



Senior Moments

*The quarterly newsletter
of Bookham & District
u3a*

Issue 87

November

2025

Chair Report

This is a surprise. Less than three months ago I did not even know that I would be willing to rejoin the Committee let alone come back as Chairman. It was the third of September meeting when Phil announced that the AGM would be postponed to November to allow arrangements to be put in place to close the u3a. At that meeting I told him that I might be able to return but would not be able to confirm, until I had clarified a few issues. So here I am. It will take me a little time to catch but I hope to meet as many of you as I can over the coming months.

Firstly, I would like to say a big thank you to the Committee for their work behind the scenes, some of which will be evident to you and a great deal that make the organization tick without you being directly aware. A special mention is necessary to those that are now stepping down: Phil, who was a very new member when he agreed to step up and has continued to guide the u3a, as the Chairman for the past two years. He has ensured that the u3a is an attractive organization for many and, where the membership continues to grow. Then to Harold, who has been a stalwart for many years particularly with his technical skill, and finally to Frank for finding us such a wonderful range of speakers.

A thank you is also due to the Tuesday helpers, those on reception, providing the refreshments and ensuring that the microphones, etc. work. Then there are the Group Administrators who keep the groups going and to all of you for actively participating in this organisation.

I will leave the pleading for more volunteers for another time.

When you read this Kay will have resumed the winter evening programme of events. A sold-out quiz night will have already taken place with another in November. A Murder Mystery evening at the end of November. If you have any suggestions for entertainment opportunities, I know Kay would be delighted to hear from you, or speak to any member of the Committee.

At Christmas time there are many ways of celebrating the holidays, so whichever way is for you may I wish you a happy time and may next year bring you joy. I am looking forward to seeing you in the hall or at your groups.



Lyn Farrell

Bookham & District u3a

Registered Charity No 1036386 u3a Membership No 254/239/93

The Committee 2025

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Editorial

This final issue of Senior Moments for 2025 has been delayed by a month so that the details of the very important AGM could be included. We now have a new Chair in Lyn Farrell who many will remember was in that office a few years ago. She has stepped forward because of the difficulty we have had in finding someone for this post. I am sure Lyn will do a great job and serve the Bookham u3a well, as she has done in the past. We are fortunate also to now have a Vice Chair in Carol James, a new member and we wish her well. It is sad to see Frank Cross retire from his post as Speaker Secretary; he carried out this task for over 10 years and found many interesting speakers.

For the first time an article has been deliberately repeated in this issue. It is on pages 4 and 5 by Kim Kitson who has shown us how to use AI and also use it to produce an article ready for publication. I have used it successfully and so has Harold Reglar who has a second article in this issue. Our new Chair Lyn Farrell also has a piece. As editor I am hoping this will inspire others to produce interesting pieces for Senior Moments. Remember you only have to come up with an idea, AI does the rest.

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AI and Genealogy:

How Artificial Intelligence Can Save You Hours in Family History Research
By Steve Doyle, Wokingham u3a Family History Group

As someone who has pursued family history (FH) for many years, I've seen how digital tools have transformed the way we research. Since retiring two years ago, I've had the chance to dive deeper into both genealogy and the broader social history that surrounds our ancestors. And in the past year, I've begun exploring how Artificial Intelligence (AI) can further revolutionise this fascinating hobby.

Let me start by saying: I'm not an AI expert. But since September last year, I've been using freely available tools like ChatGPT to assist my research. My aim is to give others the confidence to do the same. Just as the internet changed how we find information, I believe AI will become just as influential in the next decade.

AI may sound intimidating—or even threatening—to some. But in reality, it's just a highly advanced computer program. It's not conscious, it doesn't seek world domination, and it certainly isn't out to replace human curiosity.

Used wisely, it can become an invaluable research assistant.

What Can AI Actually Do for Family Historians?

Many genealogy platforms already use AI behind the scenes. Ancestry, FindMyPast, and FamilySearch all apply AI to transcribe historical documents, suggest record hints, and even cluster DNA results. AI also enhances and colourises photos, builds timelines, infers relationships, and suggests possible ancestors.

