

u3a

Thatcham

June 2026

Newsletter



Thatcham

u3a

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Foreword

Yesterday I attended my monthly u3a book group. We discussed Agent Zigzag by Ben McIntyre. One of our members was on holiday and another was held up by an appointment. Since we meet in private houses, the group is not large anyway.

What followed was the richest of experiences. It is the same every time we meet but it never fails to leave me feeling so much the better for the afternoon. We do not always agree but we feel safe to express ourselves openly and we learn from our shared different perspectives. I know that some book groups are really just an excuse for social chitchat. We do that as well, but the main business of the session is unfailingly focused on the chosen book.

To my mind this is the core of the u3a. We need convenors to make the thing happen at all, and there will be a 'topic', a purpose that motivates us to meet, but the most powerful contributions come from each other and everyone has their part to play.

Thank you for being a member of Thatcham u3a and doing your bit. Remember that it is a voluntary organisation, an independent charity, and that you are the volunteers. It may seem that you cannot bring much to proceedings, but I assure you that every time you turn up for something, someone else benefits.

I hope to see you all at the AGM at the Frank Hutchings Hall on Friday 12th June. Every smiling face warms the hearts of those who are in a position to take on a bigger role.

Ann Dibble

May 2026



Origin of Common Phrases

1. In the 1400s a law was set forth in England that a man was allowed to beat his wife with a stick no thicker than his thumb.

Hence we have 'the rule of thumb.'

2. Many years ago in Scotland , a new game was invented. It was ruled 'Gentlemen Only... Ladies Forbidden'... and thus the word GOLF entered into the English language.

3. Each king in a deck of playing cards represents a great king from history:

Spades - King David,

Hearts - Charlemagne,

Clubs -Alexander the Great,

Diamonds - Julius Caesar

4. In Shakespeare's time, mattresses were secured on bed frames by ropes. When you pulled on the ropes the mattress tightened, making the bed firmer to sleep on. Hence the phrase....
..... 'goodnight, sleep tight.'
5. It was the accepted practice in Babylon 4,000 years ago that for a month after the wedding, the bride's father would supply his son-in-law with all the mead he could drink. Mead is a honey beer and because their calendar was lunar based, this period was called the honey month, which we know today as the honeymoon.
6. In English pubs, ale is ordered by pints and quarts...

So, in old England , when customers got unruly, the bartender would yell at them 'Mind your pints and quarts, and settle down.'

It's where we get the phrase 'mind your P's and Q's'

7. Many years ago in England, pub frequenters had a whistle baked into the rim or handle of their ceramic cups. When they needed a refill, they used the whistle to get some service.

'Wet your whistle' is the phrase inspired by this practice.

8. In 1696, William III of England introduced a property tax that required those living in houses with more than six windows to pay a levy. To avoid the tax, house owners would brick up all windows except six. (The Window Tax lasted until 1851, and older houses with bricked-up windows are still a common sight in the U.K.) As the bricked-up windows prevented some rooms from receiving any sunlight, the tax was referred to as “daylight robbery”!

Now, there you have the origin of these phrases.

Interesting isn't it!! 😊

Kerry Thomas

HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW YOUR NOVELS?

Famous beginnings. Can you identify which novel these first words relate to?

1. It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.....
2. It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen.....
3. In my younger and more vulnerable years my father gave me some advice that I've been turning over in my mind ever since....
4. Call me Ishmail.....
5. When he was nearly thirteen, my brother Jem got his arm badly broken at the elbow...
6. There was no possibility of taking a walk that day.....
7. You will rejoice to hear that no disaster has accompanied the commencement of an enterprise which you have regarded with such evil forebodings....
8. If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you'll probably want to know is where I was born...
9. I have just returned from a visit to my landlord – the solitary neighbour that I shall be troubled with....
10. It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness....
11. 3 May, Bistriz. Left Munich at 8.35pm, on 1st May, arriving in Vienna early next morning.....
12. It was a pleasure to see Mr Sherlock Holmes again.....
13. All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way....
14. The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there.....
15. It was a pleasure to burn.....

Kerry Thomas



Adagio

In April, we were invited to entertain the staff and residents at Willow's Edge in Newbury. Everyone had a very enjoyable afternoon of singing which was rounded up with tea and cake. It was lovely to help celebrate the birthday of one of the residents, too. We have been invited for a return visit later in the year.

Perhaps you would like to work out three of the songs which were on our Set-list from the singonyms below.

