



MONTHLY MEETINGS

25th September 2025 - Monthly Meeting review

On Thursday 25th September, the presentation at our monthly meeting followed the recent trend of providing something different. The topic was the “Air Transport Auxiliary” (ATA) which operated during World War 2. Our guest speaker was Caroline Speirs, whose mother, Rita Baines from Trentham, was in the ATA during the war and even flew the iconic spitfire. She was the only lady ferry pilot from Staffordshire.



Caroline commenced by providing a history of the Air Transport Auxiliary. Pilots were located in various areas of the country, in groups known as **Ferry Pools**. The role of these pilots was to ferry aircraft (both new and repaired) to the places they were needed by the RAF, hence they were called “**Ferry Pilots**.” Meir Aerodrome was one of the collection sites that was used extensively during the War period. The Rootes Securities factory, located across the adjoining Grindley Lane, produced Blenheims and Beaufighters and also carried out repairs as required.

Caroline then talked generally about the experiences of her mother and the other lady pilots, and concluded with a 20-minutes film for which she wrote the script. The film explained why Rita Baines, with no flying experience at all, came to fly planes for the ATA.

Many thanks to Caroline Speirs for an excellent presentation, which was enjoyed by all.

Dates for your Diary

30th October 2025 – A presentation will be given by Peter Hardy, whose talk is titled “The National Memorial Arboretum.” The talk will cover the history and development of the Arboretum.

27th November 2025 – The pre-Christmas entertainment will again be provided by the branch ukulele group, and will include a “Singalong.” Songs will be a variety of well-known ballads and Christmas favourites. Festive refreshments will be served after the presentation.

Please encourage other members to attend, what is always a good afternoon out.

MEMBERSHIP

At the branch committee meeting held on 9th October 2025, the Membership Secretary reported that the count of members was 408, which comprised 357 renewals and 51 new members. The total membership count at a similar time in 2024 was 422, which indicates a small reduction and is of course disappointing.

Many thanks to those who have persuaded family and friends to join us, but as the figures above indicate, it is imperative that current members encourage new memberships whenever the opportunity arises. Similarly, if you have a Facebook Page, please publicise whenever you are able.

Should you know anyone who would like to join us, application forms can be obtained from our website, or from membership officer, Alan Stevenson, Tel. 01782 395760: or by emailing: a.stevenson09@btinternet.com

You can also find us on Facebook at: <https://www.facebook.com/StokeSouthu3a/>

May we respectfully remind members who have not yet renewed, that the new membership year commenced on 1st April 2025.

u3a TRUST MATTERS

The 2025 Trust AGM took place on Wednesday 15th October in Hinckley, Leicestershire. It was again a hybrid event, i.e. attendances both in person and on-line. The chairman attended on-line on behalf of the branch.

A summary of agenda matters that were discussed/agreed, together with noteworthy statistics are presented below:

1. Although there are 1015 u3as, only 350 branches registered to vote at the AGM.
2. There were only two resolutions that required branch approval. Since both were of a statutory nature, they were approved without discussion.
3. There are presently 420,000 u3a members within the UK, this being a slight increase on the previous year. Trust staff remain acutely aware of a prior year resolution that requires them to achieve a membership of 500,000 by 2028.

4. The annual subscription of Trust membership will remain at £4 per member for the current year.
5. The Trust is still advertising roles on the governance and finance committees. Additionally, it is seeking new directors to join the board of the u3a trading company (*TATTL*), and the u3a magazine committee.

COMMITTEE MATTERS

Potential new group – Seated Yoga update

The Groups' Co-ordinator has conversed with the group leader of the presently operating Yoga class to determine her thoughts. The leader wished to have more time to ponder over suggestions.

Since some of the members interested in seated yoga do attend the current yoga class, the committee consider it unlikely they will attend both classes. The Groups' Co-ordinator was unable to attend the October committee meeting to provide an update, therefore the matter will remain in abeyance until an outcome is determined.

FOCUS ON GROUPS

Discussion Group

The next group meeting is confirmed for **Tuesday 11th November 2025**, 10.00am to 11.15am. It will take place in Stoke Library, which is located in the Council Hub close to the Market.

The subject under discussion will be: **"Remembrance Day"**

The group leader is Bob Jones whose contact number is 01785 817743.

New members are welcome to join the group.

Family History

A short reminder that the activity remains suspended for the foreseeable future due to the group leader being unwell. Group members can, however, continue to use the computers and software at Longton Library. Should anyone wish to take on the leadership role on a short-term basis, please contact the Groups' Co-ordinator.

High attendances – Gentle Exercise class

As a result of a Waiting List being operated for this highly attended class, we advise potential new attendees to contact the group leader before initial attendance.

