

STRATFORD -UPON-AVON u3a

NEWSLETTER

May 2026

<https://stratford.u3asite.uk/>

Founded 2000

This Month
Wednesday 27th May
2 p.m. at the Methodist Church
Elizabeth Rose



Will be talking about African Songs and Percussion.
With (optional but encouraged) audience participation
You may remember Elizabeth spoke before about African Textiles and her collection.
It would be lovely to see you there

Next Month
Wednesday 24th June

2 p.m. at The Methodist Church

Come and hear

John Kinory will talk about

My Life and Times as a Film Extra



U3A monthly meeting, Wednesday 29 April 2026, talk report.

Michelle Flint – Textile and Mixed Media Artist.

Michelle showed us many samples of her work, and her modern sewing machine, on which she did a demonstration later. She collects sewing machines and has 24 vintage Singers. Her studio is a converted garage, colourfully painted like Lego bricks.

She was trained as a weaver. She started this career on 1 January 2018 in addition to her job as a teacher. Her daughter was “responsible” as she did Irish dancing and, through this connection, Michelle was asked to paint a silk backdrop. She produced a design on a small piece of paper, but the finished piece was the size of stage curtains 7m x 3.5m! It was a difficult start as the weather ruined the first one and she did it again, after work! (Snow drift in the studio.)



While she had a pause for child rearing her husband suggested textile art (making her watercolour sketches into free-motion embroidery) which led to this new career. It is hard to control the dyes, and they need a “resist”. Her first free-motion embroidery was St. James’ Church, Bishampton - she has done four versions, and one is now in Australia. She uses a colour wash then uses the sewing machine to colour in the picture. It is very complicated! She also uses paint for highlights. She also does private commissions of pets, houses, churches and portraits. etc.

Public commissions are harder to get. She did Anne Hathaway’s Cottage for the SBT just before lock-down in 2020. The plan was to watch the garden as it developed. She used water-soluble fabric which, after doing the embroidery, is dipped in water and the fabric disappears, leaving just the embroidered sections. Care must be taken not to distort the fabric. It is done in sections and is very time-consuming.

During lock-down Michelle made a quilt for the Commandery Museum of Worcester. Michelle was new to quilting! She used the “Trapunto” method (Italian for quilting), in which the fabric is stuffed with wadding, creating a raised effect. Michelle used the traditional 15th Century technique. After embroidering around the design, on the back of quilt, Michelle separated two threads and stuffed wadding into the quilt with a knitting needle! It was also hand knotted. Michelle used her children as models in the designs. It is a large work, 2m x 2.2m.

A wall hanging was produced for Arts Uplift and Warwickshire Museum. People were interviewed in workshops about their pandemic experiences, which were depicted around

the edge. It was screen printed and embroidered. Stratford and Nuneaton feature in the work. The recordings are in Warwickshire Museum Archive.

Michelle also made an embroidery for the Worcester Charter celebrations for the Worcester Guildhall. It was 3m x 3m and goes from floor to ceiling. It is too big to be displayed regularly but people can ask to see it. The work was done in Michelle's garden-gazebo as it was too big for the house. The fabric is thick and only the vintage sewing machines could cope with it.

Michelle also made a flag for the RSC. She ran embroidery workshops in the town's warm hubs and used the artwork to create a design for a flag and banner. The flag was unfurled at Shakespeare's birthday parade in 2024.

She also made a banner and two Monks' habits depicting the history of Evesham Abbey for Evesham Abbey Trust. One class each from 13 primary schools, with 20 children in each class were involved. The art produced was digitally edited and made into a banner which was printed on fabric. The monks' habits were embellished with some of the printed designs. It was a lot of work and re-arranging. In the end there was a picture of monks in habits and a banner.

Michelle finished the session with a demonstration using her modern Husqvarna sewing machine. This drew a considerable amount of interest. A fascinated, impressed and enthusiastic audience really enjoyed the presentation.

(Helen Elliott – Speaker Secretary)

P.S. We are always looking for speakers. Do you know any good local people? Would you like to give a talk about your hobby? Please contact Helen via the website, or better still talk to her at a meeting.

