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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN



Christmas is coming!

Once Halloween, Bonfire Night and Remembrance Day are over, I always feel that time seems to go faster and, before we know it, we have reached the 'season to be jolly'. For most of us, it is a lovely time of year, getting together with family and friends or just relaxing quietly, but we should always be aware that some people do not look forward to this time of year or that they get very anxious about it.

I always keep lists to remind me of jobs to be done. Each year I enjoy sending cards, not just to people I rarely see but also to local friends who I do see. However, I have certainly cut down on the number that I post, now that even second-class stamps are so expensive! I also like to do stockings for Christmas morning so keeping a list of what I put in last year's helps, although certain things are obviously traditional – such as chocolate and smellies. Do you remember the days when you got an orange in your stocking? Does anyone still get one in theirs?

In the run-up to Christmas, I know that there will be lots of u3a activities taking place, often with a Christmas or Winter theme. Many Groups try to do something different or special in December so do let us know how these go. We always enjoy reading about them – and sometimes they give other Groups ideas for next year.

I am sure that, during this month, many of us will indulge in a little nostalgia too as we think back to Christmas times in the past. 'Nostos' means return home and 'algos' means pain. Hopefully this season gives us a sense of wistfulness and affection for times past, with just a hint of melancholy. As we get older and our ideas and needs of what we actually want for Christmas get fewer, we probably enjoy some 'confelicity' too, which is the pleasure we take from the happiness of others. Seeing friends and family members enjoying themselves and expressing their delight opening their presents can be priceless.

However you plan to celebrate, or otherwise, I hope that you enjoy yourselves and that you can have a relaxing time.

I wish you all a very Happy Christmas!

Gill

NEWSLETTER for Oundle & District

Edition Number 206
December 2025

If you would like to find out more about Oundle & District u3a, take a look at <https://oundleanddistrict.u3asite.uk> or contact Chairman: oundleu3achairman@gmail.com Membership Secretary: oundleu3amembership@gmail.com Website Manager: oundleu3awebmanager@outlook.com

Registered Charity Number 1183800



MONDAY 8th DECEMBER

will showcase

Sweet F.A.

**featuring The Julie
Burgess One**

Queen Victoria Hall, Oundle

Doors open at 2.00pm
for Christmas Fayre

MONDAY 12th JANUARY

Michael Aubrey

And his talk will be

"Improbable Adventures".

Doors open at 2.00pm
for tea/coffee and biscuits



MONTHLY MEETINGS

We do not seem to be blessed with dry weather on the afternoons of our Monthly Meetings, but so high was the level of interest in Debbie Land's talk '**Secret War – the Lysander's Clandestine Role in SOE Operations**', that our members braved the rain and we had to put out extra chairs! Amongst other responsibilities, Debbie enjoys being part of the team responsible for maintaining the heritage of Richard Shuttleworth's fully-working collection of aircraft and vehicles, and supporting the wonderful daytime and evening air shows at The Shuttleworth Collection www.shuttleworth.org.



In her presentation we learnt technical details of the versatile Lysander aircraft, where they were based, the timing of operations and stories of the pilots and the agents. Debbie told us she was a storyteller, rather than an historian, and she kept her audience enthralled throughout. We shall long remember this informative and interesting talk.



At our December meeting on **Monday 8th December**, entertainment will be provided by **Sweet F.A. (Peter Fairweather and Will Adams)**. Will's comedy roots stretch back to Cambridge Footlights in the 1970s. Peter is a chartered engineer developing industrial computer software, so says he needs all the laughs he can get. Their words are expertly and wittily put to music by **Julie Burgess**. Julie is an excellent keyboard player and singer, Peter plays piano and guitar, while Will says he plays the fool to Grade 8. Sweet F.A. feel that the great tradition of the English comic song is long overdue for a comeback – and the time is now!

