

Newsletter

News for members of Beeston u3a

*Produced quarterly and distributed electronically to all members.
Some printed copies will be made available for new members and
anyone who has difficulty reading from a screen.*

December 2025

Next Open Meeting: Thursday 8th January 2026

Nottingham Herstory—50 Remarkable Women

Miriam Jackson from the Nottingham Women's History Group (whose aim is to celebrate, promote and research the contribution made by women to Nottingham's history) will be speaking about a book published by the Group last year.

Open meetings take place at Beeston Methodist Church (currently in the church hall due to ongoing refurbishments) on the first Thursday of the month, starting at 10a.m. with refreshments and time to mingle and chat, with a speaker at 10.30a.m.

Please remember to bring your own mug if possible.

There is no need to sign in to these meetings. New members and visitors will continue to be welcomed in the reception area.

A Zoom hyperlink is circulated to all members prior to the open meeting for those who are unable to attend in person.

Calendar of Future Open Meetings 2025

5th February 2026	Julia Tabreham	Carers Behind Bars Julia Tabreham, former Chief Executive of the Carers Federation, shares details of her research into prison healthcare. Julia is a member of Beeston u3a Committee and will be taking over as our new Speaker Seeker in May 2026.
5th March 2026	Emma Sheardown	'No such word as can't' Emma will share the inspirational journey from her parents being told she would never walk or talk to becoming World Champion in the sport of Para Dressage.

From the Chair...

Showcasing our groups

One of the privileges of my role as Chair is that I have the opportunity to visit our interest groups and see them in action. We currently have 109 different groups and the range and diversity of their activities is breathtaking. Starting from this month we are going to showcase this richness by featuring two or three different groups in our newsletters and website on a rolling program. This month we are highlighting the activities of the Practical Art, Flower Arranging, and Photography groups. If you would like your group to be showcased in future editions, encourage your group leaders to contact me.

Celebrating our volunteers

The willingness of Beeston u3a members to step up and volunteer for a whole range of different activities has always impressed me. To be honest we could not operate without them. At this month's open meeting I asked for volunteers to set up the hall for future meetings. I also asked if anyone would be interested in joining the team of yellow-sashed meeters and greeters who welcome members at each meeting. You can guess the outcome. We now have three new meeters and greeters and eight new helpers to set up the hall on a rota basis.

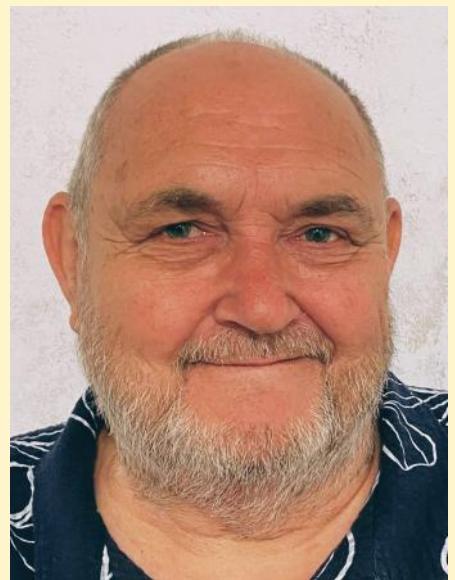
An opportunity not to be missed

We are currently looking for a volunteer to take on the role of Publicity Officer replacing Karen Attwood when she steps down in April 2026. This is a rewarding role promoting the rich range of activities and events offered by Beeston u3a. Our membership has increased by over two hundred in the past year and the Publicity Officer has a key role to play in maintaining our current healthy position in a climate where many u3as are experiencing declining numbers. This is a flexible role so it can fit into a busy person's schedule.

If you would like to know more about the role, contact me at chair@beestonu3a.org.uk. Training and support will be provided.

Finally, as the year comes to a close, I would like on behalf of the Beeston u3a Committee to send you our warmest wishes for a wonderful Christmas and a Happy New Year. We look forward to seeing you all refreshed and ready for new activities and experiences in the new year!

Warmest wishes,
Noel Kelly
Chair. Beeston u3a



Introducing.....

A big welcome to Lynda Child who has recently been seconded on to the Beeston u3a Committee.

Lynda is going to concentrate on encouraging as many people as possible to volunteer to help with Beeston u3a activities outside the Groups.

Lynda is well known in Beeston as the Chair of the popular Attenborough, Beeston, Chilwell Art Trail and she is well known to those who know her as a most excellent organiser and motivator.

Beeston u3a are fortunate that she has stepped forward to help.