Sunday morning walkers

We have been having a great time in the countryside of late as the weather warms up. The lambs have been fun to watch, and we helped get one back to its Mummy as it got stuck on the wrong side of a field gate



We have seen deer run across fields in front of us and buzzards and red kites soaring high above. Skylarks have been singing and swallows, swifts and house martins are starting to appear too.

Our walks have taken us around Ilmington, Foxcote and Hidcote to name a few places. We've enjoyed refreshments at Hudsons as we've rambled around Binton and Luddington. Had lunch at The View after a glorious walk in Austy Woods to see the bluebells. And are regulars in The Crown Plaza or Carluccios as we walk the circular route of Lucy's Mill and Lenches Meadow.



All good for the soul. We are a relaxed, friendly chatty group and use WhatsApp to organise our 3-5 mile walks. If you would like to join us, please contact the Stratford upon Avon Group Co-ordinator on the U3A website

RUMMIKUB

We are now settled in our new home, Dot's Café in the Arts Centre in Rother Street. At our last get together, there were four tables playing happily for 2 hours from 2 till 4. Come and join us, lots of tuition and help available. As with many games, easy to learn, but it takes a little time to become expert. A brilliant game to teach the whole family.



HAZELL BEDELL

Hazell died peacefully at home on 11th April

Although she had been housebound for many years, she and her late husband Ron had formerly been very active members of u3a. Ron was a past chairman. Hazell had appeared in two pantomimes: as Cinderella's fairy godmother, complete with wand and tiara, and as the witchy godmother in Sleeping Beauty. She was a lady of many parts, including being an accomplished and serious poet.

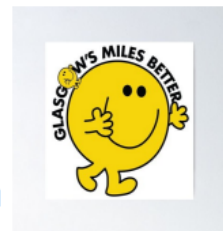
Despite her physical infirmity Hazell remained mentally alert and retained an interest in u3a activities. She will be greatly missed by her family and so many friends.

Word of the month

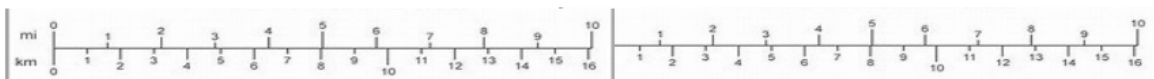
MILE

There are major marathons today on every continent and over 200 in the UK each year. Pheidippides, who collapsed and died after running the 26 (or so) miles from Marathon to Athens to announce victory over the Persians, could never have imagined such a legacy! For a long time the **mile** remained an important target for athletes until Roger Bannister's amazing 3 minutes 59.4 in 1954. But the challenge for us all today is the **K**. A marathon may be out of the question but we are all being encouraged to try 5K or even 10K for our health. The length of the Kilometre (Greek for 1000 metres) was fixed in 1795 France as 1000 times the distance of a metre, that being one ten-millionth of the shortest distance from the North Pole to the equator via Paris!

This must have seemed much more logical to the French Academy of Sciences than the rather arbitrary mile, dependent on the tread of Roman soldiers' feet as they marched across Europe to conquer the known world. A mile was 1000 paces (**mille passus**) - the total distance covered by a soldier's left foot striking the ground a thousand times. Over time variations of the mile crept in, with a whole slew of slightly different versions, but these days the 'statute mile' (1760 yards) is generally accepted. The word **mile** crops up in many idioms in English. In the 1980s Glasgow's hugely successful **smiley** slogan turned a supposedly hard gritty city into a vibrant destination for tourism and investment.



Mille is represented as a 1000 in Roman numerals by **M**. The related word **million** (1000 x 1000) is written as **M** with a bar above.



NEWS FROM OUR INTEREST GROUPS

Brush up your German

Rodger's account of his week included the RSC's production of Bertolt Brecht's anti-fascist drama *Arturo Ui*, which had left him feeling ängstlich. Angela had spent time with family in San Francisco, and we learned of some of the advantages of Waymo's robotaxi services as well as the limitations and concerns of life there as a green card holder. Jo's sister, also in the US, had recently reached a milestone birthday with a dedication celebrating her extraordinary life. David was just back from a great holiday in Collioure, deeply Catalan in culture, situated in Pyrénées-Orientales and only part of France since 1659. Finally Margaret harked back to her past life as a tourism officer with an unlikely tale of Chief Inspector Japp's bid to outdo Poirot by solving a mystery crime on her patch.



