

Bicester u3a Newsletter

u3a

August 2026



Chairman's News

Hello everyone.

So here comes August! Historically July is the hottest UK month. And so it's proved. My lawn reminds me of my days in the Middle East. Pale straw colour.

Well, despite the record breaking heatwaves, lots of activities have gone ahead. Many groups have planned and held extra activities to celebrate this special year. Our main event was held at the end of June at The Littlebury.

Temperature records have been set all over the UK and Europe and we've set a couple of records ourselves. It's our 40th year of existence as you already know and this is a special Newsletter issue, the 100th, which like me perhaps you didn't know. (No! Helena has not edited them all).

I am sorry that many of you were unable to get a ticket for The Littlebury event. The hotel limit was 140. We had to accept that number so that the hotel could accommodate us inside if the weather turned wet. As it transpired it was a beautiful day and I believe everyone enjoyed the events presented. At this point I would like to thank the event sub-committee, Sylvia, George, Anthony and Liz for their time, effort and creativity towards delivering a splendid day. See more about what happened in this newsletter and our website for the full report. There were some great and some funny pictures taken.

The other big event was the annual holiday. This year centred on Chester and surrounding areas. Once again expertly planned and organised by Audrey Luff (our very own travel agent?) See the holiday report and great photos recording the interesting places and points of interest visited. Wonderful!

We needed to cancel our June monthly meeting as the first ever Red warning for heat was published by the met office for our locality. It was decided that this represented a real exhaustion risk and discomfort. Gill will likely rebook Jessica Thurtell for next year.

Should I mention The FIFA World Cup? No better not!

So, go to the website and u3a Bicester chat to keep up-to-date with what is happening, news from groups and future events planned.

Have a good late summer and don't forget to get some photographs of buildings for the Photographic competition.

Best wishes, Garth



40th Celebration Event

The rather unimaginatively named 'Summer Event' took place on 30 June as the centrepiece of our 40th Anniversary. Thankfully, although the title was somewhat dull, the event proved to be a thoroughly enjoyable experience, with lots of members coming away saying how much they enjoyed themselves. It centred around a very delicious hog roast, (with vegetarian and vegan options) followed by strawberries and cream. There were performances from the Ukulele Band and Rock Group, with garden games to enjoy, an observational Treasure Hunt, a Photo Booth to take some silly pictures and the opportunity to examine, and later taste, the entries to the cake decorating competition. The high point of proceedings was the unveiling of the 40th Anniversary Banner and the day finished with the auction of the Beatles painting which had been produced by Paul Lillie while he spoke at the May Monthly meeting. Everyone present went away with a souvenir programme to remember the day.

Obviously such an event cannot take place without a lot of work from the organising committee and volunteers on the day, and a huge amount of effort had gone into creating the new banner. It was truly a collaborative effort which turned out to be a worthy way of celebrating our 40th Anniversary.

The auction for the Beatles painting was won by Jeremy Brindle.

The prize for highest score in the garden games was won by Gerald Hodges.

The cake decorating competition was won by Eileen Dennett with a cat themed Mew 3a entry.

The Treasure Hunt was won by Alison Crutchfield.

The answers to the questions were as follows:

