



From the Chair

Hello everyone. Welcome to the Thorley u3a March newsletter.
A few things to bring to your attention (full details are all below):

Changes, Changes, Changes !!!

Over the next few months a number of key changes will be taking place.
Probably the biggest change is our move from the Charis Centre to the United Reformed Church from April.

**Our first meeting at the URC will be on Monday 13th April starting at 2PM.
NOTE – new venue and new time!!!!**

The recently revived/resurrected History group is changing its meeting day and time from April.
What the Papers Say has also changed its meeting venue.

Now here is a nice story. I recently went to see my brother who lives in the fine county town of Wiltshire, namely Trowbridge. He gave me an article that he had come across which I thought was worth sharing with you.

On 24th August 1914 Lieutenant Harry Colebourn a Canadian veterinary and soldier was travelling by train to Quebec. On his way he stopped at a small town and a hunter was selling a black bear cub which Harry purchased for \$20 and named her Winnie after his hometown of Winnipeg. Both Harry and the bear sailed to England. They were then stationed on Salisbury Plain from 17th October 1914 until Harry was posted to France. On December 9th 1914 Harry left Winnie in the care of London Zoo.

During the First World War, Winnie became a favourite attraction at the Zoo and after returning from the war Harry decided that as they had looked after the bear so well she should live there permanently. Winnie's charm and good nature were not lost on a Mr. A.A Milne who regularly took his son Christopher to see her. It was Christopher's deep affection for Winnie that sparked the creation of the beloved fictional character Winnie-the-Pooh.

Winnie the bear continued to live at London Zoo and died in 1934. In 1995 the people of Manitoba, Canada presented the Zoo with a statue of Harry and Winnie.

(Thanks to Wiltshire Libraries)

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.

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 Reformed 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.

A further announcement will be made at the next monthly meeting in March, and of course on our website.

The Committee



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, including a new Chair and a new Vice Chair.

If you are interested in attending Committee meetings, get in touch. Our meetings are informal, lighthearted, full of humour, and productive. There is also lots of mutual support. 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.



If we do not get one or two volunteers stepping forward from our 630 members, then the whole future of our U3A is at stake.



Thorley u3a 15th Anniversary

At the end of 2011 our u3a was established, and in early 2012 it was up and running. Over the last 15 years, it has continued to grow and become more successful. We have over 40 successful groups, holidays, theatre trips, coach trips, and events thanks to the efforts of many past and present Committee members, Group Leaders and volunteers. We are planning a get together for later in the year to celebrate the 15th anniversary.

In the meantime, if you have any memories of anything you have been involved in since you joined, a short article, a photo, a funny incident, a poem, in fact anything, please send it to me to include in future Newsletters.

Dave Willett

Book your spot at u3a Festival 26

u3a Festival 26 brings the movement together for fun, learning and new connections. Join us on Wednesday 1 July - Friday 3 July at The *University of York* for a celebration of everything that makes u3a so special.

There's a huge variety of activities on offer - here's a taster of what you can look forward to:

- Sparking new ideas at talks on a wide range of subjects.
- Getting moving at a fitness workshop or in a sports tournament.
- Exploring your creativity with hands-on craft workshops.
- Enjoying live performances by talented u3a musical groups - or have a go at making music yourself.

Places are limited - book your tickets and accommodation now to avoid missing out. Please note that tickets and accommodation are booked via separate links, which you'll find below.

**Enter our website –
now click on u3a at the top. U3a will turn red. Scroll down to see
all the details.**

U3a Survey



From our East of England u3a Region

We'd like to invite your members to take part in a national u3a survey that explores what u3a means to them and how being part of u3a has impacted their lives.

*This survey is open to **all members** so please take a moment to fill it out yourselves as well. It is a great opportunity for members to share their experiences and support their u3a to thrive into the future. The feedback will be used to grow membership, demonstrate the impact of u3a and raise our profile. Please share the survey with your members and encourage as many people as possible to take part:*

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/u3a-me>

To thank members for their time, they will be entered in a John Lewis £100 prize draw. The survey closes on 31 March.

Thank you for your support.

The survey results will:

- help u3as attract new members and volunteers by better articulating the value of u3a participation, and identifying the barriers and enablers to getting involved
- raise the profile of u3a as a charity by demonstrating its impact on members' lives
- provide strong evidence to support future communications, campaigns, and partnerships.
-

The survey is intended for **all types of members**, including you. Please take a moment to share your experience as well:

Thank you very much for your continued support in helping us ensure that the member voice sits at the heart of what we do.

