



Newsletter

February 2026

CHAIR'S WELCOME



Photo: Susan Turner

Many thanks are due to Jill Chambers for both organising the talks and providing us with an excellent series of interesting and entertaining presenters and subjects.

These events could not take place without our loyal band of volunteers from the Really Useful Group; thank you to all of you. If you would like to add your support, please do not hesitate to contact Alison Dewar or, indeed, any of our committee members. Don't forget, the u3a in Kennet is run for its members by its members, and they are all volunteers.

Mike Morison, Chair, u3a in Kennet

COFFEE EXCHANGE, JANUARY 2026

Graham Biggs and Debbie Robson visited the Town Hall in January to talk about the Prospect Hospice which is based in Wroughton and is dedicated to giving end of life and palliative care to local people. The hospice serves an area of about 200 square miles stretching from Lechlade down to Bedwyn.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Coffee Exchange:

10.15am, 26th February 2026, Town Hall, Marlborough. 'Magna Carta; Myths and realities'. David du Croz

Coffee Exchange:

10.15am, 26th March 2026, Town Hall, Marlborough

The copy date for the next Newsletter will be 19th March 2026 with contributions to: newsletter@u3aikkennet.org.uk

Other useful links u3aikkennet.org.uk and www.facebook.com/u3aikkennet

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

In the past, they have been able to look after 16 in patients but, because of funding shortages, they are now down to only 6. There is hope that these numbers can be increased. But there are other services available and Debbie, the Home Team leader, shared much detail on what her team is able to offer people in their own homes. The team are able to offer medical care and support as well as respite for carers. But all this comes at a cost and Debbie explained how she has to make difficult choices each day because of the limited funds that are available.



The whole operation at Prospect costs about £10 million to run annually. Much to the surprise of many in the audience, only 18 per cent comes from the NHS – and seems to be largely in the form of drugs and other

supplies. That leaves £8.2 million to find !! Prospect is a charity and depends on the local community to raise this. This is done in a wide variety of ways including fetes, sponsored events, legacies, donations and the shops.

Graham, the Voluntary Operations and Recruitment Officer, explained that he manages about 750 volunteers. Nearly 500 of these are involved in running the 17 shops in the area. There are also those who help in the hospice itself.

Photo; Hamzah

Some work on reception, some help the carers in the building and carry out other tasks in the background. Some work in the cafe in Wroughton which provides food and drink to visitors to the building. They have recently branched out into catering for outside events.

Over 100 members heard the informative and interesting presentation. Several in the audience had volunteered in the past or were still volunteering. Having heard so much about the outstanding work that is being undertaken, hopefully more will come forward. The Hospice welcomes support:

- Volunteer regularly for up to 4 hours per week
- Ad hoc activities: support fund raising activities in a variety of ways

Contact Graham Biggs: tel. 01793 816193 or email grahambiggs@prospect-hospice.net

KENNET TALK, 10th FEBRUARY 2026, KENNET VALLEY HALL, LOCKERIDGE

It's 1936 ! What's on the Box?

Patrick Hickman–Robertson spent five years at the beginning of his long career working as a clerk at the BBC. He overlapped with many of the pioneers of TV entertainment working there. Combine this experience with his fascination for facts, and his own extraordinary collection of vintage magazines (including many about television) means that Patrick was able to produce an amazing talk at Kennet Valley Hall in February. He told the story of early television equipment , television broadcasts, and the actors and early stars of the medium. He showed pictures of the

stars and told the story of each one's career. Some came from the film industry, some from theatre or music hall. Apparently, some of the earliest faces on TV screens were just people working in the office who were pulled in front of the camera and so became part of history.

From his extensive magazine collection Patrick has advertising pictures of the first TV sets. The earliest were large pieces of wooden furniture with small oblong screens about 16 " by 5 ins. Patrick also has pictures of the first cameras, the first studios and the first technicians. Much of the story he told centred around the rivalry between John Baird and the BBC in the 1930s. Baird who developed the original technology began programmes but needed the BBC transmitters to broadcast. So although he was the pioneer. by 1937 the BBC adopted the electronic system and took over all TV broadcasting.