Christmas Carols hosted by Stephen Degnan and our Singing for Fun Interest Group on December 11th



Recent Committee Events

It was a very good day for our annual stall in the Market Square, Beeston back in September. We managed to avoid the bad showers, although the stall nearly blew away once in the wind, despite the weights. The stall was manned by various members of the Committee and we made plenty of contact with potential members, new members and established members who dropped by during the day.

Mayor Robert Bullock also came to visit.

Treasurer Richard was having fun controlling the flag for the photo of the Mayor!

Karen Attwood

Publicity



From The Chair: Showcasing our Groups (1)

The Photography Group

The u3a Photo Group gives members a challenge, once a month, to take photographs on a topic decided by mutual agreement. The subjects range from locations such as Highfields Park and the Lace Market to topics like dereliction, patterns and textures. The equipment used by members ranges from camera phones to expensive DSLR pieces; however, merit is given for technique. Members submit a folio of photos for the whole group to view and to offer comments in a supportive way. You don't need to be an expert and relevant photos from your own personal albums are always welcome.

If you like what you see, do come along to see for yourself.



From The Chair: Showcasing our Groups (2)

Practical Art Groups

Beeston u3a offers two Practical Art groups, where members produce their own artwork in a friendly and supportive environment. Each group meets twice a month at the Conservative Club in Beeston. Experience ranges from those with professional qualifications to those who had never picked up a paintbrush before joining the group. No formal teaching takes place. Instead, members learn from each other in an atmosphere of fun, friendliness and trust. There is a warm feeling in the groups and a real buzz. The social element of making new friends is as important as the artwork produced, and members clearly enjoy each other's company. They share ideas, materials, help and advice. I saw some wonderfully creative and original work being produced, as you can see here. Other examples of the groups' work will go on the Beeston u3a website soon.

If you want to brighten your week join one of these inspiring groups. You will be welcomed with open arms.



From The Chair: Showcasing our Groups (3)

Flower Arranging Group

I dropped in to see the newly formed Flower Arranging group recently, and what a feast for the eyes it was. A riot of colour. The enthusiasm of the members was obvious, and to watch them at work was a revelation. I witnessed a blend of creativity, social engagement, and concentration. It was clearly a very therapeutic activity, and the end products were works of art as you can see here.

Noel Kelly



Review of previous Speakers' at our Open Meetings

Elizabeth Heery—Writing a Saga September Open Meeting

Actress and author Elizabeth Heery (who writes as Eliza Morton) spoke at the Beeston u3a September Open meeting.

She entertained the (slightly star struck) audience with some highlights of her career and the process of writing her popular sagas and getting them published.

Elizabeth came late to writing, in her 50s, but believes that if you have a story to tell that's the primary requisite to being a novelist. Being an established actor is an advantage – inhabiting a character is about telling stories as well.

Born in Formby, Elizabeth found herself playing scouse roles to begin with, including a stint on Brookside. She has extremely fond memories of playing Linda in Blood Brothers on stage. Several audience members privately shared great affection for her depiction of Madeline in Jeeves and Wooster.

Elizabeth writes sagas. She likes taking people to the edge of sadness and despair, but she always delivers a happy ending – she described it as 'gritty but heartwarming'.

Her latest novel, Betsy's War, is about a woman who falls for a pilot. True to her desire to inhabit the character, Elizabeth found a Tiger Moth pilot prepared to take her up into the skies – and even let her take control for a while. Describing a terrifying experience with no parachute and no brakes, the experience helped her form the characters and progress the story in the book.

It was a delight to meet such a lovely lady who spoke generously and inspirationally, especially for the readers and writers among us.

Karen Attwood



Dr. Chris Christie—A brief history of the English Language

October Open Meeting



Dr Chris Christie (who happens to be the sister of our esteemed chair Noel) gave a fascinating talk to a packed hall on the Brief History of the English Language at our October Open meeting.

Eminent academic and author, Chris's enthusiasm and expertise was evident, and we all enjoyed the whistlestop tour of the evolution of the way we talk now - and gained an appreciation for how things continue to change all the time.

An amusing video giving a summary of British dialects and a sharing of how the audience members would describe a bread roll showed how English exists in a range of varieties.

We were introduced to the family tree of languages, which showed that English is related to Danish, Dutch, German and Norwegian and alongside English, all these derive from a Germanic background.

Pictures of various invasions showed how the Celts language was heavily influenced by Latin via the Romans, and later 24000 new words were bought along by Anglo Saxon tribes. When the Norman French arrived they bought another 10000 words.

By the 15th Century there were 4.5 million Native English speakers but there were many differences between the words they were using. The invention of the printing press started to stabilise the language, at a time when the word use was increasing dramatically.

