



Learn, laugh, live

<b>Soloing the Matterhorn</b>	<b>1-2</b>
<b>Electric Flight</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Community Fair</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Artificial Intelligence</b>	<b>5-6</b>
<b>Talks Programme '26</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Online Learning</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Anyone for Croquet?</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Cheaper Train Tickets</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Cycling / Housekeeping</b>	<b>11-12</b>

## Soloing the Matterhorn



February's Monthly talk was given by James Ellson on his experiences of climbing the Matterhorn. James is a former Detective Inspector at Moss Side. His excellent talk was both gripping and emotionally charged.

**continued**

continued

The Matterhorn lies between Italy and Switzerland and at 4,478 metres is the 5th largest in the Alps. It is however a difficult and technical climb, first conquered by Sir Edward Whymper in 1865. On that climb 4 people died on the way down, the first of 500 people who have died on the mountain.

James managed to reach the summit on his 3rd attempt in 2008 aged 37 completing the task solo. As the descent is as difficult as the ascent it took 5 hours up and 5 hours down, the sub title of his talk. The original plan was to complete the climb with his friend Simon but as he was delayed James made the brave decision to do climb the mountain alone.

Having experienced the best day of James's life it was sadly to be followed by probably his worst. A few days after his return to England he tried to contact his friends Simon and Ian who were going to climb the Matterhorn a day or so after he did. Eventually he received a call from Ian who said "have you not heard"? Simon and Ian had tried to climb the Matterhorn but failed to do so and the same day they had gone instead do the easier climb of Mont Blanc. On the mountain they experienced a violent storm, which had not been forecast. The Mountain Rescue helicopter was called out but the strong winds meant they could not lift them off. As a result they had no alternative but to bivouac on the mountain. Due to the extreme cold Simon aged 31 died during the night.

The impact on James's life was extreme. Having been called out at work to attend a murder he realised he couldn't do it and resigned immediately from the Police. Despite being an avid mountaineer he gave up the activity and never climbed again. Instead he sticks to rock climbing with his wife and has managed 231 of the 280 Munroes in Scotland.

James now spends his days working on his 5 acre smallholding, giving talks and writing novels of which 5 have so far been published. Anyone interested in his novels can find details on his website <https://jamesellson.com/books/>

## Science Group Talk

### Electric Flight

Robert Bolam, a Professor from the University of Wrexham, provided an insight into the work he has been doing on the possibilities of powering aircraft using electricity.

There were 38.1 million commercial flights in 2024 which contributed to 3.5% to the global warming total. Average global temperatures have increased by 1% since 1880 and are predicted to increase to 1.5% by 2050.

The Earth's atmosphere comprises 79% nitrogen and 20% oxygen and extends to 18.9 miles above sea level. At present, aircraft can only fly in the first zone, the Troposphere as beyond that the atmosphere is too thin.

Current investigation into new aircraft design, to reduce carbon emissions, is considering:-

- Efficiency savings by Rolls Royce using an ultra fan
- Utilising lighter materials for the plane's structure
- The use of sustainable aviation fuels
- Various alternatives with hydrogen such as direct burn, fuel cells, or a combination of the internal combustion engine plus batteries.

An ultra fan is already being tested on an unmanned aircraft and work is ongoing on an electro thermal fan engine which has a propulsion system that enables climate friendly, efficient, high speed electrical propulsion of the aircraft. The key challenge is to find an effective solution which releases energy quickly.

Batteries are already being used in drones but, for larger aircraft, technology will have to advance to produce more efficient and, critically, lighter batteries to make their use in commercial aircraft viable.

## Wilmslow Town Council Community Fair

Wilmslow Council held its first Community Fair in the Church Halls of the United Reformed Church on Sunday 8th March. The event was initiated by Wilmslow Town Council a great success. The Council commented:

*“It was a wonderful turnout - 1333 people 'clicked' through the door! Even if everyone went in and out for a coffee, and you half this headcount, it's still*



*around 650, so a wonderful sign of the support of the community towards shared ventures. The best thing for me was seeing all of us altogether; a real celebration of the wonderful things going on all around Wilmslow, every day of every week. The Wilmslow Community is very lucky”.*

The u3a Committee (above) had a stand with banners, photographic display boards, rolling video, flyers and last months newsletter. A lot of interest was shown in the stand and hopefully this will have attracted new members.

