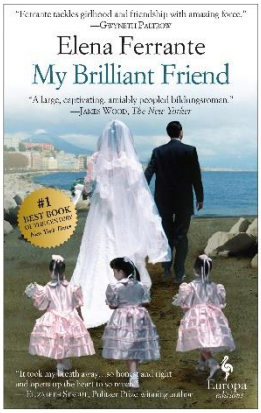
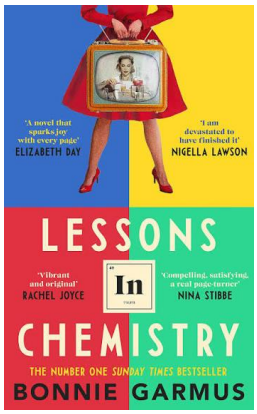
Welcome everyone to the November newsletter. I have to say it is beginning to feel quite autumnal now and signs of Christmas are appearing in all the shops! The two events I've found happening near Solihull in November both have Christmas themes too. After all, as from 1st November, there are only 54 days until Christmas day!

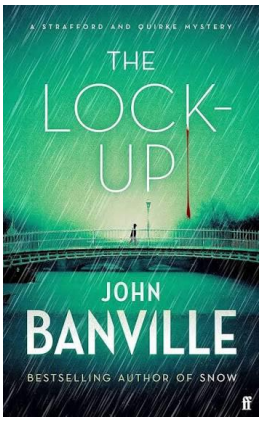
Following on from our talk on 'land girls and lumber jills' the speaker forwarded this link about the lumber Jills if you want to find out more information:

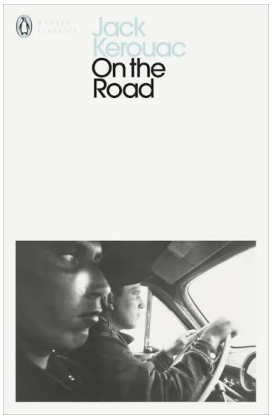
Women Lumberjacks Issue Title - Jolly Good Fellers (1942)

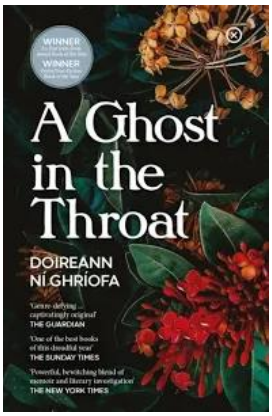
We have had a busy series of talks throughout October – here's a recap if you missed any of them. We kicked off with a session from the Book Lovers group. Five members shared the books they had chosen for Book Club. Below are the ones chosen. You may fancy giving one of them a try!











Mary has sent out an email with a list of the books recently read at book club – a very varied selection I'm sure you will agree.

This was followed by Jeanette delivering her very first talk at U3A accompanied by husband Andy. They took us on a virtual walk around Scarborough taking in old and new points of interest. Thank you, Jeanette and Andy! We then had a very interesting talk about the history of Punch & Judy delivered by Nigel Metcalfe (an outside speaker). We learnt so much whilst reliving our childhood. Who knew that Polari (the language used between Punch and Judy performers/professors) gave us some words that we still use today: barney (fight), carsey (toilet), todd (alone), cackle (talk/gossip), to name but a few. Our last meeting in October was a talk by Mary entitled 'Poisoner's Corridor'. Mary spoke about three different poisons – cadmium, mercury and chlorine and how their use/misuse has affected many people in the past. It finished with Jenni reading *Dulce et Decorum Est* by Wilfrid Owen - describing the brutal realities of World War one trench warfare, specifically describing a chlorine gas shell attack.

Events

On 13th October a small group visited Bickerscourt farm. Read on to see what Veronica had to say about the visit.

Solihull U3A outing to Bickerscourt Shire Horse Farm and Wellbeing Centre

13th October 2026.

We arrived at the very old farmhouse and buildings via a Pig Trot Lane in Danzey Green and were welcomed and shown where to park by the owners, Lucy and her son Thomas and Lorna the assistant who were there waiting for us.

They showed us into an open barn (sort of like a hay barn with open sides but with a roof) where two large tables had been set up with tablecloths and chairs and surrounded by tractors and equipment. The owner started to tell us about the 5 generations of her family that had been there farming and raising the wonderful shire horses since the 1800s. All the time the two sheep dogs were around us, very friendly and well behaved and a delight to see them trying to round 'us' up at one point. She said that they always were constantly 'rounding up'. It's in their genes.





Thomas then brought his beautiful young shire horse foal which he himself had brought into the world in April 2026. The foal had very long legs and tall and strongly built. The mother of this young shire horse was also there but was in the herd's large 'stable/pen/barn' along with several other shire horses, opposite where we were sitting.

