



**u3a**  
Winchcombe Area

# Newsletter

November 2023

The Washpool Cleeve Hill - Alastair Robinson

## Editorial - It looks like the Summer is over .....

Autumn is one of my favourite times of year, with its festive traditions from harvest home to Christmas. "Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness" as Keats so aptly put it, mixing the melancholy of the dying light of Summer with the anticipation of our winter festivals. And although at the time of writing I have yet to fully experience the joy of crunching my way through fallen leaves on a country walk during a crisp, bright day, that remains something to look forward when the leaves eventually and belatedly drop.

With Climate change we are having to adjust to increasingly odd weather patterns and this year has been no exception. Overall though, as May and August's editions have shown this has been a good year for u3a groups going out and about and we carry reports of some of the highlights of their visits. As we hunker down for who knows what sort of winter, on recent form grabbing the wellies more frequently, we can look forward to a vigorous programme of indoor activities through late autumn and winter. So for this edition I have divided group reports into Indoor and Outside visit group sections, with a list of all our active groups and how to contact group leaders.

## And the clouds darken

There are various Domesday Clocks, on climate and international affairs and they have both edged nearer to midnight over the last couple of years, with climate emergencies and political violence erupting across the world. These factors are also increasingly interlinked and as we have seen events 1000s of miles away may have serious repercussions for us.

Let us be clear from the last few years that terror is terror whether committed by armed groups or states. Sadly violence also begets violence, and the abused and traumatised young of one period can too easily become the perpetrators of the next. To understand the roots of terror is not to condone it, but to judge without understanding the historical contexts of conflicts does little to stabilise our world.

There are competing territorial claims and oppressed minority peoples across the world. The [United Nations](#) and organisations like [Human Rights Watch](#) regularly report on these and are ignored. Violence is inevitable unless just and fair mutually agreed settlements are reached. We are far from that.

*John Hurley*

## Notes from the Chair

The clocks go back on the last weekend of October. We have two 1:00 a.m.'s early on Sunday 29th. An extra hour in bed but it suddenly feels properly autumn when the sun sets an hour earlier by the clock. I do love autumn though. Such a fast change of leaves and weather. Some of the best and sharpest lights in the whole year. More stars to behold. Crisp mornings. Frosty mornings. And dragging the slow cooker out of the back of the cupboard to work it's casserole miracles. One of my favourite smells of the whole year – and it somehow makes the house feel warm?

It also feels like a good opportunity to be very involved in your interest groups of choice. It is such a positive feeling for our general well-being to meet up with friends and colleagues as the nights draw in. And we do have our monthly meetings to look forward to, and there may be cake at the December one – no promises, but you never know. On top of that there is potential to go on one of our organised trips every month as we speak. But you'll have to hurry to secure your places, via Di Smith.

I hope you all enjoy yourselves staying connected.

### New Group Leaders

Our u3a is very much alive and well. Our membership numbers continue to grow which is very pleasing. We have stormed past the Covid Interlude. One of the issues with being successful is it can create problems. We have 38 active interest groups. Some of those groups are bursting at the seams – due to safety concerns (e.g. cycling) or just a lack of space if meeting at the group leads house. This means we are always looking for new Group Leaders. You do not have to be expert in the field, as long as the potential members have some knowledge. The main skill needed is administration and keeping the group informed about meeting times and dates via email or WhatsApp, for example.

If you are thinking of joining a group but it is already oversubscribed, why not consider setting up a new group in the subject area? The current leads are more than willing to help you through the process of setting up and getting your first meeting going. Remember, our whole u3a movement is volunteer led. We cannot exist without this input. So, step forward and be counted!

*Phil Hawthorn*

## Updating Group Information on the Website

Not all group information on the website is up-to-date. If group leaders can check their entry and let me know if changes are required I can amend the information. If a group leader wishes to edit their own page then they should contact me by email and I will issue them with login credentials. The instructions are provided by the system when they login and I would be happy to support any group leader who wishes to do this.

