

Syston and District

u3a

learn, laugh, live

NOV
2025

Vitality!

Official newsletter of the Syston and District u3a

CHARITY No 1180152

FROM OUR CHAIRMAN

I hope everyone is well and had their Flu and Covid jabs.

I would like to thank Steve for finding us a speaker for our October meeting after 2 speakers unfortunately had to cancel.

The November meeting talk by Joanna Richart about the Witch and her Broom sounds very interesting. However, I am not allowing the wife to go as it may give her a few ideas. My mother-in-law used have a garden brush that had twigs and at Halloween I got my son and daughter to stand outside to see if they could see grandma fly past.

Hope to see there
Clive

WE WANT TO LET YOU KNOW

IT'S MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS TIME

Emails have been sent out (please check your junk folder) to anyone who is yet to renew their subscription, warning that they will be lapsed in mid - November. Should that happen, they will no longer be able to attend any groups or meetings. Group leaders will be informed and are not obliged to reinstate members who rejoin unless they have no waiting list.

If you have any queries, do contact our membership secretary Chris Gale email:
sadu3amembers@gmail.com

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.

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.

POSSIBLE GROUP REVIVAL – LOCAL HISTORY GROUP FINAL CALL FOR EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST!

Some of you may recall that our Local History Group has been dormant for a while. In recent months, a couple of people expressed interest in becoming the Group Organiser, but those offers haven't come to fruition — so I'm now stepping in to try and get things moving again.

If you'd be interested in attending a preliminary meeting to explore the possibilities and shape how the group might look, this is your final chance to speak up, please get in touch by email at sadu3aed@gmail.com or call 0116 2609012 (do note I have call screening, so you'll need to announce who you are when calling).

Julie Johnson

NEW TAI CHI GROUP

Some of you enjoyed our previous Tai Chi event. A new weekly group is beginning the first week in January 2026 subject to member interest. This is a great opportunity to enjoy a gentle form of stylised movement, and no intense physical exertion is required.

Our u3a is hosting this Tai Chi group at Syston Community Centre each Wednesday for ONE hour at 12pm. This is suitable for both sexes so don't be shy lads, come and join the lovely ladies and share an hour of enlightened tuition delivered to a high standard, offering all round benefits as I personally can attest. Interested? To save your space please email me sadu3apublicity@gmail.com OR register interest with Barbara Sargeant or Angie Baker who will forward your name to me. Cost to be advised but expected to be in line with usual u3a overheads.

Please register your interest asap to bring this new initiative to fruition.

Thank you all for reading this.

Jill Kempton-Hayes

u3a
learn, laugh, live

Proposed New Group



Are you interested in joining a scrabble group?
We have a member who is keen to run the group.
June would be looking to start in the New Year once we
have enough numbers to make it viable. She thinks
the maximum at the beginning would be 8 members.
June would like it to run it as a relaxing chilled out session.
At this stage we will be looking to see if there is any
interest before going any further. If you are please email
me at the below address and I will pass your details onto
June. She will be in touch nearer the time once she has
decided the day, time and place etc.

sadu3agroups@gmail.com

CREATIVE WRITING GROUP

Do you enjoy writing?

Short stories, poems, memoirs, character sketches, or just scribbled thoughts?

Would you like to share your work in a friendly, non-judgemental space?

Whether you're a beginner or a seasoned scribbler, you're warmly welcome.

Following some renewed interest, we're hoping to revive the u3a Creative Writing Group, open to all forms of creative writing. Each meeting offers an optional "trigger" or prompt to spark ideas, but you're free to bring any piece you've written—recent or long ago.

It's an opportunity to share your work, feedback is available if requested. It will be offered with care—supportive, constructive, and focused on encouraging each writer's voice.

Meetings will be held at the local library.

We previously met on the 4th Thursday of each month, 2.00–3.30pm, but this may be adjusted to suit those who wish to take part.

Interested?

Please contact Julie at: juliedjohnson@yahoo.com

Let's create a space where words are shared, voices are heard, and creativity is gently encouraged.

FAMILY HISTORY GROUP

After several months of meeting on Zoom, our Family History Group is excited to announce that we will now be gathering in person at a new venue—Syston Library. Members can make use of free access to the library versions of family history sites Ancestry and Findmypast, along with the British Newspaper Archive, and can save discoveries to take home. Whether you're just beginning or already experienced, we offer one-to-one help, presentations to support your research, and help in tackling those tricky “brick walls.”

Meetings take place on the third Tuesday of each month from 10:15 to 12:15. New members are warmly welcome. You need to be a Leicestershire Library member, joining is quick with proof of name and address. For further details, or if you want to come along, please email juliedjohnson@yahoo.com as I need to inform library staff how many computers we need. Library membership and use of computers are both free.

