

The Roundup

September 2026



THE MONTHLY MAGAZINE OF
u3a DUMFRIES

In this month's Roundup

4 MONTHLY MEETING

A fascinating insight into the Silicon Age



6 UP NEXT

Introducing our October speaker

7 DISCOVER DUMFRIES u3a

Our fantastic showcase event

10 DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Upcoming events

11 BEHIND THE SCENES

Highlights from the latest committee meeting



12 MEET THE COMMITTEE

Highlights from the latest committee meeting

13 IN OTHER NEWS

There's a lot going on



17

[GROUP SPOTLIGHT](#)

Find out what our groups have been up to



25

[FROM OUR EARS TO YOURS](#)

This month's we focus on the music of Leonard Bernstein

27

[COFFEE BREAK READ](#)

Your monthly read from the Writing Together Group



30

[TIME TO TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE](#)

Monthly quiz challenge

31

[FROM CAROL'S KITCHEN](#)

This month we're making portokalopita



33

[OUT AND ABOUT](#)

What's on in the local area

34

[A FINAL NUGGET OF WISDOM](#)

Something to ponder until next month's Roundup



Monthly Meetings



Living in the Silicon Age

Our July monthly meeting took us on a fascinating journey through one of the most extraordinary periods of technological change in human history, as Ron McHugh presented *Living in the Silicon Age: A Short History of the Microchip Revolution*.

Ron, a retired professional electrical engineer and former university academic, began by taking us back to a time when the word “computer” meant a person. For centuries, people — often women — were employed to carry out complex mathematical calculations by hand. Ron then introduced us to the pioneering work of Charles Babbage and Ada Lovelace in the 1820s and the development of mechanical calculating machines.

From there, we travelled through the decades of the 20th century, following the extraordinary development of computing technology and the arrival of the microchip. The pace of change became particularly dramatic from the 1950s onwards, taking us from slide rules and early computers through to personal computers, mobile phones, digital television and Wi-Fi.

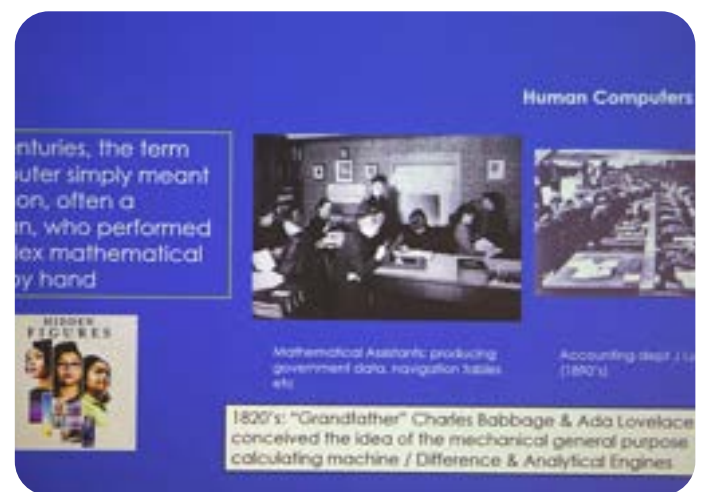


The arrival of the smartphone in 2007 was another significant milestone. Ron illustrated just how rapidly computing power has increased, with modern processors containing billions of transistors — a far cry from the technology of just a few decades ago.

Naturally, Artificial Intelligence featured prominently. Ron explored what lies behind today's AI systems and the enormous amounts of data required to train them. One example looked at driverless cars, where vast quantities of video footage have to be painstakingly annotated so that the system can recognise roads, pedestrians, traffic lights, cyclists and countless other objects.

The presentation left us with a question rather than an answer: where are we heading next? With computer power and data storage continuing to evolve at an extraordinary rate, it seems that the Silicon Age still has plenty of chapters left to write.

It was a fascinating and thought-provoking talk — and perhaps left a few of us wondering just how much more technological change we will witness in our own lifetimes.



Up next



October Meeting A Glimpse into Our Local Heritage

Our next meeting promises to take us back in time, with Tom Hughes of Cruck Cottage Heritage coming along to tell us about the fascinating Cruck Cottage in Torthorwald.

Originally constructed in the mid-18th century, or thereabouts, the cottage is an exceptionally rare surviving example of 'cruck' construction, a building method once common in the area. The main structural supports are oak crucks, or trunks, which carry the roof. The roof itself consists of counter tie beams and branch rafters, originally covered with heather turf and thatched with wheat straw.

The cottage's original walls would have been made from clay or turf, although these have since been replaced with rubble and lime mortar.

What makes Cruck Cottage particularly special is that it is believed to be the only remaining local example of this type of



The Cruck Cottage, Torthorwald

construction, which would have been much more commonplace during the 18th and 19th centuries.

Tom's talk will give us an opportunity to discover more about this remarkable building and the traditional techniques used to construct it.

It promises to be a fascinating glimpse into our local heritage – and a reminder of how much history can be found right on our doorstep.



Discover Dumfries u3a – What a Day!

What a fantastic afternoon we had at Discover Dumfries u3a on 8 September! More than 120 people came through the doors of Dumfries Baptist Church Centre, creating a real buzz as members and visitors explored the huge range of activities on offer.

With almost all of our nearly 40 groups represented, there was plenty to see and do. Many groups provided activities to try, while Group Leaders and members were on hand to answer questions and share their enthusiasm. It was lovely to see existing members discovering groups they hadn't yet tried, alongside people who were completely new to u3a.

