

East of England u3a

Inspirational Groups



Updated
January 2025



Macs and Wellies Group Benfleet u3a



During the first Covid lockdown, it was announced that up to six people could meet up outdoors. We suggested forming a group that met outdoors, in people's gardens, to chat and talk 'gardening' - the seed for Macs and Wellies was planted and our first little gathering was held on December 5th 2020.

From that initial meeting and chat, our little seed has certainly begun to grow. We meet in each other's gardens once or twice a month. We visit RHS Garden Hyde Hall monthly, meeting for an early morning coffee before strolling round to take in the seasonal changes. We have also had a couple of guided tours of the gardens, having some behind the scenes information from their knowledgeable staff.

This year saw our third Benfleet u3a Open Garden Trail, group members opening their gardens to all members of our u3a. As our little seedling flourishes, we have visited to other gardens and horticultural venues. Trips to NGS gardens and Open Garden villages, promoted in our newsletter, have been made by individuals and groups of members. In particular, a visit to a local exotic plant grower and plant explorer who has featured on *Gardener's World*. We were stunned and amazed by his collection of cacti and succulents. Now in our third year, we look forward to continued growth and further visits to the strange and unusual horticultural treasures in our midst.

Bob Munson, Group Contact Macs and Wellies Benfleet u3a

Wildlife Group Benfleet u3a



Top left: Glow-worms mating; Benfleet Downs, Essex Top right: Brent Geese feeding on eel-grass; Shoeburyness, Essex

Bottom right: Female Common Seal; River Roach, Essex Bottom left: Jersey Tiger Moth; Barling Magna Wildlife Reserve, Essex

Our Benfleet U3A Wildlife group was formed in 2018 and currently consists of 12 members who meet once a month. We are fortunate to have some very knowledgeable enthusiasts who can identify many different species of wild birds and flowers. We to have a good variety of wildlife parks, nature reserves and the Essex coastline near by. One reserve in particular is Canvey Wick, which is a SSSI due to the fact that it is rich in plants, insects and animals. There are as many species per square metre here as there are in a rainforest and it is one of the most important British sites for endangered invertebrates!

One of our trips was with a local Ranger who managed the Benfleet Downs and which is also the site of Hadleigh Castle. He offered us an evening walk to discover Glowworms. So armed with our torches we set off in the dusk. We were excited to see our first tiny light in the shrub. The females glow to attract a mate and only the males fly. We witnessed an act of mating.

Earlier this year we organised a boat trip from Wallasea Island along the rivers Crouch and Roach to observe Common seals basking on the mud banks and swimming. They were all females. Strangely there are less Common seals than Harp seals. We also saw a Marsh Harrier.

On visiting Barling Magna recently we saw a Jersey Tiger Moth feeding on a Buddleia. With wings closed it is cream & black but when they open you are struck by the bright orange.

Janet Humphrey, Group Contact Wildlife Group Benfleet u3a

Scottish Country Dancing Luton u3a



I wanted to join the u3a Luton in the hope of starting a Scottish Country Dancing Group. I went to a New Members meeting run by Groups Liaison and said I would like to try and see if there was enough interest in u3a Luton for a SCD group. They took me up on it straight away and publicised the group in the Newsletter and also produced a poster with photographs of dancers in white dresses and sashes which is put up at our Monthly Meetings.

I was very happy with the response from members. We started with monthly meetings at a local Church Hall but soon we were meeting every fortnight with a membership around 25. The aim of the group is to help everyone enjoy moving to music - as much or as little as they can manage. Everyone is welcome, with or without dancing experience. The sessions started with some of the dances some members learnt at school. There is no need to worry about bringing a partner, the group gets into a set and then work out who will be 'leader' and who will be their 'partner'. No one minds mistakes. In fact, they add to the fun and laughter.

I related to the group tales of BURNS SUPPERS and how after consuming Haggis and Neeps the dancing would begin. No one had been to a Burns Supper but they all wanted to go now. That became our goal - to be able to dance the programme for the evening. We started with the DASHING WHITE SERGEANT and CUMBERLAND REEL. That was two off our list.

