

Wyre Forest and District u3a

Newsletter

Spring

2026

learn

laugh

live

Notes from the Chair

Dear Members,

Spring has officially sprung, albeit rather chilly so far (bar the one-day heatwave) but isn't it joyous to welcome back all that mother nature brings when everything is waking up from its long winter slumbers. Spring is indeed an inspirational month when we look forward to doing more outdoor pastimes.

It's been a very busy time in our u3a with all the annual renewals to action and Tony (Treasurer) and Ann (Membership Secretary) have been hard at work processing all the payments. Our membership in Wyre Forest & District has now risen to 1,100 which is fantastic and I send a warm welcome to each one of you who has joined.

There has been an exciting new addition to our groups with Alison Wall's new Tai Chi classes, which started on 7 April. These have been extremely popular so a waiting list has been set up for members unable to join at the moment. We've also had a change of Group Leaders who have kindly stepped in and saved our Theatre, Short Mat Bowls and Art groups from having to close which is wonderful. German

Conversation is hopeful of announcing a new group leader too, in due course. It's so good to see the enthusiasm our leaders demonstrate in order to keep us all entertained. Thanks to you all.

We hosted a very successful New Members' Meeting at Franche last Thursday 16 April, and it was well attended with 45 members. 12 Leaders were there to promote their groups and answer questions and a full team of helpers prepared the rooms beforehand. A big thank you to everyone who attended and did their bit for our u3a.

So, lots of exciting things happening and yet to come, not least the national York trip event in June which promises to be a lot of fun. Enjoy your Springtime and let's look forward to warmer, sunnier days ahead for our continued social activities with all our fabulous u3a friends.

Kind regards.

Val Hurst – Chair, Wyre Forest & District

Samantha Hopes - Gardening 'Plants with a story'



Spring has rolled round again, thank goodness, and once again for our March Monthly Meeting

We had a gardening slot; not our usual 'Gardeners' Question Time' this year but a fascinating talk from Samantha Hopes, from Hopes Garden Plants.



Take a break

Word Square

How many words of three or more letters can you make from the letters in the square?

There is one word of nine letters. If you want to make it harder only allow words that contain the centre letter.

0-50 Not bad

51-100 Quite good

101-150 Very good

151 + You are expert

C	T	I
A	S	A
V	N	O

SUDOKU

			6	4	9			3
	3	4				6	9	
					3	7	5	
2	8		3					
3			8		1	5		7
5	7	1					8	
6	9				5	2		8
	5			1	9			

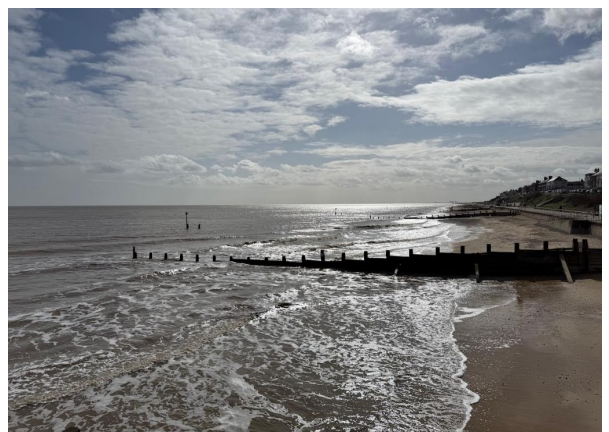


I am pleased to be able to tell you that Jan Haylock has been voted in unanimously by the Trustees, to be our Vice Chair on The Committee. Jan has accepted the offer and we are delighted she is joining us. She will make an excellent addition to our team. Thank you Jan and welcome aboard!

Many of you will know Jan already, not just for her beautiful singing voice and the various u3a events she attends, but also for her much valued tea-making skills which we all appreciate at The Harriers monthly meetings.

I'm sure you will all want to wish Jan every success in her new appointment.

Southwold, this lovely photograph was taken by Beryl Buckley on a Travel Group holiday to Suffolk.



Quiz time. A few questions to get the mind working. 10 famous opening lines from well known books. Answers to be found on page 10 but no sneaking though!

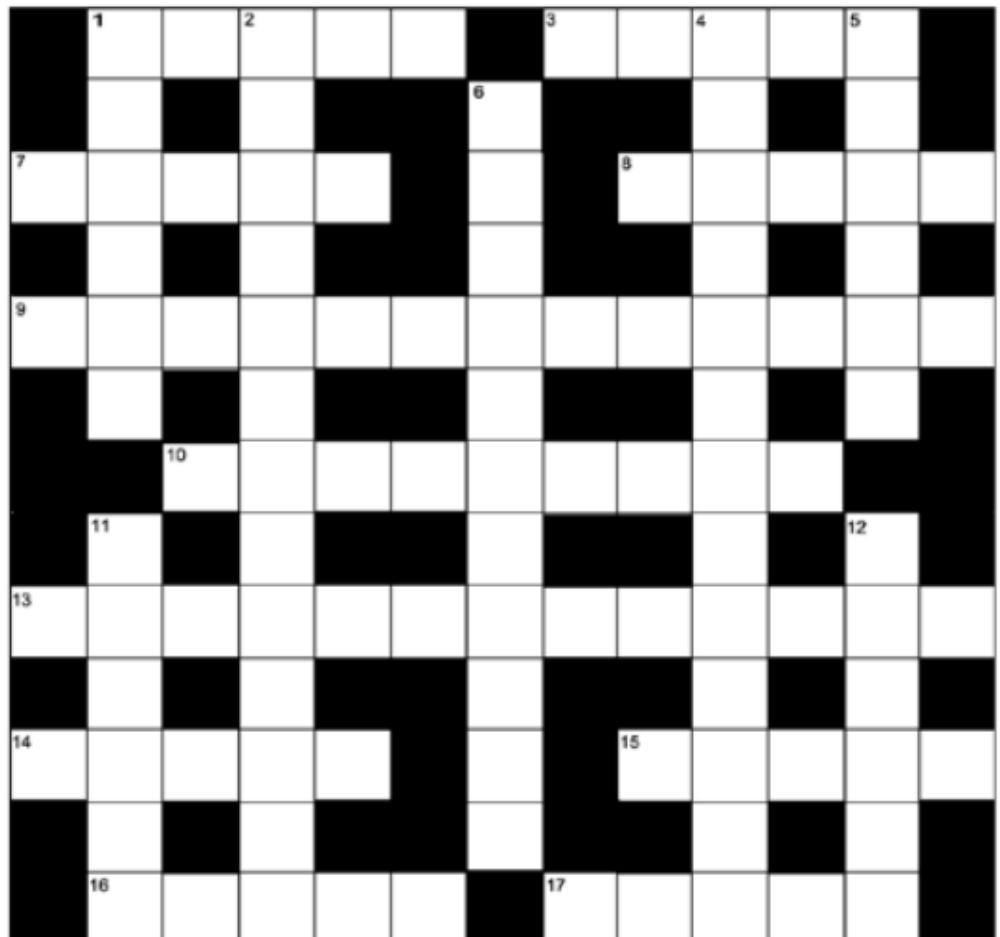
1. "Call me Ishmael"
2. "Last night I dreamt I went to Manderley again"
3. "All children, except one, grow up."
4. Not quite a first line but close enough. "A human from planet Earth was one of them, though as our story opens he no more knows his destiny than a tea leaf knows the history of the East India Company."
5. "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife."
6. "There was me, that is Alex, and my three droogs, that is Pete, Georgie and Dim and we sat in the Korova milkbar trying to make up our rassoodocks what to do with the evening."
7. "I have never begun a novel with more misgiving."
8. "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair."
9. "When a day that you happen to know is Wednesday starts off by sounding like Sunday, there is something seriously wrong somewhere."
10. "It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen."

