

u3a

Thorley

Registered Charity No: 1182852

Newsletter

May 2026



From our Chair

Hello everyone and welcome to the May edition of the Thorley u3a newsletter.

We look forward to our next monthly meeting in our new venue, the URC. Overall I felt our first meeting in the new venue went well – there are a few issues to iron out so please be patient. Any helpful suggestions as to how we might improve or enhance the meeting are welcome. I was particularly pleased by the number of people who chose to sit in the balcony at no extra charge!

I very recently visited the Museum of Timekeeping in a small village called Upton, near Newark. This is now the home of the British Horological Institute which moved to Upton Hall just after the Second World War. The museum is full of old clocks and watches and illustrates how time has always played a significant role in our lives. There is a huge collection of what I would have called Grandfather clocks but which are apparently known as Long Case clocks. I was told that in the late 17th century these were a status symbol in your country house.

One room is dedicated to the development of the Speaking Clock and has an original machine that was first used in the mid-1930s. The first voice recorded was that of Ethel Cain, who continued to tell the time to people who rang TIM (846 on the old-fashioned telephone or 123 on the new versions) for 27 years. Some of you may remember her successor's voice... that of Pat Simmons, who was the voice of TIM for the next 22 years. She has since been followed by three other people, including the current Scottish voice of actor Alan Steadman.

This small Museum is well worth a visit, alongside The Workhouse, a National Trust property at nearby Southwell. Southwell also has a stunning Norman minster – definitely a place to visit!

Best wishes to you all

Nigel

FUTURE EVENTS



Monthly Meeting – Monday May 11th

Our May 11th meeting will again be in our new venue – the United Reformed Church (URC) in Water Lane, Bishop's Stortford CM23 2JZ, which is next door to the Charis Centre.



OUR SPEAKER THIS MONTH will be Charles Garland, talking about 'Dad's Army, the Nation's Favourite Comedy'.

His fascinating and amusing talk 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.

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

TEA & COFFEE service stops at 1.50pm. Please make sure you get your cuppa in good time!

HEARING AID LOOP For best results, sit in the centre of the hall.

Future Speakers



MONDAY 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.



MONDAY JULY 6th

My Adventures in Helicopters - Duncan Bickley

A talk about various trips and adventures Duncan experienced whilst flying customers about the UK and Europe. These included flying in London, Paris, the French Alps, Mallorca and the coast of the UK.

National u3a Events

Lots of activities are organised by our national u3a organisation which members of Thorley u3a are entitled to take part in.

Among the free online learning events coming up are:

May 12th – The Call of the Wild: Stories from the Frontiers of Exploration

Join polar explorer Alex McNeil for an illustrated talk drawn from nearly two decades across the Arctic & Antarctica.

May 21st – Mindfulness and Meditation

May 22nd – AI News

Explore how AI can help you stay independent as you age.

May 29th – Drones, huh? What are they good for?

Dr Steve Bullock, who heads the Aerial Robotics MSc at the University of Bristol, gives his view of drones and their growing and evolving role in our skies.

June 11th – An ABC of Victorian Painting

Simon Evers explores three Victorian painters.

These sessions and many more can be found on the national u3a website www.u3a.org.uk under the Events tab.

Dates for Your Diary

Several exciting activities are being planned for later this year and although bookings are not yet open for the two later ones, you might like to make a note in your diary.

Thursday May 28th – New Members' Coffee Morning at Thorley Community Centre. Personal invitations will be emailed to all members who've joined in the last few months.

Saturday June 11th – Summer Concert by u3a Singers. Booking now open – see poster below.

Saturday October 24th – Quiz Night. More details later.

Tuesday December 1st – Christmas Lunch. More details later.

U3A Singers Summer Concert

The U3A Singers Summer Concert is a little later this year – on Saturday July 11th – and will feature an entertaining mix of music, including musicals by Andrew Lloyd Webber, some light classical songs, Gilbert & Sullivan, folk and melodies from both Elvis and the Beach Boys.

And because this year is the 60th anniversary of England winning the World Cup in 1966, the songs that we'll invite the audience to join in with will be those that are often heard in football stands!

