Brixworth and District Newsletter

Learn, laugh, live

Registered Charity No 1178196

Issue 110 **September/October 2026**

AGM AND MONTHLY MEETING – 2ND SEPTEMBER 2026

There was an excellent turn-out of 90 members at our 19th annual AGM. Apart from the usual reports from the Chair and Treasurer, we put it to the members that following our successful Summer Event this year, as it will be our 20th anniversary in 2027, we need suggestions for how to celebrate the event. As funds are currently healthy, this event would be subsidised by our u3a.

With two retirements from the committee: Sue Dodds-Smith as Business Secretary, and Margaret Griffiths as Speaker Secretary, your committee now looks like this:

Chair & Newsletter Editor	Chris Rowe
Treasurer	Tim Smith
Business Secretary	Jo Parker (to be co-opted at next committee meeting)
Membership Secretary	Joan Edney
Speaker Secretary	Sarah Nelson & Diane Fenton
Website Manager	Gwynneth Moore
New Members Secretary	Sue Wintersgill
Groups Co-ordinator	Jackie Bird
Accessibility Officer/Beacon Admin.	Keith Dobell
Publicity Manager	Clive Tyrrell

Please be aware that with the possibility of two more retirements next year, we do need more members to step up to the committee.



Following the AGM, Jon-Paul Carr entertained us with a talk on Northamptonshire on Film and TV, covering not only some of the famous faces from the county who found fame on the silver screen, but also many of the locations used. He began by describing the early days of movies, cine films and how every town had at least one cinema.

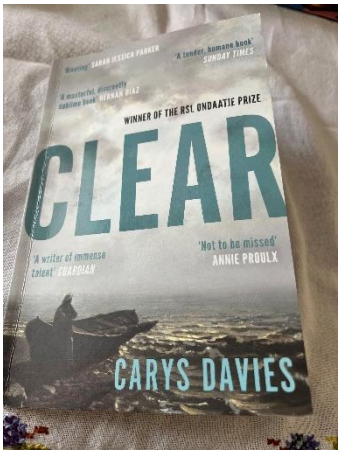
It seems that while Althorp House has been used as location quite a few times, many of the early actors seemed to have been related in some way to the Spencer Family.

Early TV signals were boosted by the radio masts at Borough Hill – long since gone, of course, although there is still one survivor now used to boost internet and mobile phone signals. How times have changed!

NEWS FROM OUR INTEREST GROUPS

BOOK GROUP:

Book Club 1 September 2026: "Clear" by Carys Davies



This was a short but beautifully written novel. Set in 1843 on an imaginary Scottish island, the book provided interesting and disturbing historical detail about the social and political history of Scotland at this time. This detail was carefully melded into the development of the novel and presented the characters with difficult dilemmas.
The descriptions of life on this remote island were very evocative. As a reader you experienced the realities and beauty of this harsh environment. Language played a big role in the book. Two of the characters had no common language and during the early period of the novel, when they were developing a means of communication their relationship also developed. As readers we were also introduced to a very expressive language where one word was both noun and descriptor. The author provides a very interesting glossary of words used in the book.

The book ended somewhat abruptly, most of us enjoyed the unexpected plot developments, some wished for more detail. Mostly though, it was an enjoyable and satisfying read.

RAMBLING GROUP

After a long dry summer it was a bit of a shock to commence our walk at Blisworth under a steady downpour. Suitably attired in boots and raincoats and some carrying umbrellas, we set off from The Walnut Inn. There were only eight of us, September seems to be the time when lots of members go off on their travels after the long school holidays.

We started the walk alongside the canal seeing many brightly coloured narrow boats moored along the sides. The route took us quite close to the main London to Birmingham railway line, which proved to be quite noisy at times, the trains were very fast. We crossed several recently ploughed fields and climbed over some slippery stiles, as the rain continued to fall coating our boots with mud. Although very wet and muddy it felt good to enjoy a lovely country walk in our 'more usual' British weather.



