

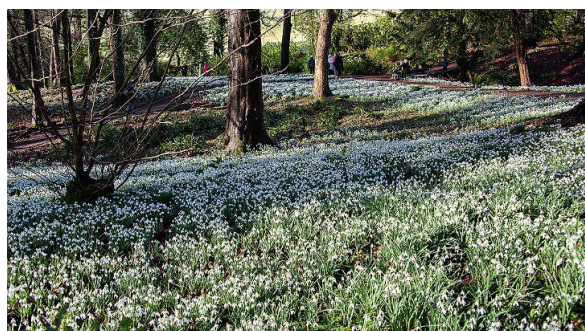
# NEWSLETTER

## Special General Meeting

This newsletter article is a bit of a milestone since it is my twentieth article for the newsletter during my time as Chair. The articles have covered many of our high points over the past three and a half years but far too often I have had to highlight the real challenges and even the very existence of our u3a. We are now at a truly pivotal moment because we need your approval to adopt the new u3a model constitution to secure our future.



Why is it a pivotal moment I hear you ask? Well, our existing constitution has served us well, but it is also restricting in terms of serving as a committee member. The new constitution is much more flexible, so, diminishing the pressure for new members to come forward to serve, a problem I have written about far



Snowdrops at Painswick Rococco Garden, Garden Lovers Group page 16 - photo - Barry Tait

too often. Putting it simply, your committee is asking you to attend the monthly meeting and vote for the new constitution on 16<sup>th</sup> March. Please note the meeting will start at 2.20pm, 10 minutes before the main meeting, so please arrive early. Like all such meetings we need a quorum of members in attendance and that minimum number is 95. Please do not leave it up to others to secure our future as a u3a. Please attend on the 16<sup>th</sup> and show your support for your committee. If you give your approval, then the Annual General Meeting will occur on 16<sup>th</sup> June as normal. There will be more information coming your way in the next few days.

A Group Leaders' working lunch was held at Churchfields Farm a few days ago and a wide range of subjects were covered. These included the new constitution, budgets, membership fees and members' welfare.

It's almost Membership Renewal time and there will be more information also coming your way on how to renew your membership. The Annual Membership fee has been held at £10.00 for the third-year running. Banks have now started imposing charges which will increase our costs and to that end we would discourage the use of cheques because they are the most expensive way of paying your renewal.

I hope to see as many of you as possible on 16<sup>th</sup> March and remember the meeting starts at **2.20pm**.

Regards

Mike Bracey, Chair

A warm welcome to new members: Elaine Thomas, John Thomas, Maggie Smith, Sandra Cupples-Taylor, Diane Hughes, Bob Jackson, Martyn White, Susan Crossley, Judy Pyper, Gina Pilley, John Pilley, Bev Comely, Diana Nutting, Lynette Mason, Melvin Simkiss, Janet Prince-Smith, William Smith, Susan Young plus reciprocal members Angela Flanagan, Sara Ashton and Lynne Bond.

# Droitwich Spa & District

## Messages from the Business Secretary

### February 2026 Easyfundraising Scheme Update



As always, I would like to say a very big thank you to all those members who, to date, have signed up to join the Easyfundraising Scheme. We now have **56** members, and as of 26<sup>th</sup> February, we have raised **£671.15**. This money allows us to support groups and venues to give members a better experience. So, if your group needs equipment please speak to one of the committee members so that we can review your request.

### Worcester Regional Representative

It is unfortunate that our representative Jean Jackson, will be stepping down from the role at the end of March. I joined the last Zoom meeting held by Jean on Wednesday evening. Sadly, no one in the whole region has volunteered to take over Jean's role which means that we will have no representation on the new Council. She will be sending out a communication to us in the near future, to inform us of how we communicate with the Council, apply for grants/allowances, who we send queries to etc., until a replacement is found. Jean has been a great Representative and will be sadly missed but she will still be helping us all by contributing to the new group being formed to help with problems around recruitment/volunteering.

### Cotswold Link

Don't forget the Cotswold Link Special Event Day on 2<sup>nd</sup> June on "From Pen to Reader: The Journey of a Book. For more information and to book tickets please visit their website at [Cotswold Link Special Interest Day - Cotswold u3a Link](#)

Regretfully, as I have already informed all members via an earlier email, the Cotswold Link will lose the Secretary and the Chair in the next few months. Again, so far, no volunteers have come forward. The Cotswold Link, organises Special Interest Days each year, organises Peer Group Zooms (for committee members to help perform the tasks associated with their role) and is a great help for new committee members and for the sharing of best practice. If the Link collapses due to the lack of replacements it will be a great loss to all the u3a's in the region.

I and the New Groups Coordinator, Sue Ackrill, will be attending the next Cotswold Link half yearly meeting at the end of March, so I am hoping to be the bearer of good news when I report on the meeting in the May Newsletter.

### Third Age Trust / u3a Festival 2026 – 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> July

Although it might seem a long way off, we all know how "time flies by" so if you want to attend the 2026 u3a Festival in York you may want to book early to avoid disappointment. Click on the link [u3a - u3a Festival 2026](#) for more information and to book tickets and/or accommodation.

# Droitwich Spa & District

## Volunteering to support your u3a

We now have three volunteers who have agreed to nominate themselves for roles on the committee come the AGM in June. This is great news, but we will probably still be short of one or possibly two volunteers for roles on the committee which do not involve a great deal of work or time. So, if you are interested, please contact me, or one of the committee members. Roles on the committee are not as onerous as people perceive and there are many benefits from taking on these roles - I have never met so many new people in any other role in my life!!

Likewise, we are still looking for volunteers during 2026 to help the committee either on an ongoing or a "one off" basis. We will be looking at how we run/organise events and hope to get people to participate - much of this will only involve people for very short periods of time and only for once a month. If any of you have any interest in contributing in any way, please do not hesitate to contact me or any of the committee members to discuss the opportunities open to members.

I do hope to see you at the **Special General Meeting** on 16<sup>th</sup> March which starts at 2.20pm.

Lesley Short, Business Secretary



## Online Learning Events – free for u3a members

Events on Zoom sharing knowledge and skills

### March 2026 Highlights

#### Exploring World Faiths: March

Monday 9 March at 10am

An *International Women's Day* event exploring the role and experiences of women across three different faith traditions.



