

u3a

Thorley

Registered Charity No: 1182852

Newsletter

July 2026



From our Chair

Hello everyone, here is your Summer read – the July newsletter. Please take time to read and take on board the information given.

Firstly, I am sorry to have to inform you that Annie Compton our Groups Co-ordinator has decided, for personal reasons, to stand down from this role. I would like to offer my sincere thanks to Annie for her time and enthusiasm given to the role over the past two and half years and wish her the very best for the future.

Secondly, well done to Alastair Curbun for getting the Wine and Beer Appreciation Group up and running. I am sure it will grow from strength to strength over the coming years.

Thirdly, subscriptions for 2026/27 will be reduced to £10 – full details below. If you pay by Standing Order, please remember to adjust the amount.

I recently saw a newspaper article that caught my eye in the City & Finance page. Shock horror... we are about to lose one of the most famous names in British business, which is set to fall into foreign hands! Tate & Lyle is to be sold to an American firm.

Henry Tate started his sugar refinery in 1859 and introduced the sugar cube to the UK in 1875. In 1875 Abram Lyle set up a rival operation and became famous for Lyle's Golden Syrup. The two companies merged in 1921. In Silvertown in East London on the banks of the river Thames, you can still see the iconic sugar refinery built in 1878. It remains one of the largest sugar refineries in the world. Despite heavy bombing during WW2 the factory never closed. While most male workers were away fighting, the factory was operated by local women who were known as "The Sugar Girls"

Best wishes to you all

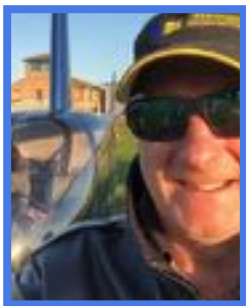
Nigel

FUTURE EVENTS



Monthly Meeting – Monday July 6th

Our July 6th 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 **Duncan Bickley** on his **Adventures in Helicopters**

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.

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 AUGUST 3rd –

Ken McDonald

A Peek Inside Some Churches in the Hundred Parishes

A look at some of the beautiful and historic churches in the Hundred Parishes, an area of around 450 square miles of northwest Essex, northeast Hertfordshire and southern Cambridge, which includes our very own St James Church in Thorley.



MONDAY SEPTEMBER 7th –

Damien O'Dell

Adventures of a Ghost Hunter

Damien's personal experiences of ghosts and haunted houses, spanning over 40 years of paranormal investigation. He leads a group called APIS (Anglia Paranormal Investigation Society) and may include some 'local haunts'.

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. **Last chance to buy tickets now!** – see poster below.

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

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

One Space Now Available for High Society

One place has just become available for the coach trip to see High Society, the Cole Porter musical at the Barbican Theatre, starring Felicity Kendal and Helen George. It's on Thursday July 9th, leaving Sainsbury's at 10.00am. Price is £83.00.

Full details are on our website. Email Sylvia Poole at sylvia@sylviaanded.co.uk

**DON'T
MISS
OUT!**

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.

This is your last chance to buy your ticket at our monthly meeting,

or phone Carmen Konopka at 01279 653091, or email her at 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

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

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Coach Trip to Bletchley Park The National Computer Museum



Another fabulous trip organised by Dave Willett! This time to Bletchley Park, once the top-secret home of World War II codebreakers and now the home of the National Computer Museum.

The outing is on Wednesday October 14th, leaving from Thorley Sainsbury's at 8.30am and returning at around 5.00pm. Cost is £47.00 per person.

Learn all about the codebreakers during the Second World War, Alan Turing, the German Enigma machine and much more. There is a lot to see at the site near Milton Keynes, together with all the usual amenities, including cafés.

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.



**DON'T
MISS
OUT!**

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.



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.

Bishop's Stortford u3a's Lavender Trip

Bishop's Stortford u3a has around 10 spare places on its half-day trip to Hitchin Lavender Fields which it is offering to our members.



The trip is on Friday July 17th, leaving from the back of Thorley Sainsbury's at 12 noon and also picking up from the Rugby Club and Bridge Street/Charrington House shortly after.

Cost of the trip is £36.00, including the coach, entry, guided tour of the lavender fields and a cream tea.

Full details are on our website, with a flyer and an application form which needs to be completed if you are interested and which gives details of how to pay.

NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Next Year's Subs to be Reduced to £10!

Following a review of our finances, your Committee has decided to reduce the 2026-27 annual subs from £15.00 to £10.00. What a fabulous bargain!

