

Syston and District

u3a

learn, laugh, live

JAN
2026

Vitality!

Official newsletter of the Syston and District u3a

CHARITY No 1180152



FROM OUR CHAIRMAN

Hi Everyone,

I hope everyone had a lovely Christmas and New Year. It was very pleasing to see members enjoying the chance to chat and supporting our marvellous ukulele & singers at our Christmas / 10th Anniversary meeting. Many thanks to those groups for making it so special and all those helped with the preparation. A special thanks goes to Tesco who very generously provided us with the mince pies.

Can I thank the committee, group leaders and all our members for a great year and I am looking forward to the next 12 months.

Clive

OUR CHRISTMAS & 10 YEAR ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS



Left - Norma Grimes, a founder member, cutting one of the two cakes.

Above – one of the cakes before the knife was taken to it.

Right – Part of the splendid finger feast that was provided.

Many thanks to Steve Kenney for the photos here and on the following pages.





Our Ukulele Group and Singers, who provided the entertainment



Both groups have performed at a wide variety of events over the years, many of them helping to generate funds for various charitable causes.



The u3a - UK Self-Help Learning

A short history to mark our 10-year anniversary

The idea of a “University of the Third Age” began in France in 1973, where it was firmly rooted in universities. Courses were taught by academics, programmes were structured, and learning followed a traditional model — just without exams or degrees.

When the idea reached the UK in the early 1980s, it took on a very different character. Instead of being tied to universities, the British version became a **self-help movement**:

- members learning from one another
- no academic hierarchy or formal teaching roles

- groups run by volunteers with an elected Executive Committee
- learning for pleasure rather than accreditation

This peer-led approach proved so successful that it became the model adopted by most English-speaking countries, including Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the USA.

Elsewhere in the world, many U3As still follow the original French pattern, especially across continental Europe, China and parts of Latin America, where university partnerships remain central.

What this means is that the U3A movement now has **two thriving traditions**:

- the **academic model**, rooted in universities
- the **self-help model**, rooted in community learning

Here in the UK, we've proudly championed the latter — and our own u3a's 10-year story is part of that wider evolution.

GROUP NEWS



Two New Groups in January



Starting on
January 13th



Tai Chi

Starting on January 5th



sadu3agroups@gmail.com

NEW GROUP IDEAS

If you have any ideas for a new group, please contact Barbara Sargeant our groups co-ordinator sadu3agroups@gmail.com or speak to her at one of our monthly general meetings. Alternatively contact her assistant Angie Baker email sadu3agroupsasst@gmail.com Acting as a group organiser doesn't have to be onerous, it doesn't have to be down to just one person, and it doesn't mean you have to organise everything the group does.

Is the group you want to join currently full? How about starting a second group? Barbara and Angie are happy to provide support and guidance on how to get going.

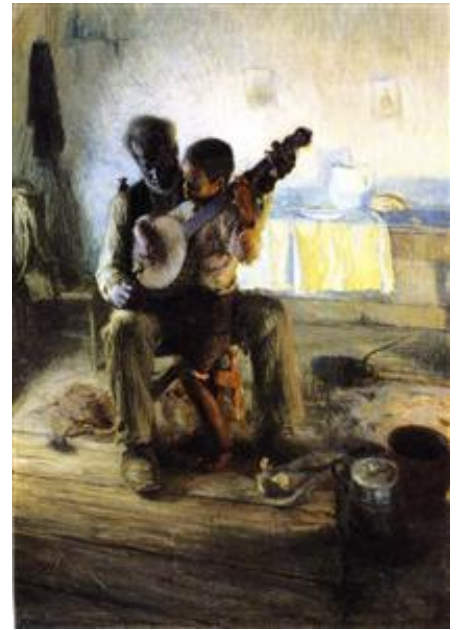
WALKING GROUP



The group clearly enjoyed their Christmas meal.
Thanks to Dave Palmer for the photos.

ART APPRECIATION GROUP

Last time we met, Karen gave a talk about Henry Ossawa Tanner. Very few of us had heard of him but he was very successful in his day and a pioneer for Black Artists in America.



Then we all explored how artists portrayed winter with examples from Monet to Hockney,



Breugel to Grant Wood.



So many different styles and approaches which makes the study of art infinitely engaging.

Next Month Carolyn is exploring the art created for the covers of Puffin books.

So much to learn and enjoy!

