

# u3a

## Thorley

Registered Charity No: 1182852

# Newsletter

## June 2026



### From our Chair

Hello everyone and welcome to the June Newsletter.

Thank you to the various people who have contributed articles and photographs of their trips, meetings and activities over the past month. We look forward to receiving many more during the rest of the year.

As you will be aware, we are an organisation run by volunteers and depend very much upon people contributing their time to ensure we have an effective organisation. We are now only six months away from 2027! And in January 2027 we will need to elect a new Chairperson and a new Vice Chairperson!

Do give this opportunity careful consideration and if you are interested in either of these positions, please do not hesitate to contact me or any other committee member about what this may entail. In addition to these two committee posts, we also need to recruit some additional 'meeters and greeters', plus tea and coffee makers. Both roles play an important part in the smooth running of our monthly meetings. Your commitment can be as little as twice a year, or more should you so wish. (As that well known slogan goes: 'Every little helps.')

May I remind you that the u3a Singers have their Summer Concert on July 11th and tickets are now on sale. Please see the poster below for full details. For those of you wanting something a little more educational, Stansted u3a is holding a Saturday Seminar on June 6th and the subject is "Charles Darwin was a Geologist". Again, full details can be found in this newsletter.

Finally, the newly formed Wine and Beer group will be holding their first meeting on 2nd June and we wish Alastair the very best for a successful group.

Best wishes to you all

*Nigel*

# FUTURE EVENTS



## Monthly Meeting – Monday June 1st

**Our June 1st 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 Mel Byron on the subject of 'Old Movies Saved My Life'

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.

**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 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.

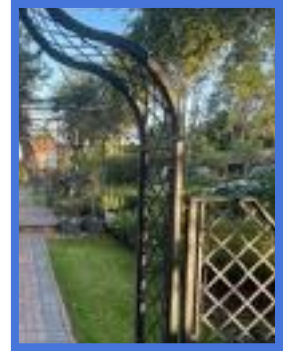


**MONDAY AUGUST 3rd –**

**David Davison**

**The National Garden Scheme, Mount Garden**

When David and Liz moved to the Mount in Harlow in 1998 it had been used as a nursery with greenhouses, boiler room and chicken runs. It is now a lovely garden, set in eight acres,



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## Dates for Your Diary

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

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

**Saturday October 24th** – Quiz Night. More details nearer the time.

**Tuesday December 1st** – Christmas Lunch. More details nearer the time.

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# 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, 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 ask 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 monthly meeting,

or phone Carmen Konopka at 01279 653091, or email her at [carmen.konopka@btinternet.com](mailto:carmen.konopka@btinternet.com)

## U3A SINGERS SUMMER CONCERT

Thorley U3A

Featuring music from  
Andrew Lloyd Webber  
musicals, folk songs, Elvis, the  
Beach Boys – plus fun football  
anthems!

Choir Director: Sue Hickman  
Pianist: Michael Smith

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

Saturday 11th July 2026  
7.30pm

**u3a** learn,  
laugh,  
live

Contact: 01279 653091

TICKETS  
£10

Inc. Refreshments  
(Children £5)

**DON'T  
MISS  
OUT!**

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

**A few places still remain** for the trip Dave Willett is organising 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 (depending on your choice), 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](mailto: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.



## Invitation to Stansted u3a's Saturday Seminar

Stansted u3a is inviting our members to its next Saturday Morning Seminar on Saturday June 6th, 9.30am-12.30pm at St Theresa of Lisieux church hall.

Some members may remember Professor David Norman's visit last year where he talked about the origin of birds from dinosaurs. This time his subject is "Charles Darwin Was a Geologist!"

Charles Darwin is justly renowned for his establishment of a mechanism (Natural Selection) that accounts for the phenomenon of organic evolution. He is credited with beginning to develop his theory while pondering the distribution of mockingbirds and tortoises on the Galápagos Islands.



However, examining the disproportionate time and effort that he expended on geological phenomena throughout the Voyage of the Beagle, it is clear that Darwin then regarded himself primarily as a geological natural philosopher – and the Galápagos held an equally pivotal role in his geological research.

Only years later was it realised how important and revelatory Darwin's geological publications were – and yet they had been eclipsed by the Origin of Species.