Tickets are just £10 each (children £5) and include refreshments during the interval.

Buy your ticket at our next monthly meeting on May 11th or phone Carmen Konopka at 01279 653091.

U3A SINGERS
SUMMER CONCERT
Thorley U3A

Featuring music from Andrew Lloyd Webber musicals, folk songs, Gilbert & Sullivan, Elvis, the Beach Boys – plus fun football anthems!
Choir Director: Sue Hickman
Pianist: Michael Smith

TICKETS
£10
Inc. Refreshments
(Children £5)

The Hub, Apton Road, Bishop's Stortford
(opposite the car park)

Saturday 11th July 2026
7.30pm

u3a learn, laugh, live
Contact: 01279 653091

Coach Trip to Royal Hospital Chelsea, plus Physic Garden or National Army Museum

Dave Willett is organising a History/Customs & Cultures coach trip to London on Wednesday September 9th.

Leaving from Thorley Sainsbury's at 8.30am, the visit will take in the Royal Hospital Chelsea (home of the iconic Chelsea Pensioners) and either the Chelsea Physic Garden or the National Army Museum, returning home at about 6.00pm. Cost is £48.00.



All the sites are about a quarter of a mile apart along Royal Hospital Road. After arriving in Chelsea at about 10.30 am, you will have the choice to go to either the National Army Museum (free entry) or the Chelsea Physic Garden with a tour (at

an extra cost of £11). Please state your choice when booking as the garden tickets have to be booked in advance.

Lunch will be in the area. Cafés nearby include Entrée and a Tesco Express, as well as a café in the National Army Museum.

At 1.50pm everyone will meet again for guided tours of the Royal Hospital with two of the residents. There will be two groups of 25 for the tour of 90 minutes-2 hours. There will also be an opportunity to visit the museum and gift shop.

The number is limited to 50. Please contact Dave Willett at dw1289@outlook.com to book a place. Payment will be requested only after you have received confirmation of your booking. A flyer is on our website.



**Last
Minute
Opportunity!**

Single Room Now Available for Weymouth Trip This Month

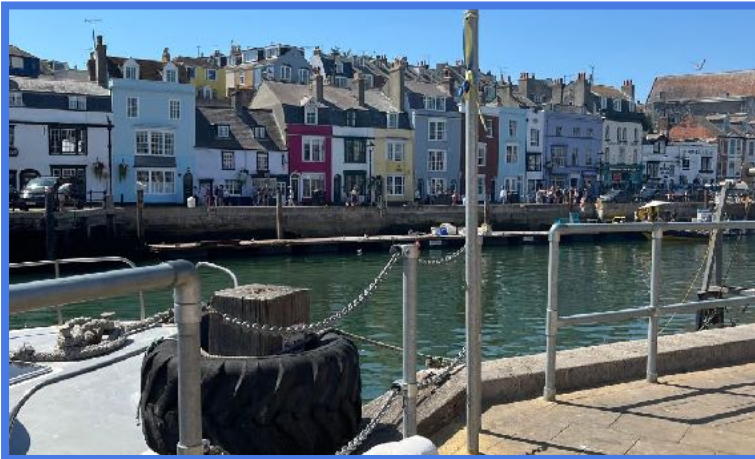
A single place has just become available for Maggie Bennett's trip to Weymouth on May 25th-29th. It's a double room for single occupancy and the price is £439, with dinner, bed and breakfast at the Norfolk Hotel.

The four-night holiday includes excursions to the West Bay and Sidmouth on the Jurassic Coast, a full day to Swanage and Corfe

Castle, plus a half day to Sherborne where the Abbey dates back to Saxon times and the ruined castle was once home to Sir Walter Raleigh.

You can find a copy of the flyer with full details on our website, under the 'events' tab.

To book please phone Maggie as soon as possible on 01279 503848.



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 Airport 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



NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

New Defibrillator Available

Taking members on a trip or a holiday? Please take our new defibrillator too!

We have just replaced our u3a defibrillator with one that is even easier to use and which comes in a more compact, easy-to-carry, bright orange case. It auto-detects if the patient needs a shock once the pads are in place and gives full verbal instructions.



