

STRATFORD -UPON-AVON u3a

NEWSLETTER

June 2026

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

Founded 2000

This Month

Wednesday 24th June

2 p.m. at The Methodist Church

Come and hear

John Kinory who will talk about

My Life and Times as a Film Extra



Next 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

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Stratford u3a monthly meeting report, Wednesday, 27 May 2026

Liz Rose and Devinder Virk – African Songs and Percussion.

Liz and Devinder work with schools, community groups etc. on various subjects under the title “In2Cultures”. She last appeared for us with African Textiles.

- Liz started with a Thumb Piano called a Kalimba. It is a small hollow box with metal pieces to produce the sound. It is a tuneful bell-like sound, and comes from South Africa. This one was machine made, but there are many different types hand crafted in the villages. They use any metal, even flattened old nails!
- Gourds are also used to make instruments, and also old cutlery for the metal parts. Devinder also used a shaker comprising a gourd and beads. Depending on the material, the thumb pianos produce high and low notes. Liz showed us a small one, made from a sardine can, which produced a soft sound!
- They are generally played with the thumbs. The largest, which was very pretty, comes from Zimbabwe, originally from Mozambique. It has two rows of metal strips and the player uses both thumbs and the forefinger of the right hand. Liz said that it was called “Nyunga Nyunga” – Sparkle/sparkle.
- We were shown a big drum, made from a hollowed-out tree trunk, by hand, from West Africa. It is called a “Djembe”. The sounding board is made of thin goat skin. It produces deep notes in the centre and high notes around the edge. It works best in the warm. Players use their hands, not sticks. We were also showed one which has cow’s skin, which is thicker and has hair on it! A stick may be used on this drum. Devinder and Liz played a healing rhythm, with Djembes, and the audience accompanied them with clapping. There are different rhythms for different occasions – celebration rhythms are jollier and loud. A Drum Call in West Africa is used to gather people for singing and dancing.

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- We had a performance of the “Hello Song” – “Jambo”, from East Africa, sung in Swahili, which includes the phrase “Hakuna Matata”, made famous in the Lion King musical - a common phrase meaning “no worries/no troubles”.
- Liz and Devinder played a children’s song from Ghana. It is in praise of the little people that African children believe live underground. It was very lively, with a drum and rattle.
- We then all sang along to the African version of “She’ll be coming round the Mountain”. It is about a problem train. The music became slower as the journey unfolded. We were also taught a chorus to a Liberian song – “I welcome you into my heart today”. The next song, from Sierra Leone, was in English – “Shoo fly, don’t bother me”. We were also invited to sing the chorus of a chant from South Africa. This highlights the protests against Apartheid, and features Mandela, Steve Biko and Archbishop Tutu. The last song came from South Africa in the Zulu language – “Now is the time we send all our thoughts to you”.

The audience was very enthusiastic and joined in willingly. It was fascinating to learn about the instruments and how they sound.

Helen Elliott, Speaker Secretary, May 2026.

Plea for Help

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

They happen on the last Wednesday of the month, the next one is

Wednesday 24th June

If you could be there for 1.15 that would be great.

You could stay for the talk which, this month, is “My life as a film extra” but, if you have another appointment you could leave by 1.50.

RSVP to Maureen at maureenbsavu3a@gmail.com

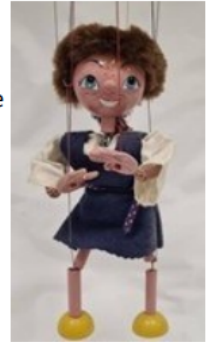
We hope to make up a rota of helpers so no-one has too much to do. Thankyou!

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WORD OF THE MONTH : PUPA - and family!

An entomologist would tell you that a **pupa** is an early stage of an insect's development, while an etymologist might explain that *pupa* was originally Latin for an early stage of a young *girl's* life. The Romans used the same word for a doll, which became *poupée* in French. In the Middle Ages we borrowed this as **puppy** (and later simply **pup**) to describe a little dog, often petted and treated like a doll. Today the word pup is applied to the young of many other animals.

A little doll in French was a *poupette*, a gift to English borrowers. The use of a **puppet** as a doll moved by strings, wires or a glove was first recorded in the 1530s. The French used puppets in church to act out bible stories. A popular figure was the Virgin Mary: *Marion* or *Marionette* - little Mary. *Marionette* later became a general term for any puppet controlled by strings.



But back to the Romans! They liked diminutives too. A little *pupa* was a *pupilla*, which they used as the word for the centre of the eye, the **pupil**: looking closely into someone's eye you see a tiny reflection of yourself as a mini person, a doll. And a final borrowing! A *pupillus* became a **pupil**: a little person, a minor placed under the care of a guardian, tutor or teacher.

