



NEWSLETTER

April–May 2024

This is an edited version of our usual newsletter, produced to give prospective members an idea of our activities

<https://www.readingu3a.org.uk>

Welcome to our latest newsletter. The days are getting longer, the bulbs are flowering and hopefully it won't be long before the weather starts to improve. To help our own u3a to improve, have you ever given any thought about how you can help?

Over the past few years, for a variety of reasons, some convenors have had to stand down from their groups, but sadly, in many instances, no one was prepared to step up and take over which meant that several groups have ceased to exist. We would like to restart some of these defunct groups.

If our groups are to continue or new groups are to start, we do need members to come forward and become convenors. Being a convenor is not as onerous as you may think, and can be very rewarding. There is also the possibility that the job can be shared between two people, and the Committee will offer all the help it can.

Whether you are a long-standing member or have recently joined, please consider volunteering to become a convenor.

Guest Speaker Meetings

Join us at the new time of 13.30 for refreshments before the talk starts at 14.00

MEMBERS ARE WELCOME TO BRING ALONG FRIENDS

REMINDER: Mon 25 March – No meeting. Church is closed to us during Easter Week.

Mon 22 April: *A Germination of an Idea – The Sutton Seeds Company*

A talk by Richard Marks, a local industrial historian and author.

Suttons Seeds was a household name for 200 years and gardeners trusted the reliability of their seeds. Richard will explore the history of Suttons from humble beginnings in 1806 to becoming an important part of Britain's horticultural industry, and a major exporter across the globe, as well as some surprising changes to ownership in the 1990s.

Mon 27 May – No meeting. It's the Spring Bank Holiday.

Members' Meetings

13.30 (free tea/coffee) for 14.00

Thurs 11 April: Sheep over London Bridge

The origins and history of the Freedom of the City of London

Thurs 9 May: Angkor Wat

This Hindu–Buddhist temple complex in Cambodia holds the Guinness World Record for the largest religious structure in the world.

The u3a Principles (2)

The u3a movement, of which Reading u3a is a part, is founded on 3 principles: the *Third Age Principle*, the *Self-help Learning Principle* and the *Mutual Aid Principle*. This article looks at the second of these – we'll look at the third in the next Newsletter.

The Self-help Learning Principle has 3 elements:

- members form interest groups covering as wide a range of topics and activities as they desire; by the members, for the members
- no qualifications are sought or offered. Learning is for its own sake, with enjoyment being the prime motive, not qualifications or awards
- there is no distinction between the learners and the teachers; they are all u3a members.

Reading u3a currently has about 40 interest groups, run by the members for the members, but would like to have even more. Every member can offer to convene a group or to help in some way. Every member can also propose new groups and activities – is there anything you think our u3a should be offering, and if so could you help run it? Remember, learning is for enjoyment, not for qualifications. The more members we have, the more activities we can offer and the greater the range of interests we can provide for, so if you can help recruit new members that should expand our scope even further.

Looking more broadly, it is not only the interest groups which are run 'by the members for the members' but the whole of Reading u3a is run this way. If you can help to convene an interest group, that's great, but if not, please think about helping in some other way, for example by joining the Committee or helping out with meetings and events by joining our STAR (Small Tasks As Required) group. Every little helps.

Reading u3a Groups at March 2024

As well as our Members Meeting and Guest Speaker Meeting each month, here is a reminder of all the other activities and interests you could sample. Why not give something new a try? I Dare You!

OR, if we don't reflect a particular interest of your own, why not think about convening a new group and introducing others to your passion?

Our committee will give you all the help and advice you need to get going.

Enjoy the arts		Try something creative	
A Slice of Arts & Culture	A Good Read	Art (Abbey)	Art (Tilehurst)
Alternative Theatre	Books	Blanket Project	Crafts
Madrigals	Play Reading	Knit and Natter	Photography
Singing for Pleasure	Theatre	Poetry	Writing for Pleasure
Keep fit and improve your wellbeing		Pursue your hobbies and pastimes	
Ambles	Circle Dancing	Bridge	Computer Club
Folk Dancing	Nature Walks	Emmer Green Lunch	Fourth Friday Film Fun
Seated Exercise	Table Tennis	Gardening	Tilehurst Lunch
TaiChi for Beginners	TaiChi	Woodley/Earley Lunch	
Walks			
Improve your languages		Research, reflect and discuss	
French Conversation	French Improvers	Church Buildings (occasional group)	
German Improvers	Italian Improvers	Current Affairs	Debating
Spanish Conversation Beginners		Heritage	History
Spanish Conversation Intermediate		Philosophy	Science & Technology
		Town Study	



Postage Rates Are Increasing

Did you know postage rates are increasing soon?

