



CHAIR'S MESSAGE AUGUST 2026

Hello u3a members!

I hope you're all enjoying the summer and finding plenty of time to catch up with family and friends. My poor garden is certainly suffering from the lack of rain, but the upside is that there's been very little weeding to do!

Although some of our activity groups take a short break over the summer, most continue to meet and thrive. This month I rejoined the Rambling Group after a break of nearly a year and was reminded just how knowledgeable our walk leaders are about the local area. We are so fortunate to have such beautiful countryside right on our doorstep. If you haven't been walking with us for a while, why not try one of the shorter walks? It's a great way to get back into the habit. You can find details of

all our walks and other activities on the u3a website.

Our u3a has produced a newsletter, in one form or another, for almost as long as we've been in existence—nearly 20 years. The Sentinel is currently edited by Will Heard, who plans to step down after the September edition. We are extremely grateful to Will for all the time and effort he has devoted to producing such an informative and engaging newsletter.

If you enjoy writing, editing or simply helping to bring our members' news together each month, please consider volunteering to take on this important role. If you would like to find out more, please contact me via the contact form on our website:

At the same time, the committee is taking the opportunity to review how we communicate with members and how you prefer to hear about what's happening in our u3a. Please look out for a short questionnaire, which will be emailed to all members soon. Your feedback will help shape our future communications.

Many thanks to Liz Cowley, Sheila Jones and Kim Hathrell for organising last month's Anniversary Film Show featuring *Wicked Little Letters*. The delicious homemade cakes and refreshments were much appreciated, and despite the hot weather, everyone enjoyed the afternoon, which also included a delightful Wallace and Gromit short film.

Finally, don't forget our next monthly meeting on **Thursday 6 August at 2.00 pm** in **St Peter's Church Hall**. Our speaker, former police officer Alan Rogers, was a tremendous success last year and is returning by popular demand. We look forward to seeing you there.

Best wishes,

Juliet



REQUEST TO ALL MEMBERS OF u3a



SEPTEMBER will be our 20th anniversary. I will be preparing a supplementary edition of The Sentinel. I would be happy to receive a contribution from you covering

topics such as your thoughts about u3a, memories of u3a events past, what groups and core meeting talks you have enjoyed or anything else that's captured your imagination about being a member of u3a,.

NEWS

1 ADVANCE CARE PLANNING – A talk by Liz Lawley

July 1st was National Advance Care Planning Day. To mark this, Balsall Common u3a held a workshop at the Methodist Church in Balsall Common.

Liz Lawley, a local member and an experienced palliative care nurse and educator, led a discussion on the plans we can put in place to ensure that our voice is heard when decisions about our care need to be made as we approach the end of our life.

Over forty members attended the talk and the discussion. This centred on some key points from the talk. Links to relevant websites have been added.

- If we have decision making capacity (as defined by the Mental Capacity Act 2005), we make the decision about whether to accept or refuse interventions offered by the medical team looking after us.
- If we don't have that capacity, the senior clinician looking after us makes the decision, (unless a lasting power of attorney (LPA) for health has been appointed or a legally compliant advance decision to refuse treatment (ADRT) is in place). This is a 'best interest' decision and the clinician making it must take into account anything that is known about our wishes.
- If we have appointed one or more LPAs, they become our proxy decision maker.
- If we have made an ADRT, this is legally binding and prohibits clinicians from carrying out the specific intervention concerned.
- We can also make an advance statement, which is not legally binding, but which clinicians must take into consideration when making decisions about our care. This can include our preferences about, for instance, where we would want to be cared for and to die, our religious or spiritual wishes and the environment that would be important to us (music, views of nature, pictures, pets).
- Next of kin has no decision-making powers in this context (it is only significant in decision-making after death) so it is important to either appoint LPA(s) or to make it clear who you want clinicians to speak to about your care.
- The following web-sites provide information and guidance on drawing up advance care plans, including appointing LPA(s), drawing up ADRTs or making advance statements:
<https://compassionindying.org.uk/> <https://advancecareplanning.org.uk/planning-ahead>
- Recommended Summary Plans for Emergency Care (ReSPECT) forms are used to summarise decisions made about the care we would receive in the event of losing capacity and about any advance care plan that is in place. These are completed by GPs or other health professionals and are held by the patient so that emergency services can access them:
<https://www.resus.org.uk/respect/respect-patients-and-carers>

- For a small charge, the Lions Club provides small plastic tubs which contain a form with information about medication, the location of a ReSPECT form, emergency contacts and whether there LPA is in place. These are kept in the fridge; a sticker for the front door is also provided to alert emergency services to their presence: <https://lionsmessageinabottle.co.uk/>

Thanks to all who attended and made this such an interesting and, hopefully, useful discussion of a difficult but important topic.

