

# THE MAGAZINE

**u3a**  
learn, laugh, live

## Market Drayton



Autumn Colours

photo by John McVittie

*The Autumn Issue*

2025

## Contents

Front Page	page 1
Contents	page 2
Committee	page 3
Chair's AGM report	page 4
Reports of monthly meetings	page 6
Non-u3a meetings	page 12
Jokes	page 13
Puzzles	page 14
Special Interest Groups	page 15
Members contributions	page 20
Puzzle Answers	page 22

## Market Drayton u3a Committee Members 2025-2026

### Executive Committee

<b>CHAIRPERSON</b>	Judy Cowdale
<b>SECRETARY</b>	Phillip Glover
<b>TREASURER</b>	Sarah Manning
<b>MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY</b>	Judy Cowdale
<b>PROGRAMME SECRETARY</b>	Kevin Read-Jones
<b>'THE MAGAZINE' EDITOR</b>	John McVittie
<b>'THE MAGAZINE' EDITOR / CONVENOR LIAISON</b>	Viv McVittie
<b>WEBSITE ADMINISTRATOR / CONVENOR LIAISON</b>	Jill Glover
<b>COUNTY NETWORK REP</b>	Alan Cartwright
<b>COMMITTEE</b>	Peter Ingham
<b>COMMITTEE</b>	Sue Walker
<b>COMMITTEE</b>	Jacqui Wright

The Annual General Meeting was held on Thursday 18th September 2025 at Festival Drayton Centre. Anyone thinking that they would like to join the committee and help develop Market Drayton u3a is encouraged to contact Judy Cowdale at any time to indicate their interest and to discuss ideas.

**MARKET DRAYTON u3a  
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

**THURSDAY 18 SEPTEMBER 2025  
CHAIR'S REPORT**

Good afternoon all and a very sincere welcome to the 2025 Annual General Meeting.

Committee

We had changes to Committee members following the 2024 AGM starting with our Treasurer - Andy Shearer - standing down. Andy spent a lot of time and energy ensuring every possible aspect of our finances were kept 'legal' and negotiating possible internet banking with NatWest, regrettably without result through no fault of his own. Our grateful thanks for your hard work Andy.

I'd like to make a special mention to Ann Swales, who so willingly offered her services as Treasurer in October 2024 following our extended search but who has now had to step down for personal reasons. Our very best wishes to Ann and our grateful thanks for the time you were able to be on Committee. Andy Shearer has stepped "into the breach" for the interim but we are, again, searching for a Treasurer!!

We gained a new Programme Secretary - Kevin Read-Jones following Colin Barthorpe standing down, and magazine editors - Viv and John McVittie, who took over from Alan Cartwright. Our grateful thanks to Kevin, Viv and John for their efforts and, not least, to Colin who spent a good number of years keeping our monthly meetings filled with varying topics.

Shortly after the AGM, Alan Cartwright, the u3a Chair, made the decision to stand down from that post but remained as a committee member. However, he has now decided to stand down from the Committee completely. We do, wholeheartedly, thank Alan for his commitment to the Committee and indeed to the u3a.

Lastly, I took over the post of Chair (initially co-opted) in November 2024. Its going OK!!

Membership. Membership is about the same year on year. We invariably lose people deciding not to continue with their membership, but at the same time we gain new members throughout the following year. Currently we have

204 members having lost 36 from last year but gained 36 this year. Swings and roundabouts I think.

Remembering. Sadly, there were a number of 'passings' during 2024-2025, not least of whom were Ann Parkinson and Peter Chevin, both inaugural members of the MD u3a. We also remember Sylvia Spain, Michael Issacs and Donald Prior.

Groups. I'm really happy to say that this year we had 5 new groups start up: spanish, mahjong, the discussion group, breakfast club and drop-in social and the possibility of a new French language group starting in October. We have one group change: Colin Barthorpe is standing down as convenor of the bird watching group with Brian Truslove taking over. Brian's first event is the September visit taking place on 22 September, then 3rd Monday in the month from October. Our grateful thanks go to Colin for his dedication in organising and supporting the bird watching group and all its members during his time as convenor. Overall, our u3a is growing; slowly perhaps, but surely.

Website and Facebook. Jill Glover, our website manager, had a significant task throughout this year following the National u3a's instigation of a whole new website system. Jill had a lot to learn about the new system and what it entailed and her hard work is gratefully recognised especially as she has had to do this while supporting a close family member through severe medical issues.

