

Totnes u3a Newsletter Spring 2026



Contents

A New Year..... 2
Membership 3
The 2025 Christmas Concert4,5
Forthcoming Events 6
Meeting at St Mary’s Church 7
Portrait Group 8
Sailing Group 9
Puzzle 10,15
Bridge 11,16
Longer Walks 12,13
Life on the Edge 14
List of groups 17,18

2026

Happy 2026! Already! And not only that. We will be in March when you read this. I know I say this every year but honestly time flies. Some say the illusion is created by our increasing busyness. Which may well be the case. But my wise old grandmother pointed out to me when in her nineties that the illusion is created by the proportion of 1 day to 90 years being very different from 1 day to even 10 years. Hence as we age time seems to accelerate. Not sure I have entirely got my head around that argument even 50 years later but there is no doubt that time does seem to fly. Perhaps it is a bit of both.

But how wonderful to have the problem of being too busy and well enough to enjoy it. We have so much to be thankful for. And great to be part of a vibrant u3a. We continue to grow with new members joining all the time. There are new interest groups forming. So please keep a look out for something that may interest you. The latest group to form is a very active Sailing Group; read about it on page 14.

If you have a special interest and would like to share it by starting a group or offering a short course please do chat to Jacquetta Selley.

The Christmas concert was a great success last December and there is a report on pages 4 and 5. We are very lucky to have so many talented members. If you think you may have something you can perform, the 2026 concert is on 17th December so plenty of time to get your act perfect.

We also have a great programme of monthly talks planned for 2026. Our thanks to Sarah Marsh for all her hard work in organising those. Please do make sure you have a copy of the programme.

Finally our AGM is due on April 23rd. Several committee members are coming to the end of their 3-year stint and so will be standing down. Do please consider whether you can step in and contribute to the running of our great u3a.

I wish you are happy and healthy year ahead.

Richard Scheffer, Chairman

Membership

Our current membership is 331 and we are continuing to attract new members.

Most of our growth is by word of mouth as we have gained a reputation for being a friendly and supportive community. This is a tribute to our entire membership.

Here is a list of our latest new members.

Andrew Dell	Geoff Dickinson	Rosemary Ensor
Mark Gibson	Jill Head	David Hendy
Hazel Hindle	Kate Metcalfe	Steve Monaghan
Liz Rashley	Cynthia Scott	Walter Simcox

If you have just joined but your name is not on this list don't worry, it will be included in the next Newsletter.

If you arrive at an event as a new member, or indeed a more longstanding member, and are not certain that you know anyone, please approach myself or any committee member. (Most of us will be wearing name badges.) We would love to chat with you ourselves; or perhaps we may introduce you to other members.

Let's learn, laugh and live our third age together.

Carol Tabb, Membership Secretary

The 2025 Christmas concert

The Christmas concert was held at St John's church on December 18th. The set-up differed from that in previous years. People sat at tables downstairs for the music and stayed there for their lunch which was brought to them. There was widespread support for this format, with many requests for it to be repeated in future years.

In the picture below you can see the pianist, Jon Cavell and his assistant Amanda. (They are also projected on the screen.)



The annual u3a Christmas concert and lunch is always a highlight in the Totnes u3a calendar and 2025 was no exception. There were, however, some considerable differences from previous concerts. To start with the lift at St. John's church was out of order which meant that those unable to manage the stairs to the second level would have been excluded from the lunch. Fortunately a visitor from a u3a elsewhere in the country had drawn our attention to their concert and lunch which they have in a cabaret setting. We decided to do just that.

The 2025 Christmas concert

The usual planning and preparations were made. Sub-committee meetings called. Tasks were allocated. Food to be ordered. Drinks to be bought. Wine glasses to be sourced. Logistics groups to be formed for setting up the tables and chairs and re-ordering them when the concert was over. It was decided that we would not serve food during the actual concert as it was thought this would be too disruptive.

