

SUMMER 2025

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

Dear Member,

I would like to introduce myself to you as the new Chair of the Woodspring U3a. My name is Julian Kern, and I live in Portishead with my wife Jane who is also a U3a member. I have been a member since 2021 and am an active participant in several of our Groups (Book groups, Creative Writing, Quiz, Italian, Pickleball, Science & Technology and Association Croquet). As you will gather from this, I am passionate about retired members taking part in activities both mind and body, it keeps us young.

Let me introduce the rest of your committee to you. Claire Watkins is our new Treasurer and Valerie Noble is taking on the role of Coffee Social Co-ordinator. Continuing in their current roles:

Phil Cook – Business Secretary

Sarah Hewlett – Membership Secretary

Chriss Pickles – Groups Organiser, IT Manager (Beacon and Web)

Joan Anderson – Press & Publicity officer

June Slater – Newsletter Editor

Many of you know Simon Beck who has been a stalwart of the Woodspring committee over many years and has served in multiple roles including Chair, Secretary and latterly as Treasurer. Simon has decided to step down from the committee but has agreed to help Claire as she takes over the Treasurer role. I would like to thank him on your behalf for his tremendous contribution and wish him well, although we still hope to see him at U3a events when he can find the time



So, there you have it, a committee who will act on your behalf. But what are you all going to do, I hear you ask? Well, apart from administration, system support, ensuring up to date policies, liaison with national and local U3a branches, organising events for the Group as a whole (such as the coffee mornings for members to meet), there is also the important function of looking after the group finances. We have built up a healthy balance and Claire will be registering us as a charity with the Commission in the near future.

At our recent meeting, the committee felt we would like to redirect some of the finance back to the groups. As you know, the U3a's object is the advancement of education, in particular the education of older people and those retired from full-time employment, including associated activities conducive to learning and personal development. We believe this also encapsulates social interaction and wellbeing.

The committee has therefore set as one of its aims the introduction of a grant application system where each year groups can apply for some funding associated with their activity (for example Literary Groups could apply for a grant to pay for an author-led event). Your committee would review applications and award grants as appropriate. Claire is currently working on how the scheme will work and there will be more of this to follow, but I hope you will agree it's a good use of our finances and meets our charitable aims.

Woodspring has nearly 500 members and runs 50 different groups. Anyone is welcome to start up a new activity and support is always available. Equally if any of you would like to join the committee and assist with any of the activities you would be most welcome.

I am looking forward to working with the committee and I promise that future reports from me will not be as long as this going forward.

Best Wishes
Julian

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

Our numbers are looking healthy following renewal with 499 members and new members joining every week or so. Some people enquiring about joining us ask "Where is Woodspring"? If they have just moved to the area it doesn't appear on any maps! Woodspring of course was a parliamentary constituency from 1983-2010 when it was replaced by North Somerset. It covered Clevedon, Portishead, Nailsea, Backwell and all the villages round about – which is our catchment area. Our members come mainly from Nailsea (31%), Clevedon (27%) and Portishead (22%), with the remaining 20% comprising all the members living elsewhere in the area, including Backwell, Yatton, Wrington, Tickenham and Pill to name but a few.

Hope to see some of you at the Coffee Social events. Please do contact me if you have any questions: s.hewlett103@gmail.com or 01275 876199

GROUPS UPDATE

We're now running 50 interest groups, which I think might be close to an all-time record for us. As we'd always intended, the groups are spread across our area – 8 in Clevedon, 17 in Nailsea, 7 in Portishead, 6 in Yatton and a further 12 which move around locations. They're also fairly evenly spread across the days of the week – we even have a couple on Sundays! But generally, we don't offer a lot at the weekend, and it would be great if we could improve that; for many people living on their own and without family nearby the weekends can feel a bit lonely. So, if you feel you could help out here – perhaps meet for coffee on Saturdays or start an interest group on Sundays – please get in touch.

My other observation for this newsletter is to do with running these groups. I'm not, for once, going to repeat my constant request for members to step forward and start new groups. This time my request is for you to consider whether you might be able to help the leader of any groups you attend. We're finding increasingly that it can be very efficient and less demanding if leadership of a group is shared – perhaps one person doing the background admin and someone else leading the actual sessions, or everyone in a group taking a turn to run one session. This works well in the book groups where members take turns to select the next book to read and discuss, or in the garden visits group where members meet to discuss the options for the following year. If your group lead finds themselves unable to continue in the short term, maybe because of ill health or unexpected commitments, do consider whether you could be the person to help out and keep the group going, rather than losing the benefit of it altogether. Sadly, I have experienced several instances over the

years of leads being unable to continue to be involved at all and their groups having to close because none of the active members were prepared to take over, so do please bear this all in mind. We love the fact that we offer sufficient interest groups to keep 500 members involved, it would just be a bonus if, when occasional extra commitment is needed, people are prepared to share their time and expertise.