Across:

1. Parish priest (5)
3. Army officer's rank (5)
7. Major source of food for baleen whales (5)
8. The trimmings of a butchered animal often considered inedible by humans (5)
9. Arguments; a conflict of people's opinions (13)
10. A journalist who writes editorials (9)
13. Loyalty in the face of trouble and difficulty (13)
14. Strong and sharp, harsh and corrosive (5)
15. Cut into cubes (5)
16. A very long time; ages (informal) (5)
17. A bottomless gulf or pit (5)

Down:

1. Small animal or insect pests (6)
2. The act of cooperating traitorously with the enemy (13)
4. Capital of the state of Missouri (9-4)
5. Shows a response to something (6)
6. Not permitting the passage of fluid through the pores (11)
11. Covered with an adhesive material (6)
12. People employed to take others to their seats (6)



Answers to crossword on page 9

Humorous sayings

I always arrive late at the office, but I make up for it by leaving early

Remember, today is the tomorrow you worried about yesterday

All the things I really like to do are either immoral, illegal or fattening

Never go to a doctor whose office plants have died.

The surest sign that intelligent life exists elsewhere in the universe is that it has never tried to contact us.

Whoever said money can't buy happiness didn't know where to shop.

People who think they know everything are a great annoyance to those of us who do.

When a man opens a car door for his wife, it's either a new car or a new wife.

I had plastic surgery last week – I cut up my credit cards.

The first time I sang in the church choir; two hundred people changed their religion.

I always wanted to be somebody, but now I realize I should have been more specific.

The road to success is always under construction.

Lead me not into temptation; I can find the way myself.

The guy who invented the first wheel was an idiot. The guy who invented the other three, he was a genius.

I take my wife everywhere, but she keeps finding her way back.

When I was a boy I was told that anybody could become President. I'm beginning to believe it.

All you need is love. But a little chocolate now and then doesn't hurt.

Never put off till tomorrow what you can do the day after tomorrow.

It's true hard work never killed anybody, but I figure, why take the chance?

Behind every successful man is a surprised mother-in-law.

A fool and his money never should have got together in the first place.

A camel is a horse designed by a committee.

We spend the first twelve months of our children's lives teaching them to walk and talk and the next twelve telling them to sit down and shut up.

I refuse to answer that question on the grounds that I don't know the answer.

I used to think I was indecisive, but now I'm not so sure.

The best way to appreciate your job is to imagine yourself without one

A clear conscience is usually the sign of a bad memory.

I'm on a seafood diet. I see food and I eat it.

I cook with wine; sometimes I even add it to the food.

To err is human; to really foul things up requires a computer.

I don't need anyone else's opinions; I already have my own!

Tai Chi

Your u3a is delighted to be able to inform you that we now have a brand-new group starting under the u3a umbrella! Welcome Tai Chi (Shibashi)! This will be facilitated by Alison Wall who is a very experienced Group Leader.

The first class will be starting on Tuesday 7 April (Improvers) followed by Friday 10 (Beginners/Improvers) and weekly on the same days thereafter. The details are below:

Group: Tai Chi (Shibashi)

Days/Times: Tuesdays 11.00am - 12.00pm (Improvers)

Fridays 11.30am - 12.30 pm (Beginners/Improvers)

Location: Wribbenhall Parish Rooms, Kidderminster Road, Bewdley.

DY12 1BY (link to location is below)

Charge: £1.00 per session

https://wyreforest.u3asite.uk/u3a_venues/wribbenhall-parish-rooms/

I know many of you have been asking about this group for a while now, so finally it's arrived. Tai Chi has many health benefits not least improved balance, memory, flexibility and reduced stress to name only a few. I'm sure some of you will know this practice consists of gentle, low-impact movements and is appropriate for all ages.

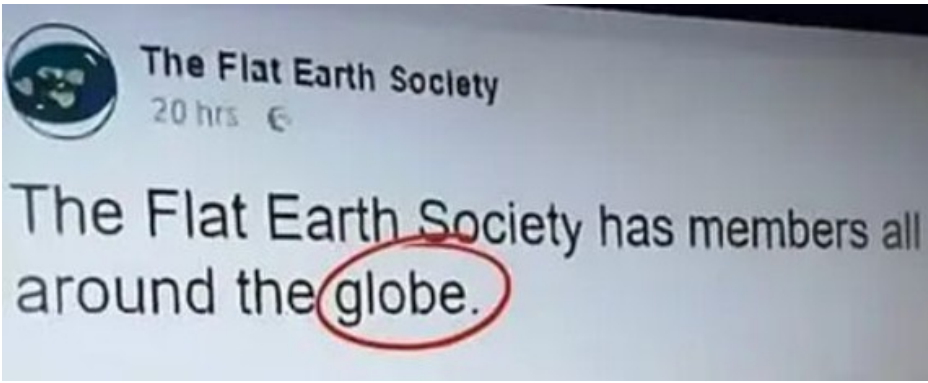
I would just flag up at this point, there is a waiting list for the Tuesday class but there are currently spaces for Fridays. So hurry and book your space if this is your thing and go and enjoy a lovely worthwhile chill out session!

The website link is attached below for full details:-

https://wyreforest.u3asite.uk/u3a_groups/tai-chi-shibashi/

The Tai Chi group enjoying a work out.





Do they realise that a globe is actually round and not flat!



So, how come I got into this mess, and how do I get out of it.

Forever pals



First ever photograph of a newly hatched telecom technician (with the egg shell still on top of its head)!



Keeping the children dry

The tale of a chicken and the British Rail Inter City 125 better known as the High Speed train.

Way back in 1975 British Rail were about to introduce their new high speed train the Inter City 125 and in fact this train went on to have a long and distinguished career only recently being taken out of service after many years of faithful service. As is the nature of these things the new trains were subject to many tests as service trains had not run at such high speeds before (125mph). It was then realised that nobody knew what would happen should an object strike the front windscreen when travelling at high speed. Someone realised that the Royal Air Force was faced with similar problems with what are known as bird strikes occurring to their jet fighters. The RAF was contacted and were most helpful and told British Rail that they had a specially developed cannon that would fire a dead chicken to test the strength of the cockpit screen and that British Rail were very welcome to use this cannon for their own tests.

This cannon duly made its way to British Rail's testing area and was made ready for testing with a new InterCity 125. Someone was detailed to pop down to the local supermarket and buy a chicken (dead of course). The acquired chicken was put into the cannon and with everybody watching on from a safe distance the cannon was fired. With an almighty crash the chicken shot through the windscreen of the train demolishing it completely and buried itself deep in the steel bulkhead behind where the driver would have normally been seated making a big dent in the steel panel.

Well after everyone had got over the shock the next item on the agenda was to find out why a dead chicken had caused so much damage, so back to the RAF. The RAF listened politely and then suggested that British Rail were probably hoping for too much by using a frozen chicken which would have behaved very much the same way that a cannon ball would have behaved.

Trehearne

Bridge Group

It is with regret that due to a lack of players I unfortunately will have to wind up the Bridge Group. I would like to thank all past members who have enjoyed this entertaining and absorbing game.

Paul Lewis

Woolcraft and Natter Group

Woolcraft and Natter Group has a new venue and also new meeting dates, details as below:-

New Venue:- The Watermill, Park Lane, Kidderminster.

New dates:- The first and third Tuesday afternoon of each month from 2.00pm - 4.00pm.

Contact with the Group Leader, Sandra Phillips, can be made via the website, the link as below:-

https://wyreforest.u3asite.uk/u3a_groups/woolcraft-and-natter/

The meaning of well known sayings — Limey

The term is thought to have originated in the 1850s as *lime-juicer*, later shortened to "limey", and originally used as a derogatory word for sailors in the Royal Navy. Since the beginning of the 19th century, it had been the practice of the Royal Navy to add lemon juice to the sailors' daily ration of grog (watered-down rum). The vitamin C (specifically L-ascorbic acid) in citrus fruits prevented scurvy and helped to make these sailors some of the healthiest of the time. At that time, "lemon" and "lime" were used interchangeably to refer to citrus fruits. Initially, lemon juice (from lemons imported from Europe) was used as the additive to grog on the Royal Navy ships but was later switched to limes (grown in British colonies), not realizing that limes contained only a quarter of the vitamin C the lemons had, and that the way the juice was stored and processed destroyed much of that, leaving the lime juice unable to prevent scurvy.