From 2 April 2024, the price of a First Class stamp will increase by 10p to £1.35 and the price of a Second Class stamp will increase by 10p to 85p.

If you use the post, you might want to invest in a few stamps now!

The Priority Services Register

Have you registered for your utility provider's priority services register?

Gas, electric and water companies all have these and they provide extra services for those who qualify – often just having a pension is enough. There's extra help in an emergency. You can tell them about special requirements, eg electricity to power medical equipment, a stair lift etc, plus any medical conditions you may have which might need extra assistance.

If you have online access, find your supplier's website and search for priority services. If not, use the general contact number on an invoice, and then ask to speak directly to them. And it works – we received a delivery of bottled water when there were recent water problems – none of that having to queue in a supermarket car park.

New Social Media Policy

Even if you are not a user, you'll be familiar with the ever increasing talk about social media. It's not only for individuals – organisations are now expected to include social media in their communication toolbox too. Social media can be a powerful tool to raise awareness and reach a wide audience quickly, but it can introduce risks such as posting content that is illegal, inappropriate or harmful. This requires procedures for managing those risks and the Charity Commission now expects that charities which use social media will have a social media policy. Reading u3a has now drawn up its own, which sets out our overall approach to social media and guides us in establishing criteria for its safe use.

The policy applies to group convenors and other members who use or are thinking about using social media in connection with one of Reading u3a's activities so, if you are using or plan to use social media for one of our groups, please have a look at the policy on our website (www.readingu3a.org.uk – go to the 'About us' page and scroll down to the policies). If you have any questions, please contact chair@readingu3a.org.uk.

STAR Group (Small Tasks As Required)

STAR group members vary between those who regularly help with tea duties and those who assist at one-off events. Unfortunately, we do not have sufficient members in this group to spread the load. We anticipate exhibiting at **Waterfest** again on **8 June** and help will be required in all respects on that day.

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Alternative Theatre Group

Mon 22 April – we are going to Wokingham Theatre to see *The Pitmen Painters*.

There are two slightly different shows in May:

Thurs 2 May – to Progress Theatre to see *Under Milk Wood* by Dylan Thomas.

Tickets are £12.

Mon 27 May – to Reading Rep for a one-man show entitled *The Importance of Being Oscar*. This is a journey through the loves and losses, successes and struggles of Oscar Wilde and is laced with excerpts from his works.

Tickets are £15 if you are over 65, otherwise they cost £22. Tickets are already on sale.

Mon 22 July – to Wokingham Theatre to see Noel Coward's farce *Blithe Spirit*.

Tickets are £16.

Ambles Group

Thurs 4 April

A three-mile linear walk from Little Heath, through Sulham Woods, across fields (lovely views over Englefield/Theale), through the pretty hamlet of North Street to Theale.

Footpaths throughout the walk, downhill initially, then flat with no stiles. Sulham Woods may be muddy, so please wear suitable footwear. There is a short uphill ramp to access the bridge to cross the M4.

Wed 24 April 10.30

A circular walk of about 2.5-miles starting from Douai Abbey outside Woolhampton. We follow pretty stretches of woodland and arable fields, with several inclines, and one or two are short but steepish. No stiles and a short section of road. Woodland paths may be muddy and uneven with tree roots, so please wear suitable boots and use your stick if necessary. There may also be livestock in fields. At Beenham we shall spend some time in the village and the church of St Mary's.

Thurs 9 May 10.30

A circular walk of about 2 miles around Twyford village with lunch at the Duke of Wellington pub, the oldest in Twyford. Good underfoot on pavements and no hills.

