



From the Chair

Hello everyone.

Here is the February Newsletter which I hope you will take time to read.

Can I thank everyone who attended the AGM at the beginning of January. Considering the weather, the turnout was very good. On the 15th January we held our first committee meeting of the year and it was my pleasure to welcome three new committee members. However, the search for an Assistant Treasurer continues and soon we will be looking for potential Chair and Vice Chair candidates for 2027.

A few things to draw to your attention:

Theatre Trip to see High Society 9th July 2026

In April the monthly meeting will be at a new venue - The United Reformed Church (UCR) AND a new start time of 2pm. Due to Easter bank holiday the April meeting will be on Monday 13th April 2pm.

A few weeks ago, I went on a u3a Tuesday walk from Barnston (just outside Dunmow). There were about 14 walkers and it turned out to be one of THE most wettest and muddiest walk that I have been on. We set off at 10am and at 10.01 am it started to rain ... and continued to do so until we got back to Barnston a few hours later! On our route we passed a farm called Tye Green Farmhouse.

Next to it is Wells Tye farm - a 16C Grade2 listed building. This had me wondering what Tye actually means? Near Bishop's Stortford there are a number of places such as Matching Tye, Staple Tye, Tye Green and probably many more. 'Tye' primarily refers to an Old English term for a small enclosed common pasture or village green, particularly found in Suffolk and Essex. There are of course, many other villages & hamlets with a shared name, such as Brent, Stocking and Furneux Pelham. There are also 'The Rodings'. How many Rodings can you name???

(PS There were originally 9 Rodings but only 8 remain)

Happy February to you all.

Best wishes

Nigel

Our Meeters and Greeters



PLEASE NOTE – THE MEETING STARTS AT 2.10 pm IN THE HALL.

The meeting starts at 2.10 pm in the Charis Centre with a welcome from the Chair.
The talk from our speaker will follow this.



Remember – We have step free access by the main entrance where meeters and greeters will take you into the hall. There is also a hearing loop system. To make best use of it, you should sit in the far right-hand corner of the hall, as seen from the stage.

Thorley u3a - Monthly meetings

CHANGE OF VENUE



The Charis Centre has been a very good host to us over the past three years. However, they have given us notice to leave in 2026 as they are starting a new children's project on Mondays.

The good news is that we are moving next door to the URC (United Reform Church). It is literally just around the corner.

The church had a makeover recently. There will be 140 chairs set out on the main floor, and plenty of places in the balcony rows. We will reserve seats for members with mobility issues in the front row of the main hall. Once the main floor seats are full, other members can climb the stairs to the balcony.

There will be all the usual services provided, refreshments, toilets, tables for membership cards collection, and for other groups to provide information.

Our meeting time will now be a 2 pm start with the Chair's introduction, followed by the speaker at 2.10 pm.

We expect to start using the URC in April.



Further announcements will be made at the next couple of monthly meetings, and of course on our website, and in the Newsletter.

The Committee

AGM Update



At our recent AGM, Nigel Varnam our, Chair, thanked these departing Committee members for their hard work over the last three years. These included –

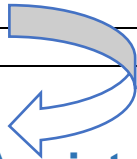
- ✚ Pam Archer – Business Secretary
- ✚ Anne Willett – Membership Secretary & Events Co-ordinator
- ✚ Linda Maxwell – Speaker Co-ordinator
- ✚ John Bailey – Asst. Treasurer

New Committee members and their roles are –

- ✚ John Acklaw – Business Secretary
- ✚ Barbara Jacobs – Membership Secretary
- ✚ Barry Maxwell – Speaker Co-ordinator
- ✚ Carmen Konopka - Communications
- ✚ Chrissy Thear – Events Co-ordinator

John Bailey has agreed to continue as Asst. Treasurer while we continue our efforts to fill this role.

