



MONTHLY MEETINGS

30th July 2026 – Monthly Meeting Review

Our guest speaker was local historian and researcher John Heal; his presentation was titled “**The photographs of William Blake of Longton.**” John has catalogued and promoted the historic



Edwardian glass-plate negatives and photographs of William Blake (1874–1957). Blake was a Stationer and Photographer based in a shop in Longton (98, Stafford Street – later re-named the Strand). The negatives are now held by The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery. John showed the audience many of these negatives in their developed form. Two of the most iconic pictures are shown within the text.

John also has a personal postcard collection of Blake’s postcard series and he highlighted a number from the "Smokies" set, titled “Fresh Air for The Potteries.” These cards captured both the visuals of heavy industrial smoke and a concern for the social conditions of local working people.

John encouraged the audience to comment on the images, which they did with some enthusiasm. We thank John very much for his presentation which was enjoyed by all.

As an aside, to mark 150 years since the birth of William Blake, Ray Johnson produced a video entitled “William Blake - Edwardian photographer of Stoke-on-Trent and North Staffordshire.” The video is narrated by John Heal and covers many of Blake’s photos. The free video is located in the Staffordshire Film Archive page on YouTube.



Dates for your Diary

27th August 2026 - Following prior year successes, “**Crafternoon Tea**” is going to be repeated. The session will again be provided in-house, and managed by Diane and Beverley.

Crafts on offer will be:

1. Flower Arranging: You will make a tea-time themed arrangement. All flowers and utensils will be provided.

2. Glass Decorating: Decorate a small glass using special pens. Some items will be provided, but if you have a small item you would like to decorate, please bring it along.

3. Card Making:

4. Art: Also, and new for 2026 we challenge you to find your inner Picasso. The Art Group will provide materials for you to experiment with, e.g. pastels, coloured pencils, water colours, acrylics, etc. There is of course no pressure to produce “Fine Art”, just come along and discover how you can use different media, and perhaps find a new hobby.

After being creative, you can enjoy a cake with coffee or tea.

24th September 2026 – A gentleman named Chris Stratman will provide live musical entertainment. His genre of music is that of “The Shadows”, and the title of his performance is “**The history of Britain’s first supergroup.**”

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

MEMBERSHIP

As at 16th August 2026, the Membership Secretary reported that the count of members was 387, which comprised 348 renewals and 39 new members. The total membership count at a similar time in 2025 was 394, which included 38 new members. The difference of seven fewer members this year is not a concern to the committee, but we would of course prefer the numbers to be on the increase.

Many thanks to those who have persuaded family and friends to join us, and please encourage new memberships whenever the opportunity arises. Likewise, 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 branch Secretary, 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 Chief Executive thanks everyone who took part in the recent national "*u3a and me* survey". The aim is to fully understand how the u3a impacts members' lives. Trust staff are working on the final stages of a summary report which will be shared with branches in September.
2. u3a Week will take place, 19-27 September 2026. The CEO considers it to be a celebration of positive ageing, highlighting our members lived experiences. This year's theme is "*expanding horizons*." The Trust is planning a line-up of online talks and events, requests members to try something different in celebration of u3a Week.
3. The Trust has organised a free workshop on two dates: 3rd September and 7th October. The workshop is titled "**Contingency and succession planning**." The two-hour online sessions explore what steps can be taken, and the need to share ideas with other u3a members. The branch committee is acutely aware of the necessity of succession planning, but are unable to implement any sort of plan without the strong interest of branch members.
4. The Chair of the u3a Council has written to all branch chairmen within the West Midlands, informing them that a new Regional Support Trust Volunteer, named Barry Appleby, has been appointed to visit and offer support to branches.

COMMITTEE MATTERS

Committee Vacancies

Another gentle reminder that a number vacancies remain within the committee. Should any member have a change of heart, please contact the chairman whose details are recorded at the bottom of this Newsletter. The committee may co-opt up to two members during the year, and they will still attract full voting rights.

It is hoped that we shall have a new Entertainments Co-ordinator in post before the next monthly meeting. Details will be provided after committee ratification.

FOCUS ON GROUPS

Discussion Group

The next group meeting is confirmed for **Tuesday 8th September 2026**, 10.00am to 11.15am. It will take place in Stoke Library, which is located in the Council Hub close to the Market. Presently, there are vacancies within the group.