Michael Aubrey, an Oundle resident and member of our u3a, will be our speaker on **Monday 12th January** with a talk entitled "**Improbable Adventures**". Michael was a barrister, don, schoolmaster and artist, but this talk is mainly about his unlikely experiences in Papua New Guinea, famine-stricken India, the Wild West of America and the Australian outback, including some of the surprising people whom he encountered (e.g. Colonel Gaddafi and Salvador Dali). These are among the incidents narrated in Michael's memoir, "*Is That Really True, Sir*", published by Unicorn (including 80 of his paintings), copies of which will be available at the talk.



December Monthly Meeting – Monday 8th December

Please remember to purchase your ticket (£2) in advance from David, our Treasurer (treasureroundleu3a@gmail.com). Do join us for some festive entertainment and refreshments to get the Christmas season under way!

Please also remember to bring your membership card to the meeting as it makes signing in a lot quicker.



Friends Of Oundle Library Calendar

The calendar, with fabulous photos of the local area taken by our Camera and Composition Group, will be on sale at our December meeting on Monday 8th December, priced at £8. The profits go to Oundle Library.

Tea Rota

If you attend our monthly meetings, you will appreciate the tea, coffee and biscuits served by our members before the meeting. We desperately need a few more volunteers. If you could help once or twice a year, please let me know and I will pass your contact details to Peg, who organises the rota. The good news is that the rota is already done for the first half of 2026.

oundleu3achairman@gmail.com

Chairman

Thank you to all Group Leaders who have read out my plea for new Committee members.

The good news is that we have some interest in both Programme Secretary and Web Manager – but not as yet for Chairman. I know that there has been a lot of discussion in your Groups about what the Chairman's role actually entails so below are the core jobs. Other jobs that I have taken on or chosen to do can easily be done by other volunteers, so I have not listed them. A suggestion has also been made that the role could be shared. This is an excellent idea and I would be happy to discuss this proposal if two friends or two members of a particular Group would be interested in finding out more.

Here are the core jobs. chair Committee meetings and AGM; write Chair's report for the AGM; host Monthly Meetings in QVH – or delegate; write a message for the Newsletter each month – or delegate; overview of and support for other Committee members' roles; host the annual Group Leaders' meeting – or delegate; comply with our Constitution; ensure a strategic direction for our u3a; ensure policies etc are updated; keep abreast of national initiatives.

As a Trust Volunteer, I will continue to attend Northamptonshire Network meetings in my capacity as County Contact and I will also attend the EMRST meetings. I certainly have no intention of abandoning our u3a!

Local events

Last month I explained our rationale for advertising events in our Newsletter. On the same theme, for those of you who get the Oundle Life magazine, do look at the centre pages for listings of local events, including our u3a meetings.

Oundle and District Choral Society

At least a third of the ODCS choir is made up of u3a members! Do come and support their Christmas Concert in St. Peter's Church on Saturday 13th December at 7.30pm. Music includes carols by Rutter, Elgar and Beamish and Finzi's '*In Terra Pax*'. Tickets £15 from members.

Renewing Your Membership for 2026

Barbara Bett

Just a reminder! your annual subscription is due for renewal on 1st January 2026. The subs for 2026 are £16.00 (or £12.00 for Associate Members who pay the full subscription at another u3a).





SPOTLIGHT ON LOCAL HISTORY GROUP 1

Barrie Harbott

Our Visit to Chester House.



Launched in October 2021, Chester House Estate at Irchester is the site of an extensive visitor destination, heritage and education resource.

Based in the estate, the Northamptonshire Archaeological Resource Centre (ARC) is a state-of-the-art facility that stores and curates Northamptonshire's

archaeological archives. It preserves materials from past excavations in the county, with the aim of making this history accessible to the public through various activities, including guided tours and public engagement programmes.



Group members attended a presentation of the archives by Chester House volunteers on 15th October. We were taken around the facility which currently holds over 20,000 boxes of material, artefacts and evidence of over 10,000 years of human activity in Northamptonshire. It is a living and growing archive with additional space for over 10,000 boxes from future excavations.



One of the most impressive items – shown left – was a large section of Roman mosaic floor, recovered from the nearby Stanwick Lakes.

We also visited the museum – it shows a range of items recovered locally (right), and has a number of excellent illustrations with reconstructions of the layout of the site, going

back to the first communities to inhabit the location.



