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 Third Age Trust
 156 Blackfriars Road, London SE1 8EN
 Email: info@u3a.org.uk
 Tel: 020 8466 6139

EDITORIAL

Editor Sharon Parsons
 editor@u3a.org.uk
Group sub-editor James Hundleby
Sub-editor Amy Beveridge

DESIGN

Art editor Yvey Bailey
Picture editor Jessica Marsh

PRODUCTION

Jane Easterman

ADVERTISING

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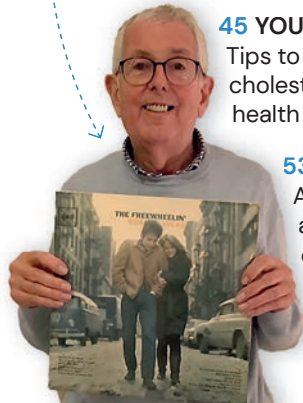


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welcome

As I write this letter, heavy rain is driving against the windows, and a howling wind is whipping around the house. It's hard to believe that at some point the sun will come out from behind the clouds, the days will grow warmer, and popping out for a pint of milk won't necessitate an armoury of waterproofs!

Indeed, by the time you're reading this, that miracle will hopefully have come to pass and spring will finally be here, bringing brighter days along with a sense of energy and renewal... So, this issue is full of ideas and inspiration aimed to put a spring in your step!

Give your wellbeing a boost with healthy ways to improve mind and body; get out in the fresh air and enjoy some of the country's most beautiful walks; step away from your phone or screen and engage with the world and the people

around you instead; fuel your body with delicious healthy food; engage your senses in the garden; and act on an expert's wise words about living and ageing well.

Not least in this issue, you'll find all sorts of life-affirming ways to make the most of your u3a. Discover fantastic workshops and events to sign up to, along with fascinating interest groups and member initiatives that are sure to inspire. And do check out the latest on u3a Festival 26 (page 19), and how you can join what promises to be a wonderful celebration of everything u3a is about.

Enjoy the issue - and the new season!



Sharon Parsons, editor

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connections

News and views to share what has been happening across u3a



A swan proved the starting point for a fascinating u3a project...

Joint effort

Flight of imagination



Larry Jeram-Croft, a member of Martock u3a, describes how an incident involving a swan led to a unique collaboration with his Creative Writing group

Some years ago, I started a u3a Writing group in the Somerset village of Martock. For some time, we had fun with writing tasks, and talking about literary festivals and publishing (as a published author myself, I was able to advise on the latter topic).

Then one day, while playing golf, I very nearly hit a swan with one of my badly aimed shots. This generated some debate in the group about the legal issues of swans, and then unexpectedly sparked an idea for the eight of us to write a collective short story.



Martock u3a's Writing group with their brilliantly conceived book

We invented a remote village that was separated from the rest of the world by the infamous Somerset Levels. It had been conducting itself to its entire satisfaction for centuries, we decided, but it also had a rich tradition of worshipping swans because of a ghostly local legend. And so ▶

▶ Blackney Foloren was born: the name is based on the words *ney*, which means ‘little island’, and *foloren*, which is Old English for ‘forlorn’.

A little brainstorming invented a host of characters to populate our fictional village, and each group member took ownership of one or more of them.

These included the vicar and his wife, two local entrepreneurs, the two ladies who ran the village shop, a fading rock star, a coven of witches, a very annoying local policeman and several badly behaved animals. Oh, and some swans!

The ‘short’ story ended up at 30,000 words and proved very enjoyable to write: so much so that we decided to write more (by then, we’d all become very fond of our little village and its characters). We decided to base the stories on a year in Blackney Foloren, set around four ancient pagan festivals: May Day, the Summer Solstice, Halloween and the Winter Solstice.

The writing process was enormous fun. We would meet monthly to discuss and consolidate what we had written previously, and consider future plot lines and development. We would then go

“ ”
**We discovered
 the collective
 imagination
 can really
 take flight**

away and write up what was happening to our characters so that they fitted into the overall story.

I would then put everyone’s contributions together, careful only to edit for format and to get the timelines right. Luckily, we all adopted a bright and breezy style, which helped it to come together easily and flow seamlessly from page to page.

As a creative writing exercise, it really seemed to succeed, and all too soon we were reaching the last story. We met as usual, and all agreed we wanted the book to end at a wedding for two of our characters... but we had no idea how to make it happen. By the end of the meeting, however, with everyone’s imaginative

input – and a lot of laughter – we’d got there. We had both our plot structure and satisfactory ending in the bag.

The project took two years from start to finish. With the book complete, we agreed that I would publish it through Amazon as I do with all my books, with full credit to all the authors and any revenue going to charity. So last May, *The Blackney Swans and Other Troublesome Creatures* became available on Amazon as a Kindle, paperback or hardback edition.



We think our collaborative book-writing project might be a first in the u3a. Having a shared aim proved a fantastic way to bring us all together but, not least, this creative project proved so enjoyable.

We discovered how, with support and encouragement, the collective imagination can really take flight!

▶ **Have you and your u3a worked together on a similar creative project? Let us know!**

What a treasure!

Mark Dowdney of Elmbridge u3a shares how a valued member was given a memorable send-off

When Meg James, our much-loved secretary for the past 10 years, announced she was stepping down, we wanted to mark the occasion properly: her dedication has helped create a thriving u3a with a membership of over 1,600 people, an all-time record!

