

ROYSTON u3a news

OCTOBER 2026 Issue 52



Could you help us bring a new interest group to life?

As you know, Royston u3a is run entirely by members, for members. Every single one of our interest groups started because someone wanted to share a hobby they loved.

You absolutely don't need to be an expert or a teacher to get involved! All it takes is a willingness to bring people together and share something you enjoy.

Take a quick moment to think about your favourite pastimes. Do you love chess, dominoes, speaking a foreign language, or chatting about films and music? Whatever your passion, chances are other members would love to share it with you.

Starting a group, whether it's a cosy circle of four or a larger gathering, is much easier than you might think, and it is incredibly rewarding.

If you have a spark of an idea, we would love to hear from you! Please get in touch with our Groups Co-ordinator for a friendly chat to explore the possibilities.

Jackie Gellert, Chair

The Chair's Forum - what is it?

I wanted to write to update you on something I have been deeply involved with over the past three years.

Back then, another local u3a Chair and I noticed a real need for an open, independent platform where u3a Chairs from across the country could connect directly.

We wanted a space to openly discuss the shared challenges and opportunities we all face, completely separate from the formal oversight of the Third Age Trust.

What started as a simple idea quickly mushroomed. We were soon joined by two fantastic Chairs from other regions to work with us and run it, and today,

our independent Chairs' Forum has grown into something truly remarkable.

Out of the 1,000 u3as across the UK, our forum now has 550 members. We meet monthly via Zoom to share practical ideas, troubleshoot problems, and support one another as much as possible in running our respective u3a's.

Our most recent Zoom session was an incredible success, drawing 112 Chairs from all corners of the country. The entire session focused on a topic close to all of our hearts: how we can better raise awareness of the u3a movement and show people what we are all about.

The discussion was absolutely amazing and sparked a wealth of brilliant, fresh ideas on how we can work to attract new members and keep our u3a thriving.

While the Third Age Trust isn't always entirely comfortable with our independent status, maintaining this beyond their control grass-roots space was exactly why we set it up. The feedback from the Chairs who attend has been incredibly rewarding, and it proves just how valuable this mutual support is for the health and future of our local u3as.

Jackie Gellert, Chair

We need help maintaining our website

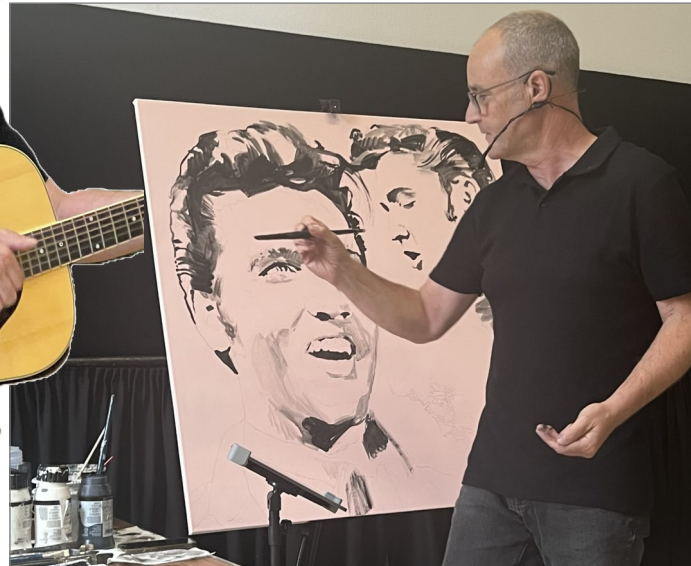
Royston u3a is looking for a volunteer to help maintain its website. While the platform software itself is managed centrally by a dedicated support team using [u3a SiteWorks](#) (a WordPress-based platform), the local team remains entirely responsible for managing its own specific content such as updating details of interest groups and publicising monthly meetings and events. We would also like to set up a Facebook page to attract new members to Royston u3a.

If you would be willing to assist us and have the necessary experience as an IT/web person who can help to maintain our website, we would love to hear from you by contacting either Jackie Gellert jackieroystonu3a@gmail.com or Richard Dajda redampelmann@gmail.com

JUNE MONTHLY MEETING

Getting all shook up
with **ELVIS**

PAUL LILLIE
performance artist.



