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Your 2025/26 Committee

Musings From the Chair

Our u3a Community

We all have a deep affection for our u3a. It truly serves as our community within the wider community—a welcoming place where friendships flourish, learning continues, fitness is maintained, and so much more is achieved. As the motto suggests: live, laugh, learn.

It is easy to overlook the fact that we are part of a much larger organisation. In fact, there are 1,015 u3as across the country, with a total membership of 420,000 individuals. This vast network is managed by the Third Age Trust and the u3a Council. The u3a is organised into 12 regions throughout the UK, and each region appoints two representatives to sit on the u3a Council. Furthermore, each region is subdivided into Networks. Our own Northamptonshire Network consists of 12 u3as, Thrapston included.



Why It Matters

Why should this matter to us? For committee members and group leaders, it means there are many local u3as with whom to share knowledge and experiences. Whatever challenge arises, someone in the wider network has likely already found a solution. For all members, the National website—u3a.org.uk—offers a wealth of information, advice, guidance, and details about events and opportunities for learning. I strongly encourage everyone to take a look.

Upcoming November Plaza Meeting

You might wonder why I am sharing this information now. The reason is that, at our November Plaza meeting, we are fortunate to welcome the CEO of the Third Age Trust (TAT), Iain Cassidy. Iain will deliver a short talk about his background as CEO and discuss current plans and developments for both the TAT and u3a. This meeting presents a valuable opportunity for you to ask questions and share your views directly with our organisation's leader.

Following Iain's address, our invited speaker, Spod Dutton, will provide An Introduction to Acupuncture. Please note that the November meeting will commence earlier than usual, at 10:15. I hope to meet you at the Plaza.....Frank



Monthly Meetings & Events

21st November 2025 presentation

19th December Christmas Event



An Introduction to Acupuncture

21st November: Speaker Spod Dutton

A whistle-stop tour of acupuncture, from its early roots to the latest evidence. Learn how an acupuncture treatment is delivered and what the benefits might be.

From a clinical point of view, Spod specialises in chronic and musculo-skeletal pain and wellbeing problems such as stress and anxiety.



The Christmas Event 2025

19th December at the Plaza, Thrapston

Doors open at 10.30

All places have been taken, tickets paid for or ordered will be available at the November meeting.

There will be a Radio Show at the event, before a light lunch. The ticket also includes a super raffle, a welcome drink and your tea or coffee.

It may run until at one o'clock

'Join in the fun and wear your Christmas Jumper or Santa Hat'





*17th October Steve Dimmer talked about
“That Bucket Woman!”*

Dame Patricia Routledge was one of Britain’s most distinguished and versatile actors, and Steve Dimmer arrived at The Plaza last month to tell us about her celebrated stage work, her musical talent, and her iconic television comedy roles.

He spoke about her early life. Born as Katherine Patricia Routledge in Tranmere, Cheshire, she attended Mersey Park Primary School and Birkenhead High School.

She went on to read English at the University of Liverpool and later trained at the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School (and also had study at the Guildhall School of Music) as she set her sights on the stage. Patricia’s professional debut was at the Liverpool Playhouse in 1952.

Over the years she built a formidable stage career: her West End debut came in 1959 in *The Love Doctor*. She proved she could sing as well as act — her vocal range was reported as a rare mezzo-soprano / contralto. In 1968 she won the prestigious Tony Awards for *Darling of the Day* (Best Actress in a Musical). And in 1988 she claimed the Laurence Olivier Awards for Best Actress in a Musical for her role in *Candide*. Her stage career also had deep dramatic work — she wasn’t just a musical-theatre performer but acted in serious plays and joined companies such as the Royal Shakespeare Company.

Of course, we saw clips of her playing Hyacinth Bucket, her most famous role. Many viewers know her best from television. She became a household name for her portrayal of the insufferably pretentious but hilarious Hyacinth Bucket (pronounced “bouquet”) in the BBC sitcom *Keeping Up Appearances* which ran 1990-1995.



Her portrayal captured the snobbery, the endless striving for social elevation, and the comedic timing to perfection — and became one of the most iconic characters in British television comedy.