Shakespeare was using several forms in one passage for humour. Dictionaries were starting to be compiled but even in 1650 the language was not settled.

Chris gave us a passage from Jane Austin from 1813 which showed a settled language and one which we totally understand these days.

"Languages are like magnets", Chris told us, "and attract new words from cultures, concepts and calque (literal translations of an original language)".

There were plenty of examples and much food for thought throughout the talk.

Karen Attwood



Trish Roberts-Thomson and Friends

Friends of Beeston Station (FOBS)

November Open Meeting

4 members of FOBS addressed a packed hall at the November open meeting. Caroline and Trish (both also Beeston u3a members) together with Heather and Ann.

FOBS was established in 2017 after an initial meeting with Broxtowe MP at the time, Anna Soubry. There are now 15 volunteers running the group under the station adoption scheme which is overseen by East Midlands Railway (EMR) the current franchise holders for our local trains.

A brief and fascinating history of the station told how it was originally a small cottage back in 1839 when Beeston was a small village. In the earliest years of the railways, freight was the main user of the tracks – predominantly for the local hosiery industry. The 1881 census showed that there were a total of 141 workmen employed at the station and sidings (just east of the station which is now a housing estate). The station was rebuilt in 1847 in the signature style of twin pavilions. The current ticket office is the only original building still standing.

Historically the station was served by level crossing gates which facilitated pedestrians to cross over into Beeston Rylands. The bridge on Station Rd was built in 1969 but this made life difficult for passengers who couldn't navigate stairs to access the London-bound platform. During the 70s, 80s and 90s passenger traffic declined, with the platforms being rebuilt in 2004. Grade 2 listing of Beeston Station building (ticket office) was awarded in 1987 after campaigning by Beeston Civic Society. A Blue Plaque was awarded in 2014 celebrating 175 years of the railway.

A prevalence survey of traffic on 6.10.25 showed the following:

- 285 trains passed through the station of which 29 were freight;
- 256 passengers boarded trains at Beeston;
- 175 trains stopped at Beeston with approx. 15 trains per hour passing through.

5 bodies are involved with the oversight and management of Beeston station. Network Rail, East Midlands Railways (EMR), the Department of Transport (responsible for funding via the Access for All Fund), Broxtowe Borough Council (BBC) who are responsible for the 2 car parks and Notts County Council who are responsible for the roads.



Continued overleaf.....

Trish Roberts-Thomson and Friends

Friends of Beeston Station (FOBS)

November Open Meeting

FOBS routine activities:

1. Gardening – planters, tubs and general upkeep along Technology Drive; seasonal work watering, leaf sweeping etc.
2. All year round work – litter picking on Sunday mornings
3. Special projects – Transport in Beeston photo display which took a huge amount of work to initiate and deliver; tin bridge; Technology Drive improvement scheme; remembrance day display and the bug hotel.
4. Social activities – national celebrations, Christmas etc.

FOBS station issues and communications:

- Parking, drop-off, signage (or lack of), traffic management, canopies and shelters
- Communications – FB, press releases, email.
- Member of Erewash and Trent Community Partnership

An ongoing issue was access to platforms – this problem originated due to the station being designated “accessible” which had deterred any development for improving access. This despite it being a 500 metres walk from one platform to another (and only if you could climb the stairs!). However, in February 2019 the Minister for Rail visited the station which resulted in the “accessible” designation being dropped which then enabled FOBS to apply for funding from the DOT “Access for All Fund”. Thankfully this was finally successful. All the development work at the time was actively supported by the then Broxtowe MP Darren Henry who actively lobbied for improvements and set up the Beeston Station Improvement Fund to maintain momentum. A feasibility study was undertaken in 2021 with many obstacles identified – land ownership (of a tiny area at the bottom of the stairs to platform 2) which was rented out to Beeston Business Park for a peppercorn rent to BBC for 100 years! Also underground cabling was a huge issue BUT finally all these were overcome and in January 2024 work on the lifts on platform 1 commenced with this highly technical project being completed in December that year.

2025 – passenger numbers are up and more Network Rail and EMR improvements are planned – currently the forecourt of the EMR ticket office is under construction and during 2026 Network Rail will replace the canopies and shelters (the shelters all have rotten wood). Further landscaping of Locomotive Way is planned by FOBS and EMR.

Moral of the story:

Complain to your MP – you may just set in progress circumstances that resolve your complaint albeit it may take 8 years!!

