

Syston and District

u3a

learn, laugh, live

JULY
2026

Vitality!

Official newsletter of the Syston and District u3a

CHARITY No 1180152

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Hi Everyone,

After my AGM report I don't have a lot to say. I would like to inform you that we will be attending the Thurmaston, Rearsby and Syston Fetes.

We have already been to the East Goscote Summer Fete and I would like to thank Jill, Helen and Dave for all their hard work.

I hope you enjoy the rest of the summer.

Clive

EDITOR COMMENT

Where has all the group news gone again? I know it's the holiday season, but out of 40 groups only 4 sent updates – 2 of them mine. That's a 10% contribution rate. If this were a school report, the comment would be "could do better".

WE WANTED TO LET YOU KNOW

HAVE A QUERY? WANT TO SPEAK TO SOMEONE?

Occasionally, some members (or potential members) may prefer to speak to someone about an aspect of our u3a, rather than locating an email address or looking on our website.

So, we now have a contact number for Syston & District u3a, which is:



0300 102 1381

At the moment, this number goes through to Steve Kenney's (Webmaster) mobile phone, and if he is unable to answer the query, then he can advise who to contact.

GROUP NEWS

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.



Jazz Appreciation

Are you a fan of Jazz?

We have a member who is keen to start a Jazz appreciation group.

The group will meet twice a month on Wednesday mornings.

Meeting at the members home in Syston

Please register your interest by emailing sadu3agroups@gmail.com



Potential New Group Wind and String

Do you have a guitar you used to play?
Do you have a clarinet you used to play
or any other wind instrument?
Do you fancy getting together to make
beautiful music?

We have a member who is keen to start a new
group where everyone can play together for
their enjoyment.

Please email me at the below address and I
will pass on your details

sadu3agroups@gmail.com

LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

Having looked at Auster Aircraft back in May, we looked at the story of Crowther Ltd. The company predates Auster, then ran alongside it, and ultimately outlived it. Crowther began in 1918 as selling agents for various foreign textile machinery manufacturers. The most dramatic crisis came with the 1932 Import Duties Act, which imposed tariffs on many foreign imports and threatened Crowther's entire business model because its machinery came from Europe. Rather than collapse, directors A. L. Wykes and Frank Bates turned the crisis into an opportunity by shifting from agency work toward British manufacture under licence. They negotiated for Pourtier cable-covering machines to be made in Britain by Harling & Todd of Burnley. This move also shows an important strategic decision: Crowther diversified early into cable machinery, reducing reliance on textile machinery alone.

An even bolder episode involved a large Australian order for Schweiter braiding machines. Because Swiss-built machines had become too expensive under tariff and exchange-rate pressures, Wykes

offered to supply British-made machines before he had final manufacturing permission or the full production network in place. He then made a rushed rail journey to Switzerland with Percy L. Hobourn of Pattison & Hobourn to secure a licence. Crowther coordinated a rapid subcontracting effort involving major industrial names, including Dorman Long, Sunbeam Motor Works, Herbert Terry & Son, and Pattison & Hobourn. The machines were complex, each with 623 parts, some with tolerances of one two-thousandth of an inch, and assembly relied on aircraft engine fitters. Despite heavy penalty clauses and an eight-week deadline, the first 50 machines were completed and shipped on time.

This provided the blueprint for Auster Aircraft production under licence, involving a network of sub-contractors. It can be argued that without the earlier experience of Crowther's, Auster Aircraft might never have existed.

DINING GROUP



Gill and Barry Marshall at our recent dining group meeting. We went to John Dory in Quorn for fish and chips. Nobody actually ordered the deep fried dessert.

KURLING GROUP



Carol Withers celebration her birthday by coming along to the Kurling group on a very hot Friday. Go girl!

FAMILY HISTORY GROUP

We tackled some queries and brick walls in our latest session. We debunked a family story about a bigamy. In the case we looked at, the family story was that the groom was convicted of bigamy but later married the lady when he could legally do so. For this to be the case there would have to be two entries on the index. A bigamous "marriage" remains on the index, even where there is a

conviction for bigamy. As there was only the one marriage entry in the civil index, the story wasn't true.

Unlike the civil marriage index, there is no publicly searchable divorce index. The National Archives (TNA) do have case files from 1858 to 1937. The files up to 1918 have been digitised and can be accessed on some family history sites. Files for the later years can be obtained from TNA. There is a central index, but a search has to be requested of the Central Family Courts and will yield only the final decree, added to which, details have often not been submitted for inclusion from the 1990's onwards. Local courts now only retain the case papers for 18 years, beyond that all that is retained is in the final decree. To get a copy isn't cheap at £65. However, for cases before divorce became more common, the newspapers often reported them. Later, only those cases with salacious detail tend to get any column inches.