In one of my first AI experiments, I gave ChatGPT 24 pages of research notes about an ancestor. It quickly generated a timeline and a compelling 300-word biography. The result wasn't perfect, but it helped me identify gaps and decide where to focus my next research steps. I repeated the process for my father, and ChatGPT not only summarised the story, but even drafted a well-worded email to request information from Canadian archives.

AI also proved helpful when I uploaded scans of handwritten World War I letters from my grandfather. In seconds, I received a typed transcript—about 90% accurate. For more complex or older handwriting, I found that pairing AI tools like Transkribus

with ChatGPT yielded better results. Teaching ChatGPT by entering a few corrected lines helped improve its accuracy for the rest of the document.

Beyond documents, AI helped me interpret DNA results and clarify relationships that even Ancestry hadn't highlighted. It can also guide image generation, enhance old photos using Photoshop AI, or animate portraits through services like MyHeritage.

Limitations and Cautions

Of course, AI has its downsides. It can produce incorrect or misleading information, and free versions are limited. Sometimes it repeats itself, gives different answers on different days, or veers off-topic. But with clear prompts and careful checking, it can still save hours of manual work.

Ultimately, AI should be treated like any other research tool: useful, but not infallible. It won't replace careful historical verification—but it can absolutely uncover leads you never knew existed.

It took ChatGPT about 10 seconds to produce the above. It would have taken me much more time to precis my notes.

I will be using AI in my future research to save time, but as with all research, facts will be checked.

Bookham & District u3a Family History group meets on the third Monday of the month at 9.30am in the Waterford Room in the Old Barn Hall. New members are welcome and can contact Roland Cunningham His10@bookhamu3a.org.uk

Further information on AI by u3a can be found at <https://u3acommunities.org/interest-groups/computing/ai-for-everyone/>

We had a speaker about using AI in at our Family History u3a group. I typed notes on my computer as he spoke which I made into an article using ChatGPT and converted in 20 seconds into this article. I'm submitting it for inclusion in Senior Moments.

Kim Kitson



Croquet extras!

Bee stops play for the Tuesday morning Golf Croquet group! A rather exhausted bumblebee was in a spot of bother at the regular Tuesday morning croquet session at Polesden Lacey recently. The poor bee was just lying there, weak and unable to move properly. However, one of group members had a Bee Revival Kit - a little kit she keeps on her keyring that contains a small glass vial of sugary syrup for just such an occasion. It did the trick and within 10 minutes the bee was happily on its way and the croquet players back on the lawns, happily conspiring how best to thwart their opponents!

Karen Jackson



Discussion point

The changing face of retirement

In this series, we debate the topics that affect the u3a and wider society. Here, CEO **Iain Cassidy** considers what retirement may mean now – and whether the organisation is keeping up



Not long ago over coffee with friends, the conversation turned to retirement. "Are you looking forward to it?" someone asked. For a moment, I didn't quite know how to answer.

The truth is, the old idea of retirement – work until 60 or 65, draw a pension and spend days at leisure – no longer fits everyone's reality. Indeed, in my last column (*u3a Matters*, Autumn 2025), I considered whether the way we view volunteering going forward may need to change, not least because volunteering and retirement often go hand in hand.

That's because today many of us are working longer, juggling caring responsibilities or still paying off mortgages well into our 70s. Others take mid-career breaks or combine part-time work with volunteering. In this new landscape, retirement feels less like a

single milestone, and more like a shifting, complex transition.

So, the question is: how do we, the u3a, keep pace with this change? Perhaps the key lies not in altering what we stand for, but in how we reach people. Could we become a bridge for younger people who have stepped back or are working reduced hours? Could we be a space where confidence is rebuilt through shared purpose, meaningful friendships and the joy of learning? Exploring these questions challenges us to think about how our model – and the way we deliver it – must evolve to meet the expectations of the next generation.

