



The December meeting (p3) - Jane Hawthorn

u3a

Winchcombe Area

Newsletter

February 2024

Editorial - The season of new resolutions and failed intentions

Do you still make new year resolutions? What was once very much a personal choice seems to have become more of a social movement. We are offered Dry January, Veganuary, and a wide choice of charity fundraisers most of which seem to involve unpleasant physical effort. I have friends who I never previously suspected of masochism who have committed to run excessive distances for fundraising every day in January. In January, through the cold and lashing rain!

If you drink in moderation, eat ethically, take appropriate exercise and support charities all year round you might look at these new year excesses with a somewhat sceptical eye. The last research I saw suggested that most resolutions end in under a fortnight. Yet for some people a resolution to change their way of life can become ... well life changing.

Social and Medical research increasingly pinpoint lifestyle issues as factors in common chronic, rather than acute, health conditions. Lifestyle changes such as giving up alcohol or junk food can have surprisingly quick benefits for those who manage to complete the initial month, and many feel so much better that they do not want to return to former habits. For them the shared support and group experience of an organised campaign (even if only on Whats App) helps set a new life direction.

Resolutions can even benefit mental health. Depression is a very common mental health issue, particularly amongst our age group. A study from Harvard suggests that taking up physical exercise can be as effective as anti-depressants in combating it. The observed social benefits are underpinned by scientific studies of the effect of exercise on brain chemistry. So the weekly Zumba class, or running in the wet benefit both mind and body - if you enjoy it. <https://www.health.harvard.edu/mind-and-mood/exercise-is-an-all-natural-treatment-to-fight-depression>

Whether the same rule applies to matters of convenience is a moot point. My own resolution to reduce my car use for the sake of the planet and avail myself of the generally three quarter empty buses that run between Gretton, Cheltenham and Winchcombe faces the fortnight test. My research suggests little time penalty and significant cost savings using public transport. Opportunity - organising life around a bus timetable will be the key. We will see.

John Hurley

Notes from the Chair

Happy New Year.

I know it is just the vagaries of how we decided to set up our calendars, but it always feels like a review and renewal time to me when we pass from one year to the next. I suppose all those resolutions or at least internalised promises to do something different are part of that “out with the old, in with the new” mentality? Personally, I made a resolution about a decade ago not to have any more New Years Resolutions, and have found that is the one promise I have managed to keep.

It is the time of year that new gym membership applications are at their highest. And the greatest number of resignations happen before the end of the first quarter, so I hear. No surprise there.

Is it an opportunity to look at your own utilisation of your u3a membership? Are there other interest groups you'd like to get involved with? Is there a subject area you think needs to be added - and could you be involved as the coordinator? There is plenty of help from our array of current group leads, if you would like advice.

Watch this space too - we are aiming to run a Group Coordinators meeting in February as a thank you to them for their volunteer efforts and also to ask for anyone to come along who would like to learn a bit more about running a group. The most important thing is you don't have to be an expert in the interest field. Just good at a bit of administration and coordination - hence the role name.

I look forward to seeing you at monthly meetings, at interest group sessions and at any of the other events we will be holding. The first of these is the quiz night at Abbey Fields Community Centre on the evening of 19th January. More details soon.

In the meantime, all good wishes for 2024.

Volunteers

I had a fear of using the V word above, just in case it made you not want to read on? Anyway, if you've got this far, I needn't have been concerned.

We started our u3a only in 2017, and naturally the original committee are still well represented on the committee today. We have had new blood too, with Jean Jones, Lynne Smith, John Hurley, Gary Search and Tony Richards joining us. My concern is about us long term incumbents. We may only have a year or two left in our current roles before we have to, constitutionally, move on. As you all know, our u3a cannot exist without volunteers. So, if you think you could offer your services, or at least have a visit to a committee meeting to get a feel for what goes on, then please get back to me.

