

# Spire u3a

Newsletter 66 July 2026



*Salisbury Cathedral from the Old Blandford Road with a chalk pit and cricket match in the foreground. This digitally restored photo from the 1880s shows a noticeable absence of buildings between Hazelmere House on the left and All Saints Church on the right. Also of note, scaffolding on the cathedral tower.*

*Michael Stroud*

## Chairman's Report

As I write, we are experiencing a cooler day. Last week I spent the afternoons sitting outside in the shade, with a freezer pack on my lap and my feet in a bowl of cold water, wearing a large-brimmed hat, doing very little.

Now I am trying to catch up before the next heat dome slides over from the continent. Since our last newsletter we have purchased and used the new laptop and projector, for the June monthly meeting that we talked about at the AGM in April.

Quite a number of you were involved in the research, decision-making and procurement process. Thank you; the kit worked very well.

The Memorial Hall has held its 2026 AGM. (Please see the article below about that.) And some of us have been registering for the online talks associated with the u3a Festival in York. I must say, that once I got through the horror that is Eventbrite, the first lecture on the Vikings in Wessex was most professional.

I was similarly privileged to hear a keynote speech [not u3a] given recently by my favourite historian William Dalrymple. I have never been keen on the restrictions that came in with the introduction of the National Curriculum. Dalrymple made the point that our young people all leave school knowing something about the Romans, the ancient Egyptians and Henry VIII's marriages but nothing about the British Empire, the East India Company and colonialism in what we still call the Middle East – the very historical themes behind many current affairs.

So I am looking forward to reading Dalrymple's next book. But I am also reminded of the phrase Education for Education's Sake. If learning is a key function of u3a aren't we lucky that we are not restricted by someone else's curriculum? – in u3a we can pursue our own learning path.

*Best wishes, Maureen*

## Next Meeting – 10 am coffee for 10:30 start

On Monday 13<sup>th</sup> July, Christine Mason will give a talk on 'Fanny Nelson – The Forgotten Wife'. Her work on Fanny began when a friend in Salisbury was too seriously ill to read a book but wanted some diversion. So Christine wrote snippets of a fictional picture of Fanny's life in Salisbury before her meeting with Horatio Nelson, and the talk grew out of that research when Christine had a request to speak to the Warminster Local History Society – fiction was abandoned for fact. That led to her being asked to present an article on Fanny for inclusion in the current issue of the annual Sarum Chronicle (available in the Salisbury Cathedral and Salisbury Museum shops).



*A pop-corny joke! Michael*

### And next month...

Our speaker on 10<sup>th</sup> August will be our very own Juliet ten Doeschate with her wonderful photos, entitled Brilliant Mini Beasts part 2.

## June Talk – A Hugely Huggable History of the Teddy Bear

Our speaker for June saw the welcome return of Dr Gillian White, who delivered an engaging and lively talk on the history of the teddy bear, whose story spans the twentieth century with ups and downs mirroring history but who endures today as a favourite toy of comfort for both children and adults alike.



We learnt that it all began with Margarete Steiff in Germany, a polio sufferer (*see photo*), who made children's clothing for a living. Using material offcuts, she also began to make toy animals, which rapidly became a success. The business grew with the design input of her nephew Richard, who had the idea to make a bear. The quality of the fur was important to him, and initially it was made with expensive mohair. He exhibited the bear at the Leipzig Toy Fair of 1903, and a New York buyer ordered 3000. Thus, the global brand of the Steiff bear with the trademark button in its left ear was born.

The teddy bear was reputedly named by Morris Michtom after the US president Theodore Roosevelt,

and production in America grew with Michtom's Ideal Novelty and Toy Company. The UK also started to manufacture teddy bears in the early years of the 20th century.

Bears were made to commemorate events of the time – thus Steiff produced a black mourning bear after the sinking of the Titanic, and small mascot war Teddies accompanied soldiers to war.

Post-war saw character and coloured bears and even novelty make-up bears. Over the years famous literary and film bears such as Winnie the Pooh, Rupert, Sooty and Paddington have entered our culture.



*President Theodore "Teddy" Roosevelt refusing to shoot a tied up bear*

Teddy bears have become highly collectable items, and the rarer and older bears change hands at auction for eye-watering sums of money.

From Richard Steiff's original design, the teddy bear has developed in form, style, colour and material but is still today an enduring toy giving safety and companionship, whatever your age.

## Committee News & the lunch in September

The committee met on Monday, July 6, to discuss routine business and future events. Other matters included praise for the new equipment used at meetings, concerns for the future of some Interest Groups, failed efforts to find a new Speaker Secretary and our 'u3a week' lunch on Saturday, 19<sup>th</sup> September.