EVENTS – PAST, PRESENT & PLANNED

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One Off Event
Indoor Carpet Bowls
Would you like to
have a go?
Venue Syston Community
Centre



It will be on a Friday Morning
Date to be confirmed when we know how many people
are interested
12 people maximum - **If you are interested please**
email Angie Baker - 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



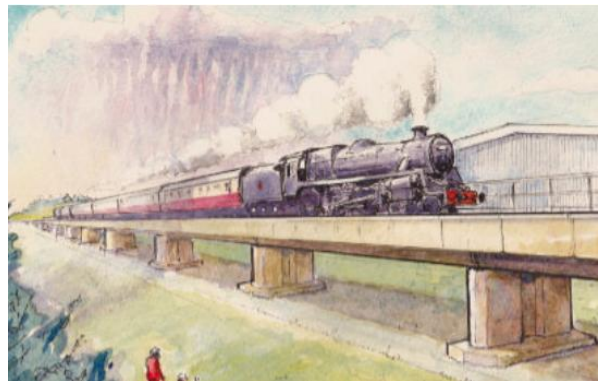
Wed Aug 12th @ 10.30 AM

We are Charnwood Eco Hub, a new Community Interest Company set up by friends Sarah Goode and Emma Ward. We are both passionate about the planet, and have both been involved in environmental projects locally for some time.

We identified a need to bring together local environmental organisations and initiatives and to raise awareness of them amongst local residents, in order to help them to reduce their own carbon footprint and live more sustainably.

Wed Sept 9th @ 10.30 AM

Tom Ingall introduces The Great Central Railway - The presentation is mostly slides with short videos/animations included. It starts by setting the scene with a brief history of the railway from construction up to the preservation era, then covers the reunification process from 2009 to date, with detail on the three main construction works completed so far, the present situation and future developments.



Wed, Oct 14 at 10:30 AM

BRIDGESCAPES OF SCOTLAND

Goings

A journey celebrating Scotland's bridge and bridge-building heritage. A talk by Bruce Keith.

NATIONAL U3A ITEMS

u3a TALKS



A few small nips: Frida Kahlo and the art of pain

Frida Kahlo is one of the most celebrated artists of the 20th century, famous for her colourful self-portraits.

She endured severe physical, emotional, and psychological traumas during her lifetime, yet her art transcends a life of pain and disability.

Thursday 16 July at 2pm

Free – online via Zoom



The History Man virtual walk, Scoundrel (Dick Turpin)

Join u3a York member, Richard Taylor, on one of his virtual walks based on historical times or events in the life of York.

Friday 24 July at 2pm

Free – online via Zoom



Flight inspirations aviation meeting: August

Flt Lt Colin Bell, WWII Mosquito Pilot

We are honoured to host Flt Lt Colin Bell, former RAF Pathfinder Mosquito pilot for the August meeting. Having flown 50 missions over Germany during WWII, Colin will share remarkable first-hand experiences of courage, precision and service with one of the RAF's elite wartime units.

Tuesday 4 August at 10am

Free – online via Zoom

Book [here](#)

Book [here](#)

Book [here](#)

More talks can be found [here](#)



We're delighted to launch an exclusive holiday programme for u3a members. These bespoke trips have been designed to create opportunities for members to come together from across the UK to learn, discover and explore.

Every getaway blends relaxed, well-organised travel with enriching and immersive experiences. Beyond traditional sightseeing, you can expect talks, workshops and shared adventures that build lasting friendships. We have teamed up with The UK Holiday

Group, a highly respected name in travel with over 40 years' expertise in creating exceptional excursions.

The first trip in the itinerary is [The Agatha Christie Story](#) - four days exploring the Devon coastline that inspired world-famous mysteries. Departing on 14 September, you'll spend four nights in a beautiful coastal hotel, with breakfast and dinner provided.

Later in the year, we have trips to Shakespeare's hometown of Stratford-upon-Avon, and a festive confectionary tour of York.

NOT u3a BUT YOU MIGHT BE INTERESTED

19 July @ 12:00 pm – 3:30 pm

A Guided Walk of Burrough Hillfort in its landscape

Burrough Hill Country Park Somerby Road, Burrough on the Hill, Leicestershire, United Kingdom

Rambling around the Ramparts: A Guided Walk of Burrough Hillfort

Free



1 August @ 12:00 pm – 2 August @ 10:00 pm

Melton Folk Festival

Grange-Restaurant-1-169.jpg +1 more

The Melton Folk Festival comprises a full weekend of music & dance (from folk to popular) all around the town. It is a free festival and attracts musicians from all over the country. A great weekend for music lovers or for those just wishing to experience the festival atmosphere.



