

Fife u3a

Newsletter March 2026

Getting to know our Chairperson, Fiona McOwan

An interview by Ruth Cross

What first brought you to Fife u3a, and what made you decide to join?

I was on the number 6 bus from Limekilns to Dunfermline and started chatting to a lady sitting next to me. She was telling me about Fife u3a and when I got home, I Googled it and thought it sounded interesting

What part of your background or previous experience do you feel has shaped you most?

Teaching. I was a high school Chemistry teacher and then around 1992 trained as a Yoga teacher. I have been involved in various charity organisations in leadership roles and thought my experience would be helpful.

What do you enjoy doing when you're not busy with u3a life?

I enjoy walking, swimming and yoga and I also volunteer on the helpline for the Pandas Foundation which supports men and women with pre- and post-natal depression.

Which groups or activities do you enjoy the most, and why?

I joined in 2024. Sharing the experience with other members on the two Summer Outings I have been on since then made both trips very enjoyable. I have a busy life so I often use the online u3a opportunities. When the AI group launched last year, I joined straight away. As well keeping up to date with new technology, I have met new people through it.

Has there been a moment in Fife u3a that really stayed with you or made you think, "This is why I'm here"?

Being asked to be Chairperson. It fits with my skillset and I am using my experience to support Fife u3a. The backing of the Committee encouraged me to take on the role. I enjoy steering the meetings and taking on the public facing roles representing Fife u3a,

What would you love to see Fife u3a achieve or develop over the next year or two?

Many members support our activities in the background. I would love to have more people involved in the Committee and Group Leader roles to strengthen our long-term survival. The strength of Fife u3a is in its members' rich mix of skills, experience and knowledge.

How do you hope members will experience the organisation under your leadership?

I hope they enjoy themselves.

Are there particular values or principles you want to emphasise as Chairperson?

Acting with integrity and finding opportunities to share the purpose of the u3a with a wider audience.

If you could start a new group, what would it be?

A Comedy group. We could investigate different comedic experiences, such as stand-up comedians or TV series, and share a few laughs.

Finally, what is one small thing that always makes your day better?

Walking in Limekilns. We are lucky in Fife to have so many uplifting places to walk, Townhill Loch and Lochore Meadows come to mind and, of course, the walk along the promenade in Limekilns.

Do you have a knack for numbers? We need you!

Fife u3a relies on wonderful volunteers and we are currently seeking a Treasurer to join our committee this May. Susan Kirkwood has done a fantastic job for the last six years and is ready to pass the baton.

This is a vital role, but you won't be doing it alone. Susan is happy to answer any questions and will work closely with you to ensure a smooth transition. If you - or someone you know - might be interested in helping us stay on track, please get in touch!

Contact Susan for more info: treasurer.fifeu3a@gmail.com.

Scottish Heritage Group 'The Happy Lands'

On Wednesday 17th December the Scottish Heritage Group enjoyed an interesting look at how The Happy Lands was created. The film was made by local people from Fife, many with family connections to the mining communities at the heart of the story. Our invited guest, Craig Seath, shared how he first became involved, beginning with a small task that gradually drew him into the project, and how he eventually found himself playing the local doctor.

Craig explained that the title "The Happy Lands" comes from an old, tongue-in-cheek nickname used in Fife's mining areas. Life in places like Lochgelly was often hard, so calling it "the Happy Lands" was a bit of dry local humour. The phrase appears in songs and stories from the area, including The Kelty Clippie, which mentions "the Happy Lands o' Lochgelly."

Craig went on to describe how the cast was made up of local folk whose real memories and voices shaped the film. Volunteers built sets, made costumes, and helped turn familiar Fife locations into 1920s pit villages. He also spent time answering questions from the group, and there were plenty, ranging from improvisation and working with first-time actors to the practical challenges of recreating a mining village on a modest budget.

Halfway through the film we paused for a break, and thanks to Doreen and Dee, we enjoyed a lovely spread of festive goodies.

Craig's talk highlighted the creativity, community spirit, and determination behind The Happy Lands, a film made by the very people whose heritage it celebrates.

To round off the evening, Susan and Jean treated us to a lively rendition of 'The Kelty Clippie'

Walking Group

I have been unable to walk for a few months and I would like to thank everyone for keeping the group going in my absence, with special thanks to Heather Blyth and Joyce Samson for leading walks.

Over the past year walks have included the new bridge and railway station at Cameron Bridge, Pittenweem to Anstruther, Balcaskie Estate, St Monans, Lochore Meadows and Cairneyhill to Torryburn.

Unfortunately due to bad weather walks at Kirkcaldy and Scotlandwell had to be cancelled but hopefully the weather will improve and we can look forward to the future walks.

