

# KINGSBRIDGE ESTUARY U3A

## WINTER NEWSLETTER 2025



A Dartmoor winter scene

### Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening

**BY ROBERT FROST**

Whose woods these are I think I know.  
His house is in the village though;  
He will not see me stopping here  
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer  
To stop without a farmhouse near  
Between the woods and frozen lake  
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake  
To ask if there is some mistake.  
The only other sound's the sweep  
Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,  
But I have promises to keep,  
And miles to go before I sleep,  
And miles to go before I sleep.



## A Word from the Editor

Peter Bolt writes:

There are a lot of pictures in this season's newsletter, for which I make no apology, because they represent the hard work of our groups, and those present at the time of the taking of the photo deserve recognition. The past quarter has been a busy time one way or another and I hope you will enjoy reading about what is happening in our local u3a. In this issue you will see pictures I took at the annual Open Meeting in September. It was so well attended and such an enjoyable event, with a considerable amount of interest being shown at the group displays at the tables. Thanks to all those who took part and in the organisation of the event.

At the time of writing there is no doubt that winter has now arrived. It is very cold and the heating has been turned on, and the energy bills are rising interminably. The Kingsbridge Estuary is a community and as such we get to know so many members, many of whom become good friends with one another. Please be aware that there are members who are very vulnerable so do look out for them as you meet in your groups.

In this issue we have, yet again, many contributors to whom I convey my thanks. You will find articles from individual members, and from many of the groups which make for great reading, information from the 'Third Age' And more! I hope you enjoy reading it, and please do so to the end because there are usually some gems there.

The monthly meetings are enjoyable occasions and enhanced by the quality of the speakers we have. This does not happen co-incidentally or accidentally, someone has to arrange it, and arrange for months ahead. We can thank both Eve and Paul respectively for doing this, but we are faced with the problem of finding a replacement for the current organiser, Paul, who is unable to continue although he has planned ahead and booked a number of speakers. The role is just too demanding for just one person. So, already working on the basis that 'several hands make light work' we are seeking members who would be prepared to be part of a group to undertake this very important task, which is highly valued by the membership. The details are in this newsletter.

I have just recently been thinking about Christmas and came across a philosophical question – 'A key philosophical question about Christmas is whether a secular celebration without religious belief can still be considered "Christmas," and how different values like tradition, community, and commercialism interact with its original meaning?' What do you think?

It is Winter, and don't we know it! Wrap up warm, keep yourselves warm at home. Have an enjoyable and happy Christmas.

Peter





## A Word from the Chairman Neil Martin writes:

**This year is almost done and a new one  
just over the horizon. What a year!**

Our u3a group in Kingsbridge Estuary seems to go from great to better. Of course, we are still short of members coming forward to help out on the running of the Kingsbridge Estuary u3a, especially around helping to find, identify and invite speakers to our monthly meetings.

I dearly would like to get a small 'speakers group' up and running in 2026, a group of friends focusing on managing speakers' engagements rather than leaving it to one individual to do it all. It needs a small group of people willing to get together over 'coffee and buns' to sort out the Speaker Programme for 2027. This is NOT a committee thing, but a Group activity like any other. Peter will be sending out information to all members as well as including it in this issue of the newsletter.

We are beginning to get several new successes under our belts, such as 'Beginners Bridge', and if you are interested, contact Lesley Goonesekara via the Bridge web page. We were heartened by the interest shown in the proposed Shakespeare Appreciation Group, which is now operating under the leadership of John Davie, starting small to find our feet, and we are already thinking how we can get another similar group underway given the great interest from Members in the subject. Again there are some details in this newsletter.

I am so pleased to see how well the groups are being supported by you the members. We now have over 40 vibrant and active groups, most of which are open to accept new members. As an active group member myself I often receive comments from our members saying just how much they enjoy & appreciate being able to participate in the groups.

Our last speaker's engagement in October was the first that was done with no slides or supporting materials for a long time. A real raconteur and so eloquent. It was a delight, but it was just the latest in a fantastic year of speakers.

The new slideshow (which also comes out as part of the monthly pack after each open meeting), seems to be a success. It reduces the time spent getting messages out before each speaker and allows people to make notes of dates and times too. We will continue this into the New Year, so if you have messages as Members, or Group Leaders, please let me have them before any open meeting.

**Well, there is nothing left to say but to wish you a Fantastic Christmas, Holidays, New Year or  
whatever you celebrate, and just HAVE A GREAT TIME!!**

**All the Best,  
Neil**



Winter quote: Welcome, winter. Your late dawns and chilled breath make me lazy, but I love you nonetheless. Terri Guillemets

## A “thank you” to our Group Leaders/Contact Persons & Volunteers Peter Bolt, Groups Co-ordinator, writes

In late September the Group Leaders, Group Contact Persons, Committee members and active volunteers were invited to a Committee “Thank you” cream tea at Avon Mill Garden centre for which we had a very good turnout.

The Avon Mill staff did us proud providing very nice large scones, lashings of cream and delicious strawberry jam! [of which I managed to drop a great big blob on my trousers!]

It is always difficult to attract new team leaders/contact persons to take responsibility leading new and existing groups, and those members that are undertaking the role do so throughout the year quietly, efficiently and without fuss, not looking for thanks, they just get on and do it! So, this is the one way for the committee on behalf of you, the members, to give heartfelt thanks for what they do.

On your behalf may I thank everybody involved in our u3a for their contributions.

**Thank you all!**



Thanks to Gill Matthews for the pictures

Why did the bear keep getting fired? He always disappeared in the winter.  
 What can you catch in the winter, even with your eyes closed? A cold.  
 What did the icy road say to the car? Wanna to go for a spin?

**Winter quote:** Anton Chekhov - People don't notice whether it's winter or summer when they're happy.

## Monthly Meeting Speakers

Barbara McLarty writes:

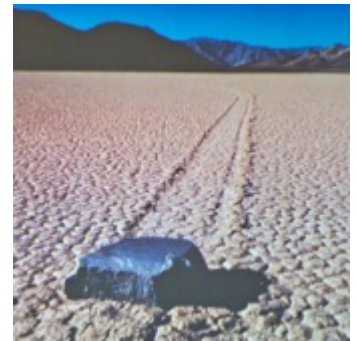


At the end of July we all met together in Malborough for our monthly meeting. This time our speaker was our old friend Adam Hart-Davis. He told us about some of the mysteries which have puzzled scientists and historians over many years, starting with UFOs and how the term “flying saucer” came to be used.

