

**University of the Third Age**  
**Newsletter September 2019**  
[sheptonmalletu3a.org.uk](http://sheptonmalletu3a.org.uk)



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**1. Chat from the Chair**

SMU3A pitched up at our usual spot in the Heritage Marquee for the 2019 Mid Somerset Show, the last one to be held on this site.

It was a bright, breezy and an occasionally wet day but we had lots of visitors and enquiries. We met U3A members from Street, Wells, Norton Radstock, Wellington and Salisbury and had three leads from people offering to make presentations at Speaker Meetings.



**The U3A stall at the show**

We handed out leaflets to nearly 50 people who showed an interest in finding out more and each shift was determined to do better than the last! So, a huge thank you to everyone who helped on the day, either by volunteering to spend an hour talking to visitors, to those who lent items for display and especially to Maggie H and Derek for their 'behind the scenes' support and help. One visitor told me he always seeks out our newsletter in the doctor's waiting room and failing

that goes home and finds it to read on our website...!

We currently have a membership of 180, so it will be interesting to note if contact enquiries increase, whether there will be a spike in the viewings of the website and if we really have encouraged anyone new to join us.

SMU3A are always pleased to be invited and support this excellent event and credit must go to the organisers and volunteers who give so much time and effort to make it such a successful day for Shepton Mallet to enjoy and be proud of.

**Liz**

## 2. What's On

### SPEAKER MEETING

**Speaker Meetings are held on the first Thursday of the month from 10.00 until 11.45 in the Council Chamber, Mendip District Council Offices**

FREE tea and coffee available at every meeting

Entrance fee £1.50 for U3A members, £2.50 for guests. To avoid delays at the door, please have the correct money ready for collection, thank you.

### 5 September

**Ian Williamson:** Trekking in Machu Picchu, Peru

### 3 October

**Dr James Taylor:** Forgotten Art of the Picture Postcard, 1840s to 1950s. An entertaining and informative talk on the subject of artist-drawn comic postcards

### 7 November

**Jenny Ross:** The Secret Life of Bats. An informative talk on the work of the Bat Conservation Trust in the United Kingdom and how locally based projects and surveys have helped to increase our knowledge of their habitats

### 5 December

**Mr Barry Edwards:** Isambard Kingdom Brunel, an alternative look at his life and work

### August Speaker Meeting

At our August speaker meeting we were pleased to welcome Ian Keys from the Darshill and Bowlsh Conservation Society. Ian gave us an informative talk and update on the progress of the two-year Heritage Project delving into the history of the Shepton Mallet Hamlets of Darshill, Ham and Bowlsh that was started in September 2018. These three locations were at the forefront of the wool, cloth and silk

industries from the early 1400s and well into the 1800s.

The project is studying the remains of the cloth making and farming industries, the present and historical build and natural environment and aims to revive something of the lives of the people of previous generations.

We were told of a poem written in 1641 by Richard Watts. The poem written in Olde English is entitled 'A Concise Poem on the Situation, Trading etc of Shepton Mallet in the County of Somerset'. It describes Shepton Mallet as 'This far famed town that lies near Mendip towering hills, whence doth arise great store of lead and coal' with mentions of an unparalleled church roof, famous school, market cross, cloth making for kings and nobles where three score thousand were employed from local villages.



**Ian Keys centre with Keith and Arthur**



**Members view the project exhibition**

One of the largest fulling mills was on the site of the current sewage treatment works. A huge building stood with two great waterwheels of twenty and thirty foot in diameter, sadly destroyed by fire. There were three more fulling mills in Darshill and a large factory complex five stories high in Bowlish.

Many of the workers in the mills were children, some as young as five years old. They had some of the most awful jobs including cleaning the wool cloth by trampling on it in vats of fullers earth and urine. It was then washed in clean water before being hung on the drying racks. There is still evidence of the terraced walls of the rack fields alongside the A371 road to Wells where the cloth was hung on tenterhooks, the name derived from the tenting or tensioning of the fabric. It was after the time of the Black Death in 1348 that the development of the area began and, in the 1400s, the building of corn

mills and fulling mills changed the landscape.

In the mid 1500s there was an influx of Huguenot weavers into Britain, French silk weavers who brought fine cloth and varieties of colour to the industry.

However, despite all the obvious prosperity, there was unrest in the 18<sup>th</sup> century with pay strikes and demonstrations and in 1775, following the introduction of the Spinning Jenny, there were riots at Bunkers Hill, the site of the old Norah Fry Hospital, where two rioters were killed.