Best Regards

Ian Mathews

East of England Council Representative



SPEAKERS FOR 2026



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!

APRIL 2026



BARCLAYS

Fraud & Scam Awareness, Keeping You Safe - Susan Farrugia

Monday 13th April

Susan Farrugia from Barclays bank will be updating us on how to steer clear of the latest scams. You can read all about their advice on their website here:

<https://www.barclays.co.uk/fraud-and-scams/>

**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)

**REMEMBER to show your Membership Card. Many members
have still not collected their cards at the monthly meetings.
NO CARD.....NO 15% DISCOUNT**



**GROUP NEWS FROM
ANNIE COMPTON**



Annie Compton is in 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



Backgammon

"This time last year I put a tiny appeal in the Newsletter for someone to teach me how to play Backgammon. I was not to know that this would bring several offers to teach, and plenty of people who wanted to learn, and so started the Thorley U3A Backgammon Group that meets twice a month at South Mill Arts. Teachers and



students have played hard over the past year, and we now have the End of Year Award for the most games won.

This year the Award goes to Ian Hudson, with everyone else playing well and enthusiastically, but some players are faster than others, therefore they rack up a higher score! We are all now working hard to play faster and battle to win the Award for 2026! I begin to think I would like to play Dominoes - properly!! Is anyone out there who know how to play?

Eillen Greer

South Mill Arts - an appeal for support

A number of our board game groups use SMA as their venue. These include – backgammon, Rummikub, Mah Jong, Scrabble and Cribbage. We are allowed free hire for which we are very grateful. SMA only ask that our members buy a cup of coffee when they are there..



Recently, SMA have told us that they do need to increase their income because of the need to maintain and improve their facilities.

So, if you go there, please buy a coffee, or even two to help. A few more coffee sales each week over a year can make a big difference.

[Please support the SMA as we use this venue a lot.](#)

The Committee

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**

**There are a few places left so get
in touch with Maggie asap**

What the Papers Say



March's theme will be –

The music you like !!! Share one of your favourites.
Are you a fan of current genres like rap ?



NEW VENUE

86 Pynchbek, Bishops Stortford, CM23 4DT

Date - Monday 16th March

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



Family History 30th January

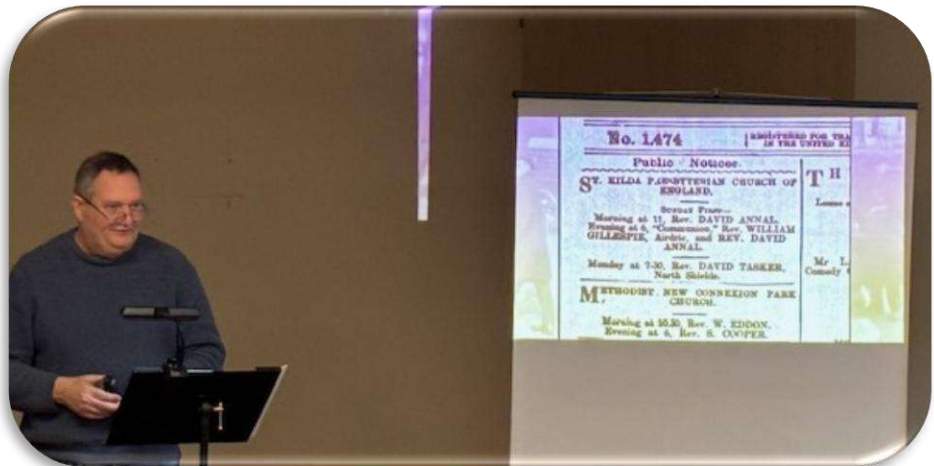
An enthusiastic group of over 30 family Historians from Thorley, Dunmow and Bishop's Stortford U3A groups were entertained by Dave Annal at the recent meeting. His talk, entitled 'Read all about it' introduced us to the wide variety of information available in local newspapers which we could use to illustrate our ancestors' lives.



He began with a brief history of the local newspaper industry which had very few titles in the 1700s, but as the paper tax was abolished in 1855 saw a massive growth in editions. A town such as Macclesfield, which had 36,000 inhabitants managed to support 8 different local editions. Dave emphasised that 'names sell papers' as everyone wasn't to see their name in print, whether it

be a sports prize, flower show event, church activity or similar so many of the activities covered are of a parochial nature. One obvious place to find our forebears is in the births, marriages and deaths announcements but in addition there could be a detailed account of a funeral or wedding, including attendees, dress and excerpts from the homily.