Also, we do have a “victim of our own success” problem. Many of our interest groups are quite full. This means we need new volunteers to step forward to potentially become a Group Coordinator. You don't have to be expert in the field, as the main skill needed is

organisation and communication. We will be holding a meet for the Group Leads and our RUMS (Really Useful Members) in February, watch out for emails in next few weeks, and that might be a good opportunity to attend and find out more. All of our current group leads are more than willing to help a new volunteer to set up a group. You will never be left alone. And just a quick thank you to all of our Leads - our u3a wouldn't be as vibrant as it is without you and your inputs.

Phil Hawthorn

email Hacking

There has recently been another spate of hacking of u3a members e-mail accounts. All members should be aware that the hackers use some very plausible requests, which at first glance, seem to be very genuine. An example of the dialogue could be something like:

Hi, Sorry to bother you, do you order from Amazon? or Could you just confirm that you have received this email?

The e-mails seem to originate from Beacon (but if you look at the return address they are clearly scams - Beacon emails generally start no-reply@beacon). Under no circumstances, whatsoever, should you reply. Delete it immediately!!

The Beacon support team have been made aware of this problem. Here is their response:

A number of u3a group members recently had their email accounts hacked, as some Group Leaders had previously sent emails as Cc (Carbon copy) using a different system from Beacon. This meant that all group members email details were visible to those who received the email. This resulted in the hackers having access to all the email addresses for further exploitation. One key benefit of sending emails using Beacon is that the system ensures they are sent Bcc (Blind carbon copy), which is recommended to all Group Leaders, to stop this situation occurring.

If you have received one of these messages and wish to discuss this further, please contact me on my mobile 07724 842946 or email me [here](#):

Many thanks, Beacon Administrator Winchcombe Area u3a

Lynne Smith

Monthly meeting programme

Month 2024	Speaker	Topic	Tea rota
February 13th	Graham Pitchfork	The Air Transport Auxillary	Astronomy
March 12th	Jessica dePlasso	Nutition, Lifestyle and Wellness	Badminton
April 9th	Jackie Harris	Sir Peter Scott - An Amazing Life	Birdwatching
May 14th	Chris O'Grady	A Walk to Rome	Boardgames
June 11th	Kathryn Turner	Recycling and Climate Action topic	Book Club 1
July 9th	Katy Bellamy	The Joy of False Memory	Book Club 2
August 13th	Alexandra Lloyd-Jones	Older Drivers Forum	Botany

December Monthly Meeting report

We always try to do something a little different at our December meetings and this year was no exception. We had a very good turn out – about 60 members – but I fear some may have turned back home as there was a tremendously heavy rain shower at about 1.55pm – just as the last few stalwarts were arriving. Thankfully, most members avoided the drenching but many thanks to those of you who braved the weather and still continued despite being soaked to the skin.

The meeting started with a few announcements followed by two important presentations. Jenny Mackelworth (member no. 1) was the driving force behind setting up Winchcombe Area u3a. She was (and still is) a member of Bishops Cleeve u3a, but felt there was a need for a branch to cover Winchcombe, Greet, Gretton and the surrounding area. The inaugural meeting was held in 2017 and the rest is history. Having covered the role of Secretary for several years, Jenny retired from the committee last year but is still a valuable member of our team for advice, a leader of several groups and RUMs (Really Useful Members). To thank Jenny (and her husband John) for their commitment and hard work she was presented with two wine glasses engraved with the u3a logo and a bottle of wine.

We also thanked Janet Bidwell who also joined in 2017 and covered several roles until her retirement from the committee last year. She still continues to support us whenever and however she can and was presented with a bottle of fine wine.

This year's Christmas offering at the meeting was a local a cappella group who sing, mainly without accompaniment, but sometimes with gentle guitar strings provided by Rob Wilcock. The group was started by Alan Foster a few years ago and after a few false starts they now meet regularly at the Plaisterers Arms for the joy of singing, downing a few beers and a bit of showing off. Our Chairman, Phil, is also a member of the group. The chaps were in good voice and entertained us for over 45 minutes with a mixture of shanties, folk songs, pop songs and finished with the carol Silent Night – joined by members of the audience. Judging by the enthusiastic applause and positive comments, this was warmly received and thoroughly enjoyed by our members. Thank you Monday Singers!



