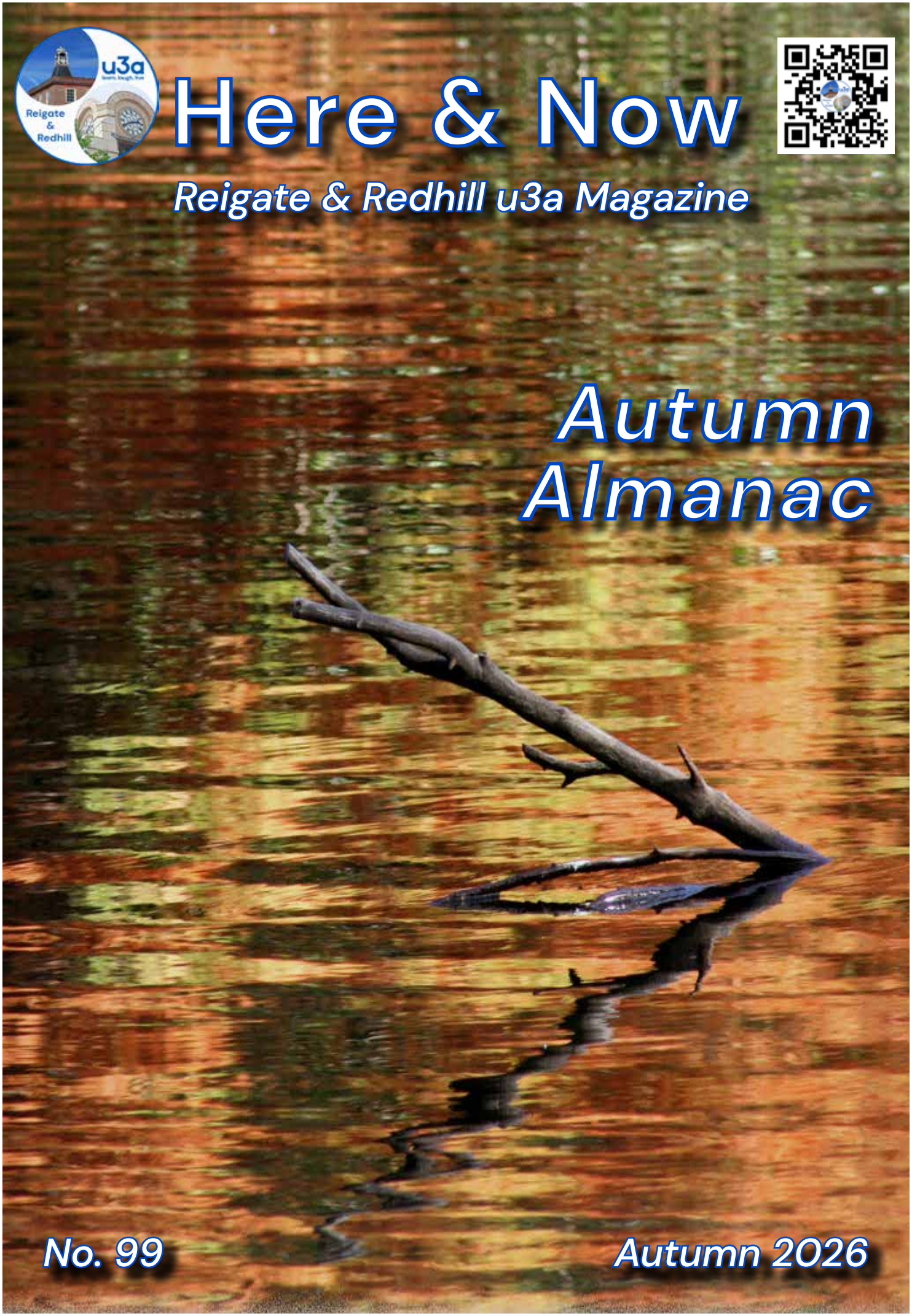
Here & Now

Reigate & Redhill u3a Magazine

Autumn Almanac



No. 99

Autumn 2026

Editorial
Autumn 2026

Welcome from the Editor

I hope you enjoy this Autumn edition of 'Here and Now'. You will notice we have not included Winter as we have changed to only having two editions a year, Spring and Autumn. Thankfully for this edition, members have given us several articles without twisting any arms, which has made our job much easier! A massive thank you to them.

The title 'Autumn Almanac' lead us to a lively brainstorm of what we could include. Carol's photographs helped enormously giving us a colourful front and back cover. Deb has been a super newish member of the editorial team researching dates and historical facts. Despite always being busy she is the first to send her articles to Shirley for her to work her magic. Thankfully Sally could come to the rescue and lead the holiday to Norfolk. Her ability to organise and use her people skills came into play. Because she had so many great u3a holidays behind her, the trip was a great success and as her article shows everyone had a great time. Although Pat King has retired from being on the magazine team, I'm delighted to include one of her published poems. The narrative writing group 2 hold a monthly short story competition and I'm pleased to include one of their chosen winners. It's really nice to include as many groups as we can and celebrate their achievements.

The very hot summer caused lots of problems for our gardeners and farmers. Many of us are thinking that we will need to plan differently in future if our gardens are going to survive the changing climate. John Cousins has kindly written about the changes he is thinking about and Christine Kirby's article about her allotment is well worth reading.

I know it has been harder for the committee to give us meeting information for the next six months. Please remember the website will always keep you up to speed with what is happening. The groups co-ordinators have sent us a lively looking page so please read about what is available to you.

The Spring edition will be our 100th edition. We would like to include as much archive material as we can. If you remember the first copies of 'Here and Now' we would love to hear from you. If you have been a member for many years, do you remember how news was shared before H&N? Do you still have some old copies of H&N before Shirley or I were on the team? If you could tell us what you have liked about the magazine. Were there any articles you particularly remember?

I hope you can help us.

Tina Pankhurst



From the Chair

Hello!

My autumn story is all about our September camping holiday in Cornwall and the wonderful places we visited.

In Tintagel we went to see the Orpheus male choir and enjoyed not only traditional Cornish songs, but also an auction. Several farmers were in the group, and products auctioned included sacks of potatoes, runner beans, home-baked biscuits and cakes. Starting at £1, the hammer went down for very low amounts. Our raffle prize was a DVD "Fisherman's Friends", which featured the Golden Lion pub where we had enjoyed a drink and watched cars parking on the beach whilst the tide was out – very risky!

Highlights for St Ives were visiting the Barbara Hepworth museum – fortunately we found a parking space before we started squeezing our campervan down narrow streets as directed by Google SatNav! We cycled across Cornwall (just 9 miles!) to visit St Michael's Mount, walking the causeway. Our hike up see to the castle was very rewarding.