Luckily for the British, the time spent travelling at sea had been reduced due to the introduction of steam power, so the mistake went unnoticed until the dawn of polar exploration. Unluckily for those early polar explorers, the lack of vitamin C in the lime juice led to a resurgence of scurvy and a new wave of misunderstanding about its causes. It wasn't until 1932 that vitamin C was categorically identified as the main curative factor in scurvy. These days, science has shown that a diet of fresh food is enough to combat scurvy and the term "Limey" has fallen out of fashion, along with the naval preference for lime juice.

In time, the term lost its naval connotation and was used to refer to British people in general, and in the 1880s, British immigrants in Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. Although the term may have been used earlier in the U.S. Navy as slang for a British sailor or a British warship, such usage was not documented until 1918. By 1925, the usage of *limey* in American English had been extended to mean any British person, and the term was so commonly known that it was featured in American newspaper headlines.

"Limey" is considered a derogatory remark.

Short Mat Bowls

I am pleased to inform you that Ann Hill has stepped into the breach left by Terry Turner's departure as short mat bowls group leader. We wish Ann all success as group leader of the short mat bowls group.

TAKE A BREAK - SOLUTION

Easy Crossword:

Across: 1. vicar 2. major 7. krill 8. offal 9. disagreements 10. columnist 13. steadfastness 14. acrid 15. diced 16. yonks 17. abyss **Down:** 1. vermin 2. collaboration 4. jefferson city 5. reacts 11. sticky 12. ushers

Possible Kidderminster Grand Prix Driver

Kidderminster had so nearly a world champion Grand Prix driver it was Peter Collins his father was Pat Collins he had a garage so Peter was always into cars ...he gradually worked his way through formula 1 and 2 and promoted to Formula One in 1952.

..Peter first was with Mercedes and Vanwall Aston Martin and then Ferrari....his won many events including the British Grand Prix in 1956... he was leading a grand Prix when very much intention of winning the World Championship and famously let his great friend Mike Hawthorn through and he went on to win the race and he went on to become world champion in 1958 would that chivalry happen nowadays ..tragically Peter was killed in the same year in the German Grand Prix at Nurburgring..he is buried at Stone the grave is still kept as it was with 2 dinky cars still in place ...Nick Underwood



**Theatre outing
BARNUM
Saturday 31st October
Malvern Theatre
Matinee 2.30pm performance**

Cost including coach travel £55 per person

Matt Rawle (Cabaret, Evita, Les Misérables) will take centre stage as the legendary 19th century showman P.T. Barnum. This spectacular production directed by Jonathan O'Boyle and choreographed by Oti Mabuse will feature an extraordinary ensemble cast of over 20 actor-musicians, acrobats and amazing circus acts. Audiences are certain to delight at every sight, wonder and miracle that the name Barnum stands for!

Coach will depart Brinton's Park at 12.45 returning to Brinton's Park around 17.00

**For reservations please email Karen Palmer
karenlbpalmer@gmail.com**

IMPORTANT : Please put 'Barnum' in the subject box of your email. Thankyou.

1. Moby Dick - Herman Melville
2. Rebecca—Daphne Du Maurier
3. Peter Pan—J.M. Barrie
4. The Hitch Hikers Guide to the Universe—Douglas Adams
5. Pride and Prejudice—Jane Austin
6. A Clockwork Orange—Anthony Burgess
7. The Razer's Edge—Somerset Maugham
8. A tale of Two Cities—Charles Dickens
9. The Day of the Triffids—John Wyndham
10. 1984—George Orwell

Answers to famous first lines in well known books.



The Creative Writing Group

Would you be interested in joining our Creative Writing Group?

This small group enjoys a couple of hours each month at The Old Beams pub in Stourport, meeting on the first Tuesday of the month at 1.p.m. The pub kindly allows us to meet for free, although we usually buy a tea/coffee or an occasional half pint, to say 'thank you'.

We are a very friendly group who enjoy writing our thoughts, be it on a specific subject which personally moves us to take up pen and paper. Some brave folk do sometimes write a poem to express what they want to say and that perhaps inspires the rest of us to attempt to compose a poem.

Reading our pieces (short or long), helps us all to learn different ways of writing and styles and makes for a very interesting and friendly afternoon.

The main purpose of our group is to encourage and take pleasure in writing and also to enjoy being together.

Ann Pullen

Garden Visits Group

Spring is almost here, so the details of our Garden Visits for 2026 are arriving.

Details of arranged visits can be found on the Garden Visits page of our u3a website, link attached below:-

https://wyreforest.u3asite.uk/u3a_groups/garden-visits/

More information will be added as arrangements are confirmed.

If you are interested in attending any of the visits, then please contact Janice Evans.

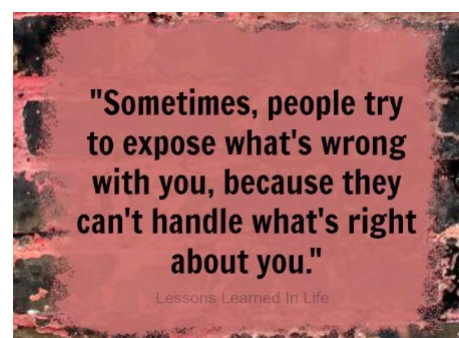
1 I started dating a zookeeper, but it turned out he was
.a cheetah - Lorna Rose Treen

2 The most British thing I've ever heard? A lady who
.said 'Well I'm sorry, but I don't apologise.' - Liz
Guterbock

3 Last year I had a great joke about inflation. But it's
.hardly worth it now - Amos Gill

Sudoku answer

7	1	5	6	4	9	8	2	3
8	3	4	5	7	2	6	9	1
9	6	2	1	8	3	7	5	4
2	8	6	3	5	7	1	4	9
3	4	9	8	2	1	5	6	7
5	7	1	9	6	4	3	8	2
6	9	7	4	3	5	2	1	8
1	2	8	7	9	6	4	3	5
4	5	3	2	1	8	9	7	6



April

So now we are in Spring – at last. Are you interested as to how months are named?

For example - April - our fourth month (though for many years in ancient Rome the second month before January and February were added).

Anglo Saxons called it Eostre-monath for their goddess Eostre which gives us the word for Easter.

Romans dedicated the month to their goddess Venus with festivities at Veneralia on April 1st and called it Aprilis. It's thought this word is from the verb Aperire (modern Italian Aprire) meaning 'to open' with reference to buds and flowers opening.

The Ancient Greek equivalent of Venus is Aphrodite (Aphros) giving us Aphrilis as the month's name.

This goddess Aphrodite appears in many myths. One of the most repeated is that concerning the Golden Apple:

Peleus and Thetis (parents of Achilles) were being married but had neglected to invite Eris the goddess of discord. Eris arrived with the Golden Apple on which was written 'For the fairest' and rolled it towards the assembled guests.

Hera (wife of Zeus and goddess of marriage), (Athena goddess of wisdom and warfare!), and Aphrodite (goddess of love and beauty) all claimed that description. Zeus decreed that Paris, son of the king of Troy, who unknown to his father was living as a shepherd on Mount Ida, should adjudicate.

Hera bribed him with riches plus power and kingship over Asia and Europe, Athena offered wisdom and skill in battle and Aphrodite promised him the love of the most beautiful woman – Helen of Sparta. Paris chose Aphrodite and gave her the apple.

Aphrodite aided Paris in stealing Helen from her husband Menelaus and taking her to Troy.

Since Helen's previous suitors from all over Greece had sworn an oath to assist Menelaus, they sailed to Troy to begin the siege and the multiple battles of the 10 year Trojan War.

Naturally Aphrodite helped the Trojans while spurned Hera and Athena supported the Greeks.

Interestingly there is archaeological evidence for the existence of the rich Bronze Age city of Troy in modern Turkey, of burning and of battles.

Whether or not our month of April is connected to Aphrodite, we can certainly take pleasure in its beauty, freshness and colour. I am writing this during spells of wintry rain and coolth alleviated by colourful crocuses, scintillating snowdrops and hardy hazels and look forward to the joy of April in all its glory.

Helen Ferguson. February 2026.

Disclaimer: WFu3a makes every effort to ensure that the information published in this newsletter is accurate. However, we cannot accept any liability for the accuracy or content. Everyone who relies on this information does so at their own risk.