You can contact me through the form on the contact page of the website [here](#): <https://u3asites.org.uk/winchcombe/contact> or through the email link on the Beacon website page.

*Gary Search*

## The Winchcombe Country Show

The weather still feels quite similar to August Bank Holiday Monday, as I write this in early October although the Indian summer may be a distant memory when you read this. It was a lovely day for the show. We managed to get a really good pitch, in a great position, which meant we had lots of passing trade. Our offerings of books and plants enticed many to browse and chat. The lingering meant that many of the visitors wanted to find out more about our u3a. So much so that we gained 15 new members, which is testament to all of those who helped on the stand.

Thank you to all of the committee and members who helped out on the day. It is always very heartening to see how powerful volunteering can be. Ian even managed to find a home for the excess books that didn't sell, taking them around to various charity shops, so our collation of all those books not only made our stand very busy, it also has helped other local charities too. Thanks again to all of those who donated plants and book, and to all the smiling attendees at the stand itself.

*Phil Hawthorn*

## Readership Survey

In the last issue I asked people the following question.

When I took over editorship of the newsletter in February 2022 I distributed it directly to members and received many notes of thanks as a result. Subsequently I have notified people that it is available on the website, to avoid spamming your inbox, but wonder if there is a diminishing readership in consequence? If you are looking at this could you just confirm readership by mailing a "yes" to [newsletter@winchcombeu3a.org.uk](mailto:newsletter@winchcombeu3a.org.uk)

I also emailed you all to ask whether members preferred to be sent the newsletter directly or access it through the website. The answer was an overwhelming preference to have it sent directly with more than a third of you responding positively with only three negative responses and a couple of qualified yes votes. Thank you to all who responded.

*John Hurley*

## Monthly Meetings

The meeting talks programme continues to provide a range of interesting topics. The programme for this quarter is now planned. As always tea and biscuits are available after the event. Brian Hayward and Karen Kane

**Tuesday 14th November 2023**      Mike Sumner: Producing a TV Commercial

**Tuesday 12th December 2023**      Social

**Tuesday 9th January 2024**      Annie Wall and Jane Morgan from the Winchcombe Green Town Group 'How Green Is Your Money?'

**Tuesday 13th February 2024**      Graham Pitchfork, local author. 'The Air Transport Auxiliary' The story of the ferry pilots during WW2.



## Coach Visit programme

If you registered to go to either Waddesdon Manor on 22nd November and / or the Guildhall Coventry Dickensian Christmas event 6th December but have yet to pay please do so. Also if you are no longer interested please let me know. Cheques to Winchcombe Area U3a and post or deliver to me at 5 The Halt Close Becketts Lane, Greet GL54 5RN.

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

Please note Waddesdon Manor on 22nd November departing at 11am cost £28 NT or £44 non NT. Worth joining the National Trust perhaps.

The Guildhall Coventry Dickensian Christmas event 6th December depart 0900hrs cost £26.

Any questions just call me on my mobile number 07340247255.

**Di Smith**

## Visit to Berkeley Castle

### The Quiz that's not a quiz!

- \* In which square do the nightingales sing? That should be easy?
- \* Which Irish cleric founded a college, named after him, in Yale in the early/ mid 1700's. He was part of 'the family'?
- \* Which family has owned their castle for the most centuries in England?
- \* Edward II was kept captive here and died, some say, in mysterious circumstances. Where?
- \* The castle has been used in the filming of Wolf Hall, The Ghost Hunter, The Other Boleyn Girl, Poldark, and more .?

No doubt you may already have guessed that the answer to all of the above is the Berkeley family.

- \* It is they that owned Berkeley Square, and indeed much of Mayfair at one time.
- \* It is Bishop Berkeley who donated land and books to Yale for Yale to found a new college, Berkeley College.
- \* The Berkeley family are the family that have owned Berkeley Castle south of Sharpness and Slimbridge since 1154.
- \* It is where Edward II met his end.
- \* And the film buffs will recognise the picture from the various films.