Lots of questions from the audience – toilets (there’s a toilet in the ticket office building and it’s disabled-friendly); lack of signage for the tin bridge not being an access/exit from the station; lack of pick-up points at platform 1 due to size of taxi rank and current forecourt construction, plus complete lack of transport signage to Beeston Interchange and lack of local bus / tram information. The latter is currently under d/w Theresa Cullen (local councillor).

Dee May

Editor's note: I felt this local group deserved a comprehensive write up of local interest.

Jeanie Barton

Supported by Communities of Hope (Nigel Adams) and Beeston u3a Poetry Appreciation Groups

Festive Review

December Open Meeting



Jeanie Barton provided members with a medley of festive favourites during the morning

Nigel Adams of Communities of Hope gave an impassioned account of this local community hub providing holistic support to disadvantaged residents of Beeston and surrounding areas.



The review was ably compered by Julia Tabreham in her understudy role as forthcoming speaker seeker when Karen steps down in May

Jeanie Barton

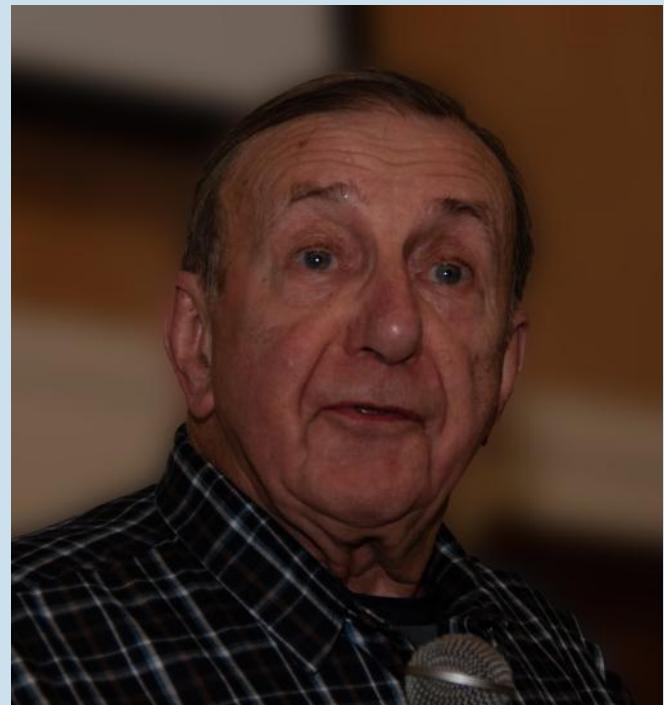
**Supported by Communities of Hope (Nigel Adams) and
Beeston u3a Poetry Appreciation Groups**

Festive Review

December Open Meeting



Jane eloquently recited a poem/carol by Anne Bronte together with 'An alternative view of Christmas' by John Betjeman



Bernard recited a poem by Norman Nicholson celebrating Innocents Day (28th December)



Members were treated to an array of festive treats which disappeared very rapidly!

Recent Events

The Fine Wine Evening

This social event has become the defining starting point for Christmas celebrations for a number of years now, and many of our members have enjoyed learning about, and sampling a selection of fine wines. Our resident experts gave us a rundown of the descriptions of each wine, and finally revealed what each bottle had cost. Everyone joined in with the appreciation of the various wines from all over the world, along with the charcuterie and cheeses which accompanied the wines. Many thanks must go to Adrian and John as the buyers and selectors, who gave us the benefit of their knowledge and research. Also, thanks to those who prepared the food for us all. Another successful social night for our members, and you can see the enjoyment on the faces of the photos, as well as the concentration when sampling the wines. This was a serious business!

Celia Billau



Interest Groups

End of Year Updates

Adventures Outside Your Comfort Zone

This youthful and energetic group is all about stepping outside of our comfort zones and embracing new experiences. Members gather once a month at The Star pub in Beeston, where we propose and discuss a variety of activities designed to challenge ourselves as well as having a laugh. Members volunteer to research and organise each trip which are then risked accessed and communicated by Facilitators as well as an active WhatsApp page.

Over recent months members have taken part in a variety of activities including ballroom and ballet dancing, foraging, narrow boating, archery and geocaching in Wollaton Park.

For those of you not aware of geocaching, it's like a walking treasure hunt using your mobile phone. There is a free app you can download that shows you the location of hidden "caches". Caches can vary from a nano sized magnetic container up to a sandwich box and can include "trackable" items that can travel worldwide. This is a great activity to pass a couple of hours whilst on holiday or to entertain bored children.

