

u3a learn,
laugh,
live

White Cliffs Country

Newsletter

Winter 2025-26

Serving Deal, Dover and Sandwich



Contents

	Page
Welcome from the Chair	2-3
IT update	3
Membership update	4
u3a Festival 2026	4
Talks and events programme	5
Interest groups news	6-7
National emergency briefing on climate crisis	7
Christmas roundup!	8

Welcome from the Chair

Our Christmas celebrations at the Astor theatre and at The Courtyard (TCY) restaurant in Deal seemed to have been enjoyed by all who attended. And this year we had an even bigger selection of wonderful Christmas jumpers and dazzling outfits (see page 8 for a Christmas roundup). It now seems a bit of a distance memory.

February already! Let's all hope spring is very much on its way, with warmer days and colourful spring flowers for all of us to enjoy.

Our membership continues to grow and we are delighted to report we now have over 480 members. Interestingly, reviewing some analysis recently, it appears 90% of our membership belong to one or more Interest Groups. I am delighted to say more new Interest Groups will commence in April. As always, we are thankful for our volunteer Group Leaders for their time and experience in providing us with a diverse programme.

We recently had a very good meeting with the management at the Astor theatre and our Talks Programme continues on the first Wednesday every month. In addition, the Astor theatre have offered the membership discounted tickets on some monthly performances. Please see the Talks and Events section for more information. The Talks Programme has been booked to the end of 2026 with a great variety of speakers and subjects. You can find all the information on our [website](#).

As the new financial year draws near, the committee are creating budgets for each of the areas for which they have responsibility, this will help us review our annual expenditure and, as we expected and reported at the last AGM, a small increase in the cost of membership will be needed.

Additionally, the committee have been very busy of late, reviewing all our role descriptions to ensure they fit what we want to provide to our members, and to identify areas or tasks yet to be filled. We have been embarking on a project to review all White Cliffs Country u3a policies, as it is important they are kept up to date, as done in the past, and available to the Charity Commission if required.



Our 30th Anniversary celebration will now be held in August, and I hope to be able to announce what and where very soon.



Best wishes.

Learn, Laugh, Live

Carol

**Carol Fowler
Chair of White Cliffs Country u3a.**

IT update

Need help with Beacon and IT?

We believe our administration system, Beacon, is much more stable and useable than it has been in the past. However, if you would like some support or help, we are delighted that Mary and Bill Venables will be holding an **IT drop-in session at The Landmark in Deal on 9 March from 10:00am to 12:00pm**. They will help you with not only any questions on Beacon or our website, but will be only too happy to help with other IT related queries. Please bring your mobile, tablet or laptop.

If you have a problem with Beacon or the website, Bill is providing us all with first line support, and you can reach him on this new email address WCCITSup@outlook.com. Please only use it for this purpose.

Our thanks to Mary and Bill for their continued support.

AI learning

We have an addition to our talks programme on Friday 20 February from 2:00pm to 3:00pm at the Astor entitled “*AI for Everyone*”. The speaker is Russell Whitworth who is a member of the Third Age Trust (TAT) AI team, and has given u3a online talks. We are delighted he accepted our invitation to come and speak in person.

Up and coming other AI learning is as follows:

“*The evolution of AI and our changing world*”

Wednesday 11 March at 2:00pm

Free online via Zoom

For more information see the (TAT) [u3a website](#).

“*AI in Action Today*” (Sevenoaks u3a Science Seminar)

Thursday 4 June

East Malling Orchards Conference Facility

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

Save the date - more information to follow.

Membership update

Our next quarterly New Members' meeting is **Tuesday 17 February 2026 at 10:30am**, Sholden Village Hall. If you are a new member and haven't had the chance to attend a New Members' meeting, please do email Ponda, our Membership Secretary, on membership@wccu3a.co.uk to let her know you are coming. Welcome new members!

White Cliffs Country u3a now has over 480 members, which brings us back to approximate pre-Covid membership numbers.

If you use Facebook, keep an eye out for our White Cliffs Country u3a flyer. Many of the local villages have kindly agreed to post our flyer on their Facebook page.

Please feel free to post pictures of your group or event activities on our Facebook pages. We have one private group (called [White Cliffs u3a](#)), and one public page (called [White Cliffs Country u3a](#)).



The annual renewal date for the White Cliffs Country u3a is on 1 May. We have moved it away from the previous 1 April renewal time to avoid the busy tax year reconciliation. Ponda, our Membership Secretary, will be sending you an email, or a letter in the post for those without email, on 1 April with instructions on how to renew your membership. Once you have renewed, your membership will be valid until 1 May 2027.

Save the date!

