



Odiham District Review

Dear u3a members,

The first few months of 2026 have been a busy time for Odiham District u3a, and we've tried to capture some of that activity for you here. While our membership continues to grow, so too does the number of groups and activities on offer. I would like to repeat my thanks to everyone who works so hard to make things work so well for all our members.

Of particular note was the number of members volunteering to be trained in CPR by Heartstart volunteers from the Meon Valley. Our first two sessions were fully booked and, with a long waiting list, we hope to run further sessions later in the year.

Our events team has also had a good start, with 99 members visiting Hever Castle to see the snowdrops. There are still a few spaces available for our next event — a General Knowledge Quiz on Friday 17 April. Click on the link to find out more about the quiz. [Quiz event](#)

Best Regards
Ian

[Quick Links](#)

[Groups](#)

- * [Group matters](#)
- * [Groups at length](#)
- * [Events & Study Days](#)

[Coffee Time](#)

- * [Gallery](#)
- * [Story Time](#)
- * [Book Recommendations](#)





Our Activity Groups

As the Spring terms comes to an end, we have 80 activity groups!

[Click here to go to the Groups page on our website](#)

Our groups provide opportunities for getting more **exercise**, satisfying **creative** talents, **discovering** new interests, exploring **literature** or just **socialising** —there is something for everyone!

So what's been going on this term...?

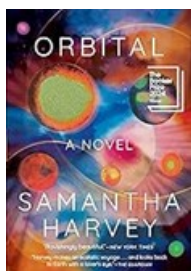
Book Group 3

Looking back to the end of last term ...

One of our members, Louise, offered her house for our December meeting.



Everyone brought a contribution to the delicious lunch, and we spent a relaxed couple of hours eating, chatting, and discussing our December book;



Orbital
by Samantha Harvey
(Book recommendations page 18)

Thank you, Louise! (and to Colin, who proved to be an excellent butler).



We carried on the Christmas cheer by combining our January meeting with a lovely lunch at The Red Lion, which is the usual venue for our monthly meetings.

Anne Johnson

Exploring Towns & Villages

After a 3-month break, we are looking forward to resuming our visits now that the worst of the winter is behind us. We have lots of interesting trips lined up for you all.

The first one on the agenda was **Farnham** on Tuesday March 10th (this would have already



Lion & Lamb Yard, Farnham
Image from F make it Farnham

happened by the time you read this). This is a return visit as we last went there in 2022 but we feel that it's well worth another tour.

On **Thursday April 16th**, we have a first for the group with a trip to **Abingdon**. This is about an hour's drive away but we feel that it will be well worth the journey.

We are working on the May trip as we've had trouble finding a guide for our chosen venue so may have to change tack. Watch this space!!

Our **June** trip, on **Thursday 11th**, sees us back in **Reading** for another guided tour by Terry Dixon. Terry has a number of different tours in his programme and we will supply the details of this one nearer the time.



Another return visit on **Thursday 16th July** takes us to **Godalming**. We haven't been there since 2018 so high time we went back!

We do try to vary the days of the week as much as possible but we are governed by the availability of the guides and our group leaders.

For further info, please check out the '**Exploring Towns & Villages**' page in the groups section of the website.

Maggie Kirtley

MOTO

On Saturday 24th January nineteen MOTO members enjoyed a very tasty meal with convivial chat at The Falcon in Rotherwick.



On 21st February, our MOTO celebrations continued! Thirty members welcomed in the Chinese New Year of the Horse at The Mayflower in Basingstoke.

Roger Booth



Pickleball

"Mighty oaks from little acorns grow", is a 14th Century proverb that aptly describes the success of the Odiham District u3a Pickleball group. From the germ of an idea in 2023, and an initial cohort of just 8 players/members, we now have a full group of over 60 with an average weekly turnout of between 35 & 45.

The group is set up around the idea of playing for fun and exercise and part of the group's undoubted success is the fact that there is no hierarchy among the players, and everyone gets to play with everybody else, irrespective of playing experience or skill level.



Group Leader, **Gary Glazerman** says,

"I'm delighted that the group has proven to be so successful", but goes on to reflect that, "Unfortunately, that success now means that demand from members to play has outstripped supply of available places to play with the group!"

Gary now believes that the only way to satisfy demand for this fast-growing sport is for a second group to be established, playing on a different day to the current Friday sessions, and he's happy to work with another prospective group leader to advise and help get a second Pickleball group set up and running.



So, if there's anyone out there who would be interested feel free to get in touch with Gary via the contact link on the Pickleball page on the website.

Recorders

The seven members of the Recorder Playing group meet for an hour on the first and third Thursdays in the month at members' houses. I am eternally grateful to the members who volunteer their houses as we must annoy their partners, pets and neighbours.

