

IN TOUCH FEBRUARY 2026

Dear all

As we begin a new year and despite the dreadful rainy weather we have been suffering from, I would like to extend my warmest wishes to all members or our Shaftesbury & Gillingham u3a community. We continue to thrive because of your curiosity, friendship, and willingness to share knowledge and experience.

The year ahead offers fresh opportunities to learn, connect, and enjoy new activities together, and I thank our volunteers, group leaders, and committee members whose dedication makes everything we do possible.

Let us now look forward to the coming year with enthusiasm, openness, and a spirit of lifelong learning.

Libby Hague-Holmes
Chairman

u3a

Shaftesbury and Gillingham

Forthcoming Events

TALKS AT THE
CHARLTON
REMEMBRANCE HALL

5th February
Miranda Pender
Talk entitled "Censored"

5th March
Dr John Twibell
Electrocution, Electromurder:
accident, suicide

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<https://sgu3a.u3asite.uk>

Next u3a Talks

Monthly open meetings are held on the first Thursday of the month at The New Remembrance Hall, Charlton, Shaftesbury, Dorset, SP7 0PL - opening at 10.00am for 10.30am start. A small charge of £2 per person is made, to cover the cost of speakers and refreshments.

Open meetings provide an opportunity to have a coffee, socialise and to enjoy presentations from invited speakers. Non-members are welcome to attend one open meeting, free of charge, to sample what is on offer.

Details of speakers for the coming year can be found on our website; the next two are shown below.

Miranda Pender—A talk entitled “Censored”

An illustrated musical talk telling the intriguing tale of the author Norah C. James and the obscenity trial of 1929. A prolific and successful writer of romantic fiction from the 1930s through to the 1970s, Norah hit the headlines when her first novel, *Sleeveless Errand*, was banned under the Obscene Publications Act. The talk recounts how Norah went from being a well-brought up young lady from a respectable family, to writing a book judged ‘filthy’ and ‘indecent’, and looks at how ideas of what is and is not acceptable in literature have changed over the years.

Miranda was born in London and lived most of her life in Essex. She has a BSc in Managerial and Administrative Studies from Aston University in Birmingham, and after a portfolio career in marketing, gardening, dog-sitting, and stable management, reinvented herself as a singer, songwriter, and artist. She has a selection of talks based around songs she has written which she presents to groups such as WIs, U3As, and Probus Clubs. Miranda now lives in Sherborne where she shares an art studio with her husband Mark. She has a particular interest in the subject of this talk, as Norah James was her grandfather’s first cousin.

Dr John Twibell –

Talk entitled “Electrocution, Electromurder” (accident, suicide)

This talk will explain the circumstances required to cause an electric shock and how this might be fatal. In modern installations chances of getting a shock are very much reduced. Normally need two simultaneous faults to occur. Several instances of electrocutions discussed.

Films and TV often show entirely unrealistic electromurder situations. Most attempted electromurder scenarios are along such lines and the victim usually survives to tell the tale. Various scenes discussed.

Dr John Twibell joined the UK Govt. (Home Office) Forensic Science Service in 1974 and trained as a fire, explosion and electrical investigator. The HOFSS became the FSS Agency in 1991. He left the FSS in 2000 to become a private forensic consultant and taught on forensic science degree courses at three universities. He also taught fire and explosion investigation on specialised courses to fire and police officers

Elizabeth Baylis
Polly Corbishley
Philip Datwiler
Margaret Lawson Smith
Shelley Morris
Christine Rawlinson
Stephen Rawlinson
Patrick Rosenvinge
Sally Sutton
Yvonne Wheeler
Anne Brake



Group News

Walking Group

It was with a heavy heart that I closed down the Walking Group, which has proved unviable in spite of herculean effort from its leader Ian Watson. I am extremely grateful to Ian for all he did because I believe our u3a needs to offer more physical activity if possible. For me, the secret of a happy and healthy retirement is keeping both mind and body active, so my hope is that someone will try again one day.

Thank you, Ian.