Gardening and Nature Lovers



The group's next meeting is a visit to Jackson's Garden Centre in Bagnall on **Friday 14th November 2025**.

The Garden Centre is located just outside the beautiful Peak District. Jackson's is a traditional, family-run plants nursery that was established over 60 years ago, with an extensive range of plants being grown on site. In addition to the Garden Centre, the site has a tea room and farm shop.

The Tea Room serves delicious homemade hot and cold food and cakes. The Farm Shop is brimming with quality locally sourced food, delicious home baking and much more.

The address of Jacksons is : Thorney Edge Road, Bagnall, Staffordshire, ST9 9LE

Members are requested to meet outside "NEXT" in Longton between 10.15-10.30am, and travel will be arranged for those without transport. Please contact Josie Peirson if you have any concerns. Josie's telephone details are: Mob: 07775 974876 or Landline: 01782 399711.

Flower Arranging Group

The group's next two meetings will take place on 27th October and 10th November 2025.

Lunch Group

The group's regular meeting place is the "Man in Space" in Trentham (New Inn Lane). The next planned meeting will take place at 12.30pm on **Tuesday 11th November 2025**. Further details may be obtained from Christine Whitfield, Mob: 07939 621499. Christine requests that new attendees contact her prior to the meeting, so that table numbers can be booked in advance.

Local History

Group leader, Phil Rowley is presently unavailable due to illness. Group meetings will however continue as normal, the next two meetings being on 4th and 18th November. Should any newcomers wish to join the class, please contact Andrew Devin (01782 942352).

OTHER ITEMS OF INTEREST

Day Trips

(a) "Doreen's Friendship Group" - The next planned Day Trip is a "**Christmas Mystery**" on **Wednesday 3rd December 2025** (From Longton Central Hall). Should anyone be interested, you may contact Doreen for further information. Her contact details are: Landline 01782 373369 or Mob. 07818 811153.

(b) The “Closer to Home” Walking Group’s next trip is to **Bury Market** on **Wednesday 10th December**. You may contact Carole Arrowsmith on 07871231767 for further details.

Winter Fuel Scam alert

The Department for Works and Pensions (DWP) is concerned that scams are on the increase as the first Winter Fuel payments are planned to commence during November. The DWP have noted in the national press that fraudsters may send messages posing as government officials processing winter fuel applications. They advise everyone that payments are made automatically and would never ask for bank details by text. The emphatic message is that anyone receiving a text message inviting them to apply for a payment **should not engage with it**.

Outdoor Art Exhibition

Do you enjoy viewing Art? Stoke-on-Trent is the first city in the UK to host the National Gallery outdoor exhibition which features 15 life-sized masterpieces on display in Bethesda Gardens for everyone to enjoy up close. Bethesda Gardens is located opposite The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery. The exhibition runs until **January 2026** and displays famous masterpieces from the world-famous London gallery, printed at life-size. The National Gallery is one of the most prestigious art galleries in the world, housing a collection of paintings from the late 13th to the early 20th century.

It is a huge cultural coup for Stoke-on-Trent, and a reflection of its unique cultural heritage. Everyone is able to enjoy viewing without being restricted by opening hours or entry fees.



Covid and FLU



The NHS is advising everyone, who is entitled, to not allow Flu or Covid to interfere with your winter plans.

Consequently, they advise that you book your vaccines early and stay protected.

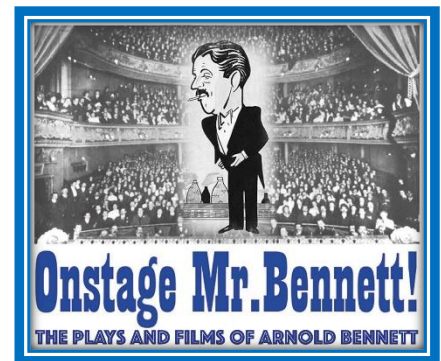
Ray Johnson Film Archive

On Tuesday 18th November 2025 at 11am, The Mitchell Arts Centre presents:

“Onstage Mr Bennett!”

Several of Arnold Bennett’s books were adapted for the stage, and he also wrote original plays and screenplays for films in the silent era. He eventually earned more from his plays and films than for all the books he wrote! The films will see some of them brought back to life.

The screening is a community day - drop in free event.



This Newsletter is also accessible on our website (via the News Button). Please try to share information with fellow members who do not have access to the internet.

Items for publication in the next Newsletter will need to reach Andrew Devin by Monday, 17th November 2025. Tel: 01782 942352 or email: a.devin2@gmail.com