Enquiries: regarding this newsletter please contact details below.

If you wish to have an article or information published please contact Ralph Bramley
newsletter@wyreforestu3a Phone: 07756636529 www.wyreforestu3a.org.uk

Registered Charity No. 1149774



Friday Night at The Rose

We have 2 new performances booked for late Spring 2026 May and June where we have reserved seats.

We have a preferential rate with the theatre which is £12 instead of £15, this occasionally varies with the performance.

If you find that the seats in our block reservation are all taken but there are seats elsewhere, feel free to book a seat, you'll still have the benefit of the discount and can join us before the performance and in the intermission.

Accidental Death of an Anarchist 22nd May 2026 Rows J1 – J5 and K1 - K5

Quote Transaction U3A 101952

A modern adaptation of a classic biting farce.

An impressive fraudster known as the Maniac is brought into Police Headquarters just as the officers are preparing for a judicial review of the recent accidental death of a suspect in custody. Outwitting his captors the Maniac dupes them into performing a farcical re-creation of the incident.

Tons of Money 19th June 2026. Rows K1 -K5 and L1 – L5

Quote Transaction U3A 101953

Ayckbourn's adaption of a famed Aldwych farce. The story of an unsuccessful inventor who inherits the life interest in a fortune which is to revert on his death to his cousin George. As cousin George is thought to have died abroad the inventor has the brilliant idea of 'dying' so he can resurrect himself as his cousin and avoid paying his enormous debts.

To book:

Ring The Rose Theatre on Tel: 01562 743745, Monday – Friday 10.30am-12.30pm quote the booking reference that's been given for that performance and pay for your ticket. The booking process for the staff is a little difficult, please bear with the volunteer who's doing the booking.

It helps us if you can email me once you've booked with your seat number/s

Collect your ticket at the box office and join the group in the bar where you'll find either Rosemary or Roy wearing a u3a badge .

Then relax and enjoy the performance and company.

We look forward to seeing you there.

Roy Hughes is also helping run this group so sometimes he will be the person on meet and greet duty.

Rosemary/Roy

rosemaryjones@virginmedia.com

Do It Yourself

It has been noticed that some u3a members have been asking about a 'Do It Yourself' club. Whilst no DIY club currently exists we are always interested should a member or members wish to start one.

Alternatively there is the Wyre Forest Repair Café that u3a members may be interested in joining, several of our u3a members already belong to the Repair Café.

There are two Repair Cafes in the area, one in Kidderminster and one at Bewdley

Detailed below are the two existing Repair Cafes in the Wyre Forest area what they do and their meeting dates. Everyone is very welcome and for more information please contact the newsletter editor Ralph Bramley.



A friendly, relaxing and social meeting space where you can bring broken, damaged or torn household and personal items for advice or repair, free of charge.



- electrical appliances
- electronic gadgets
- computers
- furniture
- toys
- ceramics
- jewellery
- clothing and textiles
- bicycles
- clocks
- garden equipment
- tool sharpening
- & much more.

Run entirely by volunteers, anyone can pop in even just for a cuppa and slice of cake. Repairs are free, but donations are encouraged to ensure the Repair Cafe can keep running in future. Come along!

Bewdley: third Saturday each month

in St George's Hall, Load Street, Bewdley DY12 2EQ.

10.00am – 2.00pm

Kidderminster: first Saturday each month (not August)

in The Youth House, Bromsgrove St, Kidderminster DY10 1PF

10.00am – 1.00pm

**Transition
Kidderminster**

Contact: Bewdley:
John Rhymer on
john.rhymer50@gmail.com

Kidderminster: repaircafekidderminster@outlook.com

**Transition
Bewdley**

General History Group 2026 programme at 05 March 2026 – part 2

Mon 11 May 2026 from 2.15 pm to 3.45pm Life within a Medieval Castle – guest speaker Paul Harding Discover History

Join Paul Harding as he talks about life within a castle. From how they helped with both attack and defence as well as how people lived within the walls. Find out more about the jobs and people involved in keeping a castle and its inhabitants safe.

Open to all u3a members £3 each pre booking required



Friday 15 May 2026 – Day visit to Stokesay Castle Fully Booked

Leaving Brintons Park at 10am to arrive at Stokesay at around 11am and leaving Stokesay at 4.15pm to return to Brintons Park.

Mon 8 June 2026 – Day visit to Ludlow with entry to the Castle £29 each Fully Booked

Leaving Brintons Park at 10am to arrive at Ludlow Castle at around 11am and leaving Ludlow at 4.15pm to return to Brintons Park. We are arranging for transport, entry and an email of a 5 page written guide



Mon 13 July 2.15 to 3.45pm Part 3 of the BBC 'Secrets of the Castle' with Ruth Goodman, Tom Pinfold & Peter Ginn. The team enter the surprisingly colourful world of medieval interior design. Peter and Tom render and limewash the inside walls of a guard tower, transforming its dark stone walls into a bright space. Ruth makes medieval paints which would have been used to decorate walls with ornate patterns. Most of the

pigments are from ochre extracted from the earth - burning it creates darker tones. She decorates the castle bedchamber using designs based on those recently discovered at an 11th-century church nearby. A colour film followed by group discussion and refreshments. Open to all u3a members £3 each pre booking

Tuesday 14 to Tuesday 21 July 2026 - Lake Maggiore, Orta and the Matterhorn Fully Booked. Contact Caroline O'Callaghan on caroline.ocallaghan66@gmail.com



ARDENNES BY BIKE

Introduction

An autumn excursion through Germany's most iconic and to make any adventurer salient no time limit or rigid route fortunately for many bikers, fortune has not been taken for can encourage a few more of consider turning their fantasy like passport, warmer clothing, waterproofs and a few euros I was ready to face the channel course, my 20 year old Yama-



several European countries to one beautiful river stretches is enough vate. To do it on a motorcycle, with plan is the sort of fantasy that, unremains on the wish list. My good granted. In these pages, I hope I my two wheeled compatriots to into reality. With necessary items, ing, waterproofs and a few euros I crossing in high spirits. Oh, and of ha 1100 BT Bulldog.

Ardres

Before I rolled onto French tarmac from Le Shuttle at Calais, I pasted an arrow onto my windshield to remind me to keep to the right-hand side. I was not intending to stick to major arteries or motorways and when the roads are narrow, with no central markings, it's easy to forget which side you should be on. I also had a 'mph to km converter sheet' visible through my tank bag map pocket, to ensure I don't forget that 30 km per hour means 19 mph.

My, not always, trustworthy Sat-Nav was wired in too, so I was as well prepared as I need be to get me to my first destination. I had booked an afternoon crossing from Folkestone and chose to ride just a few miles inland and stay overnight in Ardres. It's a nice little town just 14 miles away. But first, there was just a bit of peripheral negotiation required to avoid getting dragged into the centre of Coquelles. It was rush hour and the roads were very busy.

My Sat-Nav decided I should take an exit off a roundabout, which I stupidly obeyed. It then changed its mind, but it was too late. I was on a one-way system heading into the centre of Calais. Not the best of starts for someone who's ridden through here many times over the years. It wasn't long before I was back on track and barrelling along empty thoroughfares which took me between lovely reed-bedded lakes and lazy canals. The whole district is a popular holiday spot for tourists and nature lovers throughout the year. Ardres therefore, has many B&B's and for reasons I cannot possibly explain, I had picked a Harry Potter themed residence, where not only the grounds were resplendent with memorabilia but the rooms too. I know nothing at all about Harry or his pottering but my wife was keen for me to take many photographs of all the paraphernalia on display.

As soon as I parked up, the lady who runs the place was already out to greet me. The theme of my apartment was the sorcerer's potions room. Vials, and jars, snakes, owls, cloaks, swords and goodness knows what else were everywhere, including the shower room. When I went to explore the gardens I spotted a purple bus, a blue car, a railway carriage and several other items, all relating to the stories. It was all very impressive. My bike looked a little out of place, sheltered and secured under a tree.