If any of our members would like a place at this seminar, please email Sally Rich at [stanstedseminars@gmail.com](mailto:stanstedseminars@gmail.com), saying which u3a you belong to. Sally will reply back explaining how to pay. Cost is £7 including tea or coffee. Please ask don't send a payment until you have received confirmation of a place. If applying for more than one place, say who the places are for because no tickets are issued but there's a list of attendees on the door.

## 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.

Celebrations are 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.

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### 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*



# NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

## Members' Bargains in Bishop's Stortford

### DISCOUNTS OF 15% FROM THREE LOCAL BUSINESSES



We are very grateful to three local businesses for their generous discounts of 15% for members.

Coopers in Bridge Street, the Terrace Park Café and Caffelnn in Florence Walk all give the discounts. All you have to do is show your membership card.



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## FREE Nuffield Gym Access for 6 Months

Anyone who has joint pain (and let's face it, that includes many of us u3a members!) is eligible for six months' free membership of the Nuffield Health fitness and wellbeing gym in Anchor Street, thanks to its Joint Pain Management programme.



They ask you to commit to two special one-hour sessions a week for 10 weeks. You are then given six months' free membership, allowing you to use all the facilities, including the gym, swimming pool and classes at any time. They even reimburse you for two hours' parking in Jackson Square each time you go.

Nuffield Health, with its gyms and hospitals, is a trading charity so offers a number of community wellbeing programmes like this.

At the end of the six months they also give a massive discount for membership, which is normally £64 per month. Find out more and apply by Googling Nuffield Joint Pain or by clicking on this link <https://www.nuffieldhealth.com/about-us/our-impact/healthy-life/joint-pain-programme>

# LAST MONTH'S SPEAKER

## May: Charles Garland

Our Guest Speaker in May was Charles Garland who told us the story of the glorious TV sitcom *Dad's Army*, broadcast from 1968-1977. He was assistant to David Croft and Jimmy Perry who wrote and produced the sit com.

When the BBC decided to replay the series it was Charles who was given the task of reviewing all the episodes and cutting them down to 29 mins and 15 secs exactly in order to fit the programme scheduling. As there were originally 80 episodes and Charles reckoned that he viewed each one at least 40 times, then this was quite an achievement.

Jimmy Perry left school and joined the Home Guard. He went on to organise concert parties and this led to the origins of the Dad's Army story. Jimmy became a script writer and met his co-writer, David Croft, when working on *Beggar My Neighbour*. They wrote a pilot of six episodes and the series was originally called *The Fighting Tigers*. Michael Mills was Head of Comedy at the BBC and he did not like the title but enjoyed the script and so *Dad's Army* was born.

Charles took us through the arrival of all the actors who became household names – Arthur Lowe, Ian Lavender, John Le Mesurier, Clive Dunn, James Beck and Frank Williams. Sadly they have all passed away, but their memory lives on in the form of clips and repeats of the show and Charles treated us on screen to a couple of the memorable moments.

He said that *Dad's Army* was the Queen Mother's favourite TV programme and she got quite irate if she was interrupted whilst watching. There was no pause button or iPlayer in those days!



**Barry Maxwell**

# GROUP REPORTS

## Photographers Go to Tollesbury



On May 4th, six members of the Photography Group, plus two of their willing partners, met at the café in Tollesbury on the Blackwater River Estuary. The plan was to photograph the old Lightship and Sail Lofts at high tide, when the road in front of the Lofts floods, as well as the footpaths across the marshes, making for interesting photo opportunities.

Unfortunately, because of the time of year, the tide was not as high as we had expected and the road didn't flood. But, undeterred, the group walked around the area, taking shots of the boats, including the Lightship, the crumbling sheds, the buildings still used and the marshes.

The Sail Lofts were built between 1906 and 1908 for the Tollesbury Yacht Berthing Company; the lower floors were used for storing the yachts and sailing gear while the upper part was used by local fishermen. After World War II they fell out of regular use, before gaining Grade 2 listed status in the 1970s and being restored in the following decade.

The large red ship moored on the salt marshes is the Trinity Lightvessel, which was built in 1954 for Trinity House, the organisation which looks after shipping navigation marks around the UK. It was converted to a residential centre in 1990 for the Fellowship Afloat Charitable Trust.

Incidentally, in 2024 the History Group had a very interesting tour of Trinity House in London, organised by Dave Willett.

The beginning of our day was marked by refreshments in the Tollesbury Café and the end of our day, just before the rains came, was marked with fish and chips in The Queen's Head pub in Maldon.