Our affiliations secretary Nikki Lindsay came up with a brilliant plan – a secret treasure hunt! On the big day, the first of five poetry clues written by Nikki was popped through Meg’s letterbox. She soon worked out she had to head to

Hampton Court – but she wasn’t expecting to be taken there on my scooter! On arrival, clue no 2 directed her to the Tudor kitchens, where she received another puzzler... and she was off again, this time enjoying a Thames boat ride and a bottle of champagne (thanks to working out clue no 4), before a final clue led to a luxury cream tea at The Mitre Hotel by Hampton Court Bridge.

Needless to say, both Meg – and all her friends at Elmbridge u3a – will treasure the memory of a lovely day forever!



Meg’s prizes included afternoon tea and a scooter trip



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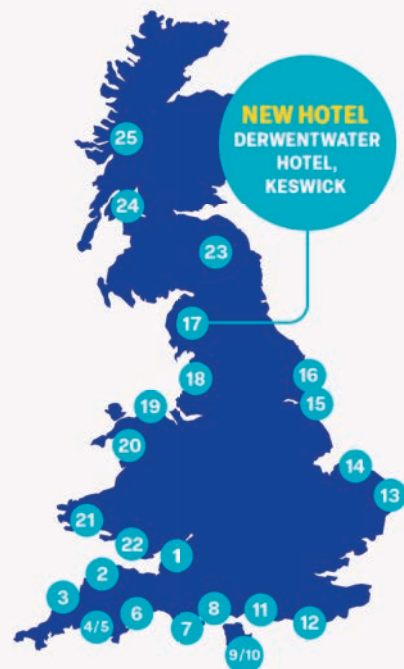
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Leading the way



To create successful, thriving u3as, the energy and enthusiasm of those at the helm are vital components, says **Allan Walmsley, Chair of the Trust**

As I write this article, I'm watching my hometown football team, Blackburn Rovers, face another dismal defeat. Over time, this well-respected team has been very successful, but it is now in the lower divisions with daunting challenges – from falling support to the loss of good players. How will they break the cycle?

It made me think, unfortunately, that there are parallels with some u3as that were once very successful. Now they too face falling membership, and I often wonder what causes that decline.

Sometimes it's because there are factors outside the u3a's control: perhaps an ageing or shrinking local population, lack of public transport services or increased local competition. Sometimes, though, it's clear that the issues come from within. There may be a lack of energy, enthusiasm or fresh ideas, and a limited range of interesting

activities for members to get involved with. If they are obvious to me, they are certainly apparent to any potential new member, and can be important factors in retaining members too.

In my experience, the role of Chair is crucial in addressing a decline. A Chair who is energetic, encouraging and leads with confidence attracts willing committee members and enthuses members. This, in turn, creates a domino effect where, for example, interest group leaders host with more vigour, and members are inspired and supported to create new groups. That infectious sense

of energy within the u3a then becomes a real factor in recruitment, retention and, of course, genuine enjoyment of everything the movement has to offer.

In my role, I visit many u3as around the country, and it's fantastic to see shining examples of great leadership and thriving u3as. I've had the pleasure, for instance, of meeting the Chairs and committee members of both Wyre Forest & District u3a in the West Midlands and Teesdale u3a in the North East recently.

While each u3a has its own unique characteristics, the leadership and enthusiasm of the key members in these u3as is there for all to see, generating a wider energy and sustained growth.

Of course, Chairs need support, both from the Trust and within their u3a. Some may have little experience of committee work before their appointment, and training and support is essential to understand what is required. But the main prerequisites, in my view, are

for a Chair to show energy and leadership.

I just wish someone would explain that to the directors of Blackburn Rovers!

““
It's fantastic to see shining examples of great leadership and thriving u3as

Tell us about the great things your u3a is doing to generate enthusiasm and energy among its members. And if your Chair deserves recognition for all they do, let us know! Email: editor@u3a.org.uk and head your email: SHINING EXAMPLE

PHOTO: PETER ALVEY



Cheer them on!

Our two determined runners are on the last leg of training for the TCS London Marathon, which takes place on 26 April. As part of Team u3a, Clive Anderson and Sheryl Kenny have spent months going

the extra mile for this incredible challenge, so if you're in the capital at that time, do come and cheer them on!

You can also support Clive and Sheryl by going to their fundraising pages at: u3a.org.uk/fundraising



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Life lessons

WORDS OF WISDOM

Gaynor Woolley of Bristol u3a offers her wise thoughts



ACCEPT CHANGE

Ageing brings changes that are not always welcome. You may not be able to run a marathon or dig the garden with ease, but think of the experiences and wisdom you have acquired to help you deal with life's issues. Fighting these inevitable changes can be time-consuming and exhausting.

LEARN TO ADJUST

Not being able to do something you once loved means there is time for something new. When you were dealing with work, family and running those marathons, didn't you always say there were things you wanted to do but never had time for? Keep in touch with people, complete that list and learn new skills.

FIND JOY

You can enjoy life whatever you do – the world is full of opportunities at every age. You don't need endless energy to fill every moment or climb mountains. Finding enjoyment can be simply having time to smell the roses. Contentment is a state of mind.

What are your Words of Wisdom? Send your three short and sweet thoughts and why to: editor@u3a.org.uk

Out and about

On safari

Stourbridge u3a's intrepid Bus Safari group use public transport to explore destinations both near and far, as group leader **Anthony Wakeley** explains

Our group started nine years ago, and the

original aim was only to visit places in the region by bus, taking advantage of our free bus passes. However, we've grown in both numbers and ambition since then, and these days we're more likely to take a train somewhere, very often followed by a bus journey to a neighbouring town or place of interest. As long as we can get there and back in a day, no destination is off-limits. We're wondering just how far we can go – Edinburgh is definitely on the cards, for instance!