Chris Gale

CRAFT GROUP

The crafters have many diverse talents, from knitting to crochet, from spinning to weaving and needle felting. We have seen many projects started and completed but unfortunately not many pictures of our endeavours, these are a few that were sent in and a couple of mine.





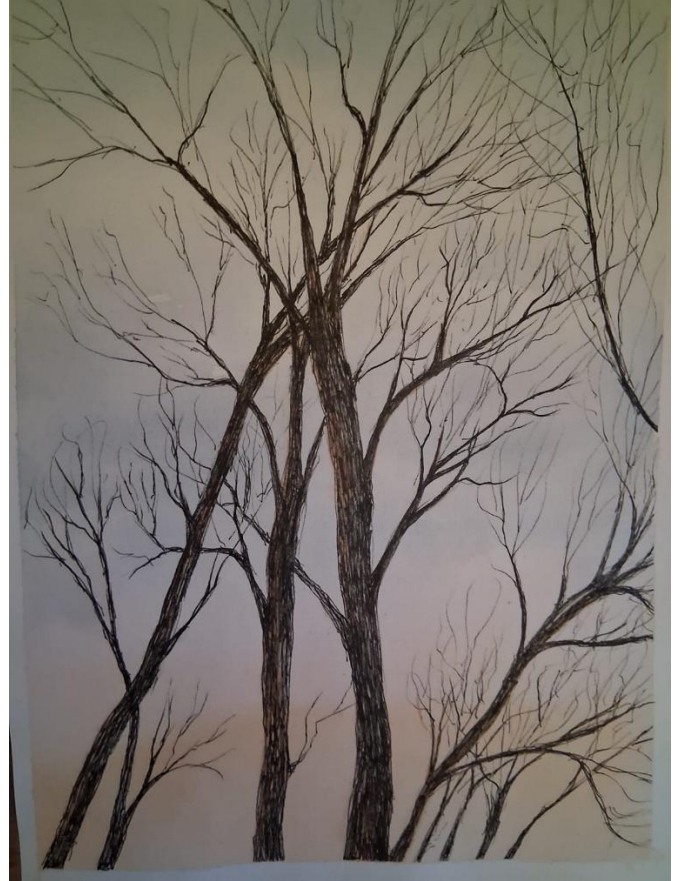
PARCHMENT GROUP



KURLING GROUP



ART GROUP 1





Thanks to Pat Glover for the Craft and Art Group photos

PLAY READING GROUP



What a wonderful year we have had in our Play Reading group. We always try to choose a comedy as we all need a bit of fun in our lives! Our November book was "Dry Rot" by John Chapman. A story about a couple of incompetent burglars who steal a horse, hide it in an old house which has dry rot and a secret panel! We didn't manage to read to the end so will complete it at the January meeting. Our December meeting saw us joining up with the second Play Reading group where we read Season's Greetings by Alan Ayckbourn. Hilarious highlights include a chaotically incompetent puppet show and a midnight love scene that ends up by setting up a fearful din among several mechanical Christmas presents.

As many of you know we have two Play Reading groups which are, at the moment full, but there may be a space or two in the second group, which meets on a Thursday once a month. If you are interested, please let us know.

Happy Reading!
Barbara

Thank you all for your contributions for this issue -splendid!!



One Off Events

Do You have any ideas for a
one off event for 2026

If you do and are
willing to organise it
I can give you all the
help you need to set
it up

Please contact me Angie Baker
at the the below email address
sadu3aevents@gmail.com

WHAT'S ON NEXT

GENERAL MEETINGS

In the Brookside Room at the Community Centre – talks usually start 10.30am
Tea/coffee and mingling from 10.00am



14

Wednesday, January 14, 2026 at 10:30 AM

JAN 2026 - KNIGHTS OF THE BLIND - LIONS INTERNATIONAL

Syston Community Centre

Come and find out about the organisation named LIONS International.

The association is made up of 1.4 million members in 49,000 clubs who bring hands and hearts to the communities we serve in nearly every country on earth. Our Lions and Leos help hundreds of millions of people every year.



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Wednesday, February 11, 2026 at 10:30 AM

FEBRUARY - THE WATER BABIES

Syston Community Centre

NATIONAL U3A ITEMS

u3a TALKS



How to Build Confidence in Later Life

Join Rebecca Ronane and discover practical, doable strategies to strengthen your self-belief, resilience and boost your confidence after fifty

Wednesday 14 January at 2pm

Free – online via Zoom



Roman Britain to the Dark Ages

From Roman Britain to the Dark Ages

After captivating audiences with his survey of England's 10,000-year journey since the last Ice Age, author Charles Boundy is back by popular demand with his next talk: From Roman Britain to the Dark Ages.

