

## From the Chair . . .

Happy New Year to all our Members. I hope the Festive Season went well and the inclement weather has not brought too many bouts of colds and flu . . . Let's hold on to the hope of seeing the forthcoming snowdrops to cheer ourselves up!

We have had a busy time:

- We celebrated u3a week with an "al fresco" picnic in Kingswood on 23rd September. Over 30 people attended and enjoyed the bright and warm sunshine. We were featured in the TAM winter issue. Our thanks to Di and David Tordoff for liaising with Kingswood.
- In October I attended the Trust's AGM in Milton Keynes. It was very nice to resume face-to-face events, but I was rather surprised by the high-tech proceedings with videos and electronic voting . . . I guess this is now the way of the world! Please see the AGM report in the same TAM winter issue.
- We have had superb speakers during September, October and November. Thanks to Josie Turner, our speakers' officer.
- In November we had a very successful Group Co-ordinators meeting in which the question of reliance on electronic communication was raised. This will be discussed again at our next committee meeting. I would like to adhere to the principle of inclusiveness for all members. Thanks to Mo Johnson for organising the meeting.
- Also in November we held a public meeting at Perton Library to promote u3a and attract new members. We didn't have a huge audience, but we made useful contacts with the Library and a very helpful Parish Councillor, Keith Elder, and it is hoped that these will bear fruit in the future.
- Finally, thanks to our Magazine editors, Mike Clack and Carol Chapple for another superb issue.

2024 will be a New Year, indeed! Unfortunately, I must stand down as Chair for family reasons.

I have enjoyed my year as Chair and it saddens me to stand down. I have worked for the Trust's vision of renewal, information sharing, transparency and diversity, and I hope we have made progress on those.

Obviously, the Chair is a pivotal post to give direction to the organisation and to revitalise it.

I urge you to consider taking this challenge for Wolverhampton u3a to continue as a viable organisation. It does not have to be a daunting job as the Chair has always been supported by the rest of committee members. Perhaps two members could do a job-share?

Furthermore, in order to be part of the Third Age Trust we have to fulfil sound governance in the form of a committee formed by a minimum of: Chair, Vice Chair, Treasurer and Secretary. If we could not fill these posts, we would not be part of the u3a Trust: this is how urgent this is!

I shall stand down at the next AGM in March (28th). Save the date!

More details about the AGM and call for post nominations will be sent out to you nearer the time. Please do not hesitate to contact me or any committee members about the role of Chair or any other role in the committee.

All best wishes,

*Mercedes Fonfria, Chair*

[mfonfria@gmail.com](mailto:mfonfria@gmail.com)



## In this issue . . .

### Round the Groups:

- Creative Writing
- Ukulele
- French
- Walking
- Reading
- Classical Music

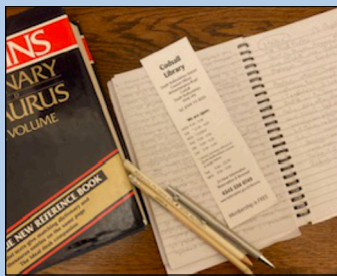
### Other news and articles:

- Wolverhampton u3a Facebook
- Christmas Party
- U3a Communities
- A Piece of Writing
- National Poetry Competition
- Forthcoming Events
- Podcasts by u3a members
- Interest Groups
- Your Committee

## Round the Groups

### Creative Writing

The Creative Writing group has met at Codsall Library, on the second Thursday of each month, since July. We are very pleased with this venue; the staff are welcoming and very helpful. The plan is to carry on at this location for the foreseeable future.



We continue with our tried and tested format of choosing a writing prompt from a pre-prepared selection. This month's prompt was "a chance remark" which resulted in writings ranging from a childhood memory of confused words, to an adopted child's story by way of the goings-on at the Hotel Mongolia. There were also a couple of poems and advice on whether a horse is better than a motor-bike if you want to relive a misspent youth.

We usually find time to have a small quiz too.

(As an aside, Codsall Library has an interesting local history shelf, with publications and maps on the Black Country towns - from the good old days when those places were part of Staffordshire!)

*John Ellard & Tess Fitzsimons, joint coordinators*

### Keep in touch with u3a members on Facebook

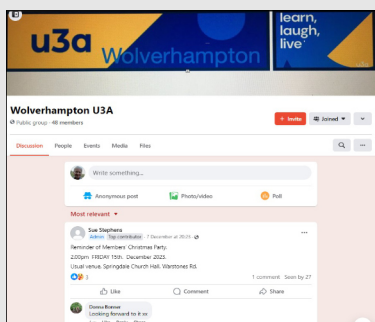


Did you know that Wolverhampton u3a has a FB Group presence?