A very good day organised by group leader Andrew Collar, with suggestions and contributions made by participating members.

**Liz Happer**

*The Photography group welcomes all those interested in photography in general, whether you use a smartphone, a digital camera or prefer the original analogue cameras.*

*Contact Andrew Collar for more information via our group page on the website.*



## Garden Group 2 in Colchester

Garden Group 2's May outing was to the lovely gardens of Anne and Peter Chillingworth at Oak Farm, Colchester.

A variety of trees surrounds the well manicured borders which are full of unusual shrubs and plants for all seasons – which really tested the knowledge of the group!

The latest addition Anne and Peter have made is a prairie garden, designed to cope with the changing weather conditions.

**Roger Thear**





## Wine & Beer Update

Our new Wine & Beer Group is holding its inaugural meeting on Tuesday June 2nd with a red wine tasting. This has proved so popular that group leader Alastair Curbbuns is going to repeat it on September 29th to fit in all the people on the waiting list!

Alastair has now planned a schedule for the rest of the year. Spaces are available at all events, except for the tasting on June 2nd.

**Thursday July 23rd – English Sparkling Wines / Bishop's Stortford Bubbly** – 3.00pm-4.30pm at the very local vineyard, Bailey Hills Estate, Wickham Hall, Hadham Road, CM23 1JG.

The tour begins with a guided stroll among the vines, to learn about the unique *terroir* and the grapes they have chosen to grow. There will then be a tasting of the 2021 and 2022 vintages (I understand that the 2022 is excellent) in their nice new and bright tasting room, which also has great outdoor seating overlooking the vines. Cost of this first vineyard visit is £25.00. Please book by May 31st. Numbers are restricted to 16 – if this number isn't reached they may open the bookings to others.

**Tuesday September 29th – Red Wine Tasting** – 2.15-4.00pm at the Thorley Community Centre.

A repeat of the tasting on June 2nd. Two or three wines will change, but still the same grape variety. There will be six different wines to sample, trying to guess the vintage, country of origin, variety of grape and cost. Cost of this tasting is £10.00.

**Tuesday November 3rd – Red Wine Tasting which will include a wine which would cost £500 in a nice restaurant** – 2.15-4.00pm at the Thorley Community Centre.

Selection of six wines based on the same grapes to sample to try and ascertain the vintage, country of origin, variety of grape and cost. The last wine will be exceptional and will give you an idea of what a £500 wine from an great vintage in a nice restaurant tastes like. Cost of this event will be £20.00

Events next year will include a beer tasting at the Belgian Brewer in January and a talk on a wine region or grape in March with a small tasting afterwards.

For more information and booking contact Alastair Curbbuns at [curbbuns@gmail.com](mailto:curbbuns@gmail.com)

## Where Are the Aliens?

The May session of the What the Papers (and You!) Say group exceeded everyone's expectations, partly because the conversation, as usual, went wider than the announced topic.

Some members described personal experiences of ghosts and UFOs. The majority were open to the possibility of an exterior agent – an alien, some supernatural being or God – having initiated life on Earth by introducing the first cellular life forms, leaving evolution to do the heavy lifting.

We then diverted to “Why do we have religions?” for a while.

Eventually, it was suggested that, in an enormous universe, whatever the mechanisms were that produced intelligent life on Earth, the same could happen on other planets. Rarely but possible.

However, the distances between stars in our galaxy, let alone the rest of the universe, are so mind-numbingly vast that knowledge of, communication with or travel between us and any other intelligent beings is basically impossible. (For details, look for Leonard Susskind on YouTube)

We are left with the awesome thought that we are and will always be the only known intelligent beings in the universe. Let us make good use of our existence and enjoy it as much as possible.

**Tom McNeeney**

*JUNE TOPIC: In the film Sliding Doors, the lead character experiences two different lives, depending on whether or not she catches her Tube train. Have you had a Sliding Doors moment?*



## Degas and Other Artists



Once again we had a wonderful display of pictures from the members of our Art Group. This month the challenge was the artist Edgar Degas, plus some other subjects suggested by our members.

Our group is very informal, so the monthly suggestion is just that – a suggestion that members may choose to follow or not. It helps those members that need a bit of a challenge.

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



**Pauline Bullions &  
Rita Foster**



## Garden Group 1 Visits Ware



Garden Group 1's May visit was to The Pines in Ware. The one-acre garden has been created by its owner over the last 35 years.

