



Learn, Laugh and Live

JANUARY NEWSLETTER 2026



The Colder Months

January brings the snow, makes our feet and fingers glow

February brings the rain, thaws the frozen lake again

March brings breezes loud and shrill, stirs the dancing daffodil

April brings the primrose sweet, scatters daises at our feet.

Thoughts from the Chair - Mauren Leeson

When we were asked last year to empty the u3a cupboards on the stage, in order for the renovation of Victory Hall to begin, I didn't realise quite what we had let ourselves in for !!!

We started with the cupboards and found loads of bits and bobs, remnants of past times and old technology. Would you believe video tapes (who has now got a VCR ?), and German language audio cassettes including a tape player !

The filing cabinet rendered musty smelling papers going back to the early 1990s. I had to go through it all to see if anything was important, but it wasn't, so I spent a lovely afternoon with a shredder! I know how to live !

However, it did turn out to be quite useful in one respect. As we are planning to have a commemorative plaque on the newly rendered outside wall of Victory Hall. I must admit that I was having trouble finding the exact date that we started CCU3A, but from the good old filing cabinet, I found it, our original certificate of inception from the U3A Organisation ! Now all I need to do is get rid of the musty smell in the garage !

The papers did make interesting reading however, and made me think about how much things have changed since that time especially for our members, and how much we now prioritise wellbeing and fun, alongside local interests, education and exercise.

With a lovely refreshed hall to look forward to, more members on the committee, more groups, more choice, our future looks bright. However, if there is something you would like us to look at providing, you know where to find me.

We are certainly going to live up to our motto :- “Learn”, “Laugh”, and “Live” in this New Year.

Happy New Year to you all.

Victory Hall, Slitting Mill Availability

As you know already, major work on the refurbishment of the Village Hall is well under way and has caused some disruption to those who use the Village Hall for their group activities. Since the last Speaker meeting on the 9th of December, all U3A activities in the Hall have ceased and we are hopeful of getting somewhere near back next to normal by March - and possibly the latter part of February. (Those groups who meet elsewhere are not affected by this refurbishment). In the meantime, make the most of this Newsletter and members will be informed when arrangements at the Village Hall can begin to return to normal. Below is a photo of the new look Village Hall.



Past Events

CHRISTMAS CHEESE AND WINE.



The Cheese and Wine Social took place on Thursday 4th December with 70 plus members attending the event. The Hall looked lovely, with the tables set out with festive decorations and bottles of wine to wash down the delicious cheese, pate and mince pies. Lots of members were wearing their Christmas jumpers and enthusiastically joined in the communal singing afterwards, even the Committee gave a cheeky rendition of Christmas favourites. Thanks go to everyone involved in organising the event, preparing the food and making sure everything went smoothly on the day. A

special thank you to all those Members who donated items for the Raffle and for Carole and Jackie for making the Prizes look so appealing and beautiful. A lovely afternoon to start our Christmas Festivities.

CHRISTMAS CONCERT



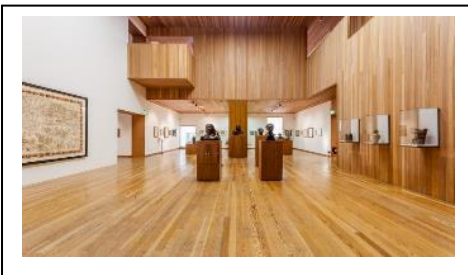
On Tuesday the 11th of December we were very fortunate to be entertained by the very talented 20-piece orchestra from Lichfield U3A. There were over 70 CCU3A members attending who enjoyed the orchestra playing several Christmas carols and songs. There was a complimentary glass of wine to help warm and lubricate our vocal chords so that we could join in with some singing.

A large thank-you to Lichfield U3A for giving us a wonderful and entertaining afternoon

Group News

Art Appreciation Group – Leader Pauline Foster

Visit to the New Art Gallery, Walsall



This year we have covered several artists and art movements, more recently Dame Laura Knight. We concluded the year with a visit to The New Art Gallery in Walsall to look at the Garman Ryan Collection. This is the gallery's permanent works of art donated by Katherine Garman and Sally Ryan. We started with a 30 minute talk, by a member of the gallery staff, which gave us some useful background information to the collection as well as the family and friends' connections. Time was not

restricted then to look round and take in what was displayed. The whole collection is large and so further visits are always recommended as art works are changed. The group found it interesting and worthwhile. We will be picking up the threads of the visit and delving a little deeper for the first session in the new year. On the 20th January we shall be visiting Birmingham Art Gallery and going by train from Hednesford station (details from Pauline).