Thursday 15 January at 2pm

Free – online via Zoom



Why snails might hold some answers to age-related memory loss

Explore how molluscs can help us to understand how we learn and remember, and how they can be used for studying age-related memory loss, in this Science Network Event with speaker Professor Mark Yeoman.

Tuesday 27 January at 11am

Free – online via Zoom

Book [here](#)

Book [here](#)

Book [here](#)

u3a Radio Podcast

The u3a radio podcast, set up in 2020, showcases the amazing things happening across the movement. It's created by a team of u3a members who all have radio experience and features interviews with members, interest group leaders, Trustees, national volunteers and Subject Advisers.

The entire series is available on our **YouTube Channel**.

[Listen now](#)

The podcast is available on the usual podcast platforms including:

- [Spotify](#)
- [Apple Podcasts](#)
- [Podtail](#)

The team is always looking for more stories – [please get in touch](#) via our contact form if you'd like to contribute. Or you can email us on communications@u3a.org.uk.

NOT u3a BUT YOU MIGHT BE INTERESTED



CRIME AND PUNISHMENT GUIDED TOUR

4th January - 31st January

The Guildhall, Guildhall Lane, Leicester, LE1 5FQ

[Visit website](#)

[Book now](#)



RED RIDING HOOD PANTO

17th January

Queniborough Village Hall, Rearsby Road, Leicester, LE7 3DH

[Book now](#)



SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS

30th January - 31st January

Humphrey Perkins School, 74-78 Cotes Road, Loughborough, LE12 8JU

[Book now](#)

Post Christmas seems to be a bit of a slack period, but going forwards, if you are aware of any local non-profit events that might be of interest, please do let me know and I will advertise them in future newsletters.

FROM OUR MEMBERS

Marking Time: A Short History of Calendars, Diaries, and the Art of Keeping Track

Every January, many of us pin up a fresh calendar or open a crisp new diary, ready to fill its pages with meetings, birthdays, holidays, and the small rhythms of everyday life. It's such a familiar ritual that it's easy to forget how recently these objects became part of ordinary households — and how much history sits behind the simple act of writing down a date.