Annual subs for Thorley u3a cover the year from September 1st, and can be paid from July onwards. Membership cards can be collected at the August meeting onwards.

Bank transfer is our preferred method of payment. Please give a reference of your surname followed by your membership number. If paying for more than one person, please make a separate payment for each person.

Account 1 should be used for subs – our full bank details are shown in the table below.

If you have a **Standing Order** you will need to amend the amount to £10.

Cheque payments should be made payable to 'Thorley u3a' and please put your membership number on the back. You can pay by cheque or **cash** at our monthly meetings, but there may be a queue!

Renewals by post: please send your cheque to Barbara Jacobs, Membership Secretary, at the address below. Enclose a stamped, self addressed envelope if you wish your membership card to be posted to you.

Barbara Jacobs
180 Stansted Road
Bishop's Sortford
Herts CM23 2AR

The **co-operative** bank

Account 1

Account name: Thorley u3a

Sort Code: 08 - 92 -99

Account Number: 67274808

Payments: Annual membership subs only

Account 2

Account name: Thorley u3a

Sort Code: 08 - 92 -99

Account Number: 67274947

Payments: All other money - groups/trips/events

Could You Be Our New Groups Co-ordinator?

Our Groups Co-ordinator Annie Compton has unfortunately had to retire from her role. We are hugely grateful to Annie, who has been doing a great job for us since 2024.

However, it means we are now looking for someone to be our new Groups Co-ordinator... could this be you?

Please give it serious consideration because Thorley u3a depends entirely on members volunteering to run our activities.

And it's a rewarding role which can enable you to meet lots of people and make new friends.

Interested? Please speak to our Chair, Nigel Varnam, or any other member of the Committee.

Annie Compton, who has done a great job of being our Groups Co-ordinator. Could you take over from her?

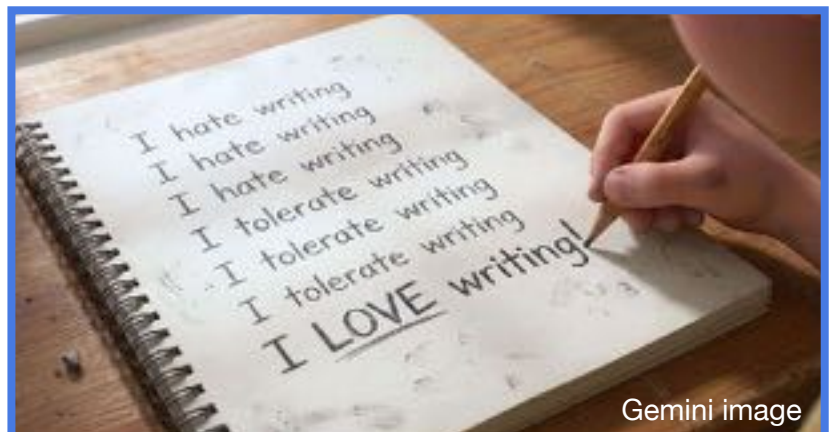


Calling All Writers!

It's time to get writing! This year our national u3a wants you to take us on on a remarkable real-life journey – of discovery, adventure or transformation – and bring the story to life in fewer than 1,000 words.

The 2026 u3a Essay Competition is open to all u3a members and free to enter. Deadline for entries is July 31st and the prizes are book bundles for the winner and two runners-up, kindly donated by HX Expeditions.

For more information, click this link: <https://www.u3a.org.uk/what-we-do/learning/learning-activities/essay->



Gemini image

Explore the UK with u3a Getaways



The first u3a getaways trip - The Agatha Christie Story - is being held from September 14th-18th, under the auspices of our national office. Join other u3a members from across the country to explore the beautiful houses and coastlines that inspired her famous mysteries.

u3a getaways is a new programme of bespoke holidays exclusively for u3a members and friends. Planned trips also include Yorkshire Festive Treats, Aviation Heritage and Wine Lovers Unite.

The trips do not include transport to the destination, but do include activities once there, plus dinner, bed and breakfast. A three-night Wine Lovers Unite trip in Harrogate in May, for example, is £569 per person in a twin or double room.

Find out more on the u3a getaways website at <https://www.justforgroups.com/u3a-getaways>



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.



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

June: Mel Byron

Mel's presentation 'Old Movies Saved my Life' started its own life at the Edinburgh Fringe. It tells a story of how Mel grew up and friends went off clubbing and underage drinking while she was imagining herself in the arms of Cary Grant sipping champagne.