Near Land's End, we had two wonderful visits. The first was to Geevor Tin Mine. Our fascinating guide had worked in the mine before it closed in 1990 and vividly brought to life the experience of working deep below the Bristol Channel in temperatures over 30°, straining with a heavy drill above his head, with water and oil dripping down his body, and in close, sweaty confines with his comrades.





The second visit was to the Minack Open Air Theatre where we watched Iolanthe by Gilbert & Sullivan being staged. A fantastic experience sitting on ancient stone seats cut into the cliff, with the amazing back-drop of neighbouring Porthcurno beach and open sea.



Finally near Looe we visited the Lost Gardens of Heligan, where the home-grown autumn harvest (pictured) was grown, and where our walk took us to see the Red Fox statue carved out of a huge fallen rhododendron.

Our trip reminded me how many lovely, sometimes hidden corners of Britain we have – and how we should share more of these wonderful places with our members, either through Holidays or Outings – a challenge going forward, as these teams currently need support. Additionally, we should not overlook the powerful tool we have with Here & Now in highlighting for you, in pictures and with words, experiences our members have enjoyed. A big thank you to Tina and her team for bringing our magazine together.

Best wishes

Gill Haimes

ALMANAC

What is an almanac?

The dictionary definition of an almanac is an annual reference book, containing a calendar and sometimes astronomical data, the rising and setting times for the sun & moon, the phases of the moon and details of eclipses.



The word almanac is thought to come from either the Greek word almenichaiaka, meaning calendar or from the Arabic word for climate al-manakh. The first known almanac was possibly penned by Rabbi Solomon Jarchus in 1150 AD.

An almanac would sometimes include long range weather forecast, planting guide, general information about historical dates and ecclesiastical festivals and saints days. When I was a child, we always used to have a copy of Old Moore's Almanac in the house. This was first published in 1697 and was written by Francis Moore, who was a physician and astrologer and who served at the court of Charles II. Surprisingly, it is still available today, either on line or from retailers like Waterstones. It includes predictions for the year ahead, and it was always fun to look back in December and see how many of them came true!

Some Old Moore predictions for 2026 include:

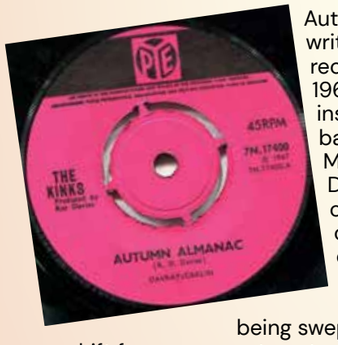
Some high profile artificial intelligence mistakes will go viral.

The publication warned of dangerous conditions leading to a mini ice age, severe flooding and avalanche clusters in Europe.

Political friction was forecast amongst political leaders (when isn't there)?

Cork was predicted to claim the 2026 Hurling Crown – but they weren't even in the final as Limerick beat Galway!

The Kinks Autumn Almanac



Autumn Almanac was written by Ray Davies and recorded by The Kinks in 1967. It was, reportedly, inspired by a hunch-backed gardener in Muswell Hill, where Ray Davies was from and celebrates British working class life and the routine changing of the seasons. The lyrics talk about 'falling yellow leaves' being swept into a sack and the shift from summer to autumn. Also mentioned are 'football on a Saturday, roast beef on a Sunday' and the pleasure of eating toasted current buns with tea.

The original line-up of The Kinks comprised the Davies brothers, Ray & Dave, Peter Quaife and Mick Avory. Ray was the principal songwriter. It's unclear who came up with the name The Kinks, but rumour has it that Kinky was originally chosen to stand out, but the band weren't too happy with that!

Ray & Dave Davies had a volatile sibling relationship; they bickered about who deserved the credit for a guitar riff. There was a fight on a tour bus in 1996, just before they finished touring. At Dave's 50th birthday party Ray picked Dave's birthday cake from the table, threw it on the floor and then stamped on it!

There has been a change in their relationship, following health scares and they are now speaking to each other!

Reading about the arguments of the Davies brothers led me to think about other

Squabbling Siblings

Two recent examples of squabbling siblings are, of course, Princes William & Harry and Liam and Noel Gallagher, but going further back there are some other notable family feuds.

The Everly Brothers, Phil & Don, could sing together beautifully, but their private lives were less harmonious. After an on-stage bust up they didn't speak for 10 years.

Olivia de Havilland and Joan Fontaine were rivals throughout their lives and were both nominated for best actress at the 1942 Academy awards. Joan Fontaine won for Suspicion.

The Andrews Sisters apparently hated each other at the end of their four decade career and didn't speak off stage.

Deb Chapman

Autumn

Harvest Festival

Usually in September there are Harvest Festival church services thanking God for the good harvest. Many schools will have a special assembly when the children will bring in food to be shared with the elderly or poor.

Oktoberfest

Oktoberfest is celebrated in Munich over a two-week period ending on the first Sunday in October. It was started in 1810 when the crown Prince of Bavaria married Princess Therese von Sachsen-Hildburghausen. There were 5 days of celebrations ending with a horse race. Since then, Oktoberfest has grown hugely. Only breweries in the Munich area are allowed to sell their beer at the festival and each one sets up an enormous tent which can hold thousands of people. The festival begins with a colourful parade. The mayor is invited to tap the first keg of beer. There are funfairs, displays of German culture and costume, brass band music, dancing but mostly drinking! Around two million gallons of beer are drunk by around six million festival goers.

Halloween

In Britain, Halloween, on the 31st October, has become a big event especially for children. It's a time to dress up as ghosts and scary characters. A time to go 'Trick or Treating' to apple bob and to carve out pumpkins. But really it marks the eve of the Christian feast of All Hallows' Day or All Saints Day. Going back to Celtic times there was a festival called 'Samhain' which celebrated the end of Summer and the beginning of Winter. It symbolised the boundary between the living and the dead. The Celts believed it was the night when the ghosts of the dead would visit the living and huge bonfires were lit to ward off the evil spirits. The 1st November is All Saints' Day when saints and martyrs are still remembered and honoured.

Firework Night

On the 5th November we remember the failed Gunpowder Plot when Guy Fawkes and his men plotted to blow up the Houses of Parliament.

The Day of the Dead

The Day of the Dead is celebrated in Mexico over two days. It's time to remember the souls of the relations who have died. It's a day to welcome their spirits back for a joyful reunion with the family still living. On 1st November the spirits of babies and the young are remembered and on 2nd November adults who have passed away are remembered too. Home-made altars are created, with photos of the dead. The altars are decorated with orange marigolds, candles and the favourite food and drinks the deceased liked. Many will visit the cemetery where their loved ones are laid to rest with food, music and stories to be told.

