



# Newsletter

September 2025



*Photo: Susan Turner*

## WELCOME

We are enjoying a busy September of u3a events which began with our Open Day on 3<sup>rd</sup> followed by our Special Interest Day on 15<sup>th</sup>, our routine Coffee Exchange on 18<sup>th</sup> and we are looking forward to our New Members' Lunch on 23<sup>rd</sup>.

Next month we will hold our Annual General Meeting (A.G.M.) on 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2025. This meeting provides us with an opportunity to look back over the past year and to thank the Executive Committee members, Group Leaders and other volunteers for their support for our u3a. I will be standing down as Chair at the end of my term of office along with Jeff Hide (Vice Chair) and Mike Morison, our Membership Secretary has stepped forward as a nominee for the Chair role.

The A.G.M. papers have been sent to all members and if you are unable to attend the meeting please return the proxy vote form to enable us to include your votes.

Our 2025 A.G.M. will be followed by another of our interesting Kennet Talks. Further details will be sent to all members soon.

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

**New Members' Lunch; 23<sup>rd</sup>**  
September 2025 at Kennet Valley Hall (by invitation only)

**Annual General Meeting and Kennet Talk, 2.15pm 22<sup>nd</sup>**  
October 2025, Town Hall, Marlborough

The copy date for the October Newsletter will be 17<sup>th</sup> October 2025.

Please send to:  
[chair@u3aikkennet.org.uk](mailto:chair@u3aikkennet.org.uk)

Links to our web page  
[u3aikkennet.org.uk](http://u3aikkennet.org.uk) and  
Facebook page  
[www.facebook.com/u3aikkennet](https://www.facebook.com/u3aikkennet)

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

## REPORT ON THE COFFEE EXCHANGE, 28<sup>th</sup> AUGUST 2025

### MARLBOROUGH HIGH STREET ON FIRE, KATE MORRISON

Kate Morrison from the Local History Group came to the Town Hall to speak to more than 120 members about the fires of Marlborough High Street. She had obviously done much research into the subject quoting contemporaneous sources and digging around to bring the stories very much alive.



Kate began with the deliberate fires of 1642 when the Royalist army attacked and captured the town. The town was plundered and 53 houses and 7 barns were burned down. Marlborough continued to be a strong supporter of Oliver Cromwell. In the next ten years, the town was rebuilt, with a New Guildhall and a market hall. It was described at the time as a thriving town which was very prosperous.

Then she moved on to the Great Fire. In 1653 an accidental blaze which started in a tanner's yard near St Peter's Church, led to the destruction of the Market House and 224 houses and most of St Mary's Church

*Photo: Hamzah*

A large part of the population was left homeless and without their livelihoods. The total loss was calculated as being £70,000. What to do? The better off – like Sir Thomas Bayley the silk merchant – were able to make insurance claims. However, many were destitute and an appeal was made to Cromwell the Lord Protector. There was a good deal of sympathy for the town in Whitehall, where the loyalty to Cromwell was recognised. A national subscription was organised to help alleviate the suffering and to fund the rebuilding of the town. Over £54,000 was raised.

In spite of precautions, Kate identified three more significant fires on the High Street. Firstly, in 1879 the Post Office Fire – where Cafe Nero is now to the right of archway to Hilliers Yard. Putting out this fire was a series of disasters which seem almost comical. Keys to water pump mislaid, the water hoses were leaking, some of the firemen were drunk, help from Pewsey and the fire engine from Tottenham House eventually came and the fire was extinguished. In 1966 there was a fire at Polly's Tea Room where three people were rescued from the upper storeys and is well remembered as the upper floors have never been rebuilt. And in 1976, there was a fire at the carpet shop believed to have been started by a firework.

Historical research can often raise as many questions as it answers. Did the Great Fire of 1653 really cause as much damage as was thought given the reports of the reconstruction that had taken place by 1654. Modern research has identified many buildings with Tudor (and even earlier) parts to their foundations, chimneys and cellars. So perhaps the buildings were damaged but not

beyond repair. Perhaps some exaggeration took place to enhance insurance claims? The High Street was deliberately widened at that time to prevent sparks from new fires jumping from one side of the street to the other. But why were thatched roofs not banned on buildings until 1690, though it was obvious they contributed to the speed of the spread of the blaze 37 years earlier?

The Local History Group is a very active group and Kate's presentation was a tribute to the work they undertake.

### **EMERGENCY CONTACT DETAILS, ANY CHANGES TO YOUR PERSONAL INFORMATION AND OUR EXPENSES CLAIM FORM.**

In case of any unforeseen emergencies it would be most helpful if members were to provide us with a phone number for a friend or relative who has agreed to be the point of contact if necessary. We keep the emergency contacts' information securely and would only use in the event of a genuine emergency. If you have not done so already please contact our Membership Secretary Mike Morison; [membershipsec@u3ainkennet.org.uk](mailto:membershipsec@u3ainkennet.org.uk) or telephone: 01249 891093.