Her favourite films are from the '30s, '40s and '50s and we were treated to lots of clips and challenged to identify stars in their early years.

She had a lot of personal heart throbs, among them James Mason, Tyrone Power, Ray Milland, Clark Gable and her big favourite – Ronald Coleman.

In 1984, Channel 4 started broadcasting old movies as a regular feature and Mel said she was instantly hooked.

The Q & A at the end of her presentation was fascinating as members threw names at her of their own favourite movies or recollections of stars. Mel demonstrated an encyclopaedic knowledge – she could not only name the film but also the co-stars. From Edinburgh Fringe to Thorley – what a treat.

Remember Charlie Haylock who talked to us about and in regional dialects last year? He's been commissioned to recite classical works of literature in a regional Suffolk accent, which are now on YouTube with illustrations.

Works include Shakespeare, Keats and Byron, to name but just a few, plus humour from Edward Lear and TS Eliot. These are the links to 'Classic Poems in Suffolk' if you fancy listening to his amazing voice again:

Part 1 <https://youtu.be/wSw4PwfzR10>

Part 2 https://youtu.be/II3LnE0vy_s

Part 3 <https://youtu.be/wBdwZf2VDzU>

Barry Maxwell

GROUP REPORTS



Summer Lunch Walk

The Walking Group's annual summer walk in Little Hadham, followed by a lunch hosted by Dave and Anne Willett was a bit difficult last year as the temperature was 35 degrees. This year it was only about 20 degrees – and it rained as well.

The 4.8 mile walk took in bits of the village, Silver Leys Polo Club, Muggins Wood, some alpacas at Hadham Hall, and even the remains of some fly tipping.

The walk was followed by lunch in Dave and Anne's garden, and then tea/coffee and a selection of five different cakes.

[Editor's Note: Dave, pictured top right, is well known for his baking skills!] The invitation to have more than one slice of cake was eagerly accepted by many.

This annual social occasion, along with David and Carmen's Winter Walk with a soup lunch, has helped to make the Walking Group a really good social group – an important part of belonging to our successful u3a.

Dave Willett



First Meeting of Wine & Beer Group



Group Leader Alastair is the one doing a flying impression!

The inaugural meeting of the Thorley U3A Wine and Beer Appreciation Group on June 2nd was a genuine success, setting an enthusiastic tone for the months ahead. Due to the strong interest and a substantial waiting list, the session will be repeated on September 29th, with only two places remaining.

The event took place at Thorley Community Centre, whose bright, spacious room — complete with wide patio doors letting in natural daylight — proved ideal for a tasting session. The room was prepared with glasses, spittoons, water biscuits, tasting notes, water and cheese, all arranged by group leader Alastair Curbun and his wife Christine.

Participants blind-tasted six red wines, an exercise that was both humbling and exhilarating. With labels hidden, everyone's palate became a blank canvas, free from brand expectations and focused purely on sensory analysis.

Despite the challenge, the group performed impressively: They successfully ranked all six wines in the correct price order. Identifying the grape varieties proved more difficult — as it should in a blind tasting. The reveal of the wine bottles at the end generated plenty of excitement and satisfaction.

The response from attendees was overwhelmingly positive. Comments included: "We really enjoyed it. Thanks for all your hard work." "We were very proud that we could distinguish a better wine from a reasonable one." "Great fun!"

Alastair Curbun

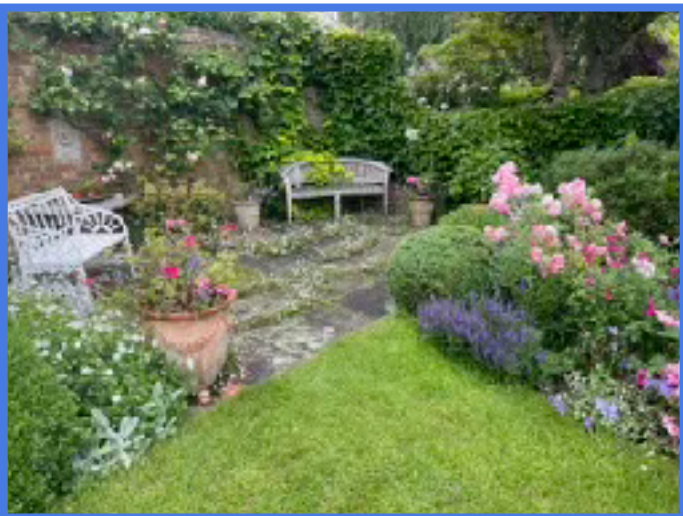
Garden Group 2 in Mashbury

June was really bursting out all over when Garden Group 2 visited the beautiful gardens of Gillie and Ashley Meacock at Mashbury near Chelmsford.