Photo didn't appear until the 20th century except in the London Illustrated News. He then illustrated the key ideas with a case study from one of his wife's ancestors, whose exploits were often recorded in the press. Our members will be busy over the next couple of months



searching the British newspaper Archive in order to contribute to our meeting in March. On the 27th February one of our members will be leading the meeting looking at maps and how they help us to see the bigger picture of our ancestors locality.

Sue Swan

ART GROUP MEETS VAN GOGH

This month our project was to paint a picture in the style of Van Gogh, or the members could do any other artist. As you can see, all very good.

Rita & Pauline



HISTORY

Thorley u3a History Group news

On 12 February some 36 History Group members and guests assembled at the Emmaus Centre on a rare dry morning. They were treated to a fascinating talk by Bishop's Stortford History Society chairman Tim Howard-Smith, on the impact on the town of the arrival of the Stort Navigation in 1769. Tim's visual aids were particularly impressive.

Before Tim began, Group chair Dave Parker floated the idea of starting a history book exchange at the monthly meetings. Some members, including himself, may have surplus history books that are simply too good to go to charity shops, Dave said.

He promised he will bring along a number of his late wife's books and pamphlets to the next meeting. Dave will also be giving a talk, with the intriguing title of "*The Tragedy of Prince Lee Boo and the wreck of the post ship Antelope*".

A number of new members paid their £20 subscriptions at the meeting – in cash. Could these members, and any who paid by other means, please email Dave with their contact details?

Dave's email is daveparker796@gmail.com.

See you all next time

Dave Parker

What the Papers Say 16th February

What we had to say about cars.



A friend reminded me to write something about this month's meeting and asked me to be funny and/or outrageous. Tricky.

Well, we usually find it difficult, initially, to ignore the latest jaw-dropping **** from a certain individual across the pond. We just can't resist the opportunity to relieve ourselves before we get on to this month's topic. (I could be properly outrageous but I fear that the ESTA allowing me to join the rest of the family in Disney World later this year could be refused.)

This was our first gathering at our new venue and it turned out just fine. Nobody got lost, everybody easily found somewhere near to park and the tea and biscuits flowed.

All present had a car and "I love driving!" produced many nods.

But there was recognition that surviving to our kind of ages comes with snags. Driving at night gets more difficult: dazzling headlights and so on. (Top tip: Get some yellow clip-ons). And modern cars are complicated, to the point that problems with sensors and warning lights seem more common than mechanical break downs. So many of the gizmos in modern cars go unused by people. People like us anyhow.

How about our next cars? This somehow prompted reminiscences about MOT-less cars and looking down at the road through the rust holes. There was shockingly little enthusiasm for buying electric cars. So expensive, on top of their incomprehensibility.

Facts on offer: Most popular family car, Toyota Corolla (50m sold, and counting. Dear Reader, I bought one.) Retail "garages" these days are less garages and more finance houses (try getting out of one without being persuaded to accept some expensive add-on).



Where does Rolls Royce get most of its income? Servicing and repairs. Where are most cars, most of the time? Sat near your house, going nowhere.

One remarkable member present has kept detailed records of the cars he had had in his lifetime of driving. All 36 of them!

Actually, moving around is an expensive pursuit, however you do it (petrol, diesel, electric, hybrid, new, second hand, leased, being given one.) Not having a car also can be very expensive or very inconvenient or both. Unless you live in a city, public transport is infrequent and unreliable. A cab for two or three miles might cost a tenner. Taxi to a hospital in north London? £300.

By the way, would you get in a self driving car? No thank you, too soon to be safe was the answer.

Later on, hearing about the driver who would not be able to replace their car when it finally became beyond repair threw a bit of a pall over us.

Our cars give us status, freedom, independence. Particularly if you live out of town, not being able to afford a car or not able to drive one is a grim prospect.

However, you might be relieved to know that members in this meeting accepted that the times will come when they can't or mustn't continue to drive.

Last snippet: Possibly, in the near future, most people will not have a car. When necessary, they will contact the nearest car storage point to book a self drive car, which will take you where you wish then return itself to storage.

