

Wheathampstead u3a January Newsletter

Happy New Year to all our members!

We look forward to bringing you more “Learning, Laughter and enjoyable Living” via our wonderful u3a, in 2026. (Have you all got used to writing the date yet? Can’t help thinking that back in the days when we wrote cheques for everything we got used to what year it was a lot quicker!)

As this is the first Newsletter of the year I thought it might be good to reminisce a little over what we all got up to last year (but if you don’t want to “read all about it” then feel free to scroll through to the “Speaker Meeting” heading for the future news

Well, we had some amazing Speakers – with Tony Tutton telling us about his life in Music and later, about Buddy Holly’s life in music (and getting us all singing along!) We heard about Ann Lawrences Life as a counter terrorism inspector and Colin Oakes told us all about Christmas traditions in Hertfordshire. And when a speaker’s car broke down and she couldn’t get here, (a Speaker Secretary’s worst nightmare, I can tell you!) our very own Brenda stepped in and revealed some of her escapades in teaching!

Our Outings have continued to be very popular - often going from “on sale” to “sold out” in a matter of hours! We even had to book 2 coaches on a couple of occasions – the visit to Althorp, where we were all equally in awe and impressed by the peace and tranquillity of the simple Island burial site of Diana, Princess of Wales, and more recently for our visit to Waddesdon Manor to see the Christmas Light trail, Christmas Market and decorated house. The weather wasn’t the best this time ... but it could have been a whole lot worse!

Workshops have continued throughout the year attracting small numbers of members to engage in specialised activities such as Tai Chi, Face Yoga, Acrylics and water colour painting and British Sign Language. The idea is that Workshops give people a taster for something which may later develop into an interest group – as did the Argentine Tango and the Family History Group.

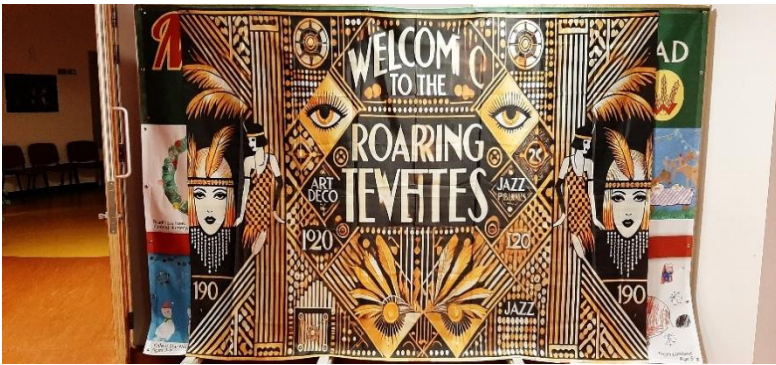
Speaking of groups, they are flourishing and multiplying with the introduction of Science, Creative Writing, Games and Italian groups.

The Supper Club has also been very successful with a membership of over 60 and around 25-30 people attending each chosen venue – It’s doing wonders for my waistline (not!), but good conversation over a lovely meal - well, the pleasure that brings just can’t be measured (at least not in inches!)

We have also introduced the London Theatre Group, members of which have seen, “Operation Mincemeat”, “The Producers” and “Witness for the Prosecution”, with lots more in the pipeline for 2026

The monthly Coffee mornings at The Swan have helped us to get to know each other a bit better – giving us chance to have a good gossip in peace and quiet at a meeting with no agenda - except, of course when Stuart Lawson entertains us with one of his monologues! Sadly, he was poorly and couldn't give us his Christmas rendition, so those attending got me instead, reading out a monologue I found on the internet telling us all about why Santa's beard is white and why we have fairies on our Christmas trees! (It would have been so much better with Stuart's Yorkshire accent!!) We're pleased to hear you are now feeling better Stuart