French for the Terrified

We continued working on our picture story of a family at the seaside, describing the different scenes using the present tense and both past tenses. We also looked at useful French 'filler' words and expressions to cover hesitations and uncertainties when speaking: from one of the *Comme une française* videos on YouTube.

Improve your French

Topics prepared by members this time included a concert at Elgar's house, the RSC production of Henry V, la fête catalane de Sant Jordi à Collioure, jobs to do around the house and some lines from *Mots D'Heures: Gousses, Rames*, a volume of clever joke French versions of English nursery rhymes (Mother Goose Rhymes) with hidden French meanings: *Humpty Dumpty* as *Un p'tit, d'un petit*, for example. The four part series of Alexandre Dumas' *Le Comte de Monte Cristo* in French (on BBC 4/ i-player) was also highly recommended.

Piano Group



As always Diabelli was on the agenda to delight: from the lively Sonatina in G to a popular duet. The legend of Philomela, set to music by Dorothy Pilling (1910-1998) was reminiscent of Debussy, while Chopin's Nocturne Opus 72 no1 was surprisingly dramatic. The 20th of 30 progressive studies by Stephen Heller, proving to be another favourite, was great fun but clearly difficult; we await no 30 with eager anticipation! The solemn mood created by Chopin's Funeral March was soon dispelled by this month's music hall offering from Janet: *They're moving father's grave to build a sewer* was written at the time of Joseph Bazalgette's endeavours to end London's Great Stink in 1858 and it entertained us hugely.

Stratford History Group

Adam Wood, whose interest is in all aspects of criminal wickedness, told us some gruesome stories from Stratford's dark history, with descriptions of flea infested lodging houses, tales of baby farmers murdering their charges, hard labour, and public hangings which were spectator entertainment locally until 1849. Picture shows rings to hold the scaffold outside Warwick goal.



December 1869: John Davies accused Jane Ward, of Emms Court, Sheep Street, of being a witch. Later he attacked her with a tobacco pipe causing a long deep wound under the eye. His sentence: 18 months with hard labour.

October 1842: Henry Godwin burst into the room of a lady in Windsor Street demanding food and drink. She refused to go and live with him. He stalked her and later came and cut her throat as she lay in bed. When the police came, they also found Godwin with his throat cut. Both survived, the lady ending up in an institution. When Godwin later died he was 'earthed' in Stratford cemetery in secret at night.

January 1884: John Watkins, a tramp in a lodging house, rushed at his wife on Clopton Bridge and tried to push her into the river. She begged the magistrates not to convict him.

March 1895: A Mr Wheeler attacked and killed his wife Betty. Neighbours called a doctor who found her on the floor with black eyes and fractured legs. He had used great violence and thrown a bucket of cold water over her too. A jury found him guilty of murder. His sentence was eight months with hard labour.

August 1889: A German gentleman, accompanied by a much younger lady and a child, took lodgings with Mrs Freeman in Tiddington Road. Next day after breakfast the landlady found him dead on the floor and the lady and child both dead in bed. Their funerals were held at Alveston Church, probably at night; the woman and child were buried in one grave, the German in another.

Other stories included drunken Mr Lindsay of Rother Street who had told his niece to drown herself. When later he became aggressive she threw a piece of coal at him. (Slow news day?) We heard of Henry Stephens who tried to get into the Birthplace without paying and behaved in a disorderly manner: sentenced to six weeks in prison! Alderman William Colbourne owned the Red Horse Hotel, which was being robbed by one of his staff. She was discovered and sent to prison for six weeks with hard labour. When his greenhouse was attacked by mischievous boys, one of them dislocated his shoulder running away... another slow news day? But then he was an alderman!

Margaret Dews

WHY ARE PEOPLE PUT OFF BY POETRY?