All in all a super trip to what may be a 'hidden gem' just half an hour's drive away.

For more information see – <https://chesterhouseestate.org/>



SPOTLIGHT ON FALCONS WALKING GROUP

Chris Milton

A look back over the last 12 months

2025 has been another active year, which is totally due to the group members who take it in turns to plan and coordinate each week's walk; without that support and input it would not be possible to run the extensive programme that we have.

We still have organised walks every Friday, meeting at a pub, just before 10:00am in time to order lunch, before starting our walks at 10:00am on the dot. The group currently has 30 members with, on average, 16

turning up each week and over the last 12 months we have not had to cancel any walk, although one recently was rather wet with continuous rain for the whole two hours. As we start from a local pub, we have seen many changes over the past 16 years during which we have visited 139 establishments; some good, others bad and some which have gone forever. Given that we still managed to find four new ones this year, we have also seen three which have re-opened after an extended period of closure.

As a group we are all a year older than last year but we are still managing an average distance of seven miles in 2½ hours. In fact, if someone has walked every week, they would have covered a distance of some 300 miles (equivalent to the distance from Oundle to Perth in Scotland).

Last May the group spent four days in the Cotswolds, based in Bourton-on-the-Water and we had three days of walking in the surrounding area.

Next year we are looking forward to spending a few days in Church Stretton where we will experience Long Mynd, Ancient Hill Forts and the Ashes Hollow Valley.

Not only is the group focused on its weekly walk, but it is a very social one, and this year we had three of our couples celebrate their Golden Wedding anniversaries.

The health benefits of walking are well known and it is one of the simplest yet most powerful ways to improve overall health and wellbeing. Regular brisk walking helps strengthen the heart, lower blood pressure and cholesterol, and maintain a healthy weight, while also boosting mood, reducing stress, and enhancing energy levels. Studies show that walking in nature further supports mental clarity, better sleep, and resilience against anxiety. Because it's free, low-impact, and accessible to people of all ages, walking is a sustainable habit that can prolong life and reduce the risk of chronic diseases.

SPOTLIGHT ON THE HISTORY MATTERS GROUP

Judith Stronach

We explored the history of Russia for the first half the year, learning about the Revolution, the civil war, the ups and finally downs of communism.



We agreed that Russia's failure to embrace democracy fully remained an enigma but, by looking at their styles of government and key figures, we understood a lot more of the underlying ethos and roots of their political systems.

The second part of the year saw us each talking about historical figures that we thought were misjudged or misrepresented in popular history and culture. These included Richard III (at length!), Thomas Becket, Eleanor of Aquitaine and William Marshall. We also held the equivalent of history slam where everyone spoke briefly on a "What If" (each person's view of what of a historical event had turned out differently). Our most recent session encompassed short talks on "Villains", including Myra Hindley, Sir Francis Galton (inventor of fingerprinting, some key elements of statistics and social science methodology but also the proponent of Eugenics).

We are all girding our loins for the next big topic - China, of whose history the group knows very little. It should be most intriguing - feel free to join the group and learn more!



Walking on a Frosty morning



18 Falcons on a walk from Polebrook



Military History Group 1 have enjoyed a busy and varied few weeks, with field trips to Yorkshire and Cambridge in addition to our usual monthly Oundle Meetings.

Our Yorkshire trip was a two night affair, with our hotel in the centre of York, by the city wall opposite one of the gates, offering us the chance to spend more time in the field. On our journey north we took the opportunity to visit the site of the Battle of Towton, located near the town of Tadcaster. This battle took place on the 29th March 1461, during the Wars of the Roses. Yorkist forces decisively defeated Lancastrian supporters of Henry VI, securing the English throne for Edward IV.

Fought over 10 hours between an estimated 50,000 soldiers from both sides, in a snowstorm on Palm Sunday, it was probably the largest and bloodiest battle on English soil with, according to contemporary records, some 30,000 casualties. Our guide for the walking tour of the battlefield was Alex, a young, knowledgeable and hugely enthusiastic volunteer, an expert on every aspect of the conflict.