On a Monday in early Sept an intrepid group of 32 u3a'ers, some in the picture visited Berkeley Castle and had what most described as an excellent guided tour. This was informative, not rushed and questions were answered. For many a return visit to this Historic Houses property is being planned to better take in the many interesting rooms and magnificent paintings. A great day out courtesy of Di Smith. Many thanks.



**Nick Hoskins**

## News from the groups

### Joining Groups

*While summer is the peak activity time for some groups others are primarily winter activities. Indoors or outdoors there is always a new Winchcombe u3a group to try.*

*Why not try a new activity for Christmas? There is a natural turnover of group members, people decide to try new things after a while, move away or simply become less active. Many of the indoor groups on the next pages are looking to recruit for the winter season - why not give them a go. Even if groups are full it is worth contacting leaders to see if a place becomes available.*

*A full list of currently active groups is provided on the next page and details of all our groups are available on the website and on Beacon. Your interests are not there or the group is full? Why not start a new group yourself. Use the newsletter to advertise a new interest. We are always looking for new people to start new activities and groups to keep our local u3a fresh and interesting.*

**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.**

## New group

### Modern Technology and Gadgets

The aim of this group is to come together and share our understanding of the many digital services that have become an important part of staying connected and living today.

Getting to grips with smartphones, tablets and computers can feel overwhelming, but learning in a comfortable environment from fellow U3A members can help boost confidence.

Each month we will tackle topics suggested by members, who have had specific problems and also explore some of the many Smart Home devices and Apps that are now on offer to make our lives easier!

If you would like to help others by sharing your knowledge or you need some help on a specific topic, please get in touch.

Topics suggested so far include: "how to set up WhatsApp groups", "accessing WiFi whilst out and about", "using Google maps for driving, walking and bus timetables", cast to a TV from phone or tablet, and simple things like "turning your phone to silent whilst in a meeting or in the theatre!".

So why not come along and join in trying to keep up with modern technology! Contact Jenny Mackelworth via the website [here](#):

## Currently active groups

***Ambling***

***Astronomy***

***Badminton***

***Birdwatching & Ecology***

***Board Games***

***Book Club***

***Book Group 2***

***Book Group 3***

***Botany***

***Cards/Whist***

***Causez en Francais***

***Cribbage***

***Cycling***

***Digital Photography***

***Discussion Group***

***Family History***

***French***

***French Conversation***

***Garden Design***

***Garden Visits***

***Good Companions***

***Historic Buildings***

***Italian***

***Legal Studies***

***Local History***

***Mahjong***

***Modern Technology and Gadgets***

***Outdoor Sketching***

***Petanque***

***Play reading***

***Science/Engineering/Technology***

***Spanish***

***Table Tennis***

***Theatre Visits***

***Travel Forum***

***Walking Dogs***

***Walking - Easy 4-6 miles***

***Wine Group: Learning about Wine***

***Writing for fun***

***What an amazing range of choice, but here are some ideas from other u3a which we do not offer:***

***Art and Art History: Music and Jazz:***

***Golf: Chess: Furniture Restoration:***

***Philosophy and Social Sciences:***

***Crafting and many others.***

***Interested in starting a group - give it a go!***

## Indoor Group Reports

### Book Groups

Our u3a has a very literary set of interests as we have not one but three thriving groups. There are, however, still opportunities to join in.

### Book group 3

We are still 5 original members and happy to take newcomers. We now meet on the 2nd Thursday of the month at the right hand bar at the The White Hart.

So far each member has selected book for discussion but we will be having a review of this at our next meeting. This is a 'led' group but democratic in operation! We started with a number of suggestions from our leader about how we might go about approaching our discussions and at the moment continue with this format. To join contact [Jenny Scampion](#) through the link on the [Groups page on the u3a website](#).