The next formal committee meeting will be on Monday, November 2<sup>nd</sup> on Zoom at 10 am.

## Group Leaders please read

Some of our Interest Groups are proving popular with members of other u3as. Please ensure that you check that everyone who attends your sessions is a fully paid-up member of u3a. The easiest way to do this is to note down their membership number, occasionally, as printed on their membership card for the current year.

This is the season for trips and outings. There is a basic Risk Assessment Form on the national u3a website. Please send a copy to Frank Bryant, our Health & Safety Officer, before you set off.

'u3a week' is the third week in September, running from Saturday to Saturday. The Committee is planning lunch at the Parish Hall on Saturday, September 19. Group Leaders are encouraged to organise something special during that week to draw attention to Spire u3a and/or to give our members a treat. Please let the committee know what you have in mind via Pauline.

## Harnham Memorial Hall AGM

Dave Chapell and Maureen Frost attended to represent Spire u3a, although anyone who lives in the parish is entitled to attend.

It was clear that the hall trustees have been active during the last 12 months and we can be confident that governance and management are under control.

Our copy of the Annual Report, including accounts, maintenance, repairs and compliance, will be available at the July monthly meeting for members to peruse.

You may have seen reports about the need to fundraise to cover long term plans and ambitions. We encouraged the trustees to think big and go for it, as we will all benefit from improvements.



## Rolls of Honour

Related to forward planning, the Memorial Hall trustees are aware that research has been done by some of our members into the names of those recorded on the Rolls of Honour. This information represents the core historical purpose of the building and will be central to the efforts to preserve the hall: some of the family names may still be represented in the locality by current residents.

Thank you to those of you who have already come forward.

You are invited to send any information, old photos etc related to this project to Helen Clemow.

*Maureen*

## Facebook

Recent posts including coming events (non-u3a) that might appeal to our members include: Imber Open Days, Tolpuddle Festival, Harnham Water Meadows & Rose Cottage Open Afternoons.

We also flag up reminders on Facebook and appropriate sources of advice on health and security matters. Last minute changes or cancellations or news that misses the newsletter deadline will also be posted on our Facebook group.

Do consider joining this (private) Facebook Group: Spire u3a (Salisbury)

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/357943631840550>

## Interest Groups

### Play Reading Group



The Play Reading group has now met twice. At our first meeting we did some exercises to loosen up our vocal cords and then read a short melodrama which was entertaining.

Procuring copies has proved a lengthy business with help from Wiltshire Performing Arts Library. Having to make a request 30 days prior to receiving the scripts, we missed a deadline and have had to improvise in the meantime. Nevertheless, we have had enjoyable meetings and look forward to some Noel Coward in July!

*Sally Leaver*

### Poetry Reading Group

This interest group now has room for more members – just turn up if you want to give it a try. The next meeting will be at Malcolm Simmons' home (2 Upper Street, West Harnham) at 2pm on Thursday 16th July, and the subject will be 'Water'.

You can contact Christine Hill, Group Leader, through the website at

[spire.u3asite.uk/u3a\\_groups/poetry-reading](http://spire.u3asite.uk/u3a_groups/poetry-reading)

### Sunday Lunch

Spire Sunday Lunch on the 19th July is being held at The Yew Tree Inn, Odstock. The table is booked for 12.30. and there are still 4 spaces available.

If you would like to join us, please email or telephone me.

*Many thanks, Pauline*

## Creative Writing Group

A dialogue:



- So what do you think I should do?
- I can see it's a tricky one. You can hardly avoid her since you have to go there. I mean, you don't have any choice really, do you?
- It's the old lady. Every time I go over there it's always the same. She makes a point of having her by her side, like a pet poodle. She makes a fuss of her in front of me, strokes her hair, tells me how pretty she is, needles me to tell her the same.
- Yuk. So what do you do?
- What can I do? Stuck there, squirming. So there I am, going red in the face, stammer something out, trying to be polite and...
- And what?
- They laugh at me. Right in my face. Both of them, they taunt me, provoke me to act like an idiot, revelling in it, like pulling wings off a fly –
- That's sick.
- Yes, that's the word. Sick. An old witch in an old wedding dress. Mutton dressed up as lamb, faded flowers in her hair, wrinkled face all rouged up to make her look like a blushing bride. It's weird, spooky, nuts. Like some horror movie. Yes, it's sick alright.
- So what do you get up to, stuck there all day?
- She tells us to play.
- What? Scrabble, Monopoly, duets on the piano?
- Backgammon, draughts, card games – but we never keep at it. It soon breaks up, with her accusing me of cheating when she does, goes all sulky when she loses, flounces off...
- You mean Estelle?
- She's so proud. So high and mighty. Girls. I hate them. Sly, mean – but that's not the worst. The witch then tells me to say sorry, make up to her, even...
- No. You don't mean to say –
- Yes. Kiss her!
- Ughh!!! That's really sick.