We play an eclectic mix of four part music, of no particular genre or period. At each session we usually warm up using the pieces we have become familiar with before moving onto the more challenging new pieces. Examples of the pieces we are currently playing can be seen on the Recorder Playing web page and include "Ode to Joy", "Spring from Four Seasons" and "The Entertainer".

In order to play four part music we need more than just the Descant recorder that people would know from school. In fact, most members of the group actually have more than one of each of the five types of recorder we use. **Soprano, Descant, Alto, Tenor or Bass.** This allows them to play different parts of the different pieces we play.

The standard has become quite good which unfortunately restricts the ability to recruit new members. I am occasionally approached by people interested in a Recorder Group for less able players, but unfortunately have never had enough interested people to enable a second group to be formed.

Kevin Long



Short Walks

Over the Autumn and Winter months we have tried to meet every other Sunday afternoon for a walk of about an hour and a half around the lanes and paths of Odiham. We do walk in the rain too as shown in the photo!



We have 29 in the group, some walking regularly and others as and when they can. We're a friendly group and enjoy our time together. We will probably plan more walks in the Spring and Summer. It's informal and we plan as we go!

Chris Lester



Strollers

Our Strollers Group meets every other Monday morning for about a 45 minute walk around Odiham.



We've managed to keep going over the winter apart from a few occasions when we have just 'strolled' into the nearest coffee shop, agreeing that it was too wet or too slippery to walk.

We have 16 in the group with some regular strollers and others who dip in and out. It's a positive way to start the week, fresh air, conversation and coffee!

Chris Lester

Table Tennis 3

The third (Wednesday) table tennis group has only been up and running for 18 weeks but has attracted a keen membership of 14 people signed up for the whole of this term and a few others who pay-and-play when they can.



As with any new group, people come-and-go, and we have a constant demand from new people to experience a free taster session, and, at this rate, will soon have no more space for permanent members.

In the same way as the Thursday, and Friday groups, we play "doubles" using two tables at Hook Community Centre for one and a half hours, rotating on and off the tables to allow people to rest if they want; whilst also offering as much table time as possible with a variety of partners and opponents. Because it's important in a mixed ability group for everyone to enjoy themselves, people are asked to adjust their standard of play according to the standard of their opponents, but occasionally I have to remind the more exuberant players to "play nice"!

This challenging but not demoralising environment seems to be working as everyone's standard of play has seen a marked improvement in consistency over the 18 sessions we have had so far.

Kevin Long

Walking for Pleasure

Our group is a friendly walking (and talking) and eating (and talking) group that meets twice a month. Also regularly walking with us are our four-legged friends, Dylan and Flora. We normally walk between 4 and 6 miles.

We started the 2026 Spring term with some walking conditions that were not for the faint hearted. Starting from Old Basing, our first walk was only minutes old when a snow shower enveloped us, and although slippery underfoot, we battled through and eventually a little sun came out to warm us.

Our next walk, around Crondall, followed heavy rain the previous day with a mixed forecast for the walk itself. Starting in drizzly murk, the weather picked up and despite one or two showers we soldiered on. We were not anticipating, however, the sight that met us as we exited one field into a narrow lane....



We needed to follow this lane for some distance – was it all flooded? Yes!

The torrent of water continued for hundreds of yards, but we made our exit off the track before we reached the bottom. How deep would it have been there?



Returning to the pub we had an enjoyable meal and felt just a little bit virtuous.

Our next walk around Sherfield on Loddon corresponded with a period of rain followed by more rain. Were spirits dampened? Of course not!

With more walks in the pipeline, we will no doubt be venturing slightly further afield as the weather improves (oh yes, we do walk in better weather too).



The group has proven very popular and currently we can take no new members.

Fortunately, a Walking for Pleasure Group 2 has recently begun, which takes place fortnightly on a Wednesday. If you are interested [click/press here](#)

Bob Davey



Groups at Length

... slightly longer articles

Environment & Climate Change

Each month we focus on a particular topic, introduced either by members of the group or by guest speakers. All members are encouraged to take part — as much or as little as they wish.

Our January meeting included a talk by Dr Derek Prior entitled.

“No More Swifts – Does it Matter?”

Derek began with some remarkable facts about swifts, along with some worrying statistics.

Did you know?

- * At around 70 mph in level flight, swifts are the fastest flying birds in the UK.
- * Once they fledge, young swifts may not land again for up to three years.
- * Adult swifts mate on the wing and try to return to the place where they fledged — if it has not been boarded up — after spending around nine months continuously in flight, sometimes reaching heights of 18,000 feet.
- * They are also closely related to hummingbirds.



However, more concerning;

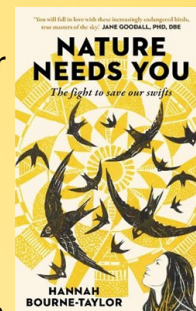
- * The British Trust for Ornithology estimates that fewer than 59,000 pairs remain in the UK.
- * This represents a decline of around 60% since 1995.
- * The swift is now among the 70 species on the RSPB Red List.