After Christmas the curate at the church offered to cook the haggis and neeps for our first BURNS SUPPER for members, family and friends. So, on the 25th February, 2023 we ran a very successful evening with a full house of 80 seated for the haggis.

During the evening a group of us did a little demonstration of the DUKE OF PERTH. After that the MC asked the audience to join in the next dance CUMBERLAND REEL. They moved as one and filled the floor. Watching 60 and 70 year old dancers had not put them off at all, they wanted to join in the fun too!

Josephine Maclean Group Contact Scottish Country Dancing Luton u3a

All Matters Welsh U3A Peterborough



The All Matters Welsh Group was set up when the U3A chairman recognised a Welsh accent (me) when he was showing a new walking group "the ropes". He had always wanted to have a Welsh group and asked if I would be prepared to take the lead.

The inaugural meeting was on 19th April 2010 with five attendees. We agreed that the name should be "All Matters Welsh" to reflect our intentions. The new members were keen to learn Welsh and I agreed to have a go at teaching them. I am not a trained teacher, but I am a first language Welsh speaker.

The group was divided into two main activities. "Welsh culture and history" and learning Welsh. U3A Peterborough gave us lots of support and leaders from other groups gave talks. The proviso was that the subject had to be, at least loosely, connected to Wales. We also have contact with Welsh societies and have given talks at their meetings including in the Welsh language.

We lost several members during Covid, but we have had reasonable success at our latest "Activities Day" and look forward to increasing our numbers again.

My funniest memory is when I was reading a Welsh language book to Welsh learners. I had to admit that there was one word that I simply did not know and had never heard of. The group burst out laughing. The word was a "Welshification" of barbeque!

Meirion Griffiths Group Coordinator All Matters Welsh Peterborough U3A

Bus Pass Travel Group Chelmsford u3a



Collage pic supplied by Leslie Wood

Most u3a members have a free bus pass but a combination of lockdowns and many bus companies not making it easy to find details of their services, to say nothing of frequent changes, created a nervousness at trying the opportunities available. After a long gestation period, Chelmsford u3a had its first bus trip in March this year on what was probably the worst weather for years! Despite that, we have met every month attracting up to 20 members, sometimes there are more of us than regular passengers. We have a fixed meet and departure time but there is no obligation to stay as a group. Most do but other go off to indulge their own interests.

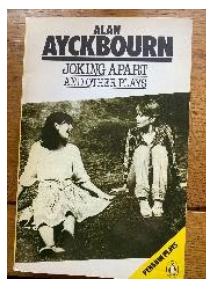
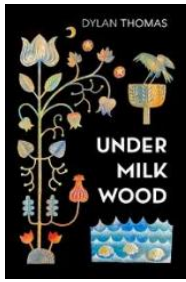
A recent trip took us by Aircoach to Southend-on-Sea, followed by rides on the open-top service along the coast and the Pier train. Decadent ice-creams, knickerbocker glories and cakes encouraged extensive memory recall of childhood and later visits.

Every trip has had its incidents, thankfully all minor. The excitement of trialling a new café, talking to other passengers in a queue or on the bus, a mad scramble to maintain a connection or waiting in a bus shelter for a late running bus - will it turn up - are not earth shattering but are wonderful conversation stimulants.

Leslie Wood, Chair of Chelmsford u3a says "what I like about it is that it has encouraged our members to make much more use of their passes. I got the feeling that they previously only used them to get the bus from their part of town to the city centre or to the hospital etc. In effect they have gained their independence again!"

Maurice Austin Group Coordinator Bus Pass Group Chelmsford u3a

Playscript Reading Group Swaffham & District u3a



Third Age Press

THE PLAY READER
7 DRAMAS
BY THIRDAGERS



During lockdown, I joined a friendly bunch of script readers from the North Norfolk u3a. Initially we were all finding our way and battling cameras, microphone muting and internet signal dropouts, but we persisted and learned how to use Zoom. We also had great fun.

When lockdown ended, the North Norfolk group went back to face-to-face meetings; preferable for the group, but the travelling distance and time taken to get there became a problem, as I was not local. Inspired by my experience, I wondered if I could set up a similar group for my own u3a. The North Norfolk group were most helpful in helping me with playscript lists and some initial guidance.