Remembrance Day

On the 11th November we remember those who have died during war. It's a day of National reflection when we wear poppies symbolising the poppies on the WW1 battlefields. There are church services, parades, wreath laying at the Cenotaph and war memorials all round the country.

Divali

Divali or Diwali is the Hindu celebration of light. It is celebrated over five days sometime between mid-October and mid-November. It symbolises light over darkness, good over evil and knowledge over ignorance. On the first day people will clean their house and buy a piece of gold or a kitchen utensil to bring them good fortune. On Day two they will light clay oil lamps and create colourful floor designs with petals or dry powders. On Day three the celebrations really begin with prayers to Lakshmi, then food and fireworks. Day four is the start of the new year so presents are given and good wishes shared. On Day five, brothers will visit their married sisters and share a lavish meal and love.

Tina Pankhurst



Coffee mornings

Coffee Mornings are usually held in the lounge of The Light in Redhill, meeting once a month on alternate Tuesdays and Thursdays. They are a great way to meet with other members. Computer support is always on hand so bring your laptops, tablets or phones. Coffees and teas are available for purchase.
We will meet from 10.15 to 11.15 on the following dates: Thursday 12 November, Tuesday 8 December, Thursday 14 January (followed by a meeting for new members), Tuesday 9 February, Thursday 11 March, Tuesday 13 April and Thursday 13 May with Plant Swap (venue Reigate Park Church). Do check our website What's On calendar and under Coffee Mornings for the latest information, as there could be a revision to date or venue.

Outings

Hampton Court Palace Festive Fayre - Friday 4 December
At time of going to press, this outing is fully booked.

The programme for 2027 has not yet been developed and, indeed, the team require new members. If you'd like to help, please contact chair@rru3a.org.uk.



All details for outings are published in our monthly bulletin and on the rru3a website What's On page https://www.rru3a.org.uk/post/outings, including link to the booking form. Advance payment must be made. In case of queries, contact the Outings team email outings@rru3a.org.uk, or telephone Richard on 07929 715198.

Technical assistance for completion of online booking forms is available at our coffee mornings.

Holidays

2 May 2027 – 5 days from £1,129
The Delights of Holland & Keukenhof

We will see - Keukenhof, Dutch Bulbfields cruise, Amsterdam with a guided walking tour of the Jewish Quarter, Amsterdam canal cruise, Koninklijke, Porceleyne Fles, Delft and Mauritshuis.

Bookings are proving popular and it is likely at time of going to press that this holiday will be fully booked.

Contact Diane Hoy for details, email holidays@rru3a.co.uk, tel 07726 341677. All participants are expected to undertake scheduled visits unless they choose to remain at the hotel for the day, having informed the holiday organiser in advance. Please contact Michael English at Tailored Travel michael@tailored-travel.co.uk if you have any mobility concerns before booking.



Monthly Meetings - 2-4pm

We are currently holding meetings with some people present at Reigate Park Church and others watching online at home.

Friday 11 Dec 2026 End of Year Show
An hour's entertainment including comedy, music and sing-along followed by tea, coffee, mince pies. Entertainment will be provided by the Comedy Improvisation Group, Handbells, Singing for Pleasure and Ukuleles.

Friday 8 Jan 2027
Heralds, Heraldry and Coats of Arms presented by Roger Duckworth
An introduction to the development of Heraldry, the functions of the Heralds (medieval equivalent of Facebook!) and the creation of Coats of Arms.

Friday 5 Feb 2027
Horatio Nelson: Life and Loves presented by James Taylor
Discover with Dr James Taylor, a former curator of pictures at the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, the extraordinary life of Vice-Admiral Lord Horatio Nelson (1758-1805) through period paintings, drawings and prints. Nelson was a charismatic and complex character who met his premature death on the deck of HMS Victory on 21st October 1805 at the age of 47. Nelson was admired by his men afloat who recognised him as an inspirational leader, but he was lampooned ashore for his relationship with Lady Emma Hamilton.

Friday 12 Mar 2027
(NB the March meeting will be on the second Friday)
Bees and Honey: Tradition, Myth, Symbol and Magic presented by Peter Smith
Bees and honey have been with us from the earliest times and appear in many of our oldest myths and legends. We take a light-hearted look at some of these stories that continue to influence us and how different aspects of bees and honey permeate our popular culture. We also look at some of the old traditions in beekeeping and how many of them are still alive and well.

Friday 2 Apr 2027
London: Bridges, Boats and Buttons presented by Andrew Warde
Discover the illuminated river, why lights on Albert Bridge are so important and what Charles Dickens was doing in a boat on a freezing cold night in January 1853.

Friday 7 May 2027
A Presentation by a Renowned Local Composer by James Francis Brown
James Francis Brown is Artistic Director of the Hertfordshire Festival of Music who has composed many pieces over the years. His musical presentation will reflect aspects of the history of Redhill and Reigate - places with some remarkable, if sometimes overlooked, artistic and scientific connections. He has written a new piece which is to be premiered in July 2027 and he will be delighted to share his creative process behind the work.

Study Days

Surrey u3a Network Study days are open to all u3a members and guests are very welcome. They are held in the Menuhin Hall, Stoke d'Abernon, starting at 9.30am with registration and running from 10am to 4pm. The fees, including coffee/tea and biscuits, are £12 for members attending and £15 for guests. To watch online at home cost is £7. Attendees should bring a packed lunch. Prior booking is necessary. All details, including how to book, can be found on the Surrey Network website. Booking forms are also available in the hall after Friday meetings.

Details of forthcoming study days are below. If details are missing at time of going to press, visit www.surreynetwork.u3asite.uk/events.

Friday 20 Nov 2027
The Music & Satire of Gilbert & Sullivan
Presented by Bernard Lockett, Gilbert & Sullivan Society
(This Study Day includes a lunch-hour recital by Menuhin School Pupils)

Friday 19 Feb 2027
Return to the Moon
Presented by Craig Underwood, Emeritus Professor of Spacecraft Engineering, University of Surrey

Friday 19 Mar 2027
AI in Society and the U3A Movement
Presented by Russell Whitworth, Andrew Freeland & Dr Andrew Rogoyski, Director, Surrey Institute for People-Centred AI, University of Surrey

Friday 16 Apr 2027
The Brilliance of British Architecture
Presented by Ian Swankie, Accredited Lecturer for The Arts Society, and a Freeman of the Worshipful Company of Art Scholars

Friday 21 May 2027
The Gut Biome - Microbial Monarchs: The Tiny Rulers of Mankind's Destiny
Presented by Dilogen de Alwis, Retired Ophthalmologist who is now practising as a Nutrition, Health and Wellness Coach

Group news

Hello, and welcome to our first Groups News in Here & Now.