Thursday Meets. I think we can say we have enjoyed a wide variety of topics. Some interesting, some thought provoking, some feel-good and some not so much but each one having its merits. I know that Kevin has organized some equally varied speakers and topics for the next year beginning with Aged to Perfection: The art and science of Cheese on 15 January where you will have the opportunity to taste some interesting cheeses!

MD u3a Future. I'm happy to say that your u3a is currently in a stable financial position but I'll leave this subject to Andy to give an overview.

Your u3a. We are continuing to encourage new members and groups; participating in local events to advertise the u3a and being part of the overall community. I think, and hope you agree, we as a whole, are "doing ok".

*Judy Cowdale. Chair MD u3a*

## *Editor's note*

*Since the annual general meeting we have been fortunate to gain the services of Sarah Manning as treasurer and we welcome her to the executive committee.*

*At the time of the AGM Market Drayton u3a had a balance of approximately £3,300. Since then member's annual subscriptions have increased the balance to approximately £5,600 and this will grow as more subscriptions are paid. The funds are mainly used to pay a levy to the Third Age Trust which is the national representative body for the u3a movement in the UK, to pay for our use of the MD Festival Centre for our monthly meetings and to pay our monthly speakers. Our special interest groups are self sufficient with individual group members paying for the costs associated with that group.*

## **Reports of Monthly Meetings**

We are sure that those of you who have attended the monthly meetings at the Festival Drayton Centre over the last few months have enjoyed our speakers. Many thanks to Kevin Read-Jones for providing us with such a varied and entertaining line up. Here are brief summaries of talks over the last few months.

### **'A life on the ocean wave' - 15th May 2025**

Graham Billingsley regaled us with a collection of anecdotes about his life at sea. He was brought up in Dorchester, Dorset, but left school with no qualifications and little prospect of work so he enlisted in the Royal Navy. In the navy he was able to get training, first as a gunner and progressing to gun laying (being responsible for aiming at the target) and general armoury. He also studied to be a ship's quartermaster and over a relatively short number of years was given increasing responsibility and was encouraged to apply for a commission as an officer.

Amongst his anecdotes was how as a trainee quartermaster he kicked over a badly labelled canister and had to call the bomb squad in case it contained dynamite or nitroglycerine - actually it was cooking oil. On another occasion he was put in charge of a group of sailors sent to search for a missing helicopter. Another time he was involved in the burial at sea of a senior

Admiral - the coffin floated and had to be recovered (twice!). On the third attempt the ship crashed into it!

As an officer he continued to be given opportunities for advancement and eventually was offered a post in the Sultan of Oman's navy. He started life at sea as an Able Seaman with no qualifications and progressed until he left as a Lieutenant Commander.

The lesson to be learned from his experiences was that, given the right opportunities, with effort and training you can make a success of your life. He was eternally grateful to the Royal Navy for giving him those opportunities.

At the conclusion of Graham's talk a collection was made towards the RNLI.

### **'An Afternoon of Comedy and Magic' - 19th June 2025**

Paul Rushworth treated us to an entertaining interlude of magic tricks - card and rope tricks mainly - many of which he had learned from his father who was also an accomplished magician.

### **'Shot at Dawn' - 17th July 2025**

During the First World War 3000 soldiers were sentenced to death by Court Martial. 346 soldiers were summarily executed by firing squad whilst the rest had their sentences commuted to hard labour or penal servitude. Amongst the charges were cowardice, disobedience towards an officer, striking an officer and desertion. There was no understanding in those days of shell shock or other mental disorders brought on by the pressures of war.

David Bardell and Mick Byrne began by describing the conditions met by the British Expeditionary Force when they landed in Belgium and France in 1914. The German army was well prepared, invaded Belgium and took the high ground. When the BEF arrived later they were forced to dig in on low ground which was saturated by rain. They built 1600 miles of 4-6 foot wide trenches in a zig-zag formation. This was to limit damage from machine-guns or heavier artillery. The trenches were fitted with duckboards to aid movement but they were slippery and not very safe. Lice and rats had to be contended with as had trench foot caused by flooding of the trenches.

