

Fife u3a Newsletter August 2026

From the Chair

At the beginning of July my partner of 36 years and I attended the u3a Festival at the University of York. I booked our train tickets in good time from Edinburgh to York return, travelling south on the Tuesday for the first day of the Festival on the Wednesday. I booked an Airbnb in the old part of the city, and we were excited as it was our first visit to York. Everyone we talked to about it said 'Oh, you'll love York' and we certainly did. We had decided to only book a few events as we wanted to have time to explore this charming old city ourselves. We received our tickets in plenty of time, and my only criticism is that these contained no information about which building the events were to be held in.

Our highlight event was a visit to the National Railway Museum, which was in easy walking distance from our residence, and we met up with the other participants who had arrived in taxis. The trains are all maintained to be in a beautiful condition and arranged in such a way that it was easy to move around on our self-guided tour.

Another highlight was our visit to York Minster, which is completely stunning from both outside and inside. We booked a time slot to climb the tower via a steep, winding, circular staircase and were very proud to reach the top. A panoramic view of the city was all around, and it was a superb vantage point. And of course we couldn't visit York without walking up The Shambles, which was so clearly the inspiration for J.K. Rowling's Diagon Alley, marked by a Harry Potter shop at the top of the row. Although we managed to do and see a lot in our 3 days, there was a lot still to see, so of course we will need to go back at some point!

Fiona McOwen

Join us at our Monthly Meetings!

We have an exciting programme of monthly meetings which start in September. You can save money, enjoy the theatre, search for life in the universe and learn what to do if you find buried treasure. The full programme is available on the website at <https://fife.u3asite.uk/events/>.

Following your responses to the survey (see separate article) some of these events will take place in the downstairs hall and the others in the upstairs Sanctuary at the St Bryce Centre- and to welcome you back (and make life easier for the Treasurer), the September meeting will be FREE!

The programme has been put together by Fiona Brooking Thomas and we are very grateful for all the work she has done for this and for her co-ordination of volunteers and liaison with St Bryce staff each monthly meeting. Fiona, unfortunately, has had to step down so we are looking for someone to take over – knowing how much of

the preparation has already been done for this year's programme. If you are able to help us with organising the monthly meetings, please speak to a member of the committee or contact Fiona McOwan chair.fifeu3a@gmail.com or Susan Kirkwood via fifeu3a@gmail.com. You may remember that we are also looking for a Secretary for our Committee so if you can help, please speak to any member of the committee or contact Fiona or Susan by email.

Abbotsford House - Fife U3A Summer Outing 2026

On a summer August day, almost 50 Fife u3a members set off for our long awaited summer trip to Abbotsford House near Melrose. The visit started with a delicious lunch taken at the Ochil Tree Restaurant on the 1st floor of the visitor Centre, affording us views of the grounds.

This was followed by a tour by very knowledgeable guides round the home of Sir Walter Scott. The house was full of artefacts collected in his lifetime. The study and the library were particularly fascinating. Apart from his prolific writing, he was also a Botanist. We visited a charming chapel and we were able to explore the grounds. Many of us opted for another chance to socialise over a coffee before making the journey back home. We certainly embodied the u3a motto of **Learn, Laugh, Live** on our trip.

Garden Visits Group

In mid-June we enjoyed a visit to Pittenweem for their Open Gardens weekend. Twelve private gardens were open as well as the one-acre Seabeach garden on the West Shore built on the site of an old gasworks. The gardens were varied in style, most with sea views and plant stalls. The ticket price covered the two days and it was tempting to return so all the gardens could be seen.



of



Our July visit was closer to home – to Pittencrieff Park in Dunfermline, known locally as The Glen. Passing the statue of Andrew Carnegie who gifted the Park to the people of Dunfermline in 1903, we made our way to the Peacock Rooms cafe for coffee. The free roaming peacocks were introduced in 1905. They were awarded the Freedom of the City

in 2024 and are cared for by a group of volunteers. We passed the formal Italian Garden, built on the site of the demolished stables, on the way to Pittencrieff House. Unfortunately the glasshouses were closed but the wide open views to the south and the nearby rose garden were very pleasant.

The last two visits for this season will be to gardens in the Canongate, Edinburgh and, in September, to the Royal Botanic Garden. The three year restoration of the historic Palm Houses means they will not be open to the public until October but perhaps we will make a visit there a priority for next year.