Tues 21 May 10.25

A linear walk of about 3-mile from Hambleden Lock along the Thames Path into Henley where we have lunch. Good underfoot but may be muddy in parts. No stiles or hills.

A Slice of Arts and Culture – NEW GROUP

I am looking forward to the first meeting of this new group, which takes place on Monday 8 April at 13.30 in the Upper Prayer Room, Abbey Baptist Church (first floor, opposite Brookside Room). Thereafter it will be on every 2nd Monday of the month at 13.30.

This is our inaugural meeting and I haven't planned a topic. I think it will be nice to find out

Blanket Group – NEW VENUE

Our next meeting is at 15.00 on **Monday 8 April at a new venue**. We will meet on the 1st floor of the Reading Biscuit Factory, next door to Iceland in Oxford Road, at the corner of Dusseldorf Way, by the Penta Hotel.

Donations of double knitting wool or knitted (garter stitch) or crochet 6-inch squares would be very welcome.

Book Group/HYBRID

We usually meet on the 1st Thursday each month, in Abbey Baptist Church at 13.30 – refreshments are usually provided from 13.00. A zoom link can be provided if you are unable to attend in person (but please let us know beforehand).

PLEASE NOTE different start time and venue in April.

Our next titles for discussion are:

Thurs 4 April: *The Spinning Heart* by Donal Ryan.
 11.45 start in The Pantry, next to Reading Town Hall & Museum.
 No zoom link available.

Thurs 2 May: *The Island of Missing Trees* by Elif Shafak.

We are a small group and new members are very welcome. Contact either of us for more information, or just come along.

Current Affairs Group

Given all that's going on in the news at the moment, have you ever thought you'd like to discuss all this with others who may have different insights and perspectives? Our Current Affairs group provides an opportunity to review issues of international and national importance, by analysing and discussing recent news reports and commentaries. In each meeting we discuss in detail two topics (one national, one international) from what's been in the news since the last meeting, and we also have a quick look at other significant news items.

We meet on the 3rd Thursday of the month at 10.30 at Abbey Baptist Church. Our next meetings are on **18 April** and **16 May**. If you would enjoy the chance to reflect on and discuss what's going on in the world, find out more from me.

French Conversation

Meeting twice monthly, on the 2nd and 4th Wednesday, this diverse group starts between 10–10.30 until noon. On the 2nd Wednesday we have a topic we can discuss, and the 4th Wednesday is devoted to general conversation

French Improvers

Held on the 1st Wednesday each month between 10 and 11.00, this small group aims to assist anyone needing to rebuild their confidence in speaking French and, in this way, improving their knowledge and ability in French conversation so that they may then move over to the French Conversation group if they wish to.

Fourth Friday Film Fun/Zoom only

Friday 26 April 10.30

Our three cartoons this month are Walt Disney's take on Hans Christian Andersen's Ugly Duckling, Ub Iwerks' version of Aesop's the Grasshopper and the Ant, and a very early Merry Melodies in which a bee comes home drunk. Stan and Ollie acquire a fishing boat, Ray Bolger does some of his trademark eccentric dancing, and the Nicholas Brothers dance to the music of Glenn Miller. We also have Pete and Dud visiting an art gallery, Competitive Dad lost on holiday in Germany, and the Two Johns discussing the financial crisis of 2008. Finally, the great Lev Weksler duets with himself on the double bass. Another great hour of film fun.

Friday 24 May 10.30

This month, our three cartoons are the Fleischer Brothers' version of Snow White, Ub Iwerks' version of Jack and the Beanstalk and a Merrie Melodies cartoon featuring the song 'We're in the Money' – all from 1933. Ginger Rogers sings and dances before she even met Fred Astaire, and the very young Nicholas Brothers sing and dance in 1936. Pete and Dud perform a spoof of Thunderbirds, there's a conflict of interest in Yes Prime Minister, and the Two Johns continue their discussion of the financial crisis of 2008.

If you've not been before, it's high time to find out what you've been missing!

Gardening Group

We hold meetings between March and October, so our first meeting this year is on the 3rd Wednesday of March between 10.30 and noon when we will discuss how our gardens have fared during the winter and plan our visits out for the year.

