



WELCOME to the first newsletter of 2025, which means Spring is just around the corner and it's safe to come out of hibernation. It's been a while since I've been able to persuade one of our members to write something about their pre-u3a life but I'm really pleased to invite you to turn to P.3 where Ray Humphries takes us on a trip around the world in his 'Memoirs of a Boy Pilot, Aged 87.' There's an Italian story translated by our Italian Appreciation group which could resonate with many of us and a translation challenge from Spanish Interests. It's a truly cosmopolitan issue this month. As always, thank you to everyone who's contributed, our newsletter wouldn't exist without you!

From the Chair – Gary Murden

Dear Members

As I'm new to the role of Chair, I aim to visit as many groups as I can and over the last couple of months I have managed Industrial Heritage, Photography and Current Affairs and have found all of them friendly, enthusiastic and knowledgeable about their subjects. In fact, I have been so impressed with the ones I have visited, I have decided to join all of them on a more permanent basis.

I've long had a passion for industrial heritage but was surprised to find a forgotten, similar passion for photography. As you know, in the past an interest in photography meant specialised equipment for developing and printing, counting how many shots you took to conserve precious film and then that dreadful wait to see if anything came out! These days most of us carry around a smart phone which can generally produce an acceptable standard of photo, with as many shots as we desire and no waiting to see what comes out. It's incredible to think that hardware and software has reached a point, that with just a little thought, can produce photos that would be worthy of most professionals in the past.

As for current affairs, well who doesn't like a good debate and the subjects covered in my first session ranged from the recent air crash in Washington, how long should older drivers be allowed to drive, the state of the NHS - good or bad? A diverse group of opinions and quite a lot of facts for a change, kept the session going for two hours and it could easily have been longer. In the next couple of months, I'm looking forward to learning about Bridge, trying a bit of Yoga and maybe delving into Crafting. At this rate by the end of this year my diary is going to be very full. Well, done to all the volunteer group leaders and keep up the good work. You are very much appreciated by our members, thank you.

Of course, all of the above can only happen if we have a full committee. This is the last newsletter before the AGM so please give serious consideration to taking your turn. Meetings are currently held 4 or 5 times a year and last about an hour.

Look out for the AGM notice coming out soon, along with the Committee Nomination form, and take the plunge, your support is essential.

MEMBERSHIP MATTERS - Kate Methven

I am delighted to say that we have now got over 260 members, and our membership is still growing into a thriving community.

May I ask that **if any of you change your email address or phone number during the year that you could let me know.** I have now heard of a couple of members who have missed out on receiving emails from Jane, our Secretary – which includes UPDATE - because they haven't passed on their new details. These need to come directly to me: click here [Change Details](#) or go to the web-site. I can then update our central database. Thank You.

A special mention and a very warm welcome to our new members who have joined this year: Brian and Susan Butler, Keith and Julie Cheeseman, Gillian Corbett, Colin Ellis, Janet Payton, Jean Smith, Richard Taylor, Avril Trump and Linda Williams.

Cotswold Link Special Interest Day
Thursday, 12th June 2025

The Pavilion, Hatherley Lane, Cheltenham

**THE INFLUENCE OF MUSIC ON OUR SOCIETY
AND CULTURE**

Go to web-site or click here for more information and to book your place:

[Special Interest Day 2025](#)

Coach Trips – Paul Grierson

I'm pleased to say that there has been sufficient interest to enable me to confirm the trips to Oxford in May and Bradford-on-Avon in June. Seats are still available on both trips. Bookings are still open for Exmouth on the 8th July and Hereford/Hay-on-Wye/Monmouth on the 12th August but more people are needed to be able to confirm these two. Unfortunately, Bridgnorth on the 9th September has had to be cancelled. Refunds for this will be available at the March meeting on the 19th. Go to the web-site for more details: [Day Trip Information](#)

MOTO is NOW **CHAT AND SCREEN**

The aim of the Group is for u3a members to meet once a month for 60 - 90 minutes, to chat on anything. There is no formalised agenda but members are encouraged to add to discussions by showing relevant videos or photos.

We meet at the Community Centre in the skittle alley, which is a quiet environment where members can hear each other clearly. It has TV to connect to a laptop or iPad for showing films.

Unlike other u3a Groups the meetings are held on a Saturday, the last in the month at 11 a.m.