1. You bring absolute radiance into my life as my solitary source of illumination; you elevate my spirits and bring me joy whenever the overhead atmosphere turns dark and gloomy.
2. Now that the storm has subsided, my vision is entirely unrestricted. I am fully aware of every barrier in my path.
3. Greetings, merchant of visions, where did you wander? Reveal to me the fantasies you carry. I travelled here solely to offer you this melody; would you share just a single illusion with me?
Lynette Harper



NOTES LEFT OUT FOR THE MILKMAN

Most of us remember getting our milk delivered in bottles and left on our doorsteps. And I'm sure that we all remember leaving out notes for the milkman. Here is a collection of obscure notes left in milk bottles...

Dear milkman:

I've just had a baby, please leave another one.

Please leave an extra pint of paralysed milk.

Cancel one pint after the day after today.

Please don't leave any more milk. All they do is drink it.

Milkman, please close the gate behind you because the birds keep pecking the tops off the milk.

Milkman, please could I have a loaf but not bread today.

Please cancel milk. I have nothing coming into the house but two sons on the dole.

Sorry not to have paid your bill before, but my wife had a baby and I've been carrying it around in my pocket for weeks.

Sorry about yesterday's note. I didn't mean one egg and a dozen pints, but the other way round.

When you leave my milk please knock on my bedroom window and wake me because I want you to give me a hand to turn the mattress.

Please knock. My TV's broken down and I missed last night's Coronation Street. If you saw it, will you tell me what happened over a cup of tea?

My daughter says she wants a milkshake. Do you do it before you deliver or do I have to shake the bottle?

Please send me a form for cheap milk, for I have a baby two months old and did not know about it until a neighbour told me.

Please send me details about cheap milk as I am stagnant.

Milk is needed for the baby. Father is unable to supply it.

From now on please leave two pints every other day and one pint on the days in between, except Wednesdays and Saturdays when I don't want any milk.

My back door is open. Please put milk in 'fridge, get money out of cup in drawer and leave change on kitchen table in pence, because we want to play bingo tonight.

Please leave no milk today. When I say today, I mean tomorrow, for I wrote this note yesterday.

When you leave the milk please put the coal on the boiler, let dog out and put newspaper inside the screen door. P.S. Don't leave any milk.

No milk. Please do not leave milk at No. 14 either as he is dead until further notice. *K Thomas*

Thatcham u3a Quiz

This quiz was produced by Microsoft Copilot from our website, my first attempt at actively using AI for something. I did have to tweak the answers a bit. What do you think – did Copilot do a good job?

1. What does the u3a in Thatcham u3a stand for?
 - a) Universal Teaching Alliance
 - b) Union of Three Academies
 - c) University of the Third Age
 - d) United Three Associations

2. Thatcham u3a is part of which wider organisation?
 - a) The National Federation of Community Groups
 - b) The Berkshire Adult Education Trust
 - c) The Royal Society of Learning
 - d) The UK-wide u3a Movement

3. Which of the following are typical activities run by Thatcham u3a?
 - a) Walking and Craft
 - b) Undergraduate degree courses
 - c) Full-time vocational training
 - d) Paid professional workshops

4. Who usually runs the interest groups of Thatcham u3a?
 - a) External training companies
 - b) Volunteers from within the membership
 - c) Local schools
 - d) Paid instructors

5. What is the key aim of Thatcham u3a?
 - a) Providing formal qualifications
 - b) Supporting lifelong learning and social connection
 - c) Preparing people for university entrance exams
 - d) Offering professional certification

Summer Holidays

Where is everyone going on their summer holidays this year? Spain remains the top holiday destination for British tourists, followed by France, Italy, and Portugal.

But here are 10 facts about Spain you may not have known.

1. They have two surnames: Most people in Spain have two surnames (apellidos). One from the father and one from the mother. Women also keep their surname when they get married.
2. Arabic has left its mark on the Spanish language: Around 4000 Spanish words have Arabic roots. Words like ‘ojala’, ‘aceite’ and ‘almohada’ come from centuries of Arabic influence in Al-Andalus.
3. No tooth fairy: In Spain, the tooth collector is Ratoncito Perez – a little mouse not a fairy.
4. More than one language: Besides Spanish, there are co-official languages in parts of Spain – Catalan, Valencian, Euskara (Basque), Galego and Aranes.
5. Spain borders Africa: Ceuta and Melilla are Spanish Cities on the North African coast, bordering Morocco.
6. Europe’s desert: The Tabernas Desert in Almeria, is mainland Europe’s only Desert.
7. The oldest working lighthouse: The Tower of Hercules in A Coruna is the oldest lighthouse still in operation.
8. Anthem with no words: Spain’s national anthem, the Marcha Real, is one of the few national anthems in the world with no official lyrics.
9. Olive oil giant: Spain produces 40-50% of the world’s olive oil, making it the biggest producer on the planet.
10. The oldest restaurant in the world: Sobrino de Botin, in Madrid, opened in 1725 and is recognised as the oldest restaurant still operating.