There was supposed to be a cycle of time in the trenches - 4-6 days on the front line, 4-6 days in a reserve trench and 4-10 days rest and recuperation. This was often ignored by senior officers. Constant bombardment of the

trenches by artillery led to sleep deprivation and the death of colleagues was a continual factor leading to mental disturbances. Some decided they had had enough and chose to desert. Others chose to disobey orders or to otherwise react strongly to their situation. This would lead to a charge being made and a Court Martial being (often summarily) arranged. For what were considered to be the most serious offences the sentence would be death by firing squad. Firing squads were, in general, made up of friends or at least close colleagues of the sentenced man. If you refused to take part in the squad you would be placed on a charge yourself. This was supposed to discourage further disobedience.

David and Mick then led us through a number of harrowing accounts of soldiers who had been shot at dawn. Some were suffering from shell shock or battle fatigue and were found hiding or wandering aimlessly so were charged with desertion. Another was charged with casting away his weapon - he had used his rifle to create a trip hazard in a trench when retreating from a German advance. Another had left his wet cap in a trench to dry out and refused to go back for it and so was charged with disobedience.

Bereaved families suffered because they got no war pension and the local community worked out that their son/husband/father had been sentenced to death by Court Martial. Women had to marry a survivor of the war to get their pension. Those who had their sentence commuted, and their family, still suffered the stigma of having been charged. It was not until 2006 that a blanket pardon was given to all those affected.

### **‘Mucks Magic - 1 Farmer, 8000 Landlords’ - 16th October 2025**

In 1929, at the age of 14, Arthur Hollins took over the tenancy of Fordhall Farm on the outskirts of Market Drayton. For the first meeting of our 2025/6 year Charlotte Hollins, Arthur's daughter, told how the farm had developed over the years.

When he took over the tenancy the higher parts of the land were very sandy and Arthur struggled to keep it fertile. This led him to become interested in soil biology and he learned that by sowing a diverse mix of grasses and herbs he could create a tightly rooted pasture that could withstand the wear and tear produced by animals. Some grasses have deep roots and bring minerals to the surface whilst others have shallower roots and produce a thick mat which protects the surface. Taking advantage of the fact that the lower pastures of the farm were by the river Tern, Arthur introduced a year-round outdoor rotation of livestock, using the water-meadows in the summer when that land was driest and the higher ground in winter. This kept the animals healthy and the pastures in good condition. This is known as ‘foggage farming’. Over 70 different plant species have been recorded in

Fordhall's pastures and this provides a healthy environment allowing the farm to keep veterinary intervention very low.

At the end of the second world war the cost of fertilisers was very high and Arthur then switched to organic farming for which he was an early pioneer. He grew no crops, concentrating on animal husbandry of cows (mainly dairy), pigs and sheep. In 1957 he and his wife began to produce yoghurts, the first commercial yoghurt producers in England. This continued until the mid-1970s when his wife was tragically killed in a road traffic accident. He then switched to beef cattle and continued to develop the farm with a farm shop, restaurant, holiday events, nature trails and other ways of diversifying the enterprise to enable the farm to be profitable.

In 1981 Arthur married again and had two children, Charlotte and Ben, who were to become instrumental in the long term development of the farm.

In the 1990s Muller, the German dairy products manufacturer, bought land adjacent to Fordhall farm and this encouraged the farm's landlord to look at alternative ways of using the land. Eviction notices were served on Arthur but his tenancy was quite secure and he was able, at considerable expense, to fight these notices in the courts. The farm began to decline. In 2003 a final eviction notice was issued, giving the family one year to close. However, Muller were not as interested as they had been in acquiring the land for expansion and the landlord gave the family an 18-month tenancy while he reassessed his options.



At this time Charlotte had just graduated from university and Ben was at college. Charlotte and Ben took jobs to maintain themselves and allow the shop and other enterprises to put money into the farm. But there was still the threat of eviction and Charlotte realised that the farm's best years had been when lots of people had been involved. With the help of friends Charlotte and Ben then attempted to get the local community involved. They held a meeting at which they put forward the idea of the land being held in community ownership and still run by a tenant farmer. But the landlord wanted £800,000 for them to buy the land. They set up a non-profit making community benefit charity and began selling £50 shares. They organised volunteer weekends and one volunteer from London was so impressed with their ideas that he started canvassing his neighbours for funds. By chance, one of these neighbours was a journalist for the Daily Telegraph and in the Easter 2006 weekend edition of the Telegraph magazine a wide ranging article appeared extolling the virtues of Fordhall farm and the idea of community ownership. Other publications followed suit. Money came rolling in, in cheques for £50. In the last two weeks of the campaign they raised £250,000 but it was touch and go whether the banks could clear all these cheques quickly enough. Helped by one large donation and a bank loan they reached their target with 24 hours to spare. And so Fordhall Organic Farm became England's first community owned farm. There are over 8000 community shareholders, so lots of people making a relatively small contribution made it all possible. And they, and their descendants, collectively own Fordhall farm forever.