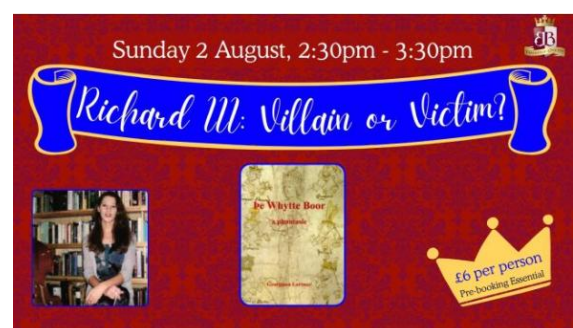
Just click on an image to take you to the website (if there is one) or more information and links to book a place.



Walking Through Time – Peter Liddle Talk

🕒 Saturday 18th July, 2:30pm to 3:30pm

Enjoy this talk by archaeologist Peter Liddle that celebrates the 50th anniversary of the foundation of the pioneering Leicestershire Fieldworkers.



Richard III: Villain or Victim? Talk

🕒 Sunday 2nd August, 2:30pm to 3:30pm

Dr Georgiana Lorimer explores the contrast between Richard's portrayal as a villain by Shakespeare and her recent study of the pivotal moments in his reign based on historical records.



THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF LEICESTER MARKET BY JOSEPH PETERS

21st July

Archaeological excavations at Leicester Market have uncovered over 2,000 years of history. Site Director Joseph Peters will present key discoveries...



LEICESTER FOOD FESTIVAL

8th August - 9th August

Set to be the biggest food event of the year, the Leicester Food Festival will be returning to Abbey Park...



'MUSIC AT THE MUSEUM' WITH THE LEICESTER COMMUNITY CONCERT BAND

9th August

Join us at Abbey Pumping Station for an afternoon of live music. Bring your picnic blankets and chairs for a...



HIDDEN HISTORIES: HIGH FLYING AROUND

9th August

With tour guide Shaun Knapp Visit the venues and hear the remarkable stories relating to Leicester's 1960s music scene. This...



Anstey to Bradgate Walk



New & Old Mountsorrel Walk

[Wonderful Walks | Discover Charnwood](#)

FROM OUR MEMBERS

Following on from last month's article on the history of laundry, here's a look at the women who actually did the laundry –

The Women Behind the Washing



Washerwomen, laundry maids, commercial laundries, and the hidden world of the wash-house

Laundry has always been hard work — but behind the tubs, coppers, mangles and steam presses stood the women who did it. For centuries, washerwomen, laundry maids, and commercial laundry workers formed a vast, largely invisible workforce. Their labour kept households, schools, hotels, hospitals and businesses running long before the age of the automatic washing machine.

This is their story.

Gabriël Metsu (1629–1667), Washerwoman (c 1650), Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie, Warsaw, Poland. Wikimedia Commons.

Washerwomen: the oldest occupation nobody talks about

Washerwomen appear in records from the medieval period onwards. They were the backbone of domestic service for ordinary families — the women who “took in washing” to make ends meet.

They were usually:

- self-employed, often widows or married women supplementing income
- paid by the piece — shirts, collars, sheets, aprons
- working from home, the yard, or the riverbank
- physically exhausted by boiling, lifting, wringing, and carrying

Their work was seasonal and weather-dependent. A sudden downpour could undo a day's labour. And yet washerwomen were essential: without them, many households simply couldn't function.

Many parish registers list women simply as “washerwoman” — one of the few occupations open to women with no capital and little formal education.

The Hidden Cost: Laundry and Women's Postnatal Bodies

One aspect of laundry history is rarely spoken about, yet it shaped countless women's lives: the physical toll on women who had recently given birth.

Laundry wasn't just tiring — it was dangerous for postnatal bodies.

The work was brutally physical

Laundry required:

- lifting buckets of boiling water
- hauling wet sheets weighing several stone
- bending, scrubbing, wringing, twisting
- hours of standing in heat and steam
- carrying loads to and from the washing line or river

Even for a healthy woman, this was punishing. For someone who had given birth days or weeks earlier, it could be catastrophic.

👶 Postnatal recovery wasn't recognised

Before the 20th century, there was:

- no maternity leave
- no protected recovery period
- no understanding of pelvic floor injury
- no expectation that others would take over heavy labour

Women were expected to resume full domestic duties almost immediately — including washday.