Plans for the coming months include a walk at Rumbling Bridge on Wed 11th March, Crawford Priory, Wilson Town, Dr Neil's Garden at Duddingston and the cancelled walk at Scotlandwell.

Walks are between 5 and 7 miles long and do not include difficult ascents. We are always happy to welcome new walkers so if you're interested just check the website for details.

Mary Hannah

Travel Group

Marrakesh

Our group of 8 travelled from Glasgow to Marrakech for a 7 day fun filled holiday with a difference. It was a bit of a culture shock to start with as we meandered through the alleys with traders and motorbikes whizzing past us but once we got to our respective Riads we really felt that we were going to get the full Marrakech experience. The food and hospitality from our staff in the Riads were exceptional including a delicious traditional Moroccan meal cooked in house one night.

We enjoyed trips around the outskirts of the old town walls visiting Bahia Palace, Saadian Tombs as well as a visit to a tannery with the smell being masked a wee bit by the sprigs of mint issued to us by our guide.



The Souks were amazing with retail temptations galore, from leather goods of all colours, beautiful hand-woven scarfs, outfits from traditional Berber clothing to exotic evening wear as well as aromatic spices and of course Ar-

gon oil. No-one managed to resist the temptation, and our cases were heavier coming home than on our outward journey!!

We enjoyed a trip to the Atlas Mountains and Ourika Valley and on our way there we had a traditional meal by the side of the river, visited a traditional Berber House and experienced the wonders of the many fragrances of Argon Oil and 'powdered botox'. Some of us made a good attempt to trek up the Atlas Mountains to the waterfall but did not quite manage to reach the top as it was a bit treacherous even with the help of our excellent and experienced Berber guide.

Two of us enjoyed an unforgettable hot air balloon ride with great views of the Atlas Mountains.

We also experienced a Moroccan evening with traditional fayre, dancing, singing and a horse-riding display.

We also visited the Yves Saint Laurent Museum and the Jardin Majorelle. Who knew that YSL started his career as a stage and costume designer and the cactus garden in Jardin Marjorelle was a wonder to behold.

All in all, a great holiday with lot of laughs and one that we will remember for a long time.

Beath Dickson



Garden Visits Group

Following February visits to the snowdrops in Aberdour and the "Gardens in Scotland" exhibition at the Castle and to 1 Alburne Park in Glenrothes, on 4th April we go to Millfield House in Falkland.

On 16th May we have a joint visit with the Out and About Group and we return to Falkland, this time to Falkland Palace and Gardens. On 13th June we go to Pittenweem: Gardens in the Burgh, which include the newly opened Seabeach garden along the West Shore. Our visit on 11th July is to Silverburn near Leven and on 1st August we visit two small gardens in the Canongate, Edinburgh. We return to Edinburgh on 19th September to the Royal Botanic Gardens where we hope to see the newly renovated Palm Houses.



Full details of each visit will be included in the Events page of the U3A Fife website..

Avril Carroll

Join the AI Explorers in Dunfermline

The frontier of technology has a home right here in Fife! The **AI Explorers** continue to meet, bridging the gap between curiosity and the cutting edge.

Our recent deep dives have covered:

- AI in Education.
- Navigating Copyright.
- Using AI for Genealogy.
- Making songs and music from simple prompts



Currently, we're sharpening our eyes to distinguish **real photography from AI-generated images**.

Want to stay ahead of the curve? We have a few vacancies for new members—come help us explore the "what's next."

Susan Kirkwood

Craft 'n' a cuppa Group

Weathering the Storm

Lately it feels as though every time I glance at the TV weather forecast - or even dare to open the weather app on my phone - another weather warning has popped up. We even had to cancel our first Craft 'n' a Cuppa Group meeting of the year thanks to a snow and ice warning. Typical.

It did make me wonder, though: how exactly do Met Office weather warnings work? With a bit of help from CoPilot, I dug up some surprisingly interesting facts:

- The current warning system arrived in 2011, replacing the old threshold-based version introduced after the Great Storm of 1987 (yes, the Michael Fish one).
- Since then, we've gained the Storm Naming service (2015) and Extreme Heat warnings (2021).
- Other warning types include Rain, Snow, Wind, Ice, Fog, Thunderstorms and Lightning.
- Warnings come in three colours: Yellow (be aware), Amber (be prepared) and Red (take action/danger to life).
- They're impact-based, meaning they're issued for likely disruption - not just a particular temperature or measurement.
- In 2025 more than 100 severe weather warnings were issued, covering around 170 days.
- Storm names for the 2025/26 season were chosen from over 50,000 public suggestions.
- The next names on the list are Dave, Eddie and Fionnuala... though let's hope we don't make it all the way to Violet and Wubbo.
- Anyone can suggest future storm names via the Met Office's "Name Our Storms" page.
- Just avoid Q, U, X, Y and Z - international convention - and keep names short and easy to pronounce.