Our Social Events Team surpassed themselves this year and organised, A Race Night, a Murder Mystery, A quiz night, Picnic on the Meads, and, of course our Christmas 1920's evening extravaganza, with a 1920's band providing the music and amazing décor (courtesy of Corinne, Gillian and Jill) to get everyone into the spirit of it all. Lots of ladies went to town in becoming flapper girls for the night, lots of the men came suitably attired and we all danced the night away. It was a great night out and here are some photos to prove it –





A very strange thing happened in the raffle – I made the cake, but I knew it was Brenda and Pauls Wedding anniversary the following week and as Brenda has always wanted to win whatever cake is on offer, I decided to make a “special” little Anniversary cake for them because she never actually wins! Anyway, when Paul

bought their raffle tickets he wafted them around saying “hey, look at this, they’re from 2 books but all the same numbers -170 to 175! So when Brenda asked me to pull out the first ticket (after making a remark about wanting the cake), I recognised the ticket numbered 170 immediately – she had actually won, and, of course, was still unaware of the 2nd. surprise cake nestling under my seat, so with much glee, she claimed the cake and so ended up with 2 celebration cakes! Her family enjoyed helping her to celebrate though with double helpings of cake all round!

Our final Social offering for 2025 was a more sedate afternoon meeting with an amazing vocalist, Ronan McArdle, entertaining us with Christmas and other popular songs whilst we drank tea and munched on festive sweets, cakes and biscuits. He had a lovely voice and not only did it evoke some spontaneous dancing, but when “Sweet Caroline” started everyone had their hands up, swaying to the music and singing along!



We had a lot of new members this year so as we reflect on our 2025 activities, it seems a good time to explain how it all works, as we have had one or two comments about why some activities cost so much.

Whilst the core activities of our u3a, and all the organising that goes into them (groups, Speaker Meetings with refreshments and our affiliation with the wider u3a - including the magazine) are covered by your subscription fee, (except where individual groups meet in a paid for venue or have small costs for refreshments etc) we have taken it upon ourselves to also offer an array of additional social events, outings, coffee mornings and workshops. These are entirely optional but have gone down very well and seem to be much appreciated, judging by the enthusiasm and all the wonderful comments we get. Such events are run on a “not for profit” basis and are costed, as best we can, to ensure that is the case. The committee and sub Committees put in a lot of time and effort to organise these and events are meticulously planned up to a year in advance. It is a lot of additional work

We were a bit upset therefore to discover that at the 1920's party, some people brought in their own drinks (notwithstanding that we had told everyone there would be a bar) and then expected the bar staff to provide glasses, clear/wash up after them and even left their empty bottles for disposal - (... the evidence!!). As they might have remarked in the roaring 20's “it's just not cricket old chums!”

For 2026 we have a whole new programme of Speakers and Outings, Workshops and Social Events plus more coffee mornings for you, so keep an eye on your inbox for our invitations to join. Our website has been updated so all the details are on there – just google “Wheathampstead u3a” and you can find out what's going on, but, of course, I will still be sending out the monthly newsletters to remind you about the Speaker Meetings and update you generally.

We look forward to seeing you in 2026.

Speaker Meeting – The next one is this Thursday 22nd January

The Speaker is Zoe Jasko who will entertain us with “The life story of Joyce Grenfell” Zoe has a wide range of interests, she is a public speaker, performer, author of three books and a trained soprano. She was Creative Director of Felici Opera and she now produces an exciting programme of events combining music, literature, history and the arts.

There will be refreshments afterwards, so we hope you'll stay for a while and enjoy them in the company of your u3a friends.

NB – Please note that the Lower Luton Rd will be closed from Kingfisher Close to Marshalls Heath lane, so you may need to find an alternative route to the hall and allow more time if this affects you.

Recycling Ink Cartridges - We will also have a container available at this and future Speaker Meetings for you to put any used ink cartridges in, so that they can be recycled.

Future Speakers dates for your diary/calendar/phone –

Feb 26 – Mike Ruff – Stories and songs from the Music Hall

Mar 26 – (No Speaker) This is our AGM and Meet The Groups event.