The Fordhall Community Land Initiative has appointed Ben as a tenant farmer with a 100 year tenancy which gives both security and an incentive to



invest in the farm. Over 100 local people are employed during the summer months. Charlotte helps manage the non-farming aspects of the enterprise. As well as the farm shop and cafe she is passionate about providing for the local community. There is a care farm which supports adults with learning disorders and helps patients connect with nature during and after their cancer treatment. There is an alternative curriculum project for vulnerable young people and they offer apprenticeships. Visitors and volunteers are always welcome. There is glamping in Yurts, guided tours, climate work such as tree planting and using sheep wool for insulation. Straw Lodge can be used for short courses, retreats, cub/scout camps and parties.

FCLI is also active in supporting other communities that have similar ambitions. They actively support the move towards a Community Power Bill which they hope will, by making authorities make decisions together, work in the best interests of local communities. Through collaboration, they aim to sustain livelihoods in land, examine nature, nurture the planet, nourish bodies and minds and inspire others to put purpose in front of profit. Over the years they have been endorsed by many celebrities, including Prunella Scales, Sting, David Bellamy, Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall and not least, King Charles.

Before she rushed off to collect her children from school, Peter Ingham gave a vote of thanks for her comprehensive and inspiring presentation.

### **Upcoming Topics for monthly meetings**

20th November 2025	The Great American Songbook
15th January 2026	The History of Cheese (with samples)
19th February 2026	60s Guitar Music
19th March 2026	Horatio Nelson
16th April 2026	JFK and Marilyn Monroe
21st May 2026	Spirits of Shelton Hospital
18th June 2026	Heroes of the Sky (RAF in WW2)
16th July 2026	BBC Light Music
August 2026	No meeting
17th September 2026	ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Attendance is free for u3a members, visitors will be charged £2.00

Members are reminded that a wide range of talks and events can be accessed on the national u3a website using Zoom. See [www.u3a.org.uk](http://www.u3a.org.uk)

## Non-u3a talks

A number of local organisations offer programs of talks which are open to the public and are free or at low cost. Amongst them are:

**Keele University World Affairs** - weekly meetings on Thursday evenings in the Westminster Theatre starting at 7.30pm. Details can be found at [kwaku.org.uk](http://kwaku.org.uk)

**Keele University Public Lectures** - held at various locations in the university and in Newcastle under Lyme. Details can be found at [www.keele.ac.uk/about/artskeele/whatson/public-lectures](http://www.keele.ac.uk/about/artskeele/whatson/public-lectures)

### **University Centre Reaseheath, Nantwich CW5 6DF**

All lectures are at 6pm on a Wednesday

19th November 2025: Curds and Culture: The Art of Cheesemaking

10th December 2025 Pet First Aid: Accidents and emergencies can happen at any time — and when they involve your pet, every second counts. Knowing what to do before you can reach a veterinarian can make all the difference

14th January 2026 Strange Lives: From corals to jellyfish to ferns to slime moulds, the reproductive cycle gets mind-blowingly weird and challenges what exactly an individual person is.

11th February 2026 Let's Talk About Sex: This session will shine a light on some of the myriad ways that animals select mates, safeguard paternity, ensure genetic diversity and raise offspring.

18th March 2026 Dog strays in the UK: how good is our care? Across the UK, thousands of dogs find themselves without a home each year — picked up as strays, surrendered to shelters, or abandoned outright. But how well do we really care for them?

For your free place at a lecture please visit the website and register

<https://ucreaseheath.ac.uk/public-lectures-and-events/>

### **Market Drayton Library**

Closer to home, there are two upcoming events at Market Drayton Library.

On Wednesday 5th November at 7.00pm, Peter Ingham will introduce a session relating to the graves of Polish Airmen in Market Drayton. On Wednesday 26th November at 7.00pm there will be a talk and a chance to reminisce about the Silhouette Factory at Towers Lawn. You can book your place at either or both of these events by contacting the library. There is a charge of £5 for each evening and refreshments are included.