SUNDAYS FOR SOLOS GROUP

The Sundays for Solos Group has been out and about again! This time, it was to the newly renovated Jewry Wall Museum, which we can highly recommend. You can really get a sense of what Roman life in Ratae Corieltavarum (the Roman name for Leicester) might have been like. We are glad that our tickets last a year and will definitely be going back for a second visit!



BOOK GROUP

The Thursday book group have been reading quite a diverse number of books over the last few months all chosen by members of the group.

The Paris Secret by Karen Swan was about an apartment in Paris which had not been opened since the Second World War which was found to be full of antiques and paintings. It was based on a true story about Marthe De Florian who locked up her apartment at the beginning of the war and fled to the south of France, it wasn't opened again until after her death in 2010.

The Aviators Wife by Melanie Benjamin is a story about Charles Lindbergh but written from his wife's aspect. It was very interesting and covered not only Lindberghs exploits but those of his wife as well, it also covered their family life and the abduction and murder of their son.

The Curfew by T M Logan is a story that any parent of grown up children can relate to as it is the story of someone's teenager who doesn't come home after a night out. It is a quite complex story due to the lies

told by various people, especially the group of teenagers who were trying to cover for each other and themselves. Not a light read!

The Portrait of Dorian Gray by Oscar Wilde. A book most have heard of but probably never read. Not enjoyed by most of the group in my opinion? The ending was the best part where Dorian Gray died, but that's just my opinion.

ART APPRECIATION GROUP

Art is such a vast subject that there is an endless variety of topics to interest and delight us. In the Art Appreciation group this means that we very rarely have a meeting that covers similar subjects.



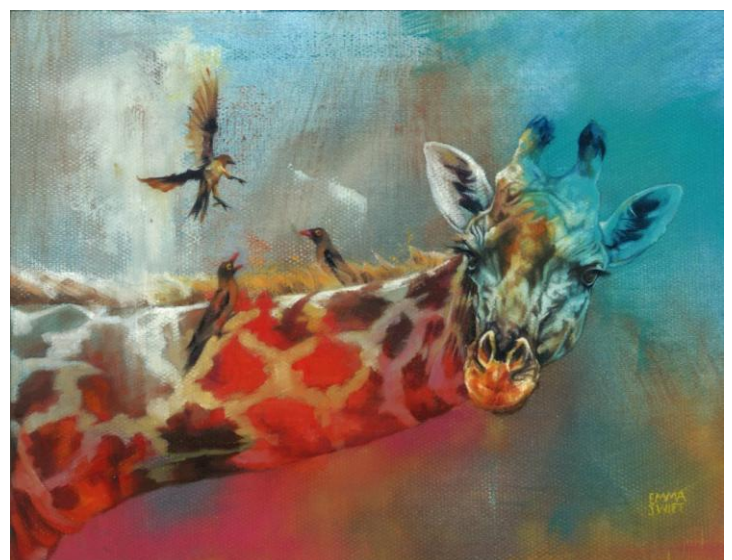
In the last few months we have discussed Bob Dylan's paintings, the early work of the Spanish architect Gaudí and the photography of Lee Miller.

In November we will have a talk about Henry Reaburn and a look at our favourite wildlife artists.

None of us are experts but we gain knowledge from researching topics and listening to other members.

If you're interested in Art and want to learn more, please contact me via the website.

Chris Gale.





U3A Darts Group

We have had the sad loss of one of our members
Roy Hartshorn

The last time he came he won the
original trophy above, and was so pleased.

We have decided that we would like his
wife Julie to keep that trophy

Although we are a new group, we have a
very close bond and all have decided that
we should have a new trophy in his memory
which will be competed for each meeting.

