



# NEWSLETTER

... from the horse's mouth

December 2025

Issue No.71



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## Chair's message:

Here at miu3a we are proud of the wide range of interest groups we have available - and there is always room for more! If you haven't joined one yet, why not browse our web pages ([miu3a.org.uk](http://miu3a.org.uk)) and see what catches your eye?

Alternatively, if you have ideas you wish to explore you can always talk with our Interest Groups' Co-ordinators Team at one of our monthly meetings. Special Interest Groups offer the best way of getting to know people and enjoy the best of what our u3a has to offer.

None of our groups would exist without our wonderful volunteers who share their time, energy, enthusiasm, and sometimes even their homes. Thanks to them, we all get to enjoy friendship, fun, and the chance to learn something new.

Please remember we are all volunteers, and our thanks and gratitude go to the many dedicated members who give their time, energy, and hospitality to keep our groups, and our monthly meetings, running. The old saying is true: *many hands make light work* and so as we move into 2026, we hope that even more of you will feel encouraged to get involved. Your support makes all the difference.

I look forward to another active year of *learn, laugh, live* at miu3a and for now wish all of you a very a happy and rewarding 2026.

**Happy New Year from all the Committee.**

Regards,  
**Carol Gupwell MIU3A Chair**

## Wish List

- 2026 is a more positive year
- Exams go well for all those taking them in 2026

## TV

- So many cookery programmes running up to Xmas that they are more confusing than helpful
- The news continues to be unwatchable these days
- Shetland was good but too many sub-plots made it difficult to follow

## Working together with the Community

### Community Arts Hub

There is a new arts hub that has been set up in Maidstone, and it offers meeting spaces to book that may be helpful for some of our groups.



Units 2-4 Granada House  
Gabriel's Hill  
Maidstone  
Kent ME15 6JR  
☎ 01622 602204

They can be contacted via their web page at

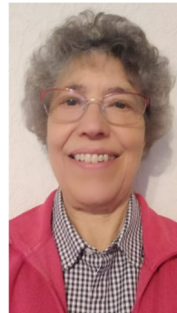
[www.creativemaidsstone.com](http://www.creativemaidsstone.com)

### Park & Ride - Reminder

There is a free park & ride service to Maidstone Hospital which is a short walk to our meeting hall. It runs Monday to Friday every half hour.

The postcode for it is ME16 0XP and it can be found behind the big DFS store just off Beaver Road.

## Interest Groups Team



**Sue and Anne**

***“We are your Interest Groups Team Leaders  
and we are here to help you”***

- If you have any concerns about the groups you co-ordinate
- Need help attracting more members to your group
- If your group is full with a waiting list, we can help with starting a second group
- If members are looking for a specific group that isn't currently on the Interest groups list, please let us know and we'll do our best to help with starting a relevant group.
- Do you have a skill you'd like to share with others?
- New members, if you need help finding the right group

Please email us at [groups@maidstoneinvictau3a.org.uk](mailto:groups@maidstoneinvictau3a.org.uk) if you want to get in touch. Alternatively, we'll be available at the monthly meetings so come and have a chat with us.

## Group Activities

### Village Visit Group 2

October to December 2025

For our guided tour round Rochester, Mary and David stepped up to the plate to offer an experience that was a little removed from the more conventional, professionally guided tours. In a similar vein, this article focuses on the more unique aspects of our visit.

Our tour started at La Providence, the Huguenot Hospital. This we were introduced to by our very own Huguenot: Marie Cavalier, AKA Mary Winder, who explained the hospital's origins together with her own Huguenot heritage, thereafter being awarded the title of Bloody Mary for the remainder of the day.

We moved on to stories of how, in November 1836, Queen (then Princess) Victoria spent the most uncomfortable night of her life at the Royal Victoria and Bull Hotel. This fact is not widely known as the event pre-dated TripAdvisor.

Just round the corner on the Esplanade, Ron Taylor impressed us all with a verbal overview of the Castle Club. Unfortunately, he was unable to physically introduce the rest of us to this esteemed establishment due to the presence of ladies in our group.



Next, we were given an account of how King John had captured Rochester Castle in 1215 with the assistance of countless pigs whose fat created an intense fire that destroyed the tunnel supports and brought down the south east turret.