We now have a successful Swaffham & District playscript reading group meeting every month with up to 10 play readers who come to my house (it`s a squeeze at times!). We get sets of plays from the library, or use on-line scripts. Recently, we found out how to connect a laptop to my living room TV, so that we can all read from a single large display. This saves on printing, which is more ecological, and can be convenient, if trips to the library are not possible. We also use phones, tablets and ipads.

We are currently evenly split between men and women members, but if the parts demand it we will take on any gender! Our most difficult play attempt was Noises Off - simply because it had so many stage directions and dual roles. When the play came to Norwich Theatre our group decided to go and see how it was done. This has led to suggestions of a Theatre Visits group...

Neighbours tell me they know when it is our monthly meeting because you can hear the laughter down the road! Some of us also belong to a u3a creative writing group, so we recently decided that the writers should produce short scripts for the playscript readers. Trying them out was a learning curve for our writers and improved their handling of dialogue. Every year in late November we do a Panto for Christmas - with mulled wine and mince pies of course. Oh yes we do!

Laurene Henderson Group Coordinator

Playscript Reading Swaffham & District u3a

British Sign Language Group Chatteris u3a



This small self-help group meets on the first Wednesday of each month from 1.45pm to 3.45pm in Chatteris. We are learning purely for fun but feel it would be wonderful to help a deaf person in need, if we possibly could. It's fun, interesting, challenging and we help each other all the way. None of us is qualified in BSL, so we are all eager beginners at the same level.

We meet on Wednesday afternoons 2:00 pm-4:00 pm on the first Wednesday of each month at a member's house.

Sally Harper Group Leader British Sign Language Group Chatteris u3a

Some useful resources:

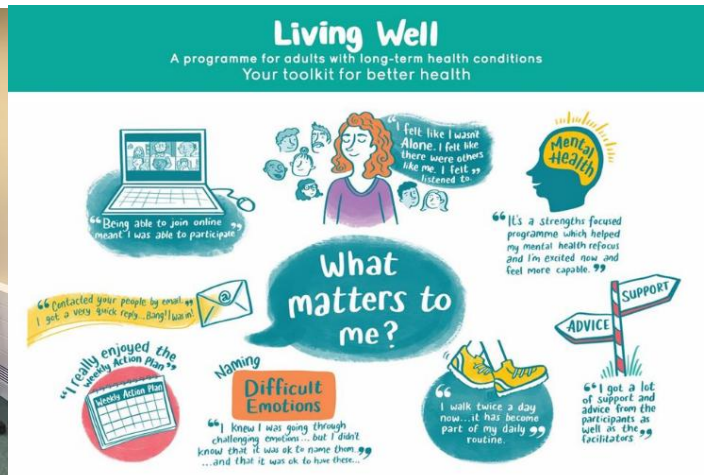
[British Sign Language - Online resources, games, & course.](https://www.british-sign.co.uk/)

<https://www.british-sign.co.uk/>

[British Sign Language BSL Dictionary](https://www.signbsl.com/)

<https://www.signbsl.com/>

Living Well Group Chatteris u3a



We were formally called Living Well With Arthritis, but after eighteen months it became increasingly difficult to find interesting topics on just arthritis. We decided to broaden the group to General Wellbeing and have recently covered chiropody, pre-diabetes and eating well for health.

We are a group which likes to involve its members in the planning of future meetings to meet our interests, needs and knowledge. External speakers and facilitators will be attending from time to time. We will also retain the Exercise component of our meetings which everyone seems to enjoy and is certainly of great benefit to us all.

The Living Well group meets on the 4th Friday of the month from 2.00pm - 4.00pm in Chatteris.

Group Leader - Lesley Pomfrett

Living Well Group Chatteris u3a



Women in History - Benfleet u3a



Photos: Clockwise from top left
Eleanor Roosevelt in her wedding dress.
Eleanor Roosevelt in later life.
Grace Murray Hopper: signing for
students at Brewster Academy
Grace Murray Hopper: a USA patriot.
Harriet Tubman: as a young women.
Harriet Tubman: commemorated on a
\$20 bill.