The response was extraordinary– we have now broken the 300 members mark and we know of more yet to join. We actually ran out of membership forms with more than 40 people taking away forms on the day. They clearly wanted to take advantage of our special offer of 15 months' membership for the price of 12 and the Committee have agreed to extend the offer to the end of the year. So, if you have friends that are thinking of joining there isn't going to be a better time than now.

The feedback from visitors was overwhelmingly positive, with comments describing the event as "a huge success", "very informative", "well organised" and praising the "amazing variety of activities" and "welcoming atmosphere". Visitors particularly appreciated being able to meet Group Leaders, chat to existing members and ask questions.

Of course, an event like this doesn't happen by itself. A huge thank you to everyone who helped, whether you were organising, setting up, welcoming visitors, running a group stand, providing activities, making cakes* or simply chatting enthusiastically about your group. Every one of you helped create the friendly atmosphere that made the afternoon such a success.

And a big thank you to Ronnie Galloway, who we are sure you will agree from the following photos, did a great job of capturing the day.

We'd also like to thank the Dumfries Baptist Church Centre and its staff for making us so welcome and helping everything run smoothly.

Discover Dumfries u3a has shown just how much enthusiasm there is for what we do. It was our event, created by our members, and its success belongs to all of us.

And the best news? This won't be the last Discover Dumfries u3a! We hope to make it a regular event and look forward to doing it all again.

**A particular thank you to everyone who donated to the refreshments table – you were incredibly generous. However, to the person who donated a box of homebaked oat biscuits: they looked delicious, but unfortunately (despite the best efforts of at least 4 people!) we couldn't get the lid off. Sorry, if you felt they were overlooked.*





Dates for your Diary

 DATE	 MEETING / SPEAKER / TOPIC
29th September	Group Leader's Meeting, 9.45 am coffee for a 10.00 am start, at the Baptist Church Centre
1st October	Tom Hughes will talk about the Cruck Cottage at Torthorwald
3rd November	Make a u3a Christmas decoration for the Christmas Tree Festival
5th November	ian Callander, Senior Telehealthcare Assessor, will talk about the developments in emergency CareCall systems
3rd December	The Ukulele Group will entertain us and get us into the Christmas spirit!
	An exciting programme of speakers is planned for 2027!

Join us on the
1st Thursday of every month
2.00 pm – 4.00 pm
 Dumfries Baptist Church
 Gillbrae Road, Dumfries DG1 4EJ

Behind the Scenes

Highlights from the latest Committee meeting

There's always plenty happening behind the scenes to keep u3a Dumfries running smoothly, and the September committee meeting reflected our continuing growth.

Membership

Our membership has now reached 304, with more forms still to be returned. Anyone joining now pays £40, covering membership through to January 2028.

Discover Dumfries u3a

The success of Discover Dumfries u3a was discussed, with the committee thanking everyone involved. Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, with comments describing it as a "huge success", "very informative" and praising the "amazing variety of activities" and "welcoming atmosphere". There is already a suggestion that the event should become an annual fixture, although funding will be considered at the 2027 AGM.

The event has also generated considerable interest in new groups, including board games, Bridge for Beginners, traditional music, Qi Gong, a coffee group and a Literary Prize Winners Book Group. Some already have substantial numbers interested, and new Group Leaders will receive support and guidance through our newly completed Group Leaders' Handbook.

Housekeeping

As our membership grows, the committee is also working on the less glamorous but important jobs: improving document management, reviewing data protection, sorting website issues and providing training on Beacon. Our u3a archives are also being transferred to Ewart Library, helping to preserve our history for the future.

Finance

The committee agreed to keep the annual subscription at £40 for 2027. With changes to Gift Aid requirements, the joint membership tier will be removed.

We have a new temporary Treasurer, Douglas Simpson, who has agreed to cover the post whilst we keep looking for a more permanent volunteer. Whilst it is unusual for a husband and wife to both be office bearers, the Committee have put controls in place, in line with our Constitution, to ensure that the roles are carried out satisfactorily.

Christmas Tree Festival

And finally, Christmas is already on the horizon! We are sponsoring a tree at St John's Forest of Christmas Trees, with a crafting afternoon planned for members to make decorations in u3a colours.

Full committee minutes are available to any member on the home page of our website

Introducing Sue Bedford, our Minute Secretary

Our Minute Secretary, Sue Bedford, brings plenty of committee experience to Dumfries u3a. She has been involved with various group and club committees since her playgroup days in the 1980s, so she is certainly no newcomer to the world of meetings and minutes!

Sue's interests are wide-ranging, and as Sue says: "My interests are gardening, sewing and curling, which make a wonderful combination as I always have plenty to do whatever the weather."

Writing the minutes of a meeting is not always the easiest job, but Sue does it brilliantly, making sure that the important discussions and decisions are captured for the record. She also very kindly hosts our committee meetings at her home, where there is always a warm welcome – and, importantly, plenty of excellent coffee!

We're very grateful to Sue for keeping us organised and for the time and enthusiasm she brings to her role.



Give Wheelchair Curling a Try!

One of Scotland's oldest traditional team sports, curling has a history stretching back centuries. Originally played on frozen lochs and ponds, Scotland's "roaring game" has certainly come a long way since then!

If you watched the Winter Olympics, you'll know that curling is a sport Scotland excels at. For anyone with a mobility impairment, however, it may have seemed like a sport that was simply out of reach. Now, there's an opportunity to enjoy this very Scottish sport right here in Dumfries, in a way that is accessible to everyone.

Two members of the wheelchair curling group, Sally and Ian, came along to our Discover Dumfries u3a event and were very impressed with the range of activities we offer. However, we don't offer curling so they asked us to spread the word about this fun, friendly and inclusive sport. Wheelchair curling is suitable for people of all ages and abilities, and you certainly don't need to be an experienced athlete to have a go.