There were 19 panels on the new banner

12 panels had red thread on them

The cycling panel had 12 spokes

There were 22 ukulele players

There were 3 guitars on stage with the rock band

There were 20 flags on the stretch of bunting

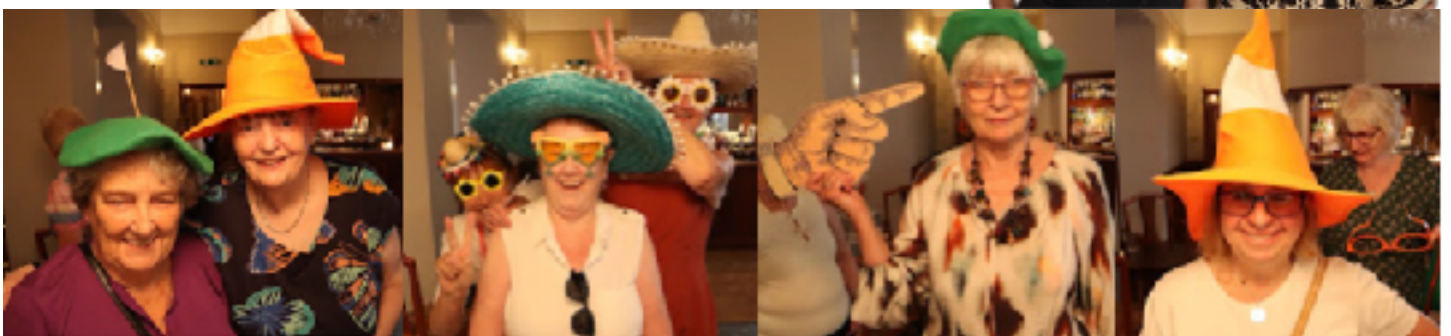
There were 34 balloons

The special number of the person wearing a red carnation, Gill Hawkins, was 7

The highest possible score on the Skittles game was 12

The Chairman's year of birth remains a question to ask him.

[Anthony Lock, Treasurer](#)



40th Anniversary Banner

Members of Stitchcraft 1, together with other talented members, created a beautiful decorative banner to celebrate our 40th anniversary, showcasing the groups active when the banner was made.

It features colourful imagery and symbols reflecting Bicester u3a's wide range of activities and interests and will serve as a lasting reminder of the 40th anniversary.

The project involved many hours of careful planning and needlework, with contributors combining traditional cross stitch and embroidery techniques with contemporary design elements.



Trip to Hampton Court - [click here](#)

Highclere trip - [follow this link](#)

Chester holiday - [click here](#)

Could you be the next Newsletter Editor?

In 2027 I will be standing down as Newsletter Editor as I have done just over a three year stint and cannot continue in the role.

There are only four newsletters a year: February, May, August and November so it's not too demanding.

You don't need any formal writing training as most of the copy is written by group leaders.

If you think you can help keep Bicester u3a members informed please contact me at newsletter.editor@bicesteru3a.online.

For the monthly meeting programme [click here](#)

New to monthly meetings?

Please come and chat to us if you are new to the u3a. We will be happy to introduce you to another member of the Bicester group. Our welcomers are: Richard Herbert, Mary Herbert, Wyn May, Juliet Ralph, Alex Sharpe, Marguerite Scott, Pauline Smith and Joy Saville.

Group Coordinator's Update

We now have 54 groups (including multiple groups for some activities).

Group News

The Mah Jong Beginners Group has transitioned from its beginner's stage and has become the Mah Jong Improvers Group. They are still open to new members. The Needle Felt Group is now up and running and demand is such that we have two such groups. There are still spaces available in Needle Felt 2.

On the topic of the Bicester u3a 40th Anniversary Celebrations, many of the groups have been holding their own special events to mark the occasion. If you have any details or pictures of these events, then please send them by email to: newsletter.editor@bicesteru3a.online

The Group Leader's Handbook and supporting documents are now available via a link on the Bicester u3a website.

Moving on and the future

As mentioned previously, there is considerable demand for other activities that are currently over-subscribed and have waiting lists including Arts and Crafts, Book and Bridge Groups, and Wine Appreciation. There is therefore a need to set up second groups for those activities. If anyone is interested in acting as Group Leader for those topics, then please contact me by email: group.coordinator@bicesteru3a.online and I can explain what would be involved and the availability of mentoring to get you started.

Wendy Smith

Any Type of Good Music

In June we listened to a selection of music from the Tyne/Tees program "The Tube" which ran from 1982 to 1987 through five series. The music selection included Level 42, The Cure, The Smiths, Simple Minds, Thin Lizzy, Frankie Goes to Hollywood, Paul Young, The Jam, INXS, Tina Turner, Elton John and many more. Maybe my memory failed me but I seemed to remember the 80's were a bad decade for music but today's selection scotched that memory.

For the July selection we were treated to a list of songs that were directly influenced by a classical piece of music. First the classical piece was played followed by the modern interpretation. Our music included Billy Joel's - This Night (Pathetique Sonata - Beethoven), Lady Gaga - Alejandro - (Vittorio Monti - Csardas). Maroon 5 - Memories (Canon in D - Pachelbel), Elvis Presley - It's now or never (di Capua - O Solo Mio) and Can't Help Falling in love (Plaisir D'Amour), Little Mix - Little Me (Faure - Pavanne), Barry Manilow - Could it be Magic (Chopin - Prelude in C Minor No. 20), The Beatles - Because (Beethoven - Moonlight Sonata) and Many more. It was a bit of an awakening to find so many popular tracks can be directly traced back to a piece of classical music.

We are not full so if anyone would like to join us once a month to listen to "Any Type of Good Music" please contact the Groups Coordinator or me.