## Jokes

We're told not to play with our food, but we can joke about it:

Pizza shop slogan: "7 days without pizza makes one weak."

Why do we put round pizza in a square box and eat it in triangles?

I arrived early at the restaurant last night. "*Do you mind waiting for a bit?*", the manager asked. "*Not at all*" I replied. "*Good, take these drinks to table 9*".

My girlfriend said I'm getting fat. But in my defence, I've had a lot on my plate recently.

I've been telling people about the benefits of eating dried grapes. It's all about raisin awareness.

If you boil a funny bone does it become a laughing stock? That's humerus.

The man who invented throat lozenges died recently. There was no coffin at the funeral.

"Buffet" is a French word that means "get up and get it yourself."

I don't like German sausages - I think they're the wurst.

Why do the French only eat one egg for breakfast? Because in France one egg is an oeuf.

A woman in the restaurant said she was a vegan. I can assure you that I'd never met herbivore.

I tried beef stew as my password but it got rejected because it wasn't stroganoff.

Smoking will kill you... Bacon will kill you... But, smoking bacon will cure it.

I accidentally ate my cat's food last night. Don't ask meow.

My wife told me to put tomato sauce on the shopping list, so I did. Now I can't read it.

Jokes about white sugar are rare, jokes about brown sugar ... demerara.

Knowledge is knowing that a tomato is a fruit. Wisdom is not putting it in a fruit salad. Philosophy is wondering if a Bloody Mary counts as a smoothie.

A man walks into a bakery, points to some bread and asks "*is this gluten free?*" The cashier replies, "*no, it costs £2.10*".

Last night, I dreamed I was swimming in an ocean of fizzy orange drink. But it was just a Fanta sea.

**PUZZLE PAGE - answers on last page**

**CONNECTING WALL**

These words can be arranged as four groups of four. Each group has a common connection. Find the groups and each group's connection.

<b>Brim</b>	<b>Lip</b>	<b>Lime</b>	<b>Eider</b>
<b>Teal</b>	<b>Edge</b>	<b>Mandarin</b>	<b>Sage</b>
<b>Rim</b>	<b>Mint</b>	<b>Blood</b>	<b>Aylesbury</b>
<b>Cobble</b>	<b>Rhine</b>	<b>Border</b>	<b>Nile</b>

**MATHS SQUARE**

<b>9</b>	<b>X</b>		<b>-</b>	
<b>+</b>		<b>X</b>		<b>-</b>
	<b>+</b>		<b>-</b>	
<b>-</b>		<b>÷</b>		<b>+</b>
	<b>X</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>-</b>	

**33**

**13**

**9**

Here are six sums that have some of the numbers missing. The aim is to enter the numbers from 1 - 9 exactly once into the empty cells to create sums that total the values shown at the end of that row or column. Perform arithmetic from left to right and top to bottom.

There is at least one correct answer.

**10**

**12**

**7**

<b>A</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>G</b>
<b>L</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>T</b>
<b>N</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>R</b>

**9-LETTER SQUARE**

Find as many words of four letters or more from the letters in the grid. You can only use a letter as many times as it is shown in the grid, and there is at least one 9-letter word. Each word must contain the central letter - in this case I.

Hint: In this puzzle there are three 9-letter words.

## Reports from Special Interest Groups

### Gardening Group

A short cutting from the Garden Group.

We had a visit from Mike King, who holds the national collection of *Saracenias*. That's Carnivorous plants. He gave us a splendid introduction to their history, place in the plant world, and also brought plenty of samples. As he lives not too far away many of us were able to visit him for our following month's meeting, and see his collections - quite amazing. The writer bought one, named JUDITH, she is happy in our Porch, eating flies and drinking rainwater!



*Photos by Trish Dawson*

We ended last year with a Garden Safari in town, made possible by 3 generous hosts, and ended with cake and tea at mine!

At the October general meeting the Garden Group's 4 day holiday to Bath was introduced to all Market Drayton members and their friends. Staying at the Lymply Stoke Hotel outside Bath for 3 nights Dinner B&B, single and double rooms are available for £395 and £335 pp respectively. (all priced at cost) N.T. members have nothing more to pay. .Our coach will leave from

Betton Road (for parking) or Tower's Lawn. Itinerary etc from Trish Dawson - [t.dawson1946@gmail.com](mailto:t.dawson1946@gmail.com) or 07977 561 754.