Thursday 30 July, in the evening. White Cliffs Country u3a will apply to enter the Deal Procession for the Carnival this year. All our u3a members are welcome to join together carrying our u3a banner in the Procession. Ponda, our Membership Secretary, will circulate more details closer to the date.

And finally...please be sure to check your junk/spam file for any correspondence from u3a.

u3a Festival 26 – booking now open!



The University of York is playing host to u3a's festival in 2026 between 1-3 July. This three-day event brings the movement together and is a celebration of the fun, learning and community that is key to u3a.

The festival will feature a wide range of activities, talks, workshops, exhibitions, sports tournaments and concerts to celebrate the vibrancy of u3a.

Accommodation will be available on site and the campus is just east of the historic city of York, with transport links by train and plenty of parking. Members will also have access to the restaurant, cafeteria, bar and refreshment areas on site.

To find out more and book your place, go to the [TAT u3a website](#).

Talks and Events programme

White Cliffs Country u3a has monthly talks which are free and open to all members. These are held on the first Wednesday afternoon of each month at the Astor Theatre in Deal. It is also hoped to hold talks in the Dover area, as well as occasional quiz sessions, coffee mornings and other events. Below is the programme up to the end of 2026. Look out for updates and additions to the programme on the [Events](#) page of the website.



If you have suggestions for talks or would like to give one yourself, please contact Sara, our [Talks Coordinator](#). We also now have a suggestion box, which will be available at the talks, and invite you to submit any suggestions for talks or ways in which we can improve our programme.

The Astor is planning to offer White Cliffs Country u3a members a £5.00 discount via their monthly Plays/Drama programme. Sara, our Talks Coordinator, will inform members in good time when these opportunities arise. All such bookings will need to be made directly with the Astor.

Talks and Events 2026

17 Feb 2026	10:30am	New Members' Meeting	Sholden Village Hall
20 Feb 2026	2:00pm	AI (Artificial Intelligence) for everyone	Astor Theatre
4 Mar 2026	2:00pm	Kent in C19: Dickens, Darwin & the coming of railways	Astor Theatre
24 Mar 2026	1:00pm	John's fun quiz – an Eggcellent Quiz!	Sholden Village Hall
1 Apr 2026	2:00pm	Sew Not History	Astor Theatre
6 May 2026	2:00pm	The Venetian Connection	Astor Theatre
3 Jun 2026	2:00pm	A history of Country Music. aka "Your Cheatin' Heart"	Astor Theatre
4 Jun 2026	tbc	Science Seminar: AI in Action Today (Sevenoaks u3a)	East Malling Orchards Conference Facility
1 Jul 2026	2:00pm	Life on the Farm Reservoir	Astor Theatre
30 Jul 2026	Evening	Deal Procession for the Carnival	Carnival
5 Aug 2026	2:00pm	Dover RNLI	Astor Theatre
2 Sep 2026	2:00pm	Annual General Meeting	Astor Theatre
7 Oct 2026	2:00pm	Pluckley: the making and faking of a ghost story	Astor Theatre
4 Nov 2026	2:00pm	Amazing WW2 Women or "Band of Sisters"	Astor Theatre
2 Dec 2026	2:00pm	Christmas celebrations through the ages	Astor Theatre

As well as the above talks and events, the Third Age Trusts offers u3a members a wide range of free online talks, workshops and courses. Find out more from the [Third Age Trust](#).

Interest group news

News from groups



The “[Churchcrawling](#)” group has so far visited Lyminge, St Martin in Canterbury, Brooke, Eastry, Barfreestone, Waldershare, Capel-le-Ferne and St Mary Nackington.

The group says they are enjoying their visits, which thus far have been coupled with the history of churches after St Augustine arrived in the 7th century, so a programme was developed to show how churches changed over the centuries, and sometimes to view outstanding feature(s) of a church.

Behind the group in the above photo in St Mary Nackington are two of the oldest stained-glass windows in England, dating from early C13, one depicting St Thomas Becket of Canterbury.

[Creative Writing](#) workshops are for u3a members who want to develop their creative writing skills, including writing autobiography or family history. They aim to provide an opportunity to develop your creative writing skills through activities and discussions in a friendly informal setting. These sessions are called workshops because they can be thought of as practical places where you produce things, hone and polish your skills and enjoy yourself.

During the workshops, there is plenty of time to have fun, write, listen to other people’s work, get feedback, explore ideas and develop skills through practical exercises. One member said, “*I’ve just had a book published and it all started with a creative writing course...From little acorns oak trees grow...*” Another person, who was a member of the group some time ago, has a book due for imminent publication and said this had all started with the Creative Writing Workshops that gave her the “writing bug”.

Do you fancy a bike ride? Join the “[Wheelers](#)” cycling group for some company while cycling round our beautiful county. Recent events have included cycling to Sandwich across the ancient road, and to Dover National Trust café. The next ride is planned for 22 April 2026.