Of course, being part of the u3a doesn't take away life's challenges, but research shows that volunteering and staying active in later life can slow biological ageing. That makes your

How can u3a keep up with a shifting working population?



local u3a walking group, language class or book club more than just a pastime – it could be a lifeline.

Retirement may be changing shape, but the need for purpose, growth and connection is timeless. And this is where u3a can – and must – play a unique role by helping people both today and tomorrow navigate the tricky waters of later life with optimism and resilience.

How do you think u3a can reach and support this changing demographic? Please email editor@u3a.org.uk and head your email RETIREMENT

Key notes from our AGM

In October, u3a members, trustees and staff gathered at Hincley Grange Hotel and Spa in Leicestershire for the Third Age Trust's AGM 2025, with many more members joining online.

Chair Allan Wainwright welcomed Sheila Crawley as vice chair and reflected on the change that has occurred since his appointment at last year's AGM.

CEO Iain Cassidy shared a draft vision and mission for the Trust, emphasising the need to adapt to a changing membership and

re-affirming the Trust's commitment to supporting a positive later life for all.

Council chair Sue Russell reported on the u3a Council's first year, encouraging members to stand for election in the new year and help shape strategic priorities. Key themes identified this year included improving communication, supporting volunteers, and enhancing digital infrastructure.

With a renewed focus on unity, growth and support, the Trust aims to reach 500,000 members by 2028. As



Iain reminded attendees, the u3a movement thrives on joy, learning and connection, and every member plays a vital role in its future.

In the previous edition I showed the ability of AI to respond in detail to a subject of 'Preparing for a Comfortable Retirement'. There are many exciting areas where AI can result in dramatic advantages over conventional methods, but also raises many issues before we can rely on results. This time I asked ChatGPT to summarise these.

Benefits of Artificial Intelligence

Efficiency and Productivity

- Automates repetitive or routine tasks, saving time and reducing human error.
- Increases output in manufacturing, logistics, and data processing.

Improved Decision-Making

- AI systems analyse large amounts of data quickly to identify trends and insights.
- Helps businesses and governments make evidence-based decisions.

Innovation and Discovery

- Accelerates research in medicine, materials science, and climate modelling.
- Enables new technologies such as self-driving cars, smart assistants, and advanced robotics.

Economic Growth

- Creates new industries and markets (e.g., AI services, robotics, data analytics).

- Can enhance competitiveness and drive productivity across the economy.

Healthcare Improvements

- Supports early diagnosis, personalised treatment, and efficient patient management.
- Helps develop new drugs and predict disease outbreaks.

Environmental and Social Benefits

- Optimises energy use, supports renewable energy management, and monitors pollution.
- AI tools can improve education access, translation, and accessibility for people with disabilities.

Issues and Risks of Artificial Intelligence

Job Displacement

- Automation may replace many routine or manual jobs.
- Requires large-scale retraining and re-skilling of the workforce.

Bias and Fairness

- AI systems can reflect or amplify biases in training data.

- Risk of unfair treatment in hiring, lending, law enforcement, or healthcare.

Privacy and Data Security

- AI often depends on large datasets containing personal or sensitive information.
- Raises concerns about surveillance, misuse of data, and loss of individual privacy.

Misinformation and Manipulation

- Generative AI can produce convincing fake news, images, or videos (deepfakes).
- Threatens trust in media, elections, and institutions.

Autonomous Weapons and Defence Risks

- AI-powered weapons raise moral and security concerns.
- Potential for misuse or accidental escalation in conflicts.

Lack of Accountability

- Hard to determine who is responsible when AI systems make mistakes.
- Legal and ethical frameworks lag behind technological progress.

Overdependence and System Failures

- Excessive reliance on AI may reduce human judgement and adaptability.
- System errors or cyberattacks could cause widespread disruption.

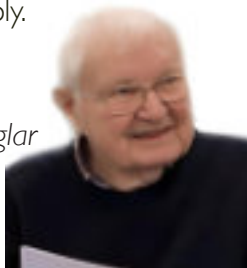
Global Inequality

- Wealth and technological advantages may concentrate in a few countries or corporations.
- Developing nations risk being left behind in the AI economy.