In addition please do keep us informed if your email address or phone number changes so that we can amend our records accordingly. Having the correct information will enable us to keep you up to date with our communications and our activities. Thank you.

Updated versions of the u3a in Kennet **Expenses Claim Form** are now available to download from the Policy & Procedures section of our [website](#).

### **DAY TRIP GROUP OUTING TO CHICHESTER, WEDNESDAY 8<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2025**

Our Day Trip Group has a few places left for the visit to Chichester on Wednesday October 8th 2025. The trip costs £16 per person and is open to u3a members only. The arrangements are as follows:

Pick-up times: Bouverie Hall car park, Pewsey at 8.30am and Marlborough High St., One Stop at 9.00am

Return journey: from Chichester (venue to be confirmed) at 5.00pm

To join the trip, please reply to [daytrip@u3ainkennet.org.uk](mailto:daytrip@u3ainkennet.org.uk) **as soon as possible** with:

- The names of people travelling.
- Where you would like to be picked up – Pewsey or Marlborough
- A mobile phone number

Your booking will be confirmed on receipt of your email and you will be sent the payment details.

## OPEN DAY 2025



Our 2025 Open Day event on 3<sup>rd</sup> September at the Town Hall was a busy and enjoyable event at which we recruited 16 new members.

Organised again this year by our Vice Chair: Jeff Hide our poster display about our Groups was the major focus along with our u3a in Kennet video showing and musical entertainment was provided by members of our Recorder Group. Refreshments were available and our Group Leaders were on hand to answer questions.

*Photo: Annette Weaver*

## NEWS AND UPDATES FROM OUR GROUPS

### WANTED: ART GROUP LEADER

We have a thriving Art Group led by Allan Skipper and there is a growing level of interest from other members to join as a result of which we are hoping to establish a second Group soon. The current Group meets in the Marlborough Scout Hut on George Lane between 2 and 4 pm on the 1st and third Thursday of each month.

There is availability at the Scout Hut for another Group to meet on the 2nd and 4th Thursday between the same times. The Scout Hut charges £12 per hour and the costs are shared between the members who attend. There are about 12 tables available so Group members currently have to share.

All that is required now is a volunteer to lead a second Group. This role can be shared between two members and there is help and advice available for the new Leader/s

Please let Allan know as soon as possible if you would be interested in setting up a second art group on email: [caskipper2@gmail.com](mailto:caskipper2@gmail.com) or call him on 07443647515.

### SHORT MAT BOWLS

Our Short Mat Bowls Group meets during the winter months from October to March at Marlborough Leisure Centre every Friday at 2pm.





This friendly Group has space for more members and Group Leader John Lafford explains that playing bowls is a good means of keeping fit as well as enjoying the company of Group members. u3a in Kennet provided funds to help the Group to purchase a new set of 'woods' (bowls) last year.

If you are interested to find out more about the Group please contact John directly on [short.mat@u3ainkennet.org.uk](mailto:short.mat@u3ainkennet.org.uk)

### POTENTIAL NEW GROUP – AMATEUR RADIO IN KENNET

One of our members is the national u3a Subject Advisor for Amateur Radio: Paul Robinson who explains that Amateur Radio is a worldwide hobby with over 500,000 people involved. In the U.K. we have around 40,000 operators and the hobby is open to everyone who holds a licence and callsign from OFCOM. Operators can use renovated valve based vintage radios for historical re-enactments, state-of the art digital equipment, Amateur TV, satellites, moonbounce and meteor showers for long distance contacts.

The hobby encourages making contact with other groups and there are competitions for distance and special interests and work closely with the Radio Society of Great Britain. There is a regular weekly Radio Net for local and regional contacts.

For further details please contact Paul callsign GONDN or email:

[Paul.robinson@subjectadviser.u3a.org.uk](mailto:Paul.robinson@subjectadviser.u3a.org.uk). Website:

<https://www.u3a.org.uk/learning/subjects/amateur-radio>

### NEW GROUP – CHESS

Members are invited to join our proposed new Group which will meet regularly.

We have some interest in the Group already along with an offer to lead it. Chess boards and chess clocks are available too.

Please contact [groups@u3ainkennet.org.uk](mailto:groups@u3ainkennet.org.uk) if you are interested to join the Group.

*Photo: Susan Turner*

### SPANISH GROUP APPEAL FOR A NEW LEADER.

Currently we have about ten members interested in joining a Spanish Group. However we do not yet have any offers to help to run it. Being a Group Leader can be a shared role and if you or anyone you know could help we would be delighted to hear from you. Please contact Georgie Neville: email [groups@u3ainkennet.org.uk](mailto:groups@u3ainkennet.org.uk)

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## SPECIAL INTEREST DAY – ‘GLOBAL TIPPING POINTS’, 15<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER 2025

Almost 150 u3a members from Kennet and other u3a's in the local area and some non members booked to attend our joint 'Special Interest Day' with Marlborough College and other local schools; Lydiard Park and Swindon Academy.