#### London Thames bridges

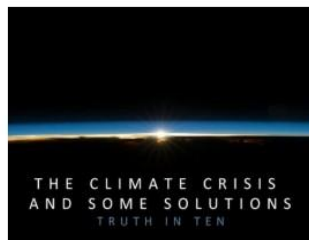
Tuesday 17 March at 2pm

Brian Cookson will talk us through the bridges in London, from Tower Bridge to Westminster Bridge, discussing their history and design.

#### The Truth in Ten: the climate crisis and some solutions

Friday 20 March at 2pm

In this talk with Brenda Ainsley, learn about local and global impacts of climate change, as well as what we can do to help create a better future for the planet.



#### Deafness and beyond: the tribulation and triumph of Ludwig van Beethoven

Thursday 26 March at 2pm

Chris Dowrick explores how Beethoven's distress was ultimately transformed into some of the most profound music ever written.

Book these and plenty more on [the events page of the u3a website](http://www.u3a.org.uk/events) ([www.u3a.org.uk/events](http://www.u3a.org.uk/events))

Queries to [learning@u3a.org.uk](mailto:learning@u3a.org.uk)



# Droitwich Spa & District

## Monthly Meetings - Monday - Norbury Theatre, commencing at 2.30pm

Come to our talks and meet up with friends for an afternoon at the Norbury Theatre, hearing, seeing, and learning different aspects of life and participating in the discussions that follow - with a cup of tea or coffee afterwards.

I hope the following subjects are of interest. Put the dates and subjects in your diary and check your emails for any changes.

### **16<sup>th</sup> March - The Canary Girls -Yellow Faces, Brave Hearts - Paul Wilkins.**

The Unknown Stories of the Canary Girls in World War One who were women munition workers, nicknamed "Canary Girls" due to the yellow skin from TNT exposure. The talk highlights their dangerous but vital work for the war effort.

This talk will follow the Special General Meeting which starts at 2.20pm

Paul trained as a genealogist and social historian and is now living in the West Midlands, he lectures at Warwick University and has spoken to many u3a's not far from us.

**20<sup>th</sup> April - Gilbert and Sullivan Politics - Bernard Lockett.** Bernard has been a life-long fan of the works of Gilbert and Sullivan. As an author, and Trustee of the International Gilbert and Sullivan Association, he will be looking at the background and history concerning the vast amount of social and political comment within the *G & S* works and to see how *W.S Gilbert* (the writer) was a man of strong social conscience and a friend of *Charles Dickens*.

## Further Speakers and Subjects for 2026

**18<sup>th</sup> May - Worcester Street Art Tours - Kate Cox** taking a guided stroll around some of the murals created in Worcester and explaining a little more about them.

**15<sup>th</sup> June - Britain in the 1970's - Philip Bowen.**

**21<sup>st</sup> September - Raconteur and musician, Roger Browne - The Golden Age of Radio.** A nostalgic trip through post-war broadcasts like *Take it from Here* and *Round the Horne*, featuring theme tunes and hilarious anecdotes.

**19<sup>th</sup> October - Tripping Yarns - Brian Anderson.**

**16<sup>th</sup> November - Song writing - Andy Smith**

I hope you can make all of these.

Geoff Stollard, Speaker Organiser

# Droitwich Spa & District

## Membership Renewal for 2026/27

The committee has recently discussed membership fees, and it was decided to set the fees at the same level as last year, ie as follows:

- Full membership fee of £10 for the year from 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2027
- Reduced membership fee of £8 for the period from 1 October 2026 to 31 March 2027
- Reduced membership fee of £6 for the period from 1 January 2027 to 31 March 2027

Unfortunately, the cost of the u3a Matters magazine (formerly Third Age Matters) has increased so for members who also wish to subscribe to the magazine, the fees will be:

- Full membership fee for the year from 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2027,  
plus up to 5 magazine issues, of £14.50
- Reduced membership fee for the period from 1 October 2026 to 31 March 2027,  
plus up to 3 magazine issues, of £11.00
- Reduced membership fee for the period from 1 January 2027 to 31 March 2027,  
plus up to 2 magazine issues, of £8.00

Please note that we have fixed membership costs which need to be covered. These are £4 per member per year as our subscription to the national u3a body, the Third Age Trust, and £1 per member per year for our use of the Beacon management information system.

### Confirmation of u3a Matters Magazine Subscription

Droitwich u3a uses two different Membership Classes; one for members who do not subscribe to the magazine, and another for those members who do subscribe. Since changing the Membership Class is not possible when renewing using the Members Portal, all members who have supplied us with an email address will be contacted during March, and asked if they wish to change their current level of magazine subscription.

### Membership Renewal Process....

The Membership Renewal process will be similar to the one adopted last year.

#### So ... for Members who have supplied us with an email address

Individual Membership Renewal requests (which will include your existing contact details, your current ICE - in case of emergency - contact details, and your current Gift Aid status) will be sent to you by email by Barry Tait, the Membership Secretary, from 1 April 2026 onwards. If you have changed your email address and not yet informed the Membership Secretary, please do so before the end of March.

# Droitwich Spa & District

## Membership Renewal Process - continued

You may renew your membership fees, by either paying:

- a) Using a debit card, a credit card or from a PayPal account using the Members Portal in Beacon. Instructions on using the Members Portal are currently available on the Droitwich u3a website at:  
<https://droitwichspa.u3asite.uk/beacon-members-portal/>  
This way of renewing your membership involves fewer actions from you and less work for the Membership Secretary. Also, please see Note 2 below.
- b) By bank transfer. Full details of how payments can be made, and other actions you will need to do (such as informing the Membership Secretary of the payment date and reference, and any changes to your contact details, your ICE contacts or your Gift Aid status) will be included in the Membership Renewal email, or the email will include directions to where they can be found on the Droitwich u3a website. Also, please see Note 2 below.
- c) By cheque. Full details of where and how payments can be made, and other actions you may need to do (such as informing the Membership Secretary of any changes to your contact details, your ICE contacts or your Gift Aid status) will be included in the Membership Renewal email, or the email will include directions to where they can be found on the Droitwich u3a website. Also, please see Note 2 below.
- d) By cash. However, do not send cash payments through the post, and cash payments will only be received from members face-to-face at a Monthly Meeting and when accompanied by a paper renewal form that includes any changes to your contact details, your ICE contacts or your Gift Aid status.

