

# u3a

## Thorley

Registered Charity No: 1182852

# Newsletter

## April 2026



### From our Chair

Hello everyone and welcome to the April Newsletter.

May I start by expressing my sincere thanks to both John Bailey and Dave Willett who have now completed their stint on the Thorley u3a committee. They have both given significant amount of time and effort over the years and have helped and supported me in my role as Chairperson.

I am pleased to say that Carmen Konopka has returned from her travels and lost no time in taking up the role of Communications officer, making a few changes to the monthly newsletter. We also welcome Tony Clark as the new Assistant Treasurer.

This month sees our monthly meeting at its new venue. This will be a challenge, and everyone involved in the preparation and running of the monthly meeting wants it to go as smoothly as possible. I am sure we will encounter a few hitches in the first few months so please bear with us and be assured that we are aiming to do our best. May I actively encourage those who feel able to consider sitting up in the balcony. The view is good and you might think you are in a theatre!

I recently decided to pay a visit to the Dressmaking and Sewing group, run by Kui Lan Price, who made me very welcome and clearly is a very talented person. Everyone was busy working on patterns and tasks which Kui Lan had set them. We were then given a demonstration on how to do a French seam and how to make a frill/ruffle for a cuff or collar. As a non-sewer I found the session very interesting and clearly everyone was fully involved and enjoying their time with Kui Lan. For your information a French seam is a self-finished, enclosed seam that hides raw edges.

Best wishes to you all

*Nigel*

# FUTURE EVENTS



## Monthly Meeting – Monday April 13th

**Our April 13th meeting will be in a NEW VENUE – the United Reform Church (URC) in Water Lane, Bishop's Stortford CM23 2JZ, which is next door to the Charis Centre.**

**OUR SPEAKER THIS MONTH** will be Susan Farrugia from Barclays Bank whose subject is Fraud and Scam Awareness, Keeping You Safe. She will be updating us on how to steer clear of the latest scams.

**DOORS OPEN AT 1.30pm**, with the Chair's welcome at 2.00pm, followed by the speaker at 2.10pm.

## Future Speakers



**MAY 11th**

**Dad's Army, The Nation's Favourite Comedy - Charles Garland**

Charles delivers a fascinating and predictably amusing talk. It includes anecdotes and personal insights about the writers, the cast and what sets Dad's Army apart from the rest of the TV comedy archive.



**JUNE 1ST**

**Old Movies Saved My Life - Mel Byron**

While her friends were sneaking into nightclubs underage, Mel Byron was spending her weekends learning about life from the films of the 30s, 40s and 50s. From these she learnt about life – if not entirely accurately.

## All About Our New Meeting Place

Water Lane United Reform Church (URC) is a beautiful historic building in the centre of town. Opened in 1860, its facilities have been updated and suit our needs very well.

There will be around 140 chairs on the main ground floor, with a lot more seating in the gallery so, if you can, please use the upstairs seating as well.



There is good step-free access and ground-floor seating will be reserved in the front for those who need it. There is also a hearing aid loop – for best results, hearing aid wearers should sit in the centre of the hall.



Tea and coffee will be served from the hatch in the main hall, with service stopping at 1.50pm. Please do not take drinks upstairs.

Tables for groups, holidays and membership will be available in the entrance foyer.

*Sue Russell and Kathryn Aitken  
who organise volunteers to serve  
teas and coffees at our meetings*

Toilets are to the left of the foyer. As well as the main entrances, there is a fire exit on the ground floor to the left of the stage. And there are two fire escapes from the gallery.

Pictured are members of your committee and volunteers who run our meetings, shown on a setting-up visit to the URC.



*Our tech team at the URC. L to R: Tony Pyne, Ray Archer, Richard Masters, Tony Graver and Ken Blethyn*

*The team of Meeters and Greeters will be there to welcome you to the URC*



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## Thorley u3a's 15th Anniversary

At the end of 2011 our u3a was established and by early 2012 it was up and running. Over the last 15 years, it has continued to grow and become more successful, with more than 40 groups.

A celebratory get-together is being planned, probably for late September.

Meanwhile 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 [comms.thorleyu3a@gmail.com](mailto:comms.thorleyu3a@gmail.com) for inclusion in future newsletters.

## Places Still Available for Lille, Bruges & Arras

A double and a twin room are still available on the Lille, Bruges and Arras by Coach trip on August 3rd this year.