It has an east-west axis and sandy soil over chalk, so is mainly shady and dry. There is an extensive irrigation system. The owner uses a lot of water, but was able to convince the water company that much of it goes onto the garden and back into ground water so they give him a discount!

The front garden is mainly lawn, with a central water feature, and trees and shrubs. The owner gave us a tour of the back garden and was able to name almost all of the plants people asked him about!

The thornless, yellow Banksiae rose was covered in blooms. The gravel garden was planted only two years ago but was looking mature and colourful. A rare treat.

**Barbara Jacobs**



## History Group Meeting in May

Probably because of the recent confusion over meeting times, only a depleted audience turned up to hear Dave Parker give his talk, entitled “A Short History of the London Stump”.

The talk seemed to go down well, and there was a lively – and lengthy – Q&A session afterwards.

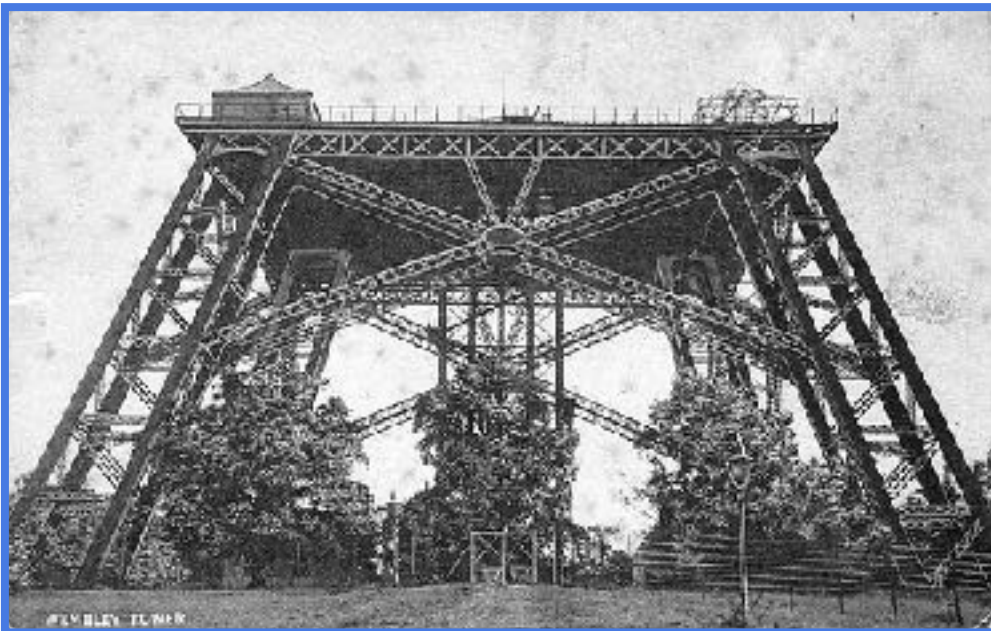
This session had to be moved forward from the planned date of June 11th. The gap has been filled by Bishop’s Stortford History Society President Bill Hardy, who will present “The History of the Barnabas Centre”, actually within the Centre itself, on June 11th.

Those wishing to attend should enter by the Centre’s main door after parking across the road in the main carpark.

Dave Willett will now be talking about Medals on July 9th, followed by Mark Ratcliffe’s presentation on Pirate Radio Stations on August 13th.

Apologies to all those affected by the confusion. From now until the end of the year all meetings will take place on the **SECOND** Thursdays of the month.

**Dave Parker**



*The first and only completed stage of Watkin's Wembley Tower, c. 1900*

# THORLEY u3a COMMITTEE



Nigel Varnam  
Chair



Linda Ketteridge  
Vice Chair



Ryland Perrin  
Treasurer



John Acklaw  
Business  
Secretary



Annie Compton  
Groups  
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Barbara Jacobs  
Membership  
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Barry Maxwell  
Speaker  
Co-ordinator



Chrissy Thear  
Events  
Organiser



Tony Clark  
Assistant  
Treasurer



Carmen Konopka  
Communications  
Co-ordinator

Please send contributions to  
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[comms.thorleyu3a@gmail.com](mailto:comms.thorleyu3a@gmail.com)

Committee members can all be  
contacted via the Contact tab  
on our website:  
[www.thorley.u3asite.uk](http://www.thorley.u3asite.uk)