrases using *de/de la/du* and *des* to buy food at a market or café. We have also collected a group of common verbs followed by *de*. At our only meeting in December we talked about typical French celebrations for Advent and Christmas. We shall go over whatever points arise next in January.

### Improve your French

Our conversations reflected various views on Christmas and we were introduced to some new expressions from those recalling life in the fast lane. Margaret inevitably talked 'eyes': we all now know a lot more about *lentilles* (not the legumes) and how they are attached. Next time we'll tackle *Quoi?* plus anything else that crops up.

### Latin

Before Christmas we at last reached the end of Arachne's tragic tale, feeling somewhat shell-shocked by the number of mythological references heaped one on another while appreciating anew Shakespeare's familiarity with them. We followed this in January with the historian Livy's account of Horatius Cocles' brave defence of the bridge, immortalised later in Macaulay's *Lays of Ancient Rome*. The Latin was much easier!

### Piano Group

We had booked the grand piano in the Church as a Christmas treat and there was plenty of Christmas music to celebrate: Leroy Anderson's Sleigh Ride for four hands, O Holy Night, O Tannenbaum, Nikki Iles' arrangement of Past 3 o'clock, and a lovely seven-carol medley duet. A Mozart Menuetto was cheerful too, and Ethan Uzlan's ragtime version of Für Elise positively dazzled: Jill had been inspired to learn it after seeing Ryan Wang perform it as a brilliant encore. (Still available on YouTube: give yourselves a treat!) Unfortunately Margaret's lens decided to detach itself suddenly while we were there, so the morning was slightly curtailed by a mercy dash to the emergency eye clinic. NHS permitting, she hopes to be playing with two working eyes again soon!

### Stratford History Group

Our December meeting in the RST's Welcome Space was a social gathering with delicious pastries and quantities of tea and coffee laid on by the RSC. After talking plans for 2026, it was time for a quiz: *So you think you know Stratford?* No prizes, but very enjoyable. The Town Hall was our January venue, when Charles Wilson, Civic Officer, gave a presentation on its history. In 1663 it was a Market Hall. Badly damaged by gunpowder exploding in the Civil War, it was demolished, rebuilt in 1769 and its open arches finally enclosed in the mid 19th century. David Garrick gave the statue of Shakespeare (now cleaned) in the niche outside. His portrait by Gainsborough was lost in a devastating fire in 1946, caused by a cigarette. Only one of the beautiful sconces in the ballroom survived; the others now there were remodelled on this one, each featuring a character from Shakespeare. We toured the building to learn more of past dignitaries and view the many ancient documents on display.

### NEW GROUP : German for Beginners

We have enough interest now to start this new group in February. It will be suitable for anyone who has no German at all or has forgotten so much that going back to the beginning would be useful. All you will need is commitment, as we'll be building on what we learn from one meeting to the next. Herzlich willkommen in Shotertery! We'll meet twice a month at 2 o'clock on the second and fourth Thursdays. For more details contact Margaret via [km27dews@gmail.com](mailto:km27dews@gmail.com).





This is not an advertisement, nor is it an endorsement, just useful information that might help our u3a

I know that many of you book and enjoy holidays with Riviera Travel. Did you know that they have an Affinity scheme. Certain organisations can receive a donation on completing your holiday. You need to mention Stratford-upon-Avon u3a when you book; and the money is paid after the holiday. Here is a link to tell you more about the scheme.

<https://www.rivieratravel.co.uk/affinity>

## Word of the Month

### Janus (words)

As we all know, this month is named after Janus, the Roman god of beginnings, gates and doorways. He has two faces looking in opposite directions and in January one looks back to the past and the other forward to the future. So a janitor, whose duties today are those of a caretaker, was once simply a gatekeeper or doorkeeper.



And Janus words? These are words which have two opposite meanings - and there are more of them than you might imagine in English. Another nightmare for anyone trying to get to grips with our amazing language!

How many can you think of? Here are a few for starters:

Bolt	to secure/fasten	or	to flee
Buckle	to fasten tight	or	to collapse
Cleave	to cut apart	or	to cling to
Dust	to remove dust	or	to sprinkle with dust
Fast	moving quickly	or	held firm
Oversight	careful supervision	or	an error
Sanction	to give approval	or	to impose a penalty/prohibition
Screen	to conceal	or	to display

There is, of course, a grammatical term for this phenomenon. If you want to impress your friends you can tell them that Judas words are technically called **contronyms**, more or less the opposite of synonyms, two or more words which have the same or a similar meaning.

Wicked!

Another word of the month. 'Quorate', a meeting at which there are sufficient members to take a decision. Our February meeting must be quorate—see front page—to accept our new accounts checkers. Please do come along, if you can.



# MEMBERS COFFEE MORNING

You are invited to join our members' regular  
coffee morning chit-chats

2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday of the month 10 till 12

The Town House Hotel, Church St



Next month we will get  
together on Saturday February 14  
All are welcome, it would be lovely to  
see you.

There is a room behind the bar at the back of the  
ground floor where we gather.



## STRATFORD-UPON-AVON u3a - SPEAKERS FOR 2026

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

DATE	NAME/ ORGANISATION	SUBJECT
28 January 2026	Poppy Jones – Silvertime Legal	Tax, Care & the New Guy – wills, care fees, estate planning etc.
25 February 2026	Abby Watson – Dogs Trust	Dogs Trust and its work.
25 March 2026	AGM + SUA Foodbank – Ian McLean	The Work of the Foodbank.
29 April 2026	Michelle Flint – Textile Artist	Textile art, including demonstration.
27 May 2026	Elizabeth Rose +1	African songs + percussion and audience participation.
24 June 2026	John Kinory	My Life and Times as a Film Extra.
29 July 2026	Janet Mobbs	How does your garden grow?
26 August 2026	Colin Wade	The Joys and Perils of being an Author. Crime thrillers.
30 September 2026	John Butterworth	My Trip to the End of the World – Antarctica, the Falklands and Argentina
28 October 2026	Margot McCleary	Ghost Stories of Warwickshire.
25 November 2026	Rosalie Taylor, Sharon Hilton, Warks. CC	Mature Drivers Workshop.
16 December 2026	TBA	No outside speaker.



# 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.

Many thanks to Annette Riddleston, our new mistress of the tea urn.

## Stratford-Upon-Avon u3a Tea Rota October 25 to September 26

Month	Group
January 2026	Playreading
February 2026	Refresh your German
March 2026	AGM
April 2026	Rummikub Club
May 2026	Spanish Intermediate
June 2026	Stratford History Group
July 2026	Sunday Morning Walkers
August 2026	Tai chi/Yoga
September 2026	Wine Appreciation