It may surprise you to learn that in 1812 Lord Byron became an overnight sensation all because of a poem! On publication, his poem, *Childe Harold*, was an instant best seller and led to Byron becoming a famous celebrity and household name.

So, why today are so many people put off by poetry? Young children have a natural love of words and of reading and writing poetry so perhaps our education system is to blame? Or perhaps it's the way some modern poetry, like modern art, has tended towards deliberate obscurity? Whatever the case - like real ale, unprocessed food and genuine face-to-face conversation - we urgently need to rediscover the joy of reading 'real' poetry!

Fortunately help is at hand with the new **Poetry Matters!** group which meets on the last Monday of every month in the Welcome Space at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre. Since starting the group has been attracting a lot of interest and its membership has been growing.

At our last meeting the seven members present explored some favourite poems chosen by each of the group. The poets included Jenny Joseph, Ted Hughes, Philip Larkin, Hilaire Belloc, Lewis Carroll, William Henley and William Wordsworth. Despite the randomness of the selection, we discovered many overlapping themes and the poems inevitably led to us reflecting on our own lives and experiences.

No two meetings will be quite the same and each one will be a 'stand-alone' so members won't lose out if they have to miss one. For our next meeting we plan to focus on poems written by women, past and present, under the age of thirty to give us a more youthful experience. Look out for a report in next month's newsletter.

Meanwhile, the good news is the **Poetry Matters!** Group is still open to new members. For further details please get in touch with **Jonathan Baker** by email at jonobaker@hotmail.com. He and the group will be delighted to hear from you.

Note from your editor: Did you know there is a book by Gyles Brandreth called *Dancing by the Light of the Moon*, in which he extolls the virtues and health benefits of learning poetry by heart. There are lots of poems to learn and tips for learning by heart. It makes me wonder why we are not all learning a poem a day or at least enjoying our poetry group.

Are you a potential Groupie

Ever thought of starting a new interest group?

What would you like to do?

Have you ever wondered how new groups start? Below is a list, borrowed from the u3a website of lots of different interest groups; there are lots more. What are you interested in? Are you on a waiting list for one of our groups? When I joined u3a, I constantly heard the refrain: 'Why don't you start a group?' In this newsletter, you will find reports from just some of our groups. If you are passionate about something, why not share your passion with the rest of us? For instance: gardening, photography, film appreciation, reading, or in the borrowed words of Monty Python, something completely different. Our u3a is growing and it would be great to have a growing number of groups too. If you are interested in starting a new group for anything do get, email our group leaders at:

<mailto:groups@stratfordu3a.org.uk?subject=New Groups>

There are lots of us with experience and willing and able to help you.

archaeology architecture **art** astronomy backgammon badminton ballroom band bird-watching board-games **book**
boules **bowling** **bridge** british bus canasta cards chair chess churches cinema classical-music coffee computer
conversation country crafts creative crib crime crochet croquet crossword crown culture **current-affairs**
cycling dancing digital dining **discussion** drama drawing easy exercise explorers exploring **family** fiction film flower-
arranging folk **french** games **garden** genealogy general geology **german** golf green guitar
history holiday indoor **italian** jazz knitting kurling language latin life line-dancing literature **local** london long
lunch mah-jong making mat meditation members mindfulness modern **music** natural nature opera outings
painting pass patchwork petanque philosophy photography pickleball pilates **play-reading** playing plus
poetry psychology pub quilting quiz **reading** recorder rummikub science scottish **scrabble** sewing shakespeare
singing singles social **spanish** **table-tennis** tai-chi technology tennis theatre travel ukulele visits
walking whist wine **wine-appreciation** wine-tasting workshop world **writing** yoga



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 mistress of the tea urn.

Stratford-Upon-Avon u3a Tea Rota to September 26

Month	Group
May 2026	Bryan and Annette
June 2026	Stratford History Group
July 2026	Sunday Morning Walkers
August 2026	Tai chi/Yoga
September 2026	Wine Appreciation

MEMBERS



COFFEE MORNING

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

2nd Saturday of the month 10.30 till 12

The Town House Hotel, Church St

Next Month: Saturday 13 June, 10.30 a.m.



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
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.