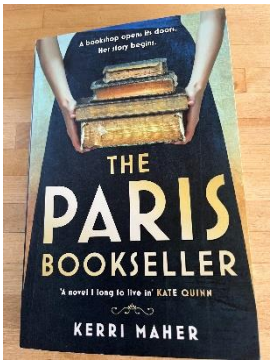
On our route back, after walking about 5 miles we came to Candle Bridge, as seen in the photograph. It was called this as a lady in a cottage next to the canal used to make and sell candles for the narrow boat folks who were going to navigate The Blisworth Tunnel. This tunnel being the longest wide, freely navigable canal tunnel in Europe. The rain had stopped by then and the reflection of the bridge, in the canal, was beautiful. As we neared the end of the walk the rain stopped, we then returned to the Walnut Inn for lunch.

BOOK SWAP TABLE – update from Paula Smith

The monthly Book Table continues to be a big success!! 📚But not just books, jigsaws too are very popular 🧩

So I'd like to say a big Thankyou for your continued support 😊

BOOK GROUP - October: “The Paris Bookseller” by Kerri Maher



The group had a complex response to this book; most found the historical context very interesting. Set in Paris between 1917 and 1934, it tells the story of Sylvia Beach, a pioneering American woman who was drawn to Paris partly because of the liberal attitudes towards homosexuality and also because of the liberal censorship laws which attracted a lot of exiled writers from Britain and America who were pushing against ‘establishment’ views on propriety and conduct. Sylvia opened a very unique bookshop for English print books, that became a place for writers and booklovers to meet and exchange ideas.

The book explores the personal relationship between Sylvia and Adrienne, a kindred spirit who was also a booklover and shop owner. Some of the group felt that this relationship could have been further developed. The book also explores the professional partnership between Sylvia Beach and James Joyce and charts Syvia’s efforts to get his book Ulysses printed. This was a long and fraught undertaking that came at great personal and financial cost.

Forthcoming titles:
3rd November: The Island of Missing Trees by Elif Shafak
1st December: The Frozen River by Ariel Lawhon
5th January: The Red Tent by Anita Daimant
2nd February: The Artist by Lucy Steeds
2nd March: The Silence of the Girls by Pat Barker

GARDEN GROUP – report from Margaret Griffiths

On a chilly afternoon threatening rain, the gardening group met at the Duke of Buccleugh’s mansion, Boughton House.

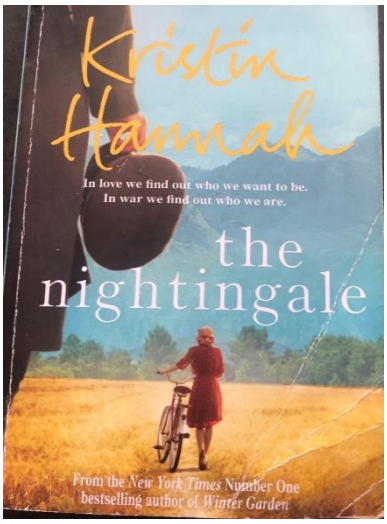
We began with tea and biscuits in the Stableyard and after a short introduction to the vast estate, we were able to explore at our leisure. This was preferable to a guide as people could choose to take long walks to the lake or around the lawns which seemed to go on for ever. As the gardens had opened just for us we could take our time and sit down to admire the views when we wished. The walled garden and rose garden were really colourful with lots of flowers despite the drought this year, and the grass felt very lush! We are very lucky to have such a prestigious estate near us and it’s even famous as the ballroom in the film of Les Miserables. I think we all enjoyed an interesting afternoon. Thank you to Annie and Sue for your hard work arranging our visits this year.







BOOK WORMS – "The Nightingale" by Kristen Hannah



During our September meeting we discussed 'The Nightingale' by Kristen Hannah which was published in 2015. It tells the story of two sisters, Vianne and Isabelle, and their struggles during the German occupation of France during World War Two. The book is historical fiction but was inspired by true life accounts of the time. It has been a worldwide best seller.