In this edition, our Poetry Reading Group, led by Peter Jackson, offers a glimpse into their world — what they do, a book they've enjoyed, and a poetry quiz for you to try. We also share an update on our first three months as your Groups Coordinators. It's been a steep learning curve, but meeting so many wonderful members and receiving such generous support has helped us settle in quickly.



Debbie

Autumn may feel quieter, but it's a great time to stay connected and try something new. Please take a moment to look at the Groups Hoping to Get Started — you might find something that suits you.



We're also keen to reduce waiting lists, and we'd love to hear from anyone interested in becoming a Group Leader. Enthusiasm is all you need.

Vivienne & Debbie
Email:groups@rru3a.org.uk

Groups Trying To Get Started. Do you want to join them?



Mahjong 2 Mahjong is a fun, sociable tile game that's easy to learn and great for keeping the mind active. If you enjoy light strategy and friendly play, this new group could be perfect for you. Come and join the fun — we'd love to welcome you!



Spanish Conversation 2 Enjoy having the opportunity to speak Spanish, and polish up your rusty language to a high standard. A new Group in the process of starting looking for a few extra members. A few more members welcome — come and join in!



Tai Chi 2 A second Tai Chi group is trying to get off the ground, meeting on either a Tuesday or Wednesday morning at the Colman Redland Centre. Tai chi is based on ancient Chinese martial exercises. New members wanted - give it a try!



Pickleball is a low-impact blend of tennis, table tennis and badminton, played with a perforated plastic ball, and one of the fastest growing sports in the UK. Just a couple more members will get us started.



Film Club We have a group leader! Watch a film chosen by a member — ideally one they've seen and enjoyed — then share what you thought of it and why. Enjoy a good film and a lively conversation? Join us!
(Copilot ai generated image)



Current Affairs 5 We have a group leader wanting to start another Group covering this important topic. We are looking for more members to join this Group. Interested in what's happening in the world? Come and join the conversation!

Groups Coordinators Update

As most of you know Debbie and Vivienne took over the Groups coordination from Nikki and Jill in July. We've settled into a routine which is hopefully working well for everyone. Debbie and Vivienne take it in weekly turns to review and answer the emails that come into the RRU3A groups inbox. Every Sunday we do a quick handover so that nothing is missed and the person "on duty" can pick up any outstanding items from the previous week.

Debbie is responsible for our Bulletin input and Vivienne manages the groups pages on our website. Whoever is available for the monthly Friday meeting will staff the groups desk. But most importantly, we are here to encourage and support new groups and group leaders.

Vivienne



Poetry Reading Group 1

We're a small group who meet on the second Wednesday afternoon of each month in a member's home. We choose our subject in advance — usually a particular poet or a shared theme — and we tend to select shorter poems or extracts so everyone has a chance to read.

Members often bring their favourites, and we're always happy to hear poems that please or puzzle us more than once — much like Browning's wise thrush who "sings each song twice over." We also enjoy finding out a little about the poet's life, often using the computer as our main source.



Rather than close analysis, we approach each poem with an open mind and simply share our reactions. Discussions often wander into related topics, making for a relaxed and enjoyable afternoon, rounded off with a cup of tea while we choose the poet or theme for the following month.

We thought it would be fun to set a short poetry quiz. Do give it a try — it may even inspire you to read more poetry.

Group Leader: Peter Jackson



Book image courtesy of Little Brown

We thought it would be fun to set a short poetry quiz. Do give it a try. It may just set you on the path of reading more poetry - which can't be such a bad thing! Answers **Page 15**

Poetry Quiz Questions:

1 Which poet wrote the ode 'To Autumn' starting with the well-known description: 'Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness'?

2 In that last poem, whose clammy cells were o'er-brimmed?

3 How old was the poet John Keats when he died? Was he 25, 35 or 45?

4 Which poem refers to a 'runcible spoon' (for half a mark) and (for the other half) who wrote it?

5 Who, in the poem by Hilaire Belloc, was asked whether she remembered an inn?

6 Who wrote a poem that described the Assyrian army coming down 'like a wolf on the fold'?

7 Who wrote 'The Charge of the Light Brigade' (for half a mark) and (for the other half) how many rode into the valley of Death?

8 Who wrote the famous poem 'Ozymandias'?

9 Who wrote a conditional poem, said to be one of the nation's favourites?

10 Which poet who worked as a librarian wrote a poem describing how we inherit our parents' shortcomings?

11 Which month is said to be the cruellest (for half a mark) and (for the other half) who wrote the poem that opened with that strange assertion?

12 Which poem contains the famous line: 'Water, water, everywhere, / Nor any drop to drink'?

13 Who wrote the poem mentioned in Q12?

14 Who wrote about an elusive feline criminal? (Clue: same as poet in Q11)

15 Who wrote a poem that told of a train stopping in summertime at a little-known station?

16 Who wrote a famous poem about the Night Mail that was to form the commentary of a film?

17 Who wrote 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree'?

18 In the poem mentioned in Q17, how many rows of beans did the poet say he intended having there? Was it 5, 7 or 9?

19 Which First World War poet wrote a poem which gave a graphic description of an enemy gas attack, exposing the fallacy of an old lie?

20 What was the old lie referred to in Q19?

Gardening for 2027

Autumn came early to my garden this year. Trees and shrubs have been dropping their leaves since late summer, many ferns have already died back for the season as have several herbaceous perennials like rodgersia and some hostas. And all this despite spending hours almost every day this summer watering the garden to keep key plants alive. Something has to change, particularly if hot dry summers become the norm and we get hosepipe bans in future years.

To my mind there are three areas to consider – watering systems, choice of plants, and modifying soil composition. Watering smart has risen up my priority list - I do not want to face watering the garden for hours on end in future years. One friend has invested in seeper hose to lay along the length of her extensive par terre. This looks to be a good (but not cheap) solution for those beds where the planting is fixed. Another friend has invested in a micro irrigation system which weaves over all their outside pots. As it works on a timer it can operate when they are on holiday too.

However, I rarely leave my pots in one location, suffering badly from a compulsive need to keep rearranging them (and I have hundreds) so this system will not work well for me. You also need an outside tap to connect up the system which I do not have in my back garden.

Selecting drought tolerant plants has become a key theme in all types of gardening forums of late. We are being encouraged to use more plants that will thrive on little to no water. Pelargoniums and geraniums have long been a stalwart here, and I recall seeing these flowering away happily on one of the British bases in Cyprus where there was a near constant hosepipe ban, and the soil was little more than dust.

However, many types are not hardy. On the other hand, there are several types of hardy salvia which are drought tolerant, and many Mediterranean plants, including herbs can be added to this list. If you throw in euphorbias, echinaceas, heleniums, grasses, some yuccas, phormiums, succulents and even a prickly pear or two there is a surprisingly wide and expanding list of plants that can be deployed to create year round interest.