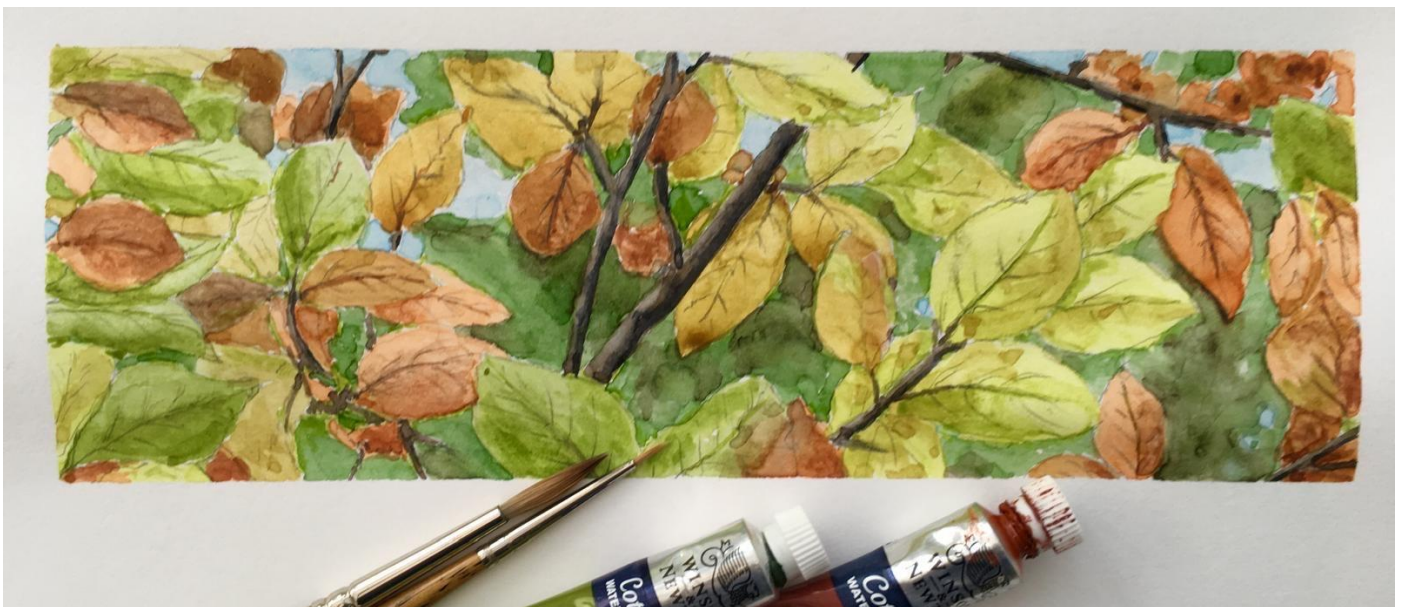
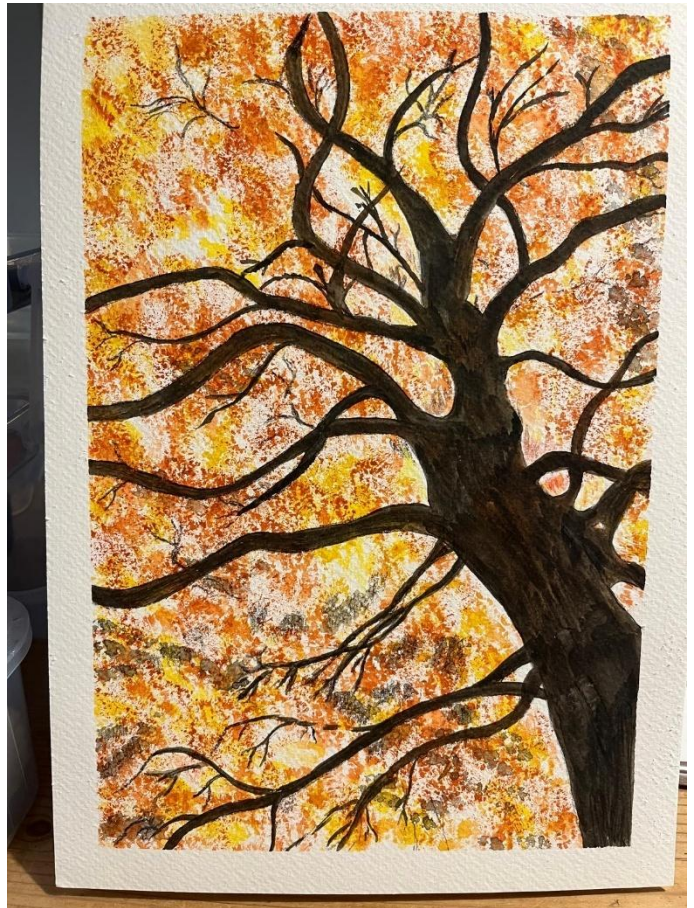


The New trophy is to be named the

Roy Hartshorn Memorial Trophy

ART GROUP

The art group have been covering an autumn theme over the last month, so we have been mainly working on trees, leaves etc., although a couple of our group have been busy on topics of their own. Here is a sample of both.





LITTER PICKING GROUP



The u3a litter picking group met this morning, 8 members collected 17 bags of rubbish, plus a bag of soggy clothes, a wall heater and 16 gas cannisters from Meadow Lane, Glebeway and Moors Lane, Syston. We finished with a well-deserved coffee in the Hobby horse pub. All reported to the Council using the 'Love clean streets' apps.



PHOTOGRAPHY GROUP



Steve

For
our



James

September meeting, we travelled to the 1620s House and Garden at Donington Le Heath (2nd time this year) on the last day before it closed for the winter season. Just a small group of 5 members this time, but it was a sunny and dry day with lots of autumn colour for us to photograph. This is just a small selection taken on the day.



