u3a Blackmore Vale

NEWSLETTER NOVEMBER 2026

Henstridge Village Hall

Tuesday 3rd November

A talk by

CHARLOTTE CARTY

In My Grandfather's Footsteps

In November our thoughts turn to remembrance. Charlotte Carty, our speaker, will tell the story of her grandfather, Lt Colonel Bruno Brown, commanding officer of the Assam Regiment 's experiences in India and Burma during WW11, and her own adventures recreating aspects of his remarkable campaign.

Refreshments from 2.15pm,
Speaker 3pm.

Getting the most from u3a

Did you know that as a member of Blackmore Vale u3a, you can access many things on the national u3a website?

u3a National Website has a dedicated Members Area which you can also access by clicking on the link at the top of the page. This area has a lot of information about national elections, national financial reports, and reporting health and safety incidents. There are other sections that provide support and advice for committee members (Trustees). At the bottom, there are two sections: subject advisors and subject networks.

Subject Advice

Subject advice This area provides a contact list of people who are members of u3a, but have an interest, experience or expertise in a particular topic and are happy to be contacted to provide advice. There is an extensive list of subjects: Rock Music, Genealogy, Folk Dancing, and the Welsh Language to name a few! You do not have to be part of a group to contact an advisor; just have an interest in a topic, which you may be stuck on. For example, you may be researching your family tree and are trying to locate a specific piece of information about an ancestor but have hit a dead end.

Subject Networks


Let's Talk Tech

Subject networks are what you may think they are. A group of people who are in touch via the website, with online meetings. You can play Bridge online, or attend a tutorial about how to get the most out of your computer, tablet or phone.

Summer Schools

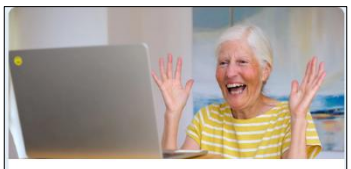
Some regions offer Summer Schools which are open to all members. Typically, they run for four days and cost £400 approximately. However, this usually includes your accommodation and food, so not really that expensive. You choose which events interest you, so you can build your own bespoke programme.



Online educational events

On line educational events cover lots of different interests, from Bruce Springsteen to David Hockney. There is a sign-up section on the page, which will let you know about any new events. There are other subjects, such as learning about AI, laughing yoga, or details of an essay competition.

Online learning


Interest groups online

The On line Learning area gives links to online events and other web pages mentioned above. It also has a link to interest groups, which you can join if you wish. This is useful if you have a hobby or project that our u3a does not have a group for. There are even radio podcasts you can tune into! It also has an area of other learning activities and competitions that is worth a look.


Radio podcast

If you want to look at any of the web pages I have mentioned, just click on the blue lettering in the text of this article. It will take to straight to that page, so you can find out more. Don't be afraid to look at other things on the website too – you can't cause any problems by clicking on the wrong thing.

I hope you have found this useful, and that you will find something of interest.

Alison Shilling

GAMES GROUP

We continue to thrive, usually two games each month.



One group are very keen on Mahjong, thanks to the expertise of Sue Latimer. They are getting very good at such a complex game. They usually manage to get through 3 games each afternoon.

The remaining players have played Rummikub, we usually get a couple of games in each time. This is also quite a good game to stretch the thinking and working out a way to work in your tiles to finish the game first.

The next games meeting will be on the 17th November.