### Cribbage

The group started in April and is going well, with usually between 6-8 players at each meeting. We meet at The White Hart on the 4th Thursday of the month from 10.30 to midday. We range from complete beginners to experienced players and would be delighted to welcome any prospective new members. If interested please contact me through the link on the [Groups page on the u3a website](#). [Ingrid Lethbridge](#)

### French

The French group continues to flourish. We meet weekly, alternating between our more formal sessions in Gretton village hall when we read, translate and discuss pre-chosen texts, and informal get-togethers in members' homes, when we chat in groups of two or three about anything and everything (always in French of course). We do now have a couple of vacancies if anyone fancies joining us. All you need is a basic knowledge of French and the ability to understand and be understood at a rudimentary level. [Maureen Ward](#)

### Writing for fun

Most of us haven't written creatively (fact or fiction) since leaving school. You may well be surprised to see how the words flow put of you once you have an idea. We write a piece of about 1000 words on a given theme once a month and then get together to read them out to other members of the group. We don't go in for literary criticism but we do enjoy the different takes on each topic.

We are a very informal group and would welcome new members even if you are only passing through to see what we get up to.

Contact [Martin Blackwell](#) for more information.

### Table Tennis

The table tennis group continues to play from 11 until 1 on Mondays in the Winchcombe Sports Hall. We mainly play doubles and players of all standards are welcome, so if you have never played or last played many years ago this is a good opportunity to start.

Contact [Martin Blackwell](#) for more information.

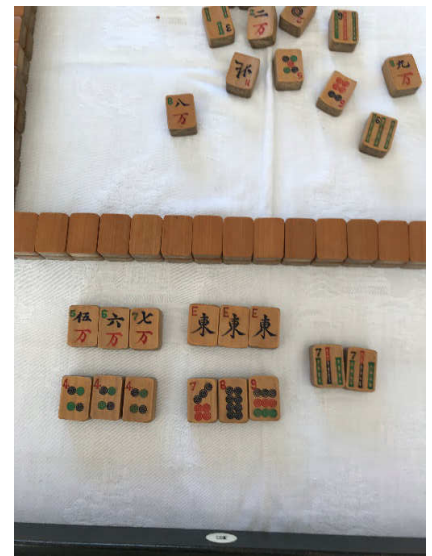


## Mah Jong

The new Mah Jong group has started very well. After only two meetings there are about a dozen people interested, and both meetings were well attended. The meetings are fortnightly on a Tuesday evening. Although some members of the group have less experience than others of playing Mah Jong, everyone is enjoying learning together.

Mah Jong is different to the 'pairs' game that is available on the internet. The tiles have Oriental themes, such as bamboo, characters, winds and dragons, and sets are collected to win a round of play. Whilst the rules and actual play can seem complicated, the game is straightforward once the basics are known.

These photos show a game in progress and a typical winning hand. There are variations on winning hands which are easy to know.



Whether you have no experience at all of Mah Jong and would like to learn or have played in the past and would like to start playing again, you would be very welcome to join the group. [Contact Nigel Sharp](#)

## Visiting groups

### Birdwatching & Ecology

A few of us went to the small gravel pit reserve at Broadway, and were surprised to find that the lake which had been there when we went previously (pre Lockdown) had virtually all drained away leaving just a small muddy puddle.

Needless to say, this did not attract any water birds, although there were the usual Robins, Great Tits and Blue Tits to be found. We were also able to take a good look at the Grey Wagtail feeding amongst the weeds.

On doing some research courtesy of Mr. Google on our return, apparently the water levels in the old gravel pit are managed on a seasonal basis, and are naturally at their lowest at the end of the summer before the autumn and winter rains set in.

Contact [David Ayres](#).



## Ambling

The Ambling Group meets monthly generally on a Wednesday. It undertakes a range of easy to moderate walks which vary from local Cotswold trails to an exploration of the alleyways of Tewkesbury. A typical walk saw us leaving Winchcombe by bus to Prescott, following the lane uphill, and taking an easy trail through varied scenery to the high point - both in terms of geography and interest - Frog Wood.



The walk then descended slowly to Langley Road and thence back to Winchcombe where some repaired to the Corner Cupboard for lunch.