Nic Davey



Auditioning for
Strictly Come Dancing

Auditioning for Sadlers Wells Ballet



Grown men go treasure hunting
(geocaching)



Interest Groups

End of Year Updates

International Folk dancing – **SALI** dancers

Yes, we are still **Smiling And Laughing** as we enjoy **I**nternational dances and their music from many countries. We never go wrong although there may be variations! Since September we have added to our repertoire with a Polish dance (tricky) an Israeli dance (waltzy) some French dances (mainly from Brittany and Poitou) as well as another Bulgarian and a couple of Greek dances.

At our last session in December we tried a Romanian dance from the Banat region which is traditionally danced on Christmas Eve. The dance Jocul Dubelor (meaning dance of the drum) is danced to the sound of a drum – Dobe. This is a two-skinned drum that they use to accompany songs. They are small drums, about 10" in diameter, with two skin membranes spread on each side of a wooden ring, about four or five inches broad. The membranes are tied to each other with hemp string. They are struck with a stick. A group of singers and dancers go round the village singing carols and dancing. This particular dance is usually danced by boys or men so we had to pretend - another excuse to laugh. It is a fairly easy dance and is rewarded by brandy cakes (Romania) or Mince pies (Beeston).



We finished the year with some jolly party dances and we are looking forward to the new season. If you fancy joining our happy group we start again on January 13th.

Gill Morral



Interest Groups End of Year Updates

Lunch Club 2

Members of Beeston u3a Lunch Club 2 enjoying their Christmas meal at Chilwell Manor Golf Club (19th Hole!)

The group meet for a meal once a month at a variety of local establishments, ranging from pubs to fine dining restaurants and all the small locals in between. It's a friendly group that simply enjoys good food and the chance to have a friendly natter in a relaxed atmosphere.

Jo Muxlow



Birdwatching Group

The Birdwatching group meets in the 2nd week of the month on alternating days from September through until June. Our December outing was to Wollaton Hall on a beautiful sunny day and we were able to identify 26 different species in the 1.5 hour walk, followed by a welcome hot drink. Including these Mandarin Ducks!

We have trips to local spots within 5 miles of Beeston and longer outings further afield such as Idle Valley in Retford and Rutland Water.

We have several members who are experienced birdwatchers and generously share their knowledge and encourage others. The group is currently half full and new members would be welcome via groups@beestonu3a.org.uk

Julie Picken



Interest Groups

End of Year Updates

Sewing, Upcycling and Repairing Group

The Sewing, Upcycling and Repairing group have had a great few months recently. We are such a lively, friendly lot that, along with our usual monthly meetings, where we share knowledge, ideas and generally have a fun time, we recently had an outing to Derby enjoying a meal and a visit to a great fabric shop as Karen describes here....

Our day out started with a delicious meal at a Lebanese restaurant in Sandiacre which was followed by a drive to Derby Cathedral Quarter where we visited a fabulous fabric shop on Sadler Gate called Derby Cloth House. This shop is a cornucopia of fabrics, haberdashery and knitting wools and they are suppliers of wedding, ball, evening, dance wear and costume and theatrical fabrics. It was established in 1980 and also sells embroidery silks and sewing threads, ribbons, trimmings (including feathered), felt and buttons. It's a bit of a Tardis as it goes back a long way so is deceptively large. Finally we visited a delightful deli coffee shop, Milk and Honey on Sadler Gate before travelling home. All in all a brilliant day!



I asked members for their thoughts on the group and these are some responses:

"A warm and supportive environment. The team provides good advice on mending and dressmaking projects which inspires me to complete my assignments. " *Catherine*.

"Relaxing and fun. " *Gill*

"Friendly people sharing ideas. " *Frances*

"It (the group) caters for complete beginners like me to those who are very experienced and knowledgeable which provides a great learning environment for the beginners. " *Lyn*

"I like the idea of Upcycling old clothes but didn't have a clue how to do it. Since joining this group I am becoming more confident in making adjustments and even redesign of old clothes. It's very rewarding and a lot of fun too!" *Sue*

"I originally joined this group to learn how to use a sewing machine. I have now bought my own and do repairs, alterations, projects and free machine embroidery. What I love most about the group is how friendly and fun it is. We learn lots from each other and have also met up for lunch, afternoon teas, garden visits and exploring local fabric and haberdashery shops. " *Uta*

"In this supportive environment we can learn from each other to improve our sewing skills. It also gives an opportunity to take part in social activities which is great fun. " *Agnes*

Val Briggs

Editor: This is a fabulous way of describing one of our Interest Groups—using group members to illustrate the benefits of group membership. Thanks ladies and Val in particular for organising this lovely article.