WANTED – Assistant Treasurer



It is fantastic that 5 members have stepped forward to join the Committee but it is still essential that we fill the Assistant Treasurer role. Can you help shape the future of what we do together in our vibrant and active U3A? It only requires a small amount of time and it is not just about spreadsheets. John has kindly offered to stay on for a short while to help smooth the way for anyone who volunteers. Can you do it? Or can you nudge someone else who you know might be willing? It is a very supportive and friendly Committee so do please join us. If you would like to attend a Committee meeting to find out more then that would be a good start and you are more than welcome to do so. Please contact Nigel Varnam Chair.



New Committee members for 2027

At the end of 2026, we will need more new faces to join the Committee. If you are interested in attending Committee meetings, get in touch. If you would like to shadow somebody in a role you would like to take on, please get in touch.

Remember – We are all volunteers, and we need members to join the Committee as well as run the many groups we have.



SPEAKERS FOR 2026



FEBRUARY 2026

Monday 2nd February

Mary and Graham Brace

Wildlife in Zambia



MARCH 2026



Ant & Dec, The W. I. and Me - Lindsey Barrell

Monday 2nd March

In this fabulously funny, heart-warming and interesting talk Lindsey will tell you all about how she appeared on primetime TV shows and won, not one, but 2 fabulous free holidays!

MORE ON OUR SPEAKERS PROGRAMME FOR 2026

- ❖ 13th April – Fraud and Scam Awareness
- ❖ 11th May – Dad's Army – the nation's favourite comedy



- ❖ 1st June – Old Movies saved my life
- ❖ 6th July – My adventures in helicopters
- ❖ 3rd August – A peek inside some churches in the Hundred Parishes



- ❖ 7th September – Adventures of a ghost hunter
- ❖ 5th October – Churchill's intervention in the Russian Civil War



- ❖ 2nd November – Sing a song of Christmas



REMEMBER – Details of all our speakers for the year are on our website. So, put these into your diaries, come along, and enjoy our new venue, the United Reform Church in Water Lane.

Discounts in 'Stortford – All offer 15% Just show your Membership Card

We are very grateful to the following traders in Bishops Stortford for their generous offers of discounts for our u3a members. [All these offer a discount of 15%](#)



Coopers – Bridge Street



Garden Terrace café



Caffelnn (Florence Walk)

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GROUP NEWS FROM ANNIE COMPTON



Annie Compton has a table in the Charis Centre at the back of the hall for our monthly meetings. New members are welcome to have a chat with Annie about any group in which they may be interested. Equally, if anyone is interested in becoming a group leader, would like to assist in running an existing group, forming a new group entirely, or joining our Committee, Annie will be more than happy to talk through what would be involved.



Suggestion Box. You can put your suggestions in the box about Groups, and for the Committee. If you prefer to email a suggestion, Here are the email addresses –

Annie Compton - groups.thorleyu3a@gmail.com

Pickleball update - 4 Thorley members now in the group



The Sawbridgeworth u3a Pickleball Group has now got 4 of our members. Pickleball is one of the fastest growing sports in the world for all ages. It is a bat and ball game played as doubles on a smaller tennis court. All very informal and friendly.

The group meets at Sawbridgeworth Tennis and Pickleball Club, Springhall Road, CM21 9ET, FREE parking, every Monday from 10am – midday.

It is outdoors so weather permitting. First session is FREE, thereafter £5 per session.

If you would like to try your hand at Pickleball (like Taylor Swift) then come along and have a go, or express an interest by emailing info@sawbridgeworthtennis.org.uk

Holiday Lille, Bruges and Arras



Monday 3rd August – Friday 7th August 2026

4 nights half board - £639 per person

**Please remember to book with Maggie Bennett -
maggiiebennett602@gmail.com**



WANTED



MORE MEMBERS FOR THE TEN PIN BOWLING GROUP

More members are needed to join the Wednesday Ten Pin Bowling Group at Braintree. Everybody welcome !

Contact – David Hoskins dharryuk77@gmail.com

MORE PLAYERS NEEDED FOR THE TUESDAY TABLE TENNIS CLUB



Everybody welcome, whatever your ability.