Art Appreciation

We are a friendly group that gets together once a month to talk about art of any kind. We also arrange visits to galleries and exhibitions from time to time. At our May meeting, Kath gave us a virtual tour of Malaga art galleries. And there is a surprisingly large number of them!



Among the picture we saw was this one "Elect me and the nation will be saved" from 1866. Nothing changes!

Also in May, a small group of us visited the Ashmolean Museum to see their latest offering, In Bloom: How Plants Changed Our World. This exhibition revealed how the pursuit of exotic plants transformed landscapes, economies and cultures, leaving a legacy that still shapes our world today. And very colourful it was too!

In June, with many of our members away on the u3a holiday, we watched a DVD on Salvador Dali. This focused not so much on his art but on his rather eccentric life. It was certainly educational.

Andrew provided the talk for our July meeting with A journey Through the Surreal World of the Belgian Artist René Magritte, complete with bowler hat and pipe! We learned about his early life, how he started as a forger, who his contemporaries were and his influence on present day culture. Sometimes disturbing, his paintings aren't for everyone, but that's the whole point.

Our August meeting will be a Show and Tell on the theme My Favourite Painting. The idea is that everyone nominates a painting and gives us a couple of sentences about it and what it means to them.

If you have an interest in any kind of art, be it painting, sculpture, architecture or whatever, we're always happy to welcome new members to our group. Come along to our next meeting or give one of us a call if you have any questions.

Steve and Val

Arts and Crafts

We've been busy over the last few months with various projects from the usual cards to mosaic pot stands, and most recently alcohol ink art. Next week we're going to try braided baskets (not Macrame) haha!!!

Although member attendance has been low due to holidays etc we still enjoy meeting up for a good chinwag. A few members have left the group to join other groups that unfortunately clash with us, but we've also had a few new members join.

Debbie Cooper



Astronomy and Space Exploration

Research on the International Space Station (ISS) is providing innovations in medicines, health, engineering and physics that help humanity now as well as inform future space travel. Why do it all in space? Minimal gravity provides a unique research environment that gives amazing opportunities. Our group members have each taken an area of the ISS work to present to the group. Very rewarding to work together. It reflects in a way the international cooperation of the many countries, including Europe, China, USA, and Russia, working together 250 miles above the earth on ISS.

Other recent focuses for us have been, a session on black holes from Sarah. Every month Andrew gives us interesting updates from Nasa, and a member tells us 'What's Up ' (what's currently of interest in the night sky.) If you are interested in Astronomy and Space exploration there is always space as we meet by zoom, please join us.

Jan Laker

Blues Appreciation

For May, Janet provided an interesting selection of Blues and Jazz-influenced tracks for us to listen to. These included: Sister Rosetta Tharpe, who was primarily a gospel singer, singing 'It's nobody's fault but mine'; Santana and John Lee Hooker playing 'Soul Blues' ;'Blue Boogie' (Chuck Berry); B.B. King's very wonderful 'The thrill has gone' ;'Blues for Mr Tibbs' by Quincy Jones; and the gorgeously toned Ella Fitzgerald singing 'Blues in the night' . 'Voodoo Child', usually associated with Jimi Hendrix was played by Stevie Ray Vaughan with considerable gusto, followed by the very mellow version of 'Please don't let me be misunderstood' sung by Nina Simone (usually associated with The Animals). We also heard: 'Summertime' by Derek Watkins; Billies Bounce by Charlie (The Bird) Parker; 'Talk to your daughter' by Robben Ford; 'Pack it up' by Freddie King; and a terrific track by Bertha Mae Lightning ' –He talked a big game, played a small tune'. However, a Google search suggested that the track was in all probability AI-generated! The session finished with a 1975 live recording of led Zeppelin's Stairway to Heaven. What a finish!

Blues, particularly the early Blues had a reputation for 'dodgy' lyrics and double entendres. Hence Steve's theme of 'Dirty Blues, Bawdy Blues and Hokum' for the June Blues session. Songs included: 'Empty Bed Blues' (Bessie Smith); 'My Girl's Pussy' (Harry Roy and His Bat Club Boys); 'Anybody want to buy my cabbage' (Lil Johnson); 'Let me play with your poodle' (Tampa Red); 'Sixty Minute Man' (Billy Ward and his Dominoes); 'Big Ten Inch Record' (Bull Moose Jackson); Drill Daddy Drill (Dorothy Ellis); Salty Dog (Blind Willie McTell); My Ding a Ling (Chuck Berry); 'Devil in Me' (2022s); 'I got what it takes' (Blanche Calloway and Her Joy Boys); 'They're red hot' (Robert Johnson) and many other others of a similar nature.