Boules – Leader Carole Howard



We meet on the second Thursday of the month at 2pm the same time as the kurling and games

Our boules teams are small at the moment and we only met 3 times last year due to the rain!

We have to play on grass which is unsuitable for playing boules but we have a fun time (the lawn at the rear of SMVH) and we play by the rules of Pétanque (Boules). We split into teams and play until a team

reaches 13 points. We then have heated discussion on who is closer to the cochonnet! (Jack)

We usually start after Easter, weather permitting - watch out for the weekly notices

We have boules available so anyone come along to play. We have Tea and Cake at the interval.

Canasta – Leader Julya New

The group is now cancelled owing to lack of interest

Comparative Religions – Leaders Joan Gripton and Pauline Foster

On Monday 23rd June nine members of the Comparative Religion groups visited the Hindu Temple in Walsall. We were welcomed by a delightful young woman who showed us round the Temple and told us lots of stories about the various gods which are part of the Hindu faith. She explained the many traditions and practices which are part of their worship and way of life. We also met the Priest, who happened to be her father, and learnt about his role in the worship. The visit helped to bring to life what we had only been able to read about and helped us understand more fully what happened in the Temple on weekdays, Sundays and festivals. The whole group enjoyed the experience and we were grateful to the people who made us so welcome. In future we hope to visit other places of worship to enhance our learning about a variety of different faiths.

Craft Group – Leader Christine Travers Brooks



Come along to our Craft group. Relaxed activities for all ability levels.

There is no need to be artistic or creative.

Join in with a guided craft topic each month

Or bring along your own craft activity to work on.

We chat and have fun while we work.

This U3A bunting was designed and made by members of the craft group and shows all our current U3A groups

Crown Green Bowling – Leader Andy Cowan



Due to the shortage of Rag Bowlers on a Friday Night, I have had to change the bowling times on a Friday which will be for 2026: 10-00am to 12 Noon, 12-30pm to 2-30pm and 2-30pm to 4-30pm.

The Rag Bowling Club are introducing Club Competitions with U3A Members in mind.

We have a Singles Handicap Competition where U3A Members who play will receive 5 Shots on their card and a Handicap Doubles Competition where a U3A Bowler entering will receive 3 shots. It would be nice to see U3A Cannock Chase Members enter these competitions and gain some valuable match experience and also enjoy the Rag Bowling Club facilities.



Cycling – Leader Peter Harding

The cycling group have been out along country lanes this summer in warm and sunny weather and earlier some of us also braved the cold over Cannock Chase. Our rides have been around fifteen miles of country lanes with an essential coffee and cake stop half way around. We are getting to know good local cafes such as the ice cream farm at Haughton and Marsh farm tea shop near Blithfield reservoir. To suit our members

home locations, we vary our start points to cover Rugeley, Lichfield, Hednesford and Penkridge. All rides are supported and suitable for beginners and electric bikes are fine. New members are welcome.

We always cycle at a gentle pace and never leave anyone behind. So beginners are always welcome to come along.

Drawing & Painting Group – Leader Alan Shaw



The group created pencil drawings, watercolour and soft pastel paintings during 2025 and will be moving on to repeating this during 2026

We cover a wide range of subjects and we use a range of art papers and these are supplied at cost by the group leader, along with trace-downs or line drawings and a reference picture.

We are a mixed ability group and beginners are welcome.

Exercise Group – Leader Maggie Wall



This is an exercise class that uses muscles from head to toe by stretching. We concentrate on correct posture, breathing and balance. This class is for any age and ability. The aim is for each person to improve their individual fitness and flexibility. All exercises are done standing up. Many can be done sitting down so are accessible to everyone. The aim of the class is for everyone to enjoy it and feel the benefits. The coffee and biscuits at the end are a bonus.