As well as being fun, wheelchair curling offers the chance to meet new people, make friends, build skills and confidence – and simply enjoy taking part in a sport again.

So, if you or someone you know has a mobility impairment, why not go along, try a few stones and see where it takes you. And you don't have to go alone. Partners are welcome too, so why not make it a shared experience? You'll be made very welcome.

Wheelchair curling takes place at Dumfries Ice Bowl, King Street, Dumfries, DG2 9AN. For more information, contact graham@dumfriescurling.co.uk.

From Art Group to Exhibition – Kathleen's Artistic Journey

Our Chair, Kathleen Simpson, is celebrating an exhibition of her artwork at the Bank Gallery in Thornhill.

Kathleen's exhibition brings together work she has created over the past ten years, using a variety of mediums including her love of textiles. Her artistic journey has developed considerably since she joined the u3a Art Group in 2015 – and she credits the group with helping her to progress her work and giving her the opportunity to experiment and develop her skills.

She began with acrylics, then dabbled in watercolour, tried her hand at oils and eventually discovered pastels. That willingness to explore different mediums has helped Kathleen develop her own artistic style and, ten years after joining the Art Group, she has now reached the point where she is exhibiting her work publicly.

The exhibition is at the Bank Gallery, Thornhill, throughout October. The gallery is open Tuesday to Sunday, 10am–4pm.



Theatre Trips with Stewartry u3a

Our neighbours at Stewartry u3a have kindly offered some spare places on two of their upcoming theatre trips, and we're pleased to be able to share the opportunities with Dumfries u3a members.

Both trips include transport from and back to Castle Douglas (included in the prices below), although this may be negotiable as tickets are now being offered to other groups.

Friday 2 October – Swallow Theatre, Whithorn
A Ghost Among the Living | Matinee | £26

The bus will leave Castle Douglas at around 12 noon at the earliest, returning before 6.00 pm.

Thursday 12 November – The Steamie
King's Theatre, Glasgow | Matinee | £49.50

The bus will leave Castle Douglas at around 10.00 am, with a lunch break at Silverburn included on the outward journey. It will return to Castle Douglas before 8.00 pm.

If either trip appeals to you, please contact Kev Jones in the first instance, preferably by email at mysta.kev@gmail.com. You can also telephone 07856 400160; if there is no answer, please leave a message and Kev will get back to you.

It's lovely to have the opportunity to share activities between neighbouring u3as, and we hope some Dumfries members will be able to take advantage of these theatre trips.

Please note: places are limited and available on a first-come basis.

How Did Your Group Begin?

One of our members, Juanita McNeish, recently got in touch with an idea for *The Roundup*. Juanita says she enjoys most subjects, although she admits to being more of an indoor type, and would love to hear how some of our groups got started.

Who had the original idea? How did you find other people who were interested? How did you decide what you would do, where you would meet and who would organise it? And, perhaps most interestingly, did everything go according to plan – or did things take an unexpected turn along the way?

Juanita says, "As a writer I just love hearing other people's stories and experiences." I suspect she isn't alone!

With our Group Leaders' Meeting taking place on Tuesday 29 September, it seems like the perfect time to start collecting some of those stories. We know there are nearly 40 groups within Dumfries u3a, with more on the way, and every one of them must have a story behind its beginnings.

So, if you are a Group Leader, we'd love to hear your group's origin story. It doesn't have to be a grand tale – perhaps it started with a conversation over coffee, an idea that wouldn't go away, or simply a few people wondering, "Wouldn't it be great if...?"

And if the group ended up becoming something quite different from what you originally envisaged, even better!

Send your stories to Carol Moyes for a future issue of *The Roundup*. You never know – your group's story might inspire someone else to start a group of their own.

Could You Give a Little of Your Time?

If you have a few hours to spare, two local organisations are currently looking for volunteers and would love to hear from you.

WWT Caerlaverock Wetland Centre has a number of volunteering opportunities available and is particularly looking for people to help as Visitor Centre Volunteers. It's a chance to support the work of this wonderful local wetland centre, meet people and spend time in a unique natural environment.

There are a number of volunteer opportunities available, so if you would like to find out more, visit the [WWT volunteering vacancies page](#).

Closer to home, the Marie Curie Charity Shop on Dumfries High Street is also urgently seeking volunteers to help the charity's vital work supporting people and families affected by terminal illness in our community.

Could you spare a few hours to join their friendly team? If you'd like to find out more, pop into the shop and ask for Shelly or Christine.

Whether you enjoy meeting people, supporting your local community or simply want to put some spare time to good use, volunteering can be a rewarding way to get involved.

Could You Be a Bell Ringer?

Did you know that St John's Church in Dumfries has a ring of eight bells?

Dumfries u3a member, Ann Roberts, is one of the church's bell ringers and would love to encourage more people to discover this fascinating hobby.

Change ringing is relatively uncommon in Scotland, with only around 20 towers, and Dumfries is the only one in southern Scotland. The local band would welcome new ringers of any age, whether you are a complete beginner or someone who has rung before. It's a sociable hobby that keeps both mind and body active, and there are opportunities to ring for Sunday services and special occasions.

Practice takes place on Thursday evenings. Interested? Contact Ann on 07731 864056 if you would like to know more.

Group Spotlight

Craft & Chat – A New Season Begins

It was lovely to get Craft & Chat back together for the start of our new season, and even more exciting to discover that our successful Discover Dumfries u3a event had generated 17 expressions of interest in the group.