And most important decision of all, identifying a compère. We were very fortunate that Bob Paton agreed to take it on. Although he made it look incredibly easy it didn't just happen. Calls had to be made for participants to volunteer to perform. It was obvious that there are a number of very talented people in our U3A and Bob had the immediate problem that he had too many acts. However, with his excellent diplomatic skills, he was able to whittle them down, without any hurt feelings, to a number that would fit into the time frame and to order them all into a suitable, well structured concert.

The day finally arrived and the logistics team were up early carrying tables down from the second level and setting up the room. Then the table decorations laid and food and drinks were brought in and set up. Special thanks to Mo and Roy who planned, sourced and bought all the food, and coordinated the serving on the day. That was no mean feat!

What a kaleidoscope it was! Poetry, story telling, and music with folk group, solos, duets, choir, piano duets, monologues and the grand piano finale of Liszt and Rachmaninoff. To say that it was a great success would be an understatement. Our thanks to Bob and to all those who performed.

A special word of thanks must be made to all those who helped tidy up. Too many to name individually. We had a time deadline to be out of the church and we made it comfortably due to "many hands making light work."

If you missed the concert and lunch put it in your diary for December 17th this year. And more important if you have a talent to showcase get practicing. It is not about perfection it is about enjoyment. We would love to see you perform.

Richard Scheffer

Forthcoming events

Date	Speaker	Event title
March 19	Alex Bowler	My big cat sightings in Devon & Dorset
April 23	Martin Lloyd	Passports, assassins, traitors and spies
May 28	Peter Marsden	Cess pits, cemeteries, sewers and shipwrecks: being an archaeologist
June 25	Alex Legger	A Life on Blue Peter and the challenges/changes at BBC
July 23	Steve Tilley	Walking the coasts of England and Wales
August	No meeting	
September 24	Open Day	
October 22	Matt Harvey	Poet
November 26	John Sinclair-Robson	People who disappear on purpose
December 8	Christmas concert	Rehearsal
December 10	Christmas concert	Event and lunch

Meeting at St Mary's Church

St. Mary's church in Totnes has now reopened after a reordering project funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

The church now has an excellent small kitchen and servery area in the southwest corner, with an accessible toilet cleverly concealed behind it. The pews in the western end of the church have been removed and this area now provides a gathering and meeting space, with beautiful tiled and wooden flooring panels which look very much in keeping with the rest of the church. Heating is now provided by infra-red panels ingeniously concealed in the new but traditional style light fittings.



In February, three members of the Totnes u3a attended a meeting of community leaders, held in the refurbished church.

The meeting was facilitated by Jess and Grace, Activities Coordinators for the Uplift Project, a specifically funded outreach and engagement element of the whole reordering project.

The gathering was an opportunity for us to see the new space created by the reordering, and to meet members of other invited charities and groups, so that we could see how the opportunities generated by the changes to the church might possibly be of benefit to our various activities in the future.