French (Advanced) – Leaders Maggie Causer (and Christine Travers Brooks)



Our Advanced French group has continued to go from strength to strength during fortnightly Zoom sessions. We are now an established group of 9 enthusiastic learners and we would love to have new members who have a love of learning and who wish to improve on their language skills. Following the success of our Holiday Destination topic we have recently been talking about hobbies and pastimes. Angie and myself both spoke about our experiences of learning a range of languages including the difficulties we often experience. Jackie is an avid knitter who enlightened us on the history of the craft and how to use the small amounts of wool left over from a project. Derek gave a very entertaining presentation on the rules of cricket (all those ins and outs!) We are now looking forward to hearing about painting for pleasure, playing board games, sewing, and

photography We are now using TEAMS alongside Zoom on the first and third Friday of the month from 14h-16h and would be delighted to welcome more faces to our group. It's not as difficult as it sounds and we have a lot of laughs along the way. Please feel free to sit in on one of our sessions.



Gardens Group – Leader Valma Cooper

The Garden Group had a lovely summer visiting a variety of interesting Gardens, all very different with original themes. These ranged from a country garden near Brewood where the owner spent the whole afternoon with us giving us good ideas, hints and suggestions - and her cakes weren't bad either. We visited one very unusual garden in September, it was like a tropical paradise with amazing foliage and surprises around every corner. Both these Garden owners have agreed to give us a talk later this year explaining how they started their gardens etc. At our October

meeting, to finish off our Season, we had a lady Speaker who amused and surprised us all by breaking into song, whistling her way through tunes connected to Gardens. I was flabbergasted! There is lots of new gardens to visit in 2026, so why not join us, you don't have to be an expert gardener to enjoy our visits, we are a small friendly welcoming group so why not join us?

History Group – Leader Maureen Leeson



Meets on the first Tuesday of the month at Slitting Mill Victory Hall at 2pm.

Martyn Hall, our resident speaker, will be giving a different talk each month following the History of Britain through the centuries.

Over the last year we heard about Ancient Britons, the Anglo Saxons, the Vikings through to 1066 and the Norman Conquest. Then through the Middle Ages and Tudors to Charles 1st losing his head, finishing the year with the English Revolution and Republican England under Oliver Cromwell.

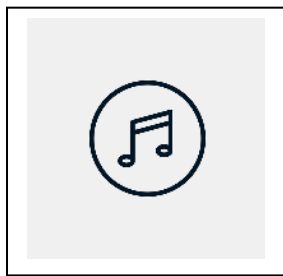
Phew what a thrilling and enthralling ride with much more to come!

For 2026 we continue and the main themes will be the lives of people living through the following times.

- March. Stuart's Restored.
- April. Georgian Britain.
- May. How the modern world began.
- June. Workshop of the World.
- July. The Two Nations.
- August. Meet the Victorians.
- September. The Edwardians.
- October. The Great War.
- November. Between the Wars.
- December. World War II and after.

EVERYONE WELCOME.

Music Appreciation – Leaders Pauline Foster



The group was formed to share music, appreciate a variety of genres and learn a little more about contemporary music.

We have a new theme each month (E.g. Jazz, Summertime, Colours, male solo singers etc.) and everyone 'brings' a couple of tracks to share and maybe tells us a little more about the artist, band, genre or the 'story' behind the track.

We meet monthly at Heddin's Ford, Hednesford. Fortunately the pub has Spotify so we don't have to actually own the CD anymore which has given us flexibility.

It's a lively, positive group that loves to share and delve into songs/singers/genres that we wouldn't naturally choose.

With the time constraint of only 2 hours and the collaborative nature of the group, places are limited in order to get round everyone and have a good discussion. But there's always the potential for another 'music appreciation 2' group if there is enough interest!