We've all got memories of Elvis, the undisputed king of Rock 'n' Roll.

Paul Lillie has been a fan since the age of ten after hearing Elvis' song *Old Shep*.

"I was mesmerised by his voice and that inspired me to paint a picture of Elvis," he said. "I sent it to Blue Peter and actually got a Blue Peter badge."

In a unique tribute Paul conjured up the spirit of Elvis with words, music and painting in a riveting presentation to a packed June meeting.

Performing songs on his guitar and painting large scale portraits of Elvis, Paul traced his incredible life and legacy.

Growing up in a poor family, singing gospel music in church, then moving to Memphis, home of the blues, Elvis developed his own flamboyant style.



"ELVIS IS IN THE BUILDING"

As a musical tribute artist Paul has performed throughout Europe and Asia.

After his first recording, *That's Alright Mama*, on local radio, he was spotted by talent manager Colonel Tom Parker and the road to stardom beckoned.

By 1958 Elvis was the undisputed king of Rock 'n' Roll, but problems were already mounting that led to his untimely death at just 42 years old.

Paul's unique presentation combined talk with live singing, playing guitar and painting.

With a huge workload to keep the money rolling in, he took far too many prescription drugs, gained weight and became increasingly depressed.

He had an extremely close relationship with his mother and was never the same after she died.

"His lifelong ambition was to be a movie star and he showed great potential as an actor," said Paul. "Although he achieved fame and fortune on a massive scale he was depressed about his film career and that he didn't achieve a Hollywood Oscar."

"His life had all the elements of a classic tragedy. A meteoric rise from rags to riches, then you see the decline at the end."

Pam Dajda

JULY MONTHLY MEETING

Life in the Household Cavalry



KEITH BALDWIN

Keith Baldwin is known as the 'Tall fellow' and his 6ft 4ins frame made him ideal for a ceremonial career with the Army.

He joined the Household Cavalry in the 1960s and gave us a humorous glimpse into life at the Cavalry's ceremonial home in Hyde Park.

"It takes four months to train a horse and four months to train the soldier to ride well, especially when you're wearing a heavy uniform that can only be described as a Christmas tree," he said.

Trooping the Colour, the state opening of Parliament and state visits would not be the same without the pomp and pageantry of the Mounted Regiment.

The Cavalry's prestige and horsemanship are down to endless rehearsals and hours spent preparing horses for parade, but all the effort is well worth it.

"It's a mega million-dollar earner so it does play a significant role," said Keith.

It's a demanding life and the 220 horses need spells of rest and relaxation, so they are put out to grass in winter and go to the seaside at Holkham in summer.

Enjoying time off at Holkham..



During his entertaining talk Keith gave us details about the history of the regiment which goes back to 1660 when the Lifeguards were formed to protect the new king Charles II.

Charles preferred black horses and the tradition has stuck to this day, although trumpeters ride greys to be easily seen.

"I'm all for learning facts and figures and having a bit of a laugh at the same time," said Keith.

Pam Dajda

A woman trumpeter on parade.



EVENTS & OUTINGS

Exploring Battersea Power Station



Royston u3a at Battersea Power Station.

Stepping into the history of Battersea Power Station is a great experience - even with a few glitches along the way.

Twenty members set out in style, thanks to an upgrade by Richmonds to a luxury coach, writes outings group leader Mike Cock.

The transformation of the art deco coal-fired power station into an exciting shopping and leisure destination is truly impressive.

The group had originally planned a tour of the iconic Art Deco Control Room A, but sadly it was cancelled at short notice for a special function.

Battersea Control Room B.

Spectacular views of London from the top of the chimney lift.

"We saw black limousines on the road outside and guessed that a foreign embassy had booked and taken precedence over us!" said Mike.

However, the group had a great audio tour of Control Room B, now a cocktail bar, preceded by a complimentary cocktail.

"The recording featured workers from the Power Station and we heard exciting tales of its past history as we were conducted round all the dials and switches still in place," said Mike.

