

STRATFORD -UPON-AVON u3a

NEWSLETTER

July 2026

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

Founded 2000

This Month

This Month
Wednesday 29 July 2026
2 p.m.
At the Methodist Church

Janet Mobbs will talk about:

How Does Your Garden Grow?

A talk illustrated with photographs, and some leaves to feel or sniff. In this talk Janet will talk about what things are needed for plants to grow and why we can provide them all and still experience failure!



Everyone is welcome, do come along, listen and have a cuppa with us afterwards



Next Month

Wednesday 26th August 2026

2 p.m. Methodist Church

Come and hear

Colin Wade

A local author and crime writer will tell us about

The Joys and Perils of being an Author

Plea for Help

Could you please come and help put out chairs for our monthly meetings in Stratford Methodist Church Wesley Hall?

The next meeting is Wednesday 29th July



You could stay for the talk which, this month, is
The Joys and Perils of being an Author by Colin Wade

RSVP to Maureen at maureenbsavu3a@gmail.com

We hope to make up a rota of helpers so no-one has too much to do. Thankyou!

This newsletter thrives on your contributions. My job as editor is to combine your contributions into a reflection of this month's happenings. Deadline for copy always 17th of the month, except December (no newsletter). I hope you enjoy the group reports and other items of importance and interest submitted by our members. Please do send group reports or events of local interest to me at <mailto:newsed@stratfordu3a.org.uk?subject=your choice>

General Data Protection Regulation

As we store your names and addresses, we need to adhere to the above regulation. Please read this important message and follow the instructions if you do not wish to receive email communication from Stratford u3a.

CHANGE TO DATA PRIVACY REGULATIONS

Due to a recent change in the law applying to charities, we have to check whether our members are willing to receive emails and other electronic forms of communication from us which are not of a purely administrative nature. You now have to be given the opportunity to opt out of receiving them.

If you DO NOT want to receive emails about our events and activities please email the membership secretary (memsecu3a@yahoo.com). Even if you opt out of these emails, you will still receive our monthly newsletter and administrative emails arising from your membership. You will still receive emails as a member of Groups to which you belong. If you have any concerns about these, please raise them with the Group Leader in the first instance.

We have amended our Data Protection procedures in the light of this and other changes. You can find our updated Privacy Policy here: Stratford.u3asite.uk/data-protection/

CLIMATE EMERGENCY FILM

Many of you may already know about this. Please see the details below if you would like to book tickets (they are free). I am told the film is fascinating.

Location: Rother Street Arts House, Stratford upon Avon CV37 6LU

Date: Wednesday 29th July 2026

Time: 6.30 pm – 8.30 pm

The film, presented by Chris Packham, features footage from last November's National Emergency Briefing, which brought together leading UK experts in climate science, food security, health, economics, national security and nature to an invited audience of more than 1,200 politicians and leaders in Westminster. A one minute trailer can be found [here](#).

It presents a clear, measured overview of how the climate and nature crisis is affecting everyday life in Britain, and what the evidence says about risks and responses.

The initiative is explicitly non-partisan and supported by a wide range of organisations, including the Church of England, National Trust, WWF, the Royal Meteorological Society and many others.

Faith communities have long traditions of stewardship, care for the vulnerable, and intergenerational responsibility. We believe this is an important moment for thoughtful, compassionate local dialogue.

Following the 50-minute film, we will host a 45-minute structured discussion about what this means for our local community.

We would greatly value your presence. More information can be found, and tickets (which are free) can be booked at:

<https://www.tickettailor.com/events/stratfordenvironmentalalliance/2252138>.

CURRENT AFFAIRS GROUP 2 (DISCUSSION)

The Group meets monthly in the library behind the bar at the Townhouse Hotel to discuss a topic for which a member has had roughly two months to research and prepare briefing material. We have recently discussed: whether the Government's more aggressive approach to immigration suggests the UK is entering a new ICE age; how to close the attainment gap in secondary education; how to strike the balance between public spending on welfare and defence; and most recently, the threat to democracy posed by special economic zones such as freeports.

For the rest of this year we plan to have more meetings than usual focused on Stratford's issues. We hope to be joined for them by guest specialists. The Stratford MP, Manuela Perteghella, has accepted an invitation to join our December meeting to discuss with us, seminar-style, a topic of her choice. We hope to be joined by a recent SDC councillor to discuss the Local Plan. There are guest experts lined up for as yet unscheduled discussions on 'homelessness in Stratford' and 'how to regenerate the high street'.

An innovation planned for October is a walking meeting to study Stratford's Victorian heritage, thus giving a new meaning to 'current' affairs. This will serve as a prelude to our annual mid-year dinner afterwards, thus giving a new meaning to 'mid-year'!

