



NEWSLETTER

... from the horse's mouth

March 2026

Issue No.72

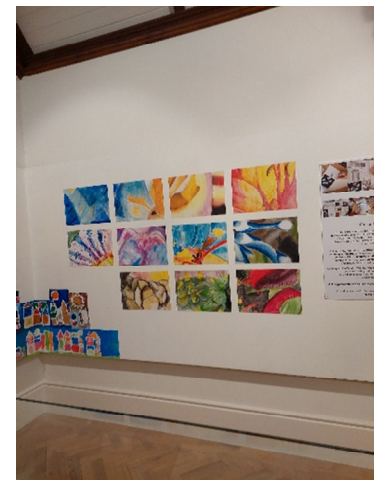
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Chair's message:

Dear Members,

At last spring has arrived, bringing longer days, lighter mornings, and the welcome sight of flowers beginning to bloom. It's a lovely time of year to reconnect, try something new, and enjoy the friendly company that makes our U3A community so special. As our groups and activities continue through the season, we hope everyone finds something that sparks interest, conversation, and a little springtime enthusiasm. Wishing you all a

bright and enjoyable season ahead.



I visited Maidstone Museum with VV3. Loose Primary school has an interesting exhibition which if you have a free hour I highly recommend. Right on our doorstep too.

Carol Gupwell
MIU3A Chair

2026 AGM

The miu3a 2026 AGM will be on **Monday 18th May** before our usual Monthly Meeting.

Please come along if you can. Full details are in the emails sent to all Members on the 19th April by the Secretary, Pam Paszkowska.

Wish list

- We have some lovely Spring weather
- Holidays are not affected by the current troubles

TV

- I am enjoying the tennis on Sky Sports
- The new Woman of Substance is intriguing
- International athletics is great on BBC2

Working together with the Community

Sevenoaks u3a Science Seminar 4 June - Save the date in your diary

The subject for this year's seminar is "AI in Action Today'. It will again be held at East Malling Research Centre.

Speakers will be covering a number of different aspects of the subject.

**Beryl Mansell,
Science Committee,
Sevenoaks u3a**

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.

They can be contacted via their web page at creativemaidstone.com



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

Park & Ride

A reminder that 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 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

Group Coordinators and Volunteers Thank You Lunch On the 23rd February



31 of our members were treated to lunch at The Cornwallis Suite in Tovil, to thank them for all their hard work running groups, admin roles, refreshments, setting up the hall for monthly meeting and committee members. A lot of hard work goes on unnoticed. It was good to meet the coordinators that don't come to the monthly meetings and put a face to the name. Beacon is now, almost, up to date, if you need help to check that your group is correct, please ask.

Anne and Sue, Groups' Coordinators

New Members Coffee Morning



Eight new members met at Leah's Bistro for coffee and shortbread. It was great to be able to introduce ourselves and meet everyone. There was plenty of chatter and everyone got on very well, sharing their experiences of miu3a already. We discussed groups members had already joined. We made sure everyone was familiar with

the website, maidstoneinvictau3a.org.uk and made sure they all had a copy of the new member's leaflet.

Anne and Sue, Groups' Coordinators

Pickle Ball

Maidstone Invicta has enjoyed a successful first year in the U3A Kent Pickle Ball league achieving 2nd place. Clearly, we are looking forward to the second season with two new U3A teams joining the league. So far as Maidstone Invicta is concerned our aim is clearly number one in the league!

The club enjoyed great recreational play. Due to popularity, we have capped membership at 20 to ensure that all players achieve maximum playing time.

We play at the YMCA where we are enjoying a new sports hall floor which has enhanced our player experience. The skill of all players has increased during the year. Onwards and Upwards!

Nigel Harvey

Maidstone Invicta Ukulele group on tour

The ukulele group has been spreading its music around Maidstone recently. In January we were invited to play at Eastfield Care Home in Sittingbourne Road, where we played a selection of songs dating from the 1920s to the 1980s; the audience was small, but the residents were appreciative, and we were invited to return as part of their summer plans.

Our U3A Ukelele Group were invited to perform at the delightfully appointed Maplewood Court Care Home in Maidstone. We started with a lively rendition of 'You are my Sunshine' as we faced several rows of tentatively smiling faces. We were in a beautiful sitting room where we entertained a group of residents for a half hour programme. We played a varied programme that we had practised and enjoyed. We hoped they'd enjoy them as much as us, even join in. They did. Some clapped, some hummed and some sang. As they got used to us a few foot tappers and hand wavers could be seen smiling. The time passed very quickly, and they were a very appreciative audience.

All too soon it was our last piece 'On the Sunny Side of the Street.' We all applauded each other We'd all had fun and early feedback suggests they'd like us to come again.

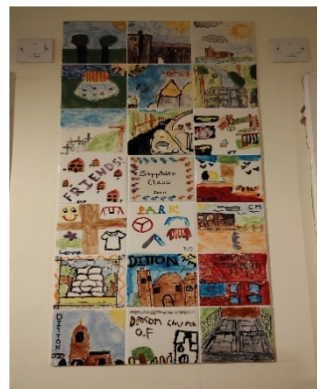
We are sorry that Glastonbury has been cancelled this year, but we are hoping to be on the Main Stage in 2027.....

Ruth Marriott, Group coordinator

Village Visits Group 2 – January to March

As January weather can be unpredictable, a group of eight of us met up for a delicious lunch in Fredericks. Service was very good, and the food was a delight to enjoy. I'm sure we will revisit sometime in the future.