So why such a dramatic decline?

Loss of habitat and the reduction in insect populations — partly due to pesticide use — are contributing factors. However, the data suggests the main reason is the loss of

nesting sites, particularly as older buildings are renovated and new developments replace traditional structures.

Derek also told us about **Hannah Bourne-Taylor**, a young conservationist campaigning to protect swifts. After researching the causes of their decline, she concluded that the lack of nesting spaces was a key issue and began campaigning for *swift bricks* — specially designed nesting spaces built into new buildings — to be included in all new developments.



Her campaign reached Government level and, on 4 July 2023, the issue was debated in Parliament. Although there was acknowledgement of a “clear requirement” to incorporate swift bricks into new developments, the proposal became planning guidance rather than a statutory requirement.

Closer to home, there are several local groups working to protect these remarkable birds. After all, swifts migrate thousands of miles across Africa before returning to Britain each year.

Derek introduced us to the charity **Hampshire Swifts**, which promotes the installation of *swift bricks* — sometimes called the “universal” nest brick. These cost around £35–£40. At present the charity is running a scheme whereby, once a brick has been purchased by a householder, volunteers will install it free of charge on the property.



Use the links to find out more about the charity

<https://www.hampshireswifts.co.uk>

and Swifts

<https://www.hampshireswifts.co.uk/the-science>

Our February meeting began with an interesting talk;

UK High Power Prices and the National Electricity Grid – Roger Booth

Roger shared the results of his extensive research into a key question:

Why are UK electricity prices so high?

Roger first introduced some of the terminology used in the energy industry and explained how electricity travels from power stations to our homes. Using helpful diagrams, he showed how electricity leaves generators at around **400,000 volts**, travels through the National Grid and is gradually stepped down until it reaches our homes at **240 volts**.

How the Grid Works

Roger also explained how the **National Electricity Grid** operates and the complex network of organisations involved in generating, transporting, buying and selling electricity before it finally reaches consumers.

The Electricity Trading Market

Roger then gave an insight into how electricity is bought and sold through stages:

- **Forward market** – trading takes place years in advance, up to two days before delivery
- **Day-ahead auction** – electricity is traded the day before delivery
- **Intraday market** – trading continues on the day, up to one hour before delivery
- **Balancing mechanism** – real-time adjustments ensure supply matches demand

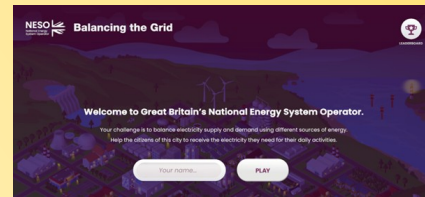
All of this helps guarantee a constant and reliable supply of electricity. The system also needs to cope with sudden surges in demand – for example when many of us put the kettle on after a major national event such as the Wimbledon finals!

Want to Know More?

Roger has kindly shared his presentation notes and reference links on our **E & CC Microsite under the Meetings tab**.

Could you keep Great Britain's lights on?

If you would like to try it yourself, the National Energy System Operator has created an interactive online game.



<https://www.neso.energy/energy-101/balancing-grid-interactive-game>

Good News Stories

Wind farms helping to cut power prices

Wind farms helped reduce UK electricity prices significantly in 2025. The average price on day-ahead markets was around £83 per megawatt-hour, but without wind power it could have been as high as £121 per MWh. That represents a saving of about **£38 per MWh – a reduction of around 31%**. These results build on similar savings of 25% in 2024, as Britain's growing number of wind farms continues to reduce reliance on gas-powered generation.

Battery breakthrough in Wales

A Welsh company, **Batri**, working with Swansea University, has produced **Europe's first sodium-ion battery cell** made entirely with domestic components.



The battery uses UK-manufactured anode and cathode materials sourced through local supply chains. It marks an important milestone for the UK battery industry and highlights the potential for more resilient, home-grown energy storage.

Would you like to know more about us?

We meet on the 4th Friday of the month, 10 to 12 pm at Odiham & Greywell Cricket Club. If you would like to visit for a taster session please [click/press here](#) to go to our webpage and use the contact link for Group Leader, [Clive Teague](#).

Bo Nightingale

Family History

Our monthly meetings follow a basic format, with the two-hour session divided into two parts — separated, of course, by the all-important refreshments.

We begin by exploring what's new in the world of genealogy. Using a laptop linked to the smart TV at the Odiham & Greywell Cricket Club, we make full use of online resources — particularly the Genealogy subject advice on the u3a National website. The monthly newsletter keeps us up to date with new research projects and newly released records, and we often highlight relevant u3a National free online events on Family Research or Social History.

Members frequently share their own discoveries, and we conclude the first section with a short video. These are often from The National Archives, such as *Tracing Your Irish Ancestors*.