Barbara Hurst

Proposed Quiz Group

We have a healthy number of members to form a quiz group but I can't do that until we have a leader. The role would involve managing membership and arranging teams for any quizzes taking place locally, so hardly onerous. Exactly how you organise group activity is up to the leader, in consultation with the members. If you think it's something you could manage and would like more information, please get in touch.

Barbara Hurst

barbara@pbhurst.com

01747 825646

Proposed Additional French Group

Unfortunately, we have been unable to organise another French group, but I am very grateful to Jenny Jackson for trying. If you think you could run a group, the interest is definitely there and I, Barbara Hurst, groups coordinator, can help you get started.

Italian Groups

All three Italian groups got together at the beginning of the new term for lunch. Much Italian was spoken and new friendships were made! San Tonino's in Shaftesbury prepared us a beautiful spread and we all agreed this was a wonderful way to start the new term, and that we should do it again soon!



Alison Rigby

Literature (Online)

We're starting off the new year by studying 'Brave New World' by Aldous Huxley, a frightening depiction of the futuristic world that may be closer than we think. To follow this dystopia we'll have a quick look at 'Island' by the same author. This novel is long and quite difficult so we'll not go into too much detail, beyond appreciating Huxley's utopian vision and regretting the sad conclusion that the forces of materialism do not allow that society to survive for ever.

Then we shall begin our Shakespeare-fest, looking closely at an early play, 'Romeo and Juliet' probably, and a late one, perhaps 'The Tempest'. In the process we'll examine the theatre conditions of the time, the companies of players and the audiences. Also the influences of the time that made Shakespeare who he was, with a brief look at the authorship question. As you'll gather, I'm preparing a book, called 'Will Shakespeare and I', gathering together my thoughts and experiences over nearly 80 years of study!

Peter Rolfe

Natural History



Our Natural History group enjoyed a visit to Blashford Lakes in the New Forest on 14th January; tranquil lakes surrounded by woodland with six hides to observe wildlife. The highlight of the day was seeing a kingfisher. We also saw tree creepers, blue and great tits, redpolls, siskin, goosander, robin, chaffinch, cormorant, dunnock, swan, tufted duck, mallard, moorhen, blackbird, pochard, great egret and nuthatch. Not to mention a pigeon. It was a really enjoyable visit, highly recommended.

Jennifer Page

Music for Pleasure

We have 11 members in our group and we had a 'full house' for the first time at our first meeting of 2026. All were seated comfortably and we had an uplifting and enjoyable concert conducted by John Wilson.

At the meeting on 22nd January, we listened to music chosen by Simon Lawson and Pam Robinson.

There is always something to look forward to.

Eileen Haddleton

Spanish

Meya Deyes is starting a Spanish group with just two members, the time and date to be confirmed. If you would be interested in joining, please contact Meya, who will be delighted to hear from you: mayadeyes@gmail.com

Bridge

Is anyone interested in setting up a Bridge group? If so, please contact Barbara Hurst barbara@pbhurst.com or 01747 825646

Church Visits

After Roger's very interesting visit to Mere Town Church we headed into the chalk valley back roads for my visit to two very different churches in the area.



Bishopstone's St John the Baptist Church Firstly, this gem of a church is about a mile outside the village of Bishopstone. After the plague came in the 17th century the village moved further west leaving an uneven field as the sole reminder of the past. This beautifully built church of Chilmark stone had some very generous benefactors in the past so there are some wonderful carvings etc. much finer than you would expect in a village church. Sandra Seal, the church warden, and Anne Strutchbury, who has done an enormous amount of research into the church's past, gave us a very interesting and detailed talk about all the features that we could see. They were delighted by our generous donations of £97.00; thank you to everyone. They are in the process of putting in for a grant

for necessary work on one of the chancel's roofs, and one of the criteria for success is groups visiting the church, so we helped in another way. I loved hearing about the carvings, etc, relating to the past, but I was also extremely impressed by the modern, beautifully crafted, oak altar and the organ player's bench, with its detailed engineering to enable the petite organist to reach the pedals!

