



Orkney U3A 2026 Annual General Meeting – Minutes

St. Magnus Centre, Kirkwall, on Thursday 16 April, 2026

Present

Keith Ramsay (Chair), Merry Dineley, Gill Lewis, Bill Stout, Gill Wilson, Roella Wilson, and 34 other members.

Apologies for absence

Alison Cruikshanks, Rosemary Doughty, Michael Gee, Sarah Gee, Bashir Hasham, Ray Herkes, Kathleen Houghton, Patricia Long, Hilary Morell, John Mowat, Tom Nimmo, Linda Osborn, Johanna Pronk, Marion Sutherland, Ellie Wiltshire, Pam Woodcock, Tim Wright

Chairman's Remarks

Keith welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Minutes of the 2025 AGM

Adoption of the 2025 minutes was proposed by Glenys Alsop and seconded by Roella Wilson. They were submitted for addition to the web site.

Matters Arising

There was none.

Chairman's Report

I'm pleased to report that 2025 was another very successful year for Orkney U3A.

The heart of any U3A is its members, as they enable the various groups to function & grow. We are lucky that we have many members with the wide ranging skills & expertise in so many subjects who are willing to run groups of all kinds & teach others. This is the founding ethos of the U3A movement. Up here in the far North, we cannot take part in most of the practical U3A activities South because of the costs & time needed to travel.

In this regard, the efforts made by the U3A organisation to embrace digital technology are paying off & a lot of national Groups are moving to an on-line model with occasional in-person meetings where practical (especially given the price of fuel!). The range of subjects offered is vast: I would encourage you to explore them. You are sure to find something of interest. The U3A website is the starting point...

We have made a number of small grants available for Groups to use, & these have been taken up & used wisely (mostly for room hire & materials) by their recipients.

We have been entertained throughout the year by a wide-ranging programme of interesting talks from members of the wider Orkney community. No matter what you want to know about, there's going to be someone around who is an expert! Orkney U3A punches well above its weight in this regard.....And there's always the tea & biscuits (& chat) afterwards, ably provided by the various Groups on a rota basis.

According to our constitution, U3A Chairpersons are only allowed to be in post for 3 years, & then must stand down. So after this meeting, my time will be up. I have to say it has been enjoyable, made easy by the support of the committee, Gill Lewis, Bill Stout, John Mowat, Gill Wilson, Merryn Dineley, & Roella Wilson. As with all good committees, they have made my job very easy, so thanks to them all. It is sometimes difficult to persuade folk to stick their heads above the parapet, but it's encouraging to see people coming forward to take on active roles with their local U3A. I would also like to say a big 'Thankyou' to Martha Kirby, who stood in for me when I was away for several months recovering from a big operation.

In closing, I would like thank you all for your support over the last 3 years in making Orkney U3A a success & I look forward to seeing you at the meetings & group activities.

Best Wishes
Keith

Treasurer's Report

Finance

As at 31st March 2026, Orkney U3A funds amount to £1,978, with a further £1,999 being held in the bank account on behalf of the Craft and Straw Work Groups.

This is the first full year under the 31st March year end date and the accounts produced by Beacon have been certified by Gavin Cullen (AIB) Scot and are attached to this report.

Our surplus for the year is reported as £938, which includes the Craft and Straw Work grant funds. Excluding this, the surplus is £233. We continue to cover our overheads despite some cost rises over the year.

Our thanks go to Gavin Cullen for his continued support and prompt response in certifying the accounts on behalf of Orkney U3A which enable them to be submitted as part of this report for the AGM.

Grants - within and without

Internal "grants" of £50 remain available to any groups who have not already taken up this offer. Any group leaders interested in this should contact me via email with an outline of their application – the only criterion for purpose is that the money is to be spent for the benefit of group members.

Membership

We have had 25 new members over the last year, and sadly a few losses. Overall Orkney U3A now has 144 members – assuming all opt to renew this year.