*Editor's note:*

Remember: Growing your own tomatoes is the best way to devote 3 months of your life to saving £1.69.

*And another gardening story:*

There's an old man, and every year he and his son plant a tomato garden together. This particular year, however, the son is in jail, and so the old man writes him a letter. *"My son, it is regrettable that you can't be here to plant the tomato garden with me this year. The soil is too hard for me to dig myself. I look forward to the day you come home so we can continue this tradition together."*

The son writes back, *"Father, don't dig up the tomato garden, that's where the bodies are buried."*

That night, the police show up at the old man's house with a warrant to search the ground for bodies. After several hours of digging around, they find nothing, apologise to the man, and go on their way.

The next day, the man receives another letter from his son, *"Father, given the circumstances, that was the best I could do. You should be able to plant the tomatoes now."*

And back to Special Interest Groups.

## **Line Dancing**

The LineDance group is going well with six new members joining recently. The group members agreed we needed to revert to two sessions on Friday - at 10.15 for absolute beginners and at 11.00 for improves. All sessions take place during school term times. The attendance fee is £3.00 to cover the costs of hiring the room at Festival Drayton - folk can choose to come to one or both of the sessions. Newbies are welcome to attend the first session free, to try before they buy. Any money left over from paying the room hire is donated to the First Responders.

We were asked to dance at a Woodcraft Care Home American themed event on October 10th. We also always have a Christmas party at the British Legion in early December.

Suzanne Edwards

## Photography Group

Over the past year we have shared many lovely images at our monthly meetings. Some being for the monthly subject, examples of which were Boots and Shoes, Abstract, Vintage and Hobbies, and others that we share for advice, discussion or to just take pleasure in showing some of our favourites.

The group is also a social event and time to learn and develop our photography skills, but also learn so much about each other. I am afraid, due to circumstances, we have been unable to organise an outing this year.

Since I joined the group, 4 years ago, it has always been a small gathering, but unfortunately over the past year several people have decided to leave for various reasons, which has prompted us into reviewing things. In the year ahead we have arranged a programme of topics as discussion points for information and learning.

- November Light and Shadow
- December No meeting
- January Computer Editing
- February Patterns and Textures
- March Night Sky Photography
- April Still vs video photography
- May Group outing
- June A photo a day
- July Moving away from intelligent auto
- August Macro/close up photography
- September Group outing



*Photo by Patricia Cardy*



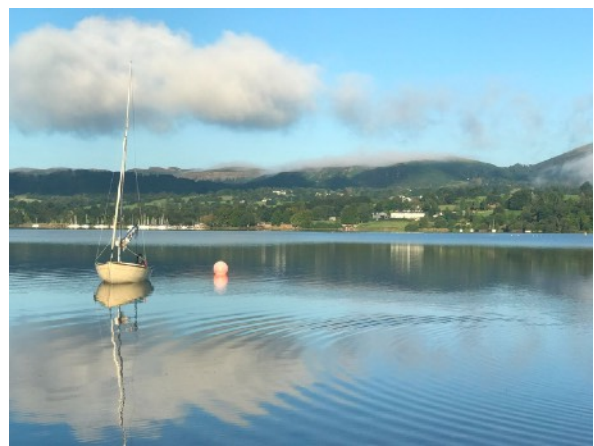
*Photo by Brian Truslove*

As the weather improves the programme will also include some outings with themes/quizzes to enjoy the social and fun element of the group further.

We meet at the Beacon Centre, which is an ideal venue to project and see the digital images taken, but we need adequate numbers to warrant the hire of the room. The only fee for the group is to cover this, so we need more members to make this an acceptable amount. We usually collect money periodically to allow the payment of the rent as we get billed and, in the past, this has worked out at about £2-£2.50 a month. We meet once a month (on the fourth Thursday) at 7.00 in the evening, but if the timing is stopping anyone from coming along, we would like to hear from you.



*Photo by Alvina Williams*



*Photo by Sue Mayer*

We have recently welcomed three new members and one returning member, which is great, but we are eager to encourage more people to come and join us. Everyone is welcome to come along and see how it feels and please do not be put off because we all, of varying abilities, just enjoy taking and sharing our photos taken on either a mobile phone or digital camera. It would be great to see more people which would enrich the group.