Now be a **poppet** (yes, another relative!) and check out the word 'doll', would you?

NEWS FROM OUR INTEREST GROUPS

Brush up your German

Fewer topics this time with some absences, but full of interest as ever. Much conversation was based on the SBT exhibition now on at the Birthplace, and on the school system in Germany where children worry about frequent class tests results and the possibility of having to repeat a year.

French for the Terrified

We have been practising using the *passé composé* with *avoir* and *être*, including negatives and reflexives! We have also read a piece using the imperfect tense describing the perils of life in times past - which led to some reminiscing about our own *jeunesse*.

Improve your French

Jazz festivals, holidays and the weather have featured largely in our conversations recently with plenty of new vocabulary being learned and used.

Piano Group

Having practised and played for us the three movements of Diabelli's 6th *Sonatine* one by one over the months, Hilary and Dorothy performed the whole piece, with special attention to the dynamics. Excellent. We also love Janet's passion for Victorian music hall, and this month she treated us to *The 4 'Oss Charrybang*. Ann followed with a rousing march from Finnish composer Oscar Merikanto and Jill stunned us with another dramatic Gershwin Prelude. Margaret's eye problem is still making reading music difficult, but she was prevailed upon to play a few Sunday School hymn tunes she'd known forever by heart. Maybe progress next time.

Stratford History Group

Joy Wilcox, one of our members, gave a delightful presentation on Waldo Lanchester, the most famous puppeteer of his age, whom she had known and done some work for while he was running the Puppet Centre in Stratford in the 1950s. It seemed impossible to summarise the vast amount of fascinating detail Joy had unearthed, but as we feel that Waldo is worth wider recognition, we have done our best and produced a longer summary of our June meeting than usual to bring you just a few facts about this splendid man and his legacy.

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Stratford History Group

Waldo Lanchester and his legacy : presentation by Joy Wilcox, with help from Margaret Dews on visuals



Once the most celebrated puppeteer in Britain, Waldo moved to Stratford in 1951 and was welcomed by the Mayor, a sign of his remarkable reputation. Joy's presentation traced his life, work, and influence, revealing a gentle, inventive man whose artistry shaped modern puppetry.

Early Life: Born to the radical activist Biddy Lanchester and her Irish partner Shamus, scorned by the family, Waldo grew up in an unconventional household. His sister Elsa became a Hollywood star and wife of Charles Laughton. Waldo, quiet and mechanically gifted, worked as an electrician after WWI and imprisonment as a conscientious objector. His interest in model theatre led him to meet Harry Whanslaw, author of *Everybody's Theatre* in 1923.

London Marionette Theatre: Whanslaw and Waldo co-founded the British Puppet and Model Theatre Guild and later the London Marionette Theatre, the first to show puppets on television. They performed across Europe and in grand London venues including the V&A, Buckingham Palace, and Selfridges at Christmas.

Malvern years: In 1935 Waldo took part in the Malvern Festival, lodging in a potter's garden - Muriel, who became his wife and creative partner. Together they opened the **Lanchester Marionette Theatre** in Foley House. Waldo published *Hand Puppets and String Puppets*, arguing that puppetry teaches children initiative, craftsmanship, and historical awareness. Their puppets appeared at the 1937 Paris Exhibition and were the first on French TV. During WWII they toured with ENSA, travelling 40,000 miles and giving 700+ performances for the troops.

Shakes versus Shav: George Bernard Shaw, a long-time admirer of marionettes, wrote *Shakes v Shav* for Waldo in 1949. Muriel created new costumes, including historically accurate tartans for Macbeth and Rob Roy. The play stages a comic duel between Shakespeare and Shaw and is still performed today. We believe that the Shakespeare puppet is now held by the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust.

Stratford & The Puppet Centre: Seeking stability after years of touring, Waldo and Muriel settled in Henley Street, opening The Puppet Centre opposite the Birthplace. They made and sold puppets and created theatrical prints. A brilliant model of the Globe Theatre, was displayed at the 1997 opening of the new Globe.

Some touring continued, but an over-ambitious puppet Handel opera at the 1951 King's Lynn Festival lost money and reduced Arts Council support. Waldo later developed Open Floor shows, with puppeteers visible to the audience. His final marionette, Methuselah, was carved from Scottish bog oak, a gift from the RSA. In 25 years the couple had travelled 150,000 miles and given 5,000 performances.

Waldo's legacy: The Puppet Centre closed in the 1960s; the building was bought by the SBT. The Lanchesters retired to Wilmcote, with Waldo continuing to lecture while participating in local photography and arts clubs until his death in 1978. Over 3,000 puppets were donated to the British Toymakers' Guild in the 1980s; others were dispersed. Forty were saved for the nation in 2006, and some of these appeared on *Antiques Roadshow* in 2022.