We are 6 ladies that make up the Women in History group, meeting monthly. Each month we each select a woman of interest and research her life. At the following monthly meeting, we each relay our findings to the group and discuss her life and works. We try to discover little known facts about that person, which make the subject more interesting.

Some of the women we have researched are:

Eleanor Roosevelt: 1884-1962 Her maiden name was also Roosevelt. She married Franklin D Roosevelt, unbeknown to them they were fifth cousins. They met on a train going from New York and had a secret courtship.

Her husband, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, served four terms in office, making Eleanor the longest-serving first lady of the United States

Harriet Tubman: 1822-1913 she escaped slavery to freedom and helped free at least 70 more slaves. She also became a cook, spy and nurse for soldiers in the Civil War.

After the war she opened a home for aged Negroes. She had a World War 2 warship named after her and the USA put her image on a \$20 bill.

Grace Murray-Hopper: 1906-1992 Was an American Computer Scientist, mathematician, and United States Navy rear admiral. One of the first programmers of the Harvard Mark 1 computer, she was a pioneer of computer programming who invented one of the first linkers/compiler. Hopper was the first to refer to a computer problem as a "bug" and to speak of "debugging" a computer.

Please contact Sheila Sears at Women in History webmail to go onto a waiting list. With 3-4 people waiting, the Interest Groups Coordinator will be asked to form another group - which will require 1 or 2 waiting members to become the Group Contact(s).

Sheila Sears Group Co-ordinator
Women in History Benfleet u3a

Moto-Bikers Group - Peterborough U3A



A few years after I retired, I thought it would be enjoyable to use my motorcycle mid-week when there are fewer biking groups out on the roads and the biking cafes are quieter. I thought there may be other members of our u3a who also had motorcycles and may be interested in forming a group. The question of u3a Insurance was raised with advice being sought from the Third Age Trust. After a considerable delay, no doubt whilst the issue was being discussed, we were advised that, as all motorcycle riders have their own insurance, it was unlikely that the u3a cover would be affected.

The Peterborough u3u has an "Activities Day" once a year in August to showcase our groups and give member an opportunity to see what other groups are available. In 2014 I took a stand and had a very positive response with 12 people signing up on the day. Rides are led based on a Rota and initially they could be on any day of the week chosen by the Ride Leader. However, this soon became un-workable so Wednesdays were chosen and, as I am only available on two Wednesdays a month, we now ride on the First and Third Wednesdays.

Rides have been organised to all points of the compass and include The Humber Bridge, many resorts on the East Coast, many museums, air bases, race tracks and bikers cafes. We have had two biking holidays. One followed the Offa's Dyke and circled Snowdonia. The other was to The Lake District via Yorkshire.

Over the years there has been a constant change of membership as members grow older or they find clashes with their other group activities becoming a problem. We have a core of regular riders, and the other members join us when a published ride takes their fancy, or they have a space in their diary.

Roy Turner

Peterborough Moto-bikers Group

Peterborough u3a Wood Turning Group



The Village Turners club was established some thirty years ago. Amongst its founding members were Tony Plumstead and John O'Halloran who were both Peterborough u3a members. Interest was so keen that the committee was attempting to keep sixty wood turners happy with only five lathes. That needed help, so Tony and John approached the Peterborough u3a with their plan to start a Wood Turning group.

Obstacles such as safety and u3a insurance were overcome and, with much effort from the Village Turning members, the group was formed. For over ten years, eight week courses have been offered to Peterborough u3a members.

Dave Hedges is a member of the Village Turners, their u3a co-ordinator and group leader. Martin Wright is their chairman and a retired professional wood turner, who readily shares his experience with the u3a Wood Turning course attendees. Other club members include Eric Savage, Adrian Stone, Graham Brewer, Barry Harpham and Stan Houchen.