From there we moved to Siberia in 1908 where 18 million trees were flattened, as later presumed, by a massive meteor explosion a mile above the earth. The area was so remote that it was 19 years before it could be investigated. From there we were transported to Peru and the Nazca Line, animal drawings carved into many miles in of desert and only truly visible from the air, presumably for the benefit of the gods. We heard about a phenomenon called ball lightning, which has been witnessed as close to us as Widdecombe, when ball-shaped lights appear after sheet lightning, even coming down the chimney!

Adam turned his attention to some man-made mysterious discoveries, including what appears to be a battery over 2000 years ago. Similarly there was the Antikythera Mechanism which worked as a primitive computer well over 2000 years ago, found by chance by fisherman in the Greek islands. The question was raised, how were inventions such as these then lost to generations to come?

After a quick mention of reported sightings of such creatures as the Yeti, Bigfoot and Nessie and true but unexplained tales of fish and frogs falling from the sky, we saw pictures of Death Valley in the USA. Here, many miles from any human settlement, it looks as if stones and boulders of varying shapes and sizes have moved and made tracks across the arid landscape. Here, however, there was an explanation. It seems that after a rare rain shower the surface becomes extremely slippery, so such so that the stones may actually be blown by the wind in these conditions.



It was a fascinating and entertaining morning enjoyed by everyone there.

[Thanks to Gill Matthews for the picture & Barbara for the text]

### More praise for Adam from Terry & Paul Graham

Dear Eve,

First can I say from both Paul and I, how nice it was to meet you on Friday last. We both had a most enjoyable time and seeing Adam Hart Davis was a real treat. It reminded of the enlightening TV programmes we used to enjoy years ago. His talk, about unexplained objects and events, was particularly interesting, entertaining and informative and encourages us all to seek more about them. It was an excellent hour or so and judging by the turnout of the number of local attendees, it was certainly an event not to be missed. For us, it was well worth the two hour journey from Bristol.

The 'icing on the cake' for us was being invited to have lunch at the "Ring O Bells" and being able to have such interesting and inspiring conversations with Adam and others, in particular, yourself, Tony & Anna and also Andrea.

Needless to say, we are both keen photographers, so I took lots of photos and have attached copies, which you may wish to circulate. Perhaps there will be an article in the local paper or a note in the committee minutes?. It's always nice to record these events and I too will incorporate the photos in my monthly Photo-Book/Diary.

The rest of our day was also enjoyable and having such fine weather we drove to Brixham, via the Dartford ferry and had a couple of hours there, also visiting "The Golden Hind" ship.

Please pass on our thanks to all who made us so welcome and especially to Adam if you are in correspondence with him about the talk. We had a great day and it's one that we will record and recall with happy memories.

Kind Regards

Terry & Paul Graham

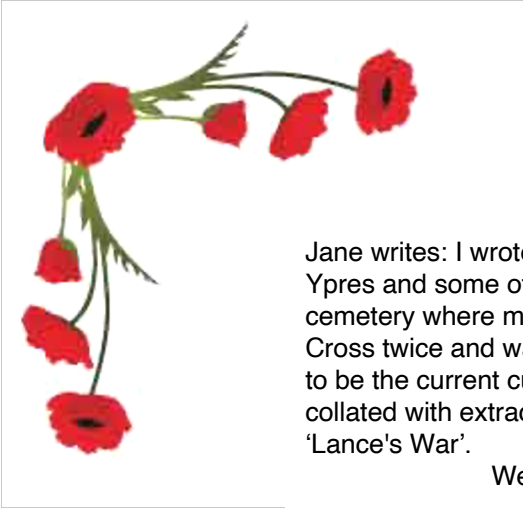
**Winter quote:** There are only two seasons – Winter and Rugby! Peter Bolt [after Bill Veeck]

**Garden Visits Group  
Pictures of a recent Garden visit  
Burrow Farm Gardens in June**



[Thanks to Wendy and others for the pictures]

A Winter quote: There's nothing better than curling up with a good book and sitting in front of the fire on winter evenings. Leo Sayer



Jane writes: I wrote this poem after a very moving few days visiting Ypres and some of the WW1 battlefields in 2014. We also went to the cemetery where my great uncle was buried. He was awarded the Military Cross twice and was killed on November 1st 1918. I feel very privileged to be the current custodian of three of his surviving diaries which I collated with extracts from his mother's diaries to make a book called 'Lance's War'.

We owe them all so much. Jane Stanley

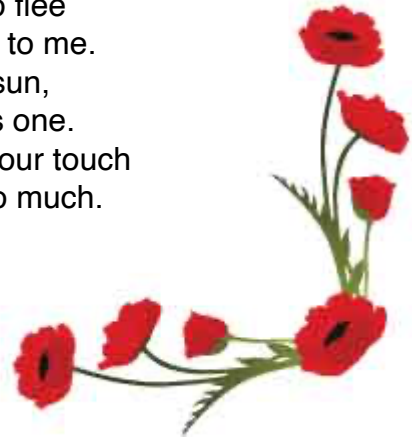
### I CRY IN THE RAIN

I can still hear your voice, see your face, feel your heart  
 Even though we are forced to be so far apart.  
 My life will never again be the same  
 For now it's the guardian of your precious name.  
 I cry in the rain and I laugh in the sun,  
 Have you any idea of what you have done?  
 Please, please return safely, I long for your touch  
 When this war is all over. I love you so much.

My heart it is aching but the blood's not as red  
 As the lifeblood that pours from the wounded and dead.  
 We hear of the horrors but where is the gain  
 When men go to war and suffer such pain?  
 I cry in the rain and I laugh in the sun,  
 My soul travels with you, my heart you have won.  
 Please, please return safely, I long for your touch  
 When this war is all over. I love you so much.

So let us look forward and hope for the day  
 When the birds sing again and we can all pray  
 For peace everlasting and hatred to flee  
 And you can return to your home and to me.  
 I cry in the rain and I laugh in the sun,  
 I dream of the day we're together as one.  
 Please, please return safely, I long for your touch  
 When this war is all over. I love you so much.

Jane Stanley



## Did you know – some facts about Christmas

- **"Xmas"**: The "X" is the Greek letter chi, which stands for Christ, so "Xmas" has been used as a shorthand for Christmas for centuries.
- **Christmas trees**: The tradition of decorating trees dates back to ancient Germanic tribes. Prince Albert helped popularize them in Victorian England after marrying Queen Victoria.
- **Mistletoe**: The custom of kissing under mistletoe is a tradition with ancient roots, as the plant was used in fertility rituals.
- **Wreaths**: Christmas wreaths have religious symbolism, with the circular shape representing eternity.
- **Robins**: Robins are a Christmas symbol because Victorian-era mail carriers were nicknamed "robins" for their red vests, and they began appearing on Christmas cards.