On the south side of the Cathedral in Minor Cannon Row, we passed Dame Sybil Thorndike's former home. Apparently when

asked if she had ever considered divorcing her husband Sir Lewis Casson, she replied – divorce never, but murder often!

Approaching the end of our tour, Restoration House inevitably brought up the matter of its connection with Samuel Pepys. Pepys spent time there whilst employed as a clerk to the Navy Board. This job evidently provided him with sufficient free time to engage his pastime for pursuing young ladies, an activity for which he was widely regarded. In Rochester a local cherry orchard provided the opportunity he sought: For we know it's right, it's in black and white and is all written down in his diary!



As time was running short, we only glimpsed the roof of Charles Dickens Swiss Chalet through a gap in buildings on the high street. Yet another little-known fact is that this building was the forerunner of flat-pack construction, having first arrived by train at Gads Hill in a pile of pieces much to the consternation of the man employed to put it together.

Finally, we enjoyed a decent lunch at Ye Arrow which thankfully was otherwise uneventful.



In summary our visit fulfilled the u3a ethos of learn, laugh, live. We learned stuff that will be forgotten by the time anyone reads this, we laughed (a lot), and we are still alive.

In November we visited the Allington Integrated Waste

Management Facility, better known as the Incinerator. We were warmly welcomed and issued with enough PPE to enter Chernobyl. A slide and video presentation were given by our host who then took us to the weighbridge office, where a manager described his operation. We were then taken to a building where waste was being unloaded. The control room was undergoing some refurbishment work, and we were unable to visit that.

Having made two previous attempts to visit, which had been thwarted for various reasons on their part, it was rather disappointing that we could see so little of their operation, although we assume that was due to health and safety risks.

Our year of explorations culminated in a gathering at the Pepperbox Inn, where 11 of us enjoyed delicious, well-presented food served by friendly and welcoming members of staff. A photograph rather hastily taken as we were about to leave. We'd been so busy eating and drinking, we'd forgotten to take a picture earlier! Haha



Thinking caps on now for 2026 when we will hopefully explore many more interesting and unusual places

*Linda Taylor*

## Invicta Art Club

We continue to meet once a month although with holidays and now Christmas attendance gets a little fragmented.

In December there were 3 of us, which left extra space. We took it in turns to act as model and did some life drawing of each other = quite challenging.

I would like to pursue this again so we can discuss this at our January meeting and gain other projects from the group. It would also be fun to do a still life but again, space limits this a bit.

I hope the group continues to thrive. If anyone is interested I can be contacted via the website – [www.miu3a.org.uk](http://www.miu3a.org.uk)

**Mo Clayton**

## Grumpy Old Men

Grumpy Old Men have always been seen as something of a closed, somewhat mysterious group. Some say it's because we have no female members. Others insist it's because, as a product of our debating talents, we've unintentionally elevated ourselves to the role of ambassadors not just to miu3a but the whole u3a movement.

In any case, our secret world has recently been breached. Two wonderful and fearless ladies, Anne Wicken and Sue Wicks, infiltrated our meeting at the Muggleton (we only convene at the finest of establishments) under the respectable cover of the Interests Groups' Coordinators Team. We have previously invited eminent ladies to join us including Queen Camilla (then Duchess of Cornwall) in the hope that she might become our Patron but she, like others, failed to turn up.

The monitoring visit began with our Group Leader offering what he considered was a warm and generous gesture: two Porn Star Martinis. Unfortunately, this was badly misread as an attempt to influence their report. The conversation

rapidly moved on and our Group Leader was then subjected to some very direct questioning as to our vicarious responsibilities under risk assessments, DEI, GDPR, LGBTQ, (and several other acronyms he claims to understand perfectly). He believes he addressed all of these issues most comprehensively, although recollections may vary.

The most significant challenge arose when the monitoring team brought up the u3a ethos: learn laugh live. They felt the name Grumpy sat awkwardly with the laugh element. Of course, it is quite possible that learn laugh live post-dates the inaugural meeting of GOM in April 2015 but the Group Leader was not equipped with that information whilst standing, in a state of discombobulation, before what was increasingly looking like a House of Commons Select Committee. If only they had knocked-back those Porn Star Martinis!

