



Newsletter Number 81 May 2026

Views and opinions expressed in the newsletter are not necessarily those of the Editor or Committee

Deadline for the next newsletter items is Tuesday 13th October 2026. Please email newsletter.editor@buckinghamu3a.org.uk

Chair person's report, May 2026.

I would like to offer Buckingham U3A condolences to Germaine Radcliffe and family on the passing of Dr Paul Radcliffe. Paul held membership card number 1 and was a stalwart of the Buckingham U3A. He was involved with the Science, Architecture, and Philosophy Groups during the time he was with Buckingham U3A.

Buckingham U3A continues to grow not only in membership, but also in groups. The recently started 'Outings' by Katrina and Mark Owen, had their first trip to Ely. The interest meeting held in the Community Centre small hall, exceeded expectations. It became necessary to lay on two coaches because so many wanted to go. By the time this newsletter is published, a second outing should have taken place to Worcester.

We continue to have good, interesting speakers at the Open Meetings, the last one being Helen Fry who talked about MI9. Our Open Meeting on the 24th June will be about staying Cyber Aware and in July we will have our summer social.

The U3A show on 3bs Radio attracts interesting speakers and a growing audience. We hope that when the station goes digital in August, as well as being on the internet, the coverage will be greater. Recent speakers talked about the Buckingham Literary Festival



and Buckingham Music Festival and we will be having a series of programmes to celebrate 50 years of Buckingham University.

I realise there are many people who have not heard of the U3A and this became apparent after I gave a talk to Winslow Rotary. It is up to us all to promote the benefits of Buckingham U3A!

Howard Mordue, Chair Buckingham U3A, contact chair-person@buckinghamu3a.org.uk

The committee is:

Chairman - Howard Mordue	Vice Chairman - Mark Owen
Secretary - Heather Haydock	Treasurer - Andrew Richardson
Membership Secretary - Steve Warnes	Webmaster - Dorothy Morgan
Speaker Secretary – Ann Elliott	Technical Support - Steve Meakin
Newsletter Editor - Sheryl Hargreaves	
Group Liaison Officers - Mark Owen, Katerina Owen, Arthur Newman	

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Committee

Meetings – Summary

The accounts are healthy and membership numbers are growing. We encourage more men to join us and create more men-related groups. Ann Elliott is the speaker secretary. The Outings group is up and running.

Some of our committee members are coming to the end of their three year term and replacements for secretary and newsletter editor are sought. We hope all members consider taking a turn at a role and await volunteers to contact us.

With thanks, The Committee.

Group Liaison

Create a new Group:

If you have an interest or hobby that you would like to share with like minded people, why not start a group?

The group leader role can be shared within the group so it does not fall to one person to organise the sessions. We have a list of venues and technical devices to use. The main thing to remember is that the group is for U3A members only, it is self funding and it does not pay for teachers. Contact use via email or at open meetings.

Contact Katerina, Mark or Arthur, email group.liaison.officer@buckinghamu3a.org.uk

National U3A Online Events:

These are a wide variety of workshops and talks on topics such as art, science, history, cryptic crosswords and even laughter yoga. Signing up for an event is very easy – see <https://u3a.org.uk/events/educational-events>.

Membership Secretary – Tales from the database 2

The second in an infrequent series looking at our membership in numbers.

There are over 1,000 U3As with around 400,000 members in the UK. Our Buckingham and District U3A has 929 members with 2 pending which means we are waiting on information or fees from those. Our latest membership number is 3006 meaning that we have had that many members since we started using membership numbers.

The census suggests that the population of MK18 is between 45,000 – 55,000 people. Seems a bit vague! It seems more certain that there are around 8,000 people aged 55+ in MK18. Now, not all our members live in MK18 as you will see but a group with over 9000 members in such an area must make it the biggest official group of society in the area. We have the power!

We don't keep details of our members' ages but I know we have at least one member who is over 100 years old and quite a few in their 90s. Our first ever member No 1 was an active member until recently when he sadly passed away.

We have 25 x Doctors, 1 x Lady, 17 x Miss, 269 x Mr, 552 x Mrs, 66 x Ms and 1 x Revd. 21 members have given no email address which means that 910 have done. It also appears from our records that 97.7% of our members use or have a mobile phone. 84% of our members live in MK18 postcodes, 8% are from other MK postcodes, 1% from Luton (Leighton Buzzard) postcodes, 4% from Northants and 2% from Oxford postcodes. We have 4 members from other areas.