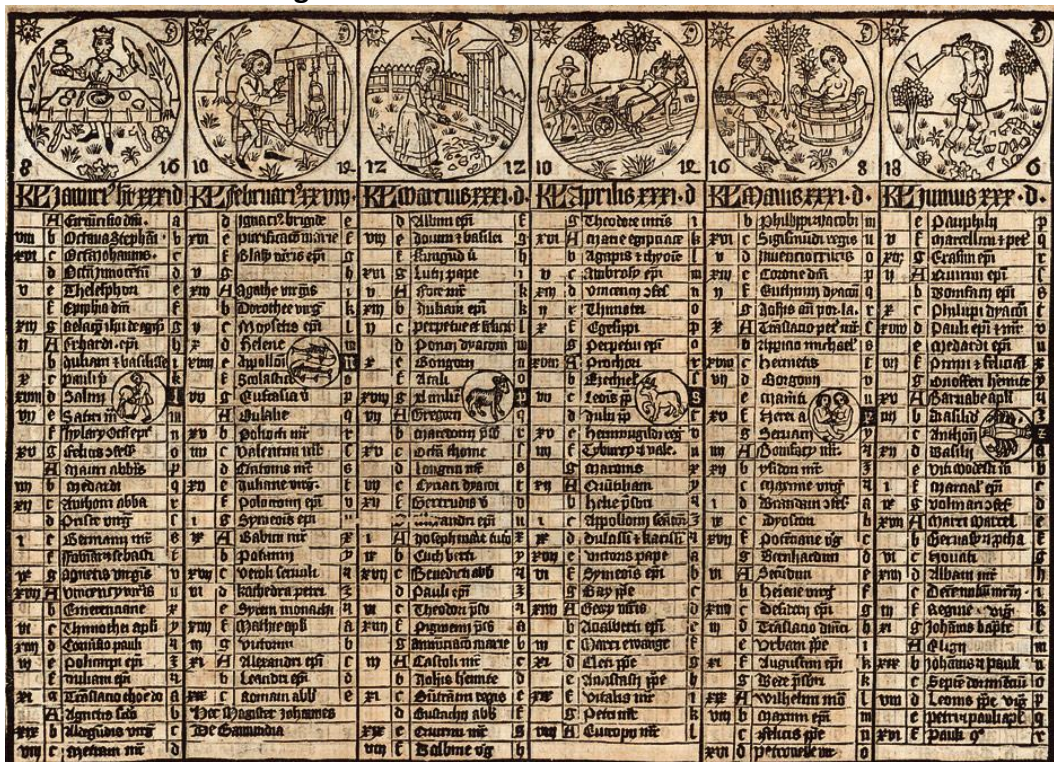
From Notches on Bone to Printed Sheets

Long before calendars were decorative or even recognisably “calendar-shaped”, people found ways to track the passing of days. Archaeologists have uncovered tally sticks, knotted cords, and bones marked with lunar cycles — practical tools for communities whose lives depended on knowing when to sow, harvest, or prepare for winter.

Early agricultural societies often used what we might call “living calendars”: the first snowdrop, the return of migrating birds, the swelling of buds. Time was measured by the natural world rather than by numbered squares.

The arrival of writing changed everything. Ancient civilisations such as the Egyptians, Babylonians, and Romans developed formal calendars to organise civic life, religious festivals, and taxation. But these were elite tools, not household items. For most people, the year was still experienced through seasons and local custom.

The First Calendars You Could Hang on a Wall



It wasn't until the invention of printing in the 15th century that calendars began to resemble something we might recognise. Printers produced annual broadsheets showing saints' days, feast days, moon phases, and the dates of fairs and markets. These sheets were pinned to walls or doors — the ancestors of the modern wall calendar.

They were strictly functional. No kittens, no scenic views, no glossy paper. And because the new year didn't always begin on 1 January, many early calendars started in March, which can be a delightful surprise when you see one in a museum.

When Calendars Became Decorative



By the Victorian era, calendars had blossomed into objects of beauty. Advances in colour printing allowed for richly illustrated designs: sentimental scenes, seasonal flowers, landscapes, and moral verses. Many were given as gifts, often tucked inside Christmas cards.

Businesses quickly realised their potential. A calendar hung in a kitchen or hallway was a year-long advertisement, so shops, dairies, garages, and insurance companies began handing them out. Many households had at least one “free calendar” every year — a tradition that continued well into the late 20th century.

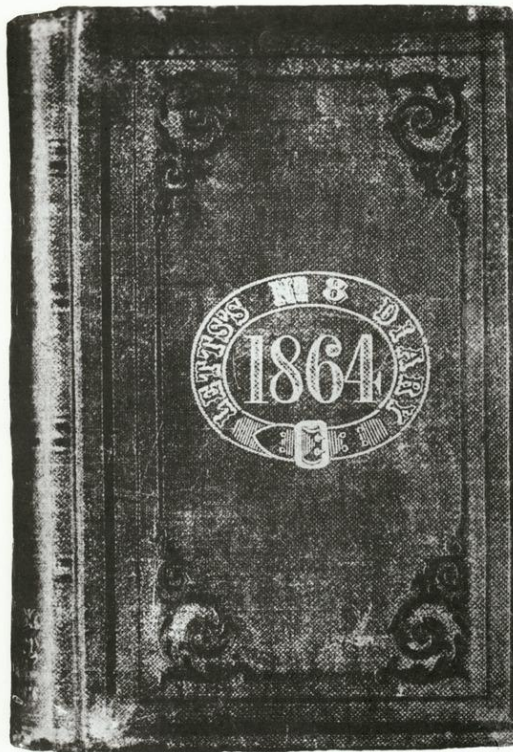
Examples of UK calendars of this era have not survived. Household simply discarded them at the year's end. The image to the left is an example of a US trade calendar. For some reason a number of these have survived and been digitised on various websites. Anyone interested in seeing more examples can visit [Search Results: "trade calendars" - Prints & Photographs Online Catalog \(Library of Congress\)](#)

By the 1950s and 60s, the picture calendar had become a fixture of many British homes. Railway posters, National Trust houses, wildlife photography, and glossy travel images all found their way onto kitchen walls. Even today, despite digital alternatives, many people still enjoy choosing a calendar that reflects their interests or brightens a room.

