

Pontesbury & Rea Valley u3a
Chair's Report 2025 - 2026
For the AGM - Wednesday 15th July 2026

Introduction

This is my first report to our members as Chair. It is a privilege to hold this position and it is extraordinary to think that almost a year has passed since taking over this particular baton from Janet Walsh. Thank you Janet for all your hard work during your time as Chair.

Our membership is thriving, as you will see from the graphic below, with our membership now exceeding 250 for the first time. Membership of our existing interest groups continues to grow, as well as the various new groups that have been developed in the past 12 months - French Conversation, Wine Tasting, Tech Made Easy and Dining Club. A particular word of thanks for the Coordinators of both our existing and new groups, without whom our u3a would not be able to flourish as it does. We are a volunteer organisation, and it is beholden on all of us to contribute to the successful running of the groups that make up our u3a. More on this later.

We are always looking for the potential to open new groups, where interest dictates, so please let the Committee know if you have ideas for new groups.

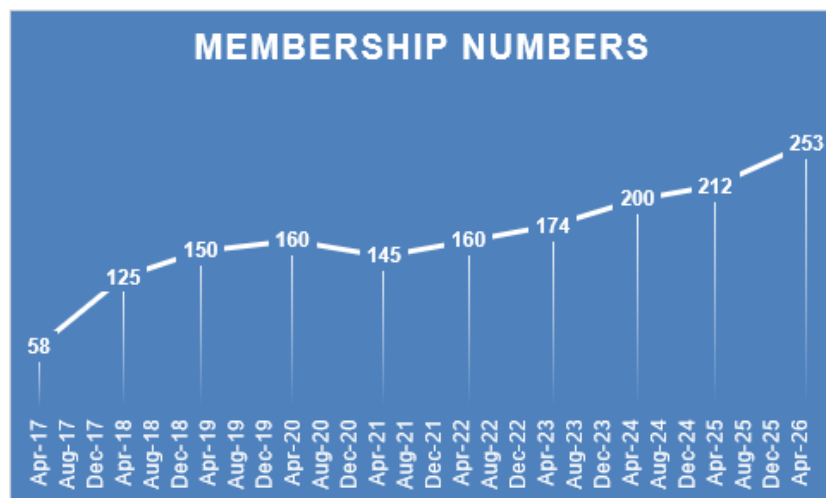
At the Regional and National level, there continue to be changes. These have little material impact on the day-to-day running of our u3a, though we do monitor the changes in case they do have an impact. If this proves to be the case we will advise our membership accordingly.

We have continued the decision not to purchase the u3a magazine, u3a Matters. There are three reasons - first, having sought feedback from members, the view was that it is not very interesting; second, we preferred to keep the membership fee unchanged rather than increase the cost to pay for a magazine that wasn't really being appreciated and thirdly, there is now a shorted version available online to all members. A copy of the latest version is kept in our stand in The Pavilion in Pontesbury for anyone who does wish to read the magazine.



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At last year's AGM Janet Walsh retired as Chair, and David Taylor retired as Deputy Chair, though continued as a Committee Member till Christmas 2025. I was appointed as Chair and Adrian Windows as Deputy Chair. Neil Bates, Jackie and Nigel Ingham were voted on to the Committee, though Jackie subsequently resigned for personal reasons. So the current Committee and their roles are - :

Steve Anderson - Chair and Membership Secretary
Adrian Windows - Deputy Chair and Website Manager
Joan Lee - Treasurer
Sue Anderson - Secretary, Publicity, Newsletter & Website support
Pat Frost - Existing Groups Facilitator
Nigel Ingham - New Groups Facilitator
Neil Bates - Open Meetings Facilitator
Caroline Wright - Minutes Secretary

Doreen Thomas remains as our Honorary President. Her presence, knowledge and considered guidance at committee meetings is invaluable.

We do welcome new committee members. Our u3a cannot run without a strong and viable committee. The roles are not onerous, so if you feel you would like to contribute to the overall running of our u3a, please contact the Secretary, Sue Anderson.



Secretarial

We continue to monitor and enact or update Trust guidance as appropriate with all Trust policies having been enacted in previous years.



Website/IT/Beacon Membership system

Adrian Windows, as the website manager, has continued to update the website throughout the year, under the guidance provided by Sue Anderson. Our new Siteworks website continues to be a robust and successful implementation of a u3a site. One new feature which was introduced during the year was a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) page, to align our website with best practice.

We continue to monitor the possible adoption of the Beacon Membership system but see no immediate benefit to our situation for the time being.

