



MONTHLY MEETINGS

26th February 2026 – Monthly Meeting Review

The Branch was very pleased to welcome Lou Macari as our guest speaker at the Monthly Meeting held on 26th February. Lou told his story of having a long career as a professional footballer, followed by club management. After leaving football, Lou considered that he had been in a privileged position throughout his life and had done little else. In 2016, after reading about the number of homeless people in Stoke-on-Trent, he decided that he must do something to make a difference. This was the time his journey began. He contacted local council members to find a building, leading to the creation of the Macari Centre in 2016, which initially provided dormitory-style accommodation, food, and clothing. This was located in Regent Road, Hanley.



During the Covid Pandemic in 2020, dormitories were deemed by the authorities to be unsafe, so Lou found an acceptable alternative. He rented a warehouse and installed 48 individual wooden pods, which provided residents with their own socially distanced space and amenities.

In August 2023, the Macari Foundation Centre moved its operations to the former Victoria Public House on Fletcher Road in Stoke. New self-contained apartments were constructed inside the building, so providing improved living conditions. The Centre presently houses twenty-one residents in self-contained apartments, and two in a nearby “Halfway-House.” Lou remains its figurehead and is still involved in its operations. Funding of course remains a challenge with grant aid never a certainty. We are very pleased to report that due to the generous contributions from the audience and the branch, a sum of £300 has been submitted to the Macari Foundation.

It was clear from Lou’s presentation that he is a compassionate man with a strong social conscience. We thank him sincerely for his excellent presentation which was well received by everyone in attendance.

We are truly fortunate that Lou chose to settle in Stoke-on-Trent.

Dates For Your Diary

26th March 2026 – The meeting offers **Spring Time Bingo** and will be led by committee members Diane and Beverley. There will be three traditional games of bingo (Lines and Full House), with prizes for the winners. There will also be a spring time quiz after the first two games, this will comprise 20 cryptic questions, but there will be one winner only (decider questions will therefore be posed if necessary).

Come along and try your luck. The meeting will conclude with refreshments and an Easter cake.

30th April 2026 – Lauren Simmonds will provide a presentation titled **“Pets as Therapy.”** The work of the Charity is all about creating everyday moments of magic. It partners with schools, hospitals, care homes and community groups to bring the comfort, companionship and joy of a **“therapy pet visit”** to those who need it most.

Lauren intends to bring along her dog “Boston.”

21st May 2026 – Popular local professional singer Holly Reynolds will entertain us after the conclusion of the AGM. Holly was very well received on her last visit a few years ago, and she will sing well known songs from the 50s and 60s.

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

Refreshment Helpers at Monthly Meetings

In last month’s Newsletter, the committee appealed for volunteers to join the catering team at monthly meetings to help serve drinks and clear up afterwards. Catering Officer, Dianne, was delighted with the response at the February meeting and wishes to convey her thanks to members as follows:

“I appreciated the wonderful response for help with the monthly meeting refreshments. Thank-you to everyone who assisted with serving and clearing up so efficiently. “Since refreshments are provided at every monthly meeting, extra help from attendees will always be welcomed.”

MEMBERSHIP

At the branch committee meeting held on 12th March 2026, the Membership Officer reported that the latest count of members was 434, (of which 64 were new members).

As at the same time in 2025, the branch had 447 members, thus showing a current reduction of 13 members. The committee, although disappointed, continue to work hard to retain members.

Please encourage new membership whenever the opportunity arises. Likewise, if you have a Facebook Page, please publicise whenever you are able.

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/>

u3a TRUST MATTERS

1. The Trust's CEO was pleased to announce that vacant council positions were filled in all regions except the West Midlands. No nominations were received from within our region.

2. The Trust is conducting a "u3a and me – member survey." It wants to learn from members; what they enjoy; what they get from their u3a; and how u3a fits into their lives. The Trust considers that responses should help them to raise the profile of the u3a.

COMMITTEE MATTERS

1. Membership Renewal and AGM Planning

The Committee's current focus remains on annual membership renewal, and planning for the AGM.

Circulation of Membership Renewal Forms and AGM Documents.

Many thanks are offered to both Lynne and Alan Stevenson who are still in the process of completing the huge task of circulating the above documents to members. Arranging for the printing of documents; placing into envelopes; and then hand delivering/posting, involves much time and effort.

(a) Membership Renewals

May we respectfully remind everyone that the new membership year commences on 1st April 2026.

(b) AGM Documents

(1) The Invitation Letter advises members that the AGM will take place on 21st May 2026. The document also contains the agenda for the meeting, (a small number of agendas will also be available on the day of the meeting).

(2) The second document is a "Committee Application Form" which contains a brief description of the vacant positions. As recorded within the Invitation Letter, the branch has eight committee vacancies which relate to all four officer roles, and four general committee positions. It is vital that we have sufficient committee members to fill all essential roles.