There is room for ten new turners on each course, all receiving one to one tuition. After learning the very necessary safety rules, everyone makes a plant dibber, moving onto a small six-inch bowl in week two. By week three, the Turners take two oblong blocks of wood and turn them into parts of a pen. The lathes whizz the wood round and various tools are used to make the lovely smooth shapes. For the following weeks everyone chooses what they would like to make and can choose woods from London Plane, Oak, Ash, Elm and Tiger Wood. All are sustainably sourced from nearby Oundle.

Dave is very keen to encourage many more PU3A members to come along on the courses. The smiles on the faces of attendees when they produce an article is magical, he says, and he wants more people to "achieve something they never thought they would".



Dave Hedges

PU3A Wood Turning Group Leader

Peterborough u3a

Life Story Group - Eastern Region



The Life Story Group was formed in January 2024 and discussion has covered a wide range of subjects around our personal histories and how we may want to record this for ourselves and future generations. We have looked at formal means with guidelines and memory boxes, and we are building up resources. Litchfield u3a have shared a wonderful step by step guide on writing life story called "Everyone Has a Story to Tell" Within the local u3a we have assistance from the Family History Group, the Photography Group and assistance with technology.

The value of the group has been to share our experiences, as children in a different era and the stories we remember which have been passed down about relatives and grandparents. We have gathered and shared memories with family members and friends including the younger generation, who are taking a keen interest in the stories we share. We are gathering old family photos and putting context to the times that these relatives lived through.

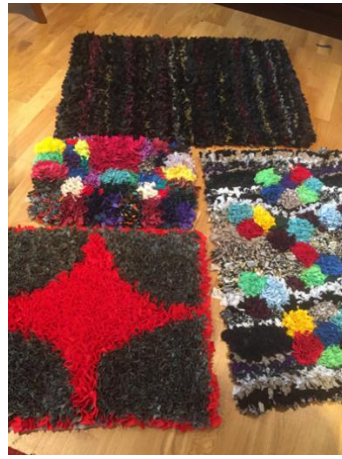
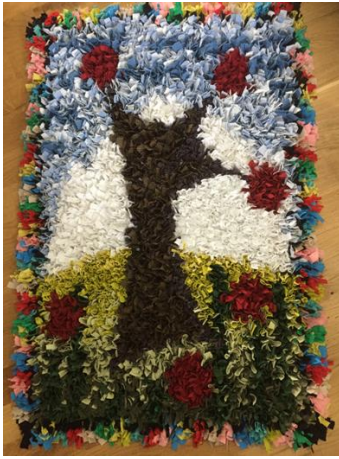
We have had discussions on living through World War 2, the end of rationing, food we ate over the decades, school games we played, the language used by relatives and what it was like living in different parts of the country. We have looked at magazines and cookbooks that are decades old, as well as important objects. Linking the social history of our times with our memories and experience generates lively discussion.

We will continue to explore topics into our adulthood and take the opportunity to reflect and share with family and friends, our life story, and the amazing times we live through.

**Maureen Cavanagh Life Stories Co-ordinator
North Walsham u3a**



Rug Making Group Dacorum u3a



I am a member of Dacorum U3A based in Hemel Hempstead. For the past few years I have been coordinating a successful Rug Making Group using a range of recycled materials. We have explored the history of Rug making in various parts of the world and have produced a number of wonderful pieces of work.

Our initial rugs were rag rugs which are known by a range of different names around the UK, for example some people call them Proggly Rugs. We have also collected and experimented with a range of tools, following the development from a pointed stick to a sprung tool called a Bodger. The fabric is cut into strips which are wound around a slotted gauge and cut to size. We found that old tee shirts were ideal for this.

Of course we have found a lot of useful books and these gave us more ideas. A Lambs Lug rug is made by folding 2" pieces of cotton or man-made fabric diagonally right side in, machining along one edge then opening out to form a kite shape. These are stitched onto backing fabric and form a beautiful rug.

Long strips of old sheeting have been plaited into braided rugs and, using a tooth brush handle as a bodkin, sewn into an Amish Knot or toothbrush rug. We have also made woven rugs with long strips and an adapted cardboard box.

