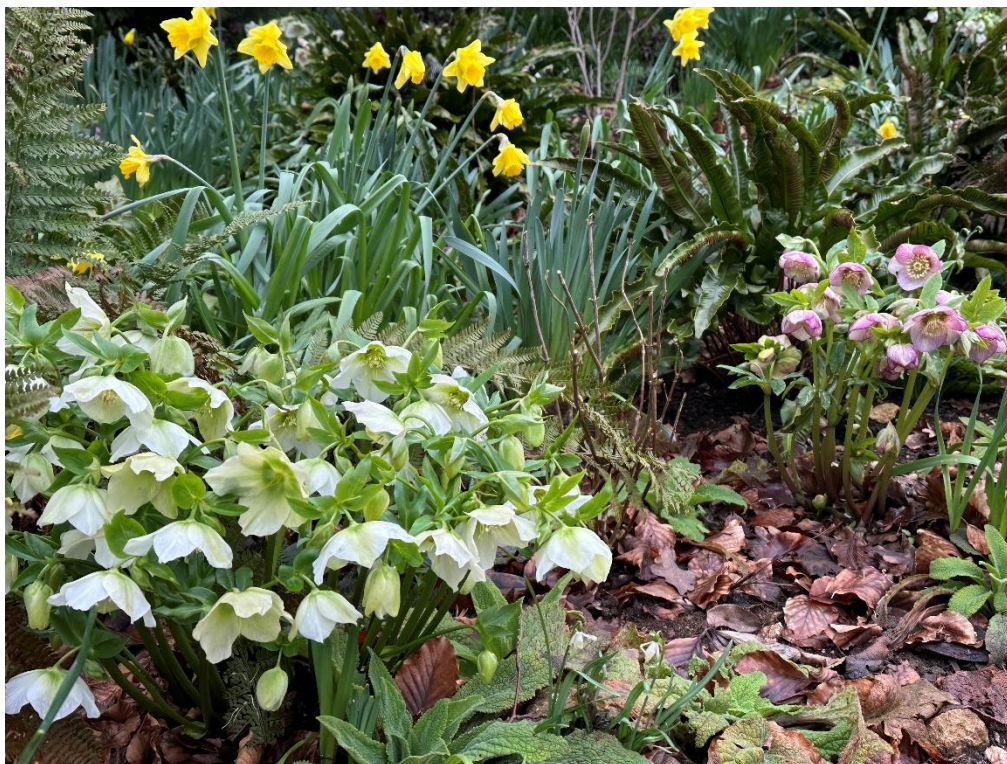




February 2026

Message from the Chair

Hello everyone

In this newsletter you will find information about our monthly talks, and reports from group leaders on recent activities. Hopefully something for everyone.

I have a couple of announcements. One of our members, Katherine Kirk, has offered to start a Discussion Group, similar to ones she has coordinated elsewhere. Katherine says "It would be gently structured so that we focus on the chosen subject. A member volunteers in advance to lead on a theme - maybe a social issue, maybe a cultural, philosophical, humorous or other subject. We can discuss anything you like! The volunteer introduces the item, speaking for no more than ten minutes, and then it will be opened out to the group for more in-depth exploration and discussion. This approach can be adapted as the group develops according to members' wishes. I would hope for us to meet once a

month on a Friday morning ideally at a suitable cafe or hostelry". If this would be of interest, please contact newslettertetburyu3a@gmail.com

There's also a message from Mark Janaway, our committee member for Publicity. "As part of our desire to widen the awareness of the u3a and what we do, I am looking for members to distribute our leaflets and posters in their local community. I already have close links with the main establishments in Tetbury itself, but if anyone is able to use their local contacts, I can provide copies of the posters and leaflets (or e-mail copies which can be downloaded and printed) which can then be made available and /or displayed. Many thanks, Mark".

You can contact Mark via the Committee page of the website <https://tetbury.u3asite.uk/committee/> or speak to him at one of the monthly talks.

That's it from me.

Martin Doidge (Chair)

Monthly Speakers

Cider to Gliders

This month's informative talk was given by Richard Chatham on the intriguing history of a small village outside of Tewkesbury.

