



Newsletter

April 2025

WELCOME



Photo: Susan Turner

u3a in Kennet continues to thrive with a total of almost 750 members at the time of publication. Along with our growing membership we have more interest groups too with a fourth one for table tennis, a third for Spanish and a new motorbikes group.

If you have suggestions for new groups please do let us know so that we can explore interest from other members.

COFFEE EXCHANGE 24th APRIL 2025



Photo: Susan Turner

Join us at the Town Hall in Marlborough to learn more about the history and mysteries of the numerous chalk horses in Wiltshire. Gary Gibbons has researched and written about the county's iconic horses and will introduce us to their stories.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS 2025

Coffee Exchange, 10.15 am,
24th April 2025, Town Hall,
Marlborough.

Gary Gibbons will uncover the mysteries of Wiltshire's chalk horses.

Coffee Exchange, 10.15 am,
22nd May 2025, Town Hall,
Marlborough

Coffee Exchange, 10.15 am,
19th June 2025, Town Hall,
Marlborough

Here are the links to our web page u3ainkennet.org.uk and Facebook page www.facebook.com/u3ainkennet

Please "control and click" on links to visit suggested webpages

COFFEE EXCHANGE 27th MARCH 2025.

NICOLA ABRAHAM, EDUCATION AND VISITS CO-ORDINATOR, THE MERCHANT HOUSE TRUST

One of her final engagements in her role brought Nicola to the Town Hall. She gave us a comprehensive history of the building. She described how, although the house was obviously badly damaged by the fire of 1653, there is much left in the structure to show that it was not totally destroyed. There is evidence of Tudor bricks and some of the fireplaces have medieval origins. . She led us through the history of the building and its occupants – the silk merchants, the printing works, the chemists, the post office and the booksellers ending its commercial times with WH Smith. She then talked us through the setting up of the Trust and its work and told us about events which take place at the house.



Photo: Hamzah

(Spoiler alert – the Christmas theme this year is to be *The Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens). Nicola talked with knowledge and passion and stressed how The Merchant House was a home of a member of “the middling sort”, a member of what we would now call the middle class and therefore is of particular interest as many of the houses which have survived from the Early Modern Times are those of the super rich and privileged. The link to the Youtube recording of the talk has been sent to members previously.

MESSAGE TO ALL MEMBERS – EMERGENCY TELEPHONE NUMBERS

We would like to hold details of an emergency contact phone number for our members. The details will be kept in confidence. If you have not already given us a number and are willing to do so please contact membershipsec@u3ainkennet.org.uk

GROUPS NEWS

DAY TRIPS GROUP



Yet another good day for the Day Trips Group – we’re not sure how much longer we will get consistently good weather for these trips. The sun was shining in The Strand when 59 of us disembarked. Several people headed straight for the Courtauld gallery and the excellent Goya to Impressionism Exhibition. Others took a 10-minute walk up to the National Gallery and visited the Siena Exhibition – or went in the opposite direction to the Tate Modern.

Photo: David Hammond



Photo: David Hammond

The adventurous went to Battersea Power station to see how that's been transformed. One couple uncovered a gem – 2, Temple Place and saw the home of William Waldorf Astor.

Sunny Embankment walks and a 2-hour river cruise were enjoyed. Talking to people at the end of the day, we heard about a visit to the Law Courts where an excellent lunch was had. Covent Garden was a draw and looking around St Paul's Church, known as the Actors' Church, was very interesting with memorial plaques to many people from Charlie Chaplin, Vivien Leigh and Eric Sykes to Peter O'Toole.

The London Transport Museum was a hit. One explorer downloaded a "circular statues tour" and followed the route. Self-guided tours of Wren's smaller churches in the City are also worth doing. Other reports were of exploring Bloomsbury and visiting St Paul's Cathedral. Juliet and I treated ourselves to tea in the Royal Opera House and a bit of people watching. Thank you to everyone who came and we hope to book another London trip soon.