Defibs can be life savers and in an emergency the quicker they are used, the better.



Don't rely on one being in the coach or building you are using, take ours with you. It is held by our chair, Nigel Varnam.

You don't need any training to use a defibrillator, but if you'd like to know more about our defib, click on this link to a short training video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dbtH57NSNFE>

Funds Given to Groups

Following our announcement last month that groups could apply for financial support, three groups have now received funds for specific items that they need.

In addition, all groups which have to pay rent have received a £150 boost to their funds.

Thank you to members who booked holidays through Riviera's Affinity scheme, which contributed to our surplus funds.

LAST MONTH'S SPEAKER

April: Sue Farrugia

Sue is from Barclays Bank and she treated us to a master class in how to avoid fraud and scams on our bank activities. The harsh statistic is that one in five bank customers were subject to some sort illicit activity on their bank account in 2024, of which

roughly 93% was online. The good news is that banks spot getting on for half that activity, but it still cost them a massive £11.4 billion that year.



A fraud is when a criminal hacks into your IT system and steals credit or debit card details. A scam is where an innocent victim is tricked into revealing banking details.

Phishing is a fairly common word that derives from fishing – ie where a criminal is trying to get 'bites' by casting a bait and getting a bite

that gives access to bank account details. A less well known word is *vishing* and this is the term used to describe a telephone scam where someone is attempting to get an innocent victim to pass on bank details. (Banks themselves never ask for details – they already know them!) *Smishing* is where someone sends a false SMS text (such as a parking fine or notice of a failed delivery) in an attempt to get a credit or debit card number in settlement of the 'problem'.

Sue gave us some great tips to avoid fraud and scams:

- Read carefully any incoming email address seeking payment. The sender's address might look genuine, but is there a letter reversed, or maybe an extra letter?
- A caller pretending to be a bank usually stays on the line and the call is still connected if you try to ring out. So if you want to check with your bank, try to ring from a different phone.
- Be careful with QR codes, criminals might stick a false QR code on top of a genuine one.
- Try to avoid using open networks when you are out and about; online banking can be a risk when the network is not secure.
- Using a credit card online is usually safer than a debit card.

The best advice is if you are not sure about something, then take a moment to consider. If someone has presented an offer that appears too good to be true, it probably is!

Sue provided a booklet *The Little Book of BIG Scams* which is full of helpful tips. She has also provided some helpful links to more information and you don't have to be a Barclays customer to access them.

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

She left us with one very interesting fact. The most vulnerable age group for fraud and scams is not our generation, but the 18-35 year olds because they are so wedded to social media on their phones or computers all the time. Us older generation can still teach the youngsters a thing or two.

Barry Maxwell

Speakers Corner

Have you ever wondered what our guest speakers think of us? We always ask after the event how they thought their session went and if they have any thoughts or suggestions for us.

Here are just a few comments from recent speakers: "I was made to feel so welcome." "So well organised." "The audience were fabulous." "Lovely feedback after the talk." "Enjoyed the receptive audience."

What do you think about our speakers? Are there any subjects you would like us to cover in the future? Please let us know by emailing speaker2.thorleyu3a@gmail.com.

Great Dunmow Bookfest On Saturday June 13th 12.00-17.30

Great Dunmow High Street will become a bookshop with stores handing over their windows to Essex authors.

John Tarrow (remember him from November 2023 when he gave us a talk about Talliston House – Britain's Most Extraordinary Home) and Andy Stuart (who will be with us in October to discuss Churchill's Intervention in the Russian Civil War) are both participating.

John wrote his first novel set in the town but there was no bookshop there to sell his book locally. So was born the idea of turning the whole town into a giant bookshop for a single day. It might not be the Hay-on-Wye festival at the moment but it is very local and may be worth noting for your calendar as a day out.