The Blues has produced many influential and significant guitarists – and this was the focus of Clive's session in July. Guitarists played included: John Mayall (O pretty woman); Gary Moore (Still got the Blues for you); Joe Bonamassa with Beth Hart (I'd rather go blind); Buddy Guy (Damn right I've got the Blues); B. B. King (The thrill is gone); Peter Green (Need your love so bad); Mark Knopfler and Dave Gilmour (Jam); Eric Clapton & Willie Nelson (Night Life); Stevie Ray Vaughan & Albert King (Born under a bad sign); Joanna Shaw Taylor (Summertime).

Book Group

The group chose **"Go as a River" by Shelley Read** to review in May.

The story is set in 1940s Colorado where teenager, Victoria Nash, is the only woman in a family of troubled men. She meets a young drifter with a mysterious past, and their connection is immediate and dangerous. When tragedy strikes, Victoria is forced to leave her home and face a decision that will change her life. Basically, a love story, with vivid descriptions of nature, it tells of survival, prejudice, loss, determination and heartbreak. Most of the group thoroughly enjoyed the book with its young heroine fighting against the odds.

Our choice for June was **"The Invisible Women's Club" by Helen Paris.**

Janet Pimm is used to being invisible. 70 something with her beloved allotment for company, she simply doesn't need anyone else. But, when the local council threaten to close the allotments, Janet will do anything she can to try to save them- even enlisting the help of her irritatingly upbeat and interfering neighbour. After a very slow beginning, this was a captivating, easy read. The story is about friendship, female lives post-menopause, community spirit and the importance of connection. We had a lively discussion, the majority enjoying the concept that there is a place in society for older women who still have a powerful voice.

In July we met to talk about **"The Women" by Kristin Hannah.**

"Women can be Heroes too." A chance remark which inspired young Frankie McGrath, a recently qualified nurse, to join the Army Nurses Corps for service in Vietnam. For a sheltered young woman from a moneyed family on Coronado Island in California, this proved to be life changing. Her training left her unprepared for the horrors of combat nursing and the conditions the medical staff had to work in. Many of the group knew very little about the Vietnam war "the horrendous war that should never have happened" A work of fiction, based on true facts, this book made compelling reading. Many threads to the story, friendship amongst strangers, the harsh treatment of returning veterans, and the fact that no-one acknowledged the role of the incredible women who played a part. We recommend this one as a thoroughly enjoyable read.

Audrey Luff

Bus Pass Adventures

We had a nice day out in Oxford. After coffee we began our visit at the Castle, finding out about all the history, including St Georges Tower. The mound (which you can pay £2 to go up), Castle walls, prison buildings, etc. More than 100 hangings took place there.

Then onto the Baptist Church and Northgate, followed by a visit to the Bodleian to see an exhibition on how humans and their pets interact with each other. There was also an interesting exhibition about birds.

Rennie Buxton



Creative Writing onwards and upwards

The group began in early 2022 with a membership of three and has grown to now 11 members: with room for a few more. We meet once a month at Clementine Lodge, here in Bicester. Each two hour session finds us actively reviewing what we have written in the last month, with lively discussion and good natured criticism, to guide and enhance future writing. We also 'practice what we preach' by giving some time over to putting 'pen to paper' in writing short exercise pieces. From time to time we look at the semantics of English Language, also helping to improve our spelling and syntax.

Over the last six months, each member by rotation has added another 500 words to a short story. This is a murder mystery and we hope to have it on our website. We are in the process of collating some of our pieces into an anthology, which again, we hope to publish on the website. Keep an eye out!

All of this activity is accompanied by our desire to become better writers and to achieve our 'love of the written word'. Every meeting passes off with elements of learning, criticism and with one large heaped spoonful of fun. We don't always take ourselves too seriously as we strive to improve our understanding. Come and join us.

Mike Wyatt

Cycling Group

We had an artistic start to the Summer with six of us cycling to All Saints Church in Middleton Stoney during the Oxfordshire Art Weeks. A grade II listed, 12th Century church in Middleton Park. A lovely setting plus tea and cake.