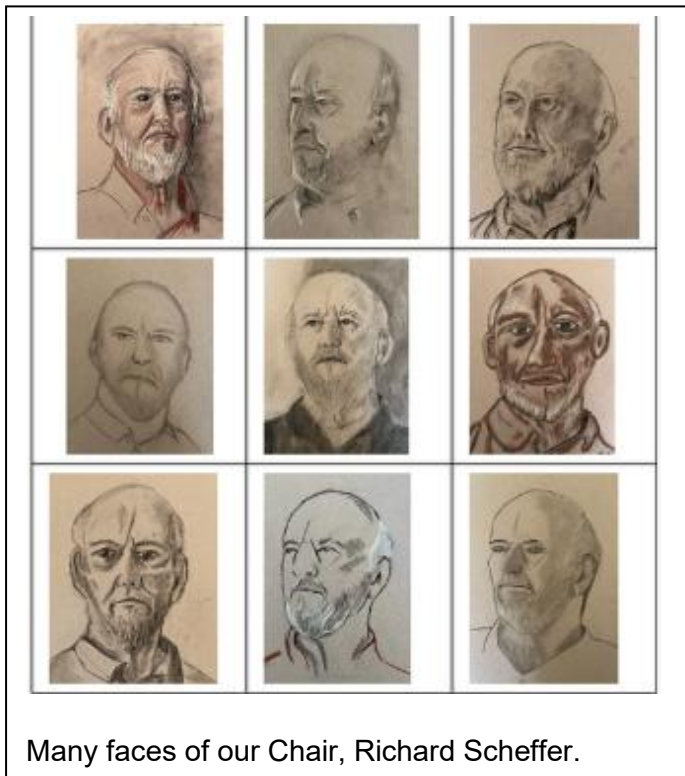
The other organisations represented included SASHA, a group who work with and support victims of domestic abuse, Beyond Borders, who support refugees and migrants, Totnes Independent School, and Jamming Station, whose aim is empowering young people through music. We were given a very warm welcome with hot drinks and delicious cakes and enjoyed meeting the various group representatives. It will be interesting to see how use of the newly created space develops in the future.

Liz Devenish, Committee member

The Portrait Group

Drawing a portrait is a complex skill. A portrait drawing not only needs to capture facial characteristics, general appearance and bearing, but also something about a person which is easily recognisable - their 'likeness'. This is the real challenge which faces the Totnes u3a Portrait Drawing Group.

For most in the group, drawing portraits has been a new experience, with some never having drawn or 'done any art' since leaving school. However, group members have developed an understanding of the complexity of drawing the face and the process for developing a likeness through carefully considered measurements; using drawing materials, they have been able to create realistic portraits.



The group meets on a Tuesday in an upstairs studio at the Mansion House and has been fully subscribed since it started nearly two years ago.

However, the group are always looking for u3a members who are willing to sit for them, which past sitters have found interesting and enjoyable. The sitting experience is supported with breaks, refreshments and good company!

If you would like to discuss sitting for the group, please contact me.

Chrissie Bennett, Group Leader

Sailing Group



As a long-time boat owner, it occurred to me that a few other people in the Totnes u3a might have an interest in sailing. So last year I floated the idea of meeting for a chat on sailing matters and possibly joining me for sailing occasionally. I was surprised to get a response from 26 others, so last autumn the Totnes u3a Sailing Group was formed.

We meet the first Thursday of each month and have had presentations on how sails work, charts and buoys, tides and currents, mooring and anchoring. Some of our members have shared their own sailing experiences.

Mike gave us a presentation about the beautiful 57ft wooden yacht he sometimes sails on. It has a fascinating history as it was built in Germany in the 1930's to train potential Luftwaffe pilots in navigation skills. Mike showed us many photos of the yacht sailing around Europe.

Richard shared his experiences of sailing his yacht from the UK to its current location in Greece. He and his wife port-hopped via Spain, Portugal, Gibraltar, Italy and many Mediterranean islands to Greece over a two-year period and we saw photos of the many places they visited on their long voyage. We have also had a presentation by Liz on the work of the Dart Sailability charity which helps disabled people get afloat on the River Dart.