We have 877 Full members, 31 Associate Members, meaning they are full members of another U3A as well. We have 27 Honorary Members who have been members more than 25 years. We have 72 separate groups listed on our system.

For what it is worth, I have run this report through ChatGPT Chatbot which is an AI enemy! It notes the following:

1. The scales is genuinely notable. 928 members in a town/rural catchment around MK18 is substantial. If the estimate of roughly 8,800 residents aged 55+ is broadly right, then membership penetration is around 10.5%. That is remarkably high level of engagement for a voluntary organisation. The statement that the group may be 'the biggest official group or society in the area' is plausible, even if not formally proven.
2. It communicates organisational vitality. The report subtly shows: Long institutional history (member numbers reaching 3006); Retention and continuity; Broad local reach; High digital engagement; Strong older-age participation. The anecdote about member No 1 is emotionally effective because it humanises the statistics.
3. Geographic loyalty is strong. 84% of members being MK18 suggests the organisation is genuinely rooted locally rather than drawing mainly from neighbouring towns.

Aren't we lucky.

Steve Warnes. Contact by emailing memsec@buckinghamu3a.org.uk.

Regular Items

Recent Events – Open Meetings

Main speaker 25th February Stephen Baker – Operation Atlantic

The long serving ex-Detective Superintendent gave us insightful descriptions of how a major drug group were investigated, including tactics used to catch the criminals on an international scale and court judgments.

We were quite intrigued by the high stakes two year saga of the late 1980s and our questions probed the full range of the talk, including the apprehension plus sentencing.

Our thanks goes to Stephen for a ‘capturing’ topic.



Main speaker 25th March – Mark Orchard: Tall Ship Sailing Experience

Mark regaled us with nearly the whole Tall Ship process from building the Jubilee Trust SV Tenacious, many voyages covering some 5945 nautical miles in calm to Force 9 conditions, and with the spectacular evidenced photos to match.

Thank you Mark for sharing such a life changing experience.

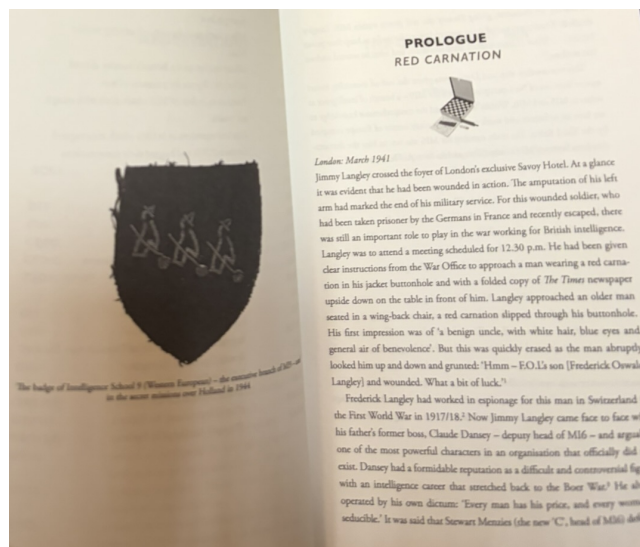


Main speaker 22nd April – Dr Helen Fry: British Intelligence MI9

We witnessed an impressive writer in Dr Helen Fry with at least ten publications (see Wikipedia) and outstanding talent as a speaker was given to us during a session full of previously hidden facts.

Photo right show Dr Helen Fry (seated) with our U3A member Barbara of 'A Husband's Most Secret War' story (www.mi9-is9.com) and her children Simon and Sharon.

Photo below is a close-up of Dr Helen Fry's book containing the Three Witches insignia connecting our speaker and U3A member.



Contact Ann via speaker.secretary@buckinghamu3a.org.uk to book the 5 minute slot.

Coffee Mornings – New Members

The last coffee morning was held on Monday 23rd March and the next new members coffee morning is to be confirmed via the website. All new members should receive a personal invitation from Judy Austin to attend the coffee morning.