Some of the places we visit are right off the beaten track and not especially well known. But

I do some research beforehand, and you can guarantee there will always be something of interest – whether it's a local museum, an art gallery, a historic building or just a lovely park. I check train and bus timetables carefully beforehand and download a town trail if there is one, although very often members are happy to explore on their own, then we all gather to travel home together.

One of the best things about our bus safari outings is that they've

given many members the confidence to explore places on their own, as well as being part of our group.

Some were a little apprehensive about using public transport in general, and it's been great to demonstrate what is possible, and later find they've gone back to places to discover more.

This is such a fantastic, fun way to see the country – or just get to know your local patch better. Everywhere has a surprise or two in store...

The group has visited a huge number of interesting places –including Sheffield, Wirksworth, Charlbury and Oswestry... the only question is, where next?



Linking up

Catch up with the Council



Sue Russell, Chair of u3a Council, provides an update on developments

This April, one year on from its establishment, the u3a Council welcomes several new Council Representatives (CRs). Over the last year, the Council's priorities have been to get to know the Trust staff, the Board and, of course, each other, as well as work through what the Council is for and what it should do. Now I'm delighted to report that CRs are enthusiastically interacting with u3as in their region and setting the agenda for the year to come.

Valuable connection

The purpose of the Council is to act as a link between the Trust and the u3a movement. It identifies overall trends and needs of u3as, raising common problems and concerns. It then forwards these to the Trust where they can be further investigated, developed or included in the upcoming strategic plans.

This year, the Council has reviewed communication channels between u3as and the u3a office, as well as recruitment and retention. In the coming months,

among other key topics, the Council will be looking at ways the Trust can support smaller u3as.

CRs are ambassadors, connecting u3a members with the Trust. Individual CRs are key contacts in the region or nation, representing members' views. In doing so, they are helping to strengthen the valued voice of u3as everywhere.

To find out who your local Council Representatives are, go to: u3a.org.uk/u3a-council

Taking action

Small is beautiful

Anne French, co-convenor of Bath u3a Climate and the Environment Action group, encourages us all to take small, simple steps to help make the world a better place to live in



All of us can do something to improve our planet

Our group has been working hard to highlight the positive steps we 'third-agers' can take to find hope in a challenging time.

Our group functions with the idea that taking action individually, or together, is better than silent denial or even despair as we face what appears to be a global climate catastrophe.

Such actions don't have to be 'big'. Small, positive acts or pledges all make a difference to our own lives and those around us: share and repair projects, tree planting... indeed, anything that encourages a more earth-friendly and mindful approach. We'd love other u3a members and groups to embrace this idea too - there is strength in numbers and we can all make a difference!

Tell us one small way you - or your u3a - have aimed to create positive change in the past year: whether that's swearing off fast fashion, walking or cycling instead of driving, rewilding a lawn or getting involved in simple climate-friendly community projects. Head your email: SMALL STEPS and send to: editor@u3a.org.uk

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Nice to meet you!

We love hearing how members from different u3as get together to enjoy shared interests and pursuits – and make valuable new friends in the process...

Walk this way...

Denise Trehitt from Southport u3a recounts her Walking group's fantastic exchange trip



There were 16 members of our Walking group who enjoyed a fabulous exchange holiday with Saltburn District u3a. From the initial contact with Sheila Golden, their Walking group leader, we were given recommendations for places to stay, where to eat and walks that showcased the lovely North Yorkshire and Teesside coast. Sheila's enthusiasm for her area and her local knowledge made the planning process for our trip so much easier.

We arranged to stay for four nights – Monday to Friday – in a family-run seafront hotel in Redcar. We travelled to Saltburn by car and arrived at lunchtime, leaving us with plenty of time to enjoy a sunny beach walk

with Sheila towards Teesport, taking in the stunning views along the coast from the Redcar Beacon.

In the days that followed, we did three more walks, each led by a different member of the Saltburn Walking group. One of the best things about an exchange like this is walking and talking with members of the local u3a who joined us. They were able to share their love and knowledge of the flora and fauna, local heritage and historical architecture.

Our most challenging walk was an 11-mile trek along the Cleveland Way. However, Julie, our walk leader, made sure everyone could walk at their own pace, and the



Great walks, views and company were guaranteed!

A fair exchange

The u3a Walking Exchange connects u3a Walking groups, giving members the chance to explore new routes and regions. The scheme allows u3a Walking groups to request a guided walk from another u3a – whether that's a short local walk, a whole day out or a longer walking holiday.

May is National Walking Month, so why not explore the benefits of walking by arranging a walk somewhere new? To sign up to the u3a Walking Exchange, go to: subjectadvisers.u3asite.uk/walking-exchange-home

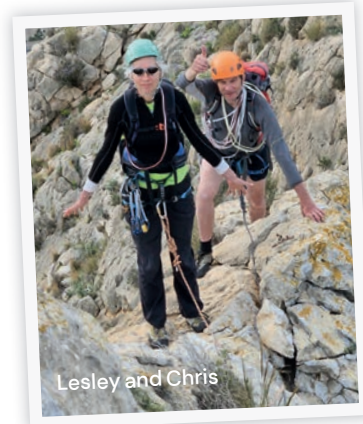
good company and stunning views made it worthwhile. Needless to say, we're already planning our next exchange!