For the following night I had pre-booked a hotel some 200 miles away, so an early start was necessary. My breakfast was left outside my apartment door, in a delightful hamper. It had rained heavily overnight, yet I set off in radiant sunshine and glowing anticipation. The next biggest town was Arras, some 60 miles away but I wasn't going via the major route. As well as programming the Sat-Nav I had printed off a list of villages and road numbers to look out for. The first village, Moringhem, was soon breached and the 'indirect route' proved to be great fun as the empty roads allowed me to enjoy the scenery and hamlets around almost every corner. Therouanne soon came and went and then I took a little detour to ride to a summit in the village of Mont St Eloi, to photograph a ruined tower and a surprisingly pleasant view across the valley. Adjacent to the ruin was a council building with a two storey glass extension that displayed paintings and posters on several levels. I surmised it was a college project by some very talented students. This was my idea of carefree and utterly self-indulgent riding. If I was touring with other bikers I might well have ruined their plans already. I travelled at my pace and in the direction I fancied. Whatever is ahead will still be there when I arrive.



Mont St. Eloi

Arras was upon me too soon. I reached the ring road quickly enough, cutting through a housing estate but my advantage was taken away when I was diverted by roadworks before I could escape the city's clutches. French towns have a habit of taking you out of orbit. It cost me half an hour as I had to wait at a level crossing to get back onto the appropriate through road. I know the centre of Arras very well, it's a regular stop-off when I'm in the car but one can never account for French 'deviations.'

As I reached the outskirts of Cambrai it began to rain heavily. I trundled through the town centre instead of taking the bypass and was tempted to shelter but doggedly, I kept going. Within half an hour the clouds had lifted and the sun dried me off. I was heading towards Charleville-Mezieres, which truly is a lovely city with a great history and I did consider it as a stopover but opted for a mountain retreat instead.

Nouzonville was my next target, but I somehow took a left a few miles before and, to my

Nouzonville was my next target, but I somehow took a left a few miles before and, to my delight, I had entered the Ardennes forest, 4,300 square kilometres of it. This was the beginning of the remote and beautiful section of my Franco/Belgian/Luxembourg/German odyssey. Mile after mile, through dense forest, climbing and descending, banking and braking, this is what road bikers dream about. And then, I arrived in Montherme, crossing the Meuse in triumph. This utterly beautiful riverside town was on my list to circle back to after reaching my hotel in Orchimont. I parked the bike on the pavement overlooking the riverbank as there wasn't a single space to be found anywhere. The policeman who was strolling along just smiled as I gesticulated that I was only going to snap a few photographs, up and downstream from this vantage point. The dark green tree-packed hillsides all around looked magnificent.



Montherme

Orchimont

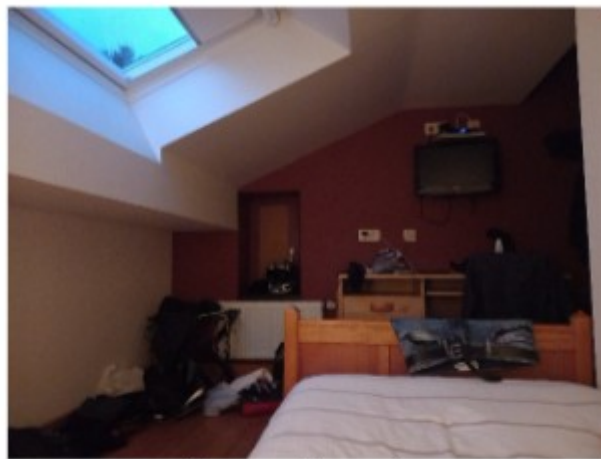
I had ridden around 160 miles so far. Only around 20 miles to go. Due to a landslide, 20 miles turned out to be thirty as the road leading east into the forest was blocked. Alternative options are down to local knowledge, of which, I had none. The Sat-Nav is useless in such situations. I had to guess how far I should go along these footpath wide roads before turning right or left to keep me in proximity. I needed something more informative than signs reading 'beware of forest fires'. For a change, my guesses were correct and I arrived in Orchimont before darkness fell. This village is so small the only place that serves food is the hotel, except on Thursdays. Today was Thursday.

That meant my riding for the day was not over. I had to journey in the dark down the narrow, excessively potholed forest lanes to the tourist hot-spot of Vresse-sur-Semois. I had almost upended the bike on the approach to Orchimont on a blind left hand bend that nearly tossed me down an un-barriered crevice. This was due to part of the road surface having broken completely away. Now, I have to pass it twice more. Going down was a little easier but coming back in pitch black, it would be more tricky.

Vresse-sur-Semois is a very attractive village lying in the valley alongside the eponymous river.

As it was off season, there was only one restaurant still open for business. I passed a smart hotel just outside the village and I did check its prices for a room and a meal, 'ouch'! I decided it was still worth risking my neck on that blind bend with the broken rubble. I enjoyed what could have been my last supper in an Italian restaurant. It was excellent, and cheap. I got back to the hotel just in time for a thunderstorm. And since the only window in my room was an un-curtained skylight I spent the night constantly being blinded by lightning flashes and thunderclaps. I did not sleep well.

I didn't need a wake-up call the next morning, but I was not the first in the dining room. Two tables were occupied by English speaking travellers who asked me if I was saddened by the demise of Queen Elizabeth II the night before. I told them I didn't know she was staying at our hotel.



Room with no view

Bouillon

The morning travel news warned that some parts of the Ardennes were impassable due to flash-flooding and landslips. I had planned to head north-east into Luxembourg and spend the night near Chateau-de-Vianden. This would have taken me through more remote territory and made for a nice circuitous run into Germany in a couple of days-time. With such dire weather I considered taking a shorter journey south-east to Bouillon. It was an easy decision and I began loading my bike.

The plastic nut that secures the Sat-Nav case to the handlebars had come a bit loose. With cold fingers and rain dripping down my neck I fiddled about to tighten it. The nut came away altogether, dropped to the ground and followed the gurgling rain down a drain. I now had no means to tighten the clasp to the handlebars. Stay calm! I remember thinking that.

I went back to my room and pondered on what I could do to keep the Sat-Nav visible, dry and powered. If I had stayed in Charleville-Mezieres I could have gone to a hardware shop and sorted something out. Up here, there was nothing and these narrow roads are often

without signposts. I concocted a solution. I pierced a hole in the centre layer of my Perspex tank bag, threaded the cable in through the hole, rolled and wrapped a pair of socks inside the sleeve of the bag so I could angle the device 45 degrees. The screen was now within my eyeline as I looked down to the tank. Not perfect, but workable.

I looked up hotels in Bouillon and picked one that was located on the eastern side of the city. Feeling more upbeat, I finished loading the bike and set off. The rain had eased and the high winds were north of where I was heading. I only have about 25 miles to go. There are two routes. One, meant cutting south through Vresse-sur-mer on a switchback layout. It looked challenging but I've had enough challenges today thank you. I opted for a wider road, north-east, then south. I was happy again. "Screw you, loose screw."

I hadn't gone half a mile when I noticed a herd of bison standing in a meadow. Wow, that's different, I just had to photograph that. At Bievre I turned right and was met with a smooth, roundabout littered, commuter-friendly route into Bouillon. My Sat-Nav behaved and even indicated a tiny slip road that I had previously googled. A gravel opening of about 30 yards led to an asphalt surface, taking me uphill to the entrance of the hotel. It was barely 10.am. This was a hostel style hotel and the girl on reception said they would not have any rooms ready before 2.pm. When I stepped back outside a cleaner came to my rescue. She gave me a key to a storage cupboard to put my luggage in, the code to get inside the dormitory (so I could use the bathroom and change out of my biking gear), and showed me a secluded corner of the grounds where I could park and lock my bike for the duration. She then said she would clean my allocated room first, so if I returned around lunchtime I could move in. I think it's my blue eyes that does it!

It was a steep walk down into the centre of Bouillon but every step was a pleasure. The rain was merely drizzling but the mists over the hill tops all around created a stunning and eerie ambience. At river level (it's the Semois), I was in a magic kingdom of European fable. Picture postcard perfection. I really enjoyed my stay here, despite my hotel room looking like a prison cell, with several metal bunks and just a hand basin. I didn't have to share the room and the toilet/shower was virtually opposite my door. The view from my window made up for everything and was nothing short of spectacular. I could see the castle, the river and rows of rooftops bordered by a panorama of dark green forestry reaching into the misty clouds.