Next meeting: Monday 16th March, 10:30. Topic: MUSIC!! An opportunity to share our favourites and widen each other's experience and enjoyment (Will there be ANY Rap or Hip Hop fans? You may be surprised!)



Tom McNeeney

THE FEBUARY MEETING AT THE CC

Wildlife in Zambia - Graham & Mary Brace



Graham and Mary returned for the third time to talk to us about wildlife in Zambia. They are passionate wildlife photographers who brought to life their photographic skills and stories about the animals and birds they patiently wait to photograph.

Zambia is a country six times larger than England with a population of only 20 million. Their journey was a 10 hour flight to Lusaka and then on to their destination of Flat Dogs Camp.

Baboons are in the area and are good at scrounging rice cakes from tourists. The nearby lake was home to hippos who ate the 'Nile cabbage' on the surface. They spend a lot of time in the water as they cannot easily support their body weight on their legs, after all, they can weigh up to 1 ½ tons. And did you know that there are 9 different sub species of zebra?

The amazing list of animals and birds they have photographed was fascinating, with photos and stories of each one. Here are a few.



Little Bee Eater



Water Buck Antelope



Giant Kingfisher

The list went on – warthog, yellow baboon, hooded vulture, hyena, wild dog, sparrow weaver and Lilian’s lovebird.



Questions from the audience led to more about Graham and Mary. They got into wildlife photography many years ago and have never looked back. They always felt safe in Zambia, with the best time to go after the rainy season from May onwards. Their next safari, a Swahili word meaning journey, planned is South Africa, a new country for them.

What a pleasure to listen to a passionate couple who love animals and wildlife photography.

Goliath Heron -biggest heron in the world

Dave Willett

COMMUNICATION



To all our members

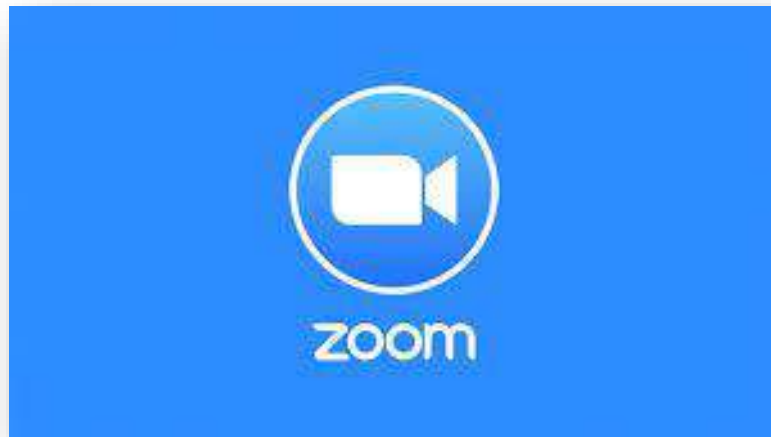
Remember that there are two easy ways for you to find out everything you need to know –

The monthly Newsletter and our website

MARCH 2026 NEWSLETTER



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 - **MARCH** talks include.

Tuesday 10th – 10 am – Spring clean your vitality with qidong

Wednesday 11th – 2 pm – The Evolution of AI

Tuesday 17th – 2 pm – London's Thames Bridges

Tuesday 24th – 11 am – Cancer Research Revolution

Thursday 26th – 2 pm – Deafness and beyond (Beethoven's deafness)

[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 March

✚ 1st – St David's Day



✚ 3rd - World Wildlife Day



✚ 8th – International Women's Day



✚ 17th - St. Patrick's Day



✚ 21st - World Poetry Day



Laugh

A few more quotes from letters sent to Islington Council's Housing Dept.

'I request your permission to remove my drawers in the kitchen.'

'Our lavatory seat is broken and is now in three pieces.'

'I want to complain about the farmer across the road. Every morning at 6am his cock wakes me up and it's getting too much.'

'I have had the Clerk of Works on the floor six times , but still have no satisfaction.'

'The lavatory seat is cracked, where do I stand ?'

A few more New Year Resolutions

- "Youth is when you're allowed to stay up for New Year's Eve. Middle age is when you're forced to."
- "I made a New Year's resolution to stop procrastinating, but I'm going to wait until next year to start."
- "I plan to be more open to new experiences, like trying a different type of antacid."
- "I will take up a sport that requires no cardio whatsoever, like darts or competitive napping."
- "This New Year, I'm going to make a resolution I can keep: no dieting all year long."