Editor's note: By our time of life, it is self-evident that these matters need consideration no matter how much one might wish to avoid the subject.

Close friends and relatives need to know how to handle situations that are often so outwith their daily experience that the one person that could help them is the very person needing the help.

Members might like to go to the Hospice UK website for additional information.

https://www.hospiceuk.org/information-and-support?gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=11234623427&gbraid=0AAAAADvx79RteNMvJJ2AQJTSsmA8rYA35&gclid=EAIaIQobChMIqKa1z6bAlQMvHJpQBh2p8zWaEAAYASAAEgK_FPD_BwE

2 u3a PHILOSOPHY GROUP

It is with sadness that, due to a diminishing number of members, the u3a Philosophy Group has decided to be 'mothballed'. The group had been advertised many times at Core meetings without success, and attempts to seek members from other u3as which lack such a group - despite early promise - ultimately came to nought. At least we can be philosophical about it!

Looking back over the years, the group has explored a wide range of topics, recent ones including: free will, forgiveness, existentialism, wealth, beauty and love. I have personally gained much from my philosophical journey with the u3a, and would like to take this opportunity to thank those past and recent members of the group whose ideas and experiences have enriched my thinking and outlook. Whilst the u3a philosophy group may be no more, its past existence has an ongoing life through its members!

Richard Hancox

3 SWIMMING GROUP AND FILM APPRECIATION GROUP – Kim Hathrell

Swimming

We are now in our summer break, with no sessions in August. We resume on Monday 7th September, 3pm, at the Xcel centre in Canley.

Film Appreciation

We are now on our summer break, with no film screening in August or September. Our next film will be shown on Wednesday October 14th, 2pm, in the Westlake Room at the rear of the Village Hall (film to be confirmed in September).

4 OUT AND ABOUT TRIP – Peter Calver

THURSFORD (Norfolk) CHRISTMAS SPECTACULAR



I know it is a little early to be thinking about Christmas, especially with the current weather but!

Are you interested?

There is an opportunity to get into the Christmas spirit with a two day, one night coach trip to visit the popular **Thursford Christmas Spectacular**. Click here [See video preview](#).

Departure date **Wednesday 2nd December 2026**, travel to Thursford for afternoon performance of the show. Seats will be in the central raised section (Ticket face value £54.50 included in the price).

After the show coach will take us to the Knights Hill Hotel, Kings Lynn where one nights accommodation will be arranged on a dinner bed and breakfast basis. [Click here for hotel details](#).

On day 2 we will spend sometime at the Nation Trust Oxburgh Estate which will be decorated for Christmas

Cost:

- Minimum of 30 paying **£280.00 per person based on two sharing.**
- **£30 supplement for single room occupancy.**

Limited number of single room occupancies available.

Price includes:

- Return Coach travel
- Ticket for the matinee (14:00) performance of Thursford Christmas Spectacular.
- One nights hotel accommodation.
- Full ABTA financial Protection.

A £55.00 per person deposit will be required with the formal booking and final payment 9 weeks before departure.

If you are definitely interested in joining such a trip please [contact Peter Calver](#)

Note: There is a limited number of single room occupations available so first come first served. This coach break is again being organised by Harry Shaw Group Travel .

5 JUNK EMAILS – Peter Calver

Like many organisations the u3a communicates with its' members by email. When these businesses send emails to a large number of recipients they use companies like Mail Chimp or Brevo to automate the process and save time. Problem for recipients of emails received from these relay companies is they may be seen by their email clients as potential scams and puts them in either the Junk Mail or Spam folders on your device.

Balsall Common u3a uses an administration and membership management system called Beacon. We also use a website that sends emails (Using the Contact Forms) by the same email relay company.

One thing you should regularly is check your "Junk Mail" folder. If you find emails in there that are not junk, depending on your email client you can do the following to mark emails coming from this address as legitimate and should go into your "Inbox" in future.

To stop u3a Beacon emails from being sent to your spam or junk folder add the main Beacon sender address to your Safe Senders List or address book.

The two main email address you may receive from the u3a are: noreply@u3abeacon.org.uk or no-reply@balsallcommon.u3asite.uk

Depending on your email provider, you can whitelist this address using the following steps:

1. Gmail

- Open a Beacon email (if found in your spam folder) and select "Report not spam".
- Alternatively, open the Settings cog (top right) and go to See all settings > Filters and Blocked Addresses. ·Click Create a new filter, type noreply@u3abeacon.org.uk or no-reply@balsallcommon.u3asite.uk in the "From" box, and click Create filter.
- On the next page, check "Never send it to Spam".