For further details contact [Derek Thom](#)

## Garden Visiting Group

During the year we have enjoyed visiting various gardens - the Lords of the Manor hotel at Lower Slaughter; Downton House, Painswick; Rockcliffe; Oak House, Gretton and Conderton Manor, often with tea and cake too!

Each very different in style and scale but within a reasonable distance from Winchcombe for an afternoon trip. Some have been National Garden Scheme openings while others have opened specially for us and we have had guided tours.

The group is small and varied but growing and we try to vary the timings of the visits, about one a month during the summer months, so that members with other commitments should be able to manage some dates. Some members are more knowledgeable, while for others it is just a nice trip out.

For further details contact [Natalie Stone](#).

## Historic Buildings and Churches

This has been a good year for our visits and even if we have had to take account of the weather on a couple of occasions the sun has generally shone upon us. Visits have been well supported and as the reports show have been full of varied interest. We even managed to catch up on visits postponed due to Covid. The programme for 2024 is in preparation and will be published in the next edition. Meanwhile we can look back on some great experiences (and a few nice meals) - see the reports below.

Groups run on a car share principle starting at the library and take place approximately once a month from April to October with occasional Christmas visits locally.

To join this group contact [John Hurley](#).



### ***Cogges Manor and Minster Lovell***

Our exploration of some of the significant built heritage of West Oxfordshire took place over the course of two visits during the summer, one to Cogges Manor and Minster Lovell and a subsequent visit to Buscot House near Faringdon.

Settlement at Cogges Manor museum on the outskirts of Witney dates back to the Normans with the Manor House itself built in the early medieval period and evolving over the centuries to meet the changing demands of tenants and owners. Over that period of time it had church and noble ownership including the Lovell family of Minster Lovell, before becoming the property of a mercantile family, a school, and eventually a farmhouse for the last 200 years. Each generation left its mark through buildings or decoration which allows the museum to illustrate each epoch in the various rooms. The house has a range of fine 18th and 19th century outbuildings and a beautiful garden all maintained by volunteers, who also run it as a small working farm.



The farm had been the property of a family who still farm nearby since the 1870s, but its main use came to an end in the 1960s when its land was sold for housing. The building was acquired by the County Council as a rural life museum and subsequently passed to the volunteer museum trust. A lovely aspect of its situation in suburban Witney is that the cafe and grounds have become a well used resource for local families.

The group progressed to Minster Lovell where we had an excellent lunch at the historic Swan Inn before visiting the site of the Minster - the derelict remains of a fine country house built by the Lovell family but abandoned for three centuries. It is now maintained by English Heritage. Adjacent is the tiny St Kenelm's church, one of 12 pilgrim Churches on the route to St Kenelm's well in Winchcombe. This unusual cruciform church with a central Tower has a strongly medieval atmosphere and shows very strongly the class and geographical divisions over the ages.



Minster Lovell has another place in the history of class struggle in 19th century Britain as it was the first site on which the Chartist Land company built its settlements of bungalows and land to enfranchise working people as 40 shilling freeholders - who could then exercise the vote. Bungalows were also built at Staunton (between Ledbury and Gloucester) and in the Forest of Dean. This route to enfranchisement failed when the Chartist Land company became bankrupt after a few years, but the built legacy remains.

### ***Buscot House***

The August visit to Buscot House was a half day event starting at the historic Trout Inn at Lechlade ( which features in Jerome K Jeromes satire "Three men in a Boat" and the 2006 television series based on it with Griff Rhys Jones, Dara O'Brien and Rory McGrath).

Buscot House is the home of the Faringdon family, and was constructed from 1780 onwards in Italianate style by Edward Lovendon. The land was turned into a "model agricultural estate" in the 19th century and Buscot village was constructed. It was purchased by the first Lord Faringdon in 1916. The second Lord Faringdon, a Labour peer, gifted the house and estate, including the village, to the National Trust in the 1950s in return for the right of the family to reside there and manage the house and estate, which they do to this day.