She also starred as the title character in the crime-drama series *Hetty Wainthropp Investigates* (1996-1998), showing her range extended far beyond comedy.

Steve discussed how Patricia Routledge combined the craft of serious theatre and musical performance with a gift for broad, memorable television comedy.

In interviews she was modest about being called “versatile”, once quipping that versatility implied “not being very good at anything” — reflecting her humility.

Patricia Routledge never married and had no children. In a 2001 interview she commented: “I didn’t make a decision not to be married and not to be a mother. Life just turned out like that because my involvement in acting was so total.”



For many years she lived in Chichester, West Sussex, and became a committed local patron and fundraiser. She was actively involved in raising funds for the Chichester Cathedral roof appeal and other community initiatives.

Patricia was awarded OBE in 1993 for services to the performing arts. Then promoted to CBE in 2004 for services to drama. Created Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire (DBE) in the 2017 New Year Honours for services to theatre and charity. In 2025 she received the Freedom of the Borough of Wirral (her home area) — a local recognition of her lasting ties to her birthplace.

One month before turning 95, Patricia Routledge wrote words that echo our u3a message:

"I'll be turning 95 this coming Monday. When I was younger, I often worried I wasn't good enough—that I'd never be cast again, that I'd disappoint my mother. But these days begin in peace and end in gratitude."

In my forties, my life finally began to make sense. Before that, I'd performed steadily—provincial stages, radio plays, West End productions—but felt somewhat lost. I was searching for something within myself, a home I hadn't yet found.

At 50, I took a television role that many of you would later know me by—Hyacinth Bucket from *Keeping Up Appearances*. I thought it would just be a minor role, a brief moment. I never expected it to become beloved across the globe. That character taught me to embrace my quirks and quietly healed something deep within me.

At 60, I started learning Italian—not for my career, but simply so I could sing opera in its native tongue. I learned the gentle art of living alone without loneliness, reading poetry aloud each night—not to perfect diction, but to soothe my spirit.

At 70, I returned to Shakespearean theatre, a place I once thought I'd aged out of. This time, there was nothing to prove. I stepped onto those legendary boards with calmness. The audience felt that serenity. I had stopped performing; I was simply being.

At 80, I discovered watercolour painting. I painted flowers from my garden, nostalgic hats from my youth, and faces glimpsed on the London Underground—each painting was a silent memory made tangible.

Now, at 95, I write letters by hand. I'm learning the simple joy of baking rye bread. I still breathe deeply each morning. Laughter remains precious, though I no longer feel the need to make others laugh. Quietness is sweeter than ever.

I'm writing this today to share something simple and true:

Growing older isn't a final act—it can be life's most exquisite chapter if you allow yourself to bloom once more.

Let the years ahead be your treasure years.

You don't have to be perfect, famous, or adored. You only need to be present—fully—for the life that's yours.

With warmth and gentle love,— Patricia Routledge





DESERT ISLAND DISCS

For the past eighteen months, the nine members of our group have been meeting monthly to listen to their 'discers' choice of eight pieces of music that have meaning to them. We've had an amazing variety of music from Grieg, Elgar (the favourite), John Rutter, Karl Jenkins to the Back Street Boys, Gigi (I remember it well!), A Hard Day's Night and the Carpenters. It's been a real delight not only because of the music but also because we get to hear life stories. We've found about a five-year-old evacuee, fishing for pike, travels all over the world, family events; happy and heart-breaking, house moves, work experiences and much more. Each member of the group has participated and in addition we have had guest 'discers' who came along to tell their story and chose luxury items, a book, their most important disc and a reflection on how they might manage on the island.

We'd like to invite you to be our next Desert Island castaway; our five guests so far have all said they really enjoyed the experience, though they say it's hard to whittle down to eight of their favourite tracks and sometimes to stay within the allocated hour (there's flexibility!). We don't pay you, except for coffee, tea and biscuits, but you will be very welcome. You don't have to be techy, a music buff or have the CDs, I will meet with you the day or so before to help you choose the YouTube or Spotify version that you prefer. We need guests from January onwards. We meet on the third Wednesday at a member's home at 2.30. Please contact me on glynishill06@gmail.com if you'd be happy to be our guest.Glyn Hill

Free Mature Drivers Event

— 19 November 2025 - Brackley

Are you a mature driver (aged 60+)? Live in Northamptonshire?
Rely on being able to drive? This FREE event is for you!