A few weeks later we headed to Holy Trinity church in Gawcott, Buckinghamshire who were hosting Buckinghamshire's Art weeks. The current church building opened in 1827 replacing the former building which became unsound following a long spell of dry weather! Again we were made very welcome with refreshments and discussions with the artists.

Although it has been an extremely hot period we have still managed to get out by choosing our days carefully.

Ian Baldwin



Drawing and Painting

We continue to meet at Tesco Community room, we are hoping to book again for next year. I have been running the group since taking over from Ann Beveridge after she moved to Chester. We hope to meet at the Littlebury gardens this summer.

Our composite picture of the Sisley painting seemed to be well accepted, so we repeat the exercise with a different painting. We look forward to another year of art.

Janet Hartley



Family History

There have been a number of Family History Group incarnations during the 40-year life of Bicester u3a. The latest is the 'Family History Assistance Group'; we currently have 28 members.

This is a Family History tuition and help activity for those u3a Bicester members who would like to know how to get started with their research. Assistance is also available for those members who have already begun their own research, and would like to discuss what they have found so far. One-to-one sessions are available with the Group Leader, or with other FH Group members who have considerable family history experience.

The summer months are traditionally thought of as quiet ones for people looking to discover more about their ancestors. That does not mean that nothing happens at all; as a case in point, I recently made contact with some 'lost' American cousins and our tree continues to grow. Then there is 'Who Do You think You Are' on the BBC; that is always worth watching. (Catch up on iPlayer, of course.) Summer often encourages visits to regions where family lived in the past; such visits can often be helpful in understanding what shaped their lives.

There is little doubt that discovering more about your family's experiences, sometimes through stories and old newspapers, can provide valuable insights into the lives of those forebears. Current thinking in Epigenetics (the study of how behaviour and environment can cause changes that affect the way our genes work), is that those experiences can sometimes shape our lives, even though they were in the past, and happened to our ancestors.

I have always thought of Family History as a dynamic, living subject; it certainly evolves with every new generation. It has been said that it connects your personal identity to broader historical narratives, constantly growing as you uncover past roots while documenting the ongoing stories and memories of your living relatives today. If you would like to know more, then please do get in touch.

Charlie Wrench

Gill's pop up quiz

All about 100

1. On what scale is the boiling point of water 100 degrees
2. What is 100 cubed
3. What is the roman numeral for 100
4. What is the term for a 100 year old person
5. How many sets of 2 numbers can be multiplied to make 100

Answers are on the back page.

Garden Visits

It has been a difficult few months for me caring for Lesley after her fall, so I missed the April and May visits, but Tricia Hallam led the group admirably.

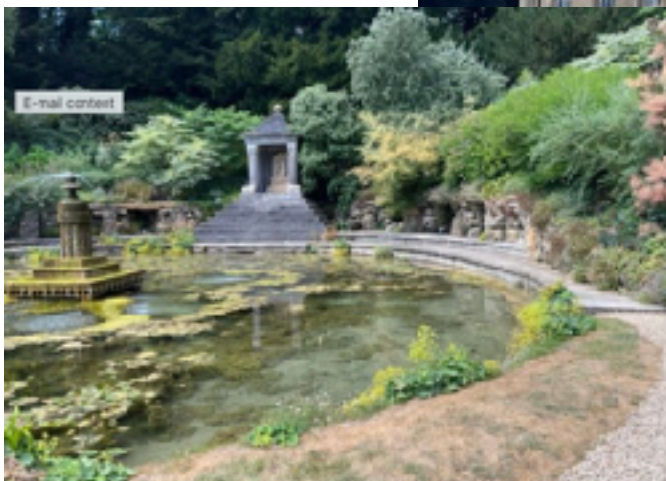
May - Ascot House, a historic home meets superb art collections, natural and formal gardens, and views across the Aylesbury Vale.

June - Sezincote is unique. At the heart of a traditional, family-run estate covering 3,500 acres of rolling Cotswold countryside stands a 200-year-old Mogul Indian palace, set in a romantic landscape of temples, grottoes, waterfalls and canals reminiscent of the Taj Mahal. A must see place.

I borrowed a wheel chair for Lesley, it was hard work pushing it up a gravel slope, but the positive thing was on arrival I was asked if I was a careryes, yes, yes, so I got in free!

July - Greys Court: a hot day, but the cafe was air conditioned. Charming series of walled gardens on a site with over 900 years of history. something to see around every corner in the garden, interconnected spaces surrounded by the warm colours of ruined walls and buildings that date back centuries. The sculptures were back again round every corner there was something different, some absolutely fascinating, some weird some cheap and some very expensive. The house originally built in the 14th century, with alterations over the centuries, and views over the Chiltern hills, well worth having a wander around.