Both sisters show bravery in different ways. Vianne struggles to look after her daughter when her husband is captured as a prisoner of war. Lots of information is given about food rationing, anti- Semitism and poverty. She hides Jewish children in a nearby abbey's orphanage. Nazi officers are billeted at her house and she suffers sexual violence from one of them.

In contrast, Isabelle leaves their home town and joins the French Resistance. She helps Allied airmen escape to neutral Spain from where they can be repatriated. She is eventually captured and sent to a concentration camp.

We found this book engaging and easy to read. Some of us found it rather repetitive and there were also some factual inaccuracies such as the widespread use of antibiotics which were not generally available at that time.

We all agreed that the story was overly romanticised at times; the relationship between Isabelle and her boyfriend was unbelievable and sentimental - almost laughably so. Other parts though such as the description of the concentration camp were much more realistic.

In general though, the book was interesting and inspired a great discussion. **Celia Moss**

WRITING FOR FUN – September/October news from the group

Due to holidays, it was a very depleted group for the September meeting, but we all enjoyed ourselves with good chat and some interesting writing exercises!

The results of the U3A national story writing competition were announced in September with presentations in October. We were very pleased that Jackie's story was short listed but unfortunately it didn't make it to the final 3. The stories had to be about an incredible journey with Jackie telling the story of Thomas Stephens' ride across the world on a penny farthing bicycle in 1885 including many of his amusing adventures during the journey.

After the summer holidays we were back to a full group in October and all wrote a story about a brief encounter. As always, the stories were all very different so we chose a ghost story for Halloween which is on this month's website. Next month we are each choosing a painting and writing our own version of the story behind or about the painting.

SINGING FOR PLEASURE

Please note that the Singing for Pleasure Group will be meeting monthly in 2027, due to low numbers. If you would like to join the group to swell the ranks (and range of voices) please contact Tim Smith.

LOCAL HISTORY GROUP – SEPTEMBER VISIT TO WEEDON ORDNANCE DEPOT



Ten members of the LH group met at the visitor centre to enjoy a one and a half hour tour with a very knowledgeable guide around the surviving buildings of the Weedon Ordnance Depot on 24th September. It was a lovely sunny and warm morning – ideal for a leisurely stroll around this somewhat mysterious and historic place. Our guide, Christine, explained how during the Napoleonic War the depot was built about as far away from any threat of invasion as was feasibly possible to get supplies, artillery and gunpowder to possible invasion sites using the existing canal system. Hundreds, if not thousands, of troops were billeted at the depot, alongside horses and cannon, not forgetting the uniforms needed. Our guide explained that boots in particular would arrive, not in pairs, but in hundreds of left boots, followed by the right – apparently it was easier for the manufacturers – although trying to pair them up on arrival must have been a logistical nightmare! The depot survived many wars from the Crimean, Boer, 1st World War and into the 2nd – always supplying the necessary arms, equipment and soldiers to whichever conflict was being fought at the time.



These days the whole site is privately owned, and the various buildings are let out to individual businesses. But being a preserved Grade 2 site, no alterations are possible and when the companies leave, the buildings have to remain in their authentic post 1960s (when the site was decommissioned) condition. The canal, which had dried out during the recent long hot summer, was just now filling with water again – although the military barges and more recent railway trucks that once queued up to receive or unload equipment will never be seen again. Now it is a constant stream of infuriatingly impatient lorries!

Next month (October 22nd), some of our LH group members will be presenting the result of their research into a few of the Coaching Inns of Northamptonshire.

KNIT AND NATTER –report from Sarah Nelson

This month's meeting went well and our usual variety of nattering on current affairs including politics including our views on the present and past PM's. Deep discussions about Kier Starmer's unattractive specs. !!!



