

# Stratford-upon-avon u3a Newsletter

February 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 25th February 2026

2 p.m. at the Methodist Church

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 40 of you.*

## Next Month

Wednesday 25th March 2026

2 p.m. at the Methodist Church

The Annual General Meeting will be followed by a short talk  
about the SUA Foodbank

Do please join us to meet the committee find out more about  
what your u3a has been doing for the last year.

# AGM

## Portuguese Group

Would you like to join this group as it has room for one or two new members? They are currently supported by an enthusiastic Portuguese lady. The group meets fortnightly on Friday afternoons. Please email Roger Pettit if you are interested.

[rogerpettitt66@gmail.com](mailto:rogerpettitt66@gmail.com) .

## Play Reading Group

Our December meeting was the last one in the Trinity Manor Care Home where we read 'Season's Greetings' by Alan Ayckbourn .

Our January meeting was the first at our new venue, the Welcome Space / Paccar Room in the Royal Shakespeare Theatre. We concluded our reading of 'Jack Absolute Flies Again', a comedy very loosely based on Sheridan's 'The Rivals'.

Our plays for the next three months will be "This Happy Breed" by Noel Coward, "A Chorus of Disapproval" by Alan Ayckbourn and "A Bunch of Amateurs" by Ian Hislop.



**Membership** a reminder! Watch out for the email early in March.

As we approach the end of 2025/26 membership year, I am pleased to report we have a total of 223 members 17 of whom have joined since 1 January 2025. In addition, we have 29 cluster members – five having joined since 1 January. What an accolade to Stratford U3A members and especially the committee, officers and group leaders past and present!

The Committee have decided not to increase the membership fee for 2026/27 and at £18 a year this is great value. The membership year runs from 1 April to 31 March and an email reminder will be sent out at the beginning of March which will contain the information on how to make payment. This is a busy time of year for Tony Orsman (our treasurer) and myself so please help the process go smoothly by following the instructions in the e-mail in order that we can link payments to individuals and by paying promptly in order that we don't have to send out follow-up emails. Many thanks in anticipation of your cooperation.

Sarah Furniss, Membership Secretary

## THE SECRET SIDE OF EMILY BRONTË

It can't have escaped the attention of many people that February saw the release of the latest, block-buster film version of Emily Brontë's classic 1847 novel, **WUTHERING HEIGHTS**, starring Margot Robbie and Jacob Elordi

What many people won't know is that while in her short life Emily Brontë only completed one novel she found time to write almost 200 poems although only a small number of them were published in her lifetime.

Emily's literary output, published under the pseudonym Ellis Bell, caused considerable outrage at the time for being what was seen as coarse, depraved and even diabolical.

So, after Emily's death at the young age of thirty her older sister, Charlotte, the author of **JANE EYRE**, felt she needed to apologise for her younger sister's work to such an extent she re-wrote some of her poems and even added verses to modify their meaning. While doing so she also helped to begin what has become known as the 'Brontë myth'.



Fortunately for us, recent scholarship has managed to 'clean' Emily's poems from Charlotte's well-intentioned interventions and the latest revised editions now present them as Emily intended. What emerges is a highly original poet of considerable powers.

If you would like to explore in company some of Emily Brontë's poems as well as those of other great poets then come and hear more about the new group **POETRY MATTERS!** at an informal, introductory meeting with tea and coffee to which all u3a members are invited.

For further details please get in touch with Jonathan Baker by contacting the Groups Coordinators via the **Contacts** page on the website.

## NEWS FROM OUR INTEREST GROUPS

### French for the Terrified and Improve your French

Because of Margaret's ongoing sight problems and the restrictions they currently impose on her activities, neither group has met this month. *Quoi!* But we were encouraged to fill the gap by delving into YouTube and revising with the likes of Géraldine, 'Comme une française'.

### Piano Group



Back in Side Room 1we enjoyed the usual interesting mix of composers and styles, from First Lessons in Bach to a Grade 5 jazz piece, 'In the Groove' by living British composer Mike Cornick. Between these extremes came an Andante from a Mozart sonata featured in a recent Pianist Magazine. A waltz dated 1899 by Samuel Coleridge Taylor has an ABRSM grade of 9 and sounded as fiendishly difficult as that suggests. Finally Hilary played a prelude by the Hungarian Stephen Heller, also not easy, and Dorothy gave us 'Gertrude's Dream Waltz', perhaps dubiously attributed to Beethoven. By popular request the two got together for a lively Diabelli duet, without which no Piano Group meeting would now be complete.

## WORD OF THE MONTH

### GRAFT

Spring is a good time to graft, transplanting a shoot from one plant on to another to combine the best traits of both. The origin of the word lies in ancient Greece with the verb *graphein* - to write, as in autograph, biography and so on. Writing would often have been done with a pointed stylus on a wax tablet, so the word also meant to scratch or to carve, which is exactly what you do with a sharp knife when you graft. And the shoot or scion has a resemblance to a pointed pencil.