Contact – David Hoskins dharryuk77@gmail.com

THEATRE TRIP

NOW FULL UP



HIGH SOCIETY THE MUSICAL
At THE BARBICAN THEATRE, LONDON
STARRING FELICITY KENDAL
AND HELEN GEORGE

9 JULY 2026 Matinee
LEAVING BACK OF SAINSBURYS AT 10AM
£83 including coach
Contact:-
Sylvia Poole

sylvia@sylviaanded.co.uk

Group Leader wanted for Customs and Cultures



Our Customs and Cultures Group is our largest group with almost 200 members. There has not been a leader for the past 3 years. For many years before then, there were successful trips and talks each year, and even dinners out to restaurants. There have been occasional coach trips to interesting places recently which come under this heading, but there is still the need for somebody, or even a small team of 2 or 3 to organise much more.

If anybody is interested, please contact me. I have a long list of all the things that were organized before.....and a lot more ideas for the future.

Dave Willett



Film Club update

Only three people have expressed an interest at present. This may possible be incorporated into Rosemary Hoskins Book Club.



Wine Tasting update

Four people are interested so far. Group Leader needed.



Creative Writing

Only two people have expressed an interest in this. Annie may do something. Watch this space.



Craft Group

Crafts that may be undertaken are cross-stitch (pictures/cards), quilling (pictures/cards), tissue paper flower making, marzipan/sugarpaste figures or flowers for decorating cakes, patchwork, pressed flowers etc.

Members can share their skills so that everyone can have a go at different crafts.

The group will meet at the home of Anne Willett on Mondays for 2 hours from 10.00am.

Contact Anne via email annemwillett@gmail.com on 07904 150595

History Group relaunched !

The relaunched History Group met last month at the Emmaus Centre from 10am to 12 noon. The programme of talks for the first six months of the year is as follows:



January 8th	The Battle of Hastings 1066	Dave Willett
February 12th	1769 – The Year that changed Stortford forever	Tim Howard-Smith
March 12 th	The Tragedy of Prince Lee Boo	Dave Parker
April 4 th	The Bishop's Castle – Waytemore and BS	Mike James
May 14th	A short history of the London Stump	Dave Parker
June 11th	Medals	Dave Willett



February Talk

1769 – The Stort Navigation opened in Bishops Stortford

More speakers are needed for the latter half of the year – all suggestions gratefully received.

Membership will be £20 per calendar year, with a £2 contribution to venue costs at the door. (Non-U3A members £3 and can attend for a meeting or two before they join our u3a). Volunteers to look after the reception desk, stacking chairs, and the refreshments will be appreciated.

Dave Parker

My contact details are: e-mail:

daveparker796@gmail.com

Dave Parker

What the Papers Say



February's month's theme will be –

If you get another car, what is it likely to be?
Are you a good driver?



NEW VENUE

86 Pynchbek, Bishops Stortford, CM23 4DT

Date - Monday 16th February

Time - 10:30 am - £2 at the door.

Fee - £1 (yes£1 only) for tea/coffee & biscuits

If this will be your first visit, Welcome!

And maybe drop a text to Tom on 07977 574 454, so I bring enough biscuits.

Tom McNeeney

NEW MEMBERS WELCOME TO 'SOUND OFF' AND EXPRESS YOUR OPINIONS. NUMBERS HAVE DROPPED OFF RECENTLY, AND IT WOULD BE GOOD TO GET A FEW MORE MEMBERS TO ATTEND.



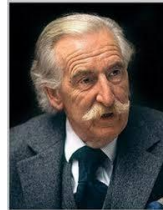
REPORTS FROM OUR GROUPS



THE JANUARY MEETING AT THE CC



CHERITH LOWRY – THE LIFE, WORK AND GARDEN OF SIR FREDERICK GIBBERD



For our first presentation in 2026 we welcomed Cherith Lowry to Thorley U3A. She is a Trustee of the Gibberd Garden Trust and last year she appeared on Michael Portillo's Great Railway Journeys talking about the life and work of Sir Frederick so it was a privilege to have her with us.