Cost of the five-day holiday is £639, which includes accommodation in the Mercure Lille Aeroport Hotel plus three full-day excursions.

Full details are on our website and booking is through the organiser, Maggie Bennett at [maggie.bennett@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:maggie.bennett@hotmail.co.uk)

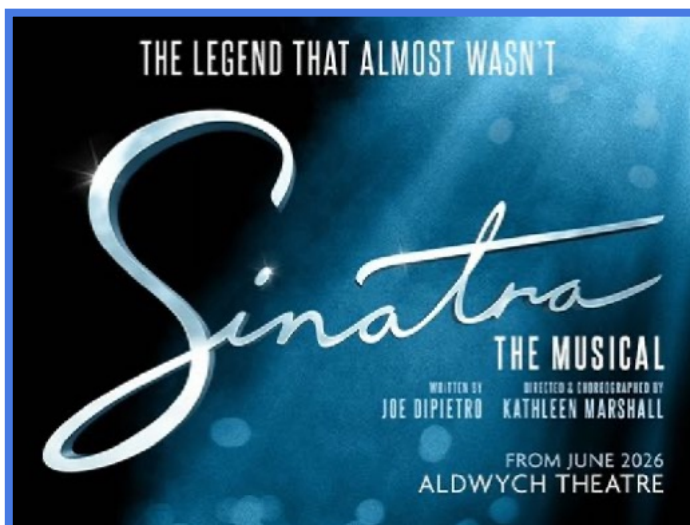
*Belfry of the historic Chamber of Commerce in the centre of Lille*



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## SOLD OUT – Trip to Sinatra: the Musical

Sylvia Poole's trip to Sinatra: the Musical on September 17th is now sold out.



However, Sylvia does hold a waiting list in case spaces become available as a result of cancellations.

Full details on our website

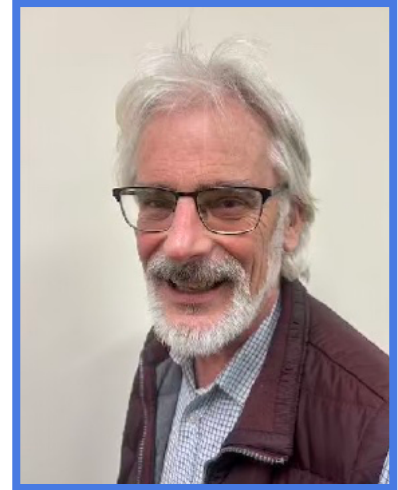
# NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

## Committee Update

We are delighted to welcome Tony Clark to our Thorley u3a Committee. Tony was co-opted as our new Assistant Treasurer at the March meeting of the committee.

He takes over from John Bailey who served on the committee in multiple roles for many years.

Pictures and full details of all the committee members are on the last page.



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## Funds Available for Groups

Our u3a funds are currently in surplus, thanks in part to contributions from Riviera Travel following holidays booked directly with the company by our members.

So if your group needs funds for new equipment, rent or anything else, please make a request to our treasurer, Ryland Perrin **by the end of April** so the committee can decide where the money can best be spent. Your request should explain how you would use the money and you can attach any relevant documents.

Contact [treasurer.thorleyu3a@gmail.com](mailto:treasurer.thorleyu3a@gmail.com)

If you plan to book a Riviera holiday, please do it direct via their Affinity Partnership scheme (not through a travel agent) so that you can nominate our u3a to receive the commission payment.

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## British Sign Language Course

Following Lindsey Barrell's talk, we've had lots of interest from members, keen to learn more about British Sign Language. We're hoping to organise a six-week course, so watch this space...

## Donation to South Mill Arts

South Mill Arts kindly allows five of our groups to regularly meet in their coffee shop without charge. They do ask our members to buy a cuppa and occasional cake because they are a charity and need income to keep going.

Because the venue is so important to us and is in need of more financial support, your committee has decided to make a donation of £1,000 to South Mill Arts.



Normally we are not allowed to give money to other charities, but Charity Commission rules allow us to if the other charity has similar objectives to our own in its constitution – which is the case with South Mill Arts.

However, please continue to buy a tea or coffee every time you go to a meeting there.

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## Emergency Contacts Needed

It's essential for us to have the name and phone number of a relative or friend of each member In Case of Emergency – an ICE contact.

