



### In this issue

The Chairman's March Message

Preview March & April Presentations / Review of February Presentation

Advance Notice 2026 AGM / Link to Third Age Trust Website and Friends Newsletter

Final Boat Story—Rob Davis / Mayors Quiz Night / Butter & Birdwatching February

Local History Article—Eric Franklin / Coffee Morning / Your 2025/26 Committee



### Musings from the Chairman



I love this time of year, the transition from winter to spring. New life, new hope fresh plans. The last weeks of winter in Thrapston always feel a bit like waiting for someone who's running late. The sky hangs low over the meadows, the swollen River Nene moves slow and grey, and the high street carries that hushed, bundled-up feeling where everyone keeps their hands stuffed in their pockets and hurried from shop to shop.

Then, almost without asking permission, the first hints of spring slip in. It starts with the fields near Nine Arches Bridge, as the floods slowly subsided. Dog walkers notice the ground giving a little underfoot instead of crunching. The air, still cold, suddenly smells faintly of wet earth—a quiet promise that things are waking up.

In our gardens, the sun began to linger a few minutes longer each evening. Blue Tits feed hungrily on the fatballs and in the leaf litter, a blackbird tugs fiercely at a worm, and word travelled in the casual way it does in a small town, "spring's nearly here."

The riverbanks were the next to change. Tufts of green pushed through where only brittle stems had been. People stopping on the bridge to chat found themselves talking about lighter coats instead of heating bills. The anglers returned, sitting on the banks with their thermoses, hopeful even when the fish were not biting.

By mid-March, Thrapston feels different. Not loud or sudden - just softened. Daffodils brightened the verges; cyclists reappeared on the quiet lanes; the Saturday market had more people lingering instead of rushing back to warm kitchens.

And one morning, as the sun broke over the rooftops and lit the church spire, you could see it clearly: winter hadn't left all at once, but spring had quietly taken over. Not with a grand announcement - just with green shoots, brighter mornings and u3a friends who can finally stop and talk rather than rushing from the cold.

As we approach our AGM in May with new members joining the committee and new plans for the year ahead, spring feels well established in Thrapston u3a and I look forward to summers promise, and all that brings.....Frank



## Monthly Meeting

20th February & 20th March 26

Doors open at 10:00 am



### *Sweet FA*

*20th March - Peter Fairweather Will Adams & Julia Burgess:*

Peter and Will began to write together in 1997 when they discovered they shared an unhealthy obsession with puns. Every year since then they have written and appeared in a comedy play or pantomime for the Denford Thespians in East Northants. This led to the formation of 'Sweet F.A.', allowing the duo to write and perform their own comic songs, ably supported by the fabulous musical talents of their resident house band, The Julie Burgess One. As a result they have become famous the length and breadth of Front Street, Denford. They have also toured extensively, to Raunds, Stanwick, Thrapston, Oundle, and even Northampton once.

Sweet F.A. feel that the great tradition of the English comic song is long overdue for a comeback – and the time is now!



*What did the Romans do for us? ....*

*17th April – Speaker Chris Carr*

With a twist, this talk from Chris Carr will focus on Roman history from the point of view of the home kitchen! The Roman invasion changed what we eat and how we cooked. As part of the talk there is a chance to taste one of the dishes the Romans made.





## History of Carry on Film – Review

### 20th February Speaker: Steve Dimmer



The Carry On films are among Britain's most recognisable and enduring comedy franchises. Produced between 1958 and 1992, the series captured a particular strain of British humour – cheeky, innuendo-laden, gloriously irreverent, but never blue. Beginning with Carry On Sergeant, the films quickly established a winning formula: low budgets, fast production schedules, familiar character types, and a dependable team of comic actors who soon became household names.

Central to the success of the series was its repertory cast. Performers such as Sid James, with his trademark laugh; Kenneth Williams, remembered for his outraged “Infamy!” joke, Barbara Windsor, often cast as the cheeky, flirtatious sex-kitten; and Hattie Jacques, formidable yet lovable in authority roles, became synonymous with the brand. Their chemistry and comic timing were as important as the scripts themselves.

The films typically parodied familiar British institutions and genres. Carry On Nurse lampooned hospital life, Carry On Cleo took aim at sword-and-sandal epics, and Carry On Camping poked fun at the British holiday craze. Historical spoofs, police capers, school settings, and even spy thrillers all fell within the franchise's comic sights. The humour relied heavily on double entendres, visual gags, slapstick, and playful satire of class and authority.

Producer Peter Rogers and director Gerald Thomas were instrumental in maintaining the series' distinctive tone. Despite modest budgets, the films consistently attracted large audiences during the 1960s and early 1970s, becoming a staple of British cinema. At their peak, they reflected – and gently mocked – changing social attitudes, particularly around sexuality and shifting class dynamics in post-war Britain.