Sue Cadwalladr

BRIDGE GROUP

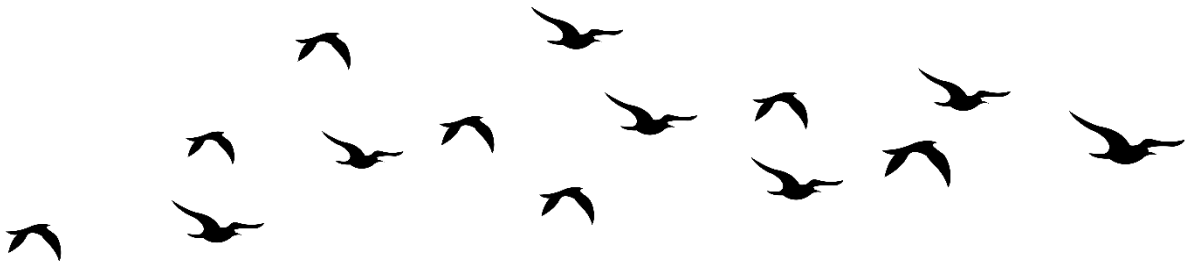


The Bridge group meets in Henstridge Village Hall Lounge on the 2nd and 4th Monday of each month. (though we have a break in August and December). We play at 2:30pm and continue until around 4:30. The group is very informal, with all levels of players welcome, including absolute novices. Beginners and others can be assisted with advice on bidding and play. We normally play several prepared hands, usually between 12 and 16, with all tables playing the same hands, introducing a level of friendly competition. A charge of £2.00 a session, to cover the cost of the room.

Martyn Lennon

WINGS

To have freedom to fly –
There is nowhere - no word
That can truly describe
What that means to a bird;
To be born with those wings
That can take one afar
With no cage to imprison,
No padlock or bar;
Imagine the thrill
Of just learning to fly,



Of soaring with trembling wings
To the sky,
Where horizons and cloud
Seem to merge and to meet,
Where the air on the wind
Is immeasurably sweet;
The desire and the magic –
The wonder of flight
Is the freedom to venture,
To go where one might,
And this thought stirs the heart
With the hope that it brings,
To be borne on the wind
Like a bird that has wings.

Dawn Lawrence

WRITING GROUP



AI generated image

There were four members meeting at Dawn Lawrence's home in October for the inaugural meeting of the writing group (name to be decided). We read a piece of work that we had created and discussed these pieces in general terms. Dawn's husband expertly made us all a cup of coffee, and snacks were also provided, for which we donated some loose change.

For the next meeting on November 20th, we need to bring a piece of work (our own or published) from the prompt - **ghosts**.

If you wish to join this group, please contact hilarysmith967@gmail.com

LUNCH GROUP



In August, we had an excellent meal at the Stapleton Arms, in Buckhorn Weston, once we had navigated the numerous unexpected road closures to get there! The Crown in Marnhull was our venue in September, which was another very enjoyable meal.



Many thanks to Lavinia and Helen and Martyn for organising these meals. In November, we are planning to eat at the Montague Inn, in Shepton Montague. We average 10 or 12 members at each meal, which makes conversation very easy. If anyone would like to join our group, we have a place available at present and can probably arrange a lift for anyone who does not have transport to get there. So please do contact me if you are interested.

Gill Westall

GARDEN VISITS

We had a very successful Open Afternoon back in September, which has resulted in five members on our 'waitlist', as we are still full at 30 members, so until someone leaves the group, that is the situation (some of these are new u3a members).



In September, we visited a lovely private garden in Batcombe, Somerset, open as part of the NGS scheme, which was very well attended. Also, we enjoyed lovely tea and homemade cakes! In October, we visited Stourhead NT again, to see the Autumn colours there, and some members went for lunch in The Spread Eagle Pub, then others had tea in the main Cafe, after walking round the lake and gardens. The colours were wonderful, but possibly not as impressive as in other years, as it may have been slightly early.



Our usual coffee morning at Dikes is on Monday 2nd November, and already have a trip organised to Kimbers Farm for a look around, and lunch for those who want it, booked for Thursday 12th November. We will also discuss where to go for our Annual Lunch in January 2027 and will be going through the various options. We rarely have a garden visit in December, just our monthly coffee morning, which will be at a slightly later date of Monday 14th December, as both Brita and I are away for the early part of the month.



At the October coffee morning, we made the announcement to the (20) members present that both myself and Brita, my assistant, will be standing down as joint Leaders from January 2027, as we have been running this very successful group for four years now, so have asked for two members to come forward to take over from us. Unfortunately, no-one has volunteered as yet, but we hope they will over the next two months as it would be very sad if the group folded after all our hard work.

Jan Nast



Visit to Dawes Twineworks West Coker 17th September 2026



The recent visit to Dawes Twineworks was attended by a group of 12 from Blackmore Vale u3a. We were made especially welcome by Ross Aitken, the Chairman, Chris, who conducted the tour, and other volunteers who served the refreshments.