Conclusion

AI has the potential to revolutionise every aspect of life — boosting innovation, efficiency, and quality of services — but it also introduces serious social, ethical, and economic challenges. Effective governance, transparency, and human oversight will be essential to ensure AI serves humanity responsibly and equitably.

Harold Reglar



What do Cryptic Crosswords, Aviation, Laughing Yoga and AI have in common?

These are among the many u3a short courses and talks that members of our u3a have attended. Every month the u3a puts a list of talks on the website, and will also send you a monthly reminder if you wish.

The Cryptic Crosswords offering consisted of a one session introduction outlining the basics of solving the clues. If you were interested in going further you could sign up for a further six, two-hour sessions, which look in depth at the various clues, and how to move on after the course.

Flight Inspiration Aviation. The talk charted the evolution of aviation, highlighting the pioneers and included early film footage.

During the chat after the talk, u3a members shared their knowledge, including an American member who tells fascinating stories of his life in the US Airforce. The Geology of Britain in the Mesozoic, the Era of Middle Life, on 27 November is one I am looking forward to, having watched the first one. Boost Your Festive Batteries With Qigong will be a must watch and don't forget you can switch your camera off so no one need see your efforts!

Laughing Yoga is offered by two different course leaders so that you can choose the one that suits you best. It is more about breathing, the value of laughing and stretching than complicated poses. I am informed by one of our members that joins these sessions that they are best done in private.

The latest one that Mike and I did was Preparing for an AI World. It was four, two-hour sessions. It covered what AI can currently do (and is doing) for you, including research, writing poetry and music, preparing photographs and illustrations. Other areas covered were

bias, environmental impact, how to stay safe when using AI, fact-checking and supplied a checklist of how to get the best out of using AI.

700 million + people around the world are using ChatGPT but, there are many other platforms around, some being better than others for various uses. Most are developed in the USA or China so it is important to be as sure as you can of the information given.

AI is a fast moving world. One of the speakers had to apologise because the slide he was showing did not match when he went on line to show us, as it moved on and had been updated within the space of a couple of days. This is now being followed up by a monthly update.

Mike and I haven't got anything booked at the moment, but as you read above some are very enthusiastic about the varied sessions.

There are many offerings each month, please have a look at this link. You may find something fascinating to while away a couple of hours. u3a - Online Learning Events (<https://www.u3a.org.uk/events/educational-events>)

Which AI ChatBot should I use?

Different users have different views on which is the best AI Chatbot and there are thousands to choose from - many aimed at very specific uses such as medical advice, financial advice, law advice etc. These tend to use curated knowledge bases that can give more reliable answers in their area of expertise. If you are looking for a general purpose feature rich mainstream AI Chatbot this is my take:

The companies listed below tend to have free to use versions and paid for

versions. The paid for versions are typically about \$20 a month. They continually change how much free use you can have and what features are available for free. They are keen to encourage us to pay for the service. At the moment the services are advert free, but expect sponsored content appear for users of the free service.

ChatGPT - is the market leader for a reason. It is amazing.

Gemini - in 2025 Gemini has improved dramatically and is a contender for the top spot. Its image generation is superb and its integration with the Google ecosystem (Google Docs, Chrome and Gmail) is valuable if this is you.

Grok is like its owner, Elon Musk - outstanding at a few things but not to everyone's taste. Its knowledge base includes everything happening on X - if you are fan of X this could be the one for you. Quirky, funny, rude and with one of the best reasoning models available.

Copilot, If you live your online life inside Microsoft 365 using Powerpoint, Word and Excel, then Copilot could really improve your productivity otherwise it is far from the best.

Claude is highly rated by programmers and authors.

Perplexity has always positioned itself as AI for search and their recent launch of an AI Web browser called Comet is a direct assault on Google's dominance in web browsing. It always gives references for its replies so it is easy to check the answers it gives. Definitely one to watch.