By the late 1970s, however, the formula began to feel dated. Changing tastes in comedy and evolving cultural sensitivities meant that the once-naughty humour seemed tame or old-fashioned. Attempts to revive the series, including Carry On Columbus, failed to recapture its earlier magic.

Today, the Carry On films remain a nostalgic memory. Regularly repeated on British television, they evoke a particular era of seaside postcards, saucy jokes, and ensemble comedy. While some elements reflect the attitudes of their time, their enduring appeal lies in their warmth, camaraderie, and unapologetically British sense of fun.



Review by Helen Dawson

# **ADVANCE NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

## **Thrapston & District U3A**

**May 15<sup>th</sup> 2026**

**The Plaza, Thrapston**

**To commence at 10.15. Doors will open at 09.45.**

Nomination forms for Committee Members are available on the website or from the monthly meeting at the Plaza.

[www.thrapstonu3a.co.uk](http://www.thrapstonu3a.co.uk)

Viv Tunstall, Business Secretary

## **The Third Age Trust**

To find out about more about the Third Age Trust click on the following two links

You will find a wealth of information such as online learning opportunities, online interest groups, events and online workshops and so much more,.

[u3a - Welcome to u3a](#)

The u3a Friends newsletter shares news, learning opportunities and member stories from across the u3a movement.

[Your u3a Bitesize Friends Newsletter February 2026](#)



## James Bond on the Thames Part 3 – Return of the Powerboats!



As a group we had 6 matching yellow Rigid Inflatables with very large engines! Another guy who was on a lifeboat crew wanted in, so he bought one to match. His nickname was Rigsby, and if you ever saw Rising Damp or Reggie Perrin, you know why!

A corporate events company came to us asking if we could supply boats and guys dressed like the SAS for events on the Thames – we thought about it long and hard, about 10 seconds and said yes!

I became an honorary Special Boat Service member for the events, given the same black suit and life jacket.

We would trail the boats up to Greenwich Marina on the Thames and launched them all. Then went up river to a 5 star hotel - where the company put us up for two nights for the events. Sometimes longer as we occasionally ran 2-3 on the spin.

We would pick up our passengers in the main room and take them to the boats for a safety brief. Then onto the Thames. It was basically a treasure hunt with clues about buildings and bridges, including the houses of Parliament. We were not allowed to go within 50 metres of that or the MI6 building.

So we had between 36 and 42 passengers – 6 to a boat. So north of Westminster down to the Thames barrier. Going through the barrier, we had to radio Thames Barrier control to get permission to go through

I forget how many clues but seem to recall about 20 or so.

So pop quiz U3A'ers: Who was the architect of the Palace of Westminster?

On one occasion, the day included a show at the Millennium Dome for the eventees. We got in for free and saw an high acrobatic show amongst many other things! The only time I went in – without these days, doubt I would have



After a fixed time, whether all questions were answered or not, we rafted up the boats about half a mile south of Tower bridge, where a final envelope was given. A starting pistol went off and it was a race to the Tower Hotel, where all the passengers ran into the hotel to find “James Bond” and steal his briefcase. The ones that got the case won!

Back to our original hotel for champagne and food!

One of the funniest things was on one event our then prime minister and the Israeli prime minister were cruising the Thames on a huge boat called the Barracuda. All private boats were banned that day, but we were allowed because of what my colleagues did for a living!

A huge black RIB with a few SBS guys in – obviously all in black (as were we) but they were armed to the teeth. They came alongside my boat, accelerated quickly and turned violently away causing a whitewall of water to come right over all of us and into the boat. They laughed we laughed and exchanged... err... “pleasant words”! Ha ha ha !

My last instalment at the behest of Tina! *Rob Davis*



## THRAPSTON'S MAYOR'S QUIZ NIGHT

THE PLAZA - 9th May 2026

Saturday evening 7.00 for 7.30

Teams of 4-6

*Our U3A has reserved 18 places  
( of which 12 are already taken)*

£10 PER PERSON (PAYMENT IN ADVANCE)

Includes the following meal options :-

FISH & CHIPS, SAUSAGE & CHIPS OR CHEESE CROQUETTE & CHIPS

TO RESERVE YOUR PLACE EMAIL: [paulollett@btinternet.com](mailto:paulollett@btinternet.com)



## **New Members Coffee Morning**

Join us on

Friday 13th March

10-30 a.m. to 12 noon

at

The Court House, Thrapston

Its not just for new members but for any members  
who fancy, tea and coffee with other members

£3.00 per person

# Butterfly & Birdwatching Report Sywell 4th February

It was a chilly February morning and eleven of us hardy souls made the trip down the A45 to Sywell Country Park, another of Northants lovely parks, although cloudy, sunshine was forecast by midday.