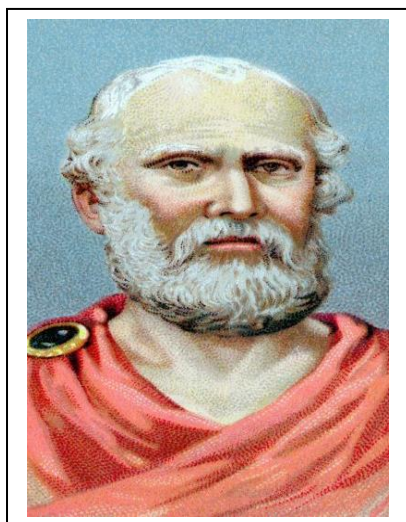
Nordic Walking Group - Leader Alan Shaw



If you like walking but the condition of your ankles, knees or hips makes this difficult, you can benefit from taking up Nordic walking. This consists of using two adapted ski poles (or two telescopic walking/trekking poles) for assisted walking and using more of your upper body muscles to take the strain off your lower limbs and joints. Nordic Walking sticks are not supplied, so you will need your own; they can be obtained from Amazon for as little as £20 (contact the Group Leader for details). If you have not done this previously, full instructions will be given to beginners by a trained instructor. What is really nice about Nordic walking is that you can put in as little

or as much effort as you wish to propel you along at a speed that suits you, so it is suitable for all ages and levels of ability. No-one gets left behind. All walks are planned so that we find ourselves close to tempting refreshments at the end of our walk. We meet at Marquis Drive Visitor Centre every fourth Friday (generally) at 10.30am.

Philosophy 1 &2 – Leader Joan Gripton



Philo means love of, Sophy means wisdom. The study of it involves argument, reasoning and asking questions. Philosophy impacts on a variety of aspects of our lives like ethics, politics, love, death, morals, happiness, freedom, religion, self-knowledge etc.

The group(s) involve a bit of reading, lots of discussion, lots of support, lots of listening and respect for one another. And it's fun and very stimulating. Come and get involved in the 'Big Questions'.

There are two groups, each meeting once a month at Heddin's Ford Pub in Hednesford.

Photography – Leader Alan Shaw



The main aims of this group are:

- 1) To help members inexperienced in using mobile phones and other digital cameras to avoid the frequent mistakes made by untrained photographers
- 2) To help members to recognise and comply with the main conventions adopted by most photographers
- 3) To help members use built-in or freely-available editing software to correct and/or improve their photos
- 4) To explore various elements of composition that will give members' photos better "eye appeal"
- 5) To encourage members to submit their photos for anonymous scoring by their fellow members and (optionally) to receive a critique of their efforts
- 6) Please note that no other camera club or photo group in the region welcomes people who take photos using their smartphones or i-Pads

We are a mixed ability group and arrangements for improved

learning are planned for 2026.

Poetry Appreciation – Leader Carol Deakin

The Poetry Appreciation group meets on the third Wednesday of the month at Heddins Ford pub in Hednesford, although our last meeting was at Hednesford library.

We decide as a group on the theme for the following month. We each bring along 2 poems to read to the group and say a little about it or about the poet. Recent themes have included Transport, Liverpool, Sun Moon and Stars, Sea Creatures, Friendship, poems with a message and poems that make us laugh.

We always enjoy a lovely, relaxed atmosphere in our small group and if you prefer, someone else will read out your chosen poem.

Science and Technology – Leader Barry James



The name of the group might conjure up ideas that you need to be a boffin to understand the topics we cover. However, nothing can be further from the truth. We cover topics from around us, how they work, what famous pioneers invented, how things were built, what benefits can a product bring for instance. There is nothing academic about the science group, anyone can understand if you are curious.

So as examples of the past, we've covered how a jet engine works, how to live on Mars, Solar panels, Marconi and his radio, Astronomy and telescopes, The Polish RAF story, Petrography, Concorde, Mining precious metals, Diabetes, Radar in the 1950's, Heat Pumps, Sailing, Genetics, and the list goes on and on. All things of great interest.

Singing For Pleasure - Leader Dianne Hooper



Singing for pleasure is held at Heddin's Ford pub, every third Tuesday of the month at 2pm until 4pm. This is purely for our own pleasure, no solos, no choir, no public performances, just singing for the sheer pleasure of it. Singing is like laughter, it lifts the mood, and we have a lot of laughter too. It doesn't matter if you think you can't sing, or that your singing isn't good enough, that's not what

it's about, it's about enjoying the experience. We all suggest songs that we like from any era, 1920 to present day, and sing along using a karaoke screen. Why not come along and give it a go, you'll find a very friendly welcome.

Thursday Tai Chi – Leader Maureen Leeson and Joan



A group of us meet every Thursday morning from 10.30am to 11.30am at Slitting Mill Victory Hall.