Today Waldo's name is little remembered in Stratford, noted only by a plaque on a bench in the garden of Anne Hathaway's Cottage. His influence, however, endures: puppetry thrives, and the RSC revived marionette performance presenting *Venus and Adonis* in 2004 and 2017. And who could forget *War Horse* and the RSC's recent *BFG*?

Joy: Joy met Waldo after creating a doll cloth kit, Pollyanna, inspired by dolls in Pollock's Toy Museum in London. He loved it and commissioned more work, including a Globe Theatre print. Joy's designs won a Design Centre Award. She and husband Malcolm moved to Leamington and set up Sari Fabrics which grew into a well-loved textile company. Her enthusiasm for Waldo, his work and legacy is infectious. We demand a blue plaque!

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Watch out for details of a new group. A large group gathered to try improv(isation) with Jim, u3a national subject advisor for Improv and his wife Cher. There was enthusiastic participation as the photos show. We started with 'and then.....' Someone says something and you continue the story. A basic improvisation exercise. Below right you can see Jim and Cher who took us gently and at some points hilariously through our paces. After the first two minutes it was fun and everyone forgot to be nervous. If you would like to join such a group, get in touch with [Maureen B.](#) click on her name and the email will open for you. I know Maureen is actively seeking to set up a group. In case you are worried. No experience necessary, just a willingness to have a go.

IMPROV



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Italian, on the left a happy group of people learning Italian. There are now 10 of them. This is more than enough for one group, so they have decided to start another one! If you are interested, get in touch [with Helen Elliott](#) (click on Helen's name and the email will open for you.)

So, what do you do in a **POETRY MATTERS!** meeting then?



Since starting the new u3a group Poetry Matters! several u3a members have been in touch to ask what happens when we meet? Probably the best answer to that is a description of our most recent meeting.

At the end of May the seven members present gathered in the bright and airy environment of the Welcome Space (PICCAR Room) at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre. We had agreed that because we had spent a lot of time reading poetry by mature male poets the focus of the meeting would be on poetry written by female poets under the age of thirty. In preparation we had each

chosen a poem for inclusion in a purpose-made anthology shared by email before the meeting.

The poets selected by the group included Emily Brontë, Elaine Feinstein, Grace Nichols, Carol Ann Duffy, Jackie Kay, Jo Crayola, Liz Berry, Anne Stevenson, Christina Rossetti and Liz Lochhead. At the meeting we drew lots to take it in turns to introduce and read our selected poems and afterwards this was followed by comments and discussion. As in previous meetings the poems we had chosen led us to explore a diverse range of subjects.

These included: what our choice of our favourite time of year says about us; the importance of appreciating growing old; recognising that great Art often masks the suffering and exploitation involved in its creation; understanding the different points of view of the adoption process; seeing how people coming together over an everyday chore can showcase a slice of society; remembering the importance of the simple joys of life; analysing the psychology of an artist's relationship with his model; and observing how women can feel oppressed by social expectations.

As these examples demonstrate, poetry is about every imaginable facet and minutiae of life. Over-and-over again we have witnessed that poets have that unique gift of being able to turn a spotlight with laser intensity on what may seem the most ordinary of things and make us see them in a different, often surprising and even shocking new light.

In answer to the original question, no account such as this can possibly convey the intense pleasure of exploring poems as part of a group or the warm friendship, great humour and even the extraordinary passion we experience in our meetings. The only way to really find out is to come along and sample one for yourself.

At our next meeting on the 29th June we will be examining poems written by well-known novelists (a surprisingly large number!) to see if they make good poets too. So, if you are interested in dropping by please get in touch with [Jonathan Baker](#) by email at jonobaker@hotmail.com. He and the group will be delighted to hear from you.

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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 11 July, 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
June 2026	Stratford History Group
July 2026	Sunday Morning Walkers
August 2026	Tai chi/Yoga
September 2026	Wine Appreciation

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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
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.

Several pages back you were invited to investigate the word ‘doll’, I’ve done it for you

Doll (n.) 1550s Doll an endearing name for a female pet or mistress, from the familiar form of the feminine proper name Dorothy. The l for r substitution in nicknames is common in English: compare Hal for Harold, Moll for Mary, Sally for Sarah etc.

It is attested from the 1610s in old slang in a general sense of ‘sweetheart, mistress, paramour;’ by the 1640s it had degenerated to ‘slattern’. The sense of a child’s toy baby’ is attested by 1700. The sense returned to living beings by 1778 as ‘pretty, silly woman’. By mid 20th Century it was used again in slang as an endearing or patronizing name for a young woman. It’s amazing what the internet can tell you.

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