Refreshments provide a welcome pause and a chance to exchange news and ideas. Margaret French is also on hand with her laptop, logged in to the major genealogy websites, and is always happy to help those seeking research guidance.

In the final section, one member presents a piece of their own research. Topics vary widely, reflecting the breadth of our shared interests in family, local and social history. Here are précis of three presentations we have enjoyed since September.

Family History.

Margaret French shared the fascinating story of '**Jack Potts: A Forgotten Hero**' — a lad from the North East who, as a young man, worked at Morrison Pit in Annfield Plain on the Durham Coalfield.

Set against the backdrop of the Great Strike (1926) and the Jarrow Hunger March (1936), unemployment in October 1936 was running at 80%. We learnt that Jack was not only



hardworking but also a talented runner. As a member of Saltwell Harriers, he became a three-time English National Cross Country Champion and was selected for the British Olympic Team (10 000m) in 1932. Unfortunately financial constraints meant he was among the team members dropped. However, he did compete in the Berlin Olympic Games, 1936. While there, he and his teammates met Hitler and Goering, who reportedly asked after their parents and grandparents. Sadly, Jack did not win a medal.



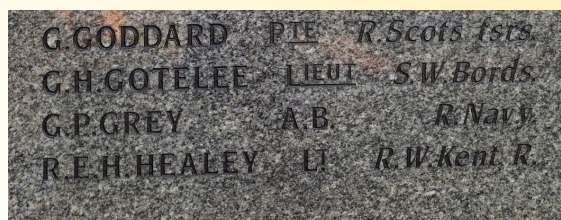
Jack went on to serve in the RAF from 1940 to 1945 and, after the war, returned to his home in Longbenton, Newcastle. His achievements were largely forgotten until the London Olympics in 2012 sparked renewed interest in former Games athletes. He now has a 'Walk' named after him near where he was born.

Margaret began researching Jack's story after discovering that he was connected to her family by marriage.

Local History

Many of us will have paused to read the names on the Odiham War Memorial — but how many can we actually remember?

Derek Spruce focused on one name in particular and introduced us to **Gerald Grey of Broad Oak**.



Why did he stand out? Gerald was one of only four servicemen from the memorial who died while serving in the Royal Navy.

Using census records and service documents, Derek carefully pieced together Gerald's story.

Born in Broad Oak in 1883, Gerald would have attended school at Colt Hill. By the 1901 census he was 18, still living at home and trained as a baker. In 1905, however, his service records show that he enlisted in the Navy. This is especially interesting as his father, brother and most local young men chose the Army — perhaps Gerald longed to see something of the world.

Sadly, that ambition did not quite materialise. During four years of service, he travelled no further than the English Channel. He served as a stoker, and when he returned home the 1911 census records him working as a coalman.

On leaving the Navy, Gerald was on the Reservist list and was called up at the outbreak of the Great War. He was assigned to HMS *Good Hope*, part of a fleet sent to track down the German squadron.



HMS Good Hope

They eventually engaged the enemy off the coast of Chile. Tragically, *Good Hope* was sunk at the Battle of Coronel on 1 November 1914, and Gerald died at the age of 31. Thanks to Derek's research, many more of us now know the story of Gerald Grey of Broad Oak.

Social History

Bo's presentation, '**Arnold Circus: The First Council Estate**', was both engaging and informative.

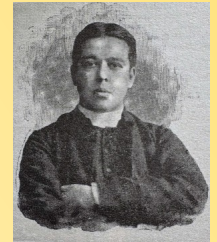
She began by setting the scene with a 1500s Agas map of the area. Visiting London today, it is hard to imagine it was once a patchwork of villages, fields and small woods.

A light-touch history lesson then led us step by step towards the building of Arnold Circus. Along the way, we explored the

origins of St Mary Spital, the Gutenberg Bible, Martin Luther, Henry VIII and the Dissolution of the Monasteries, with the subsequent selling-off of Church lands. As the population grew and people moved to towns in search of work, overcrowding followed — and the rise of slums became inevitable.

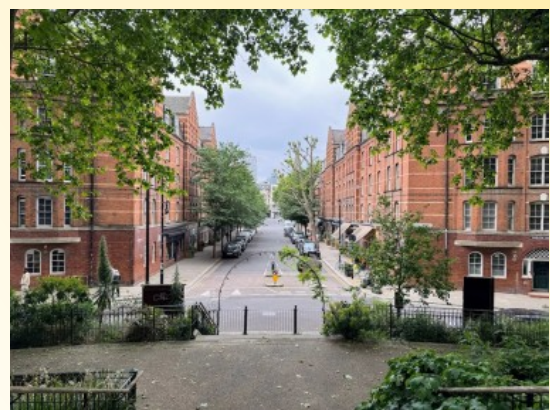


We were then introduced to the little-known Reverend Osborne Montgomery Jay, an Anglo-Catholic clergyman who served as Vicar of Holy Trinity, Shoreditch, from 1886. In 1890, he persuaded the newly formed London County Council to clear the slum and replace it with new flats.