Mistral. All the above are American based companies. If you don't want to use an American AI system then check out French based Mistral and its chatbot Le Chat. Its data centres are based in Europe so your data never leaves Europe. If you do use Mistral please share your experiences. Mistral is also highly rated for data privacy and transparency.

Chinese based AI systems like Deepseek, Qwen, Doubao and Kimi:

Whilst the USA's approach to provide more powerful AI systems is to throw increasing amounts of energy guzzling hardware at the problem, China is coming up with powerful AI systems that are much more energy efficient. If you want to minimise your global energy use and don't mind the Chinese Communist Party controlling what questions you can ask and having oversight of your data then these are worth looking at.

Locally hosted Chatbot.

If you are technical and have a powerful laptop or desktop computer then there are plenty of open source versions of AI Chatbots and LLMs available - including from OpenAI and from China. The advantage of doing this is they use much less energy, your personal data doesn't leave your computer and they are free to use. The downside is you need to be technical to use them, they are not nearly as powerful or as feature rich as the AI systems listed above, but they are surprisingly capable.

I hope this helps m...
Freeland@u3a.org.uk



Lyn & Mike Curran

GREAT RAIL JOURNEY to Les Eyzies in the Dordogne

Our trip began on 2 July at 5.15am waking at Premier Inn at Kings Cross. We walked to St Pancras for the first part of our journey to Paris via Eurostar, and met up with the rest of the Great Rail Journey group at 6am.

The first disappointment was when our Group Manager announced that our TGV travel from Gare d'Austerlitz, Paris, to Brive, (from which station it would be about an hour's coach trip to our hotel), was cancelled due to the extremely hot weather. However, the company had booked us on a different train route from the Gare de Lyon, to Lyon and a coach had been arranged for onward travel to our hotel. This would take approximately 5 hours.

NOT SO GREAT

We passed through passport control and security and boarded our reserved seats on Eurostar. However our 8.01 train finally left St Pancras 40 minutes late.

NOT VERY GREAT

Safely through the Channel tunnel and approaching Lille an announcement was made 'Is there a doctor on board?' We were near enough to see a woman lying on the floor in the gap to the next carriage. Shortly afterwards, a second announcement 'Does anyone on board have a diabetic testing kit?'

Some minutes later we were told the train would make an unscheduled stop at Lille in order to transfer the ill woman to a hospital. We waited 35 minutes before resuming the journey to Paris

So we arrived at the Gare du Nord 90 minutes late.

We hastily boarded our coach which would take us across Paris to the Gare de Lyon. Would we manage to be on time, about 2pm, to catch our train to Lyon?

No, the train left 5 minutes before we arrived at the station.

NOT GREAT AT ALL

However Great Rail Journeys were amazingly resourceful and had managed to book a coach and 2 drivers who would take us to Les Eyzies, our destination in 7-8 hours.

They were due to pick us up at the station at 3.30pm but were delayed behind a road accident. After a delay in finding the coach outside the station, we finally set off at 5.30. The coach was actually an old double decker reminiscent of a London bus with some internal damage but we all managed to find reasonably comfortable seats and it had air conditioning.

We were told it would take 7 hours, but 3 stops including one to change drivers meant we finally arrived at our hotel at 1.30am.

FAR FROM GREAT

We should have arrived around 6.30 for dinner, but the hotel owners were very understanding and quickly gave us our room keys and we were in bed by 2.a.m

A GREAT RELIEF

We eventually recovered after a relaxing first day. We had several interesting trips to Rocamadour, Sarlat, a cruise on the Dordogne river, Chateau des Milandes etc and time to 'do our own thing' The return home had also been changed to trains via Bordeaux and Montparnasse in Paris and

although Eurostar was 20 minutes late due to congestion at passport control, we arrived home at the expected time.

None of the problems were the fault of Great Rail Journeys of course and they dealt with each one incredibly well. Our Tour Manager remained outwardly calm throughout, but spent much time on her mobile phone, as the Head Office seemed to be mainly in control. Had we known this was going to happen we would have taken a few relevant photos.