I had several amazing meals and snacks in whatever café or restaurant I entered. In the evening, despite the rain, a bicycle race was staged. There was a carnival atmosphere and as I

dined, clumps of riders kept racing past the windows to reach the finish-line further along the street. There was remission from the rain at times, which provided me with the opportunity to wander up and down every street and alleyway. Bouillon has a great history and the castle is a very popular tourist attraction. Bikers flock here, but very few showed during my stay. (I wonder why?) Incidentally, Bouillon Soup is often connected to the city but is actually made from a Haitian recipe.

One member of staff at the hotel told me she loved this town but I should really visit her home town of Sedan, 10 miles away, just over the border into France. It's one place many tourists ignore yet has more charm and historical features than most for its size. I didn't add it to my list on the tank bag this time, but her recommendation has given me inspiration.



Room with a view

Trier

I walked the bike, backwards out of its sheltered hiding place and had my navigation kit ready for the next stage: Germany, but avoiding Luxembourg city along the way. I wanted clear, open roads, so I planned to ride through Mersch and reach Larochette by midday. The sun was shining and the forests were not obscured by mist as I set off for lower altitudes. At last, a rain free day.

I have 100 miles ahead of me. My gloves had dried out and the heating elements inside them kept my fingers toasty. I followed the N83 through Florenville and Tintigny, and changed to the N844 at Arlon, which took me over the border into Luxembourg. The roads had been clear but a little boring, after all the fun on previous days. The road numbers had reduced to a single digit. This one was number 8. The forests returned. I really enjoyed this section and almost missed an unmarked turn as the peaceful countryside distracted my concentration. Then I spotted an interesting deviation and took a right turn towards Greisch. The vista opened up to a wide expanse of arable land and woodland borders. A narrow, but clear lane took me to Tuntage-Helperknapp and back on track for Mersch. This had become a pleasure cruise on two wheels.

Just before Larochette, a sign led up to a ruined castle. The narrow lane was rough on the tyres and ended at the entrance to the site. There was more to explore than I expected and I climbed the steps and slopes for a good look across the town before returning to find refreshment in the centre.

I parked on the pavement right outside a café. Opposite was a mini-market with a sign that read 'Caves du Portugal.' I did not expect that, nor did I expect the girl in the café behind the bar to say "Bom Dia," to another customer standing behind me. She told me there is a large contingent of Portuguese people in the town and indeed in the city of Luxembourg. This was later corroborated by my friend Jorge in Lisbon, who's partner actually lived and worked in Luxembourg for a year, once upon a time. I dallied. The company was convivial, my grubby bike was the talk of the café and my lunch was filling.

Buoyed and brave, I chose another deviation before dropping down into Trier, my ultimate target of the day. The twisty looking roads eastwards towards Echternach, got my vote. If I took a more direct route, it would be busy and over far too soon. It was a good choice. Forest gave way to modern villages and then back to forest, and the road surface was very non British: no potholes. I encountered quite a number of bikers along the way. One gang of about 20 leather clad 'hog' riders slowed my progress a little but they turned right at Lauterborn, much to my relief. I'm not happy about having to change down from second gear so often! Echternach was a pig to negotiate as very busy junctions begin here. I'm straddling the German border, but the single lane road returned as soon as I was free of the built up area. There were some confusing moments as road signs defied logic and the Sat-Nav just spun like a catherine wheel but I got the hang of it after a very sharp U turn and began the descent down to the Mosel river and the beautiful city of Trier.

No more prison cell for me. I deserved a treat! I got a great deal on a room in a very classy hotel, with a wrought iron entrance and Roman statues along the drive. I even landed a room that had a balcony overlooking the city below. Yet, I could have secured a mainstream hotel for triple the price and extra to park my bike in the centre of the city. I kept looking at the receipt thinking there were typing errors.

If I walked by road into the centre, it would take over an hour but I noticed a gate in the side wall across the lawn from my window. There was a zig-zag footpath between the trees leading all the way into town that took 15 minutes. I don't think there could be one negative aspect

about this hotel. I spent two absolutely wonderful days in Trier. It has a history that pre dates the Romans and relics of every epoch, including a statue of Karl Marx (it's his birthplace) and such a wide variation of bars, restaurants and Palace Gardens. But first, the wine. The main square was crowded with weekend visitors and there was a joyous atmosphere. A stall in the centre was serving Mosel's famous wines, in proper glasses. I squeezed to the front and was charged 8 euros. I stood and chatted to a family group, got a photo taken with my wine and soaked up the bliss of it all. When I returned the glass I was given five euros back. I retained it and bought a refill.



Prost

The nearby Mosel river was making its way slowly north and I intend to follow its serpentine path as soon as I can overcome the urge to stay in this beautiful city until winter. Every building had character; half-timbered or gothic, they all attracted the eye. I wandered further in the evening, looking for something different for my 'abendessen'. I was rewarded when I spotted a restaurant called Kartoffelkiste (Potato Box). Dozens of options on the menu that all included potatoes. The décor was rustic and fit for a beer-fest. I over-indulged, on the food not the beer. The walk back up that hill to the hotel might be the only negative I could find.

After sunset one evening the skies turned almost purple, with hues of violet and pinky-blue clouds, with foreboding battleship grey ones pushing them overhead from the west. Again, like I witnessed in Orchimont, the mother of all thunderstorms enraged through the night. I had curtains and my window stretched the whole length of the room but I kept them open and watched nature put on a dazzling show. I could have been watching the backdrop to a heavy metal concert.



The sky was clear by daylight so normal explorations resumed but on the final morning, when it was time to leave, I could not see the trees beyond the perimeter wall. And I was aiming to be snaking alongside the Mosel in an hour. Everything had to wait. Breakfast was leisurely, which was as classy and enjoyable as the rest of this hotel experience. However, I was eager to get the bike loaded and move on, so my patience was tested.

By mid- morning, I could see the tree tops but not the city below. I'm going to chance it.

Cochem

This is going to be tricky: The Sat-Nav will direct me away over the hills and not to the curves of the river. I had listed the names of villages to aim for along the banks. If the signposts exist, I should be OK. What I didn't reckon on was a pea-soup fog and road blocks. Both of those irritations came into play before I could reach the first village. My list included; Longuich (10 miles away), then Mehring and Neumagen-Dhron (25 miles). There was a heavy mist when I crossed to the left bank at Longuich and found my route to Mehring was blocked. Visibility was virtually zero so riding this section would be pointless anyway. I need to get to higher ground.

This wrecked plans to pass through several villages, including Piesport. I had considered staying in Bernkastel-Kues, but having set off so late I decided to spend just an hour in Bernkastel-Kues and then make my way to Cochem and stay there instead. At least I was now travelling above the fog, through wooded hillsides, farmland and vineyards. Sadly, most of the harvesting had finished so there was little to marvel at in the viniculture world. I took a right turn at Sehlem and slalomed down to Lieser, and joined the riverside road once more. The fog had almost lifted and the sun burned the lingering remnants away. A short blast took me into Bernkastel-Kues.

The narrow streets and retained medieval buildings are gorgeous. The town's history dates back to 3,000 BCE. It receives visitors throughout the year. Bernkastel is actually on the right bank and Kues, the left. Landshut castle has been a ruin since 1692 and the surrounding hills are a haven for hikers. I parked up and wandered on both sides. Today, most of the people I observed looked bored, as they sat at café tables with the glazed look of disinterest. I was itching to get back on the road. I had only ridden 35 miles. A coffee and pastry was sufficient and I left with a promise to return with Joy someday so we could do this whole district justice.

I was enjoying the bankside ride along the Mosel until I reached Urzig. Another diversion sent me up into the hills again and by now I was getting frustrated with the interruptions. I

decided to enjoy the roads that were offered and galloped onwards through Baunsendorf, Hontheim and Gevenish. That led me to a superb and very twisting road down into Cochem. The steep decline was riddled with signs and billboards warning motorcyclists not to use it like a race track. I didn't but it was no less exciting. I came into Cochem and pattered slowly as I scanned for parking spots, and hotels. It was very busy, with lots of bikes lining the pavements. Ice-cream eating tourists were everywhere.