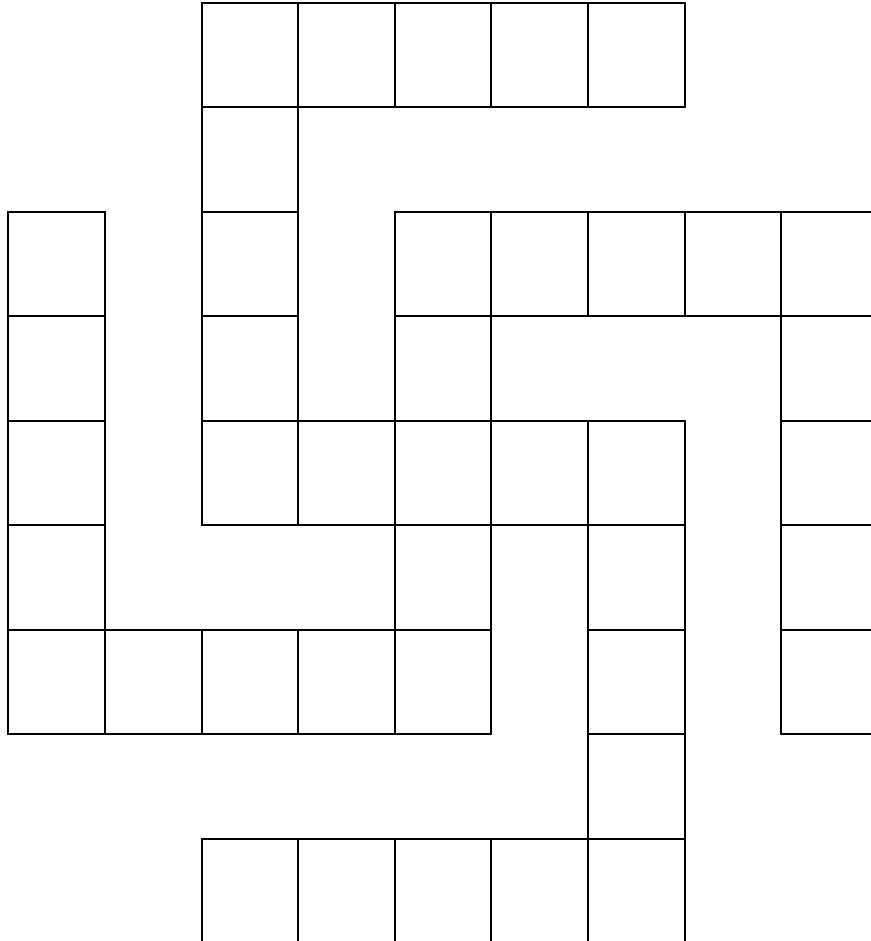
In the autumn some of the members joined me on a couple of occasions for a day sail on my yacht which is based in Plymouth. With gentle winds and flat sea we enjoyed sailing across Plymouth Sound and out past Rame Head with an opportunity for those who have not sailed before to try their hands at helming the boat and trimming the sails. We enjoyed a picnic lunch anchored off the beautiful Cornish coastline near Cawsands before sailing back and practicing our mooring skills at the marina in Plymouth.

If you are interested in joining the Group, contact at sailing@u3atotnes.uk.

Bob Dow

Puzzle Question: Countries

Listed below are the countries with 5 letters in their names.
Select 10 different countries to fill the spaces in this diagram.



- | | | | | | |
|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| ARUBA | BENIN | BURMA | CHILE | CHINA | DUBAI |
| EGYPT | GABON | GHANA | HAITI | INDIA | ITALY |
| JAPAN | KENYA | LIBYA | MACAO | MALTA | NAURU |
| NEPAL | NIGER | PALAU | QATAR | SAMOA | SPAIN |
| SUDAN | SYRIA | TIBET | TONGA | WALES | YEMEN |
| ZAIRE | | | | | |

Bridge



The following situation came up recently at the Totnes u3a Bridge Group.

West dealt the cards and the first three bids (West, North and East) were all Pass.

So the bidding came to South who held the following hand.

♠	A	K	3				
♥	-						
♦	A	K	2				
♣	A	K	Q	8	7	4	2

What was the best possible bid for South?

How should North have then responded?

Longer Walks

You may have noticed that we've had a bit of rain recently. Fifteen of us from



the u3a Longer Walks Group seized a window of opportunity in February to go for a coast walk round Dartmouth. The day dawned bright but cold after heavy rain overnight. Most of us took the bus to Dartmouth and a few people met us there, having arrived by car. We were blessed with blue sky and sunshine as we made our way through the market and past the church.