This foal had nearly died as she had sepsis from birth and had to be taken to Bristol to a specialist shire horse Vet. After many weeks trying everything the vet said it was not working and was best for the horse to be euthanised. Lucy and Thomas asked if they could take her home to die to be with her mother as the parent horse would have grieved badly if this had not happened. Amazingly once back at the farm and with a lot of care, the foal started to recover and over many weeks slowly she got better – amazingly she survived. It cost a massive amount in vets fees and Lucy told us that when something like this happen you have to all pull together and do anything for the horses – in this case they had to take out a big loan to cover the vet's expenses etc. and all the family helped in this. She was explaining that they sometimes struggle and that this was not a farm that make money – they run it for the love of the wonderful horses (Lucy has other siblings also in farming and in rough times they all pull together to get through because they want the farms to be handed down to carry on for the generations to come.) I was surprised when she said they have to work at other jobs besides long hours at the farm too.

We then went for a walk along one of the fields. Their sheep, known as 'easy' sheep because they don't need shearing, were in the next field. Lucy said they have Red Kites nesting in their trees too. – unfortunately, we didn't see them flying that morning. We walked to a pond that they are trying to dig deeper, because all the silt that has built up over years made it too shallow and in hot rainless weather it becomes empty too quickly. They have a few ponds to improve and they do a lot themselves and its hard work but invaluable.



She told us many other stories as we walked along about lambing and how you do not get much sleep in lambing times, and also horse foals being born and the problems had (and the joys) and it was really very, very interesting.

One of their new ventures is 'Wellbeing' at the farm, which is for children and adults. The children get recommended through the schools and they come to the farm. They are shown how to look after the horses (feeding, moving them etc.) and everything about them and the children, who may need a different kind of learning, or may be struggling at school with their differing needs, can come here and it really gives them confidence and wellbeing and knowing that they are valued. She said it's so lovely to see a small child, that was scared of the horses at first, leading a massive shire horse around the yard !! and it makes them proud of themselves that they can do it. Everyone can gain many benefits from the centre.

We finished the walk and got back to the farm where Lorna served up a very welcome cuppa and lovely home-made cakes. We sat and chatted and Lucy gave us more information and answered questions etc. Then Thomas brought out another horse. A much bigger horse. We all got up to meet her and also went to pet and look at the other horses who were behind us in the open barn stable.



While we were standing by the large shire horse some of the other horses which could see us over the gates made noises by banging the metal fencing etc in the and Lucy said they were wanting to be out with us too, so they were letting us know. The herd all stay together in this one big fenced 'stable/barn' at night or when necessary (they don't have separate stalls/stables as other farms.' It is the old way of keeping them together in the herd and they have kept it up all these generations. A slightly separate part of the same barn is for the mother's having their foals, so they are always all together.

One of the young horses put her head through the iron barred fence and it got stuck so for a few seconds she must have panicked and couldn't get out but suddenly she made it out much to our relief. (a bit like a child stocking its head through railings and getting stuck.)

Lucy showed us a picture of the shire horses one night all lying down asleep. I thought they always slept standing up but apparently not. They can sleep standing but do what they feel. In that picture they had cleaned out the barn the day before and put down loads of fresh straw and as she has cameras all around the farm so that she can check on them everywhere, at any time, she was watching that night and took a screen shot photo of them lying asleep because they looked so comfortable. It was funny to see them all asleep lying by each other… an amazing sight.

All the horses were soon let out to go to the fields. A lovely sight. They all went up to the far field but, as they usually do, they stayed all together as a herd. The horses are well looked after and couldn't be more loved.

It was lovely to see Lucy's mum who used to run the farm but is now retired. She came out to see us and give us some of her wisdom and stories. When we asked which was the farmhouse, she showed us to the outside of the house she was proud to let us see her garden and the front of the house. This wasn't a modern, up to date farm – it was a lovely old farmhouse, with all the curiosities outside that an old farm can bring.

It was an unusual morning and I thoroughly enjoyed all the stories and information. I'm sure the others also enjoyed it too. Thank goodness the downpour of the early morning had gone and we had good weather the whole time.

Veronica

Thank you so much Veronica, it sounds like a very special day!

Afternoon tea

Our afternoon tea was scheduled for 27th October but this has now been changed to **3rd November** - put the date in your diaries.

What's happening in the Art group

Brenda Middleton leads our art group and they meet the 2nd and 4th Fridays in the month at 10am. Here's an update for you:

ART GROUPS

WHAT WE PUT ON AND

WHAT WE PUT IT ONTO AND

HOW WE PUT IT ON AND TAKE IT OFF!

Sometimes, I set a subject for the month which enables the members to hone the skills acquired and explore new techniques.

*The most important message is still **LOOK AND SEE**.*

There are now 21 members, divided amongst the 4 groups which I organise. I have members from 4 U3A's in the area. The sessions are once per month for each group, from 10 am to 12 noon.







Previous experience is not essential, all you need is enthusiasm and a willingness to learn and practice. I try to ensure that new members cover the basics so that they will feel comfortable to work alongside existing members.

Thanks, Brenda for the update. Great paintings too!

<u>Events in November in the local area.</u>

I was scrolling the internet to find events happening near Solihull in November and came across two with Christmas themes! Firstly, a festive gift fair at the NEC and secondly, a production of The Nutcracker at the Hippodrome.