Apr 23 – Anne Lawrence – The Life of a Couter Terrorist Detective part 2

May 28– Jean Fullerton (topic TBA)

Jun 25 – Nick Blatchley – Wicked Ladies and Highwaymen in Hertfordshire.

Jul 23 – TBA

Aug 27 – Steve Lester – “That’s a Wrap”

Sep 24 – Andy Smith – Love and Laughter

Oct 22– Keith Baldwin – When Doctors and policemen start to look young.

Nov 26 – Howard Slater – Richard Rogers

Dec – 10 or 17 (TBA) – Christmas Event organised by the Committee.

Coffee Morning – The next one is Wednesday 11th February – 10.30 to 12 at The Swan.

Come along for coffee and biscuits (£3) plus an opportunity to have a good natter and put the world to rights (or just Wheathampstead/the weather/whatever you like!)

Outings – Food for thought -

Feb – Snowdrops at Anglesey Abbey (Invitations sent/bookings in hand)

Mar/Apr – Strawberry Hill House and Petersham Nurseries

May/June – Ightham Mote

July/Aug – Shuttleworth Collection & Swiss Garden

Sep/Oct – Basildon Park and Cream Tea

Oct/Nov – Brick Lane Music Hall

Nov/Dec – Christmas Market/Lights (venue tba)

Groups –

Work is in hand to re-start the Garden Visits Group. It was a thriving group prior to Covid so hopefully it will again.

A new “Local Outings” group has been proposed – the idea is to travel to more local places of interest, with no need to have to book coaches, but maybe using bus passes or the Hertfordshire Hopper.

– Look out for emails from the organisers if these might be of interest to you and, of course, if you have ideas for something new, please let Annabel (or any Committee member) know.

Science Group - our January 27th meeting at 10:00 to agreeing a way forward for the Science Group. Matters we thought would be useful to discuss include:

- Topics for discussion (Medicine, Psychology, Geology, Nuclear Physics, Astronomy, etc.)
- Speakers we can approach
- Visits to sites (Faraday Museum, Design Museum, Tower Bridge, etc.)
- External meetings (Royal Society of Chemistry, Institute of Physics, Science Museum, Royal Institution of Naval Architects, etc.)
- Videos (BBC iPlayer, YouTube, etc.)
- Other activities

It would be a completely open session and, apart from agreeing topics and activities, it would be perfect if we could identify individual speakers to supplement those we already have. These include (dates to be finalised):

- David Ireson – Physics of Music
- Stephen Richardson – Soil Science Part II
- Gunter Saunders – Biotech or AI
- Chrissy Chadney - The Science of Social Psychology and its relevance
- Martin Weston – Astronomy from the village centre!

Supper Club – next one is 22 Jan at The Golden Elephant

The Supper Club is going strong. The idea is that we take a group of people to a restaurant on one of their less busy evenings and in return, they provide a meal and glass of wine at a discounted price. Good food, good wine, good company – what's not to like?

Workshops

We will continue with our programme of Workshops in 2026. and the following are being considered –

BSL and Calligraphy again

More Art workshops

Sugar paste

“Move, Think, Connect, Making maths meaningful with movement” – led by Shanti (the lady who brought Bollywood Dancing to us).

Again, if there's something you'd like or indeed if you have a skill you can teach others, we'd love to hear from you.

Watch this space!

Learning Matters –

NEW HORIZONS MONTHLY LECTURES PROPOSAL

This is a new initiative from your Committee to increase the 'learn' area of our Learn, Live Laugh' motto.

We thought it might be a good idea to start something a bit more challenging, still open to everyone but without the refreshments. Inspired by a session at the Science Group we are going to ask the speaker there, Alex Cameron, to reprise his lecture for a bigger audience, as the opening of our NEW HORIZONS MONTHLY LECTURES programme. The plan is to have a theme for three months with three related lectures, given by experts in their field. The u3a will fund the pilot three months of room hire and speaker expenses and if successful, the lectures will continue with a small payment from each attendee.