Interest Groups

End of Year Updates

The Patchwork and Quilting Group has been now running since August 2018 and has a full membership of 16. We have seen people come and go over the years, but we still have a cohort of long standing members who were there at the inception ... a small group of us sitting around Mary N's kitchen table eager to learn a new skill!

We are a mixed group of novice and experienced sewers, but we all come together with one aim in mind ... to have fun and be creative. Some are rather braver and far more relaxed about cutting up large pieces of fabric into smaller pieces only to sew them back together again, albeit in a rather more attractive arrangement! There is only one golden rule in Patchwork, and that is never, ever throw those scraps of fabric away ... they can always be made into something wonderful.

We have an 'unofficial resident instructor' in Sue L, she is always on hand to help new members. She runs mini workshops, for new inexperienced members, to demonstrate the importance of correctly measuring fabric, correct cutting techniques, and how to safely use a rotary cutter, together with sewing methods, nesting of seams etc to ensure perfect piecing of a quilt top.

This year we have explored a variety of different and interesting quilt block designs, including Rail Fence, Scrappy/Strip quilt, Crossed Canoes using FPP (foundation paper piecing), which exercised our little grey cells to the limits as it required working back to front. We also tried our hand at raw edge appliqué with a Christmas theme. Members are free to bring their own projects to work on and are able seek help and guidance from others members as required.

Members volunteered to take a deep dive into aspects of the quilting journey- from needle types, sewing threads, colour schemes using a colour wheel, waddings, sashings and cornerstones, sandwiching the quilt layers, ideas for top quilting and finally binding.

We have a few project ideas in the pipeline for the new year - FMQ (free motion quilting), Flying Geese, Tumbling Blocks, Quilt As You Go.

In October we had a visit from Ceris, the new Project Linus Co-ordinator for the Nottingham area, who gave a very informative presentation on the history of Project Linus and her role as a volunteer. She provided us with an array of pastel and colourful pre-cut quilt kits, for members to take away and put together- these ranged from small baby/lap quilts to single bed size! Quilt donations have gone to a wider number of charities this year - including the SARC Unit (Sexually Abused Referral Centre) at the QMC, Neonatal and Teenage Cancer Trust, children in foster care and domestic abuse refuges.

Elaine Neville



Interest Groups End of Year Updates

French Conversation Group

This group has enjoyed a good 2025. we meet regularly on the second and fourth Mondays of each month. Each session is divided into two parts, the first devoted to a presentation by one of the members of the group, and the second where we talk in small groups of three or four.

The presentations this year have been varied and wide-ranging: Cezanne, the education system in France, French drinking customs (!), Astérix, French Polynesia and a host of others. We like to mix conversation with listening to recordings of French speakers. This year we also showed a French film in an extra session and members are alerted to upcoming French films at the Broadway cinema.

May we wish all members of u3a bonne année!

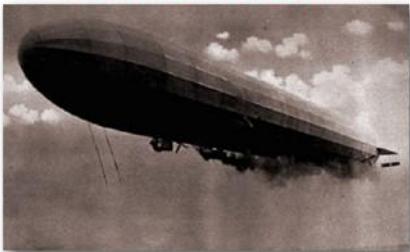
Frank Parry



Looking back on 2025: Beeston u3a History Group

U3A History Group Meeting
Friday 10th January 2025

Terror from the Skies



January 1916: The Night the Zeppelins Came

Speaker: Stephen Flinders

Beeston u3a History Group Meeting
Friday 11th April 2025

The Wars of the Roses



When the Throne of England changed hands
seven times in thirty years

Speaker: Noel Kelly

u3a Beeston u3a History Group
Summer Trip 2025

Members of the History Group and their partners are
invited to join us on our day trip to

Bosworth Battlefield Heritage Centre
& The 1620 House
Friday 20th June 2025



u3a Beeston u3a History Group Meeting
Friday 10th October 2025

Hildegard of Bingen 1098-1179
'Sybil of The Rhine'



Physician, Composer, Visionary,
Adviser to Popes and Kings

A talk by Judith Foxon

U3A History Group Meeting
Friday 14th February 2025

Thomas Paine:

The Man who set the World on Fire.



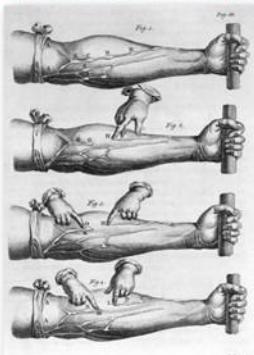
Was he a trouble maker or a man on a
mission to help humanity?