## AI - An Invitation

Like it or not Artificial Intelligence (AI) is everywhere these days. It can be found amongst, others applications, in:-

- Virtual Assistants - Alexa, Siri, Google Assistance
- TV Streaming and Online Shopping Recommendations
- Banking & Fraud Detection
- Google maps and Waze
- Online customer Support - Chatbots
- Healthcare & Medical Diagnostics
- Multiple Applications for Business - Reports, Letters, CV

The u3a Third Age Trust National AI team and members of the NW Region are putting on an **AI Workshop Monday 27th April 2026, 10am – 12noon**. This online **Zoom session** will explain: What AI is and is not. How it can help you in everyday life. How to use it safely.

The online u3a event will demystify AI and show it can enhance your daily life, just like the internet did and something to benefit everyone.

Register for a ticket to the event by emailing: [groupu3a@gmail.com](mailto:groupu3a@gmail.com). Your email you should include the following information

Full Name:

Name of Your u3a:

Email Address:

Please register early as demand for this event is expected to be high. A link to the Zoom meeting will be emailed to you.

## More on AI

Major US tech companies like Meta, Google and Apple are investing billions of dollars to find ways in which they can monetise the use of AI. The market leader Nvidia's market capitalising has increase in 3 years from \$1trillion dollars to \$5trillion. In some ways we are at the beginning of the exploration of the uses and future applications of AI.

Driverless cars, Gaming and Scientific Research are all going to benefit from the AI. Its use has already become ingrained in Business, Schools and Universities and one of the challenges will be how to assess creative original thought from the artificial. This applies to fake news and images.

A knowledge of its benefits and dangers are needed by all.

# The AI Revolution in Northern England: Boosting Services and Growth

**Northern England** is emerging as a leader in the UK's AI revolution through strategic investments and digital innovation. Key initiatives range from multilingual social care chatbots in Bradford to major tech hub expansions in Liverpool and Wigan, focusing on both public service accessibility and significant job creation.

### ENHANCING PUBLIC SERVICES



#### "Annie" Multilingual Social Care Support

A WhatsApp chatbot in Bradford providing instant adult social care advice in over 40 languages.



#### 24/7 Digital Accessibility

Offers residents a round-the-clock alternative to office-hour hubs for finding trusted support resources.

### ECONOMIC GROWTH & INVESTMENT



#### 1,000 New Jobs for Merseyside

A new AI hub by Kyndryl is set to create significant employment over three years.



#### London to Wigan HQ Relocation

Tech firm Agilisys moved its headquarters to Wigan, bringing 300+ specialists to a refurbished civic centre.



#### Privacy-First AI Design

The system is designed to provide guidance without requesting or storing users' personal information.

### Discover u3a North West Region: Learn, Laugh, Live

**The u3a Philosophy:**  
A diverse community dedicated to the shared goal of learning, laughing, and living.

**Vast Geographic Reach**  
Stretching from North Cumbria to South Cheshire and across to the Isle of Man.

**Regional vs. National Scale**

North West Region	98 Total u3as	43,000 Total Members
UK National (Total)	1,000+ Total u3as	400,000+ Total Members

**Supporting the Third Age**

**Facilitating Growth and Recruitment**  
The regional committee supports local u3as through networking and membership development.

**Dynamic Event Programming**  
Coordinating major activities including the 2026 Summer School and annual photographic competitions.

**Award-Winning Excellence**  
Celebrating regional success, such as winning Gold of the Southport Flower Show.

# £14bn

## National AI Backing

Major tech firms have committed billions toward growth zones and creating over 13,000 jobs nationwide.

## Programme for 2026 Talks

**General** - 2.30 pm Church Hall, Wilmslow Reformed Church

**25th March:** AGM

**22nd April:** Post War Britain

---

**Science Group** - 2pm Wilmslow Library

**17th February:** Electric Flight

**17th March:** Air Traffic Control, Manchester Airport

**21st April:** Biomarkers in cancer research

**19th May:** Errors in clinical publications contributing to the genetic medicine odyssey

**16th June:** Mummies, medicine and healing practices

**21st July:** Psychedelic assisted therapy: Psychedelics and mental health: hype, hope and healing

**Further details are available on the website:** [www.wilmslowu3a.org.uk](http://www.wilmslowu3a.org.uk)

**'Technology for Everyone' Group of Cheadle & Gatley** - 2pm Heald Green Village Hall, Outwood Road, Heald Green, SK8 3JL

**April 7th:** Artificial Intelligence: Genesis or Nemesis? - Prof Alistair Sutcliffe

**May 5th:** Visit to the refurbished Museum of Science & Technology

**Oct 6th:** Medical Technologies - Prof Andrew Weightman, University of Manchester.

This is an Open Group. Cost £3 including tea/coffee and biscuits. Please take your membership card or membership number with you.

## The Freedom of Online Learning



*Interest Groups Online* offers the joy and learning available within u3a - but online. For member Annie, it's enabled her to keep learning when meeting in person has been difficult.

