



Falkirk and District u3a Newsletter



December 2025

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FROM THE CHAIR

Dear Members,

How strange the weather has been recently. One day we have lots of rain and relatively warm temperatures and the next day it is cold and the sky is clear. Sometimes it can be a challenge to know what the best clothing is to wear for such changing weather conditions. Irrespective of the changing weather I do hope you are keeping warm and safe.

I think everyone who attended the Open Meeting on 9th December 2025 had a good time singing along to Christmas songs lead by Malcolm Cowie. The Christmas quiz was challenging with the winner scoring 7 out of 10, and the raffle had lots of prizes. Thank you to all the members that donated the prizes.

On Monday, 17th November 2025 seven members took up the opportunity to enjoy a trishaw ride around the Helix Park. The weather was good for the rides, although somewhat on the cold side. Nevertheless, all the members appeared to enjoy their rides in the trishaws. A big thank you to Jack Egdell for organising the event.

Did you manage to attend the Falkirk Festival of Trees on Saturday, 6th, Sunday, 7th, Saturday, 13th or Sunday, 14th 2025 in the Howgate Centre? If you did attend this event, you would have seen our Falkirk and District u3a Christmas tree beautifully decorated by some of our members. Our tree was one of around seventy trees promoting different businesses, charities, community groups, dancers and individuals. I thought the festival brought real Christmas cheer to the heart of Falkirk.

A few of our members met recently at a member's home to enjoy a craft session involving macramé. I am reliably informed that all who attended the session had a very enjoyable time and are talking about running further craft sessions in the New Year involving different crafts.

The Scrabble Club has asked me to make the following announcement. *'At the Scrabble Club meeting on 19th November Peter Kahan won his first game of Scrabble after having attended the Club for around 4 years.'* It has to be stated that he would not have won the game without the help of Roy Brown and Irene Craig. This reminds me of the old saying 'If at first you don't succeed, try, try again.'

On behalf of all the trustees of Falkirk and District u3a may I wish you a very merry Christmas and a happy and healthy New Year.

Peter Kahan

A mindfulness thought

"The body benefits from movement, and the mind benefits from stillness."

Sakyong Mipham

THE INTERVIEW

This is the next interview in the series, this time with Peter Kahan, our Chair, who answers the same 6 questions about himself.



1. What was your first job and how much were you paid?

I am a bit hazy about this, but I think my first paid job was for my mum's fencing firm, F.L. Emery and Son Ltd. Fredrick Louis Emery was my grandfather. I don't know when he first set up the business, but my mum and two uncles were the directors of the business when I worked for the firm. I made and creosoted checkerboard fencing and helped erect fences (i.e. I cleared up the mess the fencers made). I was paid £14 a week for doing this work, a good wage for a 15-year-old boy in the late 1960's. I still have memories of the pain I felt riding home on my bike on a hot summer's day with creosote splashes on my arms and face. It stung quite a lot.

2. What is your favourite place to visit in Scotland?

My favourite place in Scotland is Rowardennan on the eastern shore of Loch Lomond. It is mainly known as the starting place for the main path up Ben Lomond. Particularly on a sunny summer's day it is a beautiful and tranquil place to visit.

3. If you were alone on a desert island, what piece of music and what book would you like to have with you?

My late wife introduced me to Scottish music in general and the Corries in particular. We would spend many hours listening to and singing Corries songs. My favourite song is the Loch Tay Boat Song which tells the story of a boatman rowing across Loch Tay thinking about a girl he has fallen in love with, but who does not love him. I understand his feelings well as I fell in love with a number of girls who, sadly, did not return my love.

A choice of a book is difficult as I have read so many books over the years. I love history, so any large book or set of encyclopaedias on world history would be good so that I could study different historical events and their legacies at my leisure.

4. Do you have any pets? Have you ever had any unusual ones?

Yes, I have a black and tan, longhaired dachshund named Alfie. I live on my own so Alfie provides me with very good company. Anyone who knows about dachshunds will know that they are very intelligent, stubborn dogs who will bark at the slightest noise. However, they are also intensely loyal and love their master without question.

I don't know if they are particularly unusual, but I also have two tortoises, named, Sophie and Larry. I have had them for around 15 years. Larry was originally called Liz, but when a vet inspected Liz's underside, he discovered a large tail and immediately renamed him Larry, a name that I immediately adopted. While the breeder who sold me the two tortoises got Larry's sex wrong, it is, apparently, quite difficult to tell the sex of a tortoise when it is very young.

5. Tell us about one of your hobbies.

My favourite hobby is creating long and cross stitch tapestries. I have been making such tapestries for well over thirty years now. I find creating tapestries a very relaxing hobby. While I am creating a tapestry I am not thinking about anything else: a kind of mindfulness if you like. My last tapestry was of my three grandchildren playing in Callendar Park. My daughter sent away a photograph of them together to a company that specialise in converting photos into tapestry patterns, identifying and supplying all the wools I needed to complete the tapestry. It took me two years to finish.