Our Beacon database is still missing these for 21 of our members, so if you haven't given us an ICE contact please send it urgently to our membership secretary, Barbara Jacobs at [membership.thorleyu3a@gmail.com](mailto:membership.thorleyu3a@gmail.com)

# LAST MONTH'S SPEAKER

## March: Lindsey Barrell



It was a return of a very popular presenter who has entertained us before and has also spoken to a small group about British sign language. This time her subject was how she appeared on prime time TV shows and won two fabulous free holidays.

Lindsey told us about her early life and how in the early '80s she was living in Darlington, worked as a chef and doubled up as a waitress in a coffee shop. Darlington was a hub of theatrical entertainment and Lindsey always fancied being on the stage herself. (She is not exactly the shy and retiring type, is she!) Her first big chance came in 2017 when she got the opportunity to be in the audience at the London Palladium Live with Bradley Walsh. With her daughter, Lindsey dressed in a fabulous outfit and duly got herself noticed and selected to be a contestant.

The outfit was not needed, however, as she was put in an ice cream outfit with spikes on the top and she had to jump up and down and burst balloons. Having beaten the other contestants at this trial, she then had to select between two boxes and when she selected the right one a whole load of sprinkles came down on top of her ice cream outfit. Anyway, she had the last laugh as the prize was a holiday in Lanzarote.

Not satisfied with one major win, she applied in 2022 for a place on Ant and Dec's Saturday Night Takeaway, and again got selected as a contestant. She won the top prize – yet another sumptuous holiday. She chose a honeymoon in Cuba.

She said that all the TV folk were nice and if anyone did wonder if it is all made up for the cameras and the contestants are fake, then Lindsey was able to dispel those myths. It is for real. (Though you might have to surrender your dignity and pretend you are an ice cream...)

Lindsey's parting line was profound: "You have to be in it to win it!"

**Barry Maxwell**

# GROUP REPORTS

**NEW**

## New Group for Wine & Beer Lovers

A new Wine and Beer Appreciation Group has been set up by Alastair Curbbun. Alastair is planning initially for the group to meet every two months, with the first meeting on June 2nd at the Thorley Community Centre.

The first meeting will be a tasting of red wine and there will be five or six different versions for members to sample and try to guess the country of origin, year, cost and type of grape. It will be very informal and no knowledge is necessary.



Small tasters will be poured – you can choose to spit or swallow as you prefer!

Just come and join friends and have an enjoyable afternoon

selecting your favourite and learning a little more about wine.

It is hoped to arrange other events, including visits to vineyards and breweries, food and wine pairing and talks on specific drinks.

Cost of the first meeting will be £10 per person, payable at the meeting. Spaces are limited, so please reserve your place with Alastair as soon as possible at [curbbuns@gmail.com](mailto:curbbuns@gmail.com)

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## Pilates and Flex and Tone – Both Full

The two groups run by Mandy Cousins are currently so popular that they don't have any spaces at the moment.

Fitness Pilates on Thursdays and Flex and Tone on Tuesdays both have waiting lists only. Contact Mandy via the email link on our website.

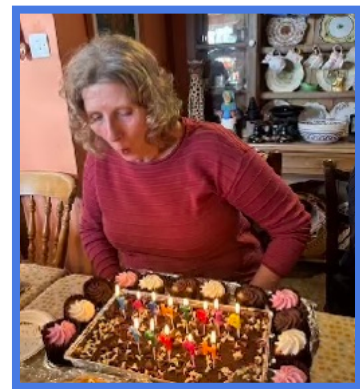
## Walkers Souper Walk



The Walking group enjoyed a lovely sunny five-mile walk through several local parks before finishing with their annual soup lunch at the home of David Herbert and Carmen Konopka.

Accompanied by lots of bread, cheese and fruit, the soups on offer were (as usual!) pumpkin and tomato, made from David's home-grown produce.

It was an extra-special occasion because it was Mary Read's birthday, celebrated with a cake!



## Gardeners visit the Mount in Roydon

Garden Group 2's March visit was to Liz and David Davidson's stunning garden at the Mount in Roydon.

Totalling eight acres, five acres on the site were turned into woodland in 2003 with the planting of 1,000 trees. The remaining three acres is divided into nine areas of lawns and seasonal borders.

There are many bronze statues tastefully placed around the garden, enhancing its beauty.