The high spot for many was the Chimney Lift experience, but this was also nearly

cancelled due to routine maintenance. Luckily this was completed just in time.

After touring an exhibition of the power station's history, members joined the short queue for the lift, 109 metres high.

The entire lift is fitted into one of Battersea's four famous chimneys and pops out at the top, giving tremendous views over London and up and down the Thames.

Finally, it was time to catch an Uber Ferry for a trip down the Thames before heading home after an eventful and enjoyable day.

Many thanks to Mike Cock for organising the outing.



HISTORY GROUP - JULY

Duxford - a tale of two sites



Dr JOHN LEWIS

Duxford Airfield is steeped in history and has been transformed into Europe's largest air museum.

But it started out divided by the A505 with two very different stories, as Duxford guide Dr John Lewis explained to a packed history group meeting.

The story began during the First World War when the 223-acre site was chosen to train Royal Flying Corps crews. Construction began in 1917 with three hangars on the south side. These dull, functional buildings were designed by Army architects and most are still standing.

In the interwar years the north side was developed, with new living quarters and domestic buildings created by more imaginative urban architects.

They changed the emphasis to form over function and in came neo-Georgian styles, surrounded by trees and greenery.

John took us on a virtual tour of the north site, pointing out the married quarters where Douglas Bader lived and how the emphasis was on sports provisions.

"The architect wanted the best possible buildings for his officers. The men saw these facilities as rather good."

So much so that Duxford was described as "a squash playing organisation with flying on the side."

During the Second World War Duxford played a prominent role during the Battle of Britain but it rarely got attacked.

"You've got pretty much the best-preserved RAF base there is as a training station going back to 1918 and over the road pretty much all the inter-war development," said John.



DUXFORD



Form on the north side. The Officers' Mess front entrance.



Function on the south side.

CURRENT AFFAIRS GROUP

Current Affairs round-up



As usual the group has been having spirited discussions, from Andy Burnham becoming PM to fears about AI, as Sarah Hillman reports.

The **September** meeting was lively but worrying. We quickly agreed to discuss AI and its threat to humanity and fortunately had some well-informed members to explain it.

It is already too late to slow down or stop AI. It can think far faster than we can and has already learned how to break through IT walls designed to constrain it. The danger to mankind is that it will divert resources (water, electricity) and distribution, such as foodstuffs, on which we depend.

"AI might regard mankind as an infestation on the planet." It cannot be turned off, is spread across millions of computer chips and designed to keep running even if bits of it fail.

Could mankind now manage without computers? President Trump reckons whoever wins on AI wins overall, so a policy of restraint by the USA is unlikely.

There was no shortage of opinions and lots of humour when we met in **July**, on the same day Andy Burnham became Prime Minister.

Some were uneasy as the electorate had no say. Will he fix the UK's £110bn of debt? Defence planned spending is a challenge. He has only two years before the next election. He leaves Greater Manchester with £1.34bn of debt – more than any other city, and with rough-sleeping growing again. His "land tax" to replace rates includes gardens. On oil, he may reactivate drilling in two fields, which is good for government finances, but bad for Net Zero.

Everyone chipped in at a spirited **June** meeting.

We admired the way Ukraine was fighting back with drones, noting Russia's difficulty in replacing lost troops. Peace between Iran and the US depends on Israel ceasing to occupy south Lebanon, but this is unlikely as the Israel - Hezbollah conflict continues - no resolution is foreseeable yet.

Some under-16s are likely to get round the social media ban and tell others how. Nevertheless, demand for youth sports and social clubs will probably increase, but Scouts and Guides already lack volunteers to run these. Should the government sponsor these?

The next meeting is on Monday October 19th at 3pm for 3.15pm at the Old Bull Inn.

HISTORY GROUP - SEPTEMBER

The Enchantress of Numbers

The inspirational Ada Lovelace was a mathematical genius so ahead of her time that her work went largely unnoticed during her life.

Now, 150 years after her death, she is recognised as a pioneer in the development of computers.

History group speaker Alan Osborne described her extraordinary achievements and the amount she packed into her short and colourful life.