The subject will be: The future of High Streets?

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

Lunch Group

The group's regular meeting place is the "Man in Space" in Trentham (New Inn Lane). The next planned meeting (2nd Tuesday in the month,) will take place at 12.30pm on **8th August 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.

Indoor Kurling

We are still encouraging more members to join this small group. Although the group recently changed its meeting room and meeting day, i.e. to alternate Fridays in the main hall, there has been little impact on attendance. The enjoyment of the group very much relies on there being a good number of participants. We are sure that you will enjoy the friendly competition.

The next meeting, in the main hall at Longton Central Hall, takes place from 10am to 12 noon on **Friday 31st July 2026 - why not give it a try?**

If you are interested in joining this group, please contact Trish Rowley on 07939 209054.

Gardening and Nature Lovers

No visit to an outside location will take place during the month of August. The regular group members will alternatively meet at the home of a group member to determine the programme of visits for the next six months.

Please contact Josie Peirson if you require further information. Josie's telephone details are: Mob: 07775 974876 or Landline: 01782 399711.

Mexican Train Dominoes

Despite a number of appeals to the membership for a restart of this longstanding activity, there has sadly been no response. The situation though will remain pending for a little while longer. Games are good fun with simple rules, but you can learn and implement a variety of strategies. The group has regularly met on alternate Wednesday mornings at Longton Central Hall. If anyone is interested, please converse with the Chairman whose details are at the bottom of this document.

Family History

One last call for a new group leader to the Family History group. Les Waller's wife, Hilary, has donated to the branch all of Lesley's reference books, these will be passed on to any potential group leader.

The activity location will remain at Longton Library, where use of the computers and software is still permitted. Should anyone be interested in attending / re-starting this group as its leader, please converse with the Chairman whose details are at the bottom of this document.

Flower Arranging Group

The group has decided to take their traditional summer break, their last summer meeting has now taken place, and they will resume on **14th September 2026**.

OTHER ITEMS OF INTEREST

Day Trip – Walking Group

The Stoke South Walking Group's next trip is to Lincoln on **Thursday 10th September 2026**. Pick-up is in Longton at 9.15am, and return is 5pm.

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

North Staffs Pensioners Convention – Day Trip

In October 2025, the branch enjoyed an excellent presentation from a longstanding volunteer at the National Memorial Arboretum. The Arboretum is a site of national remembrance located in Alrewas, Staffordshire. Its objective is to honour the fallen, and to recognise service and sacrifice.

The Pensioners Convention still have spare seats for a planned excursion on **Wednesday 16th September**. The price for non-members of the group is £25. If you are interested, please call the Convention Office on 01782 201724, or Satnam on 07849 015675.

Doreen's Friendship Group

The Friendship group is based at Longton Central Hall. Doreen is offering a day trip to Morecambe on **12th August**, and a Senior Citizen Coach Holiday to "The Suncliff Hotel" Bournemouth - Half Board with Excursions – **Monday 5th to 9th October**.



If anyone finds these trips of interest, please telephone Doreen on: **01782373369 or 07818811153**.

Potteries Men Sing

Potteries Men Sing is launching in September 2026, and is supporting "Dementia Stoke." Forty men are wanted to perform on stage in six major venues within Stoke-on-Trent. The 10-week project will give volunteers a chance to learn to sing and have

experience of singing in a male voice choir. Support and professional direction will be provided. Practice sessions will be held at Methodist Central Hall in Longton.

For more information, please contact Shauneay Connor on 07562 670430;
Or visit www.potteriesmensing.co.uk

Staffordshire Film Archive

Ray Johnson is offering a free presentation at the Mitchell Arts Centre, Hanley, titled “**Hanley – Arnold Bennett’s “Paris of the Potteries.”** The screening will take place on Tuesday 18th August at 11am.

A stroll through Hanbridge, Arnold Bennett’s fictional name for Hanley, in the company of tour-guide Mervyn Edwards.

The walk visits a dozen or so key locations on a route through the lower streets of Hanley. At each stop you can see clues to important aspects of both Hanley's past and events in Bennett’s novels and short stories.

Just turn up on the day, there is no requirement to pre-book.

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 August 2026. Tel: 07359 388836 or email: a.devin2@gmail.com