C'ETAIT LA VIE FRANCAISE!!



Frances Pullan

A day on the Wey – 19 August 2025

A day on the Wey Navigation canal can involve a variety of activities, from leisurely walks and bike rides along the towpath to exploring the waterways by boat, canoe or paddle board; making it a popular destination for outdoor recreation.



The canal features a variety of footbridges and road bridges along its 20-mile length. Also 16 locks, 13 weirs, and numerous mooring points. These structures are integral to the navigation, which was established to provide a transport route for Guildford



merchants to London in the 17th century.

The Travel Experiences Group (TEG) decided to have a practical travel experience by hiring a narrow boat from Farncombe Boathouse for their August meeting, and as more than 10 people wanted to come on the trip, a second boat was hired and other members of U3A invited to fill it.

After a thorough briefing from the Boathouse staff on where (or not) to tie ropes, the operation of lock gates and the value of reverse gear and the barge pole, we set off for a gentle cruise along the waterway admiring the trees, plants and other wildlife as we went (several of us were members of Ornithology and Botany and happy to share our knowledge/bore the others by pointing out balsam [orange and Himalayan], meadowsweet, willow herb, ducks etc and a huge Caucasian wingnut tree). Our first challenge was to negotiate safely through one of the multiple arches of a small bridge, admiring the damage to the brickwork inflicted by other boats that hadn't been so expertly steered. Then on to our first lock at Unstead. It was a bit of a steep learning curve doing everything in the right order – moor up, hold ropes, close gates, lower sluices, fill lock, drive in, open gates, drive out, pick up crew etc - and on

to St Catherine's Lock, the shallowest lock on the Wey. This



went more smoothly but somehow we managed to leave Barry behind. Fortunately he hitched a ride on the second boat and rejoined us on the first boat at the next lock! And then on past the water meadows and the very tempting waterside pubs on the edge of Guildford. The team were now becoming keen and efficient, leaping (maybe not) off the boat, tying ropes and opening sluice gates, so we sailed pattered through Millmead lock without attracting a crowd of jeering onlookers. On the far side we had a close look at the demolition site that was Debenhams, before passing under the town bridge and on past the Electric Theatre and the law courts. By now the crew were getting restless from lack of food so we made Dapdune Wharf our stopping point for lunch as it had picnic tables, tea rooms and toilets.

Afterwards, one boat continued downstream as far as the Rowbarge pub while the other headed slowly back after executing a many-point turn to avoid getting stuck in the bushes. A highlight of the return journey for those of us who happened to be looking in the right direction at the right moment was seeing one or possibly two



kingfishers flying swiftly along the canal - little more than a flash of silver and blue but very special. The weather was kind to us too with a bit of a breeze but warm enough for comfort, with sunny intervals. Overall, to quote Wallace and Gromit 'A Grand Day Out'.

Jenny & Tod Wilson



Croquet News

Another great season ended, with thanks as ever to David Snow for organising us through it and Polesden Lacey for their beautiful grounds.

A busy 2026 season next year is being planned. Advance notice that new starters will be welcomed in April, no need to do anything now, more info nearer the time. However if you're planning holidays, lessons will be on Thursday afternoons in April and it would be beneficial if you could



Peter Jackson won the firstever Two Strike Tournament



Brian admiring (?) Gareth's unique home made mallet while white lining



How not to run a hoop. Who is it? The hat is a clue



Angie Squire, winner of the AC Tournament

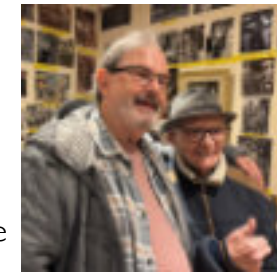


Roland Cunningham, Runner Up in the AC Tournament

London Walking Group 4

For blimey we 'ad an interesting day out in November, led by David Middleton and Cynthia Watson. We visited the museum mentioned below in Stoneleigh, a quirky and relatively unknown gem. A mine of information about Cockney life in the so called "good old days". Anything but good if you were poor. An excellent lunch in the Station Hotel followed by a walk in Nonsuch Park rounded off a grand day out.