In 1935, two small rural villages came together to form the Parish of Stoke Orchard and Tredington. What follows is a story of orchards, railways, war, and remarkable local heritage. At St James' Church, there is a beautiful survivor of medieval church art. It's a reminder that even the smallest communities can hold extraordinary history within their walls. Stoke Orchard is also home to a remarkable natural survivor — a 200-year-old pear tree, believed to be one of the oldest known examples in the country. A fitting symbol for an area long associated with orchards, cider, and perry. From around 1840 to 1960, Stoke Orchard had a direct railway line linking it to London and Birmingham. Cider and perry produced in the local orchards were transported by rail to major cities.

The area we now know as Stoke Orchard took on a very different role during the Second World War. What had once been farmland became an airfield — one of dozens across Gloucestershire. It served as a Relief Landing Strip, supporting larger RAF stations in the region. Secret documents later revealed that the airfield was known to the Luftwaffe — a sobering reminder of the risks faced by even small rural communities during wartime.

In 1941, the airfield became a training ground for pilots of the Horsa glider. These were extraordinary aircraft — made largely of wood, designed for one operational flight, and flown without engines into hostile territory. The pilots trained here knew the risks. On 6th June 1944 (D-Day) glider troops played a crucial role in securing the Pegasus Bridge. Armed with nothing more than a compass and a stopwatch, the pilots had to calculate their approach and landing in darkness. Today, the Horsa glider is remembered in Stoke Orchard in a charming and symbolic way — a replica has been built as the central feature of the local playground. From instruments of war to places of play — a powerful transformation of history into community memory.



Our next talk on "The National Gardens Scheme (NGS) and the Gardens of Gloucestershire" will take place on Monday 16th March at 10.30 am (doors open at 10 am) at the Tetbury Goods Shed GL8 8EY.

Vanessa Berridge will give us an insight into the work of the NGS and the variety of beautiful gardens on our doorstep.

Vanessa is county organiser for the NGS in Gloucestershire and opens her garden for the scheme. A magazine and newspaper columnist, Vanessa also launched The English Garden magazine in 1997. She now gives talks, writes on gardens and garden history and reviews fiction and non-fiction for magazines and newspapers.

Refreshments will be available before and afterwards - we hope to see you there.

Here's a link to our full 2026 programme <https://tetbury.u3asite.uk/events/>

By Julia Walter (Speakers Secretary)

Art Appreciation

We first looked at "**The Assumption of the Virgin**" by Titian (1518) which was commissioned for the high altar of Santa Maria Gloriosa, a Franciscan church in Venice. It is imposingly sited in the viewer's direct line of vision on entering the church. Although initially the Franciscans were critical of it, considering the Apostles in the foreground to be too large, the interest shown by the Holy Roman Emperor convinced them to keep it.



It shows a young (despite being around 65 at the time of her death) Virgin supported by angels, her arms outstretched in the early Christian position of prayer being received into Heaven by God. Both are surrounded by a vibrant golden light. Beneath her stand the Apostles including James, with a shell, and Thomas who is reaching for the belt that the Virgin sends down as proof of her ascension.

Although the painting was removed for safekeeping during both World Wars and once - not successfully - hung in the Academia, it was returned to its original position in 1945.

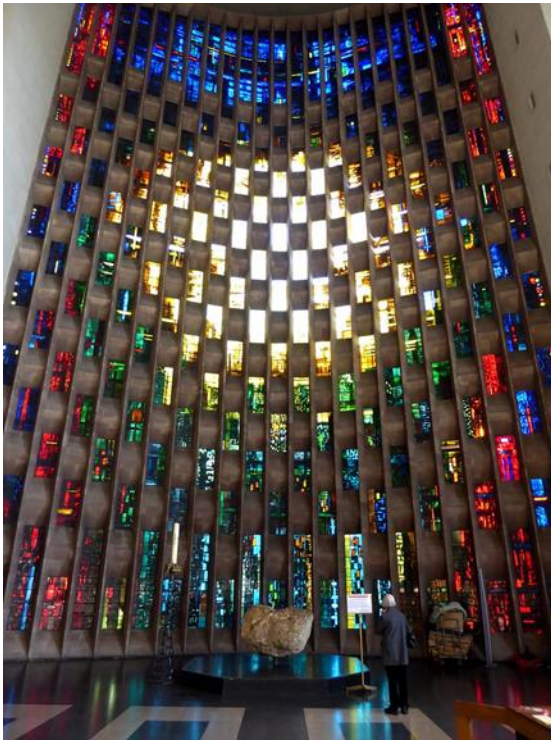
The Assumption of the Virgin, Titian, 1518,
Santa Maria Gloriosa del Frari, Venice

Our next subject was John Piper 1903-1992. An incredibly prolific artist, his work includes painting, printing, textiles, illustration, ceramics, theatre design, stained glass and photography. He is, however, mainly known for his stained glass and paintings - often focussed on the British landscape especially churches and large country houses. He was an official war artist in WWII and his depictions of bomb damaged churches and landmarks made him a household name. We looked more closely at three of his works.