We have donated our knitted jumpers and cardigans to the Baby Basics charity which were very gratefully received ***(photo of Sarah presenting them to Vanessa, one of the volunteers)***. We have also completed a doggy blanket and plan on presenting that to the doggy charity. We shared some personal completed projects including an absolutely fabulous throw with a very intricate pattern ***photo right)***. We have a very talented group of ladies producing first class work.





DUPLICATE BRIDGE RESULTS FOR THE MONTH OF SEPTEMBER

What a month it has been, with both sessions dominated by the ladies, which is great to see. There was a low turnout for the Thursday evening event due to holidays, with grandparents freed of their summer holiday duties, able to get away to re-charge their batteries with grandchild back at school. This presented the opportunity for Jill and Rosemary to take a wonderful win against some stiff opposition. A truly fabulous result for them.

Thursday 10th Sept - FINAL RESULTS TABLE					
	IMPS	%	Players	Tops	Joint Top
1st	39	65.0	Jill Snedker & Rosemary Heaver	5	5
2nd	34	56.7	Ruby Cole & Chris Williams	6	3
2nd	34	56.7	Tony Nixon & Madeleine Jones	3	4
4th	27	45.0	Richard Hartley & Bea Bennett	3	5
5th	25	41.7	Brian Collett & Roger Atterwill	3	5
6th	21	35.0	Chris Hill & Belinda	1	4

Very few members were missing from the Friday afternoon session, which was a great success for two ladies who have made me very proud, with their excellent result being a reward for me for the many years (16 now) that I have been teaching this great game. So well done Sheila and Belinda who, it must be said, rarely partner each other, making the win even more creditable.

Friday 18th Sept - FINAL RESULTS TABLE					
	IMPS	%	Players	Tops	Joint Top
1st	85	66.4	Sheila Jones & Belinda Collett	5	4
2nd	82	64.1	Tony Nixon & Katie Lindenbaum	1	5
3rd	75	58.6	Roger Atterwill & Brian Collett	4	3
4th	69	53.9	Gila Gwinn & Diane Williamson	4	2
5th	62	48.4	Helen Coghill & Mary Parker	2	3
5th	62	48.4	Roger & Kathy Morgan	3	1
7th	59	46.1	Paula Jones & Ruby Cole	1	2
8th	56	43.8	Mavis Sturgess & Fay Duckmanton	1	3
9th	48	37.5	Del Smith & Jane Davis	1	1
10th	42	32.8	Anne Weddle & Chris Russell	0	0

OCTOBER MONTHLY MEETING – Bharat Patel

Bharat Patel was this month's speaker who delivered a talk, entitled **"Tales from a journalist with an Indian take".** This was a highly entertaining, humorous and interesting talk with lots of funny stories from his career.

He also shared with us his impression of England and its people when he arrived from India as a 9 year old child. His childhood memories were as insightful as they were enlightening, and also very funny.

All Bharat's proceeds made from his book which contained similar tales, went to The Hope cancer charity, a very worthwhile cause. He made £270.00 and asked me to convey his thanks to all our generous U3A members. He commented "a lovely crowd" and thanked us for having him as our speaker. **Sarah Nelson**

GARDENING GROUP MEETING, Weds 21st Oct

This summer we have had many challenges in our gardens. Lawns have changed from green to brown and are now coming back to green again. Some perennials are having second flowerings. Others are now filling our gardens with late colourful flowers that really do lift the spirits. Some have just curled up, turned brown and will never be seen again! Members are perhaps thinking about choosing flowers for next year that need less water as daily watering was onerous this summer.

So here we are at the start of our Autumn/Winter programme. Our first Speaker on Wednesday 21st October will be Bridget Blair, who is a member of the Garden Media Guild and a former BBC journalist. Her talk is entitled Gardens Galore and will include an introduction to the Guild, getting ready for Chelsea Flower Show and favourite gardens.