With thanks to the leads who assisted here, these are updates from some of our groups:

Association Croquet

Absolute beginners will be given tuition, and all the necessary equipment will be provided. Sessions will last for about two hours and will include time for practice. There will be a small charge to cover the cost of the lawn hire and refreshments.

Croquet is an intriguing sport requiring both mental agility and physical co-ordination. Cricket, tennis, hockey, snooker, bridge and chess players all love croquet and make excellent players. We will be using the lawns at Nailsea & District Croquet Club. They are beautifully maintained and provide a good and consistent surface suitable for international matches.

A new series of meetings will be starting in June on Monday mornings at 10:30 from June 30 and Monday evenings at 6pm from June 23, so please get in touch if you'd like to join either of these groups.

Contact kathy@jnwallace.f9.co.uk

Astronomy

If you have an interest in Space, then why not join our U3A Astronomy groups?

We meet in Portishead on the 4th Wednesday of each month, and in Nailsea the day afterwards. The Nailsea meeting is shorter at one and a half hours, versus the 2 hours in Portishead. We break for a chat over a hot drink at both venues.

We present talks on Astronomy and space, with plenty of opportunities to ask questions to enable you to get a better feel for the subject. Both groups combined to watch the great American eclipse live on You Tube from a number of observatories.

We also make use of Robotic telescopes, so if you were wondering what the Sun is doing, we can observe it live from a 'scope in Tenerife, and we can make observations of stars, planets and Galaxies live from Australia (Aussie weather permitting, and availability of telescope time slots.)

We have done talks covering stars, planets, galaxies. We have looked at how scientists know how far away objects in space are, how they know what stars are made of and what it means when scientists claim they have found indications of Life!

Our two venues have plenty of space (pun intended) so feel free to join us anytime for either a one-off visit or to become a regular.

I don't publish a list of talks as the Universe and our scientists have a way of surprising us each month with new discoveries or celestial events, so it is nice to be flexible and talk about the latest findings.

If you have a burning question and would like us to address it, then send me an email with the question and which meeting you are coming to, and we will try to address it.

We circulate a copy of the Presentation to all the regular attendees on our email list, so you can keep up even if you have a diary clash.

Hopefully see you later this month, either way, keep looking up!

Contact chris.followell@gmail.com

Birdwatching

4th Birdwatching Walk at Ham Wall.

A small group of intrepid birdwatchers assembled at The Barn car park in Clevedon at 9:30 to arrange car sharing. The weather was perfect, very sunny and warm but a little cloudy to keep the sunburn away.

3 cars travelled down the M5 as far as the Wells turnoff. We then travelled all along the beautiful Polden Hills to the village of Ashcott. Winding our way through the village, we travelled north over the Somerset Levels and arrived at Ham Wall a little later than planned. The noticeboard showed many species of bird and other wildlife seen.

It was crowded, a very popular place for birdwatchers, walkers, dog walkers and families. We walked from the car park to some woodland to start the walk along a 2 mile path to t'other end. The trees were full of birds, all welcoming us to their habitat. Many warblers were singing, in particular Garden Warbler, Blackcap, Chiffchaff and Reed along with the commoner, but no less beautiful, Robin, Blackbird, Wren and Song Thrush. We seemed to be surrounded by hundreds of Dragonflies of many varieties, not many butterflies though. Very soon we had fantastic views of the now resident Marsh Harriers. The local recorders said they witnessed a 'food pass' earlier which indicated that they had a nest and fledglings. Other raptors were Buzzard, Kestrel and Kite. Sadly, we didn't see any Hobbies catching all those Dragonflies or the rare Red-footed Falcons that have moved on. Many bird species were seen or heard totalling 34. One of our troupe decided to stay on and witnessed a Grass snake swimming, WOW and other wildfowl species. Sadly, I forgot to take a photo of our merry band until the end so apologies to Julie who is conspicuous by her absence in the photo.

Everybody enjoyed the walk and are looking forward to the next one.

Contact geoffdavies@live.co.uk



Boules

This is a new weekly seasonal group who meet to play in Portishead. We had our first game of Boules this week. Most of us are newcomers to the rules but have had expert guidance from our host. We are at maximum capacity at the moment.

Contact annbaines@me.com

Bridge Group (Nailsea)

Come and join us, particularly if you haven't played for a while and feel a bit rusty. You do not need a partner and can just turn up at 1.55pm on a Friday.

You will find us in the furthest room in the Wesley Lounge, the building to the left of the Methodist church and there is usually room in the carpark.