This was a 7-mile walk following a classic figure-of-8 route. It was a mixture of footpaths, some steps and a few quiet roads. Most people were familiar with the coast path but not everyone was

familiar with the views from the inland hills.

We left the town by climbing up some steps to reach a muddy path with great views which contours along Dyer's Hill above the estuary. We descended through woodland to Warfleet before following the coast road to Dartmouth Castle. After a coffee break, it clouded over but it did remain dry all day.

We followed the inland track to Little Dartmouth then stopped for a packed lunch at Warren Point sitting on benches with views out to sea and across to Slapton Sands and Start Point. After lunch, we made our way up and down along the coast path round Combe Point, Compass Cove, Blackstone Point and Deadmans Cove with lots of views over the rocks out at sea. We spotted some seals and there was some debate over whether we had also seen tuna.

A rocky path brought us back to Dartmouth Castle. A few people dropped out for tea and the rest of us zig-zagged our way up to Gallant's Bower Iron Age fort which has great views both out to sea and up the river. We found the path down and heard a little owl on our way back to Warfleet. We descended some steps through Bayard's Cove fort and along the quay back to the town.

The u3a Longer Walks group is for people who'd like to go out for a walk for the whole day. We usually go out to explore the countryside on the 3rd Thursday of the month. Our walks explore the coast, estuaries and rivers with some inland and on Dartmoor.

The walks are usually 7-10 miles with occasional stops for some short breaks. Some walks are fairly flat but others have quite a bit of climbing (there are a lot of hills round here). We walk at a moderate pace of about 2 miles per hour which is fine for many people but probably not suitable for slow walkers.



We usually take a packed lunch. You also need to bring water or a flask. We often stop mid-morning or mid-afternoon for a short coffee or tea break. Sometimes there's also a cafe or kiosk en route. If we need to wait for a bus at the end, we usually find a cafe or pub.

Sometimes we start from Totnes and get a bus back. Some walks are a short bus or train ride away (buses are still only £3 or free if you have a pass and it's after 9.30am). You can drive if you prefer but the walks are designed to be accessible by public transport.

If you are interested in finding out more, email longerwalks@u3atotnes.uk.

Bob Carpenter

Life on the Edge

Readers will be pleased to know that Totnes is helping the planet, with Follaton House hosting the headquarters of **Life on the Edge**. This is a multi-partner project, led by the South Devon National Landscape team with support from National Lottery Heritage Fund. They aim to restore viable populations of some of the UK's rarest insects living along the South Devon coast including the last known colony of the Six-banded nomad bee. This bee faces imminent extinction unless action is taken. The project will also enable the recovery of over 20 other invertebrates including the Silver studded blue butterfly and the Long-horned bee shown below.

This will enhance the landscape and habitat, improving the whole ecosystem. Saving these species and giving them a safer long-term future means expanding and reconnecting the traditional coastal landscapes on which they depend, creating more flower rich fields and highway verges, carefully managed scrub mosaics, strategic hedgerow connections, and more wildlife friendly parks, churchyards, school grounds and private gardens. Our coastline, and its connected hinterland, will be buzzing with wildlife and packed with wild flowers.



The Silver-studded blue butterfly



The Long-horned bee

Life on the Edge has walks coming up that may well interest readers.

- Tues 31st March, 1030 Invertebrates at Wembury
- Tues 28th April, 0800 Spring birds at Berry Head
- Tues 19th May, 1030 Farming for nature at Coleton camp
- Tues 30th June, 1030 Invertebrates at Brownstone

Photos provided by John Walters and Rob Skinner

Bridge commentary

This is a very good hand but how do you, playing South, make the best of it?

Assuming the Clubs split reasonably well between the other three hands, there should be 11 tricks from the top. You need just 1 more for a small slam and 2 more for a grand slam. It all depends on what your partner is holding. The two losers in your hand are the 3 of Spades and the 2 of Diamonds. If your partner holds the Queen in either of these suits it will be a winner.