Next meeting: Saturday 29th March.

All are welcome. Please contact the leader: Michael Potter on: 07392595970

Please contact Gary Murden if you're interested in joining a new Scottish Country Dancing Group being suggested by John Marshall:

murdeng71@gmail.com 07340 965083

The Bridge for All Group is going from strength to strength with quite a few members joining since Christmas, the majority being beginners who have taken up the offer of lessons which started on January 9th.

Our usual Thursday afternoon meetings provide the opportunity for anyone who turns up to have a game of bridge. It's all about learning. We meet every Thursday afternoon at the Methodist Church Hall on Chapel Hay Lane. You'll be made very welcome if you'd like to join us. Please feel free to contact me on davebebbington@outlook.com

MEMOIRS OF A BOY PILOT AGED 87



I always wanted to be a pilot and some 70 years ago I was fortunate to win a scholarship to the RAF College Cranwell in Lincolnshire. The 3-year course was tough and there were many times I thought I would fail (some 50% did). But somehow, I beat the system and was awarded my 'wings'. I had hoped for a career as a fighter pilot but fate (or rather the MOD) decreed I would join Bomber Command.

Although I have flown many types of aircraft in my 47 years in the RAF, space allows me only to write about my time flying the mighty Vulcan as a co-pilot, Captain, Flight Commander and ultimately, Squadron Commander.

Naturally, my tour as a co-pilot was mainly operational training with the Cold War heating up. However, I did travel a lot, seeing places I never thought I would visit; Libya, with its sheer contrasts between arid desert and miles of orange groves, then bustling Nairobi in the lush highlands of Kenya. It was from there we flew to Mombasa in Tanganyika to head the flypast at its Independence Day ceremony – en-route flying round the majestic Mount Kilimanjaro. On another exercise we staged through Gan, a beautiful coral island in the Maldives – just large enough to fit in a runway and a few shacks. Not a tourist in sight in those days, only the locals coming to work each morning by brightly painted war canoes!

On then to Malaysia during the 'Indonesian Confrontation'. 4 Vulcans, each capable of carrying 21 x 1000lb bombs. However, we only dropped 4 for practice at an offshore target raft – made a big splash though! We shared the Officers' Mess with an Australian Fighter Squadron at RAAF Butterworth near Penang. Initially, there was a frosty atmosphere; however, one evening a young Aussie took the banter too far so one of our lot, a typically shaped front-row forward, lifted the poor lad above his head and dropped him in the lily pond outside. Cheers from both sides and the ice, metaphorically, melted – a great start to our month's stay.

Penang was an experience – gaudy, exotic, heaving and seedy. Fortunately, this is still vivid in

my mind as all my colour slides, like me, have disintegrated with time.

I then became a captain with my own crew and very soon, in 1962, we were confronted by the reality of our role – the Cuban Missile Crisis – when, for 10 days the V-Force was at total readiness for war with the USSR. Every squadron was at 15 minute's stand-by in crew rooms or at 5 minutes strapped in our cockpits ready to go. Of course, we didn't thank goodness.

I then left Vulcans for a while doing this and that, including an exchange tour with the USAF in Florida, living with the family 100 yards from the beach and flying their supersonic jets – 2 years' holiday with pay!

Later I returned to Vulcan, now as Flight Commander. Same routine but few highlights, however, we did bring back Lincoln Cathedral's Magna Carta from the USA after it had toured the States for their bi-centennial celebrations. It is priceless and uninsurable so the American security team wanted rid of the responsibility of it; I understand the Dean of the cathedral had threatened them with eternal damnation if anything went wrong.

It was handed over to me in a bomb, fire and waterproof box with a flotation aid should we crash in the Atlantic! It stood more chance of survival than us but we all got home safely.

Further promotion followed to Wing Commander of No. 27 Squadron. It was a completely different role, mainly monitoring the movements of the Russian Navy. This led to us flying from Cyprus, Portugal and the Azores. We also had a role in the Pacific, operating from Midway where one could still see evidence of the decisive sea battle in the Second World War. It is also the breeding ground of the Gooney Bird (Albatross), so graceful in the air, ungainly trying to land and scary when you are taking off or landing the Vulcan. But they are brilliant aviators and never hit us.