Note 1 - Members wishing to have a printed copy of the membership renewal request can obtain one by contacting Barry Tait, the Membership Secretary or Les Hazlewood, the Beacon Administrator.

Note 2 - Please note that if you wish to pay the membership fees for yourself and another member (eg a husband, wife or partner) as a single payment, please make the payment from a joint account. Otherwise, our ability to claim Gift Aid is compromised. If this is not possible, each member should make their own membership fee payment.

Confirmation of your membership renewal will be sent by email along with an e-Card Membership Card for 2026/27 following 1 April 2026. The e-Card will be in the form of a PDF attachment to the email. The 2026/27 Members Leaflet will be available for members on the Droitwich u3a website, and from which you may then obtain a printed copy.

... there will be separate arrangements for Reciprocal Members, and Members who do not use email.

# Droitwich Spa & District

## Membership Renewal Process - continued

### In Case of Emergency (ICE) Contact Details

Since autumn 2024 we have been recording members' ICE contact details, and usually this has involved at least one name, relationship and phone number, but members can and have supplied more than one contact if they wish to do so.

The Membership Renewal email described above will include your ICE contact information. If you have **not** previously supplied any ICE contacts, then please think about doing so. Please make sure that you have the ICE person's permission. Alternatively, you will have the opportunity to change any of your previously recorded ICE contacts.

### Gift Aid

Since summer 2024 we have been claiming Gift Aid from HMRC. For UK tax payers, the whole of your standard membership fee (ie not including any subscription to the u3a Matters magazine) is eligible for Gift Aid, so long as either your Income Tax or Capital Gains Tax payments are in excess of the membership fee. This could increase our income by something like 20-25%, but at no additional cost to yourself.

The Membership Renewal email described above will include information about your Gift Aid status. If you have previously chosen to Gift Aid your membership fee, such a declaration will remain in force until such a time as you wish to change your mind, and you will have the opportunity to do so as part of the membership renewal process. Alternatively, if you have previously chosen **not** to Gift Aid your membership fee, you will have the opportunity to change your mind and Gift Aid your membership fee.

### Finally, please note ...

According to our current Constitution, you will cease being a member of Droitwich u3a if your membership fee remains unpaid after 60 days following 1 April 2026.

## Group News - from the Existing Groups Co-ordinator

### The Conversational Psychology Group

This group is being relaunched next month, and is looking for new members, if you are interested or have any questions then do not hesitate to contact the Group Leader, Lynda Thompson.

Anne Everard, Existing Groups Coordinator

**The Conversational Psychology Discussion Group** is a friendly, informal group where we can explore human behaviour, relationships, emotions, and everyday psychological questions to learn from each other's perspectives. No background in psychology is needed; just bring your curiosity. It's for anyone interested in understanding people and themselves a little better. We discuss a different topic each session and share ideas in a relaxed, respectful environment.

The meetings will be on the 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesday of each month, at Dorset House: 10.00 for 10.15 start until about midday. Please let me know if you are able to come:

# Droitwich Spa & District

## Group Leaders Meeting - Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> March



### Good practice and useful support

Group Leaders and their deputies were invited to join the Droitwich u3a Committee for an informal business meeting and afternoon tea at Churchfields Farm on Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> March. Forty-three people attended and some tempting refreshments were provided at the start of the meeting.

Chairman Mike Bracey stressed the importance of interest groups and thanked those present for their work as Group Leaders. In his introduction he indicated that we have over 60 groups for currently 615 members and run 130+ group sessions per month.

Lesley Short our Business Secretary provided information on the Special General Meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> March, start time 2.20pm, and encouraged our attendance. She explained the reasons for the constitution changes being considered and the need for committee volunteers. Committee meetings occur on the third Monday of each month before the Monthly Meeting and any member interested may attend.

Mike stressed the fact that the annual subscription had been maintained at £10 despite cost pressures and the importance of help from Gift Aid, Easyfundraising and Riviera Travel donations. Some consideration was given to group finance, card machines for larger payments and insurance.

Gerard van Zwieten, Group Leader of the AI and Canva Group indicated this would now provide an AI consultancy service to help with emails, posters, research etc. Their advice would be practical, tailored and creative and was available to groups in all West Midland u3as.



Photos Mike Bracey

There were numerous questions during the meeting, some discussion, and, at the end, the chance to chat with other Group Leaders.

Thanks are due to Mike, Lesley and Gerard for their updates and to Anne Everard and Sue Ackrill, Group Co-ordinators for arranging a pleasant and useful occasion.

Val Hibbitt, Newsletter Editor

## New Groups

### Handbell ringing

This group meets every Wednesday afternoon from 2:00 to 4:00pm, at Galton Memorial Hall in Hadzor. Again, there are spaces in this group, so if you would like to learn to ring handbells, please contact the Group Leader. You don't need to be able to read music, although it is an advantage.

Sue Ackrill New Groups Co-ordinator

# Droitwich Spa & District

## New Groups - continued



### Big Band Music Appreciation Droitwich (BBMAD)

The group has had its first two meetings and there are spaces left if anyone else would like to join us. We meet at the Group Leader's home in WR9 OBD, on the 2nd and 4th Wednesdays of the month, from 2.30 to 4.30 pm. If you can only make one of those sessions, you are still very welcome to come along for that. We listen to, discuss and reminisce about music of big bands and the brilliant vocalists, primarily of the 20s to 60s, with members bringing their favourites to supplement the collection of the Group Leader. We can play all records, including 78s, CDs and gems found on the internet, and will shortly have a tape deck running too! Please contact the Group Leader via the u3a website if your foot is tapping in anticipation!



Sue Ackrill New Groups Co-ordinator with Annie Williams Group Leader

## News from the Groups

### Genealogy and Gallivanting Group Visit to Warwickshire Fusiliers Museum



The Genealogy and Galivanting Groups joined forces to visit the Warwickshire Fusilier Museum in Warwick. A group of twelve of us met for coffee followed by a guided tour of the museum. The collection and its archive tell the stories of the regiment over 350 years, although its focus is on the First World War.