We finished the afternoon with mince pies, stollen cake and mulled wine. Tea and coffee was also on offer but there was very little demand. I think the audience participation in the singing (which was pretty good anyway) would have been even better had we got stuck into the mulled wine a little earlier.

All in all, a successful and sociable end to our year. Many thanks to all those RUMs who made sure the mulled wine was hot, the mince pies were warmed and the kitchen left clean and tidy. It wouldn't happen without you!

Jane Hawthorn

January Monthly Meeting report

How Green is your Money Monthly meeting talk from Annie Wall and Jane Morgan.

Jane and Annie are representatives of Win Green Town. (www.win-green-town.org.uk). They want to grow awareness of where money is invested by big institutions, banks and maybe even governments. Their concern is mainly focused on what our biggest bank institutions are doing. Their motivation came from the £4.4 trillion investment into fossil fuel exploration and extraction. Most of the banks have signed up to a zero carbon promise, but it seems unlikely it has started quite yet? Presenting to local groups is one of their main methods of spreading the word.

Some banks were bigger investors: Barclays, £151b: HSBC £115.2 b: Santander, £40: Nat West £13b: Lloyds, £12b. There appear to be no clean hands here? The greenest banks were Triodos, Co-op, Nationwide and Monzo. The main action they suggested was considering moving to a greener bank. And consider asking advice from your own independent financial advisor to look at potential for greener investing. They did emphasise taking advice - it does feel too scary to just jump in yourself!

That was the big picture. To help overcome “eco-anxiety” there are local initiatives all over the country, in about 400 towns, which are collectively named ‘transition towns’. Winchcombe is one of these, as is Bishops Cleeve, Cheltenham and Stroud. It may be simple things like having a toy library, which can be part of an initiative called ‘waste not, want not’. Car sharing clubs, getting more electric vehicle charging points fitted, pointing people to home and energy advice, better insulation suggestions.

The Green Money Group has a digital newsletter. In 2024 they are aiming to work with Abbeyfields, St Peter’s church, and Winchcombe school locally to improve their energy efficiency.

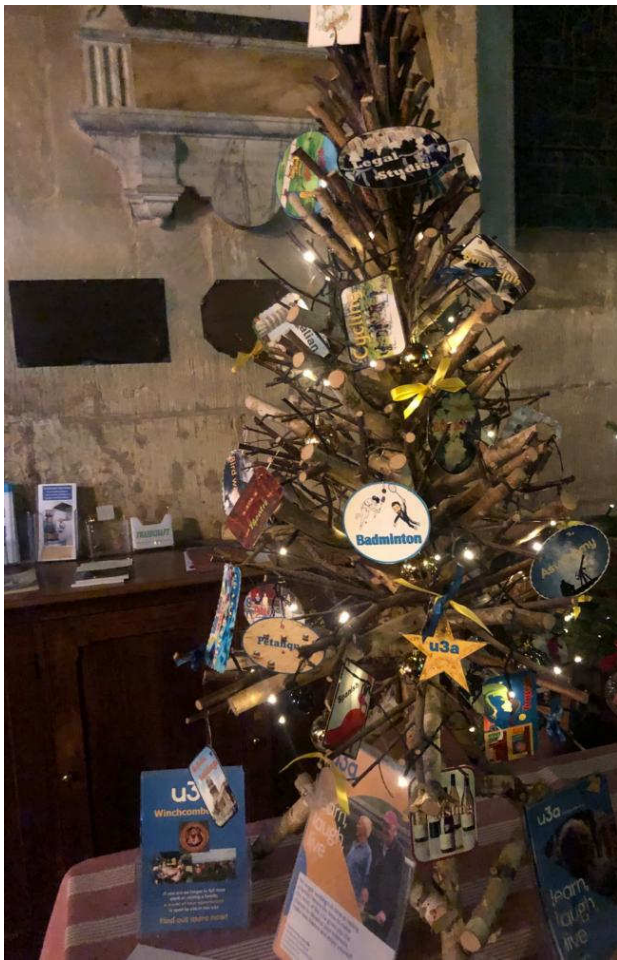
So the noise is at international level and local. Jane and Anne both reiterated that if you do change bank account for ethical reasons, to make sure you let the bank know what that is your decision. The more the senior management hears about this happening, the more likely they are to reconsider their investment strategies. It is our money, after all.