2. Outlook / Hotmail

- Go to your Junk email folder, right-click the u3a email, and choose Not junk or Report not junk.
- Click the Settings cog (top right) and select Mail > Junk email. ·Under Safe senders and domains, add noreply@u3abeacon.org.uk or no-reply@balsallcommon.u3asite.uk and save your changes.

3. Yahoo / BT / TalkTalk

- Log in via your web browser, go to your Spam folder, and open the u3a email.
- Click Not spam. ·Add noreply@u3abeacon.org.uk or no-reply@balsallcommon.u3asite.uk as a contact in your address book to ensure it is always treated as trusted.

Other email clients can be set in similar ways

6 u3a PAINTING AND ART GROUP – Richard Hancox

As previously reported, a new 'Drawing and Painting Programme' was introduced at the start of 2026. This was designed to encourage new members to attend the u3a's Painting and Art group, especially those potential members who were interested in learning to draw and paint, but who perhaps lacked confidence to try these techniques.

A programme of scheduled art activities was therefore created, with a facilitated learning approach, to enable all members to gain experience and confidence in using a wide range of artistic techniques. This programme has proved to be extremely popular, with membership of the Painting and Art Group swelling to a total of 13 artists (which is capacity for the space available). These programmed sessions have alternated with 'freestyle' sessions when members can chose to practice and embed the techniques learnt in the facilitated sessions, or are free to use other artistic techniques.

The group meets during term time on the second and fourth Thursday of each month, and we are currently planning our **Annual Summer Exhibition at Balsall Common Library, which will run from 21st September to 5th October 2026**. This exhibition will feature work from all members of our group representing a range of topics using a range of techniques and materials used through Drawing and Painting sessions held in the spring and summer terms of 2026; including: Mark making techniques, Collage, Charcoal drawing, Oil pastel techniques, Perspective studies, and Indian Ink.

The programme is set to continue for the winter 2026 term, exploring further areas of: Still life drawing, Portrait drawing *aux trois crayons*, Zentangle, and Painting with watercolours (Line and wash).

If you are interested in joining a waiting list for this group, please contact: [Richard Hancox](#) via the Group Page on the website

GROUP ACTIVITIES

PHOTOGRAPHY GROUP – Jim Melville

Success at Gallery Photiq for Balsall Common u3a three members

It is always good to see our members achieving success outside the group.

Congratulations to Pam Martin, Anne Watkinson and Bob Bracher who have been accepted in Gallery Photiq's Summer Open Print Exhibition 2026. From the 300 entries, only 35 prints were selected, so they have done exceptionally well. Their images are shown below.

The exhibition runs from Wednesday 22nd July until Saturday 15th August at 40 Park Street in Leamington Spa. It is well worth a visit, but it is normally only open from Wednesday until Saturday.

To view the images from this exhibition, and many more excellent photos, go to the gallery's website <https://photiq.uk/> and click on exhibitions.



Just Landed - Lake Kirkiki by Anne Watkinson



Sunshine Huts

by

Bob Bracher



Chrysanthemum by Pam Martin

SENTINEL EDITOR – Will Heard



I look forward to hearing from members. You can submit contributions on almost any subject. Please submit all contributions to The Sentinel via the website contact page

MEMBERS' CONTRIBUTIONS

parkrun Obsessives? Actually, no.... Kim Hathrell

Alison and I have been taking part in parkrun (little p, it is important, apparently) since August 2011. I started on the 6th, with Alison on the 13th (she was away at a Karate weekend on the 6th). Since then, attending parkrun has been a regular Saturday morning activity (and some other days, when there are special events like Christmas and New Year), apart from illnesses, holidays and a certain pandemic.

Alison completed her 500th parkrun in June 2026 (she is pictured running in the milestone t-shirt) and is now on 547 in total, plus 50 volunteer activities. I am at a paltry 444 parkruns, with 90 volunteers (I don't run if refereeing on a Saturday afternoon). But we both achieved a double milestone on 27th June this year, when we completed our alphabets (complete a parkrun which starts with every letter of the alphabet, except X for which there is no event), and also completed 100 different parkruns.

Our 100th parkrun was at Zielony Jar in Krakow, Poland. There are a few Z parkruns around, but this one was chosen as we had never been to Poland before. Out of the 25 letters of the alphabet, there have been a few letters which we have only done once: Isabel Trail (Stafford), Jubilee (Bedford), Quakers Walk (Devizes), Vicar Water Country Park (Nottingham) and



Zielony Jar. Coventry is the most frequently attended, with Alison having completed it 264 times and me 192. We could cheat and claim eXeter as our X as we have both done Edgbaston and Eastbourne parkruns as well.