Festive Gift Fair: 19-22 November 2026

This event is in its 30th year and it is the place to purchase all your Christmas presents apparently, with 325 stalls as well as plenty of food and drink options to recharge your batteries. It is open daily 9:30am - 5:00pm and prices vary from £8 - £14 (plus transaction fee). If you want to get in the Christmas spirit this might be just the place for you.



The Nutcracker 20th November – 12th December 2026



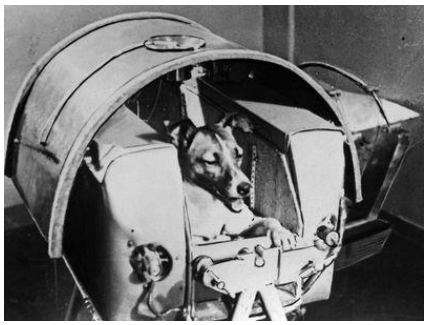
This magical production by Birmingham Royal Ballet, will be at the Birmingham Hippodrome.

Tickets from £26

Another event that will get you into the festive spirit.

<u>November in history</u>

November 3rd 1957 - First dog in orbit



Laika was a small, gentle mixed-breed dog about two years of age. She was one of a number of stray dogs that were taken into the Soviet spaceflight program after being rescued from the streets. Only female dogs were used because they were considered to be anatomically better suited than males for close confinement and were considered more docile. Her name was originally Kudryavka (Little Curly) but when she was Introduced to the public via radio, Kudryavka barked and later became known as Laika, "barker" in Russian.

Laika trained for the orbit by learning to accept progressively smaller living spaces. She was spun in a centrifuge to accustom her to changes in gravitation, and she learned to accept food in jellied form that could be easily served in an environment of weightlessness. The doctors also checked the dog's reactions to changes in air pressure and to loud noises that would accompany liftoff. Laika was fitted with a sanitation device connected to the pelvic area and had medical devices embedded into her body to monitor heart impulses, breathing rates, blood pressure and physical movement.

Some Soviet accounts implied that the dog was kept alive for six or seven days into the mission and then euthanised with poisoned food before her oxygen supply could run out. In 2002, however, a Russian scientist revealed that the previous accounts of her death were false. Laika had actually only survived about five to seven hours after liftoff before dying from overheating and panic. Apparently the Soviet scientists had insufficient time to perfect life-support systems because of intense political pressure to launch Sputnik 2 in time for the celebration of the 40th anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution.

Celebrations in November

November 5th - The Lewes Bonfire Night



This is the biggest celebrated 5th November event in the world, and is held in the usually peaceful town of Lewes East Sussex. The event is regularly attended by as many as 80,000 revellers. It commemorates the Lewes Martyrs - between 1555 and 1557, during the reign of Queen Mary I, 17 Protestants were burned at the stake in the Lewes High Street for their faith. The town carries 17 burning crosses through the streets each year to honour them. And it commemorates Guy Fawkes and the Gunpowder Plot.

It features six different torchlight processions throughout the town, plus tar barrel rolling, marching bands, drummers, traditional fancy dress and floats with topical bonfire effigies. Each procession ends in a bonfire and fireworks display. Members wear traditional striped smugglers' jerseys, carry thousands of flaming torches, drag blazing tar barrels through the narrow medieval streets, and detonate firecrackers underfoot. Local societies build giant, towering papier-mâché effigies of controversial political and public figures each year to parade and blow up in huge bonfires.



The earliest recorded bonfire in Lewes dates back to 1795 near the old Star Inn. Throughout the early 1800s, rowdy groups known as "Bonfire Boys" staged street disturbances, set off homemade fireworks (such as squibs and rousers), and clashed heavily with local police. To tame the chaos, local participants formed organised societies. The Lewes Borough Bonfire Society (originally just Lewes Bonfire Society) and Cliffe society were established in the late 1840s and 1853, transforming lawless street brawls into structured parades.

And finally, did anyone know where the site of a 13th-century moated medieval house belonging to the de **Odingsells family is in Solihull**?

It was located at Hobs Moat (located off Hobs Moat Road and Castle Lane). The site is now a Scheduled Ancient Monument and Local Nature Reserve and was the subject of a great deal of excavation in the 1980s. In 1985 they unearthed various items including pottery which helped to confirm the date of the dwelling.The moated castle is said to have been constructed as the fortified manor house of Ulverli (today in Solihull) by the de Ogdinsells family (believed to have been of Flemish origin) and was the family home of the de Limisi and the de Odingsells. William de Odingsells secured the 1242 market charter for Solihull, which helped transform the settlement into a thriving market town.

There are several theories as to why it is now called Hobs Moat: 'Hobs Moat' is a corruption of 'Odingsells' Moat', the founders of the castle whose name was anciently written as 'Hoginsells', or, after the ruin of the castle, the site was a location for the practice of pannage – where pigs ('hogs' corrupted to 'hobs') could be sent to eat acorns and other nuts.