My last two major holidays abroad have both been in Spain. Firstly, in the Picos de Europa which are a mountain range extending for about 20 km (12 mi), forming part of the Cantabrian Mountains in northern Spain. Then a trip to Andalucia to visit Ronda, Seville, Cordoba and Granada. I’d highly recommend both places. I fell in love with Seville but the Alhambra Palace in Granada must not be missed.

Kerry Thomas

Summer Holidays



Mijas Pueblo,
Cable car at Fuente de, Picos de Europa



Me in Picos de Europa and the Alhambra Palace

Who keeps Thatcham u3a Going?

There are several folk that help our u3a to run. You may know some, but others are sometimes behind the scenes and it is always nice to include them. We have the Convenors of our many groups; the people that help out for Coffee Mornings and in the Frank Hutchings kitchen too. At Monthly Speaker Meetings there are the “Welcome Team”, the Jigsaw Swap people and the Book Swap people. We have people using skills that many of us wish we had, like Mike, the PA guy, who sets up and works the equipment for Speaker Meetings as well as the August Picnic. We have our Website Guru, Andy, who ensures the website is up-to-date and that things can be found for members that like to explore the website. On a bigger scale we are part of the Area Group called Thames Valley Network, and Stephanie represents us there.

We thank them all for their part in keeping us informed and helping with the tasks that keep things at Thatcham u3a ticking along

The limericks I have written below are about the people that sit on the Exec Committee as Trustees for us all.

The Chair

We all know the Chair – a lady called Ann
Who encourages the best that she can
It really can be quite tough at the Top
But this woman? She will not stop
Till all members are happy- Well, that’s the plan !

The Membership Secretary

At Monthly Meetings, the first person you see
Our “Door Lady” and she is called Ann-marie
You tick your name on her sheets
That’s for fire safety, not just the treats!
Always a welcoming face, I’m sure you’ll agree.

The Secretary

The Early Bird at all Monthly Meetings is Kerry
No matter what – he always remains quite merry
He lays out chairs, helps with PA and does the washing up
That Welsh lilt in his voice certainly cheers us all up
Doing so much more, any cake would choose him as “top cherry”.

My Co-worker – The Treasurer

The “Money Lady”, for our u3a, is Lynn
Her hard work means we are all “on a win”
She ensures all accounting is just right
She checks and investigates; keeping things tight
Barn Dance Convenor as well- She’s a “proper good ‘un”.

Assistant to the Treasurer

This posh title belongs to our friend, Roy
A helper at u3a for years – no ploy.
His charm and his soft, witty way
Is so welcomed each and everyday
Longest serving Committee guy – Did he start when just a boy?

The Convenors' Co-Ordinator

Our great Convenors are watched over by Sue
Who is never one to cause a hullabaloo
Her help to any who need it is great
It’s a skill, and quite a lot on one plate
All achieved with no fuss or any big to-do,

The last 3, (all together, as that’s how a Committee works)

The final 3 on the Exec all start their names with a “J”
Julie-Janet- Jan, who all get their say
They check forms and policies, plus other bits and bobs
They speak for the members and do several extra jobs
They complete the Exec, and my limericks too – Hooray!

Thatcham U3A Walking Group News

Nine of us took part in our January walk from Goldwell car park in Newbury along the canal to Benham Lock and back. A total of about 3 miles.

February, while we were away, the walk was around Greenham Common.

In March we met at the Discovery Centre and walked to the reed beds, although it had not rained for the previous few days this walk turned out to be very muddy and our path was blocked so we were not able to complete the intended route. We turned back and took a shorter route back to the Discovery Centre where we enjoyed a coffee and cake!

For April's walk there were 11 of us walking from Aldermaston Wharf across the A4 and up to Beenham. We stopped at the church for a photo before returning to Aldermaston via a different path then refreshments at the Wharf café. About 4 and a half miles in total.

Chris and Mike Snelling



WINSTON CHURCHILL

Winston Churchill is often voted as our Greatest Briton

Churchill remains the only British Prime Minister to ever receive the Nobel Prize in Literature. Reading him reminds you that you don't need to write massive novels to be a brilliant writer — or a philosopher, or great wit for that matter.