Of course, plants need to establish, and they need to be in the right type of soil. The fairly newly planted Piet Oudolf dry “prairie style” borders at RHS Wisley looked to have suffered this year (Wisley held the record in the South for the longest period without rain this summer) so it will be interesting to see how these bounce back next year.

But what if, like me, you are on clay soil, and we continue to have wet winters? Few drought tolerant plants will like these conditions. One dramatic solution has been recently aired on the YouTube Rosy Hardy Gardening channel in the video ‘How To Grow a Resilient Garden: 8 Plants To Get Started’ where the nursery owner laid eight inches of gravel directly over her clay soil to create a growing medium that copes with both rain and shine. However, I would need tonnes of gravel to achieve the same result in my garden so instead I will focus on both raising selective beds and also improving drainage with grit and sand mixed into some topsoil and compost.

What plants to consider?

Lastly, I will continue to create rain shelters over yuccas, young palms and similar plants to limit the risk of black spot fungal infection during the cold damp months in Winter and Spring.

So, what drought tolerant plants am I considering in the future? At the top of my list is Yucca Rostrata. A mature specimen makes a fantastic architectural statement, but their fan shaped needle leaves look good at any size and offer a good foil for surrounding softer planting. Provided they are in free draining soil they will withstand temperatures down to 0F (-17.7C) in the harshest of winters with no protection.

Both verbena bonariensis and silene coronaria love my garden and self-seed freely everywhere including cracks in paving. I give neither any attention, and they thrive on neglect!

I also have Wood Cranesbill in great abundance. It has always been there and spreads everywhere given half a chance. I have to mow it down to keep it in check as it has world domination in mind.

It never gets watered and although it wilts in high temperatures it comes back to life when it rains.

There are plenty of other hardy varieties of geranium to add contrast (Rozanne has proven to be very resilient in my brother’s garden and I love Geranium Maderense for its sculptural leaves in mine).

Ornamental grasses increasingly play a role in my garden, and will be a staple part of my switch to low maintenance planting. Stipa gigantea (golden oats) and Calamagrostis x acutiflora Karl Foerster (feather reed grass) are on my wish list particularly if I can grow them from seed. Both are giants and are found in many botanical gardens in the UK. However, I will not be introducing any bamboo or other similar forms of invasive grass – their roots have proved to be impossible to remove from my clay soil in the past requiring major excavation.

And finally, I am building up my stocks of euphorbia (spurge), gaura, echinacea and hardy salvias to plant up where I cannot water regularly. All will need some tlc in the first year to help get their roots down but hopefully will need no additional attention in successive years.

John Cousins

Thanksgiving



The first recorded Thanksgiving, which took place in 1621, was a harvest festival in what is now the state of Massachusetts. It was a celebratory feast shared by the European colonists and the local Native Americans, who had helped the colonists learn how to survive and grow crops. In 1863, after over 200 years of sporadic celebration the American president, Abraham Lincoln, declared a National Day of Thanksgiving to be held on the last Thursday in November. He did this hoping to foster unity during the Civil War. Then for practical reasons, in 1941, the US Congress formally altered Thanksgiving from the last Thursday to the fourth Thursday in November, to prevent the date from falling too close to Christmas in some years.

Today, Thanksgiving remains a harvest festival, but the day itself is more about family gatherings. People crisscross the US to be with their loved ones for this holiday celebration. Whenever possible, my brother and I fly to Florida to join my sister for the occasion, as we both have second "vacation" homes near to her.

Press coverage indicates that Thanksgiving has taken over from Christmas as a family celebration. It is thought that this is due to the increasing commercialisation of Christmas, with its emphasis on buying and receiving presents and/or travelling to enjoy the few days off provided at that time of year.



While one can eat anything they want at a festive meal, a traditional Thanksgiving menu almost always includes a roasted turkey with savoury stuffing, mashed potatoes, gravy and cranberry sauce. My mother, and now my generation, prepare a special recipe for the stuffing which includes adding sausage meat, celery, onions and herbs to a stale bread base.



An added benefit for my family these days is having a brother-in-law who produces dynamite mashed potatoes with lashings of butter and milk. I have also found a delicious recipe for fresh cranberry sauce which allows us to skip the jar variety.

And, of course, no Thanksgiving is complete without enjoying pumpkin pie for dessert although in Florida, Key Lime Pie features as a popular alternative. My sister usually bakes the pie(s), which is great, because she is a much better baker than the rest of us.

Traditional post-dinner activities for some families include taking long walks, playing games, or putting together a large jigsaw puzzle. However, my family's favourite activity is to collapse on the sofa in a vain effort to carry on the conversation from the dining table. Most of us end up sleeping off the heavy meal. The more adventurous of us turn on the TV and watch NFL's Thanksgiving Day football games; two games are played in the afternoon and one in the evening.



It's always a pleasure to catch up with each other and the meal, while predictable, is always delicious.

Lynn Valkenaar-Woolley

Photos - June Keeble

Fungi

Autumn's overlooked gems



Fungi are at their best in autumn. They are ideally suited to the cooler weather and increased rainfall of a normal autumn. By the time you read this we can only hope normality has returned after the exceptionally warm and dry summer of 2026.

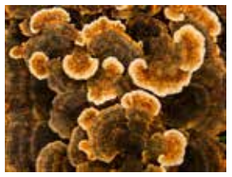
Look for them in the cooler, shadier parts of your garden, walking across a damp meadow grazed by livestock, or along woodland paths through dappled light. You should be able to see a range of species.

Fungi come in countless varieties. Among the most common are Fly Agaric (Amanita muscaria), the classic red toadstool with white spots, and Sulphur Tuft (Hypholoma fasciculare), the yellow-orange mushroom that clusters densely on rotting wood. Then there is the Amethyst Deceiver (Laccaria amethystina), a small vivid purple mushroom that hides low down among leaf litter.



The fascinating world of fungi offers a huge range of shapes, colours and sizes for you to encounter. To help you enjoy and understand the fungi you may see this autumn, whether around your garden or in the countryside, download the free iNaturalist Seek app. to your phone. Among other information this will tell you whether the fungi you see are free to touch or eat – but when in doubt don't. (This useful app. also identifies flowers).

Finally, a word about lichens. They are also most visible in autumn, as leaves fall from trees and let in more light. While not fungi, these life forms are closely inter-related. Lichens are complex organisms providing a stable symbiotic bridge between fungi and algae and cyanobacteria. All fungi require sugars and carbon. Many get this via lichens' links to photosynthesis by algae and cyanobacteria. In turn fungi provide lichens with shade, shelter and moisture in dry weather. Both benefit from this mutual partnership. Together they contribute to what you can see when out and about this autumn.