I crossed the river and turned right. The buildings on this side were mostly private houses and a few smart hotels. One hotel with large, bougainvillea wreaths hanging from every balcony rail had a sign at the front that read 'under cover parking'. I pulled in. I needed refreshment and the toilet. I asked the very polite and helpful receptionist if they had any rooms. She sort of shook her head and said, "There is only one room left I'm afraid." "How much?" "Seventy Euros." "I'll take it." "Don't you want to see the room first?" "No it's fine thank you. I am sure the bed will be made."

I lugged my gear into the lift for the top floor, entered a very dark room and dumped everything on the bed. When I opened the black-out shutters the light burst in, bringing with it the most stunning view of the fairytale Schloss this town is famous for.

At that moment I realised I had achieved my goal. My journey had reached its zenith. My original plan was to ride to Moselkern, a little further up the valley, and complete my outward journey at Eltz Castle. From Moselkern it would have meant hiking the final segment on foot and probably battling through throngs of tourists. But as I was standing at the window staring across to the largest castle along the Mosel, the need to delve further into this region of Germany melted away.

I decided I would head homeward after this stopover, knowing I had already gathered a rucksack full with surprises and memories. There will be castles and landmarks aplenty on the way back. Besides, Joy had called and mentioned England was coming to a standstill in a few days-time and ferries and trains were not operating on the day of the Queen's funeral. If the sun was guaranteed to keep appearing I might have considered extending my stay, but winter storms were predicted across Europe over the coming week.

I spent the next 36 hours enjoying everything Cochem had to offer. Narrow passageways along the confined expanse of the town, were stuffed with cafes, museums and wine merchants. Boats and barges bimbled majestically on the water. It's a small place but I had

ample amusement. For walkers, the surrounding hills have so many trails leading off in every direction that a week's rambling would not cover them all. For supper, I managed to charm my way in to a popular restaurant, run by a Dutch woman who sat with me over coffee and talked about life, the universe and everything. The Mosel wine I ordered was the finest I had ever tasted. I'm not showing Joy the receipt.



Cochem

Early the next morning, I startled the neighbourhood with the engine of my Bulldog as the pipes echoed around the walls of the covered parking lot. The remaining guests were probably happy to hear me leave but I was a little bit sad about turning homeward.

Dinant

I left Cochem on the same road I came in on. The steep switchback, uphill was no fun at all, but I put that down to the bus in front doing no more than 20 mph. I could not overtake it until I was on level ground some way after the twisties. The sun allowed me one more hour of warm rays and by the time I reached the forest my visor was catching raindrops, which didn't stop until I made it to my destination for the night. I was well on the way to Kelberg, where I knew I had to take a left. Somehow, the Sat-Nav directed me left a few miles short of that, at Horschhausen. I was heading west but from this point on, I have no idea to this day what route I took, until I got to St Vith. That was 70 miles of back roads, in and out of dense forest. At junctions, roads led either north or south, I wanted west. I knew I didn't want Prüm (south) or Cologne (north) I only had a choice of single track lanes to tiny villages and forest. It was fun, but frustrating.

I kept an eye on my fuel gauge, but one village garage with just two pumps sorted that problem out. I was too embarrassed to ask where I was. The village names were unpronounceable and were spelled almost identically to the place I had just passed through. The forest roads were devoid of life, let alone traffic, but at least I was getting less wet in there. I thought about the stories of the Ardennes during the world wars. No wonder nobody thought the enemy would pass through here into Belgium, I couldn't find a way out on my

bike! I was also very aware that should I slip off this track into the undergrowth, I'd never be found. It's a good way to steel your concentration.

The Sat-Nav had no answers. It didn't even recognise I was on a road at times. What I did know was, I was bound to turn up somewhere. St Vith suddenly appeared on a sign post and it was easy going from that point. I was way off course for my first intention. Francorpchamps Racing circuit, but that fantasy got washed away with the rain. Visiting it in this weather it would be pointless. I targeted the historic city of Dinant. It's a few miles north of Montherme, on the river Meuse. A fitting location in my book. It was also a lovely ride all the way to the cathedral in the centre.

I parked the bike facing the river and climbed a few steps to slump into a café just across from the cathedral and ordered some food and searched for a bed for the night. A hotel was fixed up within minutes, so after some pasta I took a walk around Dinant. The city stands in front of a large rock facing the wide Meuse river, with the stunning cathedral and castle tucked against the cliff face. The name Dinant derives from the Welsh name Nant Dwyfol, which will please my wife no end. It suffered extreme damage in the Great War but has been cared for since and should be on everyone's list to visit if they're in the area. One famous son worth blowing a trumpet for was Adolphe Sax, who invented the horn, saxophone. A statue of him adorns a bench and there are images of saxophones adorning the bridge that crosses the Meuse



Dinant

My hotel for the night was just five miles out of town, along a country lane, standing in its own grounds. I entered a car park overflowing with Audi's and Mercs and parked next to a Kawasaki. My room looked across to a meadow backed by a cliff-face higher than the hotel. This luxury retreat caters for conferences, corporate bashes and the occasional stray biker. It was quiet throughout and spacious, with very modern furnishings and fittings. I reserved a table for dinner as I didn't want to head back to Dinant, I had everything I wanted here.

It was a pleasant evening so I took a walk along a lane that led away into a gorge. Caves were carved into the rock. Birds of prey circled above and cows looked settled in the meadow. This was blissful solitude. I spotted a river, a footbridge and a path that led among some trees. The

only person around was a guy with a dog. I crossed the bridge and followed the path. I could see that the river had widened. A sheer cliff loomed on the opposite bank. I made my way to the edge. An abandoned chateau on the summit of the cliff came into focus. It looked magnificent. This isolated spot could easily have been missed. I found out later that I had been staring up at Chateau Waltzin.



Chateau Waltzin

Historically it has a great past. Now, it looks very sad. But I was overawed. To add this moment to the ones I experienced in almost all the places I had visited on this trip was overwhelming. I must have stood in that spot for 30 minutes, scanning every part and every aspect of the scene before me. I saw no one else on my walk back to the hotel. My world was perfect. I had been so lucky to stumble on such incredible scenery every time I stopped to look. It can't be coincidence. There must be places like these all over Europe. I know Germany can boast over 20,000 castles. Yet tourists seem to flock to the big cities, flooding and photo-bombing every photograph you try to take. On this trip, I went to popular locations but at times I was the only one present. There's no price you can put on that.

The food in the restaurant was exquisite, the décor chic, and fellow diners miserable, and rude to the overworked waiters. It was the hotel's fault. Only two staff, one of which, a dimwit, was never going to work. I took the fag-end of my wine up to my room and listened to classical music on my MP3 player. It was the regal thing to do in such surroundings! Tomorrow's, forecast was for heavy rain and thunderstorms. Some roads might be flooded. I will stay on this side of the English channel for one more night. It's 150 miles to Dunkirk. I will aim for the coast to be sure of a hotel but many options could appear before then, as I am in familiar territory from now on.

Bergues

Against all my riding instincts I chose not to take an A road to get to the E42 motorway as I feared there would be some major flooding on the remote routes. I headed east to the E411 and then north. I will never know if it was the best choice but I'm still here to write about it so

I accept it was good enough. It lashed down. Juggernauts were sending up spray, like James Bond escaping in a speed boat. They were hurtling along. I was not happy. Blue lights were flashing in my rear view mirrors as a police car zoomed passed in the outside lane. A few miles later I passed the same blue lights as the officer was putting traffic cones down on a blocked slip road. An articulated lorry had jack-knifed and the trailer was spreadeagled from the hedgerow to the second lane of the motorway. After that, not many juggernauts came swooshing past me.