REMINDERS AND UPDATES ABOUT OUR NEW GROUPS

SPANISH

We have two Spanish groups at present and will be setting up another one following requests from our members who are keen to learn the language. We will need a new Leader for the Group too. Can you help to support the new group? The new Leader will need to have a reasonable knowledge of Spanish but not necessarily a degree. A native Spanish speaker would, of course, be ideal. Please contact groups@u3ainkennet.org.uk if you can assist and for further information about the group.

MOTORBIKE GROUP

Greg Shakeshaft joined u3a in Kennet after retiring recently and noting that we do not have a motorbike group yet he has kindly offered to establish one. Following last month's publicity he is proceeding to set up the group which will operate along the lines of our cycling group with an emphasis on sociable motorbike rides to agreeable destinations for coffee/lunch/picnic or places of interest such as airfields, motor museums etc. Out of season the plan is to visit (by car?) venues of interest plus occasional speakers on motorcycling themes. Greg has a small cohort of newly retired friends who are not currently members of our u3a and who have expressed an interest in getting involved by becoming members if the group is viable.

If you might be interested to join the motorbike group or if you have biker friends who are not currently u3a members and who would consider joining u3a in Kennet to become group members please contact Greg on motorbike@u3ainkennet.org.uk

AMATEUR RADIO

We have in our midst a keen (and very experienced) amateur radio operator who also happens to be the u3a's national subject advisor on this subject.

Is anyone else out there with a 'hams' licence or interest in the topic? If so please get in touch and we'll see what we can do to make it happen. Please contact: groups@u3ainkennet.org.uk

TABLE TENNIS TUESDAY GROUP

Following our publicity about the proposed new Table Tennis Group we are pleased to confirm that sufficient members have expressed interest to join the group. If you would like to find out more please contact tabtentues@u3ainkennet.org.uk

EXTRA TABLE TENNIS SESSIONS AVAILABLE FREE OF CHARGE for U3A IN KENNET MEMBERS

u3a in Kennet member Richard Ramsden is a Table Tennis coach (level 2 Table Tennis England Qualified)and leads a Women's Table Tennis coaching and playing session on Tuesday evenings from 5:30 – 7:00pm at Kennet Valley Hall, Lockeridge.



The attendance numbers are declining towards the conclusion of the season at the end of May and as a consequence Richard has kindly offered the opportunity for u3a ladies to receive some coaching and to play free of charge.

Richard also runs sessions on Sundays for everyone from 6:30-8:30pm and is offering places for u3a members to join until the end of May. These sessions are for players with some experience already and are attended now by several u3a members.

Photo: Richard Ramsden

Please contact Richard on 07568 648468 if you are interested to find out more about his offer.

SAFETY GUIDANCE FOR ACTIVITIES OFF THE BEATEN TRACK – OF INTEREST TO OTHERS TOO

This month we sent draft outdoor safety guidance to all leaders of outdoor groups, designed for groups whose activities take place off the beaten track. The suggestions in it came from a local workshop. We have asked leaders to send the draft to all their members. A laminated version will sent once feedback has been received (by end July).

Other u3a groups and members are welcome to use the guidance and consider their needs, too. Comments are also welcome, thank you. The draft document accompanies this Newsletter.

Feedback please by email to the Committee members involved: Alastair Sheen, Alison Dewar, Catherine Lockwood and Georgie Neville:

treasurer@u3ainkennet.org.uk or groups@u3ainkennet.org.uk

TECHNICAL SUPPORT – HELP PLEASE!

We know that our members appreciate the technical support which is provided at our meetings and talks enabling us to record and share videos and ensuring that the presentations are clear and audible. Hamzah needs a small support team to enable him to continue with this valuable aspect of the Committee's role.

All roles in u3a in Kennet are filled by volunteers and we invite more members to come forward to help and to share the tasks.

We will offer training and support to anyone who is willing to join the technical team of volunteers. We need assistance with:

- setting up the sound system and videoing at u3a in Kennet events.
- managing and monitor our email and website servers.
- maintaining our u3aikkennet.org.uk emails as and when required.
- assisting members with IT issues...

Please contact technical@u3aikkennet.org.uk if you are willing to help.