This was a dark period for the industry and the population of the area declined by 40%.

In the late 1700s the area was given a new lease of life with the introduction of silk weaving and by 1812 there were four silk mills in Darshill and one in Coombe Lane owned by Nalder and Hardisty. Among the workforce again were young children, some from the local workhouse. They worked over thirty hours a week, were paid 5d from which they paid 1d towards their education.

The society is focusing its research into the industrial landscape of Shepton Mallet which was concentrated along the banks of the River Sheppey, at Longbridge, Bowlish and Darshill. A snapshot of the projects progress in the first year includes twelve properties surveyed, nine archaeological surveys underway, an archaeological dig planned, a Spring biodiversity walk, three school events with two more planned along with Summer walking tours and a fete. By the project end date of August 2020, the society are looking to deliver a printed summary of their work, a searchable website with photo gallery, a public realm heritage trail, hopefully, linked to the existing Shepton Mallet Town heritage trail and engagement and learning events in communities and schools e.g. Collet Day and links into Key Stage 2 Geography and History.

There is no doubt that the history of these areas of Shepton Mallet is significant and has left a legacy of some fine buildings that remain as a monument to the industry that once dominated the area.

You can find out more about the work of the Darshill and Bowlish Conservation Society and the history of the area by visiting the society website [Project Website](#)

### Outings

|                  |                     |  |
|------------------|---------------------|--|
| <b>September</b> | <b>Wednesday 4</b>  | <b>RSPB Shapwick Heath Nature Reserve</b><br>No charge for entry, parking £3.00 per car                                  |
|                  | <b>Wednesday 25</b> | <b>National Arboretum, Westonbirt</b> Gloucestershire  |
| <b>October</b>   | <b>Wednesday 9</b>  | <b>Donkey Sanctuary, Sidmouth</b><br>Minibus £13, free entrance to sanctuary   |
|                  | <b>Thursday 17</b>  | <b>Wincanton Races</b><br>First race day of the new season   |
|                  | <b>Wednesday 23</b> | <b>Horsehair Factory, Castle Cary</b><br>John Boyd Textile Ltd weavers of horsehair since 1837. Car sharing, entrance £6 |

For forms and details see Janet's emails. Please contact Janet if you have any ideas for future outings.

### Thursday Coffee Mornings

#### **Dobbies Restaurant, Shepton Mallet 10.30-12**

All members and non-members are welcome every Thursday morning, except on the first Thursday when we have a Speaker Meeting. Join in for a coffee and friendly chat on **September 12, 19 and 26.**

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### 3. Members' Corner

#### GET WELL SOON

To dear Bill, everyone sends their very Best Wishes for your quick recovery in hospital and a speedy return home because we are all missing you and your cheekiness!

Also to Beryl, who fell and hurt her wrist and was unable to come along and volunteer at the show as she had hoped. We missed you too and you are now first volunteer on the list for 2020!



#### **Welcome to all new members.**

If this is your first newsletter, we hope you enjoy reading it and find it informative and useful. Your ideas for future editions are always welcome. If you would like to contribute to Members' Corner please send your items of interest, letters, Castaway choices, articles, reminiscences, local history, photographs, events etc to the editor by 20th of the month.

## Castaway

Our Castaway this month is Frank Booth



1. I am Sailing - Rod Stewart
2. The Road and the Miles to Dundee - Max Boyce
3. I'm Gonna Be (500 miles) - The Proclaimers
4. The Flower of Scotland - The Corries
5. Bridge over Troubled Waters - Simon and Garfunkel
6. Mull of Kintyre - The Band of the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards
7. The Bricklayers Song - The Corries

My luxury item would have to be - A case of Scottish whisky!

My choice of book would be - A Scots Hairst by Lewis Grassic Gibbon (essays and short stories of rural Scottish life) (Hairst is a Scottish word for harvest or produce of the land)

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## 4. U3A Regional and National News

**Regional** See Photographic Competition details below

### National

11-13 **Summer School Royal Agricultural University, Cirencester**  
September Tuesday 10 September to Friday 13 September 2019. [See U3A website](#) for courses and booking

Full listings and details of all national events see What's On in Third Age Matters magazine, visit the website [www.u3a.org.uk](http://www.u3a.org.uk) or sign up to the U3A email newsletter.

**FLASH!**

**BANG!**

**WALLOP!**

### WHAT A PHOTOGRAPIC COMPETITION!

Entries are invited for the NSA (North Somerset Association of U3As)

The closing date for the area competition is 1 March 2020 with the exhibition and prize giving on the 17 April 2020 at Wells Museum.