The bombed church of **St Mary le Port**, Bristol 1940, uses bold blocks of colour, the tower depicted in the red and grey embers of fire with light still streaming

through the window. Typically for Piper, he has used dark colours or black for the extremities of this painting thereby focusing your gaze on the central scene of destruction.

Gordale Scar 1943 is one of his best known works, a segment of blue sky gives way to threatening black clouds overhead whilst a stream makes its way down the imposing grey, striated limescale rocks with grass and moss clinging on.



The majestic **Coventry Cathedral's Baptistry Window 1962** is 26m high and 16m across, an immense curved structure. It comprises 198 panes of glass with an abstract design and it faces east so the morning sun streams through.

The lattice of chevrons holding the glass provides both the strength to support it and form Piper's typical dark boundary to offset the vibrant colours thereby focussing your gaze on the central sunburst of white and yellow.

John Piper, Coventry Cathedral Baptistry window, 1962.

By **Judy Greeman**

Aviation and Classic Cars

Seven of the now more than 25 members of this new group visited Aerospace Bristol in February. We were fortunate to have the individual attention of a volunteer guide (thank you Tony Price!) who had started his career as an apprentice at Filton airfield, so was very knowledgeable and brought many of the exhibits to life with his personal experience of their development.

The exhibits cover the history of British aviation development from fragile beginnings to the jet age and space exploration. There are clear display boards and plenty of exhibits that adults and children alike can play with. Thanks to Tony, we were able to go into the cockpit of the Bristol Britannia, and also peek into the Rolls Royce engine shed.



Britannia Cockpit

Ongoing restoration projects include the Bristol Bolingbroke (pictured), which in WWII hunted German submarines in the North Atlantic and then Japanese submarines in the Pacific.



Bristol Bolingbroke restoration project



Concorde visit

The pièce de résistance, of course, is Concorde G-BOAF- the last one to fly. An excellent display projected onto the nose describes the development of the aircraft, while another display near the engine bays illustrates how she was able to fly supersonically.

For those of us not fortunate enough to have flown on her, it was fascinating (and a little sad) to go aboard. While the layout is definitely cramped, the experience and service were certainly luxurious. The Aerospace ticket enables free return visits for a year.

The group's next outing is to the Haynes Motor Museum near Yeovil on 11th March. Do come and join us!

By Judith Austin

Bookclub Monday Evening



Image by Leonhard Niederwimmer from Pixabay

At the end of January eight of us met to discuss two books - **"I know why the caged bird sings"** by **Maya Angelou** (originally published in 1969) and **"The Colossus of Maroussi"** by **Henry Miller** (originally published in 1941). Both very different books which generated a stimulating discussion, with very different receptions.

The group felt that Maya Angelou's memoir about Black Americans trapped by racism, segregation, and oppression was written in language that was powerful and honest, unlike Henry Miller's self-indulgent experiences in Greece, which were extremely difficult to read. In fact, half the group did not finish the book and gave up before the end (200 pages).

Where Angelou shared real experiences with an authentic voice, Miller tended to exaggerate the events and people in his travelogue, portraying George Katsimbali, a Greek poet and raconteur, as a larger-than-life Colossus. His book has no chapters (it is divided into three parts) and he writes about his passion for Greece in long sentences, with a style that is personal and subjective. "Such long words to say so little".

As a group we tried to think of similar places, or landscapes that we had visited, with which we felt an equivalent deep connection, and came up with - Petra, Rome, The Valley of the Kings, and the Desert of Jordan. But we imagined that Miller would have been a terrible travel companion, constantly talking about what he felt, when all we wanted to do was to appreciate what was in front of us, and take in the view, or the ancient monument.

At times Miller's language is vivid and poetic, and some of us felt that this was a redeeming factor, because he can write. It was a shame that Miller waited until the very end of the book to explain how he had been transformed by his travel experience. It would have made the book much more intelligible if this had been on page one.