### Santa Claus and gifts

- **Santa's red suit**: While Coca-Cola helped create a modern, popular image of Santa, he had been depicted in red for centuries before.
- **Rudolph**: The story of Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer was created by an advertising copywriter for the Montgomery Ward department store.
- **Gift-giving**: The modern tradition of gift-giving took off in the Victorian era, but one example of early gift-giving is French nuns leaving socks with tangerines and nuts for the poor.
- **Letters to Santa**: Santa receives over 8 million letters every year from children around the world.
- **Christmas stockings**: The tradition of hanging stockings is thought to have originated with the story of St. Nicholas leaving money in the stockings of poor families.

### Music and media

- **"Jingle Bells"**: This classic was originally written as a Thanksgiving song in 1857.
- **First song in space**: "Jingle Bells" also holds the Guinness World Record for being the first song ever broadcast from space.
- **"White Christmas"**: Bing Crosby's "White Christmas" is the best-selling Christmas single of all time.

### Other facts

- **Christmas Day**: While the Bible does not state when Jesus was born, some historians believe he was most likely born in the spring.
- **Christmas Eve**: The twelve days of Christmas refer to the journey of the three kings to reach baby Jesus.
- **Christmas in Japan**: Many people in Japan celebrate Christmas by eating KFC.
- **Christmas in Ukraine**: In Ukraine, spiders are considered symbols of good luck, and decorating a Christmas tree with cobwebs is a tradition.
- **Tallest Christmas tree**: The tallest Christmas tree ever displayed was 221 feet tall and was shown in Seattle in 1950.

Acknowledgement - "Google Search"



## Un poema de invierno para niños

(A Winter poem for children)

From Jane Paynes who leads the Spanish Intermediate Level Group.

LLEGA EL INVIERNO  
Por Marisol Perales

El señor invierno  
Se viste de blanco  
Se pone el abrigo  
Porque está temblando

Se va a la montaña  
Se mete en el río  
Y el parque y la calle  
Se llenan de frío

Se encuentra a la lluvia  
Llorando, llorando  
Y también al viento  
Que viene soplando

?Ven amigo sol!  
Grita en el camino  
Pero el sol no viene  
Porque se ha dormido

THE ARRIVAL OF WINTER  
By Marisol Perales

Mister Winter  
Dresses in White  
Puts on his coat  
Because he is shivering

He goes to the mountains  
He gets into the river  
And the park and the street  
They get very cold

He meets the rain  
Crying, crying  
And also the wind  
Which comes blowing

Come friend sun!  
He shouts along the road  
But the sun doesn't come  
Because he has fallen asleep

## ELIZ NAVIDAD A TODOS



A Winter Quote in Spanish: Diciembre tiene la claridad, la sencillez y el silencio que necesitas para un nuevo comienzo en tu vida. Vivian White

(Translation: A Winter Quote: December has the clarity, the simplicity, and the silence you need for the best fresh start of your life. Vivian White)

**“Let’s Find Out” Group  
Dawne Harbord writes:**

**“LET’S FIND OUT”-**

‘Because every question deserves a good adventure’

The ‘Let’s Find Out’ group meets the first Tuesday of the month at West Charleton Village Hall starting at 10.15 a.m. for coffee and a chat and the session starts at 10.30 a.m. We charge £10 for 3 months to cover the cost of hiring the hall.

The format is simple and straight forward, members of the group take turns to choose a subject for the group to investigate who then present their findings at the next session. Subjects have been many and varied including endangered species, food security and poets.

Our latest subject was ‘Cognitive Biases’ - mental shortcuts that our brains use in our decision making process. My personal investigations have had a major effect on my life and has gone a long way to curing me of my fear of flying. Quite a result!



If you would like to join us, please come along to a session - you are welcome to come as an onlooker for free. Please contact Dawne ([dawneharbord@gmail.com](mailto:dawneharbord@gmail.com)) or Gill ([GillM13@googlemail.com](mailto:GillM13@googlemail.com)) to let us know you are coming. Next meeting is on the 6th January 2026.

It is a great deal of fun and we learn LOTS!

**Do come and give us a go.**

**“DISCOVER – DISCUSS - DELIVER”**

**The Shakespeare Group  
Sarah Oatley writes:**

The Shakespeare Group started late in the year and, due to that fact, we have actually had only one meeting at John’s house in Thurlestone. There were six of us plus John at the first meeting. John had chosen ‘Macbeth’ as our first exploration. We were all given the First Two acts to read and we chose which characters we would like to play. All the way through the First Act (we got so engrossed) we didn’t actually finish it!! With John guiding us, and the 2 hours proposed were soon over. Talking the play through was really nice, made the understanding easier, with plenty of time to discuss phrases and it all began to make real sense. We will be meeting once a month, the next one is on Monday 1<sup>st</sup> December.

**John Davie has kindly agreed to run a second Shakespeare group following the very good response to the first group’s promotion.**

You are invited to take part in one of these very interesting [Monthly](#) groups.

The first group will continue to meet, starting at 2pm on Monday 5th January – first Monday of the month thereafter. The second (new) group will start at 2.30pm on Tuesday 6th January – first Tuesday of the month thereafter.

You are encouraged to attend either group, whichever of the two days suits you better. Both groups will be using the Lynwood Room in the Age Concern building, in Kingsbridge.

If you haven’t applied before now and wish to take part please contact John by email [jnelsondavie@icloud.com](mailto:jnelsondavie@icloud.com)

**Rupert Kirkwood  
The Lone Kayaker  
Speaker at u3a Monthly Meeting  
28<sup>th</sup> November 2025**



clocked up over 31,000 miles so far, most of it in Devon and Cornwall – cherry-picking his favourite bits – he'll share his pictures and stories with us

Rupert has worked as a farm vet in West Devon for thirty-three years but had to take early retirement due to injury. Now, he spends as much time as possible paddling his kayak around the coast of Southwest England, observing and photograph the exceptional wildlife. He has kayaked every inch of the coast of SW England, from Poole to Minehead, all 1156 miles of it. Yes, it really is that far if you paddle up every creek as far as you can get at high tide, and out to every island. Also 2,000 miles in Scotland, and short jaunts in Spain, USA, Mexico, Greenland, Chile, and Antarctica.

Gill Matthews provided a picture of Rupert at the meeting and commented "What a fabulous talk today!"