To close the circle, I retired in Gloucester many years ago, but recently a very good friend in u3a mentioned the Jet Age Museum at Staverton were looking for volunteers. So, I am now reunited with the Vulcan there and this 87-year-old boy pilot is once again boring the pants off anyone who cares to listen.



*How to follow that! Huge thanks to Ray for writing this for us. Your first-hand account of your role during the Cuban Missile Crisis, in particular, brings home the reality of situations like that and thank heavens it was **just** a big splash in Malaysia. Long may you continue to 'bore the pants' off anyone going along to the Jet Age Museum – they must be absolutely thrilled.*

NEWS FROM THE GROUPS

'Hola' from the Spanish Interest Group - Maggie Thomas

We enjoyed our Christmas celebration in December by singing a Spanish carol and enjoying some delicious homemade treats such as: Almond Lemon Cake, Tapas, Tortillas, Rice, Jamon Serrano plus seafood and salad dishes. We even had a cake 'sin gluten' for one member!

In November we read, in Spanish, about the Day of the Dead in Mexico, where families and friends closely link the passing of their loved ones to the continuity of love and faith, making sure they are still part of the festivities. They make skull models, filled with sweets and chocolates, and share food parties at the graves of the deceased, accompanied by stories and tales of their lives, and happy memories. Gifts of flowers, in particular marigolds, are customary.



In January we read a Spanish Article about 'El Día de los Reyes', (the Epiphany), and the processions of the Kings, including how the various celebrations are enjoyed in many different parts of the Hispanic World. We focussed on the villages of Peru and the article we read tells us that their folklore around Christmas and the day of the Kings is grafted onto the original indigenous traditions of South American people. For example, the Dance in Ica, is celebrated with the dances of the Negritos y Los Pallitos. This is an Afro-Peruvian festival of rhythmic dances and songs, reflecting the diverse cultures, involving violins, bells, guitars and vibrant singing in harmony. It goes on over the season in homes, town squares and churches.



In January also we made some light-hearted New Year's resolutions in Spanish. Can you work out what this one is from one of our members? The clue is 'technology'

'Propósitos de Año Nuevo 2025.

¡Para usar el calendario del teléfono para todas las citas!

Necesito hacer esto porque tengo que ir a casa para revisar mi calendario de papal antes de organizar las cosas. ¡Enfurece a mi marido porque tenemos un calendario telefónico conjunto!'

This Spring we will be looking at ways, in Spanish, to avoid fraudsters online; giving fun advice on Valentine's Day; as well as chatting about some recent current affairs in the Spanish speaking media. The photo depicts Andalucia in Spring where one member visits regularly.



CRIBBAGE – Diana Sinden



The Cribbage Group had a shaky start in January 2020 as we met only twice before lockdown called a halt to our afternoons. We restarted in September 2020 and since then have played continually twice a month with a very regular body of players.

Cribbage is an adaptable game in that it can be played by 2, 3 or 4 people at each table, so over time, everyone gets to play the different forms of the game. We play for an hour and then have a break for tea and biscuits before recommencing until approximately 4pm.

We meet at Churchdown Methodist

Church in Chapel Hay Lane on the first and fourth Tuesdays in every month and currently we can accommodate two more players, so if you have not played cribbage for some years and would like to join us, please contact me, Diana Sinden, via the Churchdown u3a website or phone: 01452 698713. We look forward to meeting you!

FAMILY HISTORY – Di Medland

The Family History group meets every month at the Churchdown Library. As there are only 5 computers available, we are restricted to 10 members, who are then able to research and record their findings. Here, we are able to use the computers to access various subscription genealogy sites including Ancestry and Find my past and The British Newspapers Archive as well as the free sites.

At each meeting we discuss our findings and share new ideas about researching and recording our searches. We also exchange names of web sites that we can use at home, mostly for free.

We do hear some interesting stories but some days we find nothing at all. Even more frustrating is when we find the person we have been searching for all afternoon shows up 2 minutes before our computer session finishes - that is the lot of Family Historians! Happy searching.

GARDEN INTERESTS – Ann Knight

We generally start the year by sharing tips and stories on propagating, planting and seed sowing, followed by planting out, nurturing young plants and general garden upkeep. The current trend is towards no-dig gardening and making compost. We learn from each other's' experience and there are usually offerings of spare plants or seeds to share.