Whilst Angelou's memoir helps readers understand history through a personal perspective, Miller (writing just before the outbreak of World War II) informs his readers that Greek history is a living experience, which is a difficult concept to appreciate.

We awarded "I know why the caged bird sings" by Maya Angelou 3.91 stars out of 5, and "The Colossus of Maroussi" by Henry Miller 1.4 stars out of 5.

By Corrine Hinton

Bookclub Wednesday

We had our first meeting of the year on the 28th January when eight of us met to discuss *The Covenant of Water* by Abraham Verghese, a 700 page book which we read over two months.

Set in Kerala, India between 1900 and 1977, a three generation family saga who suffer a peculiar affliction runs parallel with the story of Digby's life and dreams first in Glasgow then India when, because he was Catholic and lower class, he was advised to join the Indian Medical service. Verghese intertwines the stories seamlessly as he draws every thread together at the end.

We all enjoyed the book with its twists and turns, really well drawn, strong characters who suffer joy, loss and hardship yet remain resilient.

A fascinating look into India's history and culture, touching on Britain's role in its development.

Our next meeting will be on Wednesday 25th February when we'll be discussing "Precipice" by Robert Harris.

By Pauline Whittaker

Garden Visits Group

Ten of us ventured out on a cold, blustery but thankfully dry morning to Painswick Rococo Garden to see the snowdrops. There were masses of snowdrops everywhere, with the best ones in the woodland where the trees set them off beautifully. We had planned this visit several months ago, and were a bit concerned that the snowdrops might have flowered and gone past their best, as it's been a relatively mild winter. And unfortunately some had gone over, but there were still many in their prime to see. But the added bonus was seeing hundreds, if not thousands, of daffodils flowering in the meadow, which made us feel that spring is around the corner. After our visit some of us enjoyed a light lunch in the pop up café, which has become a tradition for our visits.





We have two visits planned for March, neither of which involves an actual garden!

The first will be on Monday 9th March at 10.30am, when we will be shown around the indoor plant section at Nailsworth Garden Centre, with a talk on the plants - please let me know if you intend coming, and have not already done so, as numbers are limited.

The second one will be to Hortico Plant Centre, Sherston, on Monday 23rd March at 10.30am.

By Caroline Hose

History Group

The writings and documents of the English Civil War by Jenny Dunford

Jenny began by explaining that by doing research, involving original documents in Record Offices, she became adept at deciphering the scripts used in letters and wills etc. Then as a member of The English Civil War Society, which aims to educate the public about the English 17th Century through authentic means and bring history alive, she began to get involved in battle re-enactments. This then progressed to her interest in demonstrating "living history" and finding out about how ordinary people lived day-to-day.

Of course, there were many aspects of life which prohibited women during the 17th Century, so to give talks, and put herself into the period, she chose to become an impoverished and slightly old-fashioned gentlewoman, demonstrating the factors involved in writing a letter.



Jenny came fabulously attired in shift, corset, jacket, skirt, white embroidered linen cap or coif, petticoat, stockings and shoes. As she explained this was not a costume, but were all items based on fact.

Jenny then went through everything involved in writing and sending a letter. Most items had to be made from scratch including the pen (from a hardened and shaped bird feather such as a swan or goose feather); the ink (made from oak galls, boiling water, ferrous sulphate and gum arabic used as a thickener); the paper (made from recycled linen rags) and the blotting medium (made from very fine sand). Some products were bought from the apothecary who sold a wide range of things beyond medicinal remedies.

Between 1550 - 1650 the Secretary Hand was the dominant and fashionable script used for both legal and personal documents. It was a running script designed for speed where the pen rarely left the page. It had a different alphabet which makes it difficult for modern readers to read. Some of the distinctive letters are an 'h' which looks like a broken-backed character, with the descender hooking to the left, an 'e' which frequently looks like a reversed '3' or

a small loop, and a 'c' appearing like a modern 'r' or 'v'. The Secretary Script was then replaced by a more legible Italic Hand which was used for correspondence.

When people wrote letters there was no standardized use of punctuation (which was used sparingly) or spelling, which relied entirely on the writer. Finally, letters were folded and secured with wax seals for privacy before being sent away to their destination by horseback riders.