Dave Jones



Sezincote

Jazz Appreciation

The May Jazz Appreciation session was put together by Andrew. Like an LP it had two 'sides'. Side 1 focussed on The Hot Club de Paris. This was the legendary 1930s jazz quintet, founded in Paris, by guitarist Django Reinhardt and violinist Stephane Grappelli and comprising Louis Vola (Double Bass), Joseph Nin-Nin Reinhardt (Guitar) and Roger Chaput (Guitar).

The music is often referred to as 'Gypsy Jazz'. We heard a variety of original songs by various combinations of the musicians '–I got Rhythm', 'Carinosa', 'Tiger rag', 'Ta Veo in mis suenos', Daphne, 'The Sheik of Araby', 'Honeysuckle Rose' and 'Jalousie'. Gypsy Jazz retains its popularity, with younger musicians enjoying the genre: 'I'll see you in my dreams' (English version of Te veo min mis suenos) by La Bouche Manouche, featuring Iera Serra, 'C'est Si Bon' by Jolie Mome, 'Jospeh, Jospeh' by Hot Club de Nax and the Avalaon Jazz band with Tatiana Eva-Marie singing Menilmontant. Side 2, in contrast, was Big band music. Bands included: Benny Goodman orchestra (Sing, Sing, Sing, from 1937); Cab Calloway and his Cotton Club Orchestra (Zax Zuh Zaz, from 1933); Earl Hines and his orchestra (That's plenty); Glen Miller Orchestra (In the Mood and People like you and me); Jack Teagarden and His All Star group (Basin Street Blues); Woody Herman & His Swingin' Herd (Woodchoppers Ball, from 1964); Ted Heath orchestra (Topsy); and many others.

Wini provided the music for the June meeting with a theme of 'Nighttime'. There were some great jazz songs including: Midnight in Moscow (Kenny ball and his Jazzmen); Evenin' (Count Basie and his orchestra); Stella by Starlight (Miles Davis); Tonight I shall sleep with a smile on my face (Stan Getz); Blues in the night (Frank Sinatra); 'Round Midnight (Sonny Rollins); Night Lights (Gerry Mulligan Sextet); A night in Tunisia (Dizzie Gillespie); No moon at all (Mel Torme); and many more fabulous Jazz songs.

The July session was based on an experiment. Andrew decided to see what ChatGPT (the AI assistant) might do in selecting Jazz songs on the theme of Summer and Summertime. Overall, ChatGPT did a reasonable job although there were some fairly suspect songs that were suggested. The software also took a fairly wide view of jazz, including dance-influenced songs such as the Bossa Nova and Calypso. Songs selected included: The Summer Knows (Bill Evans); Sunny (Stanley Turrentine); Summer Breeze (Ramsey Lewis Trio); Summertime (Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong); Too darn hot (Ella Fitzgerald); Tea for Two (Art Tatum); August Moon (Benny Carter & his Orchestra); The heat's on (Count Basie Orchestra); Fever (Peggy Lee); Slow Hot Wind (Sarah Vaughan); Hot House (Dizzy Gillespie); Here comes the Sun (Nina Simone's version of the Beatles song); and many other Jazz songs with a similar theme.

Andrew Thomas

Mah Jong Improvers

The Mah Jong Seasons Group (formerly the Mah Jong Improvers before the new Improvers group was formed) decided to have as our 40th event a special hands only Mah Jong session. Although only five of us could make it that day, we all enjoyed practising our special hands, and 2 of us managed to go Mah Jong with special hands.

As there are only 11 of us in the group, we do have room for one more to make up three tables, preferably someone with some Mah Jong experience. We meet every Tuesday afternoon in the Littlebury.

Alison Crutchfield



Murder Mystery Book Group

May 2026 - One More to Die by Joy Ellis.

Detective Kate Carter is called out to a fatal car accident on a remote fen lane. At first glance it looks like a drunk driver simply lost control and crashed headlong into a ditch, but nothing about the scene adds up. The number plate is fake. The driver's licence doesn't belong to the dead man in the car. One tyre doesn't match the other three. There is also a vinyl 1960's pop record in the glove box, why? A neat puncture wound in the driver's neck reveals this was no accident. The following day the body of a young woman is found in an old barn out on the fens. She's been dead at least two years. Placed on the body is another vintage pop record. Then the nightmare becomes personal, when a mysterious package arrives at the station addressed to Kate, a 45rpm record and a chilling note scrawled in block capitals ONE MORE TO GO. It's just the start, sinister phone calls, notes left on her car, unwanted gifts on her doorstep. Kate can no longer deny that she's being pursued by an obsessive stalker. Is she next in the killer's sights?