All garden visits are local, and are mostly to private homes picked from the National Garden Scheme annual handbook. Visits to other gardens will take place at different times/on different days as agreed within the group.

Heritage Group

Our February outing to 2 Temple Place was a good one. It was a lovely exhibition and everyone said that they enjoyed it.

Wed 3 April: University of Oxford Botanic Garden

A spring visit that will only take place if the weather is suitable and trains are not affected.

Wed 1 May: Watts Gallery and Artists' Village

Again this outing will rely on the trains and bus running ok.

The History Group

Fri 12 April 10.30: Richard III

Sue Ellis gave us two excellent talks last year. One was about using family wills to add information to our family trees and the other focussed on WWII's extraordinary Operation Mincemeat. Now, she returns to tell us all about Richard III. I can't wait!

Fri 10 May 10.30: The Nabobs of Berkshire

This month Clive Williams is our speaker and he has sent us the following information:

'In 1998 I was taken on a visit to the South Park Street cemetery in Calcutta (as was). I was intrigued to recognize many Berkshire names and when I returned home I

researched for 10 years – eventually finding 32 stately homes in Berkshire with East India Company associations; so many that, in the 18th century, Berkshire was known as 'the English Hindoostan'. I then wrote and self-published my book 'The Nabobs of Berkshire'.

Knit and Natter Group – NEW GROUP

Would you like to learn to knit? Or have you got an item to finish and would like to sit and chat with like-minded individuals? If so, would you like to join a Knit and Natter Group?

This would be held monthly on the 4th Wednesday afternoon, **starting on 22 May at 14.00.**

Madrigals Group

PLEASE NOTE: we will meet on Thursday 11 & 25 April (ie the 2nd & 4th Thursday this month). In May, we revert to our usual schedule.

Nature Walks Group

On our February walk in the Harris Garden we saw signs of early spring with the first fritillaries and blossom on the trees. It was literally dampened by rain, but nevertheless an interesting and enjoyable exploration of the plants and natural life of this beautiful garden.

Thurs 25 April: Caversham 10.00

Meet at 10.00 at The Warren entrance to St Peter's Churchyard. You can park by the church entrance. We will visit Saint Peter's Churchyard and Caversham Court Gardens.

Thurs 23 May: Moor Copse 10.00

I'm hoping that Moor Copse will be dry enough to visit again. We went in September and saw interesting plants and seed heads of flowers that should bloom in May so easier to identify! The river Pang runs through the reserve, and the area is home to many species of woodland and meadow flowers and birds as well as butterflies and dragonflies. Work has been done to encourage water voles to return to the river in this area. In parts of the walk Dexter cattle graze the fields, and there is no alternative path. They are there as part of the land management and are used to sharing their field with walkers. **Suitable footwear is advisable** for this walk as paths may be muddy.

Photography Group

Our new project for April/May will be *Bugs*.

Wed 24 April: An outing

Time and place TBC. Members will be notified by email nearer the date.

Wed 22 May: Park United Reformed Church 10.30

Showing our photographs from the April outing and from our projects *Weather and Bugs*. Newcomers are always welcome so please contact one of us if you would like to give our group us a try.

Poetry Group

Our forthcoming themes are:

Tues 2 April *The Weather*

Tues 7 May *Birds*

Science & Technology Group

We meet in person in the Brookside Room, Abbey Baptist Church at 13.45 for a 14.00 start.

REMINDER:

Tues 26 March / Zoom only meeting: *Earthquakes and how we measure them.*

Tues 23 April: *Water: we use it and abuse it*

The speaker will describe drinking and wastewater treatment and discuss current national and global water issues. Too much & too little water!

Tues 28 May: *Computer-themed topics*

Our speaker set up the website for the national u3a S&T community.

Today he will cover several computer-themed topics including new password facilities.

Seated Exercise Group

Our next meetings are on **Thursdays 11 & 25 April and on 9 & 23 May.**

New members are very welcome and I am happy for people to come along for up to two taster sessions, including prospective members. Please wear suitable loose fitting clothing.

Singing for Pleasure Group

PLEASE NOTE: we will meet on Friday 12 & 26 April (ie the 2nd & 4th Friday this month).

In May we revert to our usual schedule.