Jim

FEELING CRAFTY GROUP

The “Feeling Crafty” group made cards today using pressed leaves and flowers. For the spattered background effect we used ‘brusho’ paints which come in tiny pots of powdered paints which you sprinkle onto the paper, and the results can be amazing or a complete mess!



YOGA & MEDIDATION GROUP

A message from Pushpa -

The November session is cancelled as I am going away.

The December date is changed to Tuesday 9th December at 10.00am.

WHERE HAD ALL THE GROUP NEWS GONE?

Wherever it went last month it has returned with interest – thank you for the response to my plea!!

Dare I hope we can keep this up? Ed

EVENTS – PAST, PRESENT & PLANNED

Do you have an idea for an event?

If you can think of an event that our members may like to do, please tell Angie Baker, our new Events Coordinator at sadu3aevents@gmail.com

Perhaps you may even be willing to organize it? In which case the Coordinator can help you with everything you need to know.

Once the Coordinator has created the Event on our Computer System (Simple Membership). It will be easy for you to email all those interested, as all the relevant information is already recorded on the system.

Please just give it some thought, and let's make our u3a fun for everyone.

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

November 12th, 2025

The Magic of Plants

Joanna Richart returns with "A journey into the magical and medicinal world of wild plants and fungi."

Explore the dual nature of plants and mushrooms rooted in folklore and Druid traditions. We'll look at species with both healing and mind-altering properties—some poisonous in part, yet edible in others. Expect mentions of psychedelic fungi used by the Incas, plants linked to witches' spells, and curious names like witch's butter, witch's broom, and witch's hair. Open your mind—we're stepping into a world of traditional beliefs, spell-craft, and the blurred lines between remedy and poison.



December 10th, 2025

Christmas Social and 10th Anniversary Celebrations



Our own Ukelele Band and Singers will be on hand to entertain you in the Old Schoolroom, whilst you can eat, drink and chat in the Brookside Room.

Come to this double celebration of Christmas and our u3a 10th Anniversary. Yes, it really is 10 years since the Syston & District u3a was formed. Whilst the format is similar to last year's Christmas social, the food and drink will mark this as a an even more special occasion.

NATIONAL U3A ITEMS

u3a TALKS



Catherine the Great

Join Alan Freeland as he uncovers how Catherine the Great's vision and ambition transformed Russia from a medieval to a renaissance state and reshaped Russia into a European political power.

Monday 10 November at 2pm

Free – online via Zoom



The Mind of Your Microwave, with u3a Let's Talk Tech

John Davies of Bearsden and Milngavie u3a reveals the hidden computers that control almost every electrical appliance in your home.

Wednesday 19 November at 1pm

Free – online via Zoom



Safes and Safebreaking

Richard Phillips investigates the struggle between safe-makers and criminal safebreakers.

Monday 1 Dec at 10am

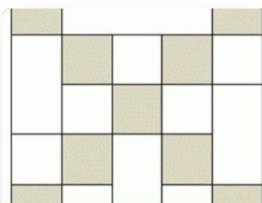
Free – online via Zoom

Book [here](#)

Book [here](#)

Book [here](#)

Puzzles and Games



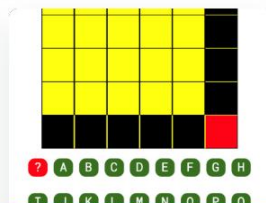
Logic Puzzles

Puzzles once a month followed by solutions the month after



Maths Challenge

New quiz every **Thursday** followed by answers a week later



Aileen's Game

Play Aileen's game, a word game created by East Suffolk u3a member Ian Clarke.

The National u3a site has these puzzle pages – you can find them [here](#) along with other activities and resources.

NOT u3a BUT YOU MIGHT BE INTERESTED

Melton Mowbray Victorian Christmas Fair 2025

Market Place, Melton Mowbray Market Place, Melton Mowbray, United Kingdom

Melton Mowbray Victorian Christmas Fair is Back! Christmas Market with an array of festive gifts, local produce, food & drink & hand-crafted wares, traditional funfair, street performers and entertainers & much more! With music and family entertainment, it's the perfect place to enjoy some Christmas gift buying and local shopping, whilst also indulging in a drink or lunch in one of our many cafes, restaurants and bars in town. Live Music on Stage Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Christmas Lights Switch: Friday 28th November from 6pm Location: Throughout Melton Mowbray Town Centre and Stockyard Melton Mowbray Opening Times: Friday 11am - 9pm [...]



Festival of Christmas Wreaths @ St John's Church
November 29 @ 10:00 am - November 30 @ 4:00 pm | FREE

Is this unique to Melton Mowbray?

It's a competition to see who can make the most inventive Christmas wreath out of *any* materials – yes anything! Forget holly and spruce: think about bottle tops, toilet roll cores, paper cake cases and more. We've had balloons, a vinyl record, painted paper plates, nail varnish, Lego, knitting. If it can go in a circle, it can be a wreath.