Joining in the fun

Lesley Atchison and Chris Pearson from Hurst, Hassocks & Ditchling u3a linked up with Haslemere's Fun & Fitness group during their visit – and are now taking the idea home

We'd come to Haslemere for six weeks to house-sit: as keen walkers, we love coming to this area because of the stunning landscape. We decided to ask Haslemere u3a if we could join them at their local leisure centre to get to know fellow u3a members.

We were welcomed with open arms, and every Tuesday and Thursday during our visit we hiked



Lesley and Chris

down the hill to the leisure centre. There we had a go at racquetball, an hour's session in the gym and – best of all – coffee and cake with everyone mid-morning when we had the chance to get to know other keen and very fit u3a members!

Needless to say, we were very sorry when our time in Haslemere came to an end. But we're suggesting to our own u3a that we set up a similar group with our nearest leisure centre, so thank you again Haslemere u3a for a delightful time and for the inspiration to do the same where we live. We hope we shall be asked back to house-sit and can join in the fun again!



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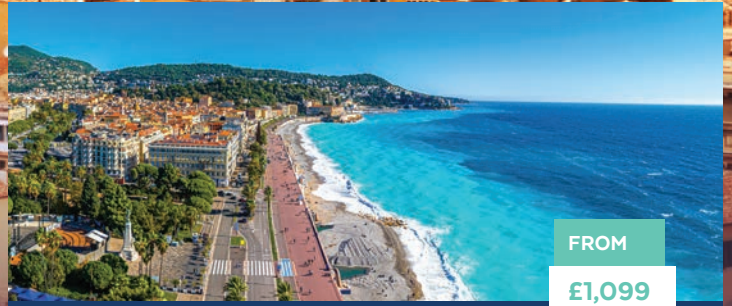
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All together now...

COME TO THE FESTIVAL!

u3a Festival is back – the biggest celebration of the curiosity, creativity and community spirit that makes u3a so special

After the huge success of the u3a Festival 2024, this year's event promises to be even bigger and better. From 1 to 3 July, the University of York will welcome over 1,000 u3a members from across the UK for three brilliant days packed with good fun and activities.

So much to enjoy

u3a Festival 26 will bring the u3a ethos to life, offering a unique opportunity to share the joy of learning with others. Attendees can look forward to a wide variety of activities, all led by u3a members and interest groups. From engaging talks and hands-on arts and crafts workshops to live performances, music lessons and sports tournaments, the festival offers something for everyone. It's



Special guest
Johnny Ball

all about trying something new in a fun and welcoming environment – and with no experience needed!

This year's festival will be opened by our celebrity guest Johnny Ball, who will also give a trademark inspirational talk.

Known for his passion for making learning fun, Johnny's presence will set the tone for an event filled with curiosity and discovery.

The festival will make the most of the university's beautiful campus location. Members can enjoy exploring the stunning surroundings and lake-side views in the summer sunshine. The campus restaurants and cafes will provide delicious meals and snacks to keep everyone energised for the packed schedule of activities.

A rare atmosphere

Margaret Fiddes, festival programme organiser, describes the event as "a celebration of everything that happens in u3as every day". It offers a rare opportunity to meet members from across the UK and immerse yourself in an atmosphere that embodies the joy of u3a – laughter, learning and the chance to live life to the full.

The festival is also a powerful reminder to the wider public that



Save the date
1-3 JULY
2026



A snapshot of the fun and activities enjoyed by members at u3a Festival 24

curiosity and creativity do not fade with age.

Even if you can't come along, keep an eye on our social media channels and make sure you're signed up to the u3a Friends newsletter for all the latest news.

And finally, if you have any ideas for future events that bring together u3a members across the country, let us know!

Tickets are limited and selling fast, so don't miss your chance to be part of this incredible event. Book your place now at u3a.org.uk/festival-2026





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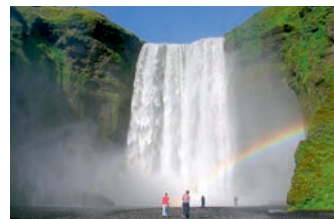
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**HIDDEN FRANCE:
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Discussion point

To be, or not to be... political

In this series, we debate the topics that affect u3a and wider society. Here, CEO **Iain Cassidy** considers what being non-political means in the movement

I often hear the phrase: “The u3a is a non-political movement.” I agree with that statement completely. But I also know it can raise questions. Does being non-political mean we keep our heads down? Does it mean we avoid talking about the world around us? The answer is no.



That was never the intention – and it certainly wasn’t the vision when u3a began. From the start, u3a has been about curious, engaged people who want to keep learning and stay connected to the world. Learning was never meant to be passive. It was – and is – about understanding society, asking questions and taking part.

Many of the things that matter most in later life today – such as health, education, social connection, access to services and community spaces – are shaped by public policy. It would be strange if a movement as large, experienced and

thoughtful as u3a had nothing to say about those things.

Being non-political does not mean being silent. What it does mean is that u3a stays out of party politics. We don’t support political parties or candidates, and we don’t allow the u3a name to be used for party-political campaigning. That matters, because it keeps u3a open and welcoming to everyone, whatever their personal views.

At the same time, we don’t step away from the issues that matter to our members. All u3as are encouraged to speak up where it aligns with our purpose, such as responding to consultations, engaging with MPs or councillors, inviting speakers, supporting relevant campaigns or exploring big social questions together. That’s all part of an active, outward-looking u3a.

The difference isn’t so much what we talk about, but how we do it. When we focus on learning, curiosity and respect for different views, we stay true to the u3a ethos.