The estate, designed by Owen Fleming in the Arts and Crafts style, comprised twenty handsome red-brick blocks, each five storeys high — creating what became the first council estate.

Bo's exploration of the social history of the period — from slum conditions to clearance and construction — concluded with photographs of Arnold Circus as it appears today.



And just occasionally, to make sure no one is left behind in the world of AI wizardry, we hold a session on using AI — usually ChatGPT — in genealogy research. The results can be quite enlightening... and sometimes rather surprising!

Science & Technology

Not being a natural author, writing a Science and Technology column for the general readership of Odiham District u3a always poses a challenge ! Yes, it's been a good first half to our third Wednesday meetings at the Cross Barn (more of that later) but something topical beyond our own interests could be of interest too. But where to start and stop when today's life is driven or enabled by technologies such as the internet, AI, satellite based navigation and surveillance all of which are essential to our lives but also sadly contribute to drones and autonomous weapons.

Searching for a topic, inspiration came from BBC Radio 3 with a couple of historic science and technology based and music-related items!

Today (March 10th) is the 150th anniversary of **Alexander Graham Bell's** first phone call when he spoke these words to his assistant in the next room saying "Mr. Watson, come here, I want to see you." Just three days earlier, Bell had filed U.S. Patent No. 174,465, which protected the method of transmitting vocal sounds using electrical signals. This patent became one of the most valuable patents in history.



Businesses quickly adopted the telephone to communicate between offices, factories and railway stations. Because telephones could transmit sound, they soon realised music could also be carried. By the late 19th century, some theatres and the Metropolitan Opera House connected microphones near the stage to telephone lines, allowing subscribers to listen from home.

In effect, it was an early form of wired broadcasting — a Victorian version of Spotify! To celebrate the day Radio 3 played Simon Jeffes' Telephone and Rubber Band' ! Here's a link to the piece <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ac1tbOiWRVw>

Petroc Trelawny's next Radio 3 science reference took us into the world of astronomy, in the context of **William Herschel**.

Herschel was a talented oboist, violinist, cellist and organist. The income from performing and composing allowed him to build, use and sell high-quality telescopes.

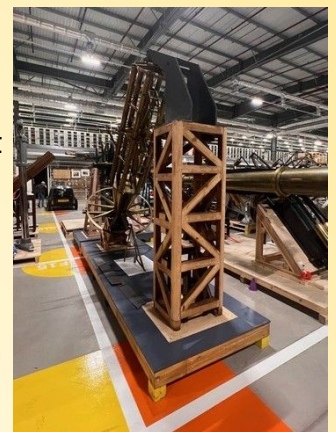
He is best known for discovering the planet Uranus and for identifying infrared radiation. Here is a link to some of his music.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ACEGgdDmiOo>

Moving on to our u3a Group, recent topics for our Science and Technology talks were down to earth on subjects such as;

- ♦ Nuclear fusion
- ♦ DNA in crimefighting
- ♦ A project to map the human genome
- ♦ The Industrial Revolution
- ♦ Is Santa compatible with the Laws of Physics?

March's meeting takes us into orbit where a Harwell based startup reveals its plans to send power collected by solar panels in orbit down to earth using radio waves. April we'll be back to Radio 3's Herschel musician and telescope maker when we hope to see a Herschel telescope amongst the collection at the Science Museum's in Wroughton.



We meet in The Cross Barn, the 3rd Wednesday of the month. Coffee at 10:00, talk from 10:30 – 12:00. If you are interested in joining us, please use the contact link on our webpage [click/press here](#)

Peter Owen



Wings & Wheels

Since the last review in late November 2025 we have had three more varied and interesting meetings and our group has grown to about 80 members. The group organisers strive to achieve a diverse mix of aviation and transport subjects both contemporary and historical with both visits to relevant museums and collections and talks given by group members and visitors.

Our **December** meet over the past few years has always been held at "home" and this year was no different – a big Transport Quiz organised and mostly compiled **by Jim Osgerby**; one of the founder members of this group, together with a general Christmas get together and social chat. The quiz is always well received and very competitive and ... as far as answers are concerned, the compiler is always right !!

The **January** meet was again at home with a talk on Tyre Technology given by Richard Pengelly – with Richard's background in the subject it was a timely reminder, given the time of year, of what we need to be mindful of in tyre performance and how they perform in certain conditions.

Richard shared a short clip taken by a car traveling in the middle lane on the M3 going towards Fleet Services in 2023. The car transporter is in the slow lane and the front near side tyre fails. There is no explosion, big bang or any warning, the tyre just collapsed taking vehicle control away from the driver.