Barry Maxwell

GROUP REPORTS

NEW

Calling All Creative Writers

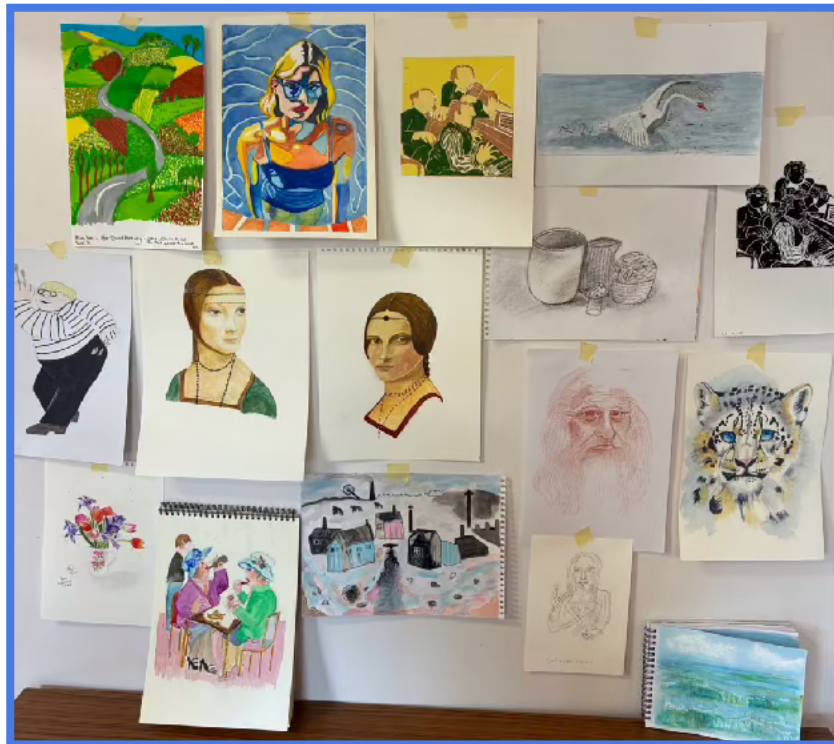
Annie Compton is setting up a new Creative writing Group.



She has some members who have already expressed an interest, but would like a few more.

So if you have a way with words and would like to develop your skills with like-minded people, please contact Annie at annie.rosina.compton@gmail.com

Artists Meet the Da Vinci Challenge



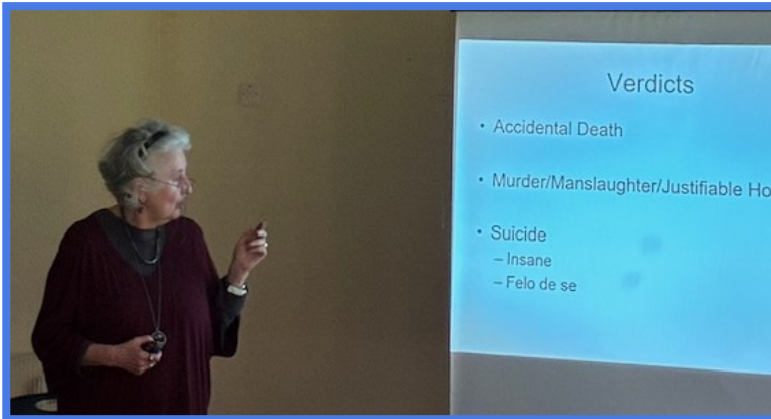
The Art Group's challenge this month was Leonardo da Vinci, and some of the members' own work. This is a wonderful display of what was generated this month.

The Art Group is held in the Baptist Church twice a month, refreshments provided. Once a month there is also an informal coffee and draw held at South Mill Arts. If you are interested in joining full details are on the website.

Pauline Bullions & Rita Foster

Family History Group: Coroner's Inquests

28 members were regaled with stories of various aspects of a coroner's life by our speaker Kathy Chater.