June 2026 - Forgotten Bones by Wes Markin

When buried bones are unearthed by a storm in North Yorkshire's picturesque coastal town of Whitby, Detective Chief Inspector Frank Black is drawn into an investigation that takes him back to the late eighties and the fiery demise of a popular pub. Frank is no stranger to vulnerability, he has a daughter who is recovering from drug addiction and has moved back home, so he lives with it and with an outsider in Detective Inspector Gerry Carver he works with it. And in Charlotte Wilson, a young eighteen year old musician discarded and buried near the old whalebones of Whitby, he recognises it. At sixty-four, Black should be retiring. But Charlotte had hopes and dreams, and nobody should be allowed to silence the voice of an angel.

Mary Herbert

Needlefelt 1

In the first session the group needle felted a small Jack Russell dog picture which could be used to make a card, picture or brooch. In the second and third sessions we made 3d sleeping foxes. The foxes were so successful that the manager of the Whitelands café suggested we sell them to one of the local teams known as The Foxes. The results were incredibly good considering that it was the first attempt at 3d sculpture. We have moved on to making a standing mouse character.



Needlefelt 2

Members of the group started with a 2d picture of a Jack Russell, similar to Needlefelt 1. On our next session we began making a 3d standing mouse, with some armature.

As each group progresses they will be guided through different techniques, whilst creating fun objects. With experience members will be able to choose their own sculptures.

Helena Tuckwell



Pub Quiz

For the pub quiz group's 40th Anniversary special event, I donned the quiz master's hat and compiled a quiz for 10 other members of the group. To make it like a real pub quiz we all had drinks and crisps.

Although everyone complained about the deviousness of the questions they all did really well. But the outright winners were Sylvia and Alice, the "Merry Widows" team who gained an extra 10 points for working out the 5% question in the 1% Club round. Well done!



Alison Crutchfield

Rock Group

The band had its first official rehearsal after an informal meeting at a Bicester coffee shop in October 2022. There the founder member, Doug Irvine (ex Marillion), whose ambitious, crazy idea it was, sketched out his loose plans and gave those attending three songs to work on. The intention was to arrange and play cover songs our way, have fun and maybe perform in public.

The original nucleus was three members, but evolved into six members at one point, before stabilising to five under the name Grim Reapers, rehearsing twice a month.

In 2025, after five gigs in public, Doug unfortunately decided to hang up his bass guitar. The band unanimously decided to carry on. At this time we were using a professional rehearsal studio, learning about P.A.s, monitors and what it takes to create a professional (or in our case, above amateur) sound.

A new bassist joined towards the end of the year and we began serious rehearsals to get us back to the original level. In June we played an “unplugged” set of our best songs at a private party in yet another Bicester coffee emporium (now sadly gone) and played at the Littlebury for the u3a’s 40th celebration. The sound unfortunately left a lot to be desired but we hope our enthusiasm showed through.

We now find ourselves once again without a bass-player (it’s a rock’n’roll life, even at our age!). So there is now a vacancy. Our remaining line-up: Sheila Baldwin (vocals and keyboard), Gary Willis (vocals and lead guitar), John Wooton (rhythm guitar) and Martin Geoffreys (drums) will continue to arrange, rehearse, and hopefully play live, for as long as the spirit is there.

Gary Willis



Scrabble

The two Scrabble groups continue to enjoy games at the Littlebury every other week. We have introduced the idea of a special theme at each session and words that fit the theme are awarded 20 extra points. Recent themes include flowers (during Chelsea week), animals (for David Attenborough's 100th birthday), and tennis (for Wimbledon).

Our celebration of the 40th Anniversary of Bicester u3a is scheduled for the 6 August when most of the 26 members will gather for a garden party. Each member will bring a food or drink beginning with a letter drawn at random from the Scrabble bag and there will be various Scrabble-related games. A report and photos will be in the next edition of the newsletter.

There are still places in the group that meets on the 2nd and 4th Mondays of the month so do get in touch if you'd like to join us.