We were lucky to enjoy a sunny morning which showed the garden in all its glory. Well worth a visit. **Roger Thear**



## Among the Daffodils



Another successful visit to Chippenham Park in Cambridgeshire for Garden Group 3 – this time to see the daffodils.

Once again we were blessed with sunny weather (it changed dramatically for the worse the next day).

This garden is one of my personal favourites – it's beautiful with interesting plants and a superb cafe.

Also it's a great garden for people with mobility issues as it is all on one level with bark pathways.

**Linda Maxwell**



## Outing to Widford Garden



Garden Group 1 enjoyed a visit to Elia Cottage in Widford at the end of March. Luckily the sun shone for us. Hugh and Margaret, our hosts, supplied us with plenty of cake and refreshment.

The interesting garden is on different levels with many pathways leading down from the house to bridges over a little stream and back up again to a summer house at the top of the garden.

Lots of spring flowers, birdsong, places to sit in the sun and enjoy the peace and quiet.

Across the lane, in front of the cottage where the owners have lived for 40 years, they have transformed an area into a woodland garden with a large pond and winding paths which is an ongoing project with areas still being planted.

**Barbara Jacobs**

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## Strollers in the Sunshine

As soon as there was a sunny day with blue skies in March, the Strollers were out to take advantage of it!



## What the Papers (and You!) Say – March

A full house enjoyed 90 minutes of members at their most interesting, passionate, lively, amusing and informative.

The meeting began with a member's moving favourite from the 1970s: John Lennon's Imagine. That encouraged us to welcome everyone to draw attention to some track or genre.

In no particular order we heard snatches of the first record (vinyl) someone had bought, or the group or the music that illuminated important points in their lives, from Jesu Joy of Man's Desire and the Lark Ascending, to Ska and Bill Hayley's Rock Around the Clock.

We had time to focus on music in Bishop's Stortford. So many choirs and music clubs! For example the Acoustic Club ([www.acousticclub.co.uk](http://www.acousticclub.co.uk)) meets every other Thursday at South Mill Arts – £7 for an evening of local musicians getting their first taste of being on stage. Or try The Moon Jammers, also at South Mill Arts (last Sunday of the month), while Herts and Soul is a popular, vibrant local choir.

We didn't forget the wider world. For example, "Add to Playlist" on BBC Radio 4 Friday at 7.15 p.m was recommended.

Music had influenced some of those present in a very personal way. For example, one was from a Salvation Army family, big enough and musical enough to advertise themselves as the local Von Trapps (think Sound of Music). Another reminisced about his years in a rock band.

At least two of us had childhoods immersed in classical music. And, how did we finish this meeting? By watching and listening to Pavarotti singing Nessun Dorma.

So, we've done Music. At the strong suggestion of quite a few on the day, we should also do Art.

**What the Papers Say** meets on the third Monday in the month, 10:30am to 12:00, at 86 Pynchbek, Thorley CM23 4DJ. Easy to find parking. Fee: a few biscuits or £1 (don't worry if you forget).

NB1: Please let me know if you would like to join this group.  
Contact [t.mcneeney@sky.com](mailto:t.mcneeney@sky.com)

NB2: And if you are planning to come, please RSVP.

**Tom McNeeney**

## Walking Group Reaches for the Stars



Often the Walking Group passes interesting places that we'd like to go back to visit properly. Last October, for instance, we had a guided tour of Hayters lawnmower factory. However, this visit with a group of 32 took us to the Bayfordbury Observatory that is now part of the University of Hertfordshire.

We started off in a mini planetarium with one of the researchers and were shown galaxies, nebulas and the planets with their orbits.

Afterwards we went outside to see two of the eight telescopes on the site. The first was installed 150 years ago. The latest hi tech telescope was demonstrated as well, with an explanation of how it's used for research. It's hard to imagine seeing a galaxy on a PC screen that is eight light years away.

We ended the visit back in the classroom with an interesting talk on the development of space travel and the Artemis Project that aims to travel from our Moon, using it as a base to voyage to Mars.

Next? Well, we have walked past the odd sewage works...

**Dave Willett**



## Tales of our Forebears

In January Family History Group speaker Dave Annal issued a challenge – use local newspapers to find out about your ancestors. The group certainly rose to the challenge and at the March meeting members filled two hours with tales of their forebears.



Two colliery disasters started off the recollections – one gave rise to the award of the Edward Cross for leading a rescue and the subsequent award to the team of a Sèvres vase from the French President. Only two of these vases were made and the first was awarded to a French colliery rescue and the second to a team from the Midlands. Why the French President awarded these is anybody's guess.