Entries from Shepton Mallet snappers should be sent to Maggie Hardy, Secretary SMU3A (see below) by 31 December 2019 so that our members can select the best 10 to go forward to the final judging in Wells, that gives everyone plenty of time. There will be a fee of £1 per entrant.

The rules are quite simple:

The competition is open to all U3A members in the NSA region.

1. Entries must be original work and not previously entered into a photographic competition.
2. Copyright remains with the owner who, by entering the competition, grants a licence for the purposes of the competition (including publicity)
3. A maximum of 10 entries per U3A
4. The Judge's decision will be final.

**Class 1: Prints** - colour or black and white - can be taken by camera, mobile phone etc. and should be mounted on a maximum sized mount of 11.3/4" x 8. ¼". Any size of photograph is permitted.

**Class 2: Digital Images** on CD or memory stick. Colour or black and white. These should be presented either on a CD Or memory stick.

The competition's theme is **Forms in Nature** which covers a wide spectrum.

It will culminate with an exhibition of entries on Friday 17 April 2020 from 2-4pm at Wells Museum, then the results will be announced and the prizes awarded.

Entry to the exhibition and prize giving will be £2 (payable on the day) and will include refreshments.

There will be updates in future newsletters and for more information please contact the Secretary (Maggie Hardy).

Please support your Shepton U3A and let's have a good show of pictures. You don't need to be Lord Snowdon, just pictures which fit the theme and you have enjoyed taking and looking at, which have made you smile, laugh - or cry!

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## 5. Group News

### New Group Short Tennis



We are grateful to Eric Wehrfritz who has been instrumental in trialling a short tennis group this summer. Eric was able to secure the services of Lester Holley who provided the court, all the equipment and a course of six weekly lessons at no cost. Approximately 10 members took advantage and more have expressed an interest but were unable to make the lessons.

**We are now able to add it as a new group for Shepton U3A.**

Sessions will be weekly at 2pm on Wednesdays at the Tennis Club on Frithfield Lane. All members of U3A are welcome to just turn up, all equipment is provided and coaching/instruction is available if required. The group will also be able to play during the winter months at the Leisure Centre. Again, many thanks to Eric for all the hard work he has done over the summer months to get this new group off the ground.

### **Singing for Pleasure** by Val Sherring

I have now completed four sessions as group leader and pianist for the Singing for Pleasure group that takes place on the 4th Friday of the month at the Salvation Army Hall, 10.30am to 11.30am. I arrived for my first meeting in April with some trepidation as Alison was a very hard act to follow and I hoped that at least some members would turn up either through loyalty or curiosity! I needn't have worried as one by one the regulars came walking through the door eager to start singing.

I have made a few changes to the repertoire but mostly we use the two song books that Alison used plus folk songs and older ones that are out of copyright. We still have a 'round' or something similar half way through to break up the morning. Sometimes this works well and sometimes it doesn't but we have fun finding out.

Alison always stressed that this group is NOT a choir and it is not necessary to be able to read music. A love of singing is all that is needed. There are no auditions, homework or questions and answers. Also, when I make a mistake playing the piano, I expect everyone to carry on singing and definitely not bring it to my attention! That would make me more stressed and I would then make more mistakes which wouldn't be very helpful.

There is plenty of room to accommodate more members. I will wait in anticipation to hear from some of you? We have had our usual break in August and will resume on Friday, 27 September.

I would add that Derek has been invaluable in assisting me with the administrative tasks, keeping the register and handing out the music. It would have been helpful if he could deputise for me in playing the piano as well but I suppose I can't have everything! Derek and I have known each other since 1981 when we were both members of the Centre Light Opera Club and at one stage he was the chairman and I was the secretary so we go back a long way. We have found we still work well together just as we did all those years ago. Thank you Derek for lightening the load.

### Strollers

We were able to stroll over Charlton Viaduct and admire the views for our August outing which was well attended by 18 members.

The now defunct Grade II\* listed Victorian railway bridge, is currently used for Kilver Court staff car parking. It is not usually accessible to visitors but we had been granted permission and were accompanied by Geoff, the informative garden tours guide. The bridge was built



usually accessible to visitors but we had been granted permission and were accompanied by Geoff, the informative garden tours guide. The bridge was built



in the 1870s and opened in 1874 to carry the Somerset and Dorset Joint Railway. It carried the railway over the River Sheppey and was closed in 1966 by Dr. Beeching.