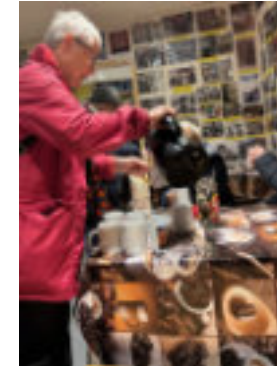
Val Cross



David with museum owner Pearly King of Peckham



Suits you Sir...



Tea & coffee was self service, Beryl did the honours



This is formal notification that the Bookham u3a Creative Writing Group has now ceased officially with the withdrawal of the last remaining members.

As you may know, this was one of the original groups dating back to 1993 and the foundation of Bookham u3a.

It was run for many years by the late local historian Edwina Vardey who was then succeeded by Bill Whitman.

It once had many members but the passing of time has seen it wither away slowly as the numbers have dropped.

For the past few years it has only operated on Zoom as it was no longer feasible to meet at people's homes.

Bill asked me to take it over earlier this year but while continuing to meet successfully every two weeks it has attracted no new members and the decline has continued.

Vegetable gardening

We met at the Leatherhead Horticultural show at the OBH yesterday for our regular monthly meet up. Beautifully presented fruit, veg, flowers, crafts laid out on many tables there all ready to be judged and awarded coveted cups. Tea/coffee and delicious scones/cake available too.

We saw veg not seen or heard of before ie Acocha which is a Brazilian cucumber, small and spiky and also a variety of squash.

To her delight and surprise

Kathryn was awarded **BEST IN SHOW** 🏆🏆 for her amazing Quinces so many



congratulations to her, very well deserved. She was presented with a small cup for the Quinces and a huge one for best in show, big enough to

put her Quinces in!

As if that wasn't excitement enough Liz and Lee won lovely



prizes on the raffle.

All in all a lovely afternoon and we met some really nice and serious veggie growing people.

Please let me have any suggestions for October:

I hope those of you who have been away have all had a good time.

Lee Saunders



Ashted Common walk photo—Liz Looney



Online Learning Events

u3a members can access talks, workshops and courses on Zoom at no extra cost. These events are led by members with a passion or talent to share or specialist guest speakers.

How to create a volunteering culture at your u3a

05 June 2025

U3a is a member-led organisation, with members contributing to their local u3a's in a range of ways, from serving coffees at a monthly meeting to leading groups or standing on the u3a committee. Every member should state their skill attributes and abilities they can offer to the membership and to update these where necessary over the years. Maybe their former employment could be of use but this is not always the case. A member of this u3a, I knew well, was a bank manager for a considerable time in his years of employment, but he also had an interest in botany, music, badminton and walking and over the years he came to lead all three of these activities with the music requiring nothing more than switching on the music the group had chosen to listen to. He also went on to become Chair of this u3a. In my case I was trained and qualified through a 7 year apprenticeship as a printer but I was never involved in publishing of any sort and yet now I have edited and sometimes printed Bookham u3a quarterly news letter for the past 13 years and learning a great deal about

all aspects of good publishing over this time.

Many women may say they have only spent their time raising a family, running a household and supporting a husband so how can this help the u3a? There still exists the belief in some quarters that this time is not counted as work. I very much doubt many women would agree with that. And, if you have done all that you are more than qualified to do a number of important jobs in this voluntary organisation. Raising a family gives you enormous experience of people of all types, so knowing how to cope and overcome very many difficulties in dealing with people and indeed how to get the very best out of them is certainly an important and very useful skill.