For any further information, please contact me,

Karen Glass, Convenor

Tel: 07719 776674

Email: [karen.ssl@icloud.com](mailto:karen.ssl@icloud.com)

## **Reading Group**

Members of MD u3a Reading Group 2 recently held our annual Christmas celebration (somewhat belatedly) at Bella Italia MD. Mario, the proprietor,

looked after us admirably and proved himself to be extremely well read. He even expressed an interest in joining our book group but was extremely disappointed to find that he was too young! The food was absolutely delicious as well, so a very good time was had by all!



We meet once a month and discuss books supplied by the County Library, an excellent service to book groups for a small fee. This year we have discussed a wide range of books from classics such as Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* and Alan Sillitoe's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* to modern classics such as Maggie O'Farrell's *Hamnet* and Sally Rooney's *Ordinary People*!

Interestingly it is often the less enjoyed books which promote the best discussions. One of our unexpected favourites this year was a book called *Frank and Red* by Matt Coyne, which was a hilarious and poignant tale of a little boy and his elderly curmudgeonly neighbour!

We all enjoy very informal and lively discussions and can often disagree but it is always accompanied by delicious cakes and coffee supplied by members in their homes.

Mary Bennett (convenor of the group)

## **Prepare to be bouled over - PETANQUE is coming soon!**

A FIRST FOR OUR u3a AND A FIRST FOR MARKET DRAYTON.

The Community Sports & Social Club will have 3 pistes up and running for Spring 2026. We have first options on day/times. There is nowhere else in Shropshire offering correct competition sized areas for this popular, all-inclusive, inexpensive game.

Signing-up lists available in February.

Many thanks to Trish Dawson for helping to arrange this.

## **Members Contributions**

You may remember that in November 2023 representatives from the Market Drayton Town Twinning Association told us of the background to the Town Twinning Movement and of the strong links formed between Market Drayton and citizens of Pézenas, in the Languedoc region of Southern France. This was reported in the Spring 2024 edition of the magazine. This year the town was pleased to welcome a group from Pézenas, including their Mayor, to Market Drayton at the time of the Ginger and Spice Festival.

The event brought back memories of George Ruddock's visit to Pézenas and inspired him to write the following poem.

### **Cobbles and Lights**

In Pézenas as the evening softly falls  
The cobbles rest beneath twilight's glow  
Shops and restaurants cast a gentle light  
A portrait of peace woven through the night

A silence wraps the town in its tender care  
The world outside seems far away  
The air is filled with promises of rest  
As twilight dons its softest vest

In the morning, life will start anew  
Footsteps will again ring on the cobbles  
But for now, the town sighs in repose  
Beneath the stars, in night's gentle throes

In Pezenas, peace weaves its evening spell  
All is good, all is well, all is quiet and serene  
The cobbles are quiet, the light gleam  
A summer's evening, a perfect dream.



George also submitted another poem which seems most appropriate at this time of year.

### **The Spirit of Nature**

The Autumn mist hangs across the land  
And deep in the shrouded trees  
The spirits of nature wander free  
Hidden in the mist, enjoying the morning breeze

The Autumn is their time  
The spirits wander in the mist across the countryside  
Always hidden from human eyes  
But as the mist lifts again they hide.



*Photos by George Ruddock*

Thank you George for your contribution. The editors would welcome any further contributions from members - poems, stories, reminiscences, photographs, designs, recipes, puzzles, jokes,..... Please submit them to John McVittie - [jmcv@ukme.com](mailto:jmcv@ukme.com)

## PUZZLE PAGE ANSWERS

### CONNECTING WALL

Aylesbury	Eider	Mandarin	Teal	<i>Ducks</i>
Blood	Brim	Cobble	Rhine	<u>      </u> stone
Lime	Mint	Nile	Sage	<i>Shades of green</i>
Border	Edge	Lip	Rim	<i>Synonyms of perimeter</i>

### MATHS SQUARE

9	x	4	-	3	<b>33</b>
+		x		-	
8	+	6	-	1	<b>13</b>
-		÷		+	
7	x	2	-	5	<b>9</b>
<b>10</b>		<b>12</b>		<b>7</b>	

### 9-LETTER SQUARE

The three 9-letter words were: Gnarliest, Integrals and Triangles.  
 The editors found 65 words of four letters or more. How did you do?