Phil Hawthorn

St Peter’s Christmas Tree Festival 8th - 10th December

At the end of October, we were approached by the organiser of St. Peter’s Christmas Tree Festival to ask if our u3a would like to take part. Having established that Jean Jones (our Vice Chair) was willing to take on the task of coordinating a small team to decorate the tree we decided to go ahead. This was very much aimed at local businesses and charities and everyone was encouraged to leave information with their tree.

Karen Kane (our Speaker Secretary) supplied an unusual wooden tree, Paul and Sarah McDonald supplied decorations – in the u3a colours of blue and gold. Jean was assisted by Joy Mitchell and the result was incredible. Jean made tags of all our group names with



imaginative pictures (e.g. a cat for the Birdwatching group). By a fortunate clash of dates the Tree Festival coincided with the Christmas Festival in Winchcombe which attracted hordes of people.

The whole event was magical – we visited twice. On Friday evening when it was quiet and peaceful with the church and trees beautifully lit and then during the day when it was buzzing and busy with people. There were about 20 trees in all with some very imaginative decorations – yellow dusters in the shape of crackers (Church Cleaners); lights in the shape of cows and milk-urn decorations (Cotteswold Dairies); a tower of loo-roll inners (Tiny Tots Nursery); and many more. I hope you managed to get to the church and vote for your favourite. If not there’s always next year.

Many thanks to Jean and Joy for your hard work in putting this together and others for contributing to the event.

Jane Hawthorn

Coach Visit programme

The following trips are planned over the next few months.

Month	Destination	Cost
February 21st	Coventry Transport Museum & tour	£25
March 20th	Day trip to Bath	£18
April 24th	Chavenage House - Tour and cream tea	£35
May 22nd	Bristol Botanic Garden and Bristol Museum	£26
June 19th	WWT Slimbridge & Peter Scott House	£28
July 11th	Day trip to Wells & Wells Cathedral	£18

Tickets are still be available for most of the visits. The price includes coach travel and entrance. If you are interested please let Di Smith know [here](#).

Cheques to Winchcombe Area U3a and post or deliver to me at 5 The Halt Close Becketts Lane, Greet GL54 5RN. Any questions just call me on my mobile number 07340247255.

Di Smith

News from the groups

Proposed Group - Bridge for Beginners

Do you want to learn Bridge? Lynne Smith is proposing setting up a group for beginners and those with just a basic knowledge of the game. The idea is to meet, possibly on a Tuesday afternoon, with an experienced player who can provide some initial coaching, while players gain experience. Lynne is happy to coordinate the group.

Is there an experienced player who would be prepared to do some coaching? If interested either as a player or coach please contact Lynne [here](#).

Lynne Smith

Coach Visit reports

Waddesdon Manor for Christmas

Waddesdon Manor lit up for Christmas was yet another of the wonderful visits that Di Smith organises.



It was quite a long drive to get to our destination and the day was chilly, but we all felt that it was a really good day out.

Being the first day of the Christmas market there were bargains to be had and the illuminations and the light show were spectacular.

I especially enjoyed walking through the woodland watching the colours changing on the trees.

Jean Jones

A Dickensian Christmas, 6 December 2023

'Twas a suitably cold and misty morning as some 30 of us set forth by coach to Coventry for a taste of a Dickensian Christmas.