A potential problem with your hand is that with so many top cards you may not be able to give the lead to the table. You may not be able to make any tricks in Hearts, even if your partner has the Ace.

So your opening bid must force your partner to keep the bidding open and to give you key information. Here are some possible opening bids.

- 1 Club** This is not forcing so should not be considered.
- 2 Clubs** This is probably your best opening bid. It forces your partner to reply and so give you some information.
- 2 NT** This too is a possibility but it invites a reply of 3 NT which is not very informative.
- 3 Clubs** This would be taken to be pre-empt and so would not be forcing. Totally unsuitable.
- 4NT** This is asking for Aces, so whether your partner has the Ace of Hearts, but not how strong the hand is in the other suits.

In fact, the Partner's hand was

♠ Q 9 8 2
♥ A 10 6 5
♦ Q 9 8
♣ 10 3

The contract ended in 6 Clubs which was made with an overtrick.

A more valuable, but more risky, contract would have been in No Trumps.

Groups

TOPIC	MEETING DAY	ORGANISER
Around the World in 80 Bites 1	Monthly meeting in members' houses	Janet Readings
Around the World in 80 Bites 3	Monthly meeting in members' houses	Tim Marsh
Badminton	Monday 15.15 – 16.15	Barry Northam
Book Club	Thursday pm	Alison Sale
Bridge	Tuesday weekly 13.30 – 16.00	John Cavell
Bridge Improvers	Either 2 nd Wednesday am or 2 nd Friday pm	Simon Gibbon
Chess	3 rd Monday at Quayside 1.30 beginners, 14.30 regulars	Roger Porkess
Choir	Wednesdays 10.00 – 12.00	Hazel Lewis
Creative Writing	3 rd Monday Waterside Bistro	Rita Trotman
Digital Photography	2 nd Monday 10.30 Dartmouth Inn	Paul Nunn
Discussion Group	2 nd Monday pm	Keith Smith
Film and Debate Group	3 rd Wed 13.00 Bridgetown Community Hall	Jeremy Holloway
Folk Band	Tuesday fortnightly 10.00	Jess Preece
Gardening 1	2 nd Monday pm	Mavis Schindler
Gardening 2	3 rd Thursday 14.00	Helen Brazier
Gardening 3	2 nd Wednesday 10.00	Alan Roffey
Geology	Dates variable	Caz Donovan
Local lunches	1 st Friday 12.00	Edwina Ratcliffe
Luncheon Club 1	2 nd or 3 rd Friday lunchtime	Rosemary Gillam

Groups and Cover Photograph

Mahjong	1 st and 3 rd Tuesdays 10 - 12 Dartmouth Inn	Maureen Wilmott
Music Appreciation	2 nd Thursday 10.30 Member's house	Barry Northam
Natural History	Monthly Tuesday/Wednesday	Dee Morris
Petanque	Wednesday & Thursday 11.00	Nigel Woodward
Play Reading 1	2 nd Friday am	David Wilks
Play Reading 2	2 nd & 4 th Fridays 10.30 Quayside	Edwina Ratcliffe
Portrait Group	Tuesday morning 10.00 - 12.00	Chrissie Bennett
Psychology 1	2 nd Tuesday am	Amy Summers
Psychology 2	3 rd Tuesday am	Peter Sheridan
Sailing	1 st Tuesday Dartmouth Inn	Bob Dow
Table Tennis	Wednesdays 11.00 - 12.30 Pavillions Leisure Centre	Barry Northam
Walking	1 st Friday	Richard Scheffer
Walking - Longer	3 rd Tuesday or Thursday	Bob Carpenter
Women's Interest Group	2 nd Thursday 11.00 Various venues	Tina Graham-Harrison

Cover Photograph

Aurora Borealis seen from Totnes on 17/1/26. Photo taken by Richard Scheffer.