If you wish to discuss beforehand, drop a line and I will either respond or send you my mobile number accordingly.

We are a small, friendly group but we do need you to have the Bridge basics.

Contact sd.dixon@btinternet.com

Coffee Socials

The May 2025 AGM and Coffee Social with a speaker from Trussell was well attended. The AGM had to be conducted first to allow more time for the urns to fully heat up and this led seamlessly into refreshments and the speaker. It was interesting to hear the origins of Trussell and how the need for this charity is still so profound in today's world. Thank you to those in attendance for your generous donations to Trussell.

Once again thank you to all the folk who helped set up the hall, serve refreshments, meet and greet arrivals and clear away after. You made it all feel friendly and welcoming and this is much appreciated.

More Coffee Social dates for your diary:

June: This coffee social is in the form of a CREAM TEA and Garden Tour at Penny Brohn. It's on Wednesday 18th at 3 pm. .

July: Scotch Horn Leisure Centre in Nailsea on Monday 28th, 2.00 to 3.30

August: Clevedon Community Centre on Friday 15th, 2.00 to 3.30

September: The White Hart in Weston in Gordano on Wednesday 24th, 10.00 to 11.30

Cycling

We meet during Spring, Summer and Autumn on different days of the week to enjoy a ride of about 20 miles - always with a break for refreshments. New members are very welcome, please get in touch if you're interested. Especially welcome would be experienced cyclists who might identify and lead the occasional ride, to ensure a variety of location and experience. I'm happy to continue to manage the admin if anyone would like to volunteer.

Contact judyeparker@hotmail.com

French

Each session we start with a chat in French, revise some grammar, and listen to, or present a topic related to France. The level is approximately A2

We would welcome new members.

Contact kenneth.jones7@talktalk.net

Garden Visits

Great day out in May with the Garden Visit to The American Museum and Gardens. The weather was perfect





We explore a range of gardens, from National Trust to local open gardens. We're planning to visit one of our member's gardens in Nailsea towards the end of the month

Nowhere FUNdraisers for CRUK



Jackie's Open Garden for Cancer Research UK

Saturday 21st June, 1-5pm

11 Cheddar Close, Nailsea, BS48 4YA

Nowhere FUNdraisers for CRUK group member, Jackie, is opening her garden to raise money for this vital charity.

Jackie moved to Nailsea in September 2021 and set about transforming her uninspiring new garden into a plant-rich, wildlife haven. Join us to enjoy the fruits of her labours and partake in some tea and home-made cake to raise money for Cancer Research UK.



This open garden is a fantastic opportunity to get ideas about how to make the most of an average sized garden – blending together vegetable area, meadow, pond, native hedging, trees, diverse planting, woodland area, patios and more. Take part in a raffle on the day to win a garden design consultation.

Free entry

Cakes, teas, and coffee available

Donations welcome

Greek Conversation

We have vacancies; please get in touch if you're interested

Contact jackie_devaney@hotmail.com

Italian Conversation

Small group to practice Italian conversation.

The idea for this group is to be a small and friendly space where you can relax and improve your Italian conversation skills. It is not 'Italian lessons', just a place to practice talking in Italian. The meetings would be once a month in members' homes, possibly mainly in and near Portishead. You'd need a basic understanding of Italian to join. Each meeting would focus on a different topic to discuss.

If you are interested and would like to find out more details, please contact Antje per email: antje44@icloud.com.

Jazz Appreciation

We're taking a summer break – see you in the Autumn

Knitting for Charity

The group continue to work well and last week I was able to deliver 21 blankets, 3 cardigans and twenty hats to Southmead maternity unit. I also delivered some trauma teddies to Avon fire service in Weston super Mare. Both were appreciative of our efforts and thanked us for our continuing support. We all enjoy our knitting and nattering and feel them to be worthwhile causes.

Contact brendacarson@btinternet.com

Lunch Group 2

Lunch Group 2 would welcome some new members. We usually meet on a Monday or Tuesday, generally in Nailsea because there seem to be few options elsewhere. Not everyone can make every lunch - we all like our holidays! We have some members who are 'singletons' but we are not a singles group, just some people who like to meet up for a nice lunch and a chat approximately once a month.

Contact junevslater@live.co.uk

Spanish

Each session we start with a chat in Spanish, revise some aspect of grammar, present and discuss a topic related to Spain or Spanish speaking countries.

The level is A2 to B1. We have room for another member or two, please get in touch if you're interested

Contact kenneth.jones7@talktalk.net

World Book Group

We have a vacancy; please get in touch if you're interested

Contact gaynor.gallagher@gmail.com

Any queries? Contact me directly

Chriss Pickles

Groups Organiser

01275 878927

chrisspickles@email.com