Originally, the stone bridge carried a single railway track but was widened to carry a second track in 1892 using red bricks. It has a total length of 317 yards (290m) and is 45 feet (14m) high. The 27 arches, each of which has a span of 28 feet (8.5 m) are built on a slight curve and the gradient falls at 1 in 55 from each end to the midpoint. To cope with the curve the arches are strengthened at intervals by buttresses.

We heard the tale of the station master at Evercreech Junction, who having waved off the last train of the day to Bath, would jump on his bike and cycle back home in that direction and always arrive before the train, hence its other name 'S and D - slow and dirty'!

Some of our local members could remember using and seeing the trains and Frank was especially pleased to check and see that his house and car were safe and sound just across the way!

### French Group by Sue Dunne

Sadly, our French Tutor, Valerie Delaitre-Smith has returned home to France, she will be much missed. Valerie led the Beginners and Intermediate French classes for over two years

and the groups have now had to close. Thank you Valerie for all your hard work and patience!

### **More ways to enjoy your U3A**

As you will have noted we have sadly had to close our French conversation group after 18 months due to Valerie's move back to France. Groups come and go and this is a fact of U3A life. Fortunately, we have been able to recruit new leaders to take over most of our groups recently as and when the need has arisen. So, if you know anyone who is a good French conversationalist let us know, merci!

Therefore, the committee were delighted to receive an offer from Eric Wehrfritz to investigate the provision of Short Tennis as a SMU3A activity. Eric was able to secure the services of Lester Holley who provided the court, all the equipment and a course of 6 weekly lessons at no cost. Approximately 10 members took advantage and more have expressed an interest but were unable to make the lessons.

Community facilities in Shepton Mallet are scarce, valuable and easily lost through lack of use or financial support and redevelopment plans are always possible (the recent successful campaign to save the town centre library being a case in point).

When the committee received a proposal of 12 months use of the court as well as nets, rackets and balls to include all U3A members for £50, it offered an opportunity that we considered very carefully. Short tennis, full tennis, disability tennis and junior tennis will all be available to benefit our members and their immediate family as part of this package. It is hoped that indoor facilities will be available for winter use at the SM Leisure Centre but any costs for this will be borne by the players on the day.

We have to go forward to grow our U3A but can only do so when our members engage with the committee and approach us with ideas and also volunteer to take a leading role. So, after consultation and discussion the committee voted unanimously to accept the proposal. This does not set a precedent and the cost will be designated as a "start-up" cost, which is allowable and compares to the investment in music books for the Singing for Pleasure Group and is considerably less than the cost each month of hiring the Chamber at MDC for our speaker meetings.

This is a new venture and will be reviewed by the committee throughout the year. At the moment we hold our committee meetings at the leisure centre and increasing our profile both there and with other community groups in Shepton Mallet may help towards the planning and provision of exercise classes or some type of dancing classes which other members have requested in the past. We are all aware that our age group is always being urged to take more exercise and encouraged to keep fit and active.

More details will be available shortly as insurance and safeguarding issues are agreed but if you are interested in joining this group or finding out more, please see the group contact details at the end of the newsletter or contact us via our website. You will need to be registered with the Tennis Club (name and contact details only) to play and Eric will be able to pass these details on with your consent.

I visited to see the group in action recently and ended up playing, it was good fun and not too many twinges the next day! I was able to speak to Lester and would encourage you to have a look at see for yourself what is on offer.

If circumstances mean you are unable to take advantage of the above, then I am still looking for my next "Castaway" and their choice of 7 pieces of music, a luxury item and a book to take to our U3A Desert Island.



This month's "Castaway" (see page 5) really enjoyed the process of thinking through their choice of discs and whittling the selection down to just 7. I think the luxury item was probably much easier to settle upon!

Do please contact any committee member with your selection at any time.

Finally, if neither sport nor music is of interest to you, then further details of the North Somerset Association photographic competition are in this issue (also page 5).

So in whichever direction your interests, skills and talent lie, I hope you can find something within SMU3A to enjoy. Liz Nash

## Walking

### First walk in August

A group of 18 set off from Timsbury to explore the quiet Priston Brook valley, a walk of 4.75 miles. Our route began with walking through fields of sheep and cows, the brook at low summer levels. We called into Priston church, a grade I listed building, remodelled by Sir Gilbert Scott in 1859 from the original Norman structure. A roman coffin found in 1917 of a woman buried nearby is on show in the porch. The villages of Timsbury and Priston were both past coal mining areas, the last pit closing in 1930.