⚠️ The risks were serious

Historical medical notes and midwives' records show that early return to heavy labour could cause:

- uterine prolapse
- haemorrhage
- reopening of tears
- infections
- long-term pelvic damage
- chronic back and hip pain

Laundry was one of the worst offenders because it combined heat, weight, lifting, twisting, and prolonged exertion.

👤 Poor women had no choice

Middle-class women might have had servants or relatives to help. Working-class women — washerwomen, charwomen, factory workers — had no such luxury.

A woman who “took in washing” often did so because she had a new baby and needed income she could earn from home. The irony is painful: the very work that allowed her to stay with her infant was the work that most damaged her recovering body.



🏠 Institutions were no kinder

In workhouses, mother-and-baby homes, and some religious laundries, women were often put to laundry work within days of giving birth. The combination of:

- exhaustion
- grief
- physical trauma
- and heavy labour

is one of the most sobering aspects of laundry history.

Laundry maids: the hidden engine of large households

In larger homes, the laundry maid was a key member of the domestic staff. Her work was skilled, relentless, and largely unseen.

Her duties included:

- soaking and boiling linens
- operating the mangle
- starching collars and cuffs
- ironing with heavy flat irons heated on the range
- maintaining the linen inventory
- keeping the laundry room at a constant, sweltering heat

Laundry maids often worked in basement rooms or outbuildings, surrounded by steam. Their day began early and ended late. Yet their work was rarely mentioned unless something went wrong.

Soap, starch and blue bags

Laundry had its own material culture — and its own smells. Many readers will remember:

- soap flakes
- soda crystals
- starch for collars and table linen
- blue bags to counteract yellowing in white fabrics

The blue bag — a small muslin pouch containing ultramarine dye — was swirled through the final rinse. It gave linens that faint, cold-white brightness that optical brighteners later imitated..

Commercial laundries: industry built on women's labour



By the late 19th century, towns and cities saw the rise of commercial steam laundries. These were major employers of women, offering:

- regular wages
- long hours
- dangerous machinery
- strict discipline

Women worked in:

- washrooms (boiling, soaking, scrubbing)
- mangling rooms (feeding sheets into huge rollers)
- ironing rooms (pressing shirts, collars, uniforms)
- finishing rooms (folding and packing)

Steam burns, mangling accidents, and chemical exposure were common. The work was hot, noisy, and physically punishing — but for many women, it offered independence and wages they controlled themselves.

The darker side: laundries that exploited unmarried mothers

Not all laundries were places of opportunity. Across Britain and Ireland, some were run by religious or charitable institutions and staffed by unmarried mothers, “fallen women”, or girls deemed “wayward”. These included the notorious Magdalene Laundries in Ireland, but similar institutions existed in England, Scotland and Wales.

Common features included:

- long hours of heavy labour
- no wages
- restricted contact with family
- harsh discipline
- work done for hotels, hospitals, and businesses

These institutions are now widely recognised as sites of exploitation and trauma.



Public wash-houses: reform, dignity and hot water

The Public Baths and Wash-Houses Acts (from 1846 onwards) encouraged towns to build municipal wash-houses. These offered:

- affordable access to hot water
- drying rooms
- mangles and ironing facilities
- a clean, safe space for working women

For women living in cramped housing with no running water, these wash-houses were a lifeline — and a small step towards dignity and autonomy.

The first public wash house was in Liverpool — pictured right.



Interior of Frederick Street wash house, the first public wash house. Taken in 1914

Tools, uniforms and the culture of laundry work

Laundry workers had their own tools and dress:

- pinafores and aprons
- headscarves to keep hair out of the steam
- flat irons, goffering irons, sleeve boards
- soap flakes, blue bags, starch, soda crystals
- huge steam presses in commercial laundries

These objects help bring the human story to life — and many readers will remember them vividly.

WASHING POWDER

The **first true commercial washing powder in the UK** appears much earlier than most people think. The key figure is **Robert Spear Hudson**, and the date is **1837** — long before Persil, Rinso or the post-war synthetic detergents.

The first commercial washing powder (UK)

- **Hudson's Dry Soap**, introduced in **1837**, is recognised as the **first commercial soap powder in the world**.
- It was essentially **dried soap flakes mixed with sodium carbonate**, designed to dissolve more easily and speed up wash-day.
- By the 1840s it was already being used by **Queen Victoria's household**, and by the 1870s it had gone into **mass production**.
- Hudson's business later became part of **Lever Brothers** (1908), who then introduced **Omo** (1908) and **Rinso** (1910) as early bleaching and detergent products.