There are four categories: adults; children under 11; children 11 to 16; businesses or groups.

And there are prizes for each category. **BUSINESSES!** Promote your company. **SCHOOLS!** Showcase your children's artwork. **ADULTS & KIDS!** Have fun, join in at Christmas and make a wreath.

It's completely FREE to enter a wreath in any of the categories, and it also **FREE to come in** and see the wreaths, so kids can bring Mum and Dad to see their work displayed on the wall. There will be a great welcome, with great refreshments, Christmas gifts, raffle, guided tours, carol singing and more!

This year there will be a special MYSTERY to solve. We can't give away too much – it's mysterious. Come and see!

franceslevett@gmail.com, 07790 631635 . See also

<https://friendsofstjohns.wixsite.com/historicchurch/fundraising>

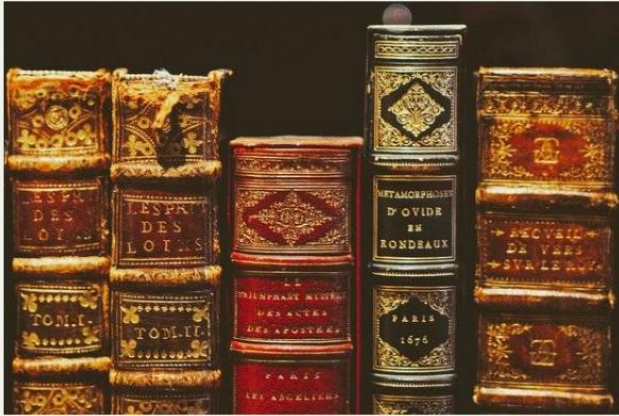
LEICESTER CHRISTMAS MARKET

13th November - 28th December

Leicester City Centre, Gallowtree Gate, Leicester, LE1 5GD

This year, Leicester's Christmas Market is bigger, brighter, and more magical than ever before!

Make sure you visit Leicester's Christmas Market, right in the heart of your city centre. From the High Street to Gallowtree Gate, you will see the streets come alive with charming wooden chalets, twinkling lights, and plenty of festive cheer.



BOSWORTH AT NIGHT – EVENING GUIDED WALK

19th November

Bosworth Battlefield Heritage Centre, Ambion Lane, Sutton Cheney, Nuneaton, CV13 0AD

[Visit website](#)

[Book now](#)



WOMEN, SEX & GENDER IN THE EARLY CHURCH – GEORGE LOCKE

23rd November

Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate, Leicester, LE1 1WB



STEAM WITH THE TEAM GUIDED TOUR

29th November

Abbey Pumping Station Museum, Corporation Road, Leicester, LE4 5PX

[Visit website](#)

FROM OUR MEMBERS

Treason Remembered: The Gunpowder Plot on Stage and in Song

While Bonfire Night is often remembered through fireworks and rhymes, its theatrical echoes run deep. From Shakespeare's *Macbeth* to folk ballads and modern reinterpretations, the Gunpowder Plot has inspired centuries of performance — not just as history, but as a mirror of power, betrayal, and belief.

Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and the Shadow of Treason

When Shakespeare wrote *Macbeth* in 1606, the Gunpowder Plot was still raw in the public mind. The play is saturated with themes of treason, regicide, and divine order — all anxieties stirred by the failed attempt to blow up King James I and Parliament the previous year.

One of the most striking moments comes in **Act II, Scene 3**, when the Porter, roused by knocking at the castle gate, imagines himself as the gatekeeper of hell. His comic routine is laced with topical references:

- He welcomes a **farmer who hanged himself** after hoarding grain in expectation of high prices — a jab at economic opportunism.
- He admits an **"equivocator"** who "committed treason enough for God's sake yet could not equivocate to heaven." This is a pointed allusion to **Henry Garnet**, the Jesuit priest executed for his role in the Gunpowder Plot, notorious for his defence of "equivocation" — the use of ambiguous language to avoid lying outright.
- He jokes about an **English tailor** who stole cloth from a French hose — a dig at petty crime and foreign fashion.

The humour is bawdy, but the subtext is deadly serious. The Porter's speech turns the castle into a metaphorical hell-mouth, with traitors and equivocators queuing to enter. For Shakespeare's audience, the reference to Garnet would have been unmistakable — a reminder that treason was not just a plot in a play, but a crime punished with the most brutal executions.

The scene continues with a riff on drunkenness: the Porter explains that drink provokes "nose-painting, sleep, and urine," and is itself an "equivocator with lechery" — it encourages desire but prevents performance. This comic interlude, placed immediately after Duncan's murder, provides a grotesque contrast: laughter at human folly set against the horror of regicide. It also reinforces the theme of **equivocation** — double meanings, half-truths, and the slipperiness of language — which runs throughout the play.