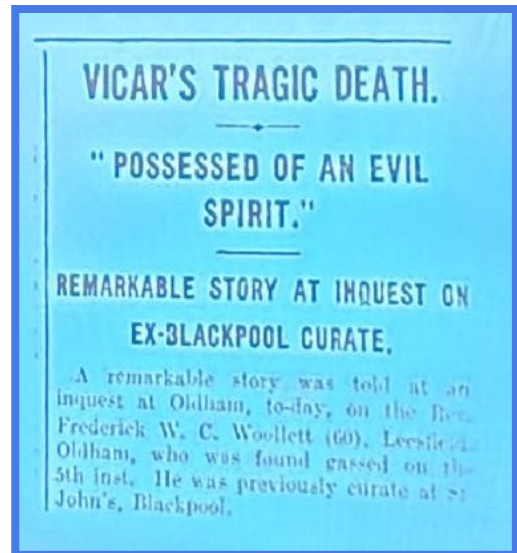


Before TV, attendance at a coroner's inquest was a source of entertainment for many. And as the only building in the area large enough to accommodate the body, jury and onlookers was often the public house, this would have been a key event in the village calendar.

Jurors, needed to be educated people, so the local shopkeepers and homeowners could be called upon several times in their life to attend.

The role of coroner was first mentioned in 1194 when Richard II (the Lionheart) who was short of money following the Crusades, created the role to ensure that the crown made money from deaths. Nothing much has changed it seems.

The coroner's handbook indicated several other functions that they are involved with, including treasure trove. Treasure is something precious that was buried with the intention of the owner coming back to dig it up. If it's not treasure, then its finders keepers. In the case of a suspicious death which needs further investigation coroners are also qualified as magistrates and will refer their suspicions to the Crown Court.



After 1926 the jury must have given thanks that they no longer had to view the body with the coroner! Refrigeration was not as good in those days...

Sue Swan

The next meeting on May 29th will look at Sue Swan's Great Aunt Lucy (no relation to Paddington I'm afraid). Members will be encouraged to draw family trees and to enquire about how to further the research. Anyone interested might find this a useful

April Garden Adventure to Little Baddow

Garden Group 2's April adventure was to the two-acre garden of Margaret Chalmers at Bassetts in Little Baddow.

It features all-year-round borders of shrubs and plants, two natural ponds and an orchard. There is also a variety of mature trees, including a magnificent eucalyptus which Margaret planted herself. A really lovely garden!

Roger Thear



Talking Trump at What the Papers Say

We abandoned the idea of imagining a conversation with Trump. He wouldn't listen. So, all we could do was talk about him. With the implicit choice to laugh or cry, we laughed and laughed.

Trump is a man who can get away with anything and knows it. He insults people at a second's notice, including the Pope, for God's sake! He's a draft avoider who now revels in ordering bombs to be dropped on targets full of civilians.

Of course, being POTUS is tough, even if you have read some books, have patience, and can remember what you said yesterday.



But this President's focus is, like Adolf Hitler, personal loyalty from his appointees rather than their ability to look after the nation. And he requires constant toe-curling praise and adulation from them. It would be fair to deduce that Trump is someone who seriously doubts his own self worth.

The man needs friends! But there are no friends in Trump Land. Relationships are all about self defence, or money, or advancement, or opportunities to control and harm people you don't like.

Eventually, he will just be history.

Tom McNeeney

At the May meeting, the topic on offer is: Is there intelligent life beyond Earth? What the Papers say meets on the third Monday in the month, 10:30am to 12:00, at 86 Pynchbek, Thorley CM23 4DJ.

Postal Museum Visit and Clerkenwell Walk



A group of 17 London regulars enjoyed a visit to the Postal Museum in Clerkenwell on April 22nd. The highlight of the visit was a ride on the small railway which carried mail from Liverpool Street to Paddington for almost 100 years.

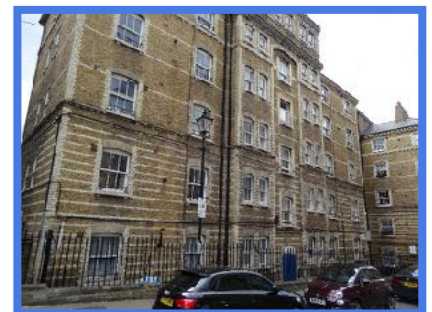
The museum is full of history about the Royal Mail. It is close to Mount Pleasant sorting office which gets its name from a mountain of rubbish which used to be dumped here in the 18th century. Later, the site became a prison, before becoming a major Post Office sorting office.



After our visit we took advantage of the weather and enjoyed a two-mile walk around Clerkenwell, passing a number of interesting places and lots of history.