**The French Conversation Group**

**Le groupe de conversation français travaille d'arrache-pied !**



## A trip to remember - Polar Bear hunt

### Neil Martin "writes":

Gill and I thought that we would love to see Polar Bears in their own environment so we booked ourselves on a voyage on a Chinese run cruise ship. Absolutely fantastic trip. I love Chinese foods, and the chef was probably one of the best in China. Over 60% were mainland Chinese, the rest from the UK. We had the best trip ever, lots of fun, good food, thousands of Guillemots and even got to see a Polar Bear.



Believe it or not there is one in this picture.

See.....

This is what we came for, but had to get a photo of a picture in a shop to pretend when we came home



Perhaps we have to go again to get closer.

But we did see lots of very loud and smelly birds (Guano by the ton)

LOL Neil



## The Church Visits Group

Liz Hext writes:



This autumn we visited four quite different churches on our two visits. In October, we ventured up the M5 and gathered at the church of St Andrew, Cullompton, whose red sandstone tower can be seen from the motorway. This is a very large fifteenth century church, showing the profitability of the wool trade in this area. It has an original wagon roof, with a carved boss at each intersection.

Its rood screen is one of the longest in Devon, and at the back of the church now rests the original carved wooden base of the medieval rood. The rood screen was a large screen, usually made of wood, that divided the chancel in a church (the area around the altar) from the nave (the area for the congregation). The rood was a large-scale crucifix, with figures of the Virgin Mary and St John, which was typically placed on top of the rood screen. The word

‘rood’ comes from the Old English word for ‘cross,’ and the rood group provided a focal point for worship, symbolizing the sacrifice of Christ. At the Reformation, the Reformers sought to destroy those statues and paintings which they alleged to have been the focus of superstitious adoration. Thus, not a single rood survives completely intact in Britain, and screens which had paintings of saints on the panelling were desecrated. St Andrew’s is unique in England, and possibly Christendom, in possessing the original rood base. It is sometimes called the ‘Golgotha’ because it is carved with skulls, rocks, and crossbones. How it escaped destruction during the Protestant Reformation is unknown. It is at least 500 years old and is thought to be the only remaining one in the country and possibly the world.



After a suitably refreshing lunch break, we moved on to the nearby village of Kentisbeare. I had long wanted to bring the group here as it is where my mother’s family is from, and I have known it well since the 1950s! (My wedding was held here.) The church is a major East Devon church, Grade 1 listed, with beautiful red and white stonework on the tower. It was built in the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century, although we know a church existed here in 1244. Inside, the rood screen is one of the finest in the country, with

outstanding carving – a superb example of medieval art. The door to the original rood stairs still survives, with traces of the original painting. The west gallery, dating from 1632,



**Keepers  
Cottage**

is another major feature, with paintwork from 1702. These two churches are well worth a visit if you are in the area.

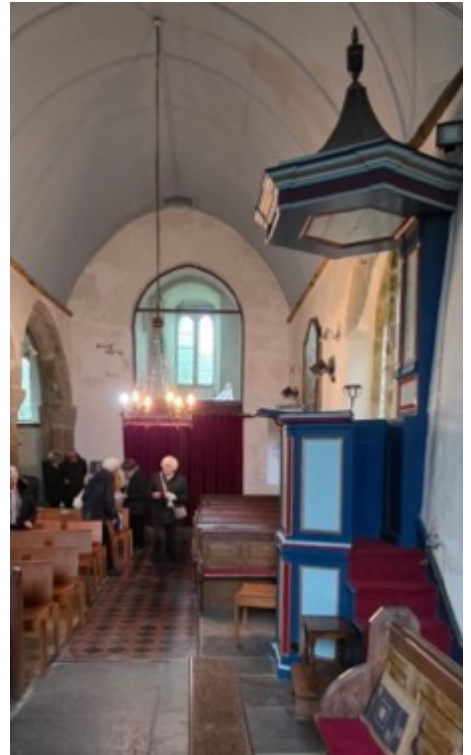
In November we stayed more local, going first to the tiny, beautifully situated church at Moreleigh, Grade 1 listed and dating from 1265. It is a tiny church, situated outside the village, possibly because it is said to have been built in a farmyard, as a penance, by Sir Peter de Fishacre, who killed the Rector of Woodleigh in a duel. His tomb can be seen embedded in the south wall and only half within the church, as he was refused

entombment inside the church. The most striking internal feature is



the stately, stiff-necked eighteenth century hexagonal pulpit, complete with sounding board and urn-shaped finial!

Thanks to Gill Matthews for the great photographs



## How would you like to be part of an active group which would benefit the whole of our local u3a?

**Peter Bolt , Groups Co-ordinator writes:**

We are seeking to establish a special group which would be able to identify good speakers and book them to speak at our monthly meetings.

The group would be quite small, operating outside of the u3a committee, perhaps no more than five members, whose role would include the following :

- Seek information from our membership about what would be suitable speaker subjects
- Research & Identify potentially good speakers
- Meet and welcome the speaker on the day of the meeting
- Introduce him/her to the Chairman and technician for the meeting [in terms of what is required regarding slides]

I know we have some very competent members within our membership, and a small group of such people would make light of what was previously singularly done by Eve & Paul respectively.

**If you would like more, information or you would like to join such a special group, please get in touch with me by email [[peter.bolt01@btinternet.com](mailto:peter.bolt01@btinternet.com)] or by 'phone [07890 934017].**

**I look forward to hearing from you.**

## Michele never fails to amuse us with her home grown poetry & Art

The (Dutch) Sint Nicolas

5<sup>th</sup> of December 2020

I ride along from roof to roof  
And that should be a proof  
That I am watching you  
...see everything you do!

I got a little cataract  
Which makes my vision less exact.  
I might see things a little rosy  
But, let's face it, that's quite cosy!

How do I manage with you lot?  
All being in a different spot?  
Roofs and chimneys not a prob  
But sat-nav I do fear a lot!

Facetime may be very modern  
But it seems to solve the problem.  
So, even when I am in Spain  
I can see you all again!

There you are, I love you all  
But keeping trek is not a ball  
Now I got to plant some carrots  
My old horse eats lots and lots



## **“LUNCH BUNCH” GROUP**

### **Sylvia Griffin writes:**

The popular “Lunch Bunch” meet on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Friday of each month. Several new members have joined our group over the past few months. Members enjoy socialising with each other at the various locations selected. Suggestions of suitable venues are always welcome from members. Over the years we have been meeting we now have a list of “favourite venues”. Car sharing is always welcomed, both from members without transport & for reducing the number of cars for parking.

[If a lunch at a different venue each month with a group of friendly, welcoming people appeals to you, please get in touch. \(via the web page contact point\)](#)

## **SUNDAY LUNCH GROUP**

### **Sylvia Griffin writes:**

The Sunday Lunch Group meet on the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of the each month at The Old Inn, Halwell. Many members enjoy a “Sunday Roast” without having to prepare it & to meet with other warm, friendly people sharing the comradery. Car sharing is always welcomed, especially for those without cars.