Fifteen people came along to our first meeting this month, including a mixture of existing members and some new faces. As Lochvale House Café was already booked, we decided to meet in my living room instead. It was a little cosy, to say the least, but there was plenty of room for crafting and chatting – just not necessarily for everyone to stretch their arms out at the same time!

For our first project of the new season, we decided to crochet poppies to donate to the Caring for our Community poppy drape, which will feature in the Remembrance Garden opposite St Michael's Church. It seemed like a lovely way to combine our love of crafting with a contribution to an important local project. The poppies, however, turned out to be rather more challenging than we had anticipated! They were particularly tricky for those who had never crocheted before, and there was quite a lot of concentration, unpicking and trying again. Fortunately, there was also plenty of help and encouragement from the more experienced crocheters – and nobody let a rebellious crochet hook spoil the fun.

As well as getting to know our new members, we spent time discussing ideas for future crafts, and there were lots of suggestions for things we could try. Our next meeting will be

Brusho painting, following a suggestion from one of our new members, Morag. She has kindly offered to take the lead and demonstrate the technique for us, so we're looking forward to seeing what we can create.

Most importantly, there was lots and lots of chat and laughter throughout the afternoon. Whether we were successfully crocheting poppies, struggling with crochet stitches or simply sharing ideas and catching up, it was great fun to be together again.

It looks like Craft & Chat is going to have another busy and creative year!

Contributed by and photographs by Carol Moyes

The Craft & Chat Group meets on the 3rd Tuesday of the month in Lochvale House.. Contact Carol Moyes, Group Leader, for further information.





The Smartphone, Computer and Technology Group

Our group – which is concerned with addressing its members' practical problems with smartphones, computers and technology in day-to-day life – is resuming its meetings in late September.

Members bring their problems to the group – which includes people with a background in computing and extensive use of smartphones. We try to assist or suggest when they need to get professional assistance. We also share information about new issues which we have come across, and new apps, etc which might be of interest to members.

Contributed by Jeremy Shearmur

The Smartphone, Computer and Technology Group meets on the last Monday of the month during in members' homes. Contact Jeremy Shearmur, Group Leader, for further information.

Drama and Discussion

The group started during the Covid lockdown, and has continued to operate using the internet. Members are currently taking out paid subscriptions to National Theatre at Home ([ntathome.com](https://www.ntathome.com)).

We discuss which of their numerous and varied offerings, contemporary and classic, we will all watch online (by way of laptops or smart TVs), and then meet using Zoom to discuss them. Most recently, we have seen a new production of 'The Importance of Being Earnest' and are about to see 'Macbeth'. But we also view completely new material, and may occasionally view live productions in Dumfries.

Contributed by Jeremy Shearmur

The Drama and Discussion Group meets every two or three weeks on Mondays by Zoom. Contact Jeremy Shearmur, Group Leader, for further information.

Science and Technology Group

This group meets to discuss issues of mutual interest in science and technology. Members take it in turns to tell each other about an issue, which leads on to general discussion. Topics which we have considered recently have ranged from controversies about the supply of blood, through early jet engines, to how scientific knowledge is spread, and Robert Putnam's work on the fall-off of membership of voluntary associations in Western countries, and its significance. In October, one of our members will be leading our discussion by talking to us about his 40 years in computing.

Contributed by Jeremy Shearmur

The Science and Technology Group meets on the last Tuesday of the month in the Group Leader's home. Contact Jeremy Shearmur, Group Leader, for further information.

Discussion on Religion

This group is concerned in broad terms with the history and sociology of religious ideas. We have had discussions about different features of many of the world's religions, as well as about such particular topics as what got into the New Testament – and what didn't – and why.

Meetings usually take the form of a member introducing our discussion, or having a visitor who tells us something about the organisation with which they are associated. (Visitors have included a member of the Society of Friends, a local Imam, a Catholic priest, a Baptist, a Church of Scotland Minister and a member of the Latter Day Saints (Mormons).) After the summer break, our meetings will include a member introducing a discussion of Gnosticism, a visitor talking about consciousness, and a member talking about individual choice with regard to ritual and belief.

Our discussions are friendly and respectful, and our members come from a variety of religious backgrounds – including Presbyterian, Catholic, Society of Friends, and Methodist – and none.

Contributed by Jeremy Shearmur

The Discussion on Religion Group meets on the 2nd Tuesday in the month in the North West Resource Centre. Contact Jeremy Shearmur, Group Leader, for further information.

Book Group – Non-fiction

This small group meets once a month to discuss a work of non-fiction suggested by one of its members, and chosen by the group as a whole. What we have looked at has been very varied, from (gentle) true crime, through history, contemporary politics, and what had made for economic growth. Examples from the last two years include Kate Summerscale's *The Peepshow* on the murders at 10 Rillington Place and their background; anthropologist Nigel Barley's amusing *The Innocent Anthropologist* on what it is actually like to do 'fieldwork' abroad; Ariana Neumann's *When Time Stopped*, a memoir of her family at the time of the holocaust; Kassia St Clair's *The Golden Thread: How Fabric Changed History*, Steve Richards' *Turning Points: Crisis and Change in Modern Britain*, and Ben Macintyre's *Colditz: Prisoners of the Castle: The incredible true story of WW2's most infamous Nazi prison*; David Landes' *Wealth and Poverty of Nations*; Simon Winder's *The Man Who Saved Britain* (on James Bond!), and Ian Mortimer's *Medieval Horizons: Why the Middle Ages Matter*.

As a consequence of ill-health, the group is now small and will need new members if it is to continue. Our experience as members has been enjoyable – not least as we get to read and discuss books which we would have never thought of looking at, if we had just been making choices for ourselves.