The proposed sessions will be at the Marford Hall, from 11am to 12 noon on the third

Thursday morning of each month (TBC) with a common format allowing for a short Q and A after the lecture. The theme for the pilot phase will be AGEING WELL and it will cover such areas as understanding the ageing process; how our brains function; maximising our potential as older people; physical activities; spirituality and the third ager. Some themes for the future could be in such areas as Medicine – from Prescriptions to Pandemics; Understanding Europe in the 21 st Century; Moral Panics - historical and present; Nature , Religion and Spirituality.

Suggestions for other themes would be welcome.

We'll let you know more in due course.

Social Events –

We have a lot to live up to after last year! Here's what we are planning for 2026.

27 March – Quiz Night – A music quiz presented by Tony Tutton with a fish and chips supper.

June – A Roman Murder Mystery, with supper.

August – Picnic in the Park (weather permitting – (we've been lucky so far!)

October – Harvest Dance/Ploughmans Supper

December – Christmas in the Caribbean

News from the wider u3a –

Please click on the links below for information from the wider u3a where you will find all sorts of activities you can join in with (especially good if you can't get out and about for any reason), plus lots of learning opportunities and so much more.

Apologies for not passing on earlier – I intended to send out a “Twixmas” email with all this, but Christmas and New Year Socialising got in the way.

<https://mailchi.mp/u3a/january-26-online-events?e=9180adf469>

<https://mailchi.mp/u3a/january-26-update-for-u3as?e=081a931c0c>

For example **-Learning** – There's jam-packed programme of online learning events this January. Every month, we cover a huge range of these – they are free and available to all.

Highlights this month include:

Exploring world faiths

Monday 12 January at 10am

Understanding online content and misinformation

Tuesday 13 January at 2pm

The world's most enchanting archipelagos: A voyage through the Scottish Hebrides

Wednesday 21 January at 3pm

Why snails might hold answers to age-related memory loss

Tuesday 27 January at 11am

There is also an opportunity to become a u3a Council Representative or to join the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee for an online coffee morning to share experiences, raise awareness and help everyone increase their knowledge and understanding.

Tuesday 3 February, 10.00-11.30

Monday 11 May, 10.00-11.30



Staying connected with *u3a Friends*

Are your members signed up to *u3a Friends*? Our monthly newsletter is the best way for your members to keep up to date about u3a news, events and opportunities. u3a Friends get access to *Friends Extra*, our exclusive scheme that offers discounts on travel, shopping, electronics and much more.

Please encourage members of your u3a to sign up on the [u3a website](#).

Local News –

Free chair Yoga at Hill Dyke Centre on Fridays

THRIVE TOGETHER
WORKING WITH WHEATHAMPSTEAD
PARISH COUNCIL
AND LIVE LONGER BETTER

FREE CHAIR EXERCISE

REFRESHMENTS

HILL DYKE CENTRE
FRIDAYS
10.30AM TO 12 NOON
CONTACT ANN 07951169233

Invitation to Kimpton Folk Festival Ceilidh.

St Patrick's Day Ceilidh

Kimpton FOLK FESTIVAL

Saturday the 14th March 2026

Live band Bullenbush and bar!

For more info see www.kimptonfolk.co.uk

7.30pm - 10.30pm in Kimpton Memorial Hall

Tickets available via Eventbrite using the QR code below

Dress code: **GREEN**

We have received an invitation from Ann Richardson who is involved in organising the Kimpton Folk Festival. See flyer below -

This should be a good one – I've known Steve Deeks, the drummer from the Bullenbush band, for over 40 years (I even have a CD they made once upon a time) so know you'll be in good and very experienced hands!

I think that is about all for now. Hope I haven't forgotten anything!

We look forward to seeing you at our social and learning events in 2026 and don't forget, if you have anything – pictures, stories, etc you'd like included in future newsletters, my email address is <mailto:janice.danby54@gmail.com>

Regards

Janice