[If you are interested in joining our friendly group, please get in touch.](#)



## **What Prompted you to join the U3A? It would be good to hear from you.**

### **Felicity Chrysanthou tells her story**

When I came across the u3a, I didn't know what it was, so 'Googled' it as you do and found KEu3a. In particular at that time it was the Mah Jong class that I was interested in and contacted Emma who was very encouraging so I went along – I love it! I hadn't played for some years, but that didn't matter we all aim to play correctly but aren't shot down in flames if we make a faux pas. But more important was the new circle of friends that I have made, I love talking to interesting people and hearing their stories – we all have a tale to tell – and from the very beginning I felt part the group.

Initially I thought that maybe I shouldn't be there, I am past pension age but still run a business, but have found out that doesn't matter. I can still make time for the activities that I want to be involve in and I am sure many others may be in similar situations – these days a pension often needs to be supplemented and it keeps the mind active.

The monthly meetings/talks at Malborough are to be recommended, always someone interesting. The stand out for me and many others was the school teacher who discovered air raid shelters in the grounds of her school and uncovered so much information about what it was like during the war.

Earlier this year, our u3a group was facing a bit of a dilemma, a shortage of committee members for one reason or another so an appeal went out – I have volunteered as Treasurer, something I can do. This has opened up an even larger circle of friends – I love it! Have I said that already?

**So the main point of my thoughts is not about me, but to say that anyone thinking of joining should give it a go, just try one of the various groups and I have no doubt you will be surprised at just how welcoming and how much fun it is.**

*Editor: It would be great to hear the stories of other members.*

## Poet of the Season. Thomas Hardy 1840 – 1928

### The Oxen By Thomas Hardy

Christmas Eve, and twelve of the clock.  
"Now they are all on their knees,"  
An elder said as we sat in a flock  
By the embers in hearthside ease.

We pictured the meek mild creatures where  
They dwelt in their strawy pen,  
Nor did it occur to one of us there  
To doubt they were kneeling then.

So fair a fancy few would weave  
In these years! Yet, I feel,  
If someone said on Christmas Eve,  
"Come; see the oxen kneel,

"In the lonely barton by yonder coomb  
Our childhood used to know,"  
I should go with him in the gloom,  
Hoping it might be so.

### A Thunderstorm in Town (A Reminiscence, 1893)

She wore a 'terra-cotta' dress,  
And we stayed, because of the pelting storm,  
Within the hansom's dry recess,  
Though the horse had stopped; yea, motionless  
We sat on, snug and warm.

Then the downpour ceased, to my sharp sad pain,  
And the glass that had screened our forms before  
Flew up, and out she sprang to her door:  
I should have kissed her if the rain  
Had lasted a minute more.



**Thomas Hardy (1840–1928)** was an English novelist and poet known for his novels like *Far from the Madding Crowd* and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, set in the semi-fictional region of Wessex, and for his poetry, which he published after criticism of his novels led him to abandon fiction. Born in rural Dorset, his rural upbringing, musical family, and critical views on Victorian society deeply influenced his work, which often features tragic characters struggling against their social circumstances and fate. He was interred in Westminster Abbey, though his heart was buried with his first wife, Emma.

Hardy initially gained fame as a novelist with works like *Far from the Madding Crowd*. His novels were often set in Wessex, a fictionalized region of southwest England that included his native Dorset.

After *Jude the Obscure* (1895) drew public attacks for obscenity, he stopped writing fiction at the age of 58. He then published his first collection of poetry, *Wessex Poems*, in 1898, and continued to write poetry for the rest of his life. *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891).

[Thanks to Google for the information]

# The Annual U3A Open Meeting

Some moments of the morning for you to enjoy by Groups





Debbie has won the lottery? No, she has just paid for her Christmas Lunch. Chairman looks pleased!



A Winter quote: A lot of people like snow. I find it to be unnecessary freezing of water. John Geddes

## KINGSBRIDGE U3A CLASSICAL WORLD

Jane Welch writes:

We are a small group of classics enthusiasts who meet regularly on Monday afternoons at the home of John Davie's house in Thurlestone. We are welcomed with tea and biscuits before settling down to watch videos on subjects ranging from the Roman empire to Alexander the Great, as well as many other subjects from ancient civilisation.



This autumn we followed Prof Alice Robert's rail journey through mainland Greece, where she visited various sites of interest, including Delphi, with John pausing the film from time to time to clarify and explain subjects raised. We then watched a very interesting programme on Socrates, presented by Bettany Hughes, which produced some lively discussion, and the following session was on Ancient Autopsy, presented by Prof Susannah Lipscomb, researching, by means of state of the art modern technology, Cleopatra's alleged poisoning by a venomous snake. The conclusion was that a snake bite was almost certainly not the cause of her death although how she actually died remained unproven. For our last session of the term we will be treated to another Ancient autopsy, this time of Alexander the Great.

Guided by John's extensive knowledge of the classics, Classical World meetings are always very interesting, enjoyable, and informative, providing us with plenty of food for thought, and we look forward to delving further into the ancient world in 2026.

## Transport & Technology Group

Christopher Mills writes:

On 12th November 2025, the Transport and Technology Group held a session on bridges in which people were asked to talk for a few minutes about a bridge which was special to them and to bring along some photos if they had any.

We heard about a fascinating group of bridges ranging from the ancient Tarr Steps bridge in Somerset to the spectacular Huajiang Canyon Bridge in China which is the world's highest. And some great photographs accompanied the short talks. Some of the other bridges discussed were Brunel's Saltash railway bridge, the Monnow Bridge and Gatehouse in Monmouth (near where there has since been some serious flooding), and the Barmouth Railway Bridge in North Wales. We eventually ran out of time and had to postpone discussion of London Bridge to the new year.

This new format for our meetings proved very successful. We won't be adopting a similar approach at every meeting, but we will try to make more use of the enthusiasm and knowledge of members as well as continuing to seek the input of visiting experts.

Any suggestions for similar topics broadly connected with transport and/or technology will be gratefully received.



The Millau Viaduct, France

### The “German” Group Marianne Bailey writes:

We meet up every other week at ‘Creek’s End’ in Kingsbridge with our tutor, John Davie, for a couple of hours with refreshments of tea / coffee at halftime.

Apart from reading aloud and translating, we tackle German Grammar and are becoming quite used to retrieving the vital verb at the very end of seemingly interminable sentences in order to make sense of the meaning ! German is a very logical and orderly language and dauntingly long words can sometimes be broken into joined-up building blocks to reveal the then obvious meaning of them.