Contributed by Jeremy Shearmur

The Non-Fiction Book Group meets on the 4th Thursday of the month in members' homes. Contact Jeremy Shearmur, Group Leader, for further information.

Discussion Group

Curious minds and great conversations

Do you enjoy a good conversation? Are you interested in hearing different viewpoints, exploring new ideas and perhaps occasionally having your thinking challenged? Then the Discussion Group could be just what you're looking for.

The group meets on the first Tuesday of each month, from 10.30am to 12.30pm at the North West Resource Centre, College Road, Dumfries.

There's certainly no shortage of things to talk about. Recent and upcoming topics cover a wonderfully eclectic mix, from generations and learning to technology, society, travel, sport, culture and community.

You might find yourself discussing whether falling IQ scores among Generation Z are linked to screen-based education, or considering the idea that humans learn best from other humans. Other discussions explore life lessons and which decade of our lives we might choose to relive.

Technology provides plenty of food for thought too: is AI the answer to our problems, or the start of a slippery slope? There are also discussions about changing trends in river cruising, the responsibilities of small community organisations and topical issues where personal rights and community interests collide.

And if sport is your thing, there's even scope for a lively discussion about supporter misconduct and the possible responses to it!

The group describes itself as friendly, lively and vibrant, with a welcoming Dumfries u3a atmosphere. You don't need to be an expert or have all the answers — everyone has something to say, and everyone has something to learn.

If you enjoy being curious, asking questions and discovering what other people think, why not come along?

Contributed by Eric Price

The Discussion Group meets on the 1st Tuesday of the month in the North West Resource Centre. Contact Eric Price, Group Leader, for further information.



DISCUSSION GROUP
Share ideas. Listen. Learn. Together.

Meets on the **1st TUESDAY** of the month
10:30 to 12:30 at the North West Resource Centre, College Road, Dumfries DG2 0BX

A flavour of this month's topics

- GENERATIONS & LEARNING**
 - Gen Z: Are falling IQ scores real — and is screen-based education part of the story?
 - Humans learn best from humans — what does that mean for the future of teaching?
- LIFE & EXPERIENCE**
 - Your most valuable life lesson
 - If you could relive one decade of your life, which would you choose — and why?
- TECHNOLOGY & SOCIETY**
 - AI: Is it the answer to our problems or the start of a slippery slope?
- SPORT & CULTURE**
 - Celtic v Hearts: What is the right response to supporter misconduct?
 - Fine the club
 - Strip the title and award it to Hearts
- TRAVEL & CHANGING TRENDS**
 - Are river cruises on the Rhine and Danube coming to an end?
- COMMUNITY & RESPONSIBILITY**
 - Reaction to the Outer Hebrides assistance-dog legal case
 - When personal rights clash with the survival of a small community organisation

JOIN US!
Friendly, lively, vibrant discussion with a welcoming Dumfries u3a atmosphere.
Everyone has something to say. Everyone has something to learn.

Curious minds. Great conversations. Stronger together.

Dowsing Group – Looking Ahead

The Dowsing Group has an exciting programme ahead. On Wednesday 30 September, professional dowser Adrian Incledon-Webber will once again lead a full-day workshop for the group. The session has already attracted 24 dowsers, so we may well see some new u3a members as a result!

The programme continues through the autumn, with u3a member Kathy Usher leading sessions on house healing in October and November. Then, in December, Kathy has something rather different planned – a quiz to round off the year.

It sounds as though the Dowsing Group has plenty to look forward to!

Contributed by Linda Russell

The Dowsing Group meets on the 2nd Thursday of the month in The Cafe, Lochvale House. Contact Linda Russell, Group Leader, for further information.

Birding Group – Back for Another Season

The Birding Group gets back into action on 7 October, with two new members joining the group.

Their first outing of the new season will be to Caerlaverock, a favourite destination and a fitting place to begin another year of birdwatching.

The group also had a very encouraging response at our Discover Dumfries u3a event. Eight people came along to find out more about the group, so it will be interesting to see how many decide to join!

There's already plenty to look forward to, with another trip being planned for October next year. In the meantime, the group will be keeping its eyes and binoculars firmly focused on the birds closer to home.

Here's to another season of good sightings, good company and, hopefully, plenty of feathers!

Contributed by Monica Callander

The Birding Group meets on the 1st Wednesday (of the month) in various locations. Contact Monica Callander, Group Leader, for further information.



Practical Gardening

This active group of keen gardeners continue the season with visits to member's gardens. This is the main thrust of our activities throughout the season where we discuss, advise, observe and generally nosey around other folks' gardens. There are no two gardens the same so the variety is endless, as is the approach to the development of a piece of land, however small or large.

The meetings always begin with a get together of members present in kitchens, patios, sheds or even in the sunshine with tea/coffee and goodies.

In June, our scheduled host had to cancel the visit so we rearranged to visit the Veteran's garden in the grounds of the Crichton. This was well worth the effort. As with most of our gardens, it is very much a 'work in progress'.

The veterans work at their own pace and as they feel able, offering a couple of hours a week or more and working alone or with a companion. It's all very much to benefit them from a mental and physical viewpoint.

It was a rather wet morning but gardeners are used to all conditions. It certainly didn't bother the hens and ducks scratching around in their compounds.

Contributed by and photographs by Alistair Brown

The Practical Gardening Group meets on the 3rd Thursday in the month during the summer months in members gardens. Contact Alistair Brown, Group Leader, for further information.



A New Kind of Book Group

Are you a keen reader who enjoys discovering books that have really got people talking? Then you may be interested in our new Reading Group with an interesting twist.