Park Gowf Competition

On a pleasant breezy day, two intrepid pairs of Park Gowfers turned up to the six-hole course at Dunnikier Golf Course. We were Anne, Marion, Patsy and Gillian with Margaret on the metaphorical subs bench.

Having collected our balls, score card and pencil from the clubhouse, we went to our starting tees with three other pairs from different organisations, in a state of eager anticipation hard to describe...

Our group was accompanied by a Real Golfer called Jimmy, whose calm and useful advice probably kept our score from being abysmal - 'Legs apart, knees bent, don't look ahead look at the ball' - though it still didn't completely eradicate a sudden and inexplicable inability to hit the ball on occasion.

It was jolly good fun anyway; lovely to met new people while taking part in a pleasurable pursuit.

Upon leaving the course, after the obligatory photo-shoot, we discovered that both the u3a pairs were within a gnat's whisker of each other score-wise - 27 and 28: needless to say, this magnificent achievement didn't put us into the prizewinning leet.

The free buffet was barrie. Sitting down after our sterling efforts on the course felt well-earned. I am surprised that more members don't join this agreeable group: we enjoy fresh air, the minimal physical effort involved, and good company - one can be as competitive or not as one desires. I exhort you to give it a go!

Patsy Bain

Local History Group - Annual Outing 8th June

Kevin Scott led the Local History Group on a fascinating walking tour of St Andrews, taking in the Ancient Crowning Stone, the old gate, and the beautiful quadrangle at St Mary's College, which features two historic Holm Oak trees.

As we walked through the grounds and beautifully preserved buildings of St Leonard's School, we learned about its macabre resident ghost.

The tour also included:

- The spectacular church organ in **St Salvator's Chapel**

- The historic ruins of **St Andrews Cathedral** and the **Castle**
- A few local haunts famously frequented by **Prince William and Kate Middleton**
- Of course, a view of the iconic **Old Course**
-

Our grateful thanks go to Kevin, who brilliantly tied the walk into most of this year's group topics, including Pilgrims, Historic Sites, Local Legends, Witch Trials, and Famous Personalities.

Scottish Heritage Group 2

A second Scottish Heritage Group was formed last year to accommodate the original group's waiting list and other interested members.

We met for the first time in September 2025 to agree a calendar for the year ahead on our regular slot of the third Tuesday of each month.

Membership of the group relies on a commitment to attend as many meetings as possible and to organise one monthly meeting – either by arranging an outing, or speaker – in rotation with other members.

Our aim is to learn more about Scottish Heritage through its history, culture, industry and people

For our first year, we enjoyed a number of interesting and informative visits to museums, galleries and places of interest, such as Perth Museum, Culross Palace, the Scottish Mining Museum and many more

The group leaders are Beth Cameron, Kate Richardson and Caroline Evans. They can be reached via the group page on Fife U3A's website.

Out and About Group

In July we had a very successful trip to the V&A, Dundee. The exhibition was Catwalk: The Art of the Fashion Show. There were several interactive displays. Of particular interest was photographs of a Dior show held in Gleneagles Hotel.

Future trips are:-

23rd August- Wemyss Caves. 14.30 to 16.30. Tickets are limited so booking with group leader is essential. Free

13th September- Ravenscraig Walled Garden and Kirkcaldy Art Club. This is part of the Doors Open Event.- Free

7th October- Scotlands Fisheries Museum in Anstruther followed by fish and chips (has to be done in Anstruther) - cost for museum is £8.80

20th November- V&A Dundee- David Bowie tour exhibition. Cost £10. Lovely cafe in V&A.

Anne Starkie

Qigong Group

For the past year the qigong group have been meeting twice a month to practise qigong for an hour and a half. (Qigong is an ancient Chinese mind/body practice which combines slow, flowing movements, deep breathing and focused meditation).

We start with a warm up of tapping the body, an ancient self massage technique that involves patting the body with the fingers, palms or loose fists. This stimulates the energy pathways to release muscle tension and awaken the nervous system. We follow tapping with a 6 movement sequence then move on to a sitting qigong practice. The last part of the session is taken up with Shibashi (18) movements. We completed Shibashi set 1 last year and also set 2. Next year I hope to move on to set 3 after completing Coiling Silk (8 exercises) and 8 pieces of brocade (8 movements). The health benefits of qigong are numerous and include increase of energy, improved balance and flexibility and reduced stress to the mind and body.