Patrick's history of TV entertainment ended on 1st September 1939 when screens suddenly went blank. The Armed Forces were mobilised when Poland was invaded. In those circumstances, the engineers had secret orders They immediately left their posts to man the first line of defence for the country at radar stations on the East Coast.

The capacity audience in Lockeridge were well entertained by the meticulously researched, detailed and humorously presented talk. At the end, Patrick showed a very early video of a couple watching a singer perform. It is in black and white, slightly smudgy with slightly screechy sound. It shows the clumpy equipment, heavy mechanical levers, and the very bulky cameras being used in the 1930s. 90 years later, it all seems impossibly crude but it was the beginning of the entertainment that is now so much part of our lives.

NEWS AND UPDATES FROM OUR GROUPS

CONTROVERSIAL DISCUSSION GROUP 3

Each meeting is member-led, usually with one person suggesting a topic and guiding the conversation. Discussions are lively, thoughtful, and often funny – with a focus on curiosity rather than confrontation. Come along, share your perspective, you don't have to agree with everyone, but you'll almost always leave better informed (and occasionally with your mind slightly changed).

The group meets on the 2nd Thursday of each month at 10.30 am at the Friends Meeting House in Marlborough. The email address for further details is: cont.disc.3@u3ainkennet.org.uk

POSSIBLE SECOND ADVANCED FRENCH GROUP – REMINDER

We have a very dynamic advanced French Group, currently with a waiting list. It would be helpful to know if there are other members who are interested in joining an Advanced French Group 2. This would be run by a French native speaker. In our group which meets monthly in the Group Organiser's house, we read and discuss current affairs articles from a prestigious weekly magazine and have recently started reading one of Alexandre Dumas' classics.

If your French is of good conversational standard and you want to practice your spoken French, then please let the group organiser, Ashley de Safrin, know of your interest;

French.adv@u3ainkennet.org.uk

ALLAN SKIPPER: THANK YOU.

Members of the Art Group will know already that Allan Skipper has stepped down from his role as Group Leader after more than four years. Thank you, Allan, for all your hard work and commitment to this very successful group during this time. It has been much appreciated by both the U3a in Kennet committee as well as the members of the group. We continue to look forward to seeing Allan's art work exhibited locally.

Jilly Hunter has taken over as the new Group Leader. We welcome Jilly to this role and wish her all the best for the future.

MAHJONG

Have you ever played this enjoyable and compelling game or would you like to try it out? Roland Fisher has spaces in his Mahjong 3 group for anyone interested in joining. The group meets fortnightly on a Tuesday afternoon in the Jubilee Centre (for which a small charge is made).

Please get in touch with Roland on: mahjong3@u3ainkennet.org.uk . Do come along and give it a try. Tuition will be provided.

OBITUARIES



DIANA COOPER

Diana Cooper, a long-standing member of u3a in Kennet, died peacefully in her sleep at home on 6th February 2026 aged 93.

She was known to many u3a members and was an active participant in the Controversial Current Affairs and Global History Groups until poor health curtailed this.

She, and her late husband John, lived in Marlborough for many years and had supported many local groups including the Merchants House and Marlborough in Bloom.

Our condolences go to her family.

PETER BLYTHE 1939 -2025

Peter passed away peacefully at Brendoncare in Froxfield on 23rd December 2025 with family by his side. Peter was born in Blackpool at the start of WW2. He was a bright, studious child and attended Stretford Grammar School for boys before studying civil engineering at Manchester

University. There he met his future wife, Dorothy Holland at a dance. The couple married in 1962 and were happily married for 63 years. Dorothy passed away in October 2024.

Peter arrived in Marlborough in 1972 with his young family, setting up home in Ducks Meadow. He had just begun working as a municipal engineer for Thamesdown Borough Council in Swindon. He was an accomplished bridge player, a keen cyclist and gardener, tending an allotment for many years. He was a Francophile and enjoyed travelling through France with his wife Dorothy in their camper van, sampling the local food and wine and staying with friends in the Pyrenees. Peter was a thoughtful, articulate family man with a wry sense of humour, He loved life in Marlborough and the friends he made here. He enjoyed being a member of the U3A wine group and numerous theatre trips.