This new group will focus on books that have been shortlisted for the Booker Prize and other major literary awards. It should provide plenty of scope for lively discussion — and perhaps some spirited disagreement about whether the judges got it right!

The group will be led by Helen Gage, who is already contacting people to establish which days and times will suit those interested and where the group might meet.

The group doesn't have a name yet, so if you have a suitably catchy suggestion, Helen might be interested!

If you would like to join the new group, please contact Kathleen Simpson, Chair, to register your interest.

Watch this space for more details — and get ready to read, discuss and perhaps discover your next favourite book!



Correction

Our apologies to Bill Walker whose photograph accompanying the Camera Group article in the July edition, was wrongly attributed to Terry. It's a great photo, which has featured in our publicity material, and it's only right that Bill gets the credit he deserves.

More New Groups – Could You Be Interested?

One of the great things to come out of our Discover Dumfries u3a event was the number of ideas and expressions of interest in new groups. Several members came forward with suggestions, and we are now looking at how we might get these off the ground.

Could one of these be the group you've been looking for?

Games Group – Kathy Usher

Scrabble is proving very popular, but Kathy is interested in setting up a games group that would include a variety of board games other than Scrabble. If you enjoy a good board game and would like to meet other members for some friendly games, this could be for you.

Traditional Music – Roger Browne

Fancy making some "Scratchy Noises"? Roger is interested in starting an informal traditional music group where members can get together for playing sessions, whatever instrument they play. No formal concert performances – just the opportunity to make music together and enjoy an informal session.

Coffee Group – Margaret Moffat

This one is particularly aimed at new members. Margaret has agreed to lead a coffee group where new members can meet some existing members, make friends and find out a little more about how u3a Dumfries works. Existing members are also needed to come along and support Margaret, so if you're an established member and could spare some time, please get in touch. New members who would like to attend should also contact Kathleen Simpson.

Qi Gong – Ken Humphreys

Ken would like to start a Qi Gong group. If you're familiar with Tai Chi, you may find Qi Gong interesting as it has some similarities. If you'd like to know more, get in touch with Kathleen Simpson and she can put you in contact with Ken.

Bridge for Beginners – Eric Price

A new, non-competitive Bridge group is being proposed for beginners. The idea is that members will play with different partners each time they attend, while the rules and basics of the game will be explained to those who are new to Bridge. If you've always fancied learning, this could be your chance to give it a try.

Interested?

If any of these groups sounds like something you'd enjoy, or you'd like to find out more, please get in touch with Kathleen Simpson, through the Contact form on the website. Even if a group is still at the discussion stage, your interest could help turn an idea into a new u3a group.

This month's selection from the **Enjoying Music Group**

This month the Enjoying Music Group have shared a selection of pieces by Leonard Bernstein (1918–1990).

Bernstein was a conductor, composer, pianist, and educator, with strong humanitarian views. Condensing that into 5 short videos cannot possibly do justice to the man, but u3a members do enjoy a challenge.



Symphony no 2 "Resurrection" clip of Finale **Mahler**

Bernstein developed the expressive approach to conducting compared to the minimalism of earlier conductors. Some would argue that this can be "over the top", as shown in this clip. Others suggest that his enthusiasm lifts both the audience and the musicians. He is certainly very popular with them.



Piano Concerto no 1 **Beethoven**

Like many composers, Bernstein played the piano well. Our group compared his playing with that of Martha Argerich, and even Bernstein would agree that she is the better pianist. But she did not also conduct.



The Art of Conducting no 3 The Score **Bernstein**

Bernstein made many programmes, delivered lectures and wrote extensively about music. He was a gifted communicator, and if you think that conductors simply wave their arms and keep time, then this is the video for you.



Piano Trio – 2 **Bernstein**

He was in many respects a frustrated “serious music” composer. He was in such demand as a conductor that time was scarce. He even stopped conducting for two years to develop his talents. That period was not fruitful, but he still had pieces such as *Candide* and the *Chichester Psalms*. This trio can be rather a challenge to the ears.



West Side Story Maria **Bernstein**

One of the most successful musicals must compensate for any “shortcomings” as a classical composer. Difficult to choose any single piece from *West Side Story*, but if your name is Maria, this must be the most romantic thing you have ever heard.



The Moon – Little things are important

"Stop, stop," shouted the Sun to the Moon. "Do you realise what you are doing? You are moving across my face, blocking out the light from Planet Earth. If you keep moving like this, Planet Earth will be plunged into darkness. Turn back immediately. Move back quickly. Have you gone mad?"

"No, I will not," replied the Moon, rather petulantly. "I want to teach those human beings on the earth a lesson. I want to show them that I am a force to be reckoned with. You get all the respect from them, but I am regarded as a second class citizen just to be laughed at and disregarded. I give them light to be out and about at night, I control the oceans, pulling them this way and that every day, but all I hear is praise of you and disrespectful comments about me. When the daylight goes, they will realise that I too have power."

The Sun had had trouble with his flighty assistant before, but never anything as bad as this. There was nothing he could do despite his clamours for the Moon to be sensible.

She did eventually agree to move away again after ten minutes, but in that short period of pitch darkness the Sun's thoughts and fears were almost unbearable.

When the light came back, his anger boiled over and he subjected the Moon to vociferous reprimands the like of which she had never had before from him.

"Tell me what they have done to you to deserve this?"

"Just listen to this," replied the upset Moon. "Hey, diddle diddle, the cat and the fiddle, The cow jumped over the Moon. That's what they are saying about me, ridiculing me. How can they expect me to put up with that?"

The Sun sighed deeply before answering, "But that is just a nonsense rhyme for children. It means nothing. It is just a little thing."