The second colliery event involved an unfortunate relative losing his life after being trapped between the horse's collar and the sharp rocks of the roof. It is hard to imagine the poor horses and miners working in such dangerous conditions.



In the late 1890s a burglary by a 13-year-old resulted in five years in the reformatory. They had stolen a few sundry items such as lamps and bicycle clips, but the main treasures were tins of pineapple. This proved their downfall as they were caught eating them on the street and the police didn't think they looked as if they could afford such luxuries.

Several unfortunate deaths were recounted. An octogenarian run over by a lorry in St Albans and a great-grandfather drowned in the Thames. Another ancestor stopped at the Fox and Hounds for a couple of beers and a bottle of cider, but died as a result of falling off the cart when the horse bolted.

What might seem like trivial offences were punished with harsh fines: a street singer wearing a sailor's outfit when singing sea shanties was fined for impersonation, while riding a bicycle without a front light could land a fine of five shillings.

Local celebrities were celebrated in the local press, and we heard of a master baker who had started out delivering the bread with a hand cart, took over the business from his father and earned a Papal medal for his work with the local church. When asked about his tips to ensure a long life he stated, 'hard work, a hearty breakfast and a bottle of Guinness'.

**Sue Swan**

*On April 24th at 2.00pm in the Emmaus centre, we welcome Kathy Chater, an experienced genealogist to talk about Coroners Inquests. Non members welcome £4 to include refreshments. Please let Sue Swan know if you are coming.*

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## History Group Meetings

At the group's March meeting chair Dave Parker consulted the 30 members present on their preferred meeting dates and times. Potential moves to either Tuesday or Friday pm meetings were overwhelmingly rejected in favour for carrying on as before with Thursday morning meetings – and that will be the norm for the rest of the year.



Dave's talk on "The Tragedy of Prince Lee Boo [pictured] and the wreck of the packet Antelope" was well received, and afterwards members browsed the history book exchange that was available for the first time. Members who have surplus books they would like to exchange or donate, please bring them along to the next meeting.

This will be on April 9th, subject Waytemore Castle, speaker Dr Mike James.

On May 7th Dave Willett will give a talk on medals.

June 11 Dave Parker returns with "A short history of the London Stump".

A special meeting on July 9th. The subject is the History of the St Barnabas Centre, the speaker is Bill Hardy – and the meeting will be held in the Barnabas Centre itself, just a few yards from our normal meeting place.

**Dave Parker**



## Beryl Cook Challenge to our Artists

As an Art Group we set challenges to the Group on a monthly basis. In March we continued with Beryl Cook, who was requested by members, and added David Hockney.

In our challenges Art Group members can copy any of the pictures by the selected artists. They can also paint or draw anything they choose if they prefer – the challenges are only set to encourage them and spark ideas.

We meet twice a month at the Baptist Church and once a month at South Mill Art Centre for sketching and coffee. This picture is a selection of what we produce.

**Rita Foster & Pauline Bullions**

# Return Visit to Hindu Temple at Neasden

2026



The Cultures and Customs Group paid a second visit to the Baps Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, a spectacular Hindu temple at Neasden – the first visit by the group was back in February 2019.

Once again it was a hugely popular visit, enjoyed by 68 members and with transport on a double-decker bus.

Organised by Dave Willett, the visit included a video about the construction of the temple with the stone being mostly shaped and carved in India, then transported and assembled in London like a giant jigsaw. We also visited the holy shrine and an exhibition explaining the beliefs of Hinduism, as well as attending a prayer meeting.

This was followed by the chance to have an Indian lunch in the neighbouring restaurant and the opportunity to shop for authentic ingredients in the Indian supermarket.

A fascinating day... thank you Dave!



2019

# THORLEY u3a COMMITTEE



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Chair



Linda Ketteridge  
Vice Chair



Ryland Perrin  
Treasurer



John Acklaw  
Business  
Secretary



Annie Compton  
Groups  
Co-ordinator



Barbara Jacobs  
Membership  
Secretary



Barry Maxwell  
Speaker  
Co-ordinator



Chrissy Thear  
Events  
Organiser



Carmen Konopka  
Communications



Tony Clark  
Assistant  
Treasurer

Please send contributions to  
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Committee members can all be  
contacted via the Contact tab  
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