Peter will be much missed by his children, John and Louise, his grandchildren Laura and Robert and his sister Diane.

OTHER NEWS AND INFORMATION for MEMBERS

I.T SKILLS WORKSHOP



The next IT Workshop will be held after Easter on the morning of either the 16th or 17th of April at St Peter's Church, Marlborough. In this workshop we will have a few experienced members who will help our less experienced members in the use of smartphones and tablets, both Apple and Android.

If you would like to come along, please contact Mike Morison on morison_2017@outlook.com. Further details will be included in our March 2026 Newsletter.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING: SECOND STRENGTH AND BALANCE COURSE

Following the success of our first set of Strength and Balance classes I have arranged a further course exclusively for u3a in Kennet members. The 5 week course on strength and balance will begin in the spring (dates to be confirmed) at the Jubilee Centre 28 High Street, Marlborough, SN8 1LW. The sessions are suitable for members of all abilities and will be delivered by former Paralympian Chris Hunt Skelley MBE with up to 10 places available at a cost of £30.00 for the 5 week course.

Please contact : jillturner@u3ainkennet.org.uk for more information and to reserve a place.

Plans are being developed for a separate course on learning how to fall more safely and building confidence in getting back up again. This course will be held at the Fitness Space in Elcot Lane and details will follow.

CPR AND DEFIBRILLATOR TRAINING



Knowing how to use a defibrillator and the basics of CPR could save a life!

A defibrillator and CPR training session will be held on Saturday 16th May 2026 from 10.00 to 12 noon at Kennet Valley Hall.

u3a in Kennet members are invited to attend including anyone who has attended previously.

Please contact jillturner@u3ainkennet.org.uk to reserve a place.

COMPLIANCE AND CHARITY COMMISSION INFORMATION

There have been little of direct interest to us from the Compliance, Legal and Charity Commission in January but, just for your information, whilst many matters are occupying the current government's time lately, an effort is being made to update the Data Protection legislation which was introduced many years before we left the EU. The Data (Use and Access) Act, when eventually settled and brought into force, will reform the existing regulations including data sharing and will create fresh digital identity verification.

When the matters concerned may affect our u3a in Kennet, the Executive Committee and any relevant group leaders will be informed.

Jeff Hide (Compliance)

HARD OF HEARING? JOINT VICE CHAIR DAVID POCOCK SHARES A USEFUL TIP

'As my hearing has been deteriorating, I have become more and more aware of the acoustics in venues such as the Town Hall, which are often poor, impacting my ability to hear and enjoy speakers. This frustration led me to ask at a hearing check-up, about how to benefit from the hearing-loop (or T-Coil) facility that some venues provide.

Apparently, for NHS hearing-aid users, the ability to receive the signal can simply be turned on in one's hearing-aid software at a check-up. This capability can then be selected via the control switch on the hearing-aid or via the mobile phone app. When I actually tried it out, at the Coffee Exchange meeting on 22 January, I was really surprised how big a difference it made, so would recommend it to anyone who may be experiencing those frustrations. Apologies to those that are already in the know!

David Pocock (Joint Vice Chair and Events)

u3a IN KENNET EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE u3ainkennet.org.uk/executive-committee/



Mike Morison, Chair,
& Beacon Administrator



David Pocock
Joint Vice Chair & Events



Gavin Maxwell-Hart, Joint
Vice Chair & Outreach



Alastair Sheen
Treasurer



Annette Weaver, Secretary



Jill Chambers
Speaker Secretary



Alison Dewar
Groups and Really Usefuls



Jeff Hide
Compliance



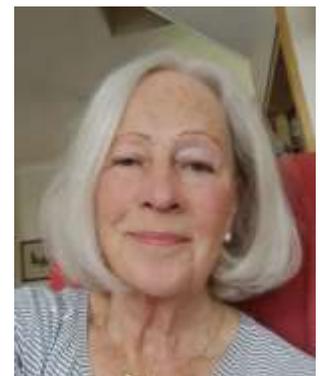
Georgie Neville
Groups



Hamzah
Technology



Julian Beames Co-opted
member, Information and
Publicity



Kate Morrison Co-opted
member: Membership
Secretary