Heart of England U3A – Speaker Calendar for 2026/27

6th August 2026

How the stagecoach transformed our area - John Butterworth

John has visited us several times. Today he will describe: how the stagecoach led to an economic boom during the late 18th century, the eccentric drivers, characters and many famous people who used it to travel through the Midlands.

3rd September 2026

The Chance family and their Smethwick glassworks - Henry Chance

Henry will talk about his family's involvement in one of the major glassworks in the West Midlands. Famous for: glazing the Crystal Palace, producing the clock face of Big Ben, cathode ray tubes for RADAR during WW2 and over 2,500 lighthouses around the world.

1st October 2026 26th Annual General Meeting

Tales from the driver's seat – a woman bus driver in the 1970s - Jess Nash

Jess tells the story of her life in the 70's as a woman in a man's world. She became one of the first lady bus drivers in London and tells of the struggles she faced, as well as funny stories

5th November 2026

The Rising of the Son – the story of the Unknown Soldier - Paul Thornber

Paul describes the people involved in selecting the body of the unknown warrior, how the project came about and how the body travelled to Westminster Abbey. The talk includes an exploration of what may, or may not, have happened to those bodies which were exhumed but not selected.

3rd December 2026

Buying & selling at auction: with stories from the auction room. Followed by Antiques Roadshow - Steven Bruce

Steven has been an auctioneer for 50 years. He talks about his time in the business with anecdotes about the characters involved. He examines the costs and how to get the best bargains. Members are invited to bring any treasures they have; after the talk, Steven will select and discuss any interesting items that catch his eye.

7 January 2027

Dr Livingstone, I presume - Fran Sandham

Fran returns to give us the story behind the legendary meeting in Africa in 1871 between Dr David Livingstone and ambitious news reporter Henry Morton Stanley. How their meeting proved to be the newspaper scoop of the century, bringing Stanley both fame and notoriety; the widespread controversy, hostility and personal ridicule he faced on his return; why their meeting was such a sensational news story – and why his four words became the most famous greeting in history.

4 February 2027

The Work of the Shakespeare Hospice - Speaker TBC

A speaker from our local hospice will tell us all about the care they provide to members of our community at a time in their lives when they need it most.

4 March 2027

To See the Beginning of Time: The Hubble Space Telescope - Andrew Lound

After his memorable talk on the Titanic Andrew returns to Stratford. The Hubble Space telescope is giving us views of the universe never before imagined. From dust clouds to star studded galaxies our minds have been opened to a universe of outstanding beauty and mind-boggling scale. Looking into deep space we are looking ever further back in time. The talk is illustrated by beautiful natural images and accompanied by music and high-quality video.

1 April 2027

From the Pillory to the Prison Cell - Ginny Davis

As a former Barrister Ginny has seen a lot of criminals. In this talk she charts the history and development of judicial sentencing from the 16th to the 20th century. Time was when counterfeiters were sentenced to be hanged, drawn and quartered and scolds were sentenced to the ducking stool. Much has changed, apart from one thing. Crime doesn't pay!

6 May 2027

Ambridge Affairs! (and other stories) - Hedli Niklaus

Local celebrity Hedli was, for many years, the voice of Kathy Perks in The Archers. She'll talk to us about her experiences there and (for those of you not keen on The Archers) recount other incidents from her long and varied acting career.

3 June 2027

The Great Fire of Warwick - Gill White

Some of you will remember the rousing talk Dr White gave us on The Duke of Devonshire, builder of Chatsworth. She returns to recount the dramatic tale of the great fire of Warwick. On Wednesday 5th September 1694 much of the centre of our county town was destroyed by fire. In the aftermath the town's leaders gathered to relieve the citizens and then, as the crisis passed, they rebuilt the town to be one of the most modern and elegant in the Midlands.

1 July 2027

Hearing Dogs for the Deaf - Merleen Watson MBE

Merleen, accompanied by her hearing dog, will tell us about the daily challenges faced by deaf people and how the Hearing Dogs charity helps to alleviate them.