In terms of different countries, we have completed parkruns in England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, Ireland, Australia, Italy, Canada, New Zealand, Isle of Man and Poland. We actually choose our holidays first and then look to see if there is a convenient parkrun, not the other way around (really, honestly, truly). And of the 100 different parkruns we have completed, four no longer exist: Yeovil Montacute, Hanbury Hall, Churchfields Farm and Dallas Burston Polo Club.

So, surely we must be obsessive about parkrun, collecting all these stats? Actually, there is a parkrun app which does it all for you, including confirming that we **aren't** obsessive because neither of us has completed that particular challenge (50 or more events in a single

calendar year).

I TUNE – YOU SPOTIFY – Will Heard



Years ago, before Spotify was invented, there was I-Tunes. Suddenly you could download quality music – by that I mean the sound quality was so good that you no longer needed expensive sound reproduction equipment to play your favourite singers but, better still, you could delve into that vast catalogue of recorded music and, at some cost, could download music to your heart's content.

My “heart's content” amounted to over 100 hours of recorded music at some considerable cost. I will not regale you with my download list. Suffice it to say that I listen to all types of music for which the word “eclectic” does not do justice.

So, when the computer that contained all the downloads became redundant and was consigned to a dark corner of my “man cave” and my life turned a corner signposted “getting old and grumpy” I forgot what dusty delights lay asleep and dreaming in their digital heaven.

Until now.

A few days ago, my son, Leon, needed a computer to satisfy his sons' ever-expanding appetite for “games” that look to me as boring as fishing. Ever willing to help my grandsons to advance their knowledge of how to zap dragons and assorted gnomes I said they could have the old computer but “What about all my I Tunes stuff” I whined. “Don't worry Dad, it's on the cloud” was the reply. “What the is the cloud” I replied.

So, it turns out, that my computer did not contain any actual downloads but a link to “the cloud”. Guided by Leon's magical hand and with a few deft strokes on the keyboard of my current computer, there was the portal to all the music I had “downloaded” to my old computer and cherished all those years ago.

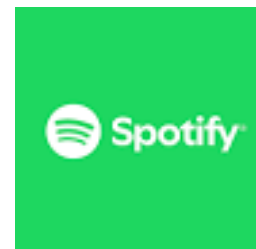
Since then, I have been in seventh heaven. I now have so much great music (my choice not yours) at my fingertips that they are tingling and my ears are ringing.

Even now, as I listened at maximum volume to “Totally Addicted To Base” by Puretone <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5kz5JMikCtU> I reflect on how far we have receded from the sheer beauty of the Beatles tunes and lyrics of the early 1960s and the raw visceral emotion of Lulu's “Boom Bang a Bang” at Eurovision in 1969.

So now I am immersed in sound. Having got totally addicted to base and then having my ears assaulted by Eric Prydz “Pjanoo” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vbEeJoJ4NV8> I am currently in remission listening to George Harrison singing “All Things Must Pass” and reflecting on my own miserable existence.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QWV4pFV5nX4&list=RDQWV4pFV5nX4&start_radio=1

Where did it all go and what happened when I got there?



Diving for dear life when we could be diving for pearls.



During my excursion down memory lane, I came across two superb compositions by Elvis Costello.

Elvis Costello (real name Declan Patrick MacManus) was born in 1954 by which time I was eight years old.

At that age I was quite conscious that eight years previously a great conflagration had just ended because I lived near to one of the army's major ordnance depots (Chilwell) which was amassing huge armoured vehicles and tanks for massacre on the scrap heap of history.

My father, an ex-despatch rider, demobbed a few months before I was borne and now plying his pre-war trade as a plumber, still rode a military grade BSA 500 WM20 motorbike and a rickety canvas topped jeep both of which may have been purchased from army surplus at Chilwell Depot alongside the military overalls that so many working men wore in those days. He no longer packed heat as far as I am aware.

So where does Elvis Costello fit in to this scenario? Well, every time I hear two of his songs – “Oliver’s Army” and “Shipbuilding” I am taken back to my childhood. In fact, I am taken back before my childhood – almost as if I had been a squaddie casualty in Churchill’s army now reincarnated as a replacement boy.

Both songs are portrayed online as anti-war songs but I must admit they do not have that effect on me. In my view they are so much more than this because they sum up in so few words the collective misery of the war and immediate post-war generation as the declining British Empire gathered pace with bomb sites and bad health and post-war rationing as the incipient legacy of total war.

The NHS had hardly got off the ground and the brash promise of the early 1960’s youth culture with full employment and money to spend, was still germinating in the bomb sites of Manchester, Birmingham, Liverpool and London.