Sue Stephens has revived the Wolverhampton u3a Facebook Group. If you are already a Facebook user, take a look by searching simply **Wolverhampton u3a**.

We would urge as many members as possible to participate. Facebook is not daunting. It's a great way for members to get to know one another; exchange views and get to know what's going on in a group environment. The more Wolverhampton u3a members who join the community, the more useful the resource will become. It's easy to register and start:

1. Go to [facebook.com](https://www.facebook.com) and click Create new account.
2. Enter your name, email address or mobile phone number, password, date of birth and gender.
3. Click Sign Up.
4. To finish creating your account, you need to confirm your email address or mobile phone number.



### Ukulele group

#### Forthcoming Ukulele group events

The u3a ukulele band has several bookings for early next year already and more will undoubtedly be booked.

We will be featuring in a charity event on January 27th from 3pm onwards at the Chindit pub Merridale Road . . . all welcome.

We are playing for some sheltered accommodation in Shifnal on February 9th, for a dementia group on February 16th and for the widows and widowers of Codsall at the village hall on May 12th.

*Gill Stevens (group coordinator)*



### French group

#### Bienvenue à u3a French group!

We are a group of people who have had very different experiences of learning French. We all want to improve our language skills to enjoy visits to France and also to keep up with French news and culture by reading newspapers such as Le Figaro and articles in our magazine, Bien-dire.



Our group meets fortnightly in a friendly setting: the home of one of our members. We are lucky to have a hostess who is a multi-media expert and selects some superb TV to help us along.

The skills we are learning and improving are French conversation and keeping our vocabulary and grammar up to date. Practising French conversation is good for socialising and learning from one another's experiences.



Whether you want to brush up your French for a holiday or practise French conversation or improve your vocab and grammar, our friendly group can probably help you.

There are no exams and everyone feels at ease and able to join in!



## Walking Group Christmas Dinner

Once again we had a very enjoyable Walking Group Annual Christmas Dinner at the Oakley Arms, Brewwood, on Wednesday 6th December, following a pleasant morning walk around the village led by Garreth Phillips. The original planned walk had unfortunately to be drastically shortened due to earlier inclement weather which resulted in impassable, thick mud and standing water in many places. Thankfully the weather on the day was kinder to us, staying dry with even a few glints of winter sunshine.



After crackers had been pulled; paper hats donned; trinkets found and festive jokes exchanged, we tucked into our tasty two or three courses of festive fare, enjoyed by all.

Another big thank you to Linda Moreland for organising it and making sure we all got what we ordered.

*Diane Tordoff*

## Christmas Party

This year's u3a Christmas party was once again held at Springdale Methodist Church on Friday, 15th December. Around 40 members were welcomed with a festive singalong led by our very own talented guitarist and singer, Josie Turner, ably accompanied by Sheila Garvin on jingles tambourine. Members were seated banquet-style to allow socialising. Whilst waiting for tea and warm mince pies to be served, we challenged ourselves in an informative festive quiz compiled by David Tordoff.

After refreshments, we were all entertained with a music quiz organised by John Sheard, which required us to guess types of weather, animals and girls' names which were contained in the titles of the tunes played: a bit of nostalgia for those who attended the walking holidays in the past. Thanks must go to all who entertained us so well and to the Committee for organising a very enjoyable afternoon.

*Diane Tordoff*

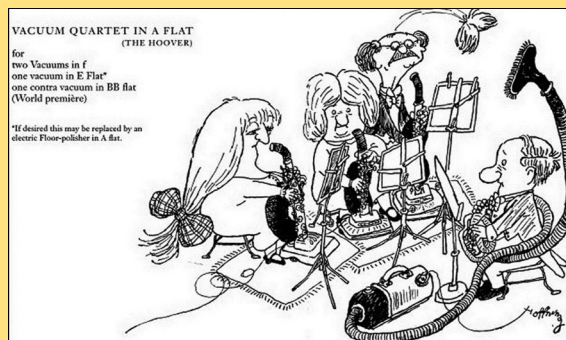


## Classical Music group

The group met ten times in 2023 and the meetings were as varied as ever. Four sessions were devoted to an individual composer – three to the relatively well-known Mendelssohn, Dvorak and Grieg (who wrote much more than Peer Gynt and a piano concerto!) and one to the Uruguayan/American Miguel de Águila who was new to most members.