Something to mull over on yet another grey and decidedly dreich day!

Sheena Lawson

Creative Writing Group

Motherhood

From the moment your child is put in your arms, you are lost.

Exhaustion and euphoria in equal measure.

A perfect specimen – eyes, nose, ears, tiny fingers and toes, everything in the places they should be.

You are delighted and completely drained. You watch them grow and learn. You are a teacher, a comfort giver, a friend, a parent, a shoulder to cry on. You defend them fiercely against the world and then let them go, hoping that all the love and care you have invested in your child will help them soar in this troubled world.

Then, you watch from a distance, an empty feeling inside as they fly the nest and set off into their own adventure. You struggle to cope with the emptiness you feel and wait for them to come round – for a meal – a chat – some advice and support.

Some people are lucky, they build a bond that strengthens year on year, that continues to build for a lifetime. Others long for the tight relationship they had when they were wanted and needed. Now they wait for a call, a visit that sometimes doesn't come.

Motherhood is a roller coaster of emotions. Would you do it all again? Of course....

The love between a mother and her child is special. No matter where they are or what they do, that love is with them always.

Do I Know You?

Are you stressed?

What has changed?

You used to be so calm, happy-go lucky, warm, and caring. Now your focus has shifted – I understand that but where have YOU gone?

A different personality has come to replace the YOU I used to know. You are no longer calm, kind, caring, patient or happy go lucky.

You have cut yourself off from those you have loved and who have loved you since birth. In cutting yourself off you have denied your children the opportunity to grow up with close family.

We are all hurt and upset. Especially since we all used to be so close.

Will the person I remember ever come back? I hope against hope that this will happen.

The longer the distance between us goes on, the more my hope fades. Will the reconciliation happen in my lifetime?

I miss the times we had together and the supportive and caring relationship we had.

Maybe one day..... I'll be here when you need me.....

Blyth McLucas

Elspeth Grisenthwaite

It is with sadness we have to announce the passing of Elspeth Grisenthwaite. One of our long standing members, Jill Marshall has kindly written this piece for those of us who remember Elspeth.

'Elspeth has been a U3A member from its inception. Her husband David was our first Secretary, Anna Maciocia was, I believe, the first President. Elspeth had a very strong belief in the ethos of the U3A based on sharing the knowledge and experience of its membership. She had an inquiring mind with a wide and varied interest that led her to attend the then extra mural classes over time at both the University of St Andrews and at Edinburgh too.

Elspeth enjoyed the theatre and being in the Theatre Group she enjoyed the company of like minded friends. She attended the Reading Group for years as she was a prolific reader. She would read anything other than historical novels, she only read historical non-fiction. Nevertheless she came to the Group meetings even when a historical subject was book of the month to listen to the discussion.

Elspeth attended the Monthly Meetings and that is where I first met her at the Volunteer Centre (long demolished) on the corner of St Brycedale Road and Avenue. She was a regular attender across the changing venues and for us both this was catch up time. She had a dry sense of humour much of which was in tune with my own so I shall remember her with great fondness and smile'

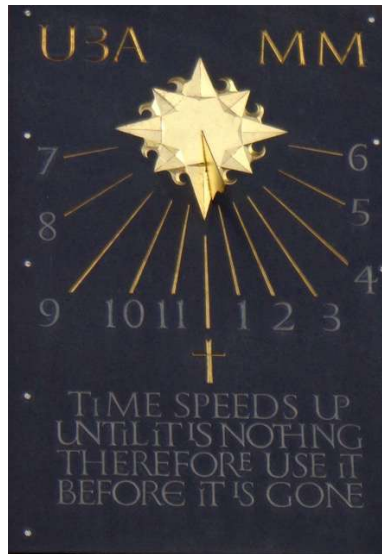
Refugees

by Brian Bilston

They have no need of our help
So do not tell me
These haggard faces could belong to you or me
Should life have dealt a different hand
We need to see them for who they really are
Chancers and scroungers
Layabouts and loungers
With bombs up their sleeves
Cut-throats and thieves
They are not
Welcome here
We should make them
Go back to where they came from
They cannot
Share our food
Share our homes
Share our countries
Instead let us
Build a wall to keep them out
It is not okay to say
These are people just like us

A place should only belong to those who are born there
Do not be so stupid to think that
The world can be looked at another way

(now read from bottom to top)



(Time speeds up until it is nothing, therefore use it before it is gone)