Sir Frederick was born in 1908 in Coventry and was the eldest of five children. When he left school in 1924 he started work as an apprentice architect and soon realised that was his calling in life. He set up his own firm and in the war years he studied town planning and architecture. After the war he became known as the architect who designed pre fab houses which were quickly constructed to provide accommodation for those who lost their homes in the war. He also designed much of Heathrow Airport.



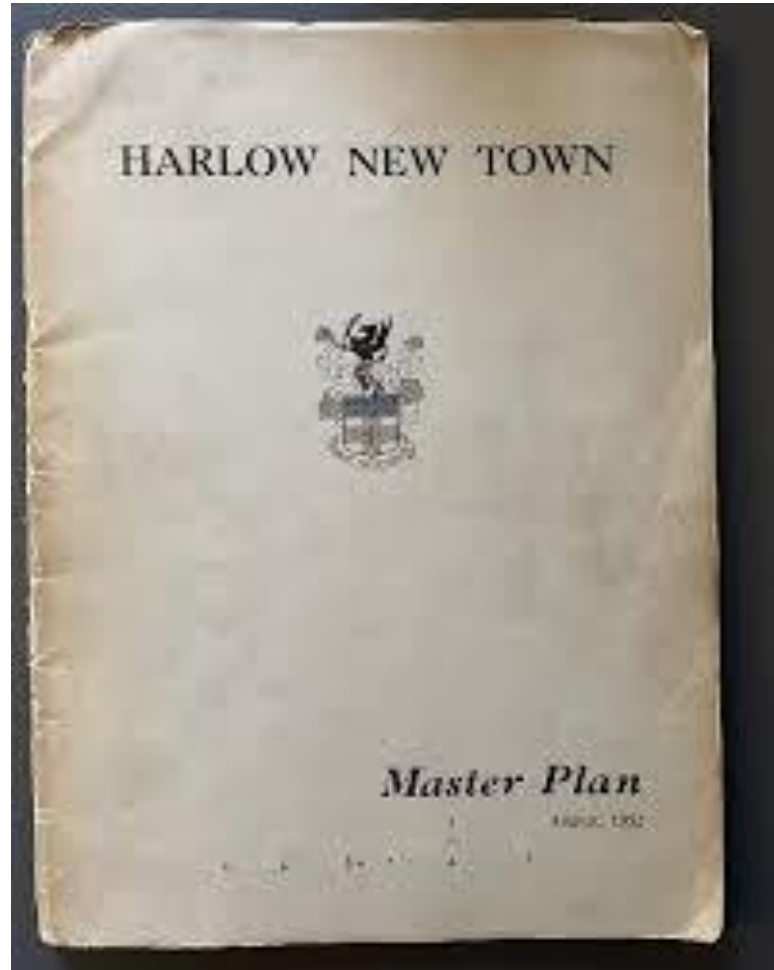
In 1946 the New Towns Commission was established to build homes for Britain and he took on the project to establish Harlow New Town as one of the satellite towns surrounding London. He was given six months to come up with a plan and by April 1947 the first residents arrived. Sir Frederick's vision was for two industrial areas, one shopping hub and four main housing areas. He wanted everyone to have access to green areas for relaxation. He was keen on architecture being

readily available to people free of charge. Harlow has over a 100 sculptures including designs by Rodin, Moore and Hepworth.

Sir Frederick's vision lives on today. He wanted to spend the rest of his days living in Harlow and he eventually purchased a property that had formerly been used as a site for greyhound breeding. He rebuilt the house in stages but the garden was a challenge – 14 acres of land, north facing, on a slope and with solid clay soil. Nevertheless the project continued and today it is probably best described as mixture of formal and informal design which contains many architectural features including a massive arch salvaged from the reconstruction of Coutts Bank in London.



