

Fife u3a

Summer 2025 Newsletter

From the Chair

This year I turned 70 and had my bucket list holiday with my sister. I've just returned from an amazing trip to the Canadian Rockies and a cruise in Alaska.

The first part of the trip was a visit to the Calgary Stampede—something I've dreamed about since my teens. It was absolutely incredible: bucking broncos, bull riding, and so much more.

We then travelled on to one of my favourite places, Banff, a beautiful town in the Rockies. We managed to fit in some Western trail riding up in the mountains. The next day, we enjoyed a delicious afternoon tea at the Château Fairmont hotel.

It was sad to leave, but we had to continue along one of the most beautiful roads in the world, heading up to Jasper—a 10-hour journey. Along the way, we visited stunning lakes, walked on a glacier, and saw some amazing waterfalls.

We stayed in Jasper for a couple of nights and went on a wildlife-watching trip, where we saw moose and elk.

The next morning, we were up early to catch the Rocky Mountaineer train for a two-day trip to Vancouver. It was a truly fantastic experience—snow-capped mountains, fast-flowing rivers, and serene lakes, all while travelling through breath-taking wilderness.



The food and service on board were excellent, with an overnight hotel stop halfway through the journey.

The last part of our trip was a cruise up the coast of Alaska, stopping at some incredible places. We swapped ships for a much smaller boat at Icy Strait Point for a whale-watching trip. I had been dreaming of seeing a whale—and we saw many!

We spent two nights in Vancouver and took the big red bus tour around the city to see all the highlights. Our favourite part was Gastown, especially its famous steam clock.

The following day, we were up very early on board the ship for the passage to the Dawes Glacier. It was a challenging journey for the ship, as a lot of ice had broken off the glacier and the weather was poor—rain and low visibility.

The ship then sailed on to Juneau for the afternoon. Juneau has no road access due to the rugged terrain and can only be reached by sea or air.

Our next port of call was Ketchikan, where we visited the famous Creek Street—once home to many brothels during the gold rush days. It's now a charming area filled mostly with souvenir shops.

We also took a bus to Potlatch Totem Park, which was incredible. The hand-carved poles and beautifully painted houses were truly impressive.

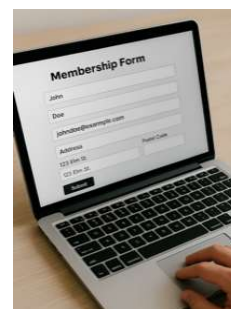


Then it was back to the ship for a sea day en-route to Vancouver, followed by two long flights back to Edinburgh.

It was truly an utterly wonderful bucket list trip. If I ever win the lottery, I'd do it all over again.
Tina Cox

Fife u3a Membership Goes Digital - With Options for Everyone!

For the 2025–2026 membership year, existing members can renew online, while prospective members wishing to join Fife u3a will be able to submit their details digitally. This is a step towards a more streamlined and environmentally friendly process. The Membership Secretary will circulate the link once the launch date is confirmed, and the website will be updated to reflect the new process.



Fife u3a has also introduced a new option: **joint membership for two people living at the same address**. Their online form supports both individual and joint applications. For joint membership, only one copy of *u3a Matters* will be sent per household.

Prefer Paper? No Problem

If you're not confident using online forms, a link to the paper version can be emailed to you on request. Once printed and completed, simply post it back to the Membership Secretary. Fife u3a is here to make sure the process works comfortably for everyone.

For Members without Email Access

A paper copy of the membership form will be sent by post to those not using email. You can simply complete it and return it with your payment. If you're comfortable using a bank transfer, you're welcome to pay via BACS. A visit to your local bank can help set this up if required. Alternatively, you may prefer to pay by cheque — just make it payable to Fife u3a and enclose it with your completed form.

Membership Fees are **£12 for individual members** and **£20 for joint membership**. For those not using email who would like the quarterly Fife u3a Newsletter posted to their home address, an additional £8 covers printing and postage for the year.

Paying Your Membership Fee

Fife u3a's preferred option is **online banking** — it's secure and convenient. If you'd rather, you're very welcome to send them a **cheque**.

Paying in Person?