Driving is an important part of our everyday life and we (Northamptonshire Safer Roads Alliance (NSRA)) are keen to help to keep mature drivers driving safer for longer.

Our driving ability to drive changes over time for different reasons, especially as we get older. It's important that we recognise whether and how our driving is changing so we can stay safe and protect both ourselves and those around us.

This Mature Drivers event is aimed at drivers 60+, and will cover all different aspects of driving.

There will be FREE hints and tips drives available to book, delivered Northampton Advanced Motorists.

Our aim is to keep mature drivers driving safer, for longer.

Book your Free tickets via Eventbrite.

<https://www.eventbrite.com/cc/northants-mature-driver-roadshows-4099083>

The event is being held at Brackley Fire Station, Oxford Road, Brackley NN13 7DY
(what3words.com/finalists.majoring.quoted) with two sessions, 10 am and 12.30 pm.





My Territorial Experience - Keith (Fox) Williams

"Every man thinks meanly of himself for not having been a soldier" - Samuel Johnson

I'd just watched the 1982 Falklands war on TV; the Soviet Union was in upheaval - near bankrupted by the arms race. I think people forget that the Soviets could have tried to take what they needed from the west by force rather than the Glasnost direction they actually took in 1985. Combine the two and I decided if WW3 broke out I would be a part of it rather than an observer.

After consultation with my then employer I joined the Territorial Army!

At 28 I was older than most recruits; my nearest unit was Royal Corps of Transport. After taking a medical and the oath of allegiance I was in. Basic training was 2 weeks in Grantham learning foot drill, firearms, camouflage, first aid, boot bulling and loads of physical training. Interesting to note, most of the recruits were, shall we say, not academically inclined, but shockingly to me, they just got on with things and completed tasks while I was still procrastinating about how to do them.

Our war role would have been in Germany moving all the accoutrements of war from railhead to the front line. Our vehicles were Bedford TM 8 tonners, so I acquired an HGV licence.

A 3 year training cycle consisted of many long weekends plus a two week stint each year either training in barracks or out in the field on exercise. Standard army rates applied so I got paid to play at driving Trucks, Landrovers and motorbikes off road and firing off semi automatic rifles, machine guns and sub machine guns. I stayed in for nearly 6 years, doing the training cycle twice - for the second 3 years I regularly volunteered to be the enemy on exercise. Less discipline and more blank ammo to play with!

The highlight was going to Germany on exercise Lionheart, a once in a generation full mobilisation exercise. 300,00 troops were involved, 130,000 British, the biggest troop movement since WW2. Working 21 hour days and being attacked by Gurkhas simulated war conditions. The locals were fine with us digging trenches practically in their front gardens and visiting their restaurants in full (filthy) combat gear - we were very near the East German border. I arrived back in England driving my Lorry with an Eager Beaver (off road forklift), machine guns, personal weapons and the whole unit's duty free booze and fag allowance on board. Against orders we drove into the green customs lane (red had a huge queue). The customs officer took one look and with a "F*** off" waved us through.

The experiences I had gave me a taste for being outdoors in all conditions, taught me a far wider range of abilities and allowed me to meet a far wider range of people than any other circumstances would support.....In summary it was an amazing experience and I've never been so fit - would I do it again. NO.



Butterfly and Birdwatching group 1st October

Stanwick lakes was the venue for our monthly walk, Autumn was here and the weather was a cool 14 degrees and it had been raining heavily, fortunately it started to ease off and by the time we arrived at Stanwick Lakes at 10.30am it had stopped completely.

By now most of the butterflies have died off or few species had now gone into hibernation, so today the focus was on the birds. Although our summer visitors like the Cuckoo, Swallow, Swifts and other species have flown south to warmer climates, other bird species migrate from the colder north and eastern countries to overwinter in the UK including Waxwings, Fieldfares and Redwings and many types of water birds.