Salvation finally arrived in the form of AI - specifically ChatGPT - which had been engaged earlier to review the minutes of the day's meeting (these had been prepared in advance by our Minute Writer - are you still with me?) Its conclusion was surprisingly complimentary particularly in respect of the healthy amount of understated humour it contained, thereby confirming that we do, in fact, satisfy the laugh requirement.

One unresolved matter at the time of the visit was what, finally, the Interests Groups' Coordinators Team might call themselves. Always ready to help, GOM enthusiastically proposed the "Office of Group Activity and Sustainability" or Ofgas for short. We are as yet unaware if this suggestion will be taken forward.

Respecting the advice of the GOM's Legal Advisor, the foregoing summary is a heavily redacted version of the full account of the monitoring visit.

All said and done, Anne and Sue are doing a magnificent job for miu3a and GOM looks forward to a glowing report. Who knows, it might even be published in this edition of the Newsletter.

*KBO, David Holmes*

*Interest Groups' Co-ordinators visit to GOM*

Having recently taken on the role of Interest Groups' Co-ordinators, Anne and I would like to get to know our u3a Groups and to be available if there are any queries or concerns. The Grumpy Old Men (GOM) were very quick to ask us if we were going to visit them anytime soon so, of course, we rose to the challenge! We put together some very 'tongue in cheek' questions, which we felt fitted this group, and surprised them on 5<sup>th</sup> November at their monthly get together at the Muggleton Inn.

It was hard to keep a straight face whilst asking some fiendishly searching questions around Inclusion (why are there no women in this group?), Health & Safety (had they done a risk assessment regarding getting up and down the stairs in the Muggleton – particularly after having a beer?) and how the u3a ethos of "Learn Laugh Live" was promoted when the name of the group refers to them being "Grumpy"

In good spirits, they rose to the challenge and were able to give some great answers to our questions. The highlight for us was when an AI review of their minutes clearly highlighted that this group is full of humour. This confirmed what we really already knew that the Grumpy Old Men is a fantastic u3a group giving the opportunity for our male members to get together without us 'nagging' women and enjoy a couple of hours freedom in the pub over a meal and a drink. Thank you so much gentlemen, we thoroughly enjoyed our visit to your group (even though we still believe you tried to bribe us with the offer of Porn Star Martinis!!!).

Other group leaders, please be reassured that we won't be coming around to your groups and giving you a grilling, we are honestly just here to help.

*Sue Wicks and Anne Wicken, Interest Groups' Coordinators*

## Table Tennis Group



The Table Tennis group continues to thrive, with 20 members who meet weekly at Allington Baptist Church for energetic (and not so energetic) games. We have a good mix of abilities and have all improved since playing with the group. We also have a lot of laughs both during games and over

coffee and biscuits mid-morning. We currently have a waiting list for new members.

The week before Christmas we had a 'bring and share' lunch following our morning's games, when we enjoyed a mix of party food with some great home-made treats from our members.



*Susan Wicks*

Contact me via the website [www.miu3a.org.uk](http://www.miu3a.org.uk)

## Art Appreciation Group, A visit to Cranbrook

For our second outing of the year the Art Appreciation group paid a visit to Cranbrook Museum in October just before the end of their season. We were keen to see the work of the Cranbrook Colony of Artists which we knew was kept there, but as it turned out our visit offered a lot more than we were expecting.

The Museum is housed in a beautiful building dating from medieval times and was originally a rectory. For a small fee we were treated to refreshments on arrival while we admired the many old radios on display. There are a lot of rooms to choose from with delightful surprises in all of them ranging from a display of Roman artefacts to information about the broadcloth industry which was important to Cranbrook's economy in medieval times.

Our guide, also the Museum's curator, gave us plenty of time to examine the work of the Cranbrook Colony of 19<sup>th</sup> C artists. The group gathered in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> C and portrayed everyday domestic life in Kent. This was a period of transition with labourers migrating to larger towns and Cranbrook gradually becoming a quiet country village.

This is reflected in the work of the artists whose models were the local residents and their own families. One of the most talented amongst them was Frederick Daniel Hardy many of whose paintings were created in what is now the 'Colony Room' in the museum pictured below.



We have chosen some topics for discussion in the New Year and will begin with a look at the world of Art Deco which reached its centenary this year. We still have space for a couple of new members, so do get in touch via the U3aInvicta website if you are interested in joining us.

*Maura Coleman, Co-ordinator: Art Appreciation Group*