Henry Garnet and the Ethics of Equivocation

At the heart of the Gunpowder Plot's moral complexity lies **Henry Garnet**, Jesuit Superior in England. Garnet was not a plotter, but he knew of the conspiracy — having learned of it in confession from Father Oswald Tesimond. Bound by canon law, Garnet could not reveal what he knew without violating the seal of the confessional, which would have led to excommunication.

Instead, Garnet urged Tesimond to persuade Robert Catesby to abandon the plan. He also wrote to Rome, pleading for Catholic leaders to discourage violence. But when the plot failed, Garnet was arrested, interrogated, and tried for treason. His use of **"equivocation"** — a theological concept allowing ambiguous speech to avoid lying — became the centrepiece of his trial.

Prosecutor Edward Coke denounced equivocation as “open and broad lying and forswearing.” Garnet was condemned and executed on 3 May 1606, hanged, drawn, and quartered at St Paul’s.

His legacy lives on in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, where the Porter jokes about admitting an “equivocator” to hell — a thinly veiled reference to Garnet:

“Faith, here’s an equivocator that could swear in both the scales against either scale, who committed treason enough for God’s sake, yet could not equivocate to heaven.”

Garnet’s story raises enduring questions: Can silence be moral? Is truth always owed to power? And how do we judge those who choose conscience over law?

Ballads, Rhymes, and Street Songs

The Gunpowder Plot also entered popular culture through song. Ballads were printed cheaply and sung in taverns, turning treason into entertainment and propaganda. The most famous survival is the rhyme:

*“Remember, remember the fifth of November,
The Gunpowder treason and plot;
I know of no reason why the Gunpowder treason
Should ever be forgot.”*

But other verses, now rarely quoted, reveal the harsher anti-Catholic mood of the time:

*“A rope, a rope, to hang the Pope,
A penn’orth of cheese to choke him,
A pint of beer to wash it down,
And a jolly good fire to burn him.”*

These rhymes, sung around bonfires, show how the plot was woven into the rhythms of everyday life — part warning, part celebration, part satire.

(see Poetry Corner for more verses)

Modern Reinterpretations: From Musicals to Masks

The Gunpowder Plot continues to inspire new works that reframe its legacy:

Treason: The Musical (2023 UK Tour)

This folk-pop musical by Ricky Allan reimagines the plot through the eyes of **Thomas Percy** and his wife **Martha Percy**, giving voice to women often sidelined in historical accounts. The show blends sweeping ballads, spoken word, and ensemble storytelling.

Nicole Raquel Dennis’s portrayal of Martha Percy was praised for its emotional depth, especially in songs like *“Take Things Into Our Own Hands”*, which explore loyalty, loss, and the cost of rebellion.

Equivocation by Bill Cain (2009)

This play imagines Shakespeare being commissioned to write the “official” version of the Gunpowder Plot. It explores censorship, artistic integrity, and the tension between truth and propaganda. Garnet appears as a character, and the play challenges audiences to consider how history is shaped by those who tell it.

V for Vendetta (1980s–2000s)

Alan Moore’s graphic novel and its film adaptation transformed the Guy Fawkes mask into a global symbol of resistance. In the story, the masked vigilante “V” fights a totalitarian regime, using the imagery of

Bonfire Night to challenge oppression.

The mask, once a Bonfire Night novelty, is now worn by protestors from Occupy Wall Street to Anonymous — a striking example of how cultural memory evolves.

The Forgotten Women of the Gunpowder Plot

While the plotters were men, several women played crucial roles — as protectors, enablers, and survivors.

Martha Percy (née Wright)

Martha came from a devout Catholic family. Her brothers Jack and Kit Wright were key conspirators, and she married **Thomas Percy**, the man who rented the undercroft where Guy Fawkes was caught.

Though Percy later abandoned her for a younger woman, Martha remained in Westminster, teaching the children of recusants to survive. Plans had even been made for her daughter to marry Robert Catesby's son — a sign of how tightly these families were bound.

Anne Vaux

A wealthy recusant, Anne Vaux sheltered Jesuit priests in safe houses with hidden “priest holes.” She was especially close to Henry Garnet, travelling with him and helping him evade capture.

After the plot failed, Anne tried to hide Garnet at Hindlip Hall. She used invisible ink to send him messages in prison, but they were intercepted. Arrested and interrogated, she was eventually released and continued to support Catholic education until her death.

These women were not passive bystanders. They navigated persecution, protected lives, and preserved faith — often at great personal risk.

Closing Reflection

From Shakespeare's stage to modern musicals, from tavern rhymes to protest masks, the Gunpowder Plot has never stood still. Each generation has found its own way to perform, sing, or symbolise the story — proof that treason, once remembered, is never entirely forgotten.