Two members of the Genealogy Group had pre-submitted a series of questions drawn from their family research for the museum to answer. The answers were fascinating and their stories gave the collection a human face that linked directly to us. I would like to thank the Fusiliers Museum, Warwick for their hospitality and hope to visit again soon.

Mike Bracey, Genealogy Group Leader

# Droitwich Spa & District

## Italian for Beginners and Holiday Italian

As I facilitate both groups and as there is little difference in levels between them, I have, with both groups' agreement, decided to try a different approach. Like any language learners we find the most difficult aspect is speaking. We 'freeze' because we are scared of making a mistake, not being understood or just making a fool of ourselves. So rather than studying Italian with a textbook we are now making communicating verbally the top priority of our studies and learning grammar as needed. We are basing our approach on the work of Stephen Krashen and Tony Marsh.



Stephen Krashen, an American university professor, states that we only acquire language in the same way in which children learn to talk through immersion and constant repetition. That trying to learn a language through studying it with the aid of textbooks is not the way to acquire the language. By "acquire" he means to be able to communicate effectively and more naturally in that language.

Tony Marsh, an ex-language instructor with the US Army and internet tutor, says that while these are indeed important, they are not the answer. Language is a tool for communication and to say you have studied and are fluent means you must be able to 'speak' it. He believes that 'speaking' is the other side of the coin to 'listening', you need to do both to become fluent. For him the whole purpose of learning a language is to be able to communicate verbally and he suggests the best way to become fluent is to play the language as if it were a game of tennis, practising what you know until it becomes second nature. If you cannot use what you already know of the language, even as little as five words with fluency, there is no point in trying to learn more grammar or vocabulary. He says 'Don't think of grammar as a set of rules but as a creative tool or patterns that you can use to come up with endless possibilities.' If you cannot hold a conversation with a few words because you 'freeze' when under pressure you cannot claim to have learned a language. You need to go through the stress of speaking under pressure to gain the confidence in yourself to be able to do this at any time.

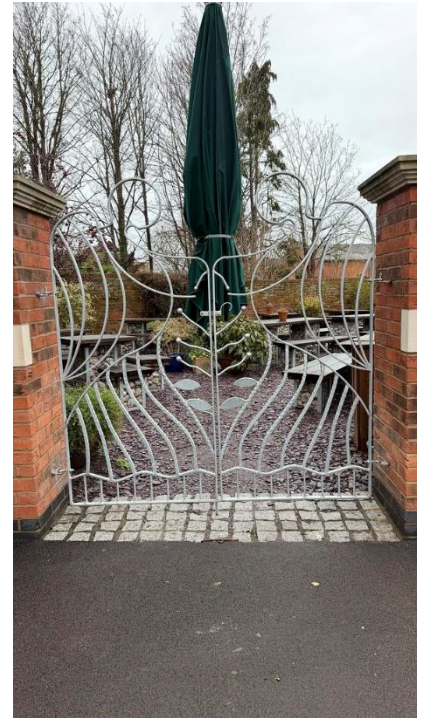
Therefore, we are now trying to use lots of immersion in the language through videos and films as well as reading as a gateway to being able to communicate fluently in Italian. Loosely based on the ideas of Tony Marsh we are going to spend time practising speaking with conversation generators and in so doing we will improve our verbal communication skills. I believe that by the time we are eligible to join the u3a, the most important aspect of learning a language is being able to communicate effectively especially when on holiday.

I am going to give the last words to Tony Marsh taken from YouTube video shorts. In language learning, learning words is the result of communicating not the cause. You didn't learn your first language by memorising. No one ever asked you to memorise anything. You learned your first language by figuring out how to rearrange the parts of the language in the moment so you can speak freely in any conversation. And that's exactly how you learn a foreign language. The Hungarian polyglot, Kató Lomb, correctly said 'You didn't learn a language so you can speak it. You speak a language so you can learn it.' Trying to learn a language so you can communicate is like saying 'I'm trying to learn to swim so I can get into the pool.' But it also works the other way around. You have to get into the pool so you can learn to swim.'

I realise that this goes against the way languages have been traditionally taught but we have less life left to live than when we were in school. We are going to learn to embrace our mistakes and have a go - as long as we can make ourselves understood we will be winning! Wish us luck!

# Droitwich Spa & District

The Digital Photography Group visit to Pershore – theme: “A winters day in Pershore”



Pictures by Dug Holloway,  
Janet Oakley, Peter Marrs,  
Derek Oakley, Patricia Smith.



Pershore's history centres on its magnificent Abbey, founded around 689 AD by King Oswald of Mercia. The Abbey grew from Saxon roots into an important Benedictine monastery in medieval times within the market town.

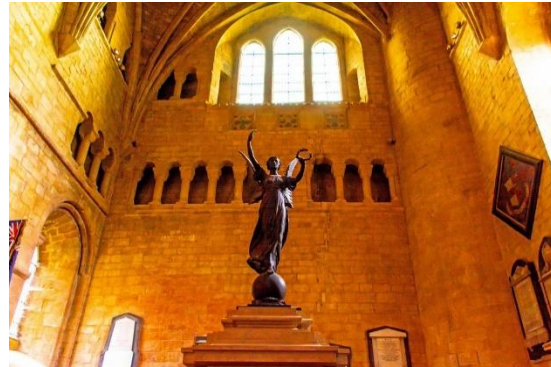
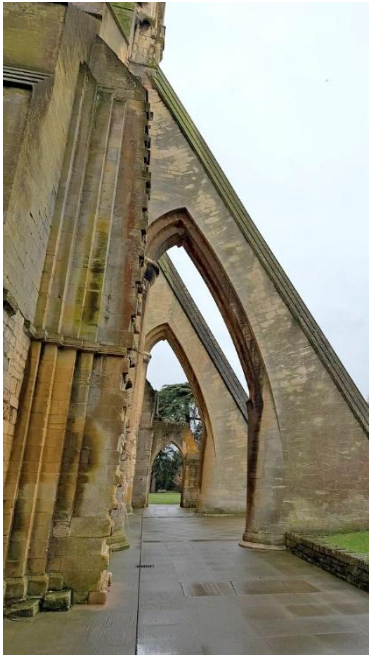


The church we see today is the triumphant remnant of a much larger building. Fire, storms and an earthquake battered the Abbey over the centuries. However, Henry V111 came closest to destroying it during the Dissolution of the Monasteries. Much of the Abbey was demolished, but the people of Pershore saved part of it to be their parish church.