I know this can sometimes feel like a fine line to walk. That’s why we’ve produced practical guidance to help u3as feel confident about where that line sits (see below). The aim isn’t to hold anyone back. Instead, it’s to support u3as to keep doing what they do best: learning together, speaking thoughtfully and making a positive difference.

In a world where public decisions shape so much of later life, the u3a voice matters – now more than ever.

- You can find the guidance on the u3a website at: u3a.org.uk/our-impact

How do you think u3a and its members can best use a collective voice to make a difference and affect change in the wider community? And if you and your u3a have taken action on subjects that affect everyone, let us know. Email editor@u3a.org.uk and head your email: OUR IMPACT

Your views matter

There has been a great response to CEO Iain Cassidy’s regular column (above), where he has invited members’ thoughts on topics that matter to us all: read just a few of the letters received about his piece *The changing face of retirement* (Winter 2025) on page 76.

We’ve had the biggest feedback so far, however, to his essay *Activism – and the power of older voices* in our February issue. It’s a subject many members feel very strongly about, and opinions were varied and thought-provoking. Initially, we intend to feature many of these

letters in a special dedicated section in a future issue of the magazine in order to enable more members to share in such an important discussion – and hopefully lead the way to positive action.

Thank you so much to everyone who has written: it’s clear there is power and passion in the collective voices of u3a!

Discover the benefits

Join your Friends!

Enjoy a monthly update of curiosity, community and connection, delivered straight to your inbox

The u3a Friends newsletter brings the best of u3a directly to you. Each digital edition features exclusive member stories, national u3a events, new learning opportunities and the latest news from across the movement.

By signing up, you'll be the first to hear about upcoming events, such as the u3a Festival, and how to get creative with our national competitions.

It's the best way to keep up to date with everything u3a – you can even submit your own stories that feature you and

your u3a's activities and achievements.

What subscribers get every month:

- Member stories – real people and adventures
- Dates for the diary – national events, learning opportunities and more
- Creative competitions and ways to get involved
- Opportunity to shout out the amazing work and activities of your u3a.

Sign up for free and join our Friends community at u3a.org.uk/friends



Discover what fellow members are up to – inspiration guaranteed!



Every edition of the u3a Friends Newsletter is packed with inspiring stories of members finding purpose, new friendships and unexpected passions in later life



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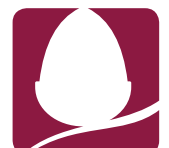


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It's a bold headline, isn't it? But stick with us for a moment (well, a page to be exact) and we'll explain what's behind it and why we're confident that One Traveller may just pique your interest...



You see, many of the life-enriching benefits you receive from being part of the u3a also apply to our holidays. Ok, we see that raised eyebrow there, you need to know more, of course.

With no families or couples present, we're not like other travel companies. We're here for the mature solo traveller. For like-minded folk wanting to see the world in good company.

Like u3a societies, our holidays bring together individuals from all walks of life who happen to be of a certain age and share some common interests. Suppose you take a holiday to Switzerland (we know, this is confident talk but please do stick with the analogy for a bit). Arriving at the airport, each of your companions will have read our brochure or looked online and thought 'I quite fancy that.' So, you set off on your travels with people who are all travelling solo, share common interests in Swiss alpine railways (to stick with our analogy)

and are coming to the holiday with comparable life experiences. Suddenly, your holiday becomes a kind of touring version of your favourite u3a society. Conversations flow naturally as excitement builds for the coming activities and expertly guided tours.

As with your societies, there are people within the group to steer the way. In our case, that responsibility falls to the Tour Manager, who will escort you from start to finish and make sure everything flows nicely.

In many ways, the structure of the holiday does the hard work for you, helping prompt conversations around where you're going, what you're eating or how you found the latest experience we organised. You can get as involved as you wish, though our Tour Managers ensure nobody feels alone or left out.

A One Traveller holiday is built to put you at ease, knowing that you have something in common with those around you.

There should be no awkwardness, and, with a set itinerary of daily excursions, you'll know what to expect each day.

Perhaps, like in u3a, you'll strike up a friendship with a companion over dinner. Perhaps you'll take this friendship home and keep in touch or even go travelling together in future. Perhaps you'll return home eager to do it all again somewhere new, knowing that you'll again encounter like-minded travellers who share your passions and interests.

With so many similarities between u3a and a One Traveller holiday, you should find yourself right at home with us and, of course, you'll be surrounded by great company who may just become new friends.

Is that eyebrow still raised?

If you've read this far, we hope to have captured your imagination a little. Why not continue the conversation with our friendly Concierge team (on **01760 722 011**) and discover how to combine your passions with our holidays. Like the u3a, it could well herald the beginning of a whole new chapter, only this time as a mature solo traveller.

Visit onetraveller.co.uk today to find out more.

INTEREST | ON THE RECORD

Love letters to vinyl

u3a music fans share their treasured vinyl album memories – and we discover why records are still so revered

Vinyl expert Jim B Donovan in his iconic Reading-based store, Just Imagination Memorabilia

In our Autumn 2025 issue we asked members to share their passion for vinyl records, along with the memories those old albums evoked. We were absolutely inundated! Thank you so much to everyone who took the time to write such detailed personal accounts of the music that has always mattered to them and why, and we're so sorry we can't include all the letters in full.

In this issue, we explore the history of vinyl and what it means today, plus u3a record fans take a spin down memory lane and share why some of those treasured albums still mean so much.