Early in the year a session was devoted to the BBC Music Magazine 2022 award winners, and included a disparate selection – folk songs by Vaughan Williams, piano music by Shostakovich and opera by Philip Glass. This could well become an annual event in our calendar!

We also had a further selection of Tone Poems, and finished the year with a programme of items suggested by members – from a seasonal sleigh-ride and Christmassy works to Malcolm Arnold's Grand, Grand Overture, inspired by a Gerard Hoffnung cartoon (pictured) and featuring a quartet of three vacuum cleaners and a floor polisher.



If you would like to join us, please contact John Sheard at [sheard56@talktalk.net](mailto:sheard56@talktalk.net). You would be most welcome.

*John Sheard*



Are you interested in Art, History, Books, Climate, Computing, Current Affairs, History or Science and Technology? If so, it may be worthwhile you joining [u3acommunities.org](https://u3acommunities.org).

This runs Zoom-based groups for each of these areas for any member of any u3a in the country. Online sessions take place monthly with very good presenters and time for you to post questions or join in discussions.

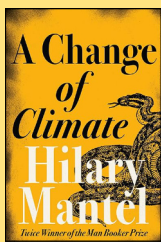
All you need to do is go onto [u3acommunities.org](https://u3acommunities.org), register to join one or more of the interest groups and select the session(s) you want to join. (By the way, they record the sessions and you can access the archive of past presentations.)

Go on, give it a go! You may be pleasantly surprised and can further your knowledge & interest in the subject you currently only participate in locally.

*David Tordoff, Coordinator, Science & Technology*

## Reading group 1

As usual we have had a fascinating and enjoyable choice of books this year. Strangely the first half of the year was dominated by American authors, while the second half was mainly UK writers. The books chosen were predominantly by female authors, and as our members have a free choice of books, this is entirely random. All our choices are modern fiction.



We started the year with a book by Hilary Mantel, one of our finest writers who tragically died in September 22. The book chosen was one of her earlier works – *A Change of Climate*, set in Norfolk.

*Great Circle* by Maggie Shipstead provided us with a good deal to discuss. An unusual book set in two time frames: not an easy read at times, but rewarding. It gives a wonderful insight into the lives of the women who piloted planes during WW2. It even mentions Cosford!

*Olive Kitteridge* by Elizabeth Strout is an example of that wonderful genre of writing about small town America. It has subsequently been made into a film.

One of our favourite writers is Barbara Kingsolver – we read two of her books which have the same characters. They cover issues of community, identity and trans cultural adoption, particularly relevant in relation to the indigenous people of America.

*The Plant Hunter* by T. L. Mogford is an exciting

adventure story about plant collecting in China. So many plants that we take for granted in our gardens were, of course, collected from China at great risk to the plant hunters.

*A Golden Age* by Tahmima Anam is set in Bangladesh and covered the period of the civil war and the atrocities against the Bangladeshi people. I think we all learnt a lot from this book.

*Small Pleasures* by Clare Chambers is a gentle book set in a local newspaper office in the late fifties. It explores issues of loneliness, family obligation, the role of women in society and the workplace and sexual identity.

*The choice of Lila* by Marilynne Robinson wasn't my finest choice, although it got rave reviews from the critics!

Finally, we read *The Island* by Victoria Hislop, which is about Spinalonga, the leper colony in Greece. A very moving story of an island where people with leprosy were kept in isolation. It's a story of how they coped and created a community in the face of this terrible disease. I defy anyone to read this and be unmoved.

The important part of reading these books is the discussion they generate, we often respectfully disagree, and some books are enjoyed more than others, but they give us the opportunity to read a variety of books which might otherwise not be read, and mostly, enjoyed.

Happy Reading!

Jeanette Black. Reading Group 1

## A piece of writing . . .

### Remembrance of An Irish Sailor known only to God.

My maternal grandfather's sister Mary Cahir nee O'Loughlin married a farmer who was prosperous enough to call himself a West Briton in the time of Parnell and Redmond, when W.B. Yeats's 'terrible beauty' was born. Great-aunt Mary and husband Uncle Mal remained loyal to Redmond and 'Home Rule' and faded into history and mere obscurity.

As a child, I remember Great-aunt Mary's daughter, Annie Cahir, my mother's first cousin, was an enigmatic figure. Whenever I visited there with my Mam and my sisters, I was always intrigued by Annie's reverent dusting of ancient, glass plate photographs of the English king, and an unknown picture of a ship anchored in a strange, oriental harbour. Time and new-born life rendered these memories superfluous and those who loomed large in my childhood, now formed a static and silent background to daily life.