We started at Florin Court in Charterhouse Square, an Art Deco

block of flats often used in filming as the residence of Hercule Poirot in the TV series. We walked past Charterhouse and, also worth a visit, Smithfield Market which will close in 2028 – no doubt to be transformed into something different. It is a listed building so it must be preserved.



Later we passed Peabody dwellings, lots of Charles Dickens locations and walked through Hatton Garden. Our last stop was Bleeding Heart Yard, named after a pub. Luckily Diane Judd noticed the gate was open (well done Diane!) allowing us to walk through to Ely Place, another fascinating place where we could enjoy St Ethelreda's Church.

An enjoyable day in London once again.

Dave Willett

Stroll through Birchanger's Bluebells

The Short Strollers Group enjoyed a walk through the glorious bluebells in Birchanger Woods this month.

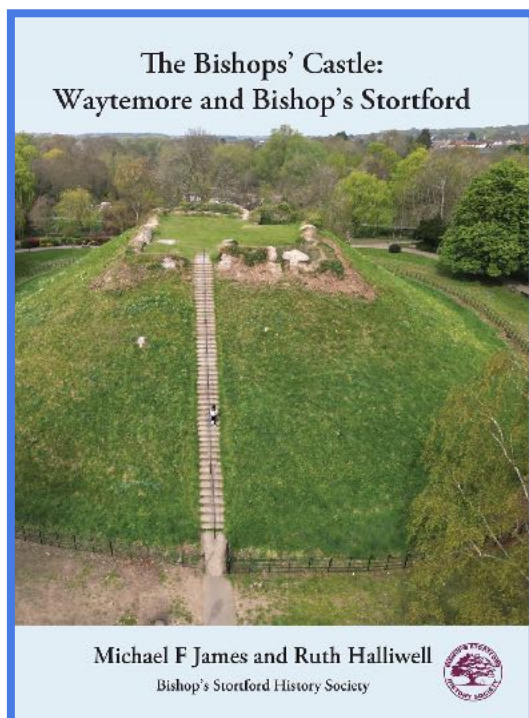
Co-ordinated by Linda Ketteridge, the group meets at 10.00am on the fourth Thursday of the month for a stroll of about two miles around local venues.
Linda Ketteridge



Temporary Stop for History Group

Unfortunately the History Group has to be suspended temporarily due to illness. It is hoped that the group will be able to start again before too long.

Apologies to those who turned up to discover the May meeting could not be held.



At the April meeting the group heard Dr Mike James present the results of his research into the fascinating history of Waytemore Castle, the subject of his latest book (pictured).

What was particularly intriguing was the revelation of the castle's central role in the administration of the town and the surrounding area. Rather than a military fortress, it was for many years the home of the courts and a prison.

Updates about the group will appear on our website.

Calling Table Tennis Players

Looking for a fun way to stay active and meet new people? Why not join the Table Tennis 2 Group on Tuesday mornings.

New members of all skill levels are welcome to the group, which meets at Great Hallingbury Village Hall.

For more information, email Tom McNeeney at t.mcneeney@sky.com

THORLEY u3a COMMITTEE



Nigel Varnam
Chair



Linda Ketteridge
Vice Chair



Ryland Perrin
Treasurer



John Acklaw
Business
Secretary



Annie Compton
Groups
Co-ordinator



Barbara Jacobs
Membership
Secretary



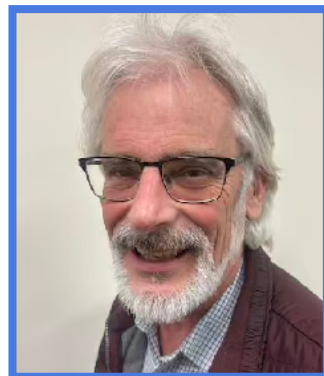
Barry Maxwell
Speaker
Co-ordinator



Chrissy Thear
Events
Organiser



Carmen Konopka
Communications
Co-ordinator



Tony Clark
Assistant
Treasurer

Please send contributions to
the Newsletter to:
comms.thorleyu3a@gmail.com

Committee members can all be
contacted via the Contact tab
on our website:
www.thorley.u3asite.uk