Speaker: Dr John Dornan

Beeston u3a History Group Meeting

Friday 14th March 2025

Simple Experiments that Changed History



Speaker: Professor Jim Turner FRS

Beeston u3a History Group Meeting
Friday 9th May 2025

Oliver Cromwell and The Puritan Revolution

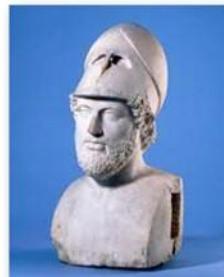


Speaker: John McLarney

Beeston u3a History Group Meeting

Friday 13th June 2025

5th Century Athens:
The Golden Century of Pericles



A Talk by Dr Bill Pavlidis

Beeston u3a History Group Meeting
Friday 11th July 2025

Unfair, Underhand and Damned un-English



The Advent of Submarine Warfare

A talk by Richard Coupland

Beeston u3a History Group Meeting

Friday 12th September 2025

Bishop Odo and
The Bayeux Tapestry



A talk by John Hassall

Beeston u3a History Group Meeting

Friday 14th November 2025

Richard Burton*



*Not that one! Instead, meet Ruffian Dick – an
extraordinary man and an extraordinary life!

A talk by Andrew Morrison

History Group Christmas Fuddle 2025

Friday 12th December 2025

A Christmas Feast
A Quiz by Richard Coupland
A Talk by Noel Kelly on



The Dark History of Fairy Tales

10am. Guild Room, Beeston Methodist Church.

Last but not least! Bee Writers' Short Story Challenge 2025

For many years, the creative writing group, Bee Writers, have run an annual short story writing challenge. This has been open to every member of Beeston u3a as well as creative writers from Ilkeston, Long Eaton and Stapleford u3as. The Beeston u3a Committee annually contributed a Waterstones' gift voucher as a prize for the winning writer.

Last year, 2024, we gave ourselves a break from running such a challenge. However, the desire to put into practice the skills we were learning and to challenge ourselves to spend some time on writing a story, was too much for one member who volunteered to run the challenge for 2025. Thank you, Peter!

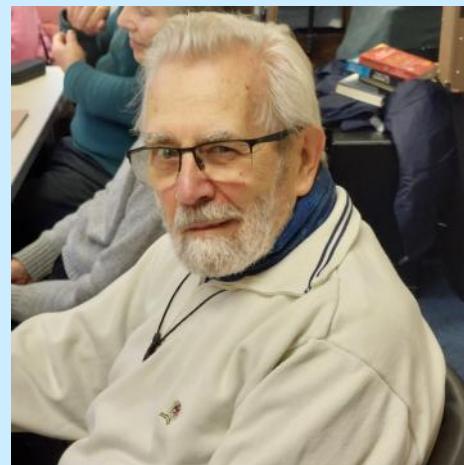
We made some changes. Firstly, we decided to keep it 'in house' and not open it to anyone outside our writing group. Secondly, we decided to select a winning story plus two runners up. As this was to be within our group, we felt we could not approach the Committee to support it and that we would finance the prizes ourselves.

One of our main changes was in the way we selected our judge. In the past, we have invited people we have had as speakers, local professional poets and novelists, as guest judges. However, at the beginning of this year, we were asked by u3a national, to link with a new creative writing facilitator in Tiverton, to assist her. As part of linking up we asked her group if they would judge the final three winning stories from the five our group had selected from the eighteen entries. They willingly did so, for which we are extremely grateful. This is real cross-country u3a collaboration. We hope to do the same for them in the future.



The winning stories were announced at our December meeting, and the winner was Joan Tully with her story, 'It Was a Blast'. The theme was a 'Memorable Holiday' and Joan gave us a futuristic story of a surprise holiday in space. It was both believable and amusing. The runners-up were John Gallagher and Peter Hilton with their stories, 'It Ain't Like the Bronx' and 'Man's Best Friend'. Our congratulations to all three.

Joan Tully



The experience was such a positive one that we are already planning our theme and timetable for 2026. Peter Hilton, the masochist, has already volunteered to run it for a second time, for which we are all extremely grateful.

Helen Stewart
Group facilitator.



John Gallagher

Peter Hilton

Joan Tully's winning short story

It was a blast

I've booked a holiday."

"What? Where?"

"It's a surprise."

"Well at least tell me what I need to pack."

"Nothing. It's all-in."

I surveyed my husband suspiciously. He *never* booked holidays. Where on earth was he taking me?

One week later, having arrived in the middle of I didn't know which country, we were bussed to an ominous-looking hanger and assigned to cubicles where we changed into the outfits that had indeed been provided.