Mulled wine and warm mince pies along with our guide awaited us on arrival at the magnificent Guildhall, which stands cheek-by-jowl with the famous Cathedral. We were then shown to our seats for an hour's entertainment in the form of carols sung by a trio in Dickensian costume, who provided musical interludes to a lively one-man enactment of Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*.

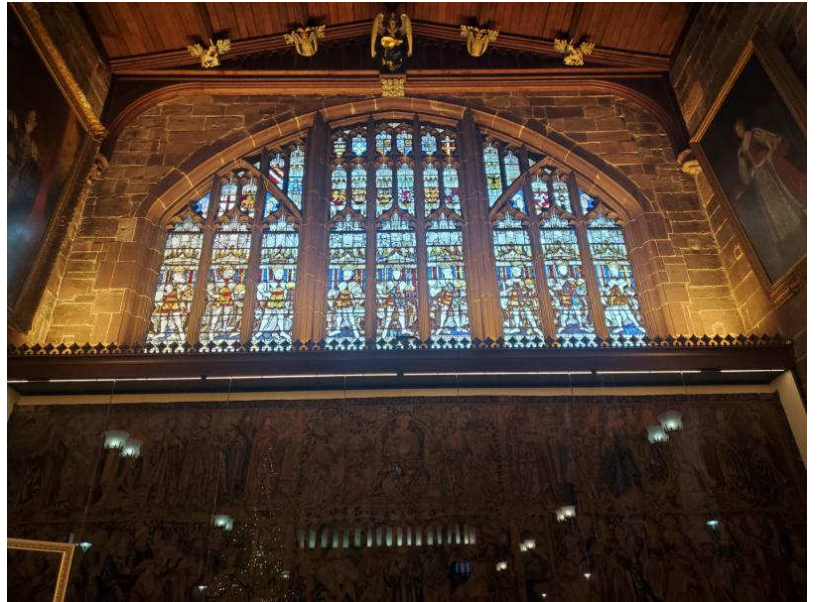
What followed was a private guided tour of the Guildhall, originally built for the Guild of St Mary as long ago as the 1340s.

The original 3-storey Caesar's Tower is also thought to date from the 14th century. The first timber-framed building was later demolished and rebuilt in stone with a complex of rooms, including a gatehouse, porch and kitchen.

Like its illustrious neighbour the Cathedral, the Guildhall and Caesar's Tower suffered much damage during the bombing raids of the Second World War.

After extensive repairs, renovation work and modernisation over many years the Guildhall we see today is a testament to the skill of the craftsmen whose painstaking restorations are astonishingly difficult to detect.

A thoughtfully planned schedule left time to explore this interesting area of Coventry and find a place for lunch. The Golden Cross, Coventry's oldest pub, was just a minute's walk away. Our thanks to Di Smith, whose choreography included suitably crisp wintry weather.



Philip Mason

Visit to RAF Cosford 19 October

On an October day of unpromising weather, Di Smith took a group from Winchcombe U3A to visit the RAF Museum at Cosford near Telford. I have been interested in aircraft since my schooldays, and have a degree in aeronautical engineering, but have never visited this museum.

On arrival we were immediately met by three volunteers to be conducted on a guided tour. We were divided into three groups and handed small radio receivers with headphones. Our guides had radio transmitters, which meant that we never struggled to hear what our guide was saying. Oh that other venues would do the same!

Our tour took almost 2 hours, and led us through the history of the aircraft of the RAF from its earliest days up to about 1980. The first aircraft we were introduced to was a Sopwith Pup, a biplane fighter with a rotary engine, which entered service in 1916. Much to my surprise, even by 1916 synchronising gear was fitted so that the gun could fire through the propeller. We then moved on to the most famous aircraft of WW2, the Spitfire, where we learned much detail. Over 20,000 were built, and there are still 201 extant, although only 75 are airworthy. Next to the Spitfire was a Wellington bomber. Although nearly 11,500 were built, only 2 survive (the only pair of Wellingtons in the world!) This was innovative, having been designed by Barnes Wallace with a geodetic airframe.