2. Treasury issue relating to membership renewals

Due to the introduction of bank charges in 2025 for the lodgement of cheques, the Branch Treasurer considers that it would be helpful if members could pay membership fees by cash, whenever possible. The Membership Secretary and Treasurer will attend group meetings and monthly meetings to minimise cash being remitted in the post.

3. Entertainments Co-ordinator

An appeal has been placed in the last two Newsletters regarding the necessity of filling the impending vacancy of the position of branch Entertainments Co-ordinator. There has been no response to date, and as previously stated, early acceptance of the role would provide a volunteer with some useful time to shadow the incumbent.

Should any members find this vacancy of interest, please contact Andrew Devin as follows:
mob: 07486 376483 or a.devin2@gmail.com

FOCUS ON GROUPS

Discussion Group

The next group meeting is confirmed for **Tuesday 14th April 2026**, 10.00am to 11.15am. It will take place in Stoke Library, which is located in the Council Hub close to the Market.

Last month's subject is being continued, it is titled: **Slavery in the 21st Century**

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

New members are welcome to join the group.

Gardening and Nature Lovers



The group's next meeting will take place on Friday 17th April 2025 (third Friday of the month – not the usual second Friday). The contemporary gardens have matured into some of the finest in Britain, described by James Alexander Sinclair in The Telegraph, as “The garden makeover of the decade”. Building on Trentham's rich horticultural legacy, currently and over the next few years, Trentham is undergoing a series of exciting renovation projects, investing in and developing new plantings whilst refreshing existing schemes.

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.

Local History

The next two group meetings will take place on **24th March** and **7th April**. Should anyone have any queries, please speak to the group's new contact, Andrew Devin, mob. 07486 376483.

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 14th April 2026**. 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.

Potential New Group – Board Games

Branch member, Derek Wardle, had proposed a number of good ideas for the introduction of this new group. After advertising the proposal in the January and February Newsletters, the response has unfortunately been poor. Two members only were interested in general board games and just one person in chess. The committee has decided to shelve the matter for the time being, but could re-visit at some time in the future. The committee would like to place on record its thanks to Derek for his interest and enthusiasm.

Potential New Ukulele Beginners Group

As a result of a waiting list being maintained in respect of the ukulele group, it was reported in last month's Newsletter that former group leader, Barbara Cooke is willing to start up a second group for beginners. Since a number of expressions of interest has been received and further interest is anticipated, the committee has authorised a three months trial period. Further details will be recorded on the Branch Website.

Second Badminton Group

This second Badminton activity has now commenced.

The group meets weekly (3.30pm to 4.30pm) on Mondays at Michelin Athletic Club Sports and Leisure, Rosetree Avenue, Trent Vale. ST4 6NL.

Should you have any queries, please contact Group Leader Linda Burgess whose telephone number is 07392 401265.

Indoor Kurling – Change of Room and Day

The Indoor Kurling activity has now moved from its regular room on the top floor of Central Hall to the Main Hall. The attendance day will change from alternate Wednesdays to alternate Fridays, but the group's start time will remain at 10am.

Outdoor Bowls

The Outdoor Bowls group will commence the 2026 Summer Season on Wednesday 1st April, and will continue until early Autumn. Group meetings are weekly, and are held at Fenton Private Bowling Club, Claude Street, Fenton, ST4 4LL. Since the group is already over-subscribed, group leader, Dave Darby is maintaining a waiting list. Therefore, if anyone wishes to attend, please contact Dave on 01782 317408, to determine if there are vacancies.

Walking Football

A member of Staffordshire Football Association has contacted the branch asking whether they could support the setting up of "Walking Football" as an activity. This particular activity has taken off very well in numerous u3as around the country, so it is being advertised to determine whether there is any interest within the branch.

Could expressions of interest be conveyed to the Chairman whose contact details are shown on the bottom line of this newsletter.

OTHER ITEMS OF INTEREST

Day Trips

The Stoke South Walking Group's next trip is to **Hebden Bridge and Halifax** on **Thursday 16th April 2026**. The cost is £25 (cash or cheque). Pick-up is opposite B and M at 9am, and return is 5pm.

You may contact Brian King on 07929 939519 for further details.

Garden Waste Service.

A reminder that residents can now sign up for the 2026/27 garden waste collection season. The service is a fortnightly collection, starting from Tuesday 1 April 2026 to Wednesday 31 March 2027, with a two-week closure period for Christmas. The cost for a one-year subscription to the service is £42. You will need to make this payment by credit or debit card. Once you have made your payment you will receive a confirmation e-mail, and your brown bin will be collected on your scheduled day. A bin sticker will arrive shortly after payment.

If you have any items you wish to have publicised in any future Newsletter, please contact Andrew Devin, Tel: 07486 376483 or email: a.devin2@gmail.com