Winston Churchill once joked:

“When I was young, I had one rule: no alcohol before lunch.

Now that I'm no longer young, I strictly follow the rule: no alcohol... before breakfast.”

Here are some of his other reflections that still hit surprisingly well today:

1. If you're going through hell, keep going.
2. You have enemies? Good. That means you stood up for something at some point.
3. A crisis is simply an opportunity in disguise.
4. A wise person doesn't make all the mistakes alone — they let others have some.
5. The best argument against democracy is a five-minute conversation with the average voter.
6. Success is the ability to go from failure to failure without losing enthusiasm.
7. Kites fly highest against the wind, not with it.
8. Only a fool never changes his mind.
9. The flaw of capitalism is inequality; the flaw of socialism is the equal sharing of misery.
10. When eagles are silent, parrots begin to chatter.
11. Everyone gets their big chance once — most people just stand up, dust themselves off, and walk away as if nothing happened.
12. Don't wish for health and wealth — wish for luck. On the Titanic, everyone was healthy and wealthy. Only a few were lucky.
13. A lie can travel halfway around the world while the truth is still putting on its shoes.
14. My tastes are simple: I am easily satisfied with the best.
15. Want to have the last word in an argument? Tell your opponent, “You may be right.”
16. Those who get ahead are often the ones who made their mistakes early — and learned from them.

17. People are excellent at keeping secrets they don't know.
 18. I like pigs. Dogs look up to us. Cats look down on us. Pigs treat us as equals.
 19. The greatest lesson in life is that sometimes even fools are right.
 20. It's easier to govern a nation than to raise four children.
 21. We live in an age of great events and small people (Highly relevant to current global events.)
 22. From wooden shoes to wooden shoes in four generations:
the first makes it, the second grows it, the third spends it, the fourth starts over.
 23. In difficult times, nations run on myths far more than we care to admit.
 24. The fastest way to ruin a relationship is to start "figuring it out."
 25. When two fight — the third wins. (again, very relevant for today)
 26. A pessimist sees difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees opportunity in every difficulty.
 27. A nation that forgets its past loses its future. (once again very relevant to where we are as a country)
 28. Even the brightest light casts a shadow.
 29. A star cannot shine without someone holding up a dark backdrop behind it.
- And then there's the story from one of his speeches.

Someone once asked:

"Sir Winston, does it feel good to know that every time you speak, the hall is full?"

Churchill smiled and replied:

"It does. But I can't help thinking — if instead of giving a speech I were being led to the gallows, twice as many people would show up."

Kerry Thomas



Chris Belcher's Wing Walk

It seems a long time since I had a mad moment and with the encouragement of my youngest son registered to do a Wingwalk for Royal Air Force Association which I have been a member of for 10 years or so. I then realised that 2026 would also be the 60th anniversary of when I left home at the young age of 18 to join up as a nursing attendant. The last couple of years had started to make me feel more anxious about things I couldn't control so I decided to do something to terrify myself and see what happened – so many write people of my age off so it was a challenge I was determined to overcome.

Sooner than I was ready the 21st May came along and thank goodness better weather with it. I'm not sure my nerves could have coped with having to rearrange the date.

Arriving at RFC Rendcomb near Cirencester was all a bit of a blur as I was almost straight into the briefing, the pilot said he had already clocked from my body language that I wouldn't be wanting a wild ride! I was up second so had little time to worry but I have to say the hardest part for me was climbing up onto the wing, I really felt every one of my 78 years. By the time I got up there I was so relieved I had made it I forgot to be nervous about the flight.

I did enjoy the experience once I got used to the powerful wind and the shaking about but I couldn't find the strength to wave so I gave up.

I am so grateful to my family, my local community and RAFA Global branch support and to date I have raised £2330.

Chris Belcher



8 FASCINATING DNA FACTS

DNA's wonders reveal just how incredible the biological blueprint of life is.