Earth and Environmental Sciences Group

Autumn Occurrences

Politics

In November 1605 Guy Fawkes was arrested beneath the Houses of Parliament, as the plot to murder James 1st was foiled. In October 1984 an IRA terrorist bomb killed 4 people at the Grand Hotel in Brighton.

In October 1903 The Women's Social and Political Union was founded by Mrs Emmeline Pankhurst and in November 1919 Nancy Astor became Britain's first female Member of Parliament. In autumn 2026 there are 266 female MPs.

October 1781 saw the end of the American War of Independence, in contrast, November 1917 saw the start of the Russian Revolution as the Red Guards took control of the Winter Palace.

In November 1963 President J F Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas.

October 1967 saw the introduction of the breathalyser by Barbara Castle, who didn't drive herself.

Arts & Education

The wearing of the first waistcoat, by Charles 1st, was documented by Samuel Pepys in October 1666. The great fire had taken place in September of that year.

Michael Faraday demonstrated, in October 1831, the dynamo, thus founding the science of electro magnetism.A little under a century later in October 1925, John Logie Baird made the first television transmission of a moving image. The first regular TV service was started by the BBC in November 1936 and 21 years later, in October 1957, Captain Pugwash first sailed onto our television screens.

Women were finally allowed to become full members of Oxford University and take degrees in October 1920. Today, women account for about half of the students at Oxford,

Miscellaneous

Harold II was killed at the Battle of Hastings in October 1066. The Bayeux Tapestry shows him being struck in the eye by an arrow.

The Mayflower arrived at Cape Cod, Massachusetts, in November 1620.

Lord Nelson was mortally wounded at the Battle of Trafalgar in October 1805. November 1843 saw his statue hauled to the top of the column in Trafalgar Square.

The Football Association was formed in October 1963. The first meeting was held in The Freemasons' Tavern in London.

In October 1911 Britain's first escalator opened at Earls Court, London.

Deb Chapman



My Allotment

I've had my allotment since 2019. I'd been thinking of getting one for some time so, when I saw an advert on Facebook inviting people to apply, I emailed straight away. At the time, there appeared to be quite a few vacant plots, although there are always stories about huge waiting lists. If you're interested, I'd definitely advise you to contact the Green Spaces department at Reigate and Banstead Council to ask.

I was still working and wasn't sure how much time I'd be able to commit to an allotment. It was suggested that I take on half a plot for a year and see how it went. This turned out to be great advice.

The whole allotment had been worked by the same gentleman for many years. As he got older, he decided that half a plot would suit him better and that's when I took over the half he'd given up. He was a fount of knowledge and really helped me in my early days. In fact, I've found people at the allotments to be invariably friendly and helpful, always willing to share their knowledge.

After a couple of years, he gave up his half, so I took that on too. The whole plot costs a little over £100 per year – barely £2 a week – which seems quite a bargain to me.

Unfortunately, I don't live especially nearby. It takes about 45 minutes to walk so I usually drive or catch the bus. It can be a bit irksome but the proximity to the Lakes Café (and their amazing fried egg sandwiches!) more than makes up for it. If you're more of a fair weather gardener, I'd definitely advise getting a more local allotment.



This year has definitely been a challenge. Two late, hard frosts destroyed all the blossom, so there is no fruit at all. The weird thing is that my neighbour's tree is covered with apples! The vine is now well established and managed to survive both frosts. Despite some damage to the leaves, it has managed to produce several bunches of delicious grapes this year.

My retirement present a few years ago was a polytunnel. Not some small, puny affair, but a whopper - 15' by 10'. It's been a complete game changer and last year kept me in greens of various sorts all through the winter. However, it does magnify the heat so, in the summer, daily visits are necessary to water inside. This year has been particularly demanding. Fortunately we've not been subject to a hose pipe ban, so it hasn't been too much of a problem.



I use planters quite a lot and in the spring had topped them up with homemade compost from my 'Hot Bin'. The result was astonishing. There were suddenly more tomato and squash plants than you could shake a stick at – all 'volunteers' from the compost. The result has been an astonishing variety of tomatoes, from huge beefsteak ones, through plum tomatoes, yellow and orange ones to tiny almost black ones. The squashes were not quite so prolific because they produced very few female flowers, so hardly any fruit.



Last year, I accidentally let some leeks flower. I left them for the bees and eventually they set seed, resulting in some lovely self-sown leeks. I'm definitely going to pursue this rather passive method of gardening as, presumably, wherever things come up and thrive, that's where they want to grow!



Something else which had grown unexpectedly was a lemon cucumber although I had to use Google lens to find out what it was! I have no idea where that came from. I'd never even heard of it! Rather like a small, round lemon, it's actually a cucumber. It was so good, I've saved some seeds from one for next year.

I freely admit a lot of things have been a disaster. The lettuces were fine for a while but all bolted in the heat. Subsequent sowings didn't germinate because it was too hot, but I'm back on track now with some very healthy looking seedlings. My entire potato crop could be held in my cupped hands. There were fewer in the harvest than I had actually planted! Spinach and chard have done well, but the spinach has also bolted now – so I'll let it go to seed. Although there were lots of beautiful scarlet runner bean flowers, it seems the bees couldn't get inside to pollinate them - something to do with the heat again – so not many beans.



All the signs are that our weather is going to continue like this, so I'm going to take note of what has worked well this season and grow it again next year. One of my new neighbours even managed to grow a huge watermelon outside – which was very inspiring, so I may try that too.

I don't have a huge surplus this year, which is quite a relief as the freezer still has some of last year's produce in it! I'll dry roast my excess tomatoes overnight in a low oven and freeze them. They're ideal to pop into a pasta sauce or casserole for that extra bit of flavour.

I do make jam, but I've nothing to make it with this year, which is a bit of a shame! Usually I also make an apple or pear cake with fresh fruit but again, not this year.

My approach to growing on the allotment has become much more relaxed over the years. I started by trying to grow things the 'proper' way in rows. Now I'm more inclined to fling a few seeds around and see how it goes. I have wild flowers on the plot too – or weeds, as they used to be known!

As well as the joy of eating home grown produce, there are few things finer than sitting in the sun after a day pottering around on the allotment, watching a bee in an evening primrose flower.

Christine Kirby

Hedgehogs

June Keeble's son Richard, recently rescued four underweight baby hogs over several afternoons in his small urban back garden. Hogs should not be out during daylight. The person from the hog charity said the babies can have a dreadful sense of direction! She has reared them, all big and plump now. Two have been returned to his garden, complete now with hog house, water and nightly food. The other two were taken to a committed neighbour nearby. This cul-de-sac community has a WhatsApp group, and decided to add more hedgehog highways to many of the homes. These are very important so the hogs can forage, roam, and find mates, as well as being able to return to their hog houses if desired. Hog homes should be purpose built to deter larger mammals, and tucked away out of direct sunlight.