Thank you to everyone who came to the group last year so making it possible to continue the practice.

Joyce Hunter

Our AI Explorations

Our recent expeditions have included the Justice system (and using AI to respond to a mock court summons), discovering more with AI in Archaeology, AI and Science Fiction and Transgender and neurodiverse issues in relation to AI. Our sessions re-start in September with Nature Conservation – so you can see we look at a broad range of issues and how AI will affect our lives. We do have some spaces, so get in touch if you would like to join the group.

https://fife.u3asite.uk/u3a_groups/ai-explorers/

AI is for Everyone

u3a Scotland is pleased to invite you to a zoom talk on AI - what AI is, where it is and what it means for u3a members. AI will be as transformational for society as the Industrial Revolution. AI can be a force for good or for harm, it is up to society to ensure we get the benefits of AI and the risks are minimised. Scotland is a leader in Ethical AI so the talk will also cover some Scottish businesses and institutions that are world class in AI. This Zoom talk is on Monday 12th October from 2.00 pm to about 3:30 pm. More information and the link to sign up is an event on our website at https://fife.u3asite.uk/u3a_events/introducing-ai-and-ai-in-scotland-on-zoom/



Susan Kirkwood. AI Explorers.

Meditation and Mindfulness

Mindfulness Meditation continues to be well attended. We introduced meditating to music which was suggested by Gina and has proved to be very popular. A suggestion was made last week about introducing a Chakra mediation. I thought we could give it a try. We are still using the KUSI as a venue and hope we can continue as it's a lovely bright room and accessible to those who don't drive as having the two stations nearby.



Anna Bennett

u3a festival at York University 1st to 3rd July 2026

It was great to be back for the festival. There were more delegates than 2 years ago. This meant a lot more events to choose from. This ranged from sport, music, dancing, lectures and many more. Tours included York Minster, ChocolateStory and museum gardens.

I tried jewellery making and Tai chi Qigong both of which I wasn't very good at! Went to a flute recital and Caribbean steel band. Both were amazing.

It was interesting to speak to other people during meal times and in the cafe many of them on their own. There were two U3a groups attending which had a large number of members.

Johnny Ball was the guest speaker for the opening ceremony which was very entertaining. I highly recommend attending the next festival in two years time.

Nanette McCulloch

Monthly Meetings Survey: What members told us

Following concerns about sound quality and audibility at monthly meetings, the Committee ran an online survey of Fife u3a members — 71 people took part, giving a good snapshot of regular attenders.

Key findings:

- Members had attended meetings in both the sanctuary and the large hall, with a slightly more positive response overall to the sanctuary. Travel distance and safety (especially in the dark) were recurring concerns for members across Fife's wide geographic spread.
- This was the biggest issue raised, despite the sanctuary's induction loop. As a result, the Committee is meeting with the RNID to get professional advice on improving sound, and may set up a follow-up session with affected members to find practical solutions. Reserving front-row seating for those with hearing loss is also being considered.
- Members are a great source of speaker ideas — future talks on scams (Police Scotland), archaeological finds (Treasure Trove Unit), and the search for life on other planets all came from member suggestions. Top interests identified were local/Fife/Scottish history, travel, science and wellbeing, community/charity work, and arts and culture.
- Some comments touched on the challenges speakers face with unfamiliar venues, microphones and screens — the Committee is looking at ways to support better visual presentations.
- Newer members said joining a large group can feel daunting, and called for a warmer, more supportive welcome. More volunteers (particularly men) are needed to help greet newcomers, alongside the many members already helping with teas, coffees and the bookstall.

What's changing:

- Most Monthly Meetings will now be held in the sanctuary, with three still in the large hall to ease crowding in the café afterwards.
- Specialist advice will be sought to improve the sound system.
- New member welcome and support will be strengthened.
- Visual presentation support for speakers will be improved.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to complete the survey — your feedback is directly shaping how monthly meetings will run going forward.

Fiona Brooking Thomas

Our Fife u3a newsletter is issued quarterly to inform members, to celebrate group activity, and promote participation. It includes the Chair's message, committee notices, group reports, and some future activity information. Articles, images and information published in this newsletter are contributed by members for general information purposes. Views expressed are those of the individual authors and do not necessarily represent Fife u3a. Updated information on groups' activities can be found on our website.

<https://fife.u3asite.uk/> SC036555