Those present enjoyed a stimulating day with presentations from our expert speakers:

- Professor Sir Muir Gray, senior public health physician
- Heidi Venamore, Chair of Council Marlborough College and former Australian government diplomat
- Professor David Waltham, Professor of Geophysics, University of London
- Dr Jeremy Wyatt, Emeritus Professor of Digital Healthcare, University of Southampton

The theme of '**Global tipping points**' was considered from a range of aspects including politics in the Middle East, ageing and health, Artificial Intelligence and climate change.

In addition to the main presentations students from the College and Swindon Academy gave short presentations on their chosen aspects of the overall theme of the Day and responded impressively to questions from the audience. Topics covered included AI, international trade, music and AI, international aid and climate change.

## OTHER NEWS FOR MEMBERS

### MARLBOROUGH LITFEST PLUS WITH TONY ROBINSON: TUESDAY 21 OCTOBER 2025

Marlborough LitFest has a cunning plan... to bring the actor, author, historical expert and presenter, Sir Tony Robinson, to Marlborough in the autumn. In an additional LitFest event after the main festival (25–28 September 2025), Robinson will be talking about his career and his debut novel, *The House of Wolf*, at Marlborough Town Hall on Tuesday 21 October 2025 at 7pm. Priority booking for Friends of LitFest opens on 6 September; general Box Office opens on 15 September.

The iconic Baldrick in the *Blackadder* series and long-time presenter of *Time Team*, Robinson makes his fictional debut for adults with *The House of Wolf*, the first in a new historical series (The House of Aethelwolf) spanning the Anglo-Saxons, Alfred the Great and the making of England. Published in September, this book is said to be perfect for fans of Ken Follett and Bernard Cornwell and has been praised by historian Dan Jones as 'A page-turner full of historical intelligence, wit and heart'.

Tickets for Sir Tony Robinson's event can be bought in person from The White Horse Bookshop in Marlborough (please note the bookshop cannot take orders by telephone) or online:

[www.marlbroughlitfest.org](http://www.marlbroughlitfest.org) Priority booking for Friends of LitFest opens on 6 September; general Box Office opens on 15 September.

For further information please contact Fran Del Mar at Marlborough LitFest on [pr@marlbroughlitfest.org](mailto:pr@marlbroughlitfest.org)

## THE MERCHANT'S HOUSE

### **Stories & Staircases – Shadows & Whispers from The Merchant's House, 28<sup>th</sup> – 31 October 2025**

For over 300 years, this remarkable house has watched over Marlborough's High Street. Take this very special opportunity to step inside for a guided tour and learn more about this extraordinary building, explore mysterious corners and curious spaces that don't quite add up – clues to secrets long forgotten. Discover the story behind the protective iron and witches' marks carved into doorways, windows, and fireplaces. And listen closely to tales of lingering spirits including that of our mysterious Lady in Green, who may still wander the rooms today.

For more information and to book visit: <https://themerchantshouse.co.uk/events/list/page/2/>

Other events include 'Spooky Tours' for the children at half-term. Available from Tuesday 28 October – Saturday 1 November, 10am – 4pm (last entry at 3pm)

Tickets: £11 (Under 18s & Historic House Members FREE)

<https://themerchantshouse.co.uk/event/spooky-tours/>

Christmas Wreath Making workshops are also being planned at The Merchant's House from 8th & 9th December 2025. Workshop: 10 – 1pm

Visit: <https://themerchantshouse.co.uk/events/list/page/2/>

## THE WHITE HORSE FESTIVAL, 2<sup>nd</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> OCTOBER 2025

A new music festival will take place in a number of local villages around Marlborough. For details please see: <https://whitehorsefestival.co.uk/>

The Festival Director: Julia Hudson is willing to consider group discounts and even some free tickets for u3a in Kennet members. Please contact Julia at email: [julia@whitehorsefestival.co.uk](mailto:julia@whitehorsefestival.co.uk) or mobile 07816 346232. Alternatively tickets are available through the website.

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u3a IN KENNET EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE [u3ainkennet.org.uk/executive-committee/](http://u3ainkennet.org.uk/executive-committee/)



Jill Turner  
*Chair and Charity  
Commission Contact*



Jeff Hide  
*Vice Chair*



Alastair Sheen  
*Treasurer*



Annette Weaver  
*Secretary*



Jill Chambers  
*Speaker Secretary*



Alison Dewar  
*Committee Member*



Hamzah  
*Technology*



Mike Morison  
*Membership & Beacon  
Administrator*



Georgie Neville  
*Committee Member*



David Pocock  
*Co-opted Committee  
Member*



Gavin Maxwell-Hart  
*Co-opted Committee  
Member*