In November Andrew Mikolajski will be joining us once again with another informative and entertaining talk. There is NO MEETING in December. Our theme for January is awaiting confirmation. February's speaker is Geoff Hodge, with a theme of "Easy Gardening". Then in March Howard Drury will be sharing "40 years of gardening tips."

It is extremely difficult to get high quality speakers and they come at a cost. Add in the now exhorbitant cost of fuel ……and thus higher travel expenses. The cost for our speakers this time, including Speaker fees and travel expenses, will come to more than £600. Add in Village Hall fees of £100, refreshments of £25 and you will realise that we have to cover our costs. Therefore, the cost per member for the Autumn/Winter programme will be £15 please, payable in cash at the meeting on 21 st 0ctober. Thank you.

Finally, after very careful consideration, we have decided to step back from running the Gardening Group, with effect from March 2027. This decision has not been taken lightly as we have really enjoyed doing it for more than 5 years. Therefore, we hope that some of you may wish to step into our shoes, where we will be here to help and advise you in any way that we can. Please give it some thought. The programme is confirmed up until March 2027 but the summer garden visits from April 2027 need to be planned by the new leaders in the coming winter months.

Best wishes from Annie Curtis and Sue Dodds-Smith, Joint Leaders of the Gardening Group.

USED STAMPS FOR CHARITY



Can I please send out a huge thank you to Brixworth U3A for the kind donations of stamps that I have received, I am sending out 3 x 1/2 kilo envelopes of stamps to charities in September. The Charities are People's Dispensary for Sick Animals, Parkinson's UK and Retina UK, these charities use the stamps to raise much needed funds for the work that they do.

In October I shall be sending out 3 x 1/2 kilo envelopes of used stamps to various charities, these being Against Breast Cancer, Bone Cancer Research Trust and Barn Owl Trust, they will use these stamps to raise much needed funds to support the work that they do.

Thanks again to everyone, any and all donations gratefully received, old, new, foreign and commemorative.

Cheers Keith Featley

A thank you from Retina UK: *Thank you so much to you and your friends for collecting and sending us another batch of stamps for Retina UK's Stamp Appeal. We really appreciate your continued support and the time and effort you all put into collecting them for us. Every contribution helps us continue our work supporting people affected by inherited sight loss and funding vital research, and we're incredibly grateful for your ongoing generosity. Thank you once again to you and your friends for thinking of Retina UK and for your continued kindness and support.*

DUPLICATE BRIDGE RESULTS FOR OCTOBER 2026

What an amazing autumn it has been so far, for our former Brixworth & District u3a Chair. Having finished top of the table for our Friday September duplicate afternoon with Sheila Jones, Belinda and Sheila follow-up with another Friday win this month. In between those two memorable victories, there is another, when Lynda Stevenson and Belinda topped the table on the second Thursday this month.

FINAL RESULTS TABLE - THURSDAY 8th OCTOBER 2026					
	IMPS	%	Players	Top	Jt Top
1st	63	65.6	Lynda Stevenson & Belinda Collett	5	3
2nd	54	56.3	Brian Collett & Roger Atterwill	5	2
3rd	52	54.2	Gila Gwinn & Del Smith	4	1
4th	51	53.1	Ruby Cole & Chris Williams	1	3
5th	47	49.0	Paul Jarvis & Tony Nixon	2	2
6th	47	49.0	Bea Bennett & Richard Hartley	1	3
7th	42	43.8	Steve Sercombe & Gareth Cox	1	2
8th	39	40.6	Karen Brown & Rosemary Heaver	1	1
9th	37	38.5	Mavis Sturgess & Jim Wardle	1	2