A graft is also a healthy tissue transplanted to repair or replace a damaged one in the body. And graft can even refer to dishonest gain through power. For those who like long words, graft is polysemous, ie. it has several meanings. The expression hard graft has its roots in Dutch/German and relates to the considerable effort of digging out (think *graben*) earth, perhaps for a grave, another polysemous word! There are thousands in the English language. Cryptic crosswords are full of them.



Stratford u3a History Group – Thursday 12 February 2026 meeting, RSC Paccar Room.

### **Tales from Anne Hathaway's Cottage – John Richards, SBT volunteer.**

John Richards is an ex-guide at Anne Hathaway's Cottage. He regaled us with some very informative facts and some amusing tales about the history and inhabitants of the cottage, and about the visitors, over the years.

It is the most photographed cottage in the UK and possibly in the world! It is timber framed, made from English Oak. It is a very hardy wood, although it stands on small stone walls, which act as a damp course. Builders used the wood when still green, and it hardened off over the years. Dendrochronology examination has dated it back to the Autumn of 1463.

The Hathaways moved in 80 years later when it was still only 3 rooms at ground level and called Hewlands Farm. John Hathaway was a tenant sheep farmer on 90 acres of land and buildings. The rent was £10 a year, so he was a fairly prosperous person. Richard, his son, also did well and was Anne's father. She was mentioned six times in records, and the spelling of her name was not consistent. Agnes (the name used in the book and film "Hamnet"), Anne, Anna and Annas were all variations at that time. Her actual birthdate is unknown, but she was said to be 68 when she died, so she was born about 1555/6. Her father married twice and had 10 children altogether. A shepherd also lived there with the family, so it must have been quite crowded!

It was Shakespeare who made Anne famous, of course. Their fathers would have known each other as they both served in various capacities on the Council and they were both involved in the wool trade. This would account for Anne and William being able to meet and court. She was 8 years older than William, so she was 26 and he was 18 when they married in November 1582. And, she was 3 months' pregnant.

People wonder how the couple found privacy with only 3 rooms in the cottage! In "Hamnet" the apple shed was featured. This is fiction! There is certainly no evidence of an apple shed to show visitors now. Their daughter, Suzanna was born 9 months after harvest time, and the Shakespeares moved to Henley Street.

Brother Bartholomew carried on farming there and eventually bought the farm for £200. He extended the original 3 rooms into a 10 roomed two storey home. This showed that he was doing well financially. His son and grandson John both improved the property, putting in fireplaces and chimneys in 1697. There is a plaque in the house with the initials IH on it, for John Hathaway.

Eventually, the property passed down the female line. In the 1700s wool had competition from cotton and times were hard, and in the 1800s the owners sold off some land and the property was mortgaged. In 1838 it was sold to a Mr. Barnes. The house was converted first into two homes then into three dwellings. The Hathaways stayed on in the middle house as tenants.

In the 1800s the Shakespeare cult developed and visitors started to come to the cottage. Charles Dickens was known to have visited as his name is in the visitors' book. It was said that he signed it sitting by the well but there is no evidence for this!

Mary H. Baker was the last of the family to live there. She used to act as caretaker and visitor guide. She also, notoriously, sold items associated with the Hathaways. There is a wooden settle in the parlour which is quite damaged. She used to tell visitors that the famous couple sat there and she sold wood chips as souvenirs! The settle actually dates to the 1700s. She also bought crockery and aged it in the oven to sell to visitors. Broken pieces of pottery were later found in the garden! *Cont'd over page*

The owner sold the property to the SBT in 1892. Mary Baker stayed on as caretaker till she died in 1899. She was paid £75 a year. Her son, William, continued there until he died in 1911. Then the SBT took it over fully as a tourist attraction and renovations and improvements were made. The entrance fee was £1.

Now the cottage has visitors from all over the world and there is a more costly and complicated ticketing system in place. It has been automated and an e-mail address is needed! There is also Gift Aid, voluntary donations and guide books available! The volunteers like Richard were once called Guides, then Visitor Welcome Assistants, then Period Interpreters and now they are called Visitor Service Assistants.



The “second-best bed”, left to Anne in William Shakespeare’s will, is on show upstairs. The “best” bed was reserved for guests, so the second-best bed was the one Anne shared with Will. It may have been used in Henley Street when they married, then went to New Place. There are indications that it is the same bed.

The kitchen is in the original 3 roomed house section and has been set up to look like it was in the 1500/1600s. The blue lias stone floor was put in by Anne’s grandfather. Richard said that some Americans actually kissed it! The thatched roof also interests them as they are not familiar with it and wonder how it was maintained. Carpenters are also interested in the mortice and tenon joints.