The texts derive from both ancient and modern German and give us an insight into not just the language but the deep German Culture that over centuries has enriched countries much further afield : Music, Literature, Religion, Art and Architecture to mention but a few of the subjects that the Group has been discussing during sessions, thereby making it a cultural as well as a linguistic journey and therefore more interesting, rounded and enjoyable.

**Nothing like nurturing “ the little grey cells” in pleasant company !**

### The Shakespeare Group Sarah Oatley writes:



The Shakespeare Group started late in the year and we have actually had only one meeting at John’s house in Thurlestone. There were six of us plus John at the first meeting. John had chosen ‘Macbeth’ as our first exploration. We were all given the First Two acts to read and we chose which characters we would like to play. All the way through the First Act (we got so engrossed) we didn’t actually finish it!! With John guiding us, and the 2 hours proposed were soon over. Talking the play through was really nice, made the understanding easier, with plenty of time to discuss phrases and it all began to make real sense. We will be meeting once a month, the next one is on Monday 1<sup>st</sup> December.

### Pétanque Peter Bashford writes:

Another good year, with regularly 10 or more players attending. Enabling 2 matches to be played alongside each other. Teams were chosen at random so everyone got to play with or against everyone else. It was with great sadness we learnt of the death of our co-ordinator Jennie Hayden during the season. Her enthusiasm will be greatly missed. We have enjoyed an extended season owing to the recent warm weather. We will recommence next year once the weather starts to warm up around Easter. Our thanks to Bryn for continuing to allow us to store the equipment at his house.



## The Music Appreciation Group

If you are interested in appreciating music of all genres then this might be the group for you. Eric Brooks sent out this piece for us to enjoy. Have a listen – click on

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SFRR3wdmDqE&list=RDt83XjF04r80&index=15>

### U3A Book Group Linda Matthewman writes:

Hi! My name is Lin Matthewman and I am the Leader of our Book Group. I used to assist Meryl Spencer with the group until she did a disappearing act back in February this year! (Actually, she moved to live near her son and his family in Leamington Spa!) She used to host the meetings and collect our books from the Library, while I was in charge of collecting money, sending out long lists of library books to choose from each year, reminding our members of the meeting each month, informing them of the title of the next book keeping, a record of members names, addresses and phone numbers etc and generally see to any other admin as needed.



I really felt rather guilty when I saw that Peter was trying (again!) to persuade U3A members to send him contributions for the newsletter he is hoping to send out soon & I thought perhaps I should show willing & produce something. [*Thank you, Lin, much appreciated. Editor*]

Our group meet on the third Thursday afternoon of the month & we have 10 official members, although we do have another “honorary” one, who attended for many years & then moved away, she wanted to stay in touch, know which books we were reading & what we thought about them, so I always include her in my monthly emails.

We receive our books from Kingsbridge Library each month & are grateful to Mary Martel, one of our members for picking up the books each month & returning the ones we have read. We no longer have one main venue as several of our members are kind enough to offer us hospitality around the area (which invariably involves cake!!)

Over the years we have read & discussed many books & we have not always had the same opinion about them, which always leads to an interesting discussion! We have just read “An American Marriage” by Tayari Jones, which we will be discussing this week & next month’s book will be “Black and British” by David Olusoga. Most of our choices are fiction but now & again we have a non – fiction book, as will be happening next time. Other notable books that we have shared have been “Scrublands” by Chris Hammer, “Normal Women” by Philippa Gregory, “How to Measure a Cow!” by Margaret Forster, “Death Comes to Dartmoor” by Stephanie Austin & “Mother’s Boy” by Patrick Gale.

I have been attending this Book Group since 2011, when the Kingsbridge U3A began & our first Leader back then was Chris Barnwell, who is still a member of our Group now (as well as in several other U3A groups too!) We met at her house for quite a number of years & we had a couple of gentlemen in the group too back then, who really added their own unique contributions to our discussions!

**Winter quote** “In the winter she curls up around a good book and dreams away the cold.”  
- Ben Aaronovitch, *Broken Homes*

## Christmas Eve in Kingsbridge

[a fictional short story]

He looked out of the conservatory window at the grey skies above listening to the rain that pummelled the roof like a roll of drums. The road was to all intents lifeless, no soul could he see wandering about, or rooting about in their garage. It's Christmas Eve, for goodness' sake! It's supposed to be a special day, there should be people around! He decided to go out regardless of the weather, if he was soaked through by the rain at least he was feeling something natural going on. Where is everybody?

'Father Christmas' thick jumper on, covered by the waterproof and festive 'woolly' hat and off he went, down the little track at the back of Jewson's which led to the Crabshell pub. Lots of cars parked and noise coming from inside the pub, all sounding very festive. People! - "John! Come on in! it was the voice of his mate, Rupert, "Come and have a Drink, it's Christmas!" So, he went into the pub, the atmosphere was friendly, warm and very noisy.



"What'll you have?" said Rupert. It was just 10am and far too early for him to have an alcoholic drink, or was it? Everybody else was drinking beer, wine and whatever and all having a jolly time of it. "Just a coke, please." John dallied for a while, but apart from Rupert he did not know anybody else there, and suspected most had arrived by boat on the high tide from Salcombe – the 'hooray Henrys', as they were known locally. He thanked Rupert for his drink, apologised for leaving so soon, and bade him farewell, wishing him a 'happy Christmas'.

The walk along the narrow Embankment Path has always been quite special. Always something going on in the estuary whether it is a meandering boat, ducks dipping, Swans gliding, or greedy gulls going about their marauding raids, and nearly always meeting someone he knows as he walks along, but not today. However, the walk along the edge of the estuary did give him time reflect on why he was feeling so empty, devoid of joy and fellowship. Living in a larger house than he needed for a number of years since the loss of his wife, having his daughter with him brought him great comfort during those trying years of grief. His community activities at the food bank, the talking newspaper for the blind, his roles and activities in the local U3A and his Church all served to distract him from himself, but it was really nice having his daughter at home, that is - until now.

Rebecca was like her mother, tall, dark haired, vivacious, and very intelligent. The clutch of 'A-stars' she gathered at the end of her Sixth Form College two years ago meant that the world was her oyster and guaranteed a place at the prestigious UCL Medical College in London. Now in her second year her ambition to become a Medical Doctor is even more entrenched in reality than when she began her studies. Regular conversations with her by telephone and video calls and coming home on holidays kept John fully informed as to where she was with her studies and how she was getting on in general. Always a very gregarious soul she has always been able to make friends easily – and one in particular, his name is Stephen. She was celebrating at a friend's birthday party to which he had been invited and they had hit it off instantly. However, this also meant that her father was 'struck off 'Becky's list as the only man in her life! So, this year it came as no surprise to him that she would like to spend Christmas with Stephen. John had suggested they might like to come to him in Kingsbridge, and he did understand and accepted that they really wanted exclusive access to themselves at this time.