"Little things are important," said his recalcitrant assistant and turned away. There was no more time for talk as the hour had come for the Sun to sink below the horizon and the Moon sailed away in the darkening sky.

In normal routine the Sun and Moon had brief opportunities to meet at dawn and dusk, as one was rising and the other setting. But for some weeks afterwards there was no sign of the Moon at all. This was unsettling for the Sun who felt responsible for order in the skies and was looking for an opportunity to ensure better behaviour from his junior colleague. From the twitterings of the birds and the swishing of the trees he was aware that nobody else had seen the Moon either.



In fact, this foolish being of the night was still sulking. She had decided to withdraw, to hide from everyone behind the clouds, to deprive them of her silvery beams and leave them in shadow. She wanted to continue punishing the world until she got an apology but was making no effort to get one.

However, although she would not admit it to herself, the Moon become lonely and unhappy. It was difficult to keep in hiding behind clouds. What could she do to fill this empty time? She decided to sail far away somewhere there would be no people and at least she could move about the skies again without being seen.

Over the endless ocean she glided, tinting the edges of the waves with silver as they moved. This felt good again.

She came to a strange land---no people, but covered with vast swathes of very strange trees, the like of which she had never seen before. She tried touching their leaves with silver but it did not seem to work well. What were they? Then she remembered hearing of a land where the bong trees grow. This must be it!

She tried to find the end of the land, to return to the more friendly sea, and eventually came to a sandy beach. She spread her light over the sand and it sparkled. This was good. This was living again.

Suddenly, to her great surprise, a small group of creatures emerged from the forest. Thinking at first they were people, she made ready to flee, but then she stopped in amazement.

There was a Turkey in clerical garb, a Pig with a very sore nose with a hole in it and an Owl and a Pussycat arm in arm. The Pig carried a large tureen of mince and the others took turns of eating from it by passing round a runcible spoon, while the Turkey handed out slices of quince. The Moon was fascinated and stayed to watch the jollity, tinting each creature with silver and lighting up their happy faces.

After eating the Owl and the Pussycat, hand in hand, danced on the silvery sand, their shining faces upturned to the Moon.

As the dawn approached, the Owl took out a guitar and sang a song of appreciation and thanks to all who had made this wedding celebration possible, finally concluding with a rousing request for three cheers for the Moon, without whom the celebrations on the beach would have been impossible.

The creatures disappeared into the forest and the Moon lingered, thoughtful, forgetting to disappear before the Sun rose from the sea, a large shining sphere.

"At last I have found you," he roared. "What is going on?"

He launched into a tirade of angry reprimands...

The Moon listened quietly for a while, then stopped him and explained that she had realised her happiness depended on doing her job by spreading light around to everyone. She went on to say she was sorry to have disrupted everything, and finished by saying, "It may seem a little thing, but the Owl's appreciation song was important."

The Sun smiled, as the Moon disappeared.

All was well in the heavens thereafter.

Ruth Thomson



Monthly Quiz Challenge

Time to test your knowledge



This month, it's a prize quiz!

If you came along to the Discover Dumfries u3a event, you may already have had a go at this month's quiz and handed in your answers. But don't worry if you missed it – you can still bring your answers along to the October monthly meeting for a chance to win the prize.

We'll therefore be keeping the answers under wraps until next month, when we'll reveal them and announce the winner!

Find the missing link

Identify the single missing link word that can be placed after the first word and before the second word to create two valid compound words or phrases.

- | | |
|----------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Slow --- Picture | 9. Shotgun --- Licence |
| 2. Field --- Advisor | 10. Ox --- Tied |
| 3. True --- Affair | 11. Tickled --- Gin |
| 4. Mobile --- Line | 12. Abstract --- Deco |
| 5. Black --- Room | 13. Country --- Genre |
| 6. Hail --- Wall | 14. Virtual --- Television |
| 7. Rain --- Tie | 15. Fashion --- School |
| 8. Jet --- Smith | |

Carol's Kitchen

something delicious to try at home

Traditional Greek Orange Cake with Syrup (Portokalopita)

This is my cake of the moment because it's easy to make, delicious and almost nobody's heard of it which ... means they don't know if you got it right or not!

Once baked, you soak the cake in half a litre of orange syrup, so it's definitely not for the calorie-conscious. But it makes the cake wonderfully moist and it works just as well as a dessert with a large dollop of thick Greek yoghurt, as it does with your afternoon cuppa.

Ingredients

For the cake

230 g plain Greek yoghurt (I use the 10% fat type)
235 ml vegetable oil
150 g sugar
120 ml orange juice
1 tsp baking powder
1 tsp baking soda
¼ tsp salt
zest of 2 oranges
1 tsp vanilla extract
450g filo pastry (about 2 packets)
4 medium sized eggs

For the syrup

350ml water
300 g sugar
80 ml orange juice
zest of 1 orange
1 cinnamon stick
1 ml orange blossom water (optional)

Method

Start by preparing the syrup. Combine the water, sugar, orange juice, the cinnamon stick and the orange blossom water, if you are using it. Bring the ingredients to a boil; once it starts boiling, reduce heat, and simmer uncovered for 15 minutes. Remove from heat and let cool completely.



While the syrup is being prepared, you must dry out the filo. Preheat your oven to 200 degrees Fahrenheit. Open up your phyllo sheets, and one by one, scrunch them up and place them on a baking sheet. Be careful that you don't scrunch them too tightly. You will need 2 or 3 baking sheets to accommodate all of your filo.