We extended the technique into Wreaths and have produced several different ones, for example Christmas, Spring and red white and blue ones for recent Royal celebrations. Two of the group have used more finely trimmed fabric to make wall hangings and cushion covers. A memory Rug involved weaving together the ties once owned by a members late husband

Our only expense is hessian for the base of the rugs, all the fabric is donated by friends, family and other members of our U3A. We continue to experiment and have shared our work at a number of craft fairs, explaining to children that recycling is older than even we are.



Jane Campbell Co-ordinator
Rug Making Group Dacorum u3a

Ely and District u3a Needlecraft Groups



Ely and District u3a sustains two needlecraft groups and our members engage in a number of different crafts sharing ideas and techniques. As well as creating items for ourselves, friends and family, our members are always on the lookout for items to create for a charitable cause.

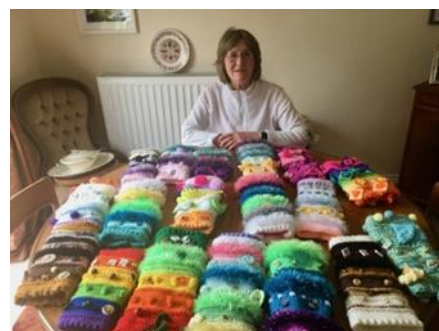
An opportunity arose at the beginning of this year when our city WI initiated a project knitting twiddle muffs for local dementia patients. Twiddle muffs help to keep hands warm and occupied, provide visual, tactile and sensory stimulation, ease agitation and encourage movement and brain stimulation.

Both our groups were not slow to embrace this project, and we have created about 90 muffs. As you can see from the photographs these are very colourful and are embellished with a whole range of tactile items such as buttons, bows and bells.

One of our members, Lesley Worstencroft (photograph below) became our twiddle muff maker extraordinaire!

Susan Bluck and Gillian Leeper

Ely and District u3a Needlecrafts and Needlecrafts+



King's Lynn u3a Handbell Team



King's Lynn U3A Handbell Team was formed in 2010 after we were fortunate to receive a lottery grant, as a set of handbells is very expensive. At present we have 12 members in the group. Some have played for years while others joined this year. The ability to read music is not necessary and results can be achieved very rapidly - usually a recognisable tune can be played within half an hour. We meet twice a month to practice and also play for different community groups. We've visited a school, a library, a museum, many village halls and even King's Lynn Town Hall.

We have a two-octave set of modern American bells. Each ringer has two bells, one in each hand, and plays each bell when required. To perform a piece of handbell music, the team need to work together and each individual ringer is of equal importance. This obviously has limitations, as the number of bells, and hence the type of music that can be played, depends very much on the number of players.

Tune ringing became popular in the 1700's when the tower bell ringers discovered that they could ring tunes. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, tune ringing on handbells was extremely popular across the north. Following the first World War many teams died out and many sets of bells have remained in store cupboards for long periods since. With the advent of modern sets of bells there has been a revival and now teams can now be found nationwide.

Pat Watts u3a Handbell Team

King's Lynn

Hunstanton u3a Bucket List Group



Early in 2024, a new group was formed within Hunstanton u3a to allow members to carry out activities that they would not wish to do on their own. They would let the other group members know what they wanted to do and hope that someone would volunteer to accompany them. We called it the u3a Bucket List Group.

Jill Davis wanted to travel on the World's fastest Zip Wire, and three group members - Alison, Zena and Mark - volunteered to accompany her. Following on from the group's previous activities, Jill finally achieved her wish.



They all set off on a very wet late May Wednesday to Wales. Six hours later, arriving in the beautiful and even wetter Welsh countryside, we had a quick look around the Zip Wire venue followed by a hearty lunch. A brief visit to Bangor's Victorian pier finished day one. The overnight rest in a lovely ex-miner's cottage was a welcome rest from the journey.