June helps support hogs on her land by having many places in the garden where they can rootle, and undisturbed sites for them to make shelters or hibernate. She does not have a hog house, there are plenty of options for them. What she DOES have, in their active times, is a feeding station, replenished nightly with high quality dry hedgehog food from an automatic feeder in a plastic box. This is secured with two heavy paving stones on top. (She tried only one, but she thinks the badgers who upturned it were probably laughing at her!). There is also a plastic barrier a few inches from the opening to the box, staked into the soil. Small mammals such as mice can get in, but not the foxes and badgers.



In a good year, June has three regular hogs visiting the feeding station. She believes there are several reasons for this. Crucially, fresh water in a shallow ceramic bowl so they can reach it. In the recent heatwaves the hogs were not only drinking from the bowl but cooling off all four feet! The hogs also have access to a secluded pond, since it has a pebble margin. Another crucial reason is that her garden is all organic and has been for many years.

Another saviour is Shelagh Roberts whose garden near Earlswood is open to nearby fields. She bought a hedgehog house for about £40 in kit form and since building it, has regular nightly visits from at least two hedgehogs. She too buys special food for her prickly friends and has noticed that she has fewer slugs eating her container plants.

Nationwide, hog numbers have plummeted but we can all help to decrease the catastrophic decline in hedgehog numbers. These wonderful mammals with their whiffle noses and scuttling gait are a joy to behold. Their future is in OUR hands.

Tina Pankhurst



Hedgehog Facts

Have 5,000 to 7,000 keratin spines.

They are nocturnal insectivores.

Have poor eyesight but good hearing and smell.

They curl up for defence.

Measure about 14-30 cm long.

Weigh up to 1.2 kg.

Hibernate between Nov and mid-March.

Babies are called hoglets.

Live 2-3 years.

Can be found in cemeteries, railway land, waste ground, public and private gardens.

They are lactose intolerant.

Poetry Quiz Answers from page 9

1. John Keats
2. The bees
3. 25
4. The Owl and the Pussycat, written by Edward Lear
5. Miranda
6. Robert Browning
7. Alfred Lord Tennyson; the six hundred
8. Percy Bysshe Shelley
9. The poem 'If' was written by Rudyard Kipling.
10. Philip Larkin, author of 'This Be the Verse'11. April, according to T S Eliot in 'The Waste Land'
12. The Rime of the Ancient Mariner
13. Samuel Taylor Coleridge
14. T S Eliot - the cat was Macavity in the poem 'Macavity: The Mystery Cat'.
15. Edward Thomas wrote the poem 'Adlestrop'.
16. W H Auden
17. W B Yeats
18. 9
19. Wilfred Owen wrote the poem 'Dulce et Decorum Est'.
20. Dulce et decorum est / Pro patria mori. (From the Roman poet Horace: 'It is sweet and fitting to die for one's country'.)





The Autumn tinges beech leaves with a Midas touch of gold,
An extravaganza of glory, before Winter makes them old.
In momentary freedom loosed leaves like snowflakes soar,
Spiralling like golden coins investing in the forest floor.

In orange, browns and yellows, colouring finely tuned
Leaves lie in a carpet, wind-blown, softly duned.
A carpet never dreamt of, in any pirate hoard
In purest gold, the like of which, no rich man could afford.
It's silent but for eddies of the breeze in the tree
Nothing but the beauty, all in perfect harmony.

Now come people hidden pathing,
A large one, small ones, playing, laughing.
The smallest of them shouts "Hey Bill,
Race you rolling down the hill"
Piles the crisp leaves on his tummy,
"Like a bath in Cornflakes Mummy"

The visitors have gone now, it's as though they've never been
The dusk fades into greyness, taking colour from the scene.
Away off in the distance, there's the hooting of an owl
And down below in silence, the night things quietly prowl.
Darkness hides the splendour, monochrome and wan
But regardless of an audience, the theatre show goes on.

Pat King

Embroideries - Felicia Taylerson



'J' is for 'Jealous'

Thomas was jealous of Nathan. That is, he thought he was, but he wasn't entirely sure, because he was not quite certain he actually knew what jealous *actually* meant. He savoured the word 'actually' as he wandered away and said it carefully several times under his breath. Mummy had said the word was 'ac-tu-a-lly' not 'acksherly', which was what Nathan said.

Mmm, Nathan. 'You're just jealous!' Nathan had bellowed, so loudly that Mrs. Thingy - the lady who supervised playtime and whose real name he was not sure of - had swooped over to them. It was then that Thomas had turned away. Mummy had said you should turn away from arguments, though Thomas was never quite sure whether it was safe or whether you were asking for a load of trouble to descend on to your back. As for turning the other cheek, well, that he *really* didn't understand.

He sighed. He was not entirely sure Mummy *understood* playtime. She had said they had had playtime when she was a little girl, but Mummy as a little girl was something he just couldn't quite imagine. And anyway, she had said there were only girls in her class. Thomas thought privately that a whole room full of girls would be *frightful*. Frightful was another word he liked, especially preceded by 'absolutely'.... He whispered 'absolutely frightful' under his breath. He had heard Mummy's friend describe the traffic as 'absolutely frightful' and stored it up for future use. Could you describe Mrs. Thingy as 'absolutely frightful'? Thomas thought probably safer not to.)

He shook his head, wandered on to the grass and sat down, gazing at the sky. He returned to the problem of 'jealous'.

Thomas liked big words, like 'descend' and 'exploded' and 'pronounce' but 'jealous' puzzled him a bit. Was it the same as 'envious'? Hmm.... Thomas frowned and said 'jealous, jealous, jealous' firmly, under his breath. Then he tried saying 'envious...' slowly, letting the word roll round his mouth: 'ennnnviuuus'. It took longer to say and felt softer somehow... but did it mean the same?

In future years, Thomas was able to reflect on other words with a similar meaning. At the age of eleven, when he was taught about the Ten Commandments, he encountered the word 'covet' in the context of another man's wife.... Now that really was complicated, but that was a while off yet.

Determined to sort out his feelings about Nathan before the end of playtime, Thomas returned to the thorny problem of 'jealous' and 'envious'. 'Jealous' felt nasty, because the 'j' exploded from your mouth, 'j j j', and when you saw the word in a book the 'e' just looked as if it was about to bite you and the 'a' looked a bit... as if it was looking down on you. (In future years, Thomas learnt that the word he was looking for to describe the look of a printed 'a' was probably 'supercilious', but he didn't know that word when he was five.)