Karen Fill

Short Walks

The Group continues to grow in numbers, although the members who actually walk are fewer. It may be due to the hot weather. In June 18 of us walked from Souldern to Aynho and back. We saw lots of deer in the Aynho Park.

Our walk in July was from Lower Heyford. We walked along the towpath to Alien's Lock and then on to Upper Heyford Cemetery. This contains 40 Commonwealth war graves from RAF Upper Heyford station. It includes personnel from the Royal Canadian and Royal New Zealand Air Forces. We then continued back to Lower Heyford.

Mary Gough



Table Tennis

Our table tennis group celebrated the 40th anniversary with a celebratory lunch at Bicester Hotel in Chesterton. It was a lovely day, and everyone enjoyed the chance to relax and catch up with

Despite the hot weather, we've continued to play throughout the summer, taking regular breaks to keep cool - with the occasional ice cream!

The group continues to grow steadily. We welcome new members who have played table tennis before, or who have experience of another racquet sport. Unfortunately, we're not able to accommodate complete beginners, as we don't have a coach.

We meet every Thursday from 10am to 11.45am, with a short break halfway through. If you'd like to come along and give us a try, we'd be delighted to hear from you.

Kate Boyes



Ukulele Group

For the first half of the year it has been business as usual and to date we've done 12 performances to local care homes etc. We were invited to play at the Blackthorn Village BBQ (where we hold our practice sessions), and for our performance we were treated to free food. The villagers gave us very positive feedback.

We also performed at the 40th celebrations at The Littlebury. On this occasion we had almost a full house of group members.

On 29 July we performed at the Garth Park Bandstand as the group's bit towards the 40th celebrations. Going forward for the rest of the year we have, to date, another 14 gigs booked up to Christmas. I'm planning to book us in for the St. Edburgs Church Christmas Tree Festival again this year.

Bill Jeffries



Wider Horizons

Wider Horizons celebrating the 40th anniversary of Bicester u3a. Twenty of us all wore red for a ruby anniversary and used the table decorations from the event at the Littlebury. The Torino Lounge kindly donated two cakes for us to enjoy and Sheila McKechnie made a gluten free cake. Joy thanked everyone for turning out in style despite the heat and it was great to see her getting out and about again.

Gill Hawkins



Wine Appreciation

In May we tasted a couple of Chardonnay wines one a Chablis (very nice) and the other a Burgundy (not quite as nice). We followed these by three reds, an Argentinian Malbec (the best), A Rioja and a Chianti Classico (both very pleasant). This was followed by a Sauterne which was very good but would have been better with a desert at the end of a meal.

In June our hosts presented a selection of wines where selection of wines they had sampled during a wine tasting at the actual vineyard, or given to accompany a meal. The surprise was an Indian Chenin Blanc wine that got the approval of all the members. Next favourite was a Chilean red with a mix of Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah grapes. Also tasted were a Merlot from Marlborough in New Zealand, a Bordeaux Claret, a Kosu from Japan and a Gruner Vetlinger from Austria. A very interesting and personal selection.

Our July tasting consisted of a varied selection from a local wine merchant starting with "M". First up was a Assyrtico wine from Crete followed by an Alborino from Uruguay both of which were pleasant. Next was an 'orange' wine from Austria made from Gruner Vetlinger, we were not sure about this, it may be improved by being drunk with food. For the reds we tasted a Pinot Noir from Romania which got a surprising seal of approval as we didn't expect to like a Pinot Noir that much. We then tasted a Xinomavro from Greece and a Kekfrankos from Hungary that were scored quite highly. An interesting selection of unusual countries wines.

We are currently full but if there are any members who would like to start a "Wine Appreciation 2" we can mentor those members until they are up and running, please contact the Group Coordinator if interested.

Richard Herbert

Gill's Pop-up Quiz Answers

1. Celsius
2. 1,000,000
3. C
4. Centenarian
5. 5 sets...1x100, 2x50, 4x25, 5x20, 10x10

Bicester u3a General Notices are now available at the monthly meetings or on our website please visit:

<https://bicester.u3asite.uk/welcome/>

Know of someone who is ill

If you know of a member who is ill please inform a member of the committee so that a card can be sent from Bicester u3a.

Press dates

Articles for inclusion in the November 2026 newsletter must be submitted by 31 October 2026.

Please note this is an absolute deadline. You can contact the editor by emailing newsletter.editor@bicesteru3a.online.

For more information about Bicester u3a, including trips, groups and details of monthly meetings visit our website at:

bicester.u3asite.uk

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