On the record

For a format once declared obsolete, vinyl records have shown remarkable staying power. In an age when music can be streamed instantly, records continue to offer something that digital

listening cannot: a physical relationship with music. Playing a record requires time, attention and intention – from removing it from its sleeve to placing it on the turntable, dropping the needle and, of course, carefully listening to an entire album.

A brief history

Vinyl records emerged in their modern form in the late 1940s, replacing fragile shellac 78rpm discs with a more durable material, allowing for longer playing times and improved sound quality. The introduction of the long-playing (LP) record transformed how music was made and heard. Instead of short singles, artists could create albums designed to be listened to from beginning to end.

“Records have shown remarkable staying power”

For decades, vinyl was the dominant music format, shaping everything from home listening habits to record shops, radio and popular culture. That dominance waned in the 1980s and 1990s with the arrival of cassette tapes, compact discs

and, later, digital formats. Vinyl sales collapsed, pressing plants closed – and many assumed the format was finished.

How vinyl survived

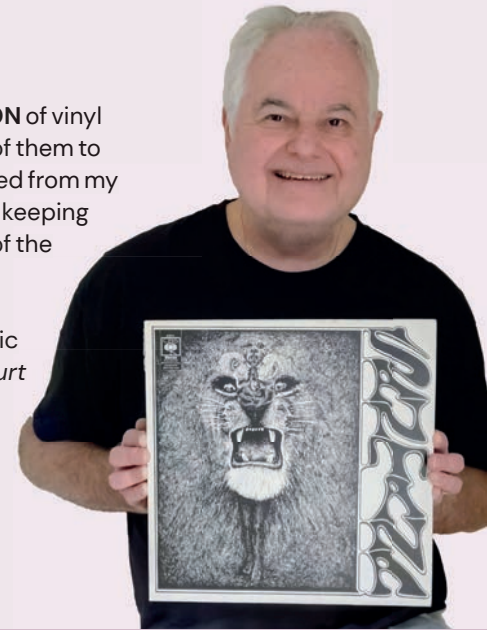
Vinyl's revival wasn't an accident. While compact discs and digital formats dominated, vinyl endured in clubs and specialist scenes. Veteran DJ and record dealer Jim B Donovan (justimaginationmemorabilia.blogspot.com) explains: “The thing about the ▶

SOME SPECIAL ALBUMS are so relevant to certain milestones in my life: *Abbey Road* by the Beatles [1969] was a present for my 18th birthday, and I bought *Split* by Groundhogs [1971] after seeing them live in Southsea when I was at Portsmouth Polytechnic. The album I cherish most is *The Garden of Jane Delawney* by Trees [1970]. This is due to the high quality of recording – it's one of only two albums they recorded and it's rare. It's also worth a lot of money! **John Hewett, Ponteland u3a**



I HAD A LARGE, VARIED COLLECTION of vinyl records, but eventually I gave most of them to charity – although I couldn't be parted from my Beatles albums. The main reason for keeping some of the others was the artistry of the album covers, an important part of owning vinyl records for me.

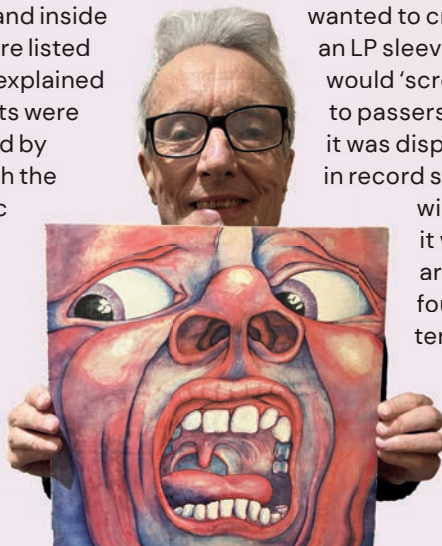
My favourites were Santana's iconic first album *Santana* [1969]; *In the Court of the Crimson King* by King Crimson [1969]; *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour* by the Moody Blues [1971]; and, of course, Pink Floyd's timeless *The Dark Side of the Moon* [1973]. **David Ross, West Wilts u3a**



ONE OF MY MOST TREASURED LPs is *In the Court of the Crimson King* by King Crimson, which I bought in 1969 when I was 16 from Brees Records in Leicester. It was 30 shillings – two weeks of my paper round money – but worth every penny.

There was so much to admire. It had a thick cardboard gatefold cover, and inside all the tracks were listed with notes that explained what instruments were being played and by whom, along with the lyrics. The music was unlike anything I'd heard before.

Much later, I discovered that King Crimson's



lyricist Pete Sinfield had explained to his friend Barry Godber that he wanted to create an LP sleeve that would 'scream' out to passers-by when it was displayed in record shop

windows, and it was Barry's artwork on all four sides of the terrifying sleeve.

Chris Pearson, Purbeck u3a

IN 1974, I WON A SIGNED COPY of 10cc's second album *Sheet Music* [1974] via a Radio Luxembourg competition. However, by the time I heard, I'd already purchased my copy from the music megastore Bruce Millers on Aberdeen's George Street. I visited this store so frequently that friends always knew that's where they'd find me if needed! My custom was rewarded when I told the shop about my prize and they agreed I could return my already-played copy – those were the days! **Neil Andrews, Orpington u3a**



BACK IN '69, my mother bought me *Electric Ladyland* by the Jimi Hendrix Experience [1968] for Christmas (a first pressing and the one with

the naked ladies on the sleeve). Imagine the shop assistant's face! I still have it, although I have been offered £1,500 for it. It is lovingly stored upright between corrugated cardboard. I play the CD version now. **John Alexander, Chesterfield u3a**



INTEREST | ON THE RECORD

I'D FIRST HEARD OF BOB DYLAN

when Peter, Paul and Mary recorded *Blowin' in the Wind* [1963]. Then a friend, who was into rhythm and blues (the 'in' music at the time) told me that Bob was a kind of blues singer. Confusing!