Thomas did, however, know all about people looking down at him! They were indeed a lot bigger than he was, but did that mean that grown-ups were always right? Or perhaps they weren't, he thought craftily. He had observed one or two occasions when Mummy or Daddy had not been right.... Like the time Daddy had insisted he needed his wellies because it was going to rain, and it *didn't* rain! And a teacher had admitted she didn't know something... a *teacher*, who didn't *know* something! He shook his head. Well, there wasn't a lot you could do about it when you were five, he thought slowly – and a little bitterly.

The warning bell for the end of playtime sounded. He hadn't got long! He had to make a decision. He decided he was jealous of Nathan because his Daddy had a very big, new car and it was blue. Thomas's Daddy's car was old and it was black. So – he was jealous! He wanted Nathan's car. But, making a quick but thoughtful decision, he decided he was better off saying he was envious, because he was not nasty or about to *hit* Nathan. He didn't resent Nathan having a big, blue car: he just thought he would quite like one too... and that felt like a satisfactory outcome. (He was not sure if this was an altruistic choice – another word he would learn in five years' time – or just safer. After all, Mrs. Thingy would certainly have a lot to say if he did hit Nathan, much as Nathan might deserve it.)

He planned his response to Nathan: 'By the way, I'm not jealous, Nathan, just envious. I wouldn't expect you to know the difference', he would say airily and stroll away. Hopefully, Nathan would be distracted from any response by the march back into the classroom and the pleasure of story time.

Thomas got to his feet and walked thoughtfully towards where the class was lining up. Was this what 'politics' was, he wondered? Daddy had said that the politicians were behaving like five-year-olds, which Thomas thought a bit unfair, but then Mummy had previously said that when you went to Big School you were really grown up. So, what exactly were the politicians doing? It was all very confusing. If this is what being grown up was like, he agreed with Auntie Pippa, whom he had heard saying despondently, 'It's such hard work being grown up.'

Luckily, Thomas had no real concept of how long it would be before he really *was* grown up. Far in the future, when Nathan was jailed for some heinous, financial crime, Thomas would think back to the day he still remembered, when he had decided that being envious of Nathan and his dad's car was better than being jealous. He was certainly not jealous – or even envious – of Nathan now. And being grown up was indeed hard work, actually!

© JEOP37 Narrative Writing Group 2

(2026: we chose to work through letters of the alphabet, to prompt our choice of individual themes for stories or non-fictional narratives, whether amusing or serious.)

Norfolk Holiday



We explored Norwich Cathedral and Castle.



Took a relaxing cruise on the Broads.



Admired the tapestries and paintings of Blickling Hall and the gardens of Felbrigg Hall.







Visited the splendour of the Sandringham Estate and enjoyed the Norfolk coast.



Saw the clocks and wandered through the gardens of Anglesey Abbey.



Comfortable hotel, knowledgeable guide, good coach driver, excellent company!

Sally Baker



WELCOME TO OPERA GROUP 2

We are an opera appreciation group that meets on the first and third Tuesday of every month. Our aim is to escape into the world of opera, a world of dramatic stories and heightened emotions told through singing, music and dance. We watch operas on DVDs and via various streaming services and discuss and compare the productions and the singers' performances. Twice a month we revel in what Dr Johnson famously defined as 'an exotic and irrational entertainment'

John Harwood

Book reviews

BENEATH A SCARLET SKY - Mark Sullivan

This is an incredible story, even more so as it happens to be true. It spans a period of 23 months and is based on the memories of a 79 year old who, like quite a few others, didn't speak about his war experiences until late in life, if at all.

At a dinner party in February 2006, the author was captivated by snippets of the extraordinary exploits of a teenager in northern Italy in the latter stages of WW2. He contacted Pino Lella and subsequently visited him and his astonishing story gradually unfolded.

The story falls into two significant parts beginning with Pino, who lived in Milan, as a carefree 17 year-old, whose main interests in life were wine, food and girls. As the war escalated in Nazi- occupied Italy, and Milan was hit hard, he was sent by his father to the Alps where underground escape routes were organised for Jews fleeing the Nazis. He risked his life a multitude of times using his mountaineering skills to lead the Jews across the treacherous snow-clad mountain paths to safety in neutral Switzerland. The stories of these journeys are gripping, and the author's understanding and descriptions of the harshness and beauty of the landscape were no doubt enhanced by his visits to the area with Pino himself.

At 18, Pino was forced by his family to join the German army and by a quirk of fate he became the personal driver to one of Hitler's top-ranking generals in northern Italy. This gave him the opportunity to work as a spy gathering vital intelligence from within the enemy circle which he passed to the Allies and he stayed in this post until the war ended, witnessing the most horrific of atrocities meted out to his fellow country men and women.

This book was an eye-opener for me as I knew little about the Nazi occupation in Italy nor the horrifying effects and treatment of the local communities which easily encapsulate the phrase "man's inhumanity to man." I found the story easy to read and totally engrossing...a powerful and emotional book showing both the worst and best of humanity as well as the incredible courage of Pino and others too. It has left a deep impression on me.

The story is based on the recollections of an elderly man whose memories varied from vivid to very weak, and even the author has stated at the start of the book that he had to embellish some events and dialogue hence regarding the story as historical fiction, though virtually all the characters are real. For me, it simply did not matter.

Hilary Loney Book Group 7...we read this several years ago.

Stuck for what to read next. Perhaps these books might be your next read. These titles come recommended by Book Group 1

The Woman by Kristin Hannah

This is the story of Frances (Frankie) McGrath who is a young Army nurse serving in the Vietnam War. It's the story of how she witnesses brutal combat and forms strong bonds with her fellow nurses. It's about love, loss and struggles. It's how she copes with PTSD and societal rejection when she returns home.

Precipice by Robert Harris

Set in 1914, this story is abut a group of upper crust bohemians and socialites known as the 'The Coterie'. It focuses on the Prime Minister H.H. Asquith and his besotted affair with Venetia his much younger mistress. His rash behaviour leads to top secret documents being leaked and the government nearly being toppled. It's a mix of Politics, Historical Fiction and Suspense.

The Measure by Nicki Erick. Recommended by Cathy McDonough Book group 3

It is a bit of a marmite book, you love it or hate it. It has everything in it that means I should have hated it but I loved it! The story is set in New York and the premise behind it is that one night everyone over 22 in the world was left a box, if opened it contained a string which gave an indication of how long they would live. Short strings meant a short life! The story revolved around a number of people and how they coped with this knowledge, which sounds a bit twee and grim. However I found it an easy to read book, with many believable characters most of whom were likeable. It bought up many dilemmas we all face in life, string or no string. Although there were some characters who were only out for themselves, my overriding take on the story was that it encouraged people to be nice to each other whatever the circumstances. It ended in an optimistic way that good in the world could prevail.

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