# Droitwich Spa & District

The Digital Photography Group visit to Pershore - theme: "A winters day in Pershore" - continued



Pershore town centre is renowned for its outstanding Georgian facade and many of the buildings are listed.

A short distance away from the town centre stands Pershore Bridge, scene of Civil War skirmishes. Look closely and you will be able to see the scars of battle.



Following the session the group adjourned to Coffee#1 for coffee and cake.

To join our group contact Alan Meyrick at [ameyrick54@gmail.com](mailto:ameyrick54@gmail.com)

Derek Oakley

## Local History Group

All talks are at The Emmanuel Church, Blake Avenue. Doors open at 10.00am for refreshments with a 10.30am start for the talk. Cost £2.50.

13<sup>th</sup> March - Marguerite Collins - **Madresfield - the True Brideshead**

10<sup>th</sup> April - Heather Flack - **Kidderminster 1912** - suffragettes and campaigners of better rights for carpet workers.

## Further Local History Programme for 2026

A varied mix of new and repeat speakers on what I hope you consider a good variety of subjects.

8<sup>th</sup> May - Mike Sharpe - **The History of Feckenham Forest**

12<sup>th</sup> June - Vanessa Morgan - **A Weekend Away** - properties around the country worth a visit.

Jeff Gogarty, Group Leader

# Droitwich Spa & District

## Maths, Science and Technology (MST) Group

We only meet in the winter months. The last meeting of this winter is:

**20<sup>th</sup> March - Brian Wilkes - Rory the Robot**

**Rory the Robot is about the surgical robot used in the treatment of Prostate Cancer.** When this talk was offered to Catherine she said yes immediately as she felt very strongly that it was a way of raising awareness of the advances that have been made in the treatment of Prostate Cancer and also about how important it is for men to go for testing. Discussing a talk called Rory the Robot with family and friends is a way of telling them about these advances in treatment and about getting tested.

Our speaker, Brian Wilkes, is one of the three main fundraisers involved in the £1m fundraising to purchase this machine for Worcestershire. He will tell us about the various ways in which the money was raised and about the advantages of this robotic method.

All members of Droitwich u3a are welcome to attend MST talks. Just dip in and out as the topic interests you. As usual, the doors at Rotary House, Corbett Ave will open at 10am for coffee/tea, biscuit and chat, with the talk starting at 10.30am. Cost will remain at £2.50.

We look forward to seeing you there.

Roger and Catherine Bach, Group Leaders

## Classical Music Appreciation

After a year of Desert Island Discs in which we chose our eight discs, book and luxury item to take with us we are returning to an alphabetical exploration of the world of classical music. So far, we have had the letters A, B and C. The presentations have all been very different but nonetheless enjoyable.



The idea is that given a letter we look for the hidden gems of classical music either from lesser-known composers or lesser-known works of well-known composers. We can do this just by the name of the composer, the title of the piece of music, the key signature, the ensemble, the instrument, the conductor or soloist or indeed any link we can make to the given letter however tenuous. Having journeyed through the alphabet in previous years with well-known composers this has tended to become quite competitive with members trying to make as many links as possible within a single piece of music. We have much to look forward to in the next 23 sessions!

Gay Enoch, Group Leader

# Droitwich Spa & District

## Future-Proofing Lifelong Learning: The Role of the AI and Canva Group

### A New Digital Horizon

The University of the Third Age (u3a) has always thrived on the curiosity of its members. Today, that curiosity extends into the digital world. We are witnessing an integration of accessible design tools, like **Canva**, and the transformative power of **Artificial Intelligence (AI)**. Far from being daunting, these technologies offer a unique opportunity to revitalise our activities and add new dimensions to our hobbies.

Canva is a design studio in your web browser, but you do not need to be a designer to use it. It works just as well for a solo member making a birthday card as it does for a Group Leader organising a coffee morning.

**Simple & Intuitive:** If you can click and drag a mouse, you can use Canva. It is pre-programmed with ready-made templates, so you never have to start with a blank page.

**For Individuals and Groups:** Whether you want to spruce up your family photo album or create a professional-looking newsletter for your Gardening Group, the tools are right at your fingertips.

**The "Pro" Advantage:** Here is the best news - because u3a branches hold registered charity status, we are eligible for **Canva for Nonprofits**. This grants us free access to the "Pro" version, unlocking premium features like unlimited high-quality stock photos, "magic" resizing tools, and brand kits, costing us absolutely nothing.

### The Broader Possibilities of AI

While Canva uses AI to assist with design and writing (through its "Magic Studio"), the potential of AI extends far deeper into the fabric of our Interest Groups. AI acts as a "digital research assistant," available 24/7 to deepen our understanding of the subjects we love. We can think of numerous case studies within our groups where AI can add value.

### Introducing the New "AI and Canva" Group Structure

To navigate this exciting landscape, we have restructured the **AI and Canva Group**. This is no longer a discussion learning group that meets every fortnight; it is a **service and support hub** designed to assist all other u3a groups.

**Our Mission:** To help Group Leaders and members integrate these new digital elements into their existing hobbies and groups they represent.

#### How We Help:

**For Group Leaders:** We offer workshops at your group meetings on using Canva to create engaging recruitment flyers or visualise group data.

**For any Interest Groups:** We consult on how AI can enhance your specific subject, like for example:

*Literature Groups:* We show how AI can suggest similar authors or summarise complex historical contexts for discussion.

*Language Groups:* We demonstrate AI tools that offer conversational practice or instant translation assistance.

# Droitwich Spa & District

## AI and Canva Group - continued

*Art Groups:* We explore generative AI as a new medium for creativity and image manipulation.



### Conclusion

The integration of Canva and AI is not about replacing the human element of u3a; it is about enhancing it. By utilising the resources of the **AI and Canva Group**, we can ensure that our community remains vibrant, relevant, and visually engaging. Whether you are researching old documents or designing the next newsletter, these tools are here to help you learn, create, and share more effectively than ever before. On the u3a Droitwich website under the AI and Canva Group, you will find seven slides showing how we as a group will operate for now.