In good weather the two-hour session usually includes a wander round my garden which has undergone some changes over the years. Often the lesson will be how not to do it rather than this is how you do it. Occasionally we will meet at the house of another member, but the session always includes a cuppa, biscuit and general chat.

Unfortunately, we are restricted in numbers as we feel we need to meet in a house with a garden, so have no spaces at present. However, if anyone is interested in starting a similar group, we can always share our experience to help you get started.

ITALIAN APPRECIATION – John Hawkswell

The Italian Appreciation Group continues to meet weekly in the Caffe & Vino restaurant in Tewkesbury. We swap stories and play games aimed at encouraging conversation. I thought readers of Update might like to read one of those stories translated into English.

“There is a small village in the Po valley in Northern Italy which is located well away from any large centre of population. On the outskirts of that village there is an old tumbledown cottage called “Bishop's Palace”. Some villagers said that it got its name as a joke, others that it was named by an estate agent wanting to big it up. All we can say for sure is that the present owner, Georgio, is not a priest indeed he cannot remember when he last attended mass. Georgio makes a living selling vegetables grown on his smallholding and fresh eggs with delicious dark yellow yolks. He has a flock of chickens, a flock of ducks and many guinea fowl, all free to range where they will.



One of Georgio's Guinea Fowl

Since the village is near the river and the land is low, the village streets flood 2 or 3 times a year. Every time there is a flood the "Bishop's Palace" is under water since the property is one of the lowest lying. Georgio is a stoic by inclination and he just carries on as normal. He sits in the living room of an evening and enjoys a glass of wine even while the floor is under water. All he needs to do is to keep his wellies on. Renata, his wife, left some years before, since for some reason, she disliked the living conditions in the village. In the Po valley when it rains it pours - of course when they see the flood waters the ducks are in their seventh heaven but what happens to the poor chickens and guinea fowl?

Georgio has a very simple solution. He acquired a double decker bus from a British student who was touring the country in a London bus before it broke down not far from the “Bishop’s Palace”. It proved an ideal solution. In times of drought, the chickens and guinea fowl live on the first floor. And when the flood waters arrive and their courtyard is under water, they simply climb the stairs to the second floor. The bus door is closed at night, so Mr. Fox cannot reach the passengers upstairs.”

<p style="text-align: center;">Monthly Meetings are held on the 3rd Wednesday of each month at 2pm Churchdown Community Centre, Parton Road Come for Refreshments, News and Speaker</p>		
Date	Speaker	Topic
19 th March	Paul Barnett	Purton Ships Graveyard
16 th April	Chris Evans	Butterfly Garden Project
21 st May	Mike Bottomley	The Incredible Story of Rudyard Kipling

Current Group List

Please contact the Group Convenor if you wish to join a group, or for more information go to our web-site: <https://churchdown.u3asite.uk>

Note: If you do not have the means to contact a convenor via the web page, please phone the Group Coordinator who will contact them for you

Interim Group Coordinator: **Gary Murden**

Contact: murdeng71@gmail.com 07340 965083

Group	Convenor	Contact Details
Art History/Appreciation	Martin Bowden	01452 854007
Book Club/Literature	Joyce Winwood	01452 715099
Bridge for All	Dave Bebbington	07587 151191
Chat & Screen (previously MOTO)	Michael Potter	07392595970
Cookery	Eve Anstis	01242 235833
Crafts	Wendy Martin	01452 714049
Creative Writing	John Hawkswell	01452 730528
Cribbage	Diana Sinden	01452 698713
Exploring Churchdown	Pam Bryant	01452 532124
Current Affairs	Robbie Philip	01452 715033
Family History	Di Medland	Contact via web page
Gardening	Ann Knight	Contact via web-page
Garden Visits	Jane Moore	Contact via web-page
Industrial Heritage	Louise Keeling	01452 712753
Italian Appreciation	John Hawkswell	01452 730528
Lunch Club	Tom Arnot	01452 498934
Meditation	Sue Grierson	07783 061063
Petanque	Ann Stollery	Contact via web-page
Photography	Ann Knight	Contact via web-page
Singing Together	Alan Winwood	01452 715099
Spanish (Language & Culture)	Maggie Thomas	01452 676751
Table Tennis	Syd Leuillette	01452 857039
Walking	Jacqui Ellis	07969 765893
Wine Appreciation	Louise Keeling	01452 712753
Yoga	Sue Grierson	07783 061063

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