Email new_joiners@buckinghamu3a.org.uk

Groups

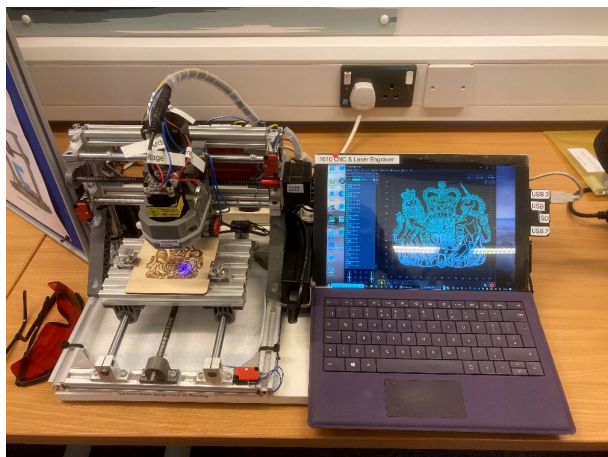
Science and Technology – Outline and Events

The group restarted in 2024 after a few years in abeyance and has now over 40 members for our regular meetings on the afternoon of the first Thursday in the month at the Library. As we have grown we have had talks from group members on a wide range of topics including Solar Farms, the Night Sky, Dentistry, Black Hole Jets, The Antikythera Mechanism, Lightning, X-Rays their history and use, Nuclear Power, Virtual Reality including demonstrations, Longevity & Ageing, Animal Vaccine production and Net Zero/Sustainability. We have also been lucky to have talks from different external speakers on Artificial Intelligence*, The Early Days of Tesla, Digital Forensics and CERN. The group also visited the Museum of Computing in Bletchley and went to see what happens to our non-recyclable waste at the Greatmoor Energy from Waste facility.

Right is a photo of Professor Harin Sellahewa of Buckingham University, with the group after his AI talk.



Our March meeting was very popular where Steve Meakin (Yes, the chap who ensures our general meetings can be seen and heard!) gave a fascinating talk titled ‘The journey of CAD/CAM from Industry to the Individual’. He described how the technology once only found in high tech factories can now be used in your home to make an amazing range of items. Steve included a demonstration of 3D printing a toy snake plus showing machines for laser engraving and routing as can be seen in the photos. You can also see examples of items he has made (next page).



We would welcome U3A members with a science or technology interest to join the group to contribute to our education across all these fields.

Contact Andrew and Yvonne by email science.and.technology@buckinghamu3a.org.uk

Outings Group – Start-up and Ely Cathedral Trip

Mark and I met with MK U3A to get some ideas on how to get going with this, where MK were and continue to be very supportive.

Going into school holidays is easy for them as the coaches are not on school runs and we can hire them at a preferential rate. We want the trips to be affordable.

At our meeting to start trips again we had some interesting suggestions of places to visit. A lot of people said they were just happy for a day out.

Ely Cathedral Trip:

Well, we reserved a 36 seater coach initially and couldn't believe the response, when at one point 117 people wanted to go. In the end we had 2 coaches and 92 people actually went (and returned). A bit ambitious for a first trip, but with the help of Patricia we were fine. We had four group tours of the cathedral which was absolutely magnificent.



Our next trip is to Worcester.

Contact Katerina or Mark by email outings@buckinghamu3a.org.uk

Craft Group - Relaunch

The first sessions of the new, relaunched Craft Group have gone amazingly well.

There is a large number of members that are showing an interest. Some have attended, some are planning to attend and some members just want to stay on the mailing list for future reference. This is absolutely fine with us. We can simply just keep increasing the total number of members allowed. We do not want to exclude anyone. Everyone is welcome to join us.

Initially we have started off with a couple of projects. A couple of members are showing less experienced people how to crochet. This activity has proved to be quite popular.

Also, we have been making Christmas cards. These have come from a kit supplied by one of the group. The intention is to sell them to raise funds for a local charity. The great thing with this project is that each and every card is unique. The finished article looks really good.

One group member brought along a quilt that she has recently completed. It is a 3D graphic of a bookcase and it looks extremely professional. Amazing mixture of skills involved.

We are meeting in the Small Hall of the Community Centre on the 1st and 3rd Friday of each month from 10am until 12 noon. Please refer to the Buckingham U3A website for more information.

The cost is £3 per person to cover the cost of the hall hire, tea/coffee and biscuits. Please bring your own drinking vessel.

We have started our own WhatsApp group “U3A Crafts”.

We have asked for 4 round tables to be set out for each session so that a separate skill could take place on each table. If you wish to mentor or share a skill then please make it known so that ‘learners’ can join you.

The next pages contain photos of the craft group activities.