Anyway, back to the story in hand. To me, the two Costello songs sum up what it was like to be a working class youth in the 1940s and 1950s – sentiments also echoed in songs such as Lennon’s “Working Class Hero” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ve-mANenpC4>) and, par excellence, in the film of Alan Sillito’s “Saturday Night and Sunday Morning” when upstart Arthur Seaton (played by Albert Finney) is taken down a peg or two by some squaddies with nothing else to do while passing away the time until the Korean war, then Suez and then Cyprus got them back to work.

So let us look at Costello’s lyrics in the light of this preamble.

In Costello’s own words (page 35-36 of his autobiography “Unfaithful Music and Disappearing Ink”) Oliver’s Army (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i9P_q4PoH-8) was inspired by seeing British soldiers patrolling the streets of Belfast which had triggered lyrics about the military career opportunities that he had “thankfully” never taken up.

He says the song is “*filled with contradictions, a jumble of ever shifting allegiances and imperial misadventures and about how they always get a working- class boy to do the killing: some of them Irishmen who, like [his] grandfather, wore a British Army uniform*”.



*Don't start that talking
I could talk all night
My mind was sleepwalking
While I'm putting the world to right
Call careers information
Have you got yourself an occupation?*
So, what does an unemployed youth do
in the late 1950s? Join the army, of
course – *call careers information. Have
you got yourself an occupation?*

*Oliver's army is here to stay
Oliver's army are on their way
And I would rather be anywhere else
But here today*

Join the army and see Catterick barracks and do five miles runs every morning before breakfast!!



*There was a Checkpoint Charlie***
He didn't crack a smile
But it's no laughing party
When you've been on the murder mile
Only takes one itchy trigger
One more widow, one less white nigger*
***Checkpoint between East and West Berlin

Have you seen the peaceful checkpoint on Ledra Street in Nicosia nowadays? Not so in the late 1950s when Ledra Street, nicknamed the "Murder Mile", was squaddie hunting ground for EOKA terrorists and every alleyway off it was a booby trap.

The "N" word is verboten these days but does it not sum up in one word the plight of a downtrodden unemployed youth (black or white) who joined the army out of economic necessity only to find he hated every minute of it and had to dodge bullets as well?

*Oliver's Army is here to stay
Oliver's army are on their way*

*And I would rather be anywhere else
But here today*

*Hong Kong is up for grabs
London is full of Arabs
We could be in Palestine
Overrun by the Chinese line**
With the boys from the Mersey and the Thames and the Tyne*

The current warfare in the Middle East might remind us that this tension has its roots partly in the death throes of the British Empire and the difficulty that the shattered British economy had in extricating itself from its responsibilities and obligations to those now freed from imperial rule.

**The reference to “the Chinese line” (possibly the 38th parallel or demilitarized zone between North and South Korea) reminds us of the Korean conflagration of the 1950s. Maybe this is a timely reminder.

*But there's no danger
It's a professional career
Though it could be arranged
With just a word in Mr. Churchill's ear
If you're out of luck or out of work
We could send you to Johannesburg*

Nice work if you can get it.



So now we come to “Shipbuilding” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U16tLVNlku4>) which seems out of context because it was not inspired by the aftermath of the 1939-45 war but by Britain's defence of the Falklands, yet it is entirely in the same vein. War is war and war needs ships and ships need men and women to build them and men and women to crew them.

So, the boys from the Mersey and the Thames and the Tyne are back in business. Yes, more work means more money to clothe the family but its sons and daughters in the navy hope they'll be “back for Christmas” and they don't get “killed in the results of their shipbuilding”.

*Is it worth it,
a new winters coat and shoes for the wife
And a bicycle on the boy's birthday.
It's just a rumour that was spread around town
By the women and children, soon we'll be shipbuilding*

*Well, I ask you, the boy said
"Dad they're going to take me to task,
But I'll be back by Christmas"
It's just a rumour that was spread around town
Somebody said that someone got filled in
For saying that people get killed in the results of their shipbuilding*

*With all the will in the world
Diving for dear life,
when we could be diving for pearls.
It's just a rumour that was spread around town
A telegram or a picture postcard
Within weeks we will be reopening the shipyard
And notifying the next of kin, once again
It's all we're skilled in,
We will be shipbuilding*

*With all the will in the world
Diving for dear life,
when we could be diving for pearls*

Without war "the boys from the Mersey and the Tyne" might just be diving for pearls instead of diving for dear life but I won't be betting on it.

NB. The trumpet solo in "Shipbuilding" is by one of the great American jazz trumpeters - Chet Baker