### Second walk in August

John and Mary took us around the fields, woods and lanes dipping in and out along the East Mendip Way near their home at Cranmore. The weather could have been kinder but we were able to enjoy the beautiful views and secret sunken lanes. Some even caught a glimpse of a deer near Temple House Farm. Tea, coffee and soft drinks were provided for those who took a picnic back to eat at Mary and John's.



If you are interested in joining any group please use the website enquiry form at [sheptonmalletu3a.org.uk](http://sheptonmalletu3a.org.uk) to find out if there are any vacancies or details about our activities.



### U3A stand at the Mid Somerset Show

#### Monthly Activities

|                  | 1st  | 2nd   | 3rd   | 4th   |
|------------------|--|---|---|---|
| <b>Monday</b>    | Walking  | Discussion<br>10.30am<br>Bowls 11am<br>Art 2-4pm  | Walking<br>Woolcraft 2.30pm                         | Bowls 11am<br>Art 2-4pm   |
| <b>Tuesday</b>   | Book Group<br>10.15am<br>Bridge 2pm<br>Table Tennis 2pm<br>Flower Club 2pm | Collectables 11am<br>Table Tennis 2pm<br>Bridge 2pm<br>Needlecraft 2pm<br>Recorder Playing<br>2pm | Bridge 2pm<br>Table Tennis 2pm                      | Family History<br>10.30am<br>Table Tennis 2pm<br>Bridge 2pm<br>Needlecraft 2pm<br>Recorder Playing<br>2pm |
| <b>Wednesday</b> | Short Tennis 2pm   | Short Tennis 2pm<br>Music Appreciation<br>2pm   | Short Tennis 2pm                                    | Short Tennis 2pm  |
| <b>Thursday</b>  | Speaker Meeting<br>10.30am   | Coffee 10.30am<br>Scrabble 2pm  | Shorter Walks<br>Coffee 10.30am<br>Strollers 1.30pm | Coffee 10.30am<br>Scrabble 2pm  |
| <b>Friday</b>    | Table Tennis 2pm   | Table Tennis 2pm  | Munch Club<br>Table Tennis 2pm                      | Singing for Pleasure<br>10.30-12<br>Table Tennis 2pm  |

The table above represents the usual meeting dates for groups. The actual dates may vary. Writing for Pleasure meets fortnightly at 2pm on a Thursday. Bus Pass Trippers travel on Saturdays. You should contact group leaders for confirmation of dates. For more

information on any of our groups visit the website [www.sheptonmalletu3a.org.uk](http://www.sheptonmalletu3a.org.uk) or contact the individual group leader below.

### Group Contacts

|                                 |                               |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <b>Art</b>                      | Gill Davies                   |
| <b>Books</b>                    | Sue Dunne                     |
| <b>Bowls</b>                    | Frank Booth                   |
| <b>Bridge</b>                   | Graham McCartney              |
| <b>Bus Pass Trippers</b>        | Janet Murray                  |
| <b>Collectables</b>             | Liz Nash                      |
| <b>Discussion</b>               | Malcolm Weeks                 |
| <b>Family History</b>           | Keith Taylor                  |
| <b>Flowers</b>                  | Freda Briars                  |
| <b>Munch Club</b>               | Maggie Fowle                  |
| <b>Music</b>                    | Catherine Wylie               |
| <b>Appreciation</b>             | Sandra Freeborn               |
| <b>Needlecraft</b>              | Di Gommo<br>Liz Weeks         |
| <b>Recorders</b>                | Sandra Morris<br>Julie Newman |
| <b>Scrabble</b>                 | Di Gommo                      |
| <b>Singing for<br/>Pleasure</b> | Val Sherring                  |
| <b>Shorter Walks</b>            | Jenny Wehrfritz               |
| <b>Short Tennis</b>             | Eric Wehrfritz                |
| <b>Solos</b>                    | Janet Murray                  |
| <b>Strollers</b>                | Lyn Hook                      |
| <b>Table Tennis<br/>1 and 2</b> | Peter Howell                  |
| <b>Walking</b>                  | Liz Weeks                     |
| <b>Woolcraft</b>                | Pam Mitchell                  |
| <b>Writing for<br/>Pleasure</b> | Catherine Wylie               |

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### 6. Committee Members

**Chair**  
**Vice Chair and Publicity**  
**Secretary**  
**Treasurer**  
**Groups Co-ordinator**  
**Membership Secretary**  
**Newsletter**  
**Outings**  
**Speakers**  
**Website**

Thank you to all our contributors this month. Please send all your items for inclusion in the next newsletter by 20<sup>th</sup> of the month. Thank you.