All these places I was now passing would be probable 'stop off' locations but in this maelstrom I just wanted to reach somewhere where there was no rain. I was heading west now, and kept going. Namur, Mons, Tournai and Lille, all received a, 'hi – bye' as I sped past as safely as I could. After Lille, the rain eased and Poperinge came to mind. I know the hotels there! But I wanted somewhere new to spend my final night. I needed fuel, so took a right towards Bergues. I found a petrol station very quickly and looked up to see a monument on a hill staring back at me. I rode into town and parked opposite a restaurant called Vauban (my favourite fortress builder). I was saturated and apologised when I walked inside and began to disrobe, the staff said it was not a problem and circled around me to mop up the puddles on the floor. Coffee was brought to my table as I scanned for a B&B for the night. I confirmed one and gave my number to the owner with a request as to where they were located relative to the restaurant I was in. She called and I stepped outside to see her waving to me from just down the street.

I was invited to park my bike in her private garage, as there was plenty of space for two wheels and then shown to a two story apartment, with stone flooring and every amenity I ever wanted. I emptied my roll bag. Despite the waterproofing and polythene inner bags, everything was drenched. Half an hour later every ledge, step and shelf was covered in squelchy clothing. I left it to dry and wandered around Bergues. It's amazing. There's even a French film about this town: Bienvenue Chez Les Ch'tis (Welcome to the Sticks.) If you haven't watched it, it's your loss.

We are almost on the France/Belgium border so the identity of the town is a little confusing but I loved it. There's a Vauban defence fortress here, hence the name of the restaurant and plenty of relics from the past everywhere. The canal system has been in use since the ninth century and flows towards Dunkirk, about 8 miles away. Bergues used to be the port town on the coast line, Dunkirk didn't exist until the sea receded and the land silted up. It has an interesting history and made my visit all the more enjoyable. So much so, I have since

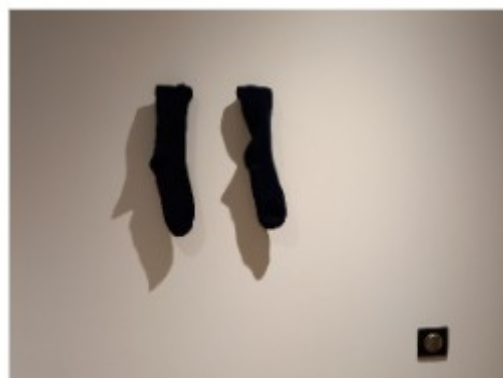
returned to the same apartment with Joy to soak up more of what the town has to offer. It's a great location for a hub once you are on French soil and wish to explore further into Belgium or France itself. Dunkirk is a much nicer place than when I first visited in the 1970's. I found a wine merchant along the canal side, disguising itself as a lock-up garage. I could buy nothing on this visit but it was another reason to return in the car to stock up for home. Many of their wines don't leave French shores.



Bergues

I was back at the Vauban restaurant for supper. They treated me like family and I just had to try their Belgian beer called Kwak. The hour-glass shaped vessel is placed in a wooden frame, resembling a chemistry stand. I had no idea how to use it but the beer was good. My final night was re-energising as I slept like the dead.

My journey to Calais and Le Shuttle took no more than 40 minutes. I was on English soil before the late Queen Elizabeth got her send off. The following day, I received a text from Philippine who runs the B&B in Bergues, stating I had left a denim jacket in the wardrobe and she would not dispose of it as I did promise I would return.



Socks drying, Bergues

Eddy Smyth

Wyre Forest u3a Interest Groups Listing—April 2026

Group Name	Group Leader	Category	Status
Absolute Beginners Guitar	Dave Bagnall	Music	Full
Adventure	Penny Smith	Sport and Exercise	Active
All In The Mind	Barry Walmsley	Science	Active
Amblers	Pauline Pitchford	Sport and Exercise	Active
Art	Maureen Bourne	Arts	Active
Art Appreciation	Elaine Yates	Arts	Active
Backgammon	Gilbert Parker	Card And Board Games	Active
Badminton (Thursday)	Rosemary Jones	Sport and Exercise	Active
Badminton (Wednesday)	Howard Morgan	Sport and Exercise	Full
Ballroom and Latin Dance Practice	Sue Langley	Sport and Exercise	Active
Bird watching	Follow the Link	Science, Social	Active
Board Games	Sue Taylor	Card And Board Games	Waiting List
Book Reading 1	Peter Gallagher	English Language and Literature	Waiting List
Book Reading 2	Tim Coombes	English Language and Literature	Waiting List
Bridge	Paul Lewis	Card And Board Games	On Hold
Craft	Shelia Munden	Crafts	Active
Creative Textiles	Gail Tutcher	Crafts	Waiting List
Creative Writing	Gabrielle Mapp	English Language and Literature	Active
Cribbage	Jean Laidler	Card And Board Games	Active
Dancing	Sue Langley	Sport and Exercise	Active
Digital Photography	Beryl Buckley	Arts	Active
Enjoying Operetta and Opera	Ralph Bramley	Theatre	Active
Enjoyment of Classical Music	Ralph Bramley	Music	Active
Environmental Concern	Gail Tutcher	Science	Active
Exercise to music	Sue Gay	Sport and Exercise	Active
Friday Afternoon Ceilidh Club	Barry Warmesley	Social	Active
Friday Film Club	Ralph Bramley	Theatre	Active
Friday Night At The Rose	Rosemary Jones	Social	Active
Game For A Laugh	Nick Underwood	Social	Active
Garden Visits	Janice Evans	Science	Active
Genealogy	Beryl Buckley	Humanities	Active
General History	Caroline O'Callagan	History	Active
German Conversation	to be announced	Foreign Language and Literature	On Hold
Gospelite Singers	Jill Judson	Music	Active
Guitar Club	Stephen Rosendale	Music	Active
Handbell Ringing	Liz Struckett	Music	Active
History	Elaine Yates	History	Active
Industrial History	Sue Cutler	History	Active
Jam Session	Martin Delahey	Music	Active
Kidderminster Station Adoption	Tony Haylock	General	Active
Local and Social History	Cathryn Plain	History	Active

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Mah Jong (Friday)	Diana Gray	Card And Board Games	Active
Mah Jong (Thursday)	Dawn Cooper	Card And Board Games	Active
Members On Their Own	Roy Leigh	Social	Active
Military History	Dennis Plant	History	Active
Moral Maze	Sally Howes	Humanities	Active
Petanque	Howard Morgan	Sport and Exercise	Waiting List
Pickleball	John Cooper	Sport and Exercise	Active
Poetry For Pleasure	Beyrl Greenwood	English Language and Literature	Active
Quizzing-4-All	Janice Evans	Social	Active
Quizzing-4-Fun Online	Janice Evans	Social	Active
Retro Rappers	Barry Walmsley	Music	Active
Rhyme And Reason	Sue Marsden	English Language and Literature	Active
Satelite Singers	Elaine Yates	Music	Active
Science and Technology in Society	Barry Walmsley	Science	Active
Scrabble and Rummikub	Ann Hill	Card And Board Games	Active
Short Mat Bowls	Ann Hill	Sport	Waiting List
Simply Photography	Steve Archer	Arts	Active
Songs Of The Seven Seas	Steve Underwood	Music	Active
Spanish Conversation	Ann Williams	Foreign Language and Literature	Active
Story Telling	Elaine Yates	English Language and Literature	Active
Strollers	Shelia Munden	Sport and Exercise	Active
Table Tennis	David Hudson	Sport and Exercise	Active
Tai Chi	Alison Wall	Sport and Exercise	Waiting list
The Railway Film Club	Tony Haylock	General	Active
The Science Of Life (Friday)	Sue Langley	Humanities	Full
The Science Of Life (Tuesday)	Sue Langley	Humanities	Active
The Thursday Lunchtime Folk Ensemble	Barry Walmsley	Music	Waiting List
Theatre	Karen Palmer	Social	Active
Travel	Ros James	Social	Active
Ukulele Baptist	Martin Delahey	Music	Active
Ukulele Willow	Martin Delahey	Music	Active
Understand The Economy	Michael Loftus	Humanities	Active
Walking For Fitness	Sue Langley	Sport and Exercise	Active
Website Support	Sandra Phillips	Science And Technology	Active
What A Performance	John Watkins	Music	Waiting List
WoolCraft And Natter	Sandra Phillips	Crafts, Social	Active