TaiChi Groups

Our popular groups have a few places available in both Beginners and Improvers groups. We meet in the Lower Hall of Abbey Baptist Church on Friday mornings.

TaiChi, based on ancient Chinese martial arts, is now practised around the world as an exercise which has positive benefits for health, mind and body, improving strength, balance and flexibility. Our classes are tailored to be suitable for Reading u3a members, taking into account age constraints, mobility and balance problems.

Thames Valley Network (TVN)

All TVN events are on Zoom and are booked through TicketSource on the TVN website <http://u3atvnetwork.org.uk> for which there is a small administrative charge – usually £1 or £2. Tickets are usually available about three weeks before an event.

Wed 10 April 1430 Zoom: *North Sea Oil Operations* – supporting the North Sea Oil Fields by helicopter – a talk by Ted Peycke – **Booking open, see TVN website**

Tu 23 April 1430 *Bordering on Insanity* - how to create an all year round border in your garden - a talk by Timothy Walker. **Booking open, see TVN website**

Fri 3 May 1030 TVN Reps Meeting and AGM (Benson)

Wed 15 May 1430 Zoom: *Doctors to the Rescue* – the work of Médecins Sans Frontières

Mon 10 June 1030 Zoom: *The Korean War* – another talk by Chris Parry

June/July: Another Quiz?

Some dates have yet to be confirmed – so check with the website.

Theatre Group

Thurs 11 April at 14.00: *And Then There Were None*, Mayflower Theatre, Southampton

Wed 8 May at 14.30: *Fawlty Towers*, Apollo Theatre, London

TWO SHOWS NOW BOOKING

1. Thurs 6 June at 14.30: *The School for Scandal*, Oxford Playhouse

Deliciously naughty and outrageously silly, this timeless comedy by Richard Sheridan is a masterclass in social satire and the art of gossip. Featuring an unforgettable cast of larger-than-life characters, each armed with a lacerating wit, *The School for Scandal* is one of the greatest comedies ever written. See [The School For Scandal | Oxford Playhouse](#) for more details.

Stalls seats are £24 (senior rate), unfortunately, if you are under 60, the price is £28.

2. Wed 14 August at 14.30: *Barnum*, The Watermill, near Newbury

Sorry this is so far ahead but it is the only way to book a group in at such a small theatre. A Watermill Theatre Production with music by Cy Coleman and lyrics by Michael Stewart. Step right up and enter the dazzling world of P.T. Barnum, where imagination and ambition know no bounds. Delight at every sight, wonder and miracle as the creator of spectacle comes to town with a sensational show featuring a whole host of characters.

Seats in the front stalls are £50 (ouch) but there will be £5 off I sell 10 or more tickets.

Tilehurst Lunch Group

Please note that there will be NO MEETING on 17 April - the next meeting is on 15 May.

Town Study Group

Wed 10 April 14-15.15 (with a break for refreshments)

Researchers will report back on Devizes – the canal, smugglers, the Civil War and a potted history, in preparation for our visit on 12 June.

Wed 8 May 14-15.15 (with a break for refreshments)

Researchers continue to report back on more aspects of Devizes – the castle, spooky events near the church, plus much, much more, in preparation for our visit with guided tour on 12 June.

Wed 12 June: coach visit to Devizes

Walk

Mon 15 April 10.45

A walk of about 4 miles, starting at Oxford Station, going along the river at Osney to Folly Bridge, and round Christchurch meadow etc.

Mon 20 May 10.00

A 5.25-mile circular walk through farmland, woods and minor public roads around Cane End, Wyfold Court and Hook End.

Woodley & Earley Lunch Group

Mon 15 April The George, Loddon Bridge (pre-ordering necessary).

Mon 20 May The Waterside Inn, Fairwater Drive, Woodley. Bus 13 or 14.