"You've got to be kidding," I muttered as I pulled on a shapeless white suit. Then a helmet was rammed unceremoniously onto my head and in a daze I followed the queue of other 'zombies' into a lift. When it came to a halt at level three we got our first glimpse of our next mode of transport.

"No way!!" I screamed at the sight of the rocket swaying precariously on its flimsy metal structure. I fought desperately to retrace my steps, but before I knew it I was tightly strapped down.

"Surprise!" my husband chuckled.

Unable to turn my back on him, I squeezed my eyes tight shut. The G-Force was nauseating as, along with my breakfast, we shot upward towards the universe. After what seemed an eternity we slowed down to approach a portal on the side a cylindrical space station. Once we'd docked, our seatbelts automatically unlocked and we floated forward.

"That's the last time you book anything," I growled through gritted teeth.

We were met by humanoid robots that divided us into groups and talked nineteen to the dozen about our surroundings. The station was split into zones, with a Trumptastic Tower in the centre - their words, not mine, but you can see where this is heading. The apartments were named San Francisco, Florida, New York, Hollywood, Yosemite, Mojave. We had been allocated Palm Springs, which suited me as each zone's temperature reflected its earth's namesake. I was relieved to be in a warm climate, although some considered a cool temperature more akin to the experience of being in outer space.

"Say 'hi' to Hyacinth," our robot receptionist smiled as 'it' booked us in.

"Who?"

"We sure do love Hyacinth Bucket," Robbie, as we'd name 'it', chuckled.

"How on earth...?"

"We get Sky TV."

With that 'of course you do' hanging in the air, Robbie led us into our quarters and - "Wow!"

"Breathtaking isn't it?" 'it' sighed, "I never get tired of that view."

Without another word, 'it' turned and left us to stare in awe as we orbited the Earth. The auroras held me transfixed, and the dozens of storms providing their own firework display gave me a whole new respect for meteorologists. If only Michael Fish had been able to see this back in 1987...

Continued overleaf.....

It's a blast continued.....

We changed into fresh suits and met up with our fellow passengers in Trump Tavern. Everyone excitedly tried to talk at once - until our meals arrived.

"How the heck..?" Needless to say, being in a weightless environment was a messy affair and some of us went to bed hungry.

Then came: A Day in the Life of an Astronaut. Floating between the thankfully-padded zones was great fun, but the activities were rather less successful. I'm not sure how many scientific experiments we wrecked, or how off-course we would have veered if they'd relied on our calculations. But that was nothing compared to trying to complete our ablutions...

"Now you know why I've been taking you to those zero-gravity exercises," hubby grinned. I merely glared sarcastically back at him, although truth to tell I was beginning to enjoy myself; but I wasn't going to tell him that. I just lay under the stars wondering whatever had happened to romance.

Then it was time for our extravehicular spacewalk. At first I flatly refused. I'd seen the programmes about astronauts nearly drowning when their helmets filled with water and I wasn't about to go home in a body bag, or worse, be ejected to orbit earth for eternity. But 'Robbie' was very persuasive and even said 'he' would come and hold my hand. Hubby said 'he' obviously had a crush on me. That did it - I agreed to go, even if it was to make my husband jealous for bringing me on this stupid trip. But what was I thinking? How could hubby be jealous of a metal robot that didn't even have a proper hand to hold. But, suited and booted, I visibly trembled as we clambered out of the hatch and attempted to stand upright while waving a stupid little Union Jack (yes, Jack - I don't believe in this Union *Flag* nonsense). Of course once outside we could see Trump's face plastered all over the spacecraft's exterior - he was underwriting these 'G-Force Getaways' after all.

I lasted about five minutes outside in the cosmos. I tried to admire the universe, I really did, but when Robbie slipped and nearly ended up as asteroid-belt fodder, that was it, and I crawled back into what had surprisingly become my comfort zone. My husband followed closely behind and it was with smug satisfaction that I saw the bilious green hue plastered across his face.

One of my favourite parts of the trip was watching the literal Guinea pigs flying around in their padded cages. Of course, they were brought down to earth (metaphorically-speaking) every once in a while to nibble at their veg, but they seemed to be enjoying themselves - sometimes even more than we humans.

Thankfully we could 'zoom' our families most days. Our kids just couldn't believe where we were. "Did Dad drug you or something?" our daughter accused. It wasn't until we got home that I whispered to her, "Actually, I had a real blast."

But my lasting memory was our robot's affectionate remark: "Say 'hi' to Hyacinth." For all Trump's declaring that in future Americans will speak only American, his AI seems to have other ideas.

Joan Tully