Gerard van Zwieten, AI and Canva Group Leader

## Coffee and Chat Group



The Monday U3A Coffee and Chat group has been successfully running for a number of years. I became its leader in the summer of last year with the help of a colleague, Linda Peck.

We meet between 10.30 am and 12 pm on the second Monday of the month, currently at one of two alternate venues where the group is always made to feel welcome. This month's meeting was at Lilian's Tea Room. Members are expected to buy a beverage and/or a cake to support the venue which hosts us.

The members of the group are all very friendly and supportive of each other. Most are members of other u3a groups too, eg Singing, Local History, Petanque, French Conversation, Book Club, etc although this isn't a prerequisite and, unsurprisingly, our interests are diverse. We're never at a loss for topics of conversation!

We are an all-women group which happened more by accident than by design. There is currently space for one new member who will be welcomed on a 'first come first served' basis. We also have a waiting list which is empty at the time of writing.

If you enjoy the company of like-minded people, please email me to express your interest!

Carol Brandrick, Group Leader

# Droitwich Spa & District

## Garden Lovers Group

The Garden Lovers Group had their first trip of 2026 on Wednesday 4th February. The annual snowdrop expedition was carried out at Painswick Rococco Garden in Gloucestershire. The beautiful snowdrops were certainly there in abundance and the weather was very kind. None of the incessant rain we've had this year, and we were blessed with blue skies and sunshine at times! Having met for coffee and cake in the cafe, the group then explored the extensive gardens and were caught on camera "underneath the arches" and elsewhere by Barry Tait. Great photos from Barry, as always.



On Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> March, our annual group meeting will be held at 10.30am, at Springridge Nursery, WR7 4AG, as usual. We will be planning all our visits for April to October 2026, and members are encouraged to come along with their ideas and suggestions for new garden venues to visit this year.

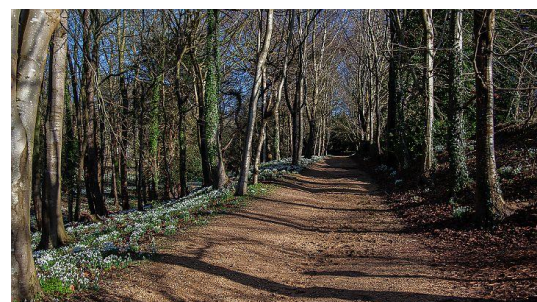
We look forward to another fabulous year of garden experiences! If you are interested in joining our friendly group of enthusiasts, please contact Elizabeth Bartle, Group Leader, via the website.



Jan van Zwieten

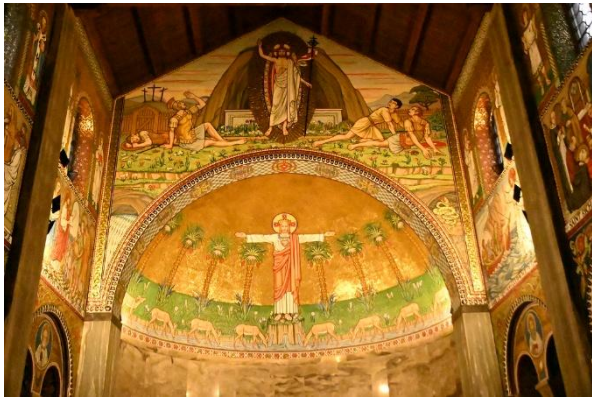


Photos - Barry Tait



# Droitwich Spa & District

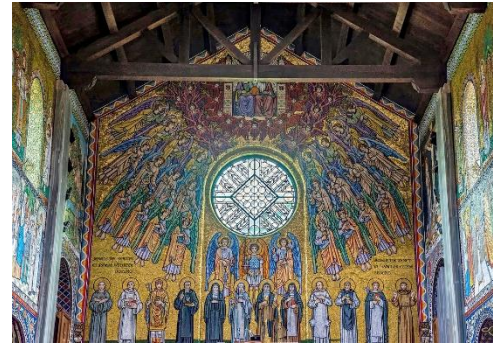
## The Digital Photography Group visit to the Church of the Sacred Heart and Saint Catherine of Alexandria, Droitwich Spa



The church was built as a memorial to Catherine Hodgkinson, who died in 1906 and was intended to reflect the early Christian basilicas of Ravenna, Italy. The foundation stone was laid on 25<sup>th</sup> November 1919, and the first Mass was celebrated on 24<sup>th</sup> November 1921.

The mosaics, covering the interior walls and vaults, were begun in 1922, and took roughly ten years to complete.

They were designed by artist Gabriel Pippet and executed by mosaicists Maurice Josey and Fred Oates. The work is internationally recognized, with much of the gold-backed glass imported from Venice. The architectural style was designed by F. Barry Peacock of the Birmingham firm Peacock and Bewlay, it



features a simple, brick exterior with a stunningly intricate interior.

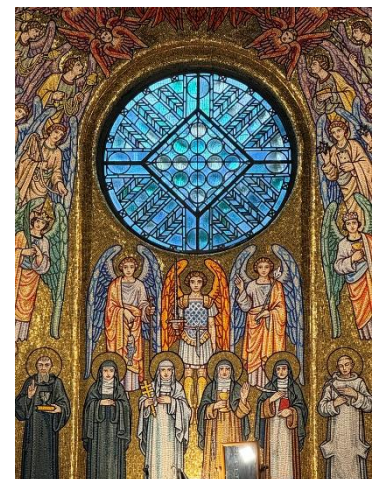
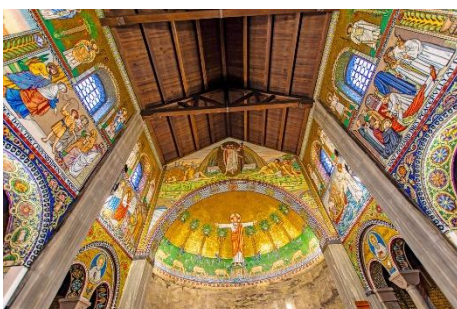
Beyond the mosaics, the church contains stone carvings and wooden Stations of the Cross, also designed by Gabriel Pippet. This replaced a smaller building from 1909 and serves as a testament to the revival of Catholic life in the Worcestershire area, where, historically, places like Harvington Hall were centres for the faith.