The cottage has many foreign visitors. The French constitute a large number of them. Richard told some amusing tales about them. With reference to Shakespeare marrying an older woman, Richard asked what is the French for “toy boy” and was told “Macron”!!! The Germans have a different sense of humour. The Dutch and Scandinavians have very good English, and so do the Eastern Europeans. Occasionally very rich visitors are able to pay for a personal, more expensive tour.

Richard was also asked about ghosts. He said that he personally has not experienced anything, but odd things are reported sometimes. The atmosphere and creaking beams can be suggestive. Now the cottage has 9 acres of land, an orchard, sculpture park and a café. There are 150 apple trees, and cider and juice are produced by Pershore College for sale.

It was a very interesting and entertaining talk and thanks were given to Richard, who made history amusing as well as educational.

(Helen Elliott, 12 February 2026.)

# 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 14 March

All are welcome, it would be lovely to see you.

### Editorial Note:

I do my best to include all the items sent to me, but it is not always possible to include everything you send.

Everyone gets a copy of this newsletter. If you do not have an email address on our system then you will receive a hard copy in the post. Please do check that we have the correct details for you.

Finally I am human and I know I make mistakes, for which I apologise. I will always do my best to correct any errors.

Please do continue to send your contributions for the newsletter to:

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

Stratford u3a monthly meeting talk, Wednesday, 28 January 2026.

Sam Passi and Gurdish of Silvertime Legal covered Tax, Care and the New Guy – estate planning, wills, trusts, Lasting Power of Attorney, care fees and Sideways Disinheritance.

**Disclaimer: I have prepared this report from notes taken at the meeting and checked it as far as possible. However, it in no way constitutes advice. All errors are mine.**

**Wills:** Sam emphasised the importance of making a will as early as possible – it is imperative that one gets one's affairs in order as soon as one has any assets. Care can be very expensive and may be needed at any point in our lives, not just in old age. It is also important to keep one's will up to date.

**Inheritance Tax (IHT)** may be payable by many people these days due to high property prices. It is not payable on assets of under £325,000 and if there are resident direct descendants there is a further allowance of £175,000. Each spouse has this amount, so it will only be payable on the death of the second one. The tax rate is 40% above this.

However, there are legal ways to pay less. One may give away money or property now and tax is not payable if one lives for 7 years plus one day. Tax is not paid on charitable donations. Giving money away, excessive spending and transferring property deliberately to avoid care home fees (**Deprivation of an Asset**) is not allowed, however. Hence the need for long term planning before the need arises.

**Care:** If your estate is worth more than £23,250 the local authority will not pay for nursing home care. Care fees can amount to £80-100,000 a year these days. One's estate is not just property, but cash and investments as well.

One needs to plan with the assumption that care fees will need to be paid. One in six men go into care, and one in three women do. 140 homes are sold every day to pay the fees, that is 40-50,000 a year! If one's spouse remains in the family home one cannot be forced to sell up and leave.

People use their pensions, savings and then the house on care fees. The local authority may agree to pay for your care but will place a charge on the property to be paid on death.

**Sideways Disinheritance** is another consideration. About 50% of people re-marry after the death of a spouse. However, in later life, there may be members of one's family that could be disinherited in this case. If a couple has Joint Ownership of their property this means that they each own 100% of the property, even though they may see it as 50/50. In this case when one dies the spouse will inherit the estate but care fees can take all of the amount. If they are **Tenants in Common** then they are only liable for their share. They can bequeath it to their children, and place their share in **Trust**. Then, the remaining widow/er could re-marry and protect their share for their relatives. There is also a possible problem with less popular in-law members of the family inheriting the assets through the descendants! Again, a trust can help here.

**Lasting Power of Attorney (LPA)** is very important at any stage in life. Incapacity can happen to anyone, not just old people, and quite quickly. The LPA must be in place before the person loses mental capacity to manage their affairs. There are two types: **Property and Finance** and **Health and Welfare**. It is wise to do both together and to employ a professional, as it could be quite complicated. It is best to have two or more attorneys, just in case of a change in their circumstances.

If it is too late, then one can apply for **Deputyship** to the **Office of the Public Guardian**. This too is expensive, about £2,000, then the Deputy also has to account for all spending, and that costs about £800 a year.

Sam stressed that Silvertime Legal is not a commercial organisation. They have no business cards nor handouts, and they do not charge for the talks. Further advice is available for no fee, through Gurdish. However, after that one would have to go to a professional to take action.

The appreciative audience was very engaged and asked a number of questions. We all agreed that this rather sober subject was handled in a very helpful and sympathetic way, with a touch of humour as well.

Helen Elliott (Speaker Secretary, Stratford u3a)



## 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
25 February 2026	Callum Stockhouse	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 to September 26

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