Many of us enjoyed a good value and tasty meal in the White Hart pub, and afterwards the stalwart few braved the very heavy rain to visit the second church.



Church of St Mary & St Lawrence This, now redundant, church is in the very tiny hamlet of Stratford Tony. This hamlet, with a population of less than 100 until the 19th century, is on the roman road between Salisbury and Blandford, at the ford of the River Ebble, which was in full flood when we visited, so no crossing the ford. The Tony part of the village name derives from Ralph de Toni, William the Conqueror's standard bearer at the battle of Hastings in 1066. He was gifted Stratford Manor, now demolished, but this lovely church remains.

Barbara Hurst heads the Churches Group and sends out all the information. Group members are encouraged to organize the church visits; this is why we get such varied, interesting visits. It is easy to find church contact details on their websites and village pubs welcome mid-

week lunch parties: a win win situation for everyone.

I was on a ramblers walk in the Bishopstone area and looked inside the church, discovering this was well worth a visit. I am sure all participants agree.

Jennifer Day

BSO Concerts

We started our 2026 concert trip with a lively Spanish themed evening **Viva Espana**, all very enjoyable, but the highlight of the evening was hearing a live performance of



Ravel's *Bolero* – starting quietly with a piccolo (I think) accompanied by the side drum throughout as each instrument picked up the same theme, building in volume until the final harmonic wrench brings the whole structure crashing down. The tension and intensity were so great I really can't describe it. You had to be there to experience the magic.

Our next concert is a program of Beethoven's *Violin Concerto* followed by Elgar's

Symphoney No. 2: all booked up now. I am taking bookings for the March concert Haydn's *Cello Concerto in D* followed by Mahler's *Symphoney No. 5*. The final concert in April is titled *Organ Symphony*: not sure what to expect to hear in the Lighthouse Theatre for this one. What I hope I am demonstrating is the variety of concerts that we have been able to attend. If you like classical music, whether, like me you are a Classic FM fan or a serious musician. there is something for all tastes.

What makes these concerts affordable is the 30% discount that we can access through group bookings; a joint decision in May decides our preferred concerts, which I can reserve seating for, confirming with payment six weeks before the concerts. Our very comfortable 50-seater coach has two pick-up points in Gillingham and two in Shaftesbury. I believe the fare is much the same cost as driving to Poole, and the parking charges when you get there, but we are dropped off right outside the Theatre in time to purchase a programme, a drink or two at the bar and snacks if you want them. Afterwards, we are picked up at the same point just outside the Theatre.

If anyone else wants to give us a try let me know through the 'Groups' link to BSO Concerts.

Jennifer Day

Rummy

One of our members has offered to lead a Rummy group, and host it at her home, if there is sufficient interest. If that's a group you might like to join, please let me know and I'll put you in touch.

Barbara Hurst

Day Trips and Theatre Trips

I am looking to start two separate groups this year, A resurrected "Day Trips" group and possibly a "Theatre visit" group. In order to get these going I will need some assistance in making the necessary arrangements. If you would like to help then please contact me.

Roger Laidler

roger46laidler@talktalk.net

Photography

Our first meeting in December went well. There was a lot of discussion about how we



would be working and what sort of things we would like to achieve. It soon became apparent that the mobile phone has firmly established itself as THE instant camera to have with you at all times and some very good phone photos were submitted by members. This being the first get-together, the subject was *Best of 2025* as a general topic. Whilst most were digital, Sue Boddington brought along some excellent prints – a timely

reminder that there's nothing like seeing it on paper to make a picture complete.

Sadly our January session had to be cancelled, but we hope to be able to review the topic *In the Kitchen* in February. We have also received a very kind invitation to visit Old Chapel Flowers for a floral photo session. That may have to wait till the weather improves though.

Thanks to Janet Ball and Sue Boddington for permission to use their copyright photos here.



Robin Collins

News from Trading Standards

The value of Trading Standards

Trading Standards' work helps every one of us. By enforcing nearly 300 laws they keep shopping fair, products safe, and businesses honest.