Gill Lewis

IT Report

Website maintenance

Activity has involved primarily three functions:

- creating and posting general meeting notices
- posting blogs from the Botany, Photography, Music Appreciation One and Walking groups
- posting general meeting notes

The Groups page has been organised to provide a separate, indexed page for each group. Minimal change is foreseen in future, but for contingency and succession planning it would be nice to have a volunteer join the committee to shadow Roella and myself.

Beacon

Beacon maintenance is minimal. It is proving to be a useful resource.

Email services

The committee email services based on Beacon and Orknet Roundcube are functioning well. We increased the contracted volume of Roundcube storage to circumvent repeated space full conditions.

Bill Stout

Group Reports

Art Pop-up

In the last year the Art group had some lovely sessions including painting and sketching at Finstown Community Garden back in the summer, expressive writing & art journalling in Stromness, and creating textile landscapes in Kirkwall.

Dwindling attendance over 2025 was one of the primary reasons for reassessing the format of meetings of the Art Group. It was agreed that instead of meeting fortnightly, the group would now operate on a pop-up basis.

From here on individuals may be encouraged to put forward suggestions for artistic methods, techniques, or activities they wish to try. Interested members could then form small sub-groups to pursue the activity. All agreed that we would like to take advantage of better weather to sketch and paint in the outdoors.

Gill Cooke has agreed to continue as the figurehead for the group, but it will be open to any individual to organise sessions.

Currently there are seven members, we welcome any new people with similar artistic interests. There is no limit to the group capacity, although specific sessions may well be restricted and offered on a first-come, first-served basis.

Gill Cooke (delivered by Gill Wilson)

Book Group (Fiction)

The book group meets every five weeks on a Friday at the Lynfield for lunch to talk about their latest read. We create a yearly schedule of books at the start of the year, with each member suggesting a title, researching its author, and starting the discussion. In 2025, our selections covered three genres: travel, thriller, and autobiography. The books we read were:

- A Long Way Home by Saroo Bierley

- To Kill a Mockingbirds by Harper Lee
- I am, I am, I am by Maggie O'Farrell
- Everland by Rebecca Hunt
- Queenie of Norwich by L.K. Wilke
- True North by Gavin Francis
- The Way of the Hermit by Ken Smith
- A Rip in Heaven by Jeanine Cummins
- The Happiest Man on Earth by Eddie Jaku
- Travels with Charley by John Steinbeck

The choice of book led to lively discussion. The group presently consists of 10 members and has reached its maximum capacity.

It's a pleasure to get together for our meetings and I would like to say a big thank to everyone for their support and friendship.

Ellie Wiltshire (delivered by Bill Stout)

Book Group (Non-fiction)

The group has now been meeting regularly for just over two years. The number of members has been constant at five participants, with one recent loss and one gain. The frequency of meetings has been reduced this year from monthly to six-weekly. Some recent books have been:

- "Being You" by Anil Seth
- "Heresy" by Catherine Nixey
- "The Coming Wave" by Mustapha Suleyman
- "A Thousand Brains" by Jeff Hawkins
- "The Beauty of Falling" by Claudia de Rham

We could accommodate another member or two.

Bill Stout

Botany Group

This is a thriving group that meets between May and September. At present we have 25 members, but we need to check on a few individuals who have not attended meetings for a while. We meet every two weeks for a Botanical Walk and we aim to identify as many plants, flowers and trees that we can. We try to visit an island at least once each year, but most walks are on the Orkney Mainland. Last year we visited Egilsay in August and we can highly recommend going there, as there are swathes of beautiful wild flowers to be seen. Other trips in 2025 were to Finstown, Birsay, the beach at Eastside, South Ronaldsay, Kirkwall where we walked the Crantit Trail, Stromness Reservoir, Loch of Hundland and Barrier Four beach, Burray.

We had our annual planning meeting on Tuesday 14 April and we will be visiting Hoy, Carness (Kirkwall), Kirbuster Loch, Bosquoy (Harray), Yesnaby, Knowes of Trotty, Arcadia Park in Kirkwall and Newark Bay. Meetings will begin on 26 of May.