It's fun making such scenes and stories up to share with the other members of the group and, of course, to hear their so varied responses to the same starting point, learn a lot from one another and enjoy such good company.

*Eric Williams*

## Walking in the Countryside



Our walk in June to Langford Lakes was a roaring success, with 14 of us enjoying the countryside and although a little dull, the rain kept off. We all enjoyed the Kingfisher Cafe for a deserved coffee and cake at the end.

Details of our next walk on 10th July will be sent out to members on 3rd July. Anyone else who has not previously joined us will be very welcome, just let me know by email before the Wednesday prior to the walk.

Each walk starts at 9.30 am, and we try and end near a coffee shop for those interested in partaking. Interesting local facts will be part of the format of each walk. In May we introduced a further walk after the café for the more energetic of our members, which went down very well and will be continued. The additional walk is purely voluntary and is at a faster pace.

Dates for walks up to August '26 are as below, so put the dates in your diaries:

10th July 26 – Cranbourne – 4.8 miles. Start at Cranborne Garden Centre with coffee at the end in their tea rooms. Their cheese scones are legendary.

7th August 26 – Downton – 4.4 miles. Start at Downton Moot Car Park with coffee just before the end at The Borough Café.

*Dave Chapell*

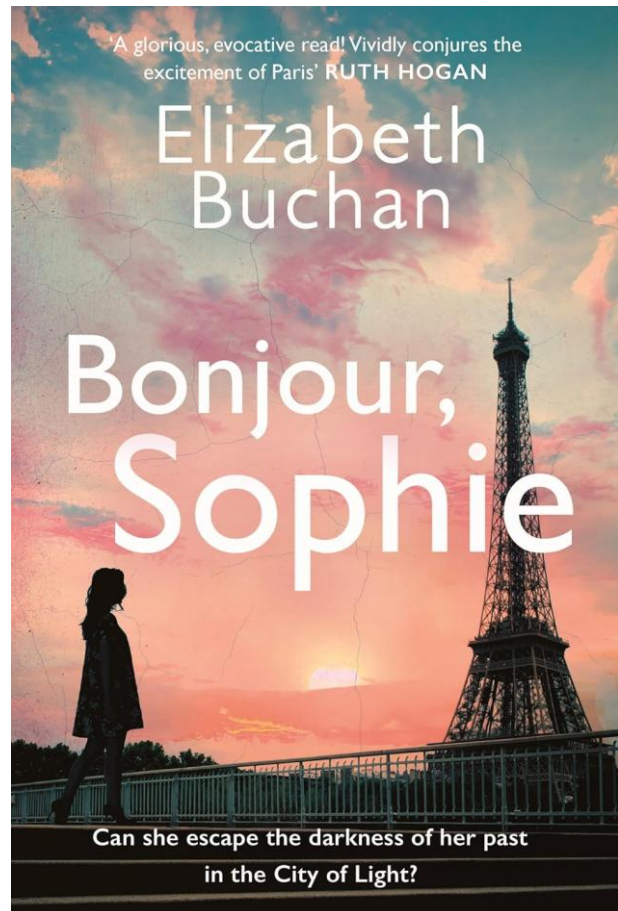
## Wednesday Book Group

Due to the extreme heat, we held a very quick and low attendance meeting this month. Our book up for discussion was *Bonjour Sophie* by Elizabeth Buchan, set in 1959. It followed a young orphaned girl who escaped her stifling oppressive life in Sussex to find her real identity in Paris.

The first half was slow-burning, describing her English country life with dysfunctional guardians. The second half found our heroine in search of her father, who had died a hero in the French Resistance. However, there were many intertwining subplots: her failed romance in England, Sophie's work with an art gallery suspected of selling looted WW2 artwork, the parallel rebellion of her lifelong friend Hettie and her real parents' role in the Resistance.

Some of our group enjoyed it; some never attempted it. The remainder thought the book was well-researched, and all subplots could have been expanded to become books in their own right. In short, an emotional and nuanced historical drama.

Sharen Steward



## Art & Craft Outing

We are negotiating for a community minibus to take us to Blandford to visit the Fashion Museum on the afternoon of Thursday 27 August. See [blandfordfashionmuseum.co.uk](http://blandfordfashionmuseum.co.uk)

We should have about two hours to look round and patronise the lovely tea room. The cost is expected to be £18.50 per person, including entrance (but not tea.)



Priority will be given to Art & Craft regulars, but there will be room for other interested members. Please let Maureen know if you would like to participate.