When *detergents* (as opposed to soap powders) arrived

Soap powders dominated the 19th century. True synthetic detergents — the kind we recognise today — arrived much later:

- **1917 (Germany)**: first alkyl sulfate surfactant developed due to wartime shortages.
- **1930s**: commercially viable fatty-alcohol-based detergents (e.g., FEWA in Germany; Dreft in the US).
- **Late 1940s**: domestic detergent use expanded rapidly after WWII.

In the UK, brands like **Persil (1909)** and **Rinso (1910)** began as *soap-based* powders and only later shifted to true synthetic detergent formulations.

POETRY CORNER

from The Woman's Labor. An Epistle to Mr Stephen Duckby Mary Collier **The Washerwoman**

When bright Orion glitters in the skies
In winter nights, then early we must rise;
The weather ne'er so bad, wind, rain or snow,
Our work appointed, we must rise and go,
While you on easy beds may lie and sleep,
Till light does through your chamber-windows
peep.
When to the house we come where we should
go,
How to get in, alas! we do not know:
The maid quite tired with work the day before,
O'ercome with sleep; we standing at the door,
Oppressed with cold, and often call in vain,
Ere to our work we can admittance gain.
But when from wind and weather we get in,
Briskly with courage we our work begin;
Heaps of fine linen we before us view,
Whereon to lay our strength and patience too;
Cambrics and muslins, which our ladies wear,
Laces and edgings, costly, fine and rare,
Which must be washed with utmost skill and
care;
With holland shirts, ruffles and fringes too,
Fashions which our forefathers never knew.
For several hours here we work and slave,
Before we can one glimpse of daylight have;
We labor hard before the morning's past,
Because we fear the time runs on too fast.

At length bright Sol illuminates the skies,
And summons drowsy mortals to arise;
Then comes our mistress to us without fail,
And in her hand, perhaps, a mug of ale
To cheer our hearts, and also to inform
Herself what work is done that very morn;

Lays her commands upon us, that we mind
Her linen well, nor leave the dirt behind.

Not this alone, but also to take care
We don't her cambrics nor her ruffles tear;
And these most strictly does of us require,
To save her soap and sparing be of fire;
Tells us her charge is great, nay furthermore,
Her clothes are fewer than the time before.
Now we drive on, resolved our strength to try,
And what we can we do most willingly;
Until with heat and work, 'tis often known,
Not only sweat but blood runs trickling down
Our wrists and fingers: still our work demands
The constant action of our laboring hands.

Now night comes on, from whence you have
relief,
But that, alas! does not increase our grief.
With heavy hearts we often view the sun,
Fearing he'll set before our work is done;
For, either in the morning or at night,
We piece the summer's day with candlelight.
Though we all day with care our work attend,
Such is our fate, we know not when 'twill end.
When evening's come, you homeward take your
way;
We, till our work is done, are forced to stay,
And, after all our toil and labor past,
Sixpence or eightpence pays us off at last;
For all our pains no prospect can we see
Attend us, but old age and poverty.

Dashing Away with the Smoothing Iron (trad, folk song)

'Twas on a Monday morning
That I beheld my darling,
She looked so neat and charming
In every high degree.
She looked so neat and nimble-o,
A-washing of her linen-o.

Chorus (repeated after each verse):
Dashing away with the smoothing iron,
Dashing away with the smoothing iron,
Dashing away with the smoothing iron,
She stole my heart away.

'Twas on a Tuesday morning
That I beheld my darling,
She looked so neat and charming
In every high degree.
She looked so neat and nimble-o,
A-hanging out her linen-o.

'Twas on a Wednesday morning
That I beheld my darling,
She looked so neat and charming
In every high degree.
She looked so neat and nimble-o,
A-starching of her linen-o.

'Twas on a Thursday morning
That I beheld my darling,
She looked so neat and charming
In every high degree.
She looked so neat and nimble-o,
A-ironing of her linen-o.

'Twas on a Friday morning
That I beheld my darling
She looked so neat and charming
In every high degree.
She looked so neat and nimble-o,
A-folding of her linen-o.

'Twas on a Saturday morning
That I beheld my darling,
She looked so neat and charming
In every high degree.
She looked so neat and nimble-o,
A-airing of her linen-o.

'Twas on a Sunday morning
That I beheld me darling,
She looked so neat and charming
In every high degree.
She looked so neat and nimble-o,
A-wearing of her linen-o.

And finally.....

Thank goodness laundry is far easier than it used to be, but the furry members of my household do seem to want to get involved with the process -

Cat commentary

Ellie and Flynn maintain that it isn't a laundry basket, it's a cat basket.

Dog commentary

Darcy insists he is merely inspecting the laundry/cat basket for security purposes. Any missing socks are purely incidental.