I have been the secretary/co-ordinator for the past three years and I have just resigned from this post, so this year we are making some changes. Each walk leader will be

responsible for their own walk, as usual, and also for providing a short botanical report and a few photos for the u3a web page. Until now, this has been done through the group co-ordinator.

The group will have a new secretary for the coming year: Phylida Wright. She will attend u3a committee meetings and pass on any relevant information to the group as well as organising people for the teas and biscuits at monthly meetings. We usually do the February meeting.

We're looking forward to another fabulous year of meetings, whatever the weather may choose to throw at us. I can't think of anything else to report and so that's all for now.

Merryn Dineley

Cinema Group

Our cinema going has continued pretty much as normal. Attendance is determined by the films on offer. We have 13 active members, but there is no practical limit on the numbers. We usually visit the Picky for an afternoon showing if possible, followed by a coffee to discuss the film & put the world to rights (although that's an increasingly forlorn task these days!). Sometimes we go to the Picky & watch 'live' recorded performances from the National Theatre, Royal Opera, & Royal Ballet.

We also visit Westside pop-up cinema in Stromness, (the advantage there being that you can bring wine & snacks!) & occasionally Cromarty Hall in the Hope.

If you're interested, there is no additional membership fee, just contact me so I can add your name to the email list.

Keith Ramsay

Craft Group

The U3A Craft Group meets weekly at Kirkwall Library on Thursday mornings from 10:00am to 12:00 midday. It is a friendly and well-established group where members bring along their own projects to work on in a relaxed and supportive environment.

The group represents a wide and diverse range of crafting interests, with members experienced in activities such as silk painting and dyeing, straw work, fibre crafts including needle felting, knitting and crochet, as well as appliqué, quilting, hook lock work, lampshade making, and embroidery.

A key strength of the group is its collaborative spirit. Members are always happy to share their knowledge, skills, and experiences, making it an encouraging space for creativity and learning.

Due to its popularity, the group is currently full and there are no vacancies available for new members at this time.

Pam Woodcock (delivered by Peter Drummond)

Music Appreciation Group One

As last year, Music Appreciation Group One meets on the last Monday of each month, from 10:30 until 12:30, at the home of the leader of the group, Glenys Alsop, to listen (and watch via YouTube, if possible) to classical music. This, however, is something of a moveable feast – members are welcome to choose compositions on the month's given theme from any genre of music. Each member either brings their own CD choices or sends Glenys links to their choice of YouTube music videos on the chosen theme.

As I've said before, over the years the group has enjoyed listening to a variety of music from all over the world (folk music from Armenia and Spain, baroque music from Bolivia, fiddle music from Northumberland and the Western Isles, compositions by Hildegard of Bingen in the 12th century, film music [eg *The Last of the Mohicans*, *Frozen*], the list goes on and on) – however, generally the majority of choices do tend to be classical.

As you'll probably guess, it's not all music! There is a break for coffee/tea and cake, and a lot of chat takes place.

Because the group has always met in members' homes, six has proved to be the ideal number of participants (simply to fit into the space available). However, Group One is now down to four, so there is definitely space for another two or three.

Glenys Alsop (delivered by Bill Stout)

Music Appreciation Group Two

The group meets in Kirkwall on the second Wednesday morning of each month. This group relies on CDs for their music choices, which can be in any musical genre. Their number is now down to three, so some consideration is being given to possibly joining Group One if the stars align!

Valerie Pomfret (delivered by Bill Stout)

Photography Group

The group remains very active with usually 12 to 14 members taking part in our photographic outings. This last year we have been to:

- Rousay for the day
- Gurness and Aikerness Beach
- HMS Tern
- Been by boat into the Gloup and then around the cliffs of Deerness
- Waulkmill Bay
- Windwick to look at the Seal Pups on a very wet day
- Arcadia Park and Scapa Beach
- Kirkwall from the Harbour to the Cathedral and lots of areas in between.

16 of us went to Grantown on Spey for 5 days in September, visiting places of interest in the surrounding area. These included Ballindalloch Castle, The Cooperage at Craigellachie, The Cairngorm Funicular, The Highland Folk Museum at Newtonmore and the Speyside Steam

Railway among a host of other sites. This year we are going to Gairloch for 3 days in September.