There were several other aircraft, including German ones, from WW2, but what really caught my imagination was a Fairey Delta 2. Only two of these were built, and in 1956 one of them (the other one!) raised the world airspeed record from 822 mph to 1132 mph. I was so impressed at the time that I made two models of it. What I didn't know was that Fairey had to fight opposition from the Ministry of Supply, who said military aircraft were almost obsolete since rockets would be used in future, and Rolls Royce, who made the engine and said it would break up if they tried to go above 1000mph. The FD2 had a "droop snoot", and was later converted to test the Concorde concept.



Having exhausted this hangar, we moved into a large purpose-built one, so crammed with aircraft that it was not easy to get a good view of any individual one. We stood under the wing of a Vulcan, and this brought back memories. As part of my degree I spent a summer in the Avro factory at Chadderton near Oldham, where Vulcans were built. Well, not quite, since there was no way of flying them from Chadderton. In the factory wings and fuselage were built, then carried by road through Manchester city centre to Woodford on the south, where they were assembled into complete aircraft. As this was always done in the dead of night I never saw it, but it was almost impossible to imagine the enormous wing we stood under on a lorry.

In the open air there were several aircraft spread around the site. One rather strange one was a Gloster Meteor modified with an extra cockpit in the nose. This was flown in 1954 as an experiment. The idea behind it was that a pilot lying prone had two advantages. Firstly, the cross-section of the fuselage could be reduced, which would reduce the drag, and secondly the pilot would be better able to withstand g-forces. It was proved in flight that it was workable, but only just as the pilot found it difficult to operate the controls. A major complication was the emergency exit for the pilot. The idea was quickly abandoned.

Inevitably an RAF museum will concentrate on its fighting capabilities, but a display on the Berlin Airlift covered a very different aspect of their work. About 75% of the 400,000 tons flown into Berlin were carried by the USAF, with the RAF and British civilian aircraft handling the rest. A total of 124.4M miles were flown. Berliners were supplied with about 2300 calories a day, which was more than the British were allowed with post-war rationing. By the end of day I still felt there was a lot more to see, and I will go again.

Thank you, Di.

Arnold Edward

Group Reports

Ambling

The ambling group continues to meet every month (weather permitting), usually on a Tuesday or Wednesday morning. Recent outings have included a conducted tour of Winchcombe's old, but now mainly closed, pubs (see the report below) and a short walk just before Christmas to the café at Sudeley castle for coffee and cakes, this proved to be a very sociable event which we may well do again next December.

Plans are already in hand for the next few months. These include a repeat of the enjoyable walk around the fields at the northern end of the racecourse, an amble around the lakes in Pittville Park and yet another visit to the paths around Hayles Fruit Farm.

The group has a healthy membership but we could probably squeeze a few more in providing that everyone doesn't turn up at the same time (seriously though, if this were to happen we'd split into two or three smaller groups for that day). Stout footwear is strongly recommended as the terrain is sometimes rough and muddy, as is waterproof clothing for inclement weather conditions.

Contact Derek Thom Group Coordinator [here](#)

Derek Thom

Ambling group Pub Walk

The ambling group enjoyed a gentle and intriguing wander around the streets of the town in November, discovering the legacy of the inns that Winchcombe has enjoyed, and now lost. At one time the town played host to 27 hostleries, today we have only four - but hey, quality before quantity!

Starting outside the Plaisterers Arms, one of the survivors, we set off down Hailes Street, where the Old Sudeley Arms still bears that name, into Chandos Street where the only red brick house in the road was a pub for a hundred years, down North Street past The Gate which Emma Dent optimistically turned into a temperance cafe, and up Gretton Road as far as the old Bell, now two semi detached homes.

Ending up at the Corner Cupboard, originally a farmhouse and only becoming licensed premises in the late 1800s, we enjoyed the usual excellent food and drink, and reflected on our good luck at living in such a convivial town. Our grateful thanks go to Roger Grime, our knowledgeable walk leader, and also to Ellen Ballard for the arrangement.