Tai Chi helps with physical issues such as anxiety, pain management, improved sleep and strengthening muscles.

Some studies noting positive effects on cardiovascular health and bone density.

We also have a good old natter and a jolly good laugh.

We cater for all abilities, with extra help for beginners.

Tai Chi Mondays – Leader Bryn Wellings

Following on from Margaret's exercise session on a Monday morning, we have a session of Tai Chi, which is a gentle form of exercise, helping you to have greater control over your muscles, improve balance and lead to a very calm mind-set. It is led and guided – with a printed description of the rules – to help any new-comers feel comfortable in our very friendly group, to which all are welcome.

Walking Group - Leader Angela Allison



We meet on the last Tuesday of the month at various locations. We have previously visited Great Haywood, Hednesford Hills, Hammerwich, Cannock Chase, Penkridge and Rugeley.

The walks are approximately 4 miles and although we have been temporarily between reference points we have never got lost. We walk at a pace suitable to the group. Having others to walk with, makes your walk a sociable and motivational activity.

It takes 200 muscles to take one step and every step can be a new adventure.

As a group we have tree hugged, swung in the trees and got very wet on a couple of occasions.

So walk for fitness, walk for fun.

Come and join us.

POSSIBLE NEW GROUPS & IDEAS FOR 2026.

Ukulele Group

Scrabble Games Group

Monthly Coffee Morning/Social.

Occasions Meals out/ Lunches.

We have some really good Speakers booked for later in the year and Martyn continues his trawl through our British History. We welcome ideas from our members and are always keen to provide new groups, events and trips etc. So if you have any ideas don't keep them to yourself, let us know!

FIRM FUTURE DATES FOR YOUR NEW 2026 DIARY.

Tuesday 14th April @ 2pm. AGM at SMVH

Free entry and tea and coffee. **PLEASE TRY TO ATTEND AND HAVE YOUR SAY.** We are looking for new Committee Members so get in touch if you could help or would like more information.

Tuesday 14th July. Summer Social with Singer and food. Details still being ironed out but tickets on sale in May.

Thursday 3rd December. Christmas Lunch at the Barns Restaurant, Cannock.

Tuesday 8th December. Christmas Party with Entertainer already booked.

Wednesday 17th June. Summer Coach trip with a cream tea on a Steam Railway. Details and Tickets on sale in April.

SUMMER COACH TRIP.

ENJOY a CREAM TEA during a 2 hour trip through the beautiful CHURNET VALLEY on a STEAM TRAIN.

Details and Price soon.
Tickets available in April.



Churnet Valley Railway

Your Committee 2025/26

Maureen Leeson - Chairperson

Vacant - Vice Chairperson

Valma Cooper - Secretary

Robert Leeson - Treasurer

Julya New - Membership Secretary

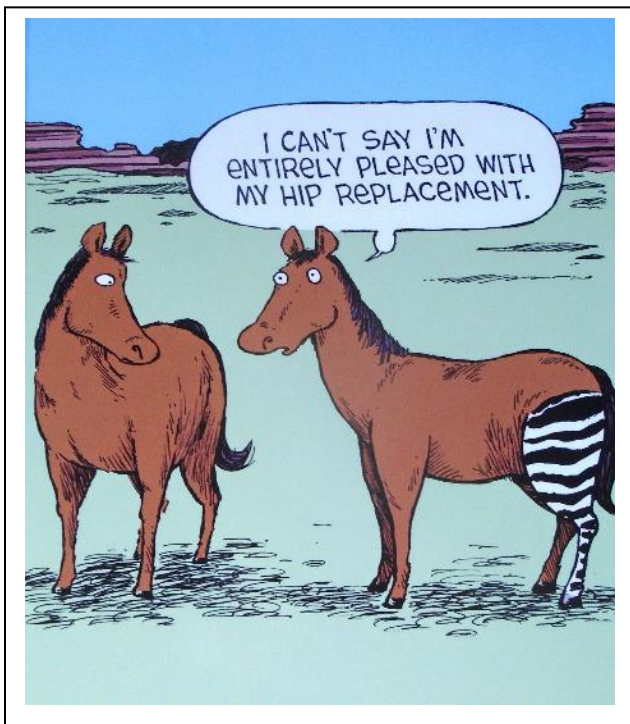
Carole Howard - Events Coordinator
Maggie Causer - Speaker Secretary
Ann Round - Committee Member
Angela Alison - Committee Member
Pauline di Pretoro - Committee Member
Kath Wheatley - Committee Member
Chris Lowries - Committee Member
Rob Lowries - Committee Member
Lesley Hipkiss - Committee Member
Jackie Bowdler - Committee Member
Margaret Wall - Committee Member
Barry James - Non Committee Member but circulates emails to Members
Alan Shaw - Non Committee Member but produces Newsletter
Ian Gordon - Non Committee member but compiles Web Site