[Women in Society and History](#) (WiSH), which is its tenth year, celebrates the role of women in Society and History. The group follow the ethos of u3a – “*by members, for members*”. Members choose who/what they would like to research, sharing their findings with the rest of the group.

Subjects have included Women’s Suffrage, International Women’s Day, The Bloomsbury Set, Blue Plaques, Social Reformers, Women and Politics, and lots more. There have been many women who sound interesting and worth investigating. One year they even looked at women who are not to be admired (e.g. Rose West and Cynthia Payne).

In the early years of the group, they watched films together, including *Housewife 49*, *The Lady in the Van*, *Hidden Figures* and *Educating Rita*.

Maureen, the Group Leader said, “*If I was asked who my favourite would be there would have to be two front runners – Fanny Craddock and Lucy Diamond and the Forty Elephants*”.

It is a lively group, and new members are always welcome, men included!

Maureen would like to thank WiSH members, past and present, for their contributions to the group.

***With thanks to the group leaders for their contributions:
Ian Hadingham, Michael Burney-Cumming,
David Wilsher and Maureen McCutcheon***

Could you be a Group Leader?

With over 480 members of White Cliffs Country u3a, there is a growing need for new groups and we are always looking for volunteers to be Group Leaders. All you need is an idea and some enthusiasm, you don't have to be an expert in a topic to start an interest group!

You could jointly lead a group or consider having a deputy Group Leader. Not sure where to begin? Current and past Group Leaders would be happy to support you, and the Third Age Trust (TAT) has over 90 Subject Advisers on hand to offer guidance and inspiration for a whole range of subjects. Information about the subjects covered by TAT Advisors can be found from the [TAT website](#). If you have an interest, skill or experience that you could share, please contact Heather, our [Groups Coordinator](#), to discuss how to take this forward and to discover what support is available.

Interest groups update

Although many existing groups are full and can't take on more members, there are some groups which still have spaces. If you fancy playing backgammon, chess or bridge, there are several places available. There are still spaces available in some other groups and a number of new ones will be starting in April (booking will be open in the near future).

Larger groups such as "Filmgoers", "Art Appreciation" and "Gentle Explorers" offer information on the topic and opportunities to join in with visits to relevant locations or get together.

And don't forget our WhatsApp social group is available for members to contact others to arrange to meet up for a meal, a coffee and chat, a trip or an event.

To find out more about interest groups, go to [WCC u3a website](#), and to see if there are spaces available and book your place, go to [Beacon](#).

The new full programme of interest groups is expected to be published around the end of July.

National Emergency Briefing on Climate Crisis



In November, ten of the UK's leading experts briefed an invited audience on the climate and nature crisis. There were over 1,200 politicians and leaders from business, culture, faith, sport and the media with the latest implication for health, food, national security and the economy.

You can find out more about this briefing [here](#).

Ellie Brooks (left in photo) from WCC u3a, attended this briefing, along with Brenda (Cotgrave and District u3a). They are both part of the *Interest Groups Online* Climate Matters group. Their involvement shows how the u3a voice can help strengthen messages that matter to members.

Ellie said, *"They were amazing speakers - all professors in different fields and showed how the climate crisis is impacted on their services. I expected the weather expert, the water talk, etc. I didn't expect the ministry of defence and how they are having to send soldiers home with heat exhaustion as it is too hot to just 'be' in some parts of the world! ... It all stressed the severity and urgency for change..."*



Christmas Lunch



Seventy-five members enjoyed the White Cliffs Country u3a Christmas lunch at The Courtyard Restaurant in Deal. We took over the entire restaurant! The food was excellent and it was a wonderful opportunity to catch up with old friends and meet new people. The staff of the Courtyard, although run off their feet by such a big group, were friendly and attentive and *"a good time was had by all!"*

Christmas Social

It was lovely to see so many members attending our Christmas Social at the Astor theatre.

Members enjoyed a cuppa and festive treats before being entertained by St Martins (Great Mongeham) hand-bell ringers, including a sing-along to our favourite festive songs. The hand-bells are over 100 years old!

This was followed by Julius Bannister, of the Astor Palm Court Orchestra, who delighted us with stories of his 45-year music career, along with violin playing. He took us from the very first time he picked up a violin as a young child, through his career, including performing in West End shows, opera and ballet, to mention a few.

A fun and enjoyable afternoon!



Christmas Crafts



Members were able to let loose their creative talents at two Christmas craft events held during November.

Gloria Brissenden led a Ribbon Wreath workshop. Members were able to bring their own bells, ribbons and foliage to add a personal touch. Anne Matthews led a workshop on Diamond Painting a Christmas tree decoration. This is a relaxing craft, which is simple and effective, and can be quite addictive!