Ultimately, wills, disbursements, and sorrow, brought my generation face-to-face in Granduncle O'Loughlin's home again. Talk turned to remembrance of times past. A chance remark drew my attention to the glass plate photographs that had received so much past devotion. I seized the chance to find the secret of the ship; but no one seemed to bother much when I asked to take it as a souvenir, except for Annie to say it was sent back from foreign parts by her brother William known as Bill, who had joined the Royal Navy and was never seen again. A week prior to Annie's death, she gave the photograph to my mother. Shortly before my mother's death in

1984, she gave me the photograph, which I delightedly accepted.

Back in my present home in England, the detective work began. Where was this anchorage? A PC and scanner magnified the hidden details of the image, over a century old. The sampan gliding serenely past the stately vessel, which flew the British Navy's white ensign at the stern, placed it firmly in Chinese waters, and photographic technology was certainly of the Edwardian Era. So, we were visiting the dawn of the 20th century. My husband thought there was something familiar about the wooded hills immediately behind the ship. He had seen the same view on postcards sent home by his National Service cousin, when he was stationed in Hong Kong in the 1960s. So, it was time to google Hong Kong, and there, looking from the city out over Kowloon Bay. There, was the modern but geographically unchanged outline of those mysterious, wooded hills.

A ship has a personality that comes from the shipyard of its birth. Describe its lines to the experts, and they will tell you who she is. We took the date, place, and picture to Greenwich and the National Maritime Museum, who identified her as 'HMS Bramble, Gunboat First Class'. She was on the China station from 1899 to 1910, when she was paid off, and her crew distributed amongst the ships of the Home Fleet.

William Cahir must have been very proud of his ship to send this photograph to his mother and sister. He did not envisage his new posting to Admiral Jellicoe's battle fleet, would end in dreadful loss of life when it met the German High Seas fleet off Jutland 1916.

By Veronica Shepherd, Creative Writing group

## National poetry competition for u3a members



The U3A Poetry Competition (closing date not until Friday 26th January 2024)

is open to all U3A members so why not have a go?

You can see all the details by opening the link below:

[www.u3a.org.uk/learning/poetry-competition](http://www.u3a.org.uk/learning/poetry-competition)

## Forthcoming Events and Speakers

Tues Jan 23rd	Roger Brown <b>The Story of Tin Pan Alley</b> – <i>Performance as it used to be</i>
Tues Feb 27th	Samuel Fieldhouse <b>Environmental Archaeology</b> – <i>Pollen, Plants, Seeds, Food, Lipids</i>
Tue Mar 26th	<b>Annual General Meeting</b> and a guest speaker

## Interest Groups at Wolverhampton u3a

If you are interested in joining a new group, please contact the Group Coordinator – see Wolverhampton u3a website:

[www.u3asites.org.uk/wolverhampton/home](http://www.u3asites.org.uk/wolverhampton/home)

- Reading
- Play Reading
- Poetry
- Shakespeare
- Creative Writing
- French
- German
- Italian
- Spanish
- Latin
- Walking
- Table Tennis
- Food
- How to Read Music
- Ukulele
- Classical Music
- Jazz Appreciation
- Contemporary History
- Philosophy
- Social Issues
- Science & Technology
- Computing
- Self-Study Resources
- Gardening
- Art Appreciation
- Craft
- Board Games

## Podcasts from u3a

Did you know that some enthusiastic u3a members produce monthly radio podcasts?

These are audio recordings covering various subjects of interest. Each recording is only about 30 minutes.

It's a great resource, especially for the housebound and lonely for some informative and gentle listening. There are currently 36 recordings available dating back to 2020.

There's a link from the main u3 website [www.u3a.org.uk](http://www.u3a.org.uk) or direct to: [www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLsB2t41TNozHSJ4fvod\\_yjxrUJDzqbDD](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLsB2t41TNozHSJ4fvod_yjxrUJDzqbDD)



## Your Committee

Mercedes Fonfria	Chair
Mo Johnson	Vice Chair/Groups Coordinator
Mary Warwicker	Secretary
Yvonne Rickard	Treasurer
Julia Hood	Membership Secretary
John Sheard	Beacon Coordinator
Josie Turner	Speakers Secretary
Margaret Taylor	Committee Member
David Ashworth	Committee Member
Carol Chapple	Magazine Co-Editor
Mike Clack	Magazine Co-Editor