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

From Hearth to Heat Pump: A Brief History of Home Heating in the UK

For many u3a members, memories of chilly mornings, icy windows, and huddling by a single fire are part of lived experience. Central heating, now taken for granted, was once a luxury — and the journey to today's thermostatic comfort is a fascinating tale of ingenuity, class divides, and cultural change.

Prehistoric Warmth: Fires and Roundhouses

In Neolithic Britain (circa 4000–2500 BCE), warmth came from open hearths placed centrally in roundhouses. These timber-framed dwellings had wattle-and-daub walls and thatched roofs — with no chimneys. Smoke escaped through gaps in the roof, often leaving interiors blackened and smoky.

- Fire served multiple roles: heating, cooking, and lighting.
- Insulation was non-existent; heat vanished quickly.
- Survival depended on flame, fur, and fortitude.

Roman Ingenuity: Hypocausts and Underfloor Heating

The Romans introduced the hypocaust system around 100 BCE — an early form of central heating. Fires heated air beneath raised floors, which then circulated through hollow walls. This luxury was reserved for villas and public baths.

- Heat was distributed through stone slabs and tile-lined walls.
- The system vanished with the fall of Rome, leaving Britain to return to open fires.

Medieval and Tudor Homes: Hearths and Hallways

From the Dark Ages through the Tudor period, heating meant a large open fire in the main hall. Chimneys emerged in the 12th century, improving smoke control. Wealthier homes added fireplaces to upper rooms, but most relied on a single heat source.

- Tapestries and heavy drapes helped retain warmth.
- Bed warming pans and thick bedding were essential.
- Smoke remained a persistent indoor companion.

Georgian and Victorian Advances: Coal and Cast Iron

The 18th and 19th centuries saw coal become the dominant fuel. Cast iron stoves and grates replaced open fires, and flues improved ventilation. The Victorian era introduced radiators and piped hot water — but only in affluent homes.

- Coal fires heated parlours and kitchens.
- Bedrooms often remained unheated — cue the hot water bottle!
- Gas lighting added warmth (and risk).

Post-War Britain: The Rise of Central Heating

After WWII, central heating began to spread — slowly. By the 1960s and 70s, many council houses and new builds featured boilers and radiators. Oil and gas replaced coal, and thermostats became household staples.

- Warmth reached every room — a revolution in comfort.
- Double glazing and insulation improved heat retention.
- Electric storage heaters offered alternatives in rural areas.

Today and Tomorrow: Smart, Sustainable Heat

Modern homes boast programmable thermostats, underfloor heating, and low-carbon solutions like heat pumps. The focus has shifted to energy efficiency, sustainability, and style.

- Smart controls allow remote temperature management.
- Renewable energy sources are reshaping heating norms.
- Retrofitting older homes remains a challenge — and an opportunity.

Reflections and Reminiscence

Many u3a members will recall warming hands by the fire, scraping ice off the inside of bedroom windows, or the ritual of lighting the coal fire each morning. This shared history is not just about technology — it's about resilience, adaptation, and the comforts we've come to cherish.

Whether you grew up with a single smoky hearth or remember the thrill of your first radiator, the story of home heating is a story of us.

Getting the Best from Your Central Heating: Practical Tips for Efficiency and Comfort

As autumn deepens and thermostats begin to twitch, many u3a members will be thinking not just about staying warm but doing so wisely. Whether your home boasts a combi boiler, a heat pump, or a trusty radiator setup, there are simple, effective ways to improve comfort and reduce costs — without sacrificing warmth.

Understand Your System

Before tweaking settings, it helps to know what you're working with:

- **Combi boilers** heat water on demand — no hot water tank needed.
- **System boilers** use a separate cylinder for hot water storage.
- **Heat pumps** extract warmth from the air or ground and work best with low-temperature radiators or underfloor heating.

Check your user manual or ask a trusted local engineer if you're unsure.

Setup Tips for Efficiency

These setup tweaks can make a big difference:

- **Set your room thermostat between 18°C and 21°C** — each degree lower can save around £90–£100 per year.
- **Use thermostatic radiator valves (TRVs)** to control heat room by room.
- **Install a programmer or timer** to match your heating to your daily routine — no need to heat unused rooms.
- **Check your boiler thermostat** — it should be high enough to heat your home efficiently, but not wastefully.
- **Keep thermostats clear of curtains and furniture** so they can sense room temperature accurately.

Programmable Systems: Let Your Heating Work Around You

Programmable thermostats and smart heating controls can help you stay warm when you need it — and save energy when you don't. They're especially useful for households with regular routines or those who want to avoid fiddling with settings daily.

Key benefits:

- **Set it and forget it:** Program your heating to come on before you wake up and switch off when you go to bed.