6. Share something about yourself that not many people know.

Although I am not an architect, I am an Honorary Fellow of the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland. I received this award for the fifteen years of work I put into setting up and running the Architects' Professional Examination Authority in Scotland Ltd: the body that manages and administers the Part 3 Examination in Scotland. The Part 3 Examination is the final professional qualification students must sit and pass before they can legally call themselves architects.

Interest Group Section

Scrabble Club

(By Peter Kahan)

Here are the two word quiz questions that I gave you to try in November.

Which 6 letter disease name starts with a vowel, finishes with a vowel and has no vowels in between?

Answer - Asthma

Which 10 letter word can be typed using only the top letters on a QWERTY keyboard?

Answer - Typewriter

Why not try the following quiz?

As you will be aware, new words are appearing in the English language all the time. Here are some words that might appear in 2026 dictionaries that you may wish to explore the meaning of:

Broligarchy, Delulu, Inspo, Tradwife and Skibidi.

Answers in next month's Newsletter.

Family History

(By Louise Westall)

Last month we discussed the different homes our ancestors would have lived in in the 19th century. We considered the conditions of those living in the 'Divottees' (turf houses) at Wallacestone and the cottages where the family lived at one end of the house and the animals at the other end. In the cities like Edinburgh, the old town had the first of what could be considered 'high rise' flats but without all the creature comforts of today. And if your ancestor was a servant in the 'big hoose', he or she slept in a sparsely furnished room at the top of the house. No ensembles or even indoor toilets in those days.

Maths Teasers

(By Peter Kahan)

How did you get on with the two Maths Teasers in the November 2025 Newsletter? I hope you were able to solve both of them, but don't worry if you could not solve one or both of them as the two questions are restated below along with their solutions.

Question 1

Solve the following equation

$$\sqrt{2x^2} = 32$$

Solution

The first stage in the solution is to square both sides of the equation as follows.

$$\left(\sqrt{2x^2}\right)^2 = 32^2$$

Or

$$2x^2 = 1024$$

Or

$$x^2 = 1024 \div 2 = 512$$

Thus

$$x = \sqrt{512} = 16\sqrt{2} = 22.63$$

Question 2

This question is taken from the 2025 National 5 Mathematics Paper 1 (Non-calculator).

In a sale, the price of a wedding dress is reduced by 20%. The sale price of the dress is £720. Calculate the price of the dress before the sale.

Solution

In answering this question it is important to note that the wedding dress price is reduced by 20%, which means that the £720 price corresponds to 80% of the full price.

Thus

$$80\% \equiv £720,$$

So

$$1\% \equiv £720 \div 80 \equiv £9$$

Thus

$$100\% \equiv £900$$

Thus, the full price of the wedding dress is **£900**

December Math Teaser

Here are another two new maths teasers for you to try in December/January.

Question 1

Here is a mental arithmetic test for you to try (calculators are not allowed).

Divide 64 by $\frac{1}{3}$, subtract 36 and divide the result by 4 to give the final answer.

Question 2

This question is taken from the 2025 NQ5 Applications of Mathematics Paper 1 (Non-calculator).

A farm has 3 different types of animals. It has sheep, pigs and cows in the ratio 9:7:4 respectively. There are 180 more sheep than there are cows.

Calculate the total number of animals on the farm.

Gardening Tips

(By The Guru)

On a dry day, gather sprigs of evergreen foliage and berries to decorate your house. Stay off your lawn when it is frozen to prevent damage and compressing the grass.

If you have a spare half hour start browsing through some of the seed catalogues with a view to next year's summer display.

Stuck for a small inexpensive Christmas Gift? Why not make a mini terrarium.

Use a 1litre Kilner jar or recycle any other jar with a wide neck. Fill the base of your jar with a thin layer of gravel to allow drainage. Next add a layer of soil and plant your greenery. Small succulents or cacti are probably the best plants to use as they are slow growing and are available in most garden centres for under £3. Cover the top of the soil with a layer of moss. Close the lid and there you have it. A piece of coloured ribbon round the neck of the jar adds a festive touch.



A very Merry Christmas to you all from the Gardening Guru.

Cycling Without Age Scotland Event

(By Jack Egde)

All those taking part agreed it was a positive experience. The ride lasted 45 minutes and the participants were well wrapped up against the cold. The pilots were very friendly and there was a very good atmosphere. Those with limited mobility really appreciated being taken all the way round the Kelpies. Some have expressed the wish to repeat the experience in the future.



The Falkirk Festival of Trees

(By Jack Egdell)

The Falkirk Festival of Trees was held in the Howgate Centre over two weekends in December. Some 75 trees were installed and decorated by local businesses and organisations, including our own u3a. Our u3a tree was decorated with hand crafted decorations, created by Toni Smillie, and the festival venue itself was decorated by a team of volunteers, including myself.