By Corinne Hinton

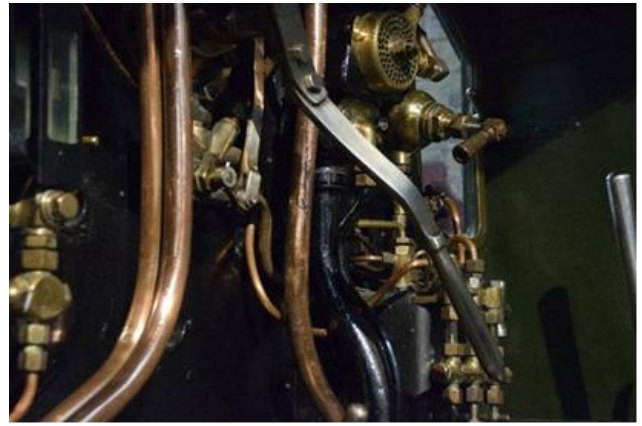
Photography Group

Unsurprisingly, the Photography Group chose an indoor venue for its January meeting, going to the Steam Museum in Swindon. As usual, we met up for a coffee first in the café there and then moved on to exploring the exhibits and models in the museum.



Here is a picture of attending group members together with some of our 'arty' images from the visit.





Our next meeting is on Friday 27th February at Tetbury Bowls Club. Our topic is 'Lighting' with several group members doing a presentation and demonstration of techniques and lighting methods. We will also be looking at our pictures from the Steam Museum.

By Mark Janaway

Playreading Group 1

In a world which is currently infested with the novelty of AI and all it's life changing possibilities, it is extraordinarily apposite that we have just read Ayckbourn's *Comic Potential* play written in 1998, a quarter of a century before this present hoo- hah. Ayckbourn's first visit to the world of AI was in 1987 when he used an android in the play "**Henceforward**".

This play takes the form of a never-ending TV soap in which the leading protagonists are androids, several mistakes are made by the leading robot, questions are asked by other cast members; are these mechanical failures or is the problem much deeper.....the smiling and laughing android, also shows signs of falling in love, displays characteristics which can surely only be described as humanoid and not mechanical malfunctions. is true? Adam, the idealistic young writer subsequently falls in love with the android, now known as Jacie.

Indeed, although it's a hypothetical answer depending on how you want to interpret the end of the play. As the playwright notes, *Comic Potential* ends with Jacie being given power and influence - which she immediately exerts by overruling over her 'benefactor' Adam. As Alan Ayckbourn notes, this is the first step towards letting a superior species into a position where humans could become obsolete very quickly.

By Clive Jarman

Wine Tasting Group

Another convivial evening proved - yet again - that we still have much to learn about wine!



Our host cunningly served three Portuguese vinho verde white wines in a blind tasting, and they were surprisingly different enough that several of us only managed to guess one correctly (some managed two). We all found the Portuguese reds that followed pleasant but not outstanding. The host has fun teasing and testing the group and we all enjoy learning. We do have space for one more if anyone is interested in joining the group.

By Judith Austin

And finally the deadline for contributions to the March newsletter is Monday 16th March.

Please send your articles to Caroline, your newsletter editor, at newsletttertetburyu3a@gmail.com

u3a National Events

Online Learning Events

u3a members can join a wide range of online talks, workshops and courses for free with their membership. Most of these opportunities are presented by members themselves, sharing their knowledge or skills with others across the movement. There is also a wide range of talks on offer from well-known speakers and organisations, plus in-person events at venues like the Royal Institution.

All of these events can be booked at the link below via Eventbrite. Online events are hosted on Zoom - further information and 'how to' guides are here www.u3a.org.uk/events/educational-events

Want to be the first in the know? Sign up to receive regular monthly updates on upcoming events: [subscribe here](#)

Interest Groups Online

Interest Groups Online is an online u3a community that gives you the opportunity to join groups, talks and courses from the comfort of your home. Like with a u3a, the activities are run by members and are a great way to meet people from all across the u3a movement.

It costs £12 to join for the year, equating to £1 per month. Membership runs from 1 April to 31 March of the next year. Membership and your groups are managed via the u3a Beacon Members Portal.

To become a member of Interest Groups Online you will need to fill out a short form and make your payment on the u3a Beacon Members Portal. As part of your subscription to Interest Groups Online, you can opt in to receive a free copy of the u3a magazine, Third Age Matters (TAM).

Take a look at the groups page for details on the wide variety of online groups, courses and talks, and how to join [interest groups online](#)