Jo Rees

French



Lunch at L'Artesan French restaurant in Cheltenham was a Christmas treat for the French group, where the only proviso was that we spoke only French during the meal. It certainly made a change from our usual meetings, and was very much enjoyed by us all. We continue to meet weekly, alternating between informal sessions in members' homes, and reading, translating and discussing texts on a variety of subjects at Gretton Village Hall. We currently have a vacancy, so anyone with at least a basic working knowledge of the language would be very welcome to join us. Contact Maureen Ward [here](#)

Maureen Ward

Family History Group

Tracing your ancestors and building a family tree is very interesting. However, it is even more satisfying to learn as much as you can about your ancestors' lives and their social and economic circumstances. At the Family History group we look at these aspects and so we can get an appreciation of how our ancestors lived their lives.

I will mention a couple of subjects that we covered in 2023.

At our September meeting we had a guide from the Tourist Information Office take us around Winchcombe and relate the relevance of various historic buildings in their heyday.

When Christianity arrived in this country it built upon existing pagan rituals, and incorporated them into Christian ceremonies. For example, Christmas takes place at what was the winter festival.

The October meeting looked at the origins of traditions at weddings and how nearly all aspects incorporate pagan beliefs. Most of this was about the fear of the devil. The ringing of bells is to drive the devil away, as is the use of fire (in the form of candles, and the veil was yellow to symbolise fire). Bridesmaids and the Best man dressed the same as the Bride and Groom so as to confuse the devil as to who was getting married. Wedding guests wore rosemary or garlic to ward off unwelcome evil spirits or vampires.

So nearly all of us have witnessed, and a lot participated in, the pagan traditions of our ancestors. The Family History group meets in the morning of the first Wednesday of the month at The White Hart. If you are interested then please contact Roland Lethbridge [here](#)

Roland Lethbridge

Table Tennis

The table tennis group held a light hearted festive tournament on its last session of the year. It was tight finish with only one point separating Maureen Ballingall, the winner, from John Mackleworth, the runner up.

More importantly, everybody had a good time. For more information about this group contact Martin Blackwell [here](#)

Martin Blackwell

Historic Buildings and Churches

Usually Winter marks a pause in our activities but this year we joined the Cotswolds u3a for a talk at their January monthly meeting. The planned meeting was a talk on the historic National Trust pub, the Fleece at Bretforten and some of its history by the current landlord. Unfortunately illness intervened and a last minute substitution was a talk on the life of the Arts and Crafts architect C R Ashbee, who founded the Chipping Campden Guild of Arts and Crafts. This provided an interesting adjunct to our visit to Chipping Campden earlier this year to look at the impact the Guild had on the historic buildings in the town. We will arrange a visit to the Fleece talk if it is rearranged and indeed a visit to the pub if we find ourselves in that direction.



A draft programme for the rest of the year includes another Winter visit - a tour behind the scenes at Cheltenham's Playhouse Theatre on 25th February.

The remaining programme includes:

- a visit to Madresfield Court near Malvern;
- a return visit to one of our old favourites, Kelmscott Manor (William Morris's House) which has been refurbished since our last visit;
- and another to Hook Norton Brewery, as many of our newer members missed out on these particular highlights.

A visit to the Black Country museum has also been suggested, but this may require coach travel to be organised.

As always members suggest (and often lead) visits so there is always scope to add a favourite place.

To join the group for any of these visits contact John Hurley [here](#)

John Hurley

Getting in touch

You can contact group leaders and committee members through the form on the contact page of the website <https://u3asites.org.uk/winchcombe/contact> or through the email link on the Beacon website page.

Joining Groups

The best way to get in touch with group leaders is through the website at <https://u3asites.org.uk/winchcombe/groups>

Full information on joining groups is provided on that page of the website.

Alternatively to contact Jane Hawthorn the groups coordinator click [here](#):

Next issue

The deadline for submissions for the **May** issue is **8th April 2024** but send your entries before then whenever you wish to this address: newsletter@winchcombeu3a.org.uk