The only legitimate daughter of Lord Byron, Ada was born in 1815 and brought up by her strict mother in a noble household. She dedicated herself to studying, with a

talent for mathematics and mechanics.

At the age of 17 she met inventor Charles Babbage who was working on a prototype of a calculating machine and became intrigued by his ideas.

"Ada was the first to recognise the machine had applications beyond pure calculation and realised its full potential as a 'thinking machine,'" said Alan.

She was in her element working with eminent scientists but was dogged by ill health and was only 36 when she died.

Ada's contributions are revered by today's scientific

community. Her papers are in the Bodleian Library and were read by Alan Turing during the war. He was so impressed that he recommended her work.

"Steve Jobs said she was so bright that if she were alive today she would put him out of work," said Alan.

She had a colourful private life – liked a drink, got into debt gambling and there were rumours of affairs.

But above all Ada Lovelace was a visionary way ahead of her time. "I think she was a wonderful woman," said Alan.

Pam Dajda

BIRD WATCHING GROUP

What's that bird?

If you'd like to find out more about birds in the countryside and improve your identification skills the Bird Watching group could be the answer.

The group has recently started up again and members have been getting out and about enjoying summer outings.

Group leader Stuart Jones believes that a growing interest in bird watching is largely down to the Merlin bird identification app.

"I'm finding that it's prompting greater interest and I know lots of younger people are becoming more aware of bird identification," he said.

The group's most recent outing was to Lackford Lakes, a wildlife oasis of reedbed, lakes, meadow and woodland near Bury St Edmunds. Snipe, lapwing, sandpiper and little egret were among a wide variety of waterfowl spotted by members.

Previous trips have been to Fen Drayton Lakes, and Little Paxton and Fowlmere nature reserves.

"We combine having a nice walk and conversation with different people, while at the same time identifying many species of birds," he said.

The group meets on the last Friday of the month at 10am and new members are welcomed. Contact Stuart Jones on the groups section of the website if you are interested in joining.

Common Snipe



Northern Lapwing



Lackford Lakes Nature Reserve, a wildlife oasis formed from former sand and gravel pits, just 10 minutes outside Bury St Edmunds.

UKULELE GROUP

Learn ukulele the easy way

Come and try the uke and have fun with a friendly group of strummers.

That's the message from the ukulele group who would love more members - and absolute beginners are welcomed.

"I'd never played anything whatsoever before I joined," says group leader John Bishop.

"Our musical director John Fowl has got lots of spare ukes and members of the group help you. It's good fun and we have a laugh and chat."

The 16 strong group meets on Tuesday mornings at Coombes Community Centre and often entertains at nursing homes in Royston, Barkway, Melbourn and Baldock.

"It goes down well. We get to play music they like to remember and they'll start singing along with us," said John.

The extensive repertoire includes everything from Big Rock Candy Mountain to Elvis and Buddy Holly medleys.

"We've got our very own exclusive, 'The Blackpool Belle'. As far as we know we're the only ukulele group south of the Watford Gap to play it. So that's our claim to fame!"

There's a relaxed approach to enjoying yourself strumming away, although John warns it can get addictive.

"One member is on holiday in Portugal but she's taken her uke with her."

Contact John Bishop via the website if you're interested in joining.

FIVE MILE WALKS GROUP

Walking in the rain

The Five Mile Walkers have been out and about making the most of the summer heatwave - but it was a different story back in June.

An intrepid group set out from The Feathers at Wadesmill through Youngsbury Park, taking a path to Barwick Ford, then continuing to the hamlet of Cold Christmas.

"The dark clouds that threatened rain decided to dump what felt like a month's total on to our

heads," said group leader Eric Heaton.

"Our waterproofs were no longer waterproof and nothing that we wore was dry by the time we reached the Feathers for lunch. We offered to cancel our visit to the pub, but the friendly staff insisted that we should come in to dry off.

"We sat in a separate area of the pub, gently steaming, and after a welcome lunch were ready to face the day again. My boots should finally be dry after three

days! We still enjoyed the walk, the company and the lunch."