FINAL RESULTS TABLE - FRIDAY 16th OCTOBER 2026					
	IMPS	%	Players	Tops	Jt Top
1st	100	62.5	Belinda Collett & Sheila Jones	3	2
2nd	96	60.0	Hazel Barr & Gila Gwinn	2	1
3rd	94	58.8	Roger Atterwill & Judy Peck	5	0
4th	90	56.3	Brian Collett & Paul Jarvis	0	4
5th	89	55.6	Ruby Cole & Chris Williams	3	1
6th	87	54.4	Lynda Stevenson & Paula Jones	2	0
7th	86	53.8	Mary Parker & Helen Coghill	1	2
8th	72	45.0	Mavis Sturgess & Fay Duckmanton	1	2
9th	71	44.4	Chris Russell & Anne Weddle	3	1
9th	71	44.4	Del Smith & Jane Davis	4	0
11th	57	35.6	Kathy & Roger Morgan	1	0
12th	47	29.4	Maggie Lewis & Sharon Hammond	0	1

NEW MEMBERS

We welcome Richard Everett – our latest new member for B&D u3a. We look forward to getting to know you, Richard, and meeting you at the main monthly meeting or at one of our interest groups.

NEW MEMBERS MEETING

We are holding a New Members' Meeting on Friday 6th November at 10 am at the Heritage Centre, Brixworth. All recently joined members are welcome to come along for coffee and a chat to learn more about Brixworth u3a and what we do.

FUTURE MONTHLY MEETINGS

November 4 — "Winston Churchill's Early Life" by Michael Kushner

Over the years there has been an abundance of stories about Britain's greatest hero. But within the 90 years of his life, he crammed in the most unbelievable achievements and disasters. This talk "The Early Years" has tried to put a different angle on his times to show other things that we may not have known about Winston Leonard Spencer Churchill, between 1874 - 1939, and why his name wasn't "Winston Churchill Spencer" ……

December 2 — "Songsmith" with Andy Smith
January 6 — "The Odyssey" (a modern take) with Mike Burton
February 3 — Rugby at the Saints by Graham McKechnie

KEEPING UP WITH ACTIVITIES AT B&D U3A



As well as this newsletter, don't forget we have an active website and also a Facebook Page to keep up to date with activities within our u3a. The Facebook Page currently has 75 of our members checking it out and posting news, photos and upcoming and recent events – so do check it out.

Our website can be found at the following link **https://brixworth.u3asite.uk**

FESTIVAL OF COMMUNITY – 25/25 October

Many of you probably visited the Community Centre last weekend to see what is happening in and around Brixworth. It was very well supported with probably about 30 local social groups represented over the weekend.

B&D u3a were there both days, with our stand manned by members of our committee and we met and chatted with not only many current members but also with members of the public who expressed an interest in joining – if not necessarily immediately but in the future when they are no longer in full-time employment. All expressed surprise at the number and range of our activities.

We also spoke to other groups and almost certainly acquired a few contact details for future speakers at our monthly meetings. Thanks go to all my fellow committee members who manned the stand over the course of the two days (and Colin). I think we all enjoyed the experience and we have it on good authority that something similar may be held next year – when hopefully the weather won't be quite so stormy! My only criticism of the set-up at the Community Centre was it was possibly too crowded – not enough room to "decorate" our table.



Some of us manning the stand on Sunday …..

LOCAL HISTORY GROUP – October meeting "Coaching Inns of Northamptonshire"

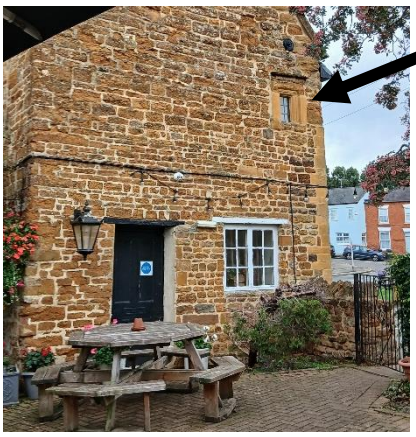
It was good to greet 30 members of the group back at Scaldwell Village Hall on Thursday 22nd October, after our summer of walks and visits around the country (sometimes in sunshine – sometimes in pouring rain – that's an English summer for you!).