It was a nice sunny autumn morning, ideal for the tour, as a lot was outside or in uncovered areas. We started with a coffee and an introductory talk from Chris, who had worked at the Museum for over 20 years. The Museum is run by volunteers and owned by The Coker Rope and Sail Trust, which is a registered charity.

Dawes Twineworks is the only surviving working Twineworks in the UK. The Jurassic sandstone of the area is ideal for growing flax and hemp, which is the raw ingredient for twine, rope, nets and sailcloth. The Twineworks began in 1851 and was mechanised by The Dawes family in 1898, and it operated until 1968. By the start of the 21st century, the site had become derelict. Local volunteers raised the money and restored the whole site and installed a 1927 Shanks oil engine to replace the one that Mr Dawes sold to fund his pension. This engine powers 11 twisting and finishing machines on the 2 floors of the 90m walk.



Chris, our guide, demonstrated the machinery working on the two floors and explained a lot about it. The quality of the sail cloth from Dawes Twineworks was known as Coker Cloth. It was considered the best quality sailcloth and was used by the Royal Navy. The visitor centre at the Twineworks is also the centre for the history of West Coker and has archives and business accounts for the Factory, and other local records, dating from 1880 to 1980. At the end of the tour, we went back for tea, coffee and cake.



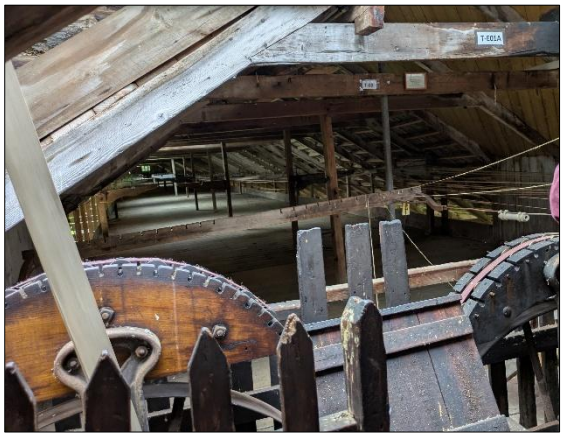
Everyone thought it was a fascinating tour and would recommend visiting, especially if you are interested in Industrial Archaeology. They have open days listed on their website and are open on the fourth Saturday of the month. A Special thanks to Ross Aitken and the volunteers who gave their time and opened up the Museum for our group and made us so welcome.

Martin White

Outing to Dawes Twineworks

On September 17th we drove to the village of West Coker, just beyond Yeovil on the A30, where we were greeted by cheerful and welcoming volunteers at the café of the Dawes Twineworks. This had been a lively business from 1899 through to 1968, when it was closed and left with much of the machinery intact until a campaign led to its restoration between 2010 and 2016.

What was being produced there for all of those years? We were surprised to learn that the West Coker area had been a centre for the production of sailcloth, that thick, heavy and weatherproof material used to make the sails of ships before the era of steam, coal, and diesel fuelled vessels. The size of sails used was variable, and lengths of sailcloth were stitched together using twine to produce the bigger sails, so supplies of twine were essential.
Twine, rope and sailcloth are all made from flax and hemp plants, which grow well on the type of soil found between Bridport and Castle Cary. From medieval times these plants were used in the local sail-making industry, and even before Dawes Twineworks existed, the site was being used for making twine and rope.



Our visit showed us the restored 100m long ‘walk’ where the yarn was twisted into twine (see photo). We saw the area where size was applied to make it weatherproof and the engine house where power is still produced from a (replaced) 100-year-old oil engine to make all the machinery turn. Our volunteer guide explained everything and was happy to answer our questions.

There is also an archive in a different building, which has some employment and trading records from a separate local factory that produced similar material: this gives an interesting insight into the social history of the area.

We ended our visit with more coffee and cake in the visitors’ café. Whether your interest is local history, the history of old buildings and machinery, the funding of restoration projects or archiving business records you will certainly find something here. It is, above all, a very enjoyable day out.