The house is principally of interest for its Burne Jones tapestries (Burne Jones lived in nearby Kelmscott which was also the home of William Morris) and also the Faringdon collection of artworks from old masters to pre-Raphaelites and modern artists such a Graham Sutherland.

Unfortunately a drizzly day curtailed exploration of the extensive and well planted gardens but the photo shows a somewhat incongruous reconstruction of terracotta warriors in one area.

*John Hurley*



### Visit to Greyfriars House

On Friday 6th October the group visited Greyfriars House in the centre of Worcester, much delayed from 2020 and 2021 due to flood and pestilence. It was worth the wait.

The house was built in the 1480s for wealthy merchant and High Bailiff Thomas Grene. The master craftsmen who designed and built the house used materials of the best quality. Much of the basic construction was made off site and the large panels erected in situ – carpenters marks can still be seen. It is a large wide building, with a long level roof between two triangular gables, three storeys high with a huge gatehouse, allowing horses to pass through to the house entrance. The overall impression is of a typical ‘black and white’ medieval house many of which can be seen in the Hereford and Worcester region. However, Greyfriars has had a chequered history and its survival is remarkable.

Over the years the house passed from owner to owner until it was purchased by a Francis Street in the 1560s. His son, also Francis, inherited the property and wished to extend and update the house. It was at this point that Greyfriars was sold to the city council for £100 in 1610 and Francis rented it on a 400 year lease at £5 per annum.

The house remained in the ownership of the city council until the mid-twentieth century by which time it had seen service as a bakery, beer house and the whole ground floor had been converted into a row of shops. By 1912 the property was showing its age with the sagging roof undergoing urgent repairs, which kept it going until the mid-1930s when it was mainly abandoned and derelict.

The city council issued a demolition order to redevelop the site. However, Worcestershire Archaeological Society had long had this beautiful and historic house in its sights and fought the order. After long and protracted negotiations, including a moratorium on demolitions during the second World War, a Major Thompson came to the rescue by purchasing the freehold from the council and the lease from the current holder as well as carrying out urgent repairs. Having spent the equivalent of over £100,000 by 1946 he had run out of money and the house was again at risk.

Fortunately, the plight of Greyfriars came to the attention of wealthy historians Matley and Elsie Moore. The two siblings were financially comfortable, having inherited money and



property from their father. They negotiated to occupy the house for their lifetime rent free and in return they would restore Greyfriars at their own expense. It was a huge undertaking which started with their occupancy in 1949.

With their knowledge of the mediaeval era and their artistic talent, the Moores were the ideal stakeholders. With the help of Archaeological Society the building was repaired and returned to its original layout. Suitable furniture and fittings were acquired – and then disposed of if the house became too cluttered. The Moores lived simply and frugally eschewing heating and strong lighting. Nothing went to waste if it could be reused or upcycled. However, holidays were one luxury they enjoyed and frequently travelled to Italy and spent three weeks in Somerset every year. Their one exception to mediaeval style was the transformation of their dining room to the Georgian era with the walls decorated in bright yellow paint and original Georgian wallpaper.

In 1952 workers' cottages in Georges Yard at the rear of the property were pulled down and the Moores set about restoring the garden to a peaceful retreat.

The house was acquired by the National Trust in 1966 with the Moores continuing in occupancy until their deaths in the 1980s. They left the entire contents of the house to the Trust.

After a light lunch at the National Trust Cafe the group crossed the road to the Tudor House Museum which after recent resorations is laid out to illustrate the lives of some the residents (and uses over the centuries) of this ancient timber framed building.

We were fortunate to meet the curator who explained how a restoration of an early plaster ceiling had been undertaken.

*Jane Hawthorn*

## 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.

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

## Next issue

The deadline for submissions for the **February** issue is **8th January 2024** but send your entries before then whenever you wish to this address: [newsletter@winchcombeu3a.org.uk](mailto:newsletter@winchcombeu3a.org.uk)