Towards the end of last year there was a feeling that the Group's maximum size of 12 members was too large for it to have satisfying conversations. This coincided with Bryan Riddleston, Stratford U3A's new Chairman, expressing concern that many Groups were full. He wanted there to be more Groups which new members of Stratford U3A could join. After a request for volunteers to leave our Group to form the nucleus of a new current affairs group, we reduced our maximum size to 8 members with effect from February this year.

Refresh your German

One of our six members has moved house out of the Stratford area, so we have a vacancy. Our emphasis is on speaking everyday German - about recent activities, future plans, recent visits to places of interest, holidays etc.

Anyone who is interested in joining the group should be able to speak some German, be a member of Stratford u3a, or willing to join. Our members take turns at hosting meetings as we meet in each other's homes. We meet on the first and third Thursday of the month from 2pm to 4pm.

I can be contacted by email on pdlakey@hotmail.co.uk

NEWS FROM OUR INTEREST GROUPS

French for the Terrified

We have two new members, so are full for the moment. We revised lots of expressions of time and practised using *venir de* and *en train de*. Then we looked at a Sempé cartoon and described what we could see and what was happening in simple French. In our second session we looked at ways of asking for directions in a strange town - and understanding the replies!

Improve your French

In recent chats we have heard how to make ratatouille, learned about the singer Zaz, the JohnFrum tribe in the Pacific, tabby cats, a family of crows and animal protection in Suffolk. We have been entertained by the latest news of 'our' pop group, les Petits Animaux, and by Colin's funny take on a new Sempé cartoon. This involved the adventurous use of le conditionnel passé, a tense we are now learning and practising.

Piano Group

A small group this time gave us lots of opportunity to discuss many piano related (and other!) topics. Pieces played included *Tomorrow* by Peter Jarrett - a modern Grade 5 piece, Chopin's *Mazurka in G minor Op (post) 67 no 2*, a waltz from *Tchaikovsky's Album for the Young Op 39 no 8* and *Schubert's Hungarian Melody D817*.

A song called *Bread and Roses*, with words from a 1911 poem by James Oppenheim, was played and sung (separately): classed as American Folk and commonly associated with the Lawrence Massachusetts textile strike of 1912, it was arranged in the 1970s by Mimi Farina, sister of Joan Baez. The song stresses that workers not only need food for their bodies but also objects of beauty to sustain their minds and hearts.

Dos gardenias, by Buena Vista Social Club, was played from the music, but had been practised by Tracey at home using the Tomplay app on her tablet. We were shown the app, which she can put on a certain setting enabling the tablet to follow where she is in the music and automatically bring up the next page at the right time, effectively turning the page without her having to do anything. We were all most impressed!

(Report by Ann Such)

WORD OF THE MONTH : ROPE

Can you imagine life without any sort of cord or rope? Our ancient ancestors solved the problem by peeling off strips of tree bark and twisting them together. They called this **reyp**, from the verb 'to peel'.

Via Old English **rap** we now have our invaluable **rope**: a thick heavy cord so strong that it formed the complex rigging of tall sailing ships, controlling the movement of sails and thus the direction of the ship. So sailors really did have to know the ropes! Once back in port, old worn-out rigging would be cut up and sold for other purposes, such as oakum: money for old rope. Good strong rope was needed by the hangman too. After a hanging he was allowed to keep it and often chopped it up into small sections to sell to eager onlookers as souvenirs or even talismans - a useful source of extra income!



Boxing matches were a less gruesome spectacle, but crowds could be rowdy. To prevent interference in bouts, boxing rings were made square in 1838 and roped off for security. Fighters being heavily beaten often found themselves on the ropes, where no self-respecting business wants to be these days.

Short ropes were once used by horse riders to hoist themselves on to their mount. Then **stirrups** came in, from Old English **stig** - climb (think *stair* & German *steigen*) and **rap** for rope. Not a lot of people know that.



And finally, the notorious red light district in Hamburg, the **Reeperbahn**, was once the street of ropemakers.



So did I have to be roped in to come up with a new word each month? Give her enough rope...? You bet not! Words are endlessly fascinating.

Stratford History Group: The Life, Literature and Legacy of Marie Corelli (1855-1925)

Nick Birch, who maintains the Marie Corelli website, gave us a fascinatingly full account of perhaps Stratford's most controversial figure. Born Minnie McKay, she was the (illegitimate or adopted) daughter of Dr Charles McKay, editor of the Illustrated London News, and his housekeeper (later second wife) Mary Mills.



Her childhood was lonely, with books her only companions. She first sent articles to Temple Bar magazine and followed these in 1886 with a novel, "A Romance of Two Worlds." To avoid the stigma of illegitimacy, she changed her name to Marie Corelli, hinting at an Italian mother.

Reading novels was then considered idleness, and critics were dismissive: "Utter bosh!" Nevertheless, 24 more novels followed over the years, and by the turn of the century, Corelli was as famous worldwide as Queen Victoria, an avid reader of her works. They may have been full of impossible flights of fancy and stereotypical characters, but the style was exuberant and the plots gripping.