[Press/click here or image](#)

We were also shown a short film on tyre manufacture and afterwards there was an interesting question and answer session.

Our FEBRUARY gathering at the Cricket Club involved the welcome return of visiting speaker, Derek Redfern. In his previous presentation, Derek talked about his friend John Surtees. On this occasion his topic was

entitled "A life in auto magazines" which concentrated on his extensive involvement in motoring publications and well illustrated with a significant number of slides.



The groups forward programme for Spring and early Summer is settled with a mix of speakers and visits and a continuing attempt to encourage and support members to give a talk on their aviation or motoring interests or experiences.

Martin Main

Events and Study Days

Our first trip of the year proved to be very popular with nearly 100 of our members signing up to go.

Yes we did see Snowdrops and the mild weather meant we saw daffodils, crocuses and a few camellias!



We were treated to a lovely informative tour in smaller groups of the Grounds – and we also had included admission to the Castle itself.

Also, it was one of the very few days in February that it didn't downpour!



Our thanks go to Yvonne Harrison and Albert Boniface for pulling off a lovely first Trip of the year!

Stop Press – our next Event – a **General Knowledge on Friday 17 April** is now available to be booked – [Quiz event](#)

Gill Harden

"DRS ABCD! Doctors ABCD – Remember that!"

Cathy Ayres and Adrian Keen from **Meon Valley HeartStart** came to the Cross Barn and provided two excellent sessions for members on the practical steps to take if you find someone who may have had a heart attack.



Fifty members in all were given the confidence and clear advice to follow. If you find someone collapsed and they are not breathing, follow the procedure:

- D** Check for DANGER.
- R** Check the person for a RESPONSE.
- S** SHOUT for assistance.
- A** Check their AIRWAY.
- B** Check for BREATHING.
- C** CALL for an ambulance.
- D** Start CPR with a DEFIBRILLATOR

Continue with CPR until the ambulance arrives. This is the essential procedure to use every time in this order, saying it out loud! DRS ABCD.

Cathy and Adrian used their great knowledge and materials with warmth and humour to get us to understand and learn – and to get us on the floor with the mannequins.



They answered all our questions. They stressed that they were focussing on the first steps in an emergency, but that these steps could be life-savers until specialist help arrives. Members were engrossed and left buzzing with more confidence, if hoping they do not have to put it into practice.

Remember: Have confidence, keep it simple and follow the procedure.

There are more than a dozen defibrillators available across Odiham and Hook: you can find them shown on the internet, but it is wise to do so in advance. The ambulances should know the locations, also.

Meon Valley HeartStart is a charity established in 2001 and provides training to community organisations, schools, clubs, family groups and others across Hampshire.

If there is demand for more sessions, do let us know. **Remember: DRS ABCD!**

Lars Mosesson

[Click here to go to our website](#)

On the lighter side...



Coffee Time

A section not to be hurried through! Sit back, put your feet up and ...

- * admire the work of our **Crafts & Chat** group.
- * enjoy three stories from our **Creative Writing 2** group
- * reflect on the **book recommendations** from our three Book groups

Crafts & Chat

The members of Craft & Chat meet fortnightly on a Tuesday afternoon. 2–4pm, in North Warnborough Village Hall. Everyone brings along their own projects they are working on and enjoy a good gossip and, of course, refreshments! The photos below are a 'peek over the shoulder' of a typical Tuesday get together.



Mystery

We often wonder whether we are the only people who play our game. We love it because we are artistic souls – I am a writer and Lucy an actress – and we find it fires our imagination and stimulates our creative juices. Whenever we eat out, which has become more frequent as our careers have blossomed, we observe. We observe, hopefully inconspicuously, our fellow diners and we create a story around them or imagine what is happening in their lives, exciting or dull. We occasionally recreate their conversations. Many of my short works have been inspired by such simple beginnings. Our evenings are never dull.

Last week I joined Lucy for dinner in a quaint country pub in the New Forest. A step up from Weatherspoon's but no threat of a Michelin star. It was a Friday evening and the restaurant, log fire and low lights, offered a touch of promised romance. We left a biting wind outside and spectral branches flapped on the windows. It felt as though we were in for the night.



"Table 2 is a first date". Lucy was quick off the mark; we hadn't even looked at the menu. "Make up's a bit OTT and he's a bit nervous".

"What about that group in the corner?" It was my turn. "My guess is it's a birthday party for yellow sweater man. There's something going on between peroxide blonde and the younger chap on her right – wandering hands if we look closely, I reckon."

"And hubby is not happy by all accounts" added Lucy "he is the bald one on the end. He's polished off two glasses of wine since we've sat down."

And so we carried on, talking in hushed whispers, improvising, occasionally gesturing and once making ourselves laugh out loud. We had decided a group of four men were farmers from Norfolk on a cycling holiday. "Tha' be using that Vaseline fer summat else today, Jack?" I came out with, a bit too loudly for the table next to us.