Work started on Sywell reservoir in 1904 and it opened in 1906 at the cost of £110,000 and was built to supply water to Rushden, Higham Ferrers and the surrounding villages, the reservoir has a capacity of around 230 million gallons. Water was pumped from Sywell through eleven miles of pipes to the service reservoir at Bedford Road, Rushden. The reservoir was de-commissioned in 1976 and in 1979 the site was bought by Northampton council for leisure pursuits.



Tits spotted high in the trees all was quiet, further along the path a Wren was busy amongst the shrubs looking for food. On arrival at the dam wall Coots were fussing around by the reeds and a pair of Pochard ducks were patrolling the dams edge, we carried on towards the pump tower where a large group of Mallards were present and after giving them some food we headed to the far end of the dam wall.



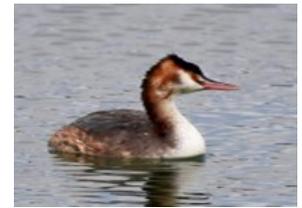
Pochard



Mallard



Mallards



Crested Grebe

The reservoir is quite deep and it is not very suitable for many migrant wader birds or geese because they cannot reach the bottom where their favoured food is and prefer the shallow gravel pits such as Summer Leys or Stanwick Lakes to over winter on.

We reached the corner and carried on along the path where a few clumps of Snowdrops were in full bloom, a couple of Redwings were spotted in the field but too far away for a photograph, these lovely Thrush like birds have arrived from Scandinavia to spend the winter here. Further on a Robin made an appearance and a Crested Grebe was out on the water diving for fish.



Goldfinch



Snowdrops



Robin



Goldfinch

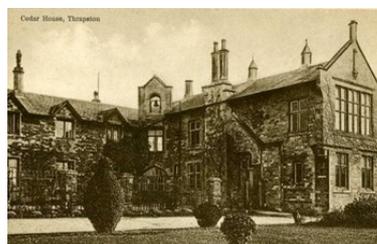
The clouds were clearing and the sun was starting to shine but it was now midday and time to head back to the parks cafe for a coffee and a hot sausage roll before going home, there is no indoor seating at the cafe so as we sat outside birds were flying in looking for crumbs, there were Robins, Blue and Great Tits, Chaffinch's and Dunnocks, also Goldcrests were to be seen, in fact we saw more birds at the cafe than on our walk.

It's always enjoyable to go for a country walk with good company and thanks to everyone who came along and also to everyone who provided the photos.....Bob Simpson

## Local History Group.

This year our small group has spent time looking at one local building and one club which achieved fame over 100 years ago.

The original buildings occupied by North Northamptonshire Council on Midland Road were erected in the 1830's as the Thrapston Union Workhouse covering 25 parishes in both Northants and Cambridgeshire. Originally constructed as an early forerunner of the "Welfare State" to house 200 people, Cedar House seldom had over 100 residents. If a family was unable to work or feed itself, they were guaranteed a bed and food in return for an honest day's work. In 1900 the Infirmary was constructed at the rear of the main house to provide nursing and accommodation for the sick. It closed as a Workhouse in the 1930's and became the home of Oundle and Thrapston Rural District Council and, under different guises, has remained with the various councils since. Two pictures of the site from circa 1930 are shown. Between 1907 when it formed and 1914 Thrapston Harriers Running Club quickly became one of the foremost cross-country running clubs in the country. Two members represented England in international events, William "Buff" Coales and Fred Hibbins and many others were local, regional and national champions. The two named men were Olympian medal winners, William in the 1908 London Olympics where he won a gold medal as a member of the men's team in the cross-country team event, followed four years later by Fred with a bronze medal at the Stockholm Olympics. I produced a booklet on the early days of the Harriers in 2011 just before the 2012 London Olympics of which there are a few copies available in Thrapston Library. The picture below shows the club with some of their trophies in 1912, Fred Hibbins being third from the left in the front row. The club ceased to function on the commencement of World War 1 in 1914 and although it did restart after the armistice, never hit its previous levels of success. In all, I have records of over 60 local men who represented the club during these seven years



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Should anyone wish to speak to me about any aspect of Local History I can be contacted at: [ericfranklin2@hotmail.com](mailto:ericfranklin2@hotmail.com)



Telephone numbers given in the newsletter are usually preceded by the Thrapston STD code—01832.  
Any Raunds numbers (indicated by R) need the STD code 01933

## ***Thrapston and District U3A Committee 2025/2026***

|  |  |
|--|--|
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### **A note from the Editor**

This newsletter is published on behalf of the committee of the Thrapston and District U3A. The opinions expressed are not necessarily those of the Editor, or of the committee of the Thrapston and District U3A, or of the U3A Trust.

**Please note that items for inclusion in the next newsletter should reach the Editor by the last day of the month.**

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Website : [www.thrapstonu3a.co.uk](http://www.thrapstonu3a.co.uk) where details of the committee and their roles can be found along with details of all the groups.

You can also join us on **Facebook** — **Thrapston and District U3A**



*Thrapston & District U3A is a registered charity number 1179593*