Thanking everyone who came along, Eric added: "In 10 years it's the worst weather that I've experienced on a walk."

New members are welcomed along for hopefully less soggy autumnal walks. The next walk starts from the Axe and Compasses at Arkesden on Wednesday October 14th at 10am. Contact Eric Heaton for more details.



Before the rains came down.

THEATRE GROUP OUTING

Fasten your seatbelts for The Car Man

Twenty four members of the Theatre group had a great afternoon at the Milton Keynes theatre when we went to see Matthew Bourne's The Car Man.

It has been described as a gripping, cinematic dance thriller featuring danger and desire!

Loosely based on Bizet's ever-popular opera, it is set in the late 1950s in an American mid-west garage,

it followed the arrival of a new young man to the town of Harmony which certainly caused a great deal of chaos among the other young lads and girls. A story of passion, betrayal, lust and greed followed.

Amongst all this was a display of breath-taking dancing. The precision was immaculate and some of the positions were truly amazing! The sets were

superb and cleverly arranged.

There were some group members who had probably been dragged along by wives, but they admitted that they had thoroughly enjoyed the spectacle!

Thank you to everyone who came along again and supported the Theatre group. I hope to see you all again soon.

Deirdre Smith

Dates for your diary

OCTOBER 2026

Tuesday 27, 2pm at Royston Town Hall and via Zoom

ONE OF OUR OWN.

Guest Speaker: DAVID DUKER

The remarkable war-time story of Battle of Britain fighter pilot, Squadron Leader Victor Ekins MBE DFC a young man from a Huntingdon village, who rose through the ranks to become admired and respected by those who served with him and who found himself at the epicentre of one of the biggest turning points in recent history.

NOVEMBER 2026

Tuesday 24, 2pm at Royston Town Hall and via Zoom

BOHEMIAN RHAPSODY: THE STORY OF 'QUEEN'.

Guest Speaker: MARTIN ORKIN

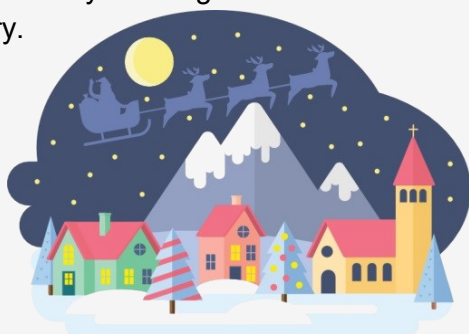
Martin Orkin, the noted music author and historian who previously delivered brilliantly researched and entertaining presentations on The Beatles and Simon & Garfunkel, returns to chronicle the meteoric rise and musical history of the legendary rock band Queen - Freddie Mercury, Brian May, Roger Taylor, and John Deacon.

DECEMBER 2026

GONE ON HOLIDAY!

No December monthly meeting.

Back in January.



JANUARY 2027

Tuesday 26, 2pm at Royston Town Hall and via Zoom

LIFE OF A COUNTER TERRORISM DETECTIVE INSPECTOR

Guest Speaker: ANNE LAWRENCE

Anne is a retired detective inspector with 33 years service in the Metropolitan Police. She will share first-hand accounts of investigating some of the world's most notorious terrorist plots including the Shoe Bomber, the London Bombings, and the plot to blow up the airlines.

Anne's extensive career took her to global hotspots like Afghanistan. In 2011 she was awarded the prestigious Queen's Police Medal (QPM) for her distinguished career.

Easy Guide to Interest Groups

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
AM		Golf Croquet	Fitness	Book Club 3	Walkers: Strollers	Bird Watching
		Philosophy	Seated Exercise	Clay Shooting		Book Club 2
			Tai Chi 1	Singing for Fun		Stitching for Fun
				Walkers: Five Mile		
PM	Solo Sundays	Art	MONTHLY MEETING last Tuesday of month	Book Club 1	Bridge	Petanque/Boules
		Current Affairs	History	Wine Appreciation	Canasta	
		French Conversation	Ukulele		Golf	
			Yarn & Chat		Tai Chi 2	
					Quiz	
EVE						

For frequency and contact details about all interest groups please see the chart on the final page or check our website for more information.
Announcements about future Events & Outings and Theatre Trips will be posted on our website when details become available.