Later, I heard 'Don't Think Twice, It's All Right' from his second album *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan* [1963]. Albums were a big deal then, but eventually I decided to spend a large portion of my savings on it, and soon I was smitten. To this day, I think of this album as a classic, and it still surprises me that a 21-year-old could produce such a work.

Mike Beaman, Havering u3a and Upminster u3a



I GREW UP DURING the heyday of progressive rock, and while at uni I was introduced to proper hi-fi. This influenced my musical tastes and I am a 'proghead' to this day. Bands including Genesis, Pink Floyd, Yes and ELP remain among my favourites. I acquired a large collection of vinyl and still have a vinyl-based hi-fi. Many of my favourite albums are half-speed mastered. Of these, my top three would be *Wish You Were Here* by Pink Floyd [1975]; *A Trick of the Tail* by Genesis [1976]; and *Crime*



of the Century by Supertramp [1974]. These, along with Mike Oldfield's *Tubular Bells* [1973] always take me back to that time.
Neil Malton, Peterborough u3a

PARTING WITH MY RECORD COLLECTION was tough, but was made easier when one of the 45rpm singles I listed on eBay – Georgie Fame's *Somebody Stole my Thunder* (with *Entertaining Mr Sloane* on the B side) [1969] – attracted unexpected interest. I listed it for

£1.99, and received several bids – then someone offered me £100 if I'd sell it direct.

Thinking this might be a scam, I suggested they place a bid as they might get it for far less. Imagine my surprise when, in the closing stages, the bidding took off and it sold for £205! I still don't know what made it so sought after...
John Sutton, Leyburn & District u3a



MY FIRST VINYL

LP was *The Rolling Stones No 2* [1965]. As a young teenager, I had saved up the cash: the prices for LPs and singles were fixed in those days at 32s/11d and 6s/8d respectively. I remember the thrill of paying for the album then rushing home to play it. I still have it.

I recently made a pilgrimage to the RS No 9 Carnaby shop in London's Carnaby Street, and the guy in the shop couldn't believe I had all the albums that were decorating their wall!

Peter Wellman, Holmes Chapel & District u3a



IN 2019 MY WIFE AND I went to a cookery demonstration with Delia Smith, and I took along my copy of the Rolling Stones' 1969 album *Let It Bleed*: I reminded Delia that it was exactly 50 years since she'd baked the cake that is on the front cover. She signed it for me and told me she was starstruck when the person who came to collect the cake was none other than Keith Richards!
Adam Walter, Bolton u3a

▶ vinyl revival is the pressing plants. If we hadn't had an enormous surge in the 1990s of 12-inch singles, they simply wouldn't have survived."

In addition, film and television soundtracks – such as Kate Bush's 1985 hit *Running Up That Hill* in the Netflix series *Stranger Things* – have introduced classic artists to younger audiences.

Navigating the marketplace

For many people over 50, collecting vinyl today is as much about managing a collection as building one. "Car boot sales in the 1980s were absolute heaven," Jim recalls. "There were no price guides or internet – people were just clearing out their collections. If I didn't come away with 50 or 100 records, something was wrong!" That landscape has shifted. Once smartphones and online marketplaces became widespread, the thrill of discovery faded.

Platforms such as Discogs dominate the market, but selling online can be time-consuming and exacting. Jim's advice is pragmatic: "If you're selling, I'd avoid the internet to begin with. Seeing is believing. Record fairs and local specialist shops let people know exactly what they're getting."

Most importantly, vinyl remains a social economy. Long-standing relationships with record shops, fairs and fellow collectors often matter more than algorithms. They also tend to reward patience, trust and shared knowledge.

Bridging generations

One of vinyl's strengths is bringing different generations together through shared discovery. Jim sees this regularly while DJ-ing vinyl-only sets to younger crowds around Reading, Berkshire. "You hear something and think it's from the 1960s," he says, "and it turns out to be brand new. There's a lot of music now that deliberately echoes older sounds."

That exchange works both ways. "I'd be lost without younger people,"

Artistic interpretation

Long before streaming thumbnails and playlists, vinyl records were physical objects designed to be seen as much as heard. Early pop albums were functional rather than expressive, often little more than a band photograph and a track list. That began to change in the late 1960s, when album artwork became inseparable from the music itself.

"*Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* by The Beatles, released in 1967, changed everything," says Jim. "Suddenly, the artwork was staggering. It wasn't just packaging – it was part of the record." From that point on, album sleeves became canvases. Influenced by photography, graphic design and cinema, covers helped define how



music was understood before a note was even played. For many collectors, that visual impact remains central to vinyl's appeal.

For collectors old and new, though, album artwork remains one of vinyl's great pleasures: something to hold, study and return to, long after the music has finished playing.

he admits. "They're the ones showing me where samples come from, and how older records are being reused in modern music. I'm constantly learning from them."

Technology has helped too. Modern turntables, including Bluetooth models, have bridged the analogue-digital divide, allowing records to be played

through wireless speakers without abandoning vinyl's tactile ritual.