Within ten miles of Droitwich are a number of old houses, including Harvington Hall, Rushock Court, Huddington Court and Grafton Manor, which were notable centres of Catholic life well before the Reformation. Their owners helped to sustain the faith during the turbulent times when its elimination was the aim of the Crown and State.



In 1641, a Parliamentary order was sent from London to the Sheriff of nearby Worcester to suppress any meetings of Catholics. In 1642, the Mayor of Worcester was "entreated to make an order that no Papists or recusants (ones who refused to attend the new Church of England) be suffered to take houses nor be residents within the city".



# Droitwich Spa & District

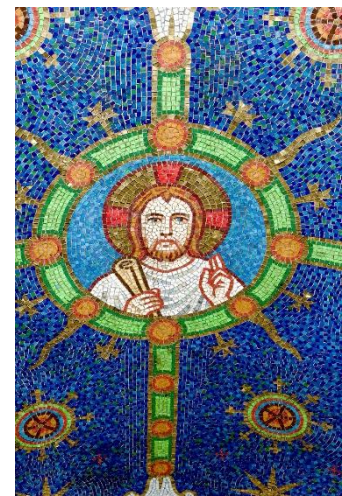
## The Digital Photography Group visit to the Church of the Sacred Heart and Saint Catherine of Alexandria - continued



The Catholic stronghold of Grafton Manor in Bromsgrove continued to serve as a centre for the faithful, and until the opening of St. Peter's Church, Bromsgrove in 1858, the chapel at Grafton was used, as it had been for centuries, for Catholic worship.



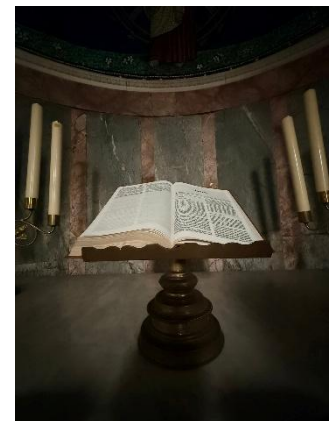
Before a Mass centre became available at Hadzor there was only one Catholic in Droitwich, a Mrs Hill, and she was known as 'the Catholic of Droitwich'. Mrs Hill used to walk the seven miles to Bromsgrove on Sundays to attend Mass.



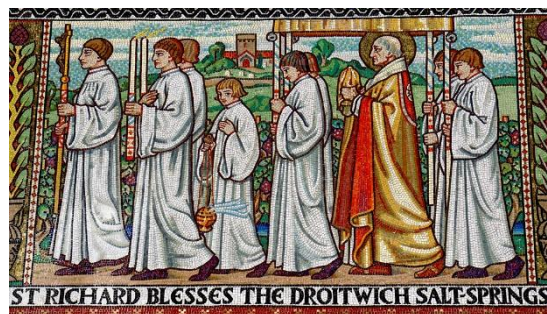
The building of the Church of Sacred Heart and St. Catherine of Alexandria was the culmination, for Droitwich, of a long and difficult period in the history of the Roman Catholic faith in Worcestershire.



The church is open to visitors daily to view the mosaics and is frequently visited by people from across the world.



Pictures by Dug Holloway, Derek Oakley, Peter Marrs, Alan Woolhead, Alan Meyrick and Paula Knight.



Following the session, we adjourned for coffee and cake to Coffee#1 at Droitwich.

Derek Oakley

To join our group contact Alan Meyrick at [ameyrick54@gmail.com](mailto:ameyrick54@gmail.com)



# Droitwich Spa & District

## Wine Appreciation Group

The Wine Appreciation Group met on 18<sup>th</sup> February at Rotary House to taste some Beaujolais wines. The wines were selected by some of the members and gave an interestingly wide range to taste.

The Beaujolais appellation is located north of Lyon and basically runs up the Rhone valley.



**Domaine des Côteaux de Font Curé, Beaujolais - Villages Blanc** - 2024 - 13% - Wine Society £12.50

White Beaujolais isn't seen very often in the UK but this clean-cut Chardonnay was most enjoyable. There was plenty of fruit on the palate, without the sweetness that sometimes comes with Chardonnay. A pleasant surprise and good for a summer's day - we rated this at 7½/10.

**Macon Villages, Les Pierres Blanches, Caves du Lugny, Soane et Loire** - 2023 - 13% - Majestic £11

Another white but from Bourgogne. Not as fruity or as interesting as the first one we tasted and rated at only 6/10.

**Beaujolais Nouveau, Pardon et Fils, Régnié** - 2025 - 12% - Majestic £10

Every year, on the third Thursday of November, the freshest Beaujolais is released, just weeks after the harvest. 'Beaujolais Nouveau' day is celebrated throughout the region and in wine bars all over Europe. This year saw a small harvest. The wine is light-bodied and fruity but with no tannins (due to its unique production method). We rated it at 6½/10.

**Beaujolais La Bourgondie Vignerons Cooperateurs** - 2023 - 12½% - Tesco £9

The Cooperative is comprised of wineries along the west bank of the Rhone valley. The wine was a basic Beaujolais with 90% Gamay grapes - quite fruity and very like the B Nouveau we remember. Not particularly exciting and rated at only 5/10.

**Beaujolais-Quincie, Louis Jadot, Quincie-en-Beaujolais** - 2024 - 12½% - Waitrose £10

From vineyards within the village of Quincie - one of 38 recognised villages. Made from 100% Gamay and quite fruity and fresh. We rated this at 6½/10.

**Fleurie Edition Limitée Chassaux et Fils** - 2024 - 12½% - Aldi £9

The Fleurie area is near the middle of Beaujolais and a well-known Appellation d'Origine being one of the ten Beaujolais crus. A fairly light, smooth wine with pleasant fruit flavours and adequate tannin. We rated this wine at 7/10.

**Juliéas, Château d'Emeringes** - 2023 - 14% - Wine Society £12.50

Juliéas is also one of the ten Beaujolais crus near the north of Beaujolais. The wine was very fruity with rather more body than the others tasted during the evening. There were good tannins making it a well-balanced wine. We rated it at 8½/10 making it the star of the evening.