Bake for 10 minutes. After the 10 minutes have passed, flip each filo sheet over and bake for an additional 8 minutes. Turn off your oven and leave the filo in the oven. Keep the oven door open slightly to further dry out the filo. The aim is to get them crunchy but not coloured. Once completely dry use your hands to crumble the filo into small pieces, and set them aside.

Preheat oven to 180 °C.

In the large mixing bowl of a stand mixer, or use a hand mixer, combine the eggs and the sugar and beat for 3 – 4 minutes, until it is a pale yellow colour.

Add the orange zest, Greek yoghurt, vanilla extract, baking powder, baking soda and salt, and mix until just combined.

Next add the oil and the orange juice to the bowl, and mix to combine well.

Using a rubber spatula begin to incorporate your dried out and crumbled filo into the cake batter, a little bit at a time. If you put all the pieces in at once, they will clump together.

After you have incorporated all of your filo into the batter, pour the mixture into a greased baking pan (*I use a 20 cm round tin lined with baking parchment*). Bake for 50–60 minutes in the middle rack of your oven until your portokalopita is a nice golden colour. Check it at 50 minutes. You don't want to burn it so cover with a sheet of foil if it is looking too brown.

Once your portokalopita is baked remove it from the oven and immediately pierce it in several places with a long clean skewer.

Pour your cooled syrup onto the hot cake, one ladle at a time. Allow each ladle to be absorbed into the cake before adding the next one. Repeat until all of the syrup has been used.

Let your cake cool before cutting, to allow the syrup to be fully absorbed.

There are many recipes for portokalopita, and it's variations, online. This recipe is originally from Mia Kouppa.





Out and About



what's on locally

Lindsey Mendick: Growing Pains

Loreburn Centre, Dumfries High Street

Jupiter+ is an ambitious off-site programme from award winning Jupiter Artland, Edinburgh, that brings world-class art to high streets across Scotland. This year, artist Lindsey Mendick presents *Growing Pains*, a new site-specific installation comprising ceramic sculptures, stained glass, office furniture and a film, set in an abandoned estate agent's office.

For more information click [here](#)

Colour: the Paletter of S J Peplow

Kirkcudbright Galleries

Over 70 paintings by one of Scotland's most important and best loved artists Samuel J. Peplow, who took such immense pleasure in the use of colour and who observed with such care and painted with such fluent talent, will be gathered for Kirkcudbright Galleries 2026 Summer Exhibition.

For more information click [here](#)

Shambellie House Annual Quilt Festival

Shambellie House, New Abbey

Enjoy the selection of over 400 quilts, specialist collections, raffle, tombola, demonstrations, sale of fabrics including Susan Briscoe's Japanese fabrics. The festival also includes our "Japanese Challenge Wallhangings" made by quilters from all over the place as well as our local school children and our wellbeing class members.

For more information click [here](#)

Walking the Port Road Line – a talk by Alan McLellan

Kirkpatrick Durham Village Hall, 1st October at 7.00 pm

Join Alan McLellan, aka 'Alan the Railway Man', to walk the old Port Road railway line from Dumfries to Stranraer, sometimes known as 'The Paddy Line', with vintage film clips and photos illustrating his journey into the past to raise funds for Cancer Research. Entry by Donation.

For more information click [here](#)



If you know of a local event that you think might appeal to our members, please contact Carol Moyes, Newsletter Editor, with the details



A Perfect Day... with a Little Chip



I have a number of mugs by Keith Brymer Jones*. I love them because they are the perfect size for my morning coffee, and they all have a colourful word or phrase stamped on them.

One of my favourite mugs has **perfect day!** stamped on it ... it also has a little chip in it.

I can't remember exactly how it happened. Perhaps it was knocked against the sink, or maybe it had a close encounter with another mug in the cupboard. Whatever the cause, there it is: a tiny imperfection on something I still use and enjoy every day.

I wouldn't give it to a guest, of course. I have standards! But I wouldn't dream of throwing it away either.

And that got me thinking about the idea of what is a perfect day?

We often imagine a perfect day as one when everything goes according to plan. The sun shines, we get everything done, nobody is difficult, and the coffee is just the right strength. Nothing goes wrong, nothing gets forgotten and there isn't a single irritating little hiccup to spoil things.

But how often does a day like that actually happen?

There is nearly always something. We wake up later than intended. We forget where we put our keys. Someone says something thoughtless. We burn the toast, miss the bus or discover that the thing we were looking forward to has been cancelled.

And yet, sometimes, despite all of that, we can look back at the end of the day and think, *'That was a lovely day.'*

Perhaps perfection isn't about everything being flawless. Perhaps it's about recognising that something can be wonderful even when it has a few imperfections. Like my mug. The little chip doesn't stop it holding coffee and it still makes me smile.



Maybe our days are a bit like that.

The things that don't go quite right can become part of the story we tell about them. Sometimes they even become the moments we remember most fondly. The holiday where it rained every day but turned into an adventure. The meal that went wrong but we laughed till our sides hurt. The afternoon when nothing worked out as planned, but a friend arrived for a coffee and made everything better.

We don't have to pretend that disappointments are delightful or that difficult days are secretly perfect. Some things genuinely hurt, and it's important to acknowledge that. But perhaps we can also learn to leave a little room for the good that exists alongside the imperfect.

So, if today doesn't go exactly as planned, don't be too quick to write it off. Look for the small pleasures. Notice the unexpected kindness. Enjoy the coffee, even if the mug does have a chip in it. Because a perfect day might not be a day without flaws. It might simply be a day that, despite its little imperfections, gives us something to be grateful for.

And if all else fails, there's always tomorrow.

Just make sure you use your favourite mug.



Keep In Touch

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We're here to help!

For all committee and other contact details, visit our website and select **Contacts** from the menu.



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