On designated dates, the card reader will be available for face-to-face payments. Paper forms will also be on hand for anyone who prefers the traditional route.

We're All Learning Together!

This small shift is designed to make life easier — and give our trees a well-earned rest. It's quick, eco-friendly, and a sign that Fife u3a is stepping into the future with confidence.

Doreen Somerville Fife u3a Membership Secretary

June members' Meeting

Fife u3a brought its 2024/25 session to a close on 12 June with a bustling Members Day exhibition at St Bryce Centre in Kirkcaldy. For the first time, the event was opened to the public as part of the Lang Toun Fest, allowing current members and visitors to explore more than 20 interest groups showcasing their activities, ranging from Artificial Intelligence to What the Papers Say. Attendees had the chance to participate in Scrabble and Rummikub games, test their recall of French and Spanish, contribute to a Poetree, solve a Word Search, or craft their initials from pipe cleaners—ensuring there was something for everyone. This new format departed from the usual speaker-led Monthly Meeting, but the familiar tradition of tea, coffee, and friendly conversation remained, creating a lively atmosphere to mark the end of the year.

Sheena Lawson and Ruth Cross

Exploring AI

This group started in February meeting monthly in Abbeyview Community Hub, Dunfermline until June 2025. A new session will start in September 2025 with the topics of Genealogy and Cybersecurity. The numbers are limited so that there is good discussion and regular contributions by all members.



At the Members Day in June, several members expressed a wish to have a similar group in Kirkcaldy.

If you are interested in being involved, then come along to the Victoria Hotel at the coffee gathering at 11 am on Friday 5th September and Susan Kirkwood, who started the Dunfermline Group can help get a new group started.

If you cannot manage the meeting on 5th September, please contact susan@susankirkwood.co.uk and you will be kept informed of developments

More information about the coffee gatherings at <https://fife.u3asite.uk/informal-gatherings>

Susan Kirkwood

The Travel Group

The Travel Group has had 2 amazing holidays recently. Our first was to Lake Como in Italy at the end of May. The trip was organised by Travel Department and included a boat trip round the lake and visits to Milan and St Moritz. The hotel was right next to the lake with a lovely garden and swimming pool and we were lucky to have good weather (apart from the day that we thought we had had a dip in the lake thanks to the tropical downpour!) All good fun and we didn't shrink. I had never been to Lake Como before and was impressed by the scenery. We went to St Moritz via the Bernina Express billed as the most picturesque rail line in Europe. The mountain road from



St Moritz was exciting; switch backing down to the valley floor. Hats off to the driver.



Our next trip was to Stockholm in July for a 5 day trip, staying in the heart of the city. There were 10 of us on this trip, splitting into various groups to try and cover everything we wanted to see. Stockholm is a great city with a good transport system, very clean and everyone seemed to speak perfect English and also friendly and helpful people.

The top pick was the Vasa Museum displaying the almost fully intact 17th-century ship that sank on her maiden voyage in 1628

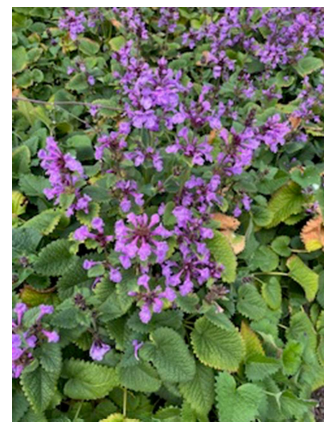
and salvaged in the 1980s. Skansen open-air museum was also worth a visit showcasing the whole of Sweden with houses, animals and traditions from every part of the country.

Marion Lackie

Garden Visits Group

The Garden Visits group enjoyed a visit to Saughton Park a 34 acre green space in the west of Edinburgh, bounded by the Water of Leith. Our first call after entering at the East Gate on Balgreen Road was the Café. On the way we passed wide herbaceous borders full of plants of all sizes with a colour scheme of mauve, blue, pink and white. Most visible were clumps of the tall variety of campanula (*Campanula lactiflor*) in full bloom. Further on, other borders, some lined by yew hedges, contained more vividly coloured plants such as heleniums and inula and there were roses of many colours. There were mature specimen trees, one of these being a walnut which had shed some of its immature green fruit, which bore no resemblance to walnuts at all.