Recent research from the Chartered Institute of Trading Standards highlights the valuable return on investment that Trading Standards deliver. For every £1 spent on Trading Standards, £11 is saved. That's because problems are prevented before they happen. Trading Standards stop £6.5 billion in losses from goods sold with short measures and help prevent livestock diseases that could cost over £10 billion per outbreak. By ensuring products and food are safe they save the NHS thousands, estimated at around £55,000 for every injury avoided.

Their work preventing dangerous imports brings £35 in savings for every £1 spent. They also give businesses over 22,000 hours of advice each year, helping them grow and thrive. Trading Standards fight scams and doorstep crime, preventing £442 million in losses annually, and tackle fraud worth over £12 billion. These efforts protect our wallets and keep confidence in UK markets strong.

Imagine life without Trading Standards. Every shopper could lose £1,000 a year on unsafe or poor-quality goods. The economy could suffer losses of £12 billion, 20,000 jobs could vanish, and £2.53 billion in public revenue would disappear due to illegal trading. Unsafe electrical goods could cause house fires costing £21,000 each, and unchecked underage sales of alcohol, knives, and vapes would put young people at risk. Even simple things like short measures of goods could cost every person over £100 a year.

As an intelligence led Service, Dorset Council Trading Standards needs your help to protect others, to support businesses, and strengthen our economy. If you buy something that isn't right, agree to work that doesn't live up to expectations, or maybe you're affected by scams, then report it at www.citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer or phone the Citizens Advice consumer helpline on 0808 223 1133. Trusted advice will be given to help sort out the problem and all information provided will be sent to Dorset Council Trading Standards.

Current Groups

Group	Date	Leader
Art Appreciation	Monday 2-3.30pm – week 2	Gil Watkinson
BSO	To be arranged	Jennifer Day
Canasta I	Monday pm – weeks 1 & 3	Hazel Baker
Canasta II	Wed p.m. – weeks 2 & 4	Barbara Watkinson
Canasta III	Thursday am – weeks 2 & 4	Pam Hooker
Churches/Places of Worship	To be Arranged 4 visits/year	Barbara Hurst
Embroidery	Wednesday – pm week 2	Lesley Frost
French for Fun 1	Tuesday/fortnightly - 10am	Ron Beard
French for Fun 2	Wednesday /fortnightly-pm	Chris Stotesbury
Garden Interest	Monday – am - week 2	Barbara Watkinson
Genealogy	Monday – pm – week 4	Liz Greenway Valerie Hencken
German Conversation	Wednesday - fortnightly-pm	Robert Light
International History	Wednesday–am week 3	Richard Sims
Italian - Beginners	Tues 10am–11am weekly	Alison Rigby
Italian Intermediate	Tues 2-3 weekly	Alison Rigby
Italian Intermediate Plus	Tues 11.15am–12.15am weekly	Alison Rigby
Literature	Mon-am on Zoom Weeks 1 & 3	Peter Rolfe
Lunch Club	Friday – week 4	Michael Pittman
Mahjong	Friday – 2pm weeks 2 & 4	Marion Pace
Medieval World	Monday 10.15am – week 4	Denise Sims
Music for Pleasure	Thursday – pm – weeks 2 & 4	Eileen Haddleton
Natural History	Wed - 10-12.30pm – week 2	Janet Fenton
Philosophy	By arrangement	Chris Spencer
Poetry & Play Reading	Thursday – pm – week 1	Janet Botterill
Reading Group	Friday 11-12pm – week 1	Colin & Anne Marsh
Really Useful Group	Anyone who would like to help	Barbara Hurst
Scrabble	Friday – am - weekly	Jill Page
Shared Interests	Varied	Barbara Hurst
Spite & Malice	Thursday – 2.00pm – Week 3	Sue Walker
Table Tennis	Thursday 2.00pm - weekly	Elizabeth Lewer Chris Stotesbury
Writing for Pleasure	Mon 10.30am Weeks 2 & 4	Peter Rolfe

For availability and further information, contact the group leaders via the website:

<https://sgu3a.u3asite.uk/groups/>