It is always sad when one's child 'flees the nest', or to be more precise, the process heading towards that end. He supposed that he would not be feeling so bad if his wife was still alive, there would be mutual support for one another, but as it stood he was essentially alone. Trying to be philosophical about it all he threw himself into his various activities and treasured the moments he had on the telephone, and the various pictures she emailed him about what she was up to in College. All these things he pondered in his mind and heart as he walked towards the sounds of music and children's laughter on the Town Square. The Town Square, a spacious area well used by weekly markets, Farmers' Markets, Food and musical festivals, outdoor film shows, and various other activities. Today, the square had a number of gazebos, protecting people from the irritating drizzle, where various traders were persuading the passersby to buy

“last minute” Christmas gifts from them. In the middle of the square, and which was the source of all the joy, was the ‘ice rink’ upon which many children young and old were thoroughly enjoying themselves. The ‘ice rink’ was in fact a series of square tile-like, very slippery boards which resembled ice but, which did not require the children to have to don ungainly, heavy, ankle-breaking ice skates! The kids didn’t mind they were having a great time, as were the parents watching them and gossiping with friends whilst sipping hot drinks clutched in their hands. Seeing the enjoyment being expressed like this lightened John’s heart and he found himself smiling with vicarious joy at the sight and the sounds of the children.



Moving on through the throng of people in the square he crossed over the road to Fore Street which was very busy with people seemingly in a frenzy of last-minute shopping, moving from shop to shop. He then heard some singing and a brass band! As he got closer to the Sacred Heart Church and in the forecourt there, John espied a group of friends singing Christmas Carols to passers-by, accompanied by the Silver Band. As he made his way to join the singing he passed, with little thought, a man who was clearly unemployed, homeless, who looked very unwell, under-nourished and was begging. He was sitting on one of the new benches provided by the Town Council and being ‘fed’ mince pies and mulled wine by John’s friend, Ann, one of the volunteer/singers, and for that moment he looked happy.

It was a very convivial moment on that forecourt with everybody enjoying some mulled wine and mince pies whilst they sang and John was sure that the sound of the music brought some joy to those who were busy shopping, but did it bring home to them the ‘reason for the Season’? He doubted it.



After the Carol singing concluded, he made his farewells, and wished all a very happy Christmas, and made his way up the busy street to the Methodist Church at the top of Fore Street and met more friends. There were cakes galore for sale and Christmas Trees to view, all decorated by voluntary organisations who used the church meeting rooms during the year. As he sat with his cup of ‘instant’ coffee in the church, John casually glanced up at the Cross which personified the person whose notional birthday would be celebrated the next day. The more he looked at the Cross the more the image of that poor chap on the bench came to mind. John had not paid much heed to him at the time, but

now found himself thinking of the man, and the more he thought of him the more guilt he felt about their respective situations, and ashamed by the way he behaved towards the man – his indifference! It was time to go to St Edmund’s Church for the annual Christmas Eve celebration, an event that attracts hundreds of Kingsbridge residents every year, and possibly the only time the church is literally full to overflowing! To John this service was the start of Christmas and he had tried every year to be present for it. However, on this occasion he was troubled in his mind about the man down in Fore street and decided to forego the St Edmund’s celebration this year in favour of seeing if he could do anything for this unfortunate man sitting on the bench – if he was still there.

Wishing everybody around him a very Happy Christmas he quickly made his way out and started back down Fore Street to the Catholic Church where he last saw the old chap. The street was beginning to empty, people had sated their spending, and making their collective ways home, or to St Edmund’ Church, or back to their families. John focussed on the thought that he would not be going back to ‘family’ this year and momentarily felt sorry for himself. At first John did not see him and then when he got closer to him he found him curled up asleep on the bench.



John looked at him for a while and then quietly sat down on the edge of the bench. He noticed the smell, the smell of poverty, his clothes were ragged, but were warm in substance, but becoming increasingly wet from the unceasing drizzle that had been about all day long. He gently nudged the chap to waken him,

who woke up with a start and looked suspiciously and a bit aggressively at John. “Yeh, what..?” John said, “You look as though you might like a bed for the night and a place to celebrate Christmas tomorrow?” The man continued to look suspiciously at John. “I can offer you a hot bath, some newer clothes, a warm, soft bed, and a special day tomorrow celebrating Christmas”. John could see the chap thinking about this and wondering about the motives behind the offer. “Nah, mate, ta for asking, I got a place where me things are.” Given his suspicions about John’s reasons for offering B&B for the night, which were very reasonable given the circumstances, John said, “OK, I fully understand where you are coming from on this. How about joining me for a late lunch and have a ‘slap up’ feed?” “Nah, yer talkin’, where?”

They went to the little restaurant in the Shambles and after a pained look from the proprietor at the sight of John’s guest, they sat at the end of the restaurant so as not to offend other diners. He ate and he talked, and he ate again until he was totally replete, and could not eat anymore. They conversed as they ate, each sharing with one another aspects of their respective lives – the details of which will, no doubt, be another short story in due course. They said their goodbyes. Charles, his name, was not profusely grateful for which John was thankful, but just said “thanks mate” and went on his way.



John started on his way home, the rain had stopped, and the Christmas lights illuminated this wonderful town and he felt happier in himself. He did not know who was more grateful for the experience, Charles or him. It was another gentle reminder to him that Christmas is not about presents and drinking, it’s about love and being kind to those in need.

He set off, in the descending gloom, across the town square, now emptying, and back along the embankment, and strode home looking forward to having a pleasant Christmas on his own.

In the gloom he saw someone waving to him.

What’s this?

That can’t be!

It is!

It was Rebecca up ahead walking towards him with a huge smile on her face and when they met, they had a long lingering hug. Why? He asked. “I found out that Stephen was going to surprise me by spending Christmas with his parents! Sod that, I thought, if I am going to spend Christmas with parents, I have one at home I’ll spend it with!”

John was overjoyed, “That’s my girl!”



**A Happy Christmas to one and all!**



**From Iain Cassidy  
CEO of the Third Age Trust**



Dear Friends,

This month has been particularly busy with staff from the Third Age Trust going out and about visiting u3as. The volunteer team have been in Scotland and Northern Ireland delivering workshops with Council Representatives, while the communications team visited Belfast, North Down & Ards, and Foyle u3as. The communications team are planning more content gathering visits so if your u3a would like to be involved, please get in touch by emailing [communications@u3a.org.uk](mailto:communications@u3a.org.uk).