The next morning brought a classic spell of wet Yorkshire weather, so the timing was perfect for a visit to the National Rail Museum, in this, the 200th anniversary year of the world's first railway. One of our meetings earlier in 2025 had focused on the vital role of railways following Operation Overlord, the invasion of Nazi occupied Europe in 1944, and our museum visit gave us a chance to consolidate and extend our knowledge of the critical role of railways in times of conflict.

The improved afternoon weather enabled us to explore the City Walls Walkway, an elevated circular route around the city centre. York's City Walls are a major feature of the history of the city – significant remains span all periods, making visible 2,000 years of urban development. They are the longest town walls in England, a scheduled ancient monument comprising some two miles of surviving masonry. They were built mainly in the 13th century of magnesian limestone and, uniquely in England, set on earthen ramparts – we were able to appreciate this extraordinary piece of living history with the bonus of stunning views of the Minster.



Our final day in Yorkshire saw us heading east, away from the city centre to the former RAF Elvington, home to the Yorkshire Air Museum, a volunteer-led organisation which has done a first class job in restoring and preserving significant elements of our aviation heritage. Pride of place is given to a stunning restoration and recreation of Friday the Thirteenth, a Handley Page Halifax heavy bomber of WW2 – no complete examples were preserved at the end of the war, so the task facing the volunteers was enormous, and the finished aircraft, a true testament to their dedication and commitment.

Our final trip this year was closer to home, to Cambridge as guests of Marshall Aerospace. Marshall are the European support partners for the amazing Lockheed Martin C130 Hercules, which had its first flight over 70 years ago and is still in volume production today! Our knowledgeable, insightful and expert host led us on a totally absorbing tour of the huge aerospace facility, with the opportunity to see Hercules aircraft in every stage of overhaul and upgrade, and to get a real understanding of the commitment, skills and knowledge needed to operate such a complex organisation. We ended our day by crossing the Newmarket Road to visit the Cambridge City Cemetery, where over 1,000 Commonwealth War Graves reminded us of the role that Cambridge played in both world wars. Cambridge was home to the Eastern General Hospital during the Great War, and the cemetery was then used by the RAF during WW2 to consolidate casualties from the eastern counties, including Bomber Command bases in Lincolnshire and fighter stations in Norfolk and Suffolk. The Cemetery, an oasis of calm, is a sobering reminder of the ultimate sacrifice made in times of war.



Our last event of the year was at the Oundle Library, following an invitation from the Friends of Oundle Library. Our theme this year was "They Think It Is All Over", focusing on the events of 1946 and their part in creating the modern world. Four of our members presented to a capacity and very supportive audience, covering topics including Palestine, Post War Germany, Austria and the Marshall Plan as well as the collapse of Britain's Far East empires and India's independence.

An energetic, involving and fascinating year – we greatly enjoy opportunities to spend more time together as a group and are already planning our trips for 2026.



SPOTLIGHT ON THE RECORDERS GROUP

Jean Fisher



Our small, intimate group of recorder players meet once a month on a Monday afternoon in Warmington where we thoroughly enjoy some convivial music making. We are officially a group of six but invariably a couple of us may be engaged in another activity so we usually become a quartet or even trio.

We always enjoy our informal sessions as we are acquiring more and more music and "variety is the spice of life" as they say.

We are all of a similar standard i.e. we can read music but we don't necessarily play all the "right" notes in the "right" order as Eric Morecambe used to say!

We enjoy the very occasional "gig" to keep us on our toes. Next weekend we are "background" to carols at an Advent Fayre.

We have a mixture of Tenor and Descant recorders and play in harmony. Our favourite piece by far is ten arrangements of Greensleeves as it feels very "Renaissance," when the recorder was very popular.

By complete contrast we have some jazz numbers with backing tracks which are great fun too, plus well known folk songs from the '60s, which take us down memory lane.

We would be delighted to welcome anyone who would like to join our Group and who remembers recorder playing at school with affection. I have spare recorders if yours has disappeared!

Please contact me via our Groups page on the website to find out more.

SPOTLIGHT ON THE u3a SINGING GROUP AT ABBOTT HOUSE

The Ukulele Group have made several visits to Abbott House to entertain so, instead of our November session in Oundle Methodist Church, the Singing Group visited to sing some of the songs we have been rehearsing this year. Nineteen singers, ably accompanied by Keith Hannis our pianist, entertained the residents with a mix of songs from the '50s and '60s, some old favourites like Cheek to Cheek and A Nightingale sang in Berkeley Square, plus some well-known songs from the Shows. It was good to see so many of the residents singing along and smiling and I think that their best rendition was the chorus 'Mud, mud, glorious mud'!

My thanks to all of the singers and to Keith. This was our first foray into entertaining and I am sure it won't be our last!

If you would like to join our Group, we meet on the third Monday of each month at Oundle Methodist Church at 2.30pm. There are no auditions. Our next session is on Monday 15th December – come and join us for some carols and Christmas songs.



NEWS FROM THE GROUPS Lidia Douglas groupscoordinatoroundleu3a@gmail.com

Gospel Singing Group: Start 2026 with a song. We would welcome one or two more members, why not give it a go – you would be very welcome.

When – we meet on the first Thursday of the month, once a month

Time – 10.30am to 11.30am-ish

Where – Normally in Oundle at Nancy's house.

Cost – no charge

We learn by ear and enjoy some gospel and spiritual songs and folk songs. It's great fun, informal and it's very heartwarming to sing for an hour together.

Interested? If you would like to join us, go to our website, and send us an email via the link on our Group's page.

Hope to see you in 2026.

Nancy Taylor and Jean Fisher (Joint Group Leaders)



News from the Groups *Continued*

New French Group: We have had an interest in starting a beginner/refresher French group. Do please contact me if you are interested so that we could start it in the New Year.

Proposed new Makers Group: Are you a hands-on person who loves to fix things, build, or experiment with technology? Or have you always wanted to learn about exciting modern tools like 3D printers and laser cutters? We are pleased to propose a brand new Makers Group, a dedicated space where curiosity meets creativity.

What is a Makers Group? It's a collaborative hub for people who enjoy "making" in all its forms. Whether your interest lies in traditional crafts, modern technology, or somewhere in between, this Group is for you. We'll pool our knowledge, share tips, and work on projects together.

What will we do? The activities will be guided by your interests. Potential projects could include: Electronics and Gadgets: Learn about microcontrollers (like Arduino or Raspberry Pi) to build simple home automation projects or fun gadgets.

3D Printing and Laser Cutting: See demonstrations; learn how to draw or source designs

Traditional Crafts: Explore woodworking, textiles, or model making. Laser Cutting and Design

Fix-it Sessions: Bring in broken items and use collective problem-solving skills to repair them.

Shared Learning: Teach and learn new skills from fellow members in a relaxed, social environment.

Why join? Social Connection: Meet like-minded individuals in your community who share a passion for creating and problem-solving.

Skill Sharing: Benefit from the diverse expertise within our U3A membership. Everyone has something to teach and something to learn.

Hands-On Fun: Step away from screens and engage in rewarding, practical activities.

Purpose: Tackle interesting challenges and see tangible results from your efforts.

We need you to make this happen! We are seeking enthusiasts, novices, and experts alike. If this sounds like your cup of tea, please contact Lidia Douglas.



Crime Novels Book Group: This group meets on the second Wednesday each month at 2.00pm in Oundle. So far we have had three meetings and it is time to welcome some new members. There are two places available and these will be on a first come first served basis. On 10th December we will be discussing *One Virgin too Many* by Lindsey David and in January, *Murder in the Family* by Cara Hunter. New members will be able to choose a book for the rest of us to read and then we discuss our thoughts about the plot; characters; etc and even whether we liked the book and why. All accompanied by a variety of teas and coffees. If you would like more information or would like to join us, please contact Anne Garraway via the Groups page on the website.



Quizzes 'n' Puzzles: Would you like an afternoon of laughter? We would love to welcome a couple more members to our Group which meets on the second Thursday of the month at 2.00pm and we meet in each other's houses. If you are interested, please contact us via our page on the website.



Playreading 2: We have a space, or two, in our Playreading Group. We meet on the first Thursday of the month at 2.30pm in each other's houses. If you are interested in joining us, please contact us via our page on the website.



Just a note to let you know that **Chinwaggers** does not meet in December and will start up again on the fourth Thursday of January (22nd) between 10.00am and noon in the Snug of the Talbot Hotel.



DECEMBER'S QUIZ

DECEMBER'S QUIZ

The Christmas Bumper Quiz

Part One: The answers to the following are either true or false.

1. There were four ghosts in Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*.
2. There were 250 gifts given in total in the '12 Days of Christmas'.
3. If you're born on Christmas Day, your star sign is Sagittarius.
4. The King's Speech is traditionally aired at 3.00pm on Christmas Day.
5. Santa traditionally wore a white suit until Coca Cola changed it to red.
6. According to tradition your Christmas decorations should be down by New Year's Day.
7. Iris is a journalist in *The Holiday*.
8. The first Christmas card was sent in the year 1901.
9. Australia has a popular Christmas dessert called 'White Christmas' which is made from meringue.
10. A camel is said to have carried Mary on its back on the way to Bethlehem.

Part Two: Christmas movies questions:

1. In *Home Alone*, how many brothers does Kevin have?
2. In which Christmas movie does Tom Hanks play six of the characters?
3. In the movie *Love Actually*, which song does Hugh Grant's character The Prime Minister dance to in number 10?
4. In *Mean Girls*, which Christmas song do the Plastics get up on stage to perform?
5. In *Home Alone 2*, who does Kevin run into in the hotel lobby?
6. *Miracle On 34th Street* centres on which real-life department store?
7. According to Buddy the Elf, what are the four food groups elves can eat?
8. In the 2006 film *Deck the Halls* what does Matthew Broderick's character (Steve Finch) do for a living?
9. Who is Jeronicus Jangle in the film *Jingle Jangle*?
10. What is the name of the prince in *Frozen*?

Part Three: Christmas music:

1. What year did Mariah Carey's '*All I Want for Christmas is You*' come out?
2. What is the best-selling Christmas single of all time?
3. What is the opening line to Shakin' Stevens's '*Merry Christmas Everyone*'?
4. What was the UK Christmas number one in 2010?
5. When was the first version of '*Santa Claus Is Comin' to Town*' released?
6. '*Jingle Bells*' was originally a song for what other holiday?
7. Who is widely considered the King of Christmas music?
8. Which famous Scottish singer was born on Christmas Day in 1954?
9. How many 'la's are in the song '*Deck the Halls*'?
10. The film *Last Christmas* starring Emilia Clarke, is a musical inspired by the music of whom?



Part Four: Christmas food and drink:

1. In which country did eggnog originate?
2. In which country is it tradition to eat KFC for Christmas dinner?
3. What is traditionally hidden inside a Christmas pudding?
4. What fruit is traditionally put inside a Christmas stocking?
5. Traditionally, when should you start making a Christmas pudding?
6. Stollen is a traditional fruit cake in which country?
7. When making mince pies, which way should you stir your mincemeat for good luck?
8. What is the most popular vegetarian alternative to a roast turkey?
9. What is glühwein?
10. In 2009 IKEA made the largest gingerbread man; to the nearest kilogram, how much did it weigh?

ANSWERS TO NOVEMBER'S QUIZ

Part One: 1. Fotheringhay; 2. Aldwinckle; 3. Polebrook; 4. Oundle; 5. King's Cliffe; 6. Ashton; 7. Thrapston; 8. Barnwell; 9. Peterborough; 10. Elton.

Part Two: 1. Grace Darling; 2. Charles Lutwidge Dodgson; 3. Mary Robinson; 4. Monopoly; 5. Franklin D. Roosevelt; 6. Neville Chamberlain; 7. Juan Carlos I; 8. 2005; 9. Laika; 10. Yitzhak Rabin.

Quizzes devised by members of the Quizzes 'n' Puzzles Group.