Writing for Pleasure Group via Zoom

In March we sat down together electronically to mull over our theme called *The Bucket List*. This title comes from a film in which two old men compile a list of things to do before they 'kick the bucket'. As usual, our group had some interesting theories on what they would do. Foremost was the ability to travel with a lost companion to near and exotic places. One writer remembered someone who loved to drive and with whom they had travelled far and wide to visit friends and relatives. Another had bought a particular map but, due to unforeseen circumstances, was never able to use. I myself wanted to ride on the Royal Mail underground railway in London. Our writers produce something magical every month, they truly amaze me and, once again, they came up with some truly wonderful pieces. Coming up next we have

Wed 3 April *Side by side*
Wed 1 May *Small acts of kindness*

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Ambling Diaries

We walked around Whiteknights campus on a warm sunny day in late January. Although it was muddy after recent rains, the sun had brought out crocus and snowdrops which covered the ground. A welcome sight after the bad weather of previous days. 14 of us then had lunch at The 3 Tuns pub in Wokingham Road.

Our first walk in February on another sunny day, was an historic one passing the impressive Victorian and Edwardian houses around Kendrick, Redlands and Upper Redlands Roads. Heather and Cathy, our leaders, gave us the history behind many of the buildings - too many to go into here - but I will record the main ones. We started off at Kendrick School, the present building being Grade 11 listed. The school owes its foundations to a wealthy cloth merchant called John Kendrick who died in 1624 and left £12,500 to the towns of Reading and Newbury to provide employment and education for the poor. Originally this was used for the workhouse, called The Oracle which was on the same site as the shopping centre is today. In the 1870's it was used for Kendrick Girls School and Kendrick Boys School which was later to merge with Reading School. The school moved to its present site in 1927. One of our members was a teacher there until retirement.

Abbey School was founded in 1887 and moved to its present site in 1905. It was originally called Reading High School and was housed in what is now the Gladstone Club on London Road. The school changed its name to the Abbey School to commemorate the original school in the Abbey Gateway. Passing the Progress Theatre in the Mount, we got a glimpse of Hillside House originally built for a member of the Palmer family in 1880. The lovely houses in the Mount were built for the managers at Huntley and Palmers whose workers lived at Cemetery Junction. It is said that George Palmer bought the land now Palmer Park to stop the railways making it their yard as railway workers were paid a lot more, and they feared they would lose workers to the railway. We then moved on to Upper Redlands Road and St Joseph's College which was originally founded in 1894 by a group of nuns from Normandy to provide "a good education in a warm and loving atmosphere" for girls. One member who attended the school had a wry smile at this description! They were at first based in Castle Hill but moved to the present site in 1910. Wantage Hall was our next port of call, and is apparently one of the first purpose-built Halls of Residence built in the Oxford

Cloister style in 1908. Reading School was next, founded as part of Reading Abbey on 29 March 1125. Despite its closure in the 1860's to merge with Reading High, it is the 10th oldest school in England. We then walked past Royal Berkshire Hospital and learned that the coat of arms above the entrance is that of King William IV and not Queen Victoria as is usually thought. We ended up joining the students for lunch at The Dairy on the University campus. 20 members came on the walk including 2 new members.



Our final walk for February was on a very windy, very cold morning, but the weather didn't put off 15 members taking part in our walk around Englefield Estate. Apart from an initial muddy tramp across a field, it was then paved paths leading through the village up to the gardens which are only open once a week.

We visited St Mark's Church in the village and our leaders, Christine and Brian, gave us some background on the church and Englefield House itself. Originally built in the 12th century, the church was extensively remodelled by Sir

George Gilbert Scott in the 1850s. It remains a busy and thriving parish church, with services every Sunday. There is plenty to interest students of history and architecture. Sir Francis Englefield and Sir Francis Walsingham both lived at Englefield House during Tudor times and an earlier Englefield, Sir Thomas (d.1514), whose tomb sits between the chancel and the Englefield Chapel, was Speaker of the House of Commons. The renowned Victorian Revival architect Sir George Gilbert Scott was responsible for restoration/remodelling in the 1850s and also worked on other projects in the area, including at nearby Bradfield College, Reading Gaol and other churches on the Estate. In the garden it was nice to see signs of Spring with camellias in brilliant bloom and splashes of colour from many spring plants. The view from the gardens is quite spectacular over the rest of the estate and the deer park. We then left the comparative shelter of the gardens to brave the wind and walk back to Cobbs Farm Shop where we had a very tasty lunch before driving back to Reading.