However, by the 1950s, some British households had moved away from the decorative paper calendars of earlier decades and adopted **perpetual wall calendars**, designed to be used year after year. These were typically made from wood or metal, with small rotating wheels or flip panels to adjust the day, date, and month. Their clean, modernist look reflected the post-war emphasis on practicality and durability, and they were often hung in kitchens, hallways, or near the family telephone. Unlike the colourful Victorian examples, these mid-century calendars were deliberately plain and functional — a quiet symbol of the era's shift toward streamlined domestic design.



The Parallel Story: Diaries and the People Who Kept Them



Above is the diary of Edward Lear

While calendars evolved on the wall, diaries developed in the hand. The first mass-produced diaries appeared in the early 19th century, with Letts of London becoming a household name. These early diaries were practical tools: places to record business appointments, household accounts, weather observations, and payments to the coal man.

But diaries also became personal companions. Some of the most vivid voices in history come from diarists: Samuel Pepys chronicling Restoration London, Anne Frank capturing the courage of a young girl in hiding, Virginia Woolf reflecting on writing and life. Yet the most valuable diaries, historically speaking, are often the ordinary ones — the farmers, shopkeepers, and housewives whose daily notes now form the backbone of local archives.

Many people kept two diaries: a “proper” one for appointments, and a more private notebook or journal for thoughts. Pepys of course pre-dates the printed diary, so used a journal. Others used the margins of their calendar as a hybrid diary — a habit still common today.

On a personal note, a couple of my paternal grandmother's small 1940s diaries came to light after my father's death. They had been kept when the family lived in the tiny Lincolnshire Wolds village of Hareby.

They often contain only occasional entries, but even those fragments speak volumes. One winter she noted the snow-blocked roads day after day, hoping the thaw would come soon so she could get into town to buy a much-needed pair of boots for one of my uncles. It's a reminder that diaries often capture the practical anxieties and quiet resilience of everyday life rather than grand events. As a family historian they gave me some brief glimpses into her life that I would otherwise never have had.

Why We Keep Them

Whether on paper or screen, calendars and diaries serve the same deep human needs:

- **Memory** — they help us remember what matters
- **Order** — they give structure to our days
- **Anticipation** — they let us look forward to events
- **Reflection** — they offer a place to look back

There's also something quietly communal about a wall calendar. It sits in a shared space, visible to everyone in the household. A diary, by contrast, is intimate — a private conversation with oneself.

Paper or Digital? The Modern Balance

Digital calendars are wonderfully efficient: reminders, syncing, colour-coding, and the ability to carry your schedule in your pocket. But paper calendars and diaries remain stubbornly popular. They're tactile, visible, and often beautiful. Many people find that writing things down helps them remember better, or simply enjoy the small ritual of turning a page.

A Final Thought

Every fresh calendar or diary is a small act of optimism. It says: here is a new year, ready to be shaped. Whether you prefer a digital planner, a wall calendar with a favourite theme, or a trusty paper diary, the tradition of marking time is one of the oldest — and most human — habits we have.

DECLUTTER DEN

Are you determined to declutter and get rid of things that you haven't used in an age this year? Look no further than Declutter Den.



If you have something that you are prepared to give away — **strictly no items for sale!** Let me know and I'll put it in declutter den and hopefully we can help each other free up some space, whilst giving others something they have a use for, even if we don't. Email: sadu3aed@gmail.com

Is a Snow Bomb Really on the Way?

❄️ Why Long-Range Snow Forecasts Deserve a Pinch of Salt

Every winter, headlines appear promising “*Arctic blasts*”, “*Beasts from the East*”, or “*the coldest January in decades*”. They spread quickly, especially on social media, and they can sound persuasive. There are headlines suggesting a “snow bomb” in the New Year, but the BBC Weather app shows only light snow for our area, not the countrywide heavy blanket some reports predict. So why do these more sensational forecasts so often miss the mark? And how can we read them with a more informed, sceptical eye?

☁️ 1. Weather Isn’t Climate — and Weather Is Chaotic

Long-range forecasts try to predict the behaviour of a chaotic system. The atmosphere is influenced by countless interacting factors — ocean temperatures, jet stream patterns, pressure systems, and even volcanic activity. Small changes early on can lead to very different outcomes later. Meteorologists can identify *trends* weeks ahead, but not precise events. A model might suggest “colder than average conditions possible”, but that’s a far cry from “heavy snow on the 3rd of January”.

📦 2. The UK Is Hard to Forecast because -

We sit at the crossroads of several competing air masses:

- cold Arctic air from the north
- continental air from the east
- mild Atlantic air from the west
- subtropical air from the south

A slight shift in the jet stream can turn a potential snow event into plain rain. That’s why the UK can go from “snow risk” to “mild and drizzly” in the space of a few days.