In the sunken Italian garden there was an ongoing and well attended performance of "Twelfth Night". There are wide playing fields, a play park and the biggest skateboard park in Scotland.





We visited the Glasshouse – here there are exotic plants including scarlet canna lilies and much lush green foliage. At the entrance is a striking copper statue of Mahatma Gandhi, which was unveiled by the Prime Minister of India on his visit in 1997.

The Park has undergone considerable restoration in recent years thanks to funding from the National Lottery. Some of this was spent on restoring the cast iron Bandstand which once again provides a popular performance space for both

amateur and professional groups.

As we left the Park we passed the recently established wild orchard area near the river. The fruit and nut trees are under planted with other food plants which provide a home for wild life.

Avril Carroll

The Garden Visits Group enjoyed a glorious afternoon of sunshine and social chat at a member's garden in Smeaton, Kirkcaldy recently. The social is an informal get together during the holiday month of July with tea, coffee and wine to wash down a shared picnic. Colin the Chocolate Caterpillar from M&S made an appearance and quickly disappeared along with strawberries and cream. If you're interested in socialising around garden visits why not check out our visiting schedule. It's fair to say that there's something for everyone, and you don't need to do any gardening of your own.



Craft Group

Kirkcaldy's Poppy Cascade

If you've passed Kirkcaldy Galleries recently, as the King and Queen did on 2 July, you can't have missed the cascades of red poppies draped over the balconies and War Memorial.



This striking display is the culmination of a community initiative launched in January by the Royal British Legion Scotland, Kirkcaldy branch. Their call for 1500 knitted or crocheted poppies - one for every name on the memorial – awoke a slumbering giant: the enthusiastic local crafting community, including

members of our own Craft Group. Craft shops in the town had to stock up on red yarn, and knitting needles and crochet hooks were red hot.

By the end of May – when the Legion closed its appeal after exceeding its goal – the town had produced an astonishing 8000 poppies, including some in purple (for animals that have served and died in war) and white (for all victims of war, including civilian



casualties). Local military cadets carefully attached the poppies to netting, and Kirkcaldy Men's Shed volunteers secured each panel in place. The result is a moving visual tribute honouring the sacrifice of those who gave their lives.

The u3a Craft Group is proud to have played a part in this inspiring act of remembrance.

Sheena Lawson

Writers' Creative Group

A YEAR OF WRITING by Gordon Agnew

While I can string a few words together, I've never considered myself particularly creative.

I secretly enjoyed playing hard to get in response to Sandra's repeated encouragement to join the Writing Group. Eventually, I succumbed to her persuasive charm—and I'm still fascinated by the wide variety of genres we all produce: short stories, serials, historical pieces, diaries, fables, collaborations, plays, reflections, (semi)autobiographical works, and of course, poetry.

It's a veritable cornucopia (yes, I've picked up some new words too) of styles. I pondered long and hard whether to say "is evident" or "are evident"—my thanks to those who write with great precision for helping me think that through. But I digress, which is something else we're rather good at and don't discourage.

Our styles and techniques range from vivid descriptions and careful characterisations to historical fidelity, speculation, cliffhangers, and bloody hooks. We listen to each other's work—and sometimes to the process that brought it about—and offer honest, constructive critiques of the writing (never the writer).

We occasionally play games designed to spark creativity or help us learn new techniques in writing and presentation. The weekly meetings, I believe, are inked into most people's diaries and only reluctantly overwritten. Each session includes a mix of different types of work, yet somehow always produces the same warm feeling of time well spent.

Though the meetings are scheduled for two hours, I often glance at the clock and think, "That can't be the time!" Lunch and conversation frequently stretch the gathering to double its intended length, and the dialogue still flows freely.

Each second can feel interminable, yet the whole meeting seems to pass in a flash. Are we constantly fighting against the current—or are we effortlessly going with the flow?