COMMITTEE NEWS

We are delighted to welcome two new members to the Committee: David Pocock and Gavin Maxwell-Hart who have joined Catherine Lockwood recently as co-opted members.

Catherine joined u3a in Kennet in February 2024 when moving back to Wiltshire from Northamptonshire and Rutland. She has so far joined Monday and Thursday Walking Groups, Double Bounce Tennis, Day Trips and attends Art History when space available.

Catherine has had a varied career including being Assistant Director of Stamford Theatre and Arts Centre, School Secretary at St Francis in Pewsey and running a busy Bed and Breakfast near Stonehenge.

Catherine and her husband Bill live in Lockeridge.

David joined the Kennet U3A in January 2024 following retirement from civil engineering and infrastructure asset management.

So far, he is a member of the Thursday walking group and the monthly quiz group. He and his wife Kath moved to Marlborough in 2004 from Dubai. They have two daughters, two sons-in-law and two grand-daughters.

David also enjoys mountain walking, woodworking, rowing (sadly now only occasionally) and watching rugby and cricket.

Gavin joined u3a recently in 2025 and is a member of the Digital Photography and Aviation Groups.

He moved to Wootton Rivers with his wife, Fran, in 1986 and they have three children – Freddy, Madeleine and William.

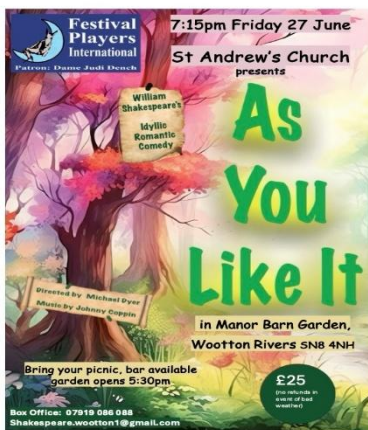
Gavin's career was in construction and he was involved with projects such as the Thames Barrier, M25 motorway, T5 @ Heathrow and the OL3 Nuclear Power Plant, Finland.

He is also at present Engineering Director for the Wilts & Berks Canal Trust.

OTHER LOCAL NEWS

We have been informed about some forthcoming local events which may be of interest to u3a in Kennet members and which we are sharing accordingly.

OPEN AIR SHAKESPEARE AT WOOTTON RIVERS



Following a very successful similar event in 2023 St Andrew's Church in Wootton Rivers is hosting the International Festival Players for an outdoor performance of Shakespeare's 'As You Like It'. The players are an all male troupe sponsored by none other than Dame Judi Dench and perform with acclaim and wit over much of the UK and some of Europe.

The play will be held outdoors from 7.15pm on Friday 27th June. The garden opens at 5:30pm and guests are invited to bring a picnic and enjoy the evening before the play begins.

THE MERCHANTS HOUSE EVENTS 2025.

The Merchant's House **Open Gardens** fundraising event will be held from 1pm – 5pm on Sunday June 22nd, 2025. Tickets are priced as follows: adults £10 in advance (£12 on the day).

<https://themerchantshouse.co.uk/event/marlborough-open-gardens-2025/>

Living History at The Merchant's House with Colonel Nicholas Devereux's Regiment of Foote – Saturday July 12th and Sunday July 13th

The 17th Century reenactment group 'Colonel Nicholas Devereux's Regiment of Foote' will return to the Merchant's House for two days from 10am until 4pm. Tickets cost £11 per adult (Friends of The Merchant's House £8) with under 18's free. <https://themerchantshouse.co.uk/whats-on/whats-on-calendar/>

MARLBOROUGH LITFEST 2025, 25th – 28th SEPTEMBER 2025

Broadcaster John Suchet, novelist Clare Chambers and horticulturalist Poppy Okotcha will join Alan Hollinghurst as the [2025 Golding Speaker](https://www.marlbroughlitfest.org/). See <https://www.marlbroughlitfest.org/>



Jill Turner
*Chair and Charity
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Jeff Hide
Vice Chair



Alastair Sheen
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Jill Chambers
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Alison Dewar
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Hamzah
Technology



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Catherine Lockwood
*Co-opted Committee
Member*



Gavin Maxwell-Hart
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