As well as viewing photographs from our outings, we also undertake a project each month, selecting 5 photographs on a particular theme that we circulate among the members.

Projects this year have included:

- On the Shore
- Sport
- Shrubs and Trees
- Weather
- Transport
- Electricity
- New Life
- Food
- "Makes Me Smile "

I must also thank Hilary Morell and David Appleton for their great help in the planning of the extended trips South and the collating of the project photos .Their input is invaluable in keeping the group functioning.

The group is full so there is currently no availability to join the group at this time .

Tim Wright (delivered by Keith Ramsay)

Play reading

There was no report.

Recorder Group

The U3A recorder group meets weekly on a Tuesday morning, usually in Kirkwall. At present, there are eight members in the group, with varied levels of experience. We have enjoyed playing a range of music from 13th century dances to 21st century pieces, and everything in between.

Most members play either treble or tenor recorders, or both.

Last year, most members participated in a workshop and playing days organised by the

Orkney branch of the Society of Recorder Players.

We expect to continue to meet on Tuesday mornings.

If any U3A members would like to join the group, treble and tenor recorders can usually be borrowed from the Orkney Instrument Bank. See the Orkney Music and Culture website for details.

Valerie Pomfret

Scrabble

Scrabble group has been doing fine this year with an average of 6 players per week.

Friday morning is the highlight of the week with some good matches and friendly conversation. Sadly two members left the group however we have acquired two new members . That is a nice solid 8 .

We are looking forward to more fun this year. Apparently there is a new version of the Collins Dictionary which we are hoping to buy with our coffee funds

Pat Retson

Social History

The Social History Group was only formed last October so we are still finding our feet. We meet once a month, on a Friday afternoon in the Carnegie Room. For our first meetings, we acted as a book group: reading *The Orkney Book*, *the New Orkney Book*, *Reminiscences of an Orkney Parish* and some of the Orkney entries in the *Old Statistical Account*. Our mix of those who did and didn't grow up in Orkney leads to very interesting discussions and comparisons.

As part of one of our early meetings, Lucy Gibbon kindly gave us a tour of the Archive, where she had difficulty moving us on from some of the old maps.

At our last meeting, we discussed Stromness and then had an outing to the town on the following Friday. Our next meeting is going to be a visit to the Orkney Museum, with a focus on the 19th and 20th Century Galleries. As the weather improves, we hope to have trips a little further afield, perhaps to Kirbuster Farm Museum and the Orkney Fossil and Heritage Centre. Social history is such a broad and interesting subject that the possibilities are almost endless.

We have 11 members now so there is room for three or four more.

Particia Long (delivered by Peter Drummond)

Straw work

Up to 12 participants gather each Thursday from 12-2 in the Carnegie Room at Orkney Library, making predominantly coiled bowls using locally grown oat straw, stitched with sisal twine. Some experimental work has been carried out using native grasses and rushes. Orkney college Agronomy department kindly supplied 3 sheaves of Orkney grown rye straw which along with bere straw has enabled comparisons to be made regarding the suitability of these species for use in the traditional activities of basket making, corn dollies and as a future activity straw plaiting.

Once again we are most grateful to Sandra Higgins for her patient guidance.

The Craft and Straw groups have received funding from the Community Health and Wellbeing fund administered by Orkney VAO which is used towards room hire, enabling these activities to take place on a regular basis.

8 group members enjoyed a bus trip to view the Tuft of Grass exhibition at the Pier Art Centre in September followed by a light lunch at the Vintage Paper cafe.

The group is presently full.

Peter Drummond, Orkney Straw work facilitator.

Walking Group 1

Walking Group One has approximately 35 signed up members of whom usually between 8 and 16 attend the monthly walks. This year we have walked at:

- Happy Valley and Russadale
- Marwick to Birsay
- Scorradales twice , once getting to the top of Ward Hill
- Newark circular walk in Deerness
- The Standing Stones and the Ring of Brodgar
- Birsay Northside Coast and
- Pickaquooy to Scapa and Back .