"Don't mind him" smiled Lucy, quick as a flash "He's learning his lines for a new play". We clinked glasses and smiled across the table.

By the time coffee arrived we had pretty much covered the whole restaurant. We spent a good ten minutes as the couple by the fire, me as the rather pompous City Lawyer, Clifford Chance to be precise, and Lucy as the frustrated landscape gardener wife who was dreaming of her tennis coach. Limited conversation unsurprisingly.



We struggled however with a lady at the corner table, partly in shadow. Middle-aged, dark ponytail and wearing bright red spectacles. She ate alone and was seemingly engrossed in a copy of Private Eye. When the Landlord brought our coffee, we asked if he knew her.

"That is Terri De Winton" he replied "Lives in the Manor House at the top of the Village. Bit of a strange one. She's a spinster – my missus does her cleaning".

"So she's a Miss Terri" I quipped to Lucy "probably a spy".

The Will

Tracy was nervously twisting her wedding ring on her finger as they all waited for Penelope to arrive. *'Typical of my younger sister,'* she thought, *'always arrives late with a big entrance. All my life I've been bailing her out of her various messes.'*

"Don't worry, your little sister will not miss this." whispered David, her husband, as he placed a hand gently on hers to still them. Behind the desk, Mr Goodman of Goodman, Goodman and Spencer was obviously annoyed, glancing repeatedly at the wall clock, its loud tick the only sound breaking the silence.



Penelope eventually arrived and marched towards Mr Goodman, her hand outstretched. completely ignoring her sister. Tracy smiled at the bright red dress clinging to Penelope's ample bottom, the hem far too high above the knee. *'Surely she's not expecting him to kiss her hand!'* As it was, he stood up and shook her hand.

"So sorry. I'm running late."

"Please take a seat, Mrs Jarvis."

"It's Ms Seymour now," she replied curtly. As she sat, she smiled across at her sister, her smile broadening as she looked past her to David. *"You'll never change sis"*, Tracy thought, as she caught David watching the hem of Penelope's dress ride up as she sat. Tracy abruptly pulled her hand from David's. He got the message and obediently looked towards Mr Goodman.

Mr Goodman began, "We are here to read the last will and testament of Harry Seymour, Uncle Harry. The whole estate is to pass to his two nieces, Penelope and Tracy, his only surviving relatives." He paused. "It seems that Uncle Harry was mainly concerned with the wellbeing of Penelope."

Tracy watched as Penelope leaned forward, an eager smile on her face. *'I don't know why I bothered to come here'*. thought Tracy. *'Penelope was always his favourite. He never even noticed me. I bet she's getting the lot: a big house, thriving businesses and those bloody horses. Oh, how she loved attending the races with Uncle Harry'*.

The solicitor droned through the legal wording. And then: "Ah, here we are. To Penelope, who has always been such a joy with that beautiful smile of hers, I leave my stables along with the racehorses." He paused to smile at Penelope, who smiled back before turning to beam at Tracy. David felt Tracy stiffen. It was going to be a difficult drive home.

Mr Goodman read on carefully, "I leave the house and all business interests to Tracy. He looked up at Tracy, "valued at 5.6 million pounds." He continued reading. "Over the years I have watched Penelope enjoy life, bringing joy to me and those around her. However, I realise she will always need the steadying influence of her older sister, so I am leaving the bulk of my estate to Tracy, who I know will manage it sensibly and will provide for Penelope's needs."



"WHAT! She gets everything. I just get the horses?", shouted Penelope.

"Canny old bugger," whispered Tracy, as Penelope stormed from the room.

Chris Harris
Creative Writing 2

Mystery

Well, I saw it all from the window of Mooley Jones café. It was called The Don't Drop Inn, frequented by those of the local riffraff who were not actually residing at Her Majesty's Pleasure elsewhere. Why his name was 'Mooley' was a mystery. Though no-one could deny it, Mooley always had plenty of moola.

It was leading up to Christmas, and I was idly gazing at the door of the pub opposite, The Ginger Tree. I watched as the neighbourhood troublemakers strutted out onto the streets. They all had that boss-of-the-walk saunter and were led by the notorious villain known as Creeper Robinson, on account of the shoes he always wore.

Down the road came, at a slow measured pace, the small band of the Salvationists. They were led by the indefatigable trumpet player known locally as Miss Prentice. Her band also had a sax, a small drummer, a trombone and the obligatory tambourine. They were promoting a measure of salvation and redemption through good living and a sense of duty. None of this was available in the Ginger Tree, and Miss Prentice was determined to lure the redeemable out from this den of depravity. Most of the time their music was accepted and sometimes even appreciated, but they were always treated with the absolute and utmost respect.