The House dates back to the 1600s. Set in around two acres, the couple developed their garden from scratch over the last 45 years.

It has stunning rose gardens, herbaceous borders, pergolas, countryside views and a large barn with nesting swallows.

Roger Thear



Artist of the Month: Picasso

This month we have some nice pictures for you. The artist we chose to focus on this month is Picasso. His artwork is quite recognisable, so we are certain you will be able to identify them! Some of the group also produced pictures from our Degas project.

Our Art group is a very talented group and everyone is very keen to have a go at any subject. If you would like to join us come along for a taster. We meet twice a month at the Baptist Church and you would be made very welcome.

Pauline Bullions & Rita Foster



Garden Group 3 Visits the Gotha Gardens



We first visited Gotha Gardens at Slip End, near Baldock, four years ago and it was wonderful to see how much Sam has developed the garden.

What was once arable farmland is now an amazingly diverse garden.

We arrived in a downpour and Sam suggested we first partake of tea and cake (homemade), have a natter for an hour, by which time the sun would be out.

It was!!!

It was also fascinating to hear about his grandparents' history and their journey from Siberia and Auschwitz to Scotland.

Thoroughly enjoyed by all.

Linda Maxwell



History Group and St Barnabas



Heavy rain failed to discourage an enthusiastic audience for a talk on the history of the St Barnabas Centre, actually in the Centre and actually on St Barnabas' Day – June 11th. Giving the talk in his own inimitable style was Bishop's Stortford History Society president Bill Hardy.

Bill recounted the fascinating story of how a near-derelict Elizabethan barn dating from 1590 was transformed into an 'overflow church' and unique community centre. Generous donations from nearby St James the Great Church parishioners funded the £1million restoration in the 1990s.

A torchlight tour of the easily accessible Tudor carpenters' marks concluded the meeting, after which refreshments were taken across the yard in the Emmaus Centre.

Earlier, group leader Dave Parker had told the members present that when he volunteered to resurrect the moribund History Group last year he had stressed that he saw himself as only an interim leader, due to his age (82) and medical problems. It has now become obvious that Dave needs support, from someone probably younger, hopefully fitter... and definitely more familiar with the internet.

Interested in taking on the role of co-leader? Contact Dave on daveparker796@gmail.com, or 01279 501544 or 07889619747.

July's meeting will be in the Emmaus Centre on the 9th, when Dave Willett will deliver his postponed talk on medals. Anyone with medals is very welcome to bring them along to the meeting.

Dave Parker

Family History Group Looks Back at School



A small but enthusiastic group of Family Historians braved the heat and shared stories of their own and their ancestors' experiences of school. In the photo Annie is explaining how as a three-year-old she walked to the local infant school unaccompanied.

We reminisced about outside toilets, medicated hard toilet paper, having the ruler smacked across the back of your hand, hymns we had sung and lack of playing fields and PE equipment.

Mark, being the only one who was brought up in the area, had recently connected with the bus driver who took him from Hatfield Heath to Newport Grammar. He always wore sandals and although his name was Pete, he went by the name of Steve! Most of us travelled unaccompanied to school or in the company of a trusted elder pupil or sibling.

However, Maddie was sent to Ireland to live with relatives so that she could benefit from a good Catholic education. Upon return to London, she recounted stories of her convent education and trying hard to miss Benediction held after school until she was caught by one of the nuns.

Barbara's family had a long connection with the infant school in Norfolk which was attended by her grandmother, mother and brothers. Her mother had written her experiences down for the grandchildren.

Stories from Stoke, the Northeast and the West Riding of Yorkshire confirmed our shared experiences of boys being treated differently to the girls, aspirations dashed by expectations for girls' education and the fun to be had in an age when exam pressure was not known.

Sue Swan

THORLEY u3a COMMITTEE



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Linda Ketteridge
Vice Chair



Ryland Perrin
Treasurer



John Acklaw
Business
Secretary



Barbara Jacobs
Membership
Secretary



Barry Maxwell
Speaker
Co-ordinator



Chrissy Thear
Events
Organiser



Tony Clark
Assistant
Treasurer



Carmen Konopka
Communications

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

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