The following day, arriving early at the Zip Wire experience, the continued wet weather cloaked the top station in mist. Spirits were not dampened and safety harnesses were fitted. Further safety checks and a quick practice run on a smaller zip wire acclimatised the travellers before a bumpy truck ride up to the top of a disused mine slope for the main event. Once released at the top, whizzing through the clouds and descending rapidly, the view opened up and they were flying over a blue lake amongst the birds. The free jet wash to the face as you descended at over 100mph was most invigorating! Then there was, gliding over tree tops and rock faces towards the bottom before the big stop at the end. After photo swaps at the village cafe, the day was finished with a stroll beside a stream leading to a dramatic waterfall. A fitting end to a fab Bucket List Experience day. After the event, Group Leader Mark wrote an article for the monthly Hunstanton u3a Newsletter.

Mark Jutsum Group Leader
Bucket List Group u3a Hunstanton



Swaffham & District u3a Archery Group



As a school boy, I used to visit the local woods to select suitable saplings to make bows and arrows. The arrows were pretty basic, but good enough to compete with the kit made by my friends. Eventually, I wanted to have better equipment, so I replaced the bows and carefully selected the best split canes from a garden centre which were then crafted to make sharp arrows with flights. During the school holidays, my friends and I competed to be the best shots in town!

When I joined the u3a, I organised many outings and events, one of which was a trip to Norwich where u3a members could take part in canoeing and archery. During the archery, I had a conversation with the instructor and was given the contact details of a local Archery Instructor who I discovered would provide all the equipment required. The archery group was formed twelve years ago.



Archery is a dangerous sporting activity, so the equipment has to be used under close supervision. Our instructor ensures that all members of the group adhere to all the safety rules with his whistle! The group is currently 12 strong and meets once a month indoors but if the weather is fine we meet outside. We practice until it is competition time! Like Wimbledon, the highest score wins a dish for the ladies and a cup for the gentlemen.

Photos are taken and printed for the next meeting.

Ian Clews Group Leader
Archery Group Swaffham & District u3a



Swaffham & District u3a Line Dancing Group



When I was the u3a's Activities Coordinator, I was asked if there would be any interest in line dancing. Since about 15 members raised their hands at the next meeting I asked if any members would be prepared to act as the group's leader. No one volunteered!

At school I had been in a dancing class and after leaving school I joined the Court School of Dancing in Chatham, Kent. Going to Clubs and dances in the RAF was great fun and needless to say I thought that leading the group was a challenge not to be missed. I contacted another u3a line dancing group for advice and I downloaded some fairly simple dances from the internet.



Before meetings, links to chosen dances were sent to members by e-mail. 'Covid' restricted our meetings but later, when our dancing improved, we performed on Swaffham's Buttercross and in Plowright Place raising £155 for 'Children in Need'.

After that, it was the anniversary of Howard Carter's discovery of Tutankahmun's Tomb in 1922 (the Carter family had links to Swaffham), so we modified some dances, a seamstress in the group made Egyptian outfits and we danced to some appropriate Eastern music which was found on the internet. Later, arrangements were made with the town's museum and we demonstrated these dances to the general public at Swaffham's market place on a Saturday and repeated the dances at the Norfolk Showground. The group has also entertained residents of a local care home and members of the Dementia Club in Swaffham.



Ian Clews Group Leader

Line Dancing Group Swaffham & District u3a

Witham and District Knit and Natter Group



We are a group that meet once month to knit and natter (all at the same time) and I have to admit sometimes its difficult to get a word in edge ways! We knit items for charity fund raising and also decorate Witham Library for projects and the local post boxes. We also combine with Essex knitters and stitchers to knit items for various projects and fund raising.

We meet in my home the first Tuesday of every month, if the ladies have been good I make them a cup of tea or coffee and even give them a biscuit or two! We try and put the world to rights but as we all know that's an impossible task, so we will never run out of conversation!



Having decorated post boxes in our home town with knitted tops for Christmas in recent years, we are now getting special requests.

In November it was to provide decorations for the entrance of the town library to mark annual remembrance events.

We not only created floral items for its main pillars but also made strings to go along the top of benches in the town.

On the whole I think most of us enjoy our little group , some of the same people have all been turning up for some years now so that's a good sign! Of course we are always open to new members. We meet on Monthly, on Tuesday afternoons between 1-2pm.

Pat Matthews Group Co-ordinator
Witham and District Knit and Natter Group