The topic this month was "Coaching Inns of Northamptonshire" – of which there are probably hundreds, the county straddling many of the major routes north out of London. But we chose some in the town (thanks to Mary for researching The George and Peacock Hotel), some in Brixworth (thanks to Janet and Jackie for looking at the Coach & Horses and also the Brixworth George) and also in Towcester (where I had lived for many years), which of course is on the old Watling Street, A5, so saw many coaches passing through before the railways changed the mode of travel and closed many inns down.

Did you know, for example, that Queen Victoria "popped" into The George in Northampton for 4 minutes (presumably a pressing need!) when she passed through the town. Cromwell is reputed to have stayed in the Brixworth George the night before the Battle of Naseby (his lookout window is known as "Cromwell's Eye" and is still there) and the Talbot Inn in Towcester was a regular overnight stopping point for author Jonathan Swift on his way from London to Ireland, where he was Dean of St Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin. Of course, the Saracen's Head in Towcester was mentioned in Pickwick Papers as "a place where a very good little dinner" could be got ready in half an hour.

And if you think Formula 1 tyre-changes are quick, the Coach & Horses was renowned for changing an entire team of horses almost as fast!





"Cromwell's Eye"

NEWS FROM THE COMMITTEE

If you are booking a holiday with Riviera Travel, please note that for B&D u3a to get the commission, you have to book by phone, not online.

As mentioned elsewhere in this newsletter, the Garden Group are looking for one or two members to take over the organisation and programme planning for the group, as Annie & Sue are looking to step down after many years.

We are looking for someone to help our Webmaster, Gwynneth, so she has someone to deputise for her – at the moment Gwynneth is the only person able to access and update our website. So please help if you have an interest in websites – or even if you don't!

Finally, it is our 20th anniversary next year and we are looking for ideas of how to celebrate, and especially an "Entertainments Officer" to co-ordinate suggestions and help make plans – maybe an Entertainments Sub-Committee is needed?

2026 CHRISTMAS LUNCH

Below is the menu for this year's Christmas lunch – if you would like to book, please let Yvonne know a.s.a.p. Instructions on booking and how to pay are overleaf. Yvonne will be at the November monthly meeting, so see her then!

2 COURSES £37.50 AND 3 COURSES £44.00
(BOTH INCLUDE A GRATUITY)

STARTERS

Chicken Liver and Brandy Pate
Cranberry chutney and toasted ciabatta

Roasted Butternut Squash Soup
Served with warm ciabatta

Salt and Pepper Squid
Mango and pineapple salsa with a fresh salad garnish

MAINS

Duo of Roast Turkey and Ham
served with all the traditional festive trimmings

Roast Beef
served with all the traditional festive trimmings

Salmon and Spinach Wellington
White wine sauce and roast potatoes

Spiced Cauliflower, Spinach and Lentil Pie
A delicious festive vegetarian option

DESSERTS

Traditional Christmas Pudding
Served with brandy sauce

Molten Chocolate Cake
Chocolate sauce and Chantilly cream

Festive cheeseboard
Wensleydale, cheddar and Stilton
Served with apple slices and crackers

U3A Christmas Luncheon 2026.

We have booked our Christmas luncheon at



Northampton Golf Club on:

Thursday 10th December 2026

from 12pm, seated at 12.50 with the meal at 1pm.

The menu is above and will be £44 for three courses or

2 courses will be £37.50.

(These prices include a gratuity for the staff)

To book your place please contact Yvonne Swallow by email at

BrixworthChristmaslunch@hotmail.com with your menu choices.

You can pay by bank transfer to the U3A account. Please make sure you put your name and Xmas on the transfer.

Account Brixworth & District U3A

Sort Code 30-96-09

Account number 00070504

Alternatively you can give your cheque made out to Brixworth u3a to a group leader or committee member with your menu choices.

If you prefer we will be at the November 4th meeting for you to book, giving us your menu choices and payment. No cancellations or changes will be possible after November 23rd 2026.

Look forward to seeing you there.

Yvonne and Tim Swallow