We have had a few postponements due to weather but mostly we have walked in sun and little rain.

I have decided to stop leading this group now for a variety of reasons but mainly as I have a very busy year ahead. I understand there are moves by some in the group to keep the walks going in conjunction with Ellie's Walking Group 2. I look forward to being follower, not a leader in the future! I am not hanging up my boots yet.

Tim Wright (delivered by James Temple)

Walking Group 2

Walking Group 2 is thriving, with attendance typically between eight and twelve people. Sometimes the weather proves difficult, but we still head out for our walks. It is a friendly group that meets on the first Monday of each month, usually covering four to five miles over a couple of hours. We aim to visit at least two of the islands each year.

Walks during 2025: Birsay – Rendall - Stromness - Dounby – Harray – Egilsay - Flotta – Orphir – Holm – Roseness – Newark Bay

I wish to extend my sincere appreciation to those who have supported me throughout the year, regardless of the weather —sunshine, rain, or relentless wind.

Following Tim Wright's retirement after twelve years as leader of Walking Group I, members felt it would be beneficial to continue having walks twice a month. Consequently, Walking Groups 1 and 2 will merge and run as the u3a Walking Group, under the leadership of Ellie Wiltshire. As previously walks will on the first Monday and third Friday of each month. Ellie Wiltshire will continue to guide the Monday walks, while the Friday walks will be led in rotation by James Temple, Marion Sutherland, Ruth Ross-Thompson, Graham Dineley, and Brian Wiltshire. James will oversee the organisation of the Friday walks. Arrangements for the walks will remain the same, a reminder will go out a week prior, and two days before the event, an update sent with details about the walk, including its distance and where to meet.

The walking group is very sociable and an excellent way to exercise. The walks are usually five miles in distance taken at a leisurely pace with stops along the way.

New members are always welcome.

Ellie Wiltshire (delivered by James Temple)

James added a word of personal appreciation for the leadership of Tim Wright over a period of several years.

Election of Officers and Committee Members

The retiring committee:

Chairman: Keith Ramsay (3 years completed, retiring)
Vice Chairman: vacant
Treasurer: Gill Lewis (2 years completed)
Secretary: Bill Stout (1 year completed)
General Members: John Mowat (3+ years completed)
Roella Wilson (3 years completed)
Gill Wilson (1 year completed)
Merryn Dineley (1 year completed)

Note that IT Support (currently Roella Wilson and Bill Stout) and Meetings Coordinator (currently Gill Wilson) are allocated to Committee members at the discretion of the Committee.

Roella Wilson as sole nominee for Chairperson was proposed by Carol Smith and seconded by Valerie Pomfret.

Keith Ramsay as sole nominee for Vice Chairperson was proposed by Lesley Ramsay and seconded by Pat Retson.

Bill Stout as sole nominee for Secretary was proposed by James Temple and seconded by Phylida Wright.

Gill Lewis as sole nominee for Treasurer was proposed by Kathy Potts and seconded by Rosie Cursiter.

Gill Wilson as sole nominee for Meetings Coordinator was proposed by Catherine Shearer and seconded by Glenys Alsop.

Merryn Dinely, John Mowat and Peter Potter were adopted as general members.

The resulting committee:

Chairperson: Roella Wilson (new)
Vice Chairperson: Keith Ramsay (new)
Treasurer: Gill Lewis (2 years completed)
Secretary: Bill Stout (1 year completed)
Non-officer member: John Mowat (3+ years completed)
Gill Wilson (1 year completed)
Merryn Dineley (1 year completed)
Peter Potter (new)

Any Other Business

Bill Stout thanked Keith Ramsay for his three years' service as chairperson and presented him with a small token of our appreciation.

There being no further business, the meeting formally closed at 3.45 pm, after which members were entertained by Pat Retson and Gill Wilson to a challenging quiz on subjects of our special interest groups.



Bill Stout
Secretary
17 April, 2026

Roella Wilson
Chairperson

DRAFT