The Writers' Group created a word cloud from your contributions to the *Poetree* on Fife u3a Members' Day. From the three words you wrote on a 'leaf' and hung on the 'tree', we gathered 114 individual words. These words inspired members of the group to craft poems that reflect the spirit of u3a

Edinburgh Fringe

Many members may know that Fife u3a member John McArthur performs with the local group Ensemble. A number of members are keen to see the group's next performance, launching their 'Puttin' on the Glitz' programme at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe this year. The programme presents a wide range of popular classics by Gershwin, Kern, Porter, Carmichael, Berlin and others, suiting a wide range of tastes. Hopefully you might want to go hear them too.



Details:

Sunday 24th August 2025

Venue: The New Town Church, 13 George St, Edinburgh EH2 2PA (Fringe Venue 111)

Time: 7.30 p.m.

Tickets: £14 (£12) at <https://www.edfringe.com/tickets/whats-on/puttin-on-the-glitz>, or Fringe Box Office 0131 226 0000, or from the venue in advance or on the day.

Scottish Heritage



The Scottish Heritage Group recently visited The Kelpies in the Helix Park in Falkirk.

The Kelpies are two enormous, 30-metre-tall (100-foot) horse-head sculptures located in The Helix Park, Central Scotland. Designed by sculptor Andy Scott and completed in 2013, they are the largest equine sculptures in the world.



While named after the mythical, shape-shifting water spirits from Scottish folklore known as Kelpies (which were often depicted as horses), the sculptures serve as a monument to the heavy working horses of Scotland's industrial past. They pay homage to the Clydesdale horses that were crucial for pulling barges along canals, working in fields, and powering various industries like coal mining and ironworks that shaped the Falkirk area.

They are a striking and iconic landmark, serving as a gateway to the Forth and Clyde Canal.

We need your help – join Fife u3a committee

Help Shape the Future of Fife u3a – We Need You!

We're reaching out with an important appeal for your support.

Several members of the current Fife u3a Committee will be stepping down soon—some immediately, others over the coming year—due to term limits or personal reasons. To keep Fife u3a running smoothly and legally as a charity, we must have a functioning committee, including a Chair, Treasurer, and Secretary. These roles are essential and cannot be combined.

We urgently need volunteers to step forward.

This is your opportunity to help shape the future of Fife u3a and ensure it continues to thrive for everyone.

Roles Needed Now:

Chair – to lead and represent the organisation

Group Coordinator – to support and represent our fantastic Group Leaders

Health & Safety Representative – to help keep our activities safe and compliant

Roles Needed by May 2026 (Let's start planning ahead):

Could you be our Treasurer?

Do you have good skills in spreadsheets or with book-keeping? Susan Kirkwood must retire as our Treasurer at the next AGM.

If you have the skills and would like to learn to take on the role as treasurer, please have a chat with her or other members of the committee to learn more.

You can contact Susan at treasurer.fifeu3a@gmail.com or 01383 731596

You can find more details of the Treasurer role in the Committee Roles on our website

Could you be our next Secretary?

This key role helps keep Fife U3A running smoothly—organising meetings, taking minutes, handling correspondence, and supporting the Chair. It involves keeping records up to date, sharing information from the national office, and helping with annual returns. If you're organised, enjoy working with others, and like being at the heart of things, we'd love to hear from you! You can find full details of all committee roles on our website

We'd love to hear from anyone interested in being mentored in these roles in advance. Learning the ropes now will help ensure a smooth transition when the time comes.

You can contact our present secretary Ruth at fifeu3@gmail.com

Although some of our current Committee members are stepping down from formal roles, many will remain actively involved—whether as Group Leaders, technical support, or in other capacities. You won't be alone; experienced members will be here to support you.

If you'd like to know more—or are even just a little curious—please get in touch with the Secretary at fifeu3a@gmail.com, or have a friendly chat with any of the current committee members. You can find their names and a link to all roles and responsibilities on our website under the “Committee” section.

Let's work together to keep Fife u3a vibrant and active.

We can't do it without you!

Ruth Cross, Secretary, Fife u3a, on behalf of the Committee

Serenity Prayer

Send me a slow news day,
a quiet, subdued day,
in which nothing much happens of note,
just the passing of time,
the consumption of wine,
and a re-run of *Murder, She Wrote*.

Grant me a no news day,
a spare-me-your-views day,
in which nothing much happens at all –
a few hours together,
some regional weather,
a day we can barely recall.

Brian Bilston