[maureenefrost@icloud.com](mailto:maureenefrost@icloud.com)

## Exploring AI

I am planning to start an Artificial Intelligence Interest Group. For better or worse, this new know-how, 'generative AI', which emerged rather unexpectedly some three years ago, is now maturing into a remarkable set of abilities, accompanied by some enormous challenges for society.



## Exploring AI

*For better or worse*

Spire u3a

*A design made in a couple of minutes using AI*

I hope we will discuss both the good and the bad but develop our skills more towards enabling the good and preventing the bad !

The first few monthly meetings will aim to give a rounded introduction as to what AI is, how to use it and how to use it wisely.

To join in, please let me have me your name, email and phone, ideally a mobile number.

*Michael Stroud*

## OBC

The reading group are due to meet on Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup>, 3.30 pm at 3 Burford Avenue. We will begin by discussing the Kate Thompson titles that we have been reading. All copies of 'Seascraper' have now been gifted to Wiltshire Libraries.

Our selection of books to read in July has arrived including an earlier novel by Benjamin Wood, a Rose Tremain story and some short story collections.

*Maureen*



## Friday Mornings

The Photography Group sessions are taking a break for the next few weeks and will resume on the new pattern in the autumn, as per the website.

The Onward Group, likewise, will be on the first Friday of the month in future.

The zoom session will remain open for any Friday morning regular to join for a chat at 10 am throughout the summer.

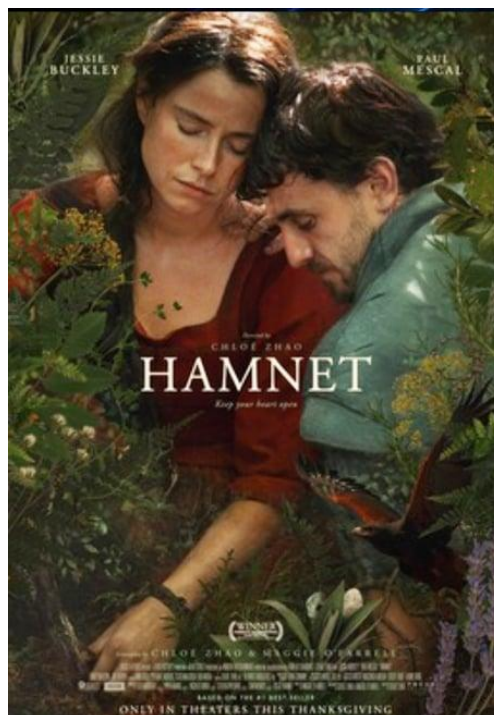
## Learn, laugh, live

### Harnham Community Network

(of which Spire u3a is a part)

Film Night is showing *Hamnet* on 15<sup>th</sup> July, 7:30 pm at the Social Club. In late 16th-century England, Agnes, a healer sensitive to the world around her, builds a home with William Shakespeare, a local tutor and aspiring playwright. As their lives fracture, they are tested by distance, silence, and grief. The film won Best Motion Picture and Best Actress in a Motion Picture at the Golden Globe Awards last year.

For more events see [harnhamcommunity.org](https://harnhamcommunity.org).



### A selection of u3a online talks

*A virtual tour of the Watts Gallery and Artists' Village.* In this engaging one-hour virtual tour, Alan introduces us to the remarkable Watts Gallery Artists' Village in Compton, Surrey. This remarkable collection of buildings includes the home of perhaps the most influential British artist of the second half of the 19th C., George Frederic Watts, and his equally accomplished wife Mary. We will tour the house and note the ceiling panels encouraging us to think moral and spiritual thoughts. We will be able to see and learn about some of William Morris's early wallpaper designs. Monday 20 July at 2 pm.

*AI News: AI futures.* Artificial Intelligence (AI) is transforming our world. Dr Ian Hawker, a u3a member, discusses how Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) and future super-intelligence could change society over the next 5, 10 and 20 years. Friday 24 July, 10 am.

For links to these and more, see [u3a.org.uk/what-we-do/events/educational-events](https://u3a.org.uk/what-we-do/events/educational-events).

### And finally... Tipple Time

Grateful thanks to Mary Robson for overseeing the June Tipple Time when our focus was 'On the Water'. We are staying with water this time but asking for your plumbing stories. What is the most memorable closet you have visited? What was chalked on the back of the privy door at the end of uncle Fred's garden? Ever tried to change a washer or fix a washing machine leak? And the history of Izal... (see [bbc.co.uk/programmes/m002xp61](https://bbc.co.uk/programmes/m002xp61))



All welcome. Just click the usual link below at 6pm to join in –

[us02web.zoom.us/j/86725675768?pwd=RjMxRGhvQ0pzYUd4NjhHT1hYNmV6UT09](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86725675768?pwd=RjMxRGhvQ0pzYUd4NjhHT1hYNmV6UT09)