In 1899 Corelli moved to Stratford, eventually settling at Mason Court, a house which then attracted more interest than Shakespeare's birthplace. She clashed with the local establishment over her defence of historic buildings. She was opinionated, outspoken and eccentric. She bought a gondola with an Italian gondolier to row her on the Avon. Nick rescued the gondola and restored it in 2010. Marie Corelli fought against the demolition of old buildings in Henley Street to construct a new library, won a libel case against Fred Winter and saved Harvard House. She held a huge celebration for its opening, with no local dignitaries invited.

In 1910 she bought the Firs Gardens for the permanent enjoyment of the people of Stratford. Despite these and other good works, in her later years she tended to be disregarded and she fell a little out of love with the town. Her faithful companion, Bertha Vyver, paid for her striking tomb in the Evesham Road cemetery.

This is the very briefest of outlines, but there is much more online, especially on mariecorelli.com.

Following in the tradition of Miss Corelli, a group of local enthusiasts continue to work towards a heritage centre and museum for the town. Until the end of September **Harvard House** is home to a second Stratford Heritage Exhibition, open Thursdays to Sundays 10.30 to 3.30. Admission is **FREE** and wheelchair accessible.



Stratford Heritage Exhibition

Working towards a town museum and heritage centre



We're back! Visit the **Stratford Heritage Exhibition:**
Harvard House, 26 High Street
Stratford-upon-Avon CV37 6AU - **Free Admission**
Open Thursdays to Sundays, 18 June to 27 September 2026
Opening hours: 10.30 to 3.30

Explore Stratford's history from early times through to the twentieth century.

Accessibility - wheelchairs up to 70 cm wide. A ramp is available
Guide and Assistance dogs only
No food or drink is allowed in this historic building

Why is the exhibition open?

Back for a second year, we're working towards a heritage centre and museum for the town. We hope that Stratfordians and visitors will join us, enjoy the exhibition and give us your feedback.



Above: Anglo-Saxon beads, Shakespeare Memorial Theatre fire (Antonia postcard), 1926

What can you expect to see? Explore:

- 200 years of the Stratford and Moreton Tramway
- 100 years since the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre fire
- Stories of little-known women such as Hephzibah Harris
- The Clopton War Hospital
- Stratford's Heritage Lamp Posts
- Tibor Reich

Activities for children and families, including a video of upstairs at Harvard House and much more!

This exhibition is organised by the Stratford Society in association with the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, and is supported by Stratford-upon-Avon District Council.

Images courtesy of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust and Helen Elliott (Harvard House photo).

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Please support this initiative of the Stratford Society, Birthplace Trust, District Council and volunteers.

Do great novelists also make good poets?

This was the question the members of the Poetry Matters! Group set out to answer in their June meeting in the bright and cheerful environment of the Welcome Space at the RSC Theatre.

The writer Ian McEwan, author of novels like the Booker Prize-winning *Amsterdam* and the globally celebrated *Atonement*, has described poetry as the 'superior and ultimate literary form'.

This is founded on his belief that poetry's unique power lies in its ability to balance itself 'on the pinprick of the moment' forcing readers to slow down and stop entirely to truly understand its depth.

So it is not a complete surprise to discover that a large number of well-known novelists have also turned their hands to writing poetry, novelists like Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, Rudyard Kipling, D H Lawrence, J R R Tolkien, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison and Michael Ondaatje, to name just a few.

In our meeting we took it in turns to introduce and read a poem we had chosen by a novelist and then this was followed by some thoughtful discussion tempered with a lot of personal reflections sparked by the poems. We found that the novelists we had selected all seemed to have transferable skills in being adept at using words to express themselves in imaginative and creative ways.

We also noted how the novelists could seem very different when switching from writing prose to poetry. For example, one of our member's choices was a poem by Jane Austen about the death of a close friend which showed her being unusually serious, formal and deeply personal in ways she never reveals herself in her novels.



So, what was our conclusion to the question, do great novelists also make good poets? After allowing for different tastes, we agreed that on the whole novelists did make excellent poets too. In some cases we felt their poetry was even better than their novels!

At our next meeting on the 27th July we will be focussing on exploring the poetry of John Keats to see if it still stands the test of time. So, if you are interested in dropping by or joining one of our future meetings please get in touch with [Jonathan Baker](mailto:jonobaker@hotmail.com) by email at jonobaker@hotmail.com. He and the group will be delighted to hear from you.

MEMBERS' COFFEE MORNING

You are invited to join our members' regular coffee morning chit-chats at the Town House, Church Street

2nd Saturday of the month 10.30 till 12 noon

Next month: Saturday 8 August, 10.30 a.m





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
July 2026	Sunday Morning Walkers
August 2026	Tai chi/Yoga
September 2026	Wine Appreciation

The new Tea Rota will be in next month's newsletter.

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
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.