Contact Lesley, Deidre and Arthur by email crafts@buckinghamu3a.org.uk



Environmental Sustainability & Science/Technology – Gawcott Solar Farm Visit

A small number of us visited the Gawcott solar farm community project last month and were taken around the facility by Harry, who travels all the way up from Cornwall to operate general management duties. As with quite a few visits to such places, our guide is familiar with visits from school children, yet appeared to handle the groups varying levels of knowledge and questions well.

We were given the descriptions of the panels, which are surprisingly thin for their translucency - including technical capacities, output, age and expected life of the hardware. To learn maintenance involves keeping thieves and vandals out was disappointing, yet the realisation just few regular lawn mowing are required is about the only other activity to accompany security was something of a relief.

Harry advised us of the community charity feature and encourage us all contact the facility for ongoing projects. See the website gawcottsolar.co.uk



Contact Heather via email environment@buckinghamu3a.org.uk or Andrew and Yvonne via science.and.technology@buckinghamu3a.org.uk to be involved with similar visits.

Science and Technology Group – Amazon Fulfillment Center (Dunstable) Visit

On the 14th May members of the Buckingham U3A Science and Technology group visited the Amazon Fulfillment Center in Dunstable.

See the photo on the next page showing internal machinations of the facility:



Despite sounding a bit naff, the visit showed that actually what the place does is to fulfill customer orders. It takes in huge amounts of items; it scans them by hand and deposits them in travelling stacks of cubby holes or ‘pods’ which whizz about the main warehouse carried by orange robots. At the same time on the other side of the building other workers are shown pictures of items they are to pick and a light shines on an appropriate cubby hole which has just been whisked into position by another orange robot. Then the items travel by conveyor belt eventually to leave the warehouse on the right lorry or van.

This is what I expected of a modern distribution warehouse I suppose but I never thought about how it worked. Well the answer is barcodes, scanners, robots and an army of 1500 or so workers who are there 24 hours a day 7 days a week.

Two things struck me particularly. One was the huge range of nationalities working there. Near the entrance was a large whiteboard where staff had been encouraged to write some common words in their own language. Soraya – our tour guide said 35 nationalities were represented in the workforce. Even so English was used throughout by everyone I heard. This seemed very modern to me but then most of my working life was in Cornwall, not known as a multi cultural centre. The pay starts at around £15 an hour for day work and £18 for night work – that’s over £30,000 a year. There was a whole range of work patterns which would suit most people with or without family and other duties. Workers have two main breaks in an 8 or 10 hour shift but could swipe out and go to the loo or for a quick break whenever they wanted and the system simply by-passed their work station for a while. I suppose that there is a close eye kept on when they swipe off and on and anyone pushing the boundaries would be ‘managed’. No unions there but

some sort of management function which was supposed to deal with workers concerns and their ideas for improvement.

The other thing was the 'brain'. The tour guide called it 'the cloud' which I guess it where it lives – in AI heaven. The capacity, speed and accuracy of the system that controls the stock and the robotic movement of that stock was startling. It seems like hundreds of these robots are charging around the site and they know where every other robot is and where it is going. If one encounters a product that has fallen out of one of the stacks of cubby holes it stops and tells the system there is a problem. An engineer dons a special jacket and plots his course to the item on an iPad. All the robots stop for him and find another route. He has an invisible protective shield. Finally, when the robot runs low on power, it tells the system it is tired and goes to plug itself in. This is Matrix and Star Trek combined. Let's hope it is not the Borg!

I loved it. This is how modern warehousing gets stuff to me within 24 hours. The sad thing is that I can't help thinking that much of the work done there by humans could easily be automated and those 1500 workers from all parts of the world could be amongst the casualties of the current tech revolutions.

I got home and found that my outstanding Amazon order was now going to arrive at 10.00pm. It arrived the next afternoon. To be fair that is unusual. By Steve Warnes.

Contact science.and.technology@buckinghamu3a.org.uk

Upcoming Open Meetings – 2:30 Buckingham Community Centre

Non-members are welcome as guests and doors are open from 2:15pm.

1) **Thursday 28th May 2026** – Meriet Duncan: Why Honey Bees Matter

Beekeeper, author and storyteller informs us about the honeybees world and the inspiring lessons they offer us about our community, resilience and our connection with nature.

2) **Wednesday 24th June 2026** – Staying Cyber Aware

3) **Wednesday 2nd July 2026** – Summer Social

Contact Ann by email Speaker.secretary@buckinghamu3a.org.uk

3Bs Radio – Tuesdays Noon 3bsradio.co.uk

Click on 'Listen Live Click Here' to hear our U3A slot. Our website has the schedule.