During the first half of the year we looked at possible solutions to mass emailing of the membership as we have now passed more than 250 members. Considerable effort was put into investigating migration to a possible mass email product, including MailerLite and Mailchimp. However, in order not to duplicate work, we have put this on hold, pending the outcome of the new Digital Services for u3a (DSU) project that the Trust is currently undertaking.

This may impact how individual u3a sites use storage and email/communication services in the future. In the meantime, it was decided to stay with the current arrangements, which allows for the despatch of the monthly newsletter as an attachment and we will continue to monitor the situation.



Interest Groups

We have more than two dozen active groups, meeting weekly, fortnightly or monthly. Venues range from home based groups to outdoor activities such as cycling and walking. Others use local facilities such as the Pavilion, Mary Webb School, the Congregational Hall, Pontesbury and Minsterley Village Halls.

As mentioned earlier, these groups could not exist without the drive and support of the dedicated coordinators who ensure the smooth running of their respective groups. We are always seeking members to take on a Coordinator role or new groups. It is not an onerous responsibility and is very rewarding when groups develop and thrive. Please let any of the Committee know if you would be interested in getting involved.

Occasionally it is necessary to “rest” a group for a relaunch in the future. An example would be Local History which, after a short rest period, relaunched this year with Jean Garner as Coordinator, and it is proving very successful. After several years, it has been decided to ‘rest ‘ the Café Society group. I have no doubt this will relaunch at some future date.

We are always looking to introduce new interest groups where there is sufficient demand. Over the last twelve months we have added French Conversation, Wine Club, Tech Made Easy and the Dining Club to our list.



Information about the group activities can be found in the monthly newsletter and on the website.



Finance

Please see the signed off accounts for 2025/26. Our u3a is in a very good financial position. Many thanks to Colin Sharp for signing off these accounts and to our Treasurer Joan Lee who has done a wonderful job of managing the accounts throughout the year.

Our membership fee has remained the same for 2026/7 (£15) and we are proposing to maintain the same fee for 2027/8. If you are a member of another u3a, then your fee to join our u3a reduces to £10.



Open Meetings

These meetings are held monthly at the Minsterley Hall, and the speakers and content are publicised in our monthly newsletter and online. Neil Bates took over the role of managing the Open Meetings after the 2025 AGM.

We've seen and heard a remarkable variety of presentations at our open meetings this year, ranging from the slightly active Chair Yoga by Debbie Rigby in February, our own Marko Ivanovic talking of the "Bloody Miller of Hogstow Mill", now Marko's family home, and Andy Hill addressing over 80 of us about the Last Flight of his war hero grandad and in April, the founder of Cuan Wildlife Rescue captivated us with the work of our local wildlife rescue group.

One of the real highlights of the year was the remarkable presentation by Shaun Higgins who spoke as Wilfred Owen and held us captivated - Shaun will return as Charles Darwin next year.

Speakers are now being booked well into 2027. Some of the highlights to look forward to are at this year's AGM where nationally known micro-artist, Graham Short will outline his work. Later this year fellow u3a member Eurwyn Jones will talk about the life and times of Sherlock Holmes, the Canal and River Trust will outline their work with particular emphasis on the catastrophic collapse that made national headlines recently and Shrewsbury Hand Bell ringers will... well you can probably guess!

In preparing our programme Neil tries to provide as much variety as possible, so local interest, charities and general interest topics will be used to provide a range that hopefully appeals to all. If you hear of a good speaker on your travels, please let us know.

Likewise, and of particular interest to our u3a, are the stories of our own members. We have so many talented members with a range of backgrounds and experience, and in keeping with the aims of the u3a, it is good to be self-sufficient in terms of the presentations that we offer.



Conclusion

I am delighted at the success of the past year. There are several reasons for the success. As mentioned earlier this is due to the diligence and wonderful support of our volunteer Coordinators without whom our u3a could not survive, and to the helpers at our Open Meetings and other events. A huge thank you to all.

Likewise, I wish to pass on thanks to my fellow Committee members who have worked tirelessly throughout the year to keep our u3a running smoothly for the benefit of all. Their quiet competence, support, humour and hard work is not seen by many but is really appreciated by myself.

If you require more information on our u3a, please don't hesitate to ask any of the Committee members or go to our website - www.pontesbury.u3asite.uk. There is a u3a notice board in the Pavilion and information is also available via our Facebook page, u3a Newsletter and the local parish newsletters.

In conclusion, thank you for your continued membership and we look forward to another successful year for the Pontesbury and Rea Valley u3a.

Steve Anderson

Chair