It's good for our health and wellbeing to keep as active as possible, both mentally and physically, and maintain our engagement with the wider world. u3a offers great resources – but what if it's difficult or impossible for you to attend face to face meetings?

I have multiple sclerosis, which restricts my life in many ways. *Interest Groups Online* has given me the opportunity to maintain old interests and develop new ones, to develop new groups to share my interests, and to meet new people and make new friends.

Within *Interest Groups Online*, I'm a member of the Writing for Pleasure group. I enjoy talking to other people who enjoy writing and talking about writing. Maisie, the group leader, sets us interesting and sometimes challenging themes and exercises.

I also lead a Mindfulness, Meditation and Poetry group. I've loved poetry all my life and love to read it aloud and listen to others reading it aloud. It's lovely to share poems and, through group members' contributions, find new poets and poems. My own mindfulness practice has sustained me through my adult life, and especially over the last 10 years. It's something I can pass on which might also help others. Reading a poem can be a mindfulness practice in itself.

[Find out more about Interest Groups Online.](#)

## Any One For Croquet?

Who has the most Wimbledon titles? Martina Navratilova with 9 Women's Singles beating even the great Roger Federer with 'only' 8 Men's titles? Obvious but wrong. The answer is Professor Bernard Neal who won 37 Wimbledon singles titles between 1963 and 2002. "Why haven't I heard of him?" Almost certainly because you don't follow croquet.

**Did you know** Wimbledon's full name is the All-England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club and started in 1868 as the All-England Croquet Club? Tennis rapidly took over. However, since the early Sixties there has been an annual championship, but only open to club members and attracts close to zero press interest.

Want to give the game a try? Come and join the **Wilmslow u3a Croquet Group** and experience the fun for yourself? Everyone is welcome and having little to no experience of playing is not a hinderance. While we aim to play to the best of our abilities and treat the game with respect, we are not competitive and want everyone to enjoy themselves.

We provide the equipment and will also spend time to help newbies pick up the essentials of the game. We play both the Golf and Association versions depending upon the tastes of whoever is playing. So, we can accommodate outright beginners up to those with some experience of the game.

What are the attractions of playing croquet with the Wilmslow u3a group? It's a gentle outdoor exercise during the better months of the year with a friendly group of people. Overall, a gentle physical and mental challenge in good company – what's not to like?

We meet at the Wilmslow Phoenix Sports Club, Styal Road Styal SK9 4HP every Monday from 2pm to 4pm starting 20<sup>th</sup> April and running until the end of September, or possibly later depending upon the weather. There is plenty of parking at the club.

Please get in touch with me if you have any questions. Peter Highfield, Group Leader & [Chairman@wilmslowu3a.org.uk](mailto:Chairman@wilmslowu3a.org.uk)



## Travel by train for less with *u3a Friends Extra*

u3a members can access cheaper train tickets with *TrainPal*, through *u3a Friends Extra*. From smart split-ticketing to no booking fees and instant eTickets, *TrainPal* helps u3a members save time and money on every journey with an exclusive discount code.

New customers can save 5% on train tickets or unlock up to 20% off Railcards for even bigger long-term savings.

[Start saving on your travel with \*u3a Friends Extra\* website.](#)

## Cycling Group

A few photos from the intrepid cycling group include one from sunny Majorca - no prizes for guessing which one that is!



## Housekeeping

### New Members

A warm welcome to this months new members: Dr Ali Raza, Rukhsana Raza, Patricia Hamilton, Mark Swatland, Emma Swatland, Noreen Russell, John Hislop, Anne Hislop and Elisabeth Bennett. New members would be welcome to attend the 3rd Tuesday monthly Coffee Morning.

### Reminder on Renewal of Membership

Renewal details were sent out in January. Those members who wish to renew can pay by cheque or cash at the monthly meeting on Wednesday 25th March. Non renewal will obviously mean a removal of their names from the membership list on Beacon and the newsletter will not then be sent. Surely that alone is reason to renew membership!

### Art Group

Dena Glass, Group Leader of the Art Group in Oakmere, Handforth has mentioned there are now some spaces with people have moved or passed away. They are thinking of changing the day now to Monday afternoon, in April. It will be a weekly event, from 2- 4.30 pm.

A friendly group they help each other and encourage beginners, though they are not a teaching class. We have lots of books & are willing to help anyone who is looking for some therapy.

### Backgammon & Mah Jong

Several people have said they would like an Interest Group to be set up for backgammon and mah jong. Is there anyone else who would like to participate? It would great to get these Interest Groups going. Learning a new skill makes a very positive contribution to the brain.