📰 3. Headlines Love Drama

Many of the most eye-catching snow predictions don’t come from the Met Office at all. They often originate from:

- **single model runs** taken out of context
- **speculative long-range charts**
- **tabloid exaggeration**

A single computer model might show a cold spell 20 days ahead — but meteorologists look for *consistency* across many models before taking it seriously. Newspapers, however, often run with the most dramatic version.

📊 4. Long-Range Models Are for Trends, Not Events

Professional forecasters use long-range models to understand broad patterns such as:

- “likely wetter than average”
- “increased chance of colder spells”
- “higher probability of stormy conditions”

These are *probabilities*, not promises. They're useful for planning energy supply or gritting budgets, but not for deciding whether to buy a snow shovel.

☼ 5. What Is Worth Paying Attention To?

For practical purposes, the most reliable guidance is:

- **Met Office forecasts up to 5 days ahead**
- **Met Office severe weather warnings**
- **Local updates from trusted meteorologists**

These use the latest data and are updated frequently as conditions evolve.

🧂 So, Take the Big Snow Predictions with a Pinch of Salt

It's not that meteorologists are getting it wrong — it's that long-range snow forecasts are inherently uncertain, and dramatic headlines often oversell what the science can actually say.

A healthy dose of scepticism keeps expectations realistic and helps us focus on the forecasts that genuinely matter.

POETRY CORNER

THE OLD YEAR by John Clare

The Old Year's gone away
To nothingness and night:
We cannot find him all the day
Nor hear him in the night:
He left no footstep, mark or place
In either shade or sun:
The last year he'd a neighbour's face,
In this he's known by none.

All nothing everywhere:
Mists we on mornings see
Have more of substance when they're
here
And more of form than he.
He was a friend by every fire,
In every cot and hall—
A guest to every heart's desire,
And now he's nought at all.

Old papers thrown away,
Old garments cast aside,
The talk of yesterday,
Are things identified;
But time once torn away
No voices can recall:
The eve of New Year's Day
Left the Old Year lost to all.

HAPPY NEW YEAR by John P Read

Brush away old heartaches.
Learn from our mistakes.
Another year is finally over.
A new dawn awakes.

Let the old year out.
Welcome the new one in.
Bury the bad things of the past
As a new year now begins.

Make your New Year wishes
As simple as you can.
Pray for peace and love,
Not for wealth or fame.

Pray for health and happiness.
Pray for your fellow man.
Pray for all the ones you love.
Pray for those who've lost their way.

As the midnight hour chimes,
We leave the old and embrace the new.
I wish the things you wish for yourself,
And may God's love stay with you

A JOURNEY TO A NEW YEAR by Sumira R. Arain

First day of the New Year.
It's time to shine for a new day.
Forget your past,
Your sorrow, your pain.
New ideas are waiting ahead.
It's time to recall all your memories,
Beautiful dreams that remain uncovered,
Painful parts of life when your heart gets crushed.
But don't be afraid.
The future is in your hand.
Hold it in your hand.
Start your race,
A new journey,
That leads you to success.
You will rise again
You will shine again.
Happy New Year!

THE YEAR by Ella Wheeler Wilcox

What can be said in New Year rhymes,
That's not been said a thousand times?

The new years come, the old years go,
We know we dream, we dream we know.

We rise up laughing with the light,
We lie down weeping with the night.

We hug the world until it stings,
We curse it then and sigh for wings.

We live, we love, we woo, we wed,
We wreath our brides, we sheet our dead.

We laugh, we weep, we hope, we fear,
And that's the burden of the year.

And finally.....

New Year: A Glossary

- **Resolution:** A bold statement made in a moment of optimism and forgotten in a moment of realism.
- **January:** The month where enthusiasm goes to hibernate.
- **Diary:** A book in which you write "MUST GET ORGANISED" on page one and nothing else thereafter.
- **Motivation:** A rare seasonal plant that blooms briefly on 1 January and dies by the 7th.
- **Leftovers:** The real reason anyone gets through the first week of the year.

New Year Survival Tips

- If you can't remember your resolutions by mid-January, you're officially excused from them.
- Calories consumed on New Year's Day don't count — they're rollover calories from last year.
- If your diary still says 2026 by March, simply call it "vintage".
- The best way to keep a resolution is not to make one you can break.
- If all else fails, declare February your personal New Year and start again.