Barnsley u3a and Arnold u3a have both been recognised for the impact they make in their local communities. You can read more below - and a huge congratulations to them for their work in raising the profile of our movement.

Get the Nation Learning Week took place earlier this month. It's an annual campaign that showcases the benefits of lifelong learning. This concept isn't new - it's what u3as have been doing for over 40 years. And, as any member will tell you, at u3a learning comes hand in hand with social connection, delivering a double whammy of the things that we know are crucial to a happy later life.

With very best wishes  
Iain Cassidy

### From the Members

#### Community Recognition for Barnsley u3a

Congratulations to Barnsley u3a who were shortlisted in the Proud of Barnsley Awards in the Community Groups category. This nomination recognises the huge impact that Barnsley u3a has on its local community. There were over 500 nominations and Barnsley u3a is one of only three shortlisted groups in its category.

Barnsley u3a Chair Pauline said about Barnsley u3a, 'You could do something almost every hour of the day if you wanted to. There are 120 groups, approximately, from A-Z.'

Honorary President of Barnsley u3a Alan continued, "We give the people out there the opportunity to come and do something that perhaps they always wanted to do but never had the opportunity to do while they were in work or raising a family. It's about loneliness and isolation... we want everyone to be aware of who Barnsley u3a are and what we do."

### From the Trust

#### Trustees' Week

Earlier this month we celebrated Trustees' Week, the annual celebration of the work of charity Trustees. **Without the Trustees who sit on local u3a committees, the learning and fun that takes place within u3as wouldn't be possible.**

Do you have any skills that you could share with your local u3a? If you'd like to get more involved, talk to your local u3a committee about current opportunities.

I have been Secretary of my u3a for two years and Publicity Officer for three. I was asked by an existing committee member and thought I could add something in terms of my experience.

I really enjoy working with the other committee members - they're smart, interesting and have a variety of life experience that influences their roles and how we take our u3a forward. I also really enjoy seeing the difference our u3a makes to our members.

If you are considering getting involved in your committee, just do it! It's rewarding and you are making a difference to people's lives.

Adam, Secretary & Publicity Officer at Hornsea and District u3a

## From Council Chair, Sue Russell

The u3a Council has been established for seven months. At its first meeting in April, representatives from the regions came together for the first time and have now formed into a team, enthusiastically representing the regions they serve.

Council Representatives are interacting with regional support teams and u3as to listen to what grass roots have to say and report back to the Trust. Currently, working parties are looking at recruitment and retention issues and communication pathways between the office and members.

It is very early days, but the work is gaining momentum.

In Spring, there will be vacancies in several regions. Currently, there are vacancies in East of England, South East, Northern Ireland and West Midlands. Some former Trustees who transitioned from the old Board to the Council will also come to the end of their term of office creating vacancies in South West, Northern Ireland, North East, West Midlands and East Midlands.

Could you serve on the Council? If you are a people person and enjoy getting out and meeting groups, then you should consider standing for election. The work is varied but is very rewarding.

For further information contact me by emailing [sue.russell@u3a.org.uk](mailto:sue.russell@u3a.org.uk).

### u3a mentioned in the House of Commons

MP Michael Payne discussed u3a and the powerful impact it has on alleviating loneliness in the House of Commons. He particularly praised Arnold u3a before raising the possibility of a backbench debate about tackling social isolation and loneliness through lifelong learning.

This was followed by a meeting with staff and u3a members which discussed the debate and ways that we could work together moving forward. Watch this space!

### “Still Smiling”

by Phil Joiner who writes:

You will possibly remember that I produce a **free** Christmas and New Year edition of ‘Still Smiling,’ which I send out to as many people as possible to hopefully provide some extra cheer over the festive Season and I attach the 2025 version. As mentioned above, there are not only jokes, cartoons and poems, but also 6 quizzes (with answers) that might be fun to try attempting with your family or friends. I have created a link which is [smiling2025.tiny.site](http://smiling2025.tiny.site). This can be shared with anyone without needing the file and can be opened themselves at any time on a desktop or tablet. The content is the same.

I am sending this email out now to give you time and opportunity to share the publication before Christmas if you wish. If you have any comments please send them to this email address which is [christmasstillsmiling@gmail.com](mailto:christmasstillsmiling@gmail.com)

You may know that I am a U3A member, but this edition is not connected in any way with the U3A, but just my own concoctions!

**Phil Joiner and family wishes everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year**

### Editor writes:

*Phil has compiled a huge amount of Christmas related content including seasonal jokes, cartoons, puzzles, word searches, anagrams and other puzzles to amuse you throughout Christmas and beyond! Unfortunately, I am technically unable to reproduce a sample for you to see. However, Phil does provide a link for you to use and I am sure you will be amused by what you will see.*

*Thank you, Phil.*

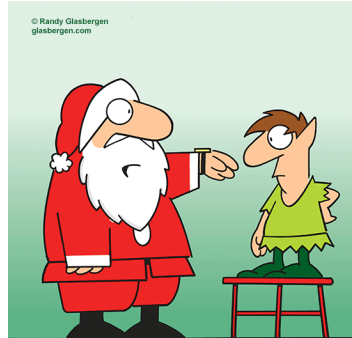
**Winter quote** : Anne Bradstreet - If we had no winter, the spring would not be so pleasant: if we did not sometimes taste of adversity, prosperity would not be so welcome

## Finally, well nearly, it's Winter Cartoon time

© Randy Glasbergen  
glasbergen.com



"I heard Little Drummer Boy 9 times, White Christmas 12 times, Rudolph 16 times and Holly Jolly Christmas 14 times... and I only had the radio on for 30 minutes!"



"Mrs. Claus bought me a smartwatch! It knows when you are sleeping, it knows when you're awake, it knows if you've been bad or good..."



© Randy Glasbergen  
glasbergen.com



"The rest of us would appreciate it if you would leave the thermostat alone."



"If snow is made from water and water has no calories, how come snowmen are fat?"

## Finally, finally!

If you have reached this far I do hope you enjoyed reading this newsletter. The next one will be in the new year in late Spring/early Summer and I hope you will feel encouraged and inclined to put pen to paper and send me something.

In the meantime, I hope you all have a Happy Christmas.

Now I am going to despatch this newsletter to our excellent Webmaster, Steve Dooley, who will be putting it on the website. Do encourage non-members to have a look at our very attractive website, and they will get a great flavour of what we do by reading the newsletters which are all available on the site.

With best wishes,

Peter