As I watched, I could see Creeper eyeing up Miss Prentice, as young men do, as Miss Prentice was undoubtedly a charmer. Trim of figure, neatly cut hair, a gleam of purpose in her eye and a quiet virtuosity on the trumpet.

Creeper tried a few sallies to distract Miss Prentice, which fell on deaf ears; the playing carried on regardless.

Then old Creeper's luck ran out. His latest sally, which I saw in gesture from the café window, implied that the passion Miss Prentice was applying to the trumpet would be better appreciated being applied to his tender lips. He turned with a grin to his acolytes.

With a grace that Sir Frederick Ashton would appreciate, Miss Prentice halted the music, handed her trumpet to the tambourine player, took a slight step back and unleashed a right hook, from shoulder height, curving with deadly accuracy and force to connect with old Creeper's jaw. A technique she had presumably learned in her life before she was saved.

Unfortunately for Creeper, a slightly open jaw and a profile impact resulted in the most damaging injury, and he went down like a heap of coats. Miss Prentice, unruffled, regained her trumpet, and with a nod to the other players, flexed her fingers, and stepping over Creeper like a fallen hero, resumed their progress.



Miss Prentice spent many solicitous hours at Creeper's bedside during his recovery. There was some shared history there, we all thought. Old Creeper later opined that the path to salvation had never been explained with such force before. At their wedding, which we all attended, Mooley gave Miss Prentice away, and all was, briefly, peace in the neighbourhood.

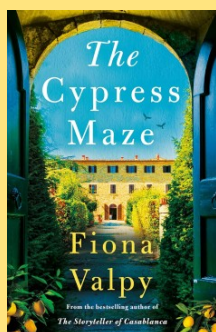
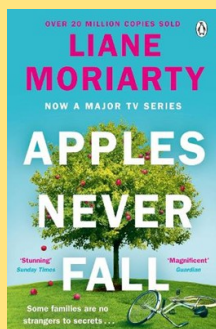
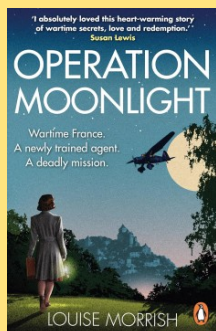
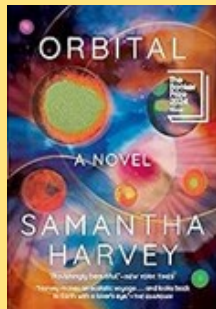
Peter Wakeham
Creative Writing 2

Recommendations from;

Book Group 1

Book Group 2

Book Group 3



The Bookworm's Bookcase

Orbital by Samantha Harvey

A team of astronauts --from America, Russia, Italy, Britain, and Japan-- in the International Space Station collect meteorological data, conduct scientific experiments and test the limits of the human body. But mostly they observe. Together they watch their silent blue planet, circling it sixteen times, spinning past continents and cycling through seasons, taking in glaciers and deserts, the peaks of mountains and the swells of oceans. Endless shows of spectacular beauty witnessed in a single day.

Operation Moonlight – Louise Morrish

WARTIME FRANCE, 1944

Trust absolutely no one.

This is the only advice newly recruited SOE agent Elisabeth Shepherd is given when faced with the impossible.

Her mission: to enter Nazi-occupied France and monitor the Germans' deadly long-range missiles.

GUILDFORD, 2018

Betty is celebrating her 100th birthday when she receives an invite from the Century Society to reminisce on the past.

She remains mysteriously tight-lipped about her past, however.

And then her carer, Tali, discovers a box full of maps, letters and a gun.

Apples Never Fall by Liane Moriarty

From the outside, the Delaneys appear to be an enviably contented family. Even after all these years, former tennis coaches Joy and Stan are still winning tournaments, and now they've sold the family business they have all the time in the world to learn how to 'relax'. Their four adult children are busy living their own lives, and while it could be argued they never quite achieved their destinies, no-one ever says that out loud. But now Joy Delaney has disappeared and her children are re-examining their parents' marriage and their family history with fresh, frightened eyes. Is her disappearance related to their mysterious house guest from last year? Or were things never as rosy as they seemed in the Delaney household?

The Cypress Maze by Fiona Valpy

Tuscany, 1943. Stranded in war-ravaged Italy, Beatrice's dream of an escapist year teaching English is shattered. Granted shelter at the Villa delle Colombe, she seeks refuge in Francesca and Edoardo's beautiful walled garden.

But Beatrice is not the only one seeking an escape here. Francesca has brought children to the safety of the house, as well as other adults, all of them seeking sanctuary on the estate with its mysterious maze. 2015. Tess arrives at the villa raw from the agonising loss of her husband. Beatrice, now custodian, guides her to the solace of its gardens, where Tess begins to heal. But all hope of peace is shattered by the arrival of Marco, the estate's absent owner, who wants nothing more than to hand it over to developers.