1. Humans are 99.9% genetically identical. That 0.1% difference is what makes each of us unique in appearance and traits.
2. Stretched end-to-end, one person's DNA could reach from Earth to the Sun and back over 300 - 600 times.
3. The DNA in our bodies can store a staggering amount of data. Far more than the world's most advanced computer.
4. DNA determines your eye colour, height, risk of disease and even your taste preferences and personality traits.
5. You share 98.8% of your DNA with a Chimpanzee, 85% with a mouse, 40% with a fruit-fly, and 41% with a banana.
6. Your DNA is found in every cell in your body. Around 30 trillion in total.
7. If you could type 60 words per minute, eight hours a day, it would take approximately 50 years to type the human genome.
8. DNA is a fragile molecule. About a thousand times a day, something happens to it to cause errors. This could include errors during transcription, damage from ultraviolet light, or any of a host of other activities. There are many repair mechanisms, but some damage isn't repaired. This means you carry mutations! Some of the mutations cause no harm, a few are helpful, while others can cause diseases, such as cancer. A new technology called CRISPR could allow us to edit genomes, which might lead us to the cure of such mutations as cancer, Alzheimer's and, theoretically, any disease with a genetic component.

Kerry Thomas



WHAT IF MEN WERE COMPUTER APPLICATION?

How would women get Technical Support?

Dear Tech Support,

Last year I upgraded from Boyfriend 5.0 to Husband 1.0 and noticed a distinct slowdown in overall system performance, particularly in the flower and jewellery applications, which operated flawlessly under Boyfriend 5.0.

In addition, Husband 1.0 uninstalled many other valuable programs, such as Romance 9.5 and Personal Attention 6.5, and then installed undesirable programs such as: Football 5.0, RFU 3.0 and Golf Clubs 4.1. Conversation 8.0 no longer runs, and House Cleaning 2.6 simply crashes the system. Please note that I have tried running Nagging 5.3 to fix these problems, but to no avail.

What can I do?

Signed: Desperate

The response...

Dear Desperate,

First keep in mind, Boyfriend 5.0 is an Entertainment Package, while Husband 1.0 is an Operating System.

Please enter command: I thought you loved me.html and try to download Tears 6.2. Do not forget to install the Guilt 3.0 update. If that application works as designed, Husband 1.0 should then automatically run the applications Jewellery 2.0 and Flowers 3.5. However, remember, overuse of the Tears application can cause Husband 1.0 to default to Grumpy Silence 2.5, Happy Hour 7.0, or Beer 6.1. Please note that Beer 6.1 is a very bad program that will download Snoring Loudly Beta version.

Whatever you do, DO NOT, under any circumstances, install Mother-In-Law 1.0 as it runs a virus in the background that will eventually seize control of all your system resources.

In addition, please do not attempt to re-install the Boyfriend 5.0 program. These are unsupported applications and will crash Husband 1.0.

In summary, Husband 1.0 is a great program, but it does have limited memory and cannot learn new applications quickly. You might consider buying additional software to improve memory and performance. We recommend Cooking 3.0.

Good Luck

Tech Support

Kerry Thomas

TITANIC

Forget the film, Titanic wasn't just a tragedy – it was a sacrifice by men

1. 73% of women on the Titanic survived, only 19% of the men did
2. Even the richest men – first class, power, status – none of it mattered when the ship was sinking. Status collapsed. Gender roles didn't.
3. “Women and children first” wasn't a suggestion it was a rule men followed.
4. Men stood there. No panic, no begging, they accepted the situation. They didn't say “it's not fair” or ask, “what's in it for me”.
5. No cameras (no selfies), no applause, no second chances. They gave everything, expecting nothing.
6. When survival is limited a man's life is negotiable.
7. Call it what you want, but when everything collapsed, men paid the ultimate price.

Kerry Thomas



Quiz Answers

Thatcham u3a QuizAnswers

1. c) University of the Third Age
2. d) The UK-wide u3a Movement
3. a) Walking and craft. We do sometimes have paid professional workshops but not often
4. b) Volunteers from within the membership. We do have a paid instructor for Tai Chi
5. b) Supporting lifelong learning and social connection

How Well do you know your Novels

1. Pride & Prejudice
2. 1984
3. The Great Gatsby
4. Moby Dick
5. To Kill a Mockingbird
6. Jane Eyre
7. Frankenstein
8. The Catcher in the Rye
9. Wuthering Heights
10. Tale of Two Cities
11. Dracula
12. Sherlock Homes
13. Anna Karenina
14. The Go-Between
15. Fahrenheit 451

Adagio

1. You are my sunshine
2. I can see clearly now
3. Meet me on the corner

It is unlikely that I will be doing any more of these twice yearly magazines due to poor article support. Most of the articles in this issue are from the same person who goes the extra mile and the rest are from regulars. I believe there are about 300 members so I must assume you are not as interested as first thought.

The random unrelated photos are of our Membership Secretary's fabulous garden.