Interest Groups

GROUP	DAY	TIME	FREQUENCY	GROUP LEADER
Ancient Greeks & Romans	Mon	3:00pm	Suspended	
Art	Mon	2:30pm	Monthly last Mon	Sylvia Jordan
Bird Watching	Fri	10:00am	Monthly last Fri	Stuart Jones
Book Club 1	Wed	2:00pm	Monthly 1st Wed	Deirdre Smith
Book Club 2	Fri	11:00am	Monthly 1st Fri	Janet Burton
Book Club 3	Wed	10:30am	Monthly last Wed	Elizabeth (Lee) Towers
Bridge	Thurs	3:00pm	2nd and 4th Thurs of month	Peter Rice
Canasta	Thurs	2:00pm	1st and 3rd Thurs of month	Sue Clark
Clay Shooting	Wed	10:00am	Monthly variable	Frank Martin
Current Affairs	Mon	3:15pm	Monthly 3rd Mon	Sarah Hillman
Events & Outings (open to all)	Variable	Variable	Occasional	
Fitness	Tues	9:30am	Weekly	Kathy Hounsell
French Conversation	Mon	2:00pm	1st and 3rd Mon of month	Barbara Fielden
Gardening	Thurs	2:30pm	Suspended	
Golf	Thurs	1:00pm	Weekly	Peter Walden
Golf Croquet	Mon	10:15am	Weekly	Sue Barnes Bishop
History	Tues	2:00pm	Monthly 2nd Tues	Reg Hounsell
Jazz Appreciation	Wed	7:30pm	Suspended	
Petanque / Boules	Fri	2:00pm	Weekly	Jane Dottridge
Philosophy	Mon	10:30am	Monthly last Mon	Stuart Jones
Quiz	Thurs	1:45pm	Monthly 3rd Thurs	Colin Wiggins
Seated Exercise	Tues	10:45am	Weekly	Kathy Hounsell
Singing for Fun	Wed	11:00am	1st and 3rd Wed of month	Jackie Gellert
Solo Sundays	Sun	12:00pm	Monthly 2nd Sun	Brenda Brown
Stitching for Fun	Fri	10:00am	Monthly 2nd Fri	Doreen Howe
Tai Chi 1 (experienced only)	Tues	12:00pm	Weekly	Joan Westcott
Tai Chi 2 (beginners only)	Thurs	1:00pm	Weekly	Joan Westcott
Theatre Trips	Variable	Variable	Variable	Deirdre Smith
Ukulele	Tues	12:00pm	Weekly	John Bishop
Walkers: Five Mile	Wed	9:45am	Monthly 2nd Wed	Eric Heaton
Walkers: Strollers	Thurs	10:15am	2nd and 4th Thurs of month	Christine Cawdell
Wine Appreciation	Wed	2:00pm	Monthly variable	Jackie Gellert
Yarn & Chat	Tues	2:00pm	1st and 3rd Tues of month	Reg Wells

Don't forget to check our website for regularly updated information

Get it in the News

If you're involved in a group why not publicise it in Royston u3a News?
Send in a short report of your latest meeting or outing - photos welcome too -
to Pam Dajda at publicityroystonu3a@gmail.com

Contacts

Please use the Royston u3a website contacts page to email us with any queries.

For general information about Royston u3a please contact the Chair.

For information about interest groups please select the option Interest Groups Co-ordinator stating the group in which you are interested.

For information about membership please select the option Membership Secretary.

For queries about our website or if you wish to send updates please select the option Website and Updates.

Royston u3a Committee

Chair	Jackie Gellert
Treasurer	Barbara Andrew
Secretary	Marion Martin
Membership Secretary	Marion Martin
Minutes Secretary	Sylvia Fuller
Groups Co-ordinator	Joan Westcott
New Members Contact	Mike Cock
Publicity	Pam Dajda
Royston u3a News	Ralph Gellert
Speaker Secretary	David Edwards

u3a | learn
Royston | laugh
live