For those who might be inspired to visit, the address is Marsh Lane, Harlow CM17 0NA. Check the website for opening times.



Other projects from him –
Liverpool Catholic Cathedral
(‘Paddy’s Wigwam’) and the
Regents Park Mosque.



Barry Maxwell

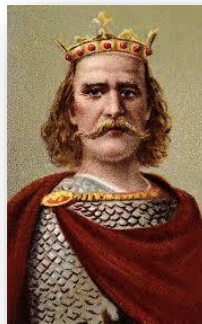
History Group – 8th January



The History Group met for its relaunched inaugural monthly meeting in January at the Emmaus Centre. 16 people braved the cold weather and the impending storm to listen to Dave Willett give a talk about 1066. This was about the Battle of Hastings, and the lead up to it during 1066. It was the last successful invasion of Britain as well. Like all stories in history, there were lots of 'what ifs?'. The discussion that followed looked at whether or not Harold could have won this decisive battle, before we talked about a few more 'what ifs' of history.



The Bayeux Tapestry



King Harold



Duke William of Normandy

It was good start, and hopefully numbers will increase in the near future.

Next meeting – Thursday 12th February – 10 am – 12 – Emmaus Centre

1769 – The Year that changed Stortford forever – Tim Howard-Smith

Dave Parker



Garden Group 2

26 members of Garden Group 2 welcomed the New Year in with an excellent lunch at the Three Willows pub where Group Leader Beryl Davis announced the Group's Programme for the coming Year.



COMMUNICATION



To all our members

Remember that there are two easy ways for you to find out everything you need to know –

The monthly Newsletter

FEBRUARY 2026 NEWSLETTER

and our website



NATIONAL U3A ZOOM LECTURES



These are to be found on our own website.

Open the website page.

Click on [u3a](#) at the top

Now click on [Events and Workshops](#)

Finally, click on [On-line learning events](#)

A drop down menu will appear. Just click on the one at the top - [Online Learning Events](#) and you will see lots of interesting Zoom talks. There are links to Radio podcasts and free Zoom lectures - **FEBRUARY** talks include.

Tuesday 3rd – 2pm – After Alzheimer's; Memory, Ageing and what comes next

Wednesday 4th – 10am – How do your medicines work -hypertension

Tuesday 10th – 2pm – Tech for all; how emerging technologies can empower
disabled and elderly people

Wednesday 11th – 1.30pm – BSL

Friday 13th – 11.30am – Early Women Doctors

These are only some of the talks.

Check them all out and you may find something that interests you.

Finally.....something funny to end on



Learn

Commemoration dates for February

1st – British Yorkshire Pudding Day



4th – World Cancer Day



14th Valentine's Day



17th – Random Acts of Kindness Day



22nd World Thinking Day



Laugh

These are real quotes from letters to the London Borough of Islington's Housing Dept.

- ❖ 'I want some repairs done to my cooker as it has backfired and burnt my knob off.'
- ❖ 'I wish to report that tiles are missing from the roof of the outside toilet, and I think it was bad wind the other night that blew them off.'
- ❖ 'Please send a man with clean tools to finish the job and satisfy the wife.'
- ❖ 'This is to let you know that our lavatory seat is broken and we can't get BBC2.'
- ❖ 'The man next door has a large erection in the back garden, which is unsightly and dangerous'.

Live

Something a bit more serious this time. This is some advice from TAT (Third Age Trust) about Mindfulness. As we are living longer, many of us are more aware of our wellbeing, and keeping our mental faculties in good working order.

Tips to be mindful



This exercise, known as the 5-4-3-2-1 technique, helps you to feel grounded in the present moment. All you need is a moment to yourself.

- Notice five things you can see - just look around you
- Notice four things you can touch – choose four different objects, and where possible feel them
- Notice three things you can hear – tune in to three different sounds, which may be near or further away
- Notice two things you can smell – seek out two different smells in the air
- Notice one thing you can taste – if needed recall this from memory. For example, think of the taste of a lime.