From the u3a Matters magazine



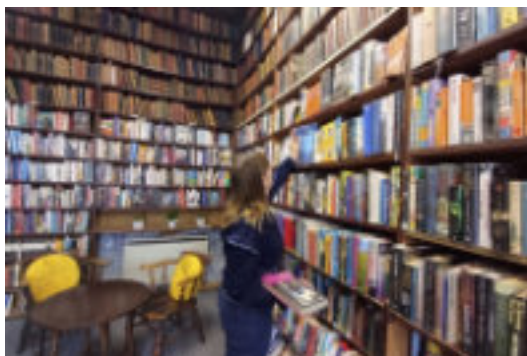
RHS Wisley's lovely gardens



Guildford Institute

My talk to the Social History Group in September featured The Guildford Institute situated in Ward Street opposite Guildford Library.

The Guildford Institute was formed on 14 June 1843 by a union of two earlier societies, The Mechanics' Institution (founded 11 March 1834) and the Literary and Scientific Society (founded 28 February 1835).



Henry Drummond of Albury enjoyed the younger society's patronage and made generous contributions towards the establishment of a library and museum. They met in a room in Angel Yard and then moved to the meeting place of The Mechanics, Mr Whitburn's Auction Rooms.

When a Public Hall was built in North Street in 1845 the Guildford Institute moved its activities and collections into the new building. In 1856 the Institute subscription being, it was said, too high, the Guildford Working Men's Institution was founded, its headquarters also being in the Public Hall.

However, the two societies overlapped and in 1892 they amalgamated and moved into new premises on the corner of Ward Street. These premises were originally the Royal Arms Coffee House Tavern and Temperance Hotel which opened in 1881.

The Natural History and Literary Society was established in 1893 and there is a huge collection of interesting articles from their Society Collections.

In 1896 a chess club was formed and in 1912 The Keep, the Institute's journal was published



twice-yearly.

The number of members rose to an all-time peak in 1916. During the First World War refugees coming into the town queued up to join and membership rose to 1,800.

The Library becomes open access in 1924 and borrowers were allowed to enter and pick out their own books instead of having them handed over personally by the Librarian.

In 1934 to commemorate the Centenary of the Guildford Institute a plaque was unveiled which read "For 100 years this



Institute has provided opportunity for reading and study for the inhabitants of this borough."



By 1945 the Institute faces the post-war world. Membership numbers began to fall due to commercial lending libraries, cinemas and radio broadcasting.

The Institute was granted Grade II listed status and in 1976 a special meeting was held to discuss its future. Two years later it was granted charitable status.

In 1982 the Institute merged with the University of Surrey. They became a Trustee of the building and ran many of its part-time

courses here. The same year a café, the Friday Beano, was opened.

The University of Surrey ceased all involvement with the Institute in 2008, and a Board of Directors was established devising a strategy for the future including plans for redevelopment for the building. A team of volunteers was established who manned the reception desk and helped with various administration tasks.

In 2012 helped by generous donations, grants and loans enabled huge improvements to the building. Ben Elton and Anne Milton unveil the new building a year later.

In 2017 there were celebrations to mark 125 years in Ward Street and in 2018 The Beano closes after 36 years. The following year the V Café carries on serving vegetarian and vegan food.

Recently the Royal Bank of Scotland ended their lease on part of the building, and the Institute has installed a new Community & Wellness Centre in its place.

They run so many interesting courses and events featuring the arts, history, languages and much more. Look at their online digital brochure or pop into reception to collect a brochure and perhaps stay for a coffee and a light lunch.

Website: guildford-institute.org.uk

Anita Laycock



Bookham u3a future events

The table below shows upcoming meetings open to all members. For more information on these meetings please refer to the Bookham u3a website. You will need to be logged in to see the additional information.

The monthly meetings always start at 2.30pm

Inn and Out at the Top	02 Dec 2025	14:30	1 hour	Old Barn Hall
A Musician's Life	13 Jan 2026	14:30	1 hr	Old Barn Hall

Study Days at Yehudi Menuhin School

Always on a Friday 10am to 4pm

Bring your own lunch

£12 u3a members

Friday 21 November:

The History of British Industry: Iron & Rivets, to Electronics & Jets, to Robots & AI

Presented by Dr Richard Marks



Visit then u3a website for more information