Alison Selby 6/10/2026

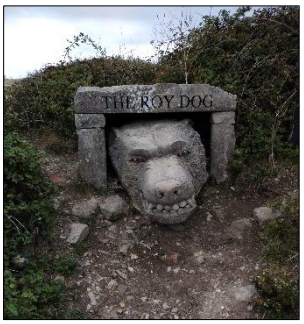
WALKING GROUPS

This year, several of the scheduled walks have been cancelled because of unsuitable weather; not, as is usually the case, for rain but because of high temperatures.

It was, therefore, with some relief that the Wednesday group could gather outside the Bird in Hand for the September walk. The small contingent of walkers proceeded down Platt Lane, across to the outskirts of Yenston and then around the Inwood Estate and back to Henstridge for lunch in the Bird.



The annual “AwayDay” longer walk attracted only six walkers, despite being open to both the Wednesday and Tuesday Groups. We gathered at the car park at the north end of Portland Bill, adjacent to the Portland Heights Hotel. The route was southwards on the South West Coast Path on the East side of the Bill and involved a couple of steepish descents to, or near to, sea level. We reached the Lobster Pot café at the south end of the Bill somewhat later than intended. Most of us partook of their excellent crab sandwiches.



The leaders rather expected that most walkers would take the option of a bus for part of the return route. However, the group completed the circumnavigation of the Bill along the west side, where the path is less hilly than on the east side. This route passes through the Tout Quarry Sculpture Park, containing numerous carvings in Portland Stone but sadly looking rather neglected.

The Wednesday group’s October walk was, unfortunately, cancelled because of inclement weather – rain this time.

Richard Kidd

Future events

(CAN BE SUBJECT TO CHANGE)

All talks and meetings are held in Henstridge Village Hall from 2.15pm

November 3rd
Charlotte Carty
In my Grandfather's Footsteps

2027

January 5th
Mandy Driver
Scottish & Southern Electricity
Benefits of joining the Priority Service Register

March 2nd
A talk
Somerset Spirit Company
Castle Cary

May 4th
Howard Clarke
Milborne Port Historical Society

July 6th
A talk
Royal Signals Museum

September 7th
Open Afternoon

November 2nd
Raymond Wills
The Gypsy Poet

Your Committee

Chair	Alison Shilling	alisonshilling@gmail.com (retiring)
Secretary	vacant	
Membership Secretary	Alison Shilling	Bvmembershipu3a@gmail.com (retiring)
Treasurer	Judy Penfold	Bvu3atreasurer.gmail.com
Publicity	Susan Kidd (non-committee)	Skiddsbvu3a@gmail.com 01963 362107
Creative Director	Judy Penfold	Jood58@gmail.com
Speaker Secretary (temporary)	Hilary Smith	Hilarysmith967@gmail.com (retiring)
Groups Coordinator	Martyn Lennon	martyn_lennon@yahoo.co.uk
Committee Member	Dennis Ollington	
Committee Member	Howard Warden	Warden444@btinternet.com
Committee Member	Jacqui Weaver	
Committee Member	Martin White	Martinwhite898@gmail.com

Group contacts

Walking Group, Tuesday	Richard Kidd	richardakidd64@gmail.com
Walking Group, Wednesday		
Reading Groups	Lydia Avery	lydia.1cranbrookcottage@gmail.com
Lunch Group	Gill Westall	Gillwestall@hotmail.com
Bridge	Howard Warden	Warden444@btinternet.com
Garden Visits	Jan Nast	Janice.nast@gmail.com
Games	Sue Cadwaladr	scaddiewag17@gmail.com

GENERAL MEETINGS

Are usually held in Henstridge Village Hall from 2.15pm on the first Tuesday of alternate months.

Members £2.00 Visitors 3.00

All our general meetings are publicised in the online Blackmore Vale magazine, local Facebook pages, websites and magazines. Posters are circulated to public places in Stalbridge, Henstridge, Wincanton, Templecombe and Milborne Port.

Venue hire

Please remember when making bookings that each group is self-funding, therefore, if there are any costs involved, a suitable fee should be charged to attendees to cover these costs. **Also, a copy of the invoice and receipt is required to be sent to the Treasurer each month to be entered into the main accounts**.

Privacy Policy

Please be assured that we will never pass on your details to third parties without explicit consent from you and that we will never share your details with any company or charity for marketing purposes.

The contents of this newsletter are provided by the members for the members and is produced at no cost to the members.