Our next tasting is scheduled for 15<sup>th</sup> April when we hope to be tasting various sparkling wines from around the world.

Roy Thurston, Group Leader

# Droitwich Spa & District



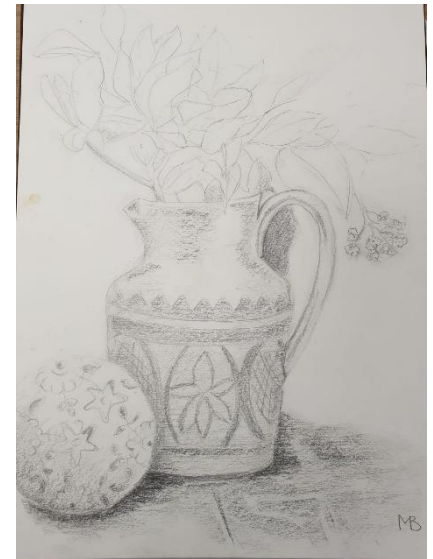
## Relaxed Multi Media Art Group

Photos of current work. Still life and pots painted and fired at Worcester Porcelain Museum. We followed up our session at the Museum with tea and cakes and lots of laughs at The Tipsy Teacup!

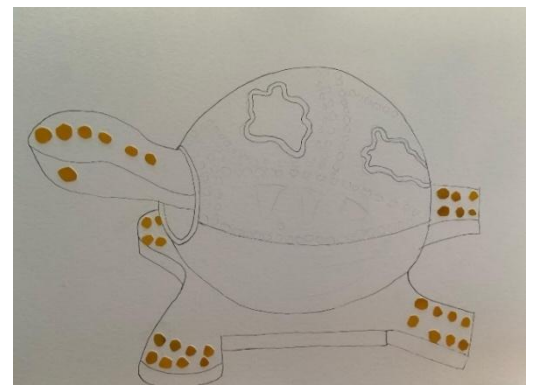
Sue Cook, Group Leader

Pictures by -

Cheryl Walton, Melanie Bell,  
Sue Cook and Gilly White.



Pots by Sue Cook,  
Cheryl Walton and  
Gilly White



# Droitwich Spa & District

## The Sacred Heart Church and the life of Saint Richard

I visited the Sacred Heart Church twice recently; the first time with the Digital Photography Group and the second time with the History Group. The latter was a guided talk arranged by Dot Colman from the Local History Group who I wish to thank because it was a real eye-opener for me, particularly since the church has undergone a major renovation of the decorations and murals recently.

One cannot take in all the tales and memories told in one visit; but I have chosen the murals which tell the life of Saint Richard.



He was born in Droitwich, Wyche at the time, 1197. The mural depicts his baptism.



While Richard studied at Oxford, his brother neglected the family estate; so, Richard came home to improve things. Dodderhill Church is on the hill and either a lake or the River Salwarpe is below.



Richard de Wyche returned to Oxford after studying in France with the Dominicans. Richard became Edmund, Archbishop of Canterbury's Diocesan Chancellor. But Edmund went into exile in France, accompanied by Richard, because of disputes with King Henry III.

The mural portrays them preparing to leave England.



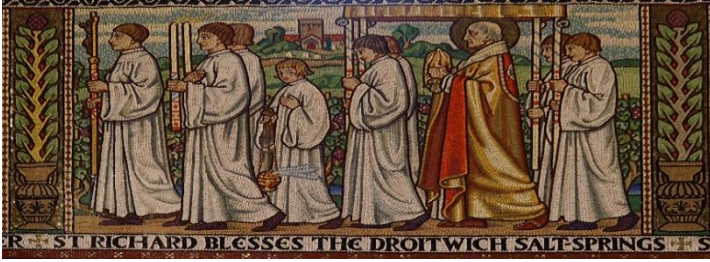
Edmund and Richard travelled to Rome where Richard receives the Pope's Blessing, kneeling before him.



The Chapter of Chichester elected Richard as their Bishop. King Henry was furious because he appropriated the revenues of vacant Sees (the seat of a Bishop). Richard, in mitre and vestments, kept his dignity and held firmly to his rights.

# Droitwich Spa & District

## The Sacred Heart Church and the life of Saint Richard - continued



Roman Droitwich was known as Salinae, Salt Springs.

But the brine stopped flowing at the salt-wells. Bishop Richard returned to Droitwich and blessed the Wells. Dodderhill Church and the River Salwarpe again, are portrayed in the distance.



Richard, later in life, travelled to Dover on a journey to recruit men for the Crusades. He was taken ill and he is receiving the Last Sacraments (1253).



To fully appreciate the original work and the subsequent renovation one needs to look closely at a part of a mural.



Members of the Local History Group listening to the talk in the church.

Thanks again to Dot Colman for arranging the visit.

Alan Meyrick

## Droitwich Wind Instrument Group (DWIG)

The u3a Droitwich Wind Instrument Group (DWIG) meets on the 2nd and 4th Mondays (except bank holidays) in Crowle Platinum Hall from 3pm to 5pm.

We have recently welcomed several new members and now have an impressive line-up of clarinets and bass clarinet, alto and tenor saxophones, baritone horn, trombone, cornet, flute/piccolo, euphonium and tenor drum.

We are just starting to rehearse river and water-themed music for our annual visit to the Wye Float event in Hereford in August, so now is a great time for you to get involved: we welcome all music-reading wind instrument players. If you can read music and play any kind of wind instrument, DWIG is the place for you.

For more information about DWIG please contact Group Leader David Wornham, Tel. 01905 775840 or [flexicase@gmail.com](mailto:flexicase@gmail.com)

Ron Hawkins for DWIG

# Droitwich Spa & District

## Newsletter Editor's note...

Thank you everyone who has contributed to this edition of our Newsletter. I hope you have enjoyed the articles and updates, also the colourful supporting photos. Please note that if you send in photos which include members, you must ask their permission.

The next Newsletter will be published in May so please submit any articles and photos, also information on up-and-coming events which members may enjoy, to the editor, either via the website or email [newsletter@droitwichu3a.co.uk](mailto:newsletter@droitwichu3a.co.uk) by Monday 4<sup>th</sup> May.

Val Hibbitt, Newsletter Editor