- **Avoid heating unused rooms:** Schedule heating around your comings and goings — no need to warm the house while you're out.
- **Zoned control:** Some systems let you heat different rooms at different times, ideal for homes with varied usage.

Tips for getting started:

- **Use weekday/weekend settings** if your routine changes.
- **Pair with TRVs** to fine-tune room temperatures.
- **Review your schedule seasonally** — what works in October may need adjusting by January.
- **Don't override too often** — frequent manual changes can confuse the system and reduce efficiency.

Smart thermostats (like Hive, Nest, or Tado) offer app-based control and learning features, but even basic programmable models can make a big difference.

Daily Habits That Help

Small changes in routine can boost efficiency:

- **Don't turn the thermostat up to "speed up" heating** — it won't work faster, just hotter.
- **Close doors to retain heat** in occupied rooms.
- **Bleed radiators** if they feel cold at the top — trapped air reduces efficiency.
- **Avoid heating unused rooms** — turn TRVs down or off where appropriate.
- **Layer up before adjusting the thermostat** — sometimes a jumper is all it takes.

A Note on Damp and Mould

While it's sensible to turn down heating in unused rooms, it's important not to let them get too cold or unventilated. Rooms left unheated for long periods — especially those with poor insulation or external walls — can become prone to condensation, damp, and mould.

- **Keep doors ajar occasionally** to allow airflow.
- **Maintain a minimum background temperature** (around 14–16°C) in vulnerable rooms.
- **Ventilate regularly** — even a few minutes a day can help.
- **Check for signs of condensation** on windows or walls and act early.

This is especially important in older homes or those with limited insulation. A little warmth and airflow can prevent costly repairs and protect your health.

Maintenance Matters

A well-maintained system runs better and lasts longer:

- **Get your boiler serviced annually** to catch issues early and maintain efficiency.
- **Check for leaks or pressure drops** — especially in older systems.
- **Upgrade insulation** in lofts, walls, and around pipes to keep heat where it belongs.

Final Thoughts

Efficient heating isn't just about saving money — it's about comfort, control, and confidence. Many u3a members grew up lighting coal fires and warming beds with hot water bottles. Today's systems offer more convenience, but they still benefit from thoughtful use and regular care.

Whether you're adjusting your TRVs or exploring smart controls, these tips can help you stay warm and wise this winter.

POETRY CORNER

The Expanded Folk Verse (Traditional)

*Guy Fawkes and his companions
Did the scheme contrive,
To blow the King and Parliament
All up alive.
Threescore barrels, laid below,
To prove old England's overthrow.
But, by God's providence, him they catch,
With a dark lantern, lighting a match!*

The Children's Rhyme (19th–20th century)

*Guy Fawkes, Guy Fawkes, 'twas his intent
To blow up the King and the Parliament.
Three score barrels of powder below,
Poor old England to overthrow.
By God's providence he was catch'd,
With a dark lantern and burning match.*

The Milton Poem (John Milton, *In Quintum Novembris*, 1626)

*That dire conspiracy, by papist hands begun,
To blast the realm beneath a fiery sun.
The vaults below with barrels they did fill,
To work their dark design with deadly skill.
But Heaven's high hand did foil the traitors' aim,
And saved the throne from fire and shame.
Let England sing, let grateful voices rise,
To Him who guards her from the foe's disguise.*

The Protestant Ballad (c.1846–1859)

*Awake, O ye Protestants, timely awake,
Our holy, our Protestant Church is at stake;
That glorious Church which we can't too much
prize,
Is mark'd for destruction by wolves in disguise.
Remember the days of Queen Mary of old,
(Our blood at the very remembrance runs cold)
When those who stood firm to the Protestant
faith,
By Papists were butcher'd or burnt at the stake.
Believe not the traitors, the infidel crew,
When they tell you that Papists are different now;
The difference is this, (it compared may be)
To a lion chain'd up — and a lion set free.*

The Gratitude Verse (19th C)

*If there hadn't been given protection from
Heaven,
To the Parliament Houses and throne,
When the Pope to the flames had devoted King
James,
They had all to destruction been blown.
Then ever let England her gratitude show,
To the Power that saved her that horrible blow;
Our voices with thankfulness loud let us raise,
To Him be the glory — to Him be the praise.*

And finally.....

“A desperate disease requires a dangerous remedy.” — Attributed to Guy Fawkes himself, this line has been reinterpreted with a wink by many satirists over the years.

“The real use of gunpowder is to make all men tall.” — Thomas Carlyle, with a dry Victorian chuckle, on how explosives level the playing field.

“Of all the plots and conspiracies that ever entered into the mind of man, the Gunpowder Plot stands pre-eminent in horror and wickedness. It is Guy Fawkes who is remembered today and King James who is forgotten.” — A historian's sly nod to the irony of fame: fail spectacularly, and you'll be immortal.