Despite the unsettled weather a good turn out of 15 members arrived for the walk. We headed off to Kingfisher bridge with the hope of seeing one of these elusive little birds, on the way a couple of Blue Tits were spotted flitting through the Hawthorn trees on the search for food and a Swan flew overhead heading to the nearby lake. At the bridge all was quiet but there was a shoal of Chub patrolling the clear water below the bridge.

Blue and Great Tit



Robin



Chaffinch

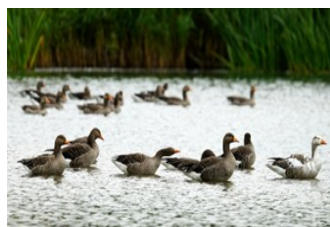


Tufted duck

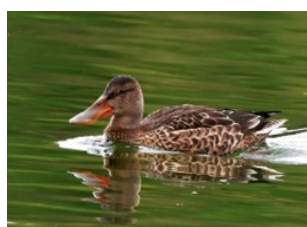


We carried on to the bird hide and a few Great and Blue Tits were on the feeders, a lovely male Pheasant flew in but quickly disappeared into the undergrowth before we could get a photo. We crossed to the other bird hide overlooking the lake and on the water there were at least twenty Greylag geese which had probably recently migrated to Stanwick, there were also plenty of Canadian Geese, Cormorants, Swans and various ducks on the lake, after watching for a while we carried on down the path to the re-constructed Bronze Age huts, which after a look round we headed over the causeway between the lakes, we spotted some Long Tailed and Blue Tits in the trees and a Heron was sitting amongst the rushes on the lake. We took the path through the woods on the other side of the lake where a few birds including a Chaffinch and Robin were spotted.
]

Greylag Geese



Shoveler Duck



Lapwings



Swan



By now it was midday and time to head back to the visitor centre for some refreshment before going home. Everyone enjoyed the trip and Stanwick Lakes is always a great place for a walk, with the river, lakes and many other habitats which are perfect to see all sorts of wildlife. Many thanks to Colin and Paul for the photos featured.

Bob



Members Coffee Morning

Everyone Welcome!

**Especially members who have joined in the last few months
and friends who might be potential members .**

**We would love to meet you all and welcome you into
our wonderful**

U3a

Join us at

**Souster House , previously The Methodist Church,
30 , Market Road , Thrapston**

On

Friday 14th November

10-30 a.m. to 12 noon

**Tea and cake and an opportunity for old and new
members to meet new friends .**

**This will follow the Group Members Meeting so is an
opportunity to meet the group leaders and find out
what they have to offer .**

Group News

There is a lot happening with groups at the moment.

If you are interested in the New Groups please add your name to the Expressions of interest form at the Plaza meeting on 21st November.



Short Mat Bowls:-

Line Dancing : The new Beginners has commenced, and is in Souster House on 1st and 3rd Wednesday of each month.

Current Issues:-

The following are changes to the groups:

Family History has ceased.

The English Group will cease in December.

French Encore will now be held in the group leaders home.

Following the responses to the survey there will be more Expression of Interest forms in the new year.

***** Plaza Meeting 21st November *****

At our November meeting we will have a visit by Iain Cassidy - CEO of The Third Age Trust, the governing body for the u3a. Iain will be talking to us and taking questions for approximately 15 minutes before our visiting speaker Spod Dutton. In order not to encroach into the speaker time, we will start the meeting at 10:15 am, 15 minutes earlier than usual.

Please come early, the doors will open at **9:45**.



Could you be a buddy?

It's clear from the survey responses, Thrapston and District u3a is very welcoming... but we can always improve! We're looking for people, who generally attend the monthly Plaza meeting, to volunteer as a buddy.

This means, if we spot a new member, or a member on their own, you can buddy up with them for the duration of the meeting, chat, show them the ropes, introduce them to more people etc.

Thrapston and District u3a is all about the friendships we make, social interaction with each other really does change lives!

If you'd like to volunteer or find out more contact Wendy at plazawelcomethrapston3a@gmail.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

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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 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