On a wet, grey and very miserable day in February, thirteen of us visited the Ditton Heritage Centre and Victorian Classroom. A few members had visited previously; however, changes have been made over the years; more items have been added to enhance the experience, and it's always nice to revisit certain places. Marilyn and David welcomed us when we arrived, generously providing tea, coffee and biscuits which warmed us up. We were divided into two groups which made things easier, and the history of the Heritage Centre was explained to us. We were free to explore as we wished and asked many questions about some of the items on display. The ceramic tiles in the back room/kitchen were a delight and each tile had been painted by a schoolchild, depicting what Ditton meant to them. Very colourful indeed and such a brilliant idea. It was a thoroughly interesting and informative visit with much to see and take in. We shall watch out for their open days throughout the year, and their Cream Tea offering which is planned.



Can anyone identify the object on the desk in the second picture? Everyone remembers ink well duties. The fourth picture is tiles

decorated by the children from the primary school, interpreting what Ditton means to them. A very colourful and inventive idea to transform plain white tiles in the kitchen area. Each panel depicts each letter of Ditton.

Unfortunately, it wasn't possible due to various constraints, to organise a visit for March. It is often the case, when endeavouring to organise a visit, that some venues are closed at this time of year; that they don't open on a Tuesday or that they require rather a lot by way of a "fee" to accommodate our group, which can be rather frustrating to say the least. It was therefore decided that meeting for lunch would be a good option, given the weather in March is largely unpredictable still, and who doesn't enjoy having lunch out.

A group of 7 of us opted for a meal at Wildwood and we all thoroughly enjoyed their over 60s menu of two courses for £10 – what a bargain! They were also very helpfully able to accommodate certain food intolerances which is always a bonus, and we were greeted by warm and friendly staff.

We welcomed a new member to our group, Brian, and it was an ideal way to introduce him to some of our members by enjoying a delicious meal together.

Plans are afoot for April and more on that topic will hopefully feature in the next Newsletter.

Linda Taylor Coordinator of Village Visits Group 2

Longer Walks

Our March Walk was from Snodland, and took in Holborough Marshes and Leybourne Lakes, five and a half miles. We heard and saw numerous birds and butterflies. The weather was just perfect, hopefully winter is now well behind us.



Holborough Marshes



Watching the Buzzards



Comma Butterfly



More birds or was it butterflies



Lunch stop beside Ocean Lake

We could do with some new members. At the moment we meet on the third Thursday of the month. If you would like to join a walking group but can't make the third Thursday let me know what day and week you are available.

Find me at the monthly meetings or on the website under groups, longer walks. I look forward to hearing from you.

Anne

Invicta Art

The art class continues monthly with a regular group of 6. We try to have a subject for those who want to follow this, but it is up to each one involved as to their preferred artwork.

Last time we did portraits in various mediums. A suggestion for April is animals, - another challenge.

We meet on the third Tuesday of the month in Barming so if you are interested contact me via the website.

Mo Clayton

Membership Renewals 2026

Thanks to all members who have already renewed for 2026-27. We have managed to keep our fees the same as last year.

If you haven't yet renewed you can do so by card online, by card at a monthly meeting or by sending a cheque to the Membership Secretary. Full details are in the email sent to every member on the 26th February. If you need any help, contact the Membership Secretary, Linda Brown

membership@maidstoneinvictau3a.org.uk

Uncovering the Treasures of Bruges - a talk by Melanie Gibson-Barton BSc (Hons)

Melanie's 'Uncovering the Treasures of Bruges' was written especially for Art Societies and is a wide-ranging talk structured around The Nine Arts and provided an insider's view of the beautiful city of Bruges, in Flanders in north Belgium, having had a home in Bruges for several years.

Although famous for its chocolate shops Melanie set out to prove that the Gothic city represents more than just this popular delicacy. The talk demonstrated the position of Bruges as a wealthy medieval port for Europe, that attracted Jan van Eyck and Hans Memling to its Court but that it later fell on hard times. Its poverty meant that its delightful Gothic buildings fortunately escaped the ravages of the Industrial Revolution and enabled the City to become a draw for travellers from the 1890s. The talk was based on the Nine Arts and included the court artists of the Middle Ages, the Symbolist painters and Frank Brangwyn as well as theatre, architecture, music, dance, sculpture, cinema, and even comics to Uncover the Treasures of Bruges.

Many of the audience members had visited Bruges and while the talk brought back memories they agreed that Melanie showed that there is much more to see in this city to inspire a return visit to explore in more depth. One audience member commented 'The talk was given without recourse to notes, with clear diction and with humour to provide an entertaining and informative event'.

'Uncovering the Treasures of Bruges' talk fits within a suite of talks by Melanie about the history and culture of Belgium that includes 'Bruges – it's more than just chocolate', 'Wandering in Flanders Fields', 'The Life and Times of Edith Cavell', 'The Belgian Royal Family – murder, madness and mayhem' and 'Ostend – more than just fish and flip flops'. All are based on Melanie's personal knowledge of the Belgium built up through previously splitting her time in recent years between Kent and Bruges, Belgium.

Melanie has been giving talks for several years to the National Trust, U3A, history groups, church groups, Women's Institutes, Soroptimists and retirement social groups such as Rotary, CSMA, ARAs and PROBUS – 'live' and in Lockdowns via Zoom.us - and tells us she has the privilege of meeting new audiences to entertain and inform every day. Her range of currently seventeen talks can be viewed at www.toonstelling.com.

Melanie Gibson-Barton BSc (Hons)