Collectors' items

"The value is usually in first editions or early pressings," Jim points out. "People obsess over tiny details in the run-out grooves – little markings that tell you when and where a record was made. It can get very nerdy very quickly!"

There are also misconceptions about sound quality. "People think thicker records automatically sound better," says Jim, "but some of the best-sounding records ever made were very thin,

such as RCA's Dynaflex pressings in the 1970s. They play beautifully."

At the extreme end of the market, prices can become eye-watering. Jim points to the Northern Soul scene, where ultra-rare American singles have fetched tens of thousands of pounds. A 1930 shellac 78rpm pressing of Tommy Johnson's *Alcohol and Jake Blues* sold for more than £27,000 because it was in better condition than the copy the buyer already owned.

Jim stresses this is a specialist world, driven by scarcity and mythology. For most vinyl collectors, value lies in understanding pressings, condition and personal taste – and in buying records to be played and enjoyed, not locked away. ●

COMING UP! We know there are many u3a members who also have fond vinyl stories of other musical genres – from classical, country and blues to jazz, pop and more... so we'll be featuring another round-up in a future issue (and we'd love to hear from some ladies too!).

“”
**Vinyl
brings
generations
together**



Insight

'Dance is directly connected to our sense of wellbeing'

Maggie Killingbeck, a trained dancer and member of Hitchin u3a, explains how movement, rhythm and creativity enrich our lives

Decades ago, as a student, I read about the integrated interaction of mind, body and feeling. In other words, humans are not just brains on legs: we are holistic beings in which cognition, movement and emotion are in action all the time.

For instance, in an examination hall, cognition might be the dominant element, but feeling and physicality will still be present; at a family celebration, feeling might influence proceedings, but the mind and body will be very much in attendance; and, while the body will feature prominently in any form of exercise, the brain and emotions will have a part to play too.

This learning has informed the way I have lived my life ever since. As a dancer, I feel strongly that we can use ourselves to enhance our sense of wellbeing, not least in the context of dance. The discipline addresses posture, builds strength and flexibility, improves balance and enhances muscle memory. These valuable benefits help us to feel in control of our bodies: indeed, at a recent lecture on self-esteem, this was among the attributes identified to a sense of self-worth.

Not least, dance offers the joy of rhythmic movement. We are, after all, rhythmic beings – from the way our

hearts beat to the steady movement we adopt when, for instance, we walk. Then, of course, there is the natural order of day and night, along with the seasons, which affect our circadian rhythms.

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It's one of the most creative, empowering and enjoyable things you will ever do

It makes sense, therefore, that working in rhythmic synchronicity helps us to make sense of, and remember, things. (Personally, I know that once I have captured the rhythm of a movement, I can embrace it with confidence and commitment.)

Dancing alone is one thing, but sharing this rhythmic experience with others can be very bonding. Moving to music together provides a wholly unique sense of integration that invariably leaves everyone uplifted.

The use of creativity in dance cannot be underestimated either, and has a direct connection to wellbeing. At my u3a, I lead a Dance Choreography group, and while I guide the movements, we all work together to explore interpretations of a theme that are fresh and original, and capture and communicate the idea of the dance. These absorbing sessions fully utilise mind, body and feeling: there is the technical aspect to consider as well as an awareness of rhythm, and the meaning we hope to convey. The process is hard work and demands our full concentration, but at the end of the session, all of us are de-stressed, and the sense of satisfaction we feel at creating something together is so rewarding.

When people tell me they can't dance, I always encourage them to give it a go – especially with the support and enthusiasm of others. Apart from its health benefits, dance is one of the most creative, empowering and enjoyable things you will ever do, and you might surprise yourself with a natural sense of rhythm and creativity you didn't know you had. Nothing will make you feel as good! ●

What exercise or active pursuit makes you feel great in mind, body and soul? Email: editor@u3a.org.uk and head your email: FEELING GOOD

Landlines are going digital – don't get left behind

If you're in u3a, you'll know that later life is about staying curious, connected and involved. That's exactly why it matters to be ready for the UK's landline upgrade.

We're now in the final year before the national switch-off of the old analogue phone network in **January 2027** – and the change is happening across the UK, so it's no longer something you can ignore.

Here's the reassuring bit: **your landline isn't going away. It's simply being upgraded.**

With Digital Voice (sometimes called a "digital landline" or "VoIP"), your calls are carried over a broadband connection instead of the old copper phone network. For most people, the experience stays familiar:

- **Keep the same phone number**
- **Keep using your existing home phone(s)**
- **Keep the same cost and plan**

In many homes, the only practical change is where the phone plugs in (often into your broadband hub, or via a simple adaptor). Don't worry if you don't have broadband, we have a solution for you as well so you can keep using your landline just like today. No matter your set up, we'll guide you through it and you'll get great benefits like enhanced scam protection and voicemail for free.

We also understand that some people still rely on their landline – for peace of mind, for health and care alarms, or because mobile coverage isn't ideal. That's why we have extra support in

D Stay connected, stay confident, and if you'd like to find out more information or to register your additional needs for support through the switchover, head to: www.bt.com/connected-together



place, including **power resilience options** so you can still make landline calls during a power cut. If you (or someone you care for) depends on the landline to contact family, carers, or the emergency services, tell us so we can make sure the right solution is in place.

The most important thing you can do is act when we contact you. If we ask you to **book an appointment**, please book it – it's there to make your move as smooth as possible and to check anything you rely on. If we ask you to **get in touch**, don't put it off – a quick conversation can help prevent disruption later.





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2026-2027 WINTER MEDITERRANEAN OCEAN JOURNEYS

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