Computers – a Poem by Kath Wheatly

I've finished my computer course at Hednesford library
But somehow after twelve long hours, I don't think its for me
I've tapped, clicked and caps locked and thought my time well spent
But later found, to my dismay, my e-mail never went!
They say I should do e-mails but really I don't care
I'd rather pick the phone up and sit upon the stair
I like the sound of my voice and other peoples' too
I like to see a human face, you don't get that on Yahoo
The grandkids are so clever, at school it is their core
I'd rather see them playing out but then I'm a dinosaur
Buy your books on Amazon, you'll never be the same
Neither will the bookshops as they al close down their name
They say, "click on E-bay, go and surf the net"
But I'm happy with the charity shops, they're all I need as yet
So I thought I'd bring up E-bay, there's something I might learn
Between you, me and the gatepost, I much prefer Age Concern
Try Internet Explorer, I was told today

Then go tap into Google, you'll soon be on your way
It asked me for my password and I entered it with glee
The word flashed up "Invalid", I don't think it likes me
They say patience is a virtue and it will come in time
But if I'm really honest, I'd rather write this rhyme
I'm writing here in comfort – a pad, a pen and tea
Without that damned computer resting on my knee
To be computer literate, you need not just the skill
But also lots of aptitude and most of all the will
I can see the advantages of this electronic toy
But I'd rather read a book and let the world go by
I might attend the next course, they are determined you see
To drag me kicking and screaming into the 21st Century

Something to Make you Laugh (or at least Smile)



Web-site

Our website is located at [Cannock Chase u3a: Welcome to Cannock Chase u3a \(u3asites.org.uk\)](http://u3asites.org.uk)

In addition to the Home page, there are sections on Welcome, Groups, Events, Photos, Reports, Local Links and Contacts, which amounts to a great deal of useful information.

Thanks go to Ian Gordon who works tirelessly to keep our web-site up to date.

Our e-mail address is cannockchaseu3a@gmail.com

Facebook

You can find our Facebook page simply by inserting a search Cannock Chase U3A

Letters to the Editor

Letter 1

I was sitting quietly in the barber's shop when the chap next to me nudged my arm and said "Have you seen this – its just disgusting." What he showed me was the front page of a national daily newspaper which carried the headline:

50% of British school children are below average intelligence

And the article occupied the following two pages. In brief, the article was a detailed rant about the sorry state of education in the UK quoting various facts and figures about shortage of teachers, general lack of resources, overuse of teaching assistants, absence of teachers due to stress and on and on, basically emphasising low teaching standards are across all schools generally.

This high profile article struck me as rather odd for two reasons;

- 1) Everyone's level of intelligence is an innate characteristic that no amount of education and teaching will improve significantly during school years
- 2) In any large sample population of people, the measurement of innate characteristics varies across a range from highest to lowest and the average is the middle point, which means that half are above average and half are below average – by definition. This same argument would also apply to peoples' height, weight, shoe size etc.

So, this article is completely fake news (apart from the headline) and demonstrates a poor level of journalism and very low editorial standards. The chap sitting next to me was obviously taken in by this and no doubt many more will have been.

So, while the statement in the headline is factually correct, the journalistic interpretation is totally incorrect, which is what makes this article fake news.

I thought afterwards that this could be a good example to teach pupils in school how to recognise fake news.

Name given

Feedback Please

I would appreciate your feedback if you have any observations, comments, anecdotes or questions about this issue. Also, if you have any suitable jokes